From Saudi to Social Media:
Arabization of Islam Via Salafi Instagram Accounts in Indonesia

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Abstract

This paper argues that Salafists, through the use of social media platforms like Instagram, are not only disseminating their interpretation of Islamic teachings but also serving as representatives of the Arabization of Islam in Indonesia. In support of this argument, this research involved an ethnographic data search by randomly sampling Instagram accounts that spread Salafism and are linked with the Arabization of Islam. The focus was specifically on the @dakwah_tauhid and @mahasiswa salaf Instagram accounts. It is argued that social media, particularly Instagram, serves as a modern platform for Salafists to propagate Islamic teachings based on the Qur'an and Sunnah. Through consistent content creation, they have garnered hundreds of thousands to a million followers, indicating their value in the Muslim community in Indonesia. Coupled with using social media like Instagram to preach 'pure' Islam, these accounts also function as influencers that contribute to the Arabization of Islam in Indonesia. This is evident in several aspects of their content, which emphasizes the Saudi interpretation of Islam. This includes referencing religious rulings (fatwas) issued by Saudi ulama, showcasing lectures by scholars who graduated from Saudi institutions, and promoting educational institutions in Indonesia that are managed by Saudi-trained graduates.

Keywords: Arabization of Islam, Digital Salafism, Social Media.

Introduction

Since Indonesia's independence in 1945, the Islamization process has been ongoing, albeit in a restricted capacity. Despite Muslims being the majority in the country, they were restricted in the public sphere from running political activities as some of them insisted on supporting the establishment of Islamic Sharia law as the ideology for their newly established country before the agreement that their political ideology would be built upon Pancasila.[1] These restrictions continued during the New Order led by the authoritarian Suharto, who eventually cemented the position of Pancasila as the single acceptable ideology and demanded the acceptance of this decree from all elements of Indonesian society. However, decades into his rule, Suharto's regime weakened and ultimately began to compromise by allowing political Islam to emerge despite this being carried out to maintain his authoritarian regime.[2]

Unfortunately, Suharto ran out of time, and despite his efforts to sustain his power, he stepped down as ruler of Indonesia after 30 years.[3]

The fall of the New Order triggered Islamic activists to emerge and enabled previously restricted ideologies to flourish.[4] Day one of the Reformation era permitted press freedom and religious expression, opening the public sphere, including Muslim activists with different interests.[5] Among the important developments in this period was the swift propagation of Salafism. The rapid advancement of Salafi propagation is due to its ability to keep up with modern trends. To put it in other words, the success of Salafism is not only because of its effort to spread its influence in the real world but also because of its savvy in building a da'wah network in cyberspace. The old media, bolstered by the new media, has increased the fragmentation between Salafists and the Indonesian established religious authorities. While the latter upholds an Indonesian rooted in the traditions established by the local scholars, the former championed a pure Islamic tradition based on the practices of the first three Muslim generations.

In response to Salafi's influence, many Indonesians have critically evaluated its impact on their society influences. The main criticism raised against Salafism is its role in the Arabization of Islam. In this context, the term refers to the Arabization of Islam as a paradigm that views the validity of Muslim religiosity by creating Arabian values and norms as the benchmark. To elucidate this point, consider the Salafist mindset that confines their doctrine to Saudi scholars and alike.[6] Although they argue that they follow the *salāf al-sālih* of the first three generations of Muslims, they tend to be very fastidious and reject teachings outside the Arab scholars. Conversely, however, Indonesia already has its scholarly establishment, and thus, the Arabization of Islam in Indonesia is seen as a challenge to the existing religious authority. Moreover, Salafism has significantly influenced the infusion of Arabic culture into Indonesian society. Up until today, with the emergence of Salafism until today, the daily lives of Indonesian Muslims have undergone significant changes that may be interpreted as the Arabization of Islam. These cultural changes vary based on attire and preferences for selecting baby names, which starkly contrasts with the practices of previous generations. As a result, The Arab culture has, to some extent, displaced Indonesian culture, sparking criticism based on its possibility to the erosion of local Indonesian culture.

New media plays a pivotal role in facilitating the homogenization of thought among Indonesian Muslims. Salafists, famously technologically sophisticated, utilize the Internet and social media to disseminate their particular Islamic interpretation originating from their main "trustworthy" religious authority. Moreover, social media serves as a medium to introduce Arab culture, especially those practices central to the Prophet Muhammad's tradition. Instagram accounts such as @dakwahtauhid and @mahasiswasalaf illustrate how Salafists utilize social media to preach their doctrines and, I assume, to propagate the Arabization of Islam in Indonesia. Taking into account all the characteristics of Salafism related to the Arabization of Islam and its criticisms, this article aims to explore the extent of this phenomenon within the Indonesian context.

Several studies have been conducted on the Arabization of Islam in Indonesia. A study by Lily Zubaidah Rahim, for example, critically illustrates the Arabization of Islam pattern and how the inflexible Wahabi-oriented Islam has challenged the inclusive and moderate Southeast Asia tradition, especially in Malaysia and Indonesia.[7] Taking the counter-narrative story of Indonesian Muslim intellectual Komarudin Hidayat with the ex-chairman of Nahdlatul Ulama, Said Aqil Siraj, Mark Woodward examined the narration from two slightly different intellectuals that essentially challenged the efforts of Wahhabi-Salafi to Arabized Islamic Indonesian.[8] Two other articles written by Jahroni are equally significant to mention here as they relate to the process of the Arabization of Islam in Indonesia, specifically from the

perspective of educational institutions. While the first article focuses on the influence of Saudi-Wahhabi ideology in higher education institutions in Jakarta, the second article highlights the critical role of Saudi Arabian charities in expanding Salafi's influence by sustaining Salafi-owned educational institutions in Indonesia. According to Jahroni, there is a strong connection between Saudi charitable organizations and the proliferation of Salafism in Indonesia. He emphasizes the role of these charities in facilitating the establishment of Salafi institutions, which subsequently serve as the primary platforms for promoting Salafi ideology and influence. However, in another of his articles, Jahroni presents an intriguing argument regarding the extent of Saudi Arabia's influence. By closely examining the reproduction of knowledge at the Saudi-sponsored college LIPIA (Institute for Islamic Sciences and Arabic) in Jakarta, he highlights the diverse backgrounds of the institution's students and how they interpret the knowledge they acquire. In other words, the knowledge internalized by LIPIA alumni is not necessarily shaped solely by Salafi influences. It is also molded by their social context and the discussions they engage in both inside and outside the campus environment.[9]

On the other hand, several studies have also been conducted on Digital Salafism in Indonesia. An article by Asep Muhammad Iqbal, for instance, deeply examined the intersection between the Internet and Salafism. By analyzing one of the Salafi websites, his work revealed the effectiveness of the Internet used by Salafi to promote their Salafi identities and to fulfill their religious purposes.[10] Lastly, the recent study by Agung Pramana examined Salafism in digital media by taking the @dakwahtauhid Instagram account as its study case. Instead of observing solely the content producers as demonstrated in the mentioned previous work, his study also includes the responses of its followers; thus, it captures the wider implications.[11] In the same way, this study examined Salafism on the Internet, specifically in social media. However, the third and fourth studies only describe Salafism in digital media without considering additional discourses. In contrast, this study offers the wider implications of digital media used by Salafism by connecting its contents to the Arabization of Islam discourses. Digital media, especially social media, is significant in the discourse because its features reflect the efforts of Indonesian Muslims to negotiate their established (or existing) religious practices and cultural identity. In the Indonesian context, platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok serve as religious spaces where content is flooded with Islamic figures and movements, sparking debates about what constitutes "authentic" Islamic practice. While some Salafi-influenced accounts, such as those to be discussed in this paper, promote Arabized forms of Islam—featuring strict interpretations of the Quran and Sunnah—others use social media to advocate for locally grounded Islamic interpretations. This aligns with what Woodward has described in his work as "resisting" Salafism. While his study focuses on real-life examples of this phenomenon, this paper aims to highlight the discourse specifically through the lens of social media. Further, this study attempts to answer the principal question: How is social media utilized by Salafis to promote their teachings, and how can its implications be situated in the Arabization of Islam discourse? This article argues that Salafists, using social media platforms like Instagram, are not only disseminating their interpretation of Islamic teachings but also serving as representatives of the Arabization of Islam in Indonesia. Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on the intersection between the internet and Salafism, this research overcomes the gap left by earlier works that have largely overlooked the socio-cultural dimensions of Salafi movements in Indonesia. It reveals how Salafists use social media platforms, especially Instagram, not just to propagate religious teaching but to reshape cultural norms, challenging traditionalist practices and fostering a transnational Salafi identity.

Methods

To address the above question, this study employed a qualitative approach. Data was obtained using a technique called netnography. As defined by Kozinets (2019), netnography is a particular form of qualitative social media research that adapts ethnographic methods to understand social interaction within contemporary digital communications contexts.[12] The research involved an ethnographic data search by randomly sampling Instagram accounts that spread Salafism and are linked with the Arabization of Islam. The newly-established Instagram platform is chosen as the main focus of this research due to its visual-centric nature and the significant efforts of Salafists, as one of the main agents for the Arabization of Islam in Indonesia, devoted to preaching on digital platforms. Its visual features can reveal how Islamic practices, fashion, and others are deeply influenced by Arab culture. For example, some posts promote *niqāb, abaya,* or other specific Arabic styles of clothing. In addition, Instagram features such as one-click sharing and discussions in the comment section often reflect the tension between localized and Arabised practices.

The focus was specifically on the @dakwah_tauhid and @mahasiswa salaf Instagram accounts. These accounts were selected as case studies due to their widespread distribution of Salafi teaching contents concerning Indonesian Muslim tradition. Regarding the contents, both accounts posted various themes. To find some posts linked to the Arabization of Islam discourse, I used Voyant in the initial research process by first categorizing themes. This application was chosen because it is useful for visualizing web-based text and analyzing textual data. After the categorization process, the research proceeded by analyzing the most frequent words or topics related to the main theme of this research. Additionally, follower comments on the account posts were also analyzed to gain more insights and implications. Complementary to the netnographic data, this research data was also obtained through a literature study of previous studies. Finally, the author analyzed the findings and provided an argumentative reflection intending to articulate those Salafist accounts of the Arabization of Islam discourses.

Digital Salafism in Indonesia: The path of Salafism toward Arabization of Islam

Numerous studies have provided an overview of the history of the development of Salafism on a global scale associated with *Wahhabi*, puritanical teaching intertwined with political goals that historically sought hegemonic expansion towards other countries. Indonesia has been a prominent recipient of this wahhabisation. Therefore, many studies exist exploring the seeds of emergence, development, and the current status of Salafism in Indonesia. A pivotal factor contributing to the effectiveness of Salafi da'wah in Indonesia is the Internet and social media. Hasan (2022) underscored the importance Salafists place on media in their preaching efforts.[13] This assertion is evident from the various studies denoting the transformation of the Salafism effort through digital media or what I highlight in this article as digital Salafism. Beyond religious teachings dissemination, digital media, especially new media, serves as a channel through which Salafists introduce Arab cultural practices to broader audiences. For example, the use of niqab and jūbā often appears as an important marker of piety. The dissemination of Arabic culture is also evident in the worship rituals that strictly follow fatwās issued by Saudi clerics, primarily reminding audiences to observe Islamic rituals in line with the "sunnah". Moreover, this dissemination is typically accompanied by the rejection of worship rituals rooted in local traditions. In doing so, Salafists have greatly benefited from platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and other forms of social media. Ghoshal (2010) characterizes this phenomenon as the Arabization of Islam, highlighting its roots in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its major emphasis on ritual and behavioral norms.[14] Similar to Ghoshal,

several studies have also highlighted Arabization with various definitions and contexts. This literature review aims to synthesize these key points: (1) The global and Indonesian-specific trajectories of Salafism, (2) the crucial role of digital in spreading Salafism, and (3) the nuanced exploration of the Arabization of Islam as a multifaceted phenomenon.

Global Salafism

Salafism is a revivalist Sunni movement aiming to implement Islam according to its predecessors, specifically the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. Derived from a combination of the Arabic letters *sīn*, *lām*, and *fā*, Adraoui (2019) defines salaf as a movement that implies a reference to a prior era.[15] Historically, Salafi teachings were initiated by Ahmad b. Taymiyya (d. 1328) was a cleric from the Hanbali madhab who advocated puritanical reform. In the eighteenth century, the term Salafism was also associated with Wahhabism, originating from another Hanafi madhab scholar, Muhammad b. Abd al-Wahhab al-Tamimi (d.1792), whose teachings were combined with political aims, belonged to a tribal leader from Najd, Muhammad b. Sa'ud al-Muqrin (d. 1765). The alliance formed between these two figures in 1744 led to the rise and fall of the movement, which finally gained prominence in the twentieth century through Abd al-Aziz b. Sa'ud (d.1953) and the descendants of Muhammad b. Abd al-Wahhab. Adraoui (2019) and Berkey (2003) noted that the intersection between the last two figures mentioned resulted in two important agendas: the establishment of the state of Saudi Arabia and the global dissemination of Salafi ideology in the twentieth century.[16]

As a movement, Salafism has been the subject of intense debate and common misunderstanding. Therefore, several points warrant clarification. To begin with, Salafis are often confused with the reformist Muslim movement started by Jamaluddin al-Afghani and others. Instead of being similar, Wiktorowicz (2005) emphasized that the two groups are different, for example, in terms of their views on rationalism.[17] Lauziere (2010) briefly explains these differences by referring to the first proponents of Islamic modernism, who happened to become Salafis of creed.[18] Additionally, Salafism is frequently perceived as a homogeneous revivalist movement. In reality, however, it encompasses various kinds of groups with different characteristics. Wiktorowicz (2005) stated that although these various groups are united by several similarities, they diverge in their interpretation of contemporary issues and the solutions they propose.[19] Based on this explanation, several articles often categorize Salafists into three main divisions: purists, politicians, and jihadists. The final point of misunderstanding concerns their relationship with Wahhabism. While it may be true that Salafis are related to Wahhabism, in reality, only a small number of Salafi followers identify themselves as Wahhabis. This reluctance is primarily because the second term echoes the negative connotations. [20]

Salafism in the Indonesian Context: The Development

Indonesia is one of the countries where Salafi teachings are spreading rapidly. Saudi Arabia's global Salafi ambitions developed slowly but bore fruit through several collaborations between Saudi and Indonesian actors. According to Hasan (2022), this story began in 1967 with the establishment of DDII (Indonesian Islamic Da'wah Council). Subsequently, in the 1980s, another important contributing factor to the campaign was the collaboration of two states in the realm of education, notably through the initiation of the Islamic and Arabic Language Institute (LIPIA).[21] In the next few years, the success of the Salafization process was seen with the adoption of Arabic clothing styles for men and women in public places.[22] Moreover, as highlighted by Bruinessen (2013), the proliferation of puritan messages gained momentum through halqahs and madrasas, owing to the many graduates of LIPIA and similar

institutions.[23] Recent developments underscored the continued evolution of Salafi influence in Indonesia, which, through changes in political landscapes, allowed the spread of Islam openly in public spaces such as mosques on urban and rural campuses.

Digital Media for Salafism

The success of the propagation of Salafism in Indonesia has significantly benefited from the advent of the Internet and social media. The interesting part of the relationship between the two is the fact that the development of Salafi da'wah coincided with the arrival of the internet in Indonesia in 1983 and experienced developments through internet cafés in the mid-late 1990s.[24] Hasan (2022) states that Salafists consider communication technology to be a very important tool in spreading Islamic teachings. Salafists consistently endeavor to remain modern and utilize the available media to facilitate their preaching. As a result, in addition to the internet and social media, which are prevalent today, Salafists at one time put in effort to develop television and radio stations.[25]

In short, in its journey, both old media and new media have helped Salafism in reaching Muslims in Indonesia. The Internet, in particular, helps Salafists in spreading their socio-religious ideas. Iqbal (2018) concludes the four classifications of internet use by Salafists. First and foremost, as a medium for propagating the typical Middle Eastern Islam ideology, focusing on *tashfiyah* or purifying Islam from *bid'ah* (Islamic practice innovation) and tarbiyah or educating the public towards "pure" Islam. Secondly, the internet serves as a platform for Salafists to counter perceived adversaries. Third and fourth, it provides a forum for articulating Salafi's perspectives on contemporary issues as well as fostering solidarity among Salafists at national and global levels. It is also important to note that youth and the upper middle class are the main targets for da'wah despite the Salafi da'wah being surely aimed at the wider community.[26]

In the digital era, Salafism has been actively disseminated through various tools. Yakin (2018) takes Radio of Rodja as its study case to reveal how the radio is utilized by Salafis to propagate and disseminate their Islamic puritanism.[27] More recently, slightly different from radio as an old medium, many works have turned their focus to new media. Aidulsyah (2023) introduces the term urban Salafism, which could be stated to be successful in utilizing social media and pop culture to disseminate Islamic narratives; thus, they change people's perspective of Salafi as an old-conservative movement to be modern.[28] Focusing on the *al-walā wa al-barrā* concept in the Qur'an, another work by Rahmatullah and Ngazizah (2022) examined Salafi preachers delivering their religious views on one of the mosque's YouTube channels, Masjid Mujahidin.[29] Nisa (2018), as the last example of Salafism-related research, used a digital ethnography approach to study One Day One Juz (ODOJ Movement). Although it is not quite striking, as its movement founders state that the movement does not belong to a single ideology, Nisa found that the ODOJ movement could be incorporated into the Salafi movement as its initiators are Islamist Tarbiya activists.[30]

Arabization of Islam

The term Arabization denotes efforts of Arab hegemony, notably by Saudi Arabia, over other parts of the world. As elucidated in the preceding section detailing the history of Salafism, the formation of Saudi was a collaboration between tribal leaders from Najd and Hanbali cleric Muhammad b. Abd al-Wahhab indicates the former as a political force while the latter as a religious authority. Subsequently, the term Arabization primarily pertains to processes within Islam or Islamization. Ghoshal (2010) defines the Arabization of Islam as an Islamic Puritan movement originating and facilitated by the Kingdom of

Saudi Arabia, which emphasizes ritual and attitude aspects over substantive religious content. Furthermore, the Arabization of Islam is a process of standardizing Islamic understanding with the end objective of creating the perception that the most ideal Islamic understanding followed by Muslims throughout the world is the Arabic version of Islam.[31] It is important to realize that usually, the influence exercised by Saudi Arabia is targeted at economically disadvantaged countries. Snider (2023) defines Arabization "as a process which describes the influence of the more powerful and wealthy Gulf Arab states on less wealthy states". [32]

Arabization, or *ta'rīb* is a transforming process towards becoming Arab. Hersch (2020), in his writing, provides a concrete illustration of combining elements of Islamization in the Arabization process in the context of Sudan. This process is exemplified in a policy that requires Sudanese people from non-Arab countries to learn Arabic, and not in reverse.[33] Similarly, the Arabization of Islam is observable in the Indonesian context as well. Halim (2018) investigates the process of Islamization of the Arabic version in the South Sulawesi area, highlighting the spread of Arab ideas and culture to Indonesia. This influence continues beyond interpretations of Islamic texts and the preservation of the Arabic language. It also encompasses preferences in attire and culinary choices, depicting a wider cultural absorption.[34]

Arabization and Islamization have become an inseparable part of Indonesia, with Salafis playing a significant role in this convergence. In a broader context, Ghoshal (2010) observes a trend of emulating and even replicating Arab culture and tradition, which, according to the perpetrators, is part of the promotion of true Islamic identity in South and Southeast Asia.[35] This is particularly relevant in the Indonesian context, where Snider described the relations between Arab countries and Indonesia in the 1960s and 1970s as "the trajectory of Arabization."[36] The last sentence by Snider refers to the influence of Salafism in Indonesia. The emulation of Saudi-style Islamic culture is a defining characteristic of Salafism and has become a permanent feature of the religious landscape in Indonesia.[37] In addition, the process of Arabization in Indonesia by Salafis is also evident in the Salafi perspective on culture, both Indonesian culture and traditional Islamic culture within Indonesia. Olivier Roy, as cited by Wiktorowicz (2005), notes that one of the characteristics of neo-fundamentalist groups such as Salafis is how they separate Islam from any cultural influences, considering the culture as antithetical to pure Islam.[38] Furthermore, Rahim (2006) emphasized that a key characteristic of Arabization in the Indonesian context is the persistent critique of indigenous customs. Thus, the possibility of this Arabization resides in their repudiation of local cultural practices alongside their preference for Arab religious authority.[39]

A dynamic and increasing focus has been placed on understanding the definition and characteristics of Salafism on both global and national scales. Some research interprets Salafism as an agent of Arabization, often coinciding with Islamization. Indonesia has emerged as a fertile ground for the development of Salafism, given that this country has the largest Muslim majority in the world but has a local Islam that is traditional and has a strong syncretism, which is different from "pure" Islam, which originates from Arabia. Snider (2023) adds that Indonesia was the target of Arabization due to its relatively lower economic status compared to Saudi Arabia. The term Islamic Arabization refers to the process of aligning a country with the Arab version of Islam across various aspects, often involving economic factors with the ultimate aim of the influenced country adopting the influencing party. In the Indonesian context, Salafization and Arabization of Islam are intertwined, operating within the same project. Today, this connection is evident both in the real world and in cyberspace, where Salafists, as Hasan (2022) emphasized, leverage the internet and social media as a golden opportunity to disseminate their Islamic interpretation to the Indonesian Muslim community. Iqbal (2014) suggests examining empirical explanations and statistical data regarding the involvement of Salafism on the Internet and

social media. This paper attempts to explore the relationship between Salafization and the Arabization of Islam through social media accounts, assessing the extent to which the process of the Arabization of Islam is occurring in Indonesia.

Results And Discussion

This section undertakes an analysis of how Salafists utilize social media, particularly Instagram, to disseminate their interpretation of Islamic teachings. In doing so, I scrutinized the content of two Instagram accounts: *Mahasiswasalaf* and *Dakwahtauhid*. Classifying thousands of content posted by both accounts helped me to discern their main concerns in proselytizing on Instagram and their goals. In addition, I also paid attention to the discussions within the comments section column to help me understand how the followers of both accounts responded and thus explain the significance of their accounts' presence among Muslim netizens in Indonesia. Moreover, this section endeavors to analyze the two Instagram accounts through the lens of the Arabization of Islam in Indonesia. I identified content classification in both accounts that could be classified as an effort to Arabize Islam in Indonesia, as elucidated in the brief descriptions from scholars in the previous section. Ultimately, this section seeks to provide insights into Salafist preaching on social media and its implications for discussions about the Arabization of Islam in the Indonesian context.

Mahasiswasalafi

Mahasiswasalaf is a combination of two words: the Indonesian term *mahasiswa*, meaning student (specifically college students), and the Arabic term *salaf*, denoting early-generation Muslims. In the context of Indonesian Islam, the term *salaf* carries varying meanings depending on which group adopts the word. As an example, according to traditionalist groups, mostly Nahdlatul Ulama, *salaf* refers to Islamic figures who were role models in the early and Middle Ages. On the other hand, self-identified Salafists restrict the term only limited to the first three Muslim generations. *Mahasiswasalaf is* more appropriately categorized in the latter group, as evidenced in its contents. Originally from Palembang, South Sumatra, *Mahasiswasalaf* posted for the first time in August 2021 and was on hiatus until March 2022. Only after that will this account publish posts regularly every day. During the composition of this paper, there were 835 posts with 567 thousand followers.
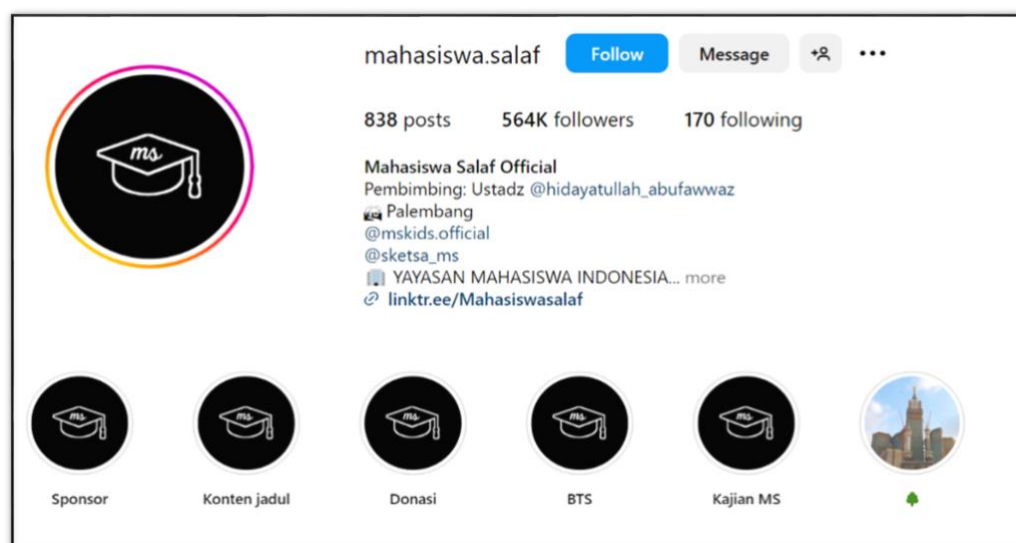

Figure 1. This picture was taken from mahasiswasalaf's Instagram account: https://www.instagram.com/mahasiswa.salaf, 24 June 2024.

Mahasiswa Salaf is an Instagram account that focuses on spreading the teachings of monotheism and guiding followers striving to be ideal Muslims. In the latter case, despite its youth-centric name, its content resonates with various generations, as evidenced by the discovery of the words most often contained in their content, such as child, wife, husband, etc. These findings also help me to place the term *salaf*, which is understood by this account as explained previously. In other words, the contents of this match the description of *Salafi*, consisting of their emphasis on monotheism and two important goals of their preaching within the framework of purification (*tasfiyah*) and education.[40]

Figure 2. This picture was created using a software called Voyant and the result is generated by analyzing the most frequent word or topic in mahasiswasalaf's Instagram posts.

To explain further the Instagram account *mahasiswasalaf*, I classified the content they distribute. Broadly speaking, their content is divided into the following four groups: (1) Islamic teachings and practices, (2) social and cultural aspects, (3) guidance on peer and family relationships, and (4) advocacy and community involvement. This account most often posts content in the form of Islamic teachings, such as excerpts from verses from the Qur'an, the Sunnah of the Prophet, and also the practice of daily worship rituals or what is understood as *fiqh ibādah*. In one post, for example, several verses from the Qur'an, Surah al-Mudattsir, are taken as a reminder to perform prayers regardless of someone's busy schedule. In addition to highlighting Quranic verses emphasizing the consequences of neglecting prayer, this post is supplemented with Prophetic sayings that strengthen this verse. As for the social and cultural aspects, what I meant is their critiques of prevailing norms among Muslims in Indonesia, advocating for their "correct" Islamic understanding of Islam in their opinion. For instance, they advocate gender segregation at wedding parties as Islamic teachings recommend separating party guests based on gender. In this way, they position the Islamic teachings that they understand to criticize the social and cultural practices of Muslims in Indonesia who still hold many weddings with a mix of guests between genders. Beyond its preaching function, this account also functions as a platform to advertise (or announce) studies and educational institutions that usually teach Islam "*sesuai sunnah*" (according to prophetic tradition), denoting the function of social media to strengthen solidarity in a community.

Mahasiswasalaf exemplifies a Salafi-oriented Instagram account that has successfully utilized new media or social media to preach Islamic teachings. The characterization of Puritanism fittingly describes this account, as evidenced by its contents, which strongly support this attribution. The four divisions and details in the example indicate that this account consistently carries out typical Salafi purification in all of

its content. In other words, the content in this account is largely inspired by a purification framework that aims to criticize - if not blame - the Islamic practices of society in Indonesia. These results also match with observations by Iqbal (2018) regarding Salafists' use of the internet. In addition, urban Salafism mentioned by Aidulsyah (2023) also fits the account Mahasiswasalaf where this account succeeds in presenting a modern impression behind the conservative side of the Salafi teachings that they understand.

Dakwahtauhid

The second account under study focuses on the Instagram account Dakwahtauhid, which, when interpreted literally, carries substantial implications. *da'wa* (in Arabic) means to preach or propagate, and *tawhīd* means the oneness of God. This account focuses on *tawhid,* a primary principle emphasis of Salafi. Salafi's Instagram accounts consistently appeal to large followers in Indonesia. Similar to *mahasiswasalaf,* this account boasts over one million followers, having posted nearly 21.000 times in the last few years.

Compared to the *mahasiswasalaf,* these accounts share both similarities and differences in thematic content. Similar to the former, Dakwahtauhid focuses on preaching *tawhid* through Islamic religious teachings and practices, alongside commentary on socio-cultural dynamics in society. The most frequent, and even seem very repetitive, are the posts distributed during the month of Ramadan. Topics regarding fast intention (*niya)* and tarawih prayers are always found in their posts, which are usually accompanied by their sarcasm towards other Muslims whom they consider to be less or incomplete (*kaffah)* Muslims in the month of fasting. For example, they criticize smokers who indulge after breakfast (*iftar)* time has come. They are confused by the attitude of smokers during the fasting month who are able to endure forbidden things for a whole day, but not cigarettes. Such critique stems from differing opinions regarding the cigarette law itself. While the former considers cigarettes to be forbidden (*harām*), the latter considers cigarettes as permissible or, at the very least, disliked act (*makrūh*). With this example, both *dakwahtauhid* and *mahasiswasalaf* emphasize the purification of Islamic teachings, deeming it necessary to correct misconceptions about religious teachings that have prevailed among Muslims in Indonesia.
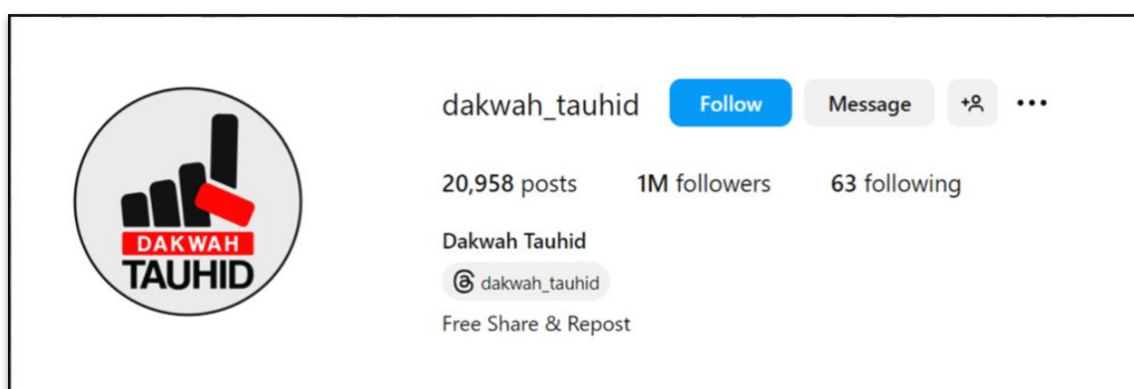

Figure 3. This picture was taken from dakwahtauhid's Instagram account: https://www.instagram.com/dakwah_tauhid, 24 June 2024.

Dakwahtauhid

The Dakwahtauhid account distinguishes itself from Mahasiswasalaf by producing more delicate content and their focus on contemporary issues. Alongside the first two points above, this account is more vocal about contemporary issues such as political affairs, LGBTQ, "heretical" sects such as Shiites

in Indonesia, and so on. What is no less important is their critiques to oppose the Islamic traditions observed by various groups, which they consider un-Islamic and in inconsistency with Salafi teachings. In its posts, Dakwahtauhid openly condemns Westernized phenomena and practices within Muslim communities, such as the birth of the prophet celebration (*maulīd*), *Yasin*, *tahlil*, and so on. By looking more closely at the posts of this account, one will catch the Salafi characteristics, which consider Western thought and customs, both Muslim and non-Islamic cultures, as big enemies because they deviate from the ideal Islam they envision.[41]
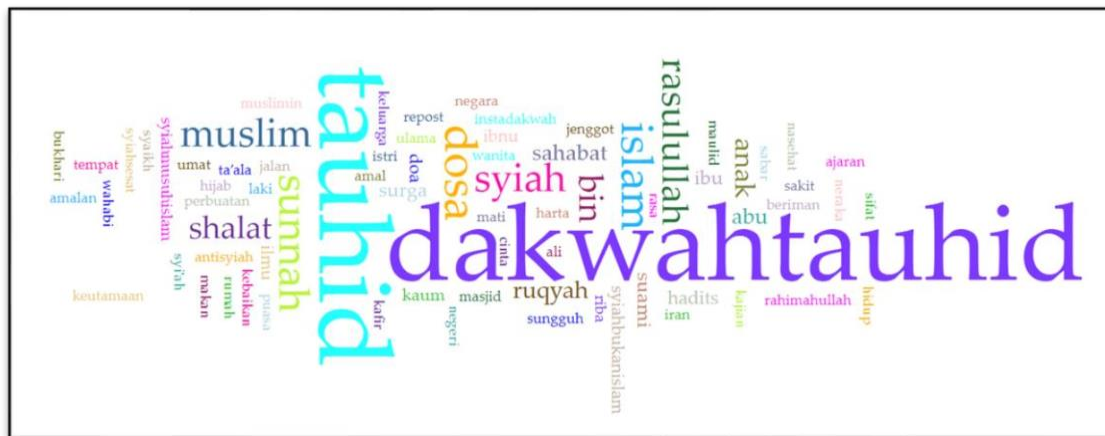
Figure 4. This picture was created using a software called Voyant and the result is generated by analyzing the most frequent word or topic Dakwahtauhid's Instagram posts.

Arabization of Islam through Instagram

The presence of accounts like Mahasiswasalaf and Dakwahtauhid plays a major role in shaping the landscape of Islamic da'wah in Indonesia. Other Instagram accounts with similar characteristics, or what they call *manhaj salaf*, will be easily discovered, producing content that not only reminds the urgency and substance of Islamic teachings but also serves as educational resources, especially for the youth, due to the sophistication of social media. In short, these accounts often gain prominence as religious authorities. Beyond their primary content focusing on purifying and educating in Islamic principles, these accounts also contribute to the Arabization of Islam in Indonesia. While some may view this merely as a form of Islamization, it is imperative to distinguish the specific influence of Arab cultural and religious norms propagated through these platforms. This is partly true, considering that Arabization and Islamization are an inseparable part. However, this Arabization of Islam in Indonesia can be observed through various manifestations, which will be elaborated upon in the following discussions.

Both accounts Mahasiswasalaf and Dakwahtauhid equally emphasize aspects of ritual and formality in religion. In doing so, they spread puritanical content originating from religious authorities in Arabia. As a result, the Islam conveyed by these accounts tends to imitate the Islamic style that prevails in Arabia, especially Saudi Arabia. To illustrate this point, we can look at the images and captions in one or two of their posts. For example, the account Mahasiswasalaf posted instructions on the proper etiquette during Friday sermons, citing prophetic sayings alongside opinions from notable Saudi clerics, Muhammad b. Al-Utsaimin (d.2001) and Abdullah b. Baz (d. 1999). In another post, this account encourages his followers to wear robes, stating that this attire is part of the Prophetic tradition. As usual, Muhammad's opinion b. Al-Utsaimin is a complement to this content. The final and most important example of the relationship between Islamic content and religious authority in Arabia is how both accounts promote educational institutions and Islamic studies several times. For example, account

dakwahtauhid posted several times about the Islamic University of Madinah which is widely recognized to be the best place to study Islam in their circle. Account Mahasiswasalaf, in one of its posts, also collaborates with and promotes a non-degree educational institution led by research performers at Rodja TV and students from King Saud University, Saudi Arabia.

Figure 5. One of Mahasiswasalaf's posts on non formal Islamic education. This picture was taken from: https://www.instagram.com/p/C7u9P0LS8EU/?igsh=dG5leTdocXJkNmwy

Figure 6. One of Mahasiswasalaf's posts on prophetic's tradition, wearing robes. This picture was taken from: https://www.instagram.com/p/C7u9P0LS8EU/?igsh=dG5leTdocXJkNmwy

The findings from the research on Mahasiswasalaf and Dakwahtauhid accentuate the strategic use of social media by Salafis to propagate puritanical Saudi-style Islamic ideas, emphasizing formal religious practices. Consistently citing Saudi clerics and exclusively promoting educational institutions within their circles indicate a process of making Islam in Indonesia become Islam in Arabia. This phenomenon resonates with Ghoshal's (2010) description of the Arabization of Islam, which describes it as an Islamic puritanical movement originating from Saudi that seeks to establish the Arab version of Islam as the ideal. Furthermore, this research aligns with Halim's (2018) observation regarding the Arabization process of Islam in Indonesia, which is indicated by formalities such as attire and other cultural practices.

The next significant theme to discuss when analyzing Salafi-oriented Instagram accounts such as Mahasiswasalaf and Dakwahtauhid is their effort to isolate Islamic teachings from the cultural norms prevalent in Indonesian society, both the culture of Indonesian society in general and the culture of Muslims that has been firmly entrenched referred to as tradition. For Salafists, tradition is an obstacle - if not an enemy - to the purity of Islamic teachings. Therefore, in the lectures and discussions they hold, in addition to Sunnah, terms such as tradition and *bid'ah* (religious innovation) frequently appear, thus indicating their main focus to judge the impure Islam of Indonesian society.

On social media such as Instagram, a notable phenomenon is the proliferation of diverse opinions and discussions among Muslims regarding religious teachings. The democratization process facilitated by the Internet and social media has resulted in the autonomy and freedom for all Muslims to express their views on religious topics. One Instagram post by the account Dakwahtauhid serves as a compelling example within this discourse. This particular post is the *fiqh* of worship connected to sociocultural

dynamics. This account criticizes the routine of tarawih prayers, which has become a tradition of traditionalists, especially Nahdlatul Ulama, commonly known as the largest mass organization followed by Muslims in Indonesia. According to this account, citing Saudi clerics such as Abdullah b. Baz, errors have occurred regarding the implementation of tarawih prayers in the Indonesian community. These four innovations (*bid'ah*) are considered a mistake because they do not have a strong basis originating from the Prophet Muhammad. In other words, Islamic worship should be based on strong religious postulates. Doing something outside the Prophet's customs is a forbidden innovation that should not be performed and the perpetrators must have their Islamic understanding understood or purified. This critique underscores their overarching goal of purifying Indonesian Muslim practices.

FIGURE 7. One of Dakwahtauhid's posts. A critique toward tarawih prayers. This picture was taken from: https://www.instagram.com/p/CgIeSgDuel_/?igsh=MXdmOHp2dHozdW9rMQ==

FIGURE 8. One of Dakwahtauhid's comment sections. This picture was taken from: https://www.instagram.com/p/CgIeSgDuel_/?igsh=MXdmOHp2dHozdW9rMQ==

The engagement from social media users or netizens is equally captivating. As previously noted, the comments section has emerged as a novel arena for religious discussions, allowing commenters to support or reject statements made by the content producer. In this article, these comments are very helpful in both ways: they serve as insight providers of the content implication. They also offer valuable implications for a deeper discussion of the Arabization of Islam. As illustrated in the capture above, there are two opinions responding to the content posted by the account Dakwahtauhid. One commenter revealed:

> Those who are angry (with this post) haven't experienced learning pure Islam without being mixed with tradition. Islam is a simple religion and does not complicate matters. Trust me! If we want to learn pure Islam, we will regret debating this problem (on Instagram).

The comments above reflect divergent views on the impact of tradition, blaming tradition for distorting Islamic faith and teachings that someone should properly understand. In addition, this comment also indicates the ego held by traditionalists who insist on rejecting the pure teachings of Islam. The above opinion, on the other hand, triggers responses opposing the view, which ultimately leads them to reflect on their views on the image of Salafi in some communities. For example, let's examine the subsequent comment:

"Salafi Manhaj basically sought to change the thoughts and habits of Muslims with arguments they consider valid. Even though they have some truth, their approach is often excessive, as if they are right and others are wrong. Da'wah should be done well, not by overthrowing existing teachings. Other Islamic teachings also have arguments and are not just made up. The previous *kyai* (ulama) were smart people who understood Islam (on Instagram).

The second comment indicates perceptions surrounding Salafis, portraying them as a group that challenges and critiques Islamic traditions in Indonesia. Their inability to tolerate is the reason behind the fact that their preaching is difficult to accept by certain segments of Indonesian Muslims. In addition, this comment suggests that Salafists aspire to form a new religious authority, thus replacing the established religious authority. To summarize, the findings of the research underscore how Salafists utilize social media to criticize the Islamic traditions of Indonesian society. Their assumption of pure Islamic teachings that must follow a certain view (mostly Saudi clerics) results in the perception of Salafis as supporters of monolithic Islamic teachings, thus considering Islamic traditions as something that must be corrected. This is what precisely underlies the relationship between the Arabization of Islam and the cleansing of Indonesian culture. The results of this research perfectly fit with Wiktorowicz's (2005) description of the Salafi, which seeks to separate Islam from any cultural influences. Similarly, Rahim (2006), along with their cultural rejection, adds their description as Muslims endorse the Saudi religious authority as a benchmark for the correct ideal of Islam.

In this discussion, I argue that Salafists, through the use of social media platforms like Instagram, are not only disseminating their interpretation of Islamic teachings but also serving as representatives of the Arabization of Islam in Indonesia. However, before concluding this discussion, several important clarifications need to be addressed. The first and foremost is related to the term Arabization of Islam in this article. What is meant by Arab, why I chose this term, and how is it related to Islamization? These are a series of questions that will arise when I discuss Salafi and digital media together. The Arabization of Islam, as mentioned by Snider (2023), is closely related to Salafism. Meanwhile, making Saudi the center of global Salafism is certainly a perilous simplification considering that global Salafis have a complex historical trajectory.[42] In this paper, however, the Saudis almost certainly play a role in both accounts, given the evidence that their references are mostly from Saudi religious authorities or local figures who have graduated from Saudi universities. Therefore, this warrants consideration of another framework termed "Saudization," which acknowledges Saudi Arabia's significant influence while recognizing the broader global dynamics of Salafi thought. Furthermore, the relationship between Arabization and Islamization is also important to discuss here. In Indonesia, Arabization is only established unilaterally with an Islamization process. The use of Arabization of Islam in this paper is because it is true, on the one hand, what scholars say regarding the presence of Arabization of Islam in Indonesia. However, on the other hand, I do not ignore the possibility of pure Islamization without any intention of Arabization, especially as performed by the two Instagram accounts as the objects of this research. Nevertheless, the available evidence is here, and I am inviting the readers to judge for themselves and critically evaluate the dynamics within this phenomenon.

Concluding Remarks

This article reveals how social media, particularly Instagram, serves as a modern platform for Salafists to propagate Islamic teachings based on the Qur'an and Sunnah. Through consistent content creation, they have garnered hundreds of thousands to a million followers, indicating their value in the Muslim community in Indonesia. By analyzing these accounts using word cloud and content categorization, the research reveals that several of their primary themes underlying the content are

Islamic teachings and practices, guidance on relationships in socializing between people, advocacy and community involvement, as well as their critiques of societal norms and contemporary Islamic issues in Indonesia. It is noteworthy that these themes are consistently framed within their goal of purification (*tasfiyah*) and education (*tarbiyah*).

Coupled with using social media like Instagram to preach "pure" Islam, these accounts also function as influencers that contribute to the Arabization of Islam in Indonesia. This is evident across various aspects of their content, which promotes the Arab version of Islam, more specifically Saudi Arabia, by taking references to religious postulates from Saudi clerics, showing videos of lectures by Saudi graduates, and promoting Saudi educational institutions or those managed by Saudi graduates. Thus, it is not an exaggeration if I say that the Islam advocated by these accounts reflects a Saudi-centric version characterized by a focus on ritualistic aspects and formalities in religious practice. In connection with Arabization, Saudization, and Salafism, it should be noted that the three of them are intertwined in this article, acknowledging their inherent connection to the Islamization aspect. the application of the term Arabization of Islam here, in fact, to underscore the close connection between Arabization and Islamization. However, in this paper, Saudi influence is very visible on both accounts. For these reasons, Saudization can be an alternative to the term Arabization in this context. Furthermore, the findings of this article make a significant contribution to both Indonesian and global studies of Salafism through the discourse of the Arabization of Islam. In the Indonesian context, this study highlighted a tool for propagating Arab cultural practices and a site of interplay between local Islamic identities and global Salafi influences, particularly through an analysis of the tensions observed in the Instagram comment section. In addition, by situating Indonesia within the broader Salafi network, this paper demonstrates how social media facilitates the transnational dissemination of Salafi ideologies, transcending local, cultural, and national boundaries.

The creators of Islamic content on Instagram in Indonesia illustrate the intersection of technology, religion, and globalization in contemporary society. This study, limited to case studies of Instagram accounts and accompanying textual analysis, recognizes its limitations in fully capturing the explanation of empirical data related to the account formation process and the underlying motivation for content creators' regular posting routines. However, the strength of this study lies in exploring the framework used, which serves as a valuable lens for understanding the Salafist presence on Instagram and social media in general. In addition, the findings could reveal a similar pattern with enhanced implementation and more adequate theoretical and methodological frameworks. Therefore, further studies can utilize a more suitable methodology that will allow the study to provide broader implications and interpretations of the existence of Salafists on Instagram. In addition, studies can also be conducted by considering other discourses to understand Islamic preaching content creators on social media.

Endnotes

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[2] Carool Kersten, *Islam in Indonesia: The Contest for Society, Ideas and Values* (Oxford University Press, 2015), 17.

[3] The rise of Islamic political activism in Indonesia is well-documented in Jajang Jahroni's dissertation, *The Political Economy of Knowledge: Salafism in Post-Soeharto Urban Indonesia*. The title highlights the close connection between the transmission of Salafi knowledge, the economic support provided by Saudi Arabia as a key actor, and Indonesia's political landscape during the Reformasi era following Suharto's resignation. At the beginning of his work, Jahroni emphasizes two contrasting realities that emerged after Suharto's fall: the joy among reformists on one side and the surge of Islamic political activism on the other. His dissertation focuses on the dynamics behind this reality, with particular attention to the Salafi movement in post-Soeharto Indonesia. Jahroni argues that Salafism in Indonesia is a dynamic phenomenon that cannot be viewed as rigid or monolithic. While it is true that Saudi Arabia played a significant role in shaping Indonesian Salafism—through educational institutions and charitable organizations—Salafi figures in Indonesia have developed their own distinct dynamics. In practice, they do not always agree with all aspects of influence or policies originating from Saudi Arabia. For a deeper exploration of Salafism in post-Soeharto Indonesia see Jajang Jahroni, *The Political Economy of knowledge: Salafism in Post Suharto Urban Indonesia* (PhD dissertation, Department of Anthropology, Boston University, 2015).

[4] Noorhaidi Hasan, *Laskar Jihad: Islam, Militansi dan Pencarian Identitas di Indonesia Pasca-Orde Baru* (Jakarta: Pustaka LP3ES Indonesia & KITLV, 2008), 31.

[5] Carool Kersten, *Islam in Indonesia: The Contest for Society, Ideas and Values* (Oxford University Press, 2015), 2.

[6] Chris Chaplin, "Salafi Activism and the Promotion of a Modern Muslim Identity," *Southeast Asia Research* 26, no. 1 (March 1, 2018): 3–20.

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[8] Mark Woodward, "Resisting Salafism and the Arabization of Indonesian Islam: A Contemporary Indonesian Didactic Tale by Komaruddin Hidayat," *Contemporary Islam* 11, no. 3 (May 3, 2017): 237–58.

[9] Jajang Jahroni, "The Narratives of Islamic School Students: Contesting Salafism in a Saudi-Wahabi Educational Institutions in Contemporary Jakarta," *Ulumuna* 24, no. 1 (June 16, 2020): 77–104, https://doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v24i1.386; Jajang Jahroni, "Saudi Arabia Charity and the Institutionalization of Indonesian Salafism," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 58, no. 1 (July 3, 2020): 35–62, https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2020.581.35-62.

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[14] Baladas Ghoshal "Arabization: The Changing Face of Islam in Asia." *India Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (2010): 69–89.

[15] Mohamed-Ali Adraoui, *Understanding Salafism* (Paris: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 6.

[16] Mohamed-Ali Adraoui, *Understanding Salafism* (Paris: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 6. See also Jonathan Porter Berkey, *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600-1800* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 268-269.

[17] Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 29, no. 3 (May 1, 2006): 207–39.

[18] Henri Lauzière, "The Construction of Salafiyya: Reconsidering Salafism From The Perspective of Conceptual History," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 42, no. 3 (July 15, 2010): 369–89.

[19] An example of this can be seen in the conception of home-making and the nation-state from the perspective of Salafists. In a study conducted by Zoltan Pall, using Salafist case studies in Cambodia and Lebanon, he identified a Salafist understanding that challenges the conventional concept of the nation-state. This perspective results in diverse strategies for home-making, heavily influenced by the socio-political context. For instance, Cambodian Muslims, as a minority group, attempt to connect the concept of home-making to the global *umma*. In contrast, Salafists in Lebanon emphasize the geographical and local context of their surroundings. Essentially, Pall's study highlights a tension between what Salafists regard as the ideal and the overarching ideals of the nation-state.

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