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Brotherhood, Political Attitudes, and Cadre Formation: The Dynamics of the 13th Nahdlatul Ulama Congress in 1938 in Menes, Banten

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Abstract

The 13th Nahdlatul Ulama Congress in 1938, held in Menes, Banten, was a significant milestone in NU's history, reflecting the organization's internal dynamics and its stance toward colonial socio-political change. This study aims to examine the historical, political, and social dimensions of the congress, particularly regarding the strengthening of ukhuwah (brotherhood), political stances toward the Volksraad, and efforts to develop youth and women's cadres. This research uses historical methods through the stages of heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. Primary sources were obtained from NU archives and official documents, such as the congress minutes, instructions from the Head of the Nahdlatul Ulama Council (HBNO), and contemporary newspaper publications; while secondary sources include NU history books and other academic studies. The results of the study show that the 13th NU Congress not only succeeded in consolidating the internal structure through the legalization of ANO (Ansor Nahdlatul Ulama) and the discourse on the formation of Muslimat, but also confirmed the organization's stance on involvement in the Volksraad, rejecting direct participation but still opening up diplomatic space through non-political channels. The spirit of Islamic brotherhood, emphasized by K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari, became the foundation for the unity of the people in facing external challenges and internal differences. The congress's holding in Menes also marked NU's geographical expansion beyond East Java. Thus, this congress became a strategic reflection on the process



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of forming NU's identity as a socio-religious force adaptable to the dynamics of the times.

Keywords:

Cadre Development, Congress, Kiai, Menes, Nahdlatul Ulama.

Abstrak

Kongres ke-13 Nahdlatul Ulama tahun 1938 yang diselenggarakan di Menes, Banten merupakan tonggak penting dalam perjalanan sejarah NU yang mencerminkan dinamika internal organisasi dan sikapnya terhadap perubahan sosial-politik kolonial. Studi ini bertujuan mengkaji dimensi historis, politik, dan sosial dari kongres tersebut, khususnya terkait penguatan ukhuwah, sikap politik terhadap Volksraad, serta upaya kaderisasi pemuda dan perempuan. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode sejarah melalui tahapan heuristik, kritik sumber, interpretasi, dan historiografi. Sumber primer diperoleh dari arsip dan dokumen resmi NU, seperti verslag kongres, instruksi Hoofdbestuur Nahdlatul Ulama (HBNU), serta publikasi surat kabar sezaman; sedangkan literatur sekunder meliputi buku-buku sejarah NU dan kajian akademik lainnya. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Kongres ke-13 NU tidak hanya berhasil mengkonsolidasikan struktur internal melalui legalisasi ANO (Ansor Nahdlatul Ulama) dan wacana pembentukan Muslimat, tetapi juga menegaskan sikap organisasi terhadap keterlibatan dalam Volksraad menolak partisipasi langsung namun tetap membuka ruang diplomasi melalui jalur non-politik. Spirit ukhuwah Islamiyyah yang ditekankan K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari menjadi fondasi persatuan umat dalam menghadapi tantangan eksternal maupun perbedaan internal. Penyelenggaraan kongres di Menes juga menandai ekspansi geografis NU di luar Jawa Timur. Dengan demikian, kongres ini menjadi refleksi strategis dari proses pembentukan identitas NU sebagai kekuatan sosial-keagamaan yang adaptif terhadap dinamika zaman.

Kata Kunci:

Kaderisasi, Kiai, Kongres, Menes, Nahdlatul Ulama.

Introduction

In the history of the Indonesian national movement, the 13th Nahdlatul Ulama Congress (Muktamar) in Menes, Banten, in 1938 can be situated within the crucial development of Indonesian Islamic politics. This period, it is said, was part of the consolidation phase of Islamic organizations amidst political

pressure from the Dutch East Indies colonial government and growing national consciousness (Ernada, 2025). During this period, formal political space for indigenous organizations was severely restricted, so Islamic organizations tended to direct their struggles toward the social, educational, and religious spheres. In this regard, NU demonstrated a distinctive development pattern, strengthening its traditional base of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) and *ulama* (Islamic scholars), and building a stable organizational structure through the Mukhtar forum, which served not only as a decision-making arena but also as a means of consolidating brotherhood and strengthening the collective identity of traditional Muslims (Misbah, Abdul., 2022).

Compared to other Islamic organizations, such as Muhammadiyah, which focused more on the modernization of education and the purification of Islamic teachings, and Sarekat Islam, which was initially strong in the political-economic movement but later experienced fragmentation, NU demonstrated a more accommodating and cultural approach in dealing with colonial power. Meanwhile, MIAI (Majelis Islam A'la Indonesia) served as a federation seeking to unite various Islamic organizations, while NU maintained its organizational autonomy and traditional base. The uniqueness of NU's strategy lay in its ability to maintain a balance between not being directly involved in practical politics and remaining active in building the community's socio-religious strength. In this context, the 13th NU Congress in Menes became an important representation of NU's position as a traditional Islamic organization that was adaptive, stable, and oriented towards strengthening society amid the dynamics of Indonesian Islamic politics as the colonial period approached its end (Kersten, 2017).

The Nahdlatul Ulama Congress is the highest discussion forum held by the Hoofdbestuur Nahdlatul Ulama (now the Nahdlatul Ulama Executive Board) at set intervals. At each congress, *kiai*, *ulama*, *jam'iyah* administrators, and *nahdliyin* masses gather in a joint forum to discuss various matters related to the organization and religious issues, such as *bahtsul masa'il* (study of religious law issues), accountability of organizational management, formulating strategies and future organizational steps, establishing the organization's AD/ART, electing and appointing new management, and discussing various problems of the Muslim community in general (Basid et al., 2024).

Over time, the Nahdlatul Ulama Congress has undergone frequent changes in format and timing. In NU historical documents, it was initially written and referred to as "Congres N.O." and used between 1926 (the first congress) and 1940 (the 15th congress). During this period, NU Congresses were held annually. Starting in 1946 (the 16th congress, the first since Indonesian independence), the term "Congres N.O." was replaced by

“Muktamar,” which is held every three years. Subsequently, from 1962 (the 23rd congress) to the present, NU Congresses have been held every five years (Fadeli & Subhan, 2007).

As Chairul Anam stated (Anam, 2010), the first through eighth NU congresses were essentially pioneering efforts. Their activities focused on strengthening NU and expanding its reach beyond East Java, ultimately attracting broader public sympathy. For example, the sixth NU Congress in 1931, held in Cirebon; the seventh in 1932, in Bandung; and the eighth in 1933, in Jakarta, were three congresses intended as strategies to expand its presence in western Java. Technically, these congresses, held in the early stages of NU’s growth, had not yet confronted the organization’s complexities. A few other issues were discussed at the congresses, in addition to religious matters (Sujati, 2020). The resulting decisions were still limited to religious laws. The mechanisms implemented were far from formalistic. Attendees sat on mats or rugs, carrying stacks of yellow books for reference. In their dynamics, the first through eighth NU congresses were more synonymous with “grand celebrations” of the Syuriah board. Decisions made during the session were determined by the kiais in the Syuriah ranks. As written in the Nahdlatul Ulama Statute, Fatsal 6, 1926: 4, it reads:

“.....Poatoesan di dalam congress jang perloe dengan keterangan hoekoem agama hanya boleh dipoatoes oleh oatoesan-oatoesan dari golongan goeroe agama (“oelama”). Lain-lain oeroesan jang tidak begitoe perloe dengan keterangan hekoem agama, oatoesan jang boekan goeroe agama boleh toeroet memoatoesnja.”

Under the above regulations, Tanfidzyah administrators may attend meetings but do not have voting rights in deciding the issues discussed, except for non-religious matters. However, because the congress discussions primarily focus on religious issues, the Tanfidzyah administrators ultimately serve as a sort of organizing committee. They are responsible for the successful implementation of the congress and for running the organization, as decided by the Syuriah (Anam, 2010).

Next, in 1934, NU’s pioneering period was considered to have ended. The NU Congress in Banyuwangi, East Java, on April 21-26, 1934, marked the beginning of NU’s development. Beginning with the 9th congress, subsequent NU congresses adopted different mechanisms. Since the 9th congress in 1934, this mechanism has been changed by the implementation of a separation of sessions between the Syuriah and Tanfidzyah ranks. Both Syuriah and Tanfidzyah have their own discussion agendas, considering the issues discussed have become more complex. Not only religious issues, but

also issues related to strengthening the organization by forming wings of the movement. Likewise, NU activities are no longer limited to seeking public sympathy; they have begun to be oriented towards efforts to engage in the struggle of the Indonesian nation in the broadest sense. With this new mechanism, subsequent NU congresses became more formal and increasingly dynamic (Hamdi, 2021).

One of the most dynamic NU congresses in history was the 1938 NU Congress in Menes. This was because, in addition to being a success, the thirteenth NU Congress also hosted a lively celebration. Meanwhile, the success and excitement of the congress were inversely proportional to the event's location. Menes, located in Pandeglang Regency, in the 1930s, was a remote area, far from the crowds and quite difficult to access. Few Nahdliyin are aware of this remote area in West Java (Yusuf et al., 1994). Despite its remoteness, the 13th NU Congress in Menes made important decisions, including the need to place NU representatives in the Volksraad and the formation of NU youth organizations such as Ansor and Muslimat. In the context of NU's presence across regions, West Java (Banten) is often seen as lacking a strong NU jam'iyah base. NU discourse is often dominated by matters in East Javanese or Central Javanese. However, history shows that one region in Tatar Sunda, namely Menes, even though it is remote, has successfully hosted NU national events that have produced strategic decisions shaping NU's future (Muhaimin, 2006)

The 13th Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) Congress in Menes, held in 1938, was part of the organization's tradition of holding congresses or conferences on a rotating basis across regions with strong bases of Islamic boarding schools and ulama, especially in the westernmost region of Java. At that time, the Banten region, especially Menes, was known as one of the centers of Islamic education and had a rapidly growing network of Islamic boarding schools, especially those associated with Bantenese ulama. The selection of Menes also reflected NU's desire to expand its reach beyond its traditional centers in East and Central Java, particularly into West Java (Sujati & Thohir, 2025).

Methods

This research uses the Historical Method, defined as a systematic set of principles, methods, and rules for effectively collecting historical source materials, critically evaluating them, and presenting a synthesis. The stages consist of heuristics, criticism, interpretation, and historiography (Kartodirdjo, 2017). In the heuristic stage, the author uses an archival study approach and historical documents of NU. Several archives that are the author's primary sources are obtained from the PBNU Library, such as the Statute of the Nahdlatul Ulama Council (1926), the Instruction of the HBNO Tanfidziyah

“Poetoesan Kongresnja Jang Ke-13 in Menes Bantam,” (1938), and the Verslag congress NO ke-13 in Menes Bantam City (1938) (Gilbert J.S.J. Garraghan, 1946).

In addition, at the same place, the author found several NU magazines from the 1930s that reported on the results of NU congress decisions. The magazines in question are Berita Nahdlatul Ulama, such as No. 18-19 of 1936, No. 16 of 1937, and No. 20 of 1937. Other documents are contemporary newspapers the author found in the Delpher.nl collection, such as the Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad, No. 77, March 4, 1938, and de Indische Courant, No. 18, 1941. Furthermore, the author draws on secondary sources, specifically books on the history of Nahdlatul Ulama, to complete the discussion.

The theory used in this study is Sartono Kartodirdjo's Theory of Organizational Development from the perspective of social history. According to Kartodirdjo, organizational development results from the interaction among social, political, and cultural structures and historical actors (Kartodirdjo, 2017). The development of NU, including the holding of the 13th NU Congress in Menes in 1938, can be understood as part of the process of organizational transformation in facing socio-political changes during the Dutch East Indies colonial period, while simultaneously strengthening institutions and expanding socio-religious roles. This approach is well-suited to explaining why the 13th NU Congress was a crucial point in the organization's development, including the birth of the idea of forming a women's organization (Muslimat NU) and NU's response to the colonial situation in the Dutch East Indies.

Result and Discussion

Initial Conditions of the 13th NU Congress in Menes.

In the 1930s, Indonesia, then still under Dutch colonial rule, experienced social and political dynamics shaped by the global economic crisis that began in 1929. The impact of this crisis led to a decline in economic activity, increased poverty, and a deterioration in public welfare. In the political sphere, the colonial government tightened its control over national movement organizations through repressive policies that limited political activity. This situation encouraged community and religious organizations, such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Muhammadiyah, and other Islamic organizations, to focus more on education, da'wah, social activities, and community empowerment as strategies to maintain their existence while building public awareness (Mas'ud et al., 2019).

In 1938, the increasingly heated international political situation due to rising tensions leading up to World War II also influenced the policies of the Dutch East Indies colonial government. In this situation, indigenous

organizations began to strengthen internal consolidation and expand their social roles as a form of adaptation to changing times. For Nahdlatul Ulama, the holding of the 13th Congress (Muktamar) in Menes, Banten, in 1938 was a crucial momentum in strengthening the organizational structure, formulating various strategic decisions, and expanding socio-religious roles, including the development of the idea of forming a women's organization that later became the forerunner of Muslimat NU. Thus, the socio-political dynamics of the late 1930s became a historical backdrop that also influenced the direction of the development of the Nahdlatul Ulama organization, leading up to the Japanese occupation in 1942. Therefore, it was fitting that after the NU Congress was held in Malang in 1937, another one was held in Menes in 1938 with enthusiasm from the Banten community (Rohmana, 2025).

The records of the Verslag Congress of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in Menes in 1938 describe the opening of the congress with a parade. On Thursday, June 16, 1938, at 1:00 PM, explosions were heard around the town of Caringin (Menes), shocking its residents. The records indicate that, had the public not known or received advance notice that a parade of thousands of students from the Mathala'ul Anwar-Nahdlatul Ulama (MA-NU) madrasah would be held, preceded by explosions, the crowd might have fled, thinking that Mount Krakatau would erupt again.

This lavish event was the largest of the many NU mass meetings held in West Java during its early years. It was an effort to introduce NU to rural areas, often the base of traditional Islamic communities. For some Nahdliyin in West Java, the Menes congress is considered a milestone in the formal growth and development of NU in West Java (Sujati & Thohir, 2025).

Psychologically, the NU Congress in Menes was made possible thanks to the leadership of K.H. Mas Abdurrahman, a senior cleric who spread NU in the Banten region and was a close friend of K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari. Technically, the 13th NU Congress was held in such a remote area thanks to the efforts of Kiai Entot Ismail (Tanfidzyah NU Pandeglang branch) and the administrators of the NU Menes branch, such as Kiai Entol Djamsari and Kiai Entol Dinawi (Nahdlatul Ulama, 1938).

At the 11th NU Congress in Banjarmasin in 1936, K.H. Entot Ismail, representing the Pandeglang branch of NU, proposed Menes as a candidate for the 12th Congress. This proposal was accepted by the forum. However, because the Malang branch had submitted a similar proposal, the forum held a meeting to decide which city would host the following year's NU Congress. After the meeting, a vote was taken. The draw resulted in Malang as the host of the 12th NU Congress (in 1937), and Menes was chosen to host the 13th NU Congress (Nahdlatul Ulama, 1936).

After the Pandeglang branch was confirmed as the host of the 13th Congress, it was immediately decided that the congress would be held in an organization-owned building. The building to be used was a building specifically constructed for the purpose. This was certainly extraordinary, considering that previous NU congresses had always used existing buildings such as the grand mosque, a hotel, or a hall belonging to a particular Islamic boarding school. The Verslag Congres N.O. ke-13 (1938: 14) described the condition of the building as follows:

“.....Gedong tsb. Diperboeat dari bamboo, jang beriboe2 batang bajaknja. Sedang dindingnja dari beberapa ratoes lembar koelit amboeloeng (kiray). Pakeonja telah habis beberapa peti sehingga dapat dikira2kan sendiri bagaimana hebat dan besarnja gedoeng itoe. Pendek kata dari djoempolnja, soesahlah dapat digambarkan dengan toelisan. Walhasil tiadalah bersalahan jika ia dikatakan ta' berbeda dengan roemah (gebouw) pasar tahoenan di tanah lapang Gambir Batavia Centrum. Sedang pekerdja'an itoe boekannja boeah oesahanja orang2 jg ahli (bouwkundigde), tetapi hanjalah pendapatannja orang2 jg tidak berpengetahoean tentang pekerdja'an itoe. Pekerdjaan itoe ta' lain, melainkan dilakoekan dengan system “gotong rojong” sadja.

Besides the venue, the highlight of this congress was the presence of government officials. Among the local government officials present were the Patih Pandeglang, the Serang Sub-district Head, the Menes Sub-district Head, the Pandeglang Sub-district Head, and the Menes Police Sub-district Head. The congress was also attended by G.F. Pijper, who served as Adviser voor Inlandsche Zaken (Advisor for Native Indies Affairs). Meanwhile, the Resident of Banten, in a letter to the congress committee, stated that he could not attend the event due to an upcoming visit to the Cibaliung District of Ujung Kulon (de Indische Courant, 1941).

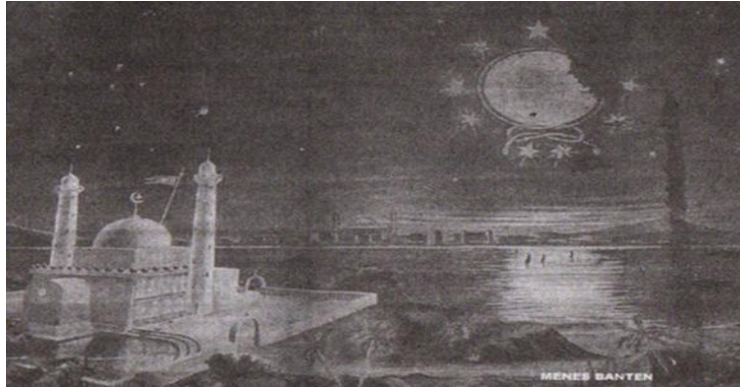


Figure 1.

Painting for the Publication of the 13th NU Congress in Banten

One thing attendees felt was missing was the presence of the Grand Rois of NU at the congress. K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari was unable to attend due to his poor health. He entrusted the success of the congress to the HBNO administrators, such as K.H. Machfud Sidiq, K.H. Wahab Hasbullah, K.H. Abdullah Ubaid, K.H. Wahid Hasyim, K.H. Ahmad Faqih, and also to the senior kiai, such as K.H. Asnawi from Kudus and K.H. Mas Abdurrahman, the host. K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari wrote down his advice and direction in a written speech. The written speech was then read by K.H. Abdullah Ubaid, part of which read:

“.....Oenteok kefaedahan oemat Islam, tidak ridhonja Toehan, apabila oemmatnja sama berseteroean. Dan selain daripada itoe, bahwa N.O. ini akan mengikat pertaliannja Oelama dengan Oelama dan Oelama dengan oemoem kaoemnja Moeslimin. Djika seandainja Igama ini tiada ada, maka kebadjikannjapoen tiada akan hidoep (ada) djoega, dan begitoe sebaliknja. Djika ada pertjektjokan antara satoe dengan jang lainnja, maka berartilah itoe memoeteoeskan tali persjarikatan (persaudaraan). Irislah ini dengan pisau persatuan dan persaudaraan.”

Such advice is closely related to K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari's efforts to unite the Muslim community, as a year earlier, a Muslim unity forum, the Indonesian Supreme Islamic Council (MIAI), had been established. This organization emphasized Muslim unity and avoided internal debates (Irfan et al., 2020). At the 11th NU Congress in Banjarmasin in 1936 and the 12th NU Congress in Malang in 1937, K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari proclaimed the spirit of Islamic

brotherhood. K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari once invited figures from various Islamic organizations, stating:

“.....kemarilah toen-toan jang mulia, kemarilah, kundjungilah permoesjawaratan kita, marilah kita bermoesjawarah tentang apa2 jang mendjadi baiknja Igama dan oemat, baik poen oeroesan Igamanja, maoepoen doenianja, sebab doenia ini tempat mengoesahakan achirat dan kebadjikan tergantoeng poela atas beresnja perikedoeniaan... oleh karena oemat Islam itu bertingkat2 dan semuanya itoe bersaoedara. Mereka mempoenjai hak atas oelama dan oelama mempoenjai kewadjiban atas mereka.”

In this situation, by the late 1930s, there was a growing awareness of the need for a more important consensus in the form of Islamic brotherhood rather than merely debating the issue of *furu'* or *khilafiyah*. At the same time, Muslims were faced with the need to fight against forces outside Islam. From there, the MIAI was formed in Surabaya in September 1937 as an Islamic federation that narrowed the gap between the orthodox and the reformists. This organization was then made public in March 1938. The announcement stated that the formation of MIAI was expected to gradually resolve disputes among Muslims and foster a better understanding (Nahdlatul Ulama, 1938).

Volksraad and NU Political Attitudes

The NU Congress in Menes made a crucial decision on NU's stance toward the prevailing political situation. At the 13th NU Congress, this desire was officially put forward by the Indramayu branch, which proposed that NU appoint a representative to the Volksraad. The reasons were: first, NU could legally express criticism and aspirations regarding the policies of the Dutch East Indies colonial government. Second, if any government officials acted adversely toward NU branches and members, NU could bring the matter before a Volksraad session. Third, by appointing a representative to the Volksraad, NU's movements would be heard and seen by the general public, thus indirectly enabling NU to promote and propagate (Banda, 1985).

This proposal was then discussed in the eighth closed session, attended by 53 branch representatives. The result was that 39 branches rejected it, 11 branches agreed, and 3 abstained. Thus, most NU branches rejected the proposal (Nurhadi et. al, 2023). The reasoning was that having NU representatives on the Volksraad would have no influence on NU, given that most Volksraad members are not from NU organizations and many are not Muslim (Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad, 1938). In response to this rejection, the HBNO reinforced the following:

“.....Oleh karena kebanyakan dari oetoesan2 (sprekers) itoe sama menjatakan ta' setoedjoendja kepada oesoel, maka H.B. sendiri terpaksa djoega ta' dapat menentoekan akan sikapnja (pendirianja) jg pasti. Itoelah sebabnja, maka H.B. hanjalah memberikan akan penerangannja, bahwa djalan2 jang akan ditempoeh oleh N.O. goena menjampaikan akan segala keberatan2nja kepada pemerintah Agoeng, masihlah amat banjaknja. Ta' boleh tidak oesaha2 jang dilakukan oleh N.O. itoe tentoe akan mendapat perhatiannja pemerintah. Dari itoe tiadalah perloe N.O. mempunjai wakilnja di dalam raad pemerintah tadi.”

Furthermore, if NU engaged in practical politics within the Volksraad, it was feared that it would drain NU cadres, who were still needed to foster NU's internal affairs. However, among NU members, the role of the people's council was widely accepted as essential for channeling the aspirations of NU and the people in general. From a broader political perspective, by 1935, voices from some Nahdliyin began to be heard more frequently, calling for NU to pursue practical politics. The temptation to engage in this form of practical politics emerged when some NU cadres faced the reality that the prestige of the Sarekat Islam was declining following the death of HOS. Cokroaminoto. These advocates of practical politics also hoped to assume the roles of several political parties suppressed by the Dutch colonial government, including those held by many exiled movement figures (Hamdi, 2021).

Despite this, NU elders remained reluctant to formally transform NU into a political organization. This choice benefited NU's existence at the time. Despite its potential to become a new political force, maintaining political distance contributed to the rapid growth of NU supporters during a period when Sarekat Islam, originally more nationalistic, was experiencing a decline in its influence. Furthermore, many kiai distanced themselves from politics because of their experience with the Islamic Union (SI) in the late 1910s and 1920s. At that time, despite being the backbone of SI membership in rural areas, their influence at the national SI level was minimal. Many kiai had become accustomed to following government regulations to maintain a distance between religion and politics. The kiai were content with the freedom to practice their religion with their congregations and manage Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) without interference from colonial authorities, as long as they remained out of political activities (McGregor, 2009).

Ultimately, NU remains organizationally focused on developing the socio-religious sector. If NU members engage in politics, that is also welcome. However, the policy pursued must be based on national politics. This is what

NU did in response to the emergence of the Indonesian Political Association (GAPI). When GAPI held the Indonesian People's Congress (Korindo) on December 23-25, 1939, in Batavia, demanding a parliamentary Indonesia, NU sent K.H. Mahfudz Shiddiq to express NU's agreement and approval of GAPI's demands (Irfan et al., 2020).

The 13th NU Congress in Menes, Banten, in 1938 can be understood as an important articulation space in the discourse of Islamic brotherhood, where NU sought to strengthen the internal solidarity of traditional Muslims amidst the political pressures of the Dutch East Indies colonial era. In this context, NU's position towards the Volksraad (a representative council established by the colonial government) reflected a cautious and accommodating attitude: NU did not position the Volksraad as the main arena of political struggle, but rather as a limited colonial institution, so that the focus of the struggle was directed towards strengthening the community through education, socio-religious organizations, and internal consolidation. This attitude shows that, from NU's perspective, *ukhuwah* was not only spiritual but also strategic in maintaining the organization's continuity without directly confronting the colonial political structure (Nahdlatul Ulama, 1938).

At the same time, the 13th NU Congress also became a crucial momentum in the institutionalization of cadre formation, particularly through the strengthening of the Ansor youth organization and the embryonic role of women, which later developed into Muslimat NU. This demonstrates that NU is beginning to build a more systematic organizational structure to ensure the sustainability of cadres and leadership regeneration. When compared to Sarekat Islam, which tends to experience political fragmentation, Muhammadiyah, which focuses more on educational modernization and Islamic reformism, and MIAI, as a federative forum for Islamic organizations, NU demonstrates a unique traditional-cultural approach that remains adaptive to changing times. This comparison clarifies the historical significance of the 1938 Menes Congress as a point of NU consolidation in strengthening *ukhuwah* (brotherhood), maintaining a moderate political position against colonial rule, and simultaneously building a sustainable cadre formation system in the political landscape of late-colonial Indonesia (Fernando et al., 2023).

Resolving the ANSOR Controversy and the Planned Formation of Muslimat

In terms of cadre development, the 13th NU Congress in Menes holds significant significance for the two NU wings: Ansor and Muslimat. Ansor is a youth organization within NU. In its early days, Ansor was often referred to as ANO, an abbreviation of Ansor Nahdlatul Ulama, with its primary task being to assist with the administrative needs of NU organizations and to serve

the individual needs of NU ulama. ANO was founded on April 24, 1934, coinciding with the 9th NU Congress in Banyuwangi (Sujati & Thohir, 2025).

However, the existence of ANO has not been supported by all NU kiai. Many NU figures still believe that a special youth organization is unnecessary. Many kiai also do not recognize the management and existence of ANO. Even during 1935-1938, there were often misunderstandings between the senior kiai and the ANO administrators (Hassan, 2005). This misunderstanding arose because the kiai did not see the urgency of ANO's existence, given that in the NU environment, there were still many young kiai and students who could be empowered without being accommodated in a special organization. Some kiai also disapproved of ANO's efforts to form a troop/scouting line called BANO (Barisan Ansor Nahdlatul Ulama), which would later become Barisan Ansor Serbaguna (BANSER). Some BANO customs, such as marching, ceremonies, wearing military-style uniforms, wearing ties, and pinning badges with gold stars on the shoulders, were considered by some kiai to resemble those of infidels. At the 12th NU Congress in Malang in 1937, participants held a pro-contra debate on the cancellation of the ANO management, although the cancellation never occurred, and the ANO problem remained an issue to be discussed at the NU Congress the following year (Nahdlatul Ulama, 1938).

The controversy was later resolved at the NU Congress in Menes. K.H. Wahab Hasbullah's speech partially eased the differences between ANO and the senior kiai.

".....So 'al ta' setoedjoenja (antipathie) sebagian dari fihak tetoea kepada ANO itoe, tidaklah boleh dibiarkan sadja. Sebab, perkara itoe tentoe ta' akan ada habisnja. Sebagai tjontoh, maka sahabat2 dari K.N. Moehammad s.a.w. sewaktu beliau mengadakan peperangan dengan orang2 Perzie, jang satoe dan lainnja ta'lah dapat memoelai akan peperangannja itoe, karena koeda2 jang mendjadi kendaraannja beliau sahabat2 Nabi itoe tidaklah pernah mengenal gadjah, jang mendjadi toenggangannja bangsa Perzie, sehingga takoet kepadanya, dan begitoe poela sebaliknya. Tetapi setelah sahabat2 terseboet membeli gadjah, jg teroes dikenalkan dengan koeda2 baliau sehingga koeda2 ini ta' takoet lagi kepada gadjah. Setelah itu mereka berangkat perang dan berhasil menakloekan bangsa Perzie. Djadi, kita memerloekan "gadjah" dan "koeda" sekaligoes. Toh, kedoeanja sama2 makan roempoet. Sebab itu kita koempoelkan mereka dalam satu kandang, yakni Nahdlatul Ulama."

In his speech, K.H. Wahab Hasbullah emphasized that the conflict between the ANO administrators and several clerics was simply due to a lack of

communication and mutual understanding. If both parties were willing to accept each other as part of the NU family, it would be a significant advantage for NU's development. Since then, ANO has been widely accepted by the clerics, and in accordance with the decision of the 13th NU Congress in Menes, the ANO Congress will be held simultaneously with the NU Congress (Ernada, 2025). The 13th NU Congress in Menes also permitted ANO branches to form BANOs with the following provisions: First, if an ANO wants to form a BANO in a certain location, it must first request permission from the local NU board. Likewise, ANO branches that have already formed BANOs must obtain permission immediately. If there is no response from the local NU board, the permit can be processed directly with the HBNO. If an ANO does not request permission first, the BANO formed is considered invalid. Second, neither ANO nor BANO should act, engage in activities, or even dress in a manner that exceeds the standards set by the 13th NU Congress in Menes (the congress stipulated that ties should not be worn in uniform), to avoid undesirable incidents such as misunderstandings (Fernando et al., 2023).

After quelling the youth organization controversy, the 13th NU Congress in Menes also marked the beginning of the NU women's organization, Muslimat, an autonomous body responsible for women's activities within the NU community (Iryana et al., 2025). Unlike previous congresses, at the NU Congress in Menes, women were not only involved in providing logistics and behind-the-scenes support but also actively participated in several sessions. In fact, this congress specifically provided a space for women to consolidate and express their aspirations in an "openbare vergadering kaoem iboe" (open gathering) (Nahdlatul Ulama, 1938). The congress report described the circumstances of the women's session as follows:

".....Pada hari rebo 15 Juni '38 sekitar poekoel 3 habis lohor telah dilangsungkan openbare vergadering (dari Congres) bagi kaoem ibu bertempat di gedoeng Congres N.O... Di dalam openbare vergadering ini, kaoem ibu N.O. Menes dan Matla'oe Anwar sama kelihaan datang berdoejoen-doejoen... mereka semoeanja membandjiri gedoeng Congres, sehingga penoeh sesak berdesakan sambil berdiri. Mereka jang ada di dalam gedoeng sadja, ditaksir tiadalah koerang dari 2000 kaoem iboe, sedang jang tidak dapat masoek k.l. ada 6000 orang. Oetoesan2 tjabang seloeroeh N.O. tiadalah sama sekali mendoega bahwa di tempat jang sebegitoe ketjil dan ta' berarti, kaoem ibunja begitoe insjaf, sadar dan mengerti, sehingga masing2 berlomba-lomba mengedjar kearah toedjoean ke-Igama'an, seolah-olah di dalam rohaninja telah dimasoeki oleh tjahaja jang gilang-gemilang di

dalam menempoeuh djalan ke-Islaman dan djalan perdjoeangan N.O. Bantam bukan sadja tempatnja kaoem laki-laki, tetapi joega mendjadi tempat kedoedoekannja kaoem2 iboe, jang sama ta' maoe ketinggalan di dalam hal mendedjar ilmoe dan pengetahoean."

The women's conference was then strengthened by speeches from prominent NU figures. Kiai Entot Ismail, as the host of the congress and the speaker for the women's conference, K.H. Abdul Jalil from Kudus, K.H. Mas Abdurrahman, and K.H. Wahab Hasbullah took turns taking the podium. They delivered remarks and provided guidance, accompanied by verses from the Qur'an and Hadith on women's right to organize. According to K.H. Wahab Hasbullah, one of NU's founders, the time had come for NU to establish an organization specifically for women of Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah. Furthermore, several national and religious organizations outside NU already have women's wings. Speakers from the women's community included Djoeaesih, representing the NU Bandung women's community, and Siti Sjarah, representing the NU Menes women's community. Both emphasized the importance of organizations for women that could educate women in accordance with Islamic teachings (Sujati & Thohir, 2025).

The dynamics of the Menes Congress then became a consideration for the HBNU (National Student Council), which immediately established a special body for women within the NU. While awaiting a decision from the HBNO leadership, the congress decided to develop a preliminary draft with three provisions. First, the body would be called the N.O. Moeslimat Section. Second, the body would be similar in nature to the ANO, having its own management and requiring prior approval from the HBNO. Third, the body aims to educate Muslim women through religious studies, courses, preaching, and the management of madrasas (Setiawan, 2022).

The initial draft was then submitted to the highest leadership of the Nahdlatul Ulama Organization (NU) for consideration. However, due to ongoing debate among scholars regarding this matter, coupled with the political situation faced by NU since the early 1940s, the plan to establish a special body for women was only legally realized eight years later. Nahdlatul Ulama Muslimat (abbreviated NOM) was officially ratified on 26 Rabi'ul Akhir 1465/29 March 1946 at the 16th NU Congress in Purwokerto. At the 19th NU Congress in Palembang (28 May 1952), NOM's status was changed to an autonomous body with a separate organizational structure, now known as Muslimat NU (Sujati, 2020).

Affirmation of Nahdlatul Ulama's Identity through the 13th NU Congress in Menes, 1938

The 13th NU Congress in Menes in 1938 was a significant milestone in the consolidation of Nahdlatul Ulama's identity, not only as a religious organization but also as a mature social organization capable of responding to national dynamics. The spirit of Islamic brotherhood, emphasized by K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari, strengthened NU's position as a unifying force for the people amidst the current ideological divisions between orthodox and reformist groups. In this context, the Menes Congress served as a stage that reflected NU's moderate view of the colonial socio-political reality: maintaining the principle of non-cooptation in practical politics while opening space for participation in national forums such as GAPI. This demonstrated that NU was not an organization apathetic toward the nation, but rather one that was meticulous in determining the battleground among preaching, education, and advocacy for the people (Atjeh, 2015).

Furthermore, by discussing the controversy surrounding the formation of Ansor and the founding of Muslimat, the Menes Congress affirmed NU's commitment to inclusive internal cadre development and empowerment (Nahdlatul Ulama, 1936). NU began building an institutional foundation to recognize the roles of youth and women as integral to the jam'iyah movement, a visionary step amid the still-strong patriarchal culture and social conservatism at the time. Thus, the 13th NU Congress was not only an administrative moment, but also a strategic articulation of NU's identity as an organization grounded in religious tradition yet adaptive to the needs of the times. From this point on, NU emerged as a cultural and social force that not only defended the interests of traditional Muslims but also shaped the course of Indonesian civilization (Zuhri, 2013).

The 13th Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) Congress, held in Menes, Banten, in 1938, had significant goals and benefits for the organization's development and for Indonesian society as a whole. The goals of the 13th NU Congress included: Affirming NU's position in society. This congress aimed to strengthen NU's existence as an organization that combines religious (Islamic) and social aspects, and to affirm NU's commitment to the teachings of Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah (Wahid, 1994).

One of the main objectives of the congress was to discuss various religious and social issues facing Indonesian Muslims, particularly those related to the influence of modern ideologies such as Wahhabism and secularism. Strengthening Nahdlatul Ulama's (NU) role in the struggle for independence: The congress also aimed to discuss how NU could contribute more significantly to the struggle against Dutch colonialism and prepare steps towards Indonesian independence (Azra, 1999).

The benefits of the 13th NU Congress for NU itself include organizational strengthening. This congress provided an opportunity for NU to strengthen its internal structure and renew its leaders' commitment to facing new challenges. Furthermore, it was beneficial for the development of Islamic thought. The outcomes of this congress enriched Islamic thought, grounded in the traditional teachings of Ahlul sunnah wal Jamaah, which emphasize moderation and tolerance in religion, while opposing various sects considered extreme (Sudirman, 2010).

This congress also laid the foundation for Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) to play an active role in the Indonesian independence struggle, both through its religious teachings and its support for the nationalist movement. It also served to establish social and political networks. This congress strengthened relations between the ulama (Islamic scholars) and Muslims in Indonesia and expanded NU's influence at the national level (Rinardi et al., 2017). Overall, the 13th NU Congress in Menes, Banten, was a pivotal moment in the history of the Nahdlatul Ulama, strengthening not only NU's position as a religious organization but also as a social and political force with significant impact on the Indonesian independence struggle.

Conclusion

Based on the Ukhuwah, Political Attitude, Cadre Formation, and Dynamics of the 13th Nahdlatul Ulama Congress in 1938 in Menes, Banten, the 13th NU Congress was an important moment in strengthening the identity of the Nahdlatul Ulama organization during the Dutch East Indies colonial period. In terms of ukhuwah, the congress strengthened the internal solidarity of Nahdliyin members by consolidating the ulama and congregations into a more structured organizational forum. In terms of political attitudes, NU during this period showed a more accommodating cultural, religious, and political character, namely, not being directly involved in practical politics but remaining responsive to colonial socio-political conditions by strengthening the role of religion and society.

Meanwhile, in terms of cadre development, the 13th NU Congress in Menes in 1938 marked a significant milestone in the process of organizational regeneration and strengthening, including the emergence of awareness of the need to expand NU's institutional role in various fields. This demonstrated that NU was developing not only as a religious organization but also as a social institution adapting to changing times. Thus, the dynamics of the 13th NU Congress reflected a strong process of organizational consolidation through strengthening brotherhood, affirming political-religious stances, and developing sustainable cadre development amidst the colonial situation of the Dutch East Indies.

Holding a congress in a remote area like Menes also marks NU's success in transcending geographical boundaries and expanding its support base beyond East Java. West Java (Banten), often viewed as a region lacking a strong NU base, has in the past hosted congresses crucial to NU's future. In practical terms, this research makes a significant contribution to the development of the NU organization and Indonesian society, particularly in terms of ukhuwah (brotherhood), political stance, and cadre formation. The dynamics that occurred during this congress shaped NU's future direction and strengthened its role in religious and national struggles.

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