

# THE APPEAL OF ISLAMIST MOVEMENTS IN LOCAL MUSLIM CONTEXTS: EXPLORING THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE ISLAMIC DEFENDER FRONT (FPI) AMONG TRADITIONAL MUSLIM COMMUNITY IN PAMEKASAN MADURA

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the Islamic Defender Front (FPI) in Pamekasan, Madura, analyzing its appeal and organizational dynamics within the local Muslim community. The research aims to uncover the motivations for FPI membership and the strategies FPI uses to strengthen solidarity among its members. The study employs religious capital and social identity theories, drawing on the works of Iannaccone and Klick, Maselko, Hughes, and Cheney, Stark and Finke, and Bourdieu's cultural capital. Findings indicate that FPI's appeal is rooted in its alignment with traditional Muslim values, its commitment to 'enjoining good and prohibiting evil,' the significant role of *kyai* and *habib* in legitimizing its activities, and its collaboration with local religious organizations. Key events, including religious studies, public *salawat* councils, and large-scale *tablighs*, strengthen internal cohesion and extend its influence. The paper argues that FPI's success in Pamekasan is due to its effective use of religious and social capital, fostering strong religious identity and community solidarity, which are crucial for its organizational effectiveness and legitimacy.

**Keywords:** FPI; Religious Capital; Kyai and Habib Influence; Social Identity; Pamekasan.

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## Introduction

It is well-known that the majority of Muslims in Madura identify themselves with traditional Islam, emphasizing the preservation of local rituals and historical scholarship. Yanwar Pribadi notes that Madura's Islamic culture is a fusion of *abangan* syncretic culture and *santri* culture.<sup>1</sup> Within this framework, many researchers argue that Muslims in Madura have historically affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), which is so influential that NU is often seen as synonymous with the Islamic identity in Madura.

The collapse of the Soeharto regime in 1998 paved the way for the emergence of various political parties and diverse religious expressions, including the puritanical views of transnational Islamist movements.<sup>2</sup> This shift triggered an ideological and organizational transition among Muslims from traditional perspectives towards Islamist views. Many *kyai* from traditional Islam connected with NU now support Islamist ideologies, particularly the Islamic Defender Front (Front Pembela Islam/FPI), which advocates for the implementation of Sharia law and the philosophy of *'amr ma'rūf naby munkar* (enjoining good and prohibiting evil).<sup>3</sup> The main activities of FPI involve campaigns to close down places perceived as centers of vice, often employing tactics of intimidation and violence, including demonstrations

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<sup>1</sup> Yanwar Pribadi, *Islam, State and Society in Indonesia: Local Politics in Madura* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> In the Indonesian context, Islamist movements refer to various groups striving to integrate Islamic values and laws into the political, social, and legal frameworks of the state. These groups generally advocate for the implementation of shari'a as the foundation of the nation and often aim to replace the secular democratic system with an Islamic-based governance model. However, the approaches and intensities of these Islamist movements are diverse; some opt for formal political channels through Islamic parties, while others pursue non-political avenues such as education and proselytization. Frequently, these movements find themselves embroiled in controversies or conflicts with other factions, such as moderates and liberals, over differing interpretations of Islam and how it should be applied in governance. John L. Esposito, *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Masdar Hilmy, *Islamism and Democracy in Indonesia: Piety and Pragmatism* (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Ahmad Zainul Hamdi, "Radicalizing Indonesian Moderate Islam from within: The NU-FPI Relationship in Bangkalan, Madura," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 7, no. 1 (2013): 71-95; Ahmad Zainul Hamdi, "Radicalising the Traditionalist: A Contemporary Dynamic of Islamic Traditionalism in Madura-Indonesia," *Epistemé: Jurnal Pengembangan Ilmu Keislaman* 15, no. 1 (2020): 1-21.

and attacks on bars, gambling dens, brothels, and nightclubs. These violent actions have led to FPI often being identified as a ‘radical movement’ and a ‘violent extremist organization’.<sup>4</sup>

The transformation from traditional Islam to Islamism has driven many Madurese *kyais* to lead FPI. They view FPI as a true Muslim organization struggling to protect Muslims by implementing Sharia law across Indonesia. This ideological shift occurs not only among religious elites but also at the grassroots level, as evidenced by the significant interest of the Pamekasan Muslim community in participating in FPI’s religious and social activities. According to *Ustadh* Herman, Vice Head of the Cadre Development Division of FPI Pamekasan, there are approximately 50,000 active FPI members, comprising nearly five percent of the Pamekasan population, mostly consisting of *kyai*, *santri*, *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) alumni, their families, and followers.<sup>5</sup> This claim reflects the significant influence of *kyai pesantren* who become FPI leaders and sympathizers, affecting their students and communities to join or at least adhere to FPI’s teachings.

The interaction between traditional Islam and the Islamist movement represented by FPI reveals mutual influence among *kyai*, with FPI winning the support of many traditional Muslims. Previous studies, such as those by Hamdi and Abd. A’la et al. have shown FPI’s appeal in Bangkalan due to its leadership by prominent local NU figures, allowing coexistence of moderate and radical Islam.<sup>6</sup> However, most of the NU community remains committed to nationalism and moderation, with FPI’s influence limited to a small, active group. Despite these insights, existing research has not deeply explored the specific factors attracting traditional Muslims in Madura or the strategies FPI uses to strengthen member solidarity, often focus-

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<sup>4</sup> Jamhari and Jajang Jahroni, *Gerakan Salafî Radikal di Indonesia* (Jakarta: PT Raja Grafindo Persada, 2004); Remy Madinier, “L’État indonésien face à l’extrémisme religieux: gestion de la violence et de l’intolérance,” Report for the Délégation aux Affaires Stratégiques (Paris: Ministère de la Défense, 2011); Mark Woodward et al., “The Islamic Defenders Front: Demonization, Violence and the State in Indonesia,” *Cont Islam* 8, no. 2 (2014): 153-171.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with *Ustadh* Herman, October 5, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Hamdi, “Radicalizing Indonesian Moderate Islam”; Abd A’la and Ahwan Mukarrom, “Power-Knowledge Relations of the Elder and the Younger Madurese Muslim Scholars in Propagating Islamism in Madura: A Counter-Narrative,” *TEOSOFI: Jurnal Tasawuf dan Pemikiran Islam* 10, no. 1 (2020): 124-153.

ing on broader ideological and social aspects instead of internal strategic mechanisms and cultural factors.

This article aims to investigate the factors driving support for the FPI in Pamekasan, Madura, and how this support enhances FPI's role as a major Islamic organization in the region. While previous studies have focused on Bangkalan, Pamekasan, known for its strong Islamic values, offers a distinct context to understand FPI's appeal among traditional Muslims. This study employs religious capital and social identity theory to analyze FPI's dynamics, utilizing Iannaccone and Klick's concept of religious capital,<sup>7</sup> Stark and Finke's model of religious economies,<sup>8</sup> and Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital.<sup>9</sup> These frameworks collectively elucidate how FPI leverages the authority of *kyai* and *habib*<sup>10</sup> to build religious identity and community solidarity, thereby enhancing its legitimacy and influence.

This research was conducted in Pamekasan from July to December 2019. In December 2020, the government officially disbanded the FPI. However, in 2021, former FPI sympathizers established a new organization with the same initials, FPI, now standing for the Front Persaudaraan Islam/Islamic Brotherhood Front. In Pamekasan, this new FPI is essentially the old FPI with a new guise; all the leaders and programs remain unchanged. Therefore, the discussion in this article remains pertinent, as the change in name does not alter the organizational structure and the core and functions of the previously existing FPI.

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<sup>7</sup> Laurence R. Iannaccone and Jonathan Klick, "Spiritual Capital: An Introduction and Literature Review," paper presented at the The Spiritual Capital Planning Meeting (2003).

<sup>8</sup> Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (California: Univ of California Press, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J. G. Richardson (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1986).

<sup>10</sup> Within Madurese society, the title *kyai* is granted to individuals distinguished by their expertise in Islamic teachings and their role as leaders or proprietors of *pesantren*, placing them in a pivotal role in the preservation of the community's religious practices. See Pribadi, *Islam, State and Society in Indonesia*. The title *habib* (Arabic term, sing. *ḥabīb*, pl. *ḥabā'ib*) refers to those who claim lineage from the Prophet Muḥammad, and like the *kyai*, they hold a revered status among Indonesian Muslims, especially within traditionalist circles. Syamsul Rijal, "Following Arab Saints: Urban Muslim Youth and Traditional Piety in Indonesia," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 48, no. 141 (2020): 145-168.

This article will begin by mapping the types and categories of FPI members in Pamekasan, exploring the motivations of members in joining the organization, and then outlining the strategies FPI uses to strengthen solidarity among its members.

## **FPI Membership: Classification and Varieties**

FPI operates as a mass organization rather than a cadre-based system. Its membership is inclusive, allowing any Muslim to join regardless of their background or organizational affiliation, provided they adhere to the principles of *ahlussunnah waljamaah*, which involves following the Prophetic tradition and the broader Sunni Muslim community. Individuals can become members through a formal recruitment process or by informally participating in FPI's various activities.

Participation in FPI events and activities informally confers membership status, and individuals can easily cease their membership by simply opting out of future activities. This approach likens FPI membership to participation in a mosque congregation, where the Muslim community (*ummah*) can freely join or leave at their discretion. Additionally, FPI recruits members through a formal process as needed. This process includes an interview, a Qur'anic recitation test, an assessment of Islamic knowledge, and, for those under seventeen, parental consent. These evaluations serve to gauge the prospective member's understanding of Islam rather than acting as strict entry barriers. Successful candidates may be inducted into the organization's military wing, Islamic Defender Soldiers (Laskar Pembela Islam/LPI), to engage in front-line activities aimed at 'prohibiting evil.' Given FPI's lack of a standardized recruitment program, formal membership drives are conducted sporadically based on organizational needs.

Based on my observations, FPI membership in Pamekasan can be divided into three main groups: elites, ordinary active members, and sympathizers. The elite group consists of *kyai* and *pesantren* board members who possess substantial religious knowledge and hold key roles as policymakers, directors, and decision-makers within the organization. They are tasked with maintaining FPI's adherence to its Islamic principles and its mission. Occasionally, the *kyai* can override certain organizational procedures, leveraging their influence and authority to make decisions that reflect their personal interests. This dy-

namic is highlighted by *Ustadh* Herman, an FPI board member, who notes, “From an organizational perspective, FPI in Pamekasan cannot be categorized as a modern organization. This is because some policies are not based on organizational decisions but rather on the influence and social status of the *kyai*. What they decide, command, and conduct will be obeyed by the members of FPI.”<sup>11</sup>

Numerous prominent *kyai*, primarily associated with the Sarekat Islam (SI) organization and a few from NU, are principals of *pesantren* and also serve on the leadership and board of FPI Pamekasan. These include *Kyai* Muhammad Munif Sayuthi, Principal of *Pesantren* At-Tauhid Panempan, who is the founder and first leader of FPI Pamekasan; *Kyai* Ali Salim, Principal of *Pesantren* Al-Islah Beringin, Palengaan, who is the second leader of FPI Pamekasan; and *Lora* Abd Aziz, the young Principal of *Pesantren* Al-Inayah Sumber Batu, Pegantenan, who is the current leader of LPI Pamekasan responsible for mobilizing FPI members to engage in ‘enjoining good and prohibiting evil’ activities. Another key figure is *Habib* Faishol, a charismatic leader in Pamekasan who advocates for FPI’s mission and programs. These influential figures are significant assets in attracting the Pamekasan community to join FPI.

The second category comprises ordinary active members, including *pesantren* students, alumni, their families, and the general public. This *santri* group encompasses both formal members of FPI and those who, while not officially part of the organization, share its objectives and ideals. Predominantly aged between 15 and 25, these individuals form the backbone of FPI Pamekasan’s membership. They are easily recognized by their distinctive attire: white *koko* (Arabic-style flowing robes) and green or checked scarves wrapped around their faces during protests, public lectures, and humanitarian aid activities, both locally and nationwide. Female members, although not present in all branches, including Pamekasan, wear wide clothing in white robes, with green or white headscarves and veils, displaying the organization’s characteristic colors.

These members typically attend FPI events in groups from various *pesantrens* located primarily in the northern parts of Pamekasan: Proppo, Palengaan, Pegantenan, Kadur, Pakong, and Waru areas. These regions are known as strongholds of the SI organization. In contrast, FPI members from southern Pamekasan are fewer in num-

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with *Ustadh* Herman, October 5, 2019.

ber, likely due to the lower presence of supporting *kyai* and *pesantrens* in these areas.<sup>12</sup> Observations of FPI demonstrations revealed that most protesters came from the northern areas. For instance, during the Aksi Bela Ulama rally on 27 September 2019, trucks and cars carrying protesters from the northern region were evident based on their license plates, an observation confirmed through interviews. Misbah, a student from a *pesantren* in Proppo, a known FPI supporter base, participated in FPI fundraising for natural disaster victims in Wamena at Arek Lancor area. Misbah and his peers were active in various FPI activities in Pamekasan, including protests against perceived immorality, store raids during Ramadan, and shutting down prostitution sites in Ponteh, Galis. He also engaged in FPI's humanitarian efforts, such as disaster management, house renovations for the poor, and nationwide fundraising for natural disasters, confirming that FPI members predominantly come from *pesantrens* led by principals involved in FPI.

The third category encompasses sympathizers, a diverse group including farmers, fishermen, employees, academics, and members of the general public. Although these individuals are not actively engaged in FPI's activities, they align with the organization's principles and support its mission. They perceive FPI as a prominent Islamic entity committed to upholding Islamic values, particularly through the promotion of 'enjoining good and prohibiting evil.' During the Cinema Mall Entertainment closure rally, I interviewed some attendees, including Ikrom, a tobacco merchant from Pakong, situated about 20 kilometers north of Pamekasan, who self-identifies as an FPI sympathizer. Despite not being an official member, Ikrom participates in all major FPI events, often informed through flyers, Facebook, or WhatsApp groups.<sup>13</sup> While most demonstrators are organized by FPI's leadership and branch coordinators, numerous participants also join the protests independently.

In conclusion, FPI Pamekasan's membership spans various segments of the local Muslim community, with a predominance of younger individuals who actively drive the organization's initiatives. Each membership category contributes distinctly to FPI, yet the elite group, primarily consisting of *kyai*, wields the most significant influence.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Ikrom, October 5, 2019.

## Principal Catalysts for FPI Membership

What drives individuals to support or become members of FPI? The appeal of FPI can be attributed to three principal factors. The first factor is rooted in ideological and ritualistic aspects. As a traditional Muslim organization, FPI adheres to religious practices that closely mirror those of the predominant Muslim population in Pamekasan. The second factor pertains to the widespread appeal of FPI's program focused on 'enjoining good and prohibiting evil.' The third factor is the demonstration of allegiance to local religious leaders, many of whom are prominent figures within FPI. These motivations are explored in greater detail below.

### *Convergence in Ideological and Ritual Practices*

There is a divergence of opinion among experts concerning the organizational orientation of FPI. Many consider FPI to be a puritanical group with a rigid interpretation of *abl al-sunnah wa al-jamā'ah* (adherence to the Prophetic tradition and Muslim community), akin to Salafist movements.<sup>14</sup> These Salafist factions insist that Islamic teachings must adhere strictly to the Qur'an and Ḥadīth as practiced by the *salaf al-ṣāliḥ* (the pious predecessors). They believe that the practices and understandings of the *salaf al-ṣāliḥ* regarding faith, jurisprudence, and daily conduct—such as dress, diet, and prayer—should remain unaltered by contemporary contexts. Consequently, they exhibit intolerance towards local religious practices that integrate cultural elements. This interpretation of ahlussunnah waljamaah contrasts with that of Indonesian traditionalist Muslim groups, which follow the theological perspectives of Ash'ārī and Māturīdī, and the legal doctrines of scholars like Abū Ḥanīfah, Mālik b. Anas, and Shāfi'ī, particularly Shāfi'ī's influence in Islamic jurisprudence, as well as the Sufi traditions of al-Ghazālī and al-Baghdādī.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Gabriel Facal, "Islamic Defenders Front Militia (Front Pembela Islam) and Its Impact on Growing Religious Intolerance in Indonesia," *TRANS: Trans-Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia* 8, no. 1 (2020): 1-22; Greg Fealy, "Islamic Radicalism in Indonesia: The Faltering Revival?" *Southeast Asian Affairs*, eds. Daljit Singh and Kin Wah Chin (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2004), 104-122.

<sup>15</sup> Ahmad Najib Burhani, "Al-tawassuṭ wa-l I'tidāl: The NU and Moderatism in Indonesian Islam," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 40, no. 5-6 (2012): 564-581; Zamakhsari Dhofier, *The Pesantren Tradition: A Study of the Role of the Kyai in the Mainte-*

In contrast, Woodward argues that FPI should be viewed as part of traditional Islam rather than a puritanical variant. Many FPI adherents practice traditional religious customs, such as visiting sacred tombs and participating in religious gatherings marked by *ṣalamāt* (salutations to the Prophet Muḥammad), often accompanied by drums and tambourines—practices that Salafists disdain and consider un-Islamic innovations.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, numerous FPI members are affiliated with Sufism, engaging in rituals like *tablīlan* (commemorative prayers for deceased family members), *dhikr* (remembrance of God), reciting *qunūt* during *fajr* (dawn) prayer, making supplications between the *adhān* (call to prayer) and *iqāmah* (second call to prayer), and attending *ṣalamāt* assemblies. These activities reflect the characteristics of traditionalist Islamic practices prevalent in Indonesia.

FPI exhibits notable flexibility in its religious methodology. In terms of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), it adheres to the four principal schools of thought, predominantly drawing from the Syafī'i school, which exemplifies a balance between textual adherence and intellectual interpretation. Practitioners of this school adopt a moderate approach in their evaluation and judgment of issues.<sup>17</sup> Conversely, FPI's theological stance is puritanical, aligning with the Salafī *manhaj* (path). This adaptability allows FPI to accommodate diverse situations and conditions, leading to minimal direct opposition from the local community in Pamekasan, unlike the more rigid Salafī groups that face significant resistance, particularly from moderate NU adherents.

FPI's recognition of local traditions and cultural values has made it appealing to many in Pamekasan. By incorporating familiar worship practices, members do not need to alter their traditional rituals, which remain consistent with their cultural and religious values. The rigorous interpretation of *ahlussunah waljamaah* by FPI does not disrupt the ritual practices of its members. Muttaqin, an FPI member from Pademawu, stated that his decision to join FPI was influenced not only by its core mission of moral enforcement but also by the alignment of its worship rituals with his own practices. He believes

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*nance of the Traditional Ideology of Islam in Java* (Canberra: The Australian National University, 1980); M. Ali Haidar, *Nabdatul Ulama dan Islam di Indonesia: Pendekatan Fikih dalam Politik* (Jakarta: PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 1994).

<sup>16</sup> Woodward et al., "The Islamic Defenders Front."

<sup>17</sup> Andri Rosadi, *Hitam Putih FPI: Mengungkap Rabasia-rabasia Mencengangkan Ormas Keagamaan Paling Kntroversial* (Jakarta: Nun, 2008).

that participation in FPI's initiatives brings spiritual rewards.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, Ilyas, an active FPI member, noted that he was drawn to FPI because its ritual practices closely mirrored his own, and he observed that Madurese Muslims accept FPI because it does not introduce new rituals.<sup>19</sup> Mukhlis, another member from Pegantenan, concurred, noting that FPI's worship practices resonate with the Madurese cultural context.<sup>20</sup>

*Kyai* Jufri from Pademawu echoed this sentiment, emphasizing the alignment between local and FPI religious practices.<sup>21</sup> I met him after the *Subh* (dawn) prayer at his langgar, a traditional prayer space smaller than a mosque. The congregation, predominantly men, typically engage in discussions on various social topics, including local and broader issues, interspersed with laughter, a common trait in rural settings. Despite the informal atmosphere, the *kyai* remains the focal point of discussion, with attendees listening intently when he speaks. During our conversation about the proliferation of FPI and Salafism in Pamekasan, it became apparent that while most of the congregation was familiar with FPI, there was considerable confusion regarding the specific tenets of Salafism.

*Kyai* Jufri elaborated that FPI and NU share many similarities in their rituals and worship practices. He emphasized that the practices of FPI align closely with those of NU, although FPI tends to adopt a more rigid stance, especially in their approach to *amr ma'ruf naby munkar*. While *Kyai* Jufri acknowledged that such a hardline approach to preaching is not universally embraced, he conceded that it can be beneficial and sometimes necessary. He also took the opportunity to clarify the concept of Salafism, noting that many in his congregation were unfamiliar with it. According to *Kyai* Jufri, Salafis are akin to the Wahhabi community. When a congregant inquired if Salafis are identified by their beard, their practice of wearing pants above the ankles, or praying *Subh* (dawn) without *qunūt* (a specific supplication), with women often donning niqab, the *kyai* affirmed these characteristics. He expressed concern about the spread of Salafi teachings and advised his community to remain vigilant. *Kyai* Jufri simplified the distinction between NU's ahlussunnah waljamaah and Salafi teachings,

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<sup>18</sup> Interview with Muttaqin, November 30, 2019.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Ilyas, December 7, 2019.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Mukhlis, December 7, 2019.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Jufri, October 20, 2019.

using clear, relatable examples for his largely agricultural audience. Essentially, he highlighted that while Salafi teachings reject traditional Islamic practices, FPI remains aligned with these practices.

FPI is viewed as more accommodating in its religious practices compared to Salafi da'wa. They adopt similar rituals to those practiced by the NU-associated Muslim community in Pamekasan, though their methods of preaching differ. Hidayat,<sup>22</sup> who studied at a prominent *pesantren* in East Java, recounted his interactions with both Salafi and FPI adherents. The Salafi he spoke with contended that the worship practices in Pamekasan diverge from those prescribed by the Prophet Muḥammad. Despite Hidayat's attempt to explain the diversity of Islamic scholarly opinions, the Salafi remained adamant, leading Hidayat to realize the fundamental differences in their perspectives.

In contrast, Hidayat's FPI neighbor did not criticize local worship practices but was actively involved in religious customs, including Indonesian and Madurese traditions such as *mawlid* (celebration of the Prophet's birthday) and *ziyarah* (visits to saints' tombs for blessings). However, this neighbor maintained a stricter stance on community immorality, advocating for its elimination through either soft or forceful measures. Hidayat frequently observed his neighbor attending FPI meetings carrying a stick, and when inquired, the neighbor responded that he intended to confront and discipline those who resisted reform. While Hidayat found this approach to be excessively harsh, he accepted it due to the neighbor's non-critical view of his own community's worship practices.

Textually, FPI's theological stance aligns with that of the Salafists in that both adhere to religious teachings grounded in the Qur'an and Ḥadīth as interpreted by the *Salaf al-ṣāliḥ*. Nevertheless, in terms of worship and rituals, FPI, much like NU and other traditional Islamic groups, embraces a certain degree of local cultural and customary practices, which the Salafists firmly reject.

#### *Incentive for Eradicating Vice* (Nahy Munkar)

A significant impetus for individuals joining FPI is their mission to “enjoin good and prohibit evil.” As one FPI member highlighted, to foster a virtuous society, Muslims must engage in two pivotal actions: “enjoining the good” (*amr ma'ruf*) and “prohibiting the evil” (*na-*

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with Hidayat, October 5, 2019.

by *munkar*). This aligns with the Qur'anic directive: "You are the best of peoples ever raised up for mankind; you enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong, and you believe in Allah." Enjoining good (*amr ma'ruf*) involves promoting actions and behaviors that align with Islamic principles and draw individuals closer to God. Conversely, prohibiting evil (*nahy munkar*) entails refraining from and opposing activities that contravene Islamic law. This concept involves systematic efforts by Muslims to fully implement Islamic teachings and avert behaviors that undermine Islamic values.<sup>23</sup> Enjoining good can be achieved through wisdom (*hikmah*), sound advice (*maw'izah hasanah*), and compelling arguments, while prohibiting evil can be pursued through three methods based on prophetic tradition: using force to prevent injustice, resorting to verbal or written admonitions when force is impractical, and, as a last resort, personally rejecting corruption.<sup>24</sup>

This moral imperative is widely recognized among Indonesian Islamic groups, including FPI, though interpretations of its application vary. For FPI, "enjoining good and prohibiting evil" (*amr ma'ruf nahy munkar*) is closely associated with activities aimed at curbing immorality, such as raiding nightclubs, discotheques, and brothels to uphold religious and moral "norms" in society. While both aspects of the principle should be applied equally, FPI places a stronger emphasis on addressing perceived immorality (Shihab, 2008).<sup>25</sup>

FPI's emphasis on "prohibiting evil" (*nahy munkar*) is deliberate. Recently, many Muslims and organizations have concentrated more on "enjoining good" (*amr ma'ruf*) rather than "prohibiting evil" (*nahy munkar*), despite their complementary nature. Zubaidi, an FPI member and leader of a traditional *pesantren* in Kadur near Pamekasan, noted that promoting good deeds like prayer and charity is relatively straightforward and widely accepted. However, addressing and prohibiting immoral behaviors presents a greater challenge. He observed that most *kyai* focus on encouraging good deeds while providing less guidance on combating evil practices. Similarly, organizations like NU and Muhammadiyah are often seen as prioritizing "enjoining good"

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<sup>23</sup> Jajang Jahroni, *Defending the Majesty of Islam: Indonesia's Front Pembela Islam, 1998-2003* (Chiang Mai, Bangkok: Asian Muslim Action Network, 2008); Muhammad Rizieq Shihab, *Dialog FPI Amar Ma'ruf Nabi Munkar: Menjawab Berbagai Tuduhan terhadap Gerakan Nasional anti Ma'siat di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Pustaka Ibnu Sidah, 2008).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

through their educational and social initiatives.<sup>26</sup> Consequently, movements like FPI, which emphasize tackling immoral behavior, are welcomed for addressing this perceived gap in the practice of moral enforcement.

The FPI's dedication to fighting immorality stems from a belief in collective responsibility and the avoidance of divine retribution. According to Islamic teachings, even the most devout Muslims who faithfully observe religious duties can face Allah's punishment if they remain passive in the face of their fellow Muslims' immoral actions. This is grounded in a Qur'anic verse: "Beware of a trial that will not only affect the wrongdoers among you." This verse serves as a warning for Muslims to actively oppose immoral practices and behaviors around them. Allah's anger does not only target the wrongdoers but can extend to those who remain silent in the face of such sins. *Kyai* Ali Salim, the leader of FPI Pamekasan, emphasized this point during a large public lecture in East Waru, attended by thousands. He illustrated this with an example: if a woman goes to a market without properly covering her aurat (the parts of the body that should be covered according to Islam) and no one admonishes her, everyone present at the market is considered sinful. However, if someone steps up to correct her, the sin is lifted from everyone. Therefore, FPI's mission, according to *Kyai* Ali Salim, is to remind Muslims of their duty to prevent others from sinning, ensuring that the community remains in a state of divine favor.<sup>27</sup>

In Islamic legal doctrine, the FPI's initiative to "forbid evil" is classified as *fard kifayah*, or the communal moral obligations. This principle requires that the entire Muslim community collectively fulfill this duty. If enough individuals undertake this responsibility, the rest are relieved of their obligation to Allah. Should this communal responsibility fall short, each Muslim is required to step in to address the deficit. This concept is commonly used in contemporary Islamic discourse to address social duties, including aiding the needy, promoting good, and prohibiting evil.

In accordance with Islamic teachings, FPI emphasizes that it is every Muslim's duty to admonish those who engage in actions contrary to Islamic values, doing so in a manner consistent with prophetic tradition. Fahmi, a member of the Red Crescent, an FPI unit dedicat-

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with Zubaidi, December 13, 2019.

<sup>27</sup> Public Lecture, September 28, 2021.

ed to social and humanitarian efforts, expressed his commitment to FPI's mission, driven by its sacred purpose of combating immorality to avoid divine retribution.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Rofik, a street vendor who joined FPI in 2018, highlighted that it is an individual's responsibility to prevent societal deviations from Islamic principles. He remarked: "If I fail to 'prohibit evil' (*naby munkar*), I fear that on the Day of Judgment, Allah will question me about my inability to address these immoralities."<sup>29</sup>

Intervening to prevent fellow Muslims from immoral conduct is seen as a form of aid. *Habib* Rizieq Shihab, quoting Prophet Muḥammad, emphasized this principle: "'Support your brother, whether he is the wrongdoer or the wronged. Assisting the oppressed is straightforward, but how do we support someone who is an oppressor?' The Prophet answered, 'By preventing him from oppressing others.'"

*Habib* Rizieq Shihab further emphasized that individuals who engage in immoral actions are essentially inflicting harm upon themselves, and therefore require intervention from others to prevent further sin.<sup>30</sup>

In essence, FPI holds a prevailing belief that the issue of immoral behavior within society has not been adequately addressed by Muslims and Islamic organizations in Indonesia. FPI positions itself as addressing this gap by actively combating such behaviors. The organization maintains that if sin is not actively confronted, divine retribution will ultimately affect the entire community, impacting not only the wrongdoers but also the devout Muslims.

### *Reverence for Habib and Kyai*

One of the most compelling reasons for joining FPI is the respect and reverence for the *habib*, particularly *Habib* Rizieq Shihab. In fact, this respect might be the most potent motivator among all. *Habib* and *kyai*, who will be discussed further in a separate section, hold significant religious and social authority among Indonesian Muslims, especially within traditional circles, due to their profound religious knowledge. *Habib* are regarded as direct descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad, which endows them with both traditional and

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with Fahmi, October 2, 2019.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Rofik, November 8, 2019.

<sup>30</sup> Rosadi, *Hitan Putih FPI*.

charismatic forms of authority. According to Max Weber's classic framework, authority is defined as "the probability that certain specific commands (or all commands) will be obeyed by a given group of persons."<sup>31</sup> Weber identifies three types of authority: traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal. Traditional authority is "based on historical precedent and the belief in the legitimacy of long-standing practices." Charismatic authority stems from the extraordinary attributes or perceived qualities of leaders, while rational-legal authority is "grounded in a system of formal rules."<sup>32</sup> *Kyai* and *habib* are vested with both traditional and charismatic authority, leading to a strong expectation of compliance from their followers.

Although FPI was not solely established by him, *Habib* Rizieq Shihab has emerged as a central figure in the organization, serving as its chief ideologue and 'supreme leader' since its founding in 1998. His followers regard him as the 'grand Imam' of Indonesian Muslims, portraying him as a 'righteous' and 'courageous' leader committed to upholding Islam. *Habib* Rizieq Shihab portrays himself as a populist leader with a direct connection to the people.<sup>33</sup> In his speeches, he employs fluent Arabic and religious rhetoric to evoke strong emotions from his audience, frequently referencing his 'humble origins' to foster relatability. He also uses informal or colloquial language, often making jokes during rallies while addressing the 'evils' affecting Muslims worldwide.<sup>34</sup> His attire, typically symbolic white—a color representing purity in Islam—paired with either a green turban (symbolizing the color of Muhammad's shrine) or a white turban, underscores the 'purity' and 'truth' of his teachings.

*Habib* Rizieq Shihab is a member of the Hadrami-Sayyid lineage, specifically from the Syihab clan, which traces its ancestry to Ḥusayn b. 'Alī b. Abī Ṭalīb, the grandson of the Prophet Muḥammad.<sup>35</sup> His

<sup>31</sup> Michael Ryan, "Authority," in *Encyclopedia of Social Theory*, ed. George Ritzer (California: Sage Publications, 2005), 19.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ihsan Yilmaz and Greg Barton, "Populism, Violence, and Vigilantism in Indonesia: Rizieq Shihab and His Far-right Islamist Populism," *European Center for Populism Studies* (May 14, 2021), <https://www.populismstudies.org/populism-violence-and-vigilantism-in-indonesia-rizieqshihab-and-his-far-right-islamist-populism> (accessed May 7, 2021).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> A. Warman, "Habib Muhammad Rizieq bin Husein bin Syihab," in *27 Habaib Berpengaruh di Betawi; Kajian Intelektual dan Karya Sosial Habaib Betawi dari Abad ke-17 hingga Abad ke-21*, ed. R. Z. Kiki (Jakarta: Jakarta Islamic Center, 2020), 100-104.

followers hold him in high regard, believing that he embodies the blessings (*berkah*) of the Prophet and his family, and view honoring him as a form of honoring his esteemed forebears.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, his charisma is attributed to his perceived humility, piety, and genuine concern for others. His revered lineage and expertise in traditional Islamic studies endow him with what Bourdieu describes as religious “capital”—a form of symbolic capital that grants religious experts authority over religious practices and the administration of religious services.<sup>37</sup> According to Mirjam Lucking, the veneration of *habib* among the Madurese is rooted in a cultural preference for Arabness as the ideal for Islamic life.<sup>38</sup> This admiration is growing, driven by a fascination with contemporary Arabic religious practices, reflecting the historical influence of early Islamic missionaries from these regions and the longstanding connections between Indonesian Muslims and the Middle East, particularly through educational pursuits in Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Egypt.<sup>39</sup>

The positive image associated with *Habib* Rizieq Shihab has drawn many Muslims in Pamekasan to join FPI. For instance, *Kyai* Munif, the first leader of FPI in Pamekasan, stated that, apart from the goal of purifying Islamic teachings (the Qur’an), which have often been interpreted according to personal interests, his main motivation for establishing FPI in Pamekasan was his respect for *Habib* Rizieq Shihab as a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. He elaborated:

One day in December 1998, *Habib* Rizieq Shihab visited my *pesantren* and proposed establishing an FPI branch in Pamekasan. I accepted his offer without hesitation due to his status as a *habib* and a charismatic figure. Another reason was my commitment to defending Islam in its

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<sup>36</sup> Mark Woodward et al., “Ordering What is Right, Forbidding What is Wrong: Two Faces of Hadhrami Dakwah in Contemporary Indonesia,” *RIMA: Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs* 46, no. 2 (2012): 105-146.

<sup>37</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital”; Terry Rey, “Marketing the Goods of Salvation: Bourdieu on Religion,” *Religion* 34, no. 4 (2004): 331-343; David Swartz, “Bridging the Study of Culture and Religion: Pierre Bourdieu’s Political Economy of Symbolic Power,” *Sociology of Religion* 57, no. 1 (1996): 71-85.

<sup>38</sup> Mirjam Lucking, “Beyond Islam Nusantara and ‘Arabization’: Capitalizing ‘Arabness’ in Madura, East Java,” *ASIEN: The German Journal on Contemporary Asia* 4, no. 137 (2016): 5-24.

<sup>39</sup> Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern Ulama’ in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004).

true form. I am deeply disappointed that many Muslims interpret the Qur'an and Ḥadīth based on their personal desires, thereby distorting Islamic teachings. Therefore, I am determined to defend Islam through FPI. By defending Islam, Allah will elevate the quality of humanity.<sup>40</sup>

*Kyai* Munif believes that *Habib* Rizieq Shihab possesses spiritual power, attributing the *habib's* visit to his house to divine revelation and guidance from Allah rather than to *Habib* Rizieq's own volition:

I believe that his visit to my house was guided by Allah. Who am I? I merely run a small *pesantren* with a limited number of students, yet a *Habib* approached me and asked me to lead FPI. This could not have been his own decision. It felt as if a divine guide had come directly to my home. It was a tremendous honor for me.<sup>41</sup>

Similarly, *Ustadh* Halim, an FPI member, believes that *Habib* Rizieq Shihab, being a descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad, carries a divine blessing (*berkah*). To attain this blessing, he decided to join FPI.<sup>42</sup> The term *berkah* (or *baraka*) refers to “a beneficent force of divine origin, which brings superabundance in the physical realm, prosperity, and happiness in the psychic sphere.”<sup>43</sup> It is typically associated with “prosperity, luck, fulfillment, plenitude, and extraordinary power.”<sup>44</sup> Divine blessings can manifest at specific moments or places and can be found in holy individuals such as *habib*, sufi, and living saints (*wali*), as well as in sacred artifacts, deceased saints, and shrines.<sup>45</sup> These blessings are considered the key to happiness in both this world and the hereafter. For many, the abundance of *berkah* is more valuable than wealth, as wealth without *berkah* is seen as ultimately leading to misery. This blessing is believed to be attainable only through loving and following the righteous path and teachings.

*Ustadh* Halim joined FPI shortly after its establishment by *Habib* Rizieq Shihab in Jakarta in 1998. He explained, “I became interested in FPI to seek blessings (*berkah*) from *Habib* Rizieq Shihab. Moreover,

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<sup>40</sup> Interview with *Kyai* Munif, February 8, 2020.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Interview with *Ustadh* Halim, October 25, 2019.

<sup>43</sup> Rijal, “Following Arab Saints.”

<sup>44</sup> Liyakat N. Takim, *The heirs of the Prophet: Charisma and Religious Authority in Shi'ite Islam* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2012), 45.

<sup>45</sup> Josef W. Meri, “Aspects of *Baraka* (Blessings) and Ritual Devotion among Medieval Muslims and Jews,” *Medieval Encounters* 5, no. 1 (1999): 46-69.

FPI's programs directly impact the community through activities such as house renovations, building wells for residents during droughts, and aiding natural disaster victims." Despite having to leave his job at a bakery to fully commit to FPI, he was still able to support his family and build houses for his family. He believes that for those who rely on Allah and defend Islam, Allah will provide sustenance from unexpected sources. He attributes his prosperity in life to the blessings of *Habib* Rizieq Shihab.<sup>46</sup>

In addition to the support from the general Muslim community, the backing of local religious leaders has significantly contributed to the growth of FPI in Pamekasan. According to *Habib* Rizieq Shihab, the primary supporters of FPI are the *ulama*, *kyai*, and *Ustadh* who provide religious teachings across various mosques and villages without expecting material rewards. They have a longstanding relationship with the *habib*.<sup>47</sup>

*Habib* Rizieq Shihab's strategic approach has proven successful. Many individuals have joined or sympathize with FPI, enhancing both the organization's and *Habib* Rizieq's influence. Furthermore, *Habib* Rizieq Shihab and FPI have been pivotal in promoting sharia-based local regulations. On 21 September 2000, at Pesantren Banyu Anyar Pamekasan, they established the 'Enforcement Committee of Islamic Sharia,' which has four main objectives: to develop a vision and mission statement for the enforcement of Islamic Sharia in Indonesia, to promote Islamic Sharia comprehensively to the public, to systematically codify Islamic Sharia legislation, and to pursue constitutional efforts for its enforcement.

Over the past decade, *Habib* Rizieq Shihab's popularity has surged as an advocate for Islamic issues. Notably, he successfully mobilized the Islamic defensive protest movements known as 411 and 212, which took place in Jakarta on 4 November and 2 December 2016, respectively. These protests, which some observers described as aggressive, aimed to prosecute Ahok [Basuki Cahaya Purnama], the former Christian Governor of Jakarta, for allegedly insulting Islam during a campaign speech. Following his pilgrimage to Mecca, *Habib* Rizieq Shihab went into exile in Saudi Arabia from 2017 to 2020, which many in Pamekasan, especially FPI members, believed was to avoid criminalization by the Indonesian government for his political

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<sup>46</sup> Interview with *Ustadh* Halim, October 25, 2019.

<sup>47</sup> Jahroni, *Defending the Majesty of Islam*.

activities. FPI followers in Pamekasan organized numerous marches in Arek Lancor park, demanding that the Jokowi regime allow *Habib Rizieq Shihab* to return from exile. During these rallies, the crowd chanted “*takbir*” (*Allāh Akbar*/Allah the greatest) and cheered *Habib Rizieq Shihab*’s name.

Even while living in exile, *Habib Rizieq Shihab*’s influence was palpable during the 2019 Presidential election. His photos adorned many billboards of opposition party candidates in Pamekasan, symbolizing his role as their spiritual guardian. His endorsement of the Prabowo-Sandi ticket was instrumental in their landslide victory in the area, where they garnered 83.77 percent of the vote compared to the mere 16.23 percent for Jokowi-Ma’ruf. According to Burhani, the reverence for *Habib Rizieq Shihab* among the people of Pamekasan was a key factor why many NU followers in Madura ignored directives from NU leaders to support Jokowi. Although Muslims in Madura are dedicated NU members, they tend to align more with its ‘conservative faction’ or ‘FPI faction,’ unlike their counterparts in Java.<sup>48</sup> It’s important to note that despite FPI’s success in Pamekasan, Jokowi ultimately won the national election.

### *Honorific Regard for Kyai*

In addition to the reverence for *Habib Rizieq Shihab*, the deference shown to *kyai* is another motivation for joining FPI. As explained in Chapter Two, *kyai* occupy the second highest stratum in the Madurese social system, just below parents and family. The significant role and socio-religious influence of *kyai* can be attributed to three primary virtues. First, they hold a high social and religious status due to their extensive religious knowledge and are often descendants of prominent *kyai*.<sup>49</sup> Many are from noble family lineages in Madura, with numerous descendants of Adikoro (one of the rulers of Pamekasan in the eighteenth century) becoming ulama in regions like Sumberanyar, Banyuanyar, Batuampar, and Tattango. They are also believed to be descendants of Sunan Giri and Sunan Bonang (two of the nine founding Javanese saints or *wali*) and Pangeran Asmoro, a king

<sup>48</sup> Ahmad Najib Burhani, “Lessons from Madura: NU, Conservatism and the 2019 Presidential Election,” *Perspective*, no. 72 (2019): 9.

<sup>49</sup> Kuntowijoyo, *Perubaban Sosial dalam Masyarakat Agraris: Madura, 1850-1940* (Yogyakarta: Matabangsa, 2002); Zainuddin Syarif, “Mitos Nilai-nilai Kepatuhan Santri,” *TADRIS: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 7, no. 1 (2013): 19-30.

of Mataram.<sup>50</sup> Second, they possess extensive social and community networks, with their broad family or marriage connections enhancing their overall standing in the community. Third, they have access to a dedicated religious congregation, particularly students who study Islamic knowledge in their *pesantren*.

The role and social function of *kyai* within socio-religious life is quite complex. They can position themselves as religious teachers in their *pesantren* and as religious leaders of the wider society, in their roles as preachers at the mosque, as leader of congregational prayers, and performing *tahlilan* or *slametan*. As social servants, *kyai* have become points of reference for public decision-making, are sought out for their guidance, and are generally obeyed by Muslims in Madura. Students' allegiance to their *kyai* is sometimes considered beyond the limits of what is reasonable; they may not only refuse to challenge the *kyai*, but also believe sincerely in the *kyai*'s every deed and word.<sup>51</sup> Opposing the *kyai* is regarded as 'barbaric', and the *kyai*'s anger may lead to 'bad luck' and a great misfortune. As a result, conflict with a *kyai* is best avoided as it will inevitably cause difficulty and shame for those who challenge their authority. The *kyai* is considered extraordinary in his ability to translate religious messages into local contexts and traditions. They not only convey religious values, but also generates the process to direct local attitudes and to transform the general orientation of the congregation. Their influence can extend to the social, cultural and political fields, which are technically beyond their capacity as solely religious figures.

Many *kyai* hold important positions in the leadership and the board of FPI Pamekasan. Most are linked to Sarekat Islam, and only a small number are affiliated to NU. *Kyai* Munif Sayuthi, the principal of *Pesantren* At-Tauhid Panempan was the founder and the first leader of FPI in Pamekasan Madura. The current leader of FPI, *Kyai* Ali Salim, is the principal of *Pesantren* Al-Islah, Bringin, Angsanah, Palengaan. *Kyai* Ali Salim, and while not formally involved in politics, he has expressed his support and voted for Islamic parties to advance Muslim interests. In the 2018 Pamekasan municipal elections, he en-

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<sup>50</sup> Yanwar Pribadi, "Religious Networks in Madura: Pesantren, Nahdlatul Ulama, and Kiai as the Core of Santri Culture," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 51, no. 1 (2013): 1-32.

<sup>51</sup> Syamsu Budiyanti, Hotman M. Siahaan and Kris Nugroho, "Social Communication Relation of Madurese People in Max Weber Rationality Perspective," *Jurnal Studi Komunikasi* 4, no. 2 (2020): 389-409.

dorsed Badrut Tamam and his endorsement and campaign speech swayed the community to vote for Badrut Tamam. In fact, the victory of Badrut Tamam in the election was partially attributed to the support of *Kyai* Ali Salim.

Another *kyai* who has significantly contributed to the development of FPI in Pamekasan is *Lora Aziz*, the current Commander of the LPI, the paramilitary wing of FPI. He is the Principal of *Pesantren Al-Inayah Sumber Batu* and a former General-Secretary of the FKM Pamekasan, an organization predominantly composed of *lora*. During my visit to his *pesantren*, I observed the tauhid phrase ‘*Lā ilāh illā Allāh Muḥammad Rasūl Allāh*’ (There is no deity but God; Muḥammad is the messenger of God), similar to the *tawḥīd* flag of FPI, prominently displayed on a large wall. To meet him, I had to request permission from the *pesantren* guards, a group of young individuals dressed in white attire with the FPI logo on their chests. While waiting for *Lora Aziz*, who was attending a Thursday night lecture, I conversed with the young guards and discovered they were his students and also involved in FPI. After an hour, *Lora Aziz* arrived on a motorbike, wearing a white cloak and turban, and we discussed FPI and LPI. He also introduced me to several FPI figures in Pamekasan.

Dhofier describes the overwhelming influence of *kyais* over their students, families, neighbors, and the surrounding community by likening the *kyai* to a king. *Kyai* are portrayed as monarchs, leaders of their kingdom (*pesantren*), and the relationship between the *kyai* and his *santri* or alumni can be characterized as a strong patron-client relationship.<sup>52</sup> This denotes a relationship between individuals of higher rank, wealth, and power with those of lesser status and influence.<sup>53</sup> This unequal relationship tends to be exploitative,<sup>54</sup> leading to dominance-legitimacy dynamics.<sup>55</sup> As the inferior group in this power dynamic, *santri* seek the *kyai*’s blessings and teachings, which results in their obedience and loyalty to the *kyai* as the superior authority figure.

*Ustadh* Herman, the Vice Head of Cadre Development of FPI Pamekasan, emphasizes that the devotion to *kyai* is a key motivation

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<sup>52</sup> Dhofier, *The Pesantren Tradition*.

<sup>53</sup> Budiyanti et al., “Social Communication Relation of Madurese People.”

<sup>54</sup> James C. Scott, “Patron-client Politics and Political Change in Southeast Asia,” *The American Political Science Review* 66, no. 1 (1972): 91-113.

<sup>55</sup> Georges Depeyrot, “Economy and Society,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine*, ed. Noel Lenski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 226-252.

for joining FPI. I met him at the FPI office on Mandilaras Street in Pamekasan, situated on the second floor of a shopping center near Asy-Syifa hospital. The walls of the office were adorned with photographs of prominent FPI figures, with the largest and most striking being of *Habib* Rizieq Shihab. There was also a photograph of *Habib* Bahar, a younger figure idolized by the FPI youth. In a casual setting, while drinking coffee and smoking, *Ustadh* Herman explained that *kyai* are instrumental in engaging Muslims with FPI. When a *kyai* is active in FPI, their students, alumni, and families naturally follow, believing in the *kyai*'s beneficial actions.<sup>56</sup>

*Ustadh* Halim, the head of Hisbah (the FPI division responsible for enjoining good and forbidding evil), shared the same view, asserting that if a *kyai* or teacher joins FPI, their *santri* and alumni will likely follow suit or at least become sympathizers. This sentiment was echoed by students from various *pesantrens* whom I met at FPI activities. Sihab, a 20-year-old from the Palengaan district, actively participates in many FPI activities because he believes in the goodness of the *kyai*'s endorsements, although he insists that joining FPI was his personal decision.<sup>57</sup>

Another student, Mukhlis, from *Lora Aziz's pesantren*, admitted that his decision to join FPI was influenced by *Lora Aziz*. He stated, "I follow what the *kyai/lora* says. If he asks me to go west, I will go west. If he requests me to go east, I will go east. Essentially, I will obey what the *kyai/lora* says, including participating in FPI".<sup>58</sup> This illustrates the high level of subservience to an admired *kyai*. Sulaiman, another student from Kador who also joined FPI due to *Lora Aziz*, mentioned feeling guilty if he did not join FPI or encourage his friends to join as well. However, the decision to join FPI is not always straightforward. Sutrisno first learned about FPI while studying at a *pesantren* in the Palengaan subdistrict, Pamekasan. His family initially disapproved of his decision, viewing FPI as a radical organization known for rallies and demonstrations. Over time, they came to support his choice after understanding that FPI also engages in social community programs.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Interview with *Ustadh* Herman, October 5, 2019.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Sihab, October 3, 2019.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Mukhlis, December 7, 2019.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Sulaiman, October 13, 2019.

The growth of FPI in Pamekasan is undeniably tied to the backing of *kyais* and *habibs*, as well as the involvement of *pesanteren* and their *santri*. While these are not the sole factors contributing to FPI's popularity, they constitute the core foundation for FPI membership in Pamekasan. The majority of FPI militants are either current students or alumni of *pesanteren*, institutions that are typically led by a *kyai*.

### The Cultivation of Members Through Religious Study

FPI organizes a variety of programs to empower its members, prominently featuring weekly religious study sessions held at the homes of FPI members. While these sessions are officially intended for FPI members, they are open to the public, and non-members may also be invited to speak if their views are consistent with FPI's principles. During my fieldwork, I attended three such sessions. The first invitation came from *Ustadh* Halim, the head of Hisbah (the FPI division responsible for enjoining good and forbidding evil). This session offered a comprehensive view of a typical FPI program, commencing with the recitation of *ṣalamāt* led by a *kyai*, *habib*, or *lora*. The second segment involved religious discourse and discussion, designed to enhance members' understanding of their faith and spiritual fervor. The final segment focused on disseminating information about FPI's programs.

The second activity I observed was a public *ṣalamāt* council hosted at the home of *Habib* Faishol, a prominent member of Pamekasan FPI's religious elite. This event, like all *ṣalamāt* assemblies, began with the recital of Surah Yasin followed by the tahlil and *ṣalamāt* to Prophet Muḥammad, based on the book *Simt al-Durar*. This book, which includes a poem written by *Habib* 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Ḥabshī (1843-1915), a notable *habib* from Hadramaut, Yemen, is traditionally recited during *Mawlid* celebrations. The event continued with *Ṣalamāt qiyām*, where attendees recite *ṣalamāt* while standing. This ritual created a deeply devotional atmosphere, with participants swaying and moving, some more energetically than others. The room was filled with the fragrance of incense, and two individuals moved around with perfume containers, spraying the scent onto attendees' hands or clothing in honor of the Prophet Muḥammad, believed to be present during the *Ṣalamāt qiyām*. This was followed by a brief religious speech and concluded with a short prayer led by a *habib* in a white robe. Although

these events are open to the public, they predominantly attract dedicated FPI members.<sup>60</sup>



**Figure 1.** FPI's *Ṣalamāt* Council.<sup>61</sup>

The third event was a public religious gathering (Tabligh Akbar or great *tablīgh*) held in a large field to accommodate a substantial audience. This gathering attracted not only FPI members but also the general public interested in the event. Tabligh Akbar aims to increase FPI membership by sharing general information about the organization and delivering religious lectures. Zein, a university student in Pamekasan, attended due to his admiration for the *habib*, and after engaging with FPI members, he became a sympathizer of the organization.

The gathering is often held in conjunction with Islamic events and celebrations of FPI's anniversary, drawing large numbers of local elites and FPI sympathizers. These events highlight FPI's influence by showcasing the number of supporters in Pamekasan. Key FPI figures and their supporters deliver speeches to inspire the crowds and encourage them to remain committed to defending FPI and addressing issues affecting Muslims. They essentially promote the idea of using FPI as a vehicle to advance a particular interpretation of Islam.

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<sup>60</sup> Observation, November 17, 2019.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

One notable event was the Tabligh Akbar held on the third anniversary of the establishment of the FPI/LPI branch office in Proppo and the 22nd anniversary of FPI nationally. This event, held on Monday, August 10, 2020, at the Kebun Sari Panagguan village *pesantren* in Proppo subdistrict, was attended by numerous senior *kyai*, including *Habib* Idrus bin Ali Alhabsy, KH (*Kyai Haji*) Awit Masyhuri, KH Abuya Ali Karrar Shinhaji (the head of the Madura Ulama Alliance), the chief commander of FPI Madura (KH Abd Aziz Syahid), *Habib* Faisal Alami, KH Ali Zainal Abidin, KH Imam Romli, KH Muh Ali Salim, KH Umar Hamdan Ali Kartal, KH Mausul Mujib, KH Syamhari, KH Subaidi, KH Suyuti, Proppo Sakera Soldiers, and KH Sarkasi Musleh. These prominent figures addressed the crowd, delivering speeches to motivate and unify the attendees.

KH Idrus Al Habsyi, in his speech, urged the audience to remain steadfast in defending Islam and to consistently follow the guidance of *Habib* Rizieq. He emphasized the precariousness of the current era, likening it to holding a flame that can easily ignite if one is careless. He asserted that entering heaven (*surga*) requires patience and relentless effort in upholding Allah's religion. To navigate these challenges, he advised that humans must maintain their faith, believe in Allah, and strive to die as Muslims. He further argued that Indonesia is currently engaging in tyrannical actions, with *ulama* facing discrimination, exemplified by the alleged government ban on activist *Habib* Rizieq Shihab's return to Indonesia. However, these claims lack evidence, as the Indonesian government has never officially barred *Habib* Rizieq Shihab from returning. Such provocative narratives accusing the government of tyranny are increasingly propagated by FPI leaders to incite opposition among the masses, portraying the government as failing to protect Islam and Muslims in Indonesia.

The religious studies organized by FPI serve not only for religious doctrinal transformation but also to strengthen solidarity among its members. Solidarity is fostered when individuals perceive shared experiences, values, religion, and interests, thereby forming a cohesive social and religious identity. This identity is cultivated and reinforced through community interactions, with public gatherings and lectures serving as the primary mediums for recruitment and unity.

## Conclusion

It can be concluded that FPI, as a religious organization, enjoys substantial acceptance within the Muslim community of Madura, particularly in Pamekasan. Its events and activities attract large audiences from various societal sectors. FPI members can be broadly categorized into three groups: elites, ordinary Muslims, and sympathizers. The elite group comprises *kyai* and FPI board members, while the ordinary members include students and the general public. Sympathizers come from diverse backgrounds, such as farmers, sailors, employees, academics, and other members of society.

FPI's capacity to draw adherents from Pamekasan society can be attributed to three principal factors: ideological alignment, moral commitment, and deference to *kyai*. The organization's alignment with the ideological and religious practices of traditional Muslim groups, who constitute the majority in Pamekasan, serves as a significant attraction. Additionally, FPI's commitment to the principle of 'enjoining good and prohibiting evil' resonates deeply with many, especially given their emphasis on the latter through a stringent preaching approach. This focus appeals to Muslims and Muslim organizations that perceive other religious leaders as overly fixated on 'enjoining good' while neglecting the prohibition of evil. The support from *kyai* and *habib* within FPI stands out as a critical motivator, as their social and religious authority compels their followers to align with FPI out of reverence and adherence to their guidance.

As a result, FPI has developed considerable cultural and social capital, positioning itself as a legitimate religious movement within Pamekasan's evolving religious context. Furthermore, its prominent militant arm is effectively mobilized to advocate the principle of 'prohibiting evil' by targeting perceived immorality. The influential role of *kyai* within FPI also facilitates cooperation with other entities to advance Islamist programs, particularly those concerning the implementation of shariah-based local regulations. The concept of religious capital plays a crucial role in FPI's success. Most FPI leaders, being prominent heads of *pesantren*, embody cultural capital, enabling them to monopolize religious authority, advocate their agenda among the laity, and offer religious services and products central to the cultural and spiritual lives of Pamekasan's population.

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