

Salafi Movement Post-Conflict Ambon: A Search for Identity in Maluku

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Abstract

This article provides an overview of the development of contemporary Salafi movements in Maluku following the 1999 conflicts. The emergence and spread of the Salafi movement in this region has been significant over the past two decades, extending throughout Muslim communities in Maluku. This article explores the origins and connections between the Salafi movements in Maluku and nationwide and examines how local Muslims have responded to these developments. Through qualitative analysis using descriptive methods, data was collected through observations and interviews with key figures from both within the Salafi community and local community leaders. The findings show that the presence of the Salafi movements in Maluku is notable, particularly through their involvement in education and politics (*da'wah*). These movements can be characterised as purist while also encompassing educational, social, and political dimensions within Malukan society. The multifaceted approaches employed by this group have contributed to its growing acceptance among local Muslims.

Keywords: Salafi, movement, Ambon, Maluku, conflict

Introduction

Contemporary Islamic movements have captured the interest of many scholars, both within and outside of the Islamic community. Approaching this topic from a socio-historical and religion-political perspective provides insight into the evolution of these movements and their connection to the country.¹ The democratisation process during the Reformation era in Indonesia brought about a significant change in the country's political landscape. It allowed for the emergence of new actors who came from diverse ideological backgrounds and were given the opportunity to participate in the debate on the position of Islam in the society. This was seen as a blessing as it provided a platform for previously marginalised voices to be heard. The debates were intense, and various perspectives on how Islam should be practised and interpreted emerged. This created a more dynamic and inclusive discussion on Islam and its role in shaping Indonesian society.²

In the wake of the reformation era, a new wave of Islamic movements emerged with different ideological positions ranging from conservatism to radicalism and liberalism. These contemporary Islamic movements have made their presence felt in many parts of the world, including countries with significant Muslim populations. However, during the New Order regime, which was characterised by authoritarianism in Indonesia, these movements remained underground and were not allowed to operate openly. Despite the crackdown, these movements continued to grow and have become a force to be reckoned with in contemporary Islamic discourse.³ In Indonesia, Noorhaedi identified several radical movements, including Front Pembela Islam (FPI), Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), Laskar Jihad (LJ), Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI), and Jamaah Islamiya (JI).⁴ The spread of radical Islamic movements is not limited to Indonesia but also observed in various Muslim-populated regions

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¹ Muhammad Wildan (ed.) (2020), *Gerakan-Gerakan Islam Indonesia Kontemporer, Buku Seri Sejarah Islam Indonesia Modern*, Yogyakarta: Adab Press; Syamsul Arifin (2014) "Gerakan Gerakan Baru in Indonesia Kontemporer: Tafsir Sosial Atas Hizbut Tahrir," in *At-Tahrir*, Vol. 14, No. 1, pp. 117-138; Rijal Mumazziq Z. (2020), "Peta Gerakan Islam Radikal Kontemporer Di Indonesia," *Falasifa*, Vol. 11, No. 2, pp. 35-43.

² Ali Muhtarom (2015), *Ideologi dan Lembaga Pendidikan Islam Transnasional di Indonesia: Kontestasi, Aktor, dan Jaringan*, Yogyakarta: Zahir Publishing, pp. v-xx.

³ Moh. Sholehuddin (2013) "Ideologi Religio-Politik Gerakan Salafi Laskar Jihad di Indonesia," *Jurnal Review Politik*, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 47-68.

⁴ Ali (2019), *Ideologi dan Lembaga Pendidikan Islam Transnasional di Indonesia*; Ali Maksom et al. (2022), "Islamic Movement in Indonesia: A Critical Study of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia and Jaringan Islam Liberal," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun*, Vol. 17, No. 2, pp. 71-82.

worldwide. Both Sahrasad and Al-Caidar have highlighted the global influence of radical Islam, with symptoms seen even in countries like Malaysia.⁵

In Indonesia, the emergence of Islamic movements in response to domestic issues and international political dynamics has had a significant impact on the social and political life of the Muslim community.⁶ After the fall of the New Order regime during the reformation period, many previously unexpressed social issues came to light, leading to conflicts in various regions such as Poso (1998), Kupang (1998), and Ambon (1999). In these conflicts, Muslims were often seen as victims. However, it was observed that government intervention for conflict resolution was slow and inadequate. Marthin van Bruinssen noted that radicalism in Indonesia gained momentum after Soeharto's regime ended and democracy was restored.⁷

Another interesting case to examine is the rise of Laskar Jihad during the Maluku conflict in 1999-2000.⁸ Due to a lack of preparation for conflict resolution, radical groups were able to capitalise on this opportunity and become influential players in the dynamics of the Ambon conflict in Maluku. It was during this period that the Salafi movement began infiltrating and growing through organisations like Laskar Jihad, led by Jafar Umar Thalib, who promoted Salafism ideology under Forum Komunikasi Ahli Sunnah wal Jama'ah, also known as Sunni Communication Forum. The LJ group introduced radical perspectives from its inception onwards.

In the name of protecting the Muslim community in Maluku from oppression, LJ claimed to defend their honour and incited conflict against Christians.⁹ Despite its disbandment in 2003 due to concerns about misuse, Salafi ideology still persists among former members. The diaspora of LJ has now expanded in Maluku, spreading its ideologies through educational and socio-economic institutions established by the group.

Contemporary Islamic movements in Maluku, including the Salafi movement, have undergone changes since the conflict. New phenomena, which were previously absent, have emerged as a result of the development of transnational Islamic movements. This development has also led to the flourishing of various religious sects outside the mainstream Islam in Indonesia. This phenomenon is an interesting academic and social issue that requires a deeper and more comprehensive study. However, recent research on the development of Islamic movements in Maluku has not sufficiently depicted the activities of the Salafi movements in the area.

Studies on post-conflict Maluku, particularly those involving Islamic movements, have failed to address the specifics of the Salafi movement. Qurtuby's research on the Islamic Movement in Maluku after the conflict did not fully explain its association with the Salafi Movement. Although he observed the emergence of Jihadist groups, he did not consider them to be part of the Salafi movement, but rather as a result of the historical rivalry between Islamic and Christian communities in Maluku. Similarly, Duriana's research on the emergence of radicalism in Maluku identified radical groups within the Islamic Movement in Ambon, Maluku. However, Duriana did not classify these groups as part of the Salafi movement.¹⁰

⁵ Sahrasad Herdi and Al Chaider (2017), *Fundamentalisme, Terorisme dan Radikalisme: Perspektif atas Agama, Masyarakat dan Negara*, Jakarta: Freedom Foundation, p. iv; Nur'aini Aziza, Hamdi Mulk and Mirra Noor Milla (2023), "Pursing Ideological Passion in Islamic Radical Group's Insurgency: A Case Study of Negara Islam Indonesia," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Society*, Vol. 13, No. 1, pp. 1-27. Compare also with, Ristapawa Indra, Mahyudin Ritonga and Fitrah Santosa (2023), "Government Control of Islamic Ideology Movement: A Case of Indonesia," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun*, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 129-144.

⁶ Endang Turmudi (ed.) (2005), *Islam dan Radikalisme di Indonesia*, Jakarta: LIPI Press, p. 1.

⁷ Marthin van Bruinssen (2002), "Genealogies of Islamic Radicalism in Post-Suharto Indonesia," *South East Asia Research*, Vol. 10, No. 2, p. 118.

⁸ Regarding Ambon conflicts, see Hasbollah Toisuta et al. (2007), "Damai-Damai Maluku," in Alpha Amirrachman (ed.), *Revitalisasi Kearifan Lokal: Studi Resolusi Konflik, Kalimantan Barat, Maluku dan Posso*, Jakarta: ICIP, pp. 110-199; Lambang Triono (2002), *Keluar dari Kemelut Maluku*, Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar; Tri Ratnawati (2006), *Maluku in Catatan Seorang Peneliti*, Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar; Gerry Van Klinken (2001), "The Maluku Wars: Bringing Society Back in Indonesia," *Indonesia*, Vol. 71, pp. 1-26; Sumanto Al-Qurtuby (2016), *Religious Violence and Conciliation in Indonesia: Christians and Muslims in the Molluccas*. London and New York: Routledge.

⁹ Kristen E. Schulze (2002), "Laskar Jihad and the Conflict in Ambon," *Journal Spring*, Vol. IX, No. 1, pp. 57-69; Sukidi Mulyadi (2003), "Violence the Banner of Religion: The Case of Laskar Jihad and Laskar Kristus," *Studia Islamika*, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 79-101.

¹⁰ Duriana (2016), "Studi terhadap Idiologi Radikalisme Agama Pasca Konflik Maluku," *Fikratuana: Jurnal Pendidikan & Pemikiran Islam*, Vol. 8, No. 2, p. 105.

The issue of the Salafi group's presence in Maluku is multifaceted and requires examination from various angles. To fully understand the situation, it is important to consider three key aspects. Firstly, the historical context surrounding the Salafi group's penetration in Maluku. Secondly, the mapping pattern of Salafi ideology in the region. And thirdly, the political perspective of Salafi movements in Maluku. This research focuses on contemporary Islamic movements in Maluku, with a specific emphasis on studying the Salafi movement. The primary goal of this study is to explain the presence of Salafi movements in Maluku today, with a particular focus on its historical context. To achieve this, the research breaks down the main question into several operational inquiries related to the historical perspectives of Salafi movements in Maluku. Specifically, the study seeks to understand the factors that contribute to the spread of the Salafi ideology movement in Maluku and how the Salafi movement has developed from the perspective of contemporary politics in the region. Additionally, the research examines the local community's responses to the expansion of Salafi ideology in Maluku. Finally, this study sheds light on the global development of Salafism and its historical perspectives in Indonesia.

Research Methods

This study delves into the modern-day Islamic movements, with a specific focus on the Salafi movement in Maluku. To truly comprehend the social structures within the Muslim community in Maluku and how they relate to Islamic movements, it is imperative to explore historical perspectives. Consequently, this research is classified as a field research.

This study is an exploratory research, aiming to thoroughly investigate the contributing factors or causes of a particular phenomenon. It utilises a descriptive-qualitative approach.¹¹ The purpose of this research is to gather extensive and in-depth information on various aspects related to the subject's personal roles and institutional affiliations. Sufficient data will be collected for analysis. Data collection will involve three different categories: individual-level data including educational background, job position, and age; structural-level data covering respondents' social backgrounds; and voting decisions based on individual backgrounds as references for considering other aspects.

The research collected data from three different categories. The first was individual-level data, which included educational background, job, and age. The second was structural-level data, which consisted of respondents' social background. Finally, the third category was voting decisions based on individual's background as references and other considerations.

The analysis process was not limited to individuals but also included institutions. This referred to respondents' attitudes and perceptions towards policies that facilitated the views of Salafi movements in Maluku. To ensure that our research does not become too broad in scope, it is necessary to limit our focus solely on the Salafi movement. Specifically, we aim to examine how this movement continues and expands upon the principles and patterns of the earlier LJ movement in areas such as da'wah, education, social and economic systems, and its impact on politics.

Theoretical Perspectives

The History of the Emergence of Salafi Movements in Indonesia

The study of the Salafi movement in Indonesia is often associated with the discussion of Wahabi movements in the Islamic world.¹² The Salafi movement, referred to by Stoddart as the Islamic reform and revivalist movement, emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. With the advent of the Wahabi movement, spearheaded by Fazlur Rahman,¹³ efforts were made to restore Islam to its original practices as followed by Prophet Muhammad and his companions (*sahabah*) also known as *salaf al-shalih* in a pre-modern context.¹⁴ The concept of Salafism aims to liberate Muslims from practices of

¹¹ Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman and John Saldana (2014), *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*, USA: Sage Publication. Inc.

¹² Lothrop Stoddart (1921), *The New World of Islam*, New York: Charles Scribner Sons.

¹³ Fazlur Rahman (1979), *Islam*, USA: Chicago University.

¹⁴ The word "Salafi" is associated with al-salaf al-shalih which means the pious former people, who were the classical ulema who hold Al-Quran and Hadits as the main sources of Islamic teachings. However, in the current Western, Salafi is known as one of Islamic movements that is radical, extreme, intolerant toward others, and tend to use violence. See Ubaidillah (2012), "Global Salafism dan Pengaruhnya di Indonesia," *Thaqafiyah*, Vol. 13, No. 1, pp. 35-48; Jacob Ghul (2021), "A Theoretical Introduction to Contemporary Salafisme," <https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Theoretical-Overview-Gen-Z-The-Digital-Salafi-Ecosystem.pdf>.

polytheism and heresy that have become prevalent in the Islamic world. This movement, founded by Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab (1703 - 1794), is commonly known as the Salafi movement (*Salafiah - Salafism*).¹⁵ Their motto promotes a return to the Qur'an and Sunna teachings. Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab was influenced by Taqiuddin Ibn Taymiyah, a 14th-century Islamic reformer from Harran, Turkey.¹⁶ Ibn Taymiyah believed that the first generation of Islam, which included Prophet Muhammad SAW, his companions, and Tabi'in (successors), should serve as role models for authentic Islam. His ideas were further developed by prominent student Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (died 751 AD) before being continued by Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab.¹⁷ When we delve further into the historical roots, we find that Ibn Taymiyah's ideas can be seen as a continuation of Ahmad Ibnu Hanbal's (780-855 AD) thoughts. Not only was Ibn Hanbal a knowledgeable scholar in fiqh and the founder of the Hanbali madhhab, he also had expertise in theology and Sufism. Additionally, he placed great emphasis on following the Sunna.

The Salafi movement has had a significant influence on reform movements in the Islamic world, including regions such as Egypt, India, and Southeast Asia.¹⁸ The Salafi movement, which originated as a puritanical reform idea, has become a prominent fundamentalist movement within the Islamic world. Its influence has extended beyond its birthplace, inspiring revival movements of Islam in various parts of the world. The Salafi movement's strict adherence to traditional Islamic teachings and practices has made it a significant force in shaping the contemporary Islamic landscape.¹⁹ The emergence of the Salafi movement has raised significant questions regarding its nature and implications for the Islamic world. Many scholars and experts have engaged in a heated debate about whether Salafism is a school of thought that promotes the purification of Islam or a radical and fundamentalist ideology that is potentially dangerous. Proponents of Salafism argue that it represents the most authentic version of Islam and emphasises a return to the practices of the early Muslim community. However, critics of Salafism contend that the movement has been used to justify violent and extremist actions, and that its strict interpretation of Islamic law can be oppressive to women and minorities. Despite this controversy, the Salafi movement continues to gain followers and influence in various parts of the world, making it an important topic for discussion and analysis.²⁰

The passage above offers an in-depth perspective on the relationship between the Salafi movement in Indonesia and the broader dynamics of Islam across the world. It highlights the fact that the emergence of Salafism in Indonesia can be traced back to the late 19th century, when Islamic scholars who were studying in Saudi Arabia brought the ideology back to West Sumatra. This marked the beginning of a long and complex genealogy of Salafism in Indonesia, which has been influenced by a range of different factors over time.

One important point to note is that the discourse on Salafism in Indonesia has always been closely intertwined with broader debates about Islam at the global level. This is because Salafism is a transnational movement that has its roots in the Middle East, and which has spread to numerous other countries around the world in recent decades. As such, the development of Salafism in Indonesia has been shaped by a range of global influences, including the rise of political Islam, the growth of Islamic fundamentalism, and the increasing importance of Saudi Arabia as a key player in the Islamic world.

Despite these global influences, however, it is clear that the evolution of Salafism in Indonesia has been shaped in significant ways by local factors as well. For instance, the movement has been influenced by the specific social and political conditions that have prevailed in Indonesia over the past century, as well as by the country's complex religious history and diverse cultural landscape. Ultimately, then, understanding the history and dynamics of the Salafi movement in Indonesia requires a nuanced and multifaceted approach that takes into account both local and global factors.²¹ Such local personalities

¹⁵ Nur Khalik Ridwan (2020), *Kajian Kritis dan Konprehensif Sejarah Lengkap Wahabi: Perjalanan Panjang Sejarah, Doktrin, Amaliyah, dan Pergulatannya*, Yogyakarta: IRCiSod, p. 20.

¹⁶ Muhammad Ali (2019) "Understanding Salafis, Salafisme and Modern Salafism," *Islamiyat*, Vol. 41, No. 1, pp. 125-136.

¹⁷ Muhammad Ali (2019) "Understanding Salafis," pp. 125-136.

¹⁸ Endang (ed.) (2005), *Islam dan Radikalisme di Indonesia*, p. 162.

¹⁹ Husnul Qadim (2007), "Dinamika Salafisme di Indonesia: Akar-Akar Intelektualitas dan Orientasi Ideologis yang Beragam," *Tashwirul Afkar*, Vol. 21, pp. 46-74.

²⁰ Khairul Huda (2022), "Mengenal Kelompok Salafi Jihadi dan 5 Doktrin Keagamaannya," accessed on 20 June 2022, www.harakah.id.

²¹ Abu Abdirrahman Al-Thalibi (2006), *Dakwah Salafiyah Dakwah Bijak, Meluruskan Sikap Keras Dai Salafi*, Jakarta: Hujjah Press, p. 10 and pp 30-31; Abdurrahman Wahid (ed.) (2009), *Ilusi Negara Islam: Ekspansi Gerakan Islam Transnasional di Indonesia*, Jakarta: The Wahid Institute, pp. 64-65.

include Haji Miskin, Haji Abdurrahman, and Haji Muhammad Arif.²² Salafism began to flourish through these three figures, despite its initial focus on purifying Islamic teachings, before developing into a massive social movement.

Since the 1980s, the rise of the New Order brought attention to the emergence and rapid growth of Salafism in Indonesia. This was primarily due to the efforts of Islamic teachers, or ustaz, who had studied at Salafi-oriented universities, such as LIPIA (Islamic and Arabic College of Indonesia), Jami'ah Imam ibn Su'ud (Saudi Arabia), and Darul Hadith Dammaj (Yemen). These teachers propagated Salafism throughout the country, leading to its widespread adoption.²³ The establishment of LIPIA in Indonesia has played a significant role in the development of Salafism and the movement. LIPIA (Islamic and Arabic College of Indonesia) is a branch of the University of Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Riyadh for Indonesia and an essential component of the Salafi movement in Indonesia.²⁴ The Saudi Arabian government established LIPIA to spread Salafi ideology globally, in response to the success of Ayatollah Khomeini and the Shi'a ideology after the 1979 Iranian revolution.²⁵

It is worth noting that some alumni of LIPIA have become prominent leaders within the Salafi community, including Yazid Jawwas, who is actively involved in Manhaj As-Sunnah in Bogor, Farid Okbah, the Director of Al-Irsyad, Ainul Haris, the head of the Nida'ul Islam Foundation in Surabaya, and Djafar Umar Thalib, the founder of the Sunni Communication Forum (FKAWJ). In particular, Djafar Umar Thalib played a significant role in the Salafi movements in Maluku and was widely known as the top leader. He became famous after leading the Laskar Jihad Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah troops.

Mapping the Ideology of Salafi

The position of Salafi in the discourse of Islamic movement in Indonesia is still a subject of debate. The question arises whether Salafism is solely a purification movement (da'wah), a social movement, or a political ideological movement. This debate has been fuelled by internal divisions within the Salafi group itself. Its momentum escalated after the 11 September 2001 attack on WTC in the US by Al-Qaeda under the command of Osama bin Laden,²⁶ and with the emergence of ISIS. Some view Salafi group's affiliation with these violent fundamentalist movements as an endorsement for violence to achieve their ideological goals.²⁷

Salafi ideology is unified in its fundamental beliefs and Aqedah, as it draws guidance from the same religious leaders. According to Lauzière, there are no internal factions within Salafi itself, as they consider themselves to be a single unified group.²⁸ With the process of globalisation, Salafi has undergone significant changes, resulting in the emergence of various subgroups within the movement. According to Wiktorowicz, these changes have been caused by differences in opinions among individuals and groups regarding issues such as jihad, apostasy, and the priorities of the movement.²⁹ In Saudi Arabia, which is considered as the centre of Salafism and its movement, the concept of Jihad is perceived differently. Those who support the Saudi Arabic Kingdom follow the formal reference of the grand mufti. They believe that the priority of the movement should be adjusted based on the national interests. On the other hand, the opposition refers to Osama bin Laden. He claimed that there were deviations within government practices in the Islamic world which he deemed to be too subservient to the West. According to bin Laden, Islamic movements should prioritise the liberation of the Islamic world from western influence.³⁰

According to Joas Wagemakers, Wiktorowicz identified three branches of Salafi groups in the Islamic world: Salafi purist, political, and Salafi jihadism.³¹ The emergence of these branches was due to debate

²² Ubaidillah (2012), "Global Salafism dan Pengaruhnya di Indonesia," pp. 35-48.

²³ UIN Syarifhidayatullah (2018), *Mencermati Berkembangnya Pendidikan Kelompok Salafi*, Vol. 1, Jakarta: Policy Brief Series, pp. 1-7.

²⁴ Abidin Wakano (2021), *Perkembangan Gerakan Fundamentalisme di Maluku* (unpublished), p. 6.

²⁵ Denny Febriansyah and Dawoud Sudqi al-Alami (2021) "Moderate Islam Vis-à-vis Salafism in Indonesia: An Ideological Competition," *Walisono: Socio-religious Research*, Vol. 29, No. 1, pp. 55-78.

²⁶ Khairul (2022), "Mengenal Kelompok Salafi Jihadi dan 5 Doktrin Keagamaannya."

²⁷ Endang (ed.) (2005), *Islam dan Radikalisme di Indonesia*, p. 157.

²⁸ Henri Lauzière (2016), *The Making of Salafism: Islamic Reform in the Twentieth Century*, New York: Columbia University Press, p. 317.

²⁹ Quintan Wiktorowicz (2006), "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 29, No. 3, pp. 207-239.

³⁰ Khairul (2022), "Mengenal Kelompok Salafi Jihadi dan 5 Doktrin Keagamaannya."

³¹ Joas Wagemakers (2017) "Revisiting Wiktorowicz: Categorising and Defining the Branches of Salafism," in Francesco Cavatorta and Fabio Merone (eds.), *Salafism after the Arab Awakening: Contending with People's Power*, Oxford: Oxford Academic, pp. 7-24; Herdi Sahrasad and Al-Chaidar (2017), *Fundamentalisme, Radikalisme dan Terorisme: Perspektif Atas Agama, Masyarakat dan Negara*, Jakarta: Freedom Foundation, pp. 450-463.

over which group has authority to interpret modern issues.³² Different perspectives exist when it comes to responding to modern issues. For instance, puritan Salafism chooses to refrain from engaging with government issues and international laws. Instead, they focus on promoting Salafi Aqedah and combating any deviating practices, similar to what the Prophet did when fighting against polytheism. For the purists, religion should be free from political interference and purified from political acts. Anything that appears to be deviating from the right path or unjust is mainly because the society has not fully understood the principles of their faith.³³ The purist faction of Salafism, also known as apolitical Salafism, prefers the path of da'wah over practical politics.³⁴

There are two types of Salafis (Muslims who follow the teachings of the Salaf, the earliest Muslim communities). One group is the quietist Salafis who avoid political engagement and focus on individual spiritual practices. The other group is the political Salafis (*haraki*) who are critical of the international world order. This group is mostly made up of educated young men who choose education as a way to spread their ideas. However, they do not justify or engage in violent acts to achieve their goals.³⁵ Instead, they strive to generate a discourse and political-academic dialogue for the advancement of Islam. Political Salafis believe that adhering solely to purist Salafi views will not bring about any progress for modern Muslims. They argue that relying only on da'wah (proselytising) efforts is insufficient in safeguarding Islamic faith. In light of the prevalent corruption within many regimes in the Muslim world, addressing these issues through political means becomes essential.

There is a third faction known as Salafi Jihadist. This group shares similar views with the political Salafi (*haraki*) movement, which believes that all deviations should be addressed critically. They speak out against various forms of deviation and injustices committed by Muslim rulers, seeing it as a call from history.³⁶ In addition, according to adherents of the jihadist ideology, verbal expressions alone are insufficient without more forceful action against oppressive regimes. They see violence as a means to attain justice and believe that engaging in jihad is necessary to establish Sharia law.³⁷ As such, this group openly advocates for waging war (jihad) against corrupt Muslim rulers who perpetuate injustice.

Regarding their radical thoughts in using violence (jihad), Shiraz Maher³⁸ noted 5 (five) basic doctrines of the Jihadist Salafi group.³⁹ The five doctrines are: *Tauhid*, *Hakimiyah*, *Al-wala' wal bara'*, *Jihad*, and *Takfir*. Salafi purists are those who become subservient to power, staying silent against rulers' injustices and deviations, providing examples of Salafism's own deviations.⁴⁰ From this perspective, the Salafi Jihadist has a similar viewpoint as the Political Salafi (*Salafi haraki*) regarding the significance of maintaining distance and adopting a critical attitude towards corrupt and unjust rulers. Additionally, for jihadists, violence (war) is considered a vital means to combat injustice and uphold truth.

It is important to note that Salafi jihadist ideology underwent an intense intellectual struggle as a response to global political dynamics for several years leading up to the Second Gulf War. This struggle ultimately resulted in the development of new ideas and movements, which gave momentum to the concepts and movements of Jihad.

³² See, Muhammad Ibtissam Han and Ismi Rahmayanti (2021), "Salafi Jihadis dan Terorisme Keagamaan: Ideologi, Fraksi dan Interpretasi Keagamaan Jihadis" *Kordinat: Jurnal Komunikasi antar Perguruan Tinggi Agama Islam*, Vol. 20, No. 1, pp. 3-22.

³³ Muhammad Ibtissam and Ismi (2021), "Salafi Jihadis dan Terorisme Keagamaan," p. 8.

³⁴ See Ghul (2021), "A Theoretical Introduction to Contemporary Salafisme."

³⁵ Sindre Bangstad and Marius Linge (2015), "'Da'wa is Our Identity' - Salafism and IslamNet's Rationales for Action in a Norwegian Context," *Journal of Muslims in Europe*, Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 174-196.

³⁶ James Pattiison, Hakkyong Kim, Sungyong Lee and Youngsik Kim (2017), "The Most Dangerous in Islam? Understanding "Jihad" as Defined and Mis-defined by Muslims," *Information*, Vol. 20, No. 7(B), pp. 5301-5308.

³⁷ Hasbullah, Wilaela, Masduki, Jamaluddin and Imron Rosidi (2022), "Acceptance of the Existence of Salafi in the Development of Da'wah in Riau Islamic Malay Society," *Cogent Social Sciences*, Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 2107280; Ghul (2021), "A Theoretical Introduction to Contemporary Salafisme," p. 6.

³⁸ Shiraz Maher (2016), *Salafi-Jihadism the History of an Idea*, London: Hurst and Company.

This writing is not meant to elaborate the 5 doctrines of Salafi jihadis in details, except for explaining the variants mapping included in the Salafi groups. More information regarding the 5 doctrines can be seen in, for example, Shiraz (2016), *Salafi-Jihadism the History of an Idea*; Khairul (2022), "Mengenai Kelompok Salafi Jihadi dan 5 Doktrin Keagamaannya," Muhammad Ibtissam and Ismi (2021), "Salafi Jihadis dan Terorisme Keagamaan," pp. 7-16.

⁴⁰ Muhammad Saeed al-Qahtani (1999), *Al-Wala' wal-Bara': According to the Aqedah of the Salaf*, London: Al-Firdous.

Findings and Discussion

Historical Perspectives of the Salafi Movement in Maluku

The presence of Salafism in Maluku dates back to the mid-20th century, but its widespread dissemination was not as prominent at that time. The origins of this movement and those responsible for bringing it to Maluku remain unclear; however, it is widely recognised that the group was primarily composed of young individuals. The significant growth of Salafi movements in Maluku can be attributed to the context of the Maluku conflict (1999-2003), during which there was fertile ground for the emergence of Laskar Jihad in Ambon.⁴¹ The Maluku conflict was one of the most intermittent conflicts between the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century. This conflict was portrayed as being related to religion, specifically Islam versus Christianity, and it garnered global attention, which sparked various interests in the conflict's dynamics.⁴²

Laskar Jihad (LJ) played a significant role in the civil war between Muslims and Christians in Maluku.⁴³ According to Moh. Sholehuddin, the movement, which identified itself as the *da'wah* Salafiyah or Salafi movement in contemporary Indonesia,⁴⁴ was established by Ustaz Jafar Umar Thalib on January 30, 2020. Its main objective was to address religious conflicts and violence in Maluku.⁴⁵ Ustaz Jafar Umar Thalib was a former student of LIPIA. He had brought together the *Ahlusunnah wal Jamaah* seven years prior to establishing the Sunni Communication Forum (FKAWJ) on February 14, 1998, during a Tabligh Akbar event in Solo, Central Java. At this event, his followers appointed him as the leader of the forum. According to Ustaz Jafar Umar Thalib, as quoted by Jacqueline Baker, FKAWJ's emergence a few months after the downfall of the New Order regime was timely. It was a moment when Indonesia was facing "the tragedy of democracy," which continued to marginalise Muslims.⁴⁶ Noorhaidi Hasan stated that LJ was a branch of the paramilitary groups of FKAWJ. Being a branch, LJ had a military structure with brigades, battalions, companies, platoons, and squads, and also had its own intelligence agency, with Jafar Umar Thalib serving as the commander in chief.⁴⁷

In the year 2000, there were two highly important missions in Maluku concerning the presence of FKAWJ and LJ. The first mission was to defend the honour of Maluku Muslims through war and jihad. The second mission was to spread Salafism, specifically "*Ahlusunnah wal Jama'ah*" to the people of Maluku.⁴⁸ According to Greg Fealy, as quoted in Noorhaidi, in response to the presence of LJ in Maluku, Jafar Umar Thalib stated that he was just fulfilling his duty as a Muslim by defending his fellow Muslims. Thalib believed that Abdurrahman Wahid's administration had failed to protect Muslims, making it a moral obligation for them to take action. He also perceived that the administration was anti-Islamic, suppressing the interests of Muslims while favouring those of non-believers.⁴⁹

Concerning the presence of LJ in Ambon,⁵⁰ an eyewitness said:

... in the situation of terribly sporadic conflicts at that time, our rationality failed to think, people were only thinking about how to survive. For some Muslims, the presence of Laskar Jihad was necessary to defend Muslims. But, for those who stick to their commonsense, the presence of Laskar Jihad was deemed to trigger endless conflicts. The point was that the presence of Laskar Jihad at that time was really a polemic among the people.⁵¹

While not all local Muslims in Ambon were supportive of the presence of LJ, there were specific reasons for their lack of appreciation. Some people perceived that the presence of LJ aggravated the conflict situations in Maluku, and this led to a negative perception of the group. However, despite this, it is

⁴¹ Duriana (2016), "Studi terhadap Ideologi Radikalisme Agama Pasca Konflik Maluku," *Journal Fikratuana*, Vol. 8, No. 2, p. 105.

⁴² Hasbollah et al. (2007), "Damai-Damai Maluku," pp. 110-199.

⁴³ Marthen Tahun and Banawiratma (2022), "The Ambiguity of Religion: A Study of Ambon Conflict 1999-2001," Thesis, Universitas Gajah Mada.

⁴⁴ Moh. Sholehuddin (2013), "Ideologi Religio-Politik Gerakan Salafi Laskar Jihad di Indonesia," p. 59.

⁴⁵ See also Sukidi (2003), "Violence under the Banner of Religion," pp. 75 -101.

⁴⁶ Jacqueline Baker (2001), "Laskar Jihad dan Mobilisasi Umat Islam in Konflik Maluku," Thesis, Murdoch University.

⁴⁷ Noorhaidi Hasan (2002), "Faith and Politics. The Rise of Laskar Jihad in the Era of Transition in Indonesia," *Indonesia*, Vol. 73, p. 159.

⁴⁸ van Bruinsen (2002), "Genealogies of Islamic Radicalism in post-Suharto Indonesia," p. 144.

⁴⁹ van Bruinsen (2002), "Genealogies of Islamic Radicalism in post-Suharto Indonesia," p. 144.

⁵⁰ There is no source explaining the total number of the Laskar Jihad troops who arrived in Ambon. From various sources, there was information that on 29 April 2000 there were 750 people of the first battalion arrived in Ambon by Ferry K.M. Rinjani, then on 4 May 2000, the second battalion also arrived. Schulze (2002), "Laskar Jihad and the Conflict in Ambon," p. 60.

⁵¹ M. Yani Kubangun, interview, on 21 September 2022.

worth noting that during the early phases of the conflict, LJ's presence was positively appreciated by many. This could be attributed to the fact that they were helpful in providing security and support during a time of chaos and uncertainty.

Jafar Umar Thalib, in addition to deploying war troops, also sent preachers who were generally followers of the Salafi movement. The preachers played a major role in spreading Salafism to almost all mosques in Ambon. Ustaz Jafar Umar Thalib was welcomed at the front yard of Alfatah Raya Mosque, where he consolidated his troops and used the pulpit to inspire jihad and promote the ideology of Salafism.⁵²

In order to promote Salafism, FKAWJ utilised various media, including mosque pulpits, newsletters, halaqas, Islamic schools, and a radio transmitter named Suara Pembela Muslim Maluku (SPMM), or Voice of the Maluku Muslims' Struggle.⁵³ In responding to the "propaganda" of disseminating Salafism ideology, eyewitness, M.N. Rahawarin, commented on his experience:

... When Laskar Jihad was arrived, we Muslims welcomed them with joy because we considered them as fellow Muslims who came from far away to defend our honour. However, in practising Islam, we sometimes felt that there were some things did not fit the tradition in our country. This was what made some people gradually became less respectful towards them....⁵⁴

Based on this explanation, it can be concluded that the Salafi movement's penetration in Maluku was carried out systematically and extensively through the presence of FKAWJ - LJ. The declaration of jihad to protect the honour of Muslims in Maluku confirms that Jafar Umar Thalib presented a radical Islamic movement with ideological and political aspects. Apart from advocating for war, they made great efforts to disseminate their understanding and doctrines of Salafism in Maluku.⁵⁵

In October 14, 2002, Jafar Umar Thalib announced the official disbandment of Laskar Jihad.⁵⁶ This caused speculation among other communities about the future of the Salafi movement.⁵⁷ Despite this, FKAWJ-LJ continued to operate in Maluku for two years. While many LJ members returned to their hometowns, a portion opted to remain in Ambon and further promote da'wah and Salafism in Maluku.

The Salafi Movement post Maluku Conflicts

The Salafi movement and Salafism in Maluku had a unique presence compared to other Islamic sects like Jama'ah Tabligh or Ahmadiyah. The latter two organisations took several years to become active among society, and they still do not publicly show their activities. On the other hand, Salafism and its community in Ambon, Maluku, grew rapidly and massively. They established educational institutions, including early-childhood education, kindergarten, and Islamic boarding schools for elementary to high-school students in Ambon City and Seram Barat District (SBB). They also had their own radio station, Suara Tauhid (107.8 MHz), and a maternal and child health clinic.⁵⁸

There were several factors that contributed to the rapid expansion of the Salafi movement. Firstly, the active participation of Salafis during the Ambon Maluku conflicts and their aid efforts during the exodus of Muslims from Ambon city played a significant role in driving its growth. Secondly, there was widespread dissemination of da'wah and education on Salafism through Taman Pengajian al-Qur'an

⁵² Hasbollah Toisuta (2014), "Khotbah Damai di Mimbar Alfatah," in Jacky Manuputty et al. (eds.), *Carita Orang Basudara: Kisah-Kisah Perdamaian dari Maluku*, Jakarta: PUSAD Paramadina.

⁵³ Right now, Radio SPMM has transformed into a new name: Suara Tauhid. Regarding the Salafism dissemination through radio, See Masduki et al. (2022) "Islam on the Air: The Struggle for Salafism through Radio in Indonesia," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Society*, Vol. 12, No. 1, pp. 59-84. See also Ahmad Munjin Nasi et al. (2023), "Countering Islamic Radicalism among Indonesian University Students: An Investigation on Social Media Using LINE Official Account," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun*, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 179-192.

⁵⁴ M. Natsir Rahawarin, interview, 16 September 2022.

⁵⁵ Muhammad Ali (2018), *Grakan Salafi di Cirebon Era Reformasi: Ajaran, Penyebaran dan Tantangan*, Yogyakarta: Universitas Gajah Mada.

⁵⁶ Liputan6 (17 October 2002), "Ribuan Anggota Laskar Jihad Meninggalkan Ambon," <https://www.liputan6.com/news/read/43341/ribuan-anggota-laskar-jihad-meninggalkan-ambon#:~:text=Liputan6.com%2C%20Ambon%3A%20Sekitar,muslim%20setempat%20berpawai%20keliling%20kota>.

⁵⁷ Based on interviews of some Ustazs, it was mentioned that the dismissal and the withdrawal of Laskar Jihad was due to basic reasons. Firstly, the government had already taken control of the conflict. Secondly, the *fatwa* from a religious leader from the Middle East who claimed that deviation occurred over the previous *fatwa*, that the commander of Laskar Jihad, Jafar Umar Thalib was deemed to be political.

⁵⁸ Information about the existence of the institutions was from the result of an interview with Ustaz Abdul Wahab Lumaela, the leader of Abu Bakar Ash-Shiddiq Foundation and ustaz Syamsul Alam, one of the teachers in Al-Amin Islamic Boarding School.

(TPQ)/Al-Qur'an Learning Centres organised by supportive communities amid tense conditions during this conflict.⁵⁹ Lastly, Salafis also engaged in social humanitarian activities such as establishing healthcare clinics and educational institutions to further promote their cause.

During the conflicts that occurred in Ambon city and Maluku, Salafism and the Salafi community emerged and had a significant impact on the Muslim society. They were able to cater to the needs of the people during the conflicts and also helped to ignite religious fervour, mentality, and spirit. Moreover, the presence of Salafism strengthened the solidarity among Muslims residing in Ambon and those outside the city. This was achieved through various campaigns, media, newsletters, bulletins, newspapers, and radio programmes.

The LJ members who stayed in Ambon after their withdrawal in 2002 continued their da'wah and humanitarian activities.⁶⁰ There were three fundamental reasons why they decided to stay in Ambon. Firstly, they wanted to strengthen the moral and mentality of Muslims in Ambon after the conflicts. This was especially important to get through the transition of post-conflicts. Secondly, they wanted to improve the understanding and awareness of religious practices among Muslims in Ambon and Maluku, in line with what Rasulullah SAW had taught. They believed that there were still many religious practices of Islam that were not aligned with pure Islamic teachings. Therefore, it was considered important and strategic to establish educational institutions such as Islamic boarding schools. Thirdly, the resources for da'wah activities among Muslims in Ambon and Maluku were still far from the expectation.⁶¹ In Ambon city, some Salafi communities established "Kampung Laskar" in Batu Merah village, previously known as Kampung Kisar.

Salafi Group Activities

Da'wah Sector

Two decades after the conflicts, Salafi groups' da'wah activities had a widespread influence in many areas of Maluku, including remote regions, except Dobo Regency and Southwestern Maluku (MBD). The movement was able to influence several mosques located around Batu Merah, Kebun cengkeh, and Kahena in Ambon city. They even constructed their own mosques like Al-Ma'ruf Mosque in Batu Merah Market and Abu Bakar Shiddiq Mosque in Al Hijrah village (also known as the troop village) Batu Merah atas. In addition, there are Jabal Qubais Mosque in Batu Merah Tanjung, Ali bin Abi Thalib Mosque in Air Kuning, Darussalam Mosque in Kompleks Pesona Alam, etc., through which the Salafi da'wah movement developed. Furthermore, regular Islamic public lectures were held every Sunday morning for Salafi group consolidation in Raya Al-Fatah Mosque of Ambon, as well as through "Suara Tauhid" radio, magazines, and leaflets such as da'wah bulletin distributed every Friday at the mosques in Ambon city.⁶²

Ustaz Shodiqun⁶³ stated that Muslims in Ambon, Maluku, still experienced lack of faith and morals. In order to provide necessary guidance on da'wah and Islamic teachings, around 200 TPQs were established in Ambon since LJ arrived until they were disbanded. These places were dedicated to strictly conducting da'wah activities and religious education. Ustaz Shodiqun played an important role in teaching at many locations of the TPQs. Furthermore, he was actively involved in the development process of Islamic boarding schools in Maluku, such as Al-Manshuroh Boarding School in Gudang Cina, Air Kuning and Al-Manshuroh in West Seram (SBB).

The curriculum covered various themes and materials that were contextual with the local problems and needs. The level of religious understanding of the Muslim population in different areas was also taken into account while adjusting the course content. The themes included *tauhid*, *akhlaq*, *fiqh*, *hadith*, *tafsir*, and more. These themes were based on standard books such as *Fathul Majid*, *Bulughulmaram*, and *Amdatul Ahkam*. Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab's *al-Tauhid* and *Ushul al-Tsulasah* were also

⁵⁹ As what he knew about, the numbers of TPQ managed by Salafi were 28. While Ustaz Shodiqun mentioned that there were more than 200 TPQs spread in Ambon City and outside the city.

⁶⁰ Ustaz Sodikun and ustaz Abu Farhan, interviews, 28 September 2022.

⁶¹ Sumanto Al-Qurtuby (2015) found that Maluku people did not have influential intellectual ulema figures who have broad range of knowledge on the aspect of religion, master various literatures, and with the characteristics inclusive-pluralistic toward the local traditions and cultures. See Sumanto Al-Qurtuby (2015), "Islam, Kristen dan Dunia Lain di Maluku" in Elizabeth Marantika (ed.), *Menanam, Menyiram Bertumbuh dan Berbuah: Teologi GPM dalam Praksis Berbangsa dan Bernegara*, Salatiga: Satya Wacana University Press dan Sinode GPM, p. 335.

⁶² Compare with, F. Aidulsyah (2023), "The Rise of Urban Salafism in Indonesia: The Social-Media and Pop Culture of New Indonesian Islamic Youth," *Asian Journal of Social Science*, Vol. 51, No. 4, pp. 252-259.

⁶³ Ustaz Shodiqun, *Interview*. 28 September 2022.

included in the curriculum.⁶⁴ When asked about new societal issues, Salafi preachers in Indonesia exclusively refer to Salafi sheikhs from Saudi Arabia and Yemen, such as Sheikh Rabi bin Hadi in Mecca, Sheikh Salen bin Fauzan in Medina, and Sheikh Abdullah Al-Buchari in Yemen. They do not refer to any religious leaders or Salafi figures in Indonesia.⁶⁵

The da'wah activities of Salafi with their massive movements pose a particular challenge to those who support cultural da'wah that accommodates tradition, such as in Nahdhatul Ulama (NU) and even Muhammadiyah. It's clear that Salafi preachers have a significant influence on people's development, not only in Maluku but also throughout Indonesia. They recruit new members through da'wah and religious classes/ta'lim.

Education and Social Sector

Salafi groups in Maluku have played a crucial role in the revival of Islam through education. Their mission has rapidly expanded.⁶⁶ Educational institutions established alongside TPQ included early-childhood education, kindergarten, elementary school, and Islamic boarding school.

Initially, the educational institutions established and managed by Salafi groups received enthusiastic responses from the society, especially in the field of religious sciences such as Quran recitation, Hadith memorisation, and Islamic manners. Students who studied in these institutions scored higher than those who studied at other equivalent schools. Salafi-managed Integrated Islamic Elementary Schools (SDIT) were even awarded as the best Integrated Islamic School in Maluku by the Education and Culture Office of Maluku Province at that time. Even the Vice President, Hamzah Haz, provided funding for the construction of an educational institution which is now known as al-Mashuroh Islamic boarding school in Air Kuning. Salafi-managed educational institutions seem to have a strong appeal. Many government officials in Ambon choose to enrol their children in early-childhood education, kindergarten, and the Islamic boarding school of al-Manshuroh. Due to concerns about modern challenges such as free sex, drugs, HIV/AIDS and Western influences, parents believe that Islamic boarding schools provide the best alternative for their children's education.

Table 1: Educational Institutions Managed by Salafi Groups in Maluku

No.	Name	Level	Location	Leader
1.	RA Al-Manshurah	TK	Tanah Rata, Ambon	Ustz. Adi A. Rahman
2.	PPS Al-Manshurah A	MI	Air Kuning, Ambon	Ustz. Mustofa
3.	PPS Al-Manshurah B	MTs	Air Kuning, Ambon	Ustz. Azhar
4.	Ma'had TN khusus Perempuan	MI, MTs dan MA	Muhajirin village, Ambon	Ustz. Saifullah
5.	Tadhrib Addu'at (laki-laki), Hifdzul Quran	MA	BTN Kebuncengkeh, Ambon	Ustz. Jazim
6.	Rumah Belajar Al-Mashurah	MI	Lahan village, SBB regency	Ustz. Solohin
7.	Ma'had Al-Manshurah	MI, MTs	Gemba village, SBB regency	Ustz. Abdul Malik
8.	Ma'had Al-Manshurah	MI, MTs	Waisala Hunun village, SBB regency	Utz Syukur
9.	Madrasah Al-Mansurah	MTs	Bula, SBB Regency	Ustz. Abu Salwa
10.	Rumah Belajar Al-Manshura	MI, MTs.	Namlea, Buru Regency	Ustz. Yusran

Source: The foundation leader Abubakar Ash-Shiddiqy

In Maluku, the Salafi movement established the Abu Bakar Ash-Siddiq Foundation to organise.⁶⁷ Establishing a foundation in Indonesia required a law-based foundation to ensure that the organisation

⁶⁴ Ustaz Abu Farhan, interview, 28 September 2022.

⁶⁵ Ustaz Abdul Wahab Lumaela, interview, 6 May 2023.

⁶⁶ UIN Syarifhidayatullah (2018), *Mencermati Berkembangnya Pendidikan Kelompok Salafi*, pp. 1-7.

⁶⁷ Abu Bakar Shiddiq Foundation was established in 2001 based on Notary/P.P.A.T Rosdiana Ely SH, The Decree of Minister of Justice and Human Rights of RI Number: C.-352.H.T03.01-TH.2001 and The Decree of the Head of the National Land RI Number: 25-IX-PPAT-2001

and its activities were both legal and compliant. Although necessary, the focus on legality was primarily a formality to confirm that the foundation was not operating against the government or country. Since its inception, the foundation has had two leaders: Abu Farhan and, since 2010, Abdul Wahab Luamaela.⁶⁸

Through the Abu Bakar Ash-Shiddiq foundation, various activities are organised and conducted. The foundation was established with three primary objectives: Religion, Social, and Humanitarian sectors. Under the religion sector, the foundation is involved in constructing places of worship, establishing Islamic schools and boarding schools, conducting religious lectures, and promoting religious understanding. In the social sector, the foundation has established both formal and non-formal institutions, such as orphanages, nursing homes, hospitals, polyclinics, and laboratories. Additionally, the foundation provides coaching for sports and arts, conducts research on sciences, traditions, and comparative studies. The humanitarian sector of the foundation provides donations and assistance to victims of natural disasters, refugees of war, the poor and the homeless, builds shelters, protects consumers, and preserves the environment.

Currently, the foundation has been responsible for carrying out various activities in three different sectors. In terms of religion, they have established five educational institutions and Islamic boarding schools. These include integrated PAUD and Al-Manshuroh Islamic boarding school in Ambon city⁶⁹ catering to primary school students up until junior high-school level, Tadrib ad-Du'a Islamic boarding school specifically designed for high-school students, as well as a women's boarding school.⁷⁰ Additionally, an Al-Manshuroh Islamic boarding school has also been set up for elementary to junior high-level students in West Seram (SBB).⁷¹ On the social front, the foundation possesses a maternal and child healthcare clinic while actively participating in providing aid during flood and landslide disasters that occurred in Batu Merah area of Ambon City during 2012 and 2013.

Economic Sector

Salafi groups have not only expanded their influence in the da'wah, education and social sectors, but also in the economic sector. Some activities are undertaken individually, while others are carried out by groups. The Salafi jama'ah, formerly known as the LJ, supports each other in their economic endeavours. They maintain a sense of togetherness through activities such as congregational prayer and da'wah in mosques. Moreover, they have established the Amin store and clove garden, with Amin store being one of the biggest stores in Ambon City that caters to Salafi people. In addition, they own welding workshops such as UD Latanza, which has several branches in Ambon City, as well as display case workshops, and independent businesses such as selling gallon water. Individual businesses initiated by them can be found in different areas of Ambon City. Along Jalan Jenderal Sudirman, we can see women wearing niqab selling retail Peralite fuel, snacks, or working in food stalls.⁷² In Ambon and Maluku, the Salafi community is economically independent but lacks public support unlike Mujani's findings.⁷³

Internal Dynamics of the Salafi Community and People's Responses

Internal Dynamics

It has been over twenty years since the emergence of Salafi groups in Maluku during the conflicts of 1999. Since then, the Salafi movement has undergone significant changes in terms of its activities and growth. The movement originally began in Ambon City as its core, and has since spread throughout all

on 31 December 2001. Changes based on the act of Establishment of Foundation had been done once as a step to adjusting with the foundation legislations, on the document Number: 04 date: 24 March 2015.

⁶⁸ Ustaz Abdul Wahab Lumaela, interview, 6 May 2023.

⁶⁹ Ustaz Abd. Awahab Lumaela, interview, 6 May 2023. What had been stated by Abd. Wahab Lumaela was in line with the explanation of the Head of Section Pokapontren Regional Office of the Ministry of Religion (through interview on 17 January 2023), Salafi in Maluku did not apply the national curriculum by the Ministry of Religion.

⁷⁰ *Tadrib ad-Du'a* Islamic boarding school was established in order to prepare preachers with adequate knowledge, understandings and capability before they would be active within the society. The future preachers in *Tadribu Ad-Du'a* were taught to master Arabic Language as a tool, great memory and understandings of Al-Quran and al-Hadith as well as to have ability in delivering *da'wah* to Muslims.

⁷¹ In Ambon City, they managed one educational institution *Sekolah Dasar Islam Terpadu/Integrated Islam Elementary School (SDIT)* at-Taifah (small group) in Tanah Rata, Galunggung. Since the number of students continued to grow, SDIT was then relocated to Gudang Cina in Air Kuning which then became the cornerstone of the establishment of al-Manshuroh Boarding School in Ambon City. Meanwhile, SDIT itself, now had transformed into Integrated Islam PAUD. Ustaz Shodiqun, interview.

⁷² Ustaz Abd. Wahab Lumaela, interview, 6 May 2023.

⁷³ Saiful Mujani et al. (2023), "Islamism and Muslim Support for Islamist Movement Organizations: Evidence from Indonesia," *Studia Islamika*, Vol. 30, No.1, pp. 39-56.

of Maluku.⁷⁴ Salafi preachers had an outstanding militancy in promoting Salafism to society, making the expansion of Salafism quite reasonable.⁷⁵

During the period of rapid expansion, the Salafi community faced internal challenges in Ambon City, as it split into two groups. The first group agreed to establish the Abu Bakar Ash-Shiddiq Foundation, while the second group established the al-Amin Islamic boarding school. Despite the challenges, it is interesting to note that the dynamics of the situation were noteworthy.⁷⁶ It is still unclear why the issue arose, but it revolved around accepting or refusing a foundation. The first group chose to accept the foundation, claiming that it was a tactical move to establish educational institutions managed by the Salafi community. According to Ustaz Wahab Lumaela, the foundation was created to better organise the activities and spread the teachings of Salafi in Ambon and Maluku.⁷⁷ Meanwhile, the second group persistently refused to accept the foundation because it was not taught by the Prophet and could potentially be misused. Another opinion stated that the internal split within Salafi was linked to disagreement over the name for their community. Some accepted the name “*Jamaah Salafi Ahlus Sunnah waljama’ah*,” while others preferred not to use the word “Salafi” as part of their community’s name, proposing instead “*Jama’ah Ahlus Sunnah waljama’ah*.”⁷⁸

The split had significant impacts, resulting in the separation of ustaz who were previously aligned. According to a member of the Salafi community at Mujahidin Mosque named Silale, Ustaz Shodiqun and Abu Farhan used to teach ta’lim together. However, since the split occurred, they have stopped teaching ta’lim at the mosque. It is worth noting that in Muhajirin village,⁷⁹ there are approximately 10 Salafis affiliated with the second group who remain separated and operate according to their own distinct viewpoints.

Both groups have a shared goal of spreading Salafi teachings in Ambon City and Maluku. The first group has already established a boarding school in Namlea, Buru Region and aims to further expand the Salafi network in Saumlaki, Southwestern Maluku Regency. On the other hand, the second group plans to build a 12-hectare Salafi housing complex in Ahuru village, Ambon City.⁸⁰

People’s Responses towards the Salafi Movement

Although many individuals have expressed approval and enthusiasm for the various forms of assistance and activities carried out by Salafi groups, the emergence of terrorism and violent extremism in recent decades has led to suspicion among society, particularly in Ambon. This suspicion extends towards the presence of the Salafi community in Ambon City as well as other areas in Maluku. On a related note, during a public lecture and training event held in Muhajirin village, police officers were present to oversee proceedings. Academics also harbour reservations towards the Salafi community due to differing perspectives on transnational Islamic issues. Certain scholars such as Shodiqun, Abu Farhan, Wahab, Iqbal Abdul Malik, and Jazim agree that these responses from individuals are normal and acceptable given their knowledge about and understanding of Salafism teachings. The establishment of the foundation, for example, according to Ustaz Abu Farhan, Ustaz Wahab and Ustaz Iqbal, was an accommodative step towards the applied rules in Indonesia.

The response of the community towards Salafism varied considerably, regardless of their role in the conflicts in Maluku. In Tulehu, for instance, rejection towards Salafism and Salafi groups was very strong. This rejection was mainly related to two aspects. First, it was related to the teaching of

⁷⁴ Based on the collected data, it was found that Salafi groups have developed and reached all regions in Maluku, including regencies where Muslim communities were the minority. According to Ustaz Wahab Lumaela, there were only two unreached areas by Salafi groups; they were Aru Islands Regency and Southwestern Maluku (MBD).

⁷⁵ Regarding the militancy of the Salafi leaders in disseminating Salafism, it was collected through interviews with some of the Salafi religious figures: Ustaz Shodiqun, Ustaz Abu Farhan, Ustaz Abdul Malik, Ustaz Iqbal, dan Ustaz Samsul Alam, and Ustaz Abd. Wahab Lumaela.

⁷⁶ Al-Amin Islamic Boarding School was established by a successful entrepreneur from South Sulawesi, Haji Nurdin, who had lived in Ambon for a long time. The previous founder of the boarding school was part of the Salafi community in Muhajirin complex, who left and built Al-Amin boarding school. The reason why this Salafi group left the community in the Muhajirin complex was because of the institutionalization of Salafi teachings or the establishment of Abu Bakar Ash-Shiddiq Foundation. One of groups that disagreed then established Al-Amin Boarding School.

⁷⁷ Ustaz Abd. Wahab Lumaela, interview, 5 May 2023.

⁷⁸ Duriana (2016), “Studi terhadap Ideologi Radikalisme Agama Pasca Konflik Maluku,” p. 111.

⁷⁹ Muhajirin Village was an area populated only by the first group of Salafi community or who supported the Foundation establishment. According to Ustaz Wahab, Muhajirin village was the solution for Salafi communities to secure themselves from things contrary to the Salafi teachings. It is not an exclusive area, Muhajirin village is an opened one, and anyone may come and pray in Abu Bakar Ash-Shiddiq Mosque.

⁸⁰ Ustaz Abd Wahab Lumaela, interview, 5 May 2023.

purification of Islam in contrast to local culture. For instance, Tulehu people are accustomed to remembrance after prayer and do collective prayers, which is considered as practices that were not taught or exemplified by the Prophet. Second, it was related to physical appearance, such as wearing sarongs versus one-piece cloth and growing a beard. Both aspects caused the Salafi community to shift their activities from the mosque, which was previously located in the country, to remote areas or borders of the country, specifically in Ar-Rahman Mosque, in Jembatan Dua village.⁸¹ The Salafi community in Tulehu has a relatively small population, consisting of around 20 young people. They stand out with their different appearances during the five prayers at Masjid Jami' in Tulehu.

During the Maluku conflicts, the presence of the Salafi group in Tulehu and Siri Sori Islam, East Saparua District, Central Maluku Regency, caused debates and clashes within the community. The Salafi group believed that the wiridan tradition, a legacy of former religious leaders, was heretical and had no basis. However, local Muslims practised the wiridan tradition as part of their Islamic practice. This caused conflicts in the region, and eventually led to the expulsion of the Salafi group from the area.⁸²

The rigid views of Salafism ideology, which do not respond to local cultural aspects, have made some people less empathetic towards Salafi groups. Salafi groups have raised debates not only on cultural issues but also on the ways of practising Islamic teachings, such as the Wiridan tradition after prayers, Tahlilan tradition (sending prayers to deceased families), dress codes, and clothing. These debates have made it difficult for Salafi groups to be fully accepted by society.

The strictness of Salafi groups in adhering to Islamic teachings, without incorporating any cultural values, is a point of contention. M. Natsi Rahawarin⁸³ argues that for local people, Islamic practices cannot be separated from cultural aspects since Islam has developed through the dimensions of culture. Traditions such as ceremonies to bid farewell to family members going on pilgrimage, celebrations for certain events, and responses to advancements in science and technology are all part of accommodating Islam into the local culture. Therefore, there is no need for further debate on this matter.

Salafi groups believe that all Islamic teaching practices should be in line with the main sources of Islam, namely Al-Quran and the practices of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in His daily life (Sunnah). According to them, any teaching practice which has no basis in these sources is considered heretical and is called bid'ah, and therefore, should be avoided. In an interview, Ustaz Wahab reaffirmed this stance:

In responding such practices, we, principally, convey it according to the Prophet Muhammad, *sahabahs*/ his companions, *salaf ash-shalih*. It is better if people follow what we convey, but if they do not follow us, it is not a problem. The most important thing is that we have conveyed this. And thank God, *Alhamdulillah*, even though we have no database about the number of Salafi community in Maluku, by noticing the current development, we can say that the level of acceptance of people towards Salafism is quite significant.”⁸⁴

Political Perspectives of the Salafi Movement in Maluku

The crucial aspect examined in this study is whether or not Salafi movements in Maluku are driven by political motives. This question can be challenging to answer, particularly given that the Salafi group (LJ) in Ambon, Maluku, has been associated with a war (jihad) mission during times of conflict in the region. As a result, the Salafi group has been branded as a radical Islamic group, which has further complicated the matter.⁸⁵ In his research, Duriana identified two Islamic movements with radical views that have relatively expanded: Salafi (LJ) and Hizbut Tahrir (HT).⁸⁶ Duriana did not provide any further details as to whether she was referring to jihadis or purists when she mentioned radicalism. It is worth

⁸¹ Salafi community held *ta'lim* (public lectures on Islam) in Al-Rahman Mosque every Friday and Saturday. Two ustazs who filled in the *ta'lim* were Ustaz Abu Soman on Friday, and Ustaz Lestaluhu on Saturday at 17.00-18.00 wit.

⁸² Abubakar Sahupala, public figure in Negeri Siri Sori Islam. Interview, 28 November 2022.

⁸³ M. Natsir R, interview.

⁸⁴ Ustaz Wahab Lumaela, interview, 5 May 2023. Compare to PPM UIN Syarifhidayatullah (2018), “Mencermati Berkembangnya Pendidikan Kelompok Salafi,” p. 3.

⁸⁵ Robert W. Hefner (2002), “Civil Pluralism Denied? The News Media and Jihadi Violence in Indonesia,” Paper.

⁸⁶ Duriana (2016), “Studi terhadap Idiologi Radikalisme Agama Pasca Konflik Maluku,” p. 107.

noting that since Ustaz Djafar Umar Thalib disbanded LJ in 2002, jihad ideology (in terms of war) has no longer been considered an important part of the Salafi movement in Maluku. Instead, the Salafi group has shifted its focus towards *da'wah*, as stated by Ustaz Sadiqun in his interview:

The presence of Salafi in Ambon, Maluku was claimed to be related to the presence of LJ in Ambon, 1999. However, based on Fatwa by MUI, LJ had stated as disbanded. The disband of LJ does not mean that all LJ members go back to Java, many of them stay or continue their *da'wah* activities in Ambon and around it, instead. There is an awareness that there is a decrease in the mentality, faith, and morals of the Muslims in Ambon, and therefore, guidance and Islamic teaching and educations are very necessary.⁸⁷

According to Ustaz Shodiqun, the Salafi group in contemporary Maluku is a Salafi purist movement that considers *da'wah* (Islamic preaching) as its main activity. They aim to help Muslims in Ambon who are still struggling with their faith and morals in practising Islamic teachings.

Furthermore, upon investigating their relationship with the Indonesian government, it was found that they do not have an ideology that contrasts with the government. In fact, they believe that it is compulsory to follow the legal government. Ustaz Abd. Wahab Lumaela confirmed this view:

Talking about our relationship with the government, in fact we hold on to Al-Qur'an and *Sunnah* regarding with the obligation to obey Allah and His Messenger, and also *ulil amri* (the leaders). As for the leaders, it should be noted our obedience depends on whether the leaders also obey Allah and hold the principals of Islam. However, if the leaders deviated, then our choice is to keep silent and did not do any harms. For example, in determining 1 Syawal, we choose to follow the government. Another example is vaccination. We follow the government because we think that these are meant for the public good.⁸⁸

Although it is accepted that the obligation to obey the leaders (*Ulil Amr*) is an important part of Islamic teachings, Salafi groups have been criticised for their deviation from the Islamic Aqedah. For instance, the available data has confirmed that all institutional education managed by Salafi groups refrains from holding flag ceremonies because they believe that the ceremonial process of honouring the red and white flag contradicts Islamic beliefs. Moreover, their institutional education doesn't follow the national curriculum and they use their own instead, nor do they issue national certificates for graduations. According to the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religion of Maluku Province, these decisions have been implemented since 2015, transforming these institutions into purely Islamic boarding schools that no longer follow equivalence exams nor issue graduation certificates.⁸⁹ However, some of the education institutions they managed have received assistance from the Ministry of Religion.⁹⁰

Ustaz Wahab Lumaela and Ustaz Shodiqun have stated that Salafism does not condone acts of violence, as the mission of Islam is to be a mercy to the universe. However, they acknowledge that some groups use Islam to justify violence and terrorism. It is important to note that there are many verses in the Quran and hadith that instruct Muslims to be friendly and respectful to all people, regardless of their religion. Ustaz Abd Rauf, Chair of the Fatwa Division of the Maluku Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), shares a similar view and argues that Salafi groups are not inherently linked to violence and terrorism, but rather there are individuals who misuse the teachings of Islam for their own gain:

As far as I'm concerned and what I have observed, the Salafi groups in Maluku today are more *da'wah*-oriented. More precisely, I call it the purist. No need to worry that they are radical groups in a negative sense. In the society, Salafi groups tend to be so exclusive that they many people suspect them as radical groups. Besides, the public seem to set a distance not to socialise with them. As a result, Salafis are stigmatised as radicals.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Ustaz Shodiqun, interview, 27 May 2020. The similar opinion as Ustaz Abu Farhan in an Interview on 25 June 2020.

⁸⁸ Ustaz Wahab Limaela, interview, 5 May 2023.

⁸⁹ Asuka Jaya Banawai, the Head of Section Pokapontren Regional Office of the Ministry of Religion Maluku, interview, 19 November 2022.

⁹⁰ Based on the data observed, it found out that all the Islamic Boarding Schools managed by Salafi groups do not have any flag poles as commonly found at national public schools. Besides that, they never held flag ceremonies on national holidays as commonly celebrated by other public schools.

⁹¹ Abd Rauf, Chair of the Fatwa Division of the Maluku Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), interview, 9 June 2023.

As stated by Ustaz Abd. Rauf, there is no cause for concern regarding the presence of Salafi groups in Maluku as they are not radical and do not advocate for jihad. Therefore, the development of Salafism in Maluku does not pose a threat to the nation. From the perspective of the National Counterterrorism Agency, Salafis in Maluku are seen as an exclusive religious movement and have not been classified as a radical terrorist group. However, it is important to handle this group with caution due to their exclusivity and potential for fostering intolerant views.⁹² Salafi groups should have engaged in socialisation to avoid stigmatisation as a radical group, and communication is key to bridging misunderstandings.

If the relationship between Salafi groups and the government is not causing any issues, then it should be examined how their relationships with the local community impact pluralism and peace in Maluku. After conducting several interviews with local Islamic leaders, it is evident that there are certain challenges in the local horizontal context that need to be addressed⁹³ as they can affect the vertical relationship with the government. The challenges are:

1. Purist is the characteristic of Aqedah/ the theology of Salafi. Salafi will destroy social cultural model of Maluku society such as *Siwalima* culture, *Pala-Gandong*, *Larvul Ngabal*, and etc. because they are deemed as *shirk*.
2. As an Islamic transnational movement, which is more Arabic in its characteristics, Salafism will change the characteristics of Islam in Indonesia which is more accommodative towards cultures into Islam with Arabic characteristics. In this context, Salafism develops religious views that is conflicting the Islamic world and non-Islamic world in the local context, national, and global context vis-à-vis.
3. The exclusive and scripturalist characteristics of Salafism will widen the segregation of the religious life of Maluku people, especially the Muslims and Christian communities.
4. *Da'wah* performed with propaganda patterns will create imaginary enemy to the future of religions in Maluku.
5. The phenomenon of "religious fundamentalism" development that does not experience the process of dialogues and meetings, can grow as an embryo of the formation of terrorist movement.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the Salafi movement, a contemporary Islamic movement in Maluku, has experienced a massive expansion compared to other Islamic movements in the region. In a historical context, the Salafi Movement in Maluku is a continuation of the Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab Movement. The genealogy of this movement is connected with the renewal movement of Ibn Taymiyah to Ahmad ibn Hanbal. In Indonesia, the emergence of the Salafi movement is closely linked with the establishment of the Indonesian Arab Institute of Sciences (LIPIA), which is an extension of the Saudi Arabian government under Ibn Saud. The goal of establishing LIPIA was not only to spread Salafist ideology, but also to prevent the spread of Shia ideology after the Iranian revolution.

The Salafi movement has spread throughout various regions in Maluku, except southwestern Maluku (MBD). The presence and rapid growth of the Salafi movement in Maluku is historically linked to the conflicts that occurred in the region from 1999 to 2003. During this period, Ustaz Djafar Umar Thalib deployed the Laskar Jihad (LJ) troops, claiming to defend the honour of Muslim people who were victims of the conflicts. The emergence of Laskar Jihad (LJ) led to the flourishing of Salafist ideology in Maluku.

The Salafi movement in Maluku post conflict can be categorised as a purification movement (Salafi purist) that aims to bring Islam back to the pure teachings of the Prophet and his companions, *salaf ash-shalih*. It is important to note that this movement is not political Salafi (Salafi Haraki) or Salafi Jihadist.

⁹² The reports from The National Counter Terrorism Agency (n.d.), "Memperkuat Inisiatif Islam Moderat dan Mendorong Peran Gerakan Salafi Tentang Isu Anti Terorisme di Maluku," Policy Brief.

⁹³ Compare to Ade Didi Rohyana and Muhammad Jauhari Sofi (2021) "Critique of Radical Religious Paradigm: An Epistemological Analysis from Principles of Islamic Thought," *Indonesian Journal of Islamic and Muslim Society*, Vol. 11, No. 1, pp. 163-184.

However, due to the emergence of Salafi groups in Maluku during the Maluku conflicts, they are often unfairly stigmatised as radical Islamic groups.

The Salafi movement in Maluku is focused on da'wah and education, with a purist ideology. They achieve this by disseminating preachers and ustaz in Maluku. The movement has established educational institutions, such as Salafis boarding school, which provides early-childhood education (PAUD), kindergarten, Madrasah (Islamic schools) from MI to Aliyah, and Boarding School for Tahfiz and Al-Quran. They also strictly teach the students about Salafism. In terms of their attitudes towards the government, they follow the legal government because they believe that it's their obligation as per Islamic teachings, i.e., to abide by the *ulil amri*.

It is crucial to address the issue of how the local people will respond, given the lack of empathy that the Salafi movement has towards local traditions and Islamic wisdoms. This challenge needs to be resolved by both the Salafi groups themselves and the local leaders. Therefore, having a dialogue is essential in this context.

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