

# GROWING EXCLUSION OF THE MAJORITY

## The “Triumph of Wahhabism” and Its Threat to Indonesian Islam in the Democratic Society

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**Abstract:** Although Wahhabi institutions have neither grown rapidly nor attracted a significant number of followers in Indonesia, the spread of Wahhabist thoughts among Indonesian Muslims has outreached the institutions and their propagators. This study proves the argument by examining the rift among a Muslim community in the Eastern Java village of "Karang Mojo", in which Wahhabism penetrates into the lives of the villagers due to exposure to a Wahhabi television station "Rodja". This Wahhabi televangelism TV channel typically broadcasts religious narratives that exclude and attack the culturally vibrant practices of Indonesian Islam that preserved the tolerance to the local cultures. No prior record was found of the presence of a Wahhabi propagator or institution in the remote village. However, currently, a Muslim group with heavy Wahhabist influence has emerged in the remote village through various channels including Rodja television (hence, the group is hereinafter referred to as *Rodjai*). Through a series of observations and interviews with a number of people from the various groups in the village, the study points out the powerful influence of Wahhabism that penetrates into not only the urban areas but also the rural villages of Indonesia. The previously-unified Muslim community in the village is now divided. The Rodjai group in the village is very aggressive in attacking the culturally-rich practices of traditional Indonesian Islam and condemning those practices as heretical and superstitious that deviate from the pure teachings of Islam.

**Keywords:** Wahhabism, Rodjai group, Indonesian Islam, democratic society, religious exclusion.

### Introduction

In an interview with Kyai Mustakim, a traditional Muslim leader in a village in East Java, Indonesia, the author asked why he had to

strongly condemn his relatives (Pak Nida and his group) in front of the people in his village. According to Kyai Mustakim, Pak Nida and his group have gone too far by saying over and over that the worship he does with the village community is *shirk*. Reading *Yasin* is said to be heresy, *slametan* is haram, and singing praises is wrong. Even Pak Nida and his group once said arrogantly to everyone in the mosque that when he died he would rather his corpse be dragged into the river than hear people say the *tablillan* prayer for him. Not just once, he often repeated the sentence, so Kyai Mustakim felt that it is too much.

The myths of the failed campaign of Wahhabism (Salafism) in Indonesia and of the toughness of the so-called “Indonesian Islam” have misled scholars to predict the spread of Wahhabism/Salafism and its impacts on the people. Noorhaidi Hasan pointed out the failure of Wahhabi campaign in Indonesia and in the Muslim world in general since the 1980s by referring to one of Wahhabi campaigning tools in Indonesia: the Salafi madrasah. He argued that despite having strong funding and connections with the Middle East, Salafi madrassas in various parts of Indonesia failed to recruit Indonesian students – especially of *abangan* backgrounds– on a wide scale. The explanation for the failure involves two aspects, namely the obsolete model of the Salafi madrasas and the exclusivist traditions they cultivated.<sup>1</sup> Other Wahhabi institutions set up to propagate Wahhabism in Indonesia generally experience the same fate, including mosques, Islamic centers, and *pengajian* gatherings. These institutions are generally regarded as less developed and insufficient to become strong contender to the “traditional” institutions of Indonesian Islam, a version of Islam considered moderate and friendly to both local cultures and diversity.

However, if one looks closely at the developments of Islam in Indonesia during the last decade, one can see that the expression of Salafist thoughts has already been felt in the public sphere of Indonesian democracy. The Salafist thoughts are deeply felt by the presence of Islamic activism in the public sphere, both virtual and real, especially when Muslims in Indonesia are confronted with such issues as religious blasphemy, the rise of non-Muslim candidates, intolerant actions, their difficult interactions with state such in other countries

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<sup>1</sup> Noorhaidi Hasan. “The Failure of the Wahhabi Campaign: Transnational Islam and the Salafi Madrasa in post9/11 Indonesia,” *South East Asia Research* 18, 4 (2010), Special Issue on *Islamic Civil Society in South East Asia- Localization and Transnationalism in the Ummah*. pp. 675-677.

and the like. Although Salafism is difficult to define because of its ambiguity, fragmentation, and not homogenous movement,<sup>2</sup> the rhetoric and thoughts of Salafism referred to in this study represent the simplistic model of Islam by way of listening to the letters of the Quran and hadith at face value, easily demarcating a theological exclusion of Indonesian Islamic practices in general (or other Muslim groups) by labeling those practices as *bid'ah* (innovation),<sup>3</sup> *syirk* (polytheism), heresy, and *kufr* (disbelievers). In addition, the Salafist attitude also include being unfriendly to diversity and glorifying the Middle Eastern cultures.<sup>4</sup> Islamic activism with these features are increasingly growing in recent years in Indonesia.

Such Islamic activism is rapidly growing and it could escalate in response to sensitive issues for Indonesian Muslims. The development (apart from the widespread seeds of the Wahhabi campaign) was also due to Indonesia's democratic environment and the development of social media that helped spreading the simplistic model of Islam but with an overwhelming emotional charge and a "new" identity.<sup>5</sup> By Islamic activism, the author does not simply refer to a movement with clear ideology, strategy, organization, leadership, and membership and a rigid agenda such as "Islamic state" or "Islamic Sharia formalization" as traditionally defined but also encompasses all expressions and activities to support the idea or certain Islamic attitudes. Islamic activism in this sense can manifest in the form of sharing various attitudes and ideas on social media, engaging in casual chat narratives in coffee shops, casual conversations with neighbors, village activities,

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<sup>2</sup> Roel Meijer (ed), *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* (London: Hurst and Company, 2009), p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> One aspect that puts Salafist groups together is the doctrine to strongly condemn the so called religious innovations (*bid'ah*) and the Muslims practicing them. See Abdullah bin Abdurrahim al-Bukhori, *Maa Hiya al-Salafiyah* (Cairo: Dar al-Istiqamah, 2012), p. 49. In practice, this attitude becomes the dominant feature among the Salafist groups in Indonesia.

<sup>4</sup> Abdulbasit Kassim, "Defining and Understanding the Religious Philosophy of Jihādī-Salafism and the Ideology of Boko Haram," *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 16 (2015), p. 175; Ahmad Salim and 'Amr al-Basyuni, *Ma Ba'da al-Salafiyah* (n.p.: n.p., n.y), p. 35-6.

<sup>5</sup> Egypt's experience confirms this thesis. According to Susanne Olson and Emin Poljarefci, in the midst of the open market of religious environment and under certain political circumstances, the Salafist rhetoric's of claiming themselves authentic Islam flourishes among Egyptian youths. Contemporary Salafism: Expressions, Practices, and Everyday Living, in *Comparative Islamic Studies* (2012), p. 55.

and so on. Again, although Salafi organizations and institutions are incapable of rivaling the majority of Indonesian Islam until now, the Wahhabist thought seems to have spread into and penetrated the recent Islamic activism in Indonesia. The exclusion of the Islamic praxis of the majority of Indonesian Muslims, for example, was originally limited among people in the Salafi (Wahhabi) circles but now the exclusionist practices tends to be widespread. The exclusion of fellow Muslims, especially regarding the practices of most Muslims in Indonesia (through the heresy, supposition, innovation, and disbelievers labeling) is no longer an exclusive rhetoric of Wahhabi groups but it has become a phenomenon common to Indonesian Muslims outside the group. In recent years, the Indonesian Islam known to have been moderate has been at the crossroads.

This study, the author seeks to prove the thesis by presenting the results of a preliminary research in a small village named "Karang Mojo" in East Java, in which the author examines the impacts of a Salafist TV station (Rodja TV) on the social dynamics of religious life in the village. The region is one of the poorest districts in East Java. The topography of the region is mountainous although the residential area is concentrated on the plain areas. Mountain ridges surround almost all of the towns in the district and sub-district. In general, this region is an agricultural and plantation area. The farming of staple food crops relies on rainwater. Access to the area is quite difficult as the roads to the area are in the mountains. According to a local officer of religious affairs, almost the entire population of the village is Muslim, except for one or two Christian families. In the particular *kampung* where the study was conducted, all of the residents are Muslim except a newcomer who married a local Muslim woman.<sup>6</sup>

In terms of economy, the *kampung* is quite developed compared to the surrounding countryside. Being situated near a big market and shopping area allows the villagers to engage in trading. There are also villagers working in the public services but most villagers are peasants and migrant workers. Most villagers have access to television broadcasts through receiver and transmitter facility set up and maintained by the community through the monthly fee of IDR 10,000 per client. The author saw that all households had television sets, although older black-and-white television sets are still found. Most

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with Kajin, a personnel at the local office for religious affair, September 2016.

villagers are viewers of nationally (Jakarta) or locally (East Java) broadcasted channels. Few villagers, however, are lucky enough to afford to install satellite dishes at home, allowing them to access various satellite television channels such as Rodja TV. In other words, TV is the villagers' main medium of accessing information including news and religious sermons, while radio and Internet are limited to young people. Road infrastructure to get to the district capital is good enough, although the road to big cities in Java is not easy as the kampong and the neighboring villages are surrounded by mountains. To go to big cities like Surabaya, Kediri, Semarang and Yogyakarta, therefore, one will have to take the mountainous roads generally considered difficult and dangerous.

At least until the 1990s, Muslims in the kampong performed religious practices as most Indonesian Muslims do. The religious practices include *tablilan*, offering communal prayer for the dead. The *tablilan* was usually conducted consecutively from the first to the seventh day after a person died, and then again on the fortieth and hundredth day. The *tablilan* was then conducted again one year and two years later and finally on the thousandth day of the person's death. On those occasions, the host family provides food and drinks with the help of the extended family members and the neighbors. The food and drink provided by the haves and the have-nots is usually different. Rich families usually serve more expensive dishes than the poorer people do. On such occasions, the congregating villagers would recite holy texts taken from the Qur'an and traditions. The congregation concluded with a prayer for the salvation of the dead, in the hope that his/her sins are forgiven and could ascend to the best place in the sight of God. Prayer is also extended to family members of the deceased, and of course also for the whole members of the gatherings.

Another communal religious practice the villagers did was *yasinan*, reciting a chapter of the Qur'an on Thursday evenings. For men, the place was determined in such a way that it rotates from house to house, while for women the *yasinan* took place in the mosque unless a family has a special request to move the *yasinan* to their house. On the occasions, the main religious activity is to read *Yasin* together. A religious sermon or a communal prayer was often held after the recitation. With the men congregation, the occasion concluded with discussing or picking the next host for the weekly *yasinan*. The weekly

*yasinan* was usually attended not only by adults but also by teenagers, with children usually go with either their father or mother.

In addition to the communal prayer for the dead (*tablilan*), the community also offer communal prayer when a baby was born. The communal prayer for the newborn is called *berjanjen*, in which the congregation recite *al-Barzanji* on the seventh day after the baby was born. Despite its name, the gatherings read excerpts not only from the *Mawlid al-Barzanji* but also from various books including *al-Diba'i*, *Qasidah Burda*, and other *mawlid* readings collected in the book of *al-Mawalid*. On the occasion, gatherings of both men and women recite classical Arabic verses of prose and poetry about the birth, the life, and the struggles of the Prophet, in which he was depicted as a gentle, sensitive and compassionate, loving and affectionate man, and being a role model of all mankind. Yet, despite most of those villagers reciting the Arabic poems do not understand the contents, they are very excited in reading and singing the verses poetically, with tone improvisation but still in harmonious rhythm. Whenever possible, they also play the tambourine. Parents and children enjoyed it, and the family who host the ritual is not an exception. The author who lives in another province also had the same ritual when a child was born, recalling that it was the most beautiful spiritual experience as a parent, especially when carrying the baby along the circles of worshipers who wished the baby to be a good boy who is devoted to parents, practicing and is caring for others.

There is also a religious practice conducting every day, in the form of *pujian*, or chanting before the five-day prayer in the mosque. *Pujian* is chanting the noble verses (*kalimah tayyibah*) in the forms of poems, supplication or guidance taken from various sources such as books of mawlid, religious poetry taught in traditional schools, or even popular poetry. The verses of the *pujian* were in Arabic and Javanese. Sometimes, there were also Javanese translation of Arabic poems. As far as the language concerned, however, no verses was conveyed in Indonesian language. The *pujian* was chanted at the mosque through a loudspeaker; with the chanter was sometimes adults, adolescents, and often children together. Grown up in the particular region, the author recalls that the chanting was loud enough to be heard from the across the village. The *pujian* provides the listeners with advices regarding, among others, patience, faith, honesty, humility, respect, obedience to

parents, diligent prayer, careful management, and spiritual values and other important human faculties.

The other type of religious practices in the village is the *selamatan* prayer, when they hold other important familial feast, for example, circumcision, wedding, one of the children go to a traditional boarding school far from home, a children get a job, a family member wants to start a business, after a bad luck is overcome. Some even conducted a *slametan* prayer after buying a motorbike in the hope that the motorbike would be useful and bring no harm to the rider. At the time of good harvest, they also conduct a small *slametan* as a sign of grateful and a form of alms giving. All people in the village get involved in this activity and other ceremonies including the non-Muslims if there is. The last type of the religious practices is *ziarah*, visitations to shrines to gain Baraka (blessing). The Wahabi in the Kampong in particular and Indonesia in general reject and do not tolerate to the religious practices.<sup>7</sup>

The authors interviewed many people and observed that the village community really needs all of the religious expressions as embodied in the communal practices. Although few people are starting to oppose the practices, the majority want to preserve them. In fact, for some of them, the rites are parts of religious obligation. The religious rituals also serve as a unifying bond among families and among community members in the neighborhood. Through these rituals, they work together, share solidarity, and pay attention and assistance to one another. The author observed that on occasions when, for example, a family conducts a commemoration to offer prayer for a deceased family member or immediate ancestor, all relatives and neighbors would come. Some bring rice, sugar, food supplies, snacks, and the like. They also participated in cooking and serving the dishes to the guests. The host, however, did not do the cooking except when necessary. Mothers and young women do most of the cooking, whereas men usually do the preparation of the venue including mats, lighting and loudspeaker. Although from some interviews, the writer found out that sometimes the hosts have to be in debt to hold such an event, they perceive such communal religious practices as an occasion for alms giving, economic sharing, and praying. They need that religious expression because the rites with all the attached symbolism

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<sup>7</sup> Sunarwoto, "Negotiating Salafi Islam and the State: The Madkhaliyya in Indonesia," *Die Welt des Islams* 60, June (2020), p. 230.

are very meaningful to them.<sup>8</sup> In later development, however, the challenges to the religious activity have come, namely some villagers' access to Radio Rodja that intensely and blatantly attack the religious practices of the Indonesian Islam as heretical. This is where the harsh story of the exclusion of the majority by a minority begins in the kampong. By "exclusion", the author means a theological exclusion into the praxis of the majority by a minority.

### Democratic Spheres and the Presence of Rodja TV

In the newly gained Indonesian democratic sphere since 1999, the Salafist campaign, which had intensified since the 1980s, gained a wider space. Democracy gives opportunity to every group in society including religious minorities to express themselves in public both to affirm their identity and to demand power sharing.<sup>9</sup> The opening of vast freedom in post-1998 Reform society that allows every single identity to express itself in public spaces openly and loudly and the resilience of Indonesian society to the shocks caused by a democratic process of both the regime change and direct local election in 34 Provinces and 514 districts. The Islamic groups previously moved underground during the Soeharto regime (including the "trans-national" Islamic groups with diverse ideological spectrum) suddenly came to the arena with considerable self-confidence. Over the last 19 years, the contestation of identity among Islamic groups has been visible in public spaces in Indonesia, not only in cities but also in villages. Moreover, this coincided with the emergence and increased use of new media.

The Indonesian Salafis, collectively constituting a group with a basic attitude of unwillingness to accept democracy,<sup>10</sup> were among the

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<sup>8</sup> Citing Geertz's approach, Lohouari Addi calls Indonesian traditional Muslims tends to have full of signs and meaning in their rites, Lohouari Addi, "Islam re-observed: Sanctity, Salafism, and Islamism," *The Journal of North African Studies* 14 (2009), p. 340.

<sup>9</sup> Ali Asghar Engineer, *Economic and Political Weekly* 33, 13 (1998), p. 697.

<sup>10</sup> The Salafists' basic stance to Democracy is refusal because they think it doesn't have legitimacy. In practice, however, the Salafists developed two attitude in response to democratic practices. *First*, a zero participation in election because they think that in principle, democracy is against Islam. The source of power is God, not human beings. *Second*, involuntary participation because they have immediate agenda or participation to avoid them from bad things to happen (*madharat*). Nawaf al-Qadimi, *Asyraqul Hurriyah: Muqaarabah li 'l-Mauqif al-Salafi min al-Dimuqratiyah* (n.p.: al-Markaz al-Tsaqafiy al-Arabiyy, n.d.), pp. 11-2.



groups that benefitted from this situation. Despite their minority status and the decreasing of their influence in Saudi Arabia (the center) because of social transformation and 2030 vision reform, they could perform confidently in the public spaces, especially through their media including magazine, radio and television stations, websites, and so on. The most prominent medium of Salafism today is Rodja TV, founded to replicate the success of Radio Rodja broadcasting since March 2005. The radio station, which is centered in Bogor and reaches Jakarta and the satellite cities (Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, Bekasi), was finally broadcasted at 756 kHz (AM) in 2007, and the coverage has expanded rapidly after expanding itself through live streaming on the internet.

The success of Radio Rodja inspired the group to experiment with TV station, and thus Rodja TV was founded and was successfully aired in 2009 via streaming on the internet. In 2011, the television bearing the tagline *Saluran Tilawah Al Quran dan Kajian Islam* (The Quranic Recitation and Islamic Studies Channel) was satellite-broadcasted and was accessible via satellite dish.<sup>11</sup> The main programs of the TV broadcast<sup>12</sup> is the reading of the Qur'anic verses, reciting the *hadith* of the Prophet, and preaching by Indonesian Salafi clerics including Ustaz Yazid Abdul Qadir Jawwas, Ustaz Firanda Ardirja, Ustaz Abdul Hakim Abdad, Zaenal Abidin Syamsuddin, Abu Haidar As-Sundawi, etc., as well as recorded preaching from the Salafis Sheikhs from the Middle East. The TV broadcasts no music, no dances, or any forms of entertainment, not even an advertisement. Most of the *ustadz* (clerics) are alumni of LIPIA and/or several universities in Saudi Arabia. The above-mentioned clerics are known among Salafis as those who are close or affiliated with al-Haramain Foundation in Jakarta, which is also viewed as a representation of the London-based al-Muntada Foundation founded by Muhammad bin Surur Zaenal Abidin, usually seen as a Salafi figure who deviates due to his attitude to the government of Saudi Arabia. The name “Surur” then becomes a label designated to man “to deviate” among certain Salafis. Therefore, TV Rodja and a number of Salafi ustadzs above are also often referred to by the Yamani Salafists (the pure Salafis), as *Sururi* or Rodjai groups, an accusation to a group of having been deviated from the true Salafis

<sup>11</sup> <https://Qur'an.radiorodja.com>, accessed April 2016.

<sup>12</sup> Accessible through Palapa D Satellite, Frequency 4057 MHz Symbol Rate: 2727 kSps / kHz Polarity: QUR'AN (Horizontal) Audio PID: 110 PCR PID: 109

methods. Nevertheless, those Indonesian Salafi groups can still be categorized as Purist Salafists in a broader term.<sup>13</sup>

Although there are harsh disagreements among Indonesian Salafis as well as reciprocal blaming (*tahdzir*) regarding Rodja TV, the presence of television has helped spreading the Salafism to reach the communities outside the group in Indonesia *en masse*. Salafist propagation no longer belongs exclusively to the Salafi members but is also accessible to the public of Indonesia both in the city and in the village through satellite TV or internet in addition to previously established radio Rodja covering the Greater Jakarta. The Salafi clerics who support Rodja TV credited the TV station to the widespread of Salafi propagation throughout Indonesia, as a counterattack against the Yamani group. They are proud of their success in their televised propagation despite the harsh disagreement as to whether or not watching TV is permitted among the Salafis, both in Indonesia and in the Middle East.<sup>14</sup> There are many testimonies uploaded on the Salafi websites about Rodja TV's great success in spreading the Salafi mission in Indonesia. The "Karang Mojo" kampung taken as the site of this study did not gain access to Salafis propagation until 2010, and probably none of them knew the word Salafi back then.<sup>15</sup> At that time, Radio Rodja was on the air but the radio waves did not reach the rural area surrounded by the mountains. Only after 2012 or 2013 did some people in the kampung who have satellite dish at home started to know Rodja TV. Interestingly, the villagers' exposure to Rodja TV was not due to any recommendation from the Salafi clerics or members but as a result of browsing of the channels. Then, the information about Rodja TV spread to several other villagers so that the TV broadcast became an important factor for the birth of a new group with a new identity in the community.

The appeal of Salafist propagation on Rodja TV is very strong, due to the certainty and strength of its literal references to the texts in the

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<sup>13</sup> Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 29 (2016), pp. 216-7.

<sup>14</sup> Holdo, Markus. "Post-Islamism... p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> The only term of Salafi they knew was a salaf boarding school, which refers to the traditional religious school focusing on the classical knowledge of Islam (*turas*), usually affiliated with NU. Religious schools affiliated to NU as well as NU members who constitute the Muslim majority in Indonesia is the most strategic target for the theological attacks by all Salafist groups in Indonesia.

Qur'an and Sunnah while providing an important new identity. The identity gives the people a sense of the genuine Islam that is not interfered with polytheistic beliefs and practices, innovation, and Hindu elements contrary to the religious praxis of the general Muslims in the area. Most of the new group leaders have *abangan* background and they previously belonged to the respected group of people due to their service in the public sector as civil servants, teachers, school inspectors, or Golkar party officials. Pak Moko, for example, was previously known as anti-Islam because he was a ruling party official of Soeharto's era. He used to suspect the Islamic activities held in the village as a source of trouble for the government. After he retired, he began to embrace Islam, to learn about mosques and to join Islamic activities. However, his previous prestigious position made it difficult to join the religious community as a beginner. His access to Rodja and his friendship with his fellow villagers who are also Rodja TV viewers have given him a new identity as the one who defends the true Islam. Thus, he became a very aggressive man fighting the traditional practices of Islam that, according to Rodja TV, is reek of innovation, polythesim and Hinduism. He wage the war including during the sermons to the mosque goers who belong to the traditional Muslim practicing the communal rituals he is blaming. Another figure is Pak Jedi, a retired teacher. He was a well-known gambler or cockfighting agent and was very hostile to the Muslim community. But as he was getting older, he quit his bad habits and began to get closer to the mosque and mosque activities, as old people of *abangan* in general would do. His friendship with the Rodjai group then gradually changed his views on the traditional Islamic practices in his village. He finally became an active member of the Rodjai Reading Circle who actively challenges the traditional Islamic practices despite not as violent as Pak Moko.

Similarly, Abu Nida. He is a very important Rodjai figure who used to be an *abangan* with little Muhammadiyah culture in his extended family, whose members also practice the communal Islamic practices as mentioned above. He did not care about religion until he was 55 and, as he got older, his curiosity and his practice of Islam increased, too. He began to learn about Islam actively and joined the Islamic activities when he was approaching 60. Along with the new enthusiasm, he gained an easy way to express and improve his Islamic knowledge by watching religious events on TV, which further brought

him to Rodja TV. The effect of TV broadcasting was so tremendous. While he previously distanced himself to the communal religious practices, his passion to correct the villager's creed and Islamic understanding was overwhelming due to the information he obtained from Rodja TV. He became more aggressive, assertive, and offensive to anyone because of the confidence and credibility he learned from the TV. As he is a multit talented person who engages in various hobbies and economic activities many people regularly come to him and assemble. It is from this "hobby" assembly in his house that the idea of Salafism spread out and finally crystallized into a new recitation group.

### **A Theological Exclusion to the Indonesian Islam**

In 2016, the author was intensely studying what was going on in the area, especially on villagers' access to Radio Rodja. On some occasion of visiting the villagers, the author found out the hosts were watching some religious programs on Rodja TV. What surprised the author was that the villagers looked so proud of having the Rodja TV. "The preacher's remarks are very great", said the host while inviting the author to join. The preacher on TV was discussing the fallacies committed by the Shia people as well as the traditional Indonesian practices of Islam. The author was very surprised at the invitation and comment; because the village was known as a stronghold of traditional Islam. There was an impression from the visit that they wanted to demonstrate a very strong religious argument showing the apostasy of religious practices and "tolerance attitudes" to others taking place in the area. In several other visits, the author joined the villagers watching the televised sermon for quite longer. The host was impressed by the author's attitude that he interpret that the host considered as having provided the villagers with the bare truth. Since then, the author have predicted that there would be unfavorable impacts of Rodja TV in the religious social life in the area.

It turned out that the author's guess was confirmed. From initial conversations with people at the mosque, the author obtained interesting information. Their religious practices that serve as their source of values, togetherness, and expressions of religiosity are under threat from a very aggressive minority. Salafism, to cite Addi, does attempt to proclaim the end of popular religions such as traditional

Islam.<sup>16</sup> The minority in question includes, among others, the one the author visited before. The condemnation, often addressed to the mosque congregation who are mostly low educated include “Is there any Quranic verse stipulating *tahlilan*?”, or “The Prophet never performed *yasinan*!” and that “*Slametan* is a Hindu tradition.”<sup>17</sup> These condemnations have not only delegitimized the villagers' religious praxis but also hurt their feelings. The daily encounter between the villagers and the “Rodjai” (Rodja TV viewers) is inevitably colored with such criticism or warnings to stay away from the baseless practices. Meanwhile, the habits of people in the village are gathering at any time. They gather and tell jokes, they chat or sometimes gossiping, either at home, in the rice fields, on the roadside seating, in the mosque porch, and other places suitable for gathering. Since most of the villagers are farmers, their free time is plenty except during planting or harvesting periods. The lively atmosphere often becomes tense when there is even one Rodjai passing by because the Rodjai are so harsh towards local traditions and have very different views on many things with common villagers. The “New Muslims” group often targets even public spaces such as mosques or other meeting spots.

Kajin, for example, a young traditional Muslim complained, “every time I met the person, he will blame everything. For him, everything is wrong and only him is correct, while everyone knows who he is.”<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, Riyanto, a peddler, added “So what? He curses at everything. He blames anything. Nobody wants to be with him.”<sup>19</sup>

In addition to massive condemnation, theological exclusion is also made by sending out anonymous letters to the mosque congregations belonging to the traditional Muslims. According to some mosque youths, one day they were reciting the *pujian* together in the mosque when they came across an anonymous letter warning them of the danger of doing such a practice. They recalled that the letter was in the form of a bulletin from nowhere. The author could not obtain such a document because the youths had discarded it. In addition to *pujian*, many other religious practices are also exposed to such verbal attacks

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<sup>16</sup> Lohouari Addi, “Islam Re-observed: Sanctity, Salafism, and Islamism,” *The Journal of North African Studies* 14 (2009), pp. 340-1.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with some mosque members, “Karang Mojo”, September 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Interview, September 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Riyanto, September 2016.

that it became an increasingly disturbing psychological terror. At the beginning, the condemnation, warning, cursing, and theological exclusion were carried out randomly, that is, when a casual encounter with people of the group took place. Coincidentally, the Rodjais generally have a higher education and more prestigious jobs than the common villagers do, so they are psychologically more confident.

Later on, those who have been "intoxicated" by Rodja TV carried out separate religious activities to consolidate their version of genuine Islam that is free from polytheism, heresy, and Hinduism. They established a new group (which means that the religious community in that area has split up) but they do not call themselves Salafis nor even realize that their new understanding of Islam has been transmitted through the Wahhabi/Salafi campaign channels. The group does not affiliate with any Salafi groups either, as no Salafi clerics have ever been to the village, no financial aid from the Middle East has reached the place, nor any connections with Salafi networks in Indonesia or the Middle East has ever taken place. The group totally consists of the locals who feel the need to straighten and purify Islam by forming a group of Islamic activities that are exempted from heresy, polytheism, and Hinduism and whose inspiration came from Rodja TV. They think that they are simply enforcing the Islamic practice in accordance with the Qur'an and Hadith and eradicating the heretic practices of Islam in the village. They strongly condemn Islamic practices of "Indonesian Islam" and make them the target for their cause. Eradicating the practices of *tablilan*, *yasinan* and *slametan* is the group's highest ideals, and this is what unites them. They do have an economic relationship, for example, by opening a joint registration of *Haji* and *Umra* Tours as well as other sporadic businesses. Such business cooperation was established after the new group was established for quite a long time. Among the group members, some even established employer-employees relationship. However, the economic dimension does not seem to be important in the group formation because although the businesses do not survive, the Rodjai group remains.

The establishment of the new group (which means the breaking of religious communities in the village) was strongly motivated by a new sense of togetherness due to their new understanding of Islam. The Salafist-style of Islamic understanding is very strong in their minds and is strongly reflected in the statement and recital activities. What stands out most in the village community is the new group's theological

exclusion of the majority of Muslims who carry out the condemned Islamic practices. The group simply call themselves as *majlis taklim*, a rarely used term to a religious congregation in the community. In general, the villagers call such group activities *jamaah* (gatherings), thus, *jamaah yasinan* (gathering to recite Yasin), *jamaah tablilan*, etc. It was the first time the term *majlis taklim* is used in the village. Here, a new identity that is different from the old ones is affirmed, although they do not even call themselves part of the Salafis, PKS or other Islamist group. In fact, most of them are not familiar with such diversity of Islam either. The followers of the new group are mostly from *abangan* families (lacking Islamic religious background) but were secularly-educated and had in their tenure more prestigious jobs as compared to the common villagers, including civil servants, teachers, school inspectors, traders, and the like. Some members came from with Muhammadiyah families and only few from NU background. They also seek to enlarge their group by recruiting members from the neighboring kampongs and villages to show off their group although no religious sermon attended by more than 100 members, except when they tried to invite the Islamist Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, now-detained on terrorism charges. They organize the gathering activities and mobilize funds from members as well as sympathizers from the neighboring villages. They are able to invite outside clerics who are more skillful in quoting verses of the Qur'an and hadith as compared to the local kyai (traditional clerics) in the village. In addition to giving sermon, they also held activities of Qur'anic recitation and so on. The topics of the sermons are diverse but the issue of the eradication of *slametan*, *tablilan*, and other traditional practices they consider heresy remains the core topic of the sermons. "I am determined to completely eradicate all the practices of *tablilan*, *slametan*, and other Hindu traditions in this village," said a group member as heard by the author during a sermon.

The interaction among the community members, which was formerly homogeneous and cool, became very tense between one another. No incident has escalated into physical conflict, but such tension is very disturbing in the daily encounter among the villagers who are mostly still related in kinship of various degrees. A slightly different way of praying, for example, how much both hands should be raised when one starts prayer, could lead to a heated disagreement. Family events were also disturbed because of the disharmony, such community events as communal work to clean the mosque or the

neighborhood are also often colored by awkward situations due to the split. The impacts of the differences among villagers due to Rodja TV programs are deeply and strongly felt in the community.

### Stemming the Tide, Revising the Traditions

How did the “Indonesian Islam” majority in the village respond to such attacks? The reactions varied but generally, they tried to fend off the attacks in any ways they could. Among common villagers, there are various cultural and spontaneous arguments in defense of their religious traditions. “Well, that’s fine! When they die, no *tablilan* nor *slametan* is needed. Let them take care of their own burial, too,” replied Yoto on one of the most violent Rodjai in attacking *tablilan*.<sup>20</sup> “They refuse *slametan*, they condemn *tablilan*, but turned out they *mbadbog* (eat) the *tablilan* food,” said Abid, another young person. The word *mbadbog* is the strongest form in the Javanese speech levels for *to eat*, designated for criminals.<sup>21</sup> That is, the villagers saw a great contradiction in the attitude of the Rodjais: they condemned *tablilan* but they ate the food given on those occasions. Many also reversed the criticism by leveraging the background of the Rodjai members, who were dark in terms of morality or religiosity.

The theological exclusion of the Rodjai was reciprocated by social and cultural exclusion by the villagers, at least in words. In practice, villagers remain attending family occasions held in the Rodjai group members despite the reluctance and lack of familiarity because, for example, villagers are forbidden to perform any religious expressions to pray for the deceased as they would normally do. Cultural arguments are also growing very rapidly among grassroots as well as the community leaders in the village. Such responses are exploited in every casual encounter among villagers at home, in the rice fields, in mosques, in markets or elsewhere whenever no Rodjai people were present, of course. If a member of the Rodjai is present, the exchange is usually mutually sarcastic and goes on become harsh argument if both parties involved have the same low level of education. Meanwhile, there is also resistance among traditional religious leaders. In various gatherings like *tablilan* and *yasinan* and in casual chatting, a short sermon is often inserted. The topic includes fending off the

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<sup>20</sup> Interview with Yoto, September 2016.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Abid, September 2016.



allegations of apostasy by explaining the various propositions taken from the Qur'an and the Prophet's traditions on the suggestion of reciting *zikir*, *wirid* and so on. Although sometimes the accusations and answers are somewhat disconnected, such a short sermon is significant enough for the common villagers whose proud tradition is under attack and, worse, who are on the verge of being excluded from "Islam" by the Rodjai people. But one or two traditional figures also expressed the same rude condemnation attacking the Rodjai. Among the traditional figures' public statements to fend off the attacks includes "So, what is the difference between dead animals and dead humans, as they think no *slametan* nor *tablilan* shall be carried out to the dead?" said Kyai Mustaqim whose statement is quoted at the start of this paper,<sup>22</sup> a remark that is also reproduced frequently by the villagers. To the *tablilan* gathering in which the author was also present, Kyai Mustaqim also delivered a statement as quoted at the beginning of this paper "How come a Muslim could say that when he dies, he prefers having his corpse dragged into the river than hearing people saying a prayer for him through *tablilan*!"

In addition to fending off the attacks in their casual chatting in the mosque or any assembly points where members of the Majlis Taklim Rodjai are not present as well as theological reinforcement from the *kyai* (traditional figures), there was also a tacit shift among the villagers aimed at "reforming" their traditions. They are no longer rigid with tradition but are increasingly supple and humanist. The *tablilan* practices (especially after a villager died and on until seven days afterward), for example, are often condemned by Rodjai as a cruel and oppressive tradition and as a blatant heresy. Their argument goes as follows: The *tablilan* practice is inhumane because the grieving family still has to prepare food and various things for the occasion, making the cost sometimes burdensome for the poor despite the help from the extended family and the neighbors. In response to this criticism, the villagers then slowly loosen up the practices by relieving the burden of the grieving family. The renewal of the tradition is carried out through an agreement, for example, that during the first to the day seventh of *tablilan*, meals should no longer be served while snacks and drinks are allowed, and neighbors have to prepare them on behalf of the grieving family. On several occasion that the author observed, the speaker often

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with K. Mustaqim, September 2016.

confirms the prohibition of serving heavy meals on the grounds of togetherness and humanity reasons. The villagers are also suggested to come directly to the *tablilan* without waiting for an invitation. In other words, the villagers' spontaneity is heavily emphasized. Thus, what is going on today is the continuation of the tradition with small "reforms." On the fortieth day of the remembrance of the dead, however, those who are economically capable are allowed to serve heavy meals to the guests as a form of alms giving. Even the seven-day *tablilan* could sometimes be reduced to a six-day *tablilan* if, for example, the grieving family consists of the deceased children who worked in another city. So, there began a flexibility in keeping up the tradition. Of course, such a change is related to various factors in addition to the responseto Rodjai allegations. For some who think they are economically capable and they want to carry out almsgiving through religious events, however, these changes sometimes put them in jeopardy. On the one hand, they want to give food or food supplies to the guests who are praying for their deceased parent or family member as a form of charity and people are also happy with the alms. On the other hand, it is forbidden for the sake of togetherness. Usually, a way out is taken to accommodate the economically capable family, almsgiving on behalf of the deceased is distributed on another occasion, for example, by hosting an additional event to recite the whole Qur'an in one day that was concluded with the distribution of food supplies to the guests.

Other reforms also occur to the tradition of chanting the *pujian* after the call to prayer in the mosque. In the past, the *pujian* used to be chanted before the congregational prayers and contained various counsels conveyed in beautiful verses in Arabic, Javanese, or both as described above. It could take up to 15 to 20 minutes and sometimes more. At present, the *pujian* chanting is not as much and as long as it used to be. In the village's main mosque, the *pujian* chanting lasts only a minute or two and it was specifically limited to the *Maghrib* (dawn) and *Iya'* (evening) prayers. In addition, the *pujian* was chanted without a loudspeaker. In the smaller mosques, the *pujian* is still chanted through loudspeakers but is carried out more briefly and the Javanese poems about the virtues of the noble values are now rarely heard. The *pujian* were all in Arabic, especially the verses which that clearly refer to the verses in Qur'an and hadith literally. This is a kind of "purification" of the Islamic tradition. Such a purification is actually very detrimental to

the Indonesian characteristics of Islam that accommodates the local cultures. The author has not asked the villagers for the reasons behind the changes in *pujian* chanting. It is still unclear whether this “Reformation” was intentional or not. However, the author speculates that the change is inseparable from the insistent harsh criticism from the Rodjai who claim that such practice is a form of heresy and has no basis in Islam. The *pujian* chanters often experience direct condemnation from the Rodjai group as the *pujian* is chanted through the loudspeakers. The author's impression at the time of site visit was that the atmosphere of before the congregational prayer was less lively and less inspiring, unlike the one when the author was still a kid.

The women of *yasinan* gathering also responded to the new challenge with various activities. Besides inviting some outside *kyai* to speak after the *Yasin* recitation, they also carry out a number of activities such as reading al-Qur'an by inviting teachers who are *hafidboh* (ones who memorized the whole Qur'an), alumni of NU *pesantren*. Such an activity was not done before the Rodjai carry on their attack on the *yasinan* practices. The women's gathering used to have only one activity: reciting *Yasin* on Thursday evenings. After the establishment of the Rodjai group, the women do many activities on purpose to respond to the Rodjai activities. The women's activism seems much stronger and more intense than the men's do. The women also seem very emotional about the new religious developments in their neighborhood and thus, they are more aggressive in responding to the changes. “Oh God, we don't know what would happen when the elderly figures die, whereas the situation is really unfavorable” lamented Ibu Sri, the coordinator of the women *yasinan* gathering, to the author.

With such a perilous situation, the activism by the members of gathering got strengthened. Consolidation also takes place in various lines and has successfully reorganized the Quranic learning center for kids in the village. In the past, the religious learning for the children only took place in the homes of the traditional religious leaders or *kyai* with limited facilities and teaching resources. With a new enthusiasm to defend the future generation, the villagers have successfully constructed a good Quranic Learning Center for Children, formulated the learning curriculum and mobilized the knowledgeable youths and adults to teach children. All of this were the results of the cooperation

among the community members in responding the disturbing spread of the "Salafi" ideas in the neighborhood.

## Conclusion

Although the Wahhabi-Salafi campaign in Indonesia seems to have failed and its institutions and formal followers have not grown rapidly, Salafist religious thoughts have spread through various channels including television. Its reach is not limited to the Muslims in urban areas but also to those living in remote villages. The characteristic of the Salafist groups to launch a theological exclusion to the traditional practices of the Indonesian Muslims and other groups inside and outside Muslim communities has spread far beyond the institutional capacity and movement of its actors. One of the media channeling the Salafist theological thoughts and contributing to the birth of Salafi-minded communities in villages is Rodja TV. The Rodjai, the Salafi-minded group of the Rodja TV viewers, has penetrated the remote parts of the country. The author once revealed the findings of this research to students who came from various regions in Indonesia and those students confirmed the findings by recounting similar trends in their villages or hometowns. One cannot underestimate these trends because problems the Salafists raise in religious and interreligious life are devastating.

The statement that Indonesian Islam is still very strong and resilient in stemming the "virus" of Salafism or Wahhabism is an exaggeration, leading to the unproven myth. Clashes at the grass root level have occurred in many places, not only in urban areas but also in the countryside as illustrated in the case of "Karang Mojo" village, East Java, Indonesia. That is just a small example of the penetration of Wahhabist thoughts into a village and the resulting shocks. Indonesian Islam, which used to be known as moderate and friendly to diversity and plurality, modernity and democracy survives until today to support Indonesia. However, along with the expansion of television and social media access to villages in the midst of democratic public space, Indonesian Islam is under increasingly serious threats in the future. In fact, the main source of information for the villagers is still television; almost no villagers access the internet. The resulting shocks when internet becomes the main source of information for the villagers are likely to be greater. []

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