DECODING EUROPEAN DRESS: *TASHABBUH* AND ULAMA FATWAS IN JAVA AND SUMATRA, 1892–1938

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Abstract

Between the 1890s and the late 1930s, the hat, the necktie, the jacket, and trousers became objects of legal argument among Muslim scholars in the Netherlands Indies. This article examines how ulama in Java and Sumatra ruled on European dress and why their rulings diverged and shifted. Applying the historical method of heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography, it analyzes Kiai Sholeh Darat's Majmū'at al-Sharī'at al-Kāfiyat li al-'Awām (1892), a fatwa of Syekh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi, Haji Abdullah Ahmad's fatwa in al-Munīr (1911), the decision of the second Nahdlatul Ulama congress (1927), K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari's Ziyādāt Ta'līqāt (1933), and two manuscripts by Habib Salim bin Jindan, including al-Masā'il al-Basīṭat fī Aḥkām Lubs al-Burnayṭat (1938). The texts are read through the juristic doctrine of tashabbuh and Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model. The analysis identifies oppositional, negotiated, and permissive readings, but argues that they did not rest on incompatible doctrines. All the scholars weighed the same variables: the wearer's intention, whether a garment was specific to non-Muslims, local custom, and need or benefit. What changed was the social meaning of the garments. As European dress spread among Muslims in the Indies and the Middle East, it ceased to mark unbelief, and the reasoning that had supported prohibition came to support permission. The ulama were neither simply resisting nor surrendering to colonial culture; they were adjusting an inherited legal doctrine to a changing world.

***Keywords**: Colonial Indonesia, European Dress, Fatwa, Tashabbuh, Ulama*

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INTRODUCTION

On September 24, 1911, *al-Munīr*, a reformist periodical founded by Haji Abdullah Ahmad in Padang earlier that year, responded to a question from a reader in Batavia, Raden Kasuma Idhum bin Suasti Abdul Aziz. The reader wanted to know whether dressing and behaving like non-Muslims made a Muslim an unbeliever (Ahmad, 1911: 170–171). That same year, Abdullah Ahmad consulted Rashīd Riḍā in Cairo about a dispute with traditionalist ulama in West Sumatra who had declared European dress forbidden. Riḍā's response, published in *al-Manār*, provided the basis for a subsequent fatwa in *al-Munīr* (Riḍā, 1911; Burhanudin, 2004, 2005). A question originating in Java thus prompted a response in Sumatra, informed by a scholarly exchange with Cairo. By then, hats, neckties, jackets, and trousers had become subjects of Islamic legal debate, with arguments circulating across islands, legal traditions, and continents.

The debate had its roots in the colonial history of dress. Throughout much of the nineteenth century, the government of the Netherlands Indies used clothing to make its legal classifications visible. Europeans, Natives, and Foreign Orientals were expected to dress in accordance with their legally assigned categories. It was only in the early twentieth century that it became more socially acceptable for Natives, Arabs, and Chinese to appear in public wearing European clothing (van Dijk, 1997; Schulte Nordholt, 1997). The expansion of education, civil service employment, and the press under the Ethical Policy, announced in 1901, further associated jackets and trousers with education, office work, and progress. These developments unfolded in a society already familiar with the mixed cultural practices of the Indies (Ricklefs, 2001; Soekiman, 2014). Historical studies of Surakarta, East Sumatra, and Minangkabau illustrate how European clothing was adopted by lower-ranking *priyayi* (members of the Javanese administrative elite) and local elites, and how photographs presented such clothing as a marker of modern life (Misbahuddin, 2021; Lukitaningsih et al., 2022; Ilma & Andoni, 2024).

Dress also carried religious significance. Religion shapes not only individual identity but also the social practices through which communities sustain solidarity (Yogesi, 2025). For Muslims, the question of European clothing was therefore not merely a matter of fashion or social status. A widely cited hadith, *man tashabbaha bi qawmin fa-huwa minhum* ("whoever imitates a people is one of them"), had long been interpreted as a warning against adopting practices that blurred the distinction between believers and unbelievers (Patel, 2022). Ulama in the Netherlands Indies, however, drew different conclusions from this principle. Kiai Sholeh Darat (c. 1820–1903) prohibited Muslims from imitating the dress of non-Muslims. Syekh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi (1860–1916) and K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari (1871–1947) accepted European garments under certain conditions, whereas Haji Abdullah Ahmad (1878–1933) and Habib Salim bin Jindan (1906–1969) permitted their use. This spectrum of prohibition, conditional acceptance, and permission is evident in several sources. Yet it also challenges a familiar, overly simplistic explanation that portrays conservative scholars as resistant to change and modernists as accommodating it.

This article addresses two question s: (1) Why did scholars who shared the same legal tradition and, in several cases, the same teachers reach different rulings on the same garments? (2) Why did rulings increasingly favor permission between the 1890s and the late 1930s? It argues that

these differences arose not from fundamentally divergent religious doctrines but from changing interpretations of the social meaning of European clothing. The scholars considered the same factors: the wearer's intention, whether a garment was exclusively associated with non-Muslims, local customs, and practical necessity. As European clothing became more common among Muslims in the Netherlands Indies and the Middle East, it increasingly lost its status as a marker of non-Muslim identity. Consequently, the same legal reasoning that had once supported prohibition could later justify permission. These fatwas thus reveal how changing social meanings shaped the application of an established legal doctrine, rather than merely reflecting the scholars' individual beliefs.

This article brings together texts from intellectual and religious contexts that are usually studied separately: a *kitab* (Islamic scholarly text) associated with a Javanese *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school), a Meccan collection of fatwas addressed to Jawi Muslims, a Minangkabau reformist periodical, proceedings of a Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) congress, and manuscripts by a Hadrami scholar based in Java. Two manuscripts by Habib Salim bin Jindan have received little scholarly attention. Following a review of the literature, the conceptual framework, and the research method, the article examines oppositional, negotiated, and permissive readings of European dress before comparing the reasoning underlying these positions.

Literature Review

Research on dress in the Netherlands Indies has established clothing as a marker of status, ethnicity, and political allegiance. Schulte Nordholt's (1997) edited volume remains foundational, while van Dijk (1997) examines how Indonesians used local, Islamic, and Western styles to signal religious, national, or modern identities. Subsequent Indonesian studies include a bibliography of dress history (Septiani, 2022), research on lesser *priyayi* in Surakarta (Misbahuddin, 2021) and indigenous men in East Sumatra (Lukitaningsih et al., 2022), an analysis of symbolic Indonesianness in the early twentieth century (Yuliantri, 2020), and a study of colonial photographs of Minangkabau women (Ilma & Andoni, 2024). Misbahuddin (2021) identifies 1900–1920 as a period when clothing in Surakarta lost much of its sacred and hierarchical significance. Although these studies explain the social meanings of dress, they rarely examine ulama's legal arguments about it.

A second body of literature examines Islamic reform and fatwa circulation. Kaptein (2009) traces the Middle Eastern influences on debates about European dress in West Sumatra, while Burhanudin (2004, 2005) situates Southeast Asian inquiries to *al-Manār* within the fragmentation of religious authority associated with print. Noer (1973) and Laffan (2003) examine networks linking Jawi students in Mecca with reformist and traditionalist movements in Southeast Asia. Patel (2022) traces the doctrine against imitation from early Islam to colonial Egypt, while Terem (2023) analyzes a 1937 Moroccan fatwa on European hats addressed to Muslims in Albania.

A third group of studies focuses on individual scholars. Umam (2013) reconstructs Kiai Sholeh Darat's intellectual biography and Pegon writings, while Misbah (2018) examines how Sholeh Darat used dress to establish ulama authority. Kharish (2019) studies Habib Salim bin Jindan's *al-Ilmām* as a collection of Hadrami fatwas, and Karyadi (2021) examines his career as a hadith scholar.

Three gaps remain. First, no study has compared rulings from Java and Sumatra across traditionalist, reformist, and Hadrami contexts within a single

analytical framework. Second, existing scholarship tends to classify ulama as conservative or progressive rather than reconstructing the legal reasoning behind their rulings. Third, to the author's knowledge, Habib Salim's 1938 treatise on the hat, *al-Masā'il al-Basīṭat fī Aḥkām Lubs al-Burnayṭat*, has not received sustained scholarly analysis. This article addresses these gaps.

Conceptual Framework

The analysis combines the Islamic legal doctrine of *tashabbuh* with Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model. Derived from the hadith discussed above, *tashabbuh* was elaborated by later jurists into rules governing when resemblance to non-Muslims was prohibited (Patel, 2022). Shafi'i works familiar to ulama in the Indies, including Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī's *al-Fatāwā al-Kubrā* and 'Abd al-Raḥmān Bā'alawī's *Bughyat al-Mustarshidīn*, differentiated rulings according to intention. Imitation intended to express religious allegiance could constitute unbelief (*kufr*). Imitating non-Muslims' festivals or religious symbols without that intention was forbidden (*ḥarām*) but did not constitute unbelief. Unintentional resemblance, meanwhile, could be disliked (*makrūh*) or permitted (*mubāḥ*). Jurists also considered whether a practice was distinctive (*khāṣṣ*) to non-Muslims or had become widespread, the local custom (*'urf*), and whether necessity (*ḥājat*) or benefit (*maṣlaḥat*) justified it. This article organizes its comparison around four variables: intention, specificity, custom, and necessity or benefit.

The doctrine rests on classifications that can change. It presupposes that practices associated with non-Muslims can be identified, a premise contested in the Indies before debates over European dress. In the late nineteenth century, Aḥmad Zaynī Daḥlān, the Shafi'i mufti of Mecca, prohibited using the large drum (*bedug*) to summon worshippers to Friday prayer because it resembled a non-Muslim practice. Sayyid 'Uthmān of Batavia, however, permitted its use under certain conditions (Kaptein, 1995: 152–153). What counted as a non-Muslim practice thus depended on the jurist's interpretation and context.

Hall's encoding/decoding model helps explain these different interpretations. Hall (1980) argued that dominant institutions encode messages with preferred meanings, which audiences interpret from three positions: dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional. The first accepts the preferred meaning, the second adapts it to particular circumstances, and the third rejects it in favor of an alternative interpretation (see also Storey, 1996). Like texts, objects such as clothing carry socially constructed meanings (Hall, 1997). In the Indies, European dress operated within at least three codes: a colonial code linking clothing to legal status, a code of progress (*kemajuan*) associating jackets and trousers with education and modernity, and the juristic code of *tashabbuh*, under which garments distinctive to non-Muslims signified religious affiliation. Fatwas on European dress can therefore be read as interpretations of an object carrying multiple meanings.

Two qualifications are necessary. Hall's model was developed for media audiences rather than jurists, so this article uses it heuristically. Moreover, because European dress carried multiple meanings, a ruling could accept one code while rejecting another. The analysis revisits this distinction when comparing the cases. Finally, the article treats fatwas as a genre through which scholars apply authoritative traditions to new questions, reproducing those traditions through argument rather than simple repetition (Asad, 1986; Masud et al., 1996).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study applies the historical method of heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography (Kuntowijoyo, 2013). Source collection began in 2023 with searches of digital collections, followed by fieldwork to locate manuscripts. The sources were selected for their historical and thematic relevance to debates on European dress, *tashabbuh*, religious identity, and local custom among Muslims in Java and Sumatra. The period 1892–1938 marks the main chronological scope of the analysis, tracing changing interpretations of European dress from prohibition to conditional negotiation and acceptance amid broader transformations in colonial society, Islamic thought, and Muslim identity in the Netherlands Indies.

The core corpus comprises seven normative texts, listed in Table 1: Kiai Sholeh Darat's *Majmūʻat al-Sharīʻat al-Kāfiyat li al-ʻAwām*, completed in 1309/1892 and cited from a reprint dated Ṣafar 1374/1954; fatwa no. 83 by Syekh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi in *Masā'il wa al-ʻAqā'id*, compiled by Ishak Adam Tualang Kedah (Kedah, 1973); Haji Abdullah Ahmad's reply in *al-Munīr* (September 24, 1911); the record of the second Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) congress in Surabaya, dated 12 Rabīʻ al-Thānī 1346/October 9, 1927; K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari's *Ziyādāt Taʻlīqāt ʻalā Manẓūmat al-Shaykh ʻAbd Allāh ibn Yāsīn al-Fāsuruwānī*, dated 1352/1933–1934; and two manuscripts by Habib Salim bin Jindan, *al-Ilmām bi Maʻrifat al-Fatāwā wa al-Aḥkām* (1930s) and *al-Masā'il al-Basīṭat fī Aḥkām Lubs al-Burnayṭat* (1357/1938).

Contextual sources include Rashīd Riḍā's fatwa in *al-Manār* 14 (1911), pp. 669–671; the Meccan fatwa collection *Muhimmāt al-Nafā'is fī Bayān As'ilat al-Ḥadīth* (1310/1892, p. 70), edited by Kaptein (1997); and periodicals published in the Indies between 1914 and 1940: *Doenia Bergerak* (1914), *Islam Bergerak* (1918), *Sinar Hindia* (1918), *Bintang Timoer* (1927), *Soeara Oemoem* (1932), *Doenia Kita* (1938), and *Aliran Baroe* (1940).

Source criticism operated at two levels. External criticism established each text's date, provenance, and physical characteristics, particularly those of Habib Salim's manuscripts. *Al-Ilmām* is a single codex on lined paper containing eighty-five fatwas. At Habib Salim's request, his senior student, Ustadz Majidi, compiled its contents in the 1930s. The manuscript is held by the Al Fachriyah Foundation in Larangan, Tangerang (Kharish, 2019). *Al-Masā'il al-Basīṭat* comprises twenty folios (forty pages), each with sixteen lines. It measures 17 × 11 cm, with a text block of 13 × 9 cm, and is written in black ink in *naskhī* script on lined paper. Its first page records the date 1357/1938. The manuscript is held at Pesantren Al-Fachriyah, Ciledug, Tangerang, and was digitized by the Ministry of Religious Affairs' Center for Research and Development of Religious Literature and Heritage (Puslitbang Lektur dan Khazanah Keagamaan) under code LKK_JKT2017_HAJ033. Internal criticism examined who posed and answered each question, the intended audience, and the authorities cited.

The interpretation stage compared the texts using the four *tashabbuh* variables outlined above and classified their readings within Hall's framework, considering genre, audience, and the scholarly and periodical networks connecting the authors. The historiographical discussion presents these readings in approximate chronological order.

DISCUSSION

The rulings are examined in three groups corresponding to Hall's decoding positions: an oppositional reading in the 1890s, negotiated readings from the early

twentieth century through the 1930s, and permissive readings between 1911 and 1938. The final section compares these positions.

An Oppositional Reading: Kiai Sholeh Darat and the Sign of Unbelief

Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ ibn ‘Umar al-Samārānī, known as Kiai Sholeh Darat, was born around 1820 in Kedung Cumpleng, Jepara, into a religious family. His father, Kiai Umar, reportedly participated in the Java War (1825–1830). After studying at several *pesantren* in Java, Sholeh Darat traveled to Mecca, where his teachers included Aḥmad Zaynī Daḥlān. Upon returning to Java, he established a *pesantren* in Darat, on the northern outskirts of Semarang, probably around 1870. Those reportedly taught by him included Hasyim Asy’ari and Ahmad Dahlan, who later founded Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, respectively. Sholeh Darat died in Semarang in 1903 (Umam, 2013; Salim, 1995).

Sholeh Darat authored at least twelve works in Pegon, a form of Javanese written in Arabic script. He used the informal *ngoko* register to make his writings accessible to ordinary Muslims (Aziz, 2013; Umam, 2013). His principal work on Islamic jurisprudence, *Majmū‘at al-Sharī‘at al-Kāfiyat li al-‘Awām*, was transcribed by his scribe, Jazuli, on 8 Sha‘bān 1309 (March 1892). It was printed in Singapore and Bombay from 1897 onward and reprinted in Java for decades (Shokheh, 2011). Its title identifies its intended audience: the *‘awām*, or ordinary believers.

On pages 24–26 of the edition examined here, Sholeh Darat prohibits Muslims from imitating practices that distinguish non-Muslims, including their dress, food, and conduct. The prohibition applies even when the wearer inwardly dislikes the garment, while admiration for it aggravates the offense (al-Samārānī, 1954: 24–26). This distinction is significant. Whereas later scholars made intention a decisive factor, Sholeh Darat placed greater emphasis on outward conduct. Resemblance itself constituted the problem, while inward approval intensified the offense.

The relevant passage from Sholeh Darat’s *Majmū‘at al-Sharī‘at al-Kāfiyat li al-‘Awām* reads:

لَنْ حَرَامْ اِغَّسَيْ وَوْعْ اِسْلَامْ پَرْوُوْفَانِيْ فَغْكَوْنِيْ وَوْعْ لِيَا
اَكَامَ اِسْلَامْ سَنَدِيَانْ اَتِيْ اَوَرَا دِمَنْ "اَغْنَدِيكَا سَتَغْهِيْ فَرَا عُلَمَاءِ مُحَقِّقِيْنْ سَفَا وَوْغِيْ
غْكَوْ فَغْكَوْنِيْ لِيَانِيْ اَهْلِ الْاِسْلَامْ كَانِيَ كَلَمِيْ جَسْ اَتَوَا تَوْفِيْ اَتَوَا دَاسِيْ مَكَ دَادِيْ
مُرْتَدْ رُوْسَكْ اِسْلَامِيْ سَنَدِيَانْ اَتِيْ اَوَرَا دِمَنْ" الْحَاصِيلْ حَرَامْ دَوْسَا كَبَيْ

“*And it is forbidden for a Muslim to imitate the clothing of non-Muslims, even if he does not like it in his heart. “It is said that half of the muhaqqiqin scholars hold that anyone who wears the clothing of non-Muslims, such as shirts, suits, hats, or ties, becomes an apostate and his Islam is compromised, even if he does not like it in his heart.” The consequence of this is a major sin*.”

This position was not arbitrary. In the 1890s, European clothing in Java remained largely associated with Europeans, while the colonial administration itself used dress to distinguish legal categories (van Dijk, 1997). Within the logic of *tashabbuh*, garments associated with colonial rulers and their religious community could therefore be understood as distinctive to non-Muslims. Sholeh Darat’s ruling reflected this social context. His approach also had a pedagogical dimension. By writing for ordinary Muslims in *ngoko*, he established a clear boundary that readers could follow without mastering the finer distinctions of legal intention. Misbah (2018) further shows that dress helped Sholeh Darat define the authority of the ulama.

In Hall’s terms, this constitutes an oppositional reading. Sholeh Darat rejected the prestige and progress associated with European dress in colonial society and recast it as a sign of unbelief. His opposition, however, did not amount to a call for complete withdrawal from colonial society. Umam (2013) notes that although Sholeh Darat criticized Dutch rule, he maintained close relationships

with Javanese individuals employed by the colonial government. His objection concerned the merging of Muslim and European identities through dress, rather than all forms of engagement with the colonial world.

Negotiated Readings: Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi and Hasyim Asy'ari

Syekh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi

Ahmad Khatib was born in 1860 in Koto Tuo, near present-day Bukittinggi, and taken to Mecca as a child. He later became the Shafi'i imam and preacher at the Masjid al-Ḥarām, where he taught generations of Jawi students until his death in 1916 (Wirman, 2017). His students included future reformists such as Abdullah Ahmad, Abdul Karim Amrullah, and Ahmad Dahlan, as well as traditionalists such as Hasyim Asy'ari (Noer, 1973; Laffan, 2003). His legal opinions therefore carried authority across both movements.

His ruling appears as fatwa no. 83 in *Masā'il wa al-'Aqā'id*, a collection of 158 fatwas by seven scholars, including 126 by Ahmad Khatib. Ishak Adam Tualang Kedah began compiling the collection in Mecca in the late 1930s, and it was published in 1393/1973 (Kedah, 1973). Although the collection does not date the fatwa, it must predate Ahmad Khatib's death and belongs to the period when European dress was a subject of debate among Minangkabau ulama. The questioner asked whether wearing a *cepiau*, a European hat associated with unbelievers, constituted apostasy and what Islamic law said about wearing a necktie.

Ahmad Khatib distinguished between the two garments. He considered the hat specific to unbelievers and therefore prohibited wearing it as an imitation of their distinctive dress. Wearing it for protection against heat or rain did not constitute apostasy because the wearer lacked the intention to imitate non-Muslims. However, Ahmad Khatib rejected this justification on the grounds that other headgear was available and no genuine necessity existed. His ruling on the necktie was more conditional. Wearing it to imitate non-Muslims was forbidden but wearing it as an ordinary accessory without that intention depended on local custom. In Istanbul, Egypt, and the Levant, where the necktie was no longer exclusive to non-Muslims, it was generally permissible. In regions where it remained a distinctive marker of non-Muslim identity, it was still forbidden (Kedah, 1973).

This reasoning makes the application of *tashabbuh* explicitly dependent on geography. The same garment could be forbidden in one place and permitted in another, depending on whether local Muslims had adopted it. Ahmad Khatib's ruling assumes that Muslims in Istanbul, Egypt, and the Levant had incorporated the necktie into their dress. The brimmed hat, by contrast, had not achieved comparable acceptance among Muslim elites in these centers, where the fez remained associated with respectable Muslim attire until the Turkish hat reform of 1925. The hat therefore retained its association with non-Muslims. Specificity, assessed in relation to local custom, was the decisive criterion, while intention and necessity served as additional considerations. In Hall's terms, this was a negotiated reading that retained an oppositional element. It acknowledged that European clothing could become religiously neutral but recognized that status only where Muslim practice had already normalized it. Importantly, the ruling stopped short of *takfīr*: wearing the prohibited hat did not automatically make the wearer an apostate.

K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari and the Nahdlatul Ulama

Hasyim Asy'ari was born in 1871 in Gedang, Jombang. After studying at several Javanese *pesantren*, he continued his studies in Mecca, where Ahmad Khatib

was among his teachers. He founded Pesantren Tebuireng in 1899 and co-founded Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in 1926 (Dhofier, 1999; Misrawi, 2010). He is also reported to have studied with Sholeh Darat (Umam, 2013). His position on European dress must be understood through two distinct sources: a collective resolution adopted at an NU congress and his own polemical writings.

The second NU congress convened in Surabaya on October 9, 1927. Its manuscript record lists 146 *kiai* from 36 regions, alongside merchants, *penghulu* (Islamic religious officials), *naib* (deputy religious officials), government representatives, and the nationalist physician Raden Soetomo (Nahdlatul Ulama, 1927). In the section *bāb al-libās wa mā ashbahahu* (p. 12), the congress declared hats, neckties, jackets, trousers, and shoes permissible for Muslims in Java and Madura. This territorial qualification is significant. Rather than declaring these garments permissible everywhere, the resolution recognized their acceptability in Java and Madura, where they were increasingly worn by Muslim officials and educated elites (van Dijk, 1997; Misbahuddin, 2021). The congress thus applied to hats the same principle of local custom that Ahmad Khatib had used to assess neckties.

The relevant passage from the resolution of the second NU congress reads as follows:

المقررة الأولى: كاڠڤكي تياڠ اسلام جاوي لن مدورا. اڠ تنه جاوي لن مدورا. اڠدالم فونيكا زمان ڠاڠكى توفي داسي جاس جلانا سفاتو كومفليت: فونيكا كيڤيڠ نفا بوتن2 اڠ فونيكا مسئلة شورى نهضة العلماء جاواب كيڤيڠ. سلاكى بوتن نجا نيماء دانڠ كافر اعدالم كاكوفورانيفون. مناوي نجا مكانن موڠكا كوفور. واه سلاكي بوتن نجا نيماء دانڠ كافر اڠدالم كاووننانيفون مكانن واهو تڤر ريايا نيفون. مناوي نجا مكانن موڠكا حرام. واه سلاكى بوتن نجا نيماء دانڠ كافر. اعدالم ككاكاهانيفون مناوى مكانن مكروه. سكيڤ فونيكا تراڠ اڠكڤ مورنى وناڠ. اڠكيه فونيكا اڠكڤ مورنى كرسان سامى2 مكانن واهو ماهام سكيڤ كانراڠن اڠ كتاب الفتاوى الكبرى لابن حجر في باب الردة سها كتاب بغية المترشدين في الرده.

> "*First ruling: This applies to Javanese and Madurese Muslims. In Java and Madura. In modern times, wearing a hat, tie, suit, pants, and shoes as a complete outfit, whether this is permitted or not, Nahdlatul Ulama has ruled that it is permissible, provided it is not done intentionally to imitate the disbelievers in their disbelief. If done intentionally, it constitutes kufr. And as long as it is not done intentionally like the disbelievers do to celebrate their holidays, it is permissible. If done intentionally, it is haram. And as long as it is not done intentionally like the disbelievers do, it is makruh. From this, it is clear that this is a matter of pure religious authority. This is the pure truth and explanation found in the book al-Fatāwā al-Kubrā li ibn Hajar fī Bāb al-Riddah Sahā Kitāb Bughyah al-Mutarosyidīn fī al-Riddah*."

Hasyim Asy'ari's *Ziyādāt Ta'līqāt*, dated 1352/1933–1934, belongs to a different genre. It comprises notes refuting a poem (*manẓūmat*) by Syekh Abdullah bin Yasin of Pasuruan that criticized NU. The work later circulated in an edition published by Maktabah al-Turāth al-Islāmī in Tebuireng (Asy'ari, 1933). Addressing resemblance to non-Muslims, Hasyim Asy'ari distinguishes three cases. Wearing their clothing to express religious allegiance or support their religious rites may constitute unbelief, as stated in *Bughyat al-Mustarshidīn* and Ibn Ḥajar's *al-Fatāwā al-Kubrā*. Imitating their festivals without such an intention is forbidden but does not constitute unbelief. Resemblance without an intention to imitate is classified as *makrūh tanzīhī* or permissible, following Ibn Ḥajar and 'Abd al-Ḥayy al-Hindī's *Tarwīḥ al-Janān* (Asy'ari, 1933).

This text is sometimes interpreted as an outright prohibition of Dutch clothing and an expression of cultural resistance to colonial rule. Some NU *kiai* in Surakarta did prohibit trousers, ties, hats, and shoes as a symbolic rejection of an infidel government, although their colleagues did not all share this position (NU Online, 2018). However, *Ziyādāt Ta'līqāt* presents a more nuanced position. It prohibits imitation motivated by religious allegiance or participation in religious observances, while classifying everyday European dress without such intentions as disliked or permissible. Compared with Ahmad Khatib, Hasyim Asy'ari places greater emphasis on the act and the wearer's intention than on the garment itself. His negotiated reading

allows European clothing under conditions derived from the Shafi'i tradition while leaving room for local custom.

Permissive Readings: Abdullah Ahmad and Habib Salim bin Jindan

Haji Abdullah Ahmad and al-Munīr

Abdullah Ahmad was born in 1878 in Padang Panjang to Haji Ahmad, a Minangkabau scholar and cloth trader. He studied under Ahmad Khatib in Mecca and became a leading figure in the *Kaum Muda* (Young Group), a reformist movement in West Sumatra. In 1911, he founded *al-Munīr* in Padang with other reformist scholars, including Abdul Karim Amrullah (Zulmuqim, 2015). Modeled on Singapore's *al-Imām*, the periodical appeared twice monthly in Jawi script until 1915. It published questions and answers on Islamic jurisprudence alongside material translated from Middle Eastern periodicals, advocating a return to the Qur'an and *sunna* and criticizing *taqlīd*, *bid'at*, and superstition. Its readership extended across Sumatra, Java, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and Malaya (Noer, 1973; Burhanudin, 2004). Abdullah Ahmad later edited *al-Islam*, a periodical associated with Sarekat Islam (Noer, 1973).

The debate over European dress reached *al-Munīr* amid a dispute with traditionalist ulama in West Sumatra, who had declared such clothing forbidden. In 1911, Abdullah Ahmad sought Rashīd Riḍā's opinion on the matter. Riḍā's response, published in *al-Manār* 14 (1911: 669–671), informed a fatwa in *al-Munīr* stating that Islam prescribes no particular style of dress (Burhanudin, 2004, 2005). The reply published on September 24, 1911, to Raden Kasuma Idhum of Batavia presents the same reasoning (Ahmad, 1911: 170–171). Dressing like non-Muslims to express religious allegiance, such as by adopting their attire to attend their places of worship, was forbidden. Without such an intention, however, dressing or behaving similarly was neither prohibited nor grounds for declaring someone an unbeliever. Shoes, jackets, and trousers might once have been associated with non-Muslims, but they had become common in many places. According to *al-Munīr*, the hadith on imitation prohibited adopting the customs or religion of others as an expression of religious allegiance, not wearing clothing that had become commonplace and lost its specific religious association.

The decisive factor was whether the clothing had become common across religious communities. Once widely adopted, a garment no longer served as an exclusive marker of another religious group. Abdullah Ahmad extended to European clothing generally the reasoning Ahmad Khatib had applied to neckties, while drawing on a different source of authority: whereas his teacher issued his ruling from Mecca, Abdullah Ahmad consulted Cairo (Burhanudin, 2005). The publication format also mattered. By answering readers in Batavia and Padang, *al-Munīr* made the ruling accessible to a wider audience than a Meccan fatwa collection or a Pegon manual could reach (Burhanudin, 2004).

A later recollection illustrates the social changes underlying this reasoning. Minangkabau writer A. A. Navis recalled that, from the early twentieth century until the Second World War, religious scholars in West Sumatra could be distinguished by their clothing. Scholars trained locally wore sarongs and caps; those who had studied in Mecca or performed the pilgrimage wore robes and turbans; and those educated in Egypt wore trousers, jackets, and ties with caps or fezzes. Navis also recalled that men's ties had once been criticized as the clothing of unbelievers, but that this criticism had largely disappeared within a generation. Members of the groups that had voiced such objections eventually wore ties themselves (Navis, 1996: 36–43). In Hall's terms,

Abdullah Ahmad's reading accepted the association between European dress and modern life, but legitimized that acceptance through a category recognized by Islamic jurisprudence: local custom.

Habib Salim bin Jindan

Habib Salim bin Ahmad bin Jindan was born in Surabaya on September 7, 1906 (18 Rajab 1324), into a Hadrami *sayyid* family. His father, Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥusayn, moved to Surabaya in 1896, while his maternal grandfather, 'Alī ibn Muṣṭafā, had studied under Aḥmad Zaynī Daḥlān (Al Yamani, 2017; Rozinah, 2014). Best known as a hadith scholar, Habib Salim authored numerous works on hadith and its chains of transmission. He died in Jakarta on June 1, 1969 (Kharish, 2019; Karyadi, 2021).

His *al-Ilmām* compiles fatwas on social and religious issues debated during the 1930s. Habib Salim often reproduced material from Middle Eastern periodicals and added his own views. At his request, his senior student, Ustadz Majidi, later collected these scattered responses (Kharish, 2019). Six of the collection's eighty-five fatwas concern Western clothing. Fatwa 27 permits wearing a hat modified with Islamic symbols, such as a crescent, provided the wearer has no intention of imitation and the hat carries no distinctive religious significance. Fatwa 58 permits trousers if they cover the *'awrat* without revealing the body's contours. It also maintains that resemblance to the People of the Book is not always forbidden, particularly in matters of common custom or practical necessity (Bin Jindan, n.d.).

Fatwa 64 treats *murū'at*, or personal dignity, as a norm shaped by local custom. Accordingly, a Muslim who wears pantaloons and goes bareheaded in keeping with community practice commits no offense. Fatwa 68 addresses wearing a priest's belt and other clerical insignia. Habib Salim argues that Ahl al-Sunnat wa al-Jamā'at do not declare Muslims unbelievers for sins, whether minor or major, as long as they adhere to the foundations of Islam. Fatwa 80 cites a report that the Prophet himself wore trousers. Fatwa 81 further states that Islam prescribes no particular style of clothing, except for *iḥrām* garments and the burial shroud. The essential requirements are to cover the body, maintain modesty, and consider the wearer's intention (Bin Jindan, n.d.).

Habib Salim develops this argument further in *al-Masā'il al-Basīṭat fī Aḥkām Lubs al-Burnayṭat* (1938), written at the request of teachers at an unnamed school. He finds no Qur'anic or prophetic text prohibiting the hat and rejects claims of scholarly consensus (*ijmā'*) against it, arguing that earlier jurists were unfamiliar with the hat in its modern form. He also warns that introducing prohibitions into religion without adequate grounds is dangerous. Criticizing some al-Azhar scholars who prohibited the hat and declared its wearers unbelievers, he maintains that legislation belongs to God, while other matters remain open to *ijtihad* informed by benefit (*maṣlaḥat*) and harm (*mafsadat*). A prohibition, he argues, requires harm to religion, life, intellect, honor, or property. Since the hat causes no such harm and may facilitate relations with other nations, it should not be prohibited.

The two subsequent *masā'il* challenge the practice of *takfīr*. According to Habib Salim, jurists agree that neither religious innovators nor perpetrators of major sins should automatically be considered unbelievers, much less those who merely wear hats. He also distinguishes everyday clothing common among Egyptians and Europeans, including modern hats, trousers, jackets, turbans, and collars, from explicitly religious attire such as a priest's robes. This distinction rests on the principle that faith and unbelief reside in the heart rather than in outward appearance (Bin Jindan, 1938).

Two features distinguish Habib Salim's position. First, he reverses the burden of proof. Whereas earlier rulings asked whether a garment was distinctive to non-Muslims, he asks whether its prohibition can be justified by demonstrable harm, drawing on the logic of the objectives of Islamic law. Second, his primary concern is not the garment itself but the practice of declaring Muslims unbelievers.

The broader context helps explain his position. During the interwar period, the brimmed hat became a political symbol across the Muslim world following Turkey's Hat Law of 1925. Jurists in different regions debated whether wearing it constituted imitation of non-Muslims. In 1937, for example, a Moroccan scholar addressed the question for Muslims in Albania (Terem, 2023). Habib Salim's term for the hat, *burnayṭat*, belongs to this wider debate, in which Muḥammad 'Abduh's 1903 fatwa permitting Muslims in the Transvaal to wear European hats had become a landmark (Patel, 2022). As members of a community classified as Foreign Orientals by the colonial state, Hadrami Muslims had also long faced expectations that their social status be reflected in their dress (van Dijk, 1997). In Hall's terms, Habib Salim accepted that European clothing had become ordinary dress in the modern age, but rejected its use as a religious marker. His position challenged both the attribution of Christian identity to European clothing and the use of outward appearance to justify *takfīr*.

One Rule, Shifting Facts

Although the scholars examined in this study reached different conclusions about European dress, their rulings drew on a shared legal tradition. The differences lay in how they interpreted the social meaning of particular garments and applied established legal criteria to changing circumstances. Comparing their rulings reveals how intention, the distinctiveness of a garment, local custom, and practical need shaped the boundaries between prohibition and permission. Table 1 summarizes these rulings and identifies the decisive criteria in each case.

Table 1. Rulings on European dress and their decisive criteria

Scholar and text	Ruling on European dress	Decisive criterion
Kiai Sholeh Darat, *Majmū'at al-Sharī'at al-Kāfiyat li al-'Awām* (1892)	Imitation of non-Muslim dress forbidden, even without inner approval Imitation of non-Muslim dress is forbidden, even without inward approval.	Outward resemblance to garments distinctive to non-Muslims.
Syekh Ahmad Khatib, fatwa no. 83 in *Masā'il wa al-'Aqā'id* (before 1916)	Hats are forbidden; neckties may be forbidden or permitted depending on local custom and intention.	Distinctiveness in relation to local custom, intention, and the absence of genuine necessity.
Haji Abdullah Ahmad, *al-Munīr* (1911)	European clothing is permitted when worn without the intention of adopting another religion.	The garments have become common across religious communities.
Second NU congress, Surabaya (1927)	Hats, neckties, jackets, trousers, and shoes are permitted in Java and Madura.	Local custom in Java and Madura.
K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari, *Ziyādāt Ta'līqāt* (1933–34)	The ruling ranges from unbelief and prohibition to disapproval or permission, depending on intention and occasion.	Intention and religious context.
Habib Salim bin Jindan, *al-Ilmām bi Ma'rifat al-Fatāwā wa al-Aḥkām* (1930s) and *al-Masā'il al-Basīṭat fī Aḥkām Lubs al-Burnayṭat* (1938)	European clothing is permitted, and wearing it does not justify declaring someone an unbeliever.	Absence of scriptural prohibition, consideration of benefit and harm, and the distinction between outward appearance and inward faith.

Source**:** Compiled by the author from the texts discussed

Taken together, these texts suggest that the scholars did not necessarily rely on different legal doctrines. Rather, they applied a shared Shafi'i tradition of *tashabbuh* to changing social circumstances. In 1892, European dress in Java remained largely associated with Europeans, leading Sholeh Darat to regard it as distinctive to non-Muslims. Ahmad Khatib recognized that Muslims in Istanbul, Egypt, and the Levant had adopted neckties, although hats retained their distinctiveness. In 1911, *al-Munīr*, drawing on Riḍā's reasoning, argued that shoes, jackets, and trousers had become commonplace and that Islam prescribed no particular style of dress. The NU congress extended this reasoning to Java and Madura in 1927. By the late 1930s, Habib Salim treated hats and trousers as common among Egyptians and Europeans alike, directing his criticism toward the practice of *takfīr*. Navis's recollection that criticism of neckties faded within a generation further illustrates this social shift. The movement from prohibition toward permission thus reflected a changing application of *tashabbuh*: as European garments ceased to be exclusive markers of non-Muslim identity, the basis for prohibiting them weakened.

The texts also reveal a shift in the sources and settings of religious authority. Sholeh Darat addressed ordinary Muslims through a practical manual; Ahmad Khatib issued rulings from Mecca; Abdullah Ahmad circulated arguments informed by Cairo through a reformist periodical; the NU congress issued a collective resolution; and Habib Salim challenged the positions of scholars associated with al-Azhar. These developments indicate that religious authority was increasingly negotiated across institutions and media. Print expanded the reach of individual rulings and enabled more scholars to participate in debates over Islamic law (Burhanudin, 2004, 2005).

Hall's model also highlights the limitations of interpreting these rulings through a single cultural code. In relation to the code of progress, Sholeh Darat's prohibition constituted an oppositional reading, whereas permissive rulings aligned more closely with the dominant association between European dress and modernity. Under the colonial code, however, the relationship was more complex. Although the prohibition of the 1890s maintained a visible distinction between Muslim and European dress, later rulings enabled Muslims to adopt garments associated with colonial rulers, weakening one visible marker of colonial hierarchy. Hall's categories are therefore best understood in relation to the particular code being interpreted, rather than as fixed labels for individual scholars. Each ruling engaged with several meanings of European dress, accepting some while rejecting others.

CLOSING

This article has examined why ulama in Java and Sumatra reached different rulings on European dress between 1892 and 1938 and why these rulings increasingly allowed its use. The differences lay not in fundamentally distinct legal doctrines but in how scholars applied the shared doctrine of *tashabbuh* to changing social circumstances. Their rulings considered the wearer's intention, whether a garment was distinctive to non-Muslims, local custom, and need or benefit. Sholeh Darat, Ahmad Khatib, Hasyim Asy'ari, Abdullah Ahmad, and Habib Salim bin Jindan differed in how they weighed these factors and interpreted the social meaning of European dress. When such garments remained associated with non-Muslims, prohibition was more likely; as they became common among Muslims in the Indies and the Middle East, conditional and broader permission became possible.

These findings qualify the view that ulama either simply resisted colonial culture or passively adopted it. Rather,

they interpreted garments whose social meanings were changing, and their rulings reflected these changing circumstances. The debate in the Indies also formed part of a transregional conversation involving Mecca, Cairo, and the Hadrami diaspora, alongside interwar controversies over the hat from Turkey to Albania. Ulama in the Indies thus participated in these wider debates rather than merely receiving ideas from elsewhere.

This study has limitations. Its sources are normative texts written by male scholars and primarily concern men's dress. Women's dress, which Navis recalls was criticized alongside the necktie, warrants separate study, as does the extent to which ordinary Muslims followed these rulings. Photographs, court records, and the periodicals examined in this study could help address these questions. Further research could also examine developments after independence. According to Navis (1996), the jacket and tie worn with a black Muslim cap became a form of national dress for men. This combination brought together garments increasingly treated as customary attire and headgear associated with Muslim and Indonesian identity, offering a possible historical outcome of the debates examined here.

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