

One Bloodline, Multiple Religiosities: Malay-speaking Hadramis on Being ‘Moderate-most’ Muslims in Contemporary Indonesia *

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Abstract

Internal contestation within Muslim communities over who embodies the ideal of moderation is often problematic, including among the descendants of the 18th-century Hadrami Arab diaspora in the Archipelago. Through qualitative research focusing on the Hadrami community dynamics in Pontianak, this article reveals divisions and internal conflicts within the community, leading to a contest over who could claim to be the most moderate. The study situates the exceptionalism of Hadrami elites in Pontianak within a "religious field," following Bourdieu's framework, and draws on Rijal's (2024) concept of viewing "*Habā'ib* as symbolic capital" in religious competence, which is reinforced by their exclusive lineage, symbols, and rituals. This pursuit of Hadrami exceptionalism in moderation, in turn, gave rise to a sense of moral obligation referred to as "the Hadrami man's burden." While theological and philosophical debates surrounding religious moderation persist, various perspectives at the vernacular level converge on the idea that being a moderate Muslim represents the virtuous ideal, forming the core of the ideological system through which some elites assert and cultivate their influence and power.

Kontestasi internal dalam komunitas Muslim mengenai siapakah perwujudan Islam moderat yang ideal seringkali menimbulkan masalah, salah satunya di kalangan keturunan diaspora Hadrami abad ke-18 di Nusantara. Melalui penelitian kualitatif yang berfokus pada dinamika komunitas Hadrami di Pontianak, artikel ini mengungkap adanya perpecahan dan konflik internal di dalam komunitas tersebut, yang memicu persaingan tentang siapa yang dapat dianggap paling moderat. Penelitian ini menempatkan keistimewaan elit Hadrami di Pontianak sebagai "medan religius," mengikuti kerangka Bourdieu, dan merujuk pada konsep Rijal (2024) yang melihat "*habā'ib* sebagai modal simbolik" dalam kompetensi agama, yang diperkuat oleh garis keturunan, simbol, dan ritual khusus. Pencarian para elit Hadrami untuk menjadi penggambaran Muslim moderat justru memunculkan beban moral yang disebut "Hadrami man's burden." Meskipun perdebatan teologis dan filosofis terkait moderasi agama terus berlangsung, berbagai pandangan di tingkat lokal justru memunculkan gagasan bahwa visi menjadi Muslim moderat merupakan capaian ideal, yang pada akhirnya justru dijadikan sebagai sistem ideologis yang dimanfaatkan para elit untuk mengokohkan dan menyebarkan pengaruh dan kuasa mereka.

Keywords: exceptionalism; Indonesian Hadrami; internal moderation; Rabithah Alawiyah

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Introduction

The post-presidential election amok in 2019 in Indonesia is inseparable from the protests of charismatic Indonesian Arabs. One may recall the 212 Act led by Habib Rizieq Shihab and the May 22nd Protest in 2019 by Sultan Syarif Melvin Alkadrie. Related to those are *Front Pembela Islam* [Islam Defender Front], an Indonesian-based Islamist group that disbanded in 2020, and Rabithah Alawiyah [Union of the Alawis], the exclusive organization of Bā ‘Alawī members, are two of many organizations led by *ḥabā’ib* whose main agenda is to preserve their doctrines and power, while glorifying the leadership of *ḥabā’ib* politicians in Indonesian politics.

‘Alawiyyin or Bā ‘Alawī is the name of a kinship group whose main doctrine is to maintain the true lineage, knowledge, tradition, and practices of the Prophet through its pious descendant ‘Alawī ibn ‘Ubaydillah of Hadramaut, Yemen from the lineage of Prophet’s daughter Faṭimah al-Zahrāh with his trustworthy nephew and companion, ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. Thus, successors of ‘Alawī are called Bā ‘Alawī or ‘Alawiyyīn [in the literal sense: the kins of ‘Alawī] (Qodmani 2014:31–33; Ṭabari and Watt 1987:18, 142). ‘Alawiyyīn maintain the family name *sayyid*, or *syed* for the descendants from the lineage of Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī and *sharīf*, or *sharīf* for descendants from Ḥasan ibn Alī’s lineage.

Claiming their position as direct descendants of the Prophet, ‘Alawiyyīn are the top strata in the traditional social hierarchy in Hadramaut and addressed with honorifics of *ḥabīb* (sing.) or *ḥabā’ib* (pl.), signifying the ‘beloved of God.’ According to their doctrines, the main features of the sharīfs are their noble and superior leadership, religious knowledge, and their accordance with the Qur’ān and the sunna, as well as with

Shafī’ite school and the Ash’arite theology (al-Layl 2002:589–99; al-Tarīm and ‘Alawī 2002:91–92; Muzammil et al. 2022). *Ḥabā’ib* scholarship infrastructures have attracted attention to the growing discussion of their movements, politics, religious understanding, and leadership.

Most studies on Indonesian Hadrami dealt with their genealogy from the 18th-century great migration from Hadramaut and their global mobilities (Feener 2004; Ho 2006; Jonge 2022; Walker 2021), their construction of religious identity, authority, and institution (Alatas 2007; Feener 2004; Ibrahim and Shouk 2009; Mobini-Kesheh 1999; Slama 2010), and their relation with new media and urban preaching movement (Akmaliah and Nadzir 2021; Amaruli, Sulistiyono, and Yuliati 2022; Hasan 2013; Rijal 2020b; Zamhari 2022). Few research pays specific attention to the diasporic groups’ performative aspects (Alatas 2014; Istiqomah 2020; Sila 2015; Woodward et al. 2012) and the female agency of Sharifa scholars in religious forums (*majlis*) within the public setting of the patriarchal Hadrami community (Husein 2021; Slama 2012).

This article agrees with recent studies that the Hadramis still maintain their group identity and tradition, especially in terms of genealogy, marriage, and religious aspiration. The dealignment in those studies lies in their treatment of the so-called “Hadrami diaspora” as part of one kinship category, which combines all long-and-far-apart descendants into one community while adding recent incoming diaspora to it. Focusing on the dynamics of the Hadrami group in Pontianak, this article shows that: First, the diasporic group did experience division and internal conflict. Second, such dynamics led to the contestation of the state of being moderate Muslim as the virtuous state and the core of the

ideological system by which its elites exercise their influence and power. Third, the contestation of being the moderate-most Bā ‘Alawī figure within the community came with a sense of moral obligation to make other Muslims moderate, echoing the sense of exceptionalism in the notion of “White Man’s Burden” (Kipling 1940:321–23).

Even in the past, differentiating the “Malay” and the “Arab” identity has been challenging. Religion, language, and culture have been more important to a person’s identification within the groups than “ethnicity” or memory. Mobini-Kesheh has remarked that the earliest “Arab” traders and preachers in the Indian Ocean “cannot be identified with certainty as Hadrami.” This claim has encouraged academics to question whether there are historically any “pure-blooded Hadramis” in early modern Muslim networks in Southeast Asia. Feener (2004) suggests that the Arab paternal lineage of *sayyid* or *sharīf* of such highly mobile and polyglot figures has been mixed excessively with that of their mothers hailing from various ethnic groups around the Indian Ocean world. The setting of such a mixture was a carrefour for syncretic experiences in that era, with fluid pluralism, transregional trade routes, and an ethnoreligious melting pot (Feener 2004:363–67; Taufik 2023). In modern times, belonging to some dominant community shaped one’s nativity, ethnicity, and nationality. This notion was largely constructed by European elites and colonial policy, governing the “customary law,” restraining those mixed race and locally-born Hadramis within the sub-categorical label of “foreign orientals,” and limiting their intra- and interregional mobility (Anderson 2016:170).

In the modern East Indies, questions about nationality and ethnicity were common, which resulted in the formulation of genealogical

works like *Silsilah Melayu dan Bugis dan Sakalian Raja-rajanya* [the Lineage of Malays and Buginese, Including their Kings] (Ahmad 1926) and *Tuhfat al-Nāfis* [Precious Gifts] (Ahmad 1982) in 18th-century.

Dutch colonials and some local elites acted as standard-bearers and upholders of cultural purity and homogeneity, chastising *muwallad* and *peranakan* for their broken language, mixed culture, famished, and less educated condition. The local sultans and kings are part of the elite that reproduced and institutionalized their cultural identity while removing the impurities of the mixed race in society. As many sultanates and kingdoms formulated and preserved the homogenous identity, a strange case occurred in the Pontianak. The mixed-race Hadrami descendants, who consisted of tradesmen-cum-pirates, announced the founding of the al-Qadri Sultanate (Alqadrī 1811; Heidhues 1998). Anderson, in his *Imagined Communities*, argued that the *Kesultanan Kadriah* would not maintain the purity of its identity and bloodline through endogamic marriages; hence, soon, the first sultan “lost his ‘Arabness’ if not his Islam, and remained subordinated to the rising Dutch and English empires in Southeast Asia” (Anderson 2016). This claim on the lost memory of Arabness, however, has not been proven true as *Kesultanan Kadriah* has existed for more than a quarter millennium, and its mixed-race identity as a Malay-Hadrami imperial family prevailed for decades after the first publication of Anderson’s book.

After the fall of the Soeharto regime in 1998, Islamic activism in Indonesia intensified and diversified within the liberal atmosphere, challenging the established Muslim organizations such as Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama. The emergence of both Islamist movements and a

variety of militant and peaceful Salafi groups characterized the activism. Some scholars argue that Middle Eastern countries funded and propagated transnational puritanism, contributing to the mainstreaming of the purist understanding of Islam within the plural society of Indonesia. For example, after completing their education in seminaries in the Arabo-Islam world, such as Egypt, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen, Muslims from Pontianak returned home with novel outlooks on Islam that may contradict the nation's long-standing beliefs, customs, and ideology.

Populated with 515,338 Muslims, or 76% of the total population (BPS Kota Pontianak 2022), Pontianak and some other regions in West Borneo are known for their large non-Muslim population from various ethnic and religious groups. As Cholil mentioned, Pontianak is categorized as the most dynamic and diverse in terms of ethnicity, so any dominant ethnic groups do not homogenize the population (Cholil 2016:37–43). Some scholars believe that the collective consciousness of living in harmony there was internalized for some time. The city's foundation in 1771 was related to cultural appropriations and mutual interactions among the citizens, turning Pontianak City into an intersection for groups of diverse religions and cultures (Alqadrie 2005:1–2; Sunarwoto 2019:356–58). However, later studies suggest how *sāda* descendants glorify their past ancestors and perform traditional Islamic rituals to garner sympathy from Muslim society and gain popularity in local politics. The last two General Elections (2019-2024) show increased *sharīf* or *sayyid* politicians elected as local, public leaders and council members (Taufik 2024; Taufik and Rijal 2024).

This study explores internal disputes about what it means to be a "moderate" individual

within the ethical framework of Muslim communities, focusing on the descendants of the Hadrami diaspora in Indonesia. It seeks to understand how these communities construct their own "moderate" ethics, which reflect religious interpretation, adaptability, passion, and political interest. It mainly highlights the divisions and internal conflicts within Hadramis in the sociopolitical setting of Pontianak, a city founded by Hadrami figures, particularly around their claims of being the most moderate between two extremes. This division has given rise to a sense of moral responsibility, which the study terms the "Hadrami man's burden."

In exploring *ḥabā'ib*'s moral calling to lead the Muslim *ummah* [community] in contemporary Indonesia, this study utilizes Bourdieu's concept of the "religious field" (Bourdieu 1991a). He defines a religious field as a given space where different religious apparatuses, whether as individuals or institutions, seek to amass religious capital to secure control over the distribution of spiritual benefits and to assert their authority in wielding legitimate power.

This research locates Hadrami exceptionalism in the religious field. Describing the field, Rijal (2024:13–14) mentions how Indonesian *ḥabā'ib* elites experienced internal rivalry between the traditionalists and Salafis who compete for being 'authentic' and moderate Sunni Islam. Drawing from Bourdieu, Woodward, and Rijal, this study regards *ḥabā'ib* as a symbolic capital of religious competence strengthened by their lineage, symbols, and rituals. Long-term accumulation of those symbolic religious capitals shapes one's legitimacy and authority in religious and social domains (Bourdieu 1991b, 1991a; Rijal 2024; Woodward et al. 2012).

This research focuses on the *ḥabā'ib*'s exceptionalism and religious moderatism in Indonesia. Data was gathered through literature review, fieldwork, and archival research. The fieldwork was conducted in Pontianak between December 2023 and February 2024. Pontianak city, the capital of West Borneo, was deliberately chosen as the research site due to its historical significance—Hadrami traders founded it in the 18th century. This delicate background makes the city an ideal location to explore a religious field closely tied to the *ḥabā'ib*. Varying opinions of Bā 'Alawī members in Pontianak were taken into account through interviews. Among the research informants were the Sultan of Pontianak, former and currently active local council members, preachers, intellectuals, and students.

This study highlights the exceptionalism of Hadrami elites claiming to be moderate leaders and politicians who are superior to other non-Hadramis. These figures perceive it as their moral obligation and burden—rooted in the imagined lineage from the earliest Muslims in the Archipelago and, by extension, the Islamic Prophet—to lead Indonesian Muslim societies. The sense of moral responsibility echoes the “white man’s burden” that emerged during the American-Vietnam War when the white American tropes felt obliged to civilize the Vietnamese and convert them to the righteous path of Christianity. Quite similarly, Hadrami elites’ moral obligation drives their agenda and efforts to correct perceived deviations in everyday life religiosity and guide the Muslim umma. This moral obligation is what the study terms “Hadrami man’s burden.”

Cultivating Authority of Malay-speaking Indonesian Hadramis

For some time, Muslim societies in Indonesia have dramatically elevated *ḥabā'ib* figures as

saints in their territories. The *sayyids* and *sharīfs* of both men and women continue to play the role of '*ulamā'* [Islamic scholars] to the point that some academicians said that Bā 'Alawī roles and influences have become more significant than before (Alkatiri and Karim Hayaze 2022). 'Alawiyīn ulama's movements are visible in *majlis ta'lim* [religious forums], public events, private gatherings, and other ceremonies in contemporary Indonesia. They could assemble many followers since they are faithful to the *tariqa* [spiritual path] Alawiyya and Sunni traditionalist doctrines (Rijal 2020a). Some of *tariqa*'s articulatory labors are *dhikr* ceremony, chanting *tawaṣṣul* [an act of praying on behalf of someone believed to be God's beloved and a saint], participating in *mawlid* [annual commemoration of the Prophet's birthday] event, performing *ziyārah* or spiritual veneration and pilgrimage to the graves of Muslim saints, and reciting *manāqib* [Arabic hagiography] and *burdah* [compilation of prayers]. Furthermore, the Hadrami also join “Rabithah Alawiyah” or Union of the 'Alawiyah to maintain their faith and religious practices.

Rabithah Alawiyah, while founded in Indonesia, acts as a transnational kinship organization for strengthening the solidarity and brotherhood of the Bā 'Alawī group. It focuses on educational and spiritual development, spreading Islamic teachings, and increasing proficiency in Arabic among its members. A *ḥabīb* named ASA, reflecting upon his position as former national secretary of Rabithah Alawiyah, stated that the Bā 'Alawī union becomes a forum for unmarried 'Alawiyīn youth to get to know each other (for marriage), indoctrinating traditions and values of the *jamā'ah* [congregation], building interpersonal connections between its members, and

strengthening the kinship relations to open opportunities for familial marriage (Rabithah Alawiyah 2023). The organization's programs also aim to protect the children of *sāda* families from the danger of modernization and intercultural marriage while establishing education centers and *majlis ta'lim* to teach the ideology and doctrines of the Indonesian 'Alawiyīn.

A commonly adopted social stratification within the Indonesian Hadrami society shares similar features with its traditional classification in the 18th-century Hadramaut. The community classifies its members by their lineage, socio-economic status, educational degree, and ethnicity, which results in four classes: the *sāda*, the *mashāyikh*, the *masākin*, and the *aḥwāl*. Meanwhile, their traditional social stratification consists of four classes merely based on lineage and socio-economic status; the *sāda*, the *mashāyikh*, the *qabā'il* (tradesmen, or mercenaries of the *sayyids* and sultans), and the *masākin* (Ibrahim and Shouk 2009:84). *Sāda* (plural form of *sayyid*) is the highest social class as it combines all family trees of the descendants of the Prophet into a single group. Members of this highest social class preserve the knowledge about the history of their supposed high-rank ancestors through odes, songs, and prayers (al-Layl 2002:589–99; al-Tarīm and 'Alawī 2002:91–92). They also maintain their status by adding an honorary first name of *sayyid* or *sharīf* for Bā 'Alawī for the men and *sayyidah* or *sharīfah* for the women. They also add the name of their sub-clan as a surname, such as Alatas, Almuthahar, Assagaf, Alaydrus, Alkaff, and Alkadrie. Some of their main features, according to Muḥammad 'Alī ibn 'Alawī and Sayyid Yūsuf Jamal al-Layl, are their nobility, leadership, religious knowledge, righteous theology, moderate and fair stance in

Islamic law, and their obedience to Shari'a (Alatas 2016:39).

The second social class is the *mashāyikh*. The term was used in the past to refer to scholars in Ḥadramaut or the scholarly non-*sāda* families that had been acknowledged as the Islamic juristic authorities for centuries. *Mashāyikh*, according to modern Arab scholars, held certain specificities, virtues of a spiritual and intellectual kind, nobility (*sharaf*), and qualities of spiritual authority (*sulṭān al-rūḥiyyāt*) (Sila 2015:21). Ismail Fajrie Alatas (2016) differentiates between *mashāyikh*, *murshid*, and 'ulamā. While the term 'ulamā refers to scholars or holders of 'ilm [knowledge], *mashāyikh*, accordingly, is generally mentioned to refer to the *sheikhs* or juristic authorities who master Islamic theology and law through the means of textual learning. Conversely, *murshid* are those who embodied the sunna and became mentors and practitioners of a tariqa to develop intimacy with the divine spiritually and psychologically before being endowed with *ma'rifat* [gnosis] and transformed into saints or *wālī Allāh* [friends of God] (Alatas 2016:36–40).

SAA (52), a *sharīf* male informant who is a *tariqah* disciple, remarks that learning law and theology is the earliest process of spiritual growth to reach gnosis. He also notes, quoting Qur'an 3: 190-94, that every Muslim could become 'ālim, *murshid*, and *shaikh* when they reflect upon the universe and combine religious knowledge with modern sciences.

The third category is the *masākin*. Not only is this term a socio-economic category for impoverished and underdeveloped individuals and families as its literal meaning suggests (plural form of *miskīn*, which means "poor"), but it also acts as an intellectual and theological category. This category is for Arab Hadramis

who cannot name and prove the family tree and its lineage to the Prophet Muhammad, even when their relatives arguably have a direct and strong bloodline. *Masākin* also has no competence in religious knowledge, particularly in Islamic law and Sunni theology. One of the *sāda* informants states that *sayyid* and *sharīf*, who inherit a “deviant” theology such as Shi’a, Wahhabiyah, and Ahmadiyah will lose their noble kin status and be demoted into a *masākin*. Sheikhs and murshids [a spiritual guide in Sufi *tarīqa*] who practice articulatory labors that violate Shari’a are also demoted to this third category instead of the first two social classes (Alatas 2016:134–36). Though the term itself is rarely used among the ‘Alawiyyīn members in Pontianak, this re-interpretation of social classes illustrates how some Indonesian Bā ‘Alawīs maintain traditional Sunni doctrines and resist other Islamic faiths and the hardline groups.

These four social classes are visible within the Muslim society in Pontianak. Royal members of *Kesultanan Kadriah* maintain their honorary name of *sharīf* or *sharīfah* and their al-Qadrī or Alkadrie surnames. The sultanate performs articulatory labors in everyday life following sunna and commemorates their stranger-king ancestors. In our interview, STT, a charismatic Alkadrie figure and former senate member in the 1990s, claims that he and his relatives are the moderates as they want to balance the hardline group of Rabithah Alawiyah with the non-*sayyid* Muslim citizens of Pontianak. He also pinpoints the resistance of members of the Malay-speaking Hadrami sultanate to be warmhearted and more friendly toward other Malay Muslims, be they from the lower (*masākin*) or higher (*mashāyikh*) socio-economic and educational levels.

Challenging the dichotomist social class between *sāda* and *aḥwāl*, STT encourages his relatives to be proactive members of Majelis Adat Budaya Melayu [MABM—the council of Malay customary culture] while remaining a member of Rabithah Alawiyah. STT argues that the Alkadrie kinship community, of the descendants of Prophet Muhammad and the founding fathers of Pontianak, is burdened with a purpose to become leading “protectors of the religion” [*pemeliharaan agama*] and “the culture bearers” [*pemangku adat*]. Thus, the Alkadrie kin identity is conceived as an exclusive identity distinct from the Malays and the Indonesian Arabs. In this sense, ethnic exceptionalism among Alkadrie people is based on the monopolization of symbolic capital as descendants of the Prophet and the bearers of their ancestor’s culture, which, following Bourdieu, is structurally super-imposed on the instruments of religious competence and accumulated symbolic labor (Bourdieu 1991a).

Grassroots Understanding of Religious Moderation

Ever since its formative period, Muslims have never singularly understood and interpreted the notion of *ummatan wasaṭan* (QS. 2: 143) and the state of being the moderate-most from all people [*awsaṭuhum*] (QS. 68:28). While there are certainly theological, ethical, and socio-political disputes over the characteristics, there is a consensus at the vernacular level that being a ‘moderate Muslim’ is simply virtuous.

Unlike other Muslim-majority countries with certain ideologies in their foreign policy, Indonesia has integrated religious moderation as its official religious stance and national strategic development project for a decade since 2014, aiming to foster moderate religious

practices in Indonesia. Through the Ministry of Religion (MoRA), the Indonesian government launched the "Strengthening Religious Moderation" Program in 2021 as part of the national development plan (Cabinet Secretary of the Republic of Indonesia 2020; Pokja Moderasi Beragama 2021). Indonesia MoRA aims ambitiously to propagate moderatism across all segments of society with a substantial budget allocation of Rp. 3.2 trillion in 2021, encompassing Muslims and adherents of five other nationally recognized religions (SF 2022). The main objectives of this ideological national project are to facilitate interfaith interaction, promote mutual awareness and understanding of all five acknowledged religions' distinctive features, mitigate "left and right" extremism, and prevent religiously motivated conflicts (Tim Peneliti Balitbang Agama RI 2018). Therefore, when discussing the discourse of "religious moderation" in the Indonesian context, it will naturally refer to the particular religion-based national development project of religious moderation [moderasi beragama] installed by MoRA under the Jokowi regime, whose literal definition is described in the following.

The essence of religious moderation is to find an intersection between two religious extremes. On the one hand, there are extreme religious adherents who believe in the absolute truth of one interpretation of religious texts, deeming other interpretations heretical. This group is commonly called ultra-conservatives. On the other hand, some religious believers are extreme in deifying their reasoning to the point of ignoring the sanctity of religion or sacrificing their religious beliefs for the instance of out-of-place tolerance to other adherents. Those are mostly called extreme liberals. Both need to be moderated. Thus, to set *Moderasi Beragama* as a

solution [against the ultra-conservative and ultra-liberal groups], one must truly understand that concept (Tim Peneliti Balitbang Agama RI 2018:7–8).

Sunarwoto (2019) mentions that religious organizations such as FPI had a program to "eradicate immorality" [*memberantas kemaksiatan*] carried out in two stages, from giving warnings to *jama'ah* who violate social norms to taking coercive measures toward those considered the embodiments of immorality (Sunarwoto 2019:351–59). Reflecting on the destruction of an Ahmadi Muslim mosque back in 2021 in Sintang (BBC News Indonesia 2021) and the arson of an ex-Gafatar house in Mempawah in 2016 (Almakin 2016), the violent history in West Borneo illustrates the failure of the state-funded program of "*penguatan moderasi beragama*" [the strengthening of religious moderation] by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Indonesia (Cabinet Secretary of Republic of Indonesia 2020; Pokja *Moderasi Beragama* 2021). In short, religious communities in West Borneo have yet to provide a safe space for small religious movements like Gafatar and Ahmadiyah.

Furthermore, their religious practices and beliefs grew more traditional and intolerant of Indonesia's multiethnic and multireligious social structure, resulting in the predominating Arab tradition, literature, and lifestyle throughout Pontianak. For instance, massive demonstrations were held in mid-2017 in Pontianak under the banner of 'Ulama Defense Action' (*Aksi Bela Ulama*) during the 'Dayak Culture Week,' carrying the same spirit as The 212 'Islam Defense Action,' the largest mass Muslim mobilization in Indonesia's contemporary history (Ahyar and Alfitri 2019). Such a phenomenon also encourages some *ḥabā'ib* to

lead the anti-Shi'a movement, but it reaches few followers. Rijal (2024) remarks that the anti-Shi'a movements, in contrast to other movements opposing minority Muslim groups, are not supported by the *sāda* community as the Sunni *sayyids* and Shi'i *sayyids* are gathered under the kin relations of Rabithah Alawiyah. Nonetheless, the union never formally declared its stance on the Shi'i movement in Indonesia (see also Abidin et al. 2020). The Shi'i *sayyids* also gather support from the former leaders of NU and Muhammadiyah and some Sunni scholars such as Quraish Shihab, Ahmad Syafii Maarif, and Said Aqil Siradj (Rijal 2024:33, 53).

Responding to the violent history between groups and clans, the central government established Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama or FKUB [forum for religious harmony] to maintain peace between groups and reduce risks of communal violence. Nonetheless, FKUB is considered weak, ineffective, and even failed in mediating, moderating, and solving problems concerning inter-religious dynamics and the building of worship houses for minority groups. Cholil (2016) argues that the failure of FKUB is due to its dependence on the government, mainly MoRA (Cholil 2016:61). Meanwhile, Sunarwoto (2019) states that FKUB's inclusive stance and multicultural values oppose the stream of Islamist ideology on digital media, which carries the idea that Muslims should not celebrate the New Year event, join congregations of other religious groups, and visit other non-Muslim praying houses (Sunarwoto 2019:349–59). The incoming new actors in the religious and socio-political arena in Pontianak has shifted the monolithic perspective of moderatism, multiculturalism, and nationalism and opened new discussions and interpretations, particularly among Hadrami descendants and ahwal [non-Alawī] citizens who graduated from the Islamic seminaries.

Sheikhs, culturists, scholars, and region representatives have become fragmented in authority, contesting power and influence. Rather than collectively establishing an open dialog space to unite the diversity, their attitudes towards minority groups appear harsh under the pretext of defending the teachings of "true" and "moderate" Islam, which is attached to the identity of Sunni Islam followed by the Muslim majority in Indonesia (Pektas 2021; Rijal 2024: 42). One of the biggest challenges in producing a bottom-up religious discourse is the absence of culturally-minded educational institutions.

Taufik proposes a grassroots understanding of moderation based on local values and norms of the Muslim societies in West Borneo. Based on his digital ethnographic research of 8,626 users within the 100 km radius of Pontianak City and their 15,654 captions on Twitter in October 2022, he pinpointed the phenomenon of de-authorization of traditional leaders. The findings also revealed the emergence of new authorities that have been changing people's understanding of religious moderation, inhibiting the growth of a nuanced sense of moderatism in the plural society of Pontianak (Taufik 2023:84–87). Nonetheless, the findings of the digital content did not identify the resurgence of traditional authorities in Pontianak's social and virtual world that exercise their socio-political power through majlis, religious events, and cultural festivals while collaborating with the local government and mass organizations.

The Hadrami Men's Burden: Being Moderate 'Self' and Moderating 'Others'

Previous discussions illustrate how the Hadrami community experiences internal division and conflict, particularly in Pontianak.

Its virtuous state of balancing Shari'a and tradition at the grassroots level transforms into an ideological system by which some Hadrami scholars and elites exercise their influence. In the case of exogamic marriage, there is a tradition of marrying the *sharīf* male and *sharīfah* women under the doctrine of *kafā'at* and an unspoken agreement among the 'Alawiyyin community in Pontianak not to attend a ceremony of inter-ethnic and inter-class marriage. According to my interview with ASA, the practice of not participating in the cultural feast of exogamic marriage is obligatory. He even regularly reminds the Bā 'Alawī community of the importance of adhering to this custom. He further explains that the absence of *sāda* members in those ceremonies shows their stance against exogamy. Furthermore, this resistance to exogamy within the patrilineal society is genderless, whether it is a *sharīfah* marrying a non-*sāda*, as their future children would not carry the bloodline of the Prophet and become part of the Bā 'Alawī group or a *sharīf* marrying a non-*sharīfah* even though their descendants will carry the Bā 'Alawī lineage. An Alkadrie preacher, UA (50), displayed his position in our interview by encouraging all Bā 'Alawī members not to attend an exogamic marriage ceremony. He remarks:

"Please tell all *sharīfs* in Pontianak. If there is a *sharīf* marrying an *ahwal* woman, we [members of the Bā 'Alawī community] will collectively not attend the ceremony because any *sharīf* who marries an *ahwal* is classified as a traitor."

That kind of power and control might have implications for non-'Alawiyyin spouses of the *sharīfah* women and their mixed children as they may experience discrimination, exclusion, and even psychological violence since the Bā 'Alawī lineage is considered higher in social

class than that of *ahwāl* or other ethnicities. Religious gatherings and cultural feasts also internalize the *kafā'at* doctrine, such as in *majlis ta'lim* when the *sheikh* gives a public lecture to the *jama'ah*, majelis burdah when people recite *qaṣīdat al-burdah* "ode of the mantle," and *majlis mawlid* when the people celebrate the birthday of previous Hadrami saints. Such internalization processes in public and private events are essential to maintain and strengthen the doctrine of *tariqah 'Alawiyyah* daily while strengthening their role as the exceptional and moderate-most (*awsāt*) individuals.

Such attitude differs between Rabithah Alawiyah Pontianak members and those of the *Kesultanan Kadriah* royal family. Even though they share the same lineage and tell stories of the same pious ancestors, members of Rabithah Alawiyah hold a grudge against the sultanate royales, as the latter tend to ignore the tradition of endogamy and identity maintenance. Contrarily speaking, some couples of the Alkadrie sub-family argue that they are becoming moderates as they open themselves to socializing with people of other ethnicities and familiarizing themselves with others' religions, cultures, and customs. Being warm-hearted and inclusive of diversity might help with historical consciousness as the Alkadrie members could recall the story that many of their ancestors are half-blooded, especially those of the founding fathers of Pontianak and the sultans of *Kesultanan Kadriah*. In this sense, an Alkadrie professor of sociology, *Sharīf Ibrahim Alqadrie* deconstructs the concept of nativity in the Pontianak context by proposing the term *putra daerah* [children of the region]. He defines *putra daerah* as those of any ethnicity residing in Pontianak for one generation or no less than 25 years (Alqadrie 1998). Following this definition, any kin mem-

bers that are classified as *putra daerah* could become leaders, be them Dayaknese, Javanese, Chinese, Malay, Buginese, or Maduranese, and are not limited to the Bā 'Alawī or Alkadrie kinship. Even though the definition gained more popularity in the late 1990s, its practice is much older as many local leaders and representative members of the Pontianak community and other cities in West Borneo are ethnically and religiously plural.

Following the death of Sultan Hamid II in 1978, *Kesultanan Kadriah* had an interregnum period for 25 years until the inauguration of Syarif Abubakar Alqadrie as the eighth sultan in early 2004. Even during the time of absence of power, several cultural and socio-political activities of sultanate family members are present with the activism of *pemangku adat* consisting of Alkadrie culturists and leaders. At that time, holders of knowledge of the sultanate's cultural specificities participated in the annual gatherings of Nusantara in sultanates and kingdoms. At the same time, the charismatic leaders of the community joined the Golongan Karya party in the 1990s as senate representatives (see also Hadiz 2010:159–60). It is also significant that Alkadrie people, when assessing their material and social position, take into account whether their children continue their education beyond elementary school and above until they can hold an academic degree and gain more social status. If so, not only is the degree a solid proof of their prosperity and capital stability (Schouten 1998:247–49), but it also shows their exceptional status as the 'true' *putra daerah* and descendants of saints. Recalling his experience as the two-term representative member of West Borneo in the 1990s, STT explains his 'moderate' position as a bureaucrat in the following:

"One thing is that during my two terms, if you sit there, your *bingke* [traditional Malay cake] becomes the constituent of all [and not only for Malays]. My wallet is open as I can come along with PPP [*Partai Persatuan Pembangunan*], PDI [*Partai Demokrasi Indonesia*], and Masyumi [*Partai Majelis Syuro Muslimin Indonesia*]. But it turns out that all of those representatives turned out to be self-segregating when they entered the council."

The statement implies STT's personal experience and observation of political representation, moral responsibility, and inclusivity in leadership. He begins by illustrating his authority in the council house with a metaphor of *bingke*, a hexagonal flower-shaped sweet cake of the Alkadrie Malays, before stating that he must divide this *bingke* among all citizens of West Borneo. By this reference, he suggests a theme of inclusivity by positioning himself as the bridge between cultural and religious divisions instead of becoming a sole *pengampu adat*. Malay society loves adopting metaphorical expressions as their culture of communicating ideas in local symbols, myths, and images instead of expressing their thoughts directly (Vengadasamy 2011:101).

STT also mentions his possession of an 'open wallet', which signifies his willingness to contribute material resources for the greater good and highlights a sense of philanthropy and mutual collaboration. His 'open wallet' metaphor also refers to his political stance in representing variant social, ideological, or religious communities and his openness to opposing political parties, such as PPP-PDI-Masyumi, which are pan-Islamic, secular nationalist, and far-rightwing Islamic parties, respectively (Formichi 2012; Madinier and Desmond 2015).

STT's political stance is unique, especially considering that Sultan Hamid II was the creator of Garuda Pancasila and that Pancasila ideology became central to the Soeharto regime (Liddle 1985; Weatherbee 1985). This ideology, following Bourdieu, establishes STT's personal "qualification" as a moderately religious politician who reinforces symbolic capitals to legitimate "all the characteristic properties of one way of life ... as it occupies a determined position in the social structure" (Bourdieu 1991a:15).

Following the 'moderate' stance of STT in practical politics, some contemporary *sharif* politicians also show bureaucratic attitudes toward other communities by posting greetings of religious holidays on social media (see Figure 1).

Those virtual greetings illustrate the politicians' gesture that may have socio-political and theological repercussions, depending on the

prevailing inter-group sentiments in Pontianak. Some cultural groups and institutions, such as MABM and *Kesultanan Kadriah*, might see it as a positive initiative toward fostering religious harmony. In the broader ethical context, such inter-religious greetings embody local values and stances, such as anti-radicalism, anti-exclusivism, and anti-partisanism. However, several Sunni traditionalist scholars may be against it, considering that it could be understood as diluting traditional values and ignoring debates within Islamic law on greetings to non-Muslim holidays.

The contest of being moderate-most *ḥabā'ib* Muslims leads to a sense of moral obligation to make 'others' moderate. That sense of exceptionalism echoes the imperialist interpretation of "the white men's burden" during the America-Vietnam War. Hence, the authors promote a similar term in this context called "the Hadrami men's burden" to highlight

Figure 1
Two Syarif Politicians of Pontianak wish a Happy Easter, Christmas, and New Year.



Sources: Syarif Amin Muhammad (@syarifamin.official: 2021) and Syarif Abdullah Alkadrie (@SyAbdullahAlkadrie: 2023)

their sense of exceptionalism. Wishing for a happy new year, Christmas, and Easter Day to other religious communities implies their ‘moderate’ stance can burden and challenge Hadrami societies. This complexity is illustrated by Syarif Abdullah Alkadrie’s caption on a social media post: "Happy Easter to those who celebrate it." The text suggests Syarif Abdullah expresses goodwill toward those celebrating Easter Day without including himself, as he does not personally observe the holiday.

The moderate-religious branding of *sharif* politicians could also be associated with ethnic politics in the context of West Borneo. Ethnic politics is highly complex and divergent since maps of regional ethnicity are oversaturated. Hence, individual identities can be manifold and hybrid (Miichi 2014), especially where exogamic practices and transnational migrations are common. In Pontianak and many other local elections, legislative candidates exploit *putra daerah* sentiment, express their appreciation of local culture (*adat*), and emphasize Islamic symbols and narratives to

assert local identities and receive more sympathy from people (Taufik 2024; Taufik and Rijal 2024). In the 2024 General Election, the ‘native’ Pontianak sentiment is emphasized, and religious identity is challenged by not only the contestant who upholds a traditionalist-puritan political stance but also those of the pluralist-bureaucrat one.

Consequently, the politicization and mobilization of religiosity and *putra daerah* sentiment are marked as ‘soft’ non-violent politics. In the context of the local election in Pontianak, among all candidates that constitute their identity and religious ethnonationalism (Ichwan, Salim, and Srimulyani 2020), the face of the recent sultan of *Kesultanan Kadriah* was found, i.e., Sultan Syarif Mahmud Melvin Alkadrie. He ran and championed the political position as a senate member of *Dewan Perwakilan Daerah* [DPD - regional representative council] position while emphasizing the imperial outlook of a Malay-Hadrami King in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Syarif Melvin, the ninth Sultan, participated in the 2024 General Election, using the title “Sultan Pontianak IX” (left). Sporting traditional Malay attire with certain significant colors, the Sultan took a group photo with Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono, the president of Partai Demokrat, a nationalist party.



Source: Syarif Melvin (@sultanmelvin9: 2023) and Partai Demokrat (2023)

The Sultan brings the slogan of upholding justice and fighting despotism, echoing with a fragment of Qur'anic verse: *jā'a al-ḥaqqu wa zahaqa al-bāṭil* [truth has arrived, and falsehood perished] (Ali 1938: al-Isrā' [17]: 81). Considering the Sultan's emphasis on moderation as Bā 'Alawī and *putra daerah* with his vision to uphold fairness and appreciate tradition (compare with Prasojo 2023). His candidacy as the representative in West Borneo intensifies the religious and ethnonationalism politics in the local and regional political arena.

Conclusion

The cultural space of Pontianak serves as a Hadrami-led religiouscape, offering insight into the cultivation of the 'Alawiyyīn community in Indonesia. This study reveals how Bā 'Alawī society faces divisions and authority fragmentation internally, which leads to contestations for power and influence. What was once a virtuous balance between Shari'a and tradition at the grassroots level has evolved into an ideological framework, which some Hadrami scholars and elites use to assert their influence. Rather than fostering an open dialog to embrace diversity, some Hadrami elites take a harsher stance towards minority groups, claiming to defend 'true' and 'moderate' Islam. In this context, 'true' and 'moderate' often refer to Sunni Islam, the dominant faith practiced by the Muslim majority in Indonesia.

The findings suggest that the so-called Hadrami ethnic group cannot be classified as a homogenous society. Instead, it encompasses a blend of long-separated interpretations, customs, and practices of Shari'a. Through the voices of the Hadrami descendants in modern-day Indonesia, particularly in the Hadrami-

pioneered city of Pontianak, the research demonstrates how the *sāda* elites exhibit diverse perspectives on the Hadrami leadership and exceptionalism despite sharing the same genealogical roots.

Claiming their identity as descendants of the Prophet, Hadrami preachers and political elites are driven by a significant moral obligation and burden: to embody the most moderate expression of Islam in both religious and social contexts. They also feel a responsibility to maintain a moderate state within other groups, particularly in terms of religious, cultural, political, and socio-economic aspirations.

It should be noted that this research is limited to examining the storied identity and exceptionalism of the Hadrami descendants in the local politics of Pontianak City. Future research on this community, and the broader Hadrami trans-regional communities in the Indian Ocean network, could explore how its members navigate the intersection of their current homeland and the ancestral origin land and how they bridge these multi-nodal and trans-local cosmopolises through exceptionalist narratives.[]

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