URBAN SUFISM, MEDIA AND RELIGIOUS CHANGE IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

In this paper, I contend that Sufism is only preoccupied with initiating new disciples and performing emotive religious rituals. By focusing on Naqshbandi-Haqqani, I argue that Sufi group actively involves in propagating its teaching to the general public. I also argue that Sufi movement actively involves in public campaign, along with other Muslim groups with similar religious outlook, to respond the perceived growing influence of Salafism and political Islamism among Indonesian Muslims. It represents contemporary public face of Sufism and Sufi activism in Indonesia. At the heart of the argument of this chapter is to examine collective efforts to maintain Sunni orthodoxy (*Ahlus Sunnah wal Jamaah*) as a dominant religious norm, reclaim Sufism as a legitimate voice within Sunni orthodoxy and general Muslim community, oppose to Salafism and political Islamism, and rationalise Sufism to academic community in Indonesia. This chapter will demonstrate that active propagation through the internet plays a significant role in generating new Islamic consciousness with greater appreciation toward Sufi tradition among Indonesian Muslims. Sufism contributes not only to shape public religious discourse/morality, influence consuming patterns of urban upper-middle class Muslims, but also maintain moderate and peaceful Islam in Indonesia.

Keywords: Urban Sufism, Muslim Community, Media, Religious Change

A. Shaping Popular Islamic Discourse and Media Campaign

Written and oral forms of transmission become two main media through which Sufism shapes popular Islamic discourse within Muslim community. Written religious transmission takes the form of online publications on the internet and print publications in form of books, journals, and pamphlets, whereas oral transmission is expressed through Friday sermons (*khutbah*) and through preaching on television. Robinson (1993: 231) has argued that because of massive literacy, mass education, and technological advancement, the oral transmission of religious knowledge is increasingly being replaced by print media and this results in forms of religious transmission that are less intimate, less personal, less immediate, but more abstract, and more intellectual. In contrary to Robinson's argument, the case of Naqshbandi-Haqqani suggests that written and oral religious transmissions are complementary rather than exclusionary of one to another. They serve to promote and maintain Sufism as a popular Islamic discourse among Indonesian Muslims. All those forms of religious transmission share a view that following *shariah* is in itself inadequate for instilling piety so long as it does not contribute to cultivating virtue and good character.

Since the dawn of modern era, print publication has been pivotal in Islamic transmission in Indonesia. Mass education and massive literacy have certainly influenced reading habits that, in turn, have helped in popularising Islamic publication to the general public. The growing number of Islamic publications that began in the 1990s has particularly played a significant role in informing contemporary religious life in Indonesia (Watson, 2005a: 190). Indonesian Islamic publishers such as Mizan, LKiS, Serambi, Pustaka Hidayah have contributed to popularise the grand works of prominent Sufi masters to the general public, which were previously known only among the Pesantren community. Sufi publication in particular however had a historical precedent especially when Hamka published his short essays on *Pedoman Masyarakat* magazine into a book entitled *Tasauf Modern* in 1939 (Howell, 2008b: 2; 2010: 1031). It is within this general environment of the rising popularity of Islamic and Sufi publications that Naqshbandi-Haqqani's written materials have a popular appeal among general Indonesian Muslims.

The Naqshbandi-Haqqani community in Indonesia has been actively involved in translating and publishing Sufi materials since its inception in the late 1990s. Prior to 2003, this included five best-selling books published by Serambi –four volumes of the *Ensiklopedia Akidah Ahlusunah* and one book entitled *Kiamat Mendekat*– and one popular book published by Hikmah entitled *Dialog dengan Para Malaikat: Perspektif Sufi*. All six books were written by Sheikh Hisham Kabbani. They were translated and published in 1998 and 2003 respectively and they all have currently sold-out. After 2003, there was a dramatic increase in the publication of Naqshbandi-Haqqani's materials. Since then, there have been hundreds of written materials in forms of books, journal, and booklets translated and published by the disciples and affiliate organisations in Indonesia. Unlike the six translated works published by Serambi and Hikmah, these other translated works were mostly produced for internal use but have spread to the general public through massive copying.

Arif Hamdani said that he produced more than 100 translated booklets containing the teachings of Naqshbandi-Haqqani (Hamdani, 2010; Kurniadi, 2010). These numerous booklets are mostly short versions of Sheikh Nazim's and Hisham's books and *sohbet* on the internet which then translated to Indonesian. Some of the best booklets entitled *Nur Muhammad* (The Light of Muhammad), *Kedatangan Imam Mahdi* (The Coming of Savior), *Ruh dan Raga* (Body and Soul), *Rahasia Power Sembilan* (The Secret of Power Nine), *Operasi Spiritual* (Spiritual Operation), *Cahaya Para Wali* (The Light of Saints), *No Smoking: Merokok Akar Semua Masalah* (Smoking is the Origins of All Problems). Arif also played a significant role in helping Yayasan Haqqani Indonesia to publish its own periodical named *Ahl-Haq*. This periodical had been published regularly between early 2005 and mid-2009. The *Ahl-Haq* was of good quality with a full color glossy-cover page. Both booklets and the *Ahl-Haq* periodical contained Sheikh Nazim's and Hisham Kabbani's *sohbet,* which were downloaded from Naqshbandi-Haqqani's websites

Along with those primary sources, some Indonesian disciples of Naqshbandi-Haqqani have also written books that emphasize certain teachings of their master

and give testimony to their personal experiences. Among others, these include Muhammad Shalahudin's *Mystic Healing: Panduan Praktis Menjadi Penyembuh Dengan Pendekatan Spiritual dan Bekam,* Asniar Shahab's *Anugerah Illahi: Perjalanan Spiritual Selebriti ke Baitullah*, Amin Syukur's *Zikir Menyembuhkan Kankerku*, and Noval bin Muhammad Alaydrus' books entitled *Mana Dalilnya* (2 volumes) and *Ahlul Bid'ah Hasanah* (2 volumes). Muhamad Shalahudin's and Amin Syukur's books were published by Hikmah (an affiliate of Mizan Islamic publisher) in 2006 and 2007 respectively, whereas Shahab's book was published by Yayasan Haqqani Indonesia in 2001 and Noval's book was published by Taman Ilmu--a small Islamic publisher in Solo-between 2008 and 2011.

Print publication covers a wide-range of topics: self-help, Quranic exegesis and Prophetic tradition, Fiqh, millenarian views, and stories of personal mystic or experience. Self-help advice deals with practical ways to address daily problems by way of fasting, reciting certain surah of the Quran, performing *dzikir* and other supererogatory rituals (*amalan sunnah*). This advice identifies as the source of all human problems, people's tendency to follow their own egos (*nafs*). Fighting the demands of the ego therefore is an umbrella topic in most of Naqshbandi-Haqqani's self-help books and online publications. Preoccupation on fighting egos (*nafs*) leads to cultivation of bad virtues such as arrogance, greed, stinginess, love of the world (*hubuddunya*), and hypocrisy. To have real inner peace, self-help advice prescribes deliberately initiating every action with a good intention by reciting *bismillah* (in the name of God), maintaining silent *dzikir* in every breath one takesale and reciting *istighfar* (to ask for forgiveness) for any mistakes or sins. This method purposely targets a change in an individual's mindset and behavior so that every action is meaningful as anexpression of total devotion.

Self-help advice also touches upon other practical matters such as healing and *halal* food recipes. In *Terapi Alamiah*–a book translated and published by Yayasan Haqqani Indonesia in 2008–, Sheikh Nazim identified more than 100 different health problems/diseases that could be cured through natural or herbal treatments. Smoking is also something that the disciples are strongly encouraged to avoid and is the subject of many self-help books published by Naqshbandi-Haqqani's

disciples in Indonesia. In *No Smoking: Merokok Akar Semua Masalah*, Sheikh Nazim said that smoking leads people astray. They cannot control their own ego's desires and fall into satanic traps. He strongly discouraged smoking, quoting his master's narrative that identified tobacco as a devil's tree which is not worth touching, let alone consuming. In the book, Sheikh Nazim rhetorically said that,

> "Smoking for a believer is something like letting a small hole to be used by a thief. While you have already closed all doors for committing big sin, it would be meaningless so long as you let the small door remain open....(Haqqani, 2005: 14)"

Self-help advice is also preoccupied with dietary habits. For instance, Nazihe Adil's *Secrets of Heavenly Food* and *Heavenly Foods* are two books dealing with Islamic foods and practical recipes to make them. Like other Sufi groups, Naqshbandi-Haqqani puts great emphasis on how to provide food properly in accordance to shariah prescriptions. These books, as suggested by Reynolds, do not only deal with the legal aspect of food but also integrate dietary habits "into the whole daily-life of the disciples which must be a nourishing routine of spiritual training" (2000: 198). Sheikh Nazim and Hisham Kabbani strongly encourage the disciples to recite *basmallah* while they are cooking

In terms of Quranic exegesis, the Prophetic tradition and *fiqh*, the four books of *Ensiklopedia Akidah Ahlusunah* series are particularly important because they are among the first translated publications detailing Naqshbandi-Haqqani's religious views.They provide the Quranic and Prophetic basis of popular Sunni orthodox positions on matters relating to doctrine, belief and religious practices such as *dzikir, sholawat, tawassul* (intermediary)*, maulid* (the Prophet's birthday celebration)*,* and *ziarah* (pilgrimage). They also provide detail explanations about those popular doctrines, beliefs and religious practices and their historical precedent in previous eras. The *Ensiklopedia* became a model for the writing of books of a similar genre, which are published later. Noval's book in particular is interesting because he is personally close to Sheikh Hisham. He accompanied Sheikh Hisham and performed as his translator on many occasions; he also gave a religious instruction at some Naqshbandi-Haqqani's affiliates in Jakarta. Unlike Sheikh Hisham's *Encyclopedia of Islamic Doctrine,* which was translated for readers of a

middle toupper class background, Noval's books is relatively cheap and focuses on those with middle to lower class background. He targets lay Muslims and offers his books as a guiding source to protect them from so-called "deviant teaching". This deviant teaching is commonly identified among the disciples as Salafi-Wahabism.

Millenarian prophecy and spiritual experience are represented by two best-selling books, *Kiamat Mendekat* and *Dialog dengan Malaikat*. Both books have adistinct place in the popular Islamic literature on millenarian prophecy and spiritual illumination. Unlike other similar books written by Indonesians and foreigners on millenarianism -- books that emphasize a Christian-Jews conspiracy and moral decay and promote a political commitment to address such problems, *Kiamat Mendekat* is different because it puts emphasis on spiritual learning and ritual commitment to anticipate the coming of *fitnah* (dissension) and turmoil in the last days. *Kiamat Mendekat* combines rational scientific explanation and its textual basis in the Quran and the Prophetic tradition with a view of the inevitability of the coming of last days, Jesus Christ, Dajjal and the Mahdi.

Meanwhile, *Dialog dengan Malaikat* contains stories and materials that are mostly coming from personal spiritual experiences of both Sheikh Nazim and Hisham Kabbani. With more than 5000 copies, the success of these two books is comparable with books of a similar genre such as *Dialog dengan Jin Muslim* and *Dajjal Akan Muncul Dari Segitiga Bermuda*, a best-selling book written by an Egyptian journalist, Muhammad Isa Dawud, and published by Pustaka Al Hidayah in 1995 and 1996 respectively. Like Muhammad Isa Dawud, who claimed that his two books were based on a real dialogue with a fellow genie, Sheikh Hisham Kabbani claims that *Kiamat Mendekat* and *Dialog dengan Malaikat* are based on the true spiritual vision of his masters, Sheikh Nazim and Abdullah Faiz, and his own experience during the civil war in his home country, Lebanon.

Print publication however has weaknesses. It contains misunderstandings of metaphoric/symbolic language, simplification, and technical translating errors. Arif Hamdani's booklets/blogs, for instance, are criticized for their errors and misunderstanding of Naqshbandi-Haqqani's teachings. The high demand for Arif Hamdani's booklets, it is said, leaves no room or time for double checking of

grammatical errors. He was reported to have been in a hurry n to translate and publish materials from Naqshbandi-Haqqani's English websites and books. As a consequence, he often loses the real meaning and message and the socio-cultural contexts of the original texts.

B. The Internet and Online Publication of Sufi Materials in Indonesia

The use of the internet for Islamic propagation represents a form of online activism and gives expression to religious identity among the young Indonesian Muslims (Brauchler, 2003: 123-151; Lim, 2005). The difference is that such online activism does not uphold radical ideas, as previously represented by some Muslim groups in Indonesia. The internet also facilitates and helps to guide an expanding cohort of disciples across Indonesia by translating into Indonesian materials taken from their main sources, the Naqshbandi-Haqqani's websites in the USA such as *Sufilive.com*, *Naqshbandi.org*, and *eShaykh.com*. This is shown by many affiliate *yayasan*/*zawiyah* that have a massive presence on the internet either in the form of subscribed domain websites or free-of-charge blogs.

Despite the early influence of the internet in the dissemination of Naqshbandi-Haqqani materials in Indonesia in the late 1990s, the online publication for preaching purposes came relatively late. The widespread use of the internet did not develop yet until at least 2005. The increase after 2005 was related to two factors: the growing number of young disciples and the general expansion of disciples across Indonesia. The young disciples regard the internet as an attractive media for disseminating Naqshbandi-Haqqani's written materials. These websites and blogs are maintained by young disciples who are keen to translate Naqshbandi-Haqqani's materials. As such, they become creative sites where young disciples can express their Sufi affiliation and religiosity. There are currently around 27 websites and blogs managed by Naqshbandi-Haqqani's disciples in Indonesia. They mostly display the most update *sohbet* of Sheik Nazim and Hisham Kabbani and disseminate Naqshbandi-Haqqani's materials and other information regarding Naqshbandi-Haqqani's activities. They include pictures, videos, online advice/consultation, and schedules of local activities conducted by each *zawiya* and

also provide update information regarding the travel plans of Sheikh Hisham Kabbani and his entourage in Indonesia.

TABLE 5.1 WEBSITES/BLOGS AFFILIATED TO NAQSHBANDI-HAQQANI IN INDONESIA

Affiliation	Address of Websites	Type
Fornaqsda	http://www.madadulhaqq.net/	Website
	http://www.kampungsholawat.net	
Rumi Café	http://www.caferumijakarta.com/	Idem
Yayasan Haqqani Indonesia	http://naqsybandi.org/	Idem
Rabbani Cinere	http://www.haqqanirabbani.asia/	idem
Yayasan Haqqani Batam	http://naqshbandibatam.org/	Idem
HHT	http://www.heavenlyhealingteam.org	Idem
	http://indonesiazawiyah.blogspot.com.au/	Free Blog
	www.naqsybandi.web.id/	Idem
	http://haqqaniindonesia.blogspot.com/	Idem
	http://haqqani7007id.wordpress.com/	Idem
	http://eshaykh7007.wordpress.com/	Idem
	http://nationalgathering.blogspot.com	Idem
YBS/HHT	http://heavenlyhealingteam.blogspot.com/	Idem
Pondok Rumi (Arif Hamdani)	http://mevlanasufi.blogspot.com	Idem
Arif Hamdani	http://naqshbandihaqqani.blogspot.com/	Idem
Zawiyah Pakanbaru	http://haqqanipekanbaru.blogspot.com/	Idem
Zawiyah Bandung	http://muhibbunbandung.wordpress.com/	Idem
Balikpapan	http://zawiya.wordpress.com/activities/	Idem
Balikpapan	http://www.zawiya-balikpapan.org/	Idem
	http://wiridnaqsybandi.blogspot.com/	Idem
	http://indonesiasufi.blogspot.com	Idem
	http://perpushaqqani.blogspot.com	Idem
	http://abuahsan.blogspot.com	Idem
	http://naqshbandiyun.blogspot.com	Idem
	http://ariefhamdani.blogspot.com	
	http://syekhkabbani.blogspot.com	

Social media are increasingly popular for exchanging information on Naqshbandi-Haqqani's teachings and activities in Indonesia. The Naqshbandi-Haqqani community in Indonesia uses a free email service provider (muhibbun_naqsybandi@yahoogroups.com) and maintains its presence on social media such as Twitter, BBM Group, and Facebook. The community also provides

a Short Message Service (SMS) in Jakarta. As of WHEN ___the mailing-list had 1555 members, the twitter account (https://twitter.com/Haqqanindonesia) had 1365 followers, and FB group had more than 5000 active members in Indonesia. This number is far less than the actual number of disciples in Indonesia but through oral transmission, social media plays a significant role in transmitting the teachings of the master. In fact, the mailing-list and social media function mainly in updating recent *sohbet* given by Sheikh Nazim and Hisham Kabbani, disseminating announcements of recent *dzikir* activities, and delivering short messages from the two masters. They translate Naqshbandi-Haqqani's materials into the vernacular language and are also used to communicate among fellow disciples.

There are also several problems particularly regarding the use of the internet among Naqshbandi-Haqqani's disciples in Indonesia. These had to do with technical problems of accessibility and network coverage, and financing. Most internet users in Indonesia access this service on time-basis and this result in a costly service that not all people can afford. High-speed internet access is o rare due to a lack of IT infrastructure. This poses a problem because high-speed internet access is crucial for videos and audio materials. In terms of network coverage, the internet service is not yet equally available in every region in Indonesia. Even when this service is available, there is still the problem of high cost. As it becomes available in every region and is cheaper to access, the demand for internet services increases. Of 26 websites/blogs managed by Naqshbandi-Haqqani's disciples in Indonesia, there are only a few which can sustain their presence on the internet. These two websites (http://www.kampungsholawat.net and http://www.caferumijakarta.com), are the most professionally maintained.

Due to these problems, the importance of the internet for disseminating Sufi teaching has to be evaluated through observation of those who have access to it and how they respond to online messages in offline situations. People certainly respond differently to the various messages. These different responses have to do with language, cultural understanding, and accessibility problems. In terms of language, the use of Arabic and English is obviously a big problem because not all of the disciples are fluent in these languages. Even if they regularly access the websites,

they still need a translation service, which is not always available. Closely related to these language problems, there is also a question of cultural understanding. Most Sufi messages from Sheikh Nazim Haqqani and Hisham Kabbani are addressed particularly to Western audience. All embracing messages and a preoccupation with the New Age spirits of cultivating love and energy sometimes fail to resonate with an Indonesian audience who are already orthodox Muslims. This, in turn, often leads to unnecessary religious controversies and polemics.

C. Sufi's e-Jihad and Its Political Significance

Bunt (2003) stated that the internet becomes an important site for waging *jihad* and disseminating *fatwa* (religious ruling). Through the internet, Indonesian Muslims can get access to various materials, ranging from books, brochures, pamphlets, to audio-video materials provided by transnational Islamist networks such as TAQ, JI, BH, and most recently ISIS. Most of those materials share features containing religious and political messages which encouraging ideological war and armed resistance against the so-called Western powers and their supporters in the Muslim world.

Since the late 1990s, online publication has played a significant role in disseminating Islamic radical ideas in Indonesia. In the absence of the New Order's authoritarian state, radical and violent messages have been available for Muslim audience to freely access and consume. Brauchler (2005) for instance shows that the internet played a significant role in disseminating violent messages of Laskar Jihad during the unfolding sectarian religious conflict in Ambon, Moluccas. Lim (2005) further suggested that the creation and assertion of identity on the Internet became a focal point of contests over power.

Naqshbandi-Haqqani offers quite different religious messages on the internet. Their websites display e-Jihad, not because they promote violence or wage a campaign for carrying-out cyber-terror (hacking or cracking). On the contrary, the websites contain messages emphasizing the importance of carrying-out greater (*tadzkiyah an nafs*) than lesser Jihad (holy war). The websites contains on the one hand, a repeated affirmation on the legitimacy of Sufism within Islamic tradition.

On the other hand, there is also a consistent and strong condemnation to religious violence and terror acts in the name of Islam. This kind of Sufi messages poses counter narrative that contest the very basic foundation of Islamist ideology. This counter narrative in turn contributes to delegitimize self-proclaimed righteousness of Islamist activism in Indonesia.

D. E-Sufism and Controversies

Though online publication has a significant role in facilitating massive dissemination of Sufi teachings and ritual, it also has their weaknesses. In many cases, the internet-mediated publication contains misunderstandings of metaphoric/symbolic language, simplification, and technical translating errors. Many blogs affiliated to Naqshbandi-Haqqani are criticized for their translating errors. As a consequence, instead of promoting a valid Sufi teaching to general audience, online resources often loses the real meaning and message and the socio-cultural contexts of the original texts.

The adoption of the internet is surely not as smooth as seem to be because it is not always generating a comfortable situation to present Sufi materials so openly to the public especially for those who are not initiated yet. Using the internet as preaching and guiding media has a consequence that a Sufi movement has to adapt to be open in revealing all its teachings which are previously perhaps kept as a secret or just shared to the most advance level of student. The 'publication of the secret' as suggested by Ernst, about *Nur Muhammad* (Muhammad's light), unseen worlds, miraculous power and so forth on the website could possibly lead to accusation that Sufi holds belief of heresy.

There are also several technical problems pertained to the use of the internet among Naqshbandi-Haqqani's disciples in Indonesia. These had to do with problems of accessibility, network coverage, and financing. Most the internet-users in Indonesia access this service on time-basis and this result in a costly service that not all people can afford. High-speed internet access is o rare due to a lack of IT infrastructure. This poses a problem because high-speed internet access is crucial for videos and audio materials. In terms of network coverage, the internet service

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E. Conclusion

Indonesia has been recognised as the largest Muslim country in the world but Islamic symbols have taken center stage in the public sphere only just recently, since the late 1990s. Since the late 1990s, the religious landscape in Indonesia has changed to the extent that Indonesian community is no longer distinguished between nominal and pious Muslims but rather has become divided between pious Muslims of different religious outlooks. The different expressions of Muslim groups have tended to create a plural Islam and, borrowing Casanova's term, a 'public religion'. It is plural because Islam is interpreted and practiced in different ways by different people, whereas the term of public refers to a 'deprivatising'

process in which Islam has been increasingly important to determine public morality and discourse in Indonesia (Casanova, 1994; 2003: 111; 2008: 101).

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