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The Role of Religious Leaders in Social Development and Interreligious Harmony: A Historical-Sociological Study of Islamic Leaders in the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

Background: The focus of this research discusses the role of religious leaders in social development and religious harmony in the 21st century. **Objective:** To analyze and understand the influence of religious leaders on social and religious dynamics in Banyumas Regency in the 21st century. **Method:** The approach used in this research is an interdisciplinary approach with qualitative methods. The research was conducted in Banyumas Regency. The subjects were families, colleagues, students, and community leaders who had interacted with religious figures from Banyumas who passed away in the 21st century. Data collection techniques included documentation, participant observation, and in-depth interviews. The data were analyzed using qualitative descriptive analysis. **Results:** Religious leaders in Banyumas play a very important role in various aspects of community life, including religion, education, politics, and economics. **Conclusion:** The presence and leadership of religious figures significantly influence the development of social and religious harmony in Banyumas. **Originality/Value:** This study offers novel empirical insights to the fields of sociology of religion and contemporary Islamic history by uncovering the multifaceted leadership of charismatic religious leaders across religious, educational, political, and economic domains within the localized context of 21st-century Banyumas Regency, an area underrepresented in modern scholarly discourse. The findings enrich empirical evidence on grassroots interfaith coexistence and serve as a strategic reference for designing local community empowerment initiatives and regional interreligious harmony policies.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Javanese society developed a sophisticated literary and religious culture and was ruled by a forward-thinking elite long before Islam came to the island in the 14th century (Subekti & Najikh, 2018). This older civilization was inspired by Hindu and Buddhist ideas and left a legacy of art, architecture, literature, and thought that is still interesting today (Izza, 2018). It is possible that before the 14th century Muslims had traveled to Java and converted to Islam, evidence of which is the discovery of several gravestones dating from 1368-9 that record the deaths of Javanese nobles who converted to Islam (Ismail, 2017).

The role of religious leaders have played the function of intermediaries for religious people in providing understanding to the community about what is happening both at the local and national levels (Hidayatulloh, 2019), religious leaders are positioned by the community as translators and provide explanations in the context of religion and clarify various national problems in general (Huda & Syawaludin, 2019). This happens because religious leaders are

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part of the political elite - a strategic position and are claimed to have the legitimate power to unite people in the face of various real threats from other groups (Capriyanti et al., 2023). In addition, religious leaders have high personality integrity, noble character, and influence in society (Suwartini, 2017). They study science, both science that comes from Allah SWT and science that comes from the use of the potential of human reason and senses in understanding the verses of 'kauniyah' which is then called 'ulum al-insaniyah' or 'al-ulum' or science.

However, sometimes many people do not realize about their role and contribution by forgetting and not maintaining what has been done by religious leaders in the form of academic and non-academic relics. Even the social role that is carried out is sometimes not remembered at all, even though it has many values contained in the teachings of Islam become acceptable and can be adopted by the community cannot be separated from religious leaders (Salim & Andani, 2020). The values of equality between groups, plurality, syncretism, and local cultural wisdom are values built by religious leaders to ground the teachings of Islam (Tahir, 2018). Likewise, 'tasammuh', justice, and multiculturalism which are noble values of the nation are also developed in Islam through religious leaders. The presence of religious education institutions and religious spirit both formal and non-formal is evidence that religious leaders also have concerns about forming a smart and well-educated society (Marhamah, 2018).

The importance of the role of religious leaders in the formation of religious patterns, the transmission of religious knowledge, the development of religious education, and social and da'wah institutions (Amsir, 2018), so conducting research on religious leaders about their roles and functions is significant considering that from a historical perspective, they have had a major contribution in the development of Islam (Wahyuddin, 2016). Especially in Banyumas, which has the largest Muslim population. Based on a report from the Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Banyumas Regency until June 2012, the population of Banyumas Regency is predominantly Muslim with 1,674,049 people, with 7,672 mosques. In second place is Christianity with 15,742 people and 84 Christian churches, followed by Catholicism with 10,177 people, Buddhism with 2,248 people, and Confucianism. It seems that the development of Banyumas' predominantly Muslim population and its places of worship (mosques) cannot be separated from the role of previous religious leaders who were so persistent and tireless in spreading Islam in Banyumas.

In addition, many people have seen the activities of religious leaders throughout history, but very few have written about their role in the development of social religion in Banyumas, especially in the 21st century (Rohman, 2016). Even though their actions and influence in the modern era are quite significant, moreover they also become examples and inspire Muslims in terms of their intellect, ideas, and struggles in responding to the challenges of modernity (Said, 2018). Therefore, it is very relevant to research religious leaders in Banyumas, whether it is related to the life of the figure, religious thought, intellectual work, and various aspects of his life can be recognized and have a clear trace for the history of thought and religion in Banyumas.

Although previous studies have widely examined the role of religious leaders in the context of religious preaching and education, there is still limited scholarly attention given to the comprehensive influence of these figures on broader aspects of social development and interreligious harmony in the 21st century, especially within specific local contexts like Banyumas Regency. Most existing literature tends to focus on historical or national-level figures, often overlooking the unique contributions of local religious leaders whose impact extends beyond religious teachings into socio-cultural, political, and economic dimensions. This study addresses that gap by analyzing the multifaceted role of religious leaders in shaping social development and promoting religious harmony in Banyumas Regency in the 21st century. Specifically, it aims to (1) find religious figures or leaders who have a role in the development of 21st century Islam in Banyumas; (2) find out the role played by religious leaders both in terms of historical and sociological aspects in the development of Islam in Banyumas; (3) find out the contributions that have been made by religious leaders in the development of Islam in Banyumas.

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Design

The approach used in this research uses an interdisciplinary approach because several elements are interconnected and influence one field with another. The approaches used are the social history approach and the social approach. The method used is qualitative research because this research is intended to find out the role of religious leaders and their contribution to the development of Islam in the Banyumas Regency in the 21st century. The method for understanding this research is by using *verstehen*, which is understanding social reality, which emphasizes diving, empathizing, and entering the subject area so that things that are internal to the subject can be understood in depth and avoid interpretation.

2.2 Research Location

This research was conducted in Banyumas Regency, Central Java. However, to focus the discussion, the religious figures in Purwokerto, Central Java who have died in the 21st century are specialized.

2.3 Research Subject

The subjects of this research are families, colleagues, students, and community leaders who witnessed the lives of Banyumas religious figures who died in the 21st century and have contributed both academic and non-academic legacies and have a role in the development of social Islam in Banyumas Regency. The research subjects focused on the families or colleagues of 5 (five) figures, namely K.H Muhammad Ilyas, K.H Abdul Malik, K.H Musallim Ridlo, K.H Dardiri and K.H Noer Iskandar al-Barsany.

2.4 Data Source

The primary data of this research comes from data obtained directly from the field as a result of understanding, and observing statements, writings, and academic and non-academic works carried out by the figures, as well as understanding, observing expressions and statements from the families of living figures or writers who have written about religious figures.

2.5 Data Collection

The techniques used in the data collection process use three types, namely:

- a) Documentation. Documentation in the form of records, books, journals, magazines, newspapers, and unwritten works in the form of educational institutions, religious institutions, or social institutions, activities, in the social, political, and religious fields, as well as photographs related to the activities of religious leaders.
- b) Participant observation in which the role of the observer is openly known to the public, maybe even he or they are sponsored by the subjects. Because of this, all kinds of information including secrets can be easily obtained. This technique is used to find the main data about the roles played by Banyumas religious leaders in religious, social, political, and even economic roles, with information obtained from family, colleagues, students, and community leaders.
- c) In-depth interviews were used to gather information and opinions, ideas, language, and opinions in a more detailed, complete, and in-depth manner from the families of Banyumas religious figures who died in the 21st century about their role in the development of Islam. Activities, opinions, feelings, knowledge, senses, educational background, academic and non-academic works, roles in religious development in Banyumas, and family life of religious figures.

2.6 Data Analysis

Data analysis techniques are the methods used in the data analysis process, data analysis techniques are activities to examine and analyze the research instruments used such as data from questionnaires / questionnaires documents, notes, and recordings in a study (Utomo et al., 2024). Data analysis is the final process of writing. After the research problem is formulated, the data is collected and clarified. The analysis technique used in this research is a descriptive qualitative analysis technique, namely processing data by reporting what has been obtained during research carefully and thoroughly and giving an interpretation of the data into a complete whole using words that can describe the object of research carried out, to compare theoretical data with practical data obtained in the field.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Result

Religious figures in the Banyumas Regency have an important role in the development of social religion, including in education, social religion, politics, and da'wah, including Muhammad Ilyas, Abdul Malik, K.H.A Shodiq, Musallim Ridlo, K.H. Dardiri and K.H Noer Iskandar al-Barsany. In detail, their roles and contributions to social religion can be explained as follows:

3.1.1 K.H Muhammad Ilyas

Muhammad Ilyas was the second descendant of Prince Diponegoro. Muhammad Ilyas outlined the rule that the boarding school established in Sokaraja and his position as Mursyid Thariqah Naqsyabandiyah Khalidiyah could only be passed on to his direct male descendants, and was not succeeded by his son-in-law, therefore it was his son

Muhammad Affandi Ilyas who succeeded Muhammad Ilyas when he died in 1916. Muhammad Affandi led the Thariqah Naqsyabandiyah Khalidiyah Sokaraja for about 13 years, he continued his father to develop the Thariqah Naqsyabandiyah Khalidiyah and teach religious knowledge to those in need. Muhammad Affandi Ilyas passed away in 1929 AD, his role as murshid of Thariqah Naqsyabandiyah Khalidiyah Sokaraja was then replaced by his son Muhammad Rifa'i Affandi.

3.1.2 Asy-Syaikh Abdul Malik

Shaykh Abdul Malik was born in Kedung Paruk, Purwokerto, on Friday 3 Rajab 1294 H (1881). The following are the roles performed by Shaykh Muhammad Ilyas and Muhammad bin Abdul Malik, namely (1) developing religious knowledge and Thariqah Naqsyabandiyah Khalidiyah to the people in Sokaraja and its surroundings and the people of Kedung Paruk and its surroundings; (2) teaching the teachings of Thariqah Naqsyabandiyah Khalidiyah to its followers which teachings have very noble meanings and values, which are intended not only for the perfection of individual behavior but also social behavior; (3) improving the social behavior of Religion, economy and politics of the followers of Thariqah Naqsyabandiyah Khalidiyah.

3.1.3 K.H. A. Shodiq Pasiraja

K.H. A. Shodik's birth history is less traceable. K.H. A. Shodik's roles were (1) to establish and develop 'Thariqah Sadziliyah' in Banyumas; (2) in the political field, he was neutral and did not belong to the board of religious organizations such as NU, Persis, Muhammadiyah or others; (3) in the field of da'wah at the beginning of the independence period, he held a public recitation which was held on a large scale in Purwokerto, especially in Pasiraja Village which is now the recitation "Langgar Kidul" every Sunday morning.

3.1.4 K.H. Musallim Ridlo

His full name is K.H. Ahmad Musallim Ridlo, he is often called Musallim. The roles carried out are (1) proselytizing in various places in the Banyumas, Kebumen, Purworejo, Wonosobo, Banjarnegara, Pemalang, Tegal, Pekalongan and Cilacap regions by using the bi-oral method (lecture) and using the Banyumasan (Ngapak) language so that it is nicknamed the lion of the podium, improving the facilities and infrastructure of the al-Istiqomah Kauman Lama Purwokerto waqf mosque in 1984, establishing the al-Masruriyah Kebumen Baturraden recitation group in 1973; (2) in the economic field advocating a populist economy based on self-reliance and entrepreneurship, such as reviving 'Baitul Mal wa Tanwil', Cooperatives, KUKM (Small and Medium Business Groups); (3) in the field of education as the initiator of the Foundation in Purwokerto and surrounding areas.

3.1.5 K.H. Abu Dardiri

K.H. Abu Dardiri is the most prominent Muhammadiyah figure in the Banyumas region. The following are the roles carried out by K.H.A Dardiri, namely (1) initiating the establishment of the Ministry of Religion; (2) active in the Muhammadiyah association (3) active in the social, religious, and educational fields; (4) in the political field of the Dutch colonial period, among others, his courage to oppose taxes.

3.1.6 K.H. Noer Iskandar al-Barsany

His full name is Dr. KH. Noer Iskandar al-Barsani, MA born in Banyuwangi May 5, 1955. Some of the roles that have been carried out include (1) applying critical and humorous methods in teaching; (2) motivating students to write frequently and document ideas; (3) contributing scientific works in the form of books, among others, initiating and managing the 'al-Hidayah' education foundation; (4) as educational personnel.

3.2. Discussion

3.2.1 Religious Leaders

Religious figures in the general view are often called ulama. In the perspective of the Qur'an, ulama is seen as part of the people who play a very important and strategic role in the formation of society. Ulama comes from the Arabic word 'alima, ya'lamu', 'alim' which means a person who knows. The word 'alim is the general form of 'alim which is a form of 'mubalaghah', meaning a person who is very deep in knowledge.

Religious figures in the first sense generally reside in the countryside, they establish boarding schools and become its leaders, or they become kyai (Scholars) and become "servants" of the community in performing religious rituals, such as leading the reading of QS. Yasin, reciting the Quran together, and so on to pray for one's safety in life in the world. Their lives are generally based on agriculture. The boarding school students assist their kyai (Scholars)

in managing the farm. In addition to the proceeds from farming, the kyai (Scholars) gets a modest honorarium from the boarding school student's fees.

Religious leaders can also be regarded as intellectuals who are committed to the creation of continuous renewal and reform in Muslim societies and show an interesting blend of the old role of the kyai (Scholars) in Muslim societies (Lukens-Bull, 2019). Intellectuals are described in several different and often contradictory ways. Although different and often contradictory. There is a vague sense of acceptance of important elements in society that define and express a common consent that provides a sense of legitimacy and basic principles for the organization and survival of society (Misztal, 2013).

The spread of Islam in Indonesia cannot be separated from the figures of the predecessors who spread and developed Islam in various ways. As done by the 'Walisanga', Islam became developed on the island of Java. Maulana Malik Ibrahim known as Sunan Gresik, for example, has spread Islam by studying local customs, opening stalls, opening agricultural land, becoming a healer, living simply, eliminating caste differences, building mosques and boarding schools, and teaching Islam easily. This was done to spread Islam in Java.

Not only that but Islamization in Indonesia was also carried out by Sufi figures (Abdurahman, 2018). No wonder it is said that Islam which entered the archipelago for the first time had a Sufi character. This is due to the characteristics and attitudes of the Sufis who are more compromising and compassionate and have an open and cosmopolitan-oriented human tendency. Islam with its style is easily accepted and absorbed into the culture of the local community. They tend to use a distinctive method, namely syncretism with the habits of the indigenous population, between Sufism (mysticism) and local culture (Susilo & Syato, 2016). Thus the role of Sufism with its 'Thariqah' institution is very large in developing and spreading Islam in Indonesia (Hidayat, 2015).

It can be said in general that the process of Islamization in Indonesia has been structurally shaped by three complementary components (Tajuddin, 2016). First, the sultanate with its maritime presence along the north coast of Java sought to conquer the inland countries. Second, groups of foreign Islamic scholars filled bureaucratic posts and led religious ceremonies at the sultanates. Third, Sufis and mystic teachers were attracted to move from the coast to the interior of Java to proselytize.

The existence of religious leaders, religious leaders are also seen as having a significant influence on the formation of provided roles and functions in cultural development, religious propagation, scientific transmission, religious education, social change and the growth of religious institutions, and the formation of patterns of religious thought in the surrounding community (Heward et al., 2018). Even religious leaders are also seen as having a significant influence on the formation of national character, the struggle for independence, the development of local politics, and the development of religious discourse in society (Nelsen & Guth, 2015). An example is how religious leaders played their role and function in resisting and expelling invaders in the past. As was done by the Banten kingdom in the late 16th and early 17th centuries where the 'qadli' (patih Mangkubumi and Tumenggung) played a major political role in carrying out the attack movement against the VOC. Similarly, the Mataram dynasty (whose territory included present-day Yogyakarta) rebelled against the Dutch East India Company (VOC) for decades to Islamize Java (Bertrand, 2015).

In Banyumas, for example, the founder of the 'Thariqah Naqsyabandiyah Khalidiyah Kedungparuk, Sheikh Abdul Malik, in addition to being a scholar and expert in 'Thariqah', was also persistent in preaching even during the Dutch and Japanese colonization. Because of his activities, he became one of the targets of arrest by colonial soldiers. They were very worried about the influence of his da'wah influencing the Indonesian people, especially the Banyumas region, to rebel against the colonizers. Faced with this situation, he immersed himself in the people's *laskar*. Just as Prince Diponegoro, his ancestor, mingled with the people to oppose Dutch colonialism, so he always injected the spirit of struggle into the guerrillas in the Slamet Mountain Hills of Banyumas.

So high is the role and influence of religion for the surrounding community that its life influences various aspects of life, not only religion but also other fields such as agriculture, the development of art and culture, socio-economics, socio-politics, and so on (Maton & Pargament, 2014).

As a religious leader, a religious leader is a person who is believed to have great authority in society (Ciocan, 2018). This happens because religious leaders or in Islam *ulama* are figures who are considered holy people and endowed with blessings. In the boarding school tradition, the main element that has a large role is called *kiai* (Scholars) who is very decisive and charismatic. In Islam, because this type of authority is "outside the world of routine and profane everyday life", the *ulama* are seen as having extraordinary advantages that make their leadership generally recognized. In addition to his advantages, a religious leader's authority and familiarity with members of the community have been shaped by his concern and orientation towards the interests of the religious community. In addition, religious leaders constitute a specific group in society that is different from most people but is a very

important element in society that defines and expresses a common consent that provides a sense of legitimacy and basic principles for the organization and survival of society (Mayer & John, 2017).

3.1.2 Social Roles

A social role is a set of expectations for someone who occupies a social position/status. Social roles have several functions for individuals and others (Belvedere, 2019). These functions include (1) the role a person plays can maintain the continuity of the structure of society, such as the role of a father or mother; (2) the role a person plays can also be used to help those who are unable in society. These individual actions require sacrifice, such as the role of Volunteers, doctors, nurses, social workers, and so on; (3) the role a person plays is also a means of self-actualization, such as a man as a husband/father, a woman as a wife/mother, an artist with his work, and so on.

Social roles in which there is Social change is a form of human civilization due to the escalation of natural, biological, and physical changes that occur throughout human life (Hendry et al., 2017). Role theory is a point of view in sociology and social psychology that considers most daily activities to be played out by socially defined categories (e.g. mother, manager, and teacher) (Koenig & Eagly, 2014). Each social role is a set of rights, obligations, expectations, norms, and behaviors that a person must face and fulfill. The model is based on the observation that people act in predictable ways, and that a person's behavior is context-dependent, based on social position and other factors.

Although the word 'role' has existed in various European languages for several centuries, as a sociological concept, it only emerged around the 1920s and 1930s (Graff, 2015). It gained prominence in sociological studies through the theoretical work of Mead, Moreno, and Linton. Mead's two concepts of mind and self are the precursors of role theory. Based on the theoretical tradition, there are a series of "types" in role theory. This theory poses the following issues regarding social behavior.

The division of labor in society forms interactions among heterogeneous special positions called roles; as follows:

- a) Social roles include "reasonable" and "permissible" forms of behavior, aided by social norms, which are commonly known and therefore capable of determining expectations;
- b) Roles are occupied by individuals called "actors";
- c) When individuals agree to a social role (i.e. when they consider the role to be "legitimate" and "constructive"), they will bear the burden of punishing anyone who violates role norms;
- d) Changing conditions may result in a social role being considered outdated or invalid, in which case social pressure is likely to lead to role change;
- e) Anticipation of rewards and punishments, as well as the satisfaction of acting in a prosocial way, are the reasons why agents comply with role requirements.

In terms of differences in role theory, there is on the one hand a more functional viewpoint, which can be distinguished from the more micro-level approach of the symbolic interactionist tradition (Scott, 2016). This type of role theory states how the interrelated actions of individuals impact society, as well as how a role theoretical viewpoint can be empirically tested.

In Marx's theory, the best place to find the role of sociological knowledge is in his predictions regarding the transformation of social class from a class in itself to a class for itself, meaning the development of class consciousness (Wacquant, 2019). Marx's activist efforts were certainly aimed at awakening the working classes of 19th-century Europe to self-consciousness. In Marx's statement, the role of theorists is determined by the state of consciousness of the proletariat (Hobsbawm, 2016). The consciousness of the proletariat itself is determined by the economic structure and the position of the proletariat in it.

3.1.3 Status and Role Conflict

A person's status and role are very important in society. Every individual must have their social status in society. Social status is a reflection of the rights and obligations that must be carried out by individuals (Havel, 2017). Social status can also be said to be an individual's position in society (Manstead, 2018). In certain situations sometimes individuals have more than one status they have. If the status they have conflicts with one another, there will be a clash or conflict and that is often called a status conflict.

With the existence of social status, individuals simultaneously have a role that must be carried out as a manifestation of their status. Social role is a very important thing where it will determine the behavior of himself and others (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Similar to social status, individuals can perform two roles at the same time. Role conflict can also occur if individuals feel they are less able to carry out both roles optimally.

In society, as a functioning mechanism, society must somehow distribute its members into various social positions and encourage them to carry out the obligations corresponding to those positions (Parsons, 2017). This in itself has to deal with motivation at two different levels; instilling in certain individuals the desire to occupy a certain position, and once in that position, offering the desire to carry out the obligations associated with it.

Using human nature assumptions from the more conservative structural-functionalist tradition as well as the more radical conflict approach, Lenski proposes two laws for the distribution of goods and services (Lenski, 2019). The two postulates are derived from Lenski's assumptions that (1) humans are social beings who need to live in society; (2) humans usually place their own or their group's primary interests above the interests of other people or groups (even if they try to hide this fact from themselves and others); (3) humans have an unlimited appetite for the goods and services available in society; (4) individuals inherit differences in their ability to obtain scarce goods and services.

The theoretical framework of religious figures and social roles will be used to analyze the role of religious figures in the development of Islam in the Banyumas Regency in the 21st century. The study of the entry and development of Islam in the archipelago was carried out more accurately by Pijnappel, the first professor of the Malay language at Leiden University. In one of his writings, he cited the work of.

3.1.4 The Role of Sufis in the Spread of Islam

The arrival of Islam in the archipelago cannot be separated from commercial factors and economic interests, but it is also often reinforced by political factors (Ali & Sulistiyono, 2020). Nonetheless, the process of individual religious transition always involves inner and emotional issues, just as the transition of the Nusantara population from local religion to Islam always involves inner issues. It is in this regard that these wandering Sufis played a significant role in the conversion of the local population to Islam on a wider scale (Knysh, 2019). It turns out that the Sufis were able to maintain the continuity of the beliefs and religious practices of the local population so that the new religion was not considered as something foreign, strange, and dangerous. With the ability and authority possessed by these wandering Sufis can easily do the elite of society (kings and nobles). These Sufis traveled to various places in the archipelago and voluntarily felt the poverty, they taught syncretic theosophy that was very familiar to the Indonesian people, they were qualified in magical matters, and had healing powers to treat people (Dugan, 2021).

Some Sufis have tied the knot with the children of royalty. For example, the 'Babad Tanah Jawa' tells us that Maulana Ishak married the daughter of the King of Blambangan who produced the descendants of Sunan Giri, Raden Rahmat or Sunan Ampel married Nyi Gede Manila, the daughter of Tumenggung Wilwatikta, Sheikh Abdurrahman married Raden Ayu Teja. In Babad Cirebon, Sunan Gunung Jati was married to the daughter of Regent Kawung Anten. These marriages with nobles had a positive effect on the development of Islam in the archipelago. As stated by Tome Pires in Summa Oriental, marriages carried out by kings/nobles made it not only the king who converted to Islam, but was followed by his people as happened in Malacca. This kind of marriage has at least formed the core of the Muslim community (a community) which became the starting point for the development of Islam in the archipelago.

The first century of Islamization of Southeast Asia coincided with the medieval outbreak of Sufism and the growth of 'Tharīqah'. It is not surprising to say that the Islam that first entered the archipelago was Sufi in character. This was due to the more compromising and compassionate nature and attitude of the Sufis, who had an open and cosmopolitan orientation. Thus the role of Sufism with its 'Tharīqah' institution was very large in developing and spreading Islam in Indonesia. As the thesis of one of the orientalists, Johns quoted by Alwi Shihab that the Islamic community already existed in the archipelago after the arrival of Sufism in the 21st century. Evidence of this is the existence of Sufi writings and works that can unite Muslims after the fall of Bagdad to rise to carry out da'wah and bring Islamic guidance. They migrated across the borders of their own country to various other countries carrying the teachings and mission of Islam.

For example, the phenomenal Sufi figure Abu Hamid al-Ghazali outlined a moderate concept of akhlaki Sufism that was acceptable to the fuqaha, dying in 1111. Ibn 'Arabi, whose work greatly influenced the teachings of almost all later Sufis, died in 1240. So did the teachings of al-Jilli, Hamzah Fansuri in Java, and 'Abd Rauf Sinkel in Malacca. Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani whose teachings formed the basis of the Tharīqah Qadiriyyah died in 1166 and Abu al-Najib al-Suhrawardi from whom the Tharīqah Suhrawardiyyah takes its name. Najmuddin al-Kubra, a prolific Central Asian Sufi figure, founder of the Kubrawiyyah Tharīqah, and highly influential on the later Naqsyabandiyah Tharīqah, died in 1221. Abu al-Hasan al-Syadzili, the North African Sufi who founded the Shadziliyyah Tharīqah died in 1258. The Rifaiyyah had become established as a Tharīqah between 1300 and 1450. The Naqsyabandiyah was already a distinctive Tharīqah by the time the Sufi who gave it its name, Baha'uddin Naqsyaband (d. 1389) was still alive, and the posthumous founder of the Shattariyyah Tharīqah, 'Abdullah al-Syattar, died in 1428-1429.

Since Islam was first taught to the people of Southeast Asia in a Sufi style, Sufi teachings greatly influenced their lives. The cosmological and metaphysical teachings of Ibn 'Arabi's Sufism could easily be integrated with Indian and indigenous Sufistic ideas. The concept of *insan kamil*, as A.C. Milner argues, had the potential to provide religious legitimacy for kings, a legitimacy not found in the more egalitarian Islam of earlier times.

The people of Southeast Asia, including the Javanese, were a community with a strong sense of brotherhood, and cooperation, somewhat isolated from their surroundings as most of them only knew Arabic unskillfully. The most educated among them studied with the great scholars of the time and then transmitted the knowledge and Thariqah they had learned to their home countries. Because of this process, the relatively small number of scholars in Mecca and Medina had a much greater influence in Southeast Asia. In the seventeenth century, these scholars included Ahmad al-Qusyasyi, Ibrahim al-Kurani, and Ibrahim's son Muhsin Thahir in Medina, who were indeed the most influential scholars and Sufis of their day. In the 18th century, the Medina cleric Muhammad al-Saman had a similar influence among the Indonesians. In the mid-nineteenth century, a native Indonesian cleric and Sufi, Ahmad Khatif Sambas in Mecca, became the main center of attention of the Javanese people, and in the second half of the century, the Shaykhs of the zawiyah of the Thariqah Naqshabandiyah at Jabal Abu Qubais in Mecca surpassed all other scholars in popularity.

Of the several Thariqahs taught by al-Qusyasyi and al-Kurani, the Shattariyah was the Thariqah much more favored by Indonesian students. Both shaykhs are known primarily as adherents of the Naqsyabandiyah Thariqah. 'Abdurrauf Singkel who studied with both of them and was sent to Sumatra as a caliph, was the most famous of their Indonesian students to study in the Arab lands. 'Abdurrauf then spread the Syatariyah Thariqah in Aceh in 1679. The organization of this Thariqah became clear and its development can be traced through the genealogy of the guru-disciple relationship to several regions in Indonesia.

Almost a century later, the Javanese in the Arab lands were very interested in the lessons given by a very charismatic scholar, Muhammad b. 'Abd Karim al-Samman (d. 1775) in Medina. Al-Samman was the custodian of the prophet's tomb and the author of several books on Sufi metaphysics, but it was primarily as the founder of a new Thariqah that he became influential. He combined the Khalwatiyah, Qadiriyyah, and Naqsyabandiyah Thariqah with the North African Shadziliyyah Thariqah. This combination became known as the Sammaniyah Thariqah. Qadiriyyah wa Naqsyabandiyah is a combined Thariqah similar to the Sammaniyah, in which the spiritual techniques of the Qadiriyyah and Naqsyabandiyah Thariqah are the main elements but also contain other elements beyond them. This Thariqah is the only one among the "mu'tabar" Thariqahs founded by an Indonesian scholar, Ahmad Khatib Sambas (East Kalimantan).

In its development, the Qadiriyyah wa Naqsyabandiyah Thariqah is one of the two Thariqahs that have the largest number of followers in the archipelago. This Thariqah which was originally born in al-Jilli now extends its network to almost all Islamic countries including Indonesia. Even the *manaqib* (the history of his birth and privileges) now always colors the potential of Islamic rituals in mainland Java.

The other tariqah is the Naqsyabandiyah Khalidiyyah which spread throughout Indonesia thanks to the zawiyah established by the caliph of Maulana Khalid, 'Abdullah al-Arzinjani in Jabal Abu Qubais, Mecca. 'Abdullah's successors, Sulaiman al-Qarimi, Sulaiman al-Zuhdi and Ali Ridha directed the spread of the Thariqah mainly to Javanese people visiting Mecca and Medina in even greater numbers. Thousands of people were initiated into the Tariqah and trained during seclusion in the zawiyah, and it was here that Indonesians received their diplomas to teach the Tariqah.

4. IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

4.1 Research Implications

The findings of this research have important academic implications, particularly in enriching the body of knowledge in Islamic history and civilization. By documenting and analyzing the pivotal roles played by religious leaders in the spread and development of Islam in Banyumas, this study provides valuable insight into the historical dynamics of religious authority and its societal influence. It highlights the importance of integrating local historical narratives into broader Islamic historiography, which can deepen students' and scholars' understanding of how Islam adapted and flourished in specific cultural and geographic contexts. This knowledge serves as a critical reference for academic curricula, especially in Islamic studies, sociology of religion, and Southeast Asian history.

4.2 Research Contributions

Socially, the research contributes to the preservation and revitalization of the legacy of religious leaders whose dedication to spiritual and societal progress has shaped the Islamic identity of Banyumas. It inspires the formation

of an Islamic social order that honors local wisdom while embracing progress and reform. Furthermore, this study supports the development of culturally rooted Islamic education by emphasizing values such as leadership, community service, and resilience. These contributions are particularly relevant for universities, as the study can serve as both a teaching resource and a foundation for further research that connects historical Islamic scholarship with contemporary challenges and aspirations in Indonesian Muslim society.

5. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

5.1 Limitations

This study acknowledges several limitations that need to be considered in interpreting its findings. The data collection process primarily relied on documentation, participant observation, and in-depth interviews, which may not fully capture the broader spectrum of historical and contemporary influences of religious leaders in Banyumas. The study focused on selected prominent figures, thereby potentially overlooking the contributions of other influential yet less-documented leaders who also played significant roles in shaping the region's religious and social landscape. Furthermore, the scope of the research is geographically limited to Banyumas, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other regions with different cultural or historical contexts.

5.2 Recommendation for Future Research

Future studies are encouraged to expand the scope and depth of investigation into the roles of religious figures in social, educational, and religious development, particularly in underrepresented regions or among lesser-known individuals. By including broader ethnographic fieldwork, oral histories, and comparative studies across regions, future research can offer a more comprehensive understanding of how Islamic values have been transmitted and sustained through generations. Additionally, scholars in education and da'wah should explore how the legacy of these religious leaders can be integrated into contemporary models of Islamic education and community development. The methods and strategies employed by past leaders can serve as valuable frameworks for developing relevant, contextualized approaches to Islamic propagation and pedagogy in the modern era.

6. CONCLUSION

Religious figures, particularly in the Banyumas region, have historically held influential positions in various aspects of community life, including religion, education, politics, and the economy. Their contributions to the development of social and religious life in Banyumas were once profound and highly respected. However, with the advent of modernism and rapid social changes, the visibility and recognition of these religious leaders have significantly declined. Their names, legacies, and societal contributions are increasingly forgotten or marginalized. This situation calls for urgent academic attention to rediscover, document, and analyze their roles so that the values they upheld can be appreciated and emulated by future generations through scientific publications and historical records.

The study concludes that religious leaders in Banyumas not only played a central role in spiritual and cultural life but also significantly shaped broader societal developments. Their influence extended into areas such as cultural preservation, religious preaching, the transmission of knowledge, the founding of religious institutions, and even social reform. They helped shape the religious mindset and identity of local communities, while also contributing to national character-building and the political movements that fought for Indonesia's independence. Their efforts were pivotal in both maintaining community cohesion and resisting colonial domination, making their role foundational in both local and national narratives.

Historically, religious leaders were instrumental in mobilizing communities for resistance against foreign powers, as seen in various regions of Java. For instance, during the late 16th and early 17th centuries, figures in the Banten kingdom, such as the qadli, Mangkubumi, and Tumenggung, played strategic political roles in resisting Dutch colonial forces. Likewise, the Mataram dynasty, which included what is now Yogyakarta, waged prolonged struggles against the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in efforts that were not only political but also religious in nature, aiming to Islamize Java and reclaim autonomy. These historical accounts underscore the enduring significance of religious leaders as agents of change whose legacies deserve greater recognition in contemporary discourse.

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Author Contribution Statement

The author declares that the entire research and writing process for this article was conducted independently. The author assumes full responsibility for all data associated with this research. No other individual contributed as a co-author or made any significant contribution to the content of this work.

Declaration of Generative AI (GenAI) Usage in Scientific Writing

The authors declare that [QuillBot](#) was used solely to correct typographical errors and minor grammatical inconsistencies. The use of AI was strictly confined to language mechanics and did not influence the substantive content, theoretical foundations, or empirical findings of the research. All instances of Generative AI usage in this article were conducted by the authors in accordance with the [JISMB GenAI Tool Usage Policy](#), with the authors assuming full responsibility for the originality, accuracy, and integrity of the work.

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