Freud's Psychoanalysis on the Religious Practice of *Manhaj* Salaf as a Psychic Mechanism in Facing Modernity in Indonesia

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Abstract

This paper aims to examine how the religious practice of manhaj Salaf in Indonesia can be understood through the psychoanalytic framework of Sigmund Freud. In the last two decades, the growth of this movement reflects the search for moral certainty and identity in the midst of a crisis of meaning in modernity. The formulation of this research problem includes: (1) how the structure of id, ego, and superego works in the formation of Salafi piety and moral discipline; (2) what psychic defense mechanisms appear in their religious practices; and (3) how those psychic dynamics operate in response to the uncertainty and pressures of modernity. Using a qualitative approach based on literature review, this study hypothesizes that Salafi religious practices function as a psychic mechanism to reduce existential anxiety through the formation of collective superegos, sublimation, and social projection. The results of the analysis show that the internalization of strict religious norms provides a sense of psychological security and identity stability, but also has the potential to create excessive guilt and exclusivity towards other groups. In conclusion, Freud's psychoanalysis provides a strong perspective to understand the psychological function of Salafi religiosity in the context of Indonesian modernity and opens up space for further studies of the relationship between moral obedience, psychological health, and social dynamics.

Keywords: Psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, Manhaj Salaf.

Abstrak

Tulisan ini bertujuan menelaah bagaimana praktik keagamaan manhaj Salaf di Indonesia dapat dipahami melalui kerangka psikoanalisis Sigmund Freud. Dalam dua dekade terakhir, pertumbuhan gerakan ini mencerminkan pencarian kepastian moral dan identitas di tengah krisis makna dalam modernitas. Rumusan masalah penelitian ini mencakup: (1) bagaimana struktur id, ego, dan superego bekerja dalam pembentukan kesalehan dan disiplin moral Salafi; (2) mekanisme pertahanan psikis apa yang muncul dalam praktik keagamaan mereka; dan (3) bagaimana dinamika psikis tersebut beroperasi sebagai respons terhadap ketidakpastian dan tekanan modernitas. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berbasis kajian pustaka, penelitian ini mengajukan hipotesis bahwa praktik keagamaan Salafi berfungsi sebagai mekanisme psikis untuk mereduksi kecemasan eksistensial melalui pembentukan superego kolektif, sublimasi, dan proyeksi sosial. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa internalisasi norma religius yang ketat memberikan rasa aman psikologis dan stabilitas identitas, namun juga berpotensi menciptakan rasa bersalah berlebih dan eksklusivitas terhadap kelompok lain. Kesimpulannya, psikoanalisis Freud menyediakan perspektif yang kuat untuk memahami fungsi psikologis religiositas Salafi dalam konteks modernitas Indonesia serta membuka ruang bagi kajian lanjutan mengenai hubungan antara ketaatan moral, kesehatan psikologis, dan dinamika sosial.

Kata Kunci: Psikoanalisis, Sigmund Freud, Manhaj Salaf.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, the rise of Salafi adherents in Indonesia has become a significant socio-religious phenomenon and interesting to study academically. This movement, which seeks to "purify" the teachings of Islam in accordance with the understanding of Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ, is growing rapidly in urban spaces, educational institutions, campus communities, and through digital media. Its adherents displayed a distinctive religious identity through literal adherence to the text, strict discipline of worship, a simple lifestyle, and a rejection of religious practices that were considered to have no authoritative basis in the early sources of Islam. This phenomenon grows in the midst of a pluralistic modern society full of ambiguity of values, thus presenting ambivalent dynamics, on the one hand, the Salaf *manhaj* represents the search for moral certainty and a firm orientation to life; on the other hand, it has the potential to cause social tensions due to the tendency to exclusivity towards diverse religious realities[1].

The development of Salafism in Indonesia cannot be separated from the global context of contemporary Islam. In various Middle Eastern countries, especially Saudi Arabia and Egypt, Salafism is gaining strength in response to the crisis of religious authority, political instability, and the failure of the project of secular modernity in

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[1] Hasan, N. (2020). *Islamic literacy and the Salafi da'wah movement in Indonesia*. Yogyakarta: Alvabet.

providing meaning and social order. In the post-Arab Spring, Salafism in many contexts appears as an offer of normative certainty in the midst of social fragmentation and future uncertainty. Within this framework, the expansion of Salafis in Indonesia does not stand as an isolated local phenomenon, but rather as part of the global dynamics of religious puritanism intertwined with transnational flows, the globalization of information, and the circulation of scientific authority across countries[2][3].

Nevertheless, Salafi religious practice is problematic academically not only because of its purification orientation, but because of the social and subjective implications that come with it. Orientation towards the purity of teachings often gives birth to a strict moral assessment mechanism for other religious practices that are considered "deviant", so that in a pluralistic society, this tendency has the potential to weaken social cohesion and trigger resistance to differences[4]. At the community level, the affirmation of orthodoxy boundaries serves to build a solid collective identity, but at the same time hardens the dividing line between "right" and "wrong", both symbolically and socially.

At the individual level, these dynamics present a more subtle problematic dimension. Strict moral discipline, high demands for piety, and the practice of self-policing require individuals to constantly negotiate personal impulses with the normative standards of the community. Research shows that strict regulation of social interaction, self-expression, and cultural consumption is an integral part of the daily life of Salafi groups[5]. Under certain conditions, this moral dilemma can give rise to a psychological dilemma when man's natural impulses must be suppressed in order to meet the demands of piety, thus creating an inner conflict that is not always reflexively realized by the subject.

The cause of these dynamics is multidimensional. Structurally, information globalization, identity crises, and socio-economic uncertainty encourage individuals, especially the urban young generation, to seek a stable and definitive moral compass (Bahar, 2023; SETARA Institute, 2023)[6][7]. In the context of fluid and competition-laden modernity, a firm moral structure often offers a sense of symbolic security, order of life, and clarity of identity. Psychologically, religious puritanism can be understood as one of the adaptive mechanisms in dealing with the existential anxiety produced by such uncertainty.

As a conceptual comparison, the discourse of moderation and plurality in Islam is also important to take into account the position of *manhaj* Salaf in the contemporary Islamic landscape of Indonesia. A study in the Journal of Moderation shows that pluralism

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[2] Hasan, N. (2020). Islamic literacy and the Salafi da'wah movement in Indonesia. Yogyakarta: Alvabet.

[3] Gunawan, T. (2022). It explores the thoughts of the Salafi movement and Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) and the war of ideas between the two in Yogyakarta. *Islamadina: Journal of Islamic Thought*, 23(1), 115–132. https://doi.org/10.30595/islamadina.v23i1.10119

[4] Kamarudin, A. (2022). The crisis of Salafi identity and da'wah among urban students. *Journal of Sociology of Religion, 16*(2), 87–105. https://journal.uinjkt.ac.id/index.php/saa/article/view/26573

[5] Muhaimin, A. (2021). Discipline and moral control in Salafi Islamic boarding schools. *Journal of Islam and Contemporary Society, 12*(3), 225–247.
   https://journal.uinmataram.ac.id/index.php/jimc/article/view/3471

[6] Bahar, M. (n.d.). *Salafi Da'wah: The dialectic of religious communities and social development in Indonesia*. PASTATU: Journal of Public Administration, Government and Politics. https://doi.org/10.54783/japp.v5i2.597

[7] Setara Institute. (2022). *Religious survey of urban youth* [Dataset]. https://setara-institute.org

in Islam is not only normative-theological, but also rooted in early Islamic socio-historical practices that emphasize the ethical and dialogical management of differences. In the context of modernity characterized by value ambiguity and identity fragmentation, the moderation approach serves as one of the religious strategies in responding to social and psychological tensions. Compared to the moderation approach that emphasizes the flexibility of social relations, the religious practice of *manhaj* Salaf actually displays a different response, namely the strengthening of moral discipline and strict orthodoxy limits. This difference clarifies this research's argument that *manhaj* Salaf can be read as a specific psychic mechanism through the formation of a collective superego and moral control to reduce the existential anxiety produced by modernity, as can be explained through Freud's psychoanalytic framework[8].

Within the framework of Freud's psychoanalysis, the tension between instinctive impulses (id) and internalized moral demands (superego) form complex psychic dynamics in the life of individuals[9]. When the religious superego becomes very dominant, individuals have the potential to experience excessive guilt, impulse repression, projection of internal conflicts to the outside self, and moral anxiety that is latent and chronic[10][11]. Without an adequate understanding of these dynamics, two important implications can arise: first, on an individual level, *manhaj* salaf adherents can experience a sustained inner tension between the ideal of piety and the reality of life; second, at the social level, moral projection and assessment mechanisms can reinforce polarization and inhibit dialogue across religious groups[12].

This is where psychoanalysis offers a relevant interpretive framework. Through the dynamic relationship between id, ego, and superego, religious behavior can be understood not only as a manifestation of theological obedience, but also as a psychic expression related to the need for inner security, moral order, and meaning in life. This approach allows religiosity to be read as a process of finding a balance between internal impulses and social moral regulation, rather than merely as normative adherence to religious teachings.

So far, discussions on Salafism in Indonesia have developed through various scholarly trajectories. Hasan (2020), Gunawan (2022), and Nurhadi (2023) primarily explore ideological orientations, global linkages, and forms of da'wah, while other studies shift attention toward everyday dimensions of Salafi life, particularly in relation to moral discipline and processes of identity formation among Muslim youth, as examined by

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[8] Bintoro, B. (2024). *Pluralisme dalam Islam: Konsep dan praktik masa Nabi Muhammad SAW*. Jurnal Moderasi: The Journal of Ushuluddin, Islamic Thought, and Muslim Society, 4(1). https://doi.org/10.14421/jm.2024.41.02

[9] Freud, S. (1923). *The ego and the id* (J. Strachey, Ed. & Trans.). In *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 19, pp. 1–66). Hogarth Press. https://pep-web.org/browse/document/SE.019.0001A

[10] Freud, S. (1930). *Civilization and its discontents* (J. Strachey, Ed. & Trans.). In *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 21, pp. 57–146). Hogarth Press. https://pep-web.org/browse/document/se.021.0057a

[11] Rizzuto, A.-M. (1998). *Why Freud rejected God: Psychoanalysis and theistic imagination*. Yale University Press.https://yalebooks.yale.edu/book/9780300075250/why-did-freud-reject-god

[12] Illouz, E., & Sicron, A. (2023). *The emotional life of populism: How fear, disgust, hatred, and love undermine democracy*. Polity Press. https://www.politybooks.com/bookdetail?book_slug=the-emotional-life-of-populism--9781509558186

Kamarudin (2022) and Muhaimin (2021). However, studies that explicitly integrate Freud's psychoanalysis to read the structure of religious personality and psychic dynamics of Salafists in Indonesia are still very limited. This analytical gap is the gap in this research.

Based on this context, using a qualitative approach based on literature review, this research is directed to answer three main questions, namely (1) how the structure of id, ego, and superego operate in shaping the piety and moral discipline of the Salafi community, (2) what psychic defense mechanisms such as repression, sublimation, and projection arise in their religious practices; and (3) how these psychic dynamics function in response to social uncertainty and the pressures of modernity. This research departs from the hypothesis that Salafi religious practices can be understood as a psychic mechanism to reduce existential anxiety through the formation of a strong collective superego, sublimation of instinctive impulses, as well as the projection of internal conflicts to external groups. Thus, Freud's psychoanalysis is positioned as a conceptual tool to complement the study of the sociology of religion, so that Salafi religiosity can be understood more comprehensively as an intertwined social, theological, and psychological process.

METHODS

The study of Salafism in Indonesia has developed rapidly in the last two decades, especially in reading this movement as an expression of contemporary Islamic puritanism rooted in the purification of the doctrine and authority of the Salaf al-Salih generation. A number of studies place Salafi as an ideological phenomenon connected to the development of Islamic thought in the Middle East, especially Saudi Arabia and Egypt, with an emphasis on the literality of the text, the rejection of heresy, and the establishment of strict orthodoxy boundaries (Hasan, 2020; Gunawan, 2022)[13] [14]. In this perspective, Salafism is understood as a normative project oriented towards the correction of local religious practices that are considered deviant from "pure" Islam.

Another approach shifts the focus from ideology to global networks and da'wah infrastructure. Literature in this spectrum highlights the role of educational institutions, Middle Eastern scholarships, networks of scholars, and digital media in shaping the expansion of Salafis in Indonesia[15] [16]. Salafism is read as the result of the systematic work of transnational networks that produce religious authority, knowledge, and loyalty across borders. This perspective enriches the understanding of how Salafis survive and thrive in the context of democratic states and digital public spaces, but tends to see Salafi subjects as products of network structures, rather than as agents with complex inner experiences.

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[13] Hasan, N. (2020). *Islamic literacy and the Salafi da'wah movement in Indonesia*. Yogyakarta: Alvabet.

[14] Gunawan, T. (2022). It explores the thoughts of the Salafi movement and Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) and the war of ideas between the two in Yogyakarta. *Islamadina: Journal of Islamic Thought*, 23(1), 115–132. https://doi.org/10.30595/islamadina.v23i1.10119

[15] Nurhadi. (2023). Religious boundaries and social conflict in Lombok: A study of the interaction of Salafis and traditional Muslims. *Journal of Sociology of Religion, 17*(1), 45–67. https://journal.uinjkt.ac.id/index.php/saa/article/view/30292

[16] Hidayatullah, R. P. (2022). The Development of the Salafi Da'wah Movement in the Context of Democracy: A Case Study in Tanjung Pinang City. *Indonesian Journal of Sociology of Religion, 3*(2), 96–110. https://doi.org/10.22373/jsai.v3i2.1754

A number of other studies have attempted to place Salafism in the local Indonesian context by emphasizing the process of adaptation, negotiation, and internal differentiation. These studies show that Salafi practices are not entirely homogeneous, but rather interact with local culture, urban dynamics, and the needs of the younger generation of Muslims[17] [18]. This approach succeeds in reducing the impression of Salafis as a monolithic ideology, but still places analysis at the level of social practice and public discourse. Despite their different focuses, the three approaches share the same epistemic assumption Salafism is primarily understood as an ideological, structural, and institutional phenomenon**. Consequently, the subjective dimension of how Salafi individuals experience, internalize, and manage moral tension in daily life is still relatively marginalized in academic discussions.

Other literature focuses on aspects of moral control and identity formation within Salafi communities, especially among youth and urban communities. These studies emphasize how worship discipline, *self-policing*, social segregation, and behavioral regulation are the main foundations for the formation of a cohesive Salafi identity[19] [20]. Within this framework, moral control is understood as a social mechanism that affirms membership boundaries and distinguishes the "upright" from the "deviant". However, there is a difference in emphasis in reading the function of moral control. Some literature sees it as a form of normative domination that has the potential to give birth to exclusivity, social polarization, and internal psychological pressure, especially when high moral standards clash with the plural realities of modern life. Studies of intra-Muslim conflicts and tensions with traditional religious practices show how Salafi moral control can contribute to social fragmentation[21].

In contrast, other literature interprets Salafi moral discipline as a source of identity stability and inner peace. In the context of modernity marked by value uncertainty, crisis of meaning, and moral disorientation, adherence to strict religious norms is understood as a strategy to obtain certainty, direction of life, and a sense of symbolic security[22] [23]. This perspective shows that moral control is not always experienced as a burden, but is often interpreted positively by the subject who undergoes it. While opening up a more balanced

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[17] Nurhadi. (2023). Religious boundaries and social conflict in Lombok: A study of the interaction of Salafis and traditional Muslims. *Journal of Sociology of Religion, 17*(1), 45–67. https://journal.uinjkt.ac.id/index.php/saa/article/view/30292

[18] Nur Kholis, Puspitasari, E., & Hariyadi. (2023). The dynamics of the Salafi da'wah movement in a multicultural society in Indonesia. *Al-Ubudiyah: Journal of Islamic Education and Studies, 4*(2), 52–65. https://doi.org/10.55623/au.v4i2.233

[19] Muhaimin, A. (2021). Discipline and moral control in Salafi Islamic boarding schools. *Journal of Islam and Contemporary Society, 12*(3), 225–247. https://journal.uinmataram.ac.id/index.php/jimc/article/view/3471

[20] Kamarudin, A. (2022). The crisis of Salafi identity and da'wah among urban students. *Journal of Sociology of Religion, 16*(2), 87–105. https://journal.uinjkt.ac.id/index.php/saa/article/view/26573

[21] Nurhadi. (2023). Religious boundaries and social conflict in Lombok: A study of the interaction of Salafis and traditional Muslims. *Journal of Sociology of Religion, 17*(1), 45–67. https://journal.uinjkt.ac.id/index.php/saa/article/view/30292

[22] Kurniawan, R. (2023). Hijrah movement as urban religious therapy: Between anxiety and piety. *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Psychology, 4*(1), 44–63. https://journal.uii.ac.id/JPSI/article/view/29387

[23] Rahman, M. (2021). Sublimation and religious expression in the campus da'wah movement. *Indonesian Journal of Social Psychology, 5*(2), 112–130. https://journal.uii.ac.id/JPSI/article/view/18639

space for understanding, this debate still leaves a fundamental question: why and how can strict moral control be experienced as a calmer, not merely an oppression? At this point, most studies stop at sociological and cultural explanations, without elaborating on the internal mechanisms that allow individuals to manage the tension between personal impulses and collective moral demands.

From all the existing literature, it appears that the study of Salafism in Indonesia has succeeded in mapping the dimensions of ideology, global networks, da'wah practices, as well as the dynamics of identity and moral control. However, there are conceptual limitations that are consistent with the lack of attention to the psychic dynamics of religious subjects. The question of how Salafi individuals manage anxiety, inner conflict, guilt, and the need for moral certainty in the midst of modernity is rarely the focus of the main analysis. Literature tends to read Salafis from the outside as ideological actors, members of da'wah networks, or part of a social structure without adequately examining the internal processes that shape their religious experience. As a result, the psychological function of Salafi religious practice is often assumed implicitly, but rarely systematically analyzed.

This is where this research puts its position. By integrating Freud's psychoanalysis into the study of Salafism, this study seeks to fill this gap by reading Salafi religious practice as an arena of psychic work, how moral discipline, purification, and exclusivity operate not only as ideological and social projects, but also as mechanisms for managing anxiety, the formation of collective superegos, and the stabilization of the identity of religious subjects. This approach is not intended to reduce religiosity to a purely psychological symptom, but to complement existing studies with layers of analysis that have so far received little attention.

RESULTS
Freud's Psychoanalysis and Contemporary Salafi Religiosity

Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis was born out of the context of European society in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which was characterized by secularization, the crisis of religious authority, and the increasing scientific rationality in understanding human behavior. In this context, Freud often was critical of institutional religion, especially when religion functioned as an illusion that calmed human anxiety through symbolic authority figures[24]. However, it is important to emphasize that Freud's criticism of religion is not synonymous with the rejection of the psychological function of religiosity itself. Quite the opposite, Freud consistently placed religion as a psychic phenomenon that has a regulating power against anxiety, inner conflict, and the need for moral order.

This difference in historical context becomes an important methodological issue when psychoanalysis is used to read Salafi religious practices in contemporary Indonesia. Salafi religiosity does not grow in European secular societies, but rather in the context of the majority Muslims who culturally and symbolically still place religion as the main source of moral legitimacy. Therefore, this study does not use Freud to assess the

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[24] Freud, S. (1927). *The future of an illusion* (J. Strachey, Ed. & Trans.). In *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 21, pp. 1–56). Hogarth Press. https://archive.org/details/SigmundFreudTheFutureOfAnIllusion1927/page/n1/mode/2up

theological truth or rationality of the Salafi faith, but rather to read the psychic function of religiosity in response to the anxiety, uncertainty, and pressures of modernity. In other words, what is analyzed is not *what is believed*, but *how beliefs work psychically* in the subject's life. This kind of approach is in line with the post-Freud reading that places psychoanalysis as a theory about personality structure and internal conflict dynamics that is cross-cultural, as long as it is used in a reflective and non-reductionist manner[25].

In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud (1923) stated that the human personality is composed of three main psychic agencies: id, ego, and superego.[26] The id represents an instinctive impulse that works on the principle of pleasure; The superego is the internalization of moral norms, prohibitions, and ideals; while the ego functions as a mediator who negotiates the demands of id, superego, and social reality. In the context of Salafi religiosity, this structure allows for a deeper reading of moral discipline and piety that appears on the surface. The religious superego is formed through the internalization of religious teachings, the authority of the ulama, as well as the ideal of collective piety that emphasizes the purity of faith and normative adherence. This superego serves as a source of moral order as well as an internal supervisor who assesses individual behavior, thoughts, and even intentions.

Meanwhile, id still presents human impulses that are spontaneous, desires, affection, entertainment, and self-expression that are not always in line with the moral standards of the community. The ego operates between these tensions by adapting the demands of piety to the realities of modern life, for example through the rationalization of practices, selective adaptation, or the use of digital media as a means of da'wah. Thus, Salafi piety cannot be understood as the dominance of the superego alone, but rather as the result of dynamic negotiations between instinctive impulses, moral demands, and concrete social conditions.

Freud's main relevance to this research lies in his theory of anxiety and the ego's defense mechanism. In Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety, Freud (1926) explained that anxiety arises when the ego faces threats from either id impulses, superego demands, and external reality pressures. To reduce such anxiety, the ego activates various defense mechanisms, which work largely outside of consciousness.

In the Salafi context, strict moral discipline and self-regulation can be read as a response to the existential anxieties produced by modernity: identity uncertainty, value ambiguity, and socio-economic pressures. Repression works when certain impulses or desires are suppressed because they are perceived as incompatible with religious norms. Projection arises when internal conflict or ambivalence is diverted outside the self, for example through labeling other groups as deviant or impure. Meanwhile, sublimation, which Freud considered to be the most adaptive mechanism, appears in the diversion of instinctive energy to religious practices of high moral value, such as intensive worship, da'wah, and asceticism. Freud asserted that defense mechanisms are not inherently pathological. Rather, this mechanism allows individuals to maintain psychic stability in

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[25] Rizzuto, A.-M. (1998). *Why Freud rejected God: Psychoanalysis and theistic imagination.* Yale University Press.https://yalebooks.yale.edu/book/9780300075250/why-did-freud-reject-god

[26] Freud, S. (1923). *The ego and the id* (J. Strachey, Ed. & Trans.). In *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 19, pp. 1–66). Hogarth Press. https://pep-web.org/browse/document/SE.019.0001A

stressful conditions[27] [28]. Within this framework, Salafi religious practice can be understood as an adaptive psychic strategy, although under certain conditions it also has the potential to give birth to excessive guilt and inner tension if the demands of the superego become too dominant.

Freud's psychic structure charts used in this study—which map the flow of id–ego–superego structures → psychic conflicts → defense mechanisms → religious symbolic practices → psychological functions—has a strong foundation in classical and post-classical psychoanalytic literature. Freud himself explicitly asserted that the conflict between the id and the superego generates anxiety, which then encourages the ego to activate defense mechanisms[29] [30]. The relationship between anxiety, defense mechanisms, and symbolic expressions (including religion) is also affirmed in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (Freud, 1930), in which collective moral norms are understood as forms of social superegos that organize the inner life of individuals.[31]

The post-Freud literature makes it clear that these mechanisms do not work in a linear manner, but rather in dynamic relationships that can be represented heuristically through models or analytical charts. Laplanche and Pontalis (1973) show that psychoanalytic concepts function as relational systems, rather than separate categories. Rizzuto (1998) specifically relates Freud's psychic structure to religious experience, by showing how representations of God, moral norms, and guilt work as part of the subject's psychic economy.[32] Thus, the chart used in this study is not intended as a mechanistic scheme, but rather as a conceptual tool for mapping the dynamic relationship between internal conflicts, defense mechanisms, and Salafi religious practices. The use of this chart is theoretically valid because it is directly rooted in Freud's argumentative logic of anxiety and ego defense, and is confirmed by contemporary psychoanalytic readings.

Operational Concept

Freud's theoretical framework not only offers abstract psychoanalytic concepts, but also provides an analytical tool that can be operationally translated in reading the dynamics of religious personality. In order for the framework to work consistently in this study, each key concept of id, ego, superego, and psychic defense mechanisms is derived into empirical

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[27] Freud, S. (1926). *Inhibitions, symptoms and anxiety*. In J. Strachey (Ed. & Trans.), *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 20, pp. 87–172). London: Hogarth Press. https://web.english.upenn.edu/~cavitch/pdf-library/Freud_Inhibitions_Symptoms_Anxiety.pdf

[28] Freud, S. (1930). *Civilization and its discontents* (J. Strachey, Ed. & Trans.). In *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 21, pp. 57–146). Hogarth Press. https://pep-web.org/browse/document/se.021.0057a

[29] Freud, S. (1923). *The ego and the id* (J. Strachey, Ed. & Trans.). In *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 19, pp. 1–66). Hogarth Press. https://pep-web.org/browse/document/SE.019.0001A

[30] Freud, S. (1926). *Inhibitions, symptoms and anxiety*. In J. Strachey (Ed. & Trans.), *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 20, pp. 87–172). London: Hogarth Press. https://web.english.upenn.edu/~cavitch/pdf-library/Freud_Inhibitions_Symptoms_Anxiety.pdf

[31] Freud, S. (1930). *Civilization and its discontents* (J. Strachey, Ed. & Trans.). In *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 21, pp. 57–146). Hogarth Press. https://pep-web.org/browse/document/se.021.0057a

[32] Rizzuto, A.-M. (1998). *Why Freud rejected God: Psychoanalysis and theistic imagination.* Yale University Press.https://yalebooks.yale.edu/book/9780300075250/why-did-freud-reject-god

indicators that can be observed in the religious practice of Salaf *manhaj* in Indonesia. This operationalization allows Freud's theory to be grounded in social reality, so that the relationship between psychic structures and religious expression can be systematically mapped as follows:

In this study, Freud's psychoanalytic concepts were operationalized so that they could be used consistently to read the dynamics of religious personality in the religious practice of Salaf *manhaj*. First, id is understood as an instinctive impulse and spontaneous desire that is naturally present in humans, but must be controlled because it is considered not in line with moral norms[33]. In the Salafi context, id appears to be a human tendency towards more free entertainment, self-expression, or social interaction, which is then limited through strict regulation of cultural consumption, gender interaction, and rejection of activities that are considered hedonistic.

The superego is operationalized as a moral structure formed through the internalization of religious teachings, the authority of the ulama, and the ideal of group piety. In the Salafi community, the superego is manifested in a puritan orientation that emphasizes the literality of the text, internal moral control (*self-policing*), and the use of halal-haram categories as a tool of judgment against oneself and other groups. This superego functions to subdue the impulse of the id while providing moral standards that are seen as stable and definite[34] [35].

The ego, understood as a balancing mechanism that seeks to negotiate instinctive impulses and moral demands in the context of modern life. In Salafi practice, the ego works when individuals seek to adapt religious teachings to social realities, for example through digital da'wah, rationalization of certain practices, or selective adaptation to the demands of complex urban life. This tension between moral ideals and social conditions is what shows the role of the ego as a mediator[36].

Psychic defense mechanisms such as repression, projection, and sublimation are important indicators in empirical readings. Repression appears when the impulse is considered unshari'a, suppressed or hidden in order to maintain piety. Projection arises when inner conflicts are diverted outside of the self so that other groups are often labeled as heretics or deviant. Meanwhile, sublimation is most evident in Salafi religious practice, which is the transfer of instinctive energy to spiritually meaningful activities such as intensive worship, simplicity of lifestyle, da'wah, and moral discipline. Freud saw

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[33] Freud, S. (1923). *The ego and the id* (J. Strachey, Ed. & Trans.). In *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 19, pp. 1–66). Hogarth Press. https://pep-web.org/browse/document/SE.019.0001A

[34] Kamarudin, A. (2022). The crisis of Salafi identity and da'wah among urban students. *Journal of Sociology of Religion, 16*(2), 87–105. https://journal.uinjkt.ac.id/index.php/saa/article/view/26573
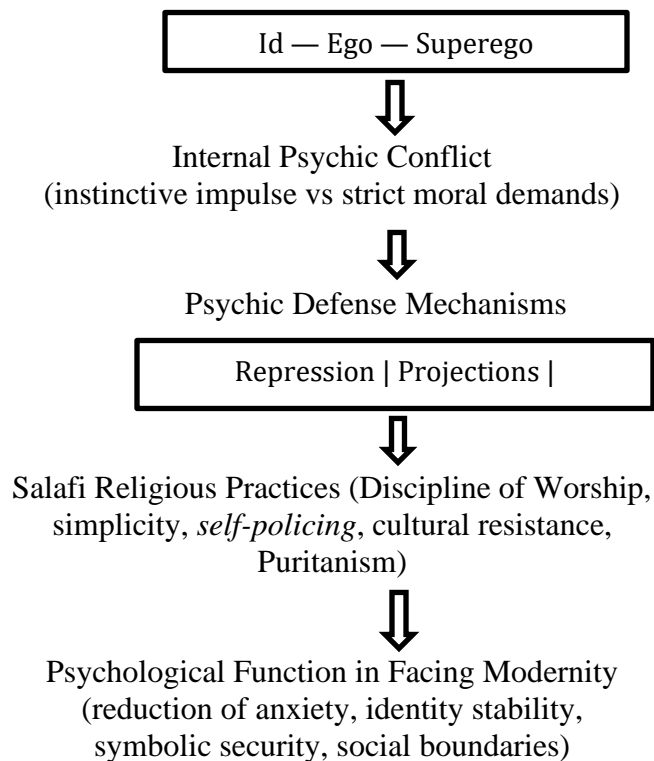
[35] Muhaimin, A. (2021). Discipline and moral control in Salafi Islamic boarding schools. *Journal of Islam and Contemporary Society, 12*(3), 225–247.

[36] Illouz, E., & Sicron, A. (2023). *The emotional life of populism: How fear, disgust, hatred, and love undermine democracy*. Polity Press. https://www.politybooks.com/bookdetail?book_slug=the-emotional-life-of-populism--9781509558186

sublimation as the most constructive form of adaptation because it could transform instinctive impulses into morally and socially valuable activities[37].

Religious practices, both in the form of worship disciplines, da'wah patterns, social relations arrangements, and resistance to local culture, are seen as empirical manifestations of these psychic dynamics. Thus, the operationalization of this concept allows for a systematic analysis of how the structure of id, ego, and superego as well as defense mechanisms work concretely in Salafi obedience and piety. This approach ensures that Freud's theoretical framework does not stop as an abstract concept, but can be used to map the psychological dynamics of Salafi religiosity in the midst of the pressures of modernity[38] (Rizzuto, 1998).

Freud's Psychic Structure Chart

Id — Ego — Superego

⇩

Internal Psychic Conflict
(instinctive impulse vs strict moral demands)

⇩

Psychic Defense Mechanisms

Repression | Projections |

⇩

Salafi Religious Practices (Discipline of Worship,
simplicity, *self-policing*, cultural resistance,
Puritanism)

⇩

Psychological Function in Facing Modernity
(reduction of anxiety, identity stability,
symbolic security, social boundaries)

The flowchart above shows that Freud's psychic structure became the main foundation in this analysis. The conflict between id, ego, and superego in Salaf *manhaj* adherents results in constant psychological tension, especially when instinctive impulses have to be controlled by very strict moral standards. These tensions do not arise passively,

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[37] Freud, S. (1930). *Civilization and its discontents* (J. Strachey, Ed. & Trans.). In *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 21, pp. 57–146). Hogarth Press. https://pep-web.org/browse/document/se.021.0057a

[38] Rizzuto, A.-M. (1998). *Why Freud rejected God: Psychoanalysis and theistic imagination.* Yale University Press.https://yalebooks.yale.edu/book/9780300075250/why-did-freud-reject-god

but are managed through various psychological defense mechanisms, such as repression that suppresses certain impulses, projections that divert internal conflicts to other groups, as well as sublimation that transforms instinctive energy into religious activities that are considered of high value. This defense mechanism then appears in the form of daily religious practices, such as worship discipline, self-control, simplicity of lifestyle, and rejection of cultural practices that are considered inconsistent with teachings. Ultimately, this series of processes results in significant psychological functions, namely reduced anxiety, strengthening symbolic security, and increased identity stability in the midst of uncertain modernity.

Description and Data

The psychic dynamics described by Freud are evident in the way Salafi individuals and communities negotiate worldly impulses with strict moral ideals. As noted by Hasan (2020), many Salafi youth view religion as a source of identity, direction of life, and psychological stability in the midst of the moral crisis of urban society. The function of religion as a defense mechanism of the ego can be seen from how puritan values are used to protect oneself from social anxiety, identity uncertainty, and the fast-paced pressures of modernity[39]. In Freud's framework, this is an attempt to control the conflict between the id that encourages the fulfillment of worldly desires and the religious superego that demands strict moral restraint.

A real manifestation of this dynamic can be observed in the Salafi communities in Yogyakarta and Jakarta. Gender segregation practices, intense ritual disciplines, prohibitions on modern entertainment, and regulation of social behavior serve as channels to direct psychic impulses toward morally acceptable forms of activity. Kamarudin (2022) shows how moral development and self-control are an important form of sublimation in this community, instinctive energy is diverted to worship activities, studies, and religious practices that strengthen group identity[40]. These findings are in line with Muhaimin's (2021) analysis of educational institutions such as Ma'had As-Sunnah Cirebon and STDI Imam Syafi'i Jember, which shows the existence of a collective superego: a set of internal moral norms that are so strong that even a small violation produces a collective sense of guilt[41]. In Freud's terminology, this condition reflects the intense dominance of the superego, which gives rise to a mixture of inner tranquility and moral anxiety simultaneously.

The phenomenon of "urban Salafi identity" also shows how modernity is not only an external challenge, but also a field for the formation of psychic defense mechanisms.

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[39] Hasan, N. (2020). *Islamic literacy and the Salafi da'wah movement in Indonesia*. Yogyakarta: Alvabet.

[40] Kamarudin, A. (2022). The crisis of Salafi identity and da'wah among urban students. *Journal of Sociology of Religion, 16*(2), 87–105. https://journal.uinjkt.ac.id/index.php/saa/article/view/26573

[41] Muhaimin, A. (2021). Discipline and moral control in Salafi Islamic boarding schools. *Journal of Islam and Contemporary Society, 12*(3), 225–247.

Nurdin (2022) explained that Salafi digital preaching on YouTube and Instagram forms a new moral space that serves as a channel for projecting anxiety towards the secular world. Digital da'wah not only spreads teachings, but also affirms the boundaries of identity through the distinction between "the upright" and the "deviant"[42]. Freud (1927) called this function psychic compensation, namely the use of religion to alleviate existential fears by presenting moral certainty. In this context, the intensity of Salafi religious devotion can be understood as a form of collective sublimation against modern uncertainty.

The exclusivity that is often attached to the Salafi group can also be understood as a protection mechanism against the collective ego. Rizzuto (2021) highlights how the shared superego forms moral boundaries that maintain internal cohesion and reduce external threats[43]. Kurniawan (2023) found that the phenomenon of Salafi hijrah in Bandung and Makassar is often rooted in experiences of personal crisis, life failures, or moral disorientation. In a psychoanalytic perspective, this condition indicates adaptive regression: the return of the individual to a more stable symbolic structure through submission to religious authority as Freud's "symbolic father" figure. Rather than being a purely theological phenomenon, hijrah here is a psychic strategy to reorganize the inner life and manage anxiety[44].

Furthermore, activities such as routine da'wah, memorization of hadith, and building intensive brotherhood serve as collective sublimation that transforms emotional energy into actions of high moral value. Rahman (2021) noted that campus da'wah activities not only strengthen piety but also become an important space for Salafi students to process emotions, affirm their identity, and seek moral justification. However, the dominance of the religious superego also produces emotional ambivalence, calmness when obedient, but excessive guilt when deviations occur[45]. Freud (1923) called this kind of guilt the "*guilt of the superego*", which is often harsher than external moral demands.

The system of muraqabah or internal social control in the Salafi community also strengthens collective morality, but it also encourages deeper emotional repression. The practice of tabdi' labeling other groups as heresy shows a projection mechanism in which uncertainty or inner conflict is diverted to external objects as a form of psychological self-defense. This mechanism helps maintain the moral self-image of the group, but in the long run it can reinforce social distancing with other Muslim groups.

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[42] Nurdin, A. (2022). Digital piety and Salafi youth: The transformation of da'wah in Indonesia. *Journal of Asian Religion and Society, 8*(1), 75–94. https://journal.uii.ac.id/JARS/article/view/19169

[43] Rizzuto, A.-M. (1998). *Why Freud rejected God: Psychoanalysis and theistic imagination.* Yale University Press.https://yalebooks.yale.edu/book/9780300075250/why-did-freud-reject-god

[44] Kurniawan, R. (2023). Hijrah movement as urban religious therapy: Between anxiety and piety. *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Psychology, 4*(1), 44–63. https://journal.uii.ac.id/JPSI/article/view/29387

[45] Rahman, M. (2021). Sublimation and religious expression in the campus da'wah movement. *Indonesian Journal of Social Psychology, 5*(2), 112–130. https://journal.uii.ac.id/JPSI/article/view/18639

From the overall data, it appears that the Salafi religious practice of *manhaj* is a complex manifestation of intertwined spiritual needs, psychological pressures, and social demands. Religion functions as a sublimative system that channels existential anxieties while building a stable moral order in the fluid and ambiguous modern world. Thus, Salafi religious dynamics cannot be understood only as a theological choice, but as a psychic strategy to achieve a sense of security, identity, and inner order.

DISCUSSION

The phenomenon of Salaf *manhaj* religious practice in Indonesia shows a configuration of religious experience that is not single, but layered between theological motivations, identity needs, and psychological mechanisms in responding to the pressures of modernity. When read through Freud's psychoanalytic lens, these dynamics appear to be not merely expressions of normative doctrine, but also psychic processes that govern the relationship between instinctive impulses, moral demands, and social reality. However, as the background points out, it is important to emphasize from the outset that not all Salafi religious expressions can be reduced to the need for psychological protection; many of them are rooted in consistent theological commitments, family traditions, da'wah networks, and the social arena that shape the religious habitus of its adherents[46].

The Dynamics of Id-Ego-Superego in the Formation of Piety, Moral, Discipline, and Salafi Religious Identity

The interaction between id, ego, and superego in Salafi *manhaj* adherents must be understood as a multi-layered process, not merely a clash between instinctive impulses and moral prohibitions, but also an identity negotiation influenced by the theological rationality and social structure of the community. Freud's theoretical literature explains that the superego functions as a moral agency that internalizes functional norms which in the case of Salafis are embodied in the emphasis on literalism, self-control, and strong rules of daily manners. Ethnographic findings in various locations show that the internalization of these norms works like a collective superego that guides behavior[47][48][49].

However, reading this phenomenon only as superego dominance would ignore the underlying theological and sociological dimensions. Much of the literal adherence to the text, the emphasis on the authority of the scholars, or the purification of rituals is rooted in an epistemological commitment to the understanding of Salaf al-Salih, rather than simply a psychic response to modern anxiety. Therefore, the collective superego here is more

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[46] Hasan, N. (2020). *Islamic literacy and the Salafi da'wah movement in Indonesia*. Yogyakarta: Alvabet.

[47] Hasan, N. (2020). *Islamic literacy and the Salafi da'wah movement in Indonesia*. Yogyakarta: Alvabet.

[48] Muhaimin, A. (2021). Discipline and moral control in Salafi Islamic boarding schools. *Journal of Islam and Contemporary Society, 12*(3), 225–247.

[49] Kamarudin, A. (2022). The crisis of Salafi identity and da'wah among urban students. *Journal of Sociology of Religion, 16*(2), 87–105.

appropriately understood as a moral structure that is simultaneous, it is the product of internalization of teachings (theological dimension), shaped and maintained by da'wah networks and social mechanisms (sociological dimension), and also functions as a psychological regulator for individuals seeking moral stability (psychoanalytic dimension).

The role of the ego appears when individuals negotiate the demands of the superego with the demands of social reality such as selective adaptation to urban life, the use of digital media for da'wah, or the rationalization of certain practices that are difficult to fully enforce outside the community. Field data show the ego works not only as a compromise supporter, but also as a decision-making arena: some adherents place compliance as an absolute priority; others develop pragmatic strategies to live in a campus environment or plural job market[50] [51].

Id as a source of spontaneous impulses (entertainment, social relations, economic needs/affections) is often controlled through community mechanisms: cultural consumption rules, gender segregation, and *peer-enforcement control*. But an important note from the field is that this control is not always pathologically charged: for many members, normative boundaries are appreciated as a source of meaning and inner peace, rather than a mere impulse restraint. In other words, the arrangement of id–superego relationships in Salafists is often productive in forming a coherent religious identity while variations in individual experiences suggest that not all perpetrators have the same psychic dynamics.

Psychic Defense Mechanisms in Religious Practices and Moral Regulation of Salafi Communities

Empirical analysis confirms that the three most consistent defense mechanisms emerge: sublimation, projection, and repression but their functions and consequences differ between subgroups and social contexts. Sublimation appears most clearly and most productively: instinctive energy is transformed into activities of religious value intensive worship, study, da'wah, community service that strengthens group cohesion and gives subjective meaning to the perpetrator[52] [53]. Many field studies record how the ethos of simplicity, ritual discipline, and religious academic engagement function as sublimative channels that provide a stable identity and life-time structure. It is important to note, however, that sublimation in the Salafi context is often intertwined with theological

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[50] Muhaimin, A. (2021). Discipline and moral control in Salafi Islamic boarding schools. *Journal of Islam and Contemporary Society, 12*(3), 225–247.

[51] Hasan, N. (2020). *Islamic literacy and the Salafi da'wah movement in Indonesia*. Yogyakarta: Alvabet.

[52] Freud, S. (1930). *Civilization and Its Discontents* (J. Strachey, Ed. & Trans.). In *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 21, pp. 57–146). Hogarth Press. https://pep-web.org/browse/document/se.021.0057a

[53] Kamarudin, A. (2022). The crisis of Salafi identity and da'wah among urban students. *Journal of Sociology of Religion, 16*(2), 87–105.

commitment, ritual acts are dogmatically meaningful endings, so energy transformation is not merely an abstract psychic mechanism, but rather a practice rooted in theological belief.

Projection works when internal conflict or ambivalence is diverted outward, often in the form of labeling other practices as "heretical" or "deviant". Digital da'wah and moral rhetoric on online platforms have become a medium of projection: a firm distinction between "the straight" and the "deviant" makes it easier for the collective to maintain identity boundaries while transferring identity anxiety to external objects[54]. This pattern also contributes to social polarization as projections shift to the delegitimization of traditional rituals within local communities.

Repression appears in the suppression of some impulses that are considered unsharia, feelings, social desires, or individual expressions that then cause psychological side effects such as collective guilt or inner tension. Studies on Salafi students show how minor transgressions trigger intense guilt, which is more the result of social and moral internalization than mere classical subconscious conflicts[55]. On the other hand, repression is not always negative, in many cases it helps facilitate self-control which is seen as a religious virtue.

In conclusion, these defense mechanisms work simultaneously, sublimation into adaptive and constructive channels, projection contributes to the formation of collective social boundaries (with the potential for external conflict), and repression serves as internal control (at the risk of psychological burden). A holistic understanding demands seeing these mechanisms in relation to theological factors, da'wah networks, and social pressures, rather than as isolated psychodynamic processes.

Psychic Dynamics as a Mechanism for Adaptation to Modernity and the Crisis of Meaning

Modernity provides a context that makes a firm moral structure an adaptive choice for some: plurality of values, social fluidity, and economic/cultural pressures create conditions of identity ambiguity that give rise to existential anxiety[56] [57]. In the Indonesian context, urbanization, access to global information, and digital public space encourage young individuals to seek normative certainty of the phenomenon observed as an increase in youth interest in Salafi da'wah[58].

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[54] Hasan, N. (2020). *Islamic literacy and the Salafi da'wah movement in Indonesia*. Yogyakarta: Alvabet.

[55] Kamarudin, A. (2022). The crisis of Salafi identity and da'wah among urban students. *Journal of Sociology of Religion, 16*(2), 87–105.

[56] Freud, S. (1930). *Civilization and Its Discontents* (J. Strachey, Ed. & Trans.). In *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 21, pp. 57–146). Hogarth Press. https://pep-web.org/browse/document/se.021.0057a

[57] Illouz, E., & Sicron, A. (2023). *The emotional life of populism: How fear, disgust, hatred, and love undermine democracy*. Polity Press. https://www.politybooks.com/bookdetail?book_slug=the-emotional-life-of-populism--9781509558186

[58] Setara Institute. (2022). *Religious survey of urban youth* [Dataset]. https://setara-institute.org

Psychic dynamics play a dual role in responding to modernity. On the one hand, the internalization of norms (collective superegos) and the sublimation of religious practices provide identity support and anxiety reduction: the structure of rules and communities gives direction, meaning, and social networks that support psychological stability to a real adaptive function. Kurniawan (2023) and Alatas (2021) document how the experience of personal crisis or moral disorientation often leads to the process of hijrah or self-attachment to the Salafi community as a strategy to reorganize the inner life[59] [60].

On the other hand, this response has complex social consequences. The affirmation of identity boundaries through projection and *self-policing mechanisms* can strengthen exclusivity, reduce the space for dialogue, and trigger conflict when encountering local praxis or plurality of traditions, as the case of the tahlilan conflict in Lombok shows that the causes of conflict are more than just individual dynamics: there are questions of legitimacy of authority, history, and local power relations. In other words, psychic strategies that calm individuals on a micro level can reinforce social distancing on a macro level.

Finally, the long-term effects depend on a combination of factors: the strength of the da'wah network, theological commitment, openness to dialogue, and access to social/economic resources. This study emphasizes the need for a cross-disciplinary perspective: psychoanalysis explains the inner mechanisms and stabilization functions, but the sociology of religion and theological studies are necessary to understand the conscious motivations, legitimacy of praxis, and the institutional dynamics that also shape behavior. Therefore, methodological recommendations include longitudinal and comparative studies of sub-groups to measure the intensity of defense mechanisms in various contexts[61] [62] [63].

The structure of the id–ego–superego and the defense mechanisms identified in this study not only explain how Salafi moral discipline was formed, but also show how the psychic structure functions as an adaptive device to face the uncertainties of modernity. Moral discipline, theological literalism, and strict self-regulation operate as a form of internal regulation of impulses, anxieties, and value ambiguities that are increasingly strengthened in the contemporary social context. In Freud's framework, the relationship between instinctive impulses, moral demands, and anxiety management strategies helps explain why some individuals find emotional stability through assertive religious

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[59] Kurniawan, R. (2023). Hijrah movement as urban religious therapy: Between anxiety and piety. *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Psychology, 4*(1), 44–63. https://journal.uii.ac.id/JPSI/article/view/29387

[60] Alatas, I. (2021). *Salafism and the religious identity of urban youth in Indonesia*. Press UII. https://press.uii.ac.id

[61] Hasan, N. (2020). *Islamic literacy and the Salafi da'wah movement in Indonesia*. Yogyakarta: Alvabet.

[62] Muhaimin, A. (2021). Discipline and moral control in Salafi Islamic boarding schools. *Journal of Islam and Contemporary Society, 12*(3), 225–247.

[63] Kamarudin, A. (2022). The crisis of Salafi identity and da'wah among urban students. *Journal of Sociology of Religion, 16*(2), 87–105.

structures, but this reading cannot be separated from the framework of beliefs that constitute the source of legitimacy for the practice.

Therefore, psychoanalytic analysis must be combined with theological, historical, and sociological dimensions so as not to get caught up in reductionism. Theological beliefs about the purity of the aqidah and the authority of the ulama, the history of the development of the da'wah movement, and the community structure that underpins the internalization of values all play a role in shaping the religious experience of Salafists. Social networks through halaqah, ma'had, and digital space are not only a medium for the dissemination of teachings, but also an arena for the formation of collective identity, moral control, and the strengthening of symbolic boundaries that provide certainty of orientation and a sense of psychological security. These layers influence the way individuals organize emotional impulses, manage guilt, and respond to the pressures of the modern environment.

Thus, psychoanalytic interpretations do offer an important understanding of how individuals stabilize identity, channel psychic energy through religious practice, and establish symbolic boundaries in social relations. But this approach cannot replace an analysis of the social structure, distribution of religious authority, and doctrinal legitimacy that shape Salafi practice. These religious practices are the result of layered interactions between psychological needs, theological commitments, social networks that organize moral life, and historical contexts that determine their space of movement in Indonesian society. It is this holistic approach that allows for a more equitable, non-pathological, and non-reductionist understanding of how Salafi puritanism functions as a moral, social, and psychological response to the challenges of modernity.

CONCLUSION

Religiosity in the Salafi community in Indonesia shows the layered interplay between theological commitments, social dynamics, and individual psychological needs in navigating the uncertainties of modernity. Freud's psychoanalytic approach helps explain how some adherents organize instinctive impulses, moral anxieties, and the need for order through the internalization of religious norms, but these aspects cannot be understood in isolation from the theological rationality and social context that shaped their religious orientation. Practices such as self-policing, religious guilt, or avoidance of certain activities are the result of a combination of doctrinal commitment, community pressure, and self-structuring strategies in the midst of social pluralism. Like other urban religious groups, some Salafis interpret moral discipline as a way of building identity and inner stability in an increasingly fluid world. Thus, Salafi puritanism is a form of moral, social, and psychological adaptation that cannot be reduced to a single explanation; Freud's psychoanalytic framework makes an important contribution to understanding the accompanying psychic dynamics, but a complete understanding requires the integration of theological and sociological perspectives in order for these phenomena to be seen in a balanced and not simplistic way.

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