

Chapter VII

Conclusion

The main object of this study has been to examine the emergence of forms of Islamic spirituality in Indonesia identified as *Majlis Dhikr*. Various *Majlis Dhikr* offer similar Islamic ritual practices to those of the increasing popular *tarekat* in Indonesia. I have argued in this study that despite criticism from other Indonesian Muslims, the ritual practices of *Majlis Dhikr* can be legitimately accepted as proper Islamic ritual since the aim of these practices is to attain closeness to God and His Prophet. Throughout this work, I have presented a wide-ranging discussion of *Majlis Dhikr* groups. Most of their rituals are observable because they are widespread in many areas of Java. This discussion includes consideration as to how *Majlis Dhikr* groups regard their practices within Islam despite the criticism from Indonesian Salafi groups and members of Indonesian *tarekat*. I also consider the extent to which the teachings and ritual of *Majlis Dhikr* groups are related to the teachings of the Qur'an, hadith and Islamic teaching and orthodox Sufism. I then examine how *Majlis Dhikr* groups disseminate their teachings and the role of *pesantren* in spreading these groups. In this concluding chapter I summarise the findings of this study and offer answers to the research questions posed in Chapter I, emphasizing the contribution this work has endeavoured to make to the scholarly literature.

The prediction of some Indonesianists that Sufi groups, along with their rural Muslim scholar proponents, would disappear from the Indonesian landscape as Indonesian society modernised has proved to be flawed. This study has provided evidence that *Majlis Dhikr* have proliferated among rural and urban people and continue to attract new membership, following on the increasing popularity of Sufi *tarekat*. Not only have peasants increased their interest in *Majlis Dhikr*, the urban middle class and many educated Muslims have been attracted to join *Majlis Dhikr* groups. The central figures in these *Majlis Dhikr* groups are *kyai* (Muslim scholars) or *ustādh* (Muslim teachers) who have mostly graduated from *pesantren*. In contrast to the predicted decline in Sufism, *pesantren* have continued to produce Muslim scholars (*kyai*) both in rural and urban Javanese areas who play an important role not only in inculcating Islamic values and norms in the lives of Muslims but also in developing *Majlis Dhikr* as venues for practising Islamic ritual.

However, despite this, there have been criticism of the emergence of *Majlis Dhikr* groups as a new phenomenon of Islamic spiritual practice in Indonesia. The

most notable criticism comes from two different groups, either from supporters of *tarekat* or from members of Indonesian Salafi groups such as *Dewan Dakwah Islamiah Indonesia* (The Indonesian Council for Islamic Preaching, DDII). The followers of *tarekat* have particularly addressed the issue of the validity of *isnād* (transmission) in *Majlis Dhikr*, since such groups do not have an unbroken line of links between their founders and the Prophet. In contrast, the Salafi have criticised the way *Majlis Dhikr* groups recite *dhikr* vocally and in unison, and have charged them with *bid'ah* and heresy because such practices, it is claimed, were never practised by the Prophet and his Companions. Despite these criticisms, these *Majlis Dhikr* groups regard their ritual as legitimate practice that offers an alternative to *tarekat* for Muslims to practise Islamic spirituality. In responding to the issue of the *isnād*, members of *Majlis Dhikr* group have argued that their ritual does not necessarily need a chain of transmission (*isnād*) back to the Prophet since what they practise in their ritual, such as reciting *Ṣalāwa*, was strongly recommended by the Prophet himself. Furthermore, they argue that even though their groups are not regarded as *mu'tabarrah* by the *Jam'iyah Ahl al-Thariqah al-Mu'tabarrah*, the Forum for *tarekat mu'tabarrah* in Indonesia within Nahdlatul Ulama, this does not necessarily mean that their *dhikr* ritual should be prohibited since the aim of this ritual is similar to that of *dhikr* rituals conducted by *tarekat*, namely to attain closeness to God.

In order to prove that their ritual practices are legitimate, *Majlis Dhikr* groups have based their argument not only on the prescriptions of the Qur'an and hadith, but also on the views of authoritative Muslim scholars. Based on their understanding and interpretation of these sources, members of *Majlis Dhikr* groups believe that their ritual of vocal recitation of *dhikr* in unison is both lawful and sanctioned by God and His Prophet. Closer examination of the debates involving the proponents and opponents of *Majlis Dhikr* in Indonesia reveals that both parties base their arguments on the interpretation of Qur'anic verses, hadith and the views of Muslim scholars. In addition, both groups have similar views on the practice of *dhikr*, but they differ on the particular issue of whether the recitation of *dhikr* has to be conducted in unison and recited vocally or has to be conducted individually and quietly. Their differences are due to different interpretations of the textual evidence, not to presence or absence of textual evidence. As argued by Quraish Shihab, a renowned Indonesian exegete, in the matter of interpretation, no one can regard their interpretation as absolutely true, while regarding other interpretations as false. This is partly because when one group of Muslims gives its interpretation of a particular religious text, this is commonly challenged by another group of Muslims. The interpretation of one group of Muslims is therefore only absolute for them, but not for another group (Shihab 1992:219-220).

Different interpretations of some aspects of Islamic teaching will happen in part when Muslims discuss multi-interpretable texts of the Qur'an and hadith. In the case of debates about the *dhikr* ritual in Indonesia, therefore I argue in this study that both the proponents and opponents of *Majlis Dhikr* base their views on interpretable Islamic teachings; as a result one should not regard one group as being truly Islamic, while accusing the other Muslim group of practising *bid'ah* and superstition in this matter. Furthermore, I argue that interpretations can be regarded as belonging to the field of *ijtihad* which allows the use of all the capabilities of reason in deducing a conclusion based on the Qur'an and hadith. If this is the case, one can expect different results of *ijtihad* among Muslims scholars. Muslims should not therefore claim that their own results of *ijtihad* are deemed to be true, while others' *ijtihad* are false, because all of such efforts will be justified later in the hereafter. If the result is true according to the meaning and purpose of God and the Prophet's purpose, then it will have two rewards. In contrast, if the result is wrong because it does not agree with God's and the Prophet's purpose, it will have only one reward.

This study also offers important findings about the extent to which *Majlis Dhikr* groups comply with the teachings of the Qur'an, hadith and orthodox Sufism. In relation to this question, I have examined several aspects of *Majlis Dhikr* ritual, including their usage of *Ṣalāwa* as a means to approach God, their concept of sainthood (*wali*), seeking intermediaries (*tawassul*), sending the merit of pious deeds to deceased persons, and seeking blessing (*tabarruk*). In these ritual aspects, rather than innovating within Islam (i., *melaksanakan bid'ah*), *Majlis Dhikr* groups rely heavily on the prescriptions of the Qur'an, hadith, and the views of authoritative Muslim theologians. Interestingly, their theological responses in these aspects are similar to those prevalent in the practices of major Sufi groups in Java. Therefore, in this sense, despite their *ghairu mu'tabarah* status according to the *Jam'iyyah*, *Majlis Dhikr* groups can be considered to be in accordance with orthodox Sufi teachings, which still stress the importance of the observance of *sharī'a*. In this sense, these groups can serve as an alternative venue for Indonesian Muslims to practice the inner aspects of Islam.

Majlis Dhikr groups in Java function as a venue for Muslims to practise *dhikr* ritual and to seek spiritual closeness to God; they also serve as institutions for deepening and preaching Islamic values (i., *dakwah Islam*). This study examines how specific *Majlis Dhikr* groups employ different strategies to do this. For instance, in order to spread its teachings in particular and to preach Islamic values in general, the *Wāḥidiyat* group has been opened by its proponents to all people regardless of their age, cultural or religious background. With this strategy, this group accepts people from different religions to join and practise

the group's ritual without asking them to convert to Islam. Further, in order to attract new followers, this group has stressed the efficacy of its *dhikr* formula not only to solve the problems commonly faced by people but also to effectively obtain *ma'rifatullah* (Gnosis of God), the highest achievement in Sufi practice.

In contrast, the *Istighāthat Iḥsāniyyat*, another *Majlis Dhikr*, uses a different strategy to promote Islamic values and teachings among Muslims. Since the *Istighāthat Iḥsāniyyat* group was established initially to attract those who have been categorised sociologically as marginalised people and theologically as nominal Muslims, it has tried to accommodate cultural aspects which are prevalent among these people into its *dakwah*. In line with this approach, this group allows Javanese popular arts such as the hobby-horse dance (J., *jaranan*), tiger-masked dance (I., *reog*), *dangdut*, Chinese dragon dance (J., *leang-leong*), and *ruwatan* to be performed on the annual anniversary of *Iḥsāniyyat*. Including such Javanese popular arts within the framework of *pesantren* and Sufi group is unusual. Moreover, this group also applies the strategy 'from tombs to mosques' (I., *dari kubur ke masjid*) in order to attract people to join the group. They have found that it is easier to ask such people to come to the tombs than directly to a mosque. It is expected that once these people have enough Islamic knowledge and have practised Islam, they will voluntarily come to the mosque. Through such methods, the presence of these *Majlis Dhikr* groups in the landscape of Indonesian Islam has contributed to narrowing the gap between *santri* Muslims and nominal Muslims, who have long been ideologically opposed to one another. Moreover, in implementing Sufi *dakwah* and religious tolerance, the *Istighāthat Iḥsāniyyat* group also allows people from different religions to join the group without asking them to convert to Islam. This strategy helps to create a peaceful religious life in Indonesia.

Similar to the *Iḥsāniyyat*, the *Dhikr al-Ghāfilīn* group uses tombs as a venue for attracting members. Like the *Iḥsāniyyat*, in addition to holding a *dhikr* ritual at Muslim saints' tombs, this group also gives religious lectures (*ceramah agama*) during the ritual in the expectation that people will not only gain spiritual enlightenment by reciting *dhikr* but also obtain knowledge of Islamic teachings and values. Furthermore, in order to spread its influence, this group accentuates the figure of the founder of the group as an icon to attract new members. This strategy is not unique among *Majlis Dhikr* groups whose current leaders are not as charismatic as their founders. The *Dhikr al-Ghāfilīn* group in particular seems to rely on this strategy because none of its leaders has the same capability as the late Gus Mik, the original founder of *Dhikr al-Ghāfilīn* who was known among people as a *wali*.

My study also clearly shows that *pesantren* have played an important role in the maintenance and the development of these *Majlis Dhikr* groups. Most of the leaders of these groups have graduated from *pesantren*, and they are mostly the sons of *kyai* from famous *pesantren* in East Java. As a result, they have used their *pesantren* networks to spread their groups. The networks of alumni of particular *pesantren* have been important in the dissemination of *Majlis Dhikr* groups to wherever these alumni live. In this way, some *pesantren* not only function as places for educating students about Islamic knowledge but have also become centres for the teaching and the propagation of *Majlis Dhikr*. Students of these *pesantren* are obliged to practise and join the recitation of *dhikr* held by these groups. One *pesantren*, *Pesantren Kedunglo*, where *Majlis Dhikr ṢalāwaWāḥidiyat* is based, even obliges its students to propagate the teachings of the group when they have graduated and returned home.

The role played by *pesantren* in the maintenance and development of *Majlis Dhikr* indicates that they are effective places to maintain both the outer and inner aspects of Islam on Java. A similar role has been revealed by previous studies on the role of *pesantren* in the maintenance of Sufism in Java. Such studies have noted that *pesantren* in Java can be divided into two categories. The first maintains Sufism without being necessarily being affiliated with a particular *tarekat*, although they nevertheless practise *dhikr* and *wirid* as in *tarekat*, and apply Sufi teachings in daily life. The second category is that of *pesantren* that specialise in the teaching and the development of *tarekat*. This study has added another category of *pesantren* in Java, that is, *pesantren* that not only practise *dhikr* and *wird* regularly but also organise and establish *Majlis Dhikr* groups and propagate these among people outside the *pesantren*.

One point which needs to be emphasised is that *pesantren* and *tarekat* in Java have been conceived by previous researchers as inseparable institutions for the maintenance of traditional Islam within the Javanese Muslim community. Most *pesantren* in Java function as places to mould students with Islamic knowledge, while some of them also function as instruments for the recruitment of members of *tarekat*, which are organized around the figure of a particular scholar and teacher. This study highlights the rise of new Islamic spiritual groups in Java, the *Majlis Dhikr*, which suggests that another institution should be taken into account when considering the maintenance of traditional Islam among Javanese.

It has been argued that Indonesia has undergone an Islamic revival since 1970's (Howell 2001). This resurgence is measured by scholars in considering phenomena as diverse as the boom in the publication of books on Islam, the reinvigoration of Islamic political parties, the prevalence of Muslim fashion among middle class urban population, the growing number of mosques, the

appearance of new forms of student activity on university campuses, and the establishment of Islamic banking. This kind of representation of Indonesia's Islamic revival puts too much emphasis on the outer aspects of Islam, while tending to ignore the increasing popularity of Islamic spiritual expression as articulated by the proliferation of both Sufi groups and *Majlis Dhikr* groups in urban and rural areas. This study has attempted to redress this imbalance by enriching perspectives on the development of Islam in Indonesia, while presenting another piece of evidence for Islamic revival in Indonesia.