



Nahdlatul Ulama's Domination in Madura: An Eco-Anthropological Perspective

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Abstract

On the basis of the ecological anthropology perspective, this study analyzes the complex relations between the environmental environment and the Muslim population in Madura so that traditionalism Islam dominates their religious culture in the Nahdlatul Ulama model. This study reveals that Islamization history in Madura, kiasi's social, religious role, and Syaichona Kholil's figure became the three main lead factors that drive traditional religious culture in Madura, especially in Bangkalan. Two of the three factors mentioned earlier are closely related to the geographical location and ecological condition of Bangkalan.

Keywords: ecological anthropology, the Muslim population in Madura, integral ecology, Syaichona Kholil, traditionalism Islam, Nahdlatul Ulama.

Introduction

Based on NU's dominance in Madura, this study is intended to review the origins of the formation of the supremacy of the traditionalist Islamic religious style of the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) model in Madura (Rahman, 1990) from a perspective that has not been widely discussed, which is ecological anthropology. From an ecological anthropology perspective, the dominance of the NU model of traditionalist Islam in Madura cannot be separated from the influence of its geographical influence. It is stated by Samuel P. Huntington that geographical environment, as well as race, are the determining factors of human culture (Febrianto, 2016).

Huntington pointed out that climate, as the most basic element in the geographical environment, has an important role in determining whether a civilization will emerge and develop or, conversely, will be destroyed and perished. This important role can be observed, for instance, from the direct impacts that the climate has on the quality of health and the pattern of human activities, as well as from the indirect impacts that the climate has on food and disease. With this paradigm, the emergence of ancient civilization around Nile River Valley becomes the ideal precedent, showing that geographical environment greatly influenced the formation of human civilizations. Generally, the ancient civilizations were located in a large

river valley that provided prosperity and triggered progress and population growth (Febrianto, 2016).

Aligning with the focus of study in this research on the influence of Madura's geographical environment on the domination of the NU model of traditionalist Islam therein, it will first be emphasized that this research limits the scope of the time and location aspects of the research. From a time perspective, this research tends to direct its discussion on how the strong influence of Islamic traditionalism in Madura "in the past" was shaped by its geographical environment. This means that this research will not discuss the influence exerted by the geographical environment in Madura on the continuity or the development of the traditionalist style of Islam "in the present time."

Meanwhile, on the location aspect, this research will focus more on conducting a study in the Bangkalan area. Bangkalan was chosen as a sample which represents the entire region in Madura because, firstly, geographically, Bangkalan is an area in Madura closest to Java. This geographical proximity will, in turn, further highlight the important influence of Java on the Islamic style that developed in Madura. The second reason for choosing Bangkalan as a focus of the research area was the existence of KH. Mohammad Kholil who is usually well-known as Syaichona Kholil. A figure of a charismatic cleric whose Islamic thought strongly influenced not only the groups of Muslims in Bangkalan in particular but also the groups of Muslims in Madura in general.

Research Method

This research method is used to determine the conclusion of a text. In other words, content analysis in this study wants to reveal the manifested and latent ideas of the author. Therefore, the purpose to be achieved in this research falls into the category of descriptive research type. In terms of approach, this research uses a qualitative approach through the method of literature study and analysis. The library research method is used for data sources. The data collection techniques in this scientific work are documentation techniques, searching for data or theories that are relevant to the questions that formulate the research problem. The data obtained in the form of library materials are then processed and analyzed critically and in-depth to support propositions and ideas that exist from various references (Haryanto, 2017). The data is then analyzed with a method that can be called the content analysis method.

Result and Discussion

Geographical Location and Ecological Condition of Bangkalan

Bangkalan is one of the districts at the western tip of Madura Island, which is still in the East Java Province. Bangkalan Regency is located at the astronomical point between 60 51' - 70 11' south latitude and between 1120 40' - 1130 08' east longitude. Based on these astronomical points, Bangkalan Regency borders the Java Sea to the north, the Madura Strait to the south and west, and Sampang Regency to the east. The area of Bangkalan is 1. 260.14 km² of land. The following is a map of Bangkalan Regency, which shows the regional borders

of rivers that support irrigation make the ecology of Bangkalan identical to the ecology of Tegal. The ecology of the moorland consists of upland land with a few rain-fed rice fields and very few wet rice fields. Therefore, in contrast to the ecology of rice fields in Java, the ecology of the upland is mostly planted with tobacco and secondary crops such as corn. Apart from that, the upland ecology is also used to raise cattle, which do not require much water (Kuntowijoyo, 2017).

Islamic Feature in Bangkalan Regency

There are at least three factors that influence the extent of the dominance of the NU model of traditionalist Islam in Bangkalan, namely: (1) the history of Islamization in Madura, (2) the social and religious role of kiai, and (3) the character of Syaikhona Kholil. Two of the three factors mentioned at the beginning—namely the history of Islamization in Madura and the socio-religious role of kiai—in the discussion of ecological anthropology are said to be very closely related to the geographical location of Bangkalan which is close to Java and is in the lowlands, as well as the ecological conditions of Bangkalan which are in the form of ecology “tegal” (purposed to describe a wide area).

1) History of Islamization in Madura

In general, the process of Islamic arrival in Madura is divided into several theories. The first theory was put forward by Abdurrahman, a historian who has special attention to Madurese's history. In his book entitled *Selayang Pandang Sejarah Madura*, Abdurachman concludes that the first bearers of Islam on Madura Island came from the grassroots. This conclusion was marked by the arrival of Islamic traders from Gujarat who stopped in Sumenep, especially at Kalianget port (eastern Madura region). Decades of interaction between residents and migrant traders have, in turn, influenced their culture and beliefs. However, on the other hand, Abdurachman still admits that the era when Islam was widely known and then embraced by many residents began with the arrival of Sunan Giri, who spread Islam massively on Madura Island (Abdurrahman, 1988).

In contrast to Abdurachman, H. J. De Graaf and TH. G. TH. Pigeaue stated that the presence of Islam on Madura Island began with the aristocratic elites in Madura. This conclusion was obtained from De Graaf and Pigeau's analysis of economic, cultural, and political developments, which have been more dominant in Java than in Madura since pre-Islamic times. The arid condition of the land and the absence of adequate ports meant that the rulers of the Javanese kingdom preferred to utilize the abundant human resources in Madura to be employed in their homes and rice fields rather than making Madura a new economic center. These unequal conditions ultimately meant that the Madurese did not have native kings who originally came from the land of Madura. Since ancient times, the rulers of the most important areas in Madura have always been Javanese, and they received mandates from the kingdom there. So, when the Hindu Buddhist kingdom in Java began to collapse and was replaced by Islamic kingdoms on the coast of East Java, Islamic influence began to enter and spread in Madura (De Graaf & Pigeaue, 1989).

Despite the differences between the two theories above, they both show that the spread of Islam in Madura must be connected to the influence of Islam in Java, which is

geographically located close to Madura. Therefore, it is not an exaggeration to say that culture related to Islamic patterns in Java also developed in Madura. In Java, the Islamic style that is developing is the syncretism of Islamic sharia with Sufism and local traditions (*local wisdom*) (Azra, 1994; Mulkhan, 2020) or mystical synthesis in Ricklefs' language (Ricklefs, 2013). Ricklefs describes mystical synthesis through the following three main pillars: *first*, a strong sense of Islamic identity that being Javanese means being Muslim; *second*, the implementation of the five pillars of ritual in Islam in the form of saying the two sentences of the shahada, praying five obligatory prayers a day, paying zakat, fasting in the month of Ramadan, and performing the hajj for those who can carry it out; third, acceptance of the reality of typical Javanese spiritual powers such as Ratu Kidul, Sunan Lawu (the spirit of Mount Lawu who is the God of Wind), and other supernatural beings (Ricklefs, 2013).

It needs to be emphasized beforehand that the Islamic pattern of mystical synthesis that developed in Java cannot be separated from the condition of society at that time, which already had a number of local religions and beliefs from generation to generation, such as animism, dynamism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. It is because these beliefs and religions have shaped their view of life that Wali Songo implemented a da'wah strategy that Azyumardi Azra called *adhesion* instead of conversion. If conversion implies total change and complete submission to Islam by eliminating local elements, then *adhesion* means changing one's belief in Islam without abandoning the old religious beliefs and practices. In this context, Azra stated that,

“*Wali Songo* di Jawa mengenalkan Islam kepada penduduk lokal bukan dalam bentuk yang eksklusivitas profetik, melainkan umumnya dalam bentuk kompromi-kompromi dengan kepercayaan-kepercayaan lokal yang mapan yang banyak diwarnai takhayul atau kepercayaan-kepercayaan animistik lainnya. Dalam banyak kasus, mereka menarik banyak orang untuk memeluk Islam dengan menggunakan jimat, pesona ilmu kesaktian, dan trik-trik supernatural lainnya.” (Azra, 1994).

Just as the Islamic style in Java took the form of accommodation and integration with non-Islamic roots and culture, more or less the same Islamic style also developed in Madura. In this context, Clifford Geertz divides the typology of Islam in Java into three forms, namely *abangan*, *santri* and *priyayi*. *Abangan* is a term for those who do not adhere to their commitment to religious rules. Meanwhile, *santri* is a term for those who have religious commitment, which is measured based on their level of obedience in carrying out a series of religious rules. Meanwhile, *priyayi* is a term for those who are socially and economically considered to have a higher degree and stratification compared to most village communities in Java (Geertz, 1983).

However, slightly different from the typology of Javanese Islam created by Geertz above, Yanwar Pribadi, in his dissertation research related to "Religious Networks in Madura," divided the typology of Islam in Madura into two forms, namely *santri* and *non-santri*. Personally, *santri* is categorized as an orthodox Islamic group—those who strongly adhere to the teachings of Islam—which are strongly influenced by the understanding of Islam from the Sunni sect. On the other hand, *non-santri*, even though they are just as orthodox and influenced by Sunni thought as *santri*, Pribadi said that *non-santri* are no more

orthodox than *santri* in implementing Islamic law. This is partly due to local mystical beliefs, which are still deeply rooted in *non-santri* students (Pribadi: 2013).

Through the typology of *santri* and *non-santri*, Pribadi also said that the composition of Islamic culture in Madura is dominated by *santri* culture. It means that the number of Muslims in Madura who are orthodox, Sunni, and ignore local mystical beliefs occupy the majority position. According to Pribadi, it cannot be separated from the influence of *kiai*, who are placed as authorities in traditional Islam and *pesantren* as traditional Islamic educational institutions (Sunyoto: 2017).

The big role that *kiai* and Islamic boarding schools have played in forming *santri* culture as the dominant Islamic style in Madura has been formed since the Islamization of Java-Madura land carried out by *Wali Songo*. It is because apart from compromising local beliefs that have been established and are already colored by superstition as described by Azra, other scholars such as Agus Sunyoto also note that *Wali Songo* was successful in carrying out Islamization in an organized and systematic manner, among other things, through *kiai* and *pesantren*.

In more detail, Sunyoto said that *Wali Songo* utilized family networks, power, and expertise in winning public sympathy through; *First*, Sufi teachings. The strength of the teachings of Sufism in question are the teachings of *wahdatul wujud* (unity of form) and *wahdatus syuhūd* (unity of view) so that it is not too strange to local beliefs which recognize many spirits everywhere, and in viewing natural objects they are influenced by the aura of divinity; *Second*, assimilation of art and culture. The art and cultural assimilation movement is seen in the form of *wayang* which is adapted to Islamic stories and breath, as well as the involvement of guardians in composing songs, ballads, music, and children's games that have an Islamic spirit. Assimilation can also be seen in architecture; for example, the three-tiered roof shape of a mosque (symbol: Iman, Islam, Ihsan) is a change to the seven-tiered roof known in Hindu buildings. *Third*, the power of educational assimilation. Educational assimilation is carried out through the construction of Islamic boarding schools that educate generations of Islamic preachers; in the context of Raden Rahmat (Sunan Ampel) the role of his children and students in the development of Islam in Java, such as Sunan Bonang and Raden Fatah as sultans of the first Islamic kingdom in Java, Demak; *Fourth*, the order of Muslim society starts from the guardian's residence which is the center of society, with mosques and *pesantren* as well as leaders and figures who are elders and respected in society (Sunyoto: 2017).

2) *The Socio-Religious Role of Kiai*

The strong role that *kiai* have in the socio-religious field of Madurese society cannot be separated from geographical and ecological factors. If you look closely, Madura's geographic location is in the lowlands, meaning that the area receives little rainfall on average in a year. Coupled with the ecological condition of the soil which tends to be chalky, Madurese people prefer to plant the plants that need little water. This cropping model then forms the ecology of the moorland.

The ecological characteristics of "tegal", in its development, have had their influence on settlement patterns in Madura. Unlike the ecology of rice fields in Java, which forms a

centralized settlement pattern or nuclear village with stretches of rice fields around it, in the "tegal" ecology in Madura, the settlement pattern is scattered (scattered villages) in small units (kampongs). The people build houses in one yard consisting of four or five related families, surrounded by a walled fence called *Kampung Meji* (Meji Villages). Some *Meji Villages* form small villages, and several small villages form villages. Outside Meji village, Madurese people usually build "tegal" and make "galengan" (used to refer to the artificial embankment of the field's barrier). It is also used to collect rainwater. Meanwhile, in Meji village, as devout Muslims, the Madurese built at least one "langgar" or prayer room as a place of worship for the people living there (Kuntowijoyo, 2017).

Even though this type of settlement pattern can only be found in rural areas and is no longer widely used in urban areas, at the beginning of its formation, this "tegal" ecology had indirectly shaped the existence of kiai, who had a strong socio-religious influence in the Madurese Muslim community. Because Tegal's ecological settlement pattern is scattered across several Meji villages, it makes it difficult for the Madurese Muslim community to become a unified territorial and social unit. At this point, the figure of the kiai becomes the organizing principle that unites society, which is still divided by a collective sentiment in the form of religion (Kuntowijoyo, 2017).

Furthermore, religion became stronger as a collective sentiment in the Madurese Muslim community when it was discovered that the combination of Islamic law, Sufism, and local traditions also resulted in various religious rituals. Like Java, in the map of the Madurese Muslim life cycle, you can almost find religious rituals that color it. During the pregnancy cycle, for example, there are religious rituals in the *pelet kandhung* tradition. In the wedding cycle, there are religious rituals wrapped in the *siraman* tradition. In the death cycle, there are *tahlilan* on days 1 to 7, as well as on the 40th day, 100th, and a year later. Not to mention religious rituals in celebratory traditions, such as *rokat tasek*, village cleansing, and so on.

In short, various kinds of religious rituals require a village elite who is specifically qualified to handle them, and these criteria are found in the figure of the kiai. The Kiai's knowledge of Islam makes them the most educated figures in the village and worthy of leading various religious rituals. From here on, kiai plays a central role in socio-religious life in Madura. The strong position of kiai in Madura in certain domains can defeat the position of *klebun* (the village head), who is only administrative (Kuntowijoyo, 2017).

3) *Syaichona Kholil's Character*

No ulama or kiai has as strong an influence as KH. Mohammad Kholil (usually called by Bangkalan people as Syaichona Kholil) in Madura—especially in the Bangkalan and western Sampang areas. Syaichona Kholil was born in Bangkalan on 11 Jumadil Akhir 1225 H, which coincides with 1835 AD (Rahman, 1999). Syaichona Kholil appears as a kiai figure who is highly respected and followed in all his religious advice by the Madurese Muslim community, not only because of the depth and breadth of his religious knowledge but also because his guardianship was apparent from an early age. Several major kiai in Java, such as KH. Hasyim Asy'ari from Jombang and KH. As'ad Samsul Arifin from Situbondo is recorded as having studied religious knowledge with Syaikhona Kholil.

Various oral tales also tell the story that from an early age Syaikhona Kholil had demonstrated the *karomah* and privileges of a saint that were impossible for most ordinary people to possess (Bizawie, 2016).

Syaichona Kholil's influence on the Madurese Muslim community to this day can be seen from the large number of visitors from both inside and outside Bangkalan who come to his grave every day. The crowd of visitors even reaches its peak, especially on Friday nights and during his *haul* (annual commemoration of his death day). Not only that, the great influence of Syaichona Kholil also seems to flow to his descendants (Bani Kholil). In western Bangkalan and Sampang, kiai of pesantren and *langgar* (a little place to perform prayer) who do not have a genealogical relationship with Syaichona Kholil have relatively little social and political influence in Bangkalan. On the other hand, if the kiai has blood ties to Syaichona Kholil, then the community will respect and obey him (Rozaki, 2013).

NU Model of Islamic Traditionalism in Bangkalan

After tracing geographical location, ecological conditions, the history of Islamization, the socio-religious influence of kiai, and the figure of Syaichona Kholil as factors that influence the style of Islam in Madura, especially in Bangkalan, the next question that needs to be answered is how relevant all these factors are to Islamic traditionalism of the NU model that it became very dominant in Madura.

The word “*tradisi*” as the basic word for “*tradisional*” is an absorption from English, namely tradition. In the Oxford Dictionary, the word tradition is defined as “the transmission of customs or beliefs from generation to generation, or the fact of being passed on in this way” (Hornby, 2000) Something that is transmitted from previous generations to subsequent generations certainly takes various forms and is very broad in scope. Therefore, Edward Shils, in his book *Tradition*, limits the scope of tradition as something that has been created, practiced, and believed in the past, which includes human thinking methods and the work resulting from them, such as the discovery of forms of social relations and technology. Apart from that, traditions also include beliefs that are transmitted orally or in writing. Traditions also include secular and religious beliefs. Tradition also covers the thoughts of beliefs revealed by God as well as the interpretation of these beliefs. Tradition also includes beliefs formed based on experience as well as beliefs based on logical conclusions (Jauhari, 2004).

In the Western world, the idea of traditionalism emerged in the 18th and 19th centuries. At that time, the meaning of tradition tended to be limited to certain forms, such as folklore, myths, legends, oral literature, customary law, ceremonies, and religious rituals. Meanwhile, in the Islamic world, the idea of true tradition existed even before pre-Islamic times. Because, as understood, the Prophet Muhammad saw. was sent to bring Islamic law, some elements of which are a relay from the traditions of previous people, such as prayer, fasting, hajj, and so on. It's just that the idea of this tradition only emerged in Islam as a new social-religious movement in the 20th century. Traditionalist Islam emerged as a reaction to social changes resulting from modernity, which gave rise to a tendency to forget tradition (Shepard, 1987; Nata, 2001).

One of the characteristics usually attached to traditionalist Islamic groups is their exclusive (closed) nature. This reluctance to accept ideas originating from outside his group—

especially in the religious field—is triggered by his supporter base, most of whom live in rural areas and earn a living as farmers or livestock breeders, which does not require them to move from one area to another like traders. The lack of mobilization or interaction with the outside world ultimately makes traditionalist Islamic religious orientation tend to only look at the past. For traditionalist Islam, various religious aspects ranging from the methodology of law-making to the legal decisions taken by the Prophet, his companions, and the *Salaf al-Sālih* scholars are ideal precedents that must be followed (Shepard, 1987; Nata, 2001).

Another characteristic that is also attached to traditionalist Islamic groups is an attitude that tends to prioritize *the ukhrāwī* (afterlife) aspect. In this context, traditionalist Islam is seen to be struggling more with activities that are religious rituals such as increasing *dhikr* (remembering God), praying, and so on. Because of this *ukhrāwī* orientation, traditionalist groups pay less attention to worldly aspects. They become less appreciative of things that seem worldly, such as the hustle and bustle of the world of politics (Shepard, 1987; Nata, 2001).

At first glance, the characteristics mentioned above seem pejorative. Moreover, the idea of new traditions emerged in Islam in the 20th century, long after Islam developed rapidly in Madura. However, let's analyze the geographical location and ecological conditions of Madura—especially Bangkalan—which causes it to receive little rainfall so that it experiences a slowdown in becoming a new economic center. It is not surprising that Islamic traditionalism can develop more in Madura than modernism.

In the context of Islamic traditionalism in Madura, Kuntowijoyo noted that in the 1920s, the Muhammadiyah reformist movement needed help establishing its influence in rural areas of Madura. Likewise, SI has begun to lose its influence in Madurese villages because of the political agenda it promotes. Meanwhile, NU, since its inception, has been handled by kiai of pesantren, including pesantren in Bangkalan, by prioritizing traditionalist values that prioritize *ukhrāwī* aspects rather than worldly ones. Regarding this, Kuntowijoyo wrote;

“Kiai Doromuntaha (menantu KH. Mohammad Kholil atau Syaichona Kholil, red) dari Bangkalan adalah salah satu dari pendiri Nahdlatul Ulama. Nahdlatul Ulama merupakan sebuah gerakan sosial keagamaan yang menggantikan kedudukan SI di desa-desa. Nahdlatul Ulama berbeda dengan SI yang dalam perkembangannya menjadi semakin politis., juga berbeda dengan Muhammadiyah dengan modernismenya. Belajar dari kehancuran politik yang dilakukan oleh SI, maka demi kepentingan-kepentingan agama, NU menekankan masalah-masalah agama lebih keras. Pada tahun 1927, pemimpin NU di Surabaya secara terbuka menentang penggunaan agama untuk tujuan-tujuan politik. Mengenai Muhammadiyah, ia menganggap tidak penting pembaruan agama, sebaliknya menekankan pada peranan para kiai sebagai pemimpin dan pendidik. Dengan demikian, NU bercorak seperti petani, sebuah gerakan yang bereaksi menentang kelas-kelas menengah, para pemimpin urban SI, dan Muhammadiyah.” (Kuntowijoyo, 2017).

The dominance of the NU model of Islamic traditionalism in Madura, especially in Bangkalan, increasingly found its momentum in the figure of Syaichona Kholil. Apart from being known as a religious scholar and saint who has a strong influence in Madura, Syaichona Kholil's big name cannot be separated from the process of forming NU as a forum for *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*. Zainul Milal Bizawi said that in the years before the founding of NU, in Mecca, there was a major event that threatened the existence of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* related to the abolition of the caliphate by Turkey and the coming to power of the

Wahhabi regime which did not open up space for the development of schools of thought, in the holy land. Several great scholars then gathered at the Grand Mosque. These scholars concluded that it was very urgent to establish a forum for the growth development and preservation of the teachings of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*. After performing *istikhārah*, the Haramain scholars sent a message to KH. Hasyim Asy'ari immediately passed on to two other ulama, namely Habib Hasyim Umar Bin Toha Bin Yahya Pekalongan and KHR. Asnawi Kudus. Kiai Hasyim Asy'ari then came to the residence of Habib Hasyim and Syaichona Kholil. The two scholars gave their approval to Kiai Hasyim Asy'ari to form *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah jam'iyyah* (Bizawie, 2016).

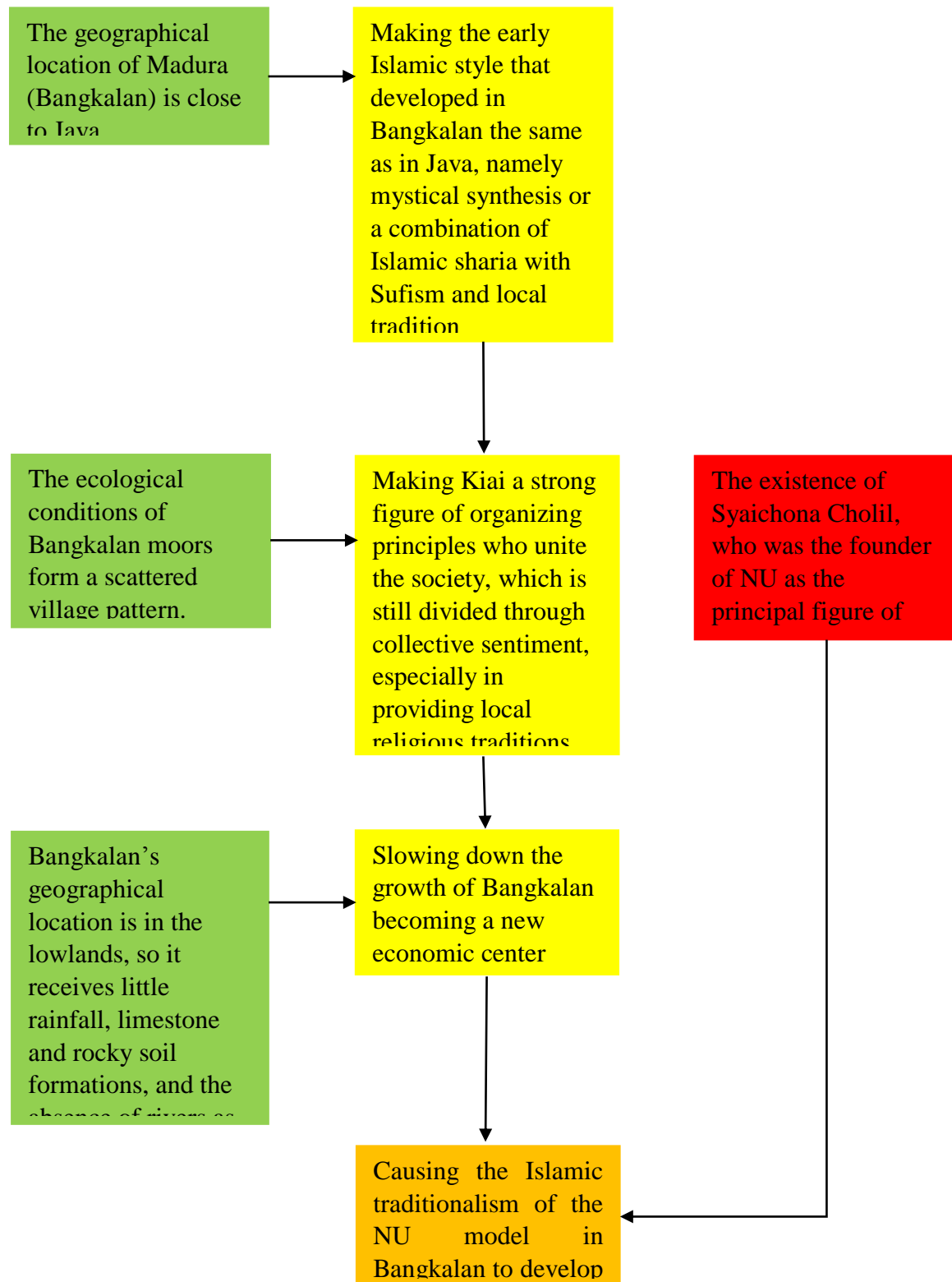
However, in his journey, Kiai Hasyim Asy'ari was very careful in taking steps and even occasionally needed clarification about taking the next step. In 1924, Syaichona Kholil immediately summoned his student, As'ad Syamsul Arifin Situbondo, a 27-year-old senior student, to come. Syaichona Kholil ordered As'ad to deliver a stick to Kiai Hasyim Asy'ari's residence in Tebuireng Jombang while reciting (QS. Tāhā [20]: 17-23) directly in front of Kiai Hasyim Asy'ari. Upon arrival in Tebuireng, As'ad conveyed the mandate from Syaichona Kholil to Kiai Hasyim Asy'ari. After As'ad, the students handed over the stick given by Syaichona Kholil and read the QS. Tāhā [20]: 17-23, Kiai Hasyim Asy'ari caught the signal that his teacher had made up his mind to approve *the jam'iyyah* that KH had prepared immediately. Wahab Hasbullah and other scholars.

However, once again, due to Kiai Hasyim Asy'ari's cautious attitude, the *jam'iyyah* that had been prepared had only been realized in one year had passed. Until then, Syaichona Kholil again sent As'ad *sowan* to Tebuireng to hand over prayer beads, followed by reciting one of the *Asmā' al-Husna*, namely *Ya Jabbār Ya Qohhār* three times. It took only a year later, on December 31, 1926, in Surabaya, ulama from all over Java and Madura gathered. They deliberated and agreed to establish *the Jam'iyyah Nahdlatul Ulama* organization in Indonesia.

Thus, the great name of Syaichona Kholil, which cannot be separated from the history of the birth of NU, on the one hand, and the great respect the Bangkalan people have for Syaichona Kholil, on the other hand, ultimately makes the NU style dominate the religious culture of the Bangkalan people.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the ecological impact that influences the large dominance of traditionalist Islam of the NU model in Madura, especially Bangkalan, is explained in the following chart;



Starting from the geographical location of Bangkalan, which is close to Java, the initial Islamic style that developed in Bangkalan was the same as in Java, namely mystical synthesis. In the Islamic style of mystical synthesis, there are many local religious traditions that combine Islamic sharia and Sufism with the beliefs and religions adhered to by Javanese society before the coming of Islam, such as animism, dynamism, Hinduism, and Buddhism.

Furthermore, Bangkalan's natural conditions, which receive little rainfall, soil formations that are dominated by limestone and rock, and the absence of rivers that support irrigation, make Bangkalan's ecology identical to the moors. The settlement pattern formed in the ecology of moors is scattered villages. Residents' houses are scattered (scattered villages) in small village units consisting of four or five related families. At this point, Kiai becomes a strong figure of organizing principal who unites people between villages through collective sentiment. The most effective collective sentiment is religion, more specifically through the provision of local religious traditions. Due to the Islamic style of mystical synthesis that previously developed in Bangkalan, it has become identical to the local religious traditions.

On the other hand, Bangkalan's natural conditions, which receive little rainfall, land formations that are dominated by limestone and rock, and the absence of rivers that support irrigation also slow down the growth of Bangkalan, becoming a new economic center. It also caused Islamic traditionalism to develop rapidly in Bangkalan. It is because the traditional Islamic support base mostly lives in rural areas and makes a living as farmers or livestock breeders, which does not require them to move from one area to another live traders. The lack of mobilization or interaction with the outside world ultimately makes traditionalist Islamic religious orientation tend to be exclusive (closed), looking only at the past (the time of the Prophet, his companions, and the *salaf al-ṣāliḥ*), prioritizing the ukhrawi aspects such as activities which are religious rituals increasing *dhikr*, prayer, and so on.

Not to mention the addition of influences other than ecological influences, namely the big name of Syaichona Kholil, who was one of the founders of NU and principal figure of clerics in Bangkalan, ultimately making the traditionalism of the NU model increasingly dominated the religious culture of Bangkalan society.

However, it still needs to be underlined that the tendencies of traditionalist Islam, as stated above, are still open to debate regarding their relevance to current conditions. Moreover, after almost five decades have passed since NU's first designation as traditionalist Islam, NU has constantly shown sociological changes in its patterns of thought and movement. Therefore, the traditionalist nature attached to NU may be no longer able to more accurately describe the map of the development of NU thought and movement now and here.

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