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MAPPING RADICAL ISLAM
IN INDONESIA

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Din Wahid

Sufism and the “Modern” in Islam

*At a time when the popular imagination outside the Muslim world has been captured by images of Muslim “fundamentalists” terrorising the “West,” and when predominantly Muslim countries themselves are under a variety of political pressures to express solidarity with narrowly legalistic Islam, it is timely to reappraise the actual variety of Islamic religiosity active in the lives of ordinary Muslims. Considerable effort is now being made by scholars, governments and private risk assessment agencies, to identify the social spaces occupied by intolerant, exclusivist expressions of Islam deriving from narrowly legalistic understandings of Islam. However, less energy is being directed towards identifying the contemporary modalities of liberal, non-exclusivist modes of Islamic religiosity. In particular, the contemporary social and political expressions of Islamic spiritual modalities drawing upon the devotional and ethical traditions of Sufism (or *taṣawwuf*) are little understood by the educated lay public and policy makers.*

Historically Sufism has often been associated with inclusivism, both because of the universalism implied in the monistic philosophies of such famous Ṣūfī thinkers as Ibn al-‘Arabī and because of the relative tolerance of more mainstream Ṣūfīs toward folk practices in the diverse lands to which Ṣūfī devotees helped carry Islam. These very marks of inclusivity have indeed attracted criticism, even forceful opposition, from other elements in the Muslim community, particularly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, by Wahhābīs and the Saudi government, established on Wahhābī foundations.

Nonetheless, members of *Ṣūfī* orders in many parts of the world have mobilized an armed rebellion against non-Muslims, most notably in opposition to European colonialism. The equation between *Ṣūfī* orders and quietism cannot be taken as a general rule. Indeed this very issue needs further investigation in the contemporary world political environment.

At the same time, there are interesting suggestions that *Ṣūfī* traditions, (broadly construed as speculative philosophy, ethical heritage, ritual form for intense devotional expression or mystical path), are often in the contemporary situation associated with liberal, inclusive interpretations of Islamic law and are therefore supportive of pluralism and democratic values. This is very much the case among some liberal Muslim elites in Indonesia today (cf. Howell 2001).

So far the projection of such a nuanced understanding of Islamic religiosity into the popular imagination and political think tanks of the world has been impeded by the lack of comparative study of non-scripturalist (i.e. non-“fundamentalist” or narrowly legalistic) forms of Islamic religiosity. A reassessment of now outmoded sociological models of “Islamic society” and the place of Sufism in these models would do much to improve this situation and help foster a more balance view of Islam among non-Muslim communities.

To discuss all questions related to Sufism as mentioned above, Pusat Pengkajian Islam dan Masyarakat (PPIM – Center for the Study of Islam and Society) UIN Jakarta in collaboration with Griffith University Australia, International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM) Leiden, the Netherlands, Melbourne Institute for Asian Languages Studies (MIALS) the University of Melbourne, the Ford Foundation and International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) Leiden, held a three-day (4-6 September 2003) conference on “Sufism and the ‘modern’ in Islam”. The conference was held at hotel Salak Bogor, West Java. 19 scholars presented and discussed their papers. They are Azyumardi Azra (UIN Jakarta), John O. Voll (Georgetown University), Martin van Bruinessen (Utrecht University), M. Ricklefs (University of Melbourne), Julia D. Howell (Griffith University), Benjamin F. Soares (Leiden University), Brian Silverstein (UCLA), Itzhak Weismann (University of Haifa), Leonardo A. Villalon (University of Florida), Matthijs van den Bos (Leiden), Michael Laffan (IIAS, Leiden University), Patrick Haenni (CEDEJ, Cairo), Pnina Werbner (Keele University), Rachida Chih

(CNRS), Redha Ameer (Melbourne University), Sri Mulyati (UIN Jakarta), Yogi Sikand (ISIM, Leiden), Ahmad Syafi'i Mufid (Center for Research and Development, Department of Religious Affairs), and M. Adlin Sila (Center for Research and Development, Department of Religious Affairs). In addition to these presenters, some *Ṣūfī* observers and its practitioners also attended the conference.

This conference presented an opportunity for a comparative analysis of the present appeal of Sufism to contemporary Muslims, particularly "modern" cosmopolitan urbanites around the world. The diversity of Sufism's expressions, linkages with legalism, inclusivist or exclusivist coloration, and orientation to political quietism or activism were explored through the comparison of cases from a wide range of contemporary societies. Such comparative analyses can contribute to the ongoing revision of theoretical understandings of the sociology of Islam, help nuance our understanding of contemporary Islamic religiosities and better inform political action for the welfare of the world community.

The conference undertook such a comparative reassessment of models of Islamic societies, and in particular focused on the place of *Ṣūfī* traditions, practices and institutions in the contemporary world. It, in particular, challenged the notion that Sufism will actually disappear from the world of Islam as Muslim-majority countries undertake economic development and experience the growth of urban sectors with their modern social institutions. It also reassessed the potential of Sufism (variously construed) as a vehicle for "modern" Islam.

The assumption that Sufism will not survive the onslaught of modernism was addressed by John O. Voll. According to Voll, the theory about the disappearance of Sufism in the face of modernity is actually encompassed by a larger theory, that of the role of religion in modern life. He argues that since the eighteenth century, scholars in the West have predicted that religion would be replaced by science, and the function of religion would continue to decrease in people's lives. The "secularisation theory", which separates religious life from political life and practices of the state, emerged in the mid-twentieth century as part of the theory of modernisation. In the framework of secularisation is a claim about the decline of religion, arguing that religious influence will disappear from modern society. The question that then emerges is whether this theory is in line with reality? According to Voll, the reality is in fact the reverse. Religion is surviving alongside modernity. This is also the case with Sufism, which has a strong ability to

adapt to modernity. As a result, says Voll, the old theory about the function of religion needs to be further considered, or in fact abandoned altogether.

*So, which theory can explain what is happening? Voll suggests that we use a new social theory, that of social movements. After analysing various changes that have taken place in Sufist movements or *ṭarīkat* (Ṣūfī order), such as the emergence of *ṭarīqah* members who are more educated, and furthermore come from a background in business, Voll concludes that there has already been a change in the Sufist movement from “popular Islam” in its old form, and it has become an important means of expressing new popular Islam in the context of modern society. According to him, *ṭarīqah* organisations have become a defined means of expressing religiosity compared with other organisations. This can explain why Sufist practices are flourishing in urban areas.*

Martin van Bruinessen argues that the rise in Sufism in several Indonesian cities can be related to the practices that emerged in the early 1980s, when middle-class Muslim groups formed. With good educational backgrounds, these middle-class Muslims had careers in various sectors, both governmental and private. During the second half of the 1980s these groups began to indicate their interest in Sufism by undertaking various studies with Sufistic nuances. Alongside these studies, the rise of Sufism in urban areas can also be seen from various publications. An example is Amanah magazine, which published several articles about Sufism, covering issues such as the practice’s prominent figures and issues connected with spiritualism. Books with Sufistic nuances also sold well during this period. This continued up until the 1990s.

*Van Bruinessen also comments that several *ṭarīqah*, such as Naqshbandiyyah and Qādiriyyah wa Naqshbandiyyah, received an enthusiastic reception in urban areas. Both these Ṣūfī orders drew attention from more than just the general religious community, as they attracted the elite groups, such as bureaucrats and politicians. Abah Anom, the leader of Qādiriyyah wa Naqshbandiyyah, for example, applied Sufist practices to victims of drug dependency, and attracted his followers from bureaucratic, academic and other groups. At the same time, Kadirun Yahya, the leader of Naqshbandiyyah, also attracted new followers from political circles. As acknowledgement of their socio-political role, both of these leaders became members of the MPR (People’s Consultative Council) in 1993.*

An interesting issue related to this Sufist trend, in the opinion of van Bruinessen, is that "fundamentalist" groups on campus followed the *ṭarīqah* model. In their system of organising the followers, these groups applied *bay'ah*. They also practiced *qiyām al-lail* in order to perform their *tahajjud* (evening prayers), they read the *Qur'ān*, and read *wirid* until they cried because of their longing for the Creator.

The emergence of the cosmopolitan community's passion for religious studies in general, and Sufism in particular, encouraged several groups to create new businesses that offered short courses on Sufism. In Jakarta, this activity was pioneered by Yayasan Paramadina (Paramadina Foundation), founded by the eminent Muslim intellectual, Nurcholish Madjid. Yayasan Paramadina offered various religious studies, including Sufism, which were aimed at middle class Muslims, and with an open and critical approach attracted their attention. The success of Yayasan Paramadina prompted the emergence of other similar organisations, such as IIMAN (Indonesian Islamic Media Network), sponsored by the publisher, MIZAN; ICNIS (Intensive Course and Networking for Islamic Sciences), founded by several lecturers from UIN (State Islamic University) Jakarta; and Yayasan Tazkiya Sejati, founded by Sri Adyanti Rachmadi. Different from the first three organisations, the final one mentioned specialised in *taṣawwuf* studies.

The emergence of various forms of Sufism in urban areas gave rise to the assumption that *ṭarīqah* would disappear. However the research carried out by Julia D. Howell rejects this assumption. Based on interviews and observations she carried out in relation to the organisations above, she concludes that the existence of these commercial organisations mutually complemented the existence of *ṭarīqah*. Why is this the case? Because in the opinion of Howell, these various organisations did not try to give their full support to the development of spiritualism in the same way that it was given by the *ṭarīqah*. In *ṭarīqah*, the teachings had been carried out for a long time, by way of personal and very intense relationships, and they were complemented by Sufistic practices, with the aim of improving their ethics and having a mystic experience. These things were not offered in the religious studies institutes. Moreover, these institutions also collaborated with several *ṭarīqah* from outside the city if they wanted to see and carry out Sufist practices directly. Azyumardi Azra comments that the organisers of these institutions of Sufist studies were felt to be too "theoretical" and "academic" by their members. This weakness,

together with an increase in the desire of participants to follow Sufist practices, according to Azra, brought about the emergence of dhikr movements in several large cities, such as the Arifin Ilham dhikr movement.

Furthermore, in the opinion of Howell, the emergence of the Sufist phenomena in all its forms in urban areas indicates an important change in the religious orientation of the Indonesian Muslim community, particularly in modernist circles. If the previous generation of Muslim modernists had an agenda of "rationalising" of religious life by way of "removing" Sufist traditions and practices and basing it purely on "scripturalist practice", then the neo-modernist generation recognises that Sufism is important in the fulfillment of the community's needs, particularly for middle class Muslims. This change in orientation, according to Howell, was caused by the approach of the previous modernist group, which was felt to be devoid of spiritual life.

The phenomena of urban Sufism was not limited only to the emergence of Sufism, it also appeared in other forms such as the one referred to by Azra as "pseudo-Sufi", with its roots in the "New Age" movements that had previously emerged in western countries. Ahmad Syafi'i Mufid classifies these types of movements as "messianistic and perennial religious movements." Mufid's research into the Salamullah group clarifies this issue. This group, founded by Ibu Lia Aminudin in 1996, taught its members to always live a pure life, close to Allah, and totally zuhd. According to Mufid, their messianistic character can be seen from their teachings about the return of the Jesus Christ and Imam Mahdi in order to unite the Christian and Muslim communities. The perennial quality can be seen from their agenda of peace, which became one of their main agendas. In their mission of peace, the Salamullah group considers all religions to be basically the same because they all came from the same God. Although a fatwā for deviation was issued against the religious movements by the MUI (Indonesian Council of Ulama) because its leaders claimed to receive their revelation from Jibril, the Salamullah group still exists.

If this is the case in Indonesia, then what about Sufist movements in other countries? Apparently the phenomena of urban Sufism in other countries is not very different from the situation in Indonesia. The Khalwatiyyah in Egypt, for example, as discussed by Rachida Chih, has flourished in Cairo. As a result of its close relationship with al-Azhar University, many of the university's students are devotees. In order to attract new devotees, who are generally students from outside the city,

ṭarīqah Khalwatiyyah founded *raudah*, a type of dormitory where various ṭarīqah activities are carried out. *Raudah* have a social function, as the senior members of the ṭarīqah try to help the new arrivals to interact and integrate themselves into the new social environment, namely the city of Cairo, which is totally foreign to them. In these *raudah*, the more senior ṭarīqah members introduce the new members to their ṭarīqah and their *shaikh*, along with introducing their Ṣūfī brotherhood as a second family to replace their family in the village that they have left behind.

This perennial Sufist phenomena can also be found in Casablanca, Morocco, as discussed in the research of Patrick Haenni. The practitioners of Sufism in this city take several eclectic elements from Sufism, Zen and Yoga. They are not rigid in their practice of a particular religion, such as Sufism, but they also take spiritual elements from other religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism.

According to Haenni, there are at least four prominent figures who play an important role in the eclectic religious movement of the Moroccan bourgeoisie. The first is Driss Badidi, a high school teacher, Zen teacher, a member of *al-Ghāziyah* and is also very close to *Bushishiyyah*. He is the director of the Zen Association of Morocco. His various writings all revolve around a central concept that "spirituality must be limited by tradition, culture and religion." The second, Driss Benzouine, is a practitioner and chairman of the Yoga Association of Morocco. This former member of *Bushishiyyah* and follower of *Naqshbandiyyah* often organises seminars and conferences about spiritualism in general, Yoga and Sufism. The third, Rashid Ben Rochd, is a former entrepreneur who became a writer when his enterprise was bankrupt. He is a practitioner of Zen and Yoga, and is also a devotee of Sidi Hamzah, a ṭarīqah leader. As a practitioner of Ṣūfī, Zen and Yoga, he often presents his theories about the links between Sufism and Asian spiritual traditions. The fourth is Fawzi Sqali, a professor of anthropology, ethnology and religious studies who became an interpreter for Sidi Hamzah. He tries to place religious discourse in a global context, with an emphasis on universalism, tradition, syncretism and delocalisation. Thanks to the efforts of these four figures, according to Haeni, Sufist practices with syncretic and perennial nuances have developed amongst the bourgeois community in Morocco.

What can we summarise from the three-day conference on Sufism mentioned above? The discussions during the conference offered proof that Sufist practices can survive the onslaught of modernism, because

Sufism adapts to modernism itself. Thus, in the middle of a spiritual drought, Sufism is able to quench the thirst of the urban community. Another interesting issue taken from this conference is proof that the belief that Sufism causes passivity, pessimism and escapism from the world for its members is wrong. Azra points out that historically speaking, many prominent Sufist figures, such as Hamzah al-Fansuri, Shamsuddin al-Sumatrani, Nuruddin al-Raniri and Abdurra'uf al-Sinkili, were actively involved in the socio-political struggle during the sultanate of Aceh. Furthermore, various social upheavals opposing colonialism, such as the farmers' uprising in Banten in 1881, were lead by ṭarīqah leaders.

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