

NEW FACE OF CONTEMPORARY SUFISM IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: EXPERIENCE OF INDONESIA AND MALAYSIA

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Abstract: The current global spiritual revival has been reflected in the revival of Sufism, to the extent that Sufism now has a different appearance from its earlier conventional manifestations. Global developments have driven Sufism to put its appearance relevant to the demands of global living. Focusing on the experiences of Indonesia and Malaysia, this paper attempts to examine the developments of Sufism. These countries seem to represent contemporary trends of Sufism in Southeast Asia. The new face of contemporary Sufism called “urban Sufism” is found in Indonesia. The practices of urban Sufism, which is influenced by the political realm, can be observed within Majelis Dzikir Nurussalam (MDN) established by the former President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. In Malaysia, the new appearance of Sufism was initiated by Dar al-Arqam, which later changed its name as Ikhwan Global (IG). This group actively encourages its members to be economically self-reliant by undertaking a range of business activities and at the same time promotes a Sufi lifestyle as the focus of its activities. This research found that contemporary Sufism is no longer oriented exclusively toward the pursuit of spiritual achievements, but it also becomes an instrument of political and economic interests.

Keywords: Urban Sufism, Sufism in Southeast Asia, Majelis Dzikir Nurussalam, Ikhwan Global.

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Introduction

Global spiritual awakening has had an impact on religious revival that tends to be esoteric, because it is a common reality that is taking place throughout the world awareness of the need for spiritual life has formed a new awareness for the emergence of global spiritual awareness expressed in various forms of religious activities that are more on excavation “inside”.¹ In reality Southeast Asia is called as part of the world community cannot close itself to these developments, especially the populated Muslim community trying to interpret this spiritual awakening with the rise of Sufism as an effort to re-find themselves in the essence of life that has felt far away the value of spirituality causes humans experiencing the emptiness of life due to ignored elements of spirituality which is indeed something that cannot be separated from human life. Therefore, awareness of spiritualism as part of an alternative effort to rediscover elements of spiritualism whose role cannot be ignored to complement human life in order to be able to return to find humanity.

This global spiritual awakening in the form of Sufism can be understood as a form of dynamics of contemporary spiritualism that looks different from the face of conventional Sufism, especially those referring to classical Islamic orthodoxy, because global development has succeeded in forcing other expressions on Sufism that must be relevant to the needs of global life. Global Sufism is a major part of the formation of a new face of Sufism that must negotiate with the ongoing changes in global life. For this reason, the contemporary dynamics of Sufism in Southeast Asia can be seen from the growing phenomenon in countries in the region, especially those with a Muslim population who are familiar with the Sufism tradition which actually shows the rise of Sufism.² In this paper, the contemporary dynamics of Sufism will be seen from the experience of two countries with the largest population of Muslims in the region, namely Indonesia and Malaysia. These two countries are seen as representations of the dynamics of contemporary Sufism that took

¹ Julia Day Howell, “Sufism and the “Modern” in Islam”, in Martin van Bruinessen and Julia D. Howell, *Sufism and the Modern in Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007a), 15; Marcia Hermansen, “Global Sufism: “Theirs and Our”, in Ron Geaves, et.al., *Sufis in Western Society: Global Network and Locality* (USA and Canada: Routledge, 2009), 26.

² Kikue Hamayotsu, “Islam and Nation Building in Southeast Asia: Malaysia and Indonesia in Comparative Perspective”, *Pacific Affairs* 75, no. 3 (2002), 353-375.

place in Southeast Asia because the progress taking place in the country is part of the general picture that occurred in the region.

The rise of Sufism contemporaries in Indonesia and Malaysia is a reality that cannot be separated from the orthodoxy of Sufism which is a general characteristic of Islam in the region, so the new dynamics of Sufism are developing as a form of change in the face of Sufism in Southeast Asia. Praxis can be called Indonesia as a country that is most visible in the dynamics of contemporary Sufism as part of religious expressions that have surfaced lately, including variants that appear in the face of Sufism because it can grow and develop well in people's lives, while in Malaysia because of the strong dominance of the country in monitoring religious growth, Sufism tends not to have a variety of colors, but the dynamics of the resurrection are very clearly seen in the developments taking place in the country. From the two countries, it is seen that the change in face of Sufism, which was initially very strong in orthodoxy in the classical Sufism tradition, tended to break away from these elements with a more loose form and to be accommodating to change. The face of Sufism in Southeast Asia tends to change because of the changes themselves that "force" so that Sufism can develop and be able to participate in global life.

The new face of contemporary Sufism in Southeast Asia in the experience of Indonesia and Malaysia shows that actually Sufism activities are no longer only carried out on efforts to grow the spiritual element, but also find other elements that become Sufism orientations, such as politics and economics. Forming the new face of Southeast Asian Sufism. In Indonesia's experience, the dynamics of contemporary Sufism can be seen from the strengthening of urban sufi phenomena that become the trend of the community's religious life, both in the official religious domain such as mosques, *majlis ta'lim* or offices also become spaces where the introduction of Sufism. In the context of the so-called Sufi practices of the city in the form of *dhikr* assemblies also involved in the realm of government being an alternative activity that is widely practiced by upper-middle-class people, so that the city Sufi phenomenon is called the main reality of the formation of a new face of contemporary Sufism in Indonesia.³ Malaysia has also developed an organized global movement of Sufism

³ Arif Zamhari, "The Development of Chanting Group in East Java: A Case Study of the Salawat Wahidiyyah Group in Pesantren Kedunglo, Kediri", *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs* 42, no. 1 (2008), 125-156.

in the form of a spiritual movement to build economic independence by carrying out various business activities in an effort to support the spiritual movement that continues to promote Sufi-style life as the focus of its activities in attracting people to make alternative choices so that the spiritual movement can develop widely not only in Malaysia but also in other countries.⁴

This paper is intended to explain the contemporary dynamics of Sufism in Southeast Asia by looking at the faces that shape Sufism, including also the changes that indicate that the development of contemporary Sufism tends to differ from the initial face of Sufism, although of course the entity shown still refers to Sufism orthodoxy, but changes the face of Sufism displayed is very clearly seen in the development of contemporary Sufism in the experiences of Indonesia and Malaysia. This new face of Sufism which is displayed as a form of Sufism response to the symptoms of the development of global spiritualism which requires Sufism to be able to actualize itself to change takes place, thus forming a new facial appearance as a result of negotiations on the dynamics that form new expressions in shaping contemporary Sufism. This change in the face of Sufism in Southeast Asia is also reinforced that the orientation of Sufism practices is no longer only for spiritual interests, but also opens space for other orientations as it is stated that political and economic elements are another part of Sufism activities carried out by referring to the Majelis Zikir Nurussalam (MZN) for the experience of Indonesia which is very visible in its political orientation and the Ikhwan Global (IG) for the case of Malaysia which affirms the economic orientation in the practiced Sufism.

Majelis Zikir Nurussalam (MZN) and Ikhwan Global (IG)

Majelis Zikir Nurussalam (MZN)

MZN is one of the spiritual institutions that has an extensive network in Indonesia covering almost all provinces with their respective regional leadership which is still continuously connected with the MZN Center. MZN was founded around 2000 with the main activities of religious activities tending to be esoteric, such as *dhikr* and *istighāthah* which are also equipped with various other social

⁴ Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, "New Trends of Islamic Resurgence in Contemporary Malaysia: Sufi-Revivalism, Messianism and Economic Activism", *Studia Islamika* 6, no. 3 (1999), 5.

activities involved in the community by channeling aid and social charity. This MZN is in great demand because the main character who is the chairman of the board of trustees is a national figure, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY).⁵ All MZN activities in the form of religious or social as mentioned are always associated with SBY in them because MZN is indeed a spiritual institution involving SBY in various moments of activities carried out, so that MZN is widely known as “Majelis Zikir SBY Nurussalam” as a confirmation that MZN is part from SBY, the dissemination of the MZN network is certainly inseparable from the figure of SBY who is widely known to the Indonesian people because he was the sixth Indonesian president, so MZN also functions as a liaison for all those who have interests to connect with SBY to make MZN an alternative so that it can become a part of SBY, so that MZN gets a lot of attention from all circles to be actively involved in it with diverse interests.⁶

The MZN management structure involves many politicians and religious leaders in it demonstrating that MZN is a spiritual institution that has the support of various parties which facilitates the work of MZN as a spiritual institution to conduct a series of routine religious activities because in terms of aspects of funding sources MZN can be called quite independent and established in conducting a series of projections of activities carried out by MZN, whether related to religious or social activities.⁷ In addition, the involvement of many groups is mentioned in it as well as giving space that MZN is not only a conventional spiritual institution that has purely spiritual activities because the group's participation shows that there are other activities than just spiritual interests, so MZN also in various activities conducted shows that in addition to being a spiritual institution there are also many involved in various political activities that take place, especially political activities involving the main figure of the development council, namely SBY. In its development, MZN also functions as part of the political activities carried out by SBY,

⁵ Noorhaidi Hasan, *The Making of Public Islam Piety, Democracy and Youth in Indonesian Politics* (Yogyakarta: SUKA Press, 2013), 119.

⁶ Ken Miichi, “Urban Sufi and Politics in Contemporary Indonesia: The Role of Dhikr Associations in the Anti-Ahok Rallies”, *South East Asian Research* 27, no. 3 (2019), 230; Ken Miichi, “Democratization and “Failure” of Islamic Parties in Indonesia”, in Ken Miichi and Omar Farouk (eds.), *Southeast Asian Muslim in the Era of Globalization* (USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 10.

⁷ Interview with Amsori, a congregation of MZN, 21/02/2017.

especially in the development of SBY's positive side in the community by displaying a side of religiosity that is able to attract public sympathy to idolize and support SBY's politics.

When SBY served as president of the MZN, he gained wide space in network expansion and influence in the community because in various MZN state religious activities, he was actively involved in it, including introducing the practice of Sufism in the form of remembrance rituals and *istighāthah* becoming a growing trend among Indonesian people because it received support from SBY who was then a ruler, so many practices of dhikr and *istighāthah* were carried out in government institutions as an alternative activity to follow the ongoing trends. Recent developments show, especially when SBY was no longer the president of MZN activities, which continues to the present with his routine activities in the religious and social fields, although the intensity of the role of MZN in SBY's practical politics is not very visible, but several activities are carried out as forms of representation support for SBY's political activities, including in efforts to support the SBY family's politics which were also actively involved in the MZN to assert that the MZN as part of SBY's political activities continued to the present.

Ikhwan Global (IG)

Ikhwan Global (IG) is one of the religious organizations that concentrates on education and economics which are classified as successful in developing the two fields mentioned, although IG is better known in the last aspect because it succeeded in establishing a congregation-based economy by establishing various business fields which not only developed in Malaysia but also in other countries it shows the success of the IG's economic movement. IG as a religious organization applies the practice of Sufism life which is not rigid and tends to be more flexible than conventional Sufism practices. The success of IG in the economic field is certainly inseparable from the preceding elements that the IG is part of the representation and continuation of the Darul Arqam (DA) movement as a religious organization founded by a Malaysian religious leader, namely Ashaari Muhammad in 1969.⁸ DA as a the Sufism movement which has an economic orientation has succeeded in developing the economic base

⁸ Stephane Doyet and Remy Madinier, *Les Musulmans d'Asie du Sud-est Face au Vertige de la Radicalisation* (Paris: IRASEC-les Indes Savantes, 2003), 25.

of pilgrims with various economic activities that are not only able to meet the needs of pilgrims, but also able to develop businesses built on togetherness. However, as a religious and economic movement, it was finally dissolved by the Malaysian government because it was deemed to threaten the country's political stability until finally in 1997 DA had a comerfosis into Ruqafa as the basis for the DA movement.

In the Rufaqa era, the DA economic movement which had been pioneered again was developed with activities that were better than before, so that the expansion of the economic movement developed by Rufaqa succeeded in increasing the achievements of DA in the economic field, including the expansion of unknown business fields during the DA. The existence of Rufaqa is different from DA which is considered contrary to Malaysian state policy because Rufaqa herself did not get the same treatment, although it is commonly known that Rufaqa with DA is an inseparable part of the management system and the activities carried out are the same. However, Rufaqa was not involved in the political realm as the DA before, so the existence of Rufaqa did not get in conflict with the ruling government at the time, so Rufaqa could freely develop economic fields that had been initiated by continuously improving economic performance by utilizing a wider network of pilgrims than before, so that Rufaqa can easily in an effort to develop self-existence. In its development, precisely in 2008, Rufaqa changed himself with IG as the name of his new movement until now. Changes from DA to Rufaqa to IG have implications for changes in identity and entities following ongoing development trends, so IG as a continuation of two religious organizations is called to continue to expand the economic movement while referring to the experience of DA and Rufaqa in developing the economic orientation developed by the organization.⁹

IG as a Sufism movement that has an orientation to the economy positions the IG as a form of representation of spiritual organizations that have a good economic vision not previously known in the Sufism tradition. For this reason, IG as a Sufism movement has formed a new orientation in the Sufism movement that Sufism is not always related to mere economic orientation, but is widely open to economic aspects that have succeeded in exploiting the potential of

⁹ Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, "Islamic Development According to Rufaq Corporation: Strategy and Implementation", *Politeia Journal* 1, no. 2 (2009), 65.

existing pilgrims as part of economic development. In its development, IG has succeeded in developing global economic networks while continuing to make Sufism a part of life choices while opening up to global developments, forming the impression that a movement is a form of Sufism in responding to developments and at the same time utilizing all possible opportunities for can survive and develop in global life.

Changing Face of Sufism

The dynamics of contemporary Sufism in Southeast Asia are marked by a change in the face of Sufism that has developed in Indonesia and Malaysia, because Sufism—which has been identified as an esoteric—subjective form of religious expression, but contemporary developments suggest that there is a more exoteric-objective change in Sufism different from before because the practical aspects of Sufism are more “exclusive” as they show that conventional Sufism has become more “inclusive”, because the latter dynamics show a new tendency to try to bring Sufism to “an open-world” in social spaces that are linked to information technology.¹⁰ The change has implications for the formation of a new face of Sufism that develops as a changing identity because Sufism is a form of religious expression that cannot close itself to changes in global life that indeed force Sufism to change according to the trends that shape change.¹¹

The new face of developing Sufism is able to attract the attention of various groups of people, both from the lower to upper classes to be involved in it by trying to understand it as a new form of error that is relevant to global needs, so that Sufism activity becomes an alternative choice for the community in trying to find godliness compatible with changes occur in life.¹² This change in the face of Sufism can be understood as a form of Sufism’s response to all changes that have taken place by trying to change the face that is

¹⁰ Openness can be seen that contemporary Sufism can be seen and studied as an ongoing social phenomenon because rituals and doctrines of Sufism are presented in the global world by utilizing information technology media.

¹¹ Thomas Gibson, “Islam and the Spirit Cults in New Order Indonesia: Global Flows vs. Local Knowledge”, *Indonesia* 69, no. 1 (2000), 42.

¹² Julia Day Howell, “Revitalised Sufism and the New Piety Movements in Islamic Southeast Asia”, in Bryan S. Turner and Oscar Salemink (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Religions in Asia* (London: Routledge, 2015), 276.

more open to all circles, so that facial changes are also a consequence of Sufism's efforts to actualize themselves in global change because it is almost impossible to maintain the old face of change continues. To understand the new face of Sufism can be marked from the entity displayed on the face of contemporary Sufism that took place in Indonesia and Malaysia with the main reference MZN and IG to explain the changing face of Sufism in Southeast Asia.

First, Open to the Global World

Southeast Asian Sufism—rather slowly than other religious organizations—in response to global developments that took place in Muslim-populated countries or the world as a whole. The response to the global world is seen as important in the effort to form a new face of Sufism that is “open” to all changes, because the global world itself is a form of openness, so that Sufism can only participate in the world by opening itself to the world, because without providing an open response it is believed that Sufism will not be able to “survive” in the reality of a global world that continues to develop. Sufism's response to global reality has implications for the formation of a new face of Southeast Asian Sufism as experienced by Indonesia and Malaysia to tend to be more open to the global world, because Sufism seems to have no choice but to accept the global world and try to take part in trying to participate in it is an option to be able to survive and develop. The response to the acceptance of Southeast Asian Sufism in the global world shows that Sufism's attitude of openness to the world because it is able to accept the global world with all its consequences, becomes an unavoidable reality which results in narrowing of space and time by opening itself to the global world.¹³

Acceptance of Sufism towards the global world forms a face of Sufism that is more open to influences or elements outside of oneself, which certainly are not found in the earlier facial expressions of Sufism that are more closed and indeed cover themselves from all elements outside of themselves. This face of openness of Sufism does not only have implications for Sufism identity that is able to accept change, but more than that it is also able to negotiate on the new reality as evidenced by the emergence of new faces in a more practical

¹³ Michael Laffan, “A Sufi Century? The Modern Spread of the Sufi Orders in Southeast Asia”, in James L. Gelvin and Nile Green, *Global Muslim in the Age of Steam and Print* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 25.

and fun way of syrup. The new appearance of this syllabic is certainly a form of acceptance of global development not only as a form of self-actualization of the changes that take place, but also has implications for the effort to find or display a syllable that is considered relevant to the development of the present and the present. The effort to present a new way of syrup—especially in accordance with development—is a situation that cannot be avoided because indeed changes that take place “force” a way of syrup in a new way with openness and can be enjoyed by all people without limited space and time because they accept the global world Sufism does not have a particular group, but belongs to all the world communities involved in it.

Second, Simplification of Orthodoxy

Other identities of the face of Sufism that developed in Southeast Asia also found an effort to simplify Sufism orthodoxy, because later evolving Sufism tended to show an effort to simplify the Sufism tradition which was considered “strict” and profound on the mysticism element to be more practical aspects and pay attention to aspects outward appearance by holding on to some public rituals as known in the doctrine of Sufism or belief systems in certain *tarekat*.¹⁴ Simplification efforts relate specifically to the needs of the global community who do not want to be “trapped” in the realm of philosophical tendencies because indeed contemporary Sufism enthusiasts are a group that is not very familiar with the traditions of Islamic orthodoxy, thus positioning the group as “connoisseurs” rather than mere practicing general meaning. This simplification is carried out by practicing a number of public rituals known in the *tarekat* tradition such as remembrance and prayer as the main activities, so that the face of Sufism displayed tends to be loose and practical when referring to conventional Sufism practices known in the established Islamic tradition as taught in the *tarekat mu'tabarab* which has a series of processes before becoming *salik*.¹⁵

This simplification of orthodoxy became a new face of Sufism that developed in Southeast Asia because this simplification effort

¹⁴ Julia Day Howell, “Introduction: Sufism and Neo-Sufism in Indonesia Today”, *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs* 46, no. 2 (2002), 1-24.

¹⁵ Arif Zamhari, “Socio-Structural Innovations in Indonesia’s Urban Sufism: The Case Study of the Majelis Dzikir and Shalawat Nurul Mustafa”, *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 7, no. 1 (2013), 120-144.

was also related to the openness of Sufism to the new elements within it, which formed the appearance of a strict face of Sufism to become looser on what was considered a representation of the form of Sufism which also very much in accordance with the tastes of contemporary society. This simplification tends to ignore the main elements in Sufism, especially what is placed in the *tarekat* as an effort to maintain originality and spiritual genealogy, namely genealogy,¹⁶ because developing Sufism activities emphasize practical aspects of the practice that come from spiritual leaders. This simplified face of Southeast Asian Sufism is not too bound to the genealogical element which is considered spiritual legitimacy because the later Sufism phenomenon tends to ignore it. However, it is still found to exist as a form of Sufism praxis that continues to make the genealogy vital in its implementation of Sufism. Still, the use of genealogy in this context does not always emphasize the main elements in various practices of Sufism, so ignoring the elements of orthodoxy in genealogy can facilitate the process of dissemination and acceptance of Sufism introduced to the global community.

Third, Familiar with Information Technology

This new face of Sufism in the contemporary dynamics of Southeast Asia also found indications that Sufism was very familiar with the advancement of information technology because most Sufism was disseminated through the use of information technology such as the internet as part of efforts to strengthen the network to reach all regions in the world. Sufism's involvement in the internet is a form of awareness of the development of life that is almost impossible to escape from the use of the internet as a medium of communication and information dissemination, so the choice to become familiar with the internet forms a new face of Sufism that was not found before in the conventional Sufism tradition. Recent developments confirm that the emergence of Sufism in the virtual world provides broad access to the global community to be able to recognize and learn various doctrines and rituals of certain Sufism.¹⁷ Reality referred to shows that almost all forms of Sufism flow and

¹⁶ Howell, Introduction", 10.

¹⁷ Julia Day Howell, "Modernity and Islamic Spirituality in Indonesia's New Sufi Networks", in Martin van Bruinessen and Julia D. Howell, *Sufism and the Modern in Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 233.

activity can be known through cyberspace because indeed Sufism itself did indeed actualize itself in the virtual world, so the presence of Sufism in cyberspace is not only part of efforts to realize Sufism, but also a form of introducing Sufism entity in the life of the global community to be able to participate in it.

This expression of Sufism familiarity with information technology can be traced to the availability of all information relating to Sufism, whether doctrine or ritual through websites or blogs managed by certain groups that are the main part or sympathizers of the Sufism movement. The availability of the site is said to make it easy for all people to be able to learn everything related to the information provided, so information relating to Sufism is very easy to be accessed by all groups which certainly provides an opportunity for strengthening the Sufism network based on cyberspace which forms an imaginative Sufism community in the sense that without having to meet physically can build connection between one another in the bond of the same interests and tendencies to find life choices in Sufism. In the context referred to, the connection between the *murshid* and *salik* also forms imaginative relationships which can form the imaginative charism of *murshid* because it is connected in such imaginative bonds. This expansion of Sufism familiarity with information technology makes social media one of the most used spaces as part of promoting Sufism as a life choice because social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and others are one of the many media chosen to strengthen the existence of Sufism in life cyberspace community.

Fourth, Political and Economic Orientation

Another face that emerged from contemporary developments in Sufism in Southeast Asia found another orientation than spiritualism, namely political and economic orientation in various activities of Sufism activities practiced. The political orientation in Sufism activities is clearly evident because the actualization of Sufism such as the practice of remembrance as it is widely practiced in various political domains is very clear in its political elements, although of course, the practice of remembrance with politics is something commonly found in traditional societies.¹⁸ However, the

¹⁸ It is interesting to say that the practice of remembrance by the assembly of the remembrance of SBY Nurussalam was part of the Democratic Party's strategy to

Sufism orientation in the remembrance activities practiced by *dhikr* assembly has brought such Sufism activities to the realm of practical politics by presenting the expression of Sufism as a tool of political interests, although it must be admitted that Sufism and politics are two elements that are difficult to separate, but the face of Sufism lately it has actually presented the form of Sufism as part of political practice for certain purposes which are contradictory to the purpose of Sufism itself.

While the economic orientation in the practice of Sufism found in several cases can be called not only can be called to maintain the tradition in ritual practices related to spiritual interests alone but also there are economic elements in it. Recent studies show that economic orientation in Sufism activities can be seen from the strengthening of the practice of spiritual commodification as a general phenomenon that occurs in almost all spheres of Sufism, both developing in traditional societies or modern urban societies, especially those involving spiritual institutions such as *tarekat* or *dhikr* assemblies.¹⁹ This economic orientation confirms that Sufism activities are not only understood as spiritual activities but are broader than economic activities. The economic orientation in various Sufism activities is certainly an identity that contradicts the previous Sufism identity which is always understood as the main activity in an effort to foster a spiritual spirit. However, as it is called that economic orientation in the practice of Sufism is a separate part which has an interrelationship to strengthen the entity because the economic orientation that exists in the practice of Sufism makes Sufism itself something that is maintained and developed in society, so that the practice of Sufism can continue and become one of the alternative religious choices of contemporary Southeast Asia.

Politics and Economics as a New Orientation of Sufism

The new face of contemporary Southeast Asian Sufism as it is called certainly gives implications for the forming of a new orientation, namely political and economic orientation in Sufism praxis. The two orientations are limited to the form of two new

take advantage of the momentum of the rise of Sufism to political interests. Hasan, *The Making of Public Islamic Piety*, 123.

¹⁹ Noorhaidi Hasan, "Piety, Politics, and Post-Islamism: *Dhikr Akbar* in Indonesia", *al-Jami'ah* 50, no. 2 (2012), 283.

orientations of Sufism based on the general symptoms that took place in Indonesia and Malaysia which became a representation of contemporary developments in Sufism in Southeast Asia. In this connection, the contemporary dynamics of the new orientation of Sufism in the case of Indonesia will be explained by the Sufi movement of the city as a dynamics of late developing Sufism such as the Majelis Zikir Nurussalam (MZN) which shows political orientation in the movements and activities, while the Sufism Malaysia is seen by the Ihwan Global (IG) is a representation that is still related to Darul Arkam (DA) who developed Tarekat Aurad Muhammadiyah (TAM) order with a very explicit economic orientation in the spiritual movement developed, although institutionally these two spiritual organizations do not become political and economic orientations as part of the main purpose of the movement is carried out, but practically the second orientation which is called very clear in the activity is carried out. For this reason, the new orientation of Sufism emphasizes that the contemporary Sufism movement is no longer only oriented to spiritual interests, but also experiences expansion in other aspects, especially politics and economics as explained below.

MZN: Political Orientation

In the context of the relationship between the remembrance assembly and politics, it can be seen in the MZN case because the participation of spiritual institutions is very clearly seen in the realm of practical politics. The assembly of remembrance which is called this is a form of representation of the involvement of the *dhiker* assembly with practical political activities, because this MZN from its inception was clearly seen as an element of political interest in it because it was founded by a politician who had been President of Indonesia, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY). The assembly's activities, as in general the *dhiker* assembly, carried out certain *dhiker* and ritual activities, but in the MZN case, it was intended to pray for SBY's political career success.²⁰ In its development, this assembly succeeded in establishing various broad networks in almost all provinces in Indonesia that functioned as religious communities of urban communities and at the same time as institutions that introduced the figure of SBY to the people of Indonesia.

²⁰ Hasan, *The Making of Public Islam Piety*, 119.

To support the MZN activity, a special institution for women under the name Majelis Zikir al-Nisa MZN was established as an effort to accommodate women who were also seen as an important political component in the political moment, and also established the Himpunan Seni Budaya Islam (HIBSI) to recruit other religious institutions, especially those with an affiliation in the field of Islamic arts and culture, all the institutions established were under MZN as the coordinator. In its development, especially after SBY was elected as the sixth President of Indonesia MZN, this was used as a foundation for religious and political interests which served to support all of SBY's policies by acting as an agency that spread to the public, especially among the people or in the community that all policies were carried out for the sake of nation and state, then all policies taken must be supported for the realization of goodness for people's lives. For this reason, supporting all policies taken by the government is a necessity for the creation of a common good which is a form of opinion that MZN has built in an effort to support all policies implemented.

Normatively, the main activity of the MZN is conducting a series of religious activities such as remembrance and *istighāthah* as well as giving compensation to the community held in the main mosque, namely Baitul Rahman Mosque in the Presidential Palace Complex and Masjid Istiqamah in Cekeas where SBY lives.²¹ The routine activities carried out by MZN get the wider community's attention, both those who have an interest in the aspects of the ritual of remembrance and *istighāthah* or the receipt of compensation given by each MZN in carrying out a series of activities. In addition, this MZN also conducts annual activities, especially ahead of Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr by giving basic needs to the general public and at the Eid al-Adha moment, sacrificial animal slaughter that attracts public attention can be involved in various moments of activities carried out by MZN. Then, MZN in the social field is also involved in mass circumcision activities and providing compensation to children which positions MZN as an institution widely known in the community because it has attention to the religious and social fields as well as being able to attract the sympathy of certain communities to be

²¹ Howard Dick and Jeremy Mulholland, "The State as Marketplace: Slush Fund and Intra-Elite Rivalry", in Edward Aspinall and Gerry van Klinken (eds.), *The State and Illegality in Indonesia* (Leiden: KTLV Press, 2010), 79.

involved and recognize the MZN authority as spiritual institutions that are directly involved in aspects that touch directly with people's needs.

In the political context, MZN as a remembrance institution is involved in various practical political activities, especially during the process of nominating SBY as president which clearly shows the MZN's partiality to SBY such as being a successful team to promote SBY in the community in its own way. The political activities carried out by MZN are specifically related to SBY as the main figure of the founder of the institution, so the role of MZN as SBY's institution of remembrance and winning institution is very clearly seen in the side of the institution, which indeed shows the phenomenon of the rise of Sufism in the midst of urban society, so that it becomes an institution of remembrance as part of a political tool specifically related to trends that develop in the Indonesian Muslim community. To that end, the effort to make the institution of remembrance as part of politics is a form of responding to developments taking place in society, especially seeing aspects of the revival of public awareness in the spiritual field as an option to make MZN a part of political tools capable of working for certain political interests.

The implementation of remembrance carried out in many activities involves certain figures such as artists or other famous figures who are believed to be an effort to attract the sympathy of the community to be actively involved in a series of activities carried out. The implementation of remembrance activities is of course able to increase the interest of the community from various groups to be involved in it because in addition to being able to fulfill the "spiritual thirst" as well as being connected with certain figures involved in the MZN. The remembrance activity that was carried out was seen as a political orientation in it as an MZN political effort in building a good image of the main figure promoted through the spiritual institution. Besides that, MZN was also able to establish communication with other developing *dhikir* assemblies in Indonesia to support SBY as president.²² For this reason, the function of MZN as a political success team is very clearly seen in the efforts of mass mobilization which were mostly involved in various ritual activities held because the MZN network in various provinces was also very clearly seen in its political affiliation to support SBY, although certainly in practical

²² Hasan, *The Making*, 119.

aspects it could not it was confirmed that the political choice was to support SBY at that time. However, the effort to utilize the *dhiker* assembly as part of political interests is a new form of orientation in Sufism which brings elements of Sufism to the realm of practical politics.

During SBY's administration, the MZN was also actively involved in efforts to fight negative issues related to SBY by displaying expressions of religiosity and totality in building the nation and state. Then, MZN was also seen in the process of supporting all policies carried out by SBY during his administration by carrying out several activities involving all elements of the MZN in all regions to support the political policies carried out. The MZN practice as a representation of contemporary Sufism expressions can certainly be seen in the context of involvement of elements of Sufism in the realm of practical politics which have also inspired other politicians to utilize spiritual institutions as part of political instruments, both in the general form that takes place in society, such as political remembrance done at certain moments or making spiritual institutions as part of political marketing confirms that political orientation is a new expression of the development of Sufism in Indonesia. In the context of practical politics, especially in the Jakarta gubernatorial election experience MZN is also called involved in various political activities that took place at that time because indeed at the political moment it involved one of SBY's families in it, the political orientation in contemporary Sufism through spiritual institutions showed the dynamics of development Sufism in Indonesia which has become part of practical political interests.

GI: Economic Orientation

The dynamics of contemporary Sufism in Malaysia can be seen from the development of GI as a spiritual movement that developed later with its own peculiarities because GI as a spiritual organization emerged as a form of response to global development which was seen as very important an effort to live to foster a spiritual spirit. GI as a spiritual movement is different from other spiritual institutions because GI promotes the importance of economic independence based on hospitality which is not well known in the previous Sufism tradition and is not generally a Sufism orientation that developed in the Islamic world. To realize the idea of economic independence, this

establishes various fields of work such as agriculture, factories, clinics and others that provide a new orientation in Sufism activities that are carried out because it gives other expressions that are not solely for the sake of mere spiritual activities, but also provide a vast space of potential Sufism as part of an effort to increase economic independence for the GI community or the Islamic community as a whole because various economic activities developed by the GI involved all people in it.

Many reviewers view this Sufism movement practiced by GIs as a form of expression from “neo-Sufism”²³ or “Sufi-revivalism”²⁴ because it not only concentrates on reviving Sufism traditions and doctrines in global life but also provides space for economic independence. GI as a spiritual movement is sought after by the upper-middle class because the expression of Sufism is considered in accordance with the perspective and spirit of the class life, but in its rapid development GI is considered a challenge by the government in power at that time, especially when the GI was still called DA, so that this group was finally considered a movement that was contrary to Islam until in the end DA was deemed heretical and its development was closely monitored by the Malaysian government in 1994.²⁵ After DA’s misdirection, then a new movement called Rufaqa emerged as a representation of DA because the leader’s DA is actively involved in the new movement. In contrast to the DA, Rufaqa actually obtained permission from the Malaysian government which was not involved in political activities like the previous DA movement. Rufaqa as a new form of DA is more concentrated on economic activity while preserving the doctrine of Sufism taught by the DA. Some of the economic fields that Rufaqa is concerned about are building shopping places such as supermarkets, minimarkets, boutiques, and others.

The GI movement in the form of Rufaqa—as for DA—continues to make spiritual elements part of the activities carried out, although economic orientation appears more prominent, the activities carried out by Rufaqa are a form of expression that sees the potential

²³ Farish A. Noor, “The Localization of Islamist Discourse in the Tafsir of Tuan Guru Nik Aziz Nik Mat, Murshid’ul Am of PAS”, in Virginia Hooker and Norani Othman (eds.), *Malaysia: Islam, Society, and Politics* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2003), 201.

²⁴ Hamid, “New Trends of Islamic Resurgence”, 5.

²⁵ Judith Nagata, “Alternative Models of Islamic Governance in Southeast Asia: Neo-Sufism and the Arqam Experiment in Malaysia”, *Global Change, Peace, and Security* 16, no. 2 (2006), 99-114.

of pilgrims as the basis for developing economic independence, so that done has a big impact on network dissemination. So far, it is noted that the GI network does not only cover countries in Southeast Asia but also includes several Middle Eastern countries such as Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Europe such as France and Germany, which confirms that the economic movement built by GI can develop well, so able to spread widely rapidly which also confirms that the GI built system in well-organized economic practices is a separate part of the dissemination of Sufism networks to be accepted by certain groups to integrate parts of the GI. The development efforts carried out by Rufaqa also established several formal education as a place to educate the children of pilgrims involved in Rufaqa. In addition, of course, educational institutions as a place to teach the doctrine of Sufism life which is believed by Rufaqa as an effort to grow spiritual spirituality while still making an economic orientation to achieve the Sufism goals taught by the Rufiqa. In its development, the educational institution founded by Rufaqa not only accommodated children from the Rufaqa community but also found outside the community who were interested in choosing an educational institution affiliated with Rufaqa as a place of education for children and their families.

Another expression that is different from the appearance of Rufaqa from the previous DA which is very clearly seen as the symbolic identity of Sufism which is generally very clearly seen in the form of clothing and other attributes that affirm the Sufism identity in it. However, Rufaqa is not a symbolic identity as part of religious expression because the congregation of Rufaqa is not very familiar with the appearance of robes and turban as is the general identity displayed by groups that choose Sufism as a life choice. The choice of Rufaqa's appearance is called this, of course, a form of expression of new Sufism tendencies that do not want to be trapped in mere symbolic aspects but rather emphasize the spiritual aspect. In addition, another view that surfaced in Rufaqa tended to be more open to efforts to provide broad space for women to get as high as education and be actively involved in social activities. Efforts to safeguard the continuity of the Sufism tradition, especially the doctrine of the Tarekat Aurad Muhammadiyah (TAM) Rufaqa gave obligations to all pilgrims involved in the economic field who were mobilized to be involved as part of efforts to disseminate the doctrine of Sufism that was taught.

Not known for certain, Rufaqa in 2008 finally changed its name to GI as the name of a new movement that still reflects the Rufiqa movement on economic aspects. Not much different from Rufaqa, the GI is also developing an economic business based on Sufism and continuing the economic base that has been built by Rufaqa, but in its development, this GI is a strategy to unite the Rufaqa network spread across the world, either in the Southeast Asia region or The Middle East. The Sufism in the doctrine of the TAM was very clearly seen in the spiritual activities carried out by the GI worshipers, including also attempting to apply the general principles of the TAM doctrine to the economic activities that were built. Recent developments explain that this GI is known as the polygamy movement among its congregations, because as believed by this GI polygamy practices as part of the strategy of strengthening entities and GI networks because genetically based networks are a strong sign of efforts to strengthen networks in order to spread throughout the world. The GI economic orientation is strengthened by showing that in the field of GI business has also pioneered the establishment of several culinary companies that are spread across various Southeast Asian regions. In addition, in an effort to disseminate the GI network to take a more open approach by building intimate relationships with important figures in various Southeast Asian regions, GI networks, of course, as part of the representation of the global Sufism movement spread almost to the entire Southeast Asian region and beyond. Seeing the new GI movement shows that GIs are aware of some of the mistakes made in the DA and Rufiqa movement models, so efforts to strengthen GI networks are more open than previous movements so as to be able to build a global Sufism network that has economic stagnation.

Concluding Remarks

The dynamics of contemporary Sufism in Southeast Asia are the result of a response to global spiritual awakening, so in an effort to respond to global developments, it has succeeded in forming a new face for Sufism in Southeast Asia, namely more open Sufism and accepting changes with all forms of expression displayed. This change of identity is certainly part of the effort to actualize Sufism in global life. As a reality that cannot be denied, Sufism must adapt and initiate a change to exist and participate in it. The new face of contemporary Sufism can be seen in the appearance of Sufism which is more open

than before but also tends to experience complications and the existence of new orientations in Sufism activities such as economics and politics. In addition, other entities attempt to self-actualize with the use of information technology such as internet media as part of the dissemination of doctrines and rituals of Sufism in a global society. Contemporary developments in Southeast Asia by looking at phenomena in Indonesia and Malaysia affirm that Sufism is no longer only oriented towards achieving spiritual achievement but also opens itself to efforts to expand Sufism in other aspects, especially politics and economics which are a form of actualization of Sufism in global life.

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