

**VEILED LABOR:
HOW ARAB NATIONALISM AND ISLAMIC REFORMIST
MOVEMENTS ERASED WOMEN'S REPRODUCTIVE
AUTHORITY IN TUAREG (BERBER) AND MINANGKABAU
SOCIETIES**

A Thesis

**Submitted to the Master's Study Program of Islamic Studies at the
Faculty of Islamic Studies in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of**

Master of Arts (M.A.)



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2025

ABSTRACT

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While scholarship on Islamic reformist movements—such as the *Sanusi* among the Tuareg and the *Padri* among the Minangkabau—has long emphasized their role in consolidating orthodox religious authority and purifying local Islamic practices, comparatively little attention has been paid to how these reforms systematically devalued and erased forms of reproductive labor that were historically central to Muslim women’s social, economic, and spiritual authority. Existing studies have primarily framed these movements as doctrinal or political responses to colonial encroachment and local heterodoxy, yet they often neglect the ways in which the daily, embodied labors of women—in kinship, birth, ritual, and transmission of indigenous Islamic knowledge—constituted a foundational, self-evident architecture of community life that posed an implicit challenge to patriarchal religious hierarchies. This paper argues that the imposition of reformist orthodoxy in both the Tuareg and the Minangkabau contexts cannot be disentangled from a broader project of Arab nationalist and patriarchal consolidation, which actively obliterated the sacred economies of reproductive labor as sites of indigenous women’s epistemic agency. By tracing how the *Sanusi* and *Padri* movements reframed local gender norms under the banner of a purified Islam, this study demonstrates that what has been upheld as ‘authentic’ Islam is historically a patriarchal reinterpretation—one that privileges male authority and marginalizes women’s central roles in sustaining Islamic *ummah* through their reproductive labor. Grounded in existing anthropological and historical scholarship and framed through decolonial and Islamic feminist theory, this paper contributes to scholarship on Islamic reform by demonstrating how patriarchal movements such as the *Sanusi* and the *Padri* obliterated forms of reproductive authority that sustained Muslim women’s cultural and spiritual labor. As such, this research highlights that such erasure was not incidental but integral to the imposition of patrilineal *nasab* over matrilineal or matrifocal/matriarchal systems that had long defined Tuareg and Minangkabau social structures. By tracing how the ideological labor of reformist orthodoxy concealed and devalued these indigenous forms of reproductive authority, this study exposes the historical contingency of ‘orthodoxy’ itself. Rather than accepting Islam as a static, patrilineal inheritance, this paper situates it as a contested terrain where the suppression of matrilineal inheritance must be recognized as a deliberate strategy to consolidate patriarchal religious and genealogical power.

Keywords: Islamic Reform, Patriarchy, Tuareg, Minangkabau, Reproductive Labor/Authority

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INTRODUCTION

While much of the scholarship on Islamic reform movements in Tuareg and Minangkabau societies has focused on doctrinal purification, legal revivalism, or anti-colonial mobilization, far less attention has been paid to the ways these reformations enacted a genealogical realignment that privileged Arab patrilineal descent (*nasab*) as both theologically authoritative and politically legitimate.¹ In both the *Sanusi* movement among the Tuareg and the *Padri* movement in Minangkabau, the push toward religious ‘purity’ was bound not only to matters of belief and ritual, but also to the restructuring of kinship. That is, the imposition of a particular model of Muslim genealogy (rooted in Arab male descent and in the rejection of locally embedded, often matrilineal or matrifocal systems) was central to the ideological labor of Islamic reform. In classical Islamic tradition, *nasab* (patrilineal genealogical descent) is the core category. The Prophet Muhammad's own descent from the Quraysh and the elaborate care with which his lineage was preserved and invoked (despite through his female descendant and no male descendants), imbued Arab genealogy with lasting spiritual and political capital in Muslim societies.² While the Qur'an does not strictly prescribe patrilineality as the only legitimate form of descent, Islamic legal traditions increasingly codified lineage through the

¹ Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern "Ulam?" in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (University of Hawaii Press, 2004); Christine Dobbin, "Economic Change in Minangkabau as a Factor in the Rise of the *Padri* Movement, 1784-1830," *Indonesia* 23 (April 1977): 1, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3350883>; Taufik Abdullah, "Adat and Islam: An Examination of Conflict in Minangkabau," *Indonesia*, no. 2 (1966): 1-24, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3350753>; E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949); Ali Abdullatif Ahmida, *The Making of Modern Libya: State Formation, Colonization, and Resistance, 1830-1932*, SUNY Series in the Social and Economic History of the Middle East (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994); Knud Holmboe, *Desert Encounter: An Adventurous Journey through Italian Africa* (London [etc.]: G. G. Harrap & company Ltd, 1936).

² Wilferd Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad: A Study of The Early Caliphate* (Cambridge: University Press, 1997); Patricia Crone, *God's Rule - Government and Islam: Six Centuries of Medieval Islamic Political Thought* (Columbia University Press, 2004); Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); Michael Gilks, *Recognizing Islam: Religion and Society in the Modern Middle East*, Revised edition. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000); Marion Holmes Katz, *The Birth of The Prophet Muhammad: Devotional Piety in Sunni Islam*, Culture and Civilization in the Middle East 11 (London; Routledge, 2007).

father, especially in matters of inheritance, guardianship, and tribal belonging.³ This codification positioned patriliney not merely as normative, but as divine will, embedded in *fiqh* and reinforced in *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth* collections. By the 18th and 19th centuries, as Islamic reformist movements gained strength across the Muslim world, *nasab* became a signifier of both religious authenticity and modernization. Particularly in peripheral societies with complex kinship formations—such as the matrilineal Minangkabau or the dual-descent Tuareg—reformists treated these local configurations as corruptions, or at best concessions to pre-Islamic custom (*ʿurf*) in need of correction. It is this conflation of theological authenticity with Arab patrilineality that constitutes the ideological engine of reform.

Founded in the early 19th century by Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Sanūsī, the *Sanusi* order emerged as a trans-Saharan Islamic revivalist movement that combined Sufi spirituality with rigorous legalism and tribal governance. While rooted in Cyrenaica (eastern Libya), the *Sanusi* spread rapidly into Saharan trade routes and tribal networks, including among Tuareg communities in southern Algeria, Mali, and Niger. While the *Sanusi* claimed universal Islamic authority, their model of legitimacy relied heavily on Arab genealogical capital. Al-Sanūsī traced his spiritual and blood lineage to the Prophet and established a hierarchy of teaching that privileged lineal descent, textual mastery, and obedience to Arab leadership structures. Though nominally Sufi, the order shared many reformist affinities with Wahhabism, including its antipathy toward local religious intermediaries—roles often fulfilled by Tuareg women through poetry, healing, and social adjudication.⁴ Crucially, Tuareg society, particularly among the Kel Tamasheq, had long structured authority through dual or even female-dominant descent

³ Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and The Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*, 11. print (Cambridge, Mass.: Perseus Books, 2002); Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond The Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Muslim Society*, New edition., Saqi Essentials (London: Saqi Books, 2011).

⁴ Susan J. Rasmussen, *The Poetics and Politics of Tuareg Aging: Life Course and Personal Destiny In Niger* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009); Susan J. Rasmussen, *Spirit Possession and Personhood among the Kel Ewey Tuareg*, Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology 94 (Cambridge: University Press, 1995).

systems, where maternal lines governed land rights, spiritual inheritance, and social adjudication.⁵ According to Susan Rasmussen (2009), Tuareg noble women historically performed vital ritual functions: composing epics, mediating between clans, and ensuring continuity of ancestral rites.⁶ The *Sanusi*'s entrance into Tuareg territories coincided with a deliberate delegitimization of this spiritual labor, casting women's ritual authority as syncretic, tribal, and non-Islamic. Instead, religious legitimacy became linked to Arabic literacy, Qur'anic memorization, and male leadership grounded in Arab patrilineal genealogy.

The *Padri* movement in Minangkabau (ca. 1803–1837) constitutes one of the most profound cases of Islamic reform intersecting with genealogical reordering. Inspired by Wahhabi revivalism, *Padri* leaders—many of whom had studied in Mecca and Medina—returned to Sumatra armed with a reformist vision to abolish syncretic practices and impose a stricter interpretation of Islam. Scholars have detailed how the *Padri* rejected local Sufi rituals, outlawed tobacco and gambling, and sought to align Minangkabau Islam more closely with Hijazi norms.⁷ What has been less discussed, however, is how these reforms targeted the very foundations of matrilineal kinship. Minangkabau society, unique among Muslim-majority communities, is matriarchal; land, house, and clan names are passed through female lines, and women play a central role in ritual, economic, and political life—particularly through the cultural symbolic core of the *Bundo Kanduang*.⁸ This figure, embedded in both *adat* and Islamic practices, mediated sacred and familial obligations, functioning as a genealogical

⁵ Rasmussen, *Spirit Possession and Personhood among the Kel Ewey Tuareg*.

⁶ Rasmussen, *The Poetics and Politics of Tuareg Aging*.

⁷ Christine Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism in a Changing Peasant Economy: Central Sumatra, 1784-1847* (London: Routledge, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315398181>; Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia*; Jeffrey Hadler, "A Historiography of Violence and the Secular State in Indonesia: Tuanku Imam Bondjol and the Uses of History," *Journal of Asian Studies* 67, no. 3 (August 1, 2008): 971–1010, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911808001228>; Abdullah, "Adat and Islam"; Michael Francis Laffan, *The Makings of Indonesian Islam: Orientalism and the Narration of a Sufi Past*, Princeton Studies in Muslim Politics (Princeton [N.J.]; Oxford [England]: Princeton University Press, 2011).

⁸ Peggy Reeves Sanday, *Women at the Center: Life in a Modern Matriarchy* (Cornell University Press, 2002); A. A. Navis, *Alam Takambang Jadi Guru: Adat dan Kebudayaan Minangkabau* (Grafiti Pers, 1984).

anchor and moral authority. The *Padri* movement, through its conflation of Islamic orthodoxy with Arab genealogical ideals, de-theologized this female authority. Reformist texts and sermons dismissed matrilineal inheritance as mere *adat*, permissible only insofar as it did not contravene *syara'*. In practice, this meant replacing female-led kinship structures with male-headed nuclear family models, promoting patrilineal religious instruction, and introducing the male-led Qur'anic schools that would become standard under later Dutch and postcolonial state Islam. The concept of *nasab* was explicitly mobilized, undermining the Minangkabau logic of mothers at the center of clan-based solidarity and reinscribed Islamic identity through a masculinist lens. Thus, the material circulation of Islamic legitimacy functioned as a socio-spiritual conversion. It was not merely Islamization, but Arabization of religious authority, in which matrilineal epistemologies were obscured. The connection between these reforms and Arab nationalism may not be immediately obvious, particularly in the *Padri* case, which predates the emergence of 20th-century Arab nationalist movements. However, this study follows the existing scholarship on Islamic reformism as the intellectual and genealogical prelude to later Arab nationalist projects.⁹

By the mid-20th century, these genealogical preferences became formalized in nationalist Islamic discourse overwhelmingly privileging male clerics, Arabized curricula, and patrilineal family models.¹⁰ The centralization of male religious authority is always linked to a deeper epistemic project: who is authorized to interpret, to transmit, and to belong.¹¹ Despite the success of these reformist projects, genealogical alternatives persist. In Tuareg oral histories

⁹ Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); Ahmad S. Dallal, *Islam, Science, and the Challenge of History*, The Terry Lectures (New Haven, [Conn: Yale University Press, 2010); Wael B. Hallaq, *Sharī'a: Theory, Practice, Transformations* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

¹⁰ Nadjé Sadig Al-Ali, *Secularism, Gender and the State in the Middle East: The Egyptian Women's Movement*, Cambridge Middle East Studies 14 (Cambridge: University Press, 2000); Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton University Press, 2011), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvct00cf>.

¹¹ Mernissi, *The Veil and The Male Elite*.

and Minangkabau rituals, fragments of female-centered authority remain.¹² What this reveals is that patriliney is not a universal Islamic inheritance, but a historicized ideological imposition, often framed as theological necessity or even divine order. The fact that the Qur'an itself leaves room for diverse kinship configurations suggests that the dominance of *nasab* in reformist discourse is less scriptural than political.¹³ Rather than treating *nasab* as divinely fixed, this research historicizes it as a malleable concept instrumentalized by reformist ideologies, often underpinned by latent or explicit Arab nationalism.

RESEARCHER'S POSITIONALITY

Following Donna Haraway's notion of situated knowledge (1988), I write as a Minangkabau woman who has inherited fragments of matriarchal pride and female piety through *adat* rituals as well as Qur'anic verses recited through the tongue of my foremothers.¹⁴ My position is one of both insider and critic; inhabiting the intimate terrain where kinship, Islam, and womanhood have historically intersected in deeply ambivalent ways. This positionality offers critical advantages but also demands vigilance. On one hand, I am the inheritor of a social formation where the institution of the *Bundo Kanduang*—the elder maternal authority—still exists, often within families and village councils, though increasingly evacuated of its once-formidable ritual and epistemic powers. On the other hand, I am also a product of Islamic schooling, postcolonial education, and global feminist discourse which has shaped my theoretical imagination. But also, risk distancing me from the tacit, intuitive knowledge systems carried by my foremothers.

¹² Rasmussen, *The Poetics and Politics of Tuareg Aging*; Sanday, *Women at the Center*.

¹³ Asma Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an*, Revised edition (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2019).

¹⁴ Donna Haraway's (1988) notion of situated knowledge asserts that all knowledge is partial and shaped by the researcher's specific social and embodied position, demanding transparent acknowledgment of one's standpoint to produce more accountable and credible scholarship. Chandra Mohanty (2003) reinforces this by showing that without clarifying positionality, researchers risk reproducing colonial and hegemonic narratives, making self-location an ethical necessity for decolonial, feminist inquiry. See Haraway's *Situated Knowledge* and Mohanty's *Feminism without Borders*.

I do not claim objectivity in the positivist sense. Rather, I claim positional clarity: my interpretation of reproductive labor and genealogical erasure is shaped by my cultural embeddedness in the very community I study, and by my training in Islamic feminism, decolonial studies, and anthropological frameworks. This enables me to perceive certain absences; the thinning of women's reproductive authority, the marginalization in *adat* spaces, as well as the obscurity of maternal sacred knowledge transmission within Islamic traditions. This does not mean romanticizing the past, but acknowledging that power is never absent, and women's agency does not always resist patriarchy but often reproduces it through piety and deference.¹⁵ Yet what distinguishes the Minangkabau context—and the Tuareg context, by extension—is that women's authority was once institutionalized not merely through moral example or textual knowledge, but through genealogical and ritual structures. The erasure of these structures, often by male reformists claiming to purify Islam, is the historical trajectory this research traces. There is always a danger in claiming insider knowledge to speak for a collectivity. I do not pretend to represent all Minangkabau women, nor to offer a unitary counter-narrative. Rather, I take seriously decolonial scholarship's warning that the subaltern does not speak in the forms we expect and that the task of scholarship is not to ventriloquize, but to make visible the structures that are historically silenced.¹⁶ My work is therefore not testimonial/apologetic but diagnostic: it tracks how women's reproductive labor was rendered non-theological, how their matrilineal genealogies were relegated to folklore, and how their authority was overwritten by androcentric piety under the banners of Arab-Islamic reform.

In sum, my positionality gives me access not only to texts but to living memory: to the rhythms of domestic negotiation, to the embedded presence of prayer and ritual in women's daily acts, to the residual power of maternal lineage that persists even when no longer

¹⁵ Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*.

¹⁶ Gayatri Spivak, *Can The Subaltern Speak? Reflections On The History Of An Idea*, ed. Rosalind C. Morris (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2010).

recognized by Islamic clerical authority. But it also burdens me with the emotional and ethical weight of witnessing its erosion—a process too often misrepresented as modernization or as natural Islamic ‘revivalist’ evolution. Thus, this is not merely research about the past, but a method of return—an act of epistemic recovery. That the decolonial subject must re-narrate the terms of what counts as knowledge, not simply fit into inherited paradigms.¹⁷ For Minangkabau and Tuareg women alike, the recovery of reproductive labor is not only a feminist imperative; it is a theological and historical reparation.

¹⁷ Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument,” *CR (East Lansing, Mich.)* 3, no. 3 (2003): 257–337, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ncr.2004.0015>.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Islamic Feminism scholars have highlighted the importance in prioritizing lived Islamic subjectivities over textualist absolutism.¹⁸ Their hermeneutics reject the essentialization of Islam as a fixed juridical canon and instead foreground the multiplicity of ethical and theological expression in Muslim life. This includes recognizing women not merely as recipients of Islamic knowledge but as producers of it through embodied ritual, reproductive labor, and spiritual practice. At its foundation, Fatima Mernissi's (1991) work has further illuminated the patriarchal selectivity embedded within classical exegesis that started from the Battle of the Camel (c.656-661) by dispelling Aisha's authority under gendered religious politics.¹⁹ When applied to matriarchal Muslim contexts, these approaches compel us to treat reproductive authority not as peripheral or folkloric, but as epistemologically central to the Islamic tradition. The imperative is not to integrate such societies into dominant frameworks but to reconstruct Islamic studies itself through their conceptual grammars.

This research stakes its primary theoretical claim in the argument that debates about women's authority in Islam have remained overly fixated on questions of legal status and textual interpretation, whether in Qur'anic exegesis, *fiqh* discourse, or modern Muslim family law. While this work is vital, such textual and juridical emphasis often obscures the social architectures that sustain or suppress women's power at the everyday level: namely, the reproductive labor that generates kinship, the ritual economies that sustain moral authority, and

¹⁸ Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "Muslim Women's Quest for Equality: Between Islamic Law and Feminism," *Critical Inquiry* 32, no. 4 (June 2006): 629–45, <https://doi.org/10.1086/508085>; Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading The Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*; Kecia Ali, *Marriage and Slavery in Early Islam* (Harvard University Press, 2010); Kecia Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur'an, Hadith, and Jurisprudence*, Reprint (Oxford: Oneworld, 2012); Ayesha S. Chaudhry, *Domestic Violence and the Islamic Tradition: Ethics, Law, and the Muslim Discourse on Gender*, First edition, Oxford Islamic Legal Studies (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2013); Asma Afsaruddin, "Women and the Qur'an," in *The Oxford Handbook of Qur'anic Studies*, ed. Mustafa Shah and Muhammad Abdel Haleem (Oxford University Press, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199698646.013.54>; Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam*.

¹⁹ Mernissi, *The Veil and The Male Elite*.

the genealogical systems that determine who counts as ‘properly’ Muslim within a community. This paper situates itself within the politics of piety but expands the terrain to the politics of genealogy. It argues that any serious decolonial Islamic feminist critique must reckon not only with how sacred texts are read but also with how genealogical regimes—particularly the Arab-Islamic ideal of patrilineal *nasab*—have been mobilized to erase alternative local kinship systems where women historically wielded spiritual, economic, and moral authority. In so doing, the study treats kinship, ritual, and genealogy as dynamic sites where power is exercised, contested, and re-inscribed under shifting colonial and reformist conditions.

Monsoon Asia or the central Sahara are proof where women’s authority was embedded in kinship systems rather than purely in textual exegesis. Anthropologist’s Barbara Watson Andaya (2006) have hinted at these deeper structures by documenting the ways Southeast Asian women have historically controlled land, inheritance, and ritual knowledge under matrilineal or matrifocal systems.²⁰ Similarly, Susan Rasmussen’s Tuareg ethnographies (1995, 2000) illuminate how Saharan Muslim women serve as guardians of clan stability through spiritual mediation, poetry, and ceremonial authority.²¹ Yet rarely have these anthropological insights been fully integrated into Islamic feminist theory. By bridging these fields, this research shows that the silencing of women’s genealogical power is not an accidental by-product of Islamization, but a calculated ideological move embedded within reformist campaigns like the *Padri* in Minangkabau and the *Sanusi* among the Tuareg.

Following Talal Asad’s (1993) argument that what counts as ‘orthodoxy’ is historically contingent and institutionally enforced, this study demonstrates that the push to impose Arab-Islamic patriliney in peripheral Muslim societies was a strategic project.²² It framed matrilineal

²⁰ Barbara Watson Andaya, *The Flaming Womb: Repositioning Women in Early Modern Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2006).

²¹ Rasmussen, *Spirit Possession and Personhood among the Kel Ewey Tuareg*; Rasmussen, *The Poetics and Politics of Tuareg Aging*.

²² Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford University Press, 2003).

or dual-descent systems as *adat* (customary practice) and labeling them as ‘customary’: reformists relegated them to a lower epistemic status than *syara*’ (divine law). In the Minangkabau case, scholars like Christine Dobbin (1983), Michael Laffan (2003), and Jeffrey Hadler (2008) have shown how *Padri* reformists, educated in Mecca and inspired by Wahhabi-Salafi ideals, returned to Sumatra with a purist mission: eradicate syncretic customs, crush local Sufi networks, and impose an Arab-oriented scripturalism.²³ Their primary target was not simply animistic or Hindu-Buddhist residues but also the powerful matrilineal *nagari* structures in which women—as *Bundo Kanduang*—controlled property inheritance and moral legitimacy. Similarly, the *Sanusi*, as described by E.E. Evans-Pritchard (1949) and more recently by Judith Scheele (2012), leveraged their Sufi authority to unify dispersed Saharan tribes under a purist Islamic framework that privileged patrilineal descent as the mark of true religious belonging.²⁴

This thesis also situates itself within the decolonial turn in Islamic Studies, which critiques the Eurocentric and Arab-centric assumptions that have long structured how Muslim societies are classified, described, and disciplined. Building on Lila Abu-Lughod’s (2013) critique of the ‘saving Muslim women’ discourse, this study inverts the question: how did Muslim men ‘save Islam’ by disciplining local women’s power? By foregrounding reproductive labor as a site of epistemic authority, this research pushes the conversation beyond *fiqh* and *shari’a* into the realm of genealogical governance.²⁵ In this sense, the study aligns with Decolonial Feminists such as Maria Lugones (2010) and Silvia Federici (2004), who have

²³ Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism in a Changing Peasant Economy*; Michael Francis Laffan, *Islamic Nationhood and Colonial Indonesia: The Umma Below the Winds* (London: Routledge, 2003), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203222577>; Jeffrey Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarchs: Cultural Resilience in Indonesia through Jihad and Colonialism* (Ithaca (N.Y.): Cornell University Press, 2008).

²⁴ Judith Scheele, *Smugglers and Saints of the Sahara: Regional Connectivity in the Twentieth Century*, African Studies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139135412>; Evans-Pritchard, *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica*.

²⁵ Lila Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013).

shown how the colonial-modern patriarchal order restructured kinship and reproductive labor to discipline indigenous and peripheral women, often by marginalizing their authority as local ‘custom’.²⁶ This parallel applies to the *Padri* and *Sanusi* contexts, showing how reformist ‘orthodoxy’ emerges as a gendered project of epistemic conquest. In sum, the thesis does not merely recover forgotten ethnographic details; it reframes how scholars should think about Islamic revivalism, genealogy, and women’s authority in the *longue durée* of Islamization. The ideological labor that framed them as deviant or subordinate is part of what this project names as the ‘veiling’ of reproductive labor itself. By demonstrating this, the study opens a path for future Islamic feminist scholarship to engage kinship anthropology and decolonial critique not as peripheral, but as central terrains for contesting what counts as authentic Islam.

²⁶ Silvia Federici, *Caliban and The Witch: Women, The Body and Primitive Accumulation*, Penguin Modern Classics (London: Penguin Books, 2021); Maria Lugones, “Toward a Decolonial Feminism,” *Hypatia* 25, no. 4 (2010): 742–59, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2010.01137.x>.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employs a multi-disciplinary, interpretive methodology grounded entirely in existing literature. It synthesizes anthropological, feminist, and historical scholarship to show how Islamic reform movements in Tuareg and Minangkabau societies restructured gendered authority, suppressed matrilineal systems, and erased women's reproductive labor from the domain of Islamic legitimacy. By doing so, it not only reinterprets known histories, but intervenes in contemporary Islamic feminist debates about the politics of genealogy, orthodoxy, and epistemic erasure. Drawing exclusively on secondary literature, this study offers a comparative, interdisciplinary reading of the religious reform movements of the *Padri* in Minangkabau and the *Sanusi* among the Tuareg, highlighting their shared investment in Arab-Islamic patriliney, genealogical purification, and the disciplining of female authority. Rather than fieldwork or archival discovery, the methodology privileges critical reinterpretation of established ethnographies, historical analyses, and feminist theory. It seeks to recontextualize existing scholarship through a decolonial feminist lens, thereby surfacing erased structures of meaning embedded in kinship systems, ritual economies, and vernacular Islamic practice.

A. Comparative Framework and Case Selection

This study employs a comparative-historical methodology, focusing on two geographically and culturally distinct Muslim societies—the Minangkabau of West Sumatra and the Tuareg of the central Sahara. Both societies have been widely studied in the anthropological literature yet rarely placed in conversation with one another. Despite their ecological and linguistic differences—wet-rice agrarianism versus desert pastoralism—both share three crucial structural features:

1. Historically matrilineal or matrifocal social orders, in which women exercised control over inheritance, property, and ritual life.
2. Longstanding integration of Islam into these kinship systems in forms that were both pious and vernacular.
3. Penetration by Islamic reformist movements (the *Padri* and the Sanusi) which sought to reorder society around patriarchal and Arab-centred ideals of Islamic ‘purity’.

The comparative logic seeks to identify patterns of ideological erasure across reformist projects in the Islamic periphery, particularly where indigenous female authority was reframed as *cultural* and subordinated to an ‘orthodox’ Islam that privileged male descent, textual authority, and genealogical purity.

B. Source and Literature

All data and material for this study derive from existing academic literature that discusses how reformist actors reframed Islam as a civilizational mission anchored in Arab patriarchal norms and genealogical linearity. At the expense of local, plural, and often matrifocal interpretations:

1. Historical and Ethnographic Studies of Tuareg and Minangkabau Societies

For the Minangkabau, the study engages:

- Christine Dobbin’s *Islamic Revivalism in a Changing Peasant Economy* (1983), a foundational account of the *Padri* movement’s emergence and interaction with colonial encroachment.
- Evelyn Blackwood’s *Webs of Power* (2000), an ethnographic examination of contemporary matrilineal kinship and female authority in Minangkabau villages.

- Barbara Watson Andaya's *The Flaming Womb* (2006), which traces the deep cosmological and ritual roots of female authority in pre-Islamic and Islamic Southeast Asia.
- Peggy Reeves Sanday's *Women at the Center* (2003), an ethnographic work of matriarchal system and reordering of maternal uncles in Minangkabau rituals and life.

For the Tuareg, the sources include:

- Susan Rasmussen's *Spirit Possession and Personhood among the Kel Ewey Tuareg* (1995) and *Healing and Islamic Spirit Possession among the Tuareg* (2000), which document women's roles in mediating the spiritual, poetic, and social life of the Tuareg.
- Judith Scheele's *Smugglers and Saints of the Sahara* (2012), providing crucial insight into authority, mediation, and gender in Saharan Islamic communities.
- E.E. Evans-Pritchard's *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica* (1949), which, though dated, remains central to understanding the historical expansion of the *Sanusi* order.

These sources offer a textured, multi-scalar view of each society's gendered, spiritual, and genealogical order prior to and after the reformist interventions.

2. Theoretical Texts in Islamic Feminism and Decolonial Critique

To interpret the implications of these reforms, the study draws extensively from Islamic feminist and postcolonial theory:

- Amina Wadud (*Qur'an and Woman*, 1992), who challenges patriarchal legal hermeneutics within the Islamic tradition.
- Leila Ahmed (*Women and Gender in Islam*, 1992), who provides a genealogical critique of Arab nationalism's absorption into Islamic revivalism.

- Fatima Mernissi (*The Veil and the Male Elite*, 1987), who links patriarchal Islamic law to the erasure of female public authority.
- Saba Mahmood (*Politics of Piety*, 2005), whose ethnography of female piety in Egypt helps problematize liberal feminist assumptions about agency.
- Lila Abu-Lughod (*Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*, 2013), offering a caution against reading gender norms outside of their social-historical embeddedness.

Additionally, the study adopts Talal Asad's genealogical method (*Genealogies of Religion*, 1993), reading religious discourse as historically contingent and politically implicated, especially in relation to colonial codification and kinship systems.

C. Method of Analysis

The methodology is interpretive and genealogical. It proceeds through three layered analytical strategies:

1. Thematic Comparative Reading

The core method is a comparative reading of ethnographic and historical texts to identify recurring themes:

- The framing of female authority as 'customary' and thus subordinate.
- The elevation of Arabized patriliney (*nasab*) as religiously 'pure'.
- The restructuring of social roles through Islamic legal discourses that privilege male lineage.

This comparative method avoids asserting equivalence between Tuareg and Minangkabau societies. Instead, it tracks ideological patterns across different contexts to expose a wider transregional logic.

2. Genealogical Critique

Following Talal Asad (1993), the research treats genealogy itself both literal and conceptual as a site of power.²⁷ It reads patriliney not as a Qur'anic inevitability but as an historically contingent prioritization, selectively deployed to marginalize women's existing roles in spiritual mediation, property transmission, and moral guidance. This method enables a historical deconstruction of orthodoxy by showing that what has been called 'authentic Islam' was shaped by political forces including Arab nationalism, colonialism, and male reformist networks.

3. Feminist Re-reading of Kinship and Ritual

Islamic feminist literature is employed to re-read ritual, kinship, and epistemology. Where earlier ethnographies might treat matriliney as a cultural curiosity or a residual form, feminist theory allows this project to interpret such practices as:

- Theological claims about moral authority.
- Reproductive labor as sacred labor.
- The intergenerational transmission of Islamic meaning outside of male clerical control.

This approach contests the dichotomy between 'Islam' and 'culture.' Showing how women's roles in both societies constituted vernacular Islamic authority.

D. Limitations and Reflexivity

As this project does not engage in fieldwork or archival excavation, it is limited by the scope and framing of existing literature. Many of the key ethnographies—especially those of the Tuareg—are filtered through Western anthropological lenses. The study is therefore

²⁷ Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), <https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/1/monograph/book/16014>.

attentive to the limits of these representations and endeavors to read *against the grain*, recovering women's agency even when it is marginalized in the text. Furthermore, the study does not aim to idealize matriliney, matrifocality, matriarchy or portray it as uniformly empowering. Rather, it treats both matrilineal and patrilineal orders as historically negotiated systems whose gendered implications vary by context.

E. Ethical and Epistemological Commitments

This research is committed to a decolonial feminist ethics, which treats indigenous women not as passive custodians of custom but as epistemic agents engaged in producing Islamic meaning on their own terms. It refuses both the secular-feminist tendency to pathologize Islamic piety and the revivalist tendency to erase women's historical centrality. It therefore builds a methodological bridge between Islamic Studies, Anthropology, and Feminist Theory; reading texts not only for what they say, but for what they silence, obscure, or render secondary.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: GENEALOGICAL DISPLACEMENT AND AFTERMATH

When one speaks of the *Padri* and the *Sanusi* not merely as movements of doctrinal purification but as projects of genealogical engineering, one begins to see that what they reformed was not only belief but the very material and spiritual tissues of community. For the Minangkabau, this meant the rice terraces, clan fields, and matrilineal kinship lines that embedded Islam in land and womb. For the Tuareg, this meant the fluid lines of clan affiliation carried in women's memories across desert routes. Each movement, in its own context, is an obliteration of the female lineages that had long secured continuity in place of a masculine custodianship. This is the historical ground upon which the critique of veiled labor stands—not merely about piety or doctrine, but about the systematic rewriting of the genealogical grammar that holds the Minangkabau and the Tuareg societies together.

1. The Sanusi: Sufi Order in the Saharan Desert

The *Sanusi* movement stands as one of the most remarkable examples of Sufi revival entwined with social regulation and proto-nationalist aspiration. Founded in 1837 by Muhammad ibn Ali al-Sanusi, the *Sanusi* brotherhood spread rapidly from Cyrenaica (in today's eastern Libya) deep into the desert trading routes that linked North Africa to the Sahel and the Sudanese hinterlands.²⁸ Among the Tuareg who are known as Berber-speaking pastoralists who dominated the trans-Saharan trade, the *Sanusi* brought not only spiritual guidance but also a profound reordering of social life. Muhammad al-Sanusi was trained in the Maghribi and Hijazi Sufi traditions yet reacted strongly against what he perceived as the excessive elaboration of popular Sufism practice (tomb cults, local saints, ecstatic rituals) that

²⁸ Evans-Pritchard, *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica*; David Robinson, *Muslim Societies in African History*, New Approaches to African History (Cambridge, [England] ; Cambridge University Press, 2004).

risked leading the believer away from strict monotheism.²⁹ The *Sanusi* was thus a *tariqa* (order) that rejected the luxurious urban lodges of other Sufi brotherhoods. Its *zawiya* (lodges) were built in isolated desert outposts, offering discipline, scholarship, and moral oversight to the dispersed pastoral tribes.

While doctrinally distinct from Wahhabism, the *Sanusi* shared its puritanical impulse. It too sought to eradicate local practices deemed superstitious. In Tuareg lands, this involved challenging local spiritual brokers and female ritual specialists who mediated the tribe's relationship to the unseen world.³⁰ The Tuareg were quintessentially nomadic. Camel caravans, seasonal grazing, and long-distance trading linked Tuareg confederacies to markets from Tripoli to Timbuktu. Women played a vital role: they often controlled tents and movable wealth, managed household decision-making in the men's frequent absence, and acted as the repositories of oral genealogies that organized clan cohesion.³¹ For the *Sanusi*, the nomadic dispersion of the Tuareg was both an opportunity and a threat. On one hand, the *zawiya* system promised stability and a spiritual-political backbone for caravans. On the other, the social fluidity that allowed Tuareg women to wield informal influence appeared incompatible with the *Sanusi* vision of a disciplined Muslim society governed by sharia and male spiritual authority.³²

The *Sanusi* succeeded by building a vast network of semi-autonomous lodges that acted as spiritual waystations and trade hubs. Caravan leaders and tribal notables pledged allegiance to *Sanusi shaykhs* who provided religious arbitration, trade security, and moral policing. In effect, the *zawiya* replaced the matrilineal clan structures with a more hierarchical, male-

²⁹ Ahmida, *The Making of Modern Libya*.

³⁰ Rasmussen, *Spirit Possession and Personhood among the Kel Ewey Tuareg*.

³¹ Rasmussen, *The Poetics and Politics of Tuareg Aging*.

³² Johannes Nicolaisen, *Ecology and Culture of the Pastoral Tuareg*, Copenhagen Nationalmuseet 9 (Copenhagen: National Museum, 1963).

centered religious framework. This transformation was not merely spiritual but political. The *Sanusi* became an anti-colonial bulwark against the Ottoman Empire's overreach and, later, Italian encroachment in Libya.³³ Yet while the order has been celebrated for its role in resisting imperial domination, its internal consolidation also worked to constrain the flexible, matrifocal patterns that had shaped Tuareg domestic life. Female genealogical memory such as the oral transmission of clan alliances was gradually subordinated to the textual authority of male *shaykhs* versed in androcentric Islamic jurisprudence.

2. *The Padri: Salafi-Wahhabism Tide in the Wet Rice Fields*

The *Padri* movement represents one of the most consequential religious reformist uprisings in Southeast Asia's Islamic history. Emerging at the turn of the nineteenth century in the Minangkabau highlands of central Sumatra, the movement was fueled by a new generation of pilgrims (*hajis*) who returned from Mecca imbued with austerity of Salafi-Wahhabi Islamic reform.³⁴ To understand the extent of *Padri* effects in the Minangkabau society, one must situate it at the nexus of expanding transregional Islamic networks. At the time, the Minangkabau stood between shifting local political economies and the fragile balancing act between *adat* (customary law) and *syara'* (sharia).³⁵ The late eighteenth century was an age of heightened pilgrimage flows for Minangkabau traders and scholars. Already renowned for their mobility within the archipelago, they had travelled further to Hijaz where they encountered the militant reformism of the Wahhabi-Saudi alliance that had seized Mecca in 1803. For many pilgrims from the outer islands, this encounter was transformative. These reformist Minangkabau ulama returned to West Sumatra with a burning conviction that local Islam had become corrupt; infected by pre-Islamic beliefs, syncretic rituals, and especially the tenacious

³³ Ahmida, *The Making of Modern Libya*.

³⁴ Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia*.

³⁵ Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism in a Changing Peasant Economy*.

authority of *adat* leaders who protected matrilineal inheritance structures that they now read as opposite to ‘pure/true’ Islam.³⁶ The *Padri* drew on the Wahhabi teaching of *bid’ah* (condemnation of religious innovation), yet the *Padri* main concern is not merely doctrinal but also economical.³⁷

The Minangkabau is an agrarian society organized around the *nagari*—autonomous village federations bound by matrilineal clan (*suku*) structures.³⁸ The *pusaka*—ancestral rice lands—were held by women’s clans and could not be alienated by individual men.³⁹ Women thus secured continuity of lineage and economic resilience, while men exercised political influence largely through ritual or leadership roles negotiated within these matrilineal enclaves.⁴⁰ In *Padris*’ eyes, this distribution of authority threatened the patriarchal sovereignty of Islam as they deemed to be the ‘true Islam.’ The matriarchal systems sustained not only a material economy, but also ritual obligations tied to clan ancestors, birth rituals, and village festivals.⁴¹ To purify Islam meant not only uprooting folk practices but restructuring the economic and genealogical basis of Minangkabau life, thus the *Padris* escalated into open conflict. Between 1803 and 1837, the highlands were engulfed in a brutal civil war that split the ulama aligned with the *Padri* from the *penghulu* (*adat* chiefs) and matrilineal elders defending customary law.

³⁶ Mahmood Kooria, “When Men Get No Share: Matrilineal Muslims and Their Laws of Succession,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 43, no. 2 (August 1, 2023): 163–75, <https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-10615635>.

³⁷ Abdullah, “Adat and Islam”; Dobbin, “Economic Change in Minangkabau as a Factor in the Rise of the *Padri* Movement, 1784-1830.”

³⁸ Franz von Benda-Beckmann, *Property in Social Continuity: Continuity and Change in the Maintenance of Property Relationships through Time in Minangkabau, West Sumatra* (BRILL, 2012).

³⁹ Evelyn Blackwood, *Webs of Power: Women, Kin, and Community in a Sumatran Village* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2000).

⁴⁰ Joel Kahn, *Constituting the Minangkabau* (London: Routledge, 1993), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003085027>.

⁴¹ E. Blackwood, “Not Your Average Housewife: Minangkabau Women Rice Farmers in West Sumatra,” in *Women and Work in Indonesia*, 2008, 17–40, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203932360>; Joke van Reenen and Joke van Reenen, *Central Pillars of the House: Sisters, Wives, and Mothers in a Rural Community in Minangkabau, West Sumatra*, CNWS Publications 45 (Leiden: Research School CNWS, 1996); Joke van Reenen, “The Salty Mouth of a Senior Woman: Gender and the House in Minangkabau,” in *Women and Households in Indonesia* (Routledge, 2000); H. Halimatussa’diyah et al., “Minangkabau Matrilinal: The Correlation between the Qur’an and Gender,” *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 80, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v80i1.8643>; Sanday, *Women at the Center*.

The Dutch, watching from the coast where they had vested mercantile interests, at first stood aloof but gradually found advantage in intervening to suppress the *Padri*.⁴² Ironically, this forged an opportunistic alliance between the Dutch colonial administration and the very *adat* elites whom the *Padri* had denounced as heterodox.⁴³

Snouck Hurgronje (1857–1936), the renowned colonial adviser and pioneering European scholar of Islam in the Indies, was instrumental in formalising the Dutch colonial state's strategy of managing Islam and *adat* as distinct yet complementary instruments of rule.⁴⁴ While the Padri War (1803–1837) and the subsequent Dutch consolidation of the Minangkabau highlands by 1871 did not directly involve Snouck—who was born two decades after the conflict ended—these earlier encounters illustrated how colonial power could exploit tensions between Islamic reformism and local customary authority. Decades later, Snouck drew upon this precedent when advising the administration in Aceh, transforming what had been an improvised approach into an explicit and systematic policy for governing indigenous Muslim societies. Only a generation earlier Prince Diponegoro (1785–1855) had led the Java War (1825–1830), where colonial authorities explicitly frame his rebellion as a struggle to restore Islamic sovereignty against Dutch encroachment.⁴⁵ Diponegoro's defeat, his capture in 1830, and subsequent exile revealed to colonial authorities the potent threat of Islamic legitimization when fused with local authority. When Snouck arrived in the Dutch East Indies in 1889, he carried this hard-earned lesson into the Dutch 'Indigenous policy.' As he later advised during the brutal Aceh War (1873–1914), where Snouck argued that the colonial administration should tolerate and codify *adat* to stabilize rural order while containing *syara* within a version of

⁴² Hadler, "A Historiography of Violence and the Secular State in Indonesia."

⁴³ Peter Burns, *The Leiden Legacy: Concepts of Law in Indonesia*, Verhandelingen van Het Koninklijk Instituut Voor Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde 191 (Leiden; BRILL, 2004).

⁴⁴ M. C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia since c.1300*, Second edition. (London: Macmillan, 1993).

⁴⁵ P. B. R. Carey, *The Power of Prophecy: Prince Dipanagara and the End of an Old Order in Java, 1785-1855*, Second edition., Verhandelingen Van Het Koninklijk Instituut Voor Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde Series ; Volume 249 (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2008).

Islam that was textually orthodox yet politically quietist.⁴⁶ In Minangkabau, the resolution of the *Padri* War provided a precedent where *adat* institutions could be recognized as ‘customary law,’ while Islamic reformist energies were to be domesticated and channeled away from political resistance. Thus, what began as a fierce struggle between *Padri* reformists and *adat* chiefs was retroactively frozen by colonial policy into a binary; *adat* was made the domain of ‘tradition’—preserving Minangkabau women’s matrilineal authority as a harmless cultural relic—while *syara*’ was remolded under patriarchal interpretations that privileged male religious elites allied with Dutch interests. This colonial inheritance of dual authority framework institutionalized this tension where reproductive labor and female genealogical power were pushed into the realm of ‘custom,’ subordinated to the ‘pure’ Islam.

3. *Mechanism of Erasure: Orthodoxy, Reform, and Gender*

In the mid-eighteenth century, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, a scholar from Najd, declared that Islam had fallen into grave corruption due to *shirk* (association of God with partners), *bid'ah* (unlawful innovation), and local syncretic practices.⁴⁷ He argued that the Muslim society—saturated with tomb veneration, saint cults, ritual pilgrimages to local holy sites—had deviated so far from Qur'an and Hadith that only radical purification could restore its essence.⁴⁸ The Wahhabi movement’s central claim was positively ideal, that Islam must return to the pure monotheism (*tawhid*) of the Prophet and the pious ancestors (*salaf*).⁴⁹ However, this implied an uncompromising rejection of local custom, sacred intermediaries,

⁴⁶ C. Snouck Hurgronje, *The Achehnese: Volume 1*, Language and Linguistics - Book Archive Pre-2000 (Leiden ; Brill, 1906); C. Snouck Hurgronje, *The Achehnese: Volume 2*, Language and Linguistics - Book Archive Pre-2000 (Leiden ; Brill, 1906).

⁴⁷ Peter G. Mandaville, ed., *Wahhabism and The World: Understanding Saudi Arabia's Global Influence on Islam*, Religion and Global Politics Series (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2022).

⁴⁸ Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: University Press, 2000).

⁴⁹ Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, *The Book of Tawheed: Sharḥ Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: International Islamic Publishing House, IIPH, 1998).

and folk ritual; all of which, in practice, the spheres women often wielded authority.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the Wahhabi alliance with the House of Saud turned this theology into a political-military force. When Wahhabi ideology captured Mecca in 1803, it rewrote the spiritual compass of the wider *ummah*. Pilgrims returning from the Hijaz, including the Minangkabau, encountered this militant creed at the peak of its zenith.

When Minangkabau pilgrims brought Wahhabi doctrine home, they did not simply quote Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's teachings; they adapted his principles to local contestations. In the Minangkabau *nagari*, customary law (*adat*) governed marriage, inheritance, ritual, and village adjudication.⁵¹ Land was vested in the *suku*, passed down matrilineally, binding property to women's wombs as the anchor of lineage.⁵² In a world where a man's status derived from his mother's clan, the *Padri*'s adoption of Wahhabi ideas was revolutionary. The *Padri* adapted the core Wahhabi logic—absolute tawhid, rejection of *bid'ah*—and turned it against *adat*.⁵³ They declared that local rituals tied to clan ancestors, agricultural rites, or women's midwifery ceremonies were *kufir* (unbelief) disguised as Islam.⁵⁴ Purification thus became a genealogical revolution that replaced the matrilineal transmission of clan rights with patrilineal *nasab*, authorized by male *ulema*. How does doctrine gain teeth? Through law. The *Padri* restructured local life by enforcing what they framed as *sharia*.⁵⁵ Marriage, once a clan-negotiated contract, was remade as a legal form regulated by male jurists. Land, once in the collective stewardship

⁵⁰ As can be seen in Tuareg and Minangkabau, women's reproductive labor becomes the irrefutable evidence of their (reproductive) authority as they are the one who reproduces the nation, the people, the *ummah*.

⁵¹ Blackwood, *Webs of Power*.

⁵² E. Blackwood, "Wedding Bell Blues: Marriage, Missing Men, and Matrifocal Follies," *American Ethnologist* 32, no. 1 (2005): 3–19, <https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.2005.32.1.3>.

⁵³ Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia*.

⁵⁴ Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarchs*.

⁵⁵ Abdullah, "Adat and Islam"; Dobbin, "Economic Change in Minangkabau as a Factor in the Rise of the *Padri* Movement, 1784-1830"; Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism in a Changing Peasant Economy*; Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarchs*; Tsuyoshi Kato, "Change and Continuity in the Minangkabau Matrilineal System," *Indonesia*, no. 25 (1978): 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3350964>; Halimatussa'diyah et al., "Minangkabau Matrilineal"; Reenen and Reenen, *Central Pillars of the House*; JOHN R. BOWEN, "On Scriptural Essentialism and Ritual Variation: Muslim Sacrifice in Sumatra and Morocco," *American Ethnologist* 19, no. 4 (1992): 656–71, <https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.1992.19.4.02a00020>.

of women's clans, was targeted for reclassification under male as head of the household. Tomb worship was banned; *rumah gadang* dismantled. The *penghulu* (*adat* chiefs) who defended women's inheritance rights were branded as heretics or collaborators with the Dutch.⁵⁶ The *Padri*'s doctrinal purification was fused with a legalistic apparatus that severed the matrilineal spine of Minangkabau *adat*. Purity in the religious sense that was not simply ideological, but also economically consequential and took form in the everyday obliteration of Minangkabau women's reproductive authority.

Meanwhile, the *Sanusi*—seemingly distant cousins of the Wahhabi movement, was also propelled by a comparable anxiety about the corruption of local Islam. Muhammad ibn Ali al-Sanusi (1787–1859) trained in Fez and Mecca before founding his *tariqa* in Cyrenaica.⁵⁷ Witnessing both Ottoman corruption and European encroachment, he envisioned a purified Sufism that rejected luxurious urban lodges and the entanglement with worldly patronage that plagued other Maghribi orders.⁵⁸ The *Sanusi* doctrine held that the Muslim community (*ummah*) must be disciplined not only by inner mystical piety but by strict adherence to *sharia*.⁵⁹ Like Wahhabism, it condemned popular saint cults, pilgrimages to holy sites, and local divination. But unlike the Wahhabis, the *Sanusi* retained core Sufi practices: *dhikr* (remembrance of God), spiritual chains of transmission (*silsila*), and the authority of the *shaykh*.⁶⁰ In this sense, they were not anti-Sufi but anti-excess, anti-decadence, and deeply anti-colonial.⁶¹ Where Wahhabism built state alliances, the *Sanusi* built *zawiya*—remote lodges

⁵⁶ Hadler, "A Historiography of Violence and the Secular State in Indonesia."

⁵⁷ Evans-Pritchard, *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica*.

⁵⁸ Knut S. Vikør, *Sufi and Scholar on The Desert Edge: Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Sanūsī and His Brotherhood*, Series in Islam and Society in Africa (London: Hurst, 1995).

⁵⁹ Evans-Pritchard, *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica*.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ W. G. Clarence-Smith, *Islam and The Abolition of Slavery* (London: Hurst, 2006).

doubling as spiritual retreats, trade hubs, and moral courts.⁶² The doctrinal engine here was a synergy of mystical purification and desert governance.

Among the Tuareg, the *zawiya* functioned as both sanctuary and surveillance. They offered caravan protection and religious arbitration but also imposed stricter codes on everyday practice.⁶³ Women's informal ritual authority, often embedded in household gatherings, marriage alliances, or local healing rites, was policed by the Sanusi *shaykhs* who regulated doctrinal orthodoxy.⁶⁴ Where the *Padri* violently confronted matrilineal *adat*, the *Sanusi* worked more subtly. They did not dismantle Tuareg matrifocality overnight, nor did they have the same fixation on *nasab*.⁶⁵ But by standardizing education through male-led *zawiya*, they shifted spiritual and social authority from diffuse clan mothers to central male *shaykhs*.⁶⁶ Oral genealogies—carried by women in poems, stories, marriage contracts—lost ground to the textual authority of male scholars trained in *fiqh* (jurisprudence). In essence, the *Sanusi* doctrinal engine was a dual mechanism; mystical purification aligned with practical disciplining of nomadic life. This disciplined Islam erased many of the fluid social arrangements that had given Tuareg women 'unusual' autonomy over family alliances and spiritual mediation.⁶⁷

At first glance, the Wahhabi and Sanusi movements appear doctrinally distinct; one a hard-liner puritanism rejecting Sufism, the other a purifying Sufi order. Yet both share a structural kinship, they reconceived 'pure' Islam as requiring the reassertion of Arab genealogical norms in non-Arab societies.⁶⁸ In the Qur'anic tradition, *nasab*—patrilineal

⁶² Scheele, *Smugglers and Saints of the Sahara*.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Nicolaisen, *Ecology and Culture of the Pastoral Tuareg*.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Clarence-Smith, *Islam and The Abolition of Slavery*.

⁶⁷ Rasmussen, *Spirit Possession and Personhood among the Kel Ewey Tuareg*.

⁶⁸ Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought*; Ali, *Marriage and Slavery in Early Islam*; Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*; Hallaq, *Sharī'a*.

descent—is a core juridical pillar. They determine inheritance, marital legitimacy, and tribal affiliation. But historically, Islam’s expansion into peripheral societies often produced hybrid systems where local kinship coexisted with Islamic law in practice.⁶⁹ The Minangkabau and Tuareg exemplify this reality where matrilineal or matrifocal lineages layered Islamic belief indissoluble to what the reformers saw as indigenous heresy. The *Padri* and *Sanusi* doctrinal engines share the ambition to overwrite the layered fabric with a single genealogical language—one that privileged patrilineal male custodianship and Arabization over local Islam. In both cases, the doctrinal claim to orthodoxy functioned as a rhetorical weapon to delegitimize women’s reproductive labor as either backward custom or dangerous superstition. Popular holy sites, midwifery rituals, clan gatherings—all fell under the suspicion of *shirk* or *bid’ah*. The doctrinal engine ran on a powerful binary of profane/sacred, divine/mundane, orthodox/folk, text/oral. In this binary, male (masculine) textual authorities—hailed from Medina or Mecca—claimed the final word. Both movements left doctrinal shadows that colonial powers exploited. The Dutch, in the Minangkabau case, learned to play *adat* and *syara’* against each other by policy theorized famously by Snouck Hurgronje. The Ottomans and later the Italians navigated Sanusi networks warily, seeking to control their moral authority while fearing their capacity to mobilize resistance. Thus, the doctrinal engines forged under the banner of purification became tools of double governance: patriarchal within, imperial without.⁷⁰ The cost was the same, women’s genealogical authority was driven into the shadows—veiled, fragmented, but never entirely extinguished. This then is the deeper point; doctrinal engines such as Wahhabism and Sanusi reformism are not merely pious ideas floating in sermons. They are material acts; they rewrite kinship, erase holy sites, standardize law, discipline birth rituals, and control trade. They travel not only through books but through the

⁶⁹ Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*.

⁷⁰ Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule, With a New Preface*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520946194>.

everyday reorganization of whose word counts as *ilm* (knowledge), whose genealogy counts as *nasab*, whose labor counts as holy.

‘VEILED’ WOMEN’S REPRODUCTIVE LABOR: THE ISSUE OF VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE LABOR IN THE CLASSICAL ISLAMIC THOUGHT

In the history of Muslim societies, the female body has been the first site where Islamic jurists impose discourse to inscribe their power.⁷¹ In the Minangkabau highlands and the Tuareg Sahara alike, women’s bodies were not only vessels for biological reproduction but conduits for spiritual, social, and economic continuity. Reproductive labor here exceeds the bearing of children; it is the weaving of lineage, the stewarding of clan property, the guardianship of ritual knowledge, and the maintenance of cosmological balance through everyday acts. Islamic feminist scholars have long insisted that patriarchal Islam’s textual politics rest on a hidden premise of disciplining these embodied labors into a system where male lineages, male scholarship, and male jurisprudence claim interpretive finality.⁷² Yet when one reads the actual socioecology of Minangkabau rice terraces or Tuareg caravan camps, one sees how fragile this claim always was.

The Minangkabau symbolizes what a scholar has called “the flaming womb,” an agrarian cosmos where women’s control over *pusaka* (ancestral lands and material wealth) is the keystone of village life.⁷³ Land is never a mere commodity but a vessel of continuity, tethered to the matrilineal *suku* whose unbroken female line carries the village’s collective identity forward.⁷⁴ When a Minangkabau child is born, the placenta is buried near the house, binding the new life to ancestral soil—a material anchoring of spiritual belonging.⁷⁵ In this

⁷¹ Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*; Mernissi, *The Veil and The Male Elite*.

⁷² Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam*; Ayesha S. Chaudhry, *Domestic Violence and The Islamic Tradition: Ethics, Law, and The Muslim Discourse on Gender*, First edition, Oxford Islamic Legal Studies (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2013); Mernissi, *The Veil and The Male Elite*; Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*; Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*; Ali, *Marriage and Slavery in Early Islam*; Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam*; Mir-Hosseini, “Muslim Women’s Quest for Equality”; Wadud, *Qur’an and Woman*; Margot Badran, *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009).

⁷³ Andaya, *The Flaming Womb*.

⁷⁴ Sanday, *Women at the Center*.

⁷⁵ Navis, *Alam berkembang jadi guru*.

system, women's work is both visible and invisibly sacral where they plant, tend, harvest, negotiate rights to fields, and perform the rituals that ensure fertility and protection from misfortune.⁷⁶ Birth rituals, midwifery, and the guidance of *bidan* (village midwives) connect everyday cycles of life to Islam as it was locally understood—not as abstract jurisprudence, but as embodied covenant with ancestors and the divine.⁷⁷ This local Islam is expressed through *adat* which is not separate from *syara'* but coexists in an entangled sovereignty.⁷⁸ The *penghulu* (male clan leaders) and imam (religious leaders) must negotiate how Quranic injunctions sit alongside obligations to maternal uncles, clan mothers, and village elders in which women's reproductive authority anchored *adat* legitimacy.⁷⁹

When the *Padri* movement declared war on 'corrupt' *adat*, they struck at this sacred economy. To destroy indigenous way of worship, they uprooted the spiritual topography that female midwives, spirit mediums, and clan mothers tended. To 'purify' inheritance, they redirected *pusaka* logic towards patrilineal control; converting the rice terrace as a matriarchal matrix into a legible asset dominated by priapic male jurists. Thus, what the *Padri* called 'reform' was a restructuring of land, birth, and ritual intersected from mothers to fathers. Its success depended on obliterating the tacit labor through which Minangkabau women made their community's cosmology. Here one sees the 'politics of the veil' not merely as cloth, but the erasure of the womb as a node of religious authority.⁸⁰

By contrast, the Tuareg of the central Sahara appear at first glance to be the opposite of the wet-rice Minangkabau. A fiercely mobile society of camel caravans, seasonal grazing, and wide horizons. Yet they too rooted authority in women's reproductive labor—though not in

⁷⁶ Kato, "Change and Continuity in the Minangkabau Matrilineal System."

⁷⁷ Sanday, *Women at the Center*; Navis, *Alam berkembang jadi guru*; Benda-Beckmann, *Property in Social Continuity*; Reenen, "The Salty Mouth of a Senior Woman."

⁷⁸ Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia since c.1300*.

⁷⁹ Kooria, "When Men Get No Share."

⁸⁰ See Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*.

fixed fields but in flexible genealogies. Tuareg social structure is famously matrifocal where descent runs through the mother alongside tents and movable wealth being managed by women. Women are the keepers of clan genealogies, recited in poems and sung epics that trace alliances, debts, and social obligations across vast distances. When men trade salt or slaves across the Sahara, it is the women's narrative memory that binds these far-flung nodes into a coherent social world. Susan Rasmussen's work on Tuareg ritual life shows how women preside over key rites of passage, birth purification, marriage negotiation, and healing ceremonies that mediate the harsh uncertainty of desert life.⁸¹ The tent, the hearth, the well—these are sites where reproductive labor fuses with spiritual guardianship.

When the *Sanusi* established *zawiya* outposts among Tuareg caravans, they introduced a new horizon of spiritual discipline. The Sanusi lodge offered security, adjudication, and a masculine scholarly authority that displaced the informal cosmology sustained by women's ritual mediation. Materially, the *zawiya* turned the dispersed, flexible flows of caravan life into a lattice of checkpoints governed by sharia-trained *shaykhs*. Spiritual purity was no longer woven by women's songs and birth rituals but codified by the patrilineal line of the *silsila*, the chain of male initiates tracing back to al-Sanusi and ultimately to the Prophet.⁸² Though less overtly violent than the *Padri's* jihad, the *Sanusi's* impact was equally profound in its quiet compression of the nomadic gaps where women's genealogical power could slip through. It imposed textual, legal forms onto orally fluid genealogies.

Islamic feminist thinkers like Amina Wadud, Leila Ahmed, and Fatima Mernissi insist that what passes as 'orthodoxy' is never a neutral inheritance.⁸³ It is the remnants of historical struggles that routinely suppressed women's interpretive authority. For Wadud, reclaiming the

⁸¹ Rasmussen, *The Poetics and Politics of Tuareg Aging*.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*; Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*; Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*.

Qur'an means reading it through the lived realities of women's bodies—not just the male *fiqh* that standardizes them.⁸⁴ Moreover, colonial encounters also amplified these patriarchal disciplines. The Dutch used *adat* selectively to stabilize Minangkabau villages but demanded that the ultimate authority rest with *sharia* which the *Padri* had already gendered.⁸⁵ Likewise, the Ottomans and Italians found the Sanusi order both a threat and a convenient moral regulator.⁸⁶ Here the 'veil' is double, women's authority is hidden first by reformist orthodoxy then by the colonial archive that records only the male *shaykhs* and *penghulu* as legitimate authorities. A decolonial Islamic feminist reading thus insists that the obliteration of reproductive labor is an epistemic violence as much as an economic one. It deletes women as genealogical narrators. It treats the placenta buried in the rice terrace as folklore, not a legitimate spiritual legacy. It treats the Tuareg mother's oral genealogy as backward, the Sanusi lodge as modern. Both the patriarchal reformists and colonial powers jointly rendered it so by severing the body from its land, its genealogy, its ritual economy. These regimes of discipline were never total. Among the Minangkabau, matriliney persists though adapted, strained, but alive. Among the Tuareg, women still recite clan genealogies that slip past the textual grid. This residual agency is not a romantic archaism but a witness to the sacred economy of reproductive labor that never fully vanishes. The challenge is to rethink that a decolonial Islamic feminist is not merely to critique male interpretations but to restore attention to the material conditions that allowed Muslim women to historically 'lead' lineage, law, and spiritual life.

⁸⁴ Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*; Amina Wadud, "Qur'ān, Gender and Interpretive Possibilities," *Hawwa* 2, no. 3 (2004): 316–36, <https://doi.org/10.1163/1569208043077297>; Amina Wadud, "Towards a Qur'anic Hermeneutics of Social Justice: Race, Class and Gender," *Journal of Law and Religion* 12, no. 1 (1995): 37–50, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1051608>.

⁸⁵ Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarchs*.

⁸⁶ Clarence-Smith, *Islam and The Abolition of Slavery*; Ahmida, *The Making of Modern Libya*; Evans-Pritchard, *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica*.

CONCLUSION

By tracing how the *Sanusi* order among the Tuareg and the *Padri* movement in Minangkabau reframed local genealogies under the banner of purifying Islam, this paper has shown that what is too often portrayed in scholarship as doctrinal correction or anti-syncretic revival is in fact an intimate, material project that restructured how communities remember, inherit, and reproduce themselves. In the biological sense, but in the moral and epistemic sense. The historical and theoretical terrain of two seemingly disparate societies —the Tuareg of the Saharan fringe and the Minangkabau of Monsoon Asia—reveal a shared enduring logic at the heart of modern Islamic reformist movements. The erasure of indigenous women's reproductive authority through the ideological elevation of Arab patrilineal *nasab* as the singular measure of religious legitimacy. Through this comparative lens, the paper demonstrates that the shift from matrilineal and matrifocal inheritance systems to male-dominated patrilineal structures was neither an incidental nor purely 'Islamic' process, but part of a broader Arab nationalist imaginary that conflated 'Arabness' with religious authenticity. This ideological convergence rendered local women's labor as either a residual custom (*adat*) or outright syncretism to be domesticated, co-opted, or suppressed in the name of a purified *ummah*.

In closing, this research claims no finality but to invite further work that takes genealogy seriously, not as a linear historical lineage but as a living, material site of struggle over who belongs, who remembers, and who inherits the right to interpret Islam. It calls on decolonial Islamic feminism to turn its gaze not only to texts but to the hidden matrix of kinship (i.e., the houses, fields, praying spaces, and maternal names that sustain communities across generations). The argument advanced here thus insists that what has been called 'orthodox' Islam in these contexts is not timeless or self-evident but historically produced through erasure. An erasure that operates precisely where it appears most natural—at the site of birth,

motherhood, inheritance, and the everyday moral labor of sustaining kin. Through the disciplining of belonging, the restricting of androcentric transmission, and the consolidating of male clerical authority that caused female piety to be obscured within the spiritual category. Yet as this research suggests, this subordination is not a sole product of patriarchal interpretation but also in fact a 'legacy of erasure' from previously legitimate and legally sanctioned, reproductive labor.

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