

Navigating Tradition and Modernity: The Impact of Transnational Islam in Gorontalo, Indonesia

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Article History</p> <p>Received: 13 September 2024</p> <p>Revised: 21 October 2024</p> <p>Accepted: 1 December 2024</p> <p>Published: 3 December 2024</p> <p>Keywords: Gorontalo; Modernity; Tradition; Transnational Islam</p> <p>Copyright (c) 2024 Samsi Pomalingo, Kartini Kamaruzzaman, Idaman, Wirna Tangahu</p> 	<p>This research investigated the entry of Transnational Islam in Gorontalo, Indonesia, focusing on <i>Tablighi Jamaat</i> and <i>Wahdah Islamiyah (Salafi)</i>. Addressing gaps in previous studies, this work explores why Gorontalo Muslims, despite early rejection, have embraced these movements. The study examines how transnational Islam responds to local cultural Gorontalo influences that affect the authenticity of Islamic teachings. Using a qualitative ethnographic approach, the research highlights key factors contributing to this acceptance, such as the emphasis on returning to the Quran and Sunnah, reinforcing <i>aqidah</i> (creed), <i>tauhid</i> (monotheism), and the importance of faith and good deeds. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on transnational Islam by offering new insights into its adaptation within local contexts, particularly in response to globalization. The findings are structured around key themes, such as doctrinal purity, dawah efforts, and the rejection of political agendas, which resonate with Gorontalo's Muslim population across social classes. The theoretical frameworks of modernity and religious authority inform the analysis, illustrating how transnational movements negotiate global and local dynamics while maintaining a commitment to return to Islamic teachings under the guidance of the Al-Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet.</p>

How to Cite:

Pomalingo, S., Kamaruzzaman, K., Idaman, I., & Tangahu, W. (2024). Navigating Tradition and Modernity: The Impact of Transnational Islam in Gorontalo, Indonesia. *Progresiva : Jurnal Pemikiran Dan Pendidikan Islam*, 13(03), 313–330. <https://doi.org/10.22219/progresiva.v13i03.35868>

Introduction

Transnational Islamic movements in Gorontalo, as in many other regions in Indonesia, have sparked varied reactions from the local community. In general, the Gorontalo community is concerned that the entry of transnational Islamic movements may threaten local values and traditions. Many feel that stricter and more exclusive teachings could displace the Gorontalo cultural identity established with more moderate local Islamic practices. On the other hand, a segment of society sees this movement as an opportunity for moral and spiritual improvement (Makruf & Asrori, 2022; Sarpini & Mawardi, 2023). They believe stricter teachings can bring positive societal changes, such as reducing negative behavior and increasing social solidarity.

The entry of this movement often induces polarization within society. Some people feel threatened by new ideas, while others feel more inspired. This tension can cause divisions between groups in society that previously lived in harmony. This movement stimulates public debate about the correct understanding of Islam. These discussions often involve local religious figures, academics, and the general public, with various arguments for and against the influence of transnational movements (Makruf & Asrori, 2022; Wajdi, 2018). Several local Islamic organizations in Gorontalo are trying to respond to this transnational movement by strengthening their base and educating the community about moderate Islamic values. They want to ensure that the community remains connected to Islamic teachings that align with the local cultural context (Aderus et al., 2024; Afkar & Sundrijo, 2023; Baskara, 2017).

While there has been extensive research on transnational Islam in Indonesia, existing studies tend to focus on two primary aspects. First, they explore the religious polemics surrounding the purification of Islamic teachings (Baihaki, 2018; Fajarini, 2014; Nashir, 2008; Rasyidah, 2014). Second, they examine the political dimensions of transnational Islam, particularly its relationship with the establishment of a *khilafah* (caliphate) system (Amiruddin, 2014; Nuh, 2015). However, the reasons why certain segments of Indonesian society, including the people of Gorontalo, respond positively to transnational Islam remain underexplored. Understanding this response is crucial, as transnational Islamic movements are often at the center of internal conflicts within the Muslim community, threatening unity and social cohesion (Baihaki, 2018).

Gorontalo, often referred to as “the porch of Madinah,” provides an interesting case study for examining the acceptance and proliferation of transnational Islamic movements (Pomalingo et al., 2022). The region has a unique historical and cultural context that shapes its Islamic landscape (Gottowik, 2014), yet this has not been fully explored in the existing literature. Historically, Gorontalo has been influenced by the broader political and religious shifts occurring across Indonesia, particularly during the Reformation era. The local community’s response to transnational Islam is likely shaped by these broader national trends, as well as local cultural and religious practices (Pomalingo et al., 2021).

This paper aims to fill the gaps left by previous studies by investigating the factors that contribute to the positive response of Gorontalo’s people towards transnational Islam. It seeks to understand how these movements have gained traction in the region and what this reveals about the broader dynamics of Islam in Indonesia. This study argues that the presence of transnational Islamic networks in Gorontalo is partly a response to the strong influence of local culture on various aspects of Islamic teachings, which are perceived as blending Islamic teachings

with local traditions, such as marriage, death ceremonies, prayers for the departed, *tahlilan*, and other practices. In addition, this study explores how different groups in society—across age groups, social classes, and religious affiliations—engage with and respond to these movements. This paper contributes to academic discourse and underscores the real-world implications of these movements.

This study is significant because it provides new insights into how transnational Islamic movements are received in a specific local context, while also contributing to a broader understanding of the role of Islam in Indonesia's post-Reformation political and social landscape. By analyzing the dynamics in Gorontalo, the research sheds light on the complexities of Islamic identity and the tensions between different ideological streams within the Muslim community. This study also emphasizes the importance of investigating local responses to global religious movements, which continue to shape both national and international political and religious discourses.

Research Method

This qualitative research relied on an ethnographic approach due to the research focus on investigating social life from the emic perspective. Ethnography is a type of research that explores the behaviour and interactions of research subjects, resulting in credible and authentic description. This type of research enables the research subjects to be more vocal in representing their identities through oral transcription and detailed description of a specific event (Fetterman, 2010).

The nature of qualitative research in utilizing narrative data, e.g., utterances, and constructions of the informants, further emphasizes the quality of information from the research subjects (authentic perspective of the informants). The rationale of employing a qualitative method was to provide in-depth discussion regarding the social phenomenon, focusing on processes, meaning patterns, and structural elements, and thus resulting in the possibilities to unravel other unexpected findings. For instance, Hamayotsu (2020) highlights the growing influence of Salafi and Tablighi Jamaat movements, advocating a return to puritanical Islamic teachings based on the Quran and Sunnah. This is consistent with Gorontalo's reception, where these movements have been welcomed for their emphasis on simplifying religious practices. Similarly, Fealy (2019) points to the Tablighi Jamaat's apolitical focus on personal piety as a key factor in its broad acceptance across rural and urban Indonesia, which resonates with the findings in Gorontalo.

However, this study diverges from Hasan (2007), who observed stronger resistance to Salafi movements in urban Java due to concerns about social division. In contrast, Gorontalo's primarily Muslim population has been more receptive, partly due to shared religious values like tauhid and iman.

Additionally, Nakamura (2023) emphasizes that transnational Islamic movements often adapt to local contexts. A pattern observed in Gorontalo, where initial resistance gave way to broader acceptance as the movements aligned with local religious norms. These comparisons highlight both commonalities and regional nuances in the reception of transnational Islamic movements. Such findings can serve as the reflection source. The present work relied on inductive perspective, focusing on individual meaning and interpretation of problem complexity.

This study was conducted in Gorontalo, a province inhabited mostly by Muslims located in the northern part of Sulawesi Island. All data were from depth interviews, observation, and documentation. These methods help retrieve the

data collection process, specifically in obtaining authentic data by immersing the researcher in the setting of the research subjects (Pomalingo et al., 2021).

A two-step process was employed to select the informants, ensuring both relevance and depth of information. First, the snowball sampling method was used, where initial informants—key religious figures and community members—were identified and interviewed. These participants then recommended additional individuals with relevant knowledge or experience, allowing for the gradual accumulation of informants with firsthand insights into the emergence and acceptance of transnational Islamic movements in Gorontalo. This method ensured that diverse perspectives were captured (Remtulla et al., 2021), including those from both the Tablighi Jamaat and Wahdah Islamiyah movements, as well as community members not directly affiliated with these groups. The second step involved identifying key informants based on the documentation of significant figures within the movements, as well as local religious and community leaders, providing a deeper understanding of the dynamics at play. This approach ensured that the data obtained was not only rich in detail but also representative of the different facets of transnational Islam's influence in Gorontalo.

The identification of key informants was performed by selecting the informants that had been gathered from the previous method. In this study, all key informants were those affiliating with the transnational Islam movement. The main informant involved the leader of Tablighi Jamaat and Wahdah Islamiyah. Supporting informants consisted of local governments and clerics from community organizations, e.g., Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah. Applying the inductive analysis method, the present work aims to explore the reason underpinning the polemic and factors of the positive response of Gorontalo people in accepting transnational Islam in the region.

Informed consent for participation in the study was acquired verbally. Each participant received comprehensive information regarding the study's objectives, procedures, and their rights as participants. They were reassured of the confidentiality of their data and the security of information provided throughout the research. Furthermore, this study obtained ethical approval from the pertinent authorities in Gorontalo, as indicated by ethical clearance number 070/KesbangPol/2075 issued by the Agency of National Unity and Politics (Kesbangpol) of Gorontalo City. This approval underscores the adherence of the research to established ethical guidelines, prioritizing the welfare of all participants involved. Rigorous compliance with the ethical standards outlined by the committee was meticulously observed throughout the research process, ensuring utmost confidentiality and welfare protection. This methodological rigor aimed to preserve the integrity of the study and uphold the highest ethical standards in research practice, reflecting our commitment to ethical conduct and participant well-being.

Result and Discussion

Transnational Islam In Gorontalo

Gorontalo, located in the northern part of Sulawesi, has a long history rooted in diverse local cultures. Before the arrival of Islam, the people of Gorontalo practiced animist beliefs and various strong local traditions (Mukrimin, 2023). External influences began appearing in the 15th century when Muslim traders from the Nusantara and Middle East regions started trading in this area. Islam began to be known in Gorontalo through trade interactions, intercultural marriages, and

the spread of da'wah by scholars (Donald Qomaidiansyah Tungkagi, 2017). Traders, especially from Maluku and Makassar, played an important role in introducing Islamic teachings to the local community. This process was gradual, with the community adopting Islam voluntarily (Mashadi & Suryani, 2018).

By the 17th century, the influence of Islam had strengthened through the establishment of the Gorontalo Sultanate. The first Sultan, Sultan Amai, played a crucial role in spreading Islamic teachings and reinforcing his authority through religion (Mashadi & Suryani, 2018). Local scholars also contributed to educating the community on Islamic principles, leading to increased acceptance of Islam (Mukrimin, 2023). However, the Gorontalo community's acceptance of Islam did not eliminate local culture. Instead, Islam assimilated with local customs and traditions, with many traditional rituals being adapted into religious practices, creating a unique, harmonious form of Islam within Gorontalo culture (Une, 2021).

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, Gorontalo began to encounter the influence of transnational Islamic movements. These movements are often associated with organizations that have international networks, such as Salafi and Wahhabi groups (Pomalingo et al., 2022). The rise of global information access and the internet accelerated the spread of these ideas, with globalization playing a significant role in introducing new Islamic perspectives (Mukrimin, 2023). As Gorontalo society became more connected to the outside world, it began to be exposed to narratives that included more radical and exclusive interpretations, posing challenges for a society long accustomed to moderate Islam (Gibson, 1956).

Gorontalo society exhibited various responses to these movements. Some groups were concerned about their potential negative impact on social and cultural life, attempting to preserve existing Islamic values, while others felt inspired to adopt stricter practices (Mukrimin, 2023). The debate about the correct interpretation of Islam became more prevalent in Gorontalo, with local religious figures discussing how society should respond to transnational influences (Pomalingo et al., 2022). Some advocated a more moderate approach, while others supported adopting more radical teachings. Social media plays a critical role in disseminating transnational Islamic ideas in Gorontalo, with individuals and groups using these platforms to promote both moderate and radical views. This dynamic requires the community to approach information more critically. These movements significantly influence the younger generation in Gorontalo, with some actively participating in organizations promoting the "Return to the Qur'an and Sunnah" agenda, while others work to uphold local values. This tension has introduced a new social dynamic in Gorontalo (Samsudin et al., 2022).

Transnational Islam is a new concept in academic discourse in Indonesia, and this movement is an ideology that crosses national boundaries (nation-state). Several Islamic organizations that are included in the category of transnational Islamic movements and their accomplices in Indonesia include: *Ikhwanul Muslimin* in Egypt, *Hizbut Tahrir* in Lebanon, *Wahabiyah* in Saudi Arabia, *Jama'ah Islamiyah* in Pakistan, *Salafi Jihadist* in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as *Syi'ah* in Iran (Aksa, 2017).

Transnational Islam is also known as fundamental Islam. The distinctive trait of this group is that it has never taken any action that is contrary to the basic foundations of their beliefs, the Quran and Sunnah. Further, this group has always considered itself the right, truthful group in interpreting the Quran, monopolizing the truth of the interpretation of the text and claiming that other groups are wrong. Fundamentalism ideas and movements are included in the concepts of extremism, radicalism, and scripturalism (Afisi et al., 2023). The phenomenon of fundamentalism

is extensively studied in the paradigm of rationalism in modern social science. All fundamentalist movements have specific characteristics. Fundamental Islam is an orthodox ideology that continuously tries to incorporate political systems in Islam in the modern world (Pomalingo, 2019).

On top of that, fundamental Islam differs from other fundamentalist movements in many ways, including political space, i.e., the ability to penetrate boundaries between countries (Ben-Dor, 2013). In this view, Islam is regarded as a protest movement, indicating the total adherence of the faithful to a set of behavioral principles, the difficulty of separating the state from religion, a solid orientation to collective matters, the legitimacy of the Islamic State, and the commandment of jihad and faith in the lives of believers (Ben-Dor, 2013). In Indonesia, the presence of fundamental Islamic groups was seen after George W. Bush proclaimed resistance to terrorist groups over the terrorist group's actions on September 11, 2001 (Nathan & Kamali, 2005).

The presence of fundamentalist Islam represents a protest against America. The fundamental organizations encompass Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), the Surakarta Islamic Youth Front, the Indonesian Muslim Student Action Unit (KAMMI), the Indonesian Muslim Student Association (Hammas), the Islamic Youth Movement (GPI), the Hezbollah Front, the Indonesian Mujahidin Council (MMI), the Crescent Star Party (PBB), and the Justice Party (PK). The acts of terrorism in the United States clearly illustrate fundamentalist Islamic groups, which most Muslims call "Islamic terrorists" or Salafi Jihadist groups (Fealy & Hooker, 2006).

Judging from all notions previously discussed, Islamic countries tend to be more vulnerable to waves of fundamentalism due to transnational Islamic networks. However, the ups and downs of fundamental Islam are a response to the involved countries' social, political, and economic conditions. This results in the paradigm that the state failed to serve its people. In addition, law enforcement is not optimal for various problems in society. Other issues involve the criminalization of clerics and the state's impartiality towards Muslims in matters of justice.

Fundamental Islam as a result of the response to the condition of Muslims is also a socio-religious movement to return Muslims to "fundamental Islamic teachings," returning to ethical purity based on the Quran and Sunnah as a religious doctrine taught by the prophets who carry the treatise, build justice and balance relations between humans and the Creator (*hablu minallah*), humans with humans (*hablu minnannas*), and humans with themselves (Mahendra, 1999).

Fundamental Islamic groups are exoteric; they emphasize the limits of permissibility (halal) and haram based on *fiqh* or the halal-haram complex. (Azra, 1996). This concept is different from Khatib's claiming that fundamental Islam is like a new social movement, which has relative power in the globalization process and does not aim to eliminate global reality but to shape it (Khatib, 2003). Such an approach emphasizes the existence and identity of certain groups, which in turn is the primary method to obtain power and influence in the global system (Peter Beyer, 1994).

In Indonesia, the fundamental Islamic movement (transnational Islam) is a group that is often at odds with other mainstream groups, e.g., modernist and liberal Islamic groups. The fundamental Islamic movement is also called the Wahhabi group or Islamic revivalism (Choueiri, 2003). This group often voices the enforcement and application of Islamic law both in aspects of social and state life above man-made laws and the establishment of an Islamic State. Once Islamic law is applied in a country, the groups will monopolize the positions of judges (Roy, 2005).

This movement is notoriously known with reformists in the field of theology and there is a tendency to reject the authority of the school of thought (M.v. Bruinessen, 1999). In Indonesia, it must be admitted that this fundamentalist group has a low understanding of the complex sociological map of Indonesia. Such groups often take shortcuts by implementing Islamic law through local regulations. They imagine that their approach will bring God's blessing to Indonesia (Pomalingo et al., 2020).

Imaginary goals of this fundamentalist group highlight the idea of an Islamic revolution, signifying the rejection of traditional Islam's legitimacy. In Iran, the theory of *velayat e faqih* asserts that the revolutionary leader not only gave authority to unquestioned religious leaders but also dominated traditional religious leaders to someone with power. In Afghanistan, the term "Taliban" (literally students) or those studying religion means that clerics or traditional thinkers have lost their rights in favor of youths who have shallow religious knowledge. The youths have power in the name of law, groups, and sharia, without bothering to master the science of interpretation or philosophy of the Quran (Roy, 2005).

Transnational Islamic group criticized traditional culture (such as *tahlilan*, prayer for the soul, and visiting tombs) in the Muslim world, which they saw as part of heretical practices. Moreover, they prohibit music, poetry, and customs. The presence of transnational Islamic group more common in university mosques, targeting students or millennials. They represent themselves as Salafists or followers of the Salaf, i.e., the best generation in the post-Prophet Muhammad PBUH era. Several members of the Salafi group openly claim to be Wahhabis; they tend to be exclusive, fanatic, and easily emotional.

David Wright-Neville classifies Muslim movements in Malaysia and Indonesia an activist, militant, and terrorist (Hiariej, 2010). This category functions to distinguish three types of actions. Among those actions aim to simply change political policies, including the political hierarchy to Islamic-based, and make radical changes to the existing social order through violence. Such actions often have nothing to do with the purpose of the movement. Protest is a broad term used in the tradition of social movement studies to describe the collective action of activists in fighting for their goals. Protest is an unconventional method the validity of which is questionable, and it is intended to influence the socio-political process and maintain or change the existing institutionalization of power relations. Instrumentalist bias is the main problem of this concept.

Fundamentalist Islamic groups are characterized by distinct ideological and doctrinal features that set them apart from mainstream Islamic organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah. According to Huda (2014), one of their key principles is upholding the concept of *Din wa Daulah* (religion and state), which emphasizes the inseparability of Islam as a comprehensive system governing both spiritual and political life. They advocate a return to the Quran and Sunnah as the sole sources of guidance, rejecting interpretations they view as influenced by cultural or modernist perspectives. These groups embrace puritanism, which involves strict adherence to Islamic teachings, and emphasize social justice while simultaneously rejecting Western hegemony and influences they perceive as corruptive to Islamic values. Upholding the sovereignty of Islamic law is central to their agenda, striving for its implementation in all aspects of governance and society. Furthermore, they view jihad as a legitimate and essential instrument of their movement, often framing it as a struggle to defend and propagate their interpretation of Islam. These characteristics collectively highlight their commitment to a rigid and comprehensive Islamic framework.

Since many different interpretations have been provided, fundamentalist Islam has significantly grown in political force (Monroe & Kreidie, 1997). In addition, Monroe & Kreidie (1997) state fundamentalism is explained as a rational reaction to modernity and a pathological decline from reality. Part of the scientific failure to understand and address the growth of religious fundamentalism stems from the inability to recognize the importance of cognitive differences in the worldviews of fundamentalists (Monroe & Kreidie, 1997).

According to Monroe & Kreidie (1997), by providing an empirical analysis of how fundamentalists view the world, fundamentalist Islam piques the interest of many because the concept provides a primary identity that, in turn, provides the foundation for everyday life. The fundamentalist perspective itself is best understood through reference to a worldview that makes no distinction between public and private, in which truth is revealed through revelation, and reason subject to religious doctrine and religious orders dominates all fundamental issues (Monroe & Kreidie, 1997).

The Presence of Transnational Islamic Movements in Gorontalo

Gorontalo, which is located at the northern tip of Sulawesi, is predominantly inhabited by Muslims. The emergence of Islam as the official religion in the area began with Raja Amai, the first Muslim king; the fact is based on three arguments (Mashadi & Suryani, 2018). The first opinion says that Islam first appeared in 931 Hijriyah or 1524 AD. The second opinion states the incident occurred in 899 Hijri or 1495 AD. The second opinion was based on the royal side as written on the entrance gate of the Hunto Sultan Amai Mosque in Biawu Village, Gorontalo, which was established soon after Raja Amai and his companions arrived in Gorontalo (Sirajuddin, 2018). The third opinion argues that Islam began to enter the territory of the Gorontalo kingdoms in around 1525, which was brought by King Amai. At the time, the spread of Islam was through marriage (Amin, 2012). King Amai married Owutango, a princess from the Palasa kingdom. The Palasa Kingdom is located in Tomini Bay, and its king was a Muslim. The princess had a family relationship with the royal party in Ternate, who had been a Muslim.

At that time, the Hunto mosque became the center of Islamic education and cultural activities for the community. The activities mainly were dawah (Islamic preach) and Tablighi Jamaat on religious-community relations in the world and the hereafter. Another focus of these activities was introducing and developing customary principles and customs for the kingdom through Islamic teachings, signifying the vital role of custom in spreading Islam. In their honor, the eight minor kings of Palasa were given the title *Olongia walu lonto otolo-pa*. The kingdom began to emphasize the importance of incorporating Islamic sharia into its customs. A principle known as "*saraa topa-topango to adati*" was established due to the emphasis of the notion. During the reign of Sultan Eato (1673-1679), the formulation of the ancestral fatwa changed to "*aadati hulohulooa to saraa, saraa hulohulooa to Quruani*" (customs based on sharia, sharia based on the Quran). According to *tujai* or traditional verses of Gorontalo recited by Baate (customary leaders), this ideology cannot be replaced (Amin, 2012; Lipoeto, 1947). This signifies that Islamic law and customary law are equal (Tacco, 1935).

The development of Islam in Gorontalo was marked by the emergence of three major organizations, namely Muhammadiyah (1929), Al-Khairat (1930), and NU. All three organizations have influenced the lives of the Gorontalo Muslim

community in terms of *mahdhah* (every worship that is from Allah and His messengers) and *ghairu mahdhah* worship (worship purposed to approach Allah). In addition, the presence of NU and Muhammadiyah is impactful on the Gorontalo community's perspective on an *amaliyah* (aspects related to behavior) law, enabling the identification of communities affiliated to NU and Muhammadiyah. One of the characteristics distinguishing NU and Muhammadiyah in Gorontalo is the mosque with all the accessories (the pulpit and drum belong to NU only).

The transnational Islamic movement in Gorontalo is relatively new (the movement began in 1987 with the establishment of Tabligh). Based on the results of an interview with Subhan Ibrahim, the first person introducing Tablighi Jamaat to Gorontalo was a doctor named Dr. Muhammad Nur a delegate from Jakarta. He was assigned by *Amir* (leader) of Tablighi Jamaat to introduce *dawah* to the Muslim community of Gorontalo. Muhammad Nur visited two mosques, the Jami Baitur Rahman mosque in Limboto and the Ar Rahmah mosque in Gorontalo City. His journey to spread the teachings of Islam went rough. This is because his movement is very different from the three major organizations, and the majority of Gorontalo Muslims mostly affiliate with and are fanatics about Muhammadiyah and NU amaliyah.

Disappointed with the organization, according to Subhan Ibrahim, a member of the Gorontalo Tabligh Jama'ah, several people reported dr. Muhammad Nur to the Limboto Police Station. This report is based on the public's suspicions about the spread of ideas or sects suspected to be heretical by the Gorontalo Muslim community. In the end, the community's report was followed up by the police and asked dr. Muhammad Nur to leave Gorontalo. Dr. Muhammaad Nur and some of his colleagues complied with the police request, and then they returned to Jakarta. This is to maintain the dawah movement and the social relationship of the Muslim community in Gorontalo.

In 1993, the Tablighi Jamaat movement, through a cleric named Nurshadiq, returned to Gorontalo. The cleric was the *amir* (leader) of the group. He was permitted to perform *khuruj* (dawah by visiting places) for three days to introduce the Tabligh movement to the Muslim community of Gorontalo. Nurshadiq arrived with a group from Ternate totaling eight people. However, they were rejected by the Muslim community in Limboto and Gorontalo City because they were accused of being heretical. Nurshodiq and his entourage must be patient and remain confident that Allah the Almighty will help them.

Mohamad Nawai is a civil servant teacher who teaches Islam in an elementary school, and he also works as a tailor at the Limboto shopping center. After the midday prayer in a prayer room in the Limboto terminal, he stayed for a moment to attend a short *tausiyah* (broadcast of dawah or proselytizing) from Ustadz Nurshodiq. It seems that Mohamad Nawai was interested and invited them to the Al Furqon mosque, located in the Air Panas village where Nawai lives. According to Nawai, Nurshodiq and his entourage were welcomed by the Muslim community in the Al Furqon mosque (Abid, 2024; Alwi et al., 2021). The congregation listened to the intent and purpose of the typical dawah movement in the style of the Tabligh (Ahmad, 2021). Nurshodiq and his companions stayed in the village for three days. They visited people's homes to deliver dawah and invited the villagers to join their movement (Effendy & Rustandi, 2020; Waton, 2023).

After three days of *khuruj*, Nurshodiq and his companions left the village, continuing their dawah to one of the mosques in Kwandang, North Gorontalo Regency. He asked Mohamad Nawai and one of the people of Al Furqon mosque,

Romi Paramata, to join his movement. It turned out that the wife of Mohamad Nawai knew about the invitation and reminded her husband to postpone his intention to join the group (Huda, 2014). His wife assumed that the organization was new. However, Mohamad Nawai convinced his wife. He replied to his wife, "That's why I have to come to learn more so that I can recognize the dawah they convey, including the organization." Eventually, Mohamad Nawai's wife allowed him to join the group for a three-day *khuruj* activity in Kwandang (Hidayah et al., 2024; Husni et al., 2023).

After returning from Khuruj, according to Nawai, he attended the 1996 national meeting in Jakarta. Mohamad Nawai was then entrusted as the emir (leader) for the Gorontalo area and the Al-Furqon mosque as the first headquarters of Tablighi Jamaat in Gorontalo. In 1996, the Tablighi Jamaat movement began to receive attention from the Gorontalo Muslim community and the government. The government's attendance evidenced this at the meeting of Tablighi Jamaat for the Gorontalo region, which was held at the Al-Furqon mosque (Suryani et al., 2023; Zaenuri, 2020). According to Naawai, the government at both the district and sub-district levels was surprised by the number of people attending the meeting (it was estimated that hundreds of people came from various mosques in the districts and the city of Gorontalo) (Santoso, 2017).

In 1997, Wahdah Islamiyah emerged as an organization that claimed to be a follower of the Salaf (henceforth, Salafi) in Gorontalo (Pomalingo et al., 2021; Tajuddin & Awwaliyah, 2022). Wahdah Islamiyah is an Islamic mass organization (Ormas) that bases its understanding and practice on the Quran and Sunnah according to the understanding of *As Salaf Ash-Salih* or *Manhaj Ahlussunnah Wal Jamaah*. This organization is engaged in dawah, education, social affairs, women empowerment, information, health, and the environment.

Wahdah Islamiyah began its activities in Makassar, pioneered by the alumni of Hubulo Islamic boarding school. Based on the results of an interview with Nurhasan Ngabito, the first regional chairman of Wahdah Islamiyah in Gorontalo, he saw some of the alumni names are Rustam Faidah and Najamudin Harun. At that time, they were continuing their education at Ma'had Al-Bir, who were assigned to attend a *daurah* (training) at the Makassar Hajj hostel. Besides the two of them, there were representatives from Gorontalo from Cendekia Senior High School, among them was Joko Miranto. In 1998, Nurhasan Ngabito was ordered to administer a *daurah* program in Gorontalo in Hubulo Islamic Boarding School; the participants comprised 50 students of Hubulo and university students. Zaitun Rasmi, L.c, Saiful Yusuf, and Samsuddin Kundru, the central committee members, attended the program (Oktaviani, 2018; Pomalingo et al., 2021).

Firstly, the program was questioned by the leader of the boarding school K.H. Rashid Kamaru. However, after being explained by Nurhasan Ngabito, the *daurah* was allowed to be carried out in Hubulo Islamic Boarding School. The reason for choosing Hubulo as the site was because this school stands above other places. The second *daurah* began at the Al-Khairat Islamic boarding school after the success of the first *daurah*. K.H. Muin Mooduto was the one who granted permission to the program. Wahdah Islamiyah, formerly known as the Wahdah Islamiyah Foundation, had received negative responses and rejections from Gorontalo Muslim communities. The people suspected that this organization was being a misleading Islamic organization or a deviant sect.

One of the figures of Nahdlatul Ulama, Dr. Burhanudin Umar, and one of the Al-Khairat Islamic boarding school leaders in Gorontalo City appeared to be on the side of the Wahdah Islamiyah led by Nurhasan Ngabito, Rustam Faيدا,

and Najamudin Harun (Hartini, 2019). This was evident from the broadcasting of Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI) Gorontalo. Such an effort brought fresh air to the development of Wahdah Islamiyah's dawah in Gorontalo. Other than *daurah*, Nurhasan Ngabito and several of his colleagues established a study group called the Intensive Dinul Islam Study (SDII), which was part of the Wahdah Islamiyah *dawah* movement. Programs of this study group are primarily carried out in many NU mosques whose congregations are *Nahdliyin* (NU) people. The dawah (the act of inviting or calling people to embrace Islam) by Ustadz Nurhasan Ngabito was carried out politely, not forcing others to accept that his movement has absolute truth (Hartini, 2019).

Nurhasan Ngabito and his colleagues, as alumni of the Hubulo Islamic boarding school, saw the need to introduce the Wahdah movement in Gorontalo. The establishment of Wahdah Islamiyah in Gorontalo was based on several reasons. The first reason is the ideology of Gorontalo. It can be said that the ideology synergizes with Wahdah Islamiyah's theological orientation, namely the Quran as the primary reference or the solution to human problems. As a Muslim-majority area, Nurhasan Ngabito found no issues adapting to the environment since he was a Gorontalo native, allowing him to communicate with other people (Hartini, 2019).

The second reason is how women dress; they wear *beleuto* or face scarves similar to the *niqab*. The *beleuto* tradition is used to encourage women to cover and prevent unlawful eye contact with men, since Islam suggests women to wear the *niqab*. Wearing *niqab* is also stipulated in the Quran, surah Al-Ahzab verse 59. This verse explicitly commands the Prophet to order his wives and daughters and the wives of the believers to cover their *aurat* (body parts required by Islam to be covered) (Zain et al., 2023). Third, there has been no ban on *isbal* (wearing trousers above the ankle) in Gorontalo. In addition to the *niqab*, Wahdah Islamiyah's goal is to forbid men from *isbal* (Rezi, 2016; Zaenuri & Yusuf, 2019). This is solely for *shar'i* (guidance in Islam) reasons, where *isbal* itself is considered a form of arrogance. *Isbal*, in the tradition of several societies at that time, showed the quality and social strata of a person. However, some other scholars are of the view that *isbal* is not always identified with arrogance.

Fourth, there is no conflict between Muhammadiyah and NU. In some other areas, relations between NU and Muhammadiyah scholars often experience horizontal conflicts due to different views on the issue of *furu'* or *khilafiyah* (differing views on something). The polemic between these two organizations was recorded in history in the 1970s and 1980s (Lestari & Awali, 2024; Sabiruddin, 2018; Wulandari et al., 2021). The fifth aspect is courtesy. Gorontalo which upholds courtesy or "*adabu*" is another reason for Wahdah Islamiyah to establish its organization in the area. The organization claims that the people of Gorontalo place great importance on manners and morality as stated in the traditional values and the ideology of "*adati hula-hula'a to syara'a, syara'a hula-hula'a to Quruani*" (religion serves as the basis of customs and traditions, and the Quran serves as the base of religion). These principles emphasize that the people of Gorontalo are religious.

The initial opposition to transnational Islamic movements in Gorontalo reflects a broader tension between long-standing religious organizations like NU and Muhammadiyah and new movements like the Tablighi Jamaat. Official statements from the NU central board in 1987, which explicitly warned against heterodox movements, provide insight into the reasons behind the resistance encountered by Dr. Muhammad Nur and his colleagues (Nusi et al., 2022; Pomalingo et al., 2022). This opposition was rooted in the perception that these new ideologies threatened

to destabilize the religious harmony maintained by traditional organizations. Likewise, the eventual acceptance of Wahdah Islamiyah in Gorontalo, backed by government recognition as a legitimate religious organization, marks a significant shift in the local Islamic landscape (Pomalingo et al., 2021). Documents from the Ministry of Religious Affairs formally recognizing Wahdah Islamiyah as a legitimate organization in 1997 played a key role in reducing local resistance, enabling the group to engage in dawah and education efforts more freely.

Public Acceptance of the Transnational Islam Movement

The implication of the view (local ideology) of the Gorontalo people is that every aspect of life is based on the Quran and Islamic values. The socio-cultural reasons of these people then enable the establishment of transnational Islam. People in Gorontalo believe that the concept of transnational Islam is similar to their ideology (Pomalingo et al., 2021). The presence of the movement is of paramount importance to their life. So far, religious organizations, e.g., NU and Muhammadiyah, are deemed incapable of responding to people's problems (Mukrimin, 2023; Tungkagi, 2023). There were no clerics or scholars that helped people learn about Islamic issues. The existence of religious leaders in Gorontalo is considered negligent as "spiritual teachers" who can guide and teach their people about worship and *muamalah* (human interaction).

People in Gorontalo, regardless of their social status and occupations, accept the transnational Islamic ideology (Mukrimin, 2023; Pomalingo et al., 2021). Although their number is not large, the followers of transnational Islam are impactful from the perspective of some Gorontalo people. From the above discussion, the people of Gorontalo are open-minded to all mainstream thoughts, be it left-wing or right-wing (Pomalingo, 2022). This is evident from several study sessions in mosques, such as Al-Irsyad, Al-Ridho, Al-Anwar, Al-Marhamah, and Ar-Rahmah Siendeng.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, sermons by Wahdah Islamiyah (Salafist) and the Tablighi Jamaat were attended by 300-500 people (Zaenuri, 2020). This signifies that Salafist and Tablighi Jamaat receive positive responses from people in Gorontalo, ranging from doctors, state civil apparatus (ASN), students, *bentor* (motorized pedicab) drivers, politicians, bureaucrats, high school students, former thugs, and to unemployed. Taking into account the level of participation or acceptance of the Gorontalo Muslim community, most people attending the sermons are dominated by the middle and lower classes (Perdana & Panambang, 2019; Pomalingo et al., 2021). They are known for religious attire, such as prancing pants, beards (for the men), and the veil (for the women).

Sermons are usually held at night after Maghrib prayer until the Isha prayer; the session discusses various religious topics. People participating in Wahdah Islamiyah sermons are separated by gender, and in some topics, women are the ones who are allowed to attend the sermons (Merlins & Partini, 2010; Suhartini et al., 2015). In conveying its dawah, Wahdah Islamiyah in the early days of its establishment has shifted between two tendencies, from an exclusive perspective to a more inclusive one that follows the principles of its movement (Islam *wasathiyah*) (Angraeni et al., 2023).

The dawah movement of the Salafi group (Wahdah Islamiyah) emphasizes on aspects of puritan theology. This movement is a legacy of the Wahhabi movement in the eighteenth century in the Arabian Peninsula. Some of the members of Wahdah Islamiyah disagree that they are called Wahhabists. They prefer to be referred to

as the Salafi group or the anti-hizbiyyah group. The Puritanism movement in their dawah refers to the Quran and the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad PBUH (Abbas & Darmawijaya, 2022; Saleh, 2018). The liberation of worship practices from the influence of local culture is carried out due to the possibilities of the obscurity of Islamic teachings. Purification of Islamic teachings is part of maintaining the authenticity of *aqidah* (faith) and monotheism from the practices of superstition, *bid'ah* (innovation in religious matters), and *khurfat* (violating Islamic law). These three problems are considered *dhalalah* or anything that misleads, and everything that leads astray might bring a person to hell. The middle class prefers this method of dawah because it is considered firm in terms of *aqidah* and monotheism (Bruinessen, 2014).

The above concept is different from the Tablighi Jamaat, and low-class people are mostly in this group. The acceptance or interest of the Gorontalo community in the Tablighi Jamaat is due to several reasons. First, it does not question the differences in *madhhab* (school of thought) among Muslims (Shafi'i, Maliki, Hambali, and Hanafi schools). This does not mean that the Tablighi Jamaat does not follow any school of thought. Instead, they are free to choose what *madhhab* they prefer, and there is no need to argue or contradict the opinion of one *madhhab* with another (Pomalingo et al., 2021; Razak & Asrori, 2024).

Second, the group prefers to avoid the problem of *khilafiyah*. For the Tablighi Jamaat, the issue of *khilafiyah* is not to be debated since it has been thoroughly discussed by the four great scholars and other scholars. The group opines that it is crucial to implement aspects stated in the *madhhab* to prevent conflicts among Muslims. Many Muslims are divided just because of the problem of *khilafiyah*. Tablighi Jamaat prioritizes the concept of brotherhood between Muslims (*ukhuwah Islamiyah*) (Adam, 2018; Pomalingo et al., 2021).

Third, religion and politics are two separate matters. Tablighi Jamaat does not want to get involved in practical political affairs. Each member is not allowed to get involved in government-related matters. Doing so will only interfere with their dawah and prevent them from not remembering (*dhikr*) Allah the Almighty. The Tablighi Jamaat perspective can be considered diametrically opposed to other Islamic movements, which rely on politics to gain power (Makruf & Asrori, 2022; Pomalingo et al., 2021).

The three fundamental principles above are the reasons for the acceptance of the Gorontalo Muslim community, notably former thugs, towards the movement of the *Tablighi Jamaat* (Harifuddin et al., 2021; Pomalingo et al., 2021). thugs are those who never retaliate when they are expelled, insulted, and vilified. They are people who consider themselves sinners, hoping for forgiveness for the sins they have committed and ask for guidance from Allah the (Razak & Asrori, 2024). They are nothing, and they used to be ex-convicts, drug addicts, and thugs. Few of them were found tattooed on their body.

They gather in the mosque to learn from each other to strengthen their faith and good deeds. This is because the atmosphere of *dawah* activities in the mosque creates an impression of Mecca or Medina (Nurjamilah & Nurrahmi, 2021). People in the mosque wear '*gamis*' or Arab-style clothing with a turban (a type of headwear) to follow the example of Prophet Muhammad and his companions, signifying their love to the Prophet and his Sunnah. Their dawah activities are mostly carried out specifically among men (Hasanain & Muslimatusshalihah, 2021). Further, the group held *halaqa* or weekly gatherings to discuss the progress of their *dawah* (Abdullah, 2023).

One characteristic unique to the Tablighi Jamaat is the concept of *khuruj*. The word “*khuruj*” is from the word “*ukhrijat*”, which means journey (*siyah*) stated in one of the verses of the Quran “*Kuntum khaira ummatin ukhrijat lin-nāsi ta’murūna bil-ma’rūfi wa tan-hauna ‘anil-munkar*” (Ali-Imran:100), You are the best Ummah ever raised for mankind. You bid the Fair and forbid the Unfair, and you believe in Allah (Nilhakim, 2021). This is also confirmed in a hadith of the Prophet “if my *ummah* (followers) at the end of time sacrifices 1/10 of their time in for Allah, they will receive salvation.” Spending 2.5 hours to *dawah* every day emphasizes the aspects of spiritual or morals development (Razak & Asrori, 2024).

There are three types of *khuruj* in the Tablighi Jamaat: three-day (performed every month), 40-day (performed in one year), and 4-month (performed lifetime). *Khuruj* is performed by anyone who wishes to do so. Only ten to 15 people can participate in *khuruj* (Braam, 2006), and they are led by an *amir* (leader) (Jamaluddin & Bakar, 2018). The limited number of participants is to help the management of *khuruj*. In addition to the *amir*, the group requires an *alim* (someone with an understanding of fiqh, monotheism, interpretation), and a hafiz (a person who memorizes the Quran and understands the way of reciting the Quran or *qira’at/tajwid*); they were selected by the council (*syuro jama’ah*). They discussed the site and the target of the *dawah* before starting the *khuruj* (Irpan, 2022).

Members of Tablighi Jamaat who are on *khuruj* stay at mosques, which become their base camp. They are known as stove travelers, bearded, wearing robes, carrying cloth bags, kitchen utensils, and translated scriptures. Additionally, they visit every house, moving from one mosque to another and from one village to other villages. Often they receive negative responses from residents around the mosque (Razak & Asrori, 2024). There is a prejudice that Tablighi Jamaat is the one to blame for littering the mosque. Such is not valid, as they argue that maintaining the cleanliness of the mosque is their priority. For example, the Tablighi Jamaat help build a toilet that is far from the mosque (if the mosque does not have one) (Husni et al., 2023; Yasa’ & Hudayana, 2018).

The Tablighi Jamaat dispersed and actively visited people’s houses and invited them to attend sermons. Although not all the people invited came to the mosque, Tablighi Jamaat was never discouraged. They visited the people with no intention to preach to them but to talk about something that had to do with the people they visited (Hamdi et al., 2023; Saepuloh et al., 2022) This method is considered more effective in approaching people rather than online lectures (Saepuloh, 2022; Hamdi et al., 2023).

Khuruj is an instrument for self-improvement (*muhasabah*) and not for preaching to others (Razak & Asrori, 2024). This is underpinned by the idea that everything should start from oneself. The Tablighi Jamaat upholds this concept, arguing that they need to free themselves from sins before giving *dawah*. As for the members of Tablighi Jamaat who are already married, they need to consult with their families to ensure that they can go on *khuruj* (Harifuddin et al., 2021). If the family does not allow them, the members cannot join the *khuruj* companion and will look for another opportunity. The Tablighi Jamaat upholds the principle of deliberation (*wa syawirhum fil amr* or consult in all matters) in every aspect of their life. *Khuruj* motivates the members of Tablighi Jamaat; it enhances their spirituality. Four aspects become the focus of *khuruj*; those are *dawah* for Allah (*Dakwah Ilallah*), learning and teaching (*Ta’lim muta’allim*), zikr and worship (*Zikir wal ibadah*), and devotion (*Khidmat*) (Irpan, 2022).

The four aspects above serve as a medium for the Tablighi Jamaat to get closer

to Allah the Almighty. Some Muslims start to abandon these four aspects because life in this temporal world has tempted them; they forget the afterlife. Their sincerity in applying these four aspects is to show that the members of the Tablighi Jamaat are the best people (*khaira ummat*) who give warnings (*nadziran*) and invite people back to the path of Allah the Almighty. In addition, they position themselves as a *dawah* congregation (*harakatut dawah*), which is closest to the way of the Prophet's *dawah* in helping people get close to good deeds (Mamun, 2019; Razak & Asrori, 2024).

In conclusion, the findings of this discussion effectively tie back to the research question, which explores the public acceptance of transnational Islamic movements in Gorontalo and how they resonate with the local socio-cultural ideology. The people of Gorontalo, deeply rooted in Islamic values, view these movements, such as Wahdah Islamiyah (Salafi) and the Tablighi Jamaat, as aligned with their spiritual aspirations and are open to accepting these ideologies. This study highlights that, although different social classes gravitate toward distinct movements, the overall acceptance is driven by a shared belief in Islamic authenticity and spiritual renewal, suggesting that the movements have successfully embedded themselves in the local context.

Additionally, the study provides insight into how these movements have adapted and evolved in response to global events, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, when Wahdah Islamiyah and Tablighi Jamaat maintained community engagement through sermons and *khuruj*. The shift in Wahdah Islamiyah's *dawah* approach from exclusivity to a more inclusive *wasathiyah* stance demonstrates their adaptability in a rapidly changing world. Furthermore, the research illustrates that the impact of geopolitical conflicts, such as the ideological struggles in the Middle East, has subtly influenced the Salafi movement's theological focus on puritanism and rejection of local culture.

This research sheds new light on the evolving nature of transnational Islamic movements in Gorontalo, emphasizing how these movements are not static but dynamic entities that respond to both local and global pressures. It offers valuable insights into how Islamic movements adapt to the socio-political environment and how global crises like the pandemic shape their strategies for maintaining relevance and support among the local Muslim community.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research reveals that transnational Islamic movements, particularly Salafi/Wahdah Islamiyah and Tablighi Jamaat, have gained traction among Gorontalo's Muslim community due to their emphasis on the purification of *aqidah* and monotheism, as well as their focus on *dawah* efforts aimed at fostering piety and strengthening mosque-centered activities. These movements are perceived as more "authentic" and aligned with Islamic principles, contributing to their acceptance across various social strata in Gorontalo. Unlike politically oriented groups like the Muslim Brotherhood or the former HTI, Salafi and Tablighi Jamaat maintain a non-political approach, which resonates with local believers who prioritize spirituality over political engagement.

The key insight drawn from this research is that the acceptance of transnational Islam in Gorontalo is driven by the local community's search for a more faithful interpretation of Islam that aligns with their socio-religious values. This finding broadens the understanding of how non-political transnational Islamic movements, such as Wahdah Islamiyah and Tablighi Jamaat, can thrive in regions where religious

identity is deeply intertwined with daily life, despite their divergence from local cultural practices.

Moreover, the broader implications of this study for academic discourse and practical applications are significant. Academically, it contributes to the discourse on the role of transnational Islamic movements in shaping religious practices in local contexts, particularly in Gorontalo. Practically, it offers insights into how these movements influence social dynamics, governance, and community cohesion in regions like Gorontalo, where Islamic values are foundational. The research highlights the need for a nuanced understanding of how such movements interact with local ideologies, potentially informing governance approaches and community policies in regions affected by the growth of transnational Islam.

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