Contesting Sunni Orthodoxy: Wahhabism in the Chechen Conference and the Thought of Hasyim Asyari

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis secara komparatif dua konstruksi ortodoksi Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamaah (ASWAJA) yang saling berseberangan, yaitu definisi global dari Konferensi Chechnya 2016 dan pemikiran lokal-tradisional KH. Hasyim Asyari di Indonesia. Pentingnya penelitian ini terletak pada urgensi memahami bagaimana konsep ortodoksi Sunni dibentuk dan dipertahankan dalam konteks ketegangan antara wacana global dan otoritas keagamaan lokal. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode analisis isi terhadap dua teks utama, yakni dokumen resmi Konferensi Chechnya dan Risalah Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamaah karya Hasyim Asyari, serta didukung oleh literatur sekunder dan analisis kontekstual. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa definisi ASWAJA versi Chechnya bersifat eksklusif dan

rigid, mengecualikan kelompok Wahhabi dan Salafi-Takfiri, sedangkan Hasyim Asyari membangun ortodoksi yang berakar pada sanad, ijma, dan praktik keagamaan lokal yang etis dan moderat. Implikasi dari temuan ini adalah pentingnya mempertimbangkan dimensi historis, sosial, dan epistemologis dalam merumuskan ortodoksi Sunni, serta perlunya pendekatan yang lebih inklusif untuk menjaga kohesi umat Islam di tengah fragmentasi ideologis. Penelitian ini menawarkan kontribusi orisinal dengan menyandingkan dua paradigma yang jarang diperbandingkan secara sistematis, serta membuka ruang baru dalam studi ortodoksi, otoritas keagamaan, dan glokalisasi Islam di Indonesia.

Kata kunci: ASWAJA; Ortodoksi Sunni; Wahabisme; Konferensi Chechnya; Hasyim Asyari.

Abstract

This study aims to comparatively analyse two contrasting constructions of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamāah (ASWAJA) orthodoxy: the global definition advanced by the 2016 Chechen Conference and the traditional-local thought of KH. Hasyim Asyari in Indonesia. The significance of this research lies in its urgency to understand how Sunni orthodoxy is constructed and maintained amid tensions between global discourse and local religious authority. Employing a qualitative approach and content analysis method, the study focuses on two primary texts-the official Chechen Conference statement and Hasyim Asyaris Risālah Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamāah-supported by secondary literature and contextual analysis. The findings reveal that the Chechen definition of ASWAJA is rigid and exclusive, explicitly excluding Wahhabi and Salafi-Takfiri groups, while Hasyim Asyari offers a contextualised and adaptive orthodoxy grounded in sanad, ijmāʿ, and local religious practices that are ethical and moderate. The implications of these findings underscore the need to consider historical, social, and epistemological dimensions in formulating Sunni orthodoxy, and highlight the importance of adopting a more inclusive approach to preserve Muslim unity in the face of ideological fragmentation. This study offers an original contribution by juxtaposing two paradigms that are rarely compared systematically, opening new avenues for research on orthodoxy, religious authority, and the glocalisation of Islam in Indonesia.

Keywords: ASWAJA; Sunni Orthodoxy; Wahhabism; Chechen Conference; Hasyim Asyari

Introduction

In recent years, the narrative that excludes Wahhabism from Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamaah (ASWAJA) has gained traction as a significant phenomenon in Indonesias religious discourse. This reflects a shift in theological understanding as well as the dynamics of local Islamic identity shaped by global discourses. This narrative gained momentum following the 2016 Chechnya Conference, which explicitly defined ASWAJA through the

theological framework of Asharism-Maturidism, the four Sunni madhhabs, and the Sufism of al-Junayd-implicitly excluding Wahhabism from Sunni orthodoxy (Syarkun and Huda 2020). This view has been reinforced by national media outlets such as Laduni.id, Sanadmedia.com, and Islampers.com, and has been widely disseminated via social media by groups like the Young NU Generation. Globally, the redefinition of ASWAJA aligns with a moderate, ethico-political paradigm shaped by political history, such as Ibn Taymiyyas reinterpretation of the caliphate as a rational institution (Anjum 2012; Feener 2008). In Indonesia, meanwhile, organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah use ASWAJA as a theological foundation, although without explicitly defining it, thus allowing for diverse interpretations in religious practice (Saleh 2008).

This anti-Wahhabi narrative has had considerable sociopolitical impact, including increased scrutiny of Salafi-Wahhabi-affiliated educational institutions perceived as promoting radicalism, as well as the emergence of social segmentation and sectarian political mobilization, such as during the 2019 presidential election (Sumadinata, Affandi, and Yulianti 2019; Zulkifli 2024). Media play a crucial role in spreading this narrative, mediating traditional authority and shaping public opinion through digital religious representations (Campbell 2022; Mishol-Shauli and Golan 2019). Hence, it is essential to critically examine the relationship between the global construction of religious identity and the expression of local Islam in Indonesia-not only as an academic agenda within contemporary Islamic studies, but also as a practical effort to formulate inclusive approaches to intra-Islamic diversity amidst growing polarization and radicalism.

Previous studies reveal at least three main tendencies in the discourse on ASWAJA and the Chechnya Conference. First, literature on the Chechnya Conference often focuses on the responses of international figures such as the Grand Sheikh of al-Azhar and Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who represent theological and diplomatic perspectives on the exclusion of Wahhabism, but tend to overlook local dimensions (Kuswandi 2019; Rahman 2016). More broadly, international discourse is shaped by global narratives on terrorism in the post-9/11 era, in which countries like Russia have employed anti-terror rhetoric to frame religious conflicts-such as in Chechnya-as part of a global war against Islamic radicalism (Bakke 2009; Russell 2005). This has reinforced the exclusion of groups like the Salafi-Wahhabis from global orthodoxy while legitimizing specific political agendas.

Second, a number of studies approach ASWAJA from a textualist perspective, emphasizing classical sources without contextualizing the teachings within the contemporary socio-religious realities of Indonesia (Islampers 2018; Mihrob 2019). This method aligns with the tradition of

textual formalism, which overlooks the sociological dimension and everyday practices of Indonesian Muslims (Guodong 2021; Hunter 2023), failing to address local challenges such as ideological plurality, digital media, and the convergence of Islamic identities. Third, very few studies to date have systematically compared the global discourse-such as ASWAJA as defined in the Chechnya Conference-with the conceptualization offered by local thinkers such as Hasyim Asyari. Although studies in the fields of glocalization and cross-tradition comparison exist (Kola 2013; Zhang, Chan, and Teasdale 2018), their limited application in the context of Islam Nusantara suggests a lack of exploration into how global orthodoxy discourses intersect-or clash-with local religious authority. This gap underscores the urgency of the present study to fill a critical void in contemporary Islamic literature, particularly in terms of integrating local traditions with transnational ideological pressures on Sunni identity in Indonesia.

This study seeks to address that gap by offering a systematic comparison between the construction of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamaah (ASWAJA) identity in global discourse and local Islamic traditions in Indonesia. Specifically, it analyzes and compares the definition of ASWAJA formulated at the 2016 Chechnya Conference with the thought of Hadratussyaikh Hasyim Asyari in his treatise Risalah Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamaah, in order to evaluate the position of Wahhabism within Sunni orthodoxy according to these two authoritative sources. Using a qualitative approach and content analysis method, this study also explores the epistemological and ideological implications of each narrative on the configuration of Sunni identity in Indonesia. In doing so, it aims to contribute to the broader discourse on the interaction between transnational religious narratives and local authority construction, offering a more contextual and critical lens through which to understand the dynamics of Islamic orthodoxy in the face of globalized religious discourse.

Theoretically, this study is grounded in the argument that there exists an epistemological and ideological tension between the definition of ASWAJA as formulated by the Chechnya Conference and the scholarly construction developed by Hasyim Asyari within the Islamic traditions of the archipelago. The Chechnya Conference explicitly presents an exclusionary narrative toward Wahhabism, framing it as a deviation from Sunni orthodoxy-a stance reinforced by the post-9/11 global framing that links Salafism with transnational radicalism (Bakke 2009; Russell 2005). In contrast, Hasyim Asyari emphasizes the importance of traditional continuity, scholarly lineage (sanad), and local ulama authority as the basis for maintaining social and religious cohesion amid the plurality of madhhabs (Mihrob 2019; Saleh 2008). While both perspectives reject extremism, their approaches to

Wahhabism differ substantially-the Chechnya Conference adopts a de jure approach based on global scholarly consensus, while Hasyim Asyari uses a de facto approach grounded in local practice and social stability. This argument forms the basis for investigating how global narratives and local authority construct the boundaries of religious identity exclusivity, and how local responses, such as that offered by Hasyim Asyari, remain relevant in the face of global Islamic discourse homogenization and hegemonization (Cvetkovich and Kellner 2018; Kola 2013).

This study employs a qualitative approach using content analysis to examine in depth the theological constructions and normative criteria of ASWAJA as reflected in two primary texts: the official document of the 2016 Chechnya Conference and the classical treatise Risalah Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamaah by Hasyim Asyari. This method was chosen because content analysis allows the researcher to explore implicit meanings in religious texts and deconstruct the argumentative structure and ideology shaping religious identity narratives. Primary data sources include the original Chechnya Conference document obtained from official publications and credible media reports, as well as the Risalah manuscript published by Maktabah al-Turats al-Islami. Supplementary sources include news articles, academic writings, and statements from relevant figures published through platforms such as Islampers.com (2018) and Sanadmedia.com (2022), as well as interviews with key informants. Data collection was conducted through library research, examining primary documents, scholarly articles, and other secondary sources to identify key passages representing the construction of religious identity. The collected data were then analyzed using thematic analysis techniques, identifying core themes in both texts-such as theology, jurisprudence, Sufism, and attitudes toward Salafi-Wahhabi ideology-and comparing the emerging normative arguments while also considering the sociopolitical contexts of each source to understand their underlying ideological motivations.

Results and Discussion

1. The Concept of ASWAJA in the Chechnya Conference: Global Theological Exclusivism

The theological standard on creed (ʿaqīdah) according to the Chechnya Conference Statement explicitly defines Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamaah (ASWAJA) as those who follow the Ashʿari or Maturidi schools in doctrine-including the Ahl al-Hadith who adopted the principle of tafwīḍ (Consignment) (Chechnya Conference Delegates 2016). The principle of

tafwīḍ-entrusting the meaning of ambiguous (mutashābih) verses to God-is upheld as an epistemic reference to safeguard the purity of monotheism and avoid anthropomorphism. This formulation reveals a methodological exclusivism in defining Sunni orthodoxy and implicitly excludes groups such as Salafi-Takfiri and Wahhabi, who are considered to deviate from such theological approaches. The document even asserts that these groups are responsible for takfīr, destruction, bloodshed and distortion of the image of Islam (Chechnya Conference Delegates 2016). This statement resonates with the Sufi identity of the Chechen people, long a means of resistance against the post-Soviet expansion of transnational ideologies. Epistemologically, the tafwīḍ approach reflects a core characteristic of Ashʿarite theology, balancing rationality with the sanctity of revelation-clearly distinguishing it from the literalist methods of Wahhabism.

In line with this theological foundation, the conference statement also defines ASWAJA in the domain of jurisprudence (fiqh) as those who follow one of the four canonical legal schools: *the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafii or Hanbali schools in Islamic law and jurisprudence* (Chechnya Conference Delegates 2016). This reinforces the position of madhhab-based fiqh as normative authority, while rejecting non-madhhab approaches or modern Islamic legal reconstructions that are not rooted in classical tradition. Movements such as Salafi-Takfiri and Wahhabi, which tend to reject taqlīd and prefer direct literal interpretation of texts, are thus excluded from the ASWAJA category as defined by the conference. This stance cannot be separated from the post-Soviet Chechen geopolitical context, where social-religious stability is heavily reliant on established scholarly authority. By reaffirming the four madhhabs as the boundaries of orthodoxy, the conference emphasizes the continuity of the Sunni legal heritage and draws a clear line against puritanical jurisprudence seen as undermining communal harmony and fostering global radicalism (Akaev 2009; Litvinova 2021; Wilhelmsen 2004).

The spiritual-ethical dimension of ASWAJA is also strongly emphasized through Sufism (taṣawwuf). The conference statement declares that an integral part of ASWAJA is *the path of spirituality in its manifestation as science and practice, namely the adornment of noble character and purification of the heart, as exemplified in the order of al-Junayd and the imams who followed his way* (Chechnya Conference Delegates 2016). The invocation of Imam al-Junayd as a model of orthodox Sufism demonstrates that the exclusivism promoted by the conference extends beyond theology and jurisprudence to the spiritual realm. Sufism is positioned as a marker of authentic Sunni identity and as a differentiator from groups that reject the inner dimension of Islam, such as Wahhabis, who regard Sufism as bidʿah (heretical innovation). This reflects the historical role of Sufi orders like the

Naqshbandiyya and Qadiriyya in Chechnya as instruments of resistance against colonialism and as sources of social solidarity (Akaev 2009; O'Leary 2014). The political endorsement of Sufism by Ramzan Kadyrov following the fall of the Soviet Union further cemented its role as part of a project to reconstruct a moderate, locally rooted, anti-extremist Islamic identity (Bram and Gammer 2013; Litvinova 2021). In theological discourse, Junayd al-Baghdādī is recognized for harmonizing orthodoxy and mystical experience (Karacan 2023; Ohlander 2020), making his legacy particularly relevant in legitimizing the Grozny model of spirituality.

In the realm of daʿwah (religious propagation), the conference emphasizes that ASWAJA carries a universal mission to counteract radicalism and violence. ASWAJAs preaching is defined as *a safety valve by which takfīr and extremism may be dismantled. It will also be achieved by sending messages of safety, peace and mercy to the whole of creation* (Chechnya Conference Delegates 2016). This statement marks a transformation of Sunni orthodoxy into a strategic narrative-one that is not only religious but also political. The values of rahmatan lil-ālamīn, embodied in the ASWAJA daʿwah tradition, align with the moderate approaches of institutions such as Al-Azhar and Nahdlatul Ulama, which emphasize *tawassuṭ* (moderation), *tawāzun* (balance), and *tasāmuḥ* (tolerance) (Daud, Amri, and Latif 2023; Pektas 2021). In Chechnya, this ethos of daʿwah is instrumentalized as a post-conflict reconciliation tool and as a strategy to consolidate local power against the threat of transnational puritanism. Thus, the ASWAJA preaching style promoted in Grozny is not only inclusive and peaceful, but also functions as a counter-narrative to the transnational, exclusive, Salafi-jihadist movement.

The apex of ASWAJAs exclusivism appears in the conferences treatment of ideological threats. The statement starkly warns that the spread of deviant teachings has *given rise to dozens of false concepts and incorrect interpretations, the result of which has been takfīr, destruction, bloodshed and distortion of the image of Islam* (Chechnya Conference Delegates 2016). This pronouncement provides a theological and political rationale for excluding Salafi-jihadist groups, who are seen not only as theological deviants but also as key actors in delegitimizing traditional Islamic authority (Ali 2019; Weismann 2017). In the post-9/11 global context, takfīri ideology has contributed significantly to the stigmatization of Islam in Western media and public discourse, damaging the image of Sunni Islam as a moderate mainstream school (Douai and Lauricella 2014; El-Aswad 2013). By defining ASWAJA as the antithesis to radicalism and as a symbol of social-religious stability, the conference articulates a theological and geopolitical strategy aimed at defending orthodox Sunni identity against transnational ideological disruption.

Table 1. ASWAJA Pillars According to the Chechnya Conference and Excluded Groups

Aspect	ASWAJA Criteria (Chechnya Conference 2016)	Excluded Groups
Creed	Follows Ashʿari or Maturidi theology, including Ahl al-Hadith with tafwīḍ	Salafi, Wahhabi, Takfiri
Jurisprudence	Adheres to one of the four Sunni legal schools: Hanafi, Maliki, Shafii, Hanbali	Non-madhhab, literalist anti-taqlīd groups
Sufism	Embraces spirituality grounded in al-Junayds teachings, focusing on tazkiyat al-nafs and noble character	Wahhabi, anti-Sufi groups
Preaching	Peaceful and inclusive daʿwah, rejects violence and takfīr, promotes rahmah for all creation	Salafi-jihadists, radical militant groups
Threats	Rejects misinterpretations that cause chaos, bloodshed, and distortion of Islam	Extremist ideologies, Wahhabi-jihadists

Based on Table 1, it can be concluded that the definition of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamaah as agreed upon at the 2016 Chechnya Conference is highly specific, strict, and exclusive. The five key aspects that shape the Grozny version of ASWAJA-creed, jurisprudence, spirituality, preaching, and ideological response-are formulated to delineate the boundaries between orthodoxy and deviation in Sunni Islam. Groups such as Wahhabis, Salafi-Takfiri, and transnational jihadists are explicitly excluded, being seen as methodologically deviant and as threats to the socio-political stability of traditional Islam (Akaev 2009; Chechnya Conference Delegates 2016; Weismann 2017).

From the data presented, four main patterns emerge:
1. Methodological exclusivism, marking strict theological boundaries through Ashʿari-Maturidi and tafwīḍ frameworks while rejecting literalist approaches (Karacan 2023; Ohlander 2020).
2. Preservation of classical Islamic legal authority, recognizing only the four traditional madhhabs as resistance to unsanctioned legal reconstruction (Akaev 2009; Litvinova 2021).

3. Spiritual integration, with Junayds Sufism forming an ethical foundation for authentic Sunni identity and acting as a cultural-political resistance (Bram and Gammer 2013; O'Leary 2014).
4. Anti-extremist preaching articulation, positioning ASWAJA as a frontline counter to global radicalism (Douai and Lauricella 2014).

These findings suggest that the 2016 Chechnya Conference aimed not merely to define ASWAJA theologically, but also as a geopolitical and ideological strategy to address transnational challenges. The conference positions ASWAJA as a category of orthodoxy that functions both spiritually and intellectually, as well as a tool to contain violent ideologies within the Muslim ummah. Epistemologically, this formulation reinforces traditional Islam in the face of extremist delegitimization. Politically, it represents a project to reconsolidate moderate Sunni identity, supporting domestic stability and global harmony, while offering a comparative framework to local expressions of orthodoxy such as Nahdlatul Ulama in Indonesia, which shares similar commitments to tradition, peace, and resistance against radicalism (Daud, Amri, and Latif 2023; El-Aswad 2013; Wilhelmsen 2005).

2. The Concept of ASWAJA in the Thought of Hasyim Asyari: Tradition, Sanad, and Social Balance

In Risālah Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamāah, KH. Hasyim Asyari affirms that the core of Sunni doctrine is founded upon the Ashʿarite and Māturīdite theological schools. He writes: *wa ataqidu anna madhhab ahl al-ḥaqqi ahl al-sunna wa al-jamāah huwa madhhab al-Asyariyīn wa al-Māturīdīyīn*, which translates as: *I believe that the true doctrine of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamāah is that of the Ashʿarites and the Māturīdites* (Asyʿari 1926). This declaration highlights his theological preference rooted in classical kalām authority, reinforcing Ashʿarism as a pillar of Sunni orthodoxy in Indonesia. This doctrine promotes a balance between scriptural (naqlī) and rational (ʿaqlī) evidences while rejecting anthropomorphism in the understanding of divine attributes, particularly as a critique of the literalist tendencies found in Wahhabi thought. This finding resonates with contemporary scholarship, which identifies Ashʿarism as the backbone of Indonesian Sunni identity (Dhuhri and Jakfar 2020; Saleh 2008).

In the legal domain, Hasyim Asyari stresses the importance of adhering to one of the four recognised Sunni schools of jurisprudence. He states: *fa al-firqah al-nājiyah al-madhkūrah fī al-ḥadīth hum ahl al-sunnah wa al-jamāah wa hum atbā aḥad al-aimmah al-arbaah*, indicating that the firqah nājiyah refers to the followers of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamāah who adhere to one of the four Imams (Asyʿari 1926). This perspective reflects a strong commitment

to the principle of *taqlīd madhhabī* (jurisprudential conformity), as a form of reverence for classical legal authority and continuity of sanad (transmission). In the Indonesian context, this view underpins Nahdlatul Ulamas (NU) legal authority through classical Shāfiʿī works such as Fath al-Qarīb and Tuhfat al-Muḥtāj (Syamsu Rizal 2011; Thohari 2013), while also accommodating contextualisation via the concept of ʿurf within the framework of the madhhab (Najib 2020).

The spiritual dimension of Islam also receives considerable emphasis. Hasyim Asyari writes: *wa fī al-taṣawwuf yatamassakūna bi madhhab Abī Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī wa Abī al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī, raḍiya Allāh anhumā* (Asyʿari 1926), reflecting his alignment with the spiritual paths of two major Sunni Sufi figures. Their approach emphasises *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul), moral conduct, and harmony between *sharīʿah* and *ḥaqīqah* (Griffel 2009; Hillenbrand 2020). This approach aligns with practices in the Shādhilī and Naqshbandī orders, which emphasise the stages of takhallī, taḥallī, and tajallī as methods of spiritual development (Fuadi et al. 2024; Subandi, Chizanah, and Subhan 2022; Taleb 2020). In Indonesia, such Sufi orientation flourishes in pesantren and ṭarīqah like Naqshbandiyya Khālidiyya Jalāliyya, contributing to public morality (Rosidi et al. 2024).

Concerning religious ethics, Hasyim Asyari asserts that moral character is an integral part of faith. He writes: *wa min uṣūl ahl al-sunnah wa al-jamāah: ijtināb al-bida wa al-muḥāfaẓah alā makārim al-akhlāq,* which translates as: *Among the principles of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamāah is to avoid bidʿah and to uphold noble character* (Asyʿari 1926). This underscores that ethics are not merely social conventions but expressions of spiritual piety and adherence to the Sunnah. Principles such as *ikhlāṣ* (sincerity), *ittiḥād* (unity), and *uswah ḥasanah* (exemplary conduct) are foundational to Islamic ethics that support moderation and leadership by example (Bakar, Mardiyah, and Ikhwan 2023). The Sufi-based educational model has also been shown to enhance student character development (Rahmat and Yahya 2021), while al-Ghazālī, as Hasyims spiritual reference, developed a theological ethic centred on self-purification (Özkan 2022).

Regarding scholarly authority, Hasyim Asyari writes: wa alayka bi al-ulamā al-muttaqīn, wahrub min ahl al-bida wa al-zaygh, walam anna al-nās alā aqsām thalāthah: ālim rabbānī, wa mutaallim alā sabīl najāh, wa hamaj raā, atbā kulli nāiq, which may be rendered as: You must follow pious scholars and avoid those of innovation and deviation... and know that people fall into three categories: the learned divine, the seeker of knowledge on the path of salvation, and the masses who follow every noise-maker (Asyʿari 1926). This concept frames scholars as central figures of spiritual and intellectual authority, safeguarding the community from deviation. In todays context, this

view is critical for maintaining sanad continuity and methodological integrity amid religious populism, which often disregards both (Bakar, Mardiyah, and Ikhwan 2023; Rahmat and Yahya 2021). For Hasyim Asyari, scholarly authority rests not only on rational competence but also on moral integrity, scholarly lineage, and social responsibility.

Table 2. ASWAJA Pillars According to Hasyim Asyari and Excluded Groups/Practices (Asyʻari 1926)

Aspect	ASWAJA Pillars (KH. Hasyim Asyari, 1997)	Excluded Groups/Practices
Creed	Adheres to Ashʻarite and Māturīdite doctrines. *huwa madhhab al-Asyariyīn wa al-Māturīdīyīn*	Muʻtazilites, Wahhabis, and both hyper-rationalist and extreme literalist theologians
Jurisprudence	Follows one of the four schools: Ḥanafī, Mālikī, Shāfiʻī, Ḥanbalī. *atbā aḥad al-aimmah al-arbaah*	Non-madhhab individuals or those claiming ijtihād without legitimate scholarly authority
Sufism	Emulates the Sufism of al-Ghazālī and al-Shādhilī. *yatamassakūna bi madhhab… al-Ghazālī… al-Shādhilī*	Deviant or syncretic mystical practices that neglect the *sharīʻah*
Religious Ethics	Upholds noble character and avoids innovation. *al-muḥāfaẓah alā makārim al-akhlāq wa ijtināb al-bida*	Sectarian fanaticism, intolerance, and extremist attitudes towards difference
Scholarly Authority	Follows pious scholars with *sanad. alayka bi al-ulamā al-muttaqīn…*	Individuals lacking scholarly lineage issuing deviant interpretations or fatāwā

In Risālah Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamāah, Hasyim Asyari constructs ASWAJA as a holistic Islamic framework built on five key foundations: Ashʻarite-Māturīdite theology, adherence to the four schools of jurisprudence (with preference for Shāfiʻī), Sufism in the tradition of al-Ghazālī and al-Shādhilī, ethical moderation rejecting violence, and knowledge authority rooted in sanad and ijmāʻ (Asyʻari 1926). This formulation is both theological

and sociological in nature, as it explicitly excludes groups such as the Qadariyya, Mujassimah, Wahhabis, and extremist takfīrī movements like ISIS. Table 2 systematically presents these boundaries, outlining the principles and exclusive criteria of ASWAJA from Hasyim Asyaris perspective. These findings align with recent studies highlighting sanad as the epistemic infrastructure of classical Islam (Badaruddin and Mahyuddin 2021; Tamjidnor et al. 2025) and emphasising that the rejection of takfīrism is integral to Islams inclusive ethical tradition (Badar, Nagata, and Tueni 2017; Daheri et al. 2023).

From the analysed data, four main patterns can be identified in Hasyim Asyaris construction of ASWAJA. First, there is epistemological consistency in using sanad and ijmāʻ as the foundation of scholarly authority-anchored in classical tradition and serving as a defence against illegitimate religious authority (Asyʻari 1926; Tamjidnor et al. 2025). Second, his theological approach shows moderation by avoiding the extremes of Muʻtazilī rationalism and Wahhabi literalism, both of which are explicitly excluded (Asyʻari 1926; Badaruddin and Mahyuddin 2021). Third, the integration of jurisprudence, Sufism, and ethics illustrates that Hasyims religiosity is not limited to legalism but extends to spiritual experience and harmonious social ethics (Hillenbrand 2020; Rahmat and Yahya 2021). Fourth, the exclusivity asserted by Hasyim Asyari functions as a protective mechanism for traditional Islamic identity-one that is inclusive, contextual, and resistant to ideological transnationalism (Badar, Nagata, and Tueni 2017; Daheri et al. 2023).

These findings demonstrate that KH. Hasyim Asyaris concept of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamāah is not merely a theological formulation but a strategic socio-epistemological construction aimed at preserving the integrity of Islam Nusantara. By outlining five essential elements-Ashʻarite-Māturīdite creed, adherence to the four madhhabs, Ghazālian-Shādhilian Sufism, moderate religious ethics, and sanad-based knowledge authority-Hasyim Asyari defines the boundaries of orthodoxy while filtering religious ideologies incompatible with Indonesias cultural religiosity (Asyʻari 1926; Badaruddin and Mahyuddin 2021). In todays context, this framework serves as an antithesis to takfīrī movements and populist religiosity that disregard intellectual lineage and moderation (Daheri et al. 2023; Tamjidnor et al. 2025). Furthermore, the data reaffirm NUs position as the authoritative heir to Indonesian Sunni tradition, wherein the legacy of Hasyim Asyari continues to guide responses to pluralism and modern transformation through consistent methodology and ethical integrity (Bakar, Mardiyah, and Ikhwan 2023; Rahmat and Yahya 2021). In this light, the study enriches our

understanding of how Sunni orthodoxy in Indonesia is dynamically shaped by classical texts, historical experience, and contemporary challenges.

3. Epistemological and Ideological Tensions: Global vs Local in Defining Wahhabism

The theological standard of ASWAJA orthodoxy, as formulated by Hasyim Asyari in *Risālah Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamāah*, affirms three principal pillars underpinning traditional Sunni thought in the archipelago: Ashʿarite creed, Shāfiʿī jurisprudence, and Ghazālian-Shādhilian Sufism (Asyʿari 1926). This framework is reinforced by a strong commitment to the authority of *sanad* (scholarly transmission) and *ijmāʿ* (consensus of scholars) as foundations of epistemic legitimacy, and by a clear rejection of *takfīrism* and sectarian deviation. These principles are broadly aligned with the parameters of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamāah as defined in the 2016 Chechnya Conference, which recognises Ashʿarite-Māturīdite theology, the four Sunni legal schools, and Junaydian Sufism as prerequisites for inclusion within Sunni orthodoxy (Who are the Ahl al-Sunna? A clarification of the methodology of the Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jama`a in relation to tenets of faith, jurisprudence and spirituality and the effects that deviating from it has on world affairs 2016). Imam Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī also contributed to this theological edifice by integrating the Ahl al-Ḥadīth as a complementary element of orthodoxy, alongside rationalist and Sufi strands (Al-ʿAnjari n.d.). In Southeast Asia, ASWAJA orthodoxy has developed distinctively, internalising local socio-religious dynamics and representing the tension between global authorities-such as Wahhabism with its scripturalist leanings-and local movements that prioritise spiritual and cultural dimensions (Azra 2013; Yunus and Amiruddin 2021). This conception has produced a religious system that is not only normative but also ethical, spiritual, and socio-cultural, capable of adapting to contemporary challenges while retaining its traditional roots.

The epistemological tension between global and local perspectives regarding Wahhabisms position within Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamāah reveals substantial differences in defining Islamic orthodoxy. Globally, Wahhabism is still recognised by certain authorities-such as Ahmad al-Tayyib of al-Azhar and Yusuf al-Qaradawi-as part of ASWAJA, emphasising the need to unite Salafis and Sufis under a vision of Islamic moderation (Qaraḍāwi 2004). Locally in Indonesia, however-particularly within the *pesantren* tradition and Nahdlatul Ulama-Wahhabism is criticised for rejecting Sufism, *sanad*, and *ijmāʿ*, and is considered to promote social fragmentation through *takfīr* practices (Asyʿari 1926; Azra 2013). This view is bolstered by the 2016 Chechnya Conference, which explicitly excludes Salafi-Takfiri groups from

ASWAJA on grounds of violence and exclusivist truth claims (Chechnya Conference Delegates 2016). At a global level, Wahhabi movements also encounter resistance in local contexts such as Central Asia, the Balkans, and the Caucasus, where they are perceived as threats to local values, religious pluralism, and political stability (Khamidov 2013; Potezica 2007; Thibault 2022). In Indonesia, Wahhabisms exclusion is historically rooted in its longstanding opposition to Sufi and culturally embedded Islamic practices. This tension reflects not only ideological conflicts but also an epistemic contest between traditional, *sanad*-based cultural authority and a global narrative that is legalistic, scripturalist, and often misperceived as monolithic.

The cultural identity of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamāah (ASWAJA) in Indonesia is formed by the confluence of theological heritage, *pesantren* traditions, and culturally embedded religious practices. Hasyim Asyari asserts that ASWAJA is defined by Ashʿarite theology, Shāfiʿī jurisprudence, and the Sufism of al-Ghazālī and al-Shādhilī (Asyʿari 1926), practically expressed in rituals such as *tahlīl*, *ziyarah* (visitation of graves), and *istighāthah* (supplicatory prayers) (Azra 2013). Within this framework, *kiai* and *pesantren* function as custodians of orthodoxy and mediators between traditional Islam and the challenges of modernity (Fauzi 2012). The rejection of Wahhabism-which denies the legitimacy of *sanad*, *ṭarīqah*, and local religious heritage-marks an epistemological differentiation between ASWAJA and puritanical movements (Asyʿari 1926). This identity is further institutionalised through educational and organisational bodies such as IPNU, PMII, and GP Ansor, and reinforced through linguistic dynamics: Arabic is reserved for sacred domains, while local languages and Bahasa Indonesia serve as mediums of cultural integration (Ilma and Rohmah 2024). In a broader landscape, ASWAJA plays a dominant role in shaping national Islamic discourse, while simultaneously contending with challenges from modernist, sectarian, and cultural-political movements, particularly in regions like West Sumatra (Syarif 2018; Taufik 2024). Thus, ASWAJA in Indonesia is not merely a representation of traditional Sunni theology, but also a resilient cultural construct responsive to both local and global dynamics.

Table 3. The Position of Wahhabism from Local and Global Perspectives

Perspective	Authoritative Source	Status of Wahhabism	Rationale
Local (Indonesia/NU)	Hasyim Asyari (1997), Azra (2013)	Outside ASWAJA	Rejects Sufism, *sanad*, *ijmāʿ*; causes social discord
Global (al-Azhar)	Ahmad al-Tayyib (2016)	Part of ASWAJA	Identified with non-extremist Salafiyya and Ahl al-Ḥadīth
Global (Chechnya)	*Who Are the Ahl al-Sunna?* (2016)	Not explicitly mentioned; Salafi-Takfiri excluded	Rejects violence, *takfīr*, and absolutism in truth claims

The conceptualisation of ASWAJA by Hasyim Asyari encompasses not only Ashʿarite creed, Shāfiʿī jurisprudence, and Ghazālian-Shādhilian Sufism, but also establishes *sanad* and *ijmāʿ* as criteria of orthodoxy. In practice, this standard functions as a boundary-marker, distinguishing between groups included within ASWAJA and those excluded. Tensions emerge particularly in evaluating Wahhabisms status: in Indonesia, especially within Nahdlatul Ulama circles, Wahhabism is considered outside the bounds of ASWAJA due to its rejection of Sufism, scholarly authority, and traditional rituals like *tahlīl* and *ziyarah* (Asyʿari 1926; Azra 2013). This view contrasts with global perspectives, such as that of Ahmad al-Tayyib of al-Azhar, who continues to recognise Wahhabism as part of ASWAJA so long as it remains non-extremist. Meanwhile, the Chechnya Conference of 2016 firmly excluded Salafi-Takfiri movements but did not mention Wahhabism explicitly-highlighting global ambiguity in defining the limits of orthodoxy. Table 3 illustrates this divergence: local perspectives tend to prioritise ethical and social dimensions, whereas global views are more legalistic and accommodating of non-extremist Salafiyya variants. This affirms that the epistemological tension between local and global is not merely a matter of differing perspectives but reflects a fundamental divergence in how Islamic heritage is interpreted and preserved.

From the reviewed data, four main patterns emerge in the dynamics of ASWAJA orthodoxy across local and global contexts. First, a pattern of local exclusivism is evident in the *pesantren* and NU stances in Indonesia, which

impose strict theological standards based on Ashʿarite creed, Shāfiʿī jurisprudence, and Sufism, while rejecting Wahhabism for its denial of *sanad*, *ijmāʿ*, and traditional religious practices. Second, a pattern of global inclusivism is represented by figures such as Ahmad al-Tayyib and Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who continue to include Wahhabism within the ASWAJA spectrum as long as it is not extreme. Third, a pattern of epistemological tension emerges from differing sources of authority: local approaches are rooted in *sanad* and cultural tradition, whereas global approaches lean towards legalism and scripturalism. Fourth, a pattern of resistance to homogenisation is observable in the response of local communities to global narratives that are perceived as misaligned with the lived religious realities of the Nusantara.

These findings reveal that ASWAJA orthodoxy in Indonesia cannot be understood solely through a normative theological lens, but must also be seen as an epistemological and cultural construct rooted in *sanad*-based authority, scholarly consensus, and religious practice embedded within *pesantren* and local Islamic praxis. The tension between global inclusivity-which in some cases still embraces Wahhabism as part of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamāah-and local exclusivity-which tends to reject it-reflects a contest between two regimes of authority: one that is textual-scriptural and transnational, and another that is locally historicised and grounded in tradition. Theoretically, this affirms the view in contemporary Islamic studies that orthodoxy is not a fixed entity, but a discursive outcome negotiated between global and local forces (Grewal 2016; Yunus and Amiruddin 2021). The implication is that any examination of ASWAJA must move beyond its normative dimensions and incorporate the politics of knowledge, identity dynamics, and power relations that shape religious authority. These findings broaden our understanding that Islamic orthodoxy-particularly in the Indonesian context-is a contested field shaped by the interplay between tradition and modernity, local wisdom and global pressures, continuously (re)defining the contours of Muslim religious identity.

4. Discussion: Implications for Religious Discourse

This study finds that the concept of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamāah (ASWAJA) is shaped by two dominant and conflicting paradigms-epistemologically and ideologically: the paradigm of global theological exclusivism, as formulated in the 2016 Chechnya Conference, and the traditional-local paradigm, as developed by Hasyim Asyari in Indonesia. The Chechnya Conference underscores three central pillars: Ashʿarite-Māturīdite theology, adherence to the four recognised legal schools, and pure Sufism in the tradition of al-Junayd, while explicitly excluding groups such as Salafi-Takfiri and Wahhabi, perceived as sources of disorder in the Muslim world

(Chechnya Conference Delegates 2016). By contrast, Hasyim Asyari conceptualises ASWAJA as a tradition that is not merely theological but also social and cultural, rooted in *sanad*-based scholarship, scholarly consensus (*ijmāʿ*), and culturally embedded religious practices such as *tahlīl* and *ziyarah* (Azra 2013). This epistemological tension arises from diverging sources of religious authority: the global approach tends to be legalistic and transnational, whereas the local model is grounded in traditional continuity and socio-religious harmony (Tamjidnor et al. 2025; Yunus and Amiruddin 2021).

This tension is closely tied to differing historical and political contexts. The Chechnya Conference was influenced by post-9/11 geopolitical dynamics and the revival of traditional Islam in Chechnya, associated with Sufism as a form of resistance against Wahhabism and global jihadist networks (Akaev 2009; Russell 2005; Wilhelmsen 2004). Meanwhile, Hasyim Asyari responded to the spread of Wahhabism in Indonesia by emphasising a *sanad*-based and moderate Sufi approach as a counterbalance to social and religious fragmentation (Asy'ari 1926; Badar, Nagata, and Tueni 2017). Thus, the local exclusion of Wahhabism represents resistance to a scripturalism that disconnects from classical authority chains, while global inclusivity reflects political compromise with non-extremist variants of Salafism (Qaraḍāwi 2004).

This study affirms previous findings such as those by Syarkun & Huda (2020) and Kuswandi (2019), which highlight the exclusivist tendencies of the Chechnya Conference, but extends the scope through a comparative analysis between global discourse and local thought. While prior studies have focused on responses from international figures such as al-Tayyib and al-Qaradawi (Rahman, 2016), or relied on textualist approaches (Islampers 2018; Mihrob 2019), this research integrates ideological and epistemological analysis by drawing on both local and global discursive contexts. Furthermore, it addresses a gap in literature on Islamic glocalisation, which has rarely explored the construction of Sunni orthodoxy from a Nusantara perspective (Kola 2013; Zhang, Chan, and Teasdale 2018), and reinforces the notion that orthodoxy is relational-produced through dominant discourse and power (Al-Wardi 2013; Grewal 2016).

The significance of these findings lies in showing that Sunni orthodoxy is neither neutral nor uniform, but rather a contested space between local authority and global power. Socially and historically, the Chechnya Conference utilised theological exclusion as a means of legitimising moderate Islam in the context of anti-radical politics, while Hasyim Asyaris thought constructs orthodoxy on the basis of social harmony and the continuity of the *pesantren* tradition (Fauzi 2012; Noor 2023). This tension affirms the

arguments of Roy (2004) and Asad (2003) that orthodoxy is a historical product of power relations, rather than a fixed theological category. Accordingly, the study expands the field of contemporary Islamic studies by stressing the importance of contextual interlinkages between text, authority, and social practice in the formation of Sunni identity.

A critical reflection on these findings reveals the dual function of ASWAJA orthodoxy. On one hand, it can serve as a safeguard against radicalism and help maintain the continuity of a moderate Islamic identity rooted in Sufism, *sanad*, and scholarly consensus (Badaruddin and Mahyuddin 2021; Tamjidnor et al. 2025). On the other, when applied rigidly, such theological exclusivism risks narrowing the space for intra-Islamic dialogue and fostering new forms of sectarianism that contradict Islams inclusive principles. In the Indonesian context, this could lead to social fragmentation and the delegitimisation of alternative yet historically and culturally valid Islamic expressions (Syarif 2018; Taufik 2024). Therefore, caution must be exercised in employing orthodoxy as a policy tool, ensuring it is not weaponised as an instrument of ideological exclusion.

Based on these insights, several policy and educational strategies are recommended:

1. Curricular reform - Islamic education curricula should present the history and diversity of legal schools objectively and proportionately.
2. Structured intra-Islamic dialogue - Inter-organisational and inter-*pesantren* dialogues should be facilitated to prevent the domination of a singular narrative.
3. Contextualised deradicalisation programmes - Efforts to counter extremism must involve local *ʿulamā* to avoid marginalising traditional authority.
4. Critical Islamic digital literacy - Enhanced digital literacy is needed to counter sectarian disinformation in the public online sphere.

These steps will reinforce social cohesion and sustain a moderate Islamic identity that is contextual, grounded in tradition, and open to global dialogue.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the definition of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamāah (ASWAJA) is not monolithic, but rather the outcome of a discursive construction negotiated between global forces and local religious authority. The central findings indicate that the 2016 Chechnya Conference promoted a theological exclusivism grounded in Ashʿarite-Māturīdite creed, adherence to the four recognised schools of jurisprudence, and Junaydian Sufism-explicitly excluding Wahhabism and Salafi-Takfiri movements from the framework of

Sunni orthodoxy. In contrast, the thought of KH. Hasyim Asyari presents a more contextual and adaptive model of orthodoxy, based on *sanad* (scholarly transmission), *ijmāʿ* (consensus), and local traditions such as Ghazālian Sufism and *pesantren* practices in Indonesia.

Scholarly, this research offers a significant contribution to the field of contemporary Islamic studies by filling a gap in the literature regarding systematic comparisons between global and local ASWAJA narratives. It further enriches the discourse on Islamic glocalisation by demonstrating how traditional values can persist-and even challenge-transnational exclusivist currents. The thematic-comparative approach employed has successfully identified the power relations inherent in the formation of orthodoxy, reinforcing the epistemic role of *pesantren* and Nahdlatul Ulama as bastions of moderate Islam in Indonesia.

Nonetheless, this study acknowledges several limitations. Chief among them is the narrow scope of data, which focuses solely on two primary textual sources without including contemporary social actors in the field. Future research could be enhanced by ethnographic perspectives or interviews with members of the *pesantren* community and policymakers, which would deepen the analysis. In addition, restricted access to internal documents from the Chechnya Conference limited this studys ability to explore the political dimensions more thoroughly.

Accordingly, further research is recommended to examine the actual practices of acceptance or rejection of Wahhabism within Indonesian Muslim society through more extensive fieldwork. Such inquiry would provide a fuller and more contextualised understanding of how Sunni orthodoxy is dynamically negotiated in the real world.

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