

# **Muslim Social Movements in Cirebon and the Emergence of National Resistance Movements Against the Dutch Colonial Government in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Indonesia**

*Journal of Asian  
Social Science Research*  
2022, Vol. 4, No. 1: 63-86  
<https://cassr.net/jasr/>  
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## **Abstract**

The early twentieth century saw the emergence of Muslim social movements as a new model of resistance against the Dutch colonial rule in Indonesia. This model of the resistance movement was a response to various changes in politics, social and religious culture in the early decades of the 20th century due to dynamics within the Muslim community as well as the new policy of the colonial government. This article studies the emergence of Muslim social movements in Cirebon, West Java, and its impacts on the development of the Muslims' resistance movement against the Dutch colonial rule in Indonesia. There have not been many studies of Cirebon's role in Islamic social movements in the early 20th century. Therefore, this article, using a historical method, attempts to contribute to this literature by examining social movements carried out by Muslims in Cirebon and their impacts on the emergence of resistance against Dutch colonial rule in Indonesia. The findings show that Cirebon, which was one of the main centres of early Islamic civilization in the Indonesian archipelago, played a

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prominent role in the emergence of Muslim social movements in early 20th century Indonesia. Various Muslim social organizations emerged in the area such as Sarekat Islam, Persarekatan Ulama, Nahdhatul Ulama, and Muhammadiyah. Although these social-religious organisations had differences or were in tension on various issues, their emergence succeeded in convincing the native people of the importance of a new strategy in their resistance against the long and hegemonic rule of the Dutch colonial government which had ruled the Cirebon region since the late 17th century.

### **Key Words**

Muslim social movements, Cirebon, resistance, Dutch colonialism, Indonesian Islam

### **Introduction**

Resistance and rebellion fill the pages of the history of European colonialism in the world. History records that only with resistance did the colonized finally gain independence. The same feature happened in the Dutch East Indies which later changed its name to Indonesia after independence. Many studies have been carried out on the resistance movements that occurred in this archipelago, such as the resistance of the king and the people of Badung in Bali (Mirawati 2013), the Aceh War led by Cut Nya Dien (Kirana and Wiharyanto 2022), Sawitto's resistance in Sulawesi (Amir 2018), the Prince Diponegoro War (Ariwibowo 2021), Wangi-Wangi people's rebellion (Lina, Hadara, and Hayari 2020), and the resistance of Sultan Thaha Saifuddin in Jambi (Sianipar 2022). One of the important points is the change in the strategy of resistance from partially, physically and regionally restricted to non-physical, well organized and massive with a much wider scope.

This change in strategy cannot be separated from the emergence of a new awareness among indigenous leaders about the importance of the intellectual side in resistance. At the same time, thanks to political pressure within the Netherlands, the colonial government made a policy change toward the native people, which was known as ethical politics, in 1901. These two factors played a major role in the emergence of Muslim social movements such as Jami'atul Khair (Sari 2020), Sarekat (Dagang) Islam (Mustakif and Mulyati 2019), Hayatul Qulub (Permanasari 2019), Muhammadiyah (Nashir 2010), Nahdlatul Ulama (Farih 2016) and others. Through these mass-based socio-religious organizations, the indigenous

people carried out resistance with a new “face and look”. The social movements of Muslims mentioned above are generally a manifestation of the ultimate mission of Islam to transform the social life of Muslims to become better and able to uphold Islamic values (Jurdi 2013). The birth of these Muslim social movements became one of the driving forces for indigenous people, especially Muslims, not only in the context of resistance to the colonial ruler but also in developing a new awareness of independence.

Regarding the history of Islamic social movements in Indonesia, Izudin divided it into several phases that were adjusted according to the period, one of which was the colonial period. This period is regarded as the initial phase of the occurrence of Islamic social movements in Indonesia, known as the traditional movements, which were characterised as partial movements. Apart from having limitations in their nature, the ideas used as manifestations of social protest were still coloured with myths so that the emerging movements were not based on collective awareness as a response to the inequality they faced (Izudin 2017).

In their development, Islamic social movements in Indonesia began to be influenced by the emergence of Islamic thoughts and reform movements in the world before the 20th century. These movements were carried out by Islamic figures, including Jamaluddin Al-Afghani (1839-1897), Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905), and Rashid Ridho (1865-1935) (Rosidin 2018a). Although geographically Islam in the archipelago is on the periphery of the Islamic world, its development cannot be separated from the influence of Islam in the Middle East as the centre of Islamic civilization (Fadhly 2018), including the publication of magazines and the formation of social, economic, religious, and even political organizations (Padmo 2007). As a result, various Islamic-based organizations emerged such as the Sarekat Dagang Islam (SDI), Jam’iyyat Khair (1905), Al-Irsyad (1915), Persyarikatan Ulama (1911), and Muhammadiyah (1912) (Sulistiono 2001). These mass-based organizations became the forerunner of strengthening national awareness that crossed regional, ethnic or racial boundaries, and spread to various regions in the Dutch East Indies including Cirebon, in now West Java province.

Cirebon is not only known as one of the centres of the Islamization of West Java but also an important part of the Islamic social movement carried out by Islamic organizations in Indonesia. This can be seen when Cirebon hosted the Al-Islam Congress in 1922. Cirebon also became one of the centres of the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) movement because of the large number of NU-based pesantren, a kind of traditional Islamic boarding

school. Other mass organizations established either at the centre or at branches were Persyarikatan Ulama and Muhammadiyah. However, in this case, there have not been many studies of Cirebon's role in Islamic social movements in the early 20th century. Therefore, in this article, using the historical method, we examine social movements carried out by Muslims in Cirebon and their impacts on the emergence of resistance against Dutch colonial rule in Indonesia.

### **Cirebon in the Early 20th Century**

Toward the twentieth century, criticism of the colonial system of centralized government strengthened and prompted changes to a decentralized direction. Finally, in 1903, the *Desentralisatiewet* (Decentralization Law), which implemented a decentralized system was officially issued (Kartodirjo 2015). Based on that, the colonial government gave wider autonomy to the residency leadership. Apart from that, in terms of structure, a special government for urban areas was also formed under the Residency, namely the *gemeente* led by the *burgemeester* (mayor) (Hardjasaputra 2011). At both the Residency and *gemeente* levels, semi-parliamentary political organizations were also formed with the number of members regulated by the colonial government with a composition of Dutch, natives and other foreigners, namely the City Council (*Gemeente Raad*) for *gemeente* and the Residency Council for Residency. This is the first local political institution provided for the people to voice their aspirations, albeit with various restrictions and limitations (Hestiliani 2019).

In 1819, Cirebon was designated as one of the twenty residencies on the island of Java. Cirebon Residency oversaw several areas in the southern part of the now West Java Province, from Cirebon to Galuh. Meanwhile, Cirebon City as the capital of the residency was established by *gemeente* (*Kotapraja* or city town) in 1906. Three factors were taken into consideration by the colonial government in determining the establishment of *gemeente* in the Cirebon Residency (Masduqi 2010). The first was the number and composition of the population. The main focus was the presence of white people in Cirebon who were not only Dutch people but also other Europeans and other nationalities, including ethnic Chinese, making up a minimum of 10% of the total population. The second was local conditions related to the potentials that could support the sustainability of *gemeente*. The last one was finance related to taxation matters in the local area which could be obtained from various sources.

Along with the development of *gemeente*, the rise of new awareness among the native people was expected to contribute to the political dynamics at that time. Some native leading figures started loudly to voice the need to

involve natives in the process of political policies used by the government, which they believed gave an impact on the fates of their fellow natives. As a direct response to this pressing notion, the colonial government established a newly semi-parliamentary council named the *Volksraad* (People's Council) on 18 May 1918, in which native representatives were involved in governmental affairs.

Meanwhile, the socio-economic conditions of Cirebon in the early 20th century were very dynamic and complex. After the enactment of the *culturestelsel* in 1830, there was a significant increase in the population of Cirebon. The change in the mode of agricultural production from traditional to modern industrialism became a magnet for migration from surrounding areas, such as Tegal and Pekalongan (Taufik and Husin 2014). The shift in production mode gave birth to a variety of new occupations. Another economic phenomenon was an increase in trade which invited foreign traders from other ethnicities such as Europe, China and the Middle East (Hartatik 2014). Cirebon was supported by a wealth of agricultural products and plantations from the surrounding areas. In addition, economic growth in Cirebon was strengthened by a city modernization policy that included the construction of ports, roads, factories, government and private offices, irrigation, waterways, markets, hospitals, and other health institutions (Hendro 2014).

The sharp increase in population and the modernization of Cirebon city impacted the environmental and health conditions in Cirebon. At the beginning of the 20th century, various epidemics hit the people in the Cirebon region such as cholera, typhus, bubonic plague, malaria, and influenza (Emalia 2020; 2021). As a result, thousands of people died and socio-economic conditions deteriorated (Masduqi 2011).

In terms of education, the educational system in Cirebon in the early 20th century was marked by the development of two educational models, religious and secular ones. Referring to points outlined in the ethical policy, the Dutch colonial government introduced modern schools such as ELS (*Europeesche Lagere School*), ELM (*Europeesche Lagere Meisjeschool*), HIS (*Hollandsch Inlandsche School*), HCS (*Holladsch Chineesche School*), *Twede Klaase Inlandsche School* (Indigenous Second Grade School) and, for advanced levels, MULO (*Meer Uitgebreid Lagere Onderwijs*). At the same time, Muslim leaders took a quick response by establishing modern yet religiously-based educational institutions such as *Madrasah Ta'lim al-Aulad al-Islam* (Darul Hikam) and *Madrasah Al-Irsyad* (Hadi 2014). *Gemeente* Cirebon's lack of attention to education and teaching for the natives encouraged people to take the initiatives to establish private schools that had similarities with the primary schools owned by the Dutch

colonial government (Masduqi 2011) such as Christian ELS, *Hollandsch Chineesche Zendingschool*, Kartini schools, Taman Siswa schools, HIS PBG, HIS Sarekat Islam, and *HIS de Volharding (persistence)* (AS Hardjasaputra and Tawalinudin 2011).

The existence of Cirebon as one of the centres of Islamic civilization cannot be separated from the various developments that have occurred in Indonesia, especially on the island of Java. A study of the history of Islamic social movements in Cirebon in the 20th century shows the great influence of developments that occurred in the city on Muslims in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia after its independence in 1945). Interestingly, what happened to the Muslims in Cirebon was also inseparable from the developments that were happening to the Muslims in the world. This is not surprising for Muslims in this archipelago had been connected to the Islamic world with various channels since the beginning of Islamization in the archipelago and this connection continued to strengthen into the 20th century (Duriana 2018).

The Islamization process that took place in Cirebon could not be separated from the role of international Muslim preachers such as Syekh Hasanudin, Syekh Nurjati, and in particular Sunan Gunung Djati. They come from the Middle East. Under their leadership, Islam spread not only in Cirebon but also in almost all of the western parts of the island of Java and southern Sumatra (Wildan 2003). The same role was also played by charismatic figures of Cirebon in the late 19th and 20th centuries such as Syekh Tolhah Kalisapu and Kiyai Abbas from Buntet. They were alumni of Middle Eastern education. Syekh Tolhah developed the Qadariyah Naqshabandiyah order and is known as a pioneer of the tarekat movement in West Java. Kiai Abbas not only introduced the Tijaniyah tarekat in the pesantren, but also played a major role in the birth of a jihad resolution in the Indonesian war of independence.

The influence of Islam on the Cirebon people is reflected in their social and cultural lives. Their traditions, customs, arts and beliefs are heavily influenced by Islamic teachings like the tradition of the coastal community of Cirebon in telling the stories of the prophets and apostles, which are usually conveyed at a circumcision ceremony by a cleric or parents to their children. Therefore, the presence of Islam in Cirebon is inseparable from the life of its people (AS Hardjasaputra and Tawalinudin 2011).

### **The Rise of Muslim-Based Mass Organizations in Cirebon**

As stated above, the early 20th century saw a change in the pattern and strategy of the resistance movement carried out by Muslims in the Dutch

East Indies, including Cirebon. Before the 20th century, the resistance movements in Cirebon were mostly physical in nature such as the ones that were carried out by Mbah Muqoyyim in Buntet, Kiai Jatira in Ciwaringin, Kiai Romli in Balerante, and the Kedondong war. The failure of physical resistance and the arrival of new ideas from abroad prompted awareness of the need for a more organized resistance strategy in the form of socio-religious organizations in Cirebon.

### *Sarekat Islam*

*Sarekat Islam* (SI) was officially established by HOS Tjokroaminoto on 10 September 1912. Previously, this organization was called *Sarekat Dagang Islam* (SDI), which was founded on 16 October 1905 in Surakarta, Central Java, by Haji Samanhudi (Djaelani 2017). One year later, SI leaders officially established their local partners in Surakarta. Then, in 1913 some branches of SI were established in West Java, including the one in the residency of Cirebon. In the first year of its establishment in Cirebon Residency, SI attracted the people of Cirebon to join. The number of members of SI in Cirebon residency was recorded at 23,000 people, which constitutes 60.96% of the total number of SI members in West Java (Lubis 2011).

Viewing the number of members, SI in Cirebon residency ranked first in West Java and second at the national level leaving only SI in Surakarta at the top. However, in the following year, their numbers decreased. For instance, in 1914, SI of Cirebon Residency became the third largest in Java with 40 thousand members, compared to Batavia which had around 77 thousand members and Surakarta which had 60 thousand members (Emalia 2008). The rapid increase of members of SI was due to its propaganda capabilities. It was claimed that SI was the only mass-based organization that was actively engaged in religious affairs with an attitude in line with upholding the orthodox streams of Islam. This also owed to the propagated notion that SI was a movement that would save the native people from the threat of colonialism and take a side with the disadvantageous communities (Jayusman and Shavab 2021).

In the early days of its development, SI got support from local *ulama* who were influential among people. In Cirebon Residency, the support that SI received did not only come from the *ulama* figures but also from people who were convinced to join. The fact that the early founder of SDI was Haji Samanhudi (1868-1956) was a decisive factor in gaining endorsement from those leading figures of palaces in Cirebon. It was a circulated report that stated that Haji Samanhudi was a former student of Kiyai Abdul Jamil (1842-1919), the supreme leader of Pesantren Buntet and a senior adviser

in religious affairs at palaces in Cirebon. This showed a close relationship between SI leaders with Cirebon. Thus, it was plausible to see the arrival of SI to Cirebon got strong support from Kiai Abdul Jamil, who then became the leader of the Syuriah Council of the Sarekat Islam of Cirebon. Therefore, Kiai Abdul Jamil was known as a palace adviser as well as a popular religious leader who had an anti-colonial attitude (Emalia 2006). It is noteworthy to mention that SI also enjoyed support from the *tarekat* groups that were flourishing in the Cirebon Residency (ANRI 2014).

Having been persuaded by the pivotal roles of the ulama such as Kiyai Abdul Jamil at the top level of SI leadership in Cirebon, the reigning sultans of the traditional local palaces as a part of the indigenous elite showed open support to SI. Sultans of both the Kasepuhan and Kanoman Palaces saw SI as the most possible vehicle for them to express their grievances resulting from the penetrative intervention of the Dutch colonial government over their affairs. Under the strict control of the colonial government for a long time, sultans of both palaces were being cut off from their subordinates. Hence, both local palaces showed their support for all activities carried out by SI such as protesting and criticizing the policies of the Dutch colonial government. For example, the palaces supported the establishment of Qur'an-based Islamic schools.

Since the inception of SI, the leaders of SI of Cirebon were active in organizing many grassroots protests, including the protest of a merchant group. They voiced their dissatisfaction with the economic deprivation of Muslims under the Dutch colonial government (*Gemeente* of Cirebon). For instance, Bratanata, a deputy chairman, in a meeting criticised the lack of opportunity for the natives to take part in government affairs. His critique was not aimed at bringing SI of Cirebon to join the colonial government but as a protest against the injustice of the *Gemeente* Cirebon that burdened the natives with tax (Emalia 2008). So, it was not surprising that the Chinese people in Cirebon who at that time controlled the economy of Cirebon became the main target of attacks. For instance, in 1913, there was a riot in the Celeng village, Lohbener, Indramayu. The riot rose from an open conflict between Mohammad Yasin, an activist of the local SI, and the *Wedana* (sub-district) assistant of Pemajahan. Many Chinese were persecuted and robbed, and their homes were burned. Another case was the Gebangilir riot between the Chinese and members of SI on 23 September 1914. This incident was not much different from that in Lohbener. In the aftermath, 25 rioters were arrested and jailed, and 14 people were stamped as sympathizers of the riot who were then released without further charge. Reports said among the victims were five Chinese people of whom three were badly injured (Taufik and Husin 2014).



In its later development, SI paid attention to other aspects, including education as well as politics. This is evidenced by the struggle of the SI of Cirebon to establish an Islamic educational institution for native people. To do so, led by M. Djaid, SI organized a special meeting that was initially to prepare for the 10th anniversary of the foundation of SI of the Cirebon branch. A number of representatives from such districts as Majalengka, Indramayu, Kuningan, Sumber, Clancang, Jamblang, Losari, Sindanglaut, and Kedawung attended the meeting. Interestingly, representatives of other associations and media were also present such as the Paguyuban Pasundan, Sin Po, Kong Po, Utusan Hindia, Neraca, Fadjar and others. There were also representatives from the central board of SI, namely H. Agus Salim dan H. Djuanda.

During the meeting, all participants discussed the need for Islamic education through which all activities were designed in accordance with the basic principles of SI, which were purely based on the teachings of the Quran and Hadith. As a result of the meeting, the Sarekat Islam of Cirebon set up the *Igama School* or *School met de Al-Quran*, but it was still similar to that of HIS intended for Javanese aristocrats. In the school, Dutch was the language of instruction. Likewise, Islamic lessons were included. The strong attention of SI of Cirebon over improving the quality of the education system was reinstated at a conference held on 16 July 16 1922 at *Societeit Paroekoenan* (Emalia 2008).

### *Muhammadiyah*

Muhammadiyah was founded by K.H. Ahmad Dahlan on 18 November 18 1912 in Kauman, Yogyakarta. This organization was mainly engaged in socio-religious affairs and was focused on opposing all forms of worship practices believed to be mixed with superstitions and heresies, and reviving the tradition of *ijtihad* (independent way of thinking) among Muslims in carrying out religious practices (Nashir 2010). In 1929, Muhammadiyah began to attract the people in West Java. The establishment of Muhammadiyah branches in West Java referred to the 18th Muhammadiyah congress in 1929 in Surakarta. The first branch of Muhammadiyah was in Garut from which Muhammadiyah spread its influence to other areas in West Java by sending missionaries to several areas such as Sukabumi, Bandung, Tasikmalaya and Kuningan. The Muhammadiyah branch of Kuningan was founded in 1929. Interestingly, its foundation was not possible without the close supervision of the board of the Muhammadiyah branch in Batavia (Purnama, Lubis, and Widyonugrahanto 2017).

The foundation of the Muhammadiyah branch in Kuningan was the first step in developing Muhammadiyah in the Cirebon residency. According

to Sidik Sadali, three years after the establishment of the Muhammadiyah branch in Kuningan, the people of Cirebon began to receive information about the organization. In 1933, a preacher from Kuningan named Kiai Toyib was invited to give a religious lecture in which he explained Muhammadiyah to the public including its aims and objectives. Since then, Cirebon regularly held religious gatherings once a month by inviting Kiai Toyib as a lecturer. This regular religious gathering took place at Haji Wasiaatmadja's house at Gang Syekh Magelung, Kebun Baru. Those who attended that program included R. Soejat and Haji Hoed (Farihin and Rosidin 2019). It is noteworthy to mention that this religious gathering was believed to be the forerunner of the establishment of Muhammadiyah educational institutions in Cirebon when it transformed into a non-formal educational institution known as Al-Wustho, which was led by Kiai Toyib. In 1947, the first formal educational institution was founded through the conversion of the Al-Wustho into an Islamic High School (*Sekolah Menengah Islam* or SMI) (Noer 1982), which is now the place of Sekolah Dasar (Elementary School or SD) 3 Muhammadiyah Cirebon.

At first, efforts to spread Muhammadiyah in the Cirebon Residency were carried out clandestinely. It was only in 1935 that Muhammadiyah was publicly introduced to the wider community after other reformist organizations such as Al-Irsyad and Persis rose to surpace in Cirebon residency, although Cirebon as a name of the place had been in a close contact with Muhammadiyah since 1922. As being stated elsewhere, Cirebon hosted the first Al-Islam congress, in which delegates of a variety of Muslim based mass organizations gathered including those of Muhammadiyah. It was KH Ahmad Dahlan, the founder as well as supreme leader of Muhammadiyah attended the congress (Hadi 2014). It seems that KH Ahmad Dahlan was more focused on matters related to congress instead of expanding Muhammadiyah's influence in Cirebon.

Haji Basoeki took the leadership of the Cirebon branch of Muhammadiyah in the first two years of its development in the city. Haji Bazar Ma'ruf, a special envoy of the central board of Muhammadiyah assisted the new chairman in handling the organization. From 1939 to 1942 the Cirebon branch of Muhammadiyah succeeded in expanding its influence, due to a new structure it introduced. Then, a teaching division was set up and led by Kamil Kartapradja. After completing his duties in Cirebon, Haji Ma'ruf Bazaar returned to Yogyakarta in 1939. After serving for five years, Haji Basoeki gave up the leadership of the Cirebon branch to Haji Hoed who took the office from 1942 to 1947 (Farihin and Rosidin 2019).

### *Persarekatan Ulama*

Hayatul Qulub was the initial name of the Persarekatan Ulama, which was founded in 1911 in Majalengka. Its founder was Kiyai Haji (K.H.) Abdul Halim, who was born in 1887 in Ciberelang, Majalengka (Noer 1982). He came from religiously devout family background. His father was K.H. Muhammad Iskandar, a religious court official (*penghulu*) in the area of Majalengka and his mother was Hj. Siti Mutmainah. Both were still close relatives. Abdul Halim was the youngest of seven children. In his childhood, he was called Mohammad Sjatari, who was later better known as Otong Syatori (Falah 2008). After completing his religious studies in some Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), in 1908 he went to Mecca like other charismatic and notorious religious figures such as K.H. Ahmad Dahlan, K.H. Hasyim Asy'ary, and K.H. Mas Abdurrahman.

Abdul Halim was a man with a mission. During his study in the holy city of Mecca, he was impressed by the two educational institutions that applied a modern teaching system, which applied a teaching curriculum and provided students with benches and tables. The halaqah system was gradually abandoned. Both institutions were located in Bab Al-Salam near Mecca and Jeddah. Impressed by this fact, Abdul Halim had a strong ambition to modernize traditional education institutions in his homeland (Noer 1982).

Upon his return in 1911, Abdul Halim started to introduce new ideas of the modern education system in his home village in Majalengka. Yet, unlike what he discovered in Mecca that focused on education, he not only gave special efforts in the fields of education (*tarbiyah*), but also in economic enterprises (*iqtişādiyah*). It was not surprising for he was a trader of the *batik* cloth, perfume and religious books. In his educational curriculum, he set up a variety of technical skills, carpentry, and textiles. Thus, Abdul Halim combined educational modernization and economic empowerment for the betterment of his fellow Muslim natives (Saefullah 2017). To support his above-mentioned goals, only six months after his homeland return, he founded an organization engaged in education and economics called Hayatul Qulub.

The Hayatul Qulub, within a short time, succeeded in attracting 60 farmers and traders. In the following years, the Hayatul Qulub was more known in the economic fields as Abdul Halim founded a study club named *Madrasah I'arat al-Muta'allimin* in 1912. Since then, the Hayatul Qulub focused on empowering fellow Muslim traders, especially when they faced Chinese traders who had almost full control of economic enterprises in the country including in the Cirebon Residency (Noer 1982). To do so,

Abdul Halim initiated building a weaving company to produce cloth needed for native *batik* traders (Falah 2008). As a result, he faced direct trading conflicts with the Chinese businessmen who were more in favour before the colonial government. This trading conflict brought about severe treatment from the colonial government and forced Abdul Halim to close down the Hayatul Qulub in 1914.

As mentioned above, Abdul Halim in the field of education founded the *Madrasah I'anat al-Muta'allimin* in 1912 before he changed its name into the *Jam'iyat I'anat al-Muta'allimin* in 1916. However, this new name was short-lived as Abdul Halim then changed it into the *Persjarikatan Oelama* (Muslim Scholar Association) following the submission of legal approval to the colonial government. Under the auspices of HOS Tjokroaminoto, a supreme leader of the Sarekat Islam, the *Persjarikatan Oelama* succeeded in obtaining legal status from the Dutch colonial government in 1917. Since then, the *Persjarikatan Oelama* was officially legalized and free to hold its activities, which for its first decade, were restricted around Majalengka and its surrounding areas. After 1934, it was able to expand its influence throughout Java and Madura (Falah 2008).

Abdul Halim's dreams to modernize Islamic traditional boarding schools came to reality when he founded Santi Asromo in 1932. Since its inception, the school was similar to that of the existing *pesantren* type. Yet, it applied a modern system in which schooling was divided into three levels, namely elementary, middle and advanced. The curriculum was composed following this level-based design. Not only were religious subjects taught, but also some secular ones. Furthermore, students were equipped with various kinds of skills such as farming, making handicrafts from iron and wood, weaving, and processing various materials such as soap making (Choirunniswah 2013).

Despite failures encountered by the Hayatul Qulub, Abdul Halim, who was so-called an ulama entrepreneur, continued his tireless efforts to improve the economic conditions of fellow natives. This was the banner of *Persjarikatan Oelama*. He strongly believed that only through being independent of the economic ties of the colonial government, the economic conditions of the natives could be improved. He then in 1927 started purchasing two and a half hectares of land for agricultural purposes. In the 1930s, he bought a printing company and in 1939 established a weaving company (Noer 1982).

In addition to educational and economic programs, Abdul Halim through the *Persjarikatan Oelama* provided social services and was then also active in politics. He established an orphanage special section which was managed by the women's division called Fathimiyah. In politics, under

the tutelage of Abdul Halim, the *Persjarikatan Oelama* used its printing company to publish a magazine called *Soeara Persjarikatan Oelama* (The Voice of Ulama Association or SPO). The *Persjarikatan Oelama* explored other means of voicing its grievances such as organizing a direct audience with the colonial government officials as seen in the case of the demand for the inclusion of religious subjects in public schools' curriculum. Another case was its objection to the implementation of the inheritance regulation that was based on customary law (*hukum adat*) instead of Islamic law. The *Persjarikatan Oelama* directly presented both demands to the office of the *Adviseur voor Inlandsch Zaken* (Advisor of Native Affairs) at Batavia in 1940 (Noer 1982).

### *Nahdlatul Ulama*

Nahdlatul Ulama (The Resurgence of Muslim Scholars or NU) was founded on 31 January 1926 as an Indonesian Islamic organization spearheaded by the ulama (Usman 2018). In its development, NU becomes the largest Muslim mass-based organization spreading in almost all parts of the country, even abroad, with tens of millions of members. According to Nina H. Lubis, two factors drove NU into West Java, namely the kinship networks among kyai and their intellectual networks in *pesantren*. Many young Muslims from areas in West Java headed to many *pesantren* in East Java to master religious subjects before setting up *pesantren* in their villages. These *pesantren* include *Pesantren Tremas* (Pacitan), *Pesantren Bangkalan* (Madura), and *Pesantren Tebuireng* (Jombang) (Purnama, Lubis, and Widyonugrahanto 2017). As for NU, which was founded in East Java by kyai who were closely attached to *pesantren*, it was not surprising that the spread of NU in West Java has been very efficiently carried out by kyai and santri through the *pesantren*-based network.

The rise of NU in West Java cannot be separated from the religious features of the people (Sujati 2019a). Generally, Muslim communities in West Java paid high respect to kyai along with their affiliation. The spread of NU in West Java would not happen without the central role of the kyai. In its 3rd national congress in 1928, NU was determined to spread its influence over all parts of Java and Madura. In particular, for the mission of establishing NU's branches in West Java, the NU central board sent a special envoy led by K.H. Wahab Hasbullah, K.H. Bishri Syansuri and K.H. Abdul Halim, all of them were members of the *Lajhnah Nashihin* (Propaganda Commission). In just two years, NU's branches were established in Cirebon, Tasikmalaya and Ciamis (Purnama, Lubis, and Widyonugrahanto, 2017).

The establishment of NU in West Java also owes to the great figures of NU in Cirebon namely K.H. Abbas and K.H. Anas, both are the leaders of Pesantren Buntet (Sujati 2019a). Although no data are indicating the exact time of the establishment of NU in Cirebon, it is safe to assume that NU in Cirebon was established at the same time as the foundation of NU in Surabaya in 1926. It is mainly because many NU's founders were Cirebon-based kyai such as K.H. Abdul Halim of Leuwimunding (Majalengka), who was later appointed as the *Khatib Tsani* (the second secretary) to accompany K.H. Abdul Wahhab Hasbullah.

In the following years, more Cirebon-based kyai came to the top leadership of NU at national, regional or local levels. Such big names should be mentioned here such as K.H. Abdullah Syatori of Pesantren Arjawinangun, K.H. Amin Sepuh of Pesantren Babakan Ciwaringin, K.H. Abbas of Pesantren Buntet, and K.H. Abdul Halim Baribis of Leuwimunding, Majalengka (Sujati 2019a). They played pivotal roles in expanding NU through the pesantren-based networks and their intellectual chains. K.H. Abbas of Pesantren Buntet was a former pupil of K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari of Pesantren Tebuireng as well as *Rois Akbar* (Supreme leaders) of NU. He used the Pesantren Buntet-based *pesantren* networks and its alumni chains to set up tens of NU branches in areas of the former Cirebon Residency.

In its development, NU Cirebon showed its persistence in defending its religious views against reformist circles. For instance, K.H. Abdul Khair of NU came to the stage in a religious debate versus K.H. Ahmad Sanusi of Persatuan Islam (Persis). This debate was held on 19 June 1932 in Ciledug, Cirebon. The main topics of the debate were the necessity of returning to the Qur'an and Hadith, the obligatory *ijtihad* and the prohibition of *taqlid* and some religious rituals considered to be heretical. The debate itself was led by H. Agus Salim of the central board of PSII and H. Alimoen as a note taker of the PSII of the Cirebon branch (Purnama, Lubis, and Widyonugrahanto 2017). Another religious debate took place in Gebang, Cirebon, on 31 May 1936 between the same two mass-based organizations along with Al-Irsyad. On this occasion, there were three debaters of NU, namely K.H. Masduqi, H. Abdul Khair and Awad Basit. From the opposing sides, there were A. Hasan and H. Moehsin of Persis, and H. Aliman of Al-Irsyad (Purnama, Lubis, and Widyonugrahanto 2017). Despite facing challenges and opposition, NU succeeded in cementing its influence in the areas of Cirebon Residency, particularly through *pesantren* and its alumni networks.

It is noted that, in the early 20th century, Muslim social movements emerged and flourished in Indonesia through various mass-based organizations. They were characterized by different and even conflicting notions in a variety of fields, mainly religious ones, among their leaders and supporters. Yet, attempts to unify those notions were not absent. In fact, at the end of the 1930s, a dream to see the unity of Muslims came to reality when different organizations agreed to set up a sort of federative organization named *Majelis Islam 'Ala Indonesia* (MIAI) on 29 September 1937. This took place in Surabaya with some prominent figures being the main actors behind the scene such as K.H. Mas Mansur of Muhammadiyah, K.H. Muhammad Dahlan and Kiai Wahab Hasbullah of NU, and Wondoamiseno of Sarekat Islam. The establishment of MIAI was aimed at bringing together all Muslim-based organizations so that they could openly discuss important issues for the ultimate benefit of Islam and Muslims (Noer 1982). The unity spirit was soon widespread among Muslim society including those in Cirebon. However, this favourable circumstance was short-lived following the arrival of the Japanese occupation that forced Muslim leaders to dismantle MIAI in 1942.

### **Factors Contributed to the Emergence of the Cirebon Islamic Social Movements**

Some factors contributed to the emergence of Muslim social movements in Cirebon in the form of social organizations as described above and their impacts on the development of Muslim resistance in Cirebon and then Indonesia. Table 1 shows factors and triggers that contributed to the emergence of Muslim social movements in Cirebon and the impacts of these movements on the rise of the resistance movement against the Dutch colonial rule.

Table 1 Factors, Triggers, and Impacts of the Cirebon Islamic Social Movements

No	Factors	Triggers	Impacts
1	The Ethical Policy	The formation of the Cheribon <i>Gemeente</i> on 1 April 1906 based on <i>Staadsblad van Nederlandsche indie</i> No. 150/1906(Majid 2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government bureaucracy was under the full control of Europeans</li> <li>• The economy and trade were controlled and dominated by foreign Europeans and Easterners</li> <li>• Cheribon <i>Gemeente</i> focused on improving the city's infrastructure</li> <li>• Indigenous people's welfare was neglected</li> <li>• Education and teaching for indigenous people were not a priority</li> <li>• The birth of Landform in 1918</li> </ul>
2	Disputes between reformist and traditionalist groups in religious ideas	The emergence of a group of Muslim reformers in Cirebon in the early 20th century (Feillard 1999)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The spread of the ideas of returning to the Quran and Hadith as the only valid sources and disregarding other sources by the ulama of the past</li> <li>• Frictions between reformist and traditionalist groups</li> <li>• The strengthening of traditional Islamic teachings in the inner circle of the Cirebon-based sultanate families</li> </ul>



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3	The emergence of a new awareness of the need for political independence among native elites	The social, political, economic, and educational conditions of the Cirebon people were in danger following several economic and health outbreaks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The emergence of various social resistance movements</li> <li>• The awakening of awareness among native traders</li> <li>• The awakening of intellectual consciousness among natives</li> <li>• The awakening of consciousness among scholars (Rosidin 2017)</li> <li>• Kedondong War 1810-1812 led by Bagus Rangin (Farhan, Widya Wardani, and Saptodewo 2020)</li> </ul>
4	The strengthening of the <i>pesantren</i> -based networks	The continuing development of <i>pesantren</i> and the rise of modern Islamic schools in Cirebon and its surroundings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The strengthening of solidarity between <i>pesantren</i>, kyai, and santri</li> <li>• The emergence of young Muslim intellectuals as future leaders with <i>pesantren</i> background</li> <li>• The strengthening of Islam as the ideology of resistance against the colonial government</li> </ul>

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As seen in Table 1, point 4 seems to be appropriately underlined, as it shows the continuity of the various developments of Muslims in Cirebon. Since the beginning of Islamisation in the Indonesian archipelago, Cirebon has been one of the centres of Islamic intellectual networks and Islamisation with leading figures such as Syekh Hasanudin, Syekh

Nurjati and Syekh Bayanullah (Sujati 2019b; Rosidin 2018b). These three Muslim preachers had arrived at the shore of Cirebon before the rise of those so-called *Walisongo* in Java. In the following periods, the prominence of Cirebon in the context of the *ulama* network continued with the rise of the palace as its centre until the end of the 17th century (eL-Mawa 2012). The fall of the palaces under the hand of the colonial government had insignificant impacts on the development of the *ulama* networks. This could be discerned in the rise of *pesantren*-based scholars such as Kiyai Muqoyyim of Buntet, Kiyai Jatira of Ciwaringin, Kiyai Romli of Balerante and Kiai Sholeh Zamzami of Benda Kerep (Rosidin 2014). This *pesantren*-based *ulama* network later played as the backbone of various physical resistance movements in Cirebon throughout the 19th century. Following the changing mode of Muslim resistance movements in the early 20th century, the *pesantren*-based *ulama* network in Cirebon continued to be limelight through such great figures as Kiyai Abbas, Kiyai Abdul Halim, and Kiai Toyyib. Therefore, it is not surprising that with all this background including its role as a centre of Islamisation, Cirebon is considered to have played a pivotal role in the emergence and development of Muslim resistance movements against the Dutch colonial rule in Java and even the Indonesian archipelago.

## **Conclusion**

This article has shown that historically Cirebon played a pivotal role in the development of Muslims in the Dutch East Indies. After its transformation into the status of the *Gemeente* on 1 April 1906, Cirebon experienced a variety of developments in different sectors of society such as economic, political, social, religious, environmental, and health. The transformation of Cirebon from an agricultural to an industrial city made it a magnet for employment in the surrounding areas. In addition, the construction of infrastructure to support the development of Cirebon, which became the main focus of the government at that time, contributed to this development.

Historically, Cirebon was a centre of Islamic civilization in Java, especially the western part of the island, particularly from the early periods of Islamization in the Indonesian archipelago to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, Cirebon has played an important role in the dynamics of Muslim social movements in Indonesia. The city was impossible to avoid being embarked by the ongoing dynamics of Muslim movements, both at the national and international levels. The dynamics of Muslim social movements in Cirebon were driven by the ethical policy made by the Dutch East Indies colonial government, tensions between reformist and traditionalist groups, the emergence of awareness among native elites, and

the strengthening of the *pesantren*-based network. What characterizes the social movements of Muslims in Cirebon is the relationship between the Muslim social movements and the intellectual network of *pesantren* in this port city.

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