

Introduction

The focus of the first part of this study is to discuss in a broader context the origins of the kinship system and religious identity of Hadhrami Sayyid Arabs in a *kampung* or *desa* (In. village) called Cikoang within the region of Makassar, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Their system of marriage, employing the principle of *kafa'ah* (In. *sekufu* or *sepadan*, equality in partners) has made the Sayyid socially exclusive and at the same time rather different from other Indonesians. It lessens their flexibility (notably as concerns their womenfolk) in their assimilation with the local people. Although the Sayyid have lived in the area for a lengthy period, they have not become Makassarese in terms of titles, language, marriage policy and kinship system.

It is true that Arabs have lived in Indonesia for a long time and some have assimilated well with the local people. According to the Dutch scholar, L.W.C. Van den Berg, reporting in 1886, many of the Arabs and particularly their children were already difficult to distinguish from the local people: they were Indonesians. Partly because of the scarcity of women born in Arabia and Arab-born women who had been raised in the Hadhramaut, the Arabs in Indonesia tended to marry local women or women of Arab descent who had never been outside Indonesia.

As a consequence, the language spoken in the household of many Arabs was not Arabic but Indonesian, Javanese, Makassarese or other local languages of their womenfolk. They also used that language as the medium of communication with their children. The boys knew Arabic only as it was studied in their mostly religious-oriented schools. The girls knew a few Qur'anic verses for prayer.

The term 'Sayyid' or 'Arab' has always been associated with Islam in Indonesia. Since Islam originated in the land of Arabia, Indonesian Muslims often believe that religion and Arab race are one: the two are inseparable from one another.

Thus the day-to-day life of the Arabs should be an exemplary enactment of Islam and Indonesians tend to express surprise when Arabs do not always behave according to the main tenets of Islam.

Historically, it is believed that Arabs came to the archipelago of Indonesia even before Islam was born in Arabia in the 7th century. An Arab presence is known in the Indonesian region prior to the 16th century, the 'early Islamic period' there, partly for reasons of trade (see Van den Berg 1886; Tibbets 1957; and Meglio 1970; cf. Algadri 1984) and partly in order to spread the faith.

There is still controversy among scholars about the wider question of who first brought Islam to Indonesia. Some authorities point to Muslim traders from Persia and Gujarat; others offer evidence of direct Arab influences, either from the Hejaz or the Hadhramaut, on early Indonesian Muslims. But everyone agrees that Islam entered Indonesia peacefully without holy wars or rebellions.

Van den Berg (1886) declared that Islam set down its roots in Indonesia primarily due to the endeavours of Arabs and not of Indians. Even Van den Berg found it was naive to imagine that all Arabs were devoted Muslims, because in reality many were transgressors of the teachings of Islam. They were like ordinary Indonesian Muslims, both good and bad.

One recent study by Hamid Algadri (1984) postulated that it was Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, political adviser to the colonial government and successor to Van den Berg, who was most responsible for preventing the assimilation of Indonesian Arabs with the local people. According to Algadri, Snouck Hurgronje's main duty was to preserve the 'divide and rule' politics of colonialism in the region. Snouck Hurgronje (1906) believed that the Arabs, with their close association with religion, were the main threat to Dutch power. Therefore their further assimilation and influence was to be prevented. Snouck Hurgronje noted that the various internal clashes that occurred between Dutch local authorities and Indonesians in a number of regions during the colonial period were in fact inspired and pioneered by Arab-born people; for example, the 30-year Aceh War, the longest ever experienced by the Dutch, was led by Habib Abdurrahman az-Zahir, a Sayyid.

So the understanding of the Arabs' religious orientation at present is in part a result of Hurgronje's legacy (Algadri 1984; Bowen 1993); for example, the Indonesians themselves often see the Arab Muslims as different. People refer to them as *orang-orang keturunan Arab Islam* (In. those of Muslim Arab descent) rather than simply Muslims. They are credited to be different in character and disposition from Indonesian Muslims. Similarly, the Makassarese differentiate

the Makassar Arabs from themselves though both communities are Muslim. It seems that the fact of being of another country of origin implies a separate understanding of religious adherence.

In the second part of this study, I discuss religious arguments arising between Cikoangese traditionalist Muslims, who hold to the practice of a certain tradition of *tasawuf* (In. mystical discipline) pioneered by the Sayyid and the Muhammadiyah, the largest reform organisation of Indonesia. The latter encourages Muslims to perform rituals only as prescribed by the main sources of Islam, the Qur'an and Hadith and those ratified by Shariah, the laws of Islam. It will emerge in my discussion that there are clear distinctions between *tasawuf* and Shariah in debates by the two parties. Each side claims itself to be the only true practitioners of Islamic teachings.

According to the people of Cikoang, *tasawuf*, or Sufism, is a particular form of knowledge with regard to Allah. *Ma'rifatullah* (Ar. Islamic gnosis or genuine spirituality) is to be regarded as the central and the most vital part of all religions. *Ma'rifatullah* is a perfect way of worship based on love, not out of fear of the punishments of hell, nor on hope of the rewards of paradise. It is a way of understanding the inner facts of religion rather than its outward and perceptible form. It is a recognised subject matter in Islamic studies, which deals with methods to gain proximity to Allah, although certain of its practices may be at odds with 'true' Islamic teachings within the perspective of religious modernists.

In expressing their love towards Allah and hoping to gain *Ma'rifatullah*, the Cikoangese celebrate a Maulid Nabi festival, locally called Maudu' (Ar. both referring to the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad), each year. The same festival gives veneration to the Prophet and his descendants, the Sayyid.

The Prophet Muhammad is conceived of as the best Sufi master, who lived out Sufistic doctrines in his sayings and his deeds. He has said: 'Whoever knows himself will know Allah.' When a man, desiring to remember Allah alone comes to know that the only path of perfect guidance is that of knowing himself: he understands that his true guide is Allah alone. He forsakes all other paths. *Tasawuf*, or Sufism, is that way of purifying the heart. Its main objective is to find the key of nearness to Allah. In this undertaking humans should cleanse their hearts from any harmful influences. Since Allah is both the origin and destination of humankind, and of all other creatures, the interests of Allah must supervene before those of humans. Sufism is a total submission to Allah, while the Shariah, encompassing a set of social and material practices, is only the means applied in the process of submission. The Shariah is likened to the medium of transportation to the destination, and not the final goal of submission to Allah.

Those who stand for Shariah will certainly oppose these ideas because in their point of view all activities engaged in by humans are also, in principle, a form of submission to Allah. People work in order to earn money for the sustenance of their family and that, too, is an act of obedience to Allah. Humans need not leave their worldly activities entirely, as long as their doings are intended to win Allah's mercy. The least that humans can do is to curb themselves in their material or immoral desires, yet without wholly alienating themselves from worldly pursuits.

For the Sufis on the other hand, Sufism is spiritual training to acquire the essence of worshipping Allah. Without Sufism, the worship of Allah is mere obligation. Sufism teaches its practitioners how to perform the religious duties, such as prayer, with joy and pleasure. A state of ecstasy is achieved when the practitioners finally communicate directly with Allah, since they see Him wherever and whenever they perform prayer.

As elsewhere in its history, Sufism has played a major role in proselytising among common Indonesians. It has been intrinsic to Islam in the region. The local people embraced the belief of the oneness of a supernatural entity – the essentiality of the Sufistic doctrine. Islam and the Sufi teachers, together with Muslim traders (mostly Arabs and Sayyid), were welcomed by the local people. Arabs came to be seen as the sole religious teachers to new converts to Islam and especially to aspirants to Sufism. This placed them among the most respected strata of Indonesian society.

Many more of the early Sufi teachers or masters who had reached the highest spiritual stations were not native Indonesians. They were foreigners from Saudi Arabia, the Hadhramaut, India, Persia and elsewhere. They came to the Indonesian archipelago – first to Sumatra, Java, then Sulawesi; many of them married and stayed until the end of their lives, while some returned home after they had completed their mission.

It was the custom of Sufis to travel from one place to another in search of accomplished masters, or to find students to listen to their teachings, following the routes set by the Muslim traders. By the time Islam became the major religion of Indonesia, most Sufi masters were native Indonesians or descendants from intermarriage between Indonesians and outsiders who lived in Indonesia.

A Sufi master is certified to teach Sufism to seekers or students, to teach them how to purify themselves, to improve morality and to strengthen their inner and outer life (these three being the main teachings of Sufism) in order to attain perpetual bliss. First, the masters concentrated on building up the consciousness

of their followers in the belief in the true Creator of this universe. Then they guided them in how to worship God through the Shariah: thus it can be said that Sufism preceded Shariah.

A Sufi master not only teaches the theory of Sufism to his disciples, but also works on their spiritual side, guiding them towards a higher degree of understanding of the truth of life. In return, seekers must follow a master able to guide them in the way of Allah and to illuminate that way for them until the state of true subjection is reached. The seekers must swear an oath of allegiance and promise their guide to leave their bad manners and habits in order to lift themselves to a better conduct in order to reach the perfect knowledge of spirituality.

Yet not all Sufi masters have disciples; some of them do not teach at all. On the other hand, not all teachers within Sufism are masters; most are still seekers themselves. True Sufi masters are very rare. It is said that to meet one is like finding a precious diamond among common pebbles. In 17th-century Gowa, among the best-known masters were Syekh Abdul Fattah Abu Yahya Abdul Bashir Adh-Dhariri Ar-Rafani and the popular Syekh Yusuf Tajul Khalwati Al-Makassari, founder of a chapter of the Tarekat Naqsyabandi-Khalwatiyah. The majority of the people of South Sulawesi adhere to this latter order (Hamid 1994).

During the 20th century, Sufism endured in the face of criticism put forward by various movements such as that of the largest Indonesian Muslim organisations, the traditionalist Nahdhatul Ulama, (NU, The Revival of Religious Scholars) and the modernist Muhammadiyah (lit. 'that which is pertaining or attributable to the Prophet Muhammad'). There were other anti-Sufi movements and even internal challenges mounted by modern forms of Sufism. Sufism was once declared to be the main cause of the deterioration and backwardness of the Muslim community throughout the world. It was also said that Sufism had made a historical distortion of the teachings of Islam, isolating its followers from proper social interaction by its application of contemplative disciplines. The criticism today of the Sufis is that they are old-fashioned traditionalists who oppose progress and modernity.

Among the chief fault-finders of Sufism worldwide are the *fuqaha*, the experts in Islamic jurisprudence, and the *mutakallim*, or theologians. These groups believe that Islam needs purification from corrupting influences and practices, and call for a reformulation of doctrine in the light of modern thought. In doing so, they believe that the conditions of Muslims will be improved and their understanding will be enlightened through both the religious and the secular sciences (cf. Adams 1933: 110). The modernists may also regard Sufism as having been influenced by other mystical sects from outside Islam, such as in Hinduism, Neo-Platonism and Christian asceticism.

The essence of Sufism lies in a belief in the unification of man and Allah called *wahdat al-wujud* (Ar. the unity of being) ascribed to the Andalusian Master Ibn al-Arabi (1165–1240). This concept of unification is inevitably seen to resemble Hindu *Vedanta* philosophy (Woodward 1989: 215). Sufi spiritual training also imitates or copies that of other domains of belief, such as the application of breath control, meditation and fasting – all also to be found in Hindu yoga. Such are the chief points of contact between Sufism and the mystical practices of other religions.

Such various stereotyped characteristics of Sufism are actually not universal, however, because in fact not all *tarekat* or orders teach that it is necessary to leave worldly things in order to attain the key of nearness to Allah, as is believed by the modernists. If we review the teachings of Syekh Yusuf Tajul Khalwati, the founder of the Tarekat Khalwatiyah (lit. Way of Seclusion) in South Sulawesi and Banten, West Java, we find the main tenets of a moderate Sufi doctrine. Syekh Yusuf insisted that this worldly life should not be totally abandoned and carnal desire must not be eliminated completely, but rather that this present human life should become the means to draw close to Allah.

However, the flaring up of desires to pursue worldly temptations is to be controlled through a set of exercises which strengthen self-discipline for the sake of Allah. The condition of carnal desire must always be checked and maintained so that it will not smother the vital organ of *qalbu* from its spiritual capability. In Arabic, *qalbu* means 'heart, soul or mind' (cf. Nicholson 1921: 113). It is the place where all knowledge about transcendental truth is cultivated. By knowing his or her *qalbu*, the seeker will know him or herself and lead to the recognition of Allah, the Creator. This is well illustrated in the oft-quoted stanza from among the poems of Hamzah Fansuri, the famed Sufi of Barus in 16th-century North Sumatra:

*Hamzah Fansuri di dalam Makkah
Mencari Tuhan di bait al-Ka'bah
Di Barus ke Qudus terlalu payah
Akhirnya dapat di dalam rumah (XXI, 14)*
(Drewes and Brakel 1986: 108)

The interpretation of which runs as follows:

Hamzah Fansuri, while at Mecca
Sought God in the shrine of the Ka'ba
Barus to Jerusalem is a journey too far
He found Him within his own house at last

And the last line of which refers to the inner 'house', the *qalbu*.

The spiritual seeker cannot recognise the existence of Allah and submit to His will unless the *qalbu* is guarded from domination by worldly desires. The Sufis agree that the only way to grasp the key of nearness to Allah is through the purification of the *qalbu*, for it is said to be the locus and generator of *iman*, or faith, and not of rationality. Like other Sufi masters, Syekh Yusuf Khalwati observed Islam in its two aspects, the external (*lahiriah*) and the internal (*bathiniah*) – Shariah, the observance of the law, being the external aspect of Islam and Sufism its internal aspect. Shariah produces the guidelines for performing rituals and conducting daily life, whereas Sufism generates their essence, the two should be applied together. Without minimising the role of the Shariah, the deepening of Sufism, which produces *haqiqah* (Ar. divine truth, reality) is the more emphasised. Internal experience can be obtained through performing the religious practices set out by the law. Thus Sufism without Shariah is invalid and Shariah without Sufism is pointless (Hamid 1994: 157–158). Syekh Yusuf taught that we should see both Sufism and Syari'at as one totality in the path to obtain *ma'rifatullah*.

Recent phenomena in Indonesia attest that there has been a growing interest among Indonesians to study Sufism. Sufism is now open to everyone, without the fear of being branded 'traditionalist'. The Muslims of Cikoang have a new appreciation of Sufism and of the religious legitimacy of the Sayyid as teachers of Sufism in modern times. As an overall trend, Sufism has won a place among the urban people of Indonesia as well. It no longer belongs solely to rural traditionalists.

Muslims living in Jakarta, for example, who are usually described as urban, modern and progressive are now regularly attending private courses in Sufism provided by at least three established institutions: Yayasan Tazkiyah Sejati (The Sejati Spiritual Foundation), founded by the Sri Adyanti B.N. Rachmadi, the daughter of the former Vice-President Sudharmono and now directed by Jalaluddin Rakhmat or 'Kang Jalal'; Yayasan Barzakh (The Barzakh Foundation); and Yayasan Wakaf Paramadina (The Paramadina Charitable Foundation) (*Inside Indonesia*, Edition No. 52 October 1997, *Tiras*, Edition No. 52/26 January 1998, and *Ummat*, Edition No. 9/15 September 1997).

Paramadina was founded in 1986 by a number of Muslim businessmen and intellectuals. Among them, Nurcholish Madjid, or 'Cak Nur', a prominent liberal Muslim scholar, has offered several packages of courses on Sufism in the last several years. Previously, religious courses facilitated by this foundation covered general studies of Islam such as Kalam, theology (*fiqih*), jurisprudence, Islamic history (*sejarah Islam*), and now *tasawuf* has been added. The latter has proved to be the most popular course among urban audiences.

The rising popularity of Sufism represents a new phase in the life of Islam in Indonesia. It is the direct consequence of a shift in the political system to favour Islam since the end of Suharto's New Order in 1989 (see Hefner 1993; Liddle 1996; Fealy 1997). Many state policies have benefited the Indonesian Muslims under this period of *Reformasi*. More and more devout Muslims are occupying high-ranking posts in the bureaucracy. The alliance between Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia (ABRI), the Indonesian Armed Forces and Islam is becoming more apparent. The establishment of Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia (ICMI; Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals) and Bank Muamalat, a banking system based on Shariah, is another breath of fresh air for Indonesian Muslims. Religious meetings regularly take place, at any time and anywhere, without the requirement to ask for government permission. Many Indonesians believe this is a time of victory for Muslims.

This condition of freedom to express their Islamic piety publicly has led Muslims into other kinds of pursuits of a more comprehensive knowledge of Islam. Kelompok Pengajian Keagamaan (religious study groups) are mushrooming in offices, hotels and other luxurious sites. Books on Shariah, Kalam and Sufism sell well. Discussions about obligatory and optional religious practices are increasingly becoming part of everyday discourse. Today, Indonesian Muslims seem to welcome all kinds of Islamic orientations, as long as their thirst for religious knowledge is met.

What needs to be stressed is that this religious phenomenon has spread more openly among the Indonesian elite. A number of top officials in the bureaucracy – businessmen, executives and other high wage earners – are now affiliating themselves with Sufism. Anderson, as recorded by local mass media (e.g. *Tiras*, No. 52/26 January 1998) maintains that this is a recent development. It would seem that an over-abundance of material wealth in these times of new prosperity has led many to a state of existential emptiness, prompting them to search for the meaning of life. They no longer indulge themselves in food and drink, because the basic needs are already well satisfied. They no longer compete for promotion. They turn to study Sufism, yet without excluding their worldly activities altogether.

Another trend is that not everyone is serious in studying Sufism as an intellectual discipline. For some people Sufism is an escape from the unpredictability of their future. Life is full of uncertainty. Political downfall and loss of wealth can happen at any time. Under such conditions, there are many who feel anxious and suffer mental stress, turning to Sufism in the pursuit of tranquillity.

We consider this phenomenon to be modern Sufism, or 'popular' Sufism. For example, businessmen can still run their businesses while practising Sufism. The impact has been in a change of attitudes toward wealth. Frequent

donations are made to humanitarian causes. Judged from the yardstick of traditional asceticism, this is the concept of social Sufism, promoting good deeds. The teachings of Sufism which emphasise the social dimension of humanity come to the fore. Every Muslim, regardless of his or her religious orientation and adherence, can now affiliate himself or herself with Sufism.

This new Sufism comes with a different face and is completely different from that in Cikoang. There is in it neither a veneration of holy persons (saints, teachers, Sayyid families) nor extensive celebrations of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday as a means to obtain union with Allah. It is to the study of such 'traditional' Sufism in South Sulawesi that we turn to now.

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