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Salafi Violence and Sufi Tolerance? Rethinking Conventional Wisdom

by Mark Woodward, Muhammad Sani Umar, Inayah Rohmaniyah, and Mariani Yahya

Abstract

It is often assumed that there is a strong correlation, if not a causal relationship between varieties of Muslim thought and violent tendencies. Salafism is often associated with intolerance and violence and Sufism with tolerance and nonviolence. In this article we demonstrate that these assumptions are baseless. Based on analysis of historical and contemporary cases from Southeast Asia and West Africa, we show that there is no significant correlation between theology and violent tendencies. Some violent groups are Sufi and others Salafi, while some non-violent groups are Salafi, others Sufi. Policy makers are therefore ill-advised to use theological orientation as a factor in assessing the violent potential of Muslim movements and organisations.

Keywords: *Sufism, Salafism, violence, West Africa, Southeast Asia*

Introduction

In policy oriented and (to a lesser extent) academic literature on political Islam there is a pervasive assumption that *Salafism*, especially its *Wahhabi* variant, is tied to violent extremism and that *Sufism* (Muslim mysticism) is inherently tolerant and peaceful. These assumptions are virtually axiomatic and rarely subject to serious scrutiny. The academic literature on Sufism tends to focus on classical texts by Rabi'a al-Adawiyya (713-801), Muhyi'l-Din ibn'l-Arabi (1165-1240), Jalaluddin al-Rumi (1207-1273) and other gnostic Sufis whose major themes were the love of God, the quest for union with the divine and the equivalence of all religions. [1] This orientation is mirrored in the anthropological literature that champions popular *Sufism* for acceptance of local cultures and the role of peaceful *Sufi shechs* and merchants in the spread of Islam. [2] Carl Ernst observes that there has been a tendency for western scholars to view *Sufism* as a peaceful alternative to an inherently violent orthodox Islam since the early nineteenth century. [3] *Salafis* are typically depicted as exclusivist, intolerant of local cultures and other religions and, particularly in the post-9/11 literature, as being the embodiment of inherently violent Islam, and are associated with "conversion by the sword." [4] Ibn Saud's 18th century wars of conquest and Rumi's 13th century verses about churches, mosques and synagogues as houses of God have become archetypes in contemporary Western discourse about *Salafis* and *Sufis*.

These views are perhaps most clearly articulated in the writings of Ed Husain and Stephen Schwartz and others located on the cusp of scholarship and advocacy journalism. Even though they are highly polemical, their works are important because they are more widely read, and

arguably have greater influence on the policy community, than those of more objective academic authors.

Schwartz has written that: "Sufis seek mutual civility, interaction, a cooperation between every human being." He describes Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792), the founder of the *Salafi* sect that carries his name, as "a simpleton from the wilderness," whose teachings inspired: "Al-Qaida on September 11, 2001, as well as in Iraq and everywhere else the terrorist conspiracy sheds blood." He characterizes al-Wahhab's principal theological work, *Kitab Tawhid* (The Book of the Unity of God), as: "a handbook for the interrogation and punishment of 'thoughtcrime.'" [5]

Husain states that: "Almost all *Salafis* believe and constantly remind each other of the need to be loyal only to Muslims, and to hate, be suspicious of, not work in alliance with, and ensure only minimal/necessary interaction with non-Muslims. This attitude is underpinned by the *Salafi* creedal belief in *al-wala wa al-bara*, broadly translated as fidelity to Muslims and hatred for non-Muslims." [6] Madawi al-Rasheed [7] and Quintan Wiktorowicz [8] are more nuanced but retain the view that *Salafism* is inherently intolerant, makes pervasive use of demonisation and other forms of symbolic violence, and the ideology if not practice of *jihād*. Wiktorowicz, for example, distinguishes between reformist and *jihadi Salafis* but maintains that reformist refrain from violence only because the Muslim community is not yet ready for *jihād*.

In this article we make two basic points about the violent *Salafi*/peaceful *Sufi* dichotomy: 1. It is factually incorrect. 2. Theological orientation cannot be used as a predictor of either violent or nonviolent behaviour. Broadly defined theological orientations including *Salafism* and *Sufism* are not prime movers or causal factors leading to either acceptance or rejection of violence against religious others as a political strategy. They can, however, be used to legitimate *a priori* dispositions towards both. In the case of violent movements many theologies become tools for the demonisation of designated enemy others. The very same theologies can be used to promote tolerance, and even acceptance of religious diversity.

The analysis presented here relies on ethnographic, historical and survey data and methods for modeling Muslim social movements developed at the Centre for the Study of Religion and Conflict at Arizona State University based on objective criteria that do not reference the theological issues central to debates between *Salafis* and *Sufis*. [9] We draw on examples of violent and nonviolent *Sufi* and *Salafi* movements in Southeast Asia and West Africa we have observed since 2008 and on historical cases from both regions dating to the 17th century. These regions are significant because they are home to some of the world's largest Muslim populations, and strategically important because of concerted efforts by the Saudi state, Saudi-sponsored non-governmental organisations and private donors to spread *Salafi* teachings. Violence is taken as a dependent variable and we made no *a priori* assumptions concerning independent variables. In this paper we report on negative findings. Theological factors, including the difference between *Sufism* and *Salafism* are not associated with violence or non-violence. Our findings parallel those of the US government sponsored Political Instability

Taskforce, according to which religious differences are not statistically significant factors in models forecasting internal conflicts such as civil wars and rebellions.[10]

Our analysis is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in both regions and is framed by works of other scholars concerned with the history of Islam in these areas and the Middle East. Comparative ethnographic research was guided by cross-regional consultation and the use of common research protocols. In this paper we examine ways in which Muslims of both theological orientations alternatively reject and embrace violence relying on a combination of ethnographic and historical data.

Salafism and Sufism in Islamic Thought and History

The distinction between *Salafism* and *Sufism* is one of the most basic in Sunni Islam. Both affirm the Quranic teaching of the Unity of God (monotheism) and take for granted the view that Islam is submission to God. They understand these teachings very differently. *Salafism* is behaviourally oriented. For *Salafis*, Islam is primarily the performance of rituals defined by *Shari'ah* as obligatory or recommended, and the regulation of social behaviour. Many, though not all, *Sufis* share these concerns but are also concerned with cultivation of spiritual states and the development of an experiential relationship with God. Many, though not all, *Sufis* approach God through the intercession of religious leaders and saints. *Salafis* maintain that nothing should stand between people and God. These differences are rarely reconcilable. Both *Sufism* and *Salafism* are diverse traditions with deep roots in Islamic scripture and history.[11]

Varieties of Sufism

Sufism is what Anne Marie Schimmel called “the mystical dimension of Islam.” [12] It is grounded in individual experience of, and self-identification with, God. The Sufi quest is often described as a journey (*sair illallah*) beginning with withdrawal from the world and reflection on religious and social truths. Reflection leads to meditation (*muraqaba*) cultivating such virtues as repentance, morality, and trust in God. When the cultivation of one virtue is complete, the traveller receives signs urging her/him to move on to another. The final destination is the state of *al-fana* (annihilation): overcoming the ego, erasing will and volition and emptying the self so that it can be filled with God’s vision, love and will. This leads to bliss, a sense of being one with God and the cosmos, appreciation of the meanings of life and Islam, heightened ethical consciousness and patterns of social relations rooted in it. Sufism can assume a myriad of ethical, philosophical and institutional forms.

Ethical Sufism is based on the concept of *ihsan* (goodness). *Husn*, the root from which *ihsan* is derived, refers to positive qualities in general. God is *al-Muhsin*, the doer of *Ihsan*. The *Qur'an* also connects *ihsan* to everything praiseworthy, including sincerity, trust in God, worship, love and good deeds.[13] Ethical *Sufism* dates to the first centuries of the Islamic era. It began as a moral protest against political triumphalism, rigid legalism and ritualistic piety in

the early periods of Islamic history. Its most basic themes are renunciation of individual will and everything other than God. It took several distinctive forms. Hasan al-Basri (642-728) stressed abandoning concern with the material world; Rabi'a al-Adawiyya (713-801) is renowned for her all-consuming love of God and efforts to aid the poor despite her own poverty; Al-Harith ibn Asad Al-Muhasabi (781-857), developed strategies for introspection and the cultivation of virtue. Abu Hamid al-Ghazali wove these themes together in his *Alchemy of Happiness*, considered by many to be the classical formulation of ethical Sufism. [14] An overarching theme is that love of God should come before desire of worldly and otherworldly rewards.

Ethical Sufism is basically apolitical, though it often leads to protests against manifest injustice. The writings of the early Ethical *Sufis*, especially those of al-Ghazali are read and admired throughout the Muslim world. Even *Wahhabis* who are unrelenting in their opposition to philosophical and institutional Sufism, are drawn to these ethical teachings.[15]

Philosophical Sufism focuses on attaining insight into spiritual meanings of Islam, the metaphysical foundations of existence and relationships between creator and created. It teaches that there is only one reality of which everything else is an expression. This Absolute Being is often called *al-Haqq* (The Truth). It is undivided, eternal, and unknowable by ordinary means. It manifests itself in creation through which it *is* known; hence it is manifest in and hidden from creation. The Sufi journey leads to realisation of this truth.

Sufi thinkers express their insights into these questions in quite different ways. Four of the most influential are Muhyi'l-Din ibn al-Arabi (1165-1240), known for his complex, esoteric formulations of *Sufi* teachings; Jalaluddin al-Rumi (1207-1273), widely acknowledged as the greatest of the *Sufi* poets; Khawaja Muhammad Hafez-e Shirazi (1325-1390), a Persian poet whose works are widely known throughout Asia as well as his native Iran; and Mansur al-Hallaj (858-922), known for bold, seemingly heretical statements concerning relationships between humanity and divinity and disregard for rituals including the five daily prayers required by the *Shari'ah*. While they differ in detail, these *Sufi* luminaries share a unitarian conception of reality and the view that the mystical path culminates in union with the divine.[16]

Ibn al-Arabi wrote at least four hundred books in which he formulated complex mystical-doctrinal systems. He claimed they were divinely inspired and Prophet Muhammad had dictated some of them to him. Ibn al-Arabi's most basic contribution to *Sufism* was the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud* (Unity of Being). According to Ibn al-Arabi, creation is the self-manifestation of the Truth, and the cosmos is a mirror image of the Creator. Divinity and humanity are only superficially distinct. The divine is the inward aspect, while the human form is the outward aspect of the Truth. Humans are microcosms of the whole of creation. An individual attaining the highest level of mystical consciousness becomes *al-insan al-kamil*, the Perfect Human and the fullest manifestation of Divine Reality. One of the implications of *wahdat al-wujud* is that ultimately nothing is real except the Divine. This is a Philosophical *Sufi* interpretation of *tauhid*. [17]

While Ibn al-Arabi relied on scholastic logic, Rumi relied on poetic and narrative forms and appealed to emotion. Rumi combined the doctrine of the unity of being with an emphasis on divine love that unites the created with creator, often referred to as lover and beloved. For Rumi, duality and division are illusions. It follows that sectarian differences, even those between Muslims and “unbelievers” are at once illusionary and an unfolding of Divine Truth. Hence his statement that the person of God is “beyond infidelity and religion.” [18] Rumi also describes those traversing the mystical path as being without religion or ethnicity, in a shared quest for, and love of the One. Rumi’s popularity in Europe and North America is among the factors contributing to the belief that *Sufism* is inherently peaceful and tolerant.

Ibn al-Arabi, Rumi and most other philosophical *Sufis* offered only muted critiques of orthodox piety. Al-Hallaj, on the other hand, offered vocal, public critiques of outward piety. Like other *Sufis*, he distinguished between the outward form (*zahir*) of Islam associated with the *Shar’iah* and the internal essence (*batin*), associated with *Sufism*. His lack of concern with externality led him to flagrant violation of *Shar’iah* to make the point that true piety is more than ritualistic compliance with *Shar’iah*. He is also famous for verbal outbursts contradicting basic Islamic tenets such as: “I am the Truth” for which he was executed, or martyred, depending on one’s point of view. While most Muslim religious authorities hold such views to be scandalous, they are nonetheless an enduring element of philosophical *Sufi* discourse and of popular *Sufism*, especially in South and Southeast Asia [19] Works by Rumi and Ibn al-Arabi are part of the curriculum in many Islamic schools in Southeast Asia and West Africa. They are also discussed in public religious talks, especially during the fasting month of Ramadan.

Institutional Sufism emerged gradually. Its origins are obscure and complex. By the 12th century it took the form of hierarchically organised religious orders known as *tariqa*. [20] Each has a particular formulation of the mystical path and set of devotional practices adopted from ethical and philosophical *Sufism*. Other beliefs and practices are rooted in local cultures. Some of these religious orders remained local, while others spread throughout the Muslim world. They were also among vehicles through which Islam spread in Africa and Asia. [21] Today Sufi religious orders continue to play important roles in Muslim life nearly everywhere even in countries where they have been outlawed and forced underground by *Salafi* (Saudi Arabia) or secular (Turkey) governments. There are also increasingly globalized *Sufi* networks that rely on the Internet to telescope relationships between local devotees and their globally oriented leaders.

Saint veneration is an important component of institutional *Sufism* and popular Islam nearly everywhere. People believed to have journeyed far on the mystical path are revered as saints (friends of God). Saints are thought to have mystical or magical powers and the ability to bestow blessing (*barakah*) and healing and to help their devotees with the problems of daily life. The quest for *barakah* also motivates pilgrimage to the graves of saints (*ziyarah*), one of the most popular forms of *Sufi* piety in West Africa, Southeast Asia and elsewhere in the Muslim world. Others visit graves simply to show respect to the holy woman or man. [22]

Differences concerning the propriety of saint veneration are among the most contentious issues in contemporary conflicts between *Sufis* and *Salafis*. In Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Mali, Malaysia and Indonesia *Salafis* have earned the undying enmity of *Sufis* for destroying holy graves. The emotional intensity of these conflicts cannot be overstated.

From the 13th century until the rise of *Salafi* movements in the 19th century Sufism permeated Muslim discourse. Institutional *Sufism* was particularly influential. [23] In West Africa and Southeast Asia *Sufis* still constitute substantial majorities of the Muslim populations. In Indonesia, for example, a survey conducted by the Centre for the Study of Religion and Conflict at Arizona State University in 2013 indicated that 77.5% of Muslims regard the core *Sufi* devotional practice of visiting graves to be essential or desirable, while only 2.1% responded that it is essential not to do. In Nigeria a survey conducted in 2011 showed 78.3% of Muslims regard visiting graves as essential or desirable while 15.4% responded that it is essential not to do.

In societies in which the validity of mystical insight is widely accepted, those who possess it easily acquire enormous moral authority and social influence that can easily be translated into political authority. Many historical and contemporary rulers have sought moral authority through the patronage of *Sufi* orders; some go to the extreme of depicting themselves as saints. [24] In Southeast Asia and West Africa *Sufi* sultanates that have limited (Yogyakarta, Indonesia) or no (Sokoto, Nigeria) formal authority continue to exercise enormous moral authority and political influence. *Sufi* moral authority has also been used for grassroots social mobilization, including the instigation of rebellions and insurgencies. [25] The most recent example is an invasion of the Malaysian state of Sabah by claimants to the throne of the Sulu Sultanate in the Southern Philippines.

Varieties of Salafism

Salafism is a conservative, behaviourally oriented form of Islam. *Wahhabism* is a variety of *Salafism* founded in Arabia in the 18th century, and is the official religion of Saudi Arabia today. [26] Linguistically, *Salafi* is an abbreviation of *al-salaf al-salih* (the pious ancestors). *Salafism* seeks to preserve or re-establish visions of Islam believed to have been practiced by the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. It focuses primarily on “correct” religious and social behaviour. *Salafis* focus on *Sunnah* (the practice of the Prophet Muhammad as recorded in *Hadith*), as a model for subsequent generations of Muslims. Anything other than this is considered religiously reprehensible innovation (*bida*). Non-*salafi* Muslims also value *Sunnah* but distinguish between commendable and reprehensible innovation. *Salafis* have little use for the *Sufi* cultivation of intuitive knowledge of God.

Salafism has been a persistent strand in Muslim discourse since the 9th century. It has taken many forms, and debates about who are the true *Salafis* are bitterly contested. Three related concepts—scriptural literalism, scriptural theology, and a revivalist ethos—are central to all forms of *Salafism*. *Salafis* regard scripture as God’s clear commands that require

implementation. Other Muslims regard scripture as communication from God that must be studied and understood prior to implementation. Many *Salafis* condemn *Sufism* and local cultural practices as unbelief that negates Islamic identity. This practice, known as *takfir* is among the doctrinal roots of Salafi radicalism.

There are other beliefs and practices on which *Salafis* differ. The most politically salient difference is that between pacifists who emphasize personal, social and ritual purity in their own communities, and activists who seek to impose their views on others. Activist strategies include preaching, the use of print, broadcast and electronic media as tools for proselytization, participation in electoral politics and violent *jihad*, among others.

Most variants of *Salafism* can be traced to the teachings of the 8th-9th century jurist Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (780-855). Subsequent *Salafi* luminaries, whose works remain influential, include the 13th-14th century Hanbalite jurist Ibn Tamiyyah (1263-1328) and Muhammad b. Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792) the founder of the *Wahhabi* sect. There are many others who are not as well known.

Ibn Hanbal maintained that only the *Qur'an* and *Hadith* are legitimate sources of law and theology. He rejected Aristotelian logic that began to influence Muslim thought in the 8th century and metaphorical readings of scripture. He was particularly concerned with maintaining the "purity" of ritual practice and religious belief. He regarded post 7th century developments to be unacceptable *bida*. [27]

Ibn Tamiyyah was the systematiser of *Salafi* thought. He reaffirmed Ibn Hanbal's scriptural conservatism and introduced an uncompromising literalist interpretation of *tauhid*. He taught that worship and devotion should be directed to God without any intermediary. For Ibn Tamiyyah, seeking the blessings of angels, saints and righteous people, and pilgrimage to tombs of saints is polytheism (*shirk*). This is the gravest sin in Islam, which if not recanted, leads to eternal damnation and can be punished by execution. This position rapidly became one of the defining features of *Salafism*. It is extremely controversial and brings *Salafis* into conflict with most other Muslims, for whom these practices are central elements of Muslim piety. [28]

Early *Salafi* thought was not inherently political, but became so because it challenged the established orthodoxy tied to institutional *Sufism*. Ibn Hanbal avoided the sectarian controversies that divided the Muslim community of his day. The contentious nature of these debates had made heresy a grave concern in intellectual circles and the community at large and hence to the political leadership that valued stability. Ibn Taymiyyah, on the other hand, was known for heated polemics that led to conflict with religious and political authorities. He was jailed for his polemical teachings five times and died in prison.

Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was the first *Salafi* scholar to have the opportunity to establish his theological views as socio-political reality. He was born into a family of Hanbalite jurists in Najd, a remote region in Eastern Arabia. He studied with leading Hanbali scholars in Syria,

Iraq and Iran as well as in Mecca and Medina. He returned to Najd in 1750 and began preaching against customs and religious practices he considered to be *shirk*. His major contribution to *Salafi* thought was *Kitab al-Tawhid*, in which he summarized Ibn Taymiyyah's understanding of *shirk*. He distinguished between greater and lesser *shirk*. Both lead to eternal damnation but only greater *shirk* is punishable (by death) in this world. Greater *shirk* includes the use of amulets, traditional healing practices and saint veneration. Lesser *shirk* is belief in causality other than that of God and public displays of religious piety including the collective devotional practices of *Sufi* orders.[29]

Initially Ibn Abd al-Wahhab failed to convince the people of Najd to accept *Salafism*. He then contracted an alliance Muhammad Ibn Saud (d. 1765) the Emir of Dar'iyah in northeastern Arabia. The alliance stipulated that Ibn Saud would support Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's religious program in return for his endorsement of Ibn Saud's political agenda. Saudi conquests of most of Arabia led to the establishment of a *Wahhabi* theocracy in which the coercive power of the state is used to enforce *Salafi* norms.[30] It is important to note that many Saudi-Wahhabi social norms, especially restrictions on women's public roles, are rooted in Najd Bedouin culture as much as in Islamic scripture, if not more so.

Like *Sufism*, *Salafism* is not inherently political. *Salafi* moral authority flows from the claim that it seeks to restore Islam to its pristine condition. If this claim is accepted, *Salafism* becomes a powerful basis for social mobilization against grievances including colonialism, corruption, economic inequality, political disenfranchisement and other forms of injustice.

The oil boom of the 1970s and 1980s enabled the Saudi government and foundations backed by the royal family including the Muslim World League (*Rabita al-Alam al-Islami*/MWL) to devote enormous financial resources to attempts to spread *Salafism*. [31] The League has played a crucial role in promoting *Salafism* in Southeast Asia and West Africa. MWL provides scholarships for students to study at Saudi Arabian Islamic Universities and supports schools and mosques that graduates establish when they return home.[32]

Religious Orientations and Violence: Southeast Asian and West African Cases

Wahhabism and *Salafism* have been associated with violence and terrorism because *Al Qaeda* and related terrorist organisations embrace the synthesis of *Wahhabi* religious teachings and Muslim Brotherhood activism formulated by Sayid Qutb.[33] There are Southeast Asian and West African *Salafi* groups that share this orientation and others that steadfastly oppose violence. There are also violent and nonviolent organisations rooted in *Sufi* teachings in both regions. There are also groups of both religious orientations that have alternated between participating in, and opposing, violence in shifting political contexts. There is also a tendency for *Salafis* to seek accommodation with other Muslims on social and religious issues that do not compromise their understanding of *tauhid*. There are *Salafi* movements in West Africa and Southeast Asia that originally engaged in harsh *takfir* that now view their *Sufi* opponents

as Muslims of a different type with whom they share common social and sometimes political agendas. This is what Woodward (*et al*) have described as the “domestication” of *Salafism*.^[34]

Salafism in West Africa and Southeast Asia

The origins of *Salafism* in West Africa and Southeast Asia are complex and predate the growth of Saudi influence by nearly three centuries. *Ulama* (Muslim religious scholars) from both regions participated in the 17th/18th century revivalist *Ahli Hadith* (traditions concerning the speech and actions of the Prophet Muhammad) movement that also contributed the development of *Salafism* in Arabia, North Africa and South Asia. *Sufis* concerned with reconciling *Hadith* based piety and mystical practice and traditional legal scholars also participated in this movement.^[35] Mecca and Medina were the centre points of the network, but it was not an Arab movement. During this period, the Holy cities were extremely cosmopolitan. Knowledge, not ethnicity was the criteria for entry into the Islamic religious elite. *Ulama* with diverse theological views taught at the Great Mosque in Mecca, the Prophet’s mosque in Medina and in private academies surrounding them. Students came from throughout the Muslim world. Most eventually returned home, though some of the most erudite settled permanently in the holy cities. The intellectual networks and lineages of the day were also complex and transcended conventional theological boundaries.^[36]

This circle contributed to the development of *Salafism* and exerted an equally strong influence on the development of *Shar’iah* centric *Sufism*. Ibrahim al-Kurani (1616-1690) was among the most renowned 17th century *Ahli Hadith* scholars. He was known for mastery of *Hadith* and his exposition of Ibn al-Arabi’s Philosophical *Sufism*. He was the founder of *Salafi* and *Sufi* lineages that are influential in Southeast Asia and West Africa to this day.^[37] The West African lineages gravitated toward *Salafism* and those in Southeast Asia towards *Shari’ah* centric *Sufism*.

Salih al-Fulani (1753-1803), from present day Guinea, was one of the leading figures in the *Ahli Hadith* movement at the end of the 18th century He was a contemporary of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, though the nature of their relationship is not known. West African scholars from this lineage including Abd al-Rahman al-Ifriqi, (1908-1957) and Umar al-Falata (1925-1999) figured significantly in the Saudi religious establishment in the 20th century.^[38] Southeast Asian *ulama* were prominent in *Sufi* orders and *Shafite* legal scholarship in Mecca and Medina throughout 19th and early 20th centuries.^[39] Most returned to their native lands after the Saudi conquest of the holy cities in 1926. Organised *Salafi* movements first developed in Southeast Asia in the mid-19th century and in West Africa a century later. In both regions these movements focused on local concerns as well as on the trans-regional *Salafi* issues of theological and ritual purity.

West African Cases

Subbanu al-Muslimin (Muslim Youth) was the first West African *Salafi* movement. It was founded in Mali in 1951 by graduates of Cairo's al-Azhar University who had been exposed to Saudi *Wahhabism* while on the *hajj*. It was structured as a modern civic organisation, combined religious and nationalist agendas and became a model for later West African *Salafi* movements. It established modern Islamic schools as alternative to colonial schools that stressed secularism and French culture. It strongly opposed *Sufi* orders and religious and social practices rooted in *Sufism* and African cultures, including saint veneration and traditional healing practices.

Subbanu al-Muslimin has been most successful in urban areas. It is a middle class movement, appealing primarily to modern elites and merchants. *Salafi* movements have also resonated with the urban middle class in Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana and Niger.[40] *Subbanu al-Muslimin's* anti-Sufi rhetoric has sometimes led to violent confrontations with supporters of *Sufi* orders, who remain the majority in West African Muslim societies. By the 1990s the frequency and intensity of these clashes had diminished as the ethos of confrontation gave way to one of what Kaba terms "the new ethic of disagreement" in which *Sufis* and *Salafis* understand each other, not as *kafir*, but as different kinds of Muslims.[41] There have been similar developments throughout West Africa.

Jama'atu Izalat al-Bida' wa Iqamat al-Sunna (the group removing *bida* and restoring the *Sunna*/ *Izala*) is the largest and most influential *Salafi* movement in West Africa.[42] It was founded in Jos, Nigeria in 1978 and has branches in neighboring countries. Like other West African *Salafi* movements *Izala* sponsors modern Islamic schools, opposes *Sufism* and traditional cultural practices, and often engages in harsh *takfiri* rhetoric.

Izala also has features reflecting its north Nigerian origins. For example, its organisational structure and performative style reflect the political culture of the military regimes that ruled Nigeria for extended periods (1969-1979, 1984-1999). *Izala* is hierarchically organised with a centralized top-down leadership. It also has a security force whose members wear military-style uniforms. They serve as guards and escorts for *Izala* officials to whom they give military style salutes at public events.

Izala was founded by al-Shaykh Abubakar Mahmud Gumi (1922-1992). He was educated in traditional Islamic schools in Nigeria and developed his *Salafi* ideas independently in the 1940s. He was especially concerned with *bida* and the purification of ritual practice. He studied in the Sudan during the 1950s and became closely associated with the Saudi *Wahhabi* establishment in the 1950s-1960s. He was Grand *Kadi* (judge) of Northern Nigeria (1962-1976). He was also a founding member of WML and was instrumental in securing scholarships for Nigerian students to study in Saudi Arabian Islamic universities. Gumi made effective use of modern mass media, especially radio and newspapers to spread *Salafi* ideas,

most notably vehement *takfiri* denunciation of Sufi orders. A *Sufi* backlash in the mid-1970s led Gumi's followers to establish *Izala* as a formal organisation.

Like many *Salafi* movements *Izala* is prone to factionalism. Some splinter groups moderated their views and sought accommodation with traditionalist Muslims in the same way that *Subbanu al-Muslimin* did. Others became even more militant. There have been occasional violent confrontations between *Salafi* and *Sufi* groups throughout West Africa. *Boko Haram* is the only *Salafi* organisation to employ violence as a strategy for spreading *Salafi* teachings and practices; it also challenges the legitimacy of the state. It is a breakaway *Izala* faction established in 2001. Its goal is to implement *Izala* discourse of *takfir* by waging violent campaigns against opponents.[43] It espouses a radical anti-western and anti-modern ideology that defines modern western education and government employment as religiously unacceptable. Since 2003 more than 3,000 people have been killed in confrontations between *Boko Haram* fighters and Nigerian security forces and in incidents of sectarian violence. It is important to note that other groups based on similar teachings chose to isolate themselves from what they perceive to be a corrupt society. Significantly other *Izala* factions strongly oppose *Boko Haram* violence.

Southeast Asian Cases

Exactly when *Salafism* came to Southeast Asia is debatable. Colonial scholars attributed the Padri War in West Sumatra (1803-1837) to *Wahhabi* influences, but recent scholarship suggests that the insurgents were *Sufis* who supported *Shari'ah* and opposed local social practices not in keeping with it.[44] The *Kaum Muda* (New Group), a broadly based *Salafi* movement, emerged in the late 19th century. It was active throughout Southeast Asia and stressed nationalism, modern education and ritual purity. Tension between puritans and modernists is an enduring theme and source of factionalism.[45] Organisations combined these themes in distinctive ways. The two most influential are *Muhammadiyah* and *Persatuan Islam*.

Ahmad Dahlan founded *Muhammadiyah* in 1912 in Yogyakarta in what is now Indonesia. It is the largest Southeast Asian *Salafi* movement with approximately forty million members and branches throughout the region. *Muhammadiyah* combines *Salafi* religious teachings with commitments to rationalism and modernity. Ibn Tamiyya, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and the Egyptian modernist Muhammad Abduh [46] are often mentioned as progenitors. Since the 1920s *Muhammadiyah's* critiques of *Sufism* and traditional cultural practices have described them as being *bida* and irrational. Textbooks used in *Muhammadiyah* schools refrain from *takfiri* rhetoric and extol the virtues of pluralism, nationalism and democracy. It is more accepting of local culture than many other *Salafi* movements and maintains close relations with the *Sufi* oriented Yogyakarta Sultanate. *Muhammadiyah* avoids direct involvement in politics and opposes violence. It has included revivalist and modernist factions since the 1920s.

Persatuan Islam (*Persis*/Unity of Islam) founded in the 1920s by Indonesian and Singaporean scholars. It is not a mass organisation but has exerted great influence on Southeast Asian *Salafi* thought.[47] *Persis* takes very strong positions opposing *bida*, *Sufism* and local cultures, and engages in harsh *takfiri* rhetoric. While some early *Persis* leaders were Pan Islamists who considered the idea of the state to be un-Islamic, others—especially Mohammed Natsir (1908-1993)—were proponents of *Shari'ah* based nationalism. Activists from *Persis* backgrounds have adapted a range of political strategies, ranging from electoral politics to terrorism.

Natsir was perhaps the most important Southeast Asian *Salafi* intellectual of the twentieth century. He maintained relationships with Islamic nationalists, including non-*Salafis*, regionally and globally. Politically he was a pragmatist. He was Prime Minister of Indonesia (1950-51) and leader of the Islamic political party *Majelis Syuro Muslim Indonesia* (*Masyumi*) from 1945 until it was outlawed in 1960. He was imprisoned between 1960 and 1966 for involvement in an ethno-religious rebellion. After his release he founded *Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia* (Indonesian Council for the Propagation of Islam/DDII).[48]

Like his Nigerian counterpart Gumi, Natsir was a prominent figure in MWL. DDII is a conduit through which MWL funds flow into Indonesia. It works closely with *Lembaga Pengetahuan Islam dan Arab* (Institute for Islamic and Arabic Studies/LIPIA), which is a public diplomacy arm of the Saudi Arabian government as well as an Islamic school, and Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University in Riyadh.[49] Efforts by Natsir and DDII contributed to the emergence of *Salafi* organisations and movements with diverse political orientations. Of these the campus based *Tarbiyah* (Islamic Education) movement that developed in the 1980s is particularly significant. It is a broadly based social movement that gave rise to numerous organisations including the non-violent Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS, The Justice and Prosperity Party) that participates in elections and *Hizbut Tahir Indonesia* that does not.[50] DDII has never been implicated in violence but was associated with violent groups operating in Eastern Indonesia between 2000 and 2002, and now support groups engaging in attacks against members of the *Ahmadiyah* sect.

Pondok Pesantren Imam Bukhari (PPIB) in Surakarta is one of many *Salafi* schools supported by MWL. It was founded by Ahmad Faiz after he completed his studies at Imam Ibn Saud University in 1994. The curriculum focuses on *Wahhabi* religious teachings and preparing students for the afterlife. There are approximately two thousand students. Most are Indonesians; others are from Malaysia and Singapore. Faiz rejects terrorism and other forms of religiously motivated violence and in an interview stated that: "Terrorists use Islamic norms to justify their sins."

As in West Africa, some Southeast Asian *Salafi* communities live in self-imposed social isolation. Some were formerly *jihadi* but renounced violence when *Saudi ulama* declared that it was no longer justified. They lead pious lives and avoid contact with what they consider to be a hopelessly defiled world. Some have established villages in remote areas and support

themselves by selling herbal medicines. There are small communities with similar religious orientations in Malaysia and Singapore. They are more integrated into economic life than their Indonesian counterparts, but avoid contact with religious others. In some parts of Malaysia, *Salafis* have a larger public presence and control as many as a third of the mosques.

Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) is the most significant violent *Salafi* organisation in Southeast Asia. It is a transnational terrorist group established in 1993 with the goal of establishing a *Wahhabi* Caliphate that has operated in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore.[51] Many *Ji* members studied at schools supported by DDII. They acquired violent *Salafi* ideologies at schools linked to the “*Nguruki* network” of schools that combine *Salafi* and *Jihadi* teachings.

Abu Bakr Ba’asyir (b. 1938) is widely regarded as *Ji*’s spiritual mentor and was one of the founders of the *Nguruki* network. He is a former DDII activist who spent 17 years in Malaysia and Singapore spreading violent *Salafi* teachings. Ba’asyir was also one of the founders of *Majelis Mujahedeen Indonesia*, an umbrella group for radical organisations. Prior to being convicted on terrorism charges in 2011, he used extreme *takfiri* rhetoric in sermons, stating that 90% of Indonesian Muslims are actually *kafir*. In an interview he stated that “*Jihad* is more important than prayer.”[52]

Sufism in West Africa and Southeast Asia

Sufism has been the dominant form of Islam in West Africa and Southeast Asia for many centuries. The traders who brought Islam to Africa and Asia, and the warriors who established kingdoms, empires and Caliphates were *Sufis*. Varied and complex combinations of Ethical, Philosophical and Institutional *Sufism* have contributed to the development not only of Islam as bodies of religious teachings and practices but of distinctive Islamic civilizations in both regions. The idea that *Sufism* is particularly peaceful can be found in contemporary discourse, especially in Senegal and Indonesia but is a decidedly post-colonial development, often framed in terms of the Western Violent *Salafi*/Peaceful *Sufi* distinction.

West African Cases

Sufism has been an important force in West African Islam for more than a millennium. Many famous saints cultivated the piety and self-purification that are the hallmarks of Ethical *Sufism*. *Sufism* has also been the mainstay of Islamic learning in West Africa, where the bifurcation between jurists and mystics common in the Middle East is rare. Foundational Islamic texts from West Africa such as *Ta’rikh al-Sudān*, (History of West Africa) by al-Sa’di (1655) refer to *Sufi* themes such as saints, asceticism, gnosis and blessing.[53]

From the seventeenth-century onward, Institutional *Sufism* has provided a framework for organising religious communities, educational institutions, social networks, and economic collectivities tied to rural agriculture. In the course of its historical evolution in the region,

Sufism has been both pacifist and violent. The West African *Sufi jihads* provide convincing refutations of the idea that *Sufism* is intrinsically peaceful.

For more than 250 years (1645-1900) *Sufi* leaders (*marabouts*) waged a series of *jihad* in attempts to establish Islamic theocracies. Nasir al-Din (d. 1674) led the first of these in what is today southern Mauritania. It was followed by many others, the most theoretically significant of which are those of Usman dan Fodio (1754-1817)—leading to the creation of the Sokoto Caliphate in present day northern Nigeria—and al-Hajj Umar Tall (1797-1865), which led to the Toucouleur Islamic Empire in parts of what are now Guinea, Senegal and Mali.

The West African *jihads* were complex events. Ethnic relations and tribal warfare, tensions between Islamic scholars and political elites, slave-raiding to supply the Atlantic slave trade, the involvement of European powers (eventually through colonialism) and the end of the slave trade all contributed to the origins and decline of this pre-modern *jihadi* tradition. Scholars debate the contributions of these factors to the development of a *jihad* centred political culture. There is, however, a consensus concerning the roles played by *Sufi* leaders, the importance of *Sufism* in West African *jihadi* ideologies and the use of master-disciple relationships and *tariqa Sufism* as tools for social mobilization and as the basis for the construction of collective identities in the theocracies the *jihads* sought to establish.

Usman dan Fodio, the founder of the Sokoto Caliphate provides a clear example. He had a vision in which he saw the Prophet Muhammad, his companions and other prophets and saints, including al-Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani (1077-1166), the founder of the *Qadiriyya tariqa* to which dan Fodio belonged. According to dan Fodio's account of this vision, al-Jilani anointed him as the leader of saints (*Imam Al-Awliyyaa*), and enjoined him "to command what is good and to forbid what is reprehensible." Then al-Jilani decorated dan Fodio with the "Sword of Truth" and ordered him to "unsheathe it against the enemies of God." (54) For dan Fodio, this was the spiritual and moral authorization for his *jihad*.

Al-Hajj Umar Tall invoked the doctrines of the *Tijaniyya tariqa* in his articulation of the doctrinal basis of *jihad*. In his *magnum opus Kitab rimah hizb al-rahim 'ala nuhur hizb al-rajim* ("The Book of the Lances of the Party of Allah the Merciful against the Necks of the Party of Satan the Accursed"), he employed the sectarian *Tijani* discourse of spiritual election to legitimise his military and political agendas. This discourse proclaims that the *Tijaniyya* supersedes all other *Sufi* orders because of the exclusive guarantee of salvation Ahmad al-Tijani, its founder, received from the Prophet Muhammad for himself and his followers. Umar Tall also employed the *Tijani* doctrine of *inkar* that demonises all who reject the *Tijani* doctrine of spiritual election to refute his opponents.

The *Tijani* demonisation of other *Sufi jihadis* is an example of the ways in which *Sufi* doctrine can be used in contentious discourse about the differential legitimacy of *jihadi* movements and theocracies. This discourse also figured significantly in the rivalry between leaders of the Sokoto Caliphate and the Borno Empire. Polemical theological exchanges between them

began in the nineteenth-century and have continued until the present, spanning pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods in West African history.

The establishment of colonial rule c. 1880s-1910s effectively ended this series of *jihads* and incorporated the *Sufi* theocracies into colonial regimes, or abolished them altogether. In these contexts, the West African *Sufi* orders were transformed in many ways. While the legacy and rhetoric of the *Sufi* theocracies provided a framework for anti-colonial resistance, most of the *Sufi* orders preferred strategies of avoiding colonial regimes. They created an Islamic public sphere outside of the colonial system. By the end of the colonial period in the 1960s, the image of the *Sufi* orders as pacifists had effectively replaced the earlier image of the *Sufis* as *jihadi* empire builders. With the rise of *Salafi* movements in the region, the new idea of *Sufi* pacifism gained even more credibility.

Sufi radicalism was transformed but not totally abandoned. This is particularly true of the *Tijaniyya* order. Exclusivist discourses of spiritual election and the demonisation of others remain constant sources of tension between *Tijanis* and other Muslims. The Qadiriyya order has engaged this exclusivist discourse by constructing an alternative discourse of spiritual election. Given the high stakes in the intra-*Sufi* discourses and counter-discourses (i.e. spiritual salvation, religious authority, control of mosques, generating and controlling mass followings) there have been instances of intra-*Sufi* violence. Confrontations between different *Tijaniyya* branches were also common during the 1950s and 1960s. Intra *Sufi* tension and conflicts ended only after the *Salafi* threat against all *Sufis* became clear during the 1970s. In this context, *Sufi* radicalism redirected itself to counteract the denunciation of *Sufism* as “totally un-Islamic” in *Salafi takfiri* discourse. Contemporary *Sufi* radicalism takes the form of more flamboyant observance of the very practices—reverence for saints, visiting their shrines, celebrating their birthdays, etc.—condemned as un-Islamic by the *Salafis*. With salvation threatened, validity of the worshipped questioned, and religious communal identity castigated, the stakes are high enough for the tension between *Sufis* and *Salafis* to erupt into violence. *Sufi* radicalism in West Africa remains, but finds new forms in changing contexts, just as *Salafi* radicalism does.

Southeast Asian Cases

Sufism has been one of the building blocks used in the construction of Islamic civilisations in Southeast Asia since the coming of Islam in the 14th century.[55] Many early Southeast Asian Muslim texts refer to *Sufi* concepts including asceticism, blessing and sainthood. Others including the 18th century *Serat* (Book of Cabolek) concern relationships, and sometimes conflict, between proponents of Philosophical and *Shar'iah* based *Sufism*. [56] Chronicles and oral tradition credit conversion both to warrior Sultans and peaceful saints (*wali*). *Sufi* orders have been present almost as long as Islam, but are not the dominant force that they are in West Africa. *Sufism* is institutionalised in state systems and networks of schools (*pesantren/pondok*) that teach law (*fiqh*) and theology (*aqidah*) as well as *Sufism*. [57] Many Southeast Asian

Muslims practice *Sufism* independent of organised *tariqa*. As is true in West Africa, many jurists are also *Sufis*.

Responses to European intrusion beginning in the 16th century included bitter protracted wars in which Muslim rulers appealed to concepts of authority rooted in Philosophical *Sufism* and later to rebellions based on similar principles led by princes and *ulama*. Among the most protracted anti-colonial struggles were the Java War (1825-1830) and the Aceh War (1914-1973). [58] In both cases *Sufism* and *jihad* legitimised resistance and were used for social mobilization. In Aceh resistance to Dutch colonialism and the Indonesian state continued until 2004. Smaller scale rebellions predicting the expulsion of *kafir* and coming of a Just King (*Ratu Adil*) occurred in Java until the 1940s.[59] Social movements based on similar principles are still encountered. Most of the hundreds of traditional Muslim states in the region came to terms with colonialism, and developed ritual systems, based on *Sufi* principles, including putative royal control of *barakah*. [60] Many of the *ulama* retreated to the countryside, where, as in West Africa, they avoided conflict with colonial states and established alternative public spheres based on *Sufi* principles.

Nadhlatul Ulama (NU), with approximately eighty million followers, is the largest Southeast Asian *Sufi* movement. It was founded in 1926 partly in response to the *Wahhabi* occupation of Mecca and Medina. [61] It is based in east Java in Indonesia. NU is led by *kyai*, charismatic figures combining the attributes of *Shar'iah* oriented *ulama* and *Sufi syechs*. Many *kyai* are reputed to have great mystical powers. There are more than 15,000 *pesantren* (boarding schools) affiliated with NU, many of which are linked to *Sufi* religious orders. NU piety emphasizes prayers for the dead (*tahlilan*), pilgrimage to holy graves (*ziyarah*) and the recitation of *salawaat* (poetry invoking the Prophet Muhammad), which are popular among *Sufis* everywhere.[62]

NU has stridently opposed terrorism and other forms of violence and promoted religious pluralism since Abdurrahman Wahid (1940-2009) assumed its leadership in 1984. Wahid also maintained that inter-religious dialog and cooperation are obligatory for all Muslims. He was especially concerned with social justice and minority rights.

NU's position on violence has been consistent for three decades. This does not, however, imply that its theology is incompatible with violence. NU leaders and the rank and file have resorted to extreme violence when convinced that the organisation and Islam were threatened. In 1965 NU played a major role in the mass slaughter of Indonesian communists. To this day, many NU leaders who participated in the killings believe that they were necessary to defend Islam. [63]

Today, *Banser*, NU's paramilitary wing, is used to support pluralist policies. It has been deployed to provide security for Christmas services and NU *Sufi* religious celebrations threatened by violent *Salafi* groups. *Banser* leaders make it clear that they will not tolerate interference with these events and will respond with force if necessary. At an event we

attended in 2012 a *Banser* commander called on NU supporters to employ “all necessary physical and spiritual power to combat anti-*Sufi* movements.”[64]

Banser is a hybrid force. Members are armed with bamboo staves and high-powered slingshots. They are also trained in *pencat silat*, a Javanese martial arts tradition that combines physical and spiritual training. Some are thought to have the power of invulnerability and the ability to overcome opponents without resorting to physical force. They acquire these powers through repeated pilgrimage to graves and other holy places associated with saints and sultans, meditation and amulets obtained from *kyai*. Experts in this mystical-martial tradition are sometimes referred to as “NU Special Forces.” They do not carry weapons because, it is said, they do not need to. *Banser* inspires awe and respect from people it serves and protects, and fear in the hearts of its enemies.

In Malaysia, a group based on similar *Sufi* principles carried out one of the most serious *jihad* attacks in the country’s history. *Persaudaraan Ilmu Dalam al-Ma’unah* (The al-Ma’unah Brotherhood of Spiritual Knowledge) was established by Mohammed Amin Mohammed Razali, known to his followers as *Ustad* (religious teacher) Amin or *Syech* in 1999. Razali had studied mystical healing and *pencat silat* at an Indonesian *pesantren*. He claimed to act on the authority of God and saints dwelling in a mystical dimension, to walk on water and to have the power of invulnerability. The group’s motto was “*Jihad* is our path! Islam will triumph!” In July of 2000 he and a group of 29 followers seized a military arms depot and proclaimed a *jihad* against the Malaysian government. They subsequently surrendered to authorities. Most received prison terms but Razali was convicted of waging war against the king and hanged. [65]

The clearest contemporary Indonesia case of violent *Sufism* is *Front Pembela Islam* (Islamic Defenders Front – FPI). Its motto is “Live honorably or die a martyr.” Rezieq Syihab and Misbahul Anam, both of whom are *Sufis*, founded FPI in 1998. Most rank and file members are from NU backgrounds. Rituals conducted at FPI headquarters in Jakarta closely resemble those common in NU communities. FPI members we interviewed described Rezieq as a *syech* who cleanses the souls of his followers.

FPI describes itself as a movement committed to combating sin, vice and heresy. It is known for attacks on those it deems “deviant” and for “sweepings” (ransacking) of nightclubs, bars, massage parlours and other establishments promoting what it considers to be immoral activities, especially during Ramadan. FPI actions have yielded few fatalities but many victims have been severely injured. More violent attacks in which there have been fatalities have been directed against the *Ahmadiyah* sect of Islam which is widely condemned for heresy because of the belief that its founder Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1908-1935) was a prophet.[66]

Conclusions and Policy Implications

For a decade now, think tanks including the RAND Corporation, the Heritage Foundation, the Libforall Foundation and the Nixon Centre have promoted peaceful *Sufism* as an alternative to violent *Salafism* and suggest that the US should encourage the spread of *Sufi* teachings as an ideological component of the “Global War on Terror.” [67] In a conference report by the Nixon Centre, Alex Alexiev, Senior Fellow at the Centre for Security Policy, argued that:

... the conflict between Sufis and Wahhabis is emblematic of a larger struggle between fundamentalism and syncretism, a struggle for the very soul of Islam. One important difference between the two is the interpretation of jihad: in Sufism, it is a striving for personal spiritual purification; while for Wahhabis it represents the struggle for the worldwide victory of Islam.[68]

Invoking scholarly authority enables Alexiev and others to establish an aura of authenticity for baseless claims about religiously justified violence and the theology of *jihad*. We have shown that the categorical distinction between peaceful *Sufism* and violent *Salafism* is untenable. The claim that *Sufis* subscribe to the teachings of the greater, peaceful *jihad* and *Salafis* to the violent, lesser *jihad* is also incorrect. All Muslim theologies, including *Wahhabism*, subscribe to the notion that the greater *jihad* is the struggle against the self.

Proponents of *Sufi* policy often invoke the works of scholars concerned with the classical texts of philosophical *Sufism* and *Sufi* leaders committed to countering violent extremism and invite them to speak at policy-oriented conferences. *Salafis* and *Wahhabis* with similar political agendas receive far less attention. Policies and policy recommendations based on the “peaceful *Sufi*”/“violent *Salafi*” distinction are fundamentally misguided. The cases examined in this article clearly show that both *Sufism* and *Salafism* are used to justify peaceful and violent political action. Policy makers and policy-oriented scholars would be well advised to abandon the quest for theological roots of violence and theological tools for combating it. More attention should be paid to variables that measure political attitudes and behaviour, particularly tolerance of religious diversity, as well as the extent and types of political change that religious movements and organisations seek to accomplish.

The widely acclaimed book *The Illusion of an Islamic State: How an Alliance of Moderates Launched a Successful Jihad Against Radicalisation and Terrorism in the World's Largest Muslim-Majority Country*, edited by Syaafi Maarif and Abdurrahman Wahid, and published by the Libforall Foundation provides an ironic illustration.[69] The book is a strident criticism of violent, intolerant variants of Indonesian political *Salafism* but ignores violent intolerant variants of Indonesian political *Sufism*. Both editors champion diversity and tolerance as religious virtues and sound policy. Ma'arif is former general secretary of *Muhammadiyah*—a *Salafi* organisation. Wahid was general secretary of *Nadhlatul Ulama*—a *Sufi* organisation.

They were close friends; shared commitments to democracy, social justice, tolerance and nonviolence mattered more to them than theological difference. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Rizieq Syihab, who is a *Sufi*, and Abu Bakr Ba'asyir, who is a *Salafi*, have both served on the editorial board of the Islamist tabloid *Suara Islam* (Voice of Islam) that demonises “liberal” Muslims and encourages violence against the *Ahmadiyah* and other “deviants.” Again, political orientations and shared commitments to intolerance matter more than theological differences.

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