

From Makkah to Bukit Kamang?: The Moderate versus Radical Reforms in West Sumatra (ca. 1784-1819)

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Abstract

*This study provides a narrative account of the moderate and radical *Islah* (reform) movements in West Sumatra from 1784-1819. *Islah* movement at the end of the eighteenth century emerged in response to the peculiar problems confronting the society. Tuanku Nan Tua, the most prominent Islamic scholar in Minangkabau spearheaded this movement by calling people back to shariah peacefully. However, some of his students who were discontent with his peaceful method of reform formed a radical movement. In view of the Padri movement's militancy and adherence to the strict form of Islam, most of popular literature claims that it was influenced by the "Wahhabi" although there is little historical evidence supporting such contestation.*

Key words: Islam in West Sumatra; Tuanku Nan Tua; The Padri movement.

1.0 Introduction

Most studies on *Islah* in the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century Minangkabau tend to focus on the Padri movement. While the Padri is an important movement in West Sumatra, its over-emphases, underestimate the process of *Islah* in the society, which had started earlier and actually preceded the well-known Padri movement. This study, thus, examines the emergence of *Islah* in West Sumatra from 1784-1803. It situates its emergence within the changing milieus of Minangkabau during the period under study. It examines the two phases of *Islah* : the moderate reform led by Tuanku Nan Tua from 1784 to 1803; and the radical *Islah* by the Padri movement from 1803 to 1819. It briefly describes Tuanku Nan Tua-led *Islah* and the Padri movement's methods of reform in Minangkabau before the occurrence of the Padri War against the Dutch in 1821. Finally, it examines the veracity of the theory of the Wahhabi influence on the Padri movement.

2.0 Defining the Key Concepts

This study adopts modern definitions for its key concepts. The term "radical" Muslims refers to those who subscribe to a strict interpretation of Islam and resorts to violence or "armed struggle" to achieve its goals. (International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, King's College London, 2007). Fred von der Mehden (2005) argues that the "radical Islam" comprises two distinctive characteristics, namely: "support of violence against non-combatant in the name of Islam to achieve religious goals" and "support of an exclusionary Islam that denies fundamental rights to non-Muslims on religious grounds and rejects almost all forms of both religious and political pluralism " (p.5). Similarly, the term "Islamic extremism" defined as the violent methods political actors use to achieve their goals, by adopting means "which shows disregard for the life, liberty and human rights of others" (Scruton, 2007) is synonymous with the "radical Islamism" used in this study. Conversely, the moderate Islam in this study does not entail the adoption of a belief or religious system, which is different from the former. In fact, in the Minangkabau historical context, the belief and jurisprudence systems of the latter was more or less similar with the former. What differentiated the latter from the former were their methods of action, characterized by tolerant, accommodative and non-violent behaviors in the preaching of Islam in the society as opposed to the former's rigid, uncompromising and militant attitudes.

3.0 The Minangkabau Milieus

When exactly Islamization of Minangkabau took place cannot be dated precisely as we know little about it (Abdullah, 1985). What is more obvious is that Islam had already entered Minangkabau since the early sixteenth century. Islam came to Minangkabau through two routes: from the Muslim sultanate of Malacca by way of the east coast rivers of Siak and Kampar; and by way of the west coast, which was dominated by the Muslim kingdom of Aceh in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries (Dobbin, 1972; Hamka, 1950). Minangkabau consisted of three regions; namely Agam, Tanah Datar and Limapuluh Kota, which constituted the heartland of Minangkabau, called collectively *Luhak nan Tigo* (The Three Regions)(Abdullah, 1971). This area which located in the uplands of the Bukit Barisan, known as the interior land whereas the areas outside of it including the coast was called the frontier (Dobbin, 1983).

A number of basic Minangkabau political and social systems need to be explained. Theoretically, the Minangkabau world was united as a single geographic and political entity under the King of Pagarruyung known as the King of the World, who exercised power in political and worldly affairs. According to a peculiar Minangkabau political system, two other Rulers were subordinate to the King of the World; *Raja Adat* (Ruler over Customary Affairs) and *Raja Ibadat* (Ruler over Religious Affairs).¹ However, in reality these Kings were only titular heads and enjoyed nominal rather than actual power. As a prominent Minangkabau historian has noted, on the eve of the Padri War, the King of the World in Pagarruyung had no authority to resolve any dispute in the society and could not even reverse any decision made by the village (*nagari*) authority. In short, in the late eighteenth century there was no centralized authority in Minangkabau (Radjab, 1954).

In the absence of the royal authority, the actual power in Minangkabau society rested in a political-social unit known as the *nagari* (village unit). A village was the most developed form of rural settlement in Minangkabau, generally comprising a large village with its satellite settlements (Graves, 1981). The size of the village unit varied widely in total population as well as geographic extent. Each village unit possessed its own mosque, public bathing place, pathways, a cockpit, and council hall for the leaders (Young, 1994). The head of each village unit, known as *Penghulu* (the secular head of clan), along with a council of the lineage chiefs presided over the affairs of the village (Graves, 1981). It was also customary for Minangkabau social organization that a number of villages would form an alliance, known as the *laras* (federation of villages).

The Minangkabau society was divided on the basis of its adherence to the disparate customs known as *Boji Caniago* and *Koto Piliang*. The villages in the Tanah Datar district, which supported the Minangkabau royalty, adhered to the *Koto Piliang* custom. On the other hand, the hill areas of Agam and Limapuluh Kota districts, which would become the stronghold of the Padri movement, followed the *Boji Caniago* custom. According to the *Koto Piliang* custom, the King of Pagarruyung is the World King, the authority holder of Minangkabau world as a whole. On the other hand, the *Bodi Caniago* contends that the authority of Pagarruyung King was only valid in the areas outside of the inner highland regions; in inner highland, this function is upheld by the *penghulu* (Naim, 1983). As opposed to the patrilineal-oriented Islam, Minangkabau society adopts a matrilineal social system in which descent is traced through mothers and their blood relatives.

According to this social system women are the heirs to the property and men are given responsibility to guard the property and look after their sisters' welfare. Minangkabau inheritance unit is normally headed by the male guardian called the *mamak* (maternal uncle). Normally, the *mamak* is the eldest male who could claim direct descent from the family's ancestral female founder. In theory, the *mamak* could not spend any part of family property without consent of the women. *Mamak's* duty is to supervise division of family property and its profits and is responsible to nurture the property so that its wealth increases (Graves, 1982).² Although Islam had flourished in the religious learning centers in various parts of Minangkabau, the time-honored beliefs and practices that contravened Islamic precepts continued to exist in the society and even Islam as practiced in Minangkabau was interwoven with some pre-Islamic elements. As Christine Dobbin (1983) informs us a contemporary manuscript written in 1761 states that most people in the inner highland were pagan or without religion with the exception of the notables who converted to Islam.

¹ Graves (1981) states that the origin, organization, and jurisdiction of the Kingdom and King of Minangkabau has not been satisfactorily explained.

² For further details on Minangkabau matrilineal system, see (Kato, 1982).

Furthermore, W. Marsden who visited Minangkabau in 1799 states that Minangkabau Muslims generally rarely performed Islamic obligations such as prayer and fasting; and mosques were also poorly attended (Marsden, 1811).

3.1 'Ulama', Surau and Minangkabau Society

Within the Minangkabau power structure, the 'ulama' had no role in administrative and political matters, as they usually were not persons of standing within the Minangkabau *adat* (custom) hierarchy. Similarly, Islamic law only played a marginal role in the society where the general matters of societal problems were decided by the local custom. It was through an Islamic learning center known as *surau* that the 'ulama' were able to build up their influence in the society. Linguistically, the Malay word *surau* means simply place, or more specifically a place for worship. In the early days of Islam in Minangkabau, *surau*s primarily functioned as prayer houses and for rudimentary Islamic learning for local Muslims.³ By the later part of the seventeenth century, the *surau* became a full-fledged Islamic institution. Shaykh Burhanuddin's reputation as a learned and pious scholar attracted many students from other parts of Minangkabau to study at his *surau* in Ulakan. This Islamic learning center enjoyed a preeminent position to the extent that it was regarded as the sole undisputed authority in religious matters in Minangkabau (Abdullah, 1985). The Ulakan *surau* was also a center of the Shattariyya sufi order and Shaykh Burhanuddin himself was the leader of the sufi order in Minangkabau (Azra, 1990).

The influence of an 'ālim and his *surau* depended on the number of students who studied there. A successful and prominent scholar would attract students from all over the Minangkabau region and beyond. These students would normally reside in a close-knit community near the *surau*. Within this community, the teacher was the center of learning and loyalty. Those students who had mastered Islamic learning at their teacher's *surau* would return to their respective villages establishing schools of their own, thereby introducing their founding teacher's learning and mystical order to their own students. In light of this, these new schools can be perceived as an extension of the original *surau* religious authority in various parts of Minangkabau where a teacher's influence could be established through a network of *surau*s unified by their loyalty to the senior teacher as well as dedication to the same mystical order (Young, 1990). In the case of Shaykh Burhanuddin, the branches of his school were set up in the villages of Pemansiangan (near present day Padang Pandjang), Kapas-Kapas, Kota Laweh, and Kota Tua. These areas became known as Empat Angkat (The Four Exalted Ones), named after the four leading 'ulama' who established *surau*s in the area (Azra, 1990; Abdullah, 1985). It was out of the Empat Angkat areas that Islamic reform emerged in Minangkabau during the late eighteenth century.

4.0 Tuanku Nan Tua at Empat Angkat : The Forerunner of *Islah*

The local leader who spearheaded the *Islah* movement at the end of eighteenth century was Tuanku Nan Tua at Empat Angkat (Henceforth, Tuanku Nan Tua).⁴ He was the student of Shaykh Burhanuddin in Ulakan. However, Tuanku Nan Tua would later form his own *surau* and contest the religious authority of the Ulakan *surau* on the ground that the latter's Islamic practices and mysticism were contrary to the *shari'a* (Kratz and Amir, 2002; Azra 1990). Thus, Tuanku Nan Tua represented a trend that was more *shari'a*-oriented than the Ulakan. Tuanku Nan Tua would later become the chief mentor of the Padri warriors, and the leading proponent of the reformist movement before its radicalization (Hamka, 1982). As a matter of fact, Tuanku Nan Renceh, Imam Bonjol, and six other 'ulama' that formed the radical wing of the Padri movement were students of Tuanku Nan Tua (Dobbin, 1983; Hamka, 1982). Tuanku Nan Tua was an eminent 'ālim of his time, widely respected by many 'ulama' from various districts of Minangkabau who looked up to him as their leader and source of reference (Hamka, 1982).

Tuanku Nan Tua's prominence in Minangkabau owed to his expertise in *tasawwuf* (mysticism) and *shari'a*. Later, Tuanku Nan Tua earned for himself the title of *Sultan 'Alim*⁵ for his expertise in the *sunna* and *shari'a* (Kratz and Amir, 2002; Azra, 1990). Tuanku Nan Tua's position as a renowned scholar attracted a huge number of students from all the four districts in Minangkabau to study at his religious school, *surau*, in Agam (Kratz and Amir, 2002). Besides being a center of mysticism, Tuanku Nan Tua *surau* at Cangking also became the center for the study of the *shari'a*.

³ For further details on *surau* and its role in Minangkabau Society, see (Azra, 1990).

⁴ The major primary source on Tuanku Nan Tua is Surat Keterangan Syekh Jalaluddin. This autobiography was written by Fakhir Saghir in 1829. It describes the conflicts between the Padris and the proponents of *adat* as well as internal conflict between the moderate and radical Padris. Besides, it provides detailed account about the role of his father in *Islah* activities in West Sumatra. (Kratz and Amir, 2002).

⁵ This religious title was normally given to a person who distinguished himself as the most prominent scholar in Minangkabau.

Tuanku Nan Tua impressed upon his disciples on how significant it was for the Minangkabau to obey the will of God. According to Azra (1990) “Tuanku Nan Tua was commonly known as a Syattariyyah [sufi order] Syekh, but later he seems to have come under Naksyabandiyyah influence when he returned sometime circa 1784 to the *darek* (inner highlands) after studying in many other suraus in Minangkabau” (p.71). Although he was inclined to sufism, he did not forbid his students and teachers at the *surau* from becoming involved in commerce. In fact, he personally was relatively an affluent trader (Dobbin, 1983). During the late eighteenth century Agam and Limapuluh Kota districts experienced economic booming due to the rise of new sources of wealth, especially coffee, salt, cassia and textiles. It was out of this new commercial center that Tuanku Nan Tua led an Islamic reform in Agam in the 1780s.

Christine Dobbin (1983) in her comprehensive study of the Padri movement argues that the changing economic pattern in Agam and Limapuluh Kota districts provided the catalyst for the emergence of the *Islah* movement. Although there was booming demand for the products from the foreign traders, the condition in southern Agam was not conducive to the conduct of commercial activities due to the society inability to provide a secure trading network. According to Dobbin (1987), this occurred primarily due to “the existence of widespread banditry, and even of whole villages of bandits ...bandits from these villages waylaid traders and robbed them of their goods or even, in the worst cases, abducted them and sold them to east coast traders” (p.125). Apart from the acute bandit problem, individual morality served as a stumbling block for the development of trade. For example, larger village markets, which had the potentials for becoming bulking points for cassia and coffee, were too often involved in cockfighting and its concomitant, gambling (Dobbin, 1983).

The rapid change in commerce also made Minangkabau old method of settling disputes inadequate. The major shortcomings of the traditional mode of dispute resolution were the absence of written law, and reliance on *adat* sayings, which were open to a variety of interpretations, resulting in long discussion in the council hall. According to Minangkabau custom, the disputants should settle the disputes among themselves as these traders came from various villages outside of the jurisdiction of the *penghulu* council of the village in which the trade occurred (Dobbin, 1983). With the rapid increment in the number of traders in the market, the *penghulu*'s method of settling disputes became inadequate. It was under these historical contexts that Islamic reformist movement, which placed premium importance on adherence to Islamic law, was able to emerge as an appealing alternative to society – providing a better method to the old mode of administrating judicial and commercial affairs (Dobbin, 1983).

As a prominent *'alim*, Tuanku Nan Tua responded to this problem by urging the people to return to the *shariah*. He emphasized upon his disciples that Minangkabau failure to follow Islamic precepts was the root cause of their problem. Concerned with Minangkabau lack of adherence to Islam, he devoted his teaching to examining what is Islamic and un-Islamic in Minangkabau beliefs and practices. In doing so he challenged those who accommodated with un-Islamic elements in the society and urged Minangkabau to adhere to the Islamic law (Azra, 1990).

The major targets of Tuanku Nan Tua's missionary activities were neighboring villages referred to as the bandit villages, which posed a major threat and obstacle to traders. He attempted to persuade neighboring villages to accept Islamic law as a higher source of dispute resolution. He ordered that the traders who were held captive in these bandit villages should be brought home and the robbers punished. He gave the bandits a serious warning by attacking their villages and even capturing some of the bandits (Azra, 1990; Dobbin, 1983). The reformist movement derived its impetus from the hill areas of Agam and Limapuluh Kota, from the villages which adhered to the *Bodi Caniago* as opposed to the *Kota Piliang* custom. It also received strong support from merchants who needed and sought protection in properly regulated law from the prevailing violence and insecurity, which threatened their commodities, and even their lives. In light of that reformist movement found wide and ready acceptance among traders as reformist emphasized on the implementation of Islamic law regulating trade and dispute provided an appealing alternative to merchants in Minangkabau inner highland (Dobbin, 1987).

According to Dobbin (1987) around 1784, Tuanku Nan Tua's *Islah* movement supported by his son, Fakhir Saghir was able “to stand forth in society, offering an alternative to the existing mode of regulating society's affairs, especially its commercial affairs” (p. 126).

The key feature of Tuanku Nan Tua's *Islah* was the establishment of a shariah-minded Muslim society through moderate and persuasive means.⁶ According to Azra (1990), Tuanku Nan Tua's emphasis *dakwah* was carried out through persuasive means:

...he [Tuanku Nan Tua] was prepared to attempt conversion in these [neighboring] villages: trying to persuade them to adopt the five pillars of Islam ... For this purpose he sent out of his surau groups of his *murids* under a leader, and he particularly sought to operate inside the most un-Islamic villages, which he felt were most in need of reform (p. 73).

However, Tuanku Nan Renceh strongly disagreed with Tuanku Nan Tua's persuasive and compromising approach in the preaching of Islam. For Tuanku Nan Renceh, his teacher's "piecemeal action now become annoying ... and he decided that each village must be transformed into an Islamic community as rapidly as possible" (Dobbin, p. 132).

Despite Tuanku Nan Renceh's disagreement with Tuanku Nan Tua, he persuaded his teacher — the most learned and respected Islamic scholar throughout Minangkabau, to be the figurehead of the Padri movement to give credence to the movement. However, Tuanku Nan Tua did not accept his disciple's invitation due to his disagreement with the latter radicalism (Hamka, 1982). One issue, which demonstrates their disagreement, concerns the punishment for a Muslim not performing the obligatory prayer:

Tuanku nan Rentjeh insisted that if anyone did not perform the *salĒt* correctly he was a *murtadd* and was liable to the penalty of death as *hadd*, Tuanku Kota Tua [Tuanku Nan Tua] met him with the milder doctrine that the *murtadd* should not be put to death, unless every effort to bring him to the true faith had failed, a case which however did not exist and was not to be expected (R.A. Kern, 1927, p.1018).

Further, Tuanku Nan Tua argued that "to interpret the Kur'an as prescribing death for those who committed misdemeanors on earth was opposed to the intention of the Prophet... He also asserted that no *negeri* should be attacked if it could be proved that even one Muslim dwelt in it" (Dobbin, 1974, p. 335). However, Tuanku Nan Tua's words fell on deaf ears; and Tuanku Nan Renceh decided to separate himself from his teacher's reform movement. Meanwhile, the radical activists had managed to persuade another prominent Minangkabau Islamic scholar, Tuanku Mensiangan to become the figurehead of the Padri movement. Now, the Padris labeled him as the most learned scholar in Minangkabau (as opposed to their moderate teacher, Tuanku Nan Tua at Kota Empat). Moreover, Tuanku Nan Tua "was branded Rahib Tua – old (Christian) monk – and Djalaluddin execrated as Radja Kafir [The Infidel King]" (Dobbin, 1974, p. 335). Tuanku Nan Renceh's militant inclination received its impetus in 1803 with the return of three other radical students of Tuanku Nan Tua from the pilgrimage in 1803. This paved the way for the radicalization of *Islah* in West Sumatra.

4.1 Radicalization of *Islah* : The Padri Movement

The non-militant Islamic reform led by Tuanku Nan Tua was interrupted in 1803 with the return of the three pilgrims to Minangkabau. The most prominent of these three pilgrims was Haji Miskin, Tuanku nan Tua's disciple who was involved in his teacher's reformist movement prior to his sojourn to Makkah. After returning from Makkah, Haji Miskin insisted that the complete transformation of Minangkabau society into an Islamic community could be legitimately achieved by the use of force (Kratz and Amir, 2002). Being dissatisfied with Tuanku Nan Tua's accommodative and non-militant method in reforming the society, Haji Miskin found a formidable ally in Tuanku Nan Renceh. Indeed, Tuanku Nan Renceh was a perfect partner for Haji Miskin as the former shared the latter's conviction of the necessity of using force in reforming the society. Tuanku Nan Renceh's village of Bukit Kamang served as the cradle of the Padri movement where these two protagonists prepared their plan for the onslaught on the society. Gradually, Tuanku Nan Renceh was able to build a strong alliance with seven other leading 'ulama' in Agam. According to Dobbin (1987), "its ferocity, earned its members the epithet *harimau yang delapan* or eight tigers" (p. 134). Tuanku Nan Renceh declared *jihad* on those who refused to accept the Padri's form of Islam and announced to people of his own village that the rule of extreme puritanism must be followed. The outward manifestations of the Padri village were "the abandonment of cock fighting, gambling and the use of tobacco, opium, *sirih* and strong drink; white clothes symbolizing purity were to be worn, with women covering their faces and men allowing their beards to grow" (Dobbin, 1987, p.132).

⁶ In the twentieth century, Tuanku Nan Tua's great grandson, Tahir Jalaluddin would play a leading role in the transmission of Muhammad 'Abduh's reformism in West Sumatra and Malaya. For further details, see Zakariya (2005). Islamic reform in Malaya: The contribution of Shaykh Tahir Jalaluddin. *Intellectual Discourse* 13, 50-72.

A penalty system was introduced for the violation of the Padris rules and each village conquered by the Padris must appoint a *qadi* whose jurisdiction laid in religious matters as well as Islamic judiciary (Dobbin, 1987). Abd A'la (2008) categorizes the Padri as the radical movement. He argues that such radicalism existed at two levels: their discursive (literal and strict) interpretation of Islam and their attitudes towards others. Borrowing from Johan Galtung's theory of violence, Abd A'la(2008) contends that the Padris committed structural, cultural and occasional violence in West Sumatra:

They Padris committed cultural violence by justifying what they did by means of religion, ideology, language and knowledge...they systematically designed structural violence by marginalizing their opponents among individuals and groups of Minangkabau ...This structural violence was then followed by occasional violence in the form of physical attacks, abduction and even assassination (p. 283).

The Padris attempted to impose their strict interpretation of Islam by force throughout Minangkabau. During their conquests and control of West Sumatra, the Padris inflicted various kinds of violence on people from various walks of society including pious Muslims. In fact, the Padris even targeted the Shattariyah sufi order, which they suspected as challenging their religious authority in Minangkabau. Dobbin (1987) describes the Padri's behaviors as follows⁷:

To show their contempt for the order, they burnt down Paninjauan ...one of the earliest Shattariyah centres in the highlands, with a large population of religious students...next they turned their attention to the Empat Angkat area, and a war was waged against Kota Tua [the main target was their own teacher, Tuanku Nan Tua at Empat Angkat] and surrounding villages for six years...They looted and robbed the wealth of the people ...They killed the ulama and all the orang cerdik [pundits]. They captured married women, wedded them to other men, and made their women captives their concubines. Still they called all their actions, "actions to perfect religion (p. 135).

Another method the Padris used to inflict terror in the mind of their enemies was through intimidation of every perceived threat including their own family members.

Tuanku Nan Renceh sent a powerful message to the villagers by killing his own aunt and warned the villagers that the Padris code of conduct must be followed (Azra, 1990). The horrible murder has been described by Abd A'la (2008):

Tuanku Nan Renceh was responsible for the suffering of the elderly woman who happened to be his own aunt. When the poor woman died, he decreed that the body should not be properly buried, but be thrown away in the bushes. The lady was killed by the Padris simply because she ate *sirih* leaves, something forbidden according to Padri law (pp. 284-285).

Tuanku Nan Renceh and his fellow radical Islamists are identified in the literature as the Padris. Therefore, it might be relevant to discuss the meaning of this word. The origins of the term Padri have often been disputed. According to van Ronkel the term originated from Pedir, a name of a place in Aceh, North Sumatera, from which Islam spread to the Minangkabau area. Indeed, Pedir also was a place where many people flocked to study Islam. It has been argued that the 'ulama' from Pedir had played a crucial role in spreading Islam to Minangkabau, and those 'ulama' were called the Padris (Steenbrink, 1990). Others argue that the term is derived from "Pidari", referring to pilgrims who had returned from Mecca by way of Aceh.⁸ The third argument contends that the term Padri originated from the Portuguese word, *padre* (priest), used by Westerners to refer to Muslim religious scholars. Steenbrink (1990) argues that this term was also used by the local people because the Islamic term was not familiar to the foreigners. For example, Anthony Reid (1967) argues that the term originated from European usage, "presumably because they first heard the Islamic party described by analogy with the priests." (p. 272) Both Steenbrink (1990) and Reid (1967) acknowledge that contemporary local sources such as *Surat keterangan Jalaluddin* did not use the term *Padri*. Rather, local sources referred to them only as *Kaum Putih* (White People), in reference to the white robes commonly associated with Muslim fervor, as opposed to their adversaries, *Kaum Hitam* (Black group), who were distinguished by dark or blue clothing (Steenbrink, 1990; Reid, 1967; Dobbin, 1972).

5.0 The Genealogy of Radicalism: Wahhabi Influence on the Padri Movement?

⁷ Dobbin based her information on the moderate and anti-Padri 'alim, Fakhir Saghir's autobiography (2002).

⁸ Dobbin (1972) favors this view, but Steenbrink (1990) considers it weak.

As noted earlier, in comparison to the peaceful *dakwah* of Tuanku Nan Tua, it was the Padri radical movement that has garnered much scholarly attention. One issue that has been highly debated concerns the sources of the Padri's ideology. Should the Padris be considered as the "agents" who introduced "Wahhabi" ideology to West Sumatra? Or rather were they essentially responding to peculiar Minangkabau problems? If the answer to the first question is in the positive, to what extent had the foreign ideology influenced the Padris? In addition, how could we "measure" the influence of ideas of a movement on another movement in history? The popular perception, as exemplified by P.J. Veth's, believes that the Padris were primarily influenced by the Wahhabis.⁹ This alleged Wahhabi incursion in Minangkabau is based on the oft-cited incident (without concrete evidence) when three pilgrims who returned from Makkah to West Sumatra initiated a radical and occasionally violent movement of religious and social reforms. Dutch observers soon assumed that these pilgrims had been influenced by Wahhabi ideas, which occupied Makkah during their pilgrimage. A scholar who introduced this view was P.J. Veth (1814-1895) who based his argument on the apparent Padri's similarity with the Wahhabis: prohibition of tobacco and wearing ornaments and silk. However, Schrieke argues that such behavior was not Wahhabi-specific and thus cannot be considered as a definitive evidence of the latter's influence on the former (Schrieke, 1973).

Furthermore, Schrieke (1973) points out that while the Wahhabi was fervently against veneration of saints, the Padris did not chastise similar actions in Minangkabau. Similarly the Padris did not forbid the celebration of *mawlid* (the birth of the Prophet). Moreover, the Padri movement was more than religious puritanical reform alone. It also entailed a conflict between the 'ulama' as represented by the Padris against Minangkabau social institution spearheaded by the *adat* leaders (Azra, 1990). Furthermore, Schrieke (1973) adds that this social system, dominated by the aristocrats, though in theory was based on the principle of consultation (*muafakat*), in reality was often violated. In light of these evidences, Schrieke (1973) contended that the Padris also represented the uprising of the 'ulama', who were marginalized in Minangkabau society, against the *adat* leaders. Martin van Bruinessen (2002) also agrees that the evidence of Wahhabi influence on the Padris "is extremely thin and there are many indications to the contrary" (p.1) Moreover, he adds that the basic contention of the "Wahhabi thesis" is also problematic. The crux of this thesis argues that the Indonesian community in Makkah was a medium through which Wahhabism reached Indonesia. Nevertheless, as Bruinessen (2002) points out, the majority of the *Jawi* community was traditional Muslims who found Wahhabi ideology unattractive. In Bruinessen's own words, "the (*Jawi*) community itself appears to have remained virtually immune to Wahhabi influences" (p.1).

More recently, Hadler (2008) makes an interesting observation on the issue of Wahhabi influence on the Padri movement:

According to every written history, they [The Minangkabau pilgrims who returned in 1803] had been influenced by the teachings of the conquering army. Coincidence is not proof, however, and in no Padri-war era Minangkabau text do we find mention of Wahhabism (p. 979).

The author also mentions that in the case of the prominent Padri leader, Tuanku Imam Bonjol there are indications of his "apparent renunciation of this Wahhabism" (p. 979). As regard the Wahhabi-thesis, Hadler (2008) points out that while every contemporary Western source on the Padris clearly claimed that the Padris were strongly influenced by Wahhabi doctrines, such claims are not based on evidence:

...it is impossible to know with any certainty whether the three [Minangkabau] hajji were directly influenced by Wahhabism while in Mecca...What is clear is that for these returning hajji, traditional Minangkabau culture was unacceptable; matriliney and matrilineal longhouses could not be reconciled with the essential teachings of Islam (Hadler, 2008, p. 980).

In addition to Hadler's criticism, another problem with the "Wahhabi-centered theory" is its over-estimation of the pilgrim returnees' role in the movement. Indeed, most of the popular works on the late eighteenth century up to the nineteenth century Islamic reform in Minangkabau emphasize the role of these three famous *hajjis*—Haji Miskin, Haji Abdul Rahman, and Haji Muhammad Arif—in the origin of the Padri movement. In contrast to such claim, as noted earlier, the advent of the reformist movement in Minangkabau actually predated the advent of the Padri movement in 1803.

⁹ Though this study uses the word Wahhabi, it should be mentioned that it is essentially a pejorative term. The followers of Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahhab did not call themselves Wahhabis. Instead, they call themselves the *Muwahhidun* (Followers of the Doctrine of the Unity of God). It was the opponents of the *Muwahhidun* that identified the followers of Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahhab as Wahhabis. For further details on Wahhabism, see Delong-Bas (2004).

As Reid (1967) puts it “the party of strict Muslims had apparently existed in Minangkabau in the eighteenth century, but it was only galvanized into aggressive action with the return in 1803 of three hajis” (p. 272). This view is also shared by Hamka (1982) who argues that the process of puritanical reform was already in motion since the late eighteenth century before the return of the trio of Minangkabau pilgrims from Mecca.

Abd A’la (2008) in perhaps the most thorough study of the Wahhabi influence on the Minangkabau radical movement to date argues that the Padris had a lot of similarities with the Wahhabis. At the same time, due to the peculiar West Sumatran historical contexts, the Padris demonstrated “some internal uniqueness not exhibited by the Wahhabis” (p. 289). These differences “were the products of different geographical, cultural and social circumstances” (Abd A’la, p. 289). The disparate historical contexts resulted in “[Padri] different traits [from the Wahhabi] in terms of propaganda strategy or in organizational structure” (Abd A’la, p. 292). A case in point is the Padri selective emulation of Wahhabi ideology:

The Padris were also selective when drawing their religious tenets from Wahhabi dogmas. While, in certain area, the Padris adopted Wahhabi doctrines wholeheartedly, in others they did not. (p. 292)

This is reflected through their mixing of Wahhabi dogmas with Ash’ari theology. For instance, the Padri’s view on Allah’s twenty attributes subscribed to Ash’ari theology. (Abd A’la, 2008). Besides, the two controversial movements differed in terms of politics, culture and economy. Further, authoritative study on the subject such as that of Dobbin’s argues that the economic factor was the most important determinant for the emergence of the Padri movement while other issues are merely secondary contributing factors. In this regard, Abd A’la (2008) writes:

When they [The Padris] planned certain agendas, the Padris often had an economic purpose in mind. Thus, when they invaded the region of Tanah Datar, they first captured areas with rich natural resources and ignored the others...when the Padris were forced to surrender to the Dutch in the South; they fled to Pasanan and Tanapuli, two regions with diverse natural resources. They moved there first of all because of the region’s rich and fertile land (p. 293).

Were economic factors, as described above, also present in the Wahhabi movement in Arabia? Did economic factor act as the main motive in Wahhabi expansionism in Arabia as it was in West Sumatra? It seems that we still do not have definitive answers to these questions. Therefore, the controversy concerning the so-called Wahhabi influence on West Sumatra is probably far from settled. While the influence of Wahhabi on the famous three Minangkabau pilgrims cannot be totally discarded; a hasty and general conclusion of its influence on the Padri movement without strong historical evidence should also be avoided.

6.0 Conclusion

Tuanku Nan Tua spearheaded the *Islah* movement in response to the Minangkabau local milieu—especially socio-economic and political changes, which made the traditional socio-political, economic and legal systems inadequate to provide solutions to new problems. The movement started as a moderate reformist movement in the late 18th century under the leadership of a prominent Islamic scholar, Tuanku Nan Tua who adopted a gradual approach in resolving the problems facing the society by emphasizing the importance of adherence to *shariah*. However, his non-militant approach was challenged by his radical students who insisted on force, militancy and violence in establishing an Islamic order in the society. This radical faction within the reformist movement received an impetus with the return of three pilgrims to Minangkabau in 1803. These radical activists eventually dominated the moderate *Islah* movement and launched their war against local “infidels” in West Sumatra. By 1815, the Padris managed to establish their rule throughout Minangkabau and imposed a strict code of conduct on the society. The Padris shared some similarities with the “Wahhabis” in terms of their uncompromising attitudes towards un-Islamic values and practices. At the same time, as a result of the peculiar Minangkabau milieu, the Padris also differed from the Wahhabi movement. This view is articulated eloquently by Abd A’la (2008):

Each movement [the Wahhabi and the Padri respectively] had its own history and fate. What can be said of the Padris cannot be said of the Wahhabis and vice versa. Nonetheless, these two movements share similarities ... in terms of radical [approach] in their determination to establish what they thought of as pure Islamic values (p. 295)

In order to get more definitive answers to this issue, more thorough comparative studies of these two movements are warranted.

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