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When Piety is Framed as Threatening: The Hijrah Movement within the Politics of Religious Moderation in Indonesia

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Abstract

This article investigates how the *hijrah* movement in Indonesia – characterized by a return to Islamic pious practices, lifestyle changes, and global Muslim identity – is increasingly constructed as a security threat within Indonesia's religious moderation agenda. Drawing on discourse analysis of state narratives, media portrayals, field research, and statements from mainstream Islamic organizations, the study finds that *hijrah* is framed not merely as a cultural or spiritual trend but as a potential conduit for ideological deviation and radicalization. Using securitization theory and grounded Foucauldian analysis, the article argues that the state's discursive alignment of *hijrah* with extremism enables soft repression and delegitimization of non-violent yet non-conforming Islamic expressions. This securitizing logic risks narrowing Indonesia's religious pluralism by stigmatizing identity-based piety, thereby undermining the very goals of tolerance and harmony that moderation policies claim to promote.

Keywords: Hijrah, piety movement, moderate Islam, securitization, Islamic authority

Introduction

On 14 October 2022, I arrived in Surabaya—the capital of East Java, Indonesia—to attend the Surabaya Islamic Festival, part of the HijrahFest series organized by the urban *hijrah* group Kajian Musawarah. While staying at the East Java Muhammadiyah office, an employee showed me a news report: the East Java provincial branches of Nadhlatul Ulama (NU) and the Indonesian Ulama Council (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia*, MUI) had publicly rejected the festival.[1] The news surprised me, although East Java's strong *Nahdliyin*[2] base as well as longstanding concerns about *hijrah*-related initiatives made such tensions plausible. The next morning, I arrived at the Jatim Expo site, where billboards of popular Islamic preachers and the East Java Governor lined the entrance. A large police presence contrasted with the still-unfinished booths offering Islamic clothing, *hajj-umrah* services, and *da'wah* communities such as Real Masjid Yogyakarta. Arif, a Real Masjid representative I had previously met in Yogyakarta, had not heard about the East Java branches of NU or MUI rejecting the event, nor their reasons. Soon after, a group of men unfurled a banner reading "*Surabaya Tidak Mengenal Hijrah-Hijrahan. Bubar atau Kami Bubarkan*." ("Surabaya Does Not Recognize *Hijrah* [Activities]. Disband or We Will Disband [You]"). Vendors became anxious as rumors of the event's cancellation spread. HijrahFest's organizers confirmed the cancellation on social media, and Arie Untung, a well-known entertainer and television host, later attributed the incident to miscommunication with local Islamic groups and insufficient coordination by the local partner community.[3]

The cancellation of the Surabaya Islamic Festival reflects a broader pattern of incidents in recent years in Indonesia. *Da'wah* forums associated with the hijrah movement in Jakarta, Bandung, Yogyakarta,

[1] CNN Indonesia, 2022.
[2] Nahdliyin is a name for members or followers of the Islamic organization Nahdlatul Ulama (NU).
[3] The Sungkars, 2023.

and other cities have faced objections from state-linked institutions and mainstream Islamic organizations.[4] Although the *hijrah* movement is often associated with Islamic lifestyle change, personal moral reform, and renewed faith, its rapid growth has also triggered anxieties related to authority, discipline, and social influence. Hijrah is understood differently by different people. It has multiple meaning: as an ethical self-transformation, an urban-style da'wah movement, a response to the post-1998 rise of the Islamic market, or a political project.

The rise of *hijrah* communities has unfolded in Indonesia amid political polarization, global Islamic revival currents, and intensified state efforts to promote 'religious moderation'. As a result, *hijrah* has become a discursive site where moral authority, Islamic legitimacy, and social control are negotiated between the state, religious organizations, and digital *da'wah* actors.

This study approaches piety as a discursive and embodied tradition, drawing on studies from Talal Asad[5] and Saba Mahmood[6]. This perspective helps analyze why *hijrah* practices—ranging from lifestyle choices to ethical self-formation—may be understood differently by state authorities, NU, Muhammadiyah, and *hijrah* groups themselves, and how these differences shape public responses to hijrah-related events. This article asks: How is the *hijrah* narrative securitized within Indonesia's

[4] Rejection of the *hijrah* movement generally arises from a generalized perception that preachers in these study groups are associated with Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), an extremist Islamist organization banned by the Indonesian government. As a result, figures such as Felix Siauw, who founded YukNgaji in Jakarta, Hanan Attaki, who founded Pemuda Hijrah in Bandung, and founders of hijrah groups in Yogyakarta and other cities, are often linked to HTI and, furthermore, to Wahhabism. The existence of HTI and in general groups affiliated with transnational Islamists continues to provoke controversy among Muslims. However, the dissolution of HTI has proven that the state has all the tools to suppress any party deemed threatening. That is why, despite having admitted to being part of HTI, Felix Siauw now preaches Islam in ways that are easily accepted by the younger generation, such as by adopting Korean culture as seen on his various social media platforms.

[5] Talal Asad, 1986, 1993.

[6] Saba Mahmood, 2005.

religious moderation agenda? Which actors participate in framing *hijrah* as a threat? By addressing these questions, the article highlights biases in the production of official religious discourse and considers their implications for Islamic pluralism, authority, and the management of piety in contemporary Indonesia.

Methodology

This article employs a qualitative approach through Foucault's discourse analysis to examine how the Indonesian state constructs 'Moderasi Beragama (religious moderation)' in official policies and speeches, especially since the 2 December 2016 *Aksi Bela Islam* (Protest to Defend Islam), which became the largest post-1998 demonstration and successfully united various elements of society, including Islamic mass organizations, religious leaders, and the general public. This method is helpful in examining how power, language, and policy shape discourses that affect interfaith and community relations. Drawing on securitization theory,[7] this study explores how the Indonesian state has expanded the concept of threat beyond violent extremism to include ideological non-compliance. This framework also helps analyze the rhetorical actions of the state and allied non-state actors that mark certain groups or ideologies as threats, thus justifying action against them. By integrating these theoretical perspectives, this study analyzes how state and non-state actors, as well as repressive and ideological state apparatuses under then-President Joko Widodo (2014-2024), have packaged religious moderation as a strategy to counter extremism.

The subjects of this research include the state speech acts of the Widodo government, Indonesia's two largest Islamic mass organizations (NU and Muhammadiyah), and the mass media outlets that shape and build the image of extremist and radical Islamic groups, especially those

[7] Buzan et al., 1998.

associated with transnational Islam (Wahhabism, Salafism, Hizbut Tahrir, and Tablighi Jamaat), 'vigilante' Islamic groups, and groups campaigning for the *hijrah* movement, which in the last ten years have been considered a threat to Indonesian political stability (as a state, *Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia* or NKRI) and national identity (based on the foundational values of Pancasila).

Unfortunately, these actions are implicitly institutionalized in religious moderation policies that are implemented not only by state institutions from central to local governments, including security forces such as the police, but also by Islamic mass organizations and their autonomous wings down to the subdistrict and village levels. Thus, religious moderation, which was originally intended to mainstream religious ways with four indicators of success (commitment to nationality, tolerance, non-violence, and acceptance of tradition) has been widely accepted by the Muslim community,[8] but has also legitimized actions and security to address threats to the above groups.

Being performative in nature, acts of speech are not limited to single public speeches delivered by state and non-state actors and authoritative figures, but also include official documents. In the context of this study, this includes the religious moderation policy and national security agenda of one moderate Islamic mass organization which frames the issue within a security framework. As part of my doctoral project, data was collected through a combination of in-depth interviews, field observations during repeated trips to Indonesia from July 2022 to December 2023 and a follow-up trip from October 2023 to April 2024, and analysis of official documents. Before starting this doctoral project, I had also conducted preliminary research from 2019 until it was halted due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Likewise, reference was made to recent studies of key stakeholders (state and non-state actors), including the Minister of

[8] Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2019; Government of Indonesia, 2020; Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, n.d.

Religious Affairs. In addition, interviews were conducted with leaders of moderate Islamic organizations, Muslim scholars involved in formulating religious moderation concepts and materials, religious scholars, and founders and followers of the *hijrah* movement, particularly the recitation group led by Ustaz Khalid Basalamah at Jakarta's Nurul Iman Mosque, the Jakarta Musawarah group, and the Bandung Pemuda Hijrah group led by Ustaz Hanan Attaki. These interviews provided valuable insights into the motivations, challenges and strategies employed by various actors not only regarding religious moderation but also how they approach the agenda of pacifying non-moderate Islamic groups categorized as threats.[9]

I also conducted field research on *hijrah* groups in several Javanese cities, particularly Jakarta and Bandung, to understand the impact of religious moderation policies at the grassroots level. This research enabled direct observation of the *hijrah* movement's activities, exploring the reasons individuals choose the *hijrah* path and how they respond when perceived as a threat to political and state stability. I also analyzed their perspectives on religious moderation.

In addition to interviews and field research, this study analyzed official documents related to the security agenda and religious moderation policies, such as the Decision of the 20th National Conference of Gerakan Pemuda Ansor in April 2017 Number: 04/KONBES-XXI/IV/2017 on the Views of Gerakan Pemuda Ansor regarding the Strategic Interests and National Security Agenda of the Republic of Indonesia; Presidential Regulation No. 58 of 2023 on Strengthening Religious Moderation; and religious moderation books published by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. These documents included policy briefs, government reports, and official statements from moderate Islamic states

[9] Some people are increasingly aware of the discriminatory nature of certain local/Indonesian Islamic narratives that portray *hijrah* followers or Islamists in general as deviant or alien to local Islamic culture, an internal conflict around religious legitimacy. This was the case when society was polarized into pro-Islam and anti-Islam in the 2017 elections. In this context, the position of 'moderate Muslims' is increasingly problematic and patronizing. See, for instance, Islami.co, 2020.

and organizations. The document analysis provided a comprehensive understanding of the state's official position on religious moderation, the identification of security issues, and the government's strategic approach in balancing religious freedom with security measures. By analyzing these documents, the study was able to match policy intentions with actual practices and outcomes. In other words, the integration of interviews, field research, and document analysis provides a holistic picture of religious moderation, explores top-down and bottom-up perspectives, and analyzes the alignment between state actions and the activities of non-state actors.

Results

Background and Context of the Hijrah Movement in Indonesia

The *hijrah* movement has emerged in Indonesia over the past decade. Some scholars have observed its emergence, though not all have specifically linked it to the term *hijrah*, especially as a spiritual journey. This is because *hijrah*, besides having strong roots in Islamic history, has become a word that some Muslims can relate to without being exclusive to a particular group. Therefore, the movement, which is characterized by cultivating Islamic practices through the medium of recitation and is massively connected in digital spaces, is ideologically diverse. However, it becomes easily identifiable through the emergence of new Islamic groups, which tend to be urban-based and unaffiliated with established mainstream Islamic organizations such as Muhammadiyah and NU.[10] Social media is frequently cited as significant driver of the movement's growth, forming a new mediated piety and challenging traditional religious authority.[11]

[10] Fansuri, 2023.

[11] See, for example, Kloos et al., 2025; Nisa, 2018; Saat & Burhani, 2020; Slama, 2018; Slama & Barendregt, 2018.

However, the visible emergence of the hijrah movement cannot be reduced solely to increasing use of social media. As an expression of Islam, this movement has a complex history in the ways Muslims navigate the times. The emergence of many groups promoting *hijrah* also cannot be completely separated from global trends of Islamism, especially in the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks. Similarly, domestic circumstances are no less behind the reaction of the *ummah*, which has long been inhibited in preaching Islam but has increasingly been finding its space again, even with a *ummah* fragmented by Indonesia's five-year political cycles. For example, social divisions during the 2014 presidential election, the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election, and the 2019 presidential election not only contributed to political Islam and Islamic populism,[12] but also led to the emergence of new Islamic groups promoting a variety of different issues, including *hijrah*.

Among the most striking elements of the *hijrah* movement is the emergence of new *asātīdh* (preachers)[13] from diverse backgrounds. Although most were educated in Islamic educational institutions in the Middle East and Northern Africa, others are converts to Islam; some even come from the entertainment industry and are musicians and actors. They often gain popularity through public appearances, facilitated by the massive and organized use of social media networks as an extension of earlier forms of media such as television and radio.[14] However, their efforts in reviving recitations in mosques have partially quenched the spiritual thirst of the Indonesian Muslim community, especially since their varied preaching methods and strategies align with the people's everyday problems in times that are increasingly uncertain. Thus, these new preachers have not only challenged the traditional religious authorities,[15]

[12] Arifianto, 2020; Azra, 2021; Fossati, 2022; Hadiz, 2016.
[13] Akmaliah, 2020.
[14] See, for example, Hoesterey, 2020; Raya, 2025; Jurriens & Tapsell, 2017; Pribadi, 2020; Sunarwoto, 2021.
[15] Saat & Burhani, 2020.

but on a broader scale, especially when initiating the establishment of groups that promote piety through *hijrah*, have also triggered contestation with long-standing Islamic groups. This is particularly the case when the *hijrah* movement is no longer limited to recitations in mosques but has expanded to public spaces.[16]

As a piety movement that resonates with the trend of religious revival across the world,[17] the *hijrah* movement has found great momentum in Indonesia. This encourages supporters to be more visible to the public, instead of just in the digital space. Similarly, just as piety movements in other religious traditions foreground religion as a set of embodied and affectively charged practices rather than as a system of doctrinal adherence, the *hijrah* movement resonates within Muslim communities by mobilizing moral and emotional registers among individuals seeking a sense of stability amid the uncertainties of everyday life. In this context, the *hijrah* movement, through its dispersed yet interconnected networks in Indonesia's urban centers, offers an alternative moral framework for Islamic practice that speaks to contemporary anxieties. These include economic concerns such as financial dissatisfaction and fear of job loss, as well as social pressures like feelings of inferiority, unhealthy comparisons, fear of missing out, and cyberbullying. The pervasive use of social media further amplifies these anxieties by exposing individuals to negative content and unrealistic lifestyles, while economic pressure intensify stress through income loss and rising living costs. Consequently, many Muslims have had to recalibrate their ethical orientations in response to shifting social, cultural, and political landscapes, particularly since the *hijrah* movement is seen to challenge traditional religious authority.[18]

[16] Fansuri 2023, 2024.

[17] For example, Protestant evangelicalism in the United States, the growing interest in Pentecostalism and charismatic forms of Christianity in Latin America and Africa, Millî Görüş youth circles, particularly in Germany, and the increasing interest in Buddhist practices in Buddhist-majority countries all illustrate this trend.

[18] Saat & Burhani, 2020; Fansuri, 2023.

Despite all this, since its inception the *hijrah* movement has drawn mixed responses. Generalizations began to emerge, attempting to link the movement to the global Islamic movement, including both Middle Eastern influences (such as the spread of Salafism and Wahhabism) and transnational movements (such as Tablighi Jamaat and Hizbut Tahrir). A national working meeting of the NU Central Board's Da'wah Institute, for instance, recommended that the government create and enact regulations prohibiting the spread of Wahhabi teachings, including by denying permits for activities that fail to align with the values of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) and Pancasila, such as HijrahFest and HijabFest. Moreover, several figures from NU and Muhammadiyah have also voiced concerns about the *hijrah* movement's link to Middle Eastern and transnational Islamist movements.[19] Although some *hijrah* groups are ideologically affiliated with Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) or preach Wahhabism, this does not justify the rejection of every hijrah group activity in various locations, which can cause friction. Moreover, the state-led dissolution of HTI in 2018 demonstrates the state's capacity to suppress groups deemed threatening.[20]

The situation grew increasingly complex when under the Widodo presidency, the Indonesian state sought to advance the agenda of mainstreaming 'moderate Islam', a project that aimed to culminate in religious moderation but instead contributed to new forms of fragmentation within the *ummah*. Although the moderate Islam project had already been pursued since the 2001-2004 presidency of Megawati Sukarnoputri—particularly as an effort to improve the image of Indonesian Islam after the 2002 Bali bombing by working with moderate organizations such as NU and Muhammadiyah[21]—it took on a different form under her successor, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (2004–2014). During Yudhoyono's presidency, the promotion of moderate Islam was

[19] See Jaringan Santri, 2020; IDN Times 2019; Republika 2019.
[20] Harijanto & Fozdar, 2023.
[21] Abuza, 2006; Umar, 2016.

aligned with his leadership motto—"a thousand friends, zero enemies"—as he sought to embrace all Islamic groups in order to maintain political stability.[22]

The politics of religious moderation, since its institutionalization, has unfortunately excluded certain Islamic groups through rigid binary thinking. Its institutionalization as part of a national strategic program since 2019, under the control of the Ministry of Religious Affairs with representative figures from traditional Islamic circles and a few from modernist Islam, is full of political nuances and group interests, rather than being oriented toward the common good. In many places—for example, in the case of the Surabaya Islamic Festival mentioned above—the involvement of the state (through policies and security apparatuses) along with the media, and Islamic mass organizations as non-state actors, in securitizing the *hijrah* movement not only undermines religious freedom, understood here as the ability of different Islamic groups to coexist peacefully, but also reveals gaps within the broader vision of religious moderation. This is because in many cases, *hijrah* activities such as *pengajian* (religious study groups) are forcibly disbanded, subjected to intimidation, and face rejection.

The State and Official Institutions Began to Associate Hijrah with Radical or Exclusive Views

Based on my field study, the *hijrah* movement surfaced only relatively recently. In around mid-2014, the Shift Pemuda Hijrah group was initiated by Ustaz Hanan Attaki and young religious activists of Bandung, aiming to not only revive religious studies relevant to the daily life problems of young people but also offer cultural strategies in creative Islamic *da'wah*, including by posting Islamic content on social media (especially Instagram). Since then, *hijrah* groups have sprung up in many cities across

[22] Aspinall, 2016; Ciorciari, 2018.

Indonesia, including Kajian Musawarah in Jakarta, initiated by celebrities and the eventual Hijrah Festival event organizer; weekly recitation events at the Nurul Iman Mosque in Blok M, Jakarta, initiated by Ustaz Khalid Basalamah; the YukNgaji community in Jakarta and many other cities initiated by Ustaz Felix Siauw; Muslim United as an event organizer for *tabligh akbar* in Yogyakarta, which later changed its name to Real Masjid; Teras Dakwah in Yogyakarta, which learned its *da'wah* strategies for young people from Shift Pemuda Hijrah; and the Munzalan community, led by Ustaz Lukmanulhakim in Pontianak.

The *hijrah* movement has been surrounded by controversy ever since its emergence. Both the state and Indonesia's more entrenched Islamic organizations began to frame the emergence of these groups, which some observers call Islamist, as part of a current of Islamic conservatism.[23] This continued the long-standing conversation about transnational Islam, the spread of which was deemed incompatible with both democracy and the nature of Islam in Indonesia. Thus, the Salafi and Wahhabi narratives were addressed in response to the rise of new preachers, some of whom were graduates of Islamic higher education institutions in the Middle East and North Africa, as well as those affiliated with Hizbut Tahrir, Tabligh Jama'at, and the Muslim Brotherhood. These preachers gained significant popularity, as they succeeded in maximizing the dissemination of Islamic preaching through social media, but on the other hand, they are considered to have challenged traditional religious authority.

Narratives of the spread of Salafi-Wahhabi ideology—which are often coupled in the narrative despite having different histories and political ideals—are frequently associated with radicalism and exclusivity in Islam, leaving a tendency for the state to target every new Islamic group, albeit through much blurring of identification. The state, through security apparatus such as the National Counterterrorism Agency, continues to scrutinize every ideology categorized as dangerous for the future of

[23] Sebastian, L.C; Hasyim, S. & Arifianto, A. R. , 2021. Also see; Bruinessen, 2013.

Indonesia, and emphasizes deradicalization not only as a process of changing individual belief systems but for rejecting extreme ideologies and embracing mainstream values. In addition, the Agency describes deradicalization as all efforts to neutralize radical ideas through interdisciplinary approaches, such as law, psychology, religion, and socio-culture, among those who are influenced by or exposed to radical or pro-violence ideas. This is where the definition of radical views provides space for interested parties to participate in defininig certain groups as radical or exclusive.

This narrative is amplified by data about radical views in Indonesia. For example, in 2023, National Counterterrorism Agency data was shared with the public by its head Boy Rafli Amar. During a working meeting between Amar and Commission III of the House of Representatives on 13 February 2023, Amar disclosed that in 2022, the Agency recorded at least 622 websites or social media accounts which had the potential to share content which could lead to radicalism.[24] Meanwhile, a survey conducted by the Setara Institute in collaboration with an international NGO suggested that extreme religious views, attitudes, and practices remained prevalent among high school students. The survey examined the tolerance level of students in five cities: Surabaya, Surakarta, Bogor, Padang, and Bandung. Of the 947 respondents, 25.6 percent considered religions other than their own to be heretical. In addition, an alarming number of students expressed willingness to engage in religiously motivated wars, believing it would lead them to heaven. The survey also showed that the sense of national unity within the framework of NKRI did not align with the rise of religious fanaticism and that, more worryingly, most students agreed that Pancasila, the country's foundational ideology, could be replaced.[25]

[24] KBR Indonesia, 2023.
[25] Setara Institute, 2023.

Some *hijrah* groups, and especially their preachers, have been repeatedly accused of being a threat both to Pancasila and NKRI, as well as to the future of Indonesian Islam. Accusations are often based on brief statements made by preachers online or during sermons. Examples include Ustaz Khalid Basalamah, who forbade *wayang* (traditional puppets)[26], the singing of Indonesia's national anthem (*Indonesia Raya*) [27], and the saluting of the Indonesian flag; Ustaz Abdul Somad, who denigrated the cross by saying there were infidel *jinn* (spirits) in the symbol; Ustaz Felix Siauw, who banned selfies and was involved with HTI[28]; and Ustaz Hanan Attaki, who was accused of slandering the Prophet Moses as a *'preman'* or thug. Although each accusation was addressed by the respective preachers, many people still associate the *hijrah* movement with radicalism. This perception is especially reinforced by deradicalization programs, which not only target jihadist groups but also ultimately scrutinize and show suspicion toward *hijrah* groups, such as religious study circles and *hijrah* festivals, often placing such events under the supervision of security forces.[29]

[26] Detik.com, 2022.

[27] Ichsan, A. Syalaby, 2021.

[28] In the case of Felix Siauw, apart from being the founder of YukNgaji, which is a widely known *hijrah* community in many cities, he is also part of Barisan Bangun Negeri, a group of preachers who play a role in activating the *hijrah* communities. As for HTI, history shows that armed rebellions such as the Darul Islam/Islamic Army of Indonesia (Darul Islam/Tentara Islam Indonesia, DI/TII), the Indonesian Communist Party (Partai Komunis Indonesia, PKI), the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, GAM), and the Free Papua Movement (Organisasi Papua Merdeka, OPM) were successfully suppressed. Therefore, HTI's efforts to uphold the caliphate—limited to an ideological campaign without a military base or broad mass support—are unlikely to pose an existential threat. The dissolution of HTI is thus better understood as a symbolic step to preserve the purity of Pancasila and reinforce the legitimacy of the state, rather than a response to a genuine threat of collapse.

[29] In addition to police surveillance at the Surabaya Islamic Festival 2022, the Pemuda Hijrah recitation at Al-Lathiif Mosque in Bandung was often visited by security forces, especially after the 212 Islamic Defense Action, who questioned activists about the content of lectures at the mosque, which was the initial place where Ustaz Hanan Attaki preached with Pemuda Hijrah. This story was told to me by one of the founders of Pemuda Hijrah when I visited the mosque during field research from mid-2022 to early 2023.

Mainstream Media Reproduce the Narrative Through Labeling, Using Provocative Headlines, and Associating Hijrah with Controversial Preachers

Hijrah groups are often associated with their preachers, especially when they first emerge, especially as their preachers often cause controversy through statements and how they frame other Islamic groups. Some of the preachers from these *hijrah* groups, for example, have initiated an association called Barisan Bangun Negeri (Front to Build the Nation), which includes Ustaz Abdul Somad, Ustaz Adi Hidayat, Ustaz Hanan Attaki, Ustaz Felix Siauw, Ustaz Oemar Mita, Ustaz Salim Fillah, and Ustaz Lukmanulhakim. These preachers not only show how they network with each other, but also how they strengthen *hijrah* groups across cities. However, some also often receive mainstream media coverage,[30] initially more for the phenomenon of the *hijrah* movement itself, but later through the media's tendency to use labelling and provocative headlines, as well as associating *hijrah* hijrah with controversial preachers.

CNN Indonesia is one such media outlet. Since the 2019 Hijrah Festival, which followed similar events in the previous two years, CNN Indonesia carried special coverage with the title 'The Spread of Salafi-style Hijrah in Indonesia' three months after the 2019 presidential election. "The spread of views to become more religious, or *hijrah*, occurs naturally in Indonesia. The phenomenon was formed along with the return of Indonesian students who studied in the Middle East, especially Saudi Arabia, which is generally Salafi," they wrote.[31]

Indeed, mentioning Salafism and juxtaposing it with Wahhabi is a narrative which is widely repeated by media outlets, academia, and the

[30] I recognize that some media, like Tirto.id and Tempo, have offered more balanced coverage of the *hijrah* phenomenon. Nevertheless, the outlets I focus on here have strongly influenced how the *hijrah* movement is framed, especially as their reports spread widely through WhatsApp groups.
[31] CNN Indonesia, 2019.

broader community in Indonesia. As a result, it has become something that provokes a lot of controversy for two reasons: one, because it is considered to be part of 'Arabization' and is therefore considered incompatible with Indonesian culture, and two, because of further generalization that it acts as the 'seeds' of extremism that lead to acts of terrorism.[32]

It is in this discursive sphere that public reactions, especially from longer-rooted Islamic groups, tend to be rash in responding to the *hijrah* movement. For example, the NU Central Board Da'wah Institute recommended in a National Meeting in October 2022 that the Indonesian government prohibit the spread of Wahhabism and asked for a ban on the HijrahFest and HijabFest events.[33] Despite not being directly related, this followed the earlier controversy of NU East Java's and MUI East Java's rejection of the Hijrahfest scheduled to be held at Jatim Expo on October 14-16, 2022 mentioned at the beginning of this paper. For mainstream media outlets such as CNN Indonesia, the controversy surrounding the hijrah movement, its preachers, and its events, is good news to cover because it attracts reader attention.

Among the controversial preachers given media coverage was Ustaz Khalid Basalamah, who used a sermon to forbid the use of *wayang* (puppets). Major media outlets including Kompas and Detik covered his statement because it drew a wide variety of responses from different parties, ranging from religious leaders to Indonesian puppetry organizations. Among others, Abdul Mu'ti, general secretary of the Muhammadiyah Central Board, commented that Basalamah's statement showed a shallow understanding of *wayang*. As reported on the Muhammadiyah TV channel, Abdul Mu'ti said that *wayang* has played an important role in Indonesia as a medium for *da'wah* and has been

[32] Many scholars have investigated that Salafism, especially in Indonesia, has at least three widely recognized varieties, namely traditional Salafism, Da'wah Salafism, and jihadist Salafism, although in practice such divisions are not always strict, as it is possible to find that one group can represent two characteristics at once. See, for example, (Chaplin, 2021; Hasan, 2007; Woodward, 2017)
[33] CNN Indonesia, 2022b.

accepted by all communities. He added that in the historical context of Islamic *da'wah*, *wayang* is an effective media for *da'wah*.[34] Basamalah later clarified that the video snippet of his sermon was edited or framed: he said that he did not say that puppets are *haram* but suggested that Islam should be considered as a tradition, meaning that if there is a tradition that is in line with Islam, there is no problem, but if it clashes with Islam, it should be abandoned. He emphasized that he had no intention of eliminating *wayang* from the history of Indonesia.[35] At another point, Basalamah was also reported to have banned the singing of the national anthem *Indonesia Raya*, which sparked also public outrage following media coverage. However, it was later proven that the video clips circulated were misleading and failed to capture his full message, which became clear after his clarification.[36]

As a result of such controversies, the Indonesian media has taken a strong interest in highlighting the role of Salafi–Wahhabi ideology behind the spread of the *hijrah* movement. For example, CNN Indonesia ran special coverage on Basalamah's weekly study group, describing it as Salafi. Basalamah himself admitted that "his *da'wah* is *da'wah salaf* or *sunnah*—da'wah that is pure Islam. That's what ultimately makes it connect at one point and be accepted by young people." He also acknowledged the negative perception of Salafi *da'wah*, which is often seen as radical and incompatible with NU's type of Islamic culture, but denied receiving sponsorship from foreign countries such as Saudi Arabia.[37]

Another preacher often accused of being Wahhabi is Ustaz Hanan Attaki. As one of Indonesia's most controversial preachers, Attaki's sermons have been criticized and verbally rejected, broken up, and even threatened. He is known as a preacher and the founder of Pemuda Hijrah

[34] Televisi Muhammadiyah, 2022.
[35] Detik, 2022.
[36] Detik, 2021.
[37] CNN Indonesia, 2019b.

and is capable of attracting young Muslims across Indonesia, with more than 10 million Instagram followers at the time of writing. Together with event organizer Ayah Amanah, Attaki routinely holds recitations attended by tens of thousands of people per day—although these events might be better described as paid sharing sessions in luxury hotel ballrooms. He has become an icon not only of the current Indonesian *hijrah* movement but also as a new model of preacher who adapts to young people's tastes. This is evident in both his unconventional appearance for a preacher and the content of his sermons, which often focus on topics such as opposite-sex relationships, romance, matchmaking, and marriage. His popularity arguably surpasses that of other male preachers in the *hijrah* movement who are currently gaining fame.

With his tens of thousands of social media followers, most of whom are urban middle-class Muslims and highly active on social media, Ustaz Hanan Attaki is seen as challenging the traditional religious authority usually associated with the *kiyai* (traditional Islamic scholars, often Javanese). From my field observations while attending Pemuda Hijrah and Ayah Amanah activities, as well as from national mainstream media coverage, many of the controversies surrounding Hanan Attaki mirror those of Khalid Basalamah: accusations of being Wahhabi and of being linked to HTI. For example, Detik.com reported on how several communities in East Java rejected Attaki's sermons throughout 2022, mainly by Banser (the paramilitary security wing of GP Ansor, NU's youth organization) and the local NU District Board, citing Wahhabi and HTI affiliations as the reason.[38]

The peak of the controversy surrounding Ustaz Hanan Attaki controversy came in 2023, when he was blessed by KH Marzuki Mustamar, Chairman of the East Java NU Regional Board. With a pledge to follow the scholars of Ahl as-Sunnah wa'l-Jama'ah (Aswaja), he officially became a

[38] Detik, 2023.

member of NU.[39] Nevertheless, he keeps preaching activities with Pemuda Hijrah in various cities. Becoming an NU member has no impact on his long-standing da'wah activities.

Wasathiyah and Local Tradition as Counter-Narratives to the Hijrah Movement

In public statements, leaders and representatives of NU, Muhammadiyah and MUI have consistently emphasized *wasathiyah* Islam ('middle-path Islam') and moderate Islam as the appropriate ways for Indonesian Muslims to practice Islam. These concepts are often linked to the promotion of *kearifan lokal* (local traditions) and the embedding of Islam in Indonesian culture historically. Official speeches, media coverage, and sermons from these parties and others reiterate that Indonesia's Islamic identity should be closer to inclusiveness, tolerance, and preservation of cultural heritage.

When addressing the *hijrah* phenomenon, these organizations tend to contrast their vision of Islam with what they describe as rigid, literalist, or 'Arab' interpretations. While rarely mentioning specific groups directly, *hijrah da'wah*—particularly its fashion, discourse, and choice of preachers—is often associated with Salafi-Wahhabi influences in these narratives. The perceived emphasis on textualism and uniformity in the hijrah movement is seen as a 'deviation' from the pluralist and syncretic character of Indonesian Islam.[40] Event documentation and media coverage reveal that these contrasts are used in both formal and informal

[39] On one occasion, KH Cholil Nafis, Chairman of MUI for Da'wah and Ukhuwah, explained that in the midst of the overwhelming flow of information on science and Islamic preaching on social media, Muslims should join an Islamic organization. He emphasized that doing so provides a clear and reliable channel for Islamic teachings. "The flow is clear. If the Aswaja is correct, then choosing between a traditionalist or modernist organization is simply a matter of preference," he said. See: Republika, 2023.

[40] CNN, 2019c.

settings. For example, in religious moderation seminars implemented by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, as well as in public discussions and television talk shows, prominent figures from NU and MUI highlight *wasathiyah* Islam as a stronghold against ideological infiltration. This was also confirmed when conversing with civil servants at the provincial level offices of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. In this context, *hijrah* is not necessarily seen as a threat, but rather as a trend that needs to be 'redirected' towards local religious values, or more explicitly, should engage with longer-rooted Islamic organizations, such as NU or Muhammadiyah. Similar language can be found in articles and opinions written by leaders or scholars affiliated with these organizations.[41]

Collaborative programs of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, MUI, and moderate Islamic organizations accentuate the importance of a balanced understanding and practice of Islam between textual and contextual observance. Among the most controversial is the certification of moderate preachers and clerics, which has been a hot topic of discussion, especially in relation to efforts to standardize preachers and spread moderate Islam. In 2019, for example, MUI planned a standardization program for preachers, also known as *da'i* certification, with the intention of unifying the vision in the delivery of preaching, as well as ensuring that the preaching material disseminated is *wassathiyah* Islam or moderate Islam, which stays away from right and left extremism.[42] In other words, moderate Islam is considered important for maintaining religious harmony in Indonesia, as well as strengthening national insight.

Non-Coercive Measures Against Hijrah-Related Events

Field observations and media reports have recorded a series of cases where *hijrah*-themed activities such as sermons, festivals, and gatherings

[41] Jaringan Santri, 2020.
[42] See, for instance, Tirto, 2019, and MUI, 2024.

were prevented from taking place or abruptly halted before or during the event. The most common forms include the disbanding of recitations, withdrawal of venue permits, and cancellation of scheduled appearances by popular *hijrah* preachers. These actions are often justified by organizers or local authorities on the grounds of maintaining public order or preventing potential riots. Some events have been also confronted with coordinated resistance from community groups affiliated with mainstream Islamic organizations. In some cases, members of these groups were physically present at the event site, displaying banners or verbally demanding cancellation. Police officers were also often present, both to mediate between the parties and to enforce the decision to stop the activity. While these interventions do not involve formal arrests or prosecutions, they nevertheless effectively stop the events in question.

Delegitimization of *hijrah*-related preachers and activists has also emerged as a recurring pattern. This occurs through public statements, sermons, and social media posts that question the religious authority, doctrinal orientation, or nationalist commitment of these preachers. These narratives are sometimes amplified to the extent that grassroots responses add an institutional dimension to public rejection. This delegitimization, although non-violent, often affects the limited space, support and local administration to organize hijrah-related programs, such as the experience of the hijrah festival in Surabaya.[43]

Documentation from several cities shows that these measures had a deterrent effect on later *hijrah* movement activities. Event organizers on several occasions had difficulty securing venues and permits or attracting support because they had experienced cancellations or, more impactfully, due to the labelling of the *hijrah* movement as Salafi or Wahhabi. Therefore, on several occasions, hijrah movement activists or organizers adjusted the format of their activities, for example by avoiding the word *hijrah*, balancing controversial preachers with those considered more

[43] Kurnia, 2023.

'acceptable', or minimizing public advertisements to reduce the risk of confrontation. Example include Hanan Attaki's paid recitations using the brand *Ayah Amanah* ('Trustworthy Father'), the rebranding of Surabaya's *Hijrah* Festival as the Surabaya Islamic Festival, and festivals in Yogyakarta using Javanese-themed titles such as *Ojo Leren Dadi Wong Apik* ('Do Not Stop Being a Good Person', 2022), *Urip iku Urup* ('Life Is to Give Light', 2023), *Wang Sinawang* ('Life Depends on One's Perspective', 2024), and *Lir Ilir* ('Awaken, Awaken'), which was ongoing at the time of the writing. While no formal ban on the *hijrah* movement has been identified, these non-coercive measures have cumulatively limited its public presence or discursively reduced its resonance both on social media and in the community.

Analysis / Discussion

Conceptualizing Piety: Discursive and Embodied Traditions

Central to this study is the concept of piety, which I approach not as a fixed set of rules or devotional acts but as a discursive and embodied tradition, following Talal Asad's definition of Islam as a discursive tradition.[44] From this perspective, piety emerges through historically situated practices that cultivate particular sensibilities, moral dispositions, and forms of authority. It is formed and negotiated within relationships of power, religious teaching, and communal discipline. Different Muslim groups, such as hijrah communities, NU, and Muhammadiyah, participate in the Islamic discursive tradition but emphasize distinct modes of ethical formation and religious reasoning.

Within urban *hijrah* groups, piety is often framed as an ethical transformation of the self, one that resonates strongly with Saba Mahmood's argument[45] that piety is not merely belief or sentiment but an

[44] Talal Asad 1986, 1993.
[45] Saba Mahmood, 2005.

embodied, disciplined practice through which moral subjects are formed. *Hijrah* preachers frequently reinterpret the classical notion of *hijrah* from a historical migration to a personal, ongoing project of self-cultivation. In this formulation, piety is cultivated through regular mosque attendance, adherence to obligatory and sunnah worship, disciplined speech and bodily comportment, and engagement with the Qur'an. Ustaz Adi Hidayat's call to 'Islamize' one's body from gaze to footsteps illustrates how *hijrah* piety emphasizes visible, embodied discipline and the continuous shaping of ethical dispositions.[46] This understanding is reinforced by participation in *pengajian* (study circles), digital *da'wah* networks, and social media circulation of Islamic content, all of which enable forms of moral training and collective self-surveillance characteristic of Mahmood's formulation.

While participating in the same discursive tradition, both NU and Muhammadiyah foreground different modalities of ethical formation. NU's conception of piety emphasizes adherence to the authority of the *kiyai*, participation in communal rituals, and deep engagement with the transmitted corpus of classical scholarship.[47] Here, piety is cultivated through long-standing textual traditions, ritual practices, and social hierarchies that structure the transmission of religious knowledge. Muhammadiyah, by contrast, situates piety within rational interpretation, institutionalized religious education, and modern organizational structures.[48] Its conception of piety reflects a disciplined organizational rationality and a commitment to scriptural reasoning aligned with modernist reform.

These variations demonstrate how different communities cultivate distinct ethical sensibilities, disciplinary regimes, and forms of religious authority, even while drawing on shared Islamic sources. Approaching

[46] He delivered this message in a lecture welcoming the Islamic New Year 1443 Hijri (2021) in a mosque in Bandung.
[47] Van Bruinessen, 1994; Hefner, 2000.
[48] Burhani, 2006; Nashir, 2010; Latief & Nashir, 2020.

piety through the frameworks of Asad and Mahmood allows us to see that the divergence is not simply about theological content or ritual preference but about competing trajectories of moral formation. This helps explain why the *hijrah* movement, despite being non-militant and oriented toward personal ethics, may nonetheless be perceived as socially disruptive. The movement embodies a competing mode of subject formation that challenges established structures of authority and reconfigures how Islamic piety should be lived in contemporary urban life.

The narrative that the *hijrah* movement is a threat is gradually shaped by dominant actors through a discursive process, rather than stemming from empirical evidence of the existence of violence and radicalism. Since *hijrah* groups first emerged in public in late 2010, followed by their initial social media uploads in 2014, they have gained significant popularity among urban Indonesians. Their rise is driven largely by the revival of recitations in mosques and by the growing exposure to Islamic preaching on social media. Their content, which among others appears on the official Instagram account of Shift Pemuda Hijrah, often addresses the everyday life challenges faced by the *ummah*, and speaks to ongoing crises and public moral decadence displayed by those in power. Together, these factors have fostered a strong desire among Indonesian Muslims to cultivate greater personal piety as it is reflected, among others, in the official Instagram account of the Shift Pemuda Hijrah (https://www.instagram.com/shiftmedia.id/). However, as discussed, the popularity of the *hijrah* movement has also triggered reactions from other Islamic groups, mainly represented by long-entrenched traditional Islamic elements to generalized accusation that the *hijrah* movement is a channel for the spread of Salafism and Wahhabism, which is therefore incompatible with the state's understanding of moderation. In the framework of securitization theory,[49] threats are not something objective, but rather the result of a 'speech act', a discursive action that states that a

[49] Buzan et al., 1998.

phenomenon threatens the continuity of national values, identity, or stability.

Statements by state officials, including the Minister of Religious Affairs and National Counterterrorism Agency, as well as NU and its youth wing GP Ansor, reproduced widely in mainstream media, reveal how the terms and symbols used to describe Islamic groups associated with Salafi-Wahhabi Islam are often applied in ways that blur the boundaries of what constitutes a concrete threat. While the National Counterterrorism Agency has indeed reported that many terrorists are adhere to Salafi-Wahhabi teachings, this connection is frequently invoked in an overly broad manner, turning the label into a convenient but imprecise narrative. Reflecting this dynamic, the Da'wah Institute of the NU Executive Board, during its 2022 National Working Meeting, issued a recommendation that the government issue regulations that prohibit the spread of Wahhabism through majelis taklim (Islamic educational gatherings), online media, and social media in Indonesia, and to not issue permits for the HijrahFest or HijabFest festivals.[50]

Such labelling frequently targets *hijrah* groups observed in this study, including the recitation group led by Ustaz Khalid Basalamah,[51] the Hijrah Festival event, and Ustaz Hanan Attaki's Pemuda Hijrah group. Based on observations conducted for this paper, including direct involvement in these groups' activities and attendance at their recitation sessions, no evidence was found to suggest they represent any security threat. This is contrary to the way these groups have been framed and constructed by other organizations and the media.

The main narrative emphasized within the *hijrah* movement centers on becoming a pious Muslim and practicing piety in daily life. But in the eyes of others, statements from key actors in the movement have

[50] CNN, 2022b.

[51] The mainstream media has also labelled the *hijrah* movement framed as Salafi or Wahhabi. See CNN 2019b and Tribun News, 2023.

undergone a shift in perceived meaning, moving from being expressions of piety to being 'warning signs' of puritanism, intolerance, and non-violent radicalism. This process, whether directly or indirectly, has contributed to framing the *hijrah* movement as representing 'angry Islam': unwelcoming and potentially threatening to national diversity, and therefore deemed as requiring special attention or even intervention.[52] This discursive social process, instead, can be interpreted as reinforcing a dichotomy of 'us and them', aimed at strengthening group identity by establishing clear distinctions between the self and the other.[53]

Therefore, it is important to observe the precedents of the state's actions in positioning certain Islamic groups as a threat. For example, scholars observed how Widodo conducted a systematic and concerted campaign of suppression against so-called Islamist groups.[54] These efforts cannot be separated from the major protests held under the '212 Islamic Defense Action' banner, which shocked Widodo (and many others) that there were large groups of people, representing Muslims, who could spill out onto the streets and directly or indirectly target the ruling regime. On the other hand, the emergence of what was later popularized as 'political Islam' was the result of political polarization during the 2014 presidential election. The anger of these Muslims was multiple in cause, including allegations of blasphemy against Jakarta gubernatorial candidate (and Chinese-Christian) Basuki 'Ahok' Tjahaja Purnama, as well as the culmination of Muslim disappointment with the Widodo administration, who many considered to have failed in being pro-Islam and in carrying out its mandate to realize social justice for all Indonesians. Notwithstanding the varied group interests that were channelled during the 212 actions, which were the largest demonstrations since 1998 and

[52] In the inauguration of the Central Board of the Indonesian Mubaligh Coordinating Board, the Minister of Religious Affairs, Yaqut Cholil Qoumas (2020-2024), for example, expressed the importance of spreading Islam in Indonesia that is more friendly and not angry. Islam that embraces, not hits.
[53] Tajfel & Turner, 2004.
[54] Fealy, 2020.

the fall of Soeharto's New Order, the Widodo government afterwards began to show a New Order-esque authoritarian style that civil society and opposition groups had warned about.

The Widodo administration largely easily muzzled its political opponents to further its ambitious development projects. The year 2017 marked the beginning of how Islamic groups began to be silenced under the controversial Mass Organizations Law. On 19 July 2017, HTI, which had long been a 'nuisance' to both the government and mainstream Islamic organizations because it explicitly championed an Islamic caliphate, was disbanded after the government revoked its legal entity status because the organization was deemed contrary to the constitution and state ideology and had the potential to cause conflict and endanger the integrity of NKRI. Then, at the end of 2020, the Islamic Defenders Front (*Front Pembela Islam*, FPI), one of the organizations that led the 212 Islamic Defense Action, was officially dissolved through a Joint Decree of six ministries and state institutions and with reference to the Mass Organizations Law.

These two important events in the history of mass organizations in Indonesia also signify the significant power of the state under Widodo. Instead of being threatened by the ideologies of certain Islamic groups, as is often argued to legitimize security actions, the Widodo administration acted to silence Muslim opposition voices, finding relative political stability. The importance of this stability was echoed until the end of Widodo's term in late 2024, echoed as the main prerequisite for the course of development, with critical voices coming from democracy activists becoming the next target. The Widodo regime increasingly manifested its authoritarian nature through the arrest of activists for criticizing state policies that were not in favor of the people.[55]

When all voices are successfully silenced by a regime, the securitization of movements such as the *hijrah* movement becomes

[55] Kumparan, 2020.

ambiguous. First, the vague construction and framing by dominant actors toward this piety movement are not only a provision for traditional Islamic groups—who, from the beginning, responded negatively with accusations of spreading Salafi-Wahhabi views considered dangerous and threatening—but also serve as a means to act politically. This political action asserts and demonstrates a 'regime of truth' that determines which form of Islam is deemed proper in Indonesia, thereby raising the issue of religious authority. In Foucault's framework,[56] religious 'truth' is not determined by the depth of spirituality, but by power structures that define who is authorized to speak and regulate religious life and practice in society. Through a network of state institutions (such as the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the National Counterterrorism Agency), large mass organizations (especially NU), and the media, a discursive regime emerges that legitimizes a form of piety aligned with moderate Islam, nationalism, and adherence to the state's national narrative.

By contrast, the *hijrah* movement—which is more personal, affective, and rooted in informal community networks—lacks such institutional legitimacy. As it cannot be incorporated into formal authorities, whether through official *da'wah* institutions or the mainstream religious education system, it is relegated beyond the bounds of permissible discourse. This official discourse normalizes particular expressions of piety, often associated with narratives promoted by NU (*Islam Nusantara*) or Muhammadiyah (*Islam Berkemajuan*), while tacitly marginalizing other forms of religiosity deemed overly symbolic, exclusive, or incompatible with the state's interpretation of nationalism. In other words, the discursive apparatus regulates not only what may be believed, but also how such belief can be publicly expressed.

Meanwhile, the other facet is the government's religious moderation policy, which has unfortunately been hijacked by traditional Islamic groups to suppress Islamic practices that are considered immoderate. This

[56] Foucault, 1980.

actually deviates from the main messages of the policy that support the pursuit of social harmony. The ambiguity of securitizing the *hijrah* movement is even more striking because the existential threat that should be the pretext for a security action does not exist in *hijrah* groups, especially those observed in this study. In this regard, the face of the Indonesian state under Joko Widodo, especially in his second term, was shaped in part because the state and mainstream Islamic organizations were allied, something that can also be seen in other Muslim countries.

As mentioned, the *hijrah* movement represents an emotional, symbolic and online community-based form of Islamic identity. It provides a 'safe space' for individual urban Muslims to construct the meaning of their faith and collectively cultivate piety, and is outside the influence of traditional religious structures. On the other hand, the state and dominant Islamic organizations promote an institutional Islam that is structural and normative in that Islam must 'fit' the national vision, be coordinated through formal institutions, and be subject to a narrative of moderation. This tension does not emerge from theological substance, but rather from who has the right to govern and represent religious truth. In other words, the conflict is not between 'violent Islam' and 'peaceful Islam', but rather between alternative representations of piety that are not subject to formal institutional logic.

It is here that securitization and structurization, as approaches which are not inclusive of religious discourse, have narrowed the space for religious expression in Indonesia. *Da'wah* activities that are not affiliated with formal institutional structures, such as *hijrah* communities and online preachers, are vulnerable to dissolution, denial of permits, or stigmatization through the media. This is not simply a matter of dissent, but a kind of 'speech disqualification' in the Islamic public sphere. Over time, such approaches risk deepening internal polarization among Muslims between those who feel represented by the state and those who are alienated because their expressions of faith are deemed deviant. In reality, most of these groups have neither political ambitions nor violent

tendencies; they simply practice their religion in ways that differ from the mainstream.

By understanding securitization processes and the underlying discursive logic, this paper offers a reading in seeing that what is at stake is not only the form of religion, but also who has the right to determine its boundaries. In the Indonesian context, the state's religious moderation strategy, when not reflectively criticized, has the potential to become a means of delegitimizing socially and constitutionally legitimate religious expressions. This is not only about security but about pluralism and epistemic justice in the national religious landscape.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the securitization of the *hijrah* movement is not grounded in violence, but in the framing of its piety practices as incompatible with the state-sanctioned notion of moderate Islam promoted during the presidency of Joko Widodo. When this notion of moderate Islam is institutionalized into a policy of religious moderation, to go beyond its theological aspects, I argue that this policy risks becoming a project of discourse domination rather than an avenue for inclusion of every religious practice.

This is because the idea of moderation developed within the community remains, even though the policy is intended to be applied across all religions and beliefs in practice. This is the gap that is politically understood both for state and non-state actors with different interests, which not only obscures the ideals of social harmony from the policy, but also triggers the division of the *ummah* due to the framing and construction of other Islamic groups outside the mainstream as Wahhabi propagators, immoderate, anti-Pancasila, and anti-NKRI, and therefore a threat.

However, in framing these groups as a threat, the political interests of each actor differ. Under the Widodo regime, the state had an interest in advancing its ambitious development projects, which are often assumed to require political stability and security. By making religious moderation part of its national strategic project, Widodo embraced mainstream Islamic organizations by placing their figures in strategic government posts, including the very controversial granting of mining concession permits. This approach was taken to maintain the very stability of his regime, and not just so his development projects received support from mainstream Islamic organizations.

Meanwhile, non-state actors, especially traditional Islamic organizations and their youth wings, have an interest in shaping normative narratives about Islam that are compatible with state ideology. Thus, some critical responses to the hijrah movement can be read as part of the struggle for symbolic capital between institutional Islam, which has historical roots and state legitimacy, and new forms of piety that grow through non-formal networks. The discourse of 'moderate Islam' promoted by the state corresponds closely with the interests of political stability and institutional status quo, where non-traditional forms of piety are often positioned in terms of suspicion of 'puritanism', 'intolerance', or 'anti-NKRI'. The stigmatization of the *hijrah* movement as 'Wahhabi' or 'Arabization' functions as a strategy of differentiation, allowing for the reinforcement of the local Islam narrative as the only legitimate form of Islam. It is also important to note that the securitization process of the hijrah movement is not necessarily directly repressive, but takes place through discursive framing by institutional actors, including the Ministry of Religious Affairs, major mass organizations, and national media.

In other words, state actors and dominant religious institutions in Indonesia, particularly those affiliated with NU, have played a central role in promoting a discourse of 'moderate Islam' as part of the national deradicalization and nation-building agenda. This positioning aligns with both political imperatives and the maintenance of religious authority.

While not all critiques of the *hijrah* movement are motivated by overt repression, their securitized framing—often through associations with Wahhabism, Arabism, or anti-Pancasila sentiment—can serve to delimit the range of acceptable Islamic expression. The institutional interests at stake are not merely theological but are also linked to broader struggles over cultural legitimacy, state access, and narrative dominance within the post-reformasi Islamic public sphere. Overall, the securitization process, while not always overtly repressive, functions through discursive framing that defines acceptable religious expression, shaping which forms of piety are publicly recognized and which are sidelined.

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