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FROM RESISTANCE TO ACCEPTANCE
The Localization of Global Salafi Movement in West Java, Indonesia[1]

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Abstract: Since the rise of global Salafism, local communities in many places around the globe, particularly Indonesia, have undergone a lot of internal debates. This study aims at finding out how the Salafi Tarbiyah Sunnah movement succeeded in overcoming the initial scepticism and opposition and gained community acceptance in West Java villages. This study, through in-depth interviews with the movement's leader alongside a key number of members of the Tarbiyah Sunnah congregation, supplemented by observation and literature review, proposes key factors that contribute to the acceptance. These encompass the charismatic leadership and religious knowledge of the leader, effective use of texts, persuasive campaign in social media, the movement's strategic cultural adaptation and its civic activities relating to community needs. These helped to situate Salafi orthopraxis. The research also uncovers the micro-level approach and strategies used by this movement in the process of incorporating its ideological concepts and broadens the theories about the process of religious change in the current social and religious conditions. The findings of this study will have policy implications for state regulation and policies in order to promote inter-religious tolerance and to address the growth of revivalist movements at the grassroots level.

Keywords: Salafism, Indonesia, resistance and recognition, cultural adaptation, civic engagement.

Introduction

Although the scholarship on Salafism in Indonesia has tended to focus on urban centers and elite activism, the spread of the movement

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into rural areas, where it faces issues of local customs and traditions, has not been adequately examined. In these contexts, the Salafi movements face collective prayers for the dead (*tahlilan*), commemorating sacred nights (*nisfu sa'ban*), and honouring saints (*tawasul*), which they classify as innovations (*bid'a*). This study examines how one movement, the Salafi Tarbiyah Sunnah community in Selacau village, Batujaajar District, West Bandung, West Java, was able to overcome the initial scepticism and gain local acceptance. The project focusses on the village level as a site of analysis to illuminate the micro-level strategies that make global Salafi ideology local in Indonesia's diverse religious landscape. Tarbiyah Sunnah has become a force of influence in West Bandung and Bandung City. The presence of Tarbiyah Sunnah in the study is not separate from the central figure of this study, namely Abu Haidar As-Sundawy or Erwan Haswansah who has gained prominence in the study.

This research explores the dynamics of religious orthodoxy, resistance and recognition in Salafi Tarbiyah Sunnah community. The investigation was a preliminary study to understand the reactions of different groups to religious activism of Salafi Tarbiyah Sunnah and the resistance that they faced. What's thought-provoking is that this study discovered that the resistance against Tarbiyah Sunnah activism was not as strong as it was thought by many. This observation led to deeper reflection on the strategies that the leaders of the Tarbiyah Sunnah used to neutralize possible opposition and continue to build community sympathy, acceptance and recognition. The community's leaders employ nuanced strategies to leverage against resistance and get recognition, which are not well understood and studied. This gaps, therefore, need to be addressed with a careful examination of communication strategies, cultural sensitivity and skilful use of traditional religious texts.

The phenomenon of Salafism in Indonesia has been studied thoroughly by researchers in terms of its development, ideology, and its impacts on identity politics and multiculturalism in the context of Indonesia. The origin of Salafism can be traced back to the rise of Saudi influence in the 1980s, through the return of Indonesian students after completing their studies in Saudi Arabia and spreading the teachings of Salafism to the local area.[2] Salafism is a literalist interpretation of

[2] N. Hasan, *Laskar Jihad: Islam, militancy and the quest for identity in post-New Order Indonesia* (New York: Southeast Asia Program Cornell University, 2006); Jajang Jahroni, "Saudi Arabia charity and the institutionalization of Indonesian Salafism," *Al-Jami'ah* 58, no. 1 (2020), 35–62.

scripture, a strict observance of the customs of the early generations of Muslims and a purification of apparent accretions of non-Islamic culture.[3]

In addition to propounding doctrinal issues, research into Salafism has been undertaken to explore multi-facet aspects of this religious movement. These comprise apolitical and political Salafis attached to political parties, identity construction and citizenship,[4] radical Salafis,[5] and Salafis' opposition to the syncretic nature of traditional Indonesian Islam,[6] and also the non-violent political development of Salafis into political party (as those of Prosperous Justice Party).[7] The scholarship on Salafism has also been concentrated on urban settings where intellectual elites are predominant.[8] Some research also shows that since the 1970s, the Saudi patronage has allowed the Salafis in Indonesia to create *madarasas* (Islamic schools), *pesantrens* (Islamic boarding schools) and foundations that propagate Salafism by infiltrating traditionalist circles and Hadhrami communities.[9] Scriptural texts, memorisation of the Quran and principles of monotheism that are Saudi Wahhabi oriented were the focus of the curriculum, while the use of multicultural educational principles which encourage students to be open to other practices is limited.[10] Gender is also a topic touched upon in recent scholarship on Salafism, for understanding better the ultraconservative

[3] F. Griffel, "What Do We Mean By 'Salafī'? Connecting Muḥammad ʿAbduh with Egypt's Nūr Party in Islam's Contemporary Intellectual History," *Die Welt Des Islams* 55, no. 2 (2015), 186–220.

[4] C. Chaplin, "Salafi Islamic piety as civic activism: Wahdah Islamiyah and differentiated citizenship in Indonesia," *Citizenship Studies* 22, no. 2 (2018a), 208–223.

[5] Hasan, *Laskar Jihad: Islam, militancy and the quest for identity*.

[6] AB. Wahib, "Being pious among Indonesian Salafis," *Al-Jami'ah* 55, no. 1 (2017), 1–26; Jahroni, "Saudi Arabia charity, 35.

[7] D. Tomsa, "Islamism and Party Politics in Indonesia," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

[8] N. Hasan, "The Salafi Movement in Indonesia: Transnational Dynamics and Local Development," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27, no. 1 (2007), 83–94.

[9] N. Hasan, "The failure of the Wahhabi campaign," *South East Asia Research* 18, no. 4 (2010), 675–705.

[10] N. Muthohirin, M. Kamaludin, and F. Mukhlis, "Salafi Madrasas: Ideology, Transformation, and Implication for Multiculturalism in Indonesia," *Fikrah* 10, no. 1 (2022), 81; BC. Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

gender norms and relations in Salafi communities, offering policy recommendations and reform.[11]

In general, although studies of salafi utilization of media such as TV and radio station are abundant,[12] the discussion on cultural adaptation and cultural contestation norms that aid in the integration of Salafis into the norms of Muslim society in Indonesia is still limited. Factors also making it easier to integrate Salafis non-violently in the Indonesian traditionalist strongholds have not been examined in detail, either.[13] Furthermore, there are still under-researched factors that could explain why Salafi movements are not accepted within the local Muslim community. Very few studies have evaluated strategies that religious movements adopt to achieve community acceptance, including opposition to threats to tradition, overcoming resistance, and eventually achieving sociopolitical acceptance.[14] There are, however, studies that focus on how salafi attracts millennial generation[15] and young urban people in general.[16]

In this context, this study's fine-grained examination of the Tarbiyah Sunnah movement, in particular, how its leaders managed to negotiate initial opposition and eventually gain recognition in West Java, enriches the theories of conditions and processes that can lead to incremental acceptance. This research can help in a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics of integration of modern 'friendly' Salafism strains in different Muslim milieus by connecting these localized experiences with other scholarly discussions on the phenomenon of modern Salafism. This study can be placed in the context of other literature reporting

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[11] BJ. Smith & S. Hamdi, "Between Sufi and Salafi subjects: Female leadership, spiritual power and gender matters in Lombok," Bianca J. Smith and Mark Woodward, *Gender and power in Indonesian Islam* (London: Routledge, 2016), 107; Z. Ismail, MA. Fakhruddin, and L. Bariroh, "Seeking a space of equality: The shifting role of Salafi women in contemporary Indonesia," *Teosofi Jurnal Tasawuf dan Pemikiran Islam* 14, no. 1 (2024).

[12] A. Masduki, I. Muzakki, I. Rosidi, and T. Hartono, "Islam on the air: the struggle for Salafism through radio in Indonesia," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 12, no. 1 (2022), 59

[13] Hasan, "The Salafi Movement in Indonesia, 83.

[14] Ibid., 83-94; G. Kepel, and AF. Robert, *Jihad: The trail of political Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006).

[15] A. Aderus, et.al., "How Salafism Forms Millennials' Religious Understanding: A Case Study from an Indonesian University," *Ulumuna* 27, no. 1 (2023), 291-392.

[16] Mochamad Sodik and BJ. Sujibto, "Against Religious Formalism: The Dynamics of Young Urban Sufism in Yogyakarta," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 17, no. 1 (2023), 12.

socially-engaged forms of modern Salafism to highlight its original contribution and deepen the understanding of the integration dynamics of Salafism in different Muslim milieus.

However, West Java has witnessed a resurgence of orthodox and revivalist Islamic currents both in recent history, hence forging fertile ground for newer scripturalist currents, such as Salafism, to take root. Though Jakarta was the capital of Indonesia, the provincial countryside was still largely spared the impact of the Modernist Muslim groups (such as Muhammadiyah) and the Traditionalists (such as Nahdlatul Ulama) prevailing on Java. This conservatism had been indicated by the continuity of the insurgencies that called for an Islamic state in Darul Islam, which have been operating here for a longer time than in other parts of the world. It had a long history of radical militancy and later, the rejection of local practices by its doctrines, which meant that later teachings against the syncretic Islam of the people were attractive to the village clergy and to those people who were alienated from it.[17]

This study was conducted with a socio-anthropological approach that aims to examine the process of apolitical Salafism in villages located in the rural areas of Indonesia. In documenting the persuasive religious discourse and socio-cultural strategies implemented by Sunnah Salafi leaders, this research offers an insider view of the process of religious integration in the world's largest Muslim population.

This study also contributes to the theoretical understanding of religious localization and cultural framing techniques that face resistance and reach orthodoxy acceptance – a process very relevant for other Muslim societies that are contending with the emergence of Salafi ideology. It is in this context that the theoretical approach of orthodoxy, in relation to religious localization and cultural framing, provides useful insights into the way in which this practice is negotiated and accepted in different Muslim cultures. In a recent study, Dadi Darmadi argues that Indonesian Islamic orthodoxy is not monolithic, but dynamic over time and space, contingent upon different threat narratives and contexts. The

[17] CS. Bamualim, "Negotiating Islamisation and resistance: a study of religions, politics and social change in West Java from the early 20th century to the present," retrieved from https://hdl.handle.net/1887/35119.

fluidity highlights the ongoing process of re-formation of orthodoxy, in response to new challenges.[18]

The study used a qualitative research method with a triangulation technique using interviews, focus group discussions, observation and photo documentation. Primary data was conducted with the Salafi Tarbiyah Sunnah community in Selacau village, West Bandung and secondary data was obtained from scientific papers. The interviews were conducted with 19 individuals from the community, insiders, outsiders, residents, and police, and explored community reactions, key players, authority roles, and community acceptance of the movement. Abu Haidar As-Sundawy became the main figure. Leaders' methods of winning over initial resistance through persuasion, social projects, and cultural changes were the subject of analysis, complementing observations on Salafi's gradual integration into the broader society.[19]

Leadership and Da'wah Strategy of Tarbiyah Sunnah Movement

The Salafi Tarbiyah Sunnah movement in West Java is based on the leadership of the local religious teacher ustadz Abu Haidar As-Sundawy (Erwan Haswansah), who has a combination of formal Islamic education, self-directed study, and grassroots da'wah experience. In the early 1990s, the shift in the movement's trajectory from a confrontational activist to a persuasive and community-oriented preacher was significant. Under the guidance of the Salafi *manhaj*, which focuses on the book of Allah (S) and the *qaul qata'* (definite opinion) of *salaf* (the early generations of Muslims), Abu Haidar had a methodology for da'wah that stresses clarity, authority of the text and cultural sensitivity.[20]

At the heart of his interpretation is the careful referencing of accepted authoritative texts, especially those which are accepted by the majority of the Shafi'i school of thought that is dominant in traditionalist Islamic practice in West Java. Through the employment of books which are local and familiar, such as *Bulugh al-Maram,* a collection of hadith on

[18] D. Darmadi, "Islamic orthodoxy at the regional level in Indonesia," Leonard C. Sebastian, Syafiq Hasyim, and Alexander R. Arifianto (eds.), *Rising Islamic Conservatism in Indonesia: Islamic Groups and Identity Politics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), 45–47.

[19] B. Théo and R. Olivier. "Post-Salafism: From Global to Local Salafism," *Mediterranean Politics* 31, no. 2 (2026), 251–270.

[20] Interview with Abu Haidar As-Sundawy, Bandung, 31 July 2019.

Islamic jurisprudence and its commentaries,[21] Abu Haidar manages to avoid the rhetoric that would otherwise alienate him from his readers, which is a common feature of Salafi purism.[22] This is a doctrinally sound approach which allows him to give his followers assurance and enables a dialogue with traditionalist Muslims who follow the same scholarly line. Similarly, he teaches Arabic language using *al-Jurumiyah* an Arabic grammar text, which is also widely used in traditional *pesantren*. This programme, which takes place weekly and brings together people with a wide range of educational backgrounds, is a prime example of how Abu Haidar's activities are able to unite the world of Salafi orthodoxy with local educational traditions. He also uses the Sundanese language and humor in teaching his sermons, which is another indication of his relationship with the local community.

Abu Haidar's leadership goes beyond engagement in text, and his institutional capacity-building is noteworthy. He has spearheaded the development of early childhood education (PAUD), Islamic schooling (BISC), Arabic language programs, radio and television programs, social media programs, guidance on hajj and umrah and retail cooperatives through the Tarbiyah Sunnah Foundation, which was established in 1991. They are dual purpose to spread the Salafi message and to meet the real needs of the community, which increases the movement's social status.

Also important is the civic participation of the movement. Abu Haidar and his followers are involved with active participation in village development projects, such as public facilities reparation and clean water wells project. This social connection has been instrumental in overcoming initial doubts and slowly moving towards acceptance, with residents and local government officials both seeing the tangible advantages of the Tarbiyah Sunnah's presence. Thus, instead of the life story of its leader, the activities of the movement itself become the main

[21] W. Anam and M. Sulaeman, "Law, Ethics, and Hadith Ahkam: An Analysis of Fatwa MUI in the Perspective of Progressive Interpretation," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga dan Hukum Islam* 8, no. 2 (2024), 1031.

[22] Contrary to Abu Haidar's endeavour, the employment of hadith in contemporary context by moderate and progressive Muslims is aimed at finding breakthrough for legal ruling which otherwise out of date according to Islamic jurisprudence. See for instance T.M. Jakfar, et.al., "Efforts to Moderate Islamic Law Understanding through Hadith Studies in Aceh and West Sumatra Mosques," *Al-Ihkam: Jurnal Hukum dan Pranata Sosial* 20, no. 1 (2025), 94-115.

media for the movement to enter into the life of the rural society in West Java.

Adopting Local and Recognized Authoritative Texts

The Tarbiyah Sunnah *da'wah* is unique in that it takes care to utilize the standard books and persuasive books in discussing real subjects.[23] Especially the Tarbiayah Sunnah's leaders sometimes quotes local and known books of authority, which are used by traditionalist Muslim scholars. Salafi supporters call for a firm and clear base for all religious actions, based on well-known scholars and their well-known works.[24] They strongly feel that not everyone is qualified in interpretation of the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*, and only the pious with vast knowledge and understanding are qualified. Abu Haidar stresses the need for the assistance of experts and renowned scholars. He emphasizes the importance of asking for advice and knowledge from the authoritative sources as prescribed by the Qur'an in chapter an-Nahl (16:43)*:* "Ask the experts everything you do not know." Abu Haidar emphasizes the need to learn Arabic in order to be able to grasp the teachings better. This prompted the start of Arabic language classes, which were attended by a cross-section of students from different educational backgrounds.[25]

This attention to authoritative texts resulted in a tremendous influence on the acceptance of Salafi Tarbiyah Sunnah da'wah, especially as Abu Haidar used local authoritative texts that are generally accepted by the local Traditionalist Muslims as his main *da'wah* texts. For example, when discussing the Hadith, only to mention one, he used *Kitab Bulugh al-Maram* and its several *sharh* (commentaries) namely, *Subul al- Salam* by Shaykh Muhammad bin Ismail Al-Amir Ash-San'ani, *Taudhih al-Ahkam* by Shaykh Abdullah bin Abdulrahman Al Bassam, and *Sharh Bulugh al-Maram* by Shaykh Salih Al-Fauzan. Interestingly, while te first commentary was written by Yemeni scholar, the second and third commentaries are written by Wahhabi-Salafi scholars. Although he has sometimes made reference to *sharh* from books authored by Salafi scholars, Abu Haidar frequently mentions scholars from the Shafi'i

[23] Interview with Dadan Suhendar, Bandung, 1 October 2021.

[24] C. Chaplin, "Salafi activism and the promotion of a modern Muslim identity," *South East Asia Research* 26, no. 1 (2018b), 3–20. https://doi.org/10.1177/0967828X17752414

[25] Interview with Abu Haidar As-Sundawy, Bandung, 2 October 2021.

school of thought and states that he does not blame the scholars from other schools for having differing opinions.[26]

One of Abu Haidar's students, called Hari Badar, admitted that Abu Haidar allowed his followers or congregation to adopt a view that they could accept. He said that Abu Haidar presents only the arguments and reasons.[27] This recognition was reinforced by Abu Umar Indra, another abu Haidar's follower. Many members of the Abu Haidar followers, he claims, are at ease since there is freedom of opinion and choice in religious matters. The most significant aspect of Abu Haidar's da'wah is "certainty" and "clarity," which signify certainty in worship since they have intelligible principles. Abu Haidar said that the da'wah in the literature is to ensure that everyone has a clear understanding and basis for what it teaches.[28]

What distinguishes Abu Haidar's approach, however, is that he doesn't focus on comparisons and contrasts - in a way this is where most of the Salafi organisations differ. He insists that instead of unnecessary divisions, there is a need to unity, and that this unity is to be achieved in an open and low-profile manner, something generally practiced by many followers of the Shafi'ites. This approach has worked well for him - especially among the urban educated public. Abu Haidar's strategy for da'wah is based on the literature side, with reference to the books that are standard within the Shafi'i school. This technique helps him to become more accurate in his religious talk and allows for accurate and acceptable communication to his audiences from several leading universities in Bandung.[29]

Moreover, the use of the Sundanese language, and the inclusion of Sundanese style of humour in his sermons has helped to bring closer ties and communication between the Salafi followers and the local community.[30] This holistic strategy has played a crucial role in reaching villages and outskirts, as well as in bringing more followers and expanding the Salafi Tarbiyah Sunnah da'wah beyond the urban areas.[31] Due to Abu Haidar's hard work and effective da'wah, many educational

[26] Interview with Abu Haidar As-Sundawy, Bandung, 2 October 2021.

[27] Interview with Hari Badar, Bandung, 26 August 2021.

[28] Interview with Abu Umar Indra, Bandung, 26 August 2021.

[29] Interview with Abu Umar Indra, Bandung, 26 August 2021.

[30] Y. Nonaka, "Practising Sunnah for reward of heaven in the afterlife," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 49, no. 145 (2021), 429–447.

[31] Hasan, "The Salafi Movement in Indonesia, 83.

programmes and foundations have been established, spreading the reach and impact of the movement. All of these fall under the umbrella of educational programmes, schools, media and social services, all of which are designed to bring about the propagation of their understanding of Islam and encourage a sense of community.[32] To help understand his studies of Kitab thoroughly, Abu Haidar taught his followers the most basic knowledge, namely knowledge of the Arabic language. Study of books with the mastery of Arabic makes it easier to follow the recitation, in addition to the implementation of the routine twice a year. The paid Arabic course is very appealing, particularly to young adults in Bandung, and is aimed at the general public. They mostly come from students to lecturers from several leading universities in Bandung.[33]

The Arabic course is taken from the Kitab *Nahwu Sarf* (Arabic grammar and syntax) with the highly studied book of a*l-Jurumiyah* written by a Moroccan linguist known as Abu Abdillah Sidi Muhammad bin Daud Ash-Sanhaji alias Ibn Ajurrum (1324 AD). It is the most widely used basic Arabic grammar book in Indonesian traditionalist Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). It is a weekly course and people come to learn the Arabic language. Pamphlets were distributed and through word of mouth the number of participants grew each day. The students encouraged other students to enroll in the course. The house for the course was now completely filled and some students had to study from outside where lectures were made audible with loudspeakers.[34] In 1992 a number of helping hands (*al-muhsinin*) donated a small plot of land (*waqf*) measuring 9x6 m2 in Selacau Village, Batujajar. On the *waqf* land, a mosque was constructed with funds provided by a Saudi donor, and was completed in 1993, and named after Umar bin Khattab.

This discipline and literature-based method, which relies on the use of known (*Shafi'i*) authoritative books, along with his respect and focus on unity and effective communication, has influenced the Salafi Tarbiyah Sunnah *da'wah* and helped to spread it. The movement's success is in its capacity to adjust and connect with a mixed audience and stay faithful to its values. By applying the following three tools: authoritative literatures, language, and inclusive preaching, Abu Haidar and the *da'wah* of Salafi Tarbiyah Sunnah have made an impact on the

[32] Interview with Abu Haidar As-Sundawy, Bandung, 1 August, 2019.

[33] Interview with Abu Umar Indra, Bandung, 26 August 2021.

[34] Interview with Abu Umar Indra, Bandung, August 26, 2021.

Indonesian society and even beyond, thus gradually facilitating the acceptance of the preaching within local community.

The Tarbiyah Sunnah and Digital Shift during COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically limited mass gatherings, and posed a huge challenge for the operations of religious movements in Indonesia. Abu Haidarwas in favor of governmental measures to slow the spread of viruses, and refused to back health restrictions imposed on religious gatherings by the government, while religious leaders were against governmental restrictions on gatherings. With the absence of physical congregations, the movement picked up speed to move towards digital platforms through the Tarbiyah Sunnah Foundation. The movement has kept its involvement high through the use of teleconferencing, social media and broadcast communication, even without the face-to-face assemblies.[35] One of the key elements of this digital approach was the successful and professional introduction of multi-channel broadcasting, such as Zoom, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and local radio networks.[36] Abu Haidar used Zoom to launch the study program "*Bumiku Mengaji*" (My Earth Recites) which extended his reach to the Indonesian diaspora worldwide in North America, Europe, Australia and Asia. Remarkably, this was the continuation of an existing international band of listeners including the *"Rojaban"* (*Rodja* Bandung) group of North American followers who regularly listened to his radio broadcasts in Bandung.[37]

The movement's virtual presence is growing, and so is the virtual infrastructure of the movement. As of January 2022, Tarbiyah Sunnah's main social media platforms had reached 154,000 subscribers on YouTube, 116,000 followers on Instagram, and had an additional 9,610 followers on Abu Haidar's Instagram account. Not only that, this technological change was not governmentally imposed but was the result of a technologically capable church, including alumni from prestigious institutions like the Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB). This volunteer technical cadre has systematically converted Abu Haidar's body of work from analog cassettes and compact discs to

[35] Interview with Hari Badar, Selacau, August 26, 2021.

[36] Masduki, Muzakki, Rosidi and Hartono, "Islam on the air, 59–84; MM. Sule, "Social media utilization in Covid-19 epoch: Virtual da'wah-ramadan lectures in Northern Nigeria," *Jurnal Ilmu Dakwah* 40, no. 2 (2020), 128.

[37] Interview with Abu Haidar As-Sundawy, Selacau, August 26, 2021.

MP3/MP4 files and online repositories, resulting in a historical transition.[38]

Although digital media use was already underway prior to COVID-19, the pandemic accelerated the professionalization of the media in the movement. Traditionally, the Tarbiyah Sunnah movement started from private meetings and extended to the da'wah centers in the suburbs' mosques such as in Cipaganti Great Mosque, Pusdai, Al-Ukhuwah Mosque, etc. The structural shift of cross-platform digital outreach was that it expanded the movement's ability to target urban upper-middle class cohorts and moved Tarbiyah Sunnah from being an informal, local effort supported by lower-middle class human capital to a highly structured, digitally integrated, and globally distributed effort.

Persuasive Engagement with State Politics and Society

Abu Haidar refutes any revolutionist political agenda, such as that of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) for the establishment of an Islamic caliphate. He claims that the *khilafah* is a blessing of Allah which will manifest itself automatically when Muslims are practicing Islam and follow sharia. In the same way, he repels from violent Islamist groups like the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) which he considers to be incompatible with the Salafi *manhaj*. Rather, it has acquired its public legitimacy by openly declaring allegiance to the Indonesian state and Pancasila and by separating itself from groups considered as posing threats to the state of Indonesia.[39] This appears to be a trend in the current ideology called (Madhkalism) a quietist form of Salafism and non-political engagements.

This has immediate consequences. Tarbiyah Sunnah in itself grew more tolerant, while at the same time Tarbiyah Sunnah was more active in its civic involvement via culturally adapting its da'wah and community service. Community development projects such as educational programs, building of public facilities and social welfare projects led to the Tarbiyah Sunnah establishing close linkages with village governments. One of the successes is the Tarbiyah Sunnah *Peduli*, where members were involved in repairing public facilities, providing clean water and assistance in educational services. When provides a low-cost kindergarten, it is especially important for low-income families and can

[38] Interview with Agus, Selacau, August 26, 2021.

[39] Y. Machmudi, "Islamising Indonesian: The Rise of Jemaah Tarbiyah and the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS)" (Ph.D dissertation, ANU Press, 2008).

provide an opportunity for Salafi women and local residents to meet. These schools served as venues for social integration, communication, trust building, local hiring of teachers, and greater interaction between the Tarbiyah Sunnah and the community in general.[40] These activities helped to bring about a change in the reputation of villages that were previously known for crime and social disruptions to a more stable and cohesive community. Abu Haidar's influence in the Tarbiyah Sunnah was gradually growing, so that candidates' seeking his support became more and more evident in the elections for the village head (Pilkades). Abu Haidar noted, though, that this recognition was not done on the basis of political involvement, but on the basis of the social benefits of the da'wah. He said the government's acceptance of Tarbiyah Sunnah was based on its concrete contribution to the communities and civil society.[41]

Religious education was always linked to civic activities that served the good of the local people, especially in education, in Selacau Village. Abu Haidar also explicitly reiterated the Tarbiyah Sunnah followers' commitment to Pancasila, which he believed its principle of unity and social harmony is in line with the main teachings of Islam. In keeping with this pragmatic approach, the movement's da'wah approach among urban middle class and educated people was more rationalistic while among the rural people, it was in a simpler form.[42]

These methods bit by bit changed the attitude of the public towards Tarbiyah Sunnah. The opposition from Traditionalist Muslims was relatively weak in Tarbiyah Sunnah in Selacau West Bandung as opposed to many communities in Java where the opposition is strong. Resistance became muted over time, there were no continuing theological or organisational criticisms, and the movement did not cause much polarization in Traditionalist communities. Initial opposition in Selacau was quelled when Abu Haidar took a gentler and more discreet tone. In the same way, opinions were not as unanimous in the mosques of Bandung, Cipaganti Grand Mosque and Ukhuwah Grand Mosque, but the presence of Tarbiyah Sunnah was generally accepted by

[40] Interview with Hari Badar, Selacau, 26 August, 2021.

[41] Interview with Abu Haidar As-Sundawy and Agus, Selacau, 26 August, 2021; Also Deni Suhendri, Selacau, 1 August, 2019.

[42] Interview with Abu Haidar As-Sundawy, Selacau, 26 August 2021.

Traditionalist congregations due to the respectful and non-confrontational approach of da'wah adopted by Tarbiyah Sunnah.[43]

The acceptance of Tarbiyah Sunnah has even been from those who were suspicious of the Tarbiyah Sunnah's growth and its large audiences: those people who were intelligence. In this condition, the State's security forces started to monitor the activities of the da'wah of Tarbiyah Sunnah for any signs of religious radicalism. The police and military intelligence officers regularly attended the lectures of Abu Haidar, initially for the purpose of spying. Following multiple observations, however, investigators determined that the movement was not a threat to security, though it was popular. Several officers who came to the event initially as part of an official duty, then went as volunteers to gain their religious knowledge, and some eventually sent their children to a local Islamic boarding school in Selacau. This shift from "surveillance" to "engagement" shows a trend towards acceptance of this movement by the State's institutions. In spite of some resistance, the spread of Tarbiyah Sunnah was becoming more accepted by local communities, civil society and government agencies and became more and more marginalized.[44]

Negotiating Orthodoxy in the Village: How Tarbiyah Sunnah Made Salafism Acceptable in Rural West Java

Numerous implications from this study can be described as follows. First, the Tarbiyah Sunnah movement seeks to make religious and socio-cultural adaptations in their da'wah mission without sacrificing the core of Salafi teachings, in order to sustain its dakwah activities and social transformation. The adaptation was carried out with the aim that the presence of the Salafi Tarbiyah Sunnah could be accepted and so that its da'wah activities would not be rejected. To ensure that this approach goes well, the Tarbiyah Sunnah's leaders tend to be tolerant in their dakwah so as not to contradict the religious views of the vast majority of Muslims. Such principle has been adopted by Salafism in rural Java. A case study on "Salafism in rural Java" conducted by Qodir et al, found that Salafism was a process of "give and take" that keeps social cohesion

[43] Interview with Ibnu Hijar Apandi, Lembang, 1 December 2021.

[44] Interview with Abu Haidar As-Sundawy, Selacau, 26 August 2021.

and at the same time helps to slowly alter the nature and form of religious practices within the community.[45]

The second theoretical contribution concerns the mediating function of the text authority and the scholarly charisma on the phenomenon of religious change. Abu Haidar's strategic use of locally known *Shafi'i* sources, rather than solely Salafi sources, supports Rosadi's argument that the success of a Salafi acceptance in culturally conservative areas is relying on the figure of a leader who can combine doctrinal purity with venerable scholarly traditions. Abu Haidar has also repeated the Salafi teachings, using the same form that is widely accepted by the local community by employing popular authoritative texts, which thereby minimises the local Islamic community's view of the threat to their Islamic identity, as seen in other Salafi movements in Riau.[46] This is a reworking of the binary opposition of 'Salafi' versus 'Traditionalist' Islam, positing a continuum in the process of negotiating the point of orthodoxy.

Thirdly, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the process of digitalizing the movement, while also offline and online Salafi activism are now becoming amalgamated. The use of social media in Tarbiyah Sunnah shows how social media can be used to serve the rural and transnational audience, and through using social media, modern Islamic identities can be created.[47] The digitalization of inter-continental study circles *(Bumiku Mengaji)* with the support of Zoom and the professionalization of content on YouTube and Instagram, is a redefinition of Wafi's understanding of "reproduction of Salafism in the online environment", which strengthens communal bonds and enhances doctrinal impact beyond geographical limits. But Tarbiyah Sunnah is not the same as the more cosmopolitan digital Salafism found in urban

[45] Z. Qodir, Krismono, and I. Abdullah, "Salafism in rural Java: The struggles of Indonesian Islam since the fall of the New Order," *QIJIS Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies* 11 (2024), 247.

[46] Hasbullah, et.al., "Acceptance of the existence of Salafi in the development of da'wah in Riau Islamic Malay society," *Cogent Social Sciences* 8, 1 (2022).

[47] S. Rijal, "Pursuing hijrah to Salafi path: Urban Muslim youth and the quest for self-transformation in Indonesia," *Contemporary Islam* 19, no. 1 (2025), 101–121; F. Aidulsyah, "The rise of urban Salafism in Indonesia: The social-media and pop culture of new Indonesian Islamic youth," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 51, no. 4 (2023), 252–259.

studies, in which local linguistic and cultural idioms (Sundanese language and humour) are employed.[48]

Fourth, civic engagement and political instrumentalism of the movement indicate that Salafi groups can hardly be defined as "anti-state" and "socially marginal". The Tarbiyah Sunnah is a community active in developing village infrastructure, supporting the local government, and practicing Pancasila in the public sphere. It can be called "civic Salafism"—a religious activism more concerned with social responsibility than confrontation. This aligns with Hasan's observation on the multi-layered nature of Indonesian Salafism, ranging from *'rawakhib'* (violent activism) to *'rawat/radik'* (cultural resistance) and even to *'bermanir'* (grassroots community building) as this study has illustrated.[49]

Finally, while many other studies on Salafism in rural areas are now emerging, the present work points out several key elements contributing to its success, such as persuasive communication, institutional diversification, and the cultivation of interpersonal trust, that are frequently overlooked in macro-studies of religious revival. This can be attributed as post-salafism.[50] The results shift the focus from urban elites to village communities, and call for comparative studies of how Salafi movement negotiate orthodoxy across Indonesia's diverse socio-cultural contexts, ranging from areas where traditionalist Islam is dominant to those where the state-society relationship is more fluid and contested.

Conclusion

This study offers multiple key insights into understanding of the Salafi Tarbiyah Sunnah movement and the factors contributing to its acceptance in Bandung region. Theoretically, the study is significant for the following reasons: Firstly, it provides valuable insights into how religious movements, particularly those with a Salafi orientation, adapt their narrative framing, build social and structural networks, attract new

[48] I. Rosidi, "Negotiating Salafi Islam of Hang Radio: Responses of active Muslim audiences to Hang Radio in Batam, Indonesia," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 62, no. 2 (2024), 387–408.

[49] A. Sunarwoto, "Negotiating Salafi Islam and the state: The Madkhaliyya in Indonesia," *Die Welt Des Islams* 60, no. 2–3 (2020), 205–234.

[50] T. Blanc and O. Roy, "Post-Salafism: From global to local Salafism, *Mediterranean Politics* (2024), 1–20.

members, and strategically leverage key events to gain community acceptance by engaging in society on religious, political, civic and cultural levels. Secondly, it provides insights into the localization strategy of the Salafi Tarbiyah Sunnah movement in the Indonesian context, which can be used to expand the knowledge of religious identity embedding and religious change process. Third, religious leadership plays crucial role in the religious change process, localization and acceptance. The Tarbiyah Sunnah's leader, Abu Haidar, had unique leadership qualities, a combination of Salafism, traditional education, adaptability and cultural sensitivity, which are crucial for navigating the complexities, challenges and dynamics in society. In so far as the application of Salafism that has been adapted and contextualized in the Indonesian religious and cultural context, the Tarbiyah Sunnah movement can be considered as one model of the emergence of post-Salafi Islam in contemporary Indonesia society. []

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