

The Construction of Symbolic Capital and the Religious Authority of Local Ulama in the Islamization of Pangandaran Coastal Communities

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Abstract:

This study examines the construction of religious authority by the local ulama and the process of Islamization in Pangandaran, a coastal region in southern West Java, a strategic hub of trade and cultural interaction in the archipelago. Islamization in coastal areas is organic and inclusive, unlike in centers of power, because coastal communities are egalitarian, cosmopolitan, and open to change. Local ulama act as social mediators, religious teachers, and interpreters of Islamic values, aligning them with local traditions and grounding Islamic teachings in everyday life. The legitimacy of ulama is built through symbolic capital in the form of ulama lineage, personal piety, moral example, knowledge, and charisma, which are reproduced through Islamic boarding school education, religious rituals, and social engagement. Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical approach to habitus, symbolic capital, and the social arena, combined with Max Weber's typology of authority, is used to analyze how the ulama acquire, maintain, and reproduce religious authority in context. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews with ulama and community leaders, and field documentation, supplemented by secondary data from scientific literature and historical archives. The analysis was conducted using descriptive-analytical and symbolic hermeneutic approaches to interpret religious practices and social interactions as media for the

reproduction of symbolic capital. The results show that the authority of ulama in Pangandaran is hybrid, combining traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal legitimacy, and functions as a moral, social, and spiritual agent that balances local traditions with Islamic values. Islamization in coastal areas occurs through cultural da'wah and symbolic acculturation, resulting in a moderate, flexible, and inclusive form of Islam. This research enriches the study of the sociology of religion and the anthropology of Islam by emphasizing the symbolic and cultural dimensions of Islamization and highlighting the role of local ulama as the primary drivers of social and spiritual transformation in coastal communities.

Keywords: coastal Islamization; local ulama; religious authority; symbolic capital.

INTRODUCTION

The process of Islamization in the Indonesian archipelago was one of the most decisive phases in Indonesia's social and cultural development. Islam arrived not through military conquest, but rather through international trade networks, cultural relations, and the peaceful preaching of Islamic scholars and preachers from Gujarat, Arabia, and Persia (Azra, 2013). Maritime routes, particularly along the north coast of Java, Sumatra, and Maluku, served as important corridors connecting Muslim traders with coastal communities in the archipelago. From these regions, Islam then spread inland through economic interactions, marriages, and traditional educational institutions such as Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) and surau (surau) (Ricklefs, 2008).

These developments demonstrate that Islamization in Indonesia did not occur uniformly but was shaped by local social and political contexts. Within the context of socio-historical development, the pattern of Islamization demonstrates a distinction between centers of power and more open coastal areas. In centers of power such as Demak, Banten, and Cirebon, the development of Islam was strongly supported by the political legitimacy of the Kingdom (Abdullah, 1987). This political structure made Islam appear hegemonic in shaping law, culture, and social order. However, in coastal and peripheral areas, the process of Islamization was more organic and dialogical. Cosmopolitan coastal communities, open to external influences, enabled da'wah to develop through symbolic and cultural negotiations without the dominance of institutions of power. Thus, Islamization in coastal areas was not only a religious expansion but also a process of social and cultural adaptation rooted in community life.

Therefore, viewing Islamization solely from the perspective of the center of power will result in an unequal and partial understanding. As Azyumardi Azra argues, the historiography of Indonesian Islam needs to be expanded with a microhistorical approach and symbolic anthropology to be more sensitive to local variations (Azra, 2021). This approach helps us understand Islam not merely as a normative doctrinal system, but as a living social reality negotiated through symbols, rituals, and social structures. Therefore, studying peripheral regions such as the southern coast of Java, including Pangandaran, is crucial for enriching our understanding of the diverse and dynamic forms of Indonesian Islam.

Within this framework, the characteristics of coastal communities are crucial for a deeper understanding. Coastal communities in the archipelago possess a distinctive social character. Their economic dependence on the sea and trade makes them open, egalitarian, and adaptable to change. Daily interactions with traders from various ethnicities and nations contribute to a pluralistic and cosmopolitan social orientation in coastal communities (Reid, 1993). Under

these conditions, Islamic values are naturally accepted through trade relations, marriage, and social solidarity, rather than through political coercion. The distinctive characteristics of coastal communities are also evident in southern West Java, such as Pangandaran, where fishing communities thrive within an egalitarian social order with a strong system of mutual cooperation (BPS, 2023). This pattern of social relations provides fertile ground for the development of Islam that accommodates local culture.

This social openness explains why local ulama played such a central role in the process of Islamization in coastal areas. Ulama functioned not only as religious teachers but also as translators of Islamic teachings, ensuring that Islamic teachings aligned with local wisdom. They interpreted Islamic values through local cultural languages, whether through oral traditions, art, or maritime rituals. Islam presented itself not as a foreign teaching that erased tradition, but as a value system that dialogued with local culture (Geertz, 1976). In this way, Islam grew as a down-to-earth and contextual moral force. Local ulama also served as social mediators, maintaining harmony, resolving conflicts, and strengthening community solidarity.

Accordingly, social spaces such as markets, ports, and fishing communities became crucial arenas for the spread of Islam. The process of Islamization in coastal areas occurred organically through daily social interactions. Islamic preaching was not merely manifested in sermons, but also in the ethics of trade, honesty, and moral examples demonstrated by scholars (Nurhadi, 2020). In this way, Islam developed as a down-to-earth teaching embedded in the social activities of society. This model of Islamization gave birth to a distinctively more flexible, egalitarian, and open to cultural plurality than Islam from the center of power.

Geographically, Pangandaran serves as a prime example of this organic Islamization model. Situated on the southern coast of West Java, Pangandaran enjoys a strategic geographic position overlooking the Indian Ocean. This location has made it a crucial hub for trade networks and cultural crossroads since pre-colonial times (Balai Arkeologi Jawa Barat, 2019). As a natural harbor, Pangandaran has long served as a transit point for merchant ships from Arabia, Gujarat, and the Middle East before continuing their journeys to other parts of the archipelago. Through interactions at the harbor and traditional markets, Islamic teachings were gradually introduced to the local community. This pattern demonstrates that Islamization in Pangandaran occurred peacefully, based on economic and cultural relations, rather than political domination.

This historical context is reinforced by the continuity of religious traditions that persist to this day. The presence of village ulama, or *ajengan*, plays a significant role in maintaining the continuity of Islamic teachings while preserving local traditions (Rahmawati, 2023). Religious practices such as *tahlilan* (religious recitation), regular religious studies, grave pilgrimages, and maritime traditions such as the *sea nadran* (sea ritual) are manifestations of Islam blending with coastal culture. These traditions demonstrate that Islam in Pangandaran did not come to eliminate old traditions, but rather to give new religious meaning to deeply rooted cultural practices. Thus, local ulama function as symbolic agents, simultaneously maintaining the continuity of Islamic values and local wisdom.

Pangandaran's rich religious traditions and history have received relatively little academic study. Most studies on Islamization in Indonesia focus on classical centers such as Banten, Cirebon, and Demak (Zulkifli, 2022), while southern coastal areas like Pangandaran have their own distinctive and significant socio-religious dynamics. This gap highlights the lack of understanding of the role of local ulama (Islamic scholars) as symbolic actors driving Islamization from below. Ulama in Pangandaran function not only as religious teachers but also

as spiritual leaders and social mediators, with authority derived from community recognition of their piety, religious lineage, knowledge, and social engagement (Bourdieu, 1986). The habitus formed through Islamic boarding school education, spiritual practices, and community interactions shapes the ulama's ways of thinking and acting contextually (Weber, 1978a). Within the dynamic social arena, they negotiate authority with traditional figures and local leaders, combining traditional and charismatic legitimacy, as per Weber's perspective (Fauzi, 2024).

By integrating the theoretical frameworks of Pierre Bourdieu and Max Weber, this study presents a comprehensive analysis of the construction of religious authority of local ulama in Pangandaran. The concepts of symbolic capital, habitus, and social arena are combined with Weber's typology of authority to explain the process of acquiring, maintaining, and reproducing ulama authority in the context of coastal communities. Religious authority is not formed structurally, but rather through social recognition, religious symbols, and life practices rooted in local culture. This study fills a gap in the study of Islamization in the southern coast of West Java that has not been widely explored by previous studies. Academically, these findings enrich the study of the sociology of religion and the anthropology of Islam by emphasizing the symbolic and cultural dimensions of Islamization. Culturally, this study emphasizes the moderate, inclusive character of Pangandaran Islam, which is aligned with local maritime traditions, while strengthening the role of local ulama as a balance between religion and culture at the grassroots level.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on Islamization in Indonesia in recent years have shifted focus from grand narratives emphasizing the role of classical Islamic kingdoms to studies highlighting local, social, and cultural dimensions. One example is Anwar's research, which examines the role of the kiai (Islamic scholars) in Madura. This study demonstrates how coastal Islamization proceeded not through formal political structures but through the village ulama (Islamic scholars), who served as mediators between Islamic teachings and maritime traditions. Local kiai were seen not simply as religious teachers but as symbolic figures who integrated Islamic ethics into the social practices of fishing communities, enabling Islam to be organically accepted without creating cultural resistance (Anwar, 2019). Nurhadi's research in Banten highlighted the authority of ulama from a socio-cultural perspective. His results showed that the legitimacy of the ulama in coastal areas was based not only on their scholarly lineage but also on their ability to maintain social harmony through cultural means. Ulama have been shown to play a strategic role in mitigating social conflict and serving as moral guides in the community's daily lives. Thus, this research reinforces the view that the religious authority of ulama is a social construct born of collective recognition, not simply a genealogical inheritance (Nurhadi, 2020).

Yusup's research in Cirebon provides a new perspective on how the habitus of Islamic boarding schools shapes the leadership patterns of ulama. The habitus acquired through extensive education in Islamic boarding schools gives ulama distinctive characteristics in religious leadership, namely simplicity, closeness to the community, and perseverance in teaching Islamic values. This finding confirms the relevance of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of habitus as symbolic capital that determines the acceptance of ulama by their communities (Yusup, 2021). Zulkifli examined the process of Islamization in coastal West Sumatra through a cultural da'wah approach. He found that Islam was accepted by the local community, not by replacing traditions, but by Islamizing existing cultural practices. For example, maritime

rituals and traditional ceremonies were preserved but imbued with Islamic content. This strategy suggests that Islamization in coastal areas occurred through symbolic negotiation between religion and culture, not confrontation (Zulkifli, 2022).

Rahmawati studied village ulama (Islamic scholars) in Central Java and found that their authority was largely determined by their active involvement in community social activities. Ulama played a role not only in religious studies and sermons but also in daily activities such as mutual cooperation, family conflict management, and social assistance. Symbolic capital in the form of personal piety, charisma, and emotional closeness to the community were the main factors strengthening the legitimacy of village ulama (Rahmawati, 2023). Fauzi's research in East Java revealed that coastal ulama possessed dual authority: traditional authority derived from genealogical legitimacy and charismatic authority born of moral reputation. This research demonstrated that Islamization on the coast was inclusive, as ulama served as mediators between local traditions and Islamic values. This demonstrated Islam as a religion capable of dialogue with local culture without losing the substance of its teachings (Fauzi, 2024). In addition to these studies, there is also a study by Mansur on Islamization in coastal Aceh. This study confirms that Islam entered Aceh through international trade routes and the role of local ulama, who adapted Islamic teachings to local customs. These ulama played a role in creating a more egalitarian social system, where religious and customary norms coexisted (Mansur, 2019). Hidayat's research in Lombok shows that cultural *da'wah* through local traditions such as *roah* (traditional pilgrimage) and grave pilgrimages was an important instrument in strengthening the ulama's position in society. This study highlights how ulama utilized local symbols to expand their religious influence, thus achieving a more down-to-earth acceptance of Islam (Hidayat, 2018).

In another context, Kurniawan's study of Islamization in South Kalimantan shows that local ulama serve as agents of social transformation, particularly in maintaining a balance between modernity and tradition. Ulama are considered figures capable of negotiating religious values with socio-economic developments, thus maintaining their relevance amid changing times (Kurniawan, 2021). Fadli's research in coastal South Sulawesi confirms that Islamization occurs through traditional education. Local ulama, who establish small mosques (*surau*) and Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), play a central role in spreading Islam. This research demonstrates that symbolic capital, in the form of mastery of religious knowledge and the ability to educate the younger generation, is the key to their religious authority (Fadli, 2022). Research over the past five years has increasingly emphasized the role of local ulama, symbolic capital, and cultural *da'wah* strategies in the process of Islamization in coastal areas. However, studies specifically on ulama in Pangandaran are still very limited. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by highlighting how local ulama in Pangandaran construct their religious authority through symbolic capital, *habitus*, and socio-cultural practices of coastal communities.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach because the phenomenon being studied, the construction of symbolic capital and the religious authority of local ulama in Pangandaran, is a complex social reality, rich in meaning, and cannot be fully explained through numbers or statistics. A qualitative approach allows researchers to explore the symbolic meanings, cultural values, and social legitimacy inherent in ulama figures, thereby understanding how their authority is formed and maintained in coastal communities. This approach aligns with Max Weber's perspective on *verstehen*, namely the interpretive understanding of the meaning of social action from the perspective of the actor (Weber, 1978a). Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical

framework is also relevant because symbolic capital, habitus, and social arena can only be understood within the sociocultural context in which they operate. The method applied is descriptive-analytical with an approach symbolic ethnography. The descriptive-analytical method allows for an in-depth depiction of socio-religious phenomena, while simultaneously analyzing the relationship between symbolic capital, habitus, social arena, and the religious authority of local ulama (Bourdieu, 1986). Symbolic ethnography, based on the thinking of Clifford Geertz, views culture as a network of meanings and emphasizes the interpretation of symbols used by communities to understand their world (Geertz, 1976). Social practices, rituals, and religious interactions are not merely behaviors, but symbolic articulations that affirm the legitimacy of ulama in the social arena.

This study uses qualitative data consisting of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through participant observation, in-depth interviews with religious scholars, community leaders, and residents, and field documentation in the form of photographs, notes, and recordings of religious activities. Observations included religious study groups, maritime rituals, social mediation, and daily interactions to examine how the ulama's habitus is formed and their symbolic capital is reproduced. Secondary data were sourced from scientific literature, historical archives, recent journals, and local documents, which provide the historical and conceptual context of Islamization in the archipelago. Data collection techniques included participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation, with triangulation to ensure validity. Analysis was conducted interactively through continuous reduction, presentation, and drawing conclusions (Miles et al., 2014), and using Bourdieu's hermeneutic analysis. Religious rituals such as haul (haul), tahlilan (religious gatherings), and religious study groups are understood as symbolic practices that articulate the ulama's legitimacy in the social arena. With this method, the research not only describes religious activities, but also interprets the symbolic mechanisms that shape the authority of local ulama, while understanding Islamization in Pangandaran as a living, organic, and meaningful social process.

DISCUSSION

The Construction of Symbolic Capital of Local Ulama in Pangandaran

1. *Lineage and Genealogy of Scholars*

Ulama lineage is one of the main sources of symbolic capital for local ulama in Pangandaran. In traditional Islamic society, the descendants of the ulama are often considered to have greater spiritual value and social legitimacy than other individuals. Genealogical ties to prominent ulama figures are seen as a symbolic legacy that provides moral strength and public trust. Pierre Bourdieu calls this form of recognition symbolic capital, namely legitimacy that arises not from material wealth or formal position, but from social recognition of an individual's value and honor in a particular social arena (Bourdieu, 1977). Ulama lineage serves as a symbol of spiritual continuity between previous and future generations, recognized by society through respect, pilgrimages, and belief in the "barakah" or blessings of ulama lineage.

The descendants of religious scholars play a central role in the social legitimacy and beliefs of the Pangandaran community. The lineage of religious scholars is not merely a family identity, but also a means of transmitting values, knowledge, and spiritual symbols that are collectively recognized. The community's belief in the blessings of knowledge and prayers that are "passed down" from teacher to student demonstrates how lineage guarantees moral and scholarly continuity. The views of students and residents who believe that the descendants of religious

scholars possess special charisma reinforce that the symbolic capital of local religious scholars is built through a combination of spiritual reputation, lineage, and inherited religious practices, thus maintaining the authority of religious scholars at the community level. Within Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework, what Undang Abdul Hamid experienced can be understood as a form of inherited symbolic capital, namely, symbolic capital obtained through the inheritance of social and spiritual status from ancestors with high religious reputations (Bourdieu, 1986). In a society like Pangandaran, the socio-religious arena is governed by the logic of respect for tradition and the origins of religious scholars, so that the descendants of religious scholars occupy a strategic position in the symbolic hierarchy. Bourdieu asserts that this kind of social legitimacy can only persist if it is inherited along with the appropriate habitus, namely religious dispositions and ethics that reflect the moral character of ancestors (Bourdieu, 1990). Thus, the symbolic legitimacy derived from lineage can only be maintained through actual religious practices that are consistent with the religious values of the community.

The lineage of ulama is only the initial foundation of social legitimacy. Public trust is only maintained if the descendants of ulama demonstrate exemplary behavior, morals, and sincerity in religious practice. Thus, symbolic capital is not simply inherited through lineage but must be lived out through deeds and concrete behavior. This view demonstrates the dynamics of symbolic capital reproduction, which is not only genealogical but also cultural. From Bourdieu's perspective, habitus plays a crucial role in reproducing and strengthening symbolic capital through social actions that align with the values recognized by the community (Bourdieu, 1991). Ulama who are descendants of previous ulama will lose their symbolic capital if they are unable to maintain the moral and social ethos that underpin their ancestors' legitimacy. Therefore, the lineage-based construction of symbolic capital in Pangandaran can be understood as a process that combines spiritual heritage and social action, where religious habitus serves as a link between the past and the present.

Sociologically, the coastal communities of Pangandaran place ulama (Islamic scholars) descended from prominent figures as guardians of the continuity of values and social balance. This is evident in their role in religious activities such as haul (haul), tahlilan (religious gatherings), and large-scale religious studies (pengajian), where the presence of ulama (Islamic scholars) descended from prominent kiai (Islamic leaders) often serves as a symbol of the event's legitimacy. In Bourdieu's terminology, the socio-religious arena in Pangandaran is a symbolic production space where spiritual values are reproduced through collective reverence for figures deemed to possess high symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984). Therefore, the lineage of ulama in Pangandaran is not merely a genealogical tradition, but rather a system of legitimacy that underpins the social and spiritual structure of the coastal community.

2. *Personal Piety and Moral Exemplarity*

Personal piety and moral example are the most prominent elements in the formation of the symbolic capital of local ulama in Pangandaran. In the view of coastal communities, the measure of a ulama's honor is not solely determined by the depth of his knowledge or social status, but rather by his behavior and attitude that reflect Islamic values. Ulama who live simply, generously, and are close to the community are considered to possess blessings that bring peace to their surroundings. This concept aligns with Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the power of recognition, namely power that arises from social recognition of symbolic values manifested through a person's actions and habitus (Bourdieu, 1977). Thus, personal piety becomes the basis for generating a ulama's social and spiritual legitimacy in the socio-religious arena.

Integrity and sincerity are the main foundations of ulama. He stated that society judges ulama not by their titles or intelligence, but by their daily behavior, demonstrating simplicity, honesty, and concern for others. Concrete actions such as helping residents or leading prayers during fish harvests, thanksgiving ceremonies, or sea celebrations strengthen the emotional bond between ulama and the community, demonstrating that the ulama's legitimacy is built through social experience, not simply formal authority. A similar view was expressed by Undang Abdul Hamid of Pondok Alhamidiyah, who emphasized that the ulama's piety is reflected in their empathy and engagement with the community. The relationship between ulama and the community is more like a moral relationship than a structural one, where respect grows naturally through mutually beneficial interactions. Theoretically, Pierre Bourdieu's concept of religious habitus explains how the ulama's behavior and ethics become a source of ongoing social recognition. The habitus, reflected in the way they interact, dress, speak, and serve the community, forms symbolic capital recognized as a sign of spiritual authenticity. The alignment between the ulama's habitus and the moral expectations of the community enhances their legitimacy. Furthermore, personal piety serves as a mechanism for the reproduction of symbolic capital: spiritual reputation is transformed into consistent social trust, evident in the community's continued trust in religious leaders to lead religious ceremonies, mediate conflicts, and provide advice in daily life. Thus, the moral exemplarity and sincerity of religious leaders become core dimensions of symbolic capital construction in Pangandaran, affirming their position as guardians of harmony and spiritual legitimacy within coastal communities.

3. *Knowledge and Social Role of Ulama*

In the context of Pangandaran society, knowledge is a crucial foundation for establishing the authority and symbolic capital of ulama. The community values the depth of religious knowledge as an indicator of spiritual legitimacy and a measure of a person's suitability as a role model. However, mastery of knowledge alone is not enough; it must be accompanied by the ability to implement it in social life. Within Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework, mastery of religious knowledge can be understood as a form of cultural capital that, when recognized by society, can transform into symbolic capital that provides social influence and moral legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1986). In other words, religious knowledge functions not only as knowledge but also as a means of reproducing values and symbolic power within the socio-religious arena. Religious education is a strategic tool for ulama to maintain their social position. He emphasized that religious knowledge is not only for teaching scriptures, but also for guiding society to face the challenges of the times, so that religion feels relevant in everyday life. Pondok Alhamidiyah serves as a medium for transmitting Islamic values, strengthening the social legitimacy of ulama in coastal communities.

KH. Muhsin Aziz from the Assujaiah Islamic Boarding School added that knowledge must be accompanied by social skills. Ulama not only teach, but also mediate conflicts, listen to complaints, and provide practical solutions for the community. This function demonstrates the transformation of ulama into social mediators, where cultural capital in the form of religious knowledge is converted into symbolic capital through public recognition and trust, in accordance with Bourdieu's theory. Kang Wawan, the guardian of the Makom of Syaikh Ahmad and Syaikh Muhamad, emphasized that the community trusts ulama more than official officials in resolving social problems, because the moral and spiritual reputation of ulama is considered more just and calming. This phenomenon can be analyzed through Bourdieu's concept of the social arena, where ulama, traditional leaders, and local officials

compete to maintain their positions through their owned capital. In Pangandaran, ulama occupy a dominant position due to a combination of cultural and symbolic capital, which is continuously reproduced through education, preaching, and participation in local rituals and traditions, such as haul and hajat laut. Thus, religious knowledge and social service become the main sources of symbolic legitimacy for local ulama.

4. *Charisma and Spiritual Power of Ulama*

Charisma is one of the most important aspects in the formation and maintenance of the symbolic capital of ulama in the coastal communities of Pangandaran. In a socio-religious context, charisma is not merely understood as supernatural abilities or innate spiritual powers, but as the result of social recognition of an individual's moral, spiritual, and scholarly qualities. Pierre Bourdieu explains that charisma is a product of symbolic construction acquired through social relations in the arena of power, where society collectively grants legitimacy to individuals deemed to possess moral or spiritual virtues (Bourdieu, 1991). In traditional societies such as Pangandaran, the charisma of ulama grows from repeated interactions between pious behavior, simplicity of life, social service, and the ability to build emotional closeness with the community. The charisma of ulama in Pangandaran stems from their sincerity, piety, and closeness to the community. The community respects ulama not because of their position or title, but because of their consistent moral and spiritual behavior, such as praying for the sick, calming calamities, and being present in daily social life. In Bourdieu's framework, this charisma is an embodied symbolic capital of recognition that is internalized through behavior, attitudes, and lifestyles that reflect the moral and religious values of the community.

Charisma also arises from the ability of ulama to maintain harmonious relationships with the community, reflected in sincere actions and social service. The ulama's religious habitus, namely the moral and spiritual disposition formed through education, experience, and daily religious practice, allows their actions to be accepted as authentic and symbolic. Furthermore, the ulama's charisma serves as a mechanism for social stabilization. Their presence in religious rituals and local traditions such as hajat laut (sea celebrations), haul (haul), and tahlilan (religious gatherings) demonstrates that the ulama's symbolic power transcends religious and cultural spaces. Through reciprocal symbolic exchange, the community grants trust and respect, while the ulama provide moral and spiritual orientation. The charisma of ulama in Pangandaran, therefore, is the result of the interaction between symbolic capital, religious habitus, and the social arena that continuously strengthens their religious legitimacy.

5. *Reproduction and Accumulation of Symbolic Capital*

The reproduction and accumulation of symbolic capital are crucial processes in maintaining the existence and social authority of ulama (Islamic scholars) in the coastal communities of Pangandaran. Symbolic capital, encompassing honor, recognition, and social legitimacy, is not static but is continually maintained through social action, religious education, and ongoing cultural interactions. Pierre Bourdieu asserted that any form of capital can only survive if reproduced through social practices appropriate to the structure of the arena in which it operates (Bourdieu, 1977). In this context, ulama in Pangandaran strive to maintain their symbolic position through educational institutions such as Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), da'wah activities, and involvement in coastal religious traditions such as hajat laut (sea celebrations), haj ulama (Islamic gatherings), and tahlilan (religious gatherings). Through these activities, ulama not only transmit religious teachings but also pass on moral,

spiritual, and cultural values that strengthen their legitimacy in the eyes of the community. Pesantren become centers of reproduction of the ulama's symbolic capital in Pangandaran. Pesantren not only teach religious knowledge but also instill morals, religious habits, and life ethics that are then carried by the students into society, creating a cycle of cultural reproduction. KH. Muhsin Aziz emphasized the importance of social involvement as a means of strengthening the legitimacy of ulama; actions such as helping communities in times of disaster or illness become the accumulation of symbolic capital through the conversion of social capital into symbolic capital.

In addition to education, mass religious rituals such as haul (haw), tahlilan (religious gatherings), and grave pilgrimages also serve as arenas for symbolic reproduction, strengthening social recognition of ulama (Islamic scholars) and solidifying the community's moral consensus. Field observations by Kang Wawan indicate that the role of ulama in leading prayers and sermons at these moments strengthens their symbolic position. In the modern era, adaptation through digital media expands the ulama's social arena, allowing da'wah (Islamic preaching) and religious values to remain accepted by the younger generation without diminishing symbolic legitimacy. This transformation demonstrates the ulama's flexibility in maintaining their authority and public trust, allowing the symbolic capital acquired through education, social action, and rituals to remain vibrant, relevant, and sustainable in the context of social and cultural change in the coastal communities of Pangandaran.

Local Religious Authority of Ulama

1. Typology of Religious Authority

The religious authority of ulama in Pangandaran is formed from a combination of traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal legitimacy, as explained by Max Weber. Weber distinguished three main sources of authority: first, traditional authority based on belief in an order inherited from the past; second, charismatic authority arising from the extraordinary qualities of an individual; and third, rational-legal authority born of a system of formal rules and procedures recognized by society (Weber, 1978a). In the context of coastal communities like Pangandaran, these three forms of authority do not exist separately, but are intertwined in the social practices of ulama. Ulama are respected not only for their hereditary status and tradition, but also for their spiritual charisma and ability to manage educational institutions in a rational and structured manner. The head of the Alhamidiyah Islamic Boarding School emphasized that the authority of ulama in Pangandaran is highly dependent on the continuity of religious tradition. He stated that ulama are respected because they are considered to be the successors to the values and practices of previous kiai, preserving the customs and teachings inherited from them. This phenomenon reflects traditional authority, where legitimacy is obtained through symbolic inheritance which strengthens the social religious structure through collective recognition of society (Bourdieu, 1989).

In addition to tradition, charismatic authority also plays a crucial role in fostering emotional closeness within the community. KH. Muhsin Aziz emphasized that the community respects ulama for their sincerity and spiritual closeness, not merely for their formal status. This charisma emerges from ongoing social interactions and fosters mutual trust, which, within Bourdieu's framework, constitutes symbolic power, the power born from the recognition of the symbolic value embodied by ulama. Furthermore, rational-legal authority begins to develop through the structured management of educational institutions. Alhamidiyah Islamic Boarding School systematically integrates general and

religious curricula, equipping students with the skills to face the challenges of the times. This form of legitimacy reflects institutional capital, namely social recognition gained through mastery of formal institutions. Field observations show that the community responds to all three forms of authority contextually: tradition and charisma are dominant in religious rituals, while rational-legal is evident in education and pesantren management. Thus, the authority of ulama in Pangandaran is hybrid and adaptive, combining traditional, emotional, and functional values. These three dimensions complement each other in Bourdieu's social arena, enabling ulama to maintain a dominant symbolic position amidst social dynamics and modernization.

2. *Mechanisms of Legitimacy and Social Recognition*

The legitimacy of the authority of ulama in Pangandaran stems not only from historical heritage or profound religious knowledge, but also from social mechanisms that enable society to consistently grant recognition and trust. In Max Weber's theory, legitimacy is the primary source of any form of authority; it arises when society recognizes an individual's right to lead based on tradition, charisma, or legal rationality (Weber, 1978b). However, Pierre Bourdieu added a more dynamic dimension by introducing the concepts of recognition and symbolic power, namely, power that can only exist when recognized and trusted by others (Bourdieu, 1991). Thus, religious legitimacy is not a fixed entity, but rather the result of symbolic interactions between ulama and society, who mutually justify their respective positions. The head of the Assujaiah Islamic Boarding School emphasized that the legitimacy of ulama in Pangandaran stems from trust formed through long-term social interaction. He explained that society judges ulama based on their actual involvement in daily life, not merely through sermons or formal positions. This trust is gained through consistent behavior, social service, and demonstrated piety. From Bourdieu's perspective, this phenomenon includes symbolic exchange, namely the symbolic exchange between the actions of the ulama and social recognition that produces symbolic power.

Undang Abdul Hamid, the head of Pondok Alhamidiyah, added that community recognition stems from the perceived concrete benefits: prayers, advice, and the peace provided by religious scholars. Social legitimacy is performative, born from concrete practices, and represents the conversion of spiritual and social capital into symbolic capital. Collective ritual practices, such as haul (haul), tahlilan (religious gatherings), and hajat laut (sea offerings), also strengthen the legitimacy of religious scholars. According to Kang Wawan, the community entrusts prayer and dhikr activities to religious scholars because they are believed to bring blessings. These rituals are a form of symbolic performance, reaffirming the position of religious scholars within the social structure. Furthermore, the educational arena of Islamic boarding schools serves as a means of reproducing legitimacy through the formation of religious habitus. Kang Dindin Centreng emphasized that students respect religious scholars because they are accustomed to seeing their role models, not out of fear. Within Bourdieu's framework, this process constitutes cultural reproduction, where the values and authority of religious scholars are continuously transmitted through institutionalized moral and social experiences.

3. *Interaction of Ulama with Communities and Other Actors*

In the socio-religious structure of Pangandaran society, ulama do not live in a separate space, but rather exist within a complex network of interactions with various social actors,

such as the general public, cultural figures, government officials, and local economic actors. Pierre Bourdieu explains that every social actor operates in a social field, namely a space of interaction where individuals or groups struggle to maintain their position and capital (Damayanti, 2025). In the field of religion, ulama hold a strategic position because they control symbolic capital in the form of religious knowledge, morality, and spiritual legitimacy recognized by society. However, this position is constantly negotiated through relationships and collaborations with other actors who also have social and economic interests in the coastal community. The head of the Assujaiah Islamic Boarding School emphasized that the relationship between ulama and society is mutually beneficial. He explained that ulama need the community to support the Islamic boarding school, while the community needs spiritual and moral guidance. This relationship reflects a mutual exchange of capital, where trust and respect (symbolic capital) are converted into social and material support (social and economic capital) that strengthens the ulama's position in the social arena.

Undang Abdul Hamid, head of Pondok Alhamidiyah, added that ulama also act as social mediators, bridging the community with the government. By engaging in social programs and youth education, ulama combine spiritual logic with bureaucracy, demonstrating the conversion of symbolic capital into political capital. Interactions with local cultural figures, as explained by Kang Dindin Centreng, emphasize the ulama's role as cultural brokers, navigating local traditions to ensure they remain in line with Islamic values. Meanwhile, engagement with local economic actors, such as fishermen and traders, demonstrates the transformation of symbolic capital into moral economic capital, where economic activities gain spiritual legitimacy through the ulama's guidance. Thus, ulama in Pangandaran build dynamic and functional social networks, combining symbolic, social, and cultural capital. They are not simply spiritual leaders but also guardians of social harmony, mediators, and value directors who balance community interests, local traditions, and formal power structures. The socio-religious arena here becomes a stable space for symbolic exchange thanks to the ulama's multifaceted role.

Local Ulama's Religious Strategies and Practices in Islamization

1. Cultural Preaching and Acculturation of Islamic Values with Local Traditions

Cultural da'wah is an approach that positions local culture as a medium for conveying Islamic values without erasing the traditional identities that have existed within the community. This da'wah model emphasizes the principle of contextualization, namely how Islamic teachings are conveyed according to the social and cultural characteristics of the local community. According to Zainal Arifin, in his research on culture-based da'wah in Central Java, the success of da'wah depends heavily on the ability of scholars to "dialogue" with local traditions and find common ground between religious texts and cultural contexts (Arifin, 2020). This approach aligns with the concept of da'wah bil hikmah, which prioritizes wisdom and gentleness in conveying teachings. Saefudin Zuhri also emphasized that successful da'wah is one that can make Islam the spirit of culture, not a force that negates culture (Zuhri, 2021).

The preaching of ulama in Pangandaran makes extensive use of local traditions, such as sea celebrations, haul ulama (Islamic gatherings), and maritime religious studies. He emphasized that the approach to preaching is transformative, not confrontational: "For example, in the case of a sea celebration, the intention is not directed towards the sea, but towards giving thanks to Allah." This statement demonstrates a cultural preaching strategy, where local traditions are reinterpreted to align with the values of monotheism, in line with

Samsul Munir Amin's concept of cultural preaching and Yudi Latif's findings on the role of ulama as "cultural interpreters" in Islamization in Indonesia. Undang Abdul Hamid (Head of Pondok Alhamidiyah) emphasized that rituals and customs serve as a means of moral education: "If we gradually guide our culture with religious values, that tradition becomes a medium for preaching." This process reflects the acculturation of Islamic values through symbolic reinterpretation, such as sea celebrations or pilgrimages to the tombs of saints, which strengthen the emotional closeness of the community without eliminating the substance of religion, as explained by Siti Aisyah (Komunika).

Theoretically, cultural preaching in Pangandaran can be analyzed through Bourdieu's framework on field of religion and symbolic conversion, where ulama use the symbolic capital of piety, moral legitimacy, and cultural adaptability to build social recognition. This strategy creates a "new social space" where religion and culture mutually affirm each other, strengthening the cultural identity and social networks of coastal communities. The success of cultural da'wah depends on a balance between the ulama's scholarly authority and local cultural wisdom, ensuring that Islamization proceeds organically and inclusively.

2. *The Role of Ulama as Educators and Spiritual Guides*

In the context of traditional Islamic society, ulama function not only as transmitters of religious teachings but also as moral educators and spiritual guides for the community. In Islamic educational theory, the role of ulama is similar to the concepts of murabbi and mursyid: figures who not only transfer knowledge but also shape the character, ethics, and religious awareness of the community. According to Husni Thamrin's research in the *Al-Ta'dib Journal*, the role of ulama as educators encompasses intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions, with the ultimate goal being to produce individuals not only knowledgeable but also morally upright and socially conscious (Thamrin, 2021). This dual role makes ulama the primary agents in maintaining the continuity of religious traditions and the moral resilience of local communities. Pesantren education in Pangandaran is integrative, combining academic, social, and spiritual dimensions. He asserts: "Students not only study the yellow books, but also engage in community service. They are trained to become useful individuals, part of both da'wah and education." This emphasizes an educational model that emphasizes a balance between knowledge and social practice, as well as the development of manners and moral awareness. Islamic boarding schools function as moral laboratories where students internalize the values of simplicity, honesty, and caring, forming the religious habitus of society (Tarsono et al., 2025).

In addition to being educators, ulama also serve as spiritual guides. Undang Abdul Hamid emphasized that guidance is provided directly in social life: "If residents have problems, they come to us for advice or prayer. Sometimes we don't provide technical solutions, but we calm their hearts." The activities of istighasah, tahlilan, and dhikr serve as a means of strengthening spiritual bonds and the inner resilience of the community (Fadhlin, 2021). The interactions of ulama also encompass socio-cultural dimensions, such as providing advice on business or household matters, which makes them spiritual counselors and agents of social cohesion (Rofiuddin, 2023). Theoretically, this role can be analyzed through Bourdieu's concepts of symbolic authority and religious habitus, where spiritual education and guidance generate moral legitimacy and symbolic capital, strengthening the social networks and moral resilience of the Pangandaran coastal community.

3. *Ulama as Social Mediators and Guardians of Harmony*

In the social structure of traditional Islamic societies, ulama (Islamic scholars) play a crucial role as social mediators, mediating conflicts, advising on moral issues, and maintaining harmony within the community. This role is rooted in the ulama's position as figures believed to possess spiritual integrity, religious knowledge, and social wisdom (Thamrin, 2021). The head of the Assujaiah Islamic Boarding School (Pondok Assujaiah) demonstrated that ulama in Pangandaran play an active role as mediators in resolving social and family conflicts. He explained that residents often come to the Islamic boarding school to discuss disputes, where issues are resolved through deliberation and counsel, without resorting to formal legal channels. This demonstrates that the ulama's legitimacy as mediators stems from community trust, not administrative power. Within Pierre Bourdieu's framework, this position reflects symbolic power, where ulama gain social recognition through inherent and socially recognized moral authority, which serves as symbolic capital in everyday social arenas. In addition to conflict mediation, ulama also play a crucial role in maintaining harmony between social and cultural groups. The head of the Alhamidiyah Islamic Boarding School emphasized that ulama often act as liaisons between religious leaders, cultural figures, and village officials when tensions arise over customs or cultural practices. This approach is a form of cultural negotiation, where religious norms are combined with local cultural expressions to prevent conflict. This position is crucial in pluralistic and dynamic coastal communities, as ulama function as balance maintainers between religious orthodoxy and social realities. Wardani's research emphasizes that ulama, as cultural mediators, can reduce social fragmentation and strengthen solidarity among residents.

The mediating role of ulama is also evident in broader social issues, such as land disputes or aid distribution. Kang Wawan, Guardian of the Makom of Syaikh Ahmad and Syaikh Muhamad, stated that the public is more trusting when ulama explain the inequities in aid distribution, as they are perceived as fair and reassuring. This phenomenon emphasizes the ulama's function as a social buffer, reducing tensions through ethical and religious communication. From a religious communication perspective, this role includes social da'wah or reconciliatory preaching, namely the use of moral authority to stabilize society. Furthermore, ulama also maintain harmony between generations. Kang Dindin Centreng, a cultural figure and religious activist, explained that ulama involve young people in religious activities such as pilgrimages, grave cleaning, or tahlilan (religious recitation). This strategy strengthens the reproduction of social values between generations and ensures the continuity of traditions. In Bourdieu's terminology, this is a form of cultural reproduction, where social structures and values are passed on through repeated symbolic practices.

Conceptually, the role of ulama as social mediators and guardians of harmony in Pangandaran can be understood through Bourdieu's concept of the religious social field. In this field, ulama utilize a combination of symbolic capital (piety, moral reputation), social capital (networks with residents and prominent figures), and cultural capital (mastery of texts and traditions) to maintain their position as mediators and regulators of social balance. Research by Ika Rahmah (Journal of Islamic Social Studies, 2023) confirms that the mediatory function of ulama is a crucial factor in creating stability in multicultural coastal communities. Thus, ulama in Pangandaran serve not only as religious leaders but also as guardians of social morality, mediating the integration of religion, culture, and daily community life.

4. *Transformation of Da'wah in the Modern Era*

The transformation of da'wah in the modern era demonstrates a paradigm shift from conventional pulpit-based patterns to a digital, dialogical, and participatory approach. In the context of a modern society increasingly connected through technology, religious scholars face the challenge of adapting da'wah messages to be relevant to the dynamics of digital communication. According to research by Nabilah A. Rahman, the transformation of da'wah requires scholars to understand the logic of new media, namely how religious messages are packaged in visual, narrative, and interactive formats that are easily understood by the digital generation (Rahman, 2023). This approach requires not only technological mastery but also social sensitivity to changes in how society understands religion. Ulama in Pangandaran have begun utilizing social media and digital platforms to expand the reach of da'wah. She stated that traditional religious studies in mosques are now complemented by short videos, online lectures, and light writings accessible to the younger generation, with the support of students (santri) in content creation. This demonstrates the ulama's adaptation to developments in information technology and addresses the challenges of a generation that is increasingly less likely to attend conventional religious study groups. Digital da'wah is a form of modernized da'wah, in which ulama act as digital preachers, conveying moral messages through the language of media.

However, digital transformation is not merely mechanical. KH. Muhsin Aziz, the head of the Assujaiah Islamic Boarding School, emphasized the importance of maintaining spiritual values in online da'wah. He emphasized that social media is a tool, not an end; da'wah loses its substance if it only pursues popularity. This criticism highlights the risk of commercialization of da'wah, which Arief Darmawan's research calls the commodification of da'wah, where religious messages are oriented towards market logic and digital media algorithms. Therefore, clerics are expected to continue emphasizing sincerity, ethics, and etiquette in conveying messages, so that da'wah remains authentic and not merely viral content. In addition to digital transformation, clerics are also experiencing a shift in their roles in the socio-economic sphere. Kang Dindin Centreng, a cultural figure and religious activist, stated that clerics are now actively promoting community economic empowerment, for example through the establishment of cooperatives and entrepreneurship training. Da'wah is no longer solely spiritual but also contextual, addressing social problems and increasing the independence of the community. Socio-economic da'wah is a form of integrative da'wah that positions religion as a driver of social change. Thus, modern ulama become agents of social transformation as well as drivers of an economy based on religious values.

From Pierre Bourdieu's perspective, this phenomenon can be understood as an expansion of the socio-religious field. The da'wah arena now encompasses the digital and economic realms, where ulama compete with new actors such as religious influencers, online activists, and media-based institutions. Ulama who are able to manage symbolic capital (moral authority), cultural capital (religious knowledge), and digital capital (media control) will maintain social dominance and legitimacy. Fauzan N. Hakim's study shows that the success of modern da'wah depends on the ulama's ability to integrate spiritual values with technology and social benefits. Thus, the transformation of da'wah in Pangandaran reflects a more participatory, contextual, and digital direction of Islamization. Ulama no longer play merely religious communicators, but also digital educators, social mobilizers, and guardians of community spirituality in the modern era. Their success in maintaining a balance between

tradition and innovation demonstrates that modern da'wah has not lost its meaning but rather adapted its form to be more relevant and sustainable. This approach demonstrates that the ulama's authority remains alive due to their flexibility in utilizing technology and integrating spiritual values with the socio-economic dynamics of coastal communities.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that local ulama in Pangandaran occupy a very central position in the formation and maintenance of the socio-religious structure of coastal communities. This role is not solely carried out through formal religious authority, but rather through symbolic, moral, and cultural approaches that enable the process of Islamization to proceed peacefully, adaptively, and sustainably. Based on the analysis of field data linked to Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework, it can be concluded that the ulama's social power stems primarily from their symbolic capital, such as personal piety, clerical lineage, mastery of religious knowledge, and moral legitimacy recognized collectively by the community. This symbolic capital is reproduced and reinforced through various social arenas, including Islamic boarding school education, cultural da'wah practices, and social relations built on trust, respect, and exemplary behavior. The ulama's religious authority in Pangandaran exhibits a charismatic-traditional character, but is not static. The ulama are able to adapt to social change without losing legitimacy, because their authority is not built coercively, but through a process of social recognition and the internalization of religious values in the daily lives of coastal communities. The da'wah strategy developed by local ulama (Islamic scholars) displays an inclusive and contextual approach to Islamization. The integration of Islamic values with local traditions such as sea celebrations, thanksgiving ceremonies, and pilgrimages reflects a creative accommodation between normative Islamic teachings and local culture. This approach not only maintains social harmony but also strengthens the community's religious identity without negating its cultural roots. In the modern context, the role of ulama has expanded through the use of digital media and involvement in social and economic activities, so da'wah is no longer limited to the spiritual realm but also actively present in the public sphere. These findings confirm that local ulama remain relevant as agents of socio-religious change amidst the dynamics of contemporary coastal communities.

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