

## **From *Madhab* to Social Dogma: the Tablighi Jamaat's Fluidity of Teachings and the Integration of Ummah**

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### ***Abstrak***

*Jamaah tabligh adalah salah satu organisasi Islam terbesar di dunia. Meskipun tidak mengambil bentuk organisasi formal sebagaimana organisasi-organisasi Islam lain, aspek kedisiplinan dalam menjalankan prinsip-prinsip dasar organisasi, terutama yang berkenaan dengan bagaimana menjalankan dakwah di tengah masyarakat Muslim yang plural dalam hal mazhab, dari para anggota jamaah tabligh merupakan salah satu hal penting yang perlu untuk ditiru. Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui bagaimana strategi dakwah yang digunakan oleh Jamaah tabligh dalam menghadapi orang-orang dengan mazhab yang berbeda di tengah masyarakat. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa jamaah tabligh menjunjung tinggi prinsip kesetaraan dalam dakwah yang mereka laksanakan melalui mekanisme fluidasi dan desakralisasi mazhab serta demazhabisasi. Dalam hal ini, setiap anggota dalam Jamaah Tabligh, terlepas dari status social dan afiliasi mazhabnya, memiliki kesempatan yang sama untuk menjadi da'I dan menjadi mad'u.*

**Kata Kunci:** Demazhabisasi, Desakralisasi, Fluidasi Mazhab, Jama'ah Tabligh, dan Strategi Dakwah.

### ***Abstract***

*Tablighi Jamaat is one of the largest Muslim organization in the world. Despite lacking formal form of organization like other Islamic organization in general, the members of the Tablighi Jamaat is well known for their loyalty and discipline in implementing the principles of the organization, especially regarding the organizations' guidelines on conducting da'wa to Muslims with different religious background such as madhab affiliation. This paper, therefore, aims at explaining the strategy of performing da'wa applied by the Tablighi Jamaat in plural social settings. Findings suggest that the Tablighi Jamaat utilized the notion of equality as its most important principle of da'wa. The idea of equality is actualized through several mechanism like madhab fluidation, desacralization of madhab and demadhabization. In this context, every member of the Tablighi Jamaat has the same opportunity to be da'I (preacher) as well as to be mad'u (audience).*

**Keywords:** Demadhabization, Desacralization, Madhab Fluidation, Strategy of Da'wa, and Tablighi Jamaat.

## A. Introduction

A number of transnational political movements under the banner of Da'wa fueled by organizations such as The Tablighi Jamaat, Hizb ut-Tahrir, Wahhabi, Ahmadiya, and Ikhwan al-Muslimin have been gaining momentum in many developing countries since the last four decades. Among those transnational religio-political movements, The Tablighi Jamaat is perhaps the most successful. The organization's existence is well known for its unique da'wa movement that has been labeled conservative, traditionalist, reformist, salafist, and globalist at the same time. Though having no strict structure of organization like mass or professional organization or political party, the Tablighi Jamaat is well known for its well organized and discipline movements and for its democracy like mechanism of decision-making process.<sup>1</sup>

The Tablighi Jamaat has managed to open its branches in one hundred and eighty countries around the world with total members of around eighty million people. The Tablighi Jamaat success as a global da'wa movement is of course not without controversy. The Tablighi Jamaat has been hit by the impact of the political discourse of fighting global terrorism in which the Tablighi Jamaat was accused by a number of western scholars as sponsoring the jihadist in several cases of bombing such as in United Kingdom, United States of America, and French.<sup>2</sup> Moving further, Fred Burton and Scot Stewart even claimed that the Tablighi Jamaat has latent and secretive connections with terrorist groups in Pakistan.<sup>34</sup>

The Tablighi Jamaat grows rapidly in the US, Latin America, Europe, Asia, Africa and the Middle East. In South East Asia region including Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, Philippine and Malaysia, the Tablighi Jamaat keeps

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<sup>1</sup> Abdurrahman Ahmad al-Syirbuni, *Kupas Tuntas Jamaah Tabligh* (Jakarta: Pustaka Nabhani, 2010), 7.

<sup>2</sup> Muhammad Amira Rana, *Tablighi Jamaat: The Discourse and Challenge* (Islamabad: Pak Institute for Peace, 2009), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Joshua W. Hedges, "Tablighi Jamaat: The Premier Latent Network" (Washington D.C.: The Fund for Peace, 2008), 1, <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/93813/200804%20Tablighi%20Jamaat.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> See Also, Shireen Khan Burki, "The Tablighi Jama'at: Proselytizing Missionaries or Trojan Horse?," *Journal of Applied Security Research* 8, no. 1 (January 2013): 98–117, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19361610.2013.738407>.

growing and eventually became integral element of Islamicity in those respected countries. The existence of the Tablighi Jamaat in South East Asia has given new colors to the existing local and indigenous pattern of religiosity in society.<sup>5</sup> The Tablighi Jamaat movement has become alternative for da'wa movements by bringing fresh interpretations on new da'wa movement based on the notion of egalitarianism, non-hierarchical between preachers and the general audience.<sup>6</sup>

The Tablighi Jamaat provides a more inclusive space for the Muslim communities (ummah) to develop their capacity to perform da'wa by eliminating the divisive barrier between the preacher (da'i) and the preacher (mad'u). On the more inclusive da'wa sphere imagined by the the Tablighi Jamaat, everyone can play an active role as da'i in their internal as well as external social environment. This is the separating line between the Tablighi Jamaat and other organization of Islamic movements in which, mostly, the preachers (or Kyai in Indonesian context) hold authority to perform da'wa in their community. The new system of da'wa pattern promoted by the Tablighi Jamaat ignited a number of diverse reactions from outside the movement. One of the most mainstream reaction was an accusation of the Tablighi Jamaat as *jahil* (ignorant) since mastering a set of particular Islamic knowledge is not on its task lists.<sup>7</sup>

The success of the Tablighi Jamaat is basically a result of its inclusive strategy of performing da'wa emerging from its vision of enhancing the unity of the Muslim ummah (Islamic community). This strategy in constructed upon a firm believe that Muslims today are too busy debating small and insignificant internal differences among them and fail to address long term and universal goals of the betterment of the ummah (Muslim communities).

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<sup>5</sup> Farish A. Noor, *Islam on the Move: The Tablighi Jama'at in Southeast Asia* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 30.

<sup>6</sup> Ariesta, "Alasan-Alasan Bertahannya Masyarakat Ekonomi Kelas Bawah Dalam Keanggotaan Jamaah Tabligh: Studi Di Nagari Ampang Kuranji, Kecamatan Kota Baru Dharmasraya." (Universitas Andalas, 2009), 2.

<sup>7</sup> Abdurrahman Ahmad al-Syirbuni, *Kupas Tuntas Jamaah Tabligh*, 91.

## B. Conflicting Madzhab and the need of unification

The term *madhab* is originated from an Arabic word '*zahaba*' which means passing through or going through certain way, or something that stands for someone's purpose whether it is an abstract or concrete one. *Madhab* can also be understood as a method constructed through the process of research on religious text or social phenomena relating to the religion of Islam. Another textbook definition of *madhab* suggests that the term refers to a school of thought concerning the Islamic perspective regarding numerous social issues codified as fiqh, ushul fiqh, and theology. In its development, the term *madhab*, however, expanded its boundary to include another area of thought such as ideology and politics.<sup>8</sup>

The idea of *madhab* emerged during the period after the prophet Muhammad had passed away, 150 years after the birth of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula. During that period of time, the companions of the prophet create and develop a set of Islamic knowledge, especially Islamic laws, by utilizing a host of other discipline such as philosophy and social sciences as supporting tools to interpret the Qur'an and the written traditions of the prophet.<sup>9</sup>

Differences in terms of methodology and approach used to interpret the holly text of the Qur'an had resulted in different *ijtihad* of the Imams.<sup>10</sup> From a number of imams, not all of their Qur'anic interpretations are extremely different. Instead, their interpretations of the Qur'an and the Hadith to constructing Islamic law are full of similarities. This is because the relations among those imams, especially the famous four of Sunni Islam, resemble the relation of teachers and pupils. Thus, the *silsila*, the root of knowledge, of the imams are traceable and signifies a continual development rather that paradigmatic shifts. In this regard, it is often that the imams shared their admirations towards each other. Imam al-Malik,

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<sup>8</sup> For a comprehensive discussion on the development of Islamic school of thoughts please refer to, Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> Cook.

<sup>10</sup> Imam is an honorific title given to great Islamic thinkers during the early period of the companions of the prophet Muhammad.

for example, is known as the teacher of Imam as-Syafi'i and Imam as-Syafi'i was also the mentor of Imam Hanbali.<sup>11</sup>

Despite a generous amount of admirations sent by one imam to other imams that marked the relation among them, sharing scientific commentaries aimed at criticizing theories built by those imams was also common during the initial phase of *madhab* development. The scientific discourse during that period of time was relatively advanced. Debates on religious matters were held in a scientific manner in which different opinions were respected. Generation after those Imams who learned and followed the opinions of those imams then classified and categorized the thoughts of those imams in the form of what now known as "*madhab*".<sup>12</sup>

Each of those imams has followers that spread the teachings of their imam through study groups and institutions of both formal and informal education. The teachings of the imam brought diverse manifestation of Islamicity to the respected regions and assimilated with local cultures thus gave birth to a unique and special form of Islam regarding tradition and culture.

Several centuries later, the idea of *madhab* grew exponentially and became diverse and widespread distinct teachings. It even reached 130 different *madhabs*. Traditionally speaking, there are eight major official *madhabs* acknowledged among the international Muslim communities. Five of the eight major *madhabs* come from the Sunni tradition whether three of them come from the Shiite tradition. The five *madhabs* from Sunni tradition are Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, Hambali, and Zahiri whether the three from Shiite tradition are Ja'fari, Zaidi, and Ibadi. In terms of theological thinking, there are six major *madhabs* in which three come from Sunni tradition and other three come from Shiite tradition. They are Mu'tazili, Ash'ari, and Maturidi from Sunni tradition and Imamiyah (the twelver), Ismaili, and Zaidi from Shiite tradition.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought*.

<sup>12</sup> See, Wael B. Hallaq, *A History of Islamic Legal Theories: An Introduction to Sunnī Uṣūl Al-Fiqh* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>13</sup> Noel J. Coulson, *A History of Islamic Law* (New Brunswick, N.J: Aldine Transaction, 2011).

Muslim dynasties that did not fit with the Jariri *madhab* excluded that *madhab* from the discourse of Islamic law. Similar fate was also experienced by the Zahiri *madhab* that had been shut down by the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman codified the four major *madhab* of Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hambali to be the official *madhabs* of the state. Despite having such a dark history of violent competitions among each other due to having vested interests of the ruling class, the spread of *madhab* in the modern world keeps growing and assimilate with religious tradition of the local population. The *madhab* of Hanafi grew in India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, China, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, and the Balkan regions. Hanbali school of thought thrives in Africa (Egypt, Tunis, Algeria, and Morocco), Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Spain. The syafi'i school of thought, however, made its way through Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei), Iraq, Egypt, and Africa. The Maliki *madhab*, however, managed to be dominant in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, a monarch well known for its Wahhabism.<sup>14</sup>

*Madhab* which was initially a collection of thoughts and interpretations of the Qur'an made by the Imams as a result of a long struggle in deconstructing the mystery and symbolic meanings of the sacred text of the Qur'an which contains the Islamic teachings of sharia, morality, sexuality, economics, and prophetic sociology among other things. These collections of teachings were consolidated during the ninth and tenth century as theological dogmas by the followers of the imams. The idea of *madhab*, later in its development, was politicized by the ruling groups by placing them as the official school of thought of the state in order to protect the political interests, economic advantage, and power of the ruling group.<sup>15</sup>

In other hand, the followers of certain *madhabs* were competing with each other in gaining acknowledgment and legitimacy from the state and tried to put their representatives in the parliament as mufti or *qadi*. Regarding this, *madhab* was not only utilized to better understand the teachings of Islamic laws but also to suppress

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<sup>14</sup> Devin Stewart, "The Structure of the Fihrist: Ibn Al-Nadim as Historian of Islamic Legal and Theological Schools," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 39, no. 03 (August 2007): 369, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743807070511>.

<sup>15</sup> Antony Black, *The History of Islamic Political Thought: From the Prophet to the Present*, 2nd ed (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

the seeds of rebellion for power from the people or competing political rivals. With this in mind, it is easier to understand that differences in terms of *madhab* may lead to marginalization, discrimination, and conflict, let alone what differences in terms of political ideology may lead to.<sup>16</sup>

Conflicts emerging from differences in terms of *madhab* affiliations would get worse if there is political interests at stake. Islam in all of its history has always been interlinked with politics and power, especially to competition on winning them. What Muslims in society believe to be a good way to understand the teachings of Islam, thus what a *madhab* offers, plays a crucial role in determining the very existence of such certain *madhab*? The idea of *madhab* has often been exploited by politicians to gain their political interests by sacrificing other *madhabs* which hinder their political agenda. The symbols of *madhab* are nothing but legitimizing tools of political power from other rivalling politicians. Submission, loyalty, and piety of the followers of a certain *madhab* to the ruling groups are condition that the ruling party always wants to create in order to strengthen their role.<sup>17</sup>

So far, the largest and most enduring conflict in the overall history of *madhabs* is the conflict between Sunni and Shiite that has been happening in several countries such as Iran, Iraq, Yemen, Lebanon, Pakistan, and Syria. Such conflict has taken a huge number of victims from both sides. It has also been transformed into continuous latent conflict. Wherever the two competing *madhabs* meet, it is almost certain that conflict will follow. The emergence of the phenomenon of accusing infidelity (*takfir*) as a very important initial phase of conflict between the two groups, so far, seems unavoidable.

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<sup>16</sup> Black, 81.

<sup>17</sup> Black, *The History of Islamic Political Thought*, 141.

### **C. Fluidity of Madhabs and the De-madhab-ization of Islam within the Religious Culture of the Tablighi: a Potential antidote for Madzhabs based conflicts**

Evil things emerged as a result of the idea of *madhabs* and it is one of the most persistent sources of conflict and violence in the Muslim world. Divisions among Muslims as a by-product of the manifestation of the idea of *madhab* has inspired the founder of the Tablighi Jamaat to organize a religious movement that can operate beyond the divisive lines of *madhabs*. This was believed to be the best way to avoid conflicts and violence due to differences in terms of *madhab* affiliation. The Tablighi Jamaat do not engage on the mundane area, known as *furu'iyah*, under which the proponents of a host of *madhabs* do. It means that the Tablighi Jamaat does not endorse to talk about or discuss the differences among many *madhabs* in the Muslim worlds in their religious da'wa movement.

The Tablighi Jamaat is well aware about the sensitiveness of talking about such issues and that talking about them would likely to incite conflict, social violence, and even war among fellow Muslims. The idea that *madhab* has become dogma rather than a range of responses towards a host of problems faced by certain Muslims in certain place during certain period of time is well acknowledged by the Tablighi Jamaat. The Tablighi Jamaat feels sorry for those who places the idea of *madhab* as final statements of religious matters rather than a fluid and dynamic sphere where religious matter could be discussed properly.

The only way to escape the trap of *madhab* in the current world, according to Tablighi Jamaat is by ignoring the artificial differences created by different *madhabs* in Islam. It means that the Tablighi Jamaat endorse its follower to keep silent when it comes to mundane differences emerging from the idea of *madhab*. Instead of talking about them, the Tablighi Jamaat prefer to ignore those different *madhabs*. In the mind of the Tablighi Jamaat, it is far more important to talk about Iman (strengthening faith), 'amal (good deeds), and da'wa (proselytizing methods) than to talk about *madhabs* that might only result in more sectarianism among Muslims.

The relatively innovative breakthrough constructed by the Tablighi Jamaat, however, has its negative consequences. The Tablighi Jamaat is often accused as superficial in terms of its understanding of Islamic teachings since it denied incorporating the discourse of *madhab* into its mainstream religious narratives. In the same time, the Tablighi Jamaat is also surrounded by its fellow Islamic movements that place the discourse of *madhab* in their core discourse of Islamic teachings and movements. For many Islamic movements beside the Tablighi Jamaat, taking out the discourse of *madhab* equals to taking out locus and scientific sphere in which Islam can be discussed properly because of their believe that any religious matter must be backed up by “dalil” (textual evidence) and that without textual evidence a religious matter must be judged “haram” (forbidden).

The emergence of the tablighi movement in the beginning of twentieth century in Mewat, India has brought about massive cultural evolutions regarding Islamic religious da’wa movement not only to local area of India but also to other Muslim communities around the worlds. The tablighi offers more than just a new and fresh pattern and approach of da’wa but also an alternative middle path movements that allows Muslims to break the tensions and rigidities marking the pattern of relation among different groups of Muslims due to having caught and locked up in the prisons of “*madhabs*” for so many years.<sup>18</sup>

The phenomena of conflict and the prisons of “*madhabs*” among Muslims since the tenth century has become a core tradition to understand Muslims in the current world. In other name, it has been flesh and bones of the Muslim worlds. The conflicts regarding *madhabs* turn more sharply when they relate to competition in the context of politic, economy, education and culture. Such competition has even turned into social violence and military aggressions among followers of different *madhabs* as it is evidenced in many parts of the world especially in the Middle East region where sectarian conflicts due to political competition for powers have been thriving for years.

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<sup>18</sup> Jan Ali, “Islamic Revivalism: The Case of the Tablighi Jamaat,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 23, no. 1 (April 2003): 173–81, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602000305935>.

Conflicts involving the Sunni and the Shiite in Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Syria, Pakistan, Egypt, Lebanon and Jordan are among a long list of other conflicts in which religious symbols has effectively mixed with political competitions for power in very complicated ways. In southeast Asia, especially in Indonesia, conflicts involving different *madhabs* also emerge between traditionalist Muslim groups and their modernists counterparts such as between Muhammadiyah and Nahdatul Ulama, Wahabi and the Nahdiyyin, Ahmadi and local Muslim groups, and of course between Shiite and Sunni. Such a long list of conflicts and even violence involving different sects of Islam is a strong evidence of the roles and contributions of different interpretations made by different *madhabs* to the proliferation of conflicts among Muslims. The existence of religious groups with their differences on *madhab* identity is not reciprocally complementing in spreading the da'wa of Islam. Instead, such different groups are constantly weakening each other and even are destroying each other.<sup>19</sup>

Putting an end to this chronic problem of *madhabs*-based conflict among Muslims will take a long time and new approaches for different Muslim groups in understanding each other's existence. The emergence of the tablighi with its concept of "the fluidity of *madhab*" or "de-*madhab*-ization" aimed at defrosting the frigidity in understanding the idea of *madhab* and integrating the existing *madhabs* into a single massive energy focusing on iman (strengthening faith) and 'amal (endorsing good deeds) is perceived to be a good and sufficient solution. The concept of de-*madhab*-ization may also be defined as a process of setting free Islam from the entangling, rigid, and divisive culture of *madhab*. Fluidization of *madhab* and demadhabization are important things to apply in order to minimize the conflicts and tensions emerging from differences in terms of cultural practices brought by different *madhabs* that have the potentials to divide Muslims.

The process of fluidization and demadhabization will bring new color that can play the role as mediator to fill the gap and misperceptions among different Muslim groups in the local, regional, national and even transnational levels. The

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<sup>19</sup> Daniel Byman, "Sectarianism Afflicts the New Middle East," *Survival* 56, no. 1 (January 2, 2014): 79–100, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2014.882157>.

fluidization and *demadhabization* movement brought by the Tablighi Jamaat can release the Muslims from the prisons of *madhabs* since it prioritizes freedom to choose and change whatever *madhab* its followers might find suitable for their beliefs and values. In this regard, the members of the Tablighi Jamaat are not encouraged to stick to one particular *madhab* but gives freedom for its members to practice whatever *madhab* they want in one condition; they should not provoke other members by preaching their *madhab* in front of other fellow members. Moreover, it is demanded that every member should be able to adapt and assimilate into local *madhab* of the local community where they do their da'wa movement.

In the Tablighi Jamaat, the notion of *madhab* which has been an everlasting trend and is central part of Muslim religious movements has undergone 'desacralization' and 'de-*madhabization*' process. One of the most famous trademarks of the movement is its restriction on talking about and problematize the notion of *madhab* publicly. For the Tablighi Jamaat, talking about differences in terms of *madhab* has no practical function and can only serve to divide the *umma* further. It contradicts the higher goal of the Islamic da'wa. For the Tablighi Jamaat, there are a long list of other taks that need to be addressed by the *umma* which are more important and more fundamental. The Tablighi Jamaat believes that differences in a wider sense should serve for the unity of the *umma* by focussing on understanding fundamental teaching of Islam rather than problematizing mundane issues. The later, according to the Tablighi Jamaat will only result in more debates and more social conflicts due to egoism on each group of the followers of certain *madhabs*.

The teaching of the Tablighi Jamaat which is silent when it comes to differences in terms of *madhab* signifies its belief to the need of *madhab* fluidization and *demadhabization* since it tries to accommodate every *madhab* into its core narrative of Islamic universalism. The Tablighi Jamaat attempts to suppress the discourse of *madhab* differences from entering the process of social interaction and ritual construction by putting forward the discussion on more fundamental Islamic teachings such as basic ibadah (ritual of shalat), ukhuwah islamiyah (islamic fraternity), and ikromul Muslimin (serving fellow Muslims).

De-madhabization and *madhab* fluidization has twofold significant implication to the overall islamicity of the Tablighi Jamaat. First, it allows the Tablighi Jamaat to avoid being prisoned in a particular Islamic understanding based on a particular *madhab*. Secondly, it allows the Tablighi Jamaat to become very inclusive in terms of the *madhab* affiliation of its members. It means that the Tablighi Jamaat stays away from its member *madhab* affiliation as long as they, the member of the Tablighi Jamaat, do not preach their *madhab* publicly. In this regards, the founder of the Tablighi Jamaat movement, Sheikh Ilyas, has instructed his fellow Tablighi Jamaat's members all around the world to practice, or at least, pretend to practice, local *madhab* where they perform their Islamic da'wa or preaching as a strategy to construct the identity of universal *madhab* of the Tablighi Jamaat. It makes possible that the Tablighi Jamaat of south asia including india, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan which tend to affiliate to the Hanafi school of thought can accommodate the Tablighi Jamaat of southeast asia including Indonesia, Malaysia, brunei, Thailand, and Singapore which tend to affiliate to the Syafi'i school of thought. A similar case can also be observed among the Tablighi Jamaat of African continent including sudan Ethiopia, Somalia, and Yemen which is the followers of Syafi'i *madhab* and the Tablighi Jamaat of the middle east such as Qatar, KSA, Algeria, Libya, morocco, Tunisia, Kuwait, and Bahrain which follow the Maliki and Hanbali school of thought.<sup>20</sup>

This breakthrough innovation in terms of managing diversity within Muslims initiated by the founder of the Tablighi Jamaat has made escaping the trap of *madhab* fanaticism, imminent danger for the unity of the ummah, possible. Mawlana Ilyas, the founder of the Tablighi Jamaat, realized that should the Muslims keep arguing their *madhabs* the greater purpose of Islam would not be achieved since the target or objective of the da'wa movement of the Tablighi Jamaat includes all Muslims regardless of the background of their tribe, ethnic, tradition, culture, and of course religious *madhab* affiliation. A *madhab* adhered by a member of the Tablighi Jamaat thus insignificant identity marker because what matters is his

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<sup>20</sup> Burki, "The Tablighi Jama'at."

consistency of doing da'wa (preaching), enriching himself with Islamic teaching discourses and glorifying God in way possible.

The basic tenet of the Tablighi Jamaat discourse revolves around the idea that every Muslims in bounded with the glorious words of “*la ilaha illallah, Muhammadar Rasulullah*”. These words must be held firmly by every Muslim in the world in order to deconstruct artificial and mundane boundaries separating them. What is currently happening, according to the Tablighi Jamaat, is that those words only serve as lip service that contribute insignificantly to the da'wa movement. Those words have not yet inspire the Muslims to advocate for a form of social relation in which the sovereignty of god is above that of the human. The Tablighi Jamaat's teachings of *de-madhab-ization* has allowed the movement to be accepted by almost every Muslim in the world regardless of *madhab* affiliation and ideological position. The Tablighi Jamaat is successful in becoming a greater umbrella to represent Muslims from numerous *madhab* affiliation. This is the main power of the Tablighi Jamaat.

Sticking to the basic tenets of Islamic religious practices such as performing daily prayer together has been a central topic in the narrative of Islamic teaching propagated by the Tablighi Jamaat. Another source of power of Tablighi Jamaat is giving an equal opportunity for its member to perform da'wa. It does not matter whether a member is expert or not in terms of religious discourse. As long as he or she can invite Muslims to perform five times prayer together in a mosque or can inspire people to do good things, she or he deserves to be a da'i or Islamic preacher. The Tablighi Jamaat applies the principle of *بلغوا عني ولو آية*, a principle of equality to preach the religion of Islam. According to the Tablighi Jamaat, the obligation of every Muslim is to convey a message of Islam such as a hadith or an excerpt of the Qur'an. If such a message of Islamic teaching has been conveyed, then such obligation is considered as paid. Hence, for doing the task of da'wa, one does not have to be an expert in Islam for becoming such expert would definitely take times.

Uniting Muslims with different denominations or *madhabs* within the environment of da'wa of the Tablighi Jamaat is not an easy task. Every member must struggle to adapt to new relational and interactional pattern in the movement

in which members should not question and problematize their differences in *madhab* affiliation. However, even with great efforts, members of the Tablighi Jamaat are still struggling to change their previous style of da'wa in which they are familiar with glorifying one *madhab* and provoking their audiences that other *madhabs* are inferior. It is true especially during the time of *khuruj* (traveling for da'wa) to communities of different *madhab*.

Giving freedom to practice any *madhab* its followers might find suitable and encouraging its followers to follow, though temporarily, local Islamic tradition where they perform the task of da'wa positively contribute to the success of the Tablighi Jamaat. Muslims are starting to feel that debates and conflicts regarding differences in terms of *madhab* due to different interpretation of the same religious texts are no longer entertaining. Muslims around the world seem to think that the Tablighi Jamaat movement serves as an oasis in the middle of the desert, that the movement provide something new, something that has been invisible among the Muslims for many years. The mainstreaming of integration and interconnection between local *madhab* and global ones facilitated by the Tablighi Jamaat movement in the local and global levels in the form of *khuruj* ritual where a group of tablighi member visit another group of fellow tablighi members with different *madhab* affiliation resulted in the emergence of a unique phenomenon of Islamic glocalization. To be precise, this phenomenon should be regarded as a process of globalization and glocalization at the same time.

#### **D. Integration of the Ummah: Finding common ground and avoiding division**

The Tablighi Jamaat movement is open and inclusive towards almost any sects in Islam except Shiite. The Tablighi Jamaat is proud to call itself an alternative for da'wa movement and a middle way in the midst of intensifying religious conflicts around the world due to internal divisions within the Islamic ummah. In this research, I prefer to address it as a middle way between Sufism and salafism. In the words of Sikand, the Tablighi Jamaat attempts to bring together elements of Sufism and salafism in a loose and complementing way yet the expected result of

this integration is supposed to be solid in its practice.<sup>21</sup> In one hand, the rituals performed by the Tablighi Jamaat are sophisticated in nature yet in another hand the Tablighi Jamaat practice tight salafi way of worships especially regarding the idea of practicing the tradition of the prophet, duplication the pattern and the life style of the prophet and following the moral of his companions.

The Tablighi Jamaat's pattern of da'wa functions not only as a medium for responding a need for spiritual transformation but it also functions as a medium of integration of the ummah into a more global and universal framework. Teachings and value principles developed by the Tablighi Jamaat involves not only the aspect of worships, but it also involves other issues such as how to build a more harmonious social relations according to a strong version of Islamic fraternity. This mission was attested when Sheikh Ilyas preferred not to give this movement a "name". It is those outside the Tablighi Jamaat who calls this movement "tablighi" or "da'i" as we find it today.

Sheikh Ilyas's preference not to give a name for a movement that he founded is a strategy to avoid being stigmatized, labelled, and divided by outsider groups. Despite the important role played by a name in the identity construction of an organization or movement as it gives a sort of representation of what the organization or movement does, for Sheikh Ilyas giving a name would likely to create another social conflict among Muslims. Even though it is hard to imagine a movement without a name, this strategy deserves high appreciation for its purpose is to bring unity to the ummah. However, this previously nameless movement gained many names given by outsiders such as stove da'is, the people of beard, and the angels of tunic among many others. If a name was really needed by this movement, Sheikh Ilyas, however, would have no problem to call it the movement of faith (*harakatul iman*) since such name would reflect the universality of Islamic spiritual movement which is free from political and economic tendencies.

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<sup>21</sup> Yoginder Sikand, "Islamist Militancy in Kashmir: The Case of the Laskare-E-Taiba," in *The Practice of War: Production, Reproduction and Communication of Armed Violence*, ed. Aparna Rao, Michael Bollig, and Monika Bock (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007).

The mission of integration of ummah is present and highly visible in the da'wa movement of the Tablighi Jamaat that attempts to accommodate a number of denominations, sects, organizations, ideology as well as *madhabs* since its main goal is to bring Muslims back to the da'wa pattern of the prophet. The Tablighi Jamaat operates upon a principle that differences in terms of ethnicity, language, sect, or *madhab* affiliation are not important. What matters in this inclusive platform of the Tablighi Jamaat movement is the commitment to replicate the life of the prophet such as a willingness to sacrifice one's interest for the sake of other fellow Muslims, willingness to continue the tradition of the prophet, and willingness to travel on the path of Allah (*khuruj fi sabilillah*). *Madhab* that has been perceived as sacred beyond religion by certain Muslim groups among the Islamic ummah such as by Muslims in Iraq, Pakistan, Egypt, and in other places has no place in the discourse of the Tablighi Jamaat. The Tablighi Jamaat goes even further by restricting its followers to talk about mundane *madhab* related issues (*khilafiyah*) and differences in terms of products of *madhab*. Members of the Tablighi Jamaat are allowed to talk and to preach about basic tenets of Islam such as faith (*iman*), good deeds (*amal*), and da'wa (calling people to the path of the lord).

It is not easy to build a Muslim society without *madhab* or to persuade Muslims not to talk and problematize the discourse of *madhab* because the area of *madhab* involves long-standing discourse such as *fiqh*, *ushul fiqh*, *kalam*, and philosophy. Such area of religious inquiries has been central to the religious discourse of the Islamic ummah for centuries. One of many yardsticks to measure the progress of certain Muslim group has been its domination upon the discourse of *madhab* related products and its reproduction. What the Tablighi Jamaat attempt to do is to change the current discourse regarding religion among Muslims, which has been dominated by the discourse of *madhab*, with the teachings of Islam regarding the day-to-day practices of the prophet and of the companions of the prophet. The absence of *madhab* and theological discourse in a wider sense such as found in the Tablighi Jamaat has been the source of strength as well as weakness of the Tablighi Jamaat. Outsiders such as Wahabi affiliated groups accuse the Tablighi Jamaat as noncompetent in religious understanding thus its pattern of da'wa contains heresy.

Findings collected throughout this research suggest that *the Tablighi Jamaat can implement madhab integration* yet there are still internal and external problems hindering the process. In their times of gathering during the ritual of *khuruj*, debates and discussion about *madhab* are practically nonexistent. Even when such topic emerges out, it only lasts in a flash. Instead, members of the Tablighi Jamaat talk much about their stories of experiencing the faith (*iman*) and good deeds (*amal*), *ibadah* (worships), and their progress of da'wa such as how many new members has been successfully invited to join the movement and the potential recruits in the future.

**E. Concluding remarks: From inclusive discourse to practical integration: the internalization of the glorious words (*kalimah tayibah*), ikromul muslimin (serving fellow Muslims) and social service (khidmat sosial)**

Among members of the Tablighi Jamaat, patterns of integration grow not only in the level of discourse but also in the level of day-to-day practice and it is obvious that all members are struggling to keep such process going. In the level of discourse, for example, the principle of integrative teachings is reflected in several core tenets of the Tablighi Jamaat teachings such as the so called the integration of the glorious words of *tayyibah*, which is "*la ilaha illallah*". These words are used every time the Tablighi Jamaat members begin their door-to-door da'wa in a neighborhood.<sup>22</sup> In Temboro, Jakarta, and Central Lombok where our participatory observation with a group of Tablighi Jamaat members took place during the so-called khuruj (da'wa traveling), the words "*la ilaha illallah*" are always cited by the Tablighi Jamaat's members whenever they find prospective targets of da'wa in the neighborhood. The glorious phrase that literally means no gods, but Allah is believed to have magnificent power to unite people who are already separated by ethnicity, culture, language and tradition. It is also believed firmly that once this

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<sup>22</sup> Claudia Preckel, "Philosophers, Freedom Fighters, Pantomimes: South Asian Muslims in Germany," on *Islam and Muslims in Germany*, ed. by Ala Al-Hamarneh dan Jörn Thielmann (Brill, 2008), 318, <https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004158665.I-592.82>.

glorious phrase united a group of Muslims the boundary would be much stronger than that of the blood ties.

Ahmad, a member of Tablighi Jamaat during his da'wa enterprise in Central Lombok said,

*“Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh, praise be to Allah. Thank god for allowing us to meet in today. Allah has arranged this meeting because we are as Muslims are brothers and sisters. All Muslims are united by the glorious words of la ilaha illallah. The one, Allah, creates humankind. Even though we are coming from different families and parents, we still brothers and sisters because we are united by one faith (iman).*

The use of this glorious phrase of *la ilaha illallah* is a good start to build a spirit of universal sense of goodwill. Our own argument is that this glorious phrase has a tremendous power in touching the deepest conscience of Muslims since it denies artificial boundaries separating Muslims in this current world. It provides a platform for other social systems of stratification and division to dissolve into a single system of unity based on faith. The construction of social relation built by this glorious phrase is socially purer because it is free from conflicting interests emerged from the profanity of political economy. Needs of humanity according to this framework are essential needs of holistic salvation in the world and the hereafter.

The imagined power contained in the glorious phrase of *la ilaha illallah* serves to build self-confidence and strengthen the sense of unity among members of the Tablighi Jamaat. The glorious phrase of *la ilaha illallah*, among members of the Tablighi Jamaat, must be implemented in such a way that every member must rely only to Allah and not to others. The spiritual atmosphere created by the imagined power of the glorious phrase is marked with blessings where the sense of unity among members of the Tablighi Jamaat thrives. During our participatory observations with several groups of Tablighi Jamaat in Indonesia, Thailand, and Malaysia, we found that every member in such groups is equally respected by other members regardless of his social status, class, caste, and profession. Needs, rights and obligations of all members are same, which is to perform the duty of da'wa as an act of self and social purification. Different from other Islamic groups that over-

privilege the ulemas among them, in the Tablighi Jamaat such privilege is nonexistent. There is no privilege for anybody including for the ulemas.<sup>23</sup> However, members of the Tablighi Jamaat maintain a level of respect for the ulemas only in certain areas. They really want to change the stigma that ulemas should be glorified as perfect, even beyond.

As we have elaborated on previous part of this paper, in the Tablighi Jamaat system of social interaction, every member has two interlinked roles; as a preacher and as an audience (in Indonesian context this division is analogous to the classification of santri and kyai). During his role as part of the audience, a member must be ready to learn and to listen to sermons (Bayan) that preached by another member who plays the role of the preacher and vice versa. A member must be ready to give sermons to his fellow members during his role as preacher. The notion of equality of role as practiced by the Tablighi Jamaat has motivated all members of the group to keep learning and strengthening their level of faith and skill of performing da'wa.

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<sup>23</sup> Preckel, 318–21.

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