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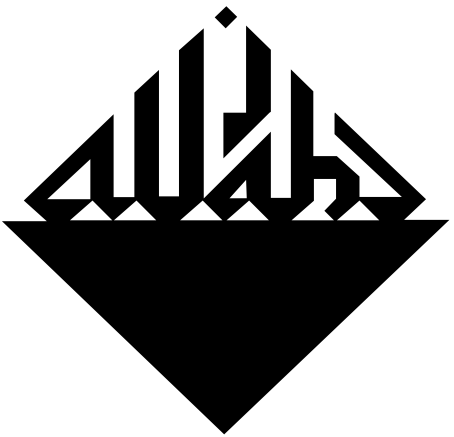

Gender and Islam in Indonesian Studies, A Retrospective

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Paradigms, Models, and Counterfactuals: Decolonializing the Study of Islam in Indonesia

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Ba ʻAlawi Women and the Development of Hadrami Studies in Indonesia

Fatimah Husein

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Fatimah Husein

Ba ʿAlawi Women and the Development of Hadrami Studies in Indonesia

Abstract: *Research concerning the Indonesian Hadrami diaspora predominantly centers on male actors, with contributions primarily from male scholars. There remains a notable lack of scholarship that adequately addresses the contributions of Hadrami female religious authorities and is authored by female scholars. I begin by examining the research surrounding the Hadrami diaspora in the Indian Ocean region. In the second part, I focus on literature concerning Hadrami women to highlight the scarcity of research that explores the dynamics of contemporary Indonesian Ba ʿAlawi female preachers, despite their impact in coloring Indonesian Islam. Finally, through the perspective of feminist epistemology and "gender jihad," I emphasize the epistemological contributions by these preachers as the preservers and disseminators of their Sufi tradition, known as Ṭarīqa ʿAlawiyya, while also providing new interpretations and practices of this thariqah. This article helps to enhance our understanding of the Hadrami diaspora in the Indian Ocean region, the dynamics of Sufi networks, and the roles of women in Indonesian Islam.*

Keywords: Ba ʿAlawi Women, Ṭarīqa ʿAlawiyya, Tarekat Network, Hadrami Studies, Islam in Indonesia.

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Abstrak: *Riset tentang diaspora Hadrami Indonesia sebagian besar berpusat pada tokoh laki-laki, dan ditulis oleh laki-laki. Masih sangat sedikit penelitian yang membahas peran tokoh perempuan Hadrami oleh peneliti wanita. Tulisan ini dimulai dengan pembahasan mengenai berbagai penelitian tentang diaspora Hadrami di wilayah Samudra Hindia. Pada bagian kedua, saya memfokuskan pada literatur mengenai perempuan Hadrami untuk menggarisbawahi kurangnya penelitian yang mengeksplorasi dinamika penceramah perempuan Ba ʻAlawi Indonesia kontemporer, meskipun mereka cukup berpengaruh dalam mewarnai Islam di Indonesia. Pada bagian akhir, melalui perspektif epistemologi feminis dan "gender jihad," saya menekankan kontribusi epistemologis oleh para penceramah ini sebagai pelestari, pendakwah dan pemberi interpretasi baru atas tradisi Sufi mereka, yang dikenal dengan Ṭarīqah ʻAlawiyyah. Tulisan ini membantu meningkatkan pemahaman kita tentang diaspora Hadrami di wilayah Samudra Hindia, dinamika jaringan tarekat, dan peran perempuan dalam Islam di Indonesia.*

Kata kunci: Perempuan Ba ʻAlawi, Ṭarīqah ʻAlawiyyah, Jaringan Tarekat, Kajian Hadrami, Islam di Indonesia.

ملخص: تركز الأبحاث المتعلقة بالشتات الحضرمي الإندونيسي في الغالب على الشخصيات الذكورية، ويكتبها رجال. ولا يزال هناك عدد قليل جدًا من الدراسات التي تتناول أدوار الشخصيات النسائية الحضرمية من قبل باحثات. تبدأ هذه الورقة بمناقشة حول مختلف الأبحاث المتعلقة بالشتات الحضرمي في منطقة المحيط الهندي. وفي الجزء الثاني، أركز على الأدبيات المتعلقة بالنساء الحضرميات لتسليط الضوء على النقص في الأبحاث التي تستكشف ديناميكيات الداعيات العلويات الإندونيسيات المعاصرات، على الرغم من تأثيرهن الكبير في إثراء الإسلام في إندونيسيا. في الجزء الأخير، ومن خلال منظور الإبستمولوجيا النسوية و»الجهاد الجندري»، أؤكد على المساهمات الإبستمولوجية لهؤلاء الداعيات كحافظات وداعيات ومقدمات لتفسيرات جديدة لتقاليدهن الصوفية، المعروفة بالطريقة العلوية. تساعد هذه الورقة في تعزيز فهمنا للشتات الحضرمي في منطقة المحيط الهندي، وديناميكيات شبكات الطرق الصوفية، ودور المرأة في الإسلام في إندونيسيا.

الكلمات المفتاحية: نساء آل باعلوي، الطريقة العلوية، شبكات الطرق الصوفية، الدراسات الحضرمية، الإسلام في إندونيسيا.

The term Hadrami refers to people from Hadramaut, a region that is part of present-day Yemen. While Indonesia's Hadrami diaspora is divided into two main categories, namely the Ba ʿAlawi, which literally translates to "the children of ʿAlawi," referring to the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad, who are also known as *sada* (singular: *sayyid*, with the feminine form being *sayyidah*), or *ashrāf* (singular: *sharīf*, with the feminine form being *sharīfah*); and the *mashāyikh* (sing. *shaykh*, with the feminine form being *shaykhah*) or non-*sāda*.

Research on Hadrami women, mostly conducted by Western scholars, has highlighted various aspects of their early social circumstances in the Dutch East Indies (van den Berg 1886; Boxberger 2002; Freitag 2003), their involvement in different Indonesian Hadrami organizations (Slama 2012; Mobini-Kesheh 1999), and their participation in female-exclusive rituals (Seise 2018). Additionally, other scholars have explored the experiences of Indonesian Ba ʿAlawi female preachers (*asātidhah*, sing. *ustādhah*) in the *daʿwah* (Arabic, meaning invitation, or proselytization) stage (Abaza 2004; Nisa 2012; Slama 2012; Alatas 2016). However, despite the contribution of contemporary Indonesian Ba ʿAlawi female preachers to the richness of Indonesian Islam, these studies do not provide a comprehensive analysis of their roles in preserving and disseminating the teachings of the Ṭarīqa ʿAlawiyya, a Sufi path traditionally associated with men in the community. This involvement in the *ṭarīqah* significantly alters the gendered nature of the *ṭarīqah* (discussed below). In the discourse surrounding the various dimensions of these female preachers, existing literature fails to address the evolution of their roles, particularly for those who have recently completed their studies in Yemen. This includes their efforts to maintain and disseminate the teachings of the *ṭarīqah* via both online and offline platforms, as well as their new interpretations and practices of the *ṭarīqah*.

My article does not focus on the broader analysis of gender and Islam in Indonesia, a subject that has already been explored by Nancy Smith-Hefner in this volume. Instead, through the perspectives of feminist epistemology (Haraway 1988; Harding 2001; Grasswick 2018; Udasmoro 2021) and "gender *jihād*" (Wadud 2006), I highlight the epistemological contributions made by these contemporary Indonesian Ba ʿAlawi female preachers within the Hadrami diaspora

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in Indian Ocean regions, the dynamics of Sufi networks, and the wider framework of Islam in Indonesia. While one may argue that their contributions are overshadowed by male authorities within the community, I will demonstrate that the knowledge they acquire and share in the Indonesian context can still be understood through the framework of feminist epistemology and gender *jihād*, while acknowledging their distinct form of agency.

Key Studies on Hadrami Diaspora

The field of Hadrami studies can be categorized into two distinct research traditions that are mostly sociologically focused and not particularly concerned with religious issues. One line of tradition focuses on the framework of diaspora studies, and the other contextualizes their research within the examination of Islamic networks in the Indian Ocean regions (see Husein 2021, 167–168). The first category includes the historical context of migration, the process of adapting to local customs or preserving their own traditions, recollections of their homeland, and the aspiration for a potential return. A pivotal inquiry that shapes the study of the Hadrami diaspora, particularly concerning the Hadrami communities in Indonesia, pertains to the extent to which they assimilate into the host societies, or whether their unique identities are maintained, creolized, or adapted and manipulated. The following discussion does not aim to provide an exhaustive account on the entire Hadrami diaspora, as this topic has been addressed in numerous publications, nor does it seek to conduct a thorough examination of all literature pertaining to the topic. Instead, it emphasizes several significant works to contextualize the discussion of Indonesian female Ba ʿAlawi within the broader study of Islam in Indonesia, and to address a notable gap in addressing the dynamics of Indonesian Hadrami women, despite their important roles in colouring Indonesian Islam.

Aboushouk and Ibrahim's (2009) work in presenting various perspectives from scholars on the issue of whether the Hadrami diaspora in Southeast Asia preserves its identity or integrates into local cultures, is an example of research on the first category. In a similar vein, Abdullah (2009, 45) explores the assimilation process of the Hadramis in Malaysia, who hold historical, social, and political significance and have played a major role in shaping political discourse while occupying various key positions. Historically speaking, at least

Hadramis in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore were, and to some extent still are, a single community. From a rather different perspective, Bajunid (1998, 4) contends that although the Hadrami have adopted certain local customs and formed marriages with local women, such practices do not diminish the core elements of Hadrami identity, which is fundamentally based on a patrilineal descent ideology. Some scholars, however, post different arguments on a continuous Hadrami–Arab identity within the diaspora. Freitag (2003, 5) asserts, for example, based on her observations of the Hadrami diaspora in the Indian Ocean region, that this community preserved a robust religious and spiritual connection to their homeland, even as they experienced differing degrees of assimilation into the societies in which they settled.

This is in line with other arguments by Ho (2006) and Feener (2004). Ho (2006, 199–296) introduces the term "creoles" (see also Mandal, 2018), whereas Feener (2004) posits a comparable term of "hybridity" for this community arguing that the Hadrami diaspora in Southeast Asia has profound interactions with a variety of cultures and communities across different areas of the Indian Ocean. Alatas (2011, 45) offers an alternative perspective by exploring how the Indonesian Hadramis, particularly the Ba ʿAlawi scholars, have creatively "adapted and manipulated" their Sufi path, referred to as Ṭarīqa ʿAlawiyya, which defines the identity of the Hadrami community and consist of "a canon of saints, sacred texts, rituals, special places, and genealogies" (further discussed below) (Ho 2006, 47; see also Bang, 2003, 13–16). This adaptation has been instrumental in asserting their importance within the larger framework of Indonesian national identity, while preserving their distinct genealogical lineage, and was facilitated by the establishment of academic networks that connected the Ba ʿAlawi with local *kiai*s, who are scholars of Islam in Indonesia. The issue of identity certainly captivates the interest of these researchers. Boxberger (2002) further investigates key aspects of the social and religious life of the Hadramis from the 1880s to the 1930s, taking into account the perspectives of different societal factions. She analyzes how emigration across the Indian Ocean has influenced the development of Hadrami identity and cultural traditions.

Walker's works (2012; 2021) are similarly centred on the theme of diaspora and is included in the first category. In his study of Comorian Hadrami (2012), he explores the similarities and distinctions between

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Zanzibaris of Hadrami descent and those of Comorian descent regarding their connections to their homeland, which have uniquely influenced their practices and identities. He further argues that Indonesian-born Hadramis travelled to the Hadramaut to engage with the cultural practices and traditions of their ancestors, as well as to sustain connections with their homeland (Walker 2012, 438). This approach to diaspora is not exclusive to Indonesia. For instance, the Hadrami community in Zanzibar has similarly upheld the tradition of sending their male offspring to the homeland, not solely to acquire the language and Hadrami principles but also to understand "the value of money and the merits of hard work" as experienced by their community (Walker 2012, 446).

In the second category, which encompasses studies that situate their research within the examination of Islamic networks in the Indian Ocean regions, several significant works are included, notably the studies carried out by Bang (2003) and Kaptein (2014). Bang's comprehensive research on the academic interchange of concepts between Hadramaut and the East African Coast, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, focuses on an empirical examination of the familial and academic connections maintained by Ahmad b. Abi Bakar b. Sumayt (d. 1925). Her contribution centered on the reconstruction of the pathways through which the Ba 'Alawi disseminated their interpretation of Islam during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. On the other hand, Kaptein (2014) explores the life of Sayyid 'Uthman b. Yahya (d. 1914), who dedicated approximately two decades to residing and studying in Mecca and Hadramaut, and subsequently enjoyed a lengthy career in teaching and preaching to Muslims in the Netherlands East Indies. Sayyid 'Uthman's involvement in the colonial administration rendered him a controversial figure and a target of criticism by other Indonesian Hadramis, particularly during the rise of Pan Islamism (1895–1900), when he was viewed as aligning with the Dutch (2014, 141).

In redirecting our focus to the study of Indonesian Hadrami communities, it is essential to acknowledge the substantial contributions made by van den Berg (1886) as the first study of this diaspora in the Netherlands East Indies. Steenbrink (2010) highlights in the Indonesian translation of this book that the latter commenced his research in 1884 focusing on the Indonesian Arab community, their country of origin, socio-economic conditions, and cultural practices. Van den

Berg has effectively examined the historical context of migration from Hadramaut, detailing the traits of the population, their beliefs, political aspirations, and the impact they have had on the Indonesian community. Furthermore, their interactions with local Muslim leaders had frequently been characterized by discord, which had resulted in the Hadrami diaspora exerting limited influence within the broader Muslim community. Indeed, only a limited number of Dutch oriental scholars expressed interest in the origins and activities of this diasporic community. The academic interest in the Indonesian Hadrami diaspora garnered global scholarly attention primarily following a series of international workshops, commenced in 1995 in London, focusing on Hadrami migration across the Indian Ocean (de Jonge 2022, vii).

The migration of Hadramis across the Indian Ocean, particularly to Indonesia, was primarily driven by the community's perceived lineage as descendants of the Prophet Muhammad, a status that held significant importance during that era (Alatas 2010, xxxii). While scholars have varying views regarding the timeline of Hadrami settlement in Southeast Asia, by the eighteenth century, they had become well integrated into the regional networks (Alatas 2018, 57). Most Hadramis who came to Java from Singapore stopped over in Batavia (now Jakarta). The earlier (before 1844) and smaller colonies in Batavia stayed with the local people (*pribumi*), especially in the area where the Benggali lived, namely at Pekojan in the west part of present-day Jakarta. They then replaced the Benggali in the area and became the majority with a few Chinese descendants and local Indonesians (van den Berg 2010, 100–101; see also Shahab 2005).

Overall, as noted by Jacobsen (2009, 3), the narrative of the Hadrami in Indonesia has predominantly been one of achievement, encompassing aspects of trade, politics, education, and religion. They have generally prospered, with many individuals establishing successful business ventures. In his seminal work, de Jonge (2022) examines the transformations in the social, economic, cultural, and national identities of Arabs from Hadramaut residing in the Netherlands East Indies and Indonesia. This book addresses, among other things, Dutch colonial policies affecting the Hadrami community, Abdul Rahman Baswedan as a pivotal figure within this group, and the interactions between Snouck Hurgronje and the Hadrami community. According to Mobini-Kesheh (1999), the Hadrami community in the Netherlands

East Indies underwent a transformation in their identity from 1900 to 1942, marked by an "awakening" (*nahḍah*) that involved the embrace of modern, Western-style educational and organizational practices.

There are also several significant works concerning the Indonesian Hadrami diaspora authored by Indonesian scholars. A noteworthy contribution is Alatas' seminal publication (2021), which highlights prominent Indonesian Ba 'Alawi figures, particularly the Sufi master Habib Muhammad Luthfi b. 'Ali b. Yahya (born 1947). Alatas (2021, 21) explores the concept of religious authority as exercised by the Indonesian Ba 'Alawi saints and scholars, analyzing the triangular dynamic involving the *sunna* (the teachings and practices of Prophet Muhammad), the connectors, and the community in the process of transmitting Islam (See also Alatas' other works, 2011 and 2016). In a separate study, Rijal (2020) examines the influence of Habib Munzir al-Musawa (d. 2013) and his *majelis taklim* (a regular gathering for learning Islam), which drew thousands of urban Muslim youth. Rijal posits that the opportunity for these young individuals to express their youthful identity is a significant factor motivating their participation in this *majelis taklim*, alongside the spiritual solace it provides.

A more recent study conducted by Najib (2021) documented the spiritual journey of "return" to Hadramaut in 1993 undertaken by Habib Anis b. 'Alwi al-Habshi (d. 2006) and Habib 'Abdul Qodir b. Ahmad Asseggaf (d. 2010). This book outlines the intricate spiritual journey (*riḥlah rūḥāniyyah*) to various cities in Yemen, aimed at restoring the spiritual connections between Hadramaut and Indonesia to preserve the teachings of the Ṭarīqa 'Alawiyya. Research by Alkadzim (2023) gives a specific attention to the internal dynamics within the Ba 'Alawi's Ṭarīqa 'Alawiyya. He argues that the interplay between growth and conservation of the *ṭarīqah* has led to the emergence of a concurrent restorative movement.

Among few female writers, a Ba 'Alawi scholar, Yasmine Zaki Shahab (b. 1948), is a worthy mention. Her research primarily examines Hadrami descent in Jakarta through an anthropological perspective. She argues (2005) that the introduction of Islam by esteemed Hadrami individuals elevated their status and contributed to the Indonesian resistance against Dutch colonial rule. However, the 1970s in Jakarta had witnessed a decline in their religious role, influenced by a variety of external factors as well as the internal factor of the kinship system.

The literature examined above underscores important aspects of the Hadrami diaspora, particularly within the Dutch East Indies and present-day Indonesia. Although those studies, including those conducted by female scholars, have addresses the roles of women, they have not investigated the development and dynamics of contemporary Indonesian Ba 'Alawi female preachers despite their contributions to the richness of Indonesian Islam. This represents a notable deficiency in the academic study of Islam in Indonesia, especially regarding the understanding of the development and contributions of Indonesian Hadrami women. The subsequent section further explores the existing research on Hadrami women in Indonesia, conducted by both male and female authors. It highlights the available literature and identifies gaps necessary for comprehending the significant contributions of Ba 'Alawi women within the Hadrami diaspora in the Indian Ocean, the intricacies of Sufi networks, and the wider framework of Islam in Indonesia.

Hadrami Women within the Study of Indonesian Islam

Most studies concerning Hadrami women are situated within the context of diaspora studies, emphasizing aspects such as gender identity, agency and limitations, as well as their expression of piety in public settings. Certain works do not focus exclusively on these women; rather, they address the topic within the broader framework of Hadrami communities. Furthermore, these works can also be contextualized within the examination of Indonesian Islam. Van den Berg's classic book mentioned above (2010, 85–86), for example, has indeed dedicated a chapter on the "social position of women," in which he indicated that in Hadramaut, women experience a significantly more favorable situation compared to their counterparts in other Islamic nations. Men seldom initiate divorce without justifiable causes, even though this was frequently practiced among the Hadramis in the Netherlands East Indies (See also Boxberger 2002, 128). This situation has placed women and children within polygamous families in a challenging predicament (van den Berg 2010, 166).

Boxberger (2002, 125–147) discusses detailed challenges experienced by women in Hadramaut in observing milestone rituals in their life, including birth, maturation, marriage, reproduction, and death. She explains (2002, 125–128), for example, that the arrival of a male child

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was typically celebrated and proclaimed with greater enthusiasm than that of a female child, as an additional son was regarded as a more significant benefit to the family. In addition, girls entered into arranged marriage shortly after reaching puberty. Neither the bride nor the groom possessed the authority to decline participation in a marriage orchestrated by their parents or guardians. Their first meeting typically occurred on the day of the wedding, although they might have had some interactions during their childhood. A comparable circumstance that limits the educational opportunities for girls and women in Hadramaut is examined by Freitag (2003).

In a similar line but within the Indonesian setting, Vera (2018) explores the topic of equality in marriage (*kafā'ah*) in Solo, Central Java. Marriage is perceived as the most crucial component in maintaining the patriarchal genealogy and identity of the Ba 'Alawi, and therefore Ba 'Alawi women encounter difficulties when marrying non-Ba 'Alawi men (see also Slama 2014; Abaza 2004, 178). Vera's research findings indicate that the Hadrami women have been historically shaped by the patriarchal ethnic culture originating from Yemen, and, as a consequence, they were given a limited public space. In addition, they are perceived as lacking significant knowledge of the Hadrami traditions.

Interestingly, Slama's (2012) examination of Hadrami women's agency in Indonesia, specifically those living in urban areas such as Jakarta, Yogyakarta, and the island of Sulawesi, yielded a rather different conclusion. The study emphasizes the ways in which these women navigate the gender norms established by their community alongside the broader gender models that exist within Indonesian society. Slama (2012, 326–327) asserts that while it is essential to interpret the discourse within the framework of the significant limitations on Hadrami women's agency, his examination of Wanita Islam Al-Khairaat and Banatul Khairaat, the women's wing of Hadrami organizations in Palu, Sulawesi, demonstrates that these women have transcended their local community by disseminating their message not only to Hadrami individuals but also more broadly to Muslim women. This situation is reminiscent of earlier events in the 1930s, when the women of Al-Irshad in Pekalongan, Central Java, made their presence felt in the Hadrami public sphere through the women's wing of their organization, Nahḍah al-Mu'minat (Awakening of the Female Believers) (Mobini-Kesheh 1999, 69).

The activities that have enabled Hadrami women to enter public domains have also stimulated Seise (2018) to study the Ba 'Alawi female community in Palembang, South Sumatra. These women are notably engaged in various Islamic activities, with a significant emphasis on the celebration of *Mawlid*, which commemorates the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad. Their participation in female-only *Mawlid* events has provided these women with a platform to express their emotions and engage in physical expressions during the celebrations. This practice has proven a significant transformation, because, as noted by Boxberger (2002, 162), in their homeland "while men attended *mawlid* celebrations, commemorating Muhammad's birth, in Sufi centers and in mosques, women gathered in courtyards and homes for their observations."

Three further studies that specifically examine the growing visibility of Ba 'Alawi preachers within the context of public Islam in Indonesia merit attention. First, Abaza's (2004) research on the new preaching style in Jakarta, which focuses on *majelis taklim* that are primarily led by women. In her examination of a new preaching style led by of Ustazah Faridah bt. Mohammad b. 'Ali al-Habshi (b. 1955), she has provided insights into the significant interconnection between gentrification and religious practices among the urban middle class. Second, Nisa's (2012) examination on the contributions of two Ba 'Alawi female preachers, namely Ustazah Halimah Alaydrus (will be discussed further below) and Ustazah Khodijah Al-Junayd, to the development of *da'wah* in Jakarta, a field traditionally dominated by men. She argues that the rise of urban contemporary Ba 'Alawi Ustazah highlights not only their roles in publicly expressing piety, but also underscores their significant impact on enhancing the position of fellow Ba 'Alawi female preachers. Both scholarly works have contributed to the understanding of the gender dynamics in contemporary Indonesian Hadrami diaspora. One last notable work to mention is Alatas' (2016) study on pilgrimage, which emphasizes the role of Ustazah Halimah Alaydrus as a significant preacher who has effectively engaged the interest of individuals of non-Hadrami descent in undertaking a pilgrimage to Hadramaut. Through her *majelis taklim* and publications, she has constructed Hadramaut and its residents as real fragments of the ancient Prophetic era, thus positioning it as a pilgrimage site for all Muslims, rather than solely for those with ancestral connections to the region (2016, 612–617).

The aforementioned studies have explored various aspects of Hadrami women in Indonesia. What this literature does not offer is the examination of the changing role of contemporary Indonesian Ba ʿAlawi women, especially those recently graduated from their studies in Yemen, in their endeavors to preserve and transmit the teachings of the Ṭarīqa ʿAlawiyya for the wider public through their visual and textual preaching. The subsequent section will employ a feminist epistemology perspective and gender *jihād* approach to analyze the evolving role of Ba ʿAlawi women and their influence on the development of Indonesian Islam.

Epistemological Contribution of the Ba ʿAlawi Female Preachers

The study of Indonesian Ba ʿAlawi women and their epistemology, especially regarding their function as *asātidhah*, entails an analysis of how they acquire and disseminate the teachings of the Ṭarīqa ʿAlawiyya, which defines the identity of the Hadrami community. This *ṭarīqah*, which defines the identity of the Hadrami community, was founded by Muhammad b. ʿAli Ba ʿAlawi (d. 1255), commonly referred to as *al-Faqīh al-Muqaddam*, the Paramount Jurist. He received the Sufi investiture cloak indirectly from Shuʿayb Abu Madyan (d. 1197), a revered Sufi saint from Tlemcen, Morocco, through ʿAbdullah al-Salih al-Maghribi (Bang 2003, 14; Ho 2006, 41). Bang (2003, 15–16) further defines the *ṭarīqah* as "a transmission of mystical knowledge in the genealogical chain, which then was infused with the Madyaniyya during the lifetime of *al-Faqīh al-Muqaddam*." The texts and rituals that emulate the prophetic piety established by the revered ancestors of the *sāda* serve to distinguish the *ṭarīqah* from broader Islamic teachings. In addition, its membership is understood as engaging in the transmission of Prophetic knowledge, participating in daily worship, and maintaining ties to the ancestors through practices such as *hadhrah* (meaning presence, a ritual for invoking the spirit of the Prophet), as well as adhering to daily litanies like the *ratib* (litany) or "daily allowance of (spiritual) food" (Alatas 2010, 49). After the reunification of South and North Yemen in 1990, the Ṭarīqa ʿAlawiyya underwent a significant revival through several Ba ʿAlawi scholars and discreet governmental support for Sufism. This initiative was part of the government's strategy to mitigate the influence of various radical Salafi factions. A prominent figure in this movement is Habib ʿUmar b. Muhammad b. Hafidz (b. 1963) (Alatas 2010, 50).

The methods by which these Indonesian Ba ʻAlawi women obtain and share the teachings of the Ṭarīqa ʻAlawiyya, as well as how the viewpoints and experiences of these women influence this knowledge, can be examined through the lens of feminist epistemology, a branch of theory that examines women's unique contributions to the creation of knowledge. It argues that gender influences our concept of knowledge (Grasswick 2018). This perspective acknowledges that knowledge is inherently subjective, influenced by the viewpoints and experiences of those who create and transmit it.

The emergence of feminist epistemology can be traced to standpoint theory which emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as feminist critical theory, focusing on the production of knowledge and the practice of power. This theory was initially intended to explain the success of feminist research in an explanatory manner, but was later also intended as a prescriptive method or methodology that illuminated feminist research (Harding, 2001). To that extent, black feminist epistemology emerged as a challenge to white feminist domination, and emphasized respect for ethnic, class, and gender differences in the production of knowledge (Collins 2000).

Citing Cixous (1976), Udasmoro (2021, 24) asserts that feminist epistemology arose from the recognition that knowledge has predominantly favored the dominant (masculine) perspective, resulting in the marginalization of women and other groups. For this reason, feminist epistemologists fight for eliminating the oppression of women in the production of knowledge (Grasswick 2018). Udasmoro (2021, 25) further posits that a crucial element in elucidating the functioning of this epistemology is the identification of the subject and the object. This distinction is significant due to the ongoing processes of subjectification and objectification that are perpetually reproduced within the dynamics between women and men.

Closely related to this, Haraway (1988) emphasizes the significance of the concept of "Situated Knowledge" to comprehend how objects are positioned within the production of knowledge. This concept is crucial as, in numerous traditions, women have frequently been regarded as objects rather than subjects in the knowledge production process. She argues (1988, 592) that "Situated knowledges require that the object of knowledge be pictured as an actor and agent, not as a screen or a ground or a resource, never finally as slave to the master

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that closes off the dialectic in his unique agency and his authorship of 'objective' knowledge." As highlighted by Udasmoro (2021, 26), this way of positioning an object as an entity possessing agency offers a novel perspective on the relationship between object and subject.

While certain individuals advocate for the eradication of the marginalization and oppression of women in knowledge production via a secular framework, Amina Wadud (2006) coined the phrase "gender *jihād*" in her pursuit of justice grounded in her Islamic faith. Wadud (2006, 10) fully comprehends the negative connotations frequently associated with the term *jihād* and instead opts to highlight its interpretation as "a struggle to establish gender justice in Muslim thought and praxis." For her (2006, 190), women need to pursue their education to achieve greater self-sufficiency, rather than remaining reliant on men's knowledge for epistemological, philosophical, and ontological full agency. The quote below (2006, 183–184) emphasizes her point of view:

> It is in this way that some progressives and conservatives actually embrace the same paradigm: to be fully human, a moral agent, and a public leader, one must be male. For the conservatives this means that a woman is allowed to maintain her womanhood, as long as she does not draw attention to her marginality by rendering it fully human. For the progressive this means that a woman is fully human and can therefore act in roles heretofore exclusive to men, as long as she is not too much a woman. Given such a choice, I reject both limitations. I am fully human; I am fully woman. If gender bias in Islamic practices is ever to be genuinely removed, then we women need to articulate from the center of the marginality of our lives. The stage needs to be reset and women's stories need to become models for the overarching process of Islam as engaged surrender, no matter where it occurs.

The importance of acknowledging women's experiences, knowledge and dedication to Islam is also highlighted by Shaikh (2013, 15) who analyzes how the category of experience "may currently intersect with feminist thought to produce egalitarian knowledge of gender and subjectivities within Muslim thought." Using gender as a critical lens, feminists have examined the diverse experiences that underlie rituals, practices, ethics, and authority in various religious traditions, and have argued that women's experiences also shape egalitarian scholarship in Islamic thought. Is it feasible to thoroughly apply the feminist epistemology perspective or the gender *jihad* approach to examine the contributions of contemporary Indonesian Ba 'Alawi women in their

endeavors to promote and disseminate the teachings of the Ṭarīqa ʿAlawiyya?

The rise of Indonesian Ba ʿAlawi preachers on the offline public stage, drawing thousands of women attendees, represents a relatively recent development. Prior to the 1990s, there were indeed numerous *majelis taklim* led by respected Ba ʿAlawi figures, albeit on a much smaller scale. This emergence has prompted questions regarding the means by which these female preachers establish authority and credibility, including their intellectual and spiritual education, their access to traditional knowledge, and their engagement with the broader community through diverse platforms, both online and offline. My first article on the subject (Husein 2021) attempts to show how contemporary Indonesian Ba ʿAlawi female teachers and preachers have become the preservers and transmitters of the Ṭarīqa ʿAlawiyya; thus, I will refrain from elaborating on it further in this current article.

To provide a concise summary, the reconnection between Hadramaut and Indonesia post-1990 can be attributed to the aforementioned *riḥlah rūḥāniyyah* aimed at preserving and disseminating the teachings of the Ṭarīqa ʿAlawiyya, with Habib ʿUmar b. Hafidz playing a pivotal role in this endeavor. The visit of the two prominent Ba ʿAlawi scholars mentioned above, namely Habib Anis b. ʿAlwi al-Habshi and Habib ʿAbdul Qodir b. Ahmad Asseggaf, laid the groundwork for sending Indonesian students to Dār al-Muṣṭafā male boarding school in Tarim, Yemen, which was founded in the early part of 1993 under the leadership of Habib ʿUmar b. Hafidz. This initiative was propelled by these influential figures, who received support from various Indonesian stakeholders committed to enhancing the prospects of the younger male generation in Indonesia and bolstering their capacity for preaching in the modern context. Due to the request of many women, in 1998 Dār al-Zahrā female boarding school was founded by Habib ʿUmar b. Hafidz within the same city. This establishment marked a notable shift in women's participation in the endeavor to preserve and disseminate the teachings of the *ṭarīqah*. This also serves as a crucial initial step in women's contribution in developing new practices of the *ṭarīqah*. This situation contrasts significantly with late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the Netherlands East Indies, during which education for Hadrami girls was exclusively provided at home, and only a small number of Hadrami women served as religious educators for the girls within the community.

I have examined three ethnographic cases of Indonesian Ba ʿAlawi women, focusing on their motivations for studying in Hadramaut and their subsequent roles upon returning home. These cases illustrate different generational perspectives and vary in terms of the duration of their studies and their individual motivations (2021: 177–179). The individuals discussed are: Ustādhah Halimah bt. Usman Alaydrus (henceforth referred to as Ustazah Halimah), born in 1979 in Indramayu, West Java; Ustazah Khodijah Abdulqodir b. Hud Assegaf, born in Surabaya, East Java, in 1978; and Ustazah Syifa Muhsin al-Haddad, born in 1995 in Solo, Central Java.

Ustazah Halimah stands out as the most prominent Ba ʿAlawi female figure among the three preachers referenced and will be further discussed here. She pursued her studies at Dār al-Zahrā from 1998 to 2002, a path that was not traditionally embraced by the earlier female Hadramis. Upon her return, she commenced her preaching activities by moving from one *majelis taklim* to another in an offline capacity. Her reputation quickly expanded, leading to invitations to speak at various events, both locally in Jakarta and nationally across Indonesia. However, with the rise of social media, her prominence has increased substantially. Her Instagram account, @halimahalaydrus, has 2.8M followers with more than 3K posts, and her YouTube channel has 825K subscribers. Her preaching, both online and in-person, emphasizes the significance of Muslim women and devout Ba ʿAlawi females in maintaining and practicing the T□ari□qa ʿAlawiyya, alongside addressing various contemporary issues pertinent to young Muslim women — subjects that are often overlooked by their male counterparts. A typical offline event featuring Ustazah Halimah attracts over ten thousand women, both Ba ʿAlawi and non-Ba ʿAlawi, and is normally held in various hotel ballrooms or meeting halls. The number of online followers and the offline audience of this magnitude is rarely found among contemporary Ba ʿAlawi male preachers.

In addition to Ustazah Halimah, it is essential to emphasize the growing prominence of another Ba ʿAlawi preacher, Ustazah ʿAisyah bt. Farid b. Syech ʿAbu Bakar, who was born in 1988, and spent six years studying at Dār al-Zahrā. She identifies herself as a "motivational speaker," "entrepreneur," "inspirator," and "international preacher," boasting over 100K followers on her Instagram account. Ustazah ʿAisyah is notably innovative, having organized various events that incorporate theatrical elements. One such event was the theater production titled "The Queen

of Jannah," which took place at the Usmar Ismail Jakarta Film Center in January 2022. Such an innovative model is seldom observed among Ba 'Alawi male authorities.

A lengthy list of distinguished Ba 'Alawi female preachers can also be included, notably the "trio Jindan family," which refers to the three daughters of the esteemed Habib Novel b. Salim Jindan (d. 2005): Ustazah Amiroh bt. Novel Jindan, Ustazah Fatimah bt. Novel Jindan, and Ustazah Fachriyah bt. Novel Jindan. Ustazah Amiroh bt. Novel Jindan dedicated several years to her studies in Tarim prior to the establishment of Dār al-Zahrā, where she informally learned from Hababah Ummu Salim, the spouse of Habib 'Umar b. Hafidz. The three sisters have opted to deliver their *da'wah* in person. The younger generations of Ba 'Alawi *asātidhah*, including Ustazah Sania bt. Umar al-Mutahhar (b. 2001), who boasts nearly 135K followers on her Instagram, and Ustazah Fatimah bt. Mundzir al-Musawa (b. 1998), with approximately 333K followers on the same social media platform, are also noteworthy additions to this list. The messages they convey all emphasize the significance of maintaining, implementing, and disseminating the principles of the *ṭarīqah*, as well as the necessity for women to uphold ethical standards, particularly in public settings.

Alongside their preaching across various regions of Indonesia, some Ba 'Alawi female preachers, including Ustazah Halimah, Ustazah 'Aisyah, and the "trio Jindan family" have expanded the *ṭarīqah* network, utilizing both their social media platforms and by visiting several countries, including Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, Australia, New Zealand, Oman and Egypt. What is particularly noteworthy is their new role in leading non-hajj pilgrimage, referred to as *ziyārah* (Arabic: for visit or pilgrimage). These spiritual journeys are undertaken to the graves of notable male and female Muslim saints, along with the engagements with devout Hadramis residing in both Indonesia and Hadramaut. The participation in these journeys includes not only Ba 'Alawi women but also the broader Indonesian Muslim women (see Husein, forthcoming 2025). This recent practice of *ziyarah* has further reinforced the developing *ṭarīqah* networks in the Indian Ocean regions.

The increasing influence of these Ba 'Alawi female preachers, particularly through their mentorship under Habib 'Umar b. Hafidz and Hababah Ummu Salim, has empowered them to serve not only as a custodians and disseminators of the *ṭarīqah*, but also to contribute to

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the development of new practices of the *ṭarīqah* in online and offline spaces. I would like now to return to my previous question, is it possible to comprehensively utilize the feminist epistemology perspective or the gender *jihad* approach to analyze this new role undertaken by the above Ba ʻAlawi female preachers in studying, practicing, and transmitting the T□ari□qa ʻAlawiyya?

Firstly, as epistemology is concerned with how knowledge is acquired, the motivations behind the Ba ʻAlawi females' decision to study in Hadramaut reveal significant insights, as illustrated by the three aforementioned examples (Husein 2021). Ustazah Syifa's desire to travel to Hadramaut indeed originated from her personal determination. However, she recognized that her journey would not have been possible without her father's approval. The significance of male authority and decision-making is also evident in the cases of Ustazah Halimah and Ustazah Khodijah, where the influential roles of their father and uncle, respectively, played a crucial part. Secondly, many of these Indonesian Ba ʻAlawi *asātidhah* acquired their intellectual and spiritual resources through the Dār al-Zahrā boarding school, an institution established by men, and granted restricted permissions to engage in public preaching from their predominantly male authorities. Thirdly, in promoting the teachings of the *ṭarīqah*, they have emphasized the significance of adhering to traditional roles designated for women, which may be easily interpreted as an internalization of patriarchal norms.

I argue that, despite a degree of dependence on male expertise for epistemological full agency (Wadud 2006, 190), the knowledge acquired and disseminated by Ba ʻAlawi female preachers within the Indonesian context can still be interpreted through the lens of feminist epistemology and gender *jihad*, although with certain limitations. The sermons that these preachers deliver often encourage the contributions of Muslim women, particularly within the Ba ʻAlawi, in safeguarding and promoting the teachings of the *ṭarīqah*. Moreover, their innovative approach to preaching, combined with the size of their offline audience and online followers, distinctly surpasses that of their male counterparts. Indeed, the active involvement of women in socioreligious movements that uphold the principles of female subordination presents a challenge for feminist analysts (Mahmood 2005, 5). Therefore, to be able to interpret their activism within the perspectives of feminist epistemology and gender *jihad*, one needs to comprehend that "the very idioms they

use to enter these arenas are grounded in discourses that have historically secured their subordination to male authority" (Mahmood 2005, 5–6). As historically men within the community have predominantly acted as the primary guardians and transmitters of the *ṭarīqah*, it is challenging for these women to fully assert their identities and roles within this deeply entrenched patriarchal framework. Nevertheless, their courage to engage publicly and participate in the formation of new understandings and practices regarding the *ṭarīqah*, both offline and online, has enriched this body of knowledge. This represents a significant change, particularly in the Indonesian Hadrami context, as the assertion of public religious authority is no longer solely the domain of men, but is also embraced by the women of the community.

Conclusion

As an Indonesian Ba ʻAlawi woman, I have endeavored to amplify the voices and experiences of my fellow females in the community and their dynamics within Indonesian Islam, a subject that has frequently been neglected in scholarly discussions. The studies previously mentioned, mostly conducted by Western scholars on the broader Hadrami women and specifically the Indonesian Hadrami, have not explored the role of contemporary Indonesian Ba ʻAlawi women, particularly those who have recently completed their education in Yemen. Consequently, they have overlooked the dynamics involved in preserving and disseminating the teachings of the *Ṭarīqah ʻAlawīyah*, as well as their participation in the formation of new understandings and practices of the *ṭarīqah* within the specific context of Indonesia.

My article emphasizes the significant contributions of Indonesian Ba ʻAlawi female preachers, through their online and offline platforms, illustrating how they have become essential components of the evolving *ṭarīqah* networks within the Indian Ocean regions. By reviewing the existing literature on the Hadrami diaspora and the Hadrami women in Indonesia, I have demonstrated that, traditionally, the men within this community served as the primary custodians and transmitters of the T□ari□qa ʻAlawiyya. Nevertheless, my research has revealed the epistemological contributions made by these Ba ʻAlawi *asātidhah*, who have assumed roles similar to those of their male counterparts, while also providing new interpretations and practices of the *ṭarīqah*.

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One might argue that the contributions of these female preachers exist in the shadow of the males within the community, suggesting that they do not have any agency. However, I agree with Slama (2012), who posits that while "Hadrami women do not engage in discourses that celebrate their rise in these spheres during recent decades, at least not in those that resort to a secular feminist language" (2012, 325), they, and more specifically Indonesian Ba 'Alawi women, "increasingly enter public sphere as self-consciously pious agents" (2012, 326–327). I further argue that acknowledging the distinct form of agency exhibited by contemporary Indonesian Ba 'Alawi female preachers will offer deeper insights that challenge patriarchal readings of women's socioreligious activism, as suggested by Mahmood (2005) concerning the grassroots women's piety movement in Cairo, Egypt.

To conclude, through the examination of these contemporary Indonesian Ba 'Alawi female preachers, I have demonstrated that they have now carved out their own niches of religious authority within the diverse religious landscapes in Indonesia, and thus, at least potentially, have changed the gendered nature of the *ṭarīqah*. It is important to promote further research in this area, particularly from the viewpoints of Southeast Asian and Indonesian female academics. This will offer significant contributions to the study of Hadrami diaspora around the Indian Ocean, the study of Sufi networks, and the study of the roles of women in Indonesian Islam.

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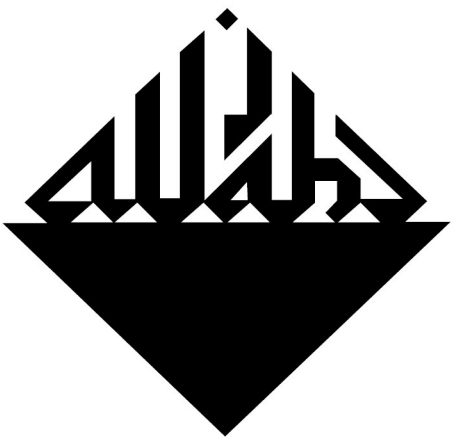

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