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THE ROLE OF ARABIC IN STRENGTHENING MUSLIM RELIGIOUS IDENTITY: INSIGHTS FROM MINANGKABAU'S SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the role of Arabic as a foreign language in strengthening the religious identity of Muslims as a social group. Previous studies indicate that religious identity can shift due to various factors, with religious understanding being the most influential. From the Islamic perspective, the Qur'an, regarded as the holy scripture and written in Arabic, serves as the primary source of Islamic teachings. Thus, proficiency in Arabic is considered a crucial factor in shaping Islamic identity. However, previous research has not thoroughly examined how Arabic strengthens Muslim religious identity from a sociological viewpoint. This study employs a qualitative method through literature review, focusing on Minangkabau's history as a case of socio-cultural acceptance of Islam. The analysis is conducted using William H. Sewell Jr.'s theory of social transformation. The findings reveal that Arabic plays a central role as a resource in Minangkabau's social transformation, particularly in the formation and reinforcement of Muslim religious identity at the social level.

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis peran Bahasa Arab sebagai bahasa asing dalam memperkuat identitas religius Muslim sebagai kelompok sosial. Studi sebelumnya menunjukkan bahwa identitas religius dapat mengalami perubahan karena berbagai faktor, dengan pemahaman terhadap agama sebagai faktor yang paling berpengaruh. Dari perspektif Islam, Al-Qur'an, yang dianggap sebagai kitab suci dan ditulis dalam Bahasa Arab, menjadi sumber utama ajaran Islam. Oleh karena itu, penguasaan Bahasa Arab dianggap sebagai faktor penting dalam perubahan identitas keislaman. Namun, penelitian sebelumnya belum menjelaskan secara mendalam bagaimana Bahasa Arab memperkuat identitas religius Muslim dari sudut pandang sosiologis. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif melalui studi kepustakaan, dengan fokus pada sejarah Minangkabau sebagai contoh penerimaan sosio-kultural terhadap Islam. Analisis dilakukan dengan menggunakan teori transformasi sosial dari William H. Sewell Jr. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa Bahasa Arab memainkan peran sentral sebagai sumber daya dalam transformasi sosial di Minangkabau, termasuk dalam pembentukan dan penguatan identitas religius Muslim pada tingkat sosial.

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Background

Language and identity are closely related.[1] Therefore, including Arabic in discussions about Muslim society's religious identity is reasonable and promising, as it is the language of the Quran. The Quran is the primary source of Islamic tenets, encompassing many aspects such as ethics, creed, and law. Accordingly, Arabic is considered one of the world's sacred languages.

Islamic religious identity is subject to change, and knowledge becomes one of the fundamental driving factors.[2] Since the Quran is the source of Islamic knowledge, Muslims' comprehension of the Quran may influence the dynamics of their religious identity. Given that the Quran is written in Arabic, comprehension is clearly linked to the mastery of the language.

This aligns with many studies suggesting that Arabic is closely related to religiosity. Research by Husseinali[3] demonstrated that learning Arabic is crucial for individuals to become more engaged with Islam. A survey by Belnap[4] on the motivation for learning Arabic indicated that Muslim students aim to study the language to understand Islam. Publications by Jaspal and Coyle[5] highlighted that Arabic is a fundamental aspect of Islamic identity, as Muslims believe it to be the sacred language of Islam. Seymour-Jorn[6] and Grewal[7] illustrated Arabic as a tool among

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[1] Bonny Norton, "Language and Identity," *Sociolinguistics and Language Education* 23, no. 3 (2010): 349–69; Tope Omoniyi and Joshua A Fishman, *Explorations in the Sociology of Language and Religion*, vol. 20 (John Benjamins Publishing, 2006).

[2] Lori Peek, "Becoming Muslim: The Development of a Religious Identity," *Sociology of Religion* 66, no. 3 (2005): 215, https://doi.org/10.2307/4153097.

[3] "Who Is Studying Arabic and Why? A Survey of Arabic Students' Orientations at a Major University," *Foreign Language Annals* 39, no. 3 (2006): 395–412, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-9720.2006.tb02896.x; "Why Are You Learning Arabic? Orientations, Motivation and Achievement.," *Online Submission*, 2005.

[4] "Who's Taking Arabic and What on Earth for? A Survey of Students in Arabic Language Programs," *Al-'Arabiyya*, 1987, 29–42.

[5] Jaspal and Coyle (2010)

[6] "Arabic Language Learning among Arab Immigrants in Milwaukee, Wisconsin: A Study of Attitudes and Motivations," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 24, no. 1 (April 2004): 109–22, https://doi.org/10.1080/1360200042000212205.

[7] *Islam Is a Foreign Country: American Muslims and the Global Crisis of Authority*, vol. 22 (Nyu Press, 2014).

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Americans to preserve their Islamic identity. In more recent studies, such as those by Arifah et al.[8], Bassetti,[9] and Rahmi et al.[10]. Arabic and language study are also closely associated with Islam and Islamic identity.

Considering the aforementioned studies, I suggest that the existing discussions have not specifically addressed how Arabic functions in the dynamics of Islamic identity, particularly at the social level. Among the related studies, I find that research by Seymour-Jorn[11] was designed to discuss Arabic and Arabic learning in a social context, which is a tool for preserving the Islamic identity. However, It did not specifically address how the language operate in that context.

Although an individual is the locus of identity formation and operation[12], identity itself is a social construction that operates within a social setting and context.[13] According to this understanding, personal identity is influenced by the social context. Therefore, it is appropriate to explore how Arabic contributes to the formation of identity at the social level.

The Islamization of the Minangkabau ethnic group in West Sumatra, Indonesia, provides a suitable entry point for this discussion. Firstly, the group has undergone a dynamic transition from paganism to a society where Islam is an inseparable part of their cultural identity. Secondly, the

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[8] "Is Arabic a Sacred Language or a Foreign Language?: A Survey of Muslim Student's Belief in Non-Islamic Higher Education in Indonesia," in *Proceedings of the 7th International Conference on Language, Literature, Culture, and Education (ICOLLITE 2023)*, ed. Nuria Haristiani et al., vol. 832 (Dordrecht: Atlantis Press International BV, 2024), 153–61.

[9] "The Learning of Sacred Languages," in *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Religion* (Routledge, 2023).

[10] "Acculturation of Arabic Language on Hijrah Muslim Communication Oriented The Articulation of Islamic Identity," *RETORIKA: Jurnal Ilmu Bahasa* 9, no. 1 (2023): 1–8, https://doi.org/10.55637/jr.9.1.6714.1-8.

[11] Seymour-Jorn, "Arabic Language Learning among Arab Immigrants in Milwaukee, Wisconsin: A Study of Attitudes and Motivations."

[12] Erik H Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle* (WW Norton & company, 1994); Erik Homburger Erikson, "The Problem of Ego Identity," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 4, no. 1 (1956): 56–121.

[13] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (University of Chicago press, 1992); Danиle Hervieu-Lйger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory* (Rutgers University Press New Brunswick, NJ, 2000); Henri Tajfel, *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

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Minangkabau have maintained very limited cultural, linguistic, and geographic connections with the Arab world, from which Arabic originally came. Lastly, the Islamization process began approximately three to four centuries ago, which is relatively fast for an ethnic group with limited relationships with Arabs, where Islam originated. Therefore, this case is promising for illustrating the essential role of Arabic in strengthening Muslim identity. This work aims to explain how Arabic, specifically classical Arabic, can contribute to strengthening the religious identity of Muslim society.

Research Method

This research is a library study. I used historical references as qualitative data regarding the history of Minangkabau that is related to its interaction with Islam. The relevant historical data came from several publications, such as by Abdullah,[14] Azra,[15] Dobbin,[16] and Hadler.[17] Some other works, such as by Hamka[18] and Amran,[19] are also included.

Some writers have a Minangkabau background (Abdullah, Azra, Hamka, and Amran), while others are outsiders who conducted historical research on Minangkabau (Dobbin and Hadler). I may conclude that the information from their works, as cited in this paper, aligns with one another. Two Minangkabau writers, Hamka and Amran, are considered community historians[2021]. In this regard, the work of community historians can benefit professional historians, and vice versa, particularly in relation to

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[14] "Adat and Islam: An Examination of Conflict in Minangkabau," *Indonesia*, no. 2 (1966): 1–24, https://doi.org/10.2307/3350753; *Schools and Politics: The Kaum Muda Movement in West Sumatra* (Cornell university Southeast Asia program, 1971); *Islam, History and Social Change in Minangkabau*, 1981.

[15] *Surau: Pendidikan Islam Tradisi dalam Transisi dan Modernisasi* (Kencana, 2017).

[16] *Islamic Revivalism in a Changing Peasant Economy: Central Sumatra, 1784-1847* (Routledge, 2016).

[17] *Muslims and Matriarchs: Cultural Resilience in Indonesia through Jihad and Colonialism* (Cornell University Press, 2008).

[18] *Kenang-Kenangan Hidup* (Gema Insani, 2020); *Sejarah Umat Islam, Pra Kenabian Hingga Islam Di Nusantra*, ed. Hamka Hamka (Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2016).

[19] "Sumatra Barat, Plakat Panjang, Penerbit Sinar Harapan" (Jakarta, 1985).

[20] Fitri, Rahmi Nur. 2020. "Hamka Sebagai Sejarawan: Kajian Metodologi Sejarah Terhadap Karya Hamka." *Jurnal Fuaduna* 4 (1): 42–53.

[21] Hadler, Jeffrey. 2003. "Rusli Amran and the Rewriting of Minangkabau History." *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia*.

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local history[22]. I do not hesitate to cite these two community historians, acknowledging that this topic covers a local context and their works do not contradict those of professional historians.

To achieve the research aim, this study analyzes Minangkabau historical data from the perspective of the social transformation theory suggested by WH Sewell Jr.[23] Its' theoretical features, particularly about transformational resources and agents promise to explain the role of Arabic and mastery of Arabic within the Minangkabau historical framework.

In line with Bhaskar's[24] assertion that scientific discovery is a combination of pre-existing knowledge and the efficient activity of men, the organization of the theoretical discussion reflects my understanding of the theme. The discussion is organized into sections on "Social Transformation Theory," "Identity," and "The Minangkabau World."

Theoretical Overview

Social Transformation Theory

Social transformation involves several essential concepts: social structure, schema, resources, and agency.[25] A transformation occurs when an agency activates its capacity to bring about social change by harnessing two fundamental aspects of social structures: social schema and resources.

Structure as 'composed simultaneously of schemas, which are virtual, and resources, which are actual'.[26] The term 'schema' is uniquely designated by Sewell to replace the term 'rules' previously introduced by Giddens.[27] 'Rules' here are externally imposed and formal procedures, whereas schemas are often natural and informal. Schemas represent the collection of human knowledge acquired from long-term experiences in their circumstances. Differences in schemas, meaning differences in knowledge, lead people to live and behave differently. Resources, the

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[22] Cortada, James W. 2023. "Information Infrastructures and Historical Research: A Framework Useful for Professional and Amateur Historians ." *The Information Society* 39 (5). Routledge: 306–21. doi:10.1080/01972243.2023.2237012.

[23] *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (University of Chicago Press, 2005).

[24] *A Realist Theory of Science* (Routledge, 2008), 14.

[25] William H Sewell. WH Sewell Jr, *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (University of Chicago Press, 2005).

[26] WH Sewell Jr.

[27] Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure, and Contradiction in Social Analysis* (University of California Press, 1979).

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second element that composes structures, consists of two aspects: human and non-human. Sewell Jr[28] wrote:

> Non-human resources are objects, animate or inanimate, naturally occurring or manufactured, that can be used to enhance and maintain power; human resources are physical, strength, dexterity, knowledge, and emotional commitments that can be used to enhance and maintain power, including knowledge of the means of gaining, retaining, controlling, and propagating either human and non-human resources.

The differences in schemas may lead to a different view, whether a subject is resources or not.[29] He also wrote.[30]

> Non-human resources have a material existence that is not reducible to rules or schemas, but the activation of material things as resources, the determination of their social value and power, depends on the cultural schema that informs their social use." On the other hand, differences in schemas may lead people to harness an object in different ways.

Schemas are not rigid and unchangeable because human knowledge evolves. Notably, resources and schemas hold a reciprocal influence: schemas may affect resources, and *vice versa* resources may affect schemas. This mutual influence is known as the duality of schemas and structures. (WH Sewell Jr 2005, 136). He wrote:

> " If structures are dual in this sense, then it must be true that schemas are the effect of resources, just as resources are the effect of schemas. This seems to a reasonable claim, one whose plausibility can be demonstrated by a few examples".

Thus, human judgment on resources may change over time. In several civilizations, stones were used as tablets on which people wrote their stories and ideas. Scientific discoveries led to the invention of paper as a writing medium, which excludes stones from writing and documentation. Changes in schemas can also alter how people approach and manage resources. For example, labor was once exploited as enslaved people. Changes in schemas have led to the recognition of laborers as free human beings whose rights must be respected. Another aspect, 'schemas as the effects of resources,' can be seen in several examples. The discovery of

[28] WH Sewell Jr, *Logics of History*.

[29] WH Sewell Jr.

[30] WH Sewell Jr.

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petroleum as a primary energy source has unprecedentedly transformed the world order. This discovery has compelled countries and various social institutions to change their economic, cultural, military, and diplomatic approaches.

Identity

Identity is a social construct.[31] Social actors living in specific social contexts are responsible for creating, strengthening, and distributing various types of identity—such as ethnicity, nationality, and religion—from synchronically and diachronically. An excellent example of asserting identity as a social construct can be observed in how Muslims determine their religious identity through their interpretation of Islam. Islam is a universal world religion, as its teachings are not restricted to specific social entities. However, the backgrounds and contexts in which Muslims live contribute to different interpretations of Islam, leading to diverse character formations among Muslims.[32]

The explanation above illustrates that identity is formed when a specific worldview is accepted and applied. A worldview is a set of cognitive orientations that determine how a group identifies itself and understands the surrounding reality.[33] Studying and knowing the worldview of another group or person does not imply adopting that identity without the intention to make it one's orientation. For example, a scholar may cognitively understand the Islamic worldview without being a Muslim. In this regard, Muslims can be defined as those who have accepted the Islamic worldview and use it to define themselves and their reality. The formation of identity begins when a worldview is integrated into the self.

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[31] Anne Campbell, "Cultural Identity as a Social Construct," *Intercultural Education* 11, no. 1 (2000): 31–39; Norton, "Language and Identity."

[32] Nikki R Keddie, "Islam and Society in Minangkabau and in the Middle East: Comparative Reflections," *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 2, no. 1 (1987): 1–30; Maykel Verkuyten and Ali Aslan Yildiz, "National (Dis) Identification and Ethnic and Religious Identity: A Study among Turkish-Dutch Muslims," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 33, no. 10 (2007): 1448–62.

[33] Paul G Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Baker Academic, 2008); Mark E Koltko-Rivera, "The Psychology of Worldviews," *Review of General Psychology* 8, no. 1 (2004): 3–58.

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Considering the interconnection between worldview and identity, we can assert that knowledge is a fundamental feature of identity formation, as a worldview is a set of knowledge that helps individuals define themselves. From this perspective, we can state that Islam constitutes a worldview—referred to as the Islamic worldview—that emerges upon recognizing and accepting Islam as a comprehensive body of knowledge, including laws, ethics, rituals, and eschatology, encompassing all aspects of life. Many studies support this perspective.

Research on collective memory, for instance, reveals that memory serves as a repository where identities are nurtured and preserved, as it is a mental space in which humans store knowledge.[34] To ensure knowledge is well-preserved within collective memory, people create and maintain traditions, reinterpret their meanings, and even construct buildings that serve as anchors of memory. From this perspective, the loss of specific knowledge equates to a loss of identity[35]. The strengthening of Muslim identity in America, including the shift from viewing Islam as an ascribed identity to a declared identity, occurs as knowledge about Islam increases alongside personal maturity.

The Minangkabau World

The Minangkabau is the largest matrilineal ethnic group globally, with around 5 million people living in the Sumatera Barat (West Sumatra) province of Indonesia,[36] the Minangkabau's native land. The Minangkabau people constitute more than 90% of the total population in this area. Scholarly research indicated more Minangkabau people are living outside their homeland.[37]

Minangkabau people refer to their cultural universe as *Alam Minangkabau* (the Minangkabau world).[38] The precise historical origins of

[34] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (University of Chicago Press, 2020); Daniele Hervieu-Leger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory*, 1st edition (Cambridge: Polity, 2000).

[35] Peek, "Becoming Muslim."

[36] BPS Sumatera Barat, "Jumlah Penduduk Menurut Kabupaten/Kota Dan Jenis Kelamin Di Provinsi Sumatera Barat (Jiwa), 2021-2023" (Padang, 2024).

[37] Tsuyoshi Kato, *Matriliny and Migration: Evolving Minangkabau Traditions in Indonesia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1982); Mochtar Naim, "Merantau Pola Migrasi Suku Minangkabau Edisi Ketiga," *Jakarta: Rajawali Perss*, 2013.

[38] Christine Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism in a Changing Peasant Economy: Central Sumatra, 1784-1847.*, Reprint edition (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004); Taufik Abdullah,

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this term are unclear. However, the use of the word *Alam*, an adopted Arabic term, suggests that the concept emerged after the Minangkabau embraced Islam. *Alam Minangkabau* encompasses both the physical and metaphysical dimensions of the Minangkabau. The physical dimensions include the core cultural land, called *luhak*, and the peripheral regions known as *rantau*, along with all physical attributes such as traditional buildings and the geographical boundaries of the Minangkabau territory.

Traditionally, the Minangkabau developed a government system based on matrilineal principles[39]. There are hundreds of clans in the Minangkabau world, with the clan being the smallest governmental unit. Membership in a clan is determined by maternal lineage, meaning a person belongs to their mother's clan. Four neighboring clans may unite to form a *nagari*, an independent governmental unit in Minangkabau.

Historians[40] agree that the Minangkabau entered their historical period in the 13th CE. Several stone tablets tell the story of Adityawarman, the first king of the Pagaruyung Kingdom, dating back to this era. There are no written records predating Adityawarman (1294-1375), although the discovery of menhir stones suggests that a group of people inhabited the area as far back as 3500 BCE.

Regarding religion, the indigenous belief of the Minangkabau was animism.[41] The Minangkabau believed in supernatural powers that could influence their lives, with shamans serving as crucial figures who could connect humans with these powers.

With the establishment of the Minangkabau kingdom by Adityawarman, the Minangkabau world came under Hindu-Buddhist

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"Adat and Islam: An Examination of Conflict in Minangkabau," *Indonesia*, no. 2 (1966): 1–24; Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarchs: Cultural Resilience in Indonesia through Jihad and Colonialism*.

[39] Abdullah, "Adat and Islam: An Examination of Conflict in Minangkabau"; Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism in a Changing Peasant Economy*; Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarchs: Cultural Resilience in Indonesia through Jihad and Colonialism*.

[40] Amran, "Sumatra Barat, Plakat Panjang, Penerbit Sinar Harapan"; Hamka, *Sejarah Umat Islam, Pra Kenabian Hingga Islam Di Nusantra*; Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism in a Changing Peasant Economy: Central Sumatra, 1784-1847*; Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarchs: Cultural Resilience in Indonesia through Jihad and Colonialism*.

[41] Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism in a Changing Peasant Economy: Central Sumatra, 1784-1847*; Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarchs: Cultural Resilience in Indonesia through Jihad and Colonialism*.

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influence.[42] In Dharmasraya, the kingdom's center before moving to Pagaruyung, historians found ruins of Hindu worship sites.[43] Raffles[44] also noted similar ruins near Pagaruyung, the capital of the Minangkabau kingdom. However, the extent of Hindu influence on the Minangkabau people has not yet fully understood. Given the decentralized nature of the Minangkabau government system, the Hindu influence may have been limited to the royal family. The strong independence of Minangkabau *nagari*s (autonomous villages) likely prevented the widespread imposition of an outside religion.

The Minangkabau also had contact with Christianity. Thomas Dias, the first European to visit the Pagaruyung kingdom in 1684, was a Christian. His travel reports indicated that the natives recognized him as the first Christian to visit their land [45]. Contact with Christianity intensified as the Dutch sought to monopolize gold and agricultural products in Minangkabau, starting around the 16th CE.

However, it appears that the Minangkabau people were not interested in Christianity and tended to ignore it. An agreement between the Dutch and the local leaders *(penghulu)* on the western coast of Minangkabau, stating that neither party would interfere with the other's religious practices, further indicates this indifference[46]. One possible reason for this could be the negative perception of the Dutch as colonizers.

Finding and Discussion

Based on my understanding of historians' works regarding Islam and Minangkabau, I suggest that there are four historical phases of the Minangkabau acceptance of Islam: (1) the dawn of Islam in Minangkabau, (2) the first peaceful wave of the Islamic reformist movement, (3) the second wave of the Islamic reformist movement, and (4) the Islamic reformist movement at the beginning of the 20th CE. This classification assists me in contextually explaining the role of Arabic throughout the history of Islam in Minangkabau

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[42] Amran, "Sumatra Barat, Plakat Panjang, Penerbit Sinar Harapan"; Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism in a Changing Peasant Economy: Central Sumatra, 1784-1847*.

[43] Amran, "Sumatra Barat, Plakat Panjang, Penerbit Sinar Harapan."

[44] Lady Sophia Raffles, *Memoir_of_the_Life_and_Public_Services_o*, 1835.

[45] Timothy P. Barnard, "Thomas Dias's Journey to Central Sumatra in 1864" (Jakarta, 2013).

[46] Amran, "Sumatra Barat, Plakat Panjang, Penerbit Sinar Harapan."

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The Dawn of Islam in the Minangkabau World and Arabic

According to Hamka,[47] the interaction between the Minangkabau and Islam began in the 7th CE when Arab merchants established settlements on the west coast of Minangkabau. Historical records indicate that the Minangkabau world came under Islamic influence in the 15th CE. Dias[48] illustrated the extent of Islam's influence on the kingdom, noting that some *hajis* (Muslims who had completed the pilgrimage to Mecca) surrounded the king. In another part of his report, he gave readers the impression that Pagaruyung was an Islamic kingdom with a political network connected to the Ottoman Empire.

Islam entered Minangkabau through Minangkabau emigrants, called *perantau*, who returned to their native land. One prominent figure in Minangkabau's Islamization is Syeikh Burhanuddin (1646-1591). He Wasborn in Pariaman, an area on the west coast. Syeikh Burhanuddin emigrated to Aceh to study Islam. Upon returning, he founded a Sufi brotherhood in his hometown, Ulakan, which soon attracted Minangkabau people from many nagaris to study Islam under his guidance. After completing their studies, these students returned to their native nagaris and clans as insiders bringing in a new religion, which is Islam. The Minangkabau people at the time may never have imagined that the returning *perantau* with an "outside religion" would fundamentally change many aspects of the Minangkabau world.

Sheikh Burhanuddin is widely recognized as the driving force behind transforming the *surau* from a communal shelter to an Islamic educational institution.[49] Traditionally, *surau* served as a communal shelter, a place where unmarried Minangkabau teenagers slept at night.[50] According to Minangkabau adat, it was uncommon for teenagers to sleep in their traditional communal houses, called *Rumah Gadang*. Apart from being a place for teenagers, the *surau* also served as a place for widowers to sleep at night. Typically, only women and their husbands could sleep in the communal houses. After the arrival of Islam, clan members who had studied Islam elsewhere and claimed authority as Ulama transformed their

[47] Hamka, *Sejarah Umat Islam, Pra Kenabian Hingga Islam Di Nusantra*.

[48] Thomas Dias, "Thomas Dias' Journey to Central Sumatra in 1684: Sejarah Nusantara" (Jakarta, 1684).

[49] Azra, *Surau*.

[50] Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism in a Changing Peasant Economy: Central Sumatra, 1784-1847*.

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*surau*s into the centers of Islamic education and movement. The surau became more independent as Ulama and their followers managed to fund their activities [51].

The success of harnessing the *surau* as the center of movement to introduce Islam may be explained from the theory of transformation. The returned Islamic students were insiders who already understood the existing social schemas. Based on their understanding, they harnessed their *surau* to become their movement center in introducing Islam without getting the social rejections. Their knowledge about Islam and schemas led them to identify *surau* as their transformational resources.

From the perspective of social transformation theory, Arabic is considered a non-human resource in the initial era of the Minangkabau religious identity transformation process. This process involved a change in worldview, where Islamic values were introduced to the community both through studies conducted in the *surau* and through the insertion of these values into Tambo during the writing process. The recognition of these values was made possible by mastery of Arabic, the language of the Quran, Islamic classical references, and Islamic rituals.

Arabic played a crucial role in the *surau* as an Islamic educational institution. Research on *surau* manuscripts[52] shows that Arabic was a fundamental and compulsory subject during the era of Sheikh Burhanuddin. Old *surau* manuscripts from this period indicate that the Arabic curriculum focused on mastering grammatical aspects, such as *nahwu* and *sarf*. This suggests that, in the *surau* perspective, Arabic was seen more as a scientific tool for understanding Arabic texts, such as the Quran and classical Islamic references, rather than as a means of communication.

Arabic also served as a gateway for introducing Islamic terms and concepts into the Minangkabau worldview through the writing of Tambo. As researchers found,[53] *Tambo*is a Minangkabau oral text that contains historical information about clans, laws, ethics, and even details regarding communal properties. As an oral tradition, Tambo was passed down from

[51] Dobbin.

[52] Taufik Hidayat Ahmad, Putra Apria, and Ahmad Chairullah, "Katalog Surau II: Panduan Koleksi Naskah Pusaka Syech Burhanuddin Ulakan Surau Pondok Tanjung Medan," 2014.

[53] Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism in a Changing Peasant Economy: Central Sumatra, 1784-1847*; Abdullah, "Adat and Islam: An Examination of Conflict in Minangkabau."

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one generation to another. However, it was in the hands of the *surau* ulama that Tambo was first documented in written form and continued to be reproduced.[54] In these writings, Minangkabau ulama not only recorded Tambo but also incorporated several Arabic-Quranic terms and concepts, replacing the old terms and concepts with ones like *"akal," "syariat," "tarikat," "hakikat," "ma'rifat," "adat Islamiyah,"* and *"adat jahiliyah".*[55]

The Peaceful First Wave of Islamic Reformist Movement in the Minangkabau World and Arabic

Sufistic Islam or *Islam Tarikat* was Islam that Minangkabau ulama introduced to the Minangkabau world, which accommodated the existing tradition. Abdullah[56] noted that Islamic tariqat in Minangkabau paid more attention to individual purification than individual legal compliance. They also chose not to confront old traditions, such as gambling and cockfighting,[57] which are generally considered contrary to Islamic teachings. According to Gibbs.[58] The character of Minangkabau Sufistic Islam is the typical character of the Sufi brotherhood, regardless of the place they evolve.

Despite being widely accepted, Islam in Minangkabau played a limited role. Islam was only a religion that dealt with the private spheres. Meanwhile, public affairs were still under the *adat* institutions. *Penghulu*, as the leader of the institutions who acted as executive, legislative, and judiciary, related to clans' prosperity.[59] Meanwhile, the authority of the *ulama* was commonly limited in the scope of the *surau*. As Abdullah[60] stated, the spread of Islam in the Minangkabau world was not political, as it was only in Aceh and Java, which caused the absence of radical changes

[54] Abdullah, *Islam, History and Social Change in Minangkabau*.

[55] Ahmad Datuk Batuah and Aman Dt Madjoindo, *Tambo Minangkabau Dan Adatnja* (Dinas Penerbitan Balai Pustaka, 1956), 133.

[56] Abdullah, "Adat and Islam: An Examination of Conflict in Minangkabau."

[57] Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism in a Changing Peasant Economy: Central Sumatra, 1784-1847*; Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarchs: Cultural Resilience in Indonesia through Jihad and Colonialism*.

[58] Hamilton Alexander Rosskeen Gibb, *Modern Trends in Islam* (University of Chicago Press, 1945), 25.

[59] Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism in a Changing Peasant Economy: Central Sumatra, 1784-1847*.

[60] Abdullah, "Adat and Islam: An Examination of Conflict in Minangkabau."

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in the existing social order in Minangkabau. The social circumstance led ulama not to have a fundamental role in social life.

Adat law, which every nagaris were governed based on, was not a single legal system of the Minangkabau world[61]. Each nagaris, with its federalists' independence and autonomy, established its adat laws which were adequate to be enforced only its indigenous inhabitant and within *nagari's* geographical scope. It caused disputes involving people from different *nagaris* to be put on the negotiating table, and often the negotiations failed, hanged the disputes without the just ending. Traveler traders who often became victims of robbery while traveling outside their Nagari were among the most aggrieved parties observing the situation

Tuanku Nan Tuo, a progressive *ulama* of his time, realized it as a change for introducing the Islamic law, a universal legal system. In the 1780s, he opened an Islamic law class in his *surau*, which attracted many people from across *nagaris*[62]. Other suraus to some extent, likely followed the attempt, considering, as Azra[63] suggested, Minangkabau *suraus* linked each other.

The attempt was Minangkabau reformation dawn. From the side of *surau*, the attempt was an initial breakthrough since Minangkabau *surau*, for the first time, showed a character shift: expanding to account public affairs. Minangkabau people from outside the surau circle, such as traders, also began to recognize other aspects of Islam that they did not know so far, namely Islam as a comprehensive legal system.

The effort makes the surau have more followers, even from across villages and gaining more power. It is evidenced by the *surau's* ability to create troop units that are often used to attack the position of bandits who continue to carry out robberies.[64] The introduction and campaign for implementing Islamic law is the next transformation process in Minangkabau, which contributes to strengthening the religious identity of the Minangkabau community.

Arabic was a fundamental resource behind the transformation process. Mastery of Arabic as a tool for comprehending religious texts, not

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[61] Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism in a Changing Peasant Economy: Central Sumatra, 1784-1847*.

[62] Dobbin.

[63] Azra, *Surau*.

[64] Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism in a Changing Peasant Economy: Central Sumatra, 1784-1847*.

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for communicative purposes, enabled the introduction of Islamic laws to the Minangkabau world. With their mastery of Arabic, Minangkabau ulama claimed their authority in religion, which allowed them to run the campaign. Mastery Arabic was an essential human resource to explore Islamic law knowledge, which was previously absent from the Minangkabau world and introduced to the society. The emergence of new knowledge about Islam, the religion they have accepted so far, has led, to some extent, to the strengthening of the religious identity of the Minangkabau people.

The Second Wave of Islamic Reformists Movement in the Minangkabau World and Arabic

The previous movement was not very successful in its influence on the existing order, as traditional practices contrary to Islamic teachings—such as gambling, cockfighting, *tuak* (alcohol), and *madat* (opium) use—had not yet ceased.[65] Many penghulus (adat leaders) refused to stop these activities, seeing them as part of *adat*, or tradition. Some even participated in the opium business.[66]

The situation caused social unrest and instability in the Minangkabau world. Markets, where these activities often took place, gained a bad reputation as frequent fights and chaos made people feel insecure about conducting economic transactions.[67] These activities also destroyed many households in Minangkabau, while robbery of traders was still common.[68]

These social problems triggered the so-called Padri movement in 1803.[69] The movement began when three hajis who had just returned from Mecca proposed more uncompromising efforts to stop the activities causing social chaos in the Minangkabau world. They invited several influential scholars to join them, including Tuanku Nan Tuo. However, he refused to join.

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[65] Dobbin; Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarchs: Cultural Resilience in Indonesia through Jihad and Colonialism*.

[66] Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism in a Changing Peasant Economy: Central Sumatra, 1784-1847*.

[67] Dobbin.

[68] Dobbin.

[69] Dobbin; Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarchs: Cultural Resilience in Indonesia through Jihad and Colonialism*.

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The three hajis criticized Tuanku Nan Tuo, asserting that his methods had failed to bring about proper conduct in the Minangkabau world. Eventually, an alliance of eight influential scholars, known as Harimau Nan Salapan (the eight tigers), was formed[70]. This alliance organized troops to attack villages and *nagari*s that refused to abandon these activities, sparking the first civil war in Minangkabau, between the Padri and their opposition, who identified themselves as the adat group. The Padri also targeted bandit groups. The conflict between the Padri and the *adat* group lasted from 1803 to the early 1820s.

The Padri movement, in the context of the Minangkabau civil war, ended due to mutual awareness. Tuanku Imam Bonjol, a prominent leader of the Padri, decided to reconsider the movement, possibly after realizing the damage caused by the war and the irregularities within the Padri troops themselves. In 1820, he sent four envoys to Mecca to re-learn Islamic teachings and laws. The information and explanations they brought back led Tuanku Imam Bonjol to revise his approach, consolidating with the kaum adat.[71]

On the other hand, many *kaum adat* accepted Tuanku Imam Bonjol's offer, seeing the cooperation with the Dutch against the Padri as more harmful than beneficial. A sense of shared Minangkabau identity also seemed to play a role in this reconciliation. The aphorism *"Adat basandi syara', syara' basandi kitabullah"* (*adat* is based on sharia, and sharia is based on the Book of God) and *"Syara' mangato, adat mamakai"* (sharia' designs and *adat* applies) became a Minangkabau convention.[72] Adat law and the penghulu's position remained valid as long as they did not conflict with Islamic law and tenets. This is the most prominent legacy of the Padri War for the Minangkabau world. After the civil war ended, the conflict transitioned into a struggle against colonialism, as the Dutch sought to colonize the Minangkabau world.

The third wave of the Minangkabau transformation led to the strengthening of the religious identity of the Minangkabau people, evident in two key aspects. Firstly, the surau's role in the Minangkabau community life was strengthened. The leadership of the ulama was widely accepted,

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[70] Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism in a Changing Peasant Economy: Central Sumatra, 1784-1847*.

[71] L. Dt R. Diholoe, *Riwajat Dan Perjoengan Toeankoe Imam Bondjol Sebagai Pahlawan Islam*, 1939.

[72] Abdullah, *Schools and Politics: The Kaum Muda Movement in West Sumatra*.

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giving them a more significant social role. Secondly, the acceptance of the aphorism *"adat basandi syara' syara' basandi Kitabullah"* as the foundational philosophy of Minangkabau adat indicated a broader acceptance of Islam as the basis of local customs and laws. There is no historical record of any rejection of this philosophy, and it remains recognized to this day. These two attitudes—social acceptance of the ulama's more significant role and the acceptance of Islam as the basis of local custom and law—reflect the strengthening of religious identity.

Given that the transformation process was driven by the efforts and encouragement of the Minangkabau ulema, it is reasonable to state that this transformation was made possible due to the authority of the Ulama. This authority allowed scholars to become active agents of transformational progress. In this regard, mastery of Arabic was one of the essential aspects underpinning their authority. Mastery of Arabic sustained the existence of the *surau*, its Ulama, and their followers, enabling them to offer breakthroughs in the transformational process of the Minangkabau world. Without mastery of Arabic, the third stage of the Minangkabau identity transformation, as explained above, would not have occurred. This demonstrates that Arabic is a resource for transformation.

The Reformist Movement at the Beginning of 20th CE in the Minangkabau World and Arabic

The Paderi War ended completely in 1837 with the defeat of the Paderi and the successful exertion of Dutch force and influence in Minangkabau[73]. By exiling Tuanku Imam Bonjol and other influential Padri leaders, the Dutch managed to extinguish Minangkabau's physical opposition. Through offering the Plakat Panjang (The Long Declaration), a peace agreement and declaration between the Dutch and Minangkabau, the Dutch generally managed to avoid further physical conflicts with the Minangkabau, which could have endangered their colonial agenda.

With the approaches the Dutch applied in Minangkabau, they gained considerable economic benefits. Through a forced cultivation policy, the Dutch ordered the Minangkabau to plant coffee and monopolized its trade. Historians note that the implementation of the coffee cultivation system in Minangkabau not only covered the costs of the

[73] Amran, "Sumatra Barat, Plakat Panjang, Penerbit Sinar Harapan"; Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism in a Changing Peasant Economy: Central Sumatra, 1784-1847*; Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarchs: Cultural Resilience in Indonesia through Jihad and Colonialism*.

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Paderi War—one of the most challenging wars faced by the Dutch—but also generated enormous profits.[74]

However, to some extent, the Minangkabau also benefited from this situation. Many Minangkabau could travel to Mecca for pilgrimage and study there. Returned hajis helped surau continue to exist as centers of Islamic education in Minangkabau. The post-Padri period was marked by the strengthening of the role of Ulama and surau, despite being under the Dutch watch.[75]

In addition to ensuring the sustainability of *surau* as centers of Islamic education in Minangkabau, the Minangkabau hajis also initiated the next transformational process. Ahmad Khatib Al-Minangkabauwi (1860-1916), a Minangkabau ulama who became the Imam of the Grand Mosque, published an article attacking the Minangkabau adat system on inheritance distribution.[76] According to his interpretation of the Quran, he denounced the inheritance system of communal properties in Minangkabau as unlawful and heretical (bid'ah). Ahmad Khatib's critique was the first open attack on the foundations of Minangkabau adat.[77] However, Minangkabau ulama living in Minangkabau found theological arguments to counter the critique, asserting that communal property is a communal waqf, making it exempt from Islamic inheritance law, which governs private property[78].

Ahmad Khatib's reputation attracted many Minangkabau who wanted to study Islam with him. Among his students who later became Islamic reformers in Minangkabau and Indonesia was Abdul Karim Amrullah, also known as Haji Rasul (1879-1945).[79] Inspired by the progressive thoughts of notable scholars like Rashid Ridha and Jamaluddin al-Afghani, he criticized traditional practices as filled with unlawful innovations (*bid'ah*) and impeded Minangkabau's progress. He advocated for becoming progressive modern Muslims by directly referring to the Quran and Hadith and abandoning taqlid (blind obedience) to authority.

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[74] Amran, "Sumatra Barat, Plakat Panjang, Penerbit Sinar Harapan"; Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism in a Changing Peasant Economy: Central Sumatra, 1784-1847*.

[75] Abdullah, "Adat and Islam: An Examination of Conflict in Minangkabau."

[76] Hamka, *Kenang-Kenangan Hidup*.

[77] Abdullah, "Adat and Islam: An Examination of Conflict in Minangkabau."

[78] Novrizal AL Arfan, "Status Hukum Waris Pusako Tinggi Minangkabau Dalam Pandangan Syekh Ahmad Khatib Al Minangkabawi Dan Buya Hamka" (UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, 2024).

[79] Hamka, *Kenang-Kenangan Hidup*.

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He began his campaign in his Nagari in Maninjau. Minangkabau Sufi-brotherhood viewed his ideas as extreme, contradictory, and offensive, seeing them as a threat to their existence. From there, Haji Rasul's ideas spread throughout the Minangkabau world, leading to the formation of two major groups: Kaum Muda (the Islamic progressive group of Minangkabau) and Kaum Tua (the conservative Islamic group of Minangkabau).

In promoting their ideas, Kaum Muda Ulama reformed Islamic educational institutions.[80] They found a legal loophole within the Dutch law system allowing them to establish modern religious schools. Sumatra Thawalib, located in Padang Panjang, was the first modern school established by Kaum Muda, founded by Haji Rasul in the early 20th CE. Rahmah el Yunusiyah, a progressive woman from Kaum Muda ulama, later founded a modern Islamic school for women. Her efforts impressed Sheikh al-Azhar, who granted her a Doctor Honoris Causa, the first honorary doctorate awarded to a woman in al-Azhar's history.[81] In Padang, Kaum Muda ulama established several schools, including Adabiyah.

Besides schools, Kaum Muda also utilized printed media to spread their ideas. Inspired by the success of al-Manar and al-Urwatul Wuthqa, Minangkabau Islamic reformers and revivalists published their media to disseminate their Islamic thoughts. Notable publications included al-Imam and al-Munir.[82] Their efforts resonated beyond Minangkabau, influencing many regions in Indonesia and establishing Minangkabau as a center for Islamic reformist and revivalist movements.[83]

In response to the Kaum Muda movement, Traditionalist Islam in Minangkabau, known as Kaum Tua (the Old Group), defended themselves by strengthening their bases in surau. They denounced educational innovations as infidel systems. However, they eventually established their educational institutions using the Western system to maintain their understanding and social base.[84] To counter Kaum Muda's influence, they also founded political organizations.[85] Kaum Tua criticized Kaum Muda as

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[80] Za'im Rais, "The Minangkabau Traditionalists' Response to the Modernist Movement," 1994; Hamka, *Kenang-Kenangan Hidup*.

[81] Hamka, *Kenang-Kenangan Hidup*; Rais, "The Minangkabau Traditionalists' Response to the Modernist Movement."

[82] Hamka, *Kenang-Kenangan Hidup*.

[83] Hamka.

[84] Rais, "The Minangkabau Traditionalists' Response to the Modernist Movement."

[85] Abdullah, *Schools and Politics: The Kaum Muda Movement in West Sumatra*.

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"rootless," while Kaum Muda labeled them "backward" and "conservative".[86]

The intellectual contestation and debate between these two groups were intense, particularly concerning ijtihad and bid'ah.[87] They openly disagreed on determining the beginning and end of Ramadan.[88] Kaum Muda, following their ijtihad, used astronomical measurement and calculation (*hisab* method) to determine the start of a new moon of the Islamic lunar calendar. Meanwhile, Kaum Tua remained loyal to the traditional method of observing and sighting the crescent moon. Despite the fierce debates, both groups managed to maintain the Minangkabau social unity and did not divert their focus to fighting Dutch colonialism. In 1950 and 1951, ulama from both sides convened a large-scale meeting to discuss various social phenomena in the Minangkabau society of West Sumatra[89].

Minangkabau's transformation in the early 20th CE also involved harnessing Arabic as a resource. As before, mastery of Arabic ensured the existence of ulama and facilitated the introduction of Islamic reformation and revivalist movements initiated by Rashid Rida and Jamaluddin al-Afghani. The language enabled Minangkabau reformers and revivalists to advocate for ijtihad to reassess the old Islamic tradition in Minangkabau.

Without mastering Arabic, it would have been challenging to re-examine the Islamic tradition developed in Minangkabau. This tradition resulted from at least three centuries of transformation, starting from the appearance of Sheikh Burhanuddin. It was strengthened during the Tuanku Nan Tuo era, the second wave of Minangkabau transformation, and continued through the Padri movement, which claimed many victims. Over the centuries, the Minangkabau had established their religious identity. The efforts of the Kaum Muda ulama in the early 20th CE were extraordinary, as they succeeded in changing many aspects of the Islamic tradition in Minangkabau, making it synonymous with their interpretation. It is fair to say that these changes would not have been possible without the authority that comes with mastering Arabic.

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[86] Abdullah.

[87] Rais, "The Minangkabau Traditionalists' Response to the Modernist Movement."

[88] Abdullah, *Schools and Politics: The Kaum Muda Movement in West Sumatra*.

[89] Gusti Asnan, "Dunia Maritim Pantai Barat Sumatera," *(No Title)*, 2007, 22.

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Conclusion

The transformational process in the Minangkabau world is primarily characterized by Islamization: the process by which the Islamic worldview was introduced and accepted. In other words, this transformation involved the Minangkabau claiming and strengthening their Islamic identity after embracing the Islamic worldview. The Minangkabau world has undergone significant changes since the introduction of Islam. In the initial phase of transformation, Minangkabau society shifted from animism to becoming part of the ummah (global Muslim community). The second wave, initiated by Tuanku Nan Tuo, made the Islamic identity more pronounced. The Padri movement, representing the third wave, marked a fundamental acceptance of Islam as the core basis of Minangkabau identity. The fourth wave occurred as the Minangkabau world absorbed new reformist ideas circulating in the Islamic world, leading to an Islamic identity distinct from previous iterations.

From the perspective of social transformation theory, agents capable of managing resources facilitated the Islamization of Minangkabau. This paper argues that Arabic, particularly Classical Arabic, was a crucial resource in this transformational process, starting in the 17th CE. The emergence of Minangkabau ulama during the first and subsequent waves was due to the Minangkabau people's ability to master Arabic. Being native agents enabled them to introduce Islam relatively smoothly, as they were familiar with the existing social framework and could formulate strategies accordingly. Researchers have noted that no other region in Indonesia has embraced Islam as comprehensively as the Minangkabau,[90] which, in my view, is significantly due to the role played by local agents. In contrast, in Java, some ulama who introduced Islam were non-native Javanese[91]. Mastery of Arabic allowed enlightened Minangkabau natives to claim the authority to introduce and teach Islam to society. In other words, Arabic served as a non-human resource that empowered them to be effective agents of Islamization in the Minangkabau world.

Based on this analysis, I conclude that identity transformation through the process of Islamization cannot occur effectively without

[90] Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarchs: Cultural Resilience in Indonesia through Jihad and Colonialism*; Kato, *Matriliny and Migration: Evolving Minangkabau Traditions in Indonesia*.

[91] Azyumardi Azra and Jajat Burhanudin, *Sejarah Kebudayaan Islam Indonesia: Institusi Dan Gerakan*, 2015, 49.

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recognizing the significance of Arabic as a non-human resource. Mastery of Arabic enabled people to study and understand the Islamic worldview, which is the first step in forming and strengthening an Islamic identity. Identity can be seen as a self-embedded worldview, so any subsequent efforts to strengthen this identity should begin with an awareness of Arabic's role, specifically Classical Arabic, within the existing social framework.

While this study has highlighted the essential role of Arabic as a transformational resource in Minangkabau society, particularly within the context of the global Muslim community, there remains an opportunity to propose future research. This could explore Arabic learning schema in the Minangkabau world, including the types of Arabic taught, the curriculum used, and its implementation. Such research could also involve the study of Minangkabau manuscripts, especially those related to educational activities within the surau.

Note:

1. *This paper is adapted from a sub-chapter of Ph.D. thesis in University College Cork-Ireland, entitled Arabic Learning Among Minangkabau: Attitudes, Motivations, and Collective Religious Memory*
2. *The original version of this article was presented in 7th IISS (International ILEM Summer School Program), 2021.*

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