



Sufism in the Eyes of Muslim Elites in South Sumatra, Indonesia: A Comparison Between Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama

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Abstract : *This study aims at examining the variety of understanding and implementation of Sufistic values among elite members of Islamic mainstream organizations, namely Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama, in South Sumatra. It uses a field research method and a descriptive-qualitative analysis. This research finds that elite members of two mainstream Islamic organizations in South Sumatra similarly consider the importance of Sufistic values, such as faqr, sabr, tawakkal, ikhlas, and ihsan, for perfecting the self. However, they have differed in how these values are implemented. If the former comfortably practices the substantive forms of sufistic teachings, the latter tends to observe sufistic teachings via the route of tarekat (Sufi Orders). Such difference has led to the variety of Islamic practices and dakwah programs organized by both organizations.*

Keywords : *Indonesian Islam, Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama, Sufism.*

Abstrak : Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap perbedaan pemahaman nilai-nilai tasawuf, dan penerapannya, di kalangan para pemimpin organisasi Islam mainstream, Muhammadiyah dan Nahdlatul Ulama, di Sumatera Selatan. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian lapangan dengan teknik analisis data deskriptif kualitatif. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa para pemimpin organisasi Islam mainstream di Sumatera Selatan yang menjadi objek penelitian ini memandang penting nilai-nilai tasawuf, seperti, faqr, sabr, tawakkal, ikhlas, dan ihsan, untuk memperbaiki diri. Hanya saja, terdapat perbedaan antara para pemimpin Muhammadiyah dan NU dalam mengimplementasikan nilai-nilai tasawuf tersebut. Jika yang pertama cenderung mengerjakan amalan dalam bentuk tasawuf substantif, maka yang kedua lebih condong pada nilai-nilai tasawuf yang teraktualisasi dalam tarekat. Perbedaan pemahaman ini menghasilkan pola perilaku yang berbeda-beda dan karena itu amal dakwah yang berbeda-beda pula.

Kata Kunci : Islam Indonesia, Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama, Tasawuf.

A. Introduction

Sufism, or widely known among Indonesian Muslim as *tasawuf*,¹ has become an important part of the history of Islam in Indonesia. Its arrival in the region occurred simultaneously with the initial introduction of Islam into the archipelago, largely enabled by the vast networks of politics, trades, travels, and social and cultural works at play. Sufism is often confused with several terms, such as spirituality, mysticism, and exotericism.² It is however a distinctive Islamic term that is designed to describe particular forms of worship, invocation, and rituals carried out by a group of Muslims according to the prescribed ways established by Sufi masters and their orders (*tarekat*) that these Muslims followed.³ Sufism teaches its adherents to purify their soul (*tazkiyah al nafs*) from things

¹ Harun Nasution, *Falsafat Dan Mistisisme Dalam Islam* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1995).

² William C. Chittick, *Jalan Cinta Sang Sufi*, (Yogyakarta: Qalam, 2002), 18. Mulyadi Kartanegara, *Pengantar Studi Islam*, (Jakarta: UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Press, 2012), 195.

³ Annemarie Schimmel, "Women's in Mystical Islam", *Women Studies International Forum*, Vol. 5, no. 2 (1982): 145–51.

sinful and forbidden by Allah, and to fill it with good behavior and character.⁴

According to Rahman⁵, Sufism is originally a religious moral movement that focuses on the esoteric dimension and aims at moral holiness. However, by the twelfth century, it developed into a form of popular Sufism or mass religion, namely *tarekat* (Sufi orders). As a spiritual path, tarekat is essentially close to Sunni schools, but at a metaphysical level, it is closer to intellectual Sufism. Several of the tarekats are considered to have deviated from the teachings of Islam. The *sheikhs*, or Sufi masters, are considered to have *barakah* or a blessing power. The widespread belief in their barakah has led to the practice of praising and venerating the tombs of, and other relics ascribed to those considered as the saints. Special annual pilgrimages to the tombs of these saints continue to exist today, often accompanied by open bazaars that supply the social needs of the pilgrims who come from far-flung places.

Tarekat is the subtlest part of Islam, thus it is often considered as the most difficult aspect of the religion to understand. However, its effects are visibly manifested in various dimensions of Islamic culture and civilization. As the heart of Islam, tarekat is often equated with the human heart which governs the entire organism of Islam as the lived religion and becomes the source of the Muslim's mind. This way, tarekat is the key to the perfection of the everyday practice of Islamic teachings.⁶

Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) are two major Islamic organizations in Indonesia. Both were established during the colonial period and played an important role in the struggles for the country's independence. Both organizations were respectively founded by KH. Ahmad Dahlan (KH. Dahlan) and KH. Hasyim Asy'ari (KH. Hasyim), who had similarly studied Islam in Mecca with Sheikh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi, and when in Indonesia with KH. Muhammad Saleh bin H. Umar al-Samarani, also known as Kyai Salih Darat, in

⁴ Umar Faruq Thohir, "Pemikiran Mistisisme Annemarie Schimmel," *Ulul Albab*, Vol. 13, no. 2 (2012).

⁵ Fazlur Rahman, "Islamic Methodology in History," *Teologia*, Vol. 24, no. 2 (2013).

⁶ Raha Bistara, "Tariqah Dimensi Esoteris Dalam Islam: Studi Pemikiran Sayyed Hossein Nasr," *Journal of Islamic Civilization*, Vol. 2, no. 2 (2020): 72-9.

Semarang, Central Java. When modernist thought, especially that promoted by Muhammad Abduh and his student Rasyid Ridha, became popular in Indonesia, Dahlan was showing his interest in it and established Muhammadiyah. In contrast, Asy'ari took a staunch defense against it, and founded *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) in Surabaya on January 31, 1926, on 16 Rajab 1344 Hijra.⁷ NU is based in rural communities and is known for its strong entanglement with local traditions and culture.⁸

In the field of Sufism, most of the NU adherents are followers of Junaid al-Baghdadi and al-Ghazali. In this regard, NU has established a Sufistic organization called *Jamiyah Ahlu al-Tariqah al-Muktabarah* to help NU people develop the right mental attitude and inner awareness when doing their worship. The organization is also said to function as a forum for NU adherents to practice Sufism and tarekat correctly,⁹ that is, by providing principles guidance on how to practice the tarekat to its members, so that they do not deviate from the assumed correct belief and teachings of Islam.¹⁰

KH. Ahmad Dahlan founded Muhammadiyah on 8th Dzulhijjah 1330 Hijra or 18th November 1912 in Yogyakarta.¹¹ Geographically, it is based on urban society and features modernist symbols. According to Muhammadiyah, Islamic teachings are divided into three parts: *Iman* (faith), *Islam* (submission), and *Ihsan* (compassion). KH. Ahmad Dahlan strongly recommends Muhammadiyah members practice *al-akhlakul karimah* (noble behavior). Among his followers, he is famous for his asceticism and abstinence from wealth; he even donated his wealth to run the organization he founded. He was able to incorporate spiritualism and Sufistic ideals as the work ethic of his organization. This can be seen, for example, from the fact that “Islamic spirituality” has become one of the

⁷ Soelaiman Fadeli and Muhammad Subhan, *Ontologi NU Sejarah, Istilah, Amaliyah, Uswah* (Surabaya: Khalista, 2007).

⁸ Abdul Muchith, *NU Dalam Perspektif Sejarah* (Surabaya: Khalista, 2007).

⁹ Masyhur Amin, *NU Dan Ijtihad Politik Kenegaraannya* (Yogyakarta: al-Amin, 1996).

¹⁰ Ahmad Zahro, *Tradisi Intelektual NU: Lajnah Bahts al- Masail 1926-1999* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2004).

¹¹ Musthafa, *Muhammadiyah Dalam Gerakan Islam* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2003).

main organizational principles in all branches of Muhammadiyah. It refers to how the organization has trained its members to regulate their worldly desires through the practices of worship and rituals based on guidance from the Qur'an and the Hadith. Muhammadiyah is also active in advising its members to keep practicing *sunnah* prayers (recommendable worship) and *dhikr* (remembrance of God), as well as maintaining sincerity in their actions.

According to Zuriatul Khairi¹², both NU and Muhammadiyah adhere to orthodox Islam. When the wave of pluralism and feminism rocked Indonesia's religious spheres in the 1990s, they were forced to react and adopt to it, which means a challenge to their existence. History proved, however, that the two were able to respond to such challenges marvelously, making them even more established as an organization.

Known as the traditionalist group, NU is characterized by the following features. First, it accommodates local traditions and culture. Second, Sufism is seen as a teaching that must be preserved. Third, it places the opinions of Muslim scholars as the main reference before referring to the Qur'an and the Hadith. Fourth, following a *madzhab* (schools) is considered compulsory as an effort to correctly observe religious commands and rituals. To preserve this tradition, NU established *Jam'iyah Ahli Tariqah Muktabarah* on October 10, 1957. Then at the Semarang congress in 1979, the word an-Nahdiyah was added behind it to emphasize that this body remains affiliated with NU.¹³

Muhammadiyah is different from NU concerning how they understand and practice the values of Sufism. It considers some practices of Sufism as a form of *bid'ah* (fabricated) and superstition. Claiming itself a reformist movement, it prioritizes the development of rational aspects and emphasizes the role of reason. Moreover, it tends to directly refer to the Qur'an and the Hadith as the legal reference. Finally, it does not strictly follow one of the schools of thought.

¹² Zuriatul Khairi, *Teologi Muhammadiyah Dan NU* (Yogyakarta: UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2011).

¹³ Soeleiman Fadeli and Mohammad Subhan, *Antologi NU Sejarah, Istilah, Amaliyah, Uswah* (Surabaya: Khalista, 2007).

This study aims to reveal the understanding of Sufistic values among the elite members of NU and Muhammadiyah in South Sumatra, and how their understanding differs from each other's. This research is important for the following reasons. Muhammadiyah and NU are big organizations in Indonesia and serve as a reference for anyone interested in studying and practicing Islam. Second, both adhere to spiritual principles but differ in their practice of Sufism. Third, both are Muslim organizations that similarly develop cognitive skills and embrace the importance of various disciplines of science, traditional and modern. Finally, Sufistic values are believed to have provided alternative solutions to problems of anxiety commonly faced by humans of modern times.

The main question of this research is as follows: "How is the implementation of Sufistic values among the elites of Muhammadiyah and NU organization in South Sumatra?". This question is divided into three sub-questions. First, how is the understanding of Sufistic values among the Muhammadiyah elites in South Sumatra. Second, how is the understanding of Sufistic values among the NU elites in South Sumatra. Third, how do the elites of NU and Muhammadiyah in South Sumatra implement their understanding of the Sufistic values in daily life?

The study in this research is following Hermansen's research¹⁴ in India, which reveals that the type of thought of Sufism triggers mystical experiences which are then interpreted in problem-solving or divination modes. Furthermore, this research study is also in line with research by Schimmel¹⁵, which reveals that gender equality has a very important role in Sufism in Indo-Pakistan. The study in this research is also in line with Rennie's study¹⁶, which found that life experiences and implications of principles can influence one's understanding of religion.

The discussion in this paper will be divided into three parts. The first part discusses the understanding of Sufistic values among the Muhammadiyah elites in South Sumatra. The second part discusses the

¹⁴ Marcia K. Hermansen, "Visions as 'Good to Think': A Cognitive Approach to Visionary Experience in Islamic Sufi Thought" *Religion*, Vol. 27, no. 1 (1997): 25–43.

¹⁵ Schimmel, "Women in Mystical Islam..."

¹⁶ Bryan Rennie, "Mircea Eliade: 'Secular Mysticism' and The History of Religions," *Religion*, Vol. 38, no. 4 (2008).

understanding of Sufistic values among the NU elites in South Sumatra, and the third part discusses how Sufistic values are differently implemented among the Muhammadiyah and NU elites in South Sumatra.

B. Research Methods

This research used a qualitative method, which means that it focuses on describing the subjects under study, explaining them, and finally drawing some conclusions about them.¹⁷ Since the qualitative method offers an in-depth elaboration of speech, writing, and the observable behavior of the studied subjects,¹⁸ it is hoped that as such will help the researchers to paint a picture of the subject under study from various angles and social settings.

The key subjects of this research are elite members of Islamic mainstream organizations, namely Muhammadiyah and NU, in South Sumatra. The primary data are gathered through a variety of methods, including interviews, documentation, and observation. Informants for the interview included the executive leaders of Muhammadiyah in South Sumatra, the executive and consultative leaders of NU in South Sumatra, the chair of *Jami'ah Ahl at-Tarekat Muktabarah (Jatman) an-Nahdliyah* of South Sumatra, the chairperson of *the Jami'ah Ahl as-Sunnah wal Jama'ah (Jatman) an-Nahdliyah* Palembang, *Badal Tarekat Satariyah* in South Sumatera, and the religious leader of the Islamic boarding school of Aulia Cendikia. The selection of these informants is done through a purposive sampling strategy. Observation of this research took place in the quarters of Muhammadiyah and NU in South Sumatra, mainly focusing on observing the daily activities of the informants under study. Documents consulted for this research, are those related to Sufistic values, mostly kept in the office of Muhammadiyah and NU offices of South Sumatra, both in the form of printed and digital materials.

To analyze the data, it used Miles and Huberman's technique, which is carried out through the following processes:¹⁹ data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion.

¹⁷ Saipul Annur, *Metode Penelitian* (Palembang: Grafindo Telindo Press, 2008).

¹⁸ Basrowi and Suwandi, *Memahami Penelitian Kualitatif* (Jakarta: Rineka Cipta, 2008).

¹⁹ Afrizal, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif* (Jakarta: Raja Grafindo Persada, 2016).

C. Results and Discussion

1. Sufistic values among the Muhammadiyah elites in South Sumatra

Religion has increasingly faced fierce challenges in modern times, largely due to the growing number of varied interpretations and practices of the religion's principles teachings, and values, including the principles inherent in *tasawuf*, or Sufism. The stronger the effort of religious leaders in establishing a common ground and minimizing the gap of difference between them, the fiercer the boundary between the religious organizations. On personal levels, the connection among religious leaders in Indonesia in general, and in South Sumatra, in particular, is improving, but tension remains existent at the level of theological understanding, which is the foundation of religion, particularly about its interpretation and practice.

Amin Abdullah has emphasized the importance of a progressive-evaluative attitude toward religious differences to comprehend and tolerate the variation of religious understanding that exists both within internal Islam and between Islam and other religions. Today's attitude toward religious difference, he added, cannot simply copy that of the pre-scientific medieval society, in a way that it is not to abandon revelation, but to formulate a religious ethics that is fresher, dialogical, pluralistic, challenging, and applicable in contemporary society.²⁰ According to Amin, there are two types of Sufism in Indonesia. The first is practices of Sufism that are geared toward subjective satisfaction, mostly observed by followers of a Sufi order. The second is related to Sufistic practices directed to the fulfillment of social charity. Indeed, he claims that "in the modern period, the realm of spirituality should no longer affiliate exactly with a tarekat in its old form. For one thing, Sufism has emerged in society as a response to a mindset that is too dry with values of spirituality. It is not surprising that the main problem of Sufism, still battling with matters of isolating the self for uniting with God, has grown blind to social problems."²¹

²⁰ Amin Abdullah, *Falsafah Kalam Di Era Postmodernisme* (Yogyakarta: Pelajar, 1995).

²¹ Amin Abdullah, *Islamic Studies Di Perguruan Tinggi* (Yogyakarta: Pelajar, 2009).

According to our interviews with regional leaders of Muhammadiyah in South Sumatra, Muhammadiyah accepts Sufism in many forms. Yet, given that the foundation and aim of Sufism is morality, Muhammadiyah focuses on aspects of morality more than on *tarekat*, which has a wide range of manifestations. Some Sufi orders are classified as *muktabarah* (officially sanctioned), while others are classified as *ghairu muktabarah* (officially not sanctioned). The perception of Muhammadiyah elites in South Sumatra on sufistic values can be summarized as follows:

First, Romli SA. He is the chairman of South Sumatra Muhammadiyah Regional Leadership (*PWM South Sumatera*). He stated that many people criticized Muhammadiyah as anti-Sufism, mostly based on their observation that Muhammadiyah does not practice the verbal-communal forms of *wirid* (*dzikir*, remembrance of God) and *tahlil* (invocation of prayers and God's names), which according to them has caused a spiritual drought. Since this is incorrect, said Romli, Muhammadiyah is often 'forced' to explain to the public its views on Islamic mysticism to dispel the misconception. In fact, Muhammadiyah as an Islamic organization has always encouraged its members to maintain practices of Islamic spirituality in the framework of strengthening faith, perfecting worship, and cultivating noble character. The desire to cultivate *tajdid* (renewal) of thought aligns with the actualization of Islamic spirituality.

Muhammadiyah considers itself an Islamic movement based on Islam, the Qur'an, and the Hadith, that aims at spreading the da'wah of *al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa-n-nahy'ani-l-munkar* (commanding the goods, forbidding the evils) and *tajdid* (religious renewal), to establish a society that is Islamic in its true senses. As such is formulated as the main character of Muhammadiyah as an Islamic movement that focuses on purifying the faith and religious renewal, by returning to the Qur'an and the Hadith and reopening the gate of *ijtihad* for the advancement of the people and human life. This characteristic is largely indebted to Dahlan's thoughts about Islam. Djindar Tamimy has further emphasized that becoming a Muhammadiyah means, (a) having a correct understanding of the teachings of Islam, and recognizing the importance of the organized form of Islam to realize Islamic teachings in society.

Meanwhile, according to Nofrizal Nawawi, deputy chairman of the PWM in South Sumatra, Muhammadiyah began to adopt the "*shari'a spiritualization*" program following the 43rd Muhammadiyah congress in Aceh in 1995. Citing Munir Mul Khan's opinion,²² he said that the *Tarjih* council (an institute in Muhammadiyah that issues a fatwa), has established the so-called *Irfani* approach as one of its thought development strategies, complementing its other two well-known approaches, *Bayani* and *Burhani*. The 'irfani' approach is a method of understanding that is based on inner experiences, such as *zawq* (sense), *qalb* (heart), *wijdan* (soul), *bashirah* (vision), and intuition. In this regard, Dahlan used several phrases loaded with sufistic connotations during his speech at the 1921 Islamic Congress in Cirebon and the Muhammadiyah Congress in February 1922: these include for example "holy heart," "genuine Islam," "sacred thought," and "the holy Qur'an." Nawawi explained that Mukhlani's argumentation reflects what he called "the Sufistic notion" of Muhammadiyah's founders, asserting that Muhammadiyah is not allergic to Islam's esoteric dimension. In the 1970s, Nakamura discovered that Sufistic practices had been embraced among local Muhammadiyah activists and leaders in Kota Gede, Yogyakarta. They include the practice of *dhikr* and *wirid*, giving religious advice on the significance of abstinence from worldly desires, and making efforts to build an honest and praiseworthy personality.²³ Even today, many Muhammadiyah members continue to embrace Sufistic practices, as indicated by the increasing number of requests for training, courses, and cadre training that explore spiritual experience, both personally and on behalf of Muhammadiyah's philanthropic initiatives.

M. Idris²⁴, the fourth vice chairman of PWM South Sumatra stated, that knowledge is a mercy from God to make us knowledgeable, and with His grace, we could attain *hikmah* (wisdom) and could observe secrets of the universe that would lead us to God's blessings both in the material world and the hereafter. According to him, *Sufism* for Muhammadiyah is equivalent to the notion of *ihsan* (compassion), as indicated by the

²² Abdul Munir Mul Khan, *Moral Politik Santri* (Jakarta: Erlangga, 2013).

²³ Mitsuo Nakamura, *Bulan Sabit Muncul dari Balik Pohon Beringin* (Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press, 1983).

²⁴ M. Idris, *Interview*, January 14, 2015.

Prophet's hadiths. He added that the word *Ihsan* is derived from an Arabic verb, *ahsana* (احسن), which means a virtuous action.²⁵ According to Muhammad Amin al-Kurdi, *ihsan* is an awareness of being supervised by Allah when one is doing worship, making it congruous with contained in faith and Islam so that all worship of a servant is truly sincere for Allah²⁶. According to Imam Nawawi, *ihsan* is related to sincerity in worship. It is about the state in which a believer is aware that he or she is constantly being watched by God, with humility. Because *ihsan* is the soul of the *faith* and *islam*, it encompasses the entirety of Muslim activities in daily life, be they related to worship or *muamalah* (social relationship). *Iman* is seen as the foundation for a man's soul, which is a result between knowledge and faith, embodied in the form of Islam. The unity between *iman* and *islam* in a person will embody in the form of *akhlaq al karimah* (benevolent behavior), also known as *ihsan*.²⁷ The emphasis on the dimension of humanity in *ihsan*, and religiosity in *iman* and *islam*, as conceptualized by Muhammadiyah scholars, demonstrates the significance of keeping a balance between *Hablum Mina-Allah* (human's relationship with God) and *Hablum Min an-Nas* (human's relationship with other human beings).

Based on the data from our informants above, it is arguable that Muhammadiyah is not against Sufism, as many have criticized the organization. Sufistic values are embraced by the organization as part of its main teachings. Yet, to the extent that the organization was initially established as an effort to purify the religion from what is considered syncretic, Muhammadiyah understandably does not observe Sufism in the form of tarekat as part of its core values. Muhammad Rasyid Ridhā, the man to whom Muhammadiyah's ideology of renewal is associated with, has called the importance of textual reference to the Qur'an for interpreting Islam: it is for this reason that the movement tends to take a textual approach to the religion.

²⁵ Louis Ma'luf, *Al-Munjid fi al-Lughah wa al-A'lam* (Beirut: Dār al-Masyriq, 1986).

²⁶ Muhammad Amin al-Kurdi, *Tanwir al-Qulub* (Singapore: al-Haramain, n.d.).

²⁷ *Ibid.*

2. Sufistic Values Among the Elites of Nahdatul Ulama in South Sumatra

Following is our analysis of the understanding of Sufistic values among the NU elites in South Sumatra. Abd. Amri Siregar²⁸ said that Sufistic values are closely related to behavior and conception of God. Sufism is manifested through faithful practices of *tarekat* and rituals. It starts from repentance, indicating that practices must be evaluated before finally reaching the levels of *takhalli* (seclusion, here, from worldly desires), *tahalli* (adornment, here, with God's Attributes), and *tajalli* (theophany).²⁹ Without a doubt, Muhammadiyah and NU are the most powerful groups in Indonesia. According to some observers, they are the largest Muslim organizations in the Islamic world. Both come from quite different origins, with their advantages and weaknesses. However, these differences and similarities should be seen as a motivation to complement each other, not for justifying the self, and blaming the other.

Another informant, Marjohan³⁰, stated that Sufistic values are largely manifested in the actions of the Prophet Muhammad. To follow this path, one has to join *tarekat*. Life in this material world should be in harmony with life in the hereafter. Sufi teachers, or *murshid* have a critical role in guiding their pupils to the *ma'rifat* (divine knowledge) stage. This has resulted in the fact that respect for teachers has become central to the moral behaviors of the tarekat society. According to Sheikh Najmuddin Amin al-Qurdi, such behaviors include the following: a) students must physically and mentally respect their *murshid*; b) students must surrender and submit themselves to their *murshid*; c) students must be humble in their use of energy and wealth, d) students are not permitted to contradict with the opinions of their *murshid*, and e) pupils are not permitted to have any attachment linked to their *murshid*.³¹

²⁸ Abd. Amri Siregar is chairman of the *tanfidziyah* (executive) board of NU in South Sumatra for the period 2012-2015. *Personal Interview*, March 11, 2015.

²⁹ Yunasril Ali, *Pilar-Pilar Tasawuf* (Jakarta: Kalam Mulia, 1999), 194.

³⁰ Marjohan is the first deputy chairman of the *tanfidziyah* (executive) board of NU in South Sumatra for the period 2012-2015. *Personal interview*, March 11, 2015.

³¹ Muhammad Sayuti, *Politik Tarekat Qadiriyyah wa Naqshabandiyah Jombang: Hubungan Agama Negara dan masyarakat* (Yogyakarta: Galang Press, 2011).

Amin Suyitno³², another informant from NU South Sumatra, is a loyal follower of Sufistic values and practices. According to him, religious understanding solely dependent on reason will result in a dry perspective of the religion, in a way that one's experience of the religion will become a formal and routine basis. This cognitive model of practicing religion may only push a religious adherent away from the fundamental core of the religion he or she embraced. Practices of Sufism will help people to think of the meaning of their life and to rediscover their identity as human beings. Sufism, in this way, may be seen as a spirit that motivates human beings to dialogue with the mystery of life and may become a spirit of dialogue among believers of different religions, and of the dialectics between culture and civilization. Tarekat to Sufism is like a madrasa to a Muslim society: it guides a Sufi traveler (*salik*) to go through the seven passions: *ammārah bi al-su'*, *lawwāmah*, *mulhamah*, *mutmainnah*, *rādiyah*, and *mardiyah*.

The other informant, Periansya³³, stated that to find happiness, it is vital to practice spiritual or Sufistic memory. However, he clarified that adhering to a tarekat was not a requirement. Tarekat is a path to travel to reach the goal. Following a tarekat is not the only way to that goal. This way, there is no fundamental problem between NU and Muhammadiyah. Even the central management of both Muhammadiyah and NU appeared to be in harmony, even though at the grassroots there are some small frictions. This difference must be acknowledged because each of them has a different background, both in terms of origins, followers, and the technique of determining the law.

Achmad Sjaifuddin Zuber,³⁴ the fifth deputy chairman of the *tanfidziyah* (executive) board of NU in South Sumatra for the period 2012-2015, is very accommodating to Sufistic values. According to him, a good person is one who always tries to become a more virtuous person than their previous version. When one can reach a quality of the desirable soul, their heart will become so clear and serene that tranquility will emanate from it.

³² He is the second deputy chairman of the *tanfidziyah* (executive) board of NU in South Sumatra for the period 2012-2015. *Personal interview*, June 4, 2015.

³³ Periansya is the fourth deputy chairman of the *tanfidziyah* (executive) board of NU in South Sumatra for the period 2012-2015. *Personal interview*, March 11, 2015.

³⁴ Achmad Sjaifuddin. *Personal Interview*, March 11, 2015.

This is what is called *tajalli* (theophany) in Sufism, meaning the arrival of divine light in his heart. In such a situation, a person can differentiate between what is good and bad, between what is wrong and true, and even can 'know' God. This is the peak of spiritual stations that can be achieved by a Sufi traveler. Those who have obtained this station can fulfill their divine potential in the form of noble characters.

Sixth, according to Ahmad Zainuri,³⁵ the sixth deputy chairman of the *tanfidziyah* (executive) board of NU in South Sumatra for the period 2012-2015 from 2012 to 2015, *zuhd* (asceticism) is a fortress for a person to build his/her personality from within, especially in the face of glittering material wealth. It will also lead a person to achieve other benevolent characteristics, such as *qana'ah* and thankfulness, which respectively mean, accepting God's giving with an open heart, and using them according to their functions and proportions. Similarly, the state of *faqr* (destitution) is driven by public objectives rather than personal ones, and such acts and thoughts should be continuous. These characters substantially share some parallels with those found in people who could actualize themselves more efficiently, in the sense that they can do things based on necessity, not on a whim. This also means that they can see reality objectively and able to discern the truth from the false.

Other important characteristics of one's self-actualization are the stations of *sabr* (patience), *tawakkal* (reliance upon God), and *ridla* (contentment). Individuals with these stations will be able to hear and follow their hearts, which is the truth. They will accept whatever God has bestowed upon them and their lives as the manifestation of God's love. This will allow them to stay calm, tranquil, and cheerful, irrespective of the conditions of their life. This way, they will be able to let themselves be surrounded by infinite feelings of gratitude and happiness. In addition to that, these stations also bring forward a comfortable and joyful feeling to the soul, allowing those possessing these stations to have a resilient power against bad influences of their surroundings. This way, they will become a self-sufficient thinker, independent from conflicting interests.³⁶ More importantly, these qualities are helpful to deal with the realities of life. It

³⁵ Ahmad Zainuri, *Personal Interview*, March 21, 2015.

³⁶ *Ibid*,

does not encourage one to become a passive person or to withdraw from realities, but conversely, it aspires Muslims to become active in society, to carry out their duties as a caliphate, a substitute of God on earth. All in all, these characteristics represent an inner attitude that is needed to cope with all situations of life.

In addition to the above perspective, this research also conducted interviews with NU elites not on the executive boards. Below are their opinions.

Mardi Abdullah,³⁷ a member of the *suriah* (consultative) board of NU in South Sumatra for the period 2012 to 2015, said that Sufism requires adherence to tarekat and the assistance of a teacher. *Adab* (etiquettes) of a student to the teacher includes the following. A Sufi disciple must (a) learn that the goals and objectives of his *suluk* (traveling) cannot be achieved without the teacher's assistance, b) learn to accept his/her situations of learning, c) avoid things the teacher despises, d) must not rush to make a judgment, e) lower his/her voice at the presence of the teacher, f) ask permission before visiting the teacher, g) must not reveal his/her conscience, dreams, or *kasyaf* to the teacher, h) must not quote the teacher's statement to others, except they understand it, and i) do not gossip, make fun of, curse, stare, criticize, or broadcast the teacher's disgrace to others. It is also required for a pupil to not get irritated if the teacher interferes with his/her goal, for such intervention will usually help the student to achieve the goals. Tarekat derives from an Arabic word, namely *al-Tharqah*, which means path, status, flow, or line on something.³⁸ In Sufism, *tarekat* is seen as a journey of a *salik* toward Allah by purifying the self.³⁹ This journey is done by following the path assigned by the Sufi masters, along with its various stages and complexities, to meet directly with *Khaliq* (the God). This journey has been handed down from generation to generation. This finding is consistent with Katkova's study,

³⁷ Mardi Abdullah, *Personal interview*, March 18, 2015.

³⁸ Rasihon Anwar and Mukhtar Solihin, *Ilmu Tasawuf* (Bandung: Pustaka Setia, 2007).

³⁹ Zainul Adzfar, *Epistemologi Pengalaman Keagamaan Keagamaan Dalam Tradisi Tarekat: Studi Pengalaman Keagamaan Ikhwan Tarekat Qadiriyyah wa Naqshabandiyah (TQN) di Suryalaya*, (Semarang: IAIN Walisongo, 2006).

which demonstrated that a student should be given a direct example and have intimate interaction with the *sheikh*.⁴⁰

According to KH. As'ad Balqi, chairman of *Jamiat Ahlu at-Tarekat al-Muktabarah an-Nahdliyah* in South Sumatra⁴¹, someone who wishes to study Sufism must adhere to and follow the stations that have been set. Many have criticized that Sufism has led to poverty, arguing that teachings such as *zuhd*, *'uzlah*, *tawakkal*, *qanā'ah*, and *faqīr*, are detrimental to one's work ethic and that Sufi's rituals such as *dzikr*, *wirid*, and *prayers*, which are time-consuming, have limited one's possibility of accumulating material wealth. This criticism needs to be proved with a study. For one thing, to be able to join and practice tarekat, the process of *talqin* and *bai'at* must first be completed.⁴² *Talqin* is a warning from a Sufi teacher to students. Having a *talqin* indicates that one has entered the circle of those who practice tarekat teachings. *Bai'at* is the ability and loyalty of pupils in front of their murshid to practice and perform all of the virtues that their murshid has mandated. *Khataman* is the practice of completing reading the *aurad* (p. *wirid*, prayers), usually done every week. *Manaqib* is the reading of the biography of Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani. There are still many other activities that have to be performed by followers of tarekat, such as pilgrimage, *uzlah*, and *khalwat*.

Information from the second informant is consistent with the findings from the interviews with Ihsan, Mudin, and Sahidin, who discovered that al-Jilani has integrated *zuhd* with his Islamic movement, especially about the correct definition of *zuhd* in contexts of education and teaching, as manifested in his lectures and da'wah.⁴³ According to the findings of the interview, the understanding of Sufistic values among the NU elites in South Sumatra is divided into three categories: full acceptance,

⁴⁰ Irina R. Katkova, "Sufi Authority in 'Post-Modern' Muslim Societies," *Kalam* 14, no. 1 (2020). 1–14.

⁴¹ KH. As'ad Balqi, *Personal Interview*, in Masjid Ikhlas Jalan Talang Banten Palembang, 2015.

⁴² Suhrawardi, *'Awārif al-Ma'ārif* (Bandung: Hidayah, 1998).

⁴³ N. H. Ihsan, M. I. Mudin, and A. Sahidin, "Implementation of Zuhd in the Islāh Movement of Shaykh Abdul Qadir al-Jilani (D. 561 H/ 1161 CE)", *Madania*, 25, no. 1 (2021). 125–36.

accommodative to Sufism, and pluralist, in the sense that members of the organizations are free to decide their stance toward Sufism.

3. The implementation of Sufistic values among religious elites in South Sumatra: a comparison between Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama

According to Yusuf al-Qardhawi, Islam has numerous traits, including *wasatiyah* or *tawazun*, that is, a balanced attitude toward material and spiritual life.⁴⁴ This means that every Muslim must be able to take a balanced position between the material world and the spiritual life geared toward the hereafter.

A difference in how Sufism is understood and experienced is inevitable. This relates to what Durkheim has called the sacred and the profane. Both experiences are classified as the sacred or the religious, and the secular. Sacred experience, according to Durkheim, is identified with distinct qualities. It necessitates an acknowledgment or belief in the supernatural force that becomes the essence of religious attitudes or devotion. Second, it is usually identified with ambiguous and dualistic characters: they are physical and moral in nature, human and cosmic in origin, positive and negative, possessing both a loving and hostile spirit, alluring and bothersome at the same time, and beneficial and destructive to humanity. Third, it is not utilitarian in nature, relying on a profit-and-loss premise. Fourth, it is non-empirical and does not include a great deal of knowledge (science knowledge) derived from various study approaches. Fifth, sacred experiences are usually supportive, empowering, laden with charismatic aura, and come with ethical obligations to those possessing them.⁴⁵

The sacred is belonged to a human's extraordinary experience which usually occurs when ones have reached the limit of their ability or their breaking point. This is the state where common sense and science reached a *cul-de-sac*, or when humans are no longer able to understand and describe what they are experiencing, particularly when confronted with

⁴⁴ Yusuf Qardhawi, *Karakteristik Islam* (Surabaya: Risalah Gusti, 1996).

⁴⁵ Amatullah Armstrong, *Kunci Memasuki Dunia Tashawūf* (Bandung: Mizan, 1996).

disappointment and death.⁴⁶ According to Joachim Wach, there are two approaches to investigating the nature of religious experience. The first is to employ a historical description of the religion, sect, or school of religious thought in question. The second is to inquire "Where am I?". This refers to the prospective environment in which individual experience occurs.⁴⁷

Wach has pointed to five factors, as cited by Hendropuspito, determining the sacredness of an experience. First, religious experience is a reaction to what is experienced as absolute reality. Since this reality is binding and powerful, an experience that is "limited" cannot be considered a religious experience: it is perhaps simply a pseudo-religion. Second, religious experience entails an appreciation in which there is a dynamic link between the internalized object and the individual experiencing it. Third, the uninterrupted continuity of religious experience. Fourth, religious experience is intense; it has the potential to be the most powerful, comprehensive, unforgettable, and overwhelming experience that people can have. Fifth, religious experience is manifested via actions. This might be interpreted as a strong motivation and impetus to act.⁴⁸

Sociologically, Sufism refers to a belief system in the personal divine universe (belief system), as well as values, norms, institutions, behaviors, rituals, and symbols. Socially significant symbols of Sufism are, to some extent, strongly tied to social and cultural construction, which is a mirror of the life order of those who support it. Proponents of phenomenological ideology, such as Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman, share this viewpoint. According to them, all social realities, including religion, emerge from a dialectical interaction that includes the processes of externalization, objectivation, and internalization. Berger and Luckman argue in *The Social Construction of Reality* that society is a dialectical phenomenon created by the people who live in it. No reality for him is not socially produced, and nothing is not founded on human activity and cognition. In the end, though, man is a product of his society.

⁴⁶ S Abdullah, "Ritual Pengikut Tarekat," *Teosofi 1*, Vol. no. 2 (Des 2011): 7.

⁴⁷ Huston Smith, *Kebenaran Yang Terlupakan Kritik atas Sains dan Modernitas*, trans. Inyik Ridwan Muzir (Yogyakarta: IRCiSoD, 2001).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

According to Peter Berger, "Man not only creates a universe, but he also creates himself."⁴⁹ More specifically, he creates himself in a world." As a result of this process, a human product, culture, was created. Religion, according to Berger, is a holy non-material civilization established by humans. In future advances, human-created culture, both material and immaterial, becomes a reality beyond the creator's control. This reality then becomes an objective reality that exists independently of humans. The objectivation process refers to the process of shifting culture from subjective to objective realities. According to Nicholson, "...religious legitimacy purports to reconcile humanly defined reality to ultimate, universal, and concealed reality." Religion, like culture in general, serves as a symbol or reminder to individuals not to disrupt the cosmic order and sacredness. The legitimacy of religion appears very apparent and strong, especially in critical situations, whether they befall people such as death, illness, tragedy, and others, or groups such as war and tragedies and natural disasters.⁵⁰

According to Dadang Kahmad, any person who converts to a certain religion will be confronted with a religious institution as an objective reality. He is expected to act in conformity with the values, norms, and religious rites involved. This role is manifested in three critical functions. First, it offers a transcendental viewpoint on human events. Second, they serve as reminders to all members of the community about the importance of social order (nomos). Third, it fosters social unity among members of society.⁵¹

In his book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Max Weber shows how the Protestant ethic aided in the birth and development of the capitalist system. Donald Eugene Smith discusses how religion influences the evolution of political orders in many countries around the world. Religion is frequently connected directly with the social order itself, even in diverse societies, because religion is viewed as a mirror of the

⁴⁹ Bertrand Russell, *Sejarah Filsafat Barat dan Kaitannya dengan Kondisi Sosio Politik dari Zaman Kuno Hingga Kini*, Trans. Sigit Jatmiko (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2004).

⁵⁰ R. A. Nicholson, *Mistik Dalam Islam* (Jakarta: Bumi Aksara, 2000).

⁵¹ Abdullah, "Ritual Pengikut Tarekat."

society that sustains it. Religiosity is defined as “...interest in and engagement in religious activities...”. The term religiosity is described as the level of engagement of people in religious events, either individually or collectively, or in the general conduct or attitude that qualifies a person or group of people as pious and religious.⁵²

However, the erosion of religiosity in modern society is not unthinkable. It gives its specific style of religious practice with the growth of science and technology, as well as the rationality of modern society. For religious people, the decline in modern human religiosity, known as secularization, is a negative phenomenon that must be avoided, because it will essentially create a secular society, namely: “...a society whose primary values are utilitarian and rational, and the society accepts and even advocates change and inventions.” Unlike holy society, the supernatural, or the virtues connected with traditionalism.”⁵³ In *Beyond Belief*, Robert N. Bellah explains that the majority of American society, which is usually identified as a secular society, still requires belief in God, religion, or spirituality, even though the interpretation of God and religion differs greatly from the understanding of God and religion as it exists in conventional religion. Because its devotees assimilated their spiritual awareness into a more general environment, Bellah referred to this type of spirituality as civil religion. The concept of God was generalized, in the sense that persons of various religions can have the same understanding of God.⁵⁴

A Rumor of Angels by Peter Berger illustrates the concept of secularization. First, there has been a decline in Christian ideas and practices in modern culture. The second modifies the motivation of persons who engage in a behavior or religious practice. Religion is required as long as it is viewed as an attitude toward the sacred world and as a social institution that represents human religiosity, including modern human religiosity. Religion satisfies the spiritual side of man that rationalism and

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Syaikh Abdul Qadir al-Jailani, *Sirr al-Asrār*, Trans. Khatib Abdul Majid (Yogyakarta: Ircisod, 2017).

⁵⁴ Harold H. Titus, *Persoalan-Persoalan Filsafat*, Trans. H.M. Rasjidi (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1984).

science cannot. According to William James, religion will always exist as long as humans are anxious.

From an epistemological standpoint, religion rejects absolutism and will prefer what Seyyed Hossein Nasr perceives to be relatively absolute. Religion is absolute because it makes a claim to and is oriented toward the divine. Humans cannot exist in the absence of spiritual ideals. People can live in a different system, but their spirit always returns to the divine nature. The role of Sufism in assisting modern society to achieve their spiritual needs, as well as presenting solutions to societal problems, is critical.

Different understanding of Islam is prevalent in Indonesia, particularly between Muhammadiyah and NU, as we have explained in the previous sections. Potential problems, or conflicts, that may emerge from such differences must be resolved, and one way to do it is by formulating a common ground behind such differences. Concerning how religious elites of NU and Muhammadiyah in South Sumatra have differently understood Sufism, they share some common grounds, as will be explored below.

First, one must accommodate Sufistic values. Despite their differing names, Muhammadiyah and NU elites in South Sumatra are open to spiritual ideals in Sufism. Among the Muhammadiyah elites, these ideals are indicated by their discussion on the importance of *akhlaq karimah*, *ihsan*, sincerity, and so forth. Among the NU elites, they are indicated through their discussion on the importance of notions such as *sabr*, *tawakkal*, and *ridla*. This indicates that they similarly agreed on the importance of spirituality as the esoteric element of Islamic teachings. These considerations must be done in balance and conformity with Sharia law.

Second, Muhammadiyah and NU are members of the *Ahlus Sunnah wal Jama'ah* movement. They both base their legal systems on the Qur'an and the Hadith. However, while Muhammadiyah fosters direct access to the Qur'an and Hadith for establishing their law, the NU people refer to the long tradition of interpreting the Qur'an and the Hadith done by earlier generations of Muslim scholars.

Third, both use *ijtihad* to find solutions to worldly problems and affairs. More importantly, both employ a similar technique of *ijtihad*, which

includes the following. First is *Bayani*, or a method of extracting and determining law based on linguistic norms. Second is *qiyas* or a method of deciding new situations through similarity with legal cases stated in the Qur'an and the Hadith. Third is *istislahy*, that is, settling down novel cases that are not covered by the Qur'an and the Hadith through the use of reasoning that is based on the common benefit of the people.⁵⁵

Fourth, both organizations have a special institution that focuses on examining religious matters and social problems based mostly on *fiqh* analyses. In Muhammadiyah, the institution is called *Lajnah Tarjih*, which specifically supervises worship and issues of *mu'amalah*.⁵⁶ The Arabic word *tarjih* is derived from *rojjaḥa-yurajjihu-tarjihān*, which means selecting the stronger argument out of two competing arguments through the process of examination toward the position of the substance of both arguments. There is no contradiction between *dalils* (axioms) of sharia. The confrontation that sometimes emerges is actually due to the different perspectives employed by the mujtahid (the person who conducts the *ijtihad*).⁵⁷ In this context, *tarjih* refers to a contradiction between two external arguments of the same degree that cannot be addressed by *al-Jumu'a wa al-Tanfiq*.⁵⁸

Similarly, NU has established an institution for issuing a fatwa, called, *Lembaga Bahtsul Masa'il* (LBM)⁵⁹. *Fiqh* is seen as a practical guide for religious practices in a variety of contexts. The importance of *fiqh* in determining the structure of values and social institutions has made it central to an attempt at change. The LBM's work is as follows: first, all problems that reach the institution are inventoried, and then they are disseminated to all ulama, members of the NU *suriyah* board, and leaders of pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) affiliated with NU. After that, these Muslim scholars performed research on the subject and look at the opinions of Muslim scholars in their classical books. This process is

⁵⁵ Muhammad Azhar, *Fiqh Peradaban* (Yogyakarta: Ittaqa Press, 2001).

⁵⁶ PP. Muhammadiyah, *Fatwa-Fatwa Tarjih*, 212-218.

⁵⁷ Abdul Karim Z, *Al-Wajiz Fi Ushul al-Fiqh*, (Baghdad: al-Dar al-Arabi, 1977).

⁵⁸ S. A. Romli, *Ushul Fiqh*, (Palembang: IAIN Raden Fatah Press, 2012).

⁵⁹ R Imdadun, *Kritik Nalar Fikih NU, Transformasi Paradigma Bahsul Masail* (Jakarta: Lakpesdam, 2002).

resumed with a meeting attended by these scholars who will share and sometimes contest their arguments with each other.

D. Conclusion

This research finds out that elite leaders of both Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama in South Sumatra have similarly regarded the importance of Sufistic values, such as *sabr*, *tawakkal*, *ikhlas*, *faqr*, and *ma'rifat*, for the perfection of the Muslim selves. However, they differed greatly in how these values should be implemented daily. If the former tends to emphasize the substantive forms of sufistic values, the latter considers the importance of *tarekat* as the authoritative path to learning and embracing sufistic teachings. Such difference has, in turn, led to the variety of Islamic practices and dakwah programs carried out by both organizations. [.]

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