



## The Network of Middle Eastern and Archipelagic Sufi Scholars: Tracing the Dynamics of Sufism Development in Indonesia

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**Abstract:** The network of Middle Eastern and archipelagic Sufi scholars can be traced from various dimensions. The Islamic arrival history in Indonesia was brought by Arab, Persian, and Indian merchants, as well as scholars. This study aims to disclose the formation of the network between Middle Eastern and archipelagic Sufi scholars and uncover the dynamics of the development of Sufi teachings in Indonesia. The method applied is qualitative-descriptive with library research. The data sources are books and scientific works. The data were then analysed using Miles and Huberman, consisting of three activities simultaneously: *data* reduction, *data* display, and conclusion. This study revealed that the network of Middle Eastern and Archipelagic Sufi scholars was created through trade, da'wah, marriage, arts, culture, and education. Therefore, the process of Islamization in Indonesia was mostly carried out through the Sufi path because of the cultural similarities between the two. The impact of the network form of these two Sufi scholars shows the dynamics of the development of Sufism from groups that (1) sympathise, those who believe that Sufism is a teaching from the Prophet, and (2) those who are antipathetic and reject the presence of Sufism and tariqa teachings, especially in Indonesia because the Prophet never exemplify these teachings.

**Contribution:** The results of this study provide scientific insight into the arrival of Islam in Indonesia, which occurred more through a Sufi process through a network of Sufi scholars from the Archipelago and the Middle East.

**Keywords:** Nusantara; Middle East; Sufi scholars; development.

## Introduction

The relationship between the Archipelago and the Middle East has a long history that can be deeply traced chronologically; where this network involving Muslims in the Malay-Indonesian region and the Middle East has existed since the early days of Islam. Muslim traders from Arab Persia and the Indian subcontinent who visited the Archipelago were trading and, to a certain extent, engaged in activities spreading Islam in the areas they visited. The penetration of Islam at that time seems to have been carried out more by Sufi teachers or Sufi scholars since the end of the 12th century, coming in greater numbers to the Archipelago, leading to the emergence of a community referred to by Arab sources as *Aṣḥab al-Jawīyyīn* (our Javanese brethren) in Haramain.<sup>1</sup> This networking process naturally encouraged increasing bilateral relations involving economics, politics, and socio-religious aspects between Muslim countries in the Archipelago and the Middle East since the 14th and 15th centuries, leading to more students and Hajj pilgrims from the Malay-Indonesian world visiting Islamic scholarly centres along the Hajj route.<sup>2</sup> This communication network was religious and scholarly, not political, so the Arab traders coming to the Archipelago were not only trading but also, to a certain extent, spreading Islam to the local inhabitants.<sup>3</sup> The Sufism scholars from the Middle East who came to the Archipelago were warmly welcomed by the local people, allowing them to establish very harmonious social relationships on one side and a religious and scholarly nuance on the other, as Islam was spread by the Prophet Muhammad as a religion full of messages of peace and compassion among people.

However, in its historical development, Sufism teachings were not so easily accepted directly by certain Islamic groups, leading to a gap in understanding between the exoteric dimension (external/shari'a) and the esoteric dimension (internal/Sufism) in Islam. Those prioritizing the exoteric dimension consider the esoteric dimension unimportant and sometimes even outside Islamic teachings. Meanwhile, those prioritizing the esoteric dimension view that the

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<sup>1</sup> Raha Bistara, "Jejaring Ulama Nusantara Dengan Timur Tengah Abad XVII Dan XVIII (Studi Pemikiran Azyumardi Azra)," *Al-Munqidz: Jurnal Kajian Keislaman* 8, no. 3 (September 7, 2020): 309–25, <https://doi.org/10.52802/amk.v8i3.263>.

<sup>2</sup> Azyumardi Azra, *Jaringan Ulama Timur Tengah Dan Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII Dan XVIII: Melacak Akar-Akar Pembaruan Pemikiran Islam Di Indonesia* (Bandung: Bandung: Mizan, 1994), 17.

<sup>3</sup> Nasuha, "Model Penelitian Sejarah Islam Jaringan Ulama Timur Tengah Dan Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII Dan XVIII (Azyumardi Azra)," *Saintifika Islamica* 1, no. 2 (2014): 139–53, <https://jurnal.uinbanten.ac.id/index.php/saintifikaislamica/article/view/272>.

exoteric is no longer needed, as humans can already uncover God's secrets.<sup>4</sup> In this context, Ibrahim al-Randi explains that Muslims in worship can be classified into two groups. The first group is those whose orientation in Islam emphasizes the external laws (*al-ahkām al-zawāhir*), namely the external aspects. The second group emphasizes the internal laws (*al-ahkām al-damāir*), namely the internal elements.<sup>5</sup> The group that is antipathetic towards Sufism has a very critical view of the relationship between Islam and Sufism. They are the Orientalists and the Salafiyyah Wahhabiyyah group, who not only consider Sufism a deviation but also believe its presence fundamentally comes from outside Islam. Louis Massignon, Nicholson, Tulke, Ibn Taymiyyah, and his followers are in this group.<sup>6</sup>

Several studies have been conducted on the scholar's network in the Middle East and Nusantara (Archipelago) and the development of Sufi teachings. Firstly, Azra studied the network of scholars in the Middle East and the Nusantara in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, Nasrullah studied The Long Journey of Sufism: From Early Sufism to Neo-Sufism.<sup>8</sup> Thirdly, Nasuha researched the Model of Islamic History Research of the Scholar Network in the Middle East and the Nusantara Archipelago in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries (Azyumardi Azra).<sup>9</sup> Fourthly, Kafid researched Sufism in the Dynamics of Contemporary Muslim Community Life.<sup>10</sup> In contrast, this study will examine the network of Sufi scholars in the Middle East and the Indonesian Archipelago to understand the nature of this network so that the dynamic development of Sufi teachings in Indonesia can be fully traced. Therefore, the objectives of this study are to

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<sup>4</sup> Syamsuri Syamsuri, "Memadukan Kembali Eksoterisme Dan Esoterisme Dalam Islam," *MIQOT: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 37, no. 2 (April 14, 2013): 290–312, <https://doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v37i2.84>. 3

<sup>5</sup> Syamsuri.

<sup>6</sup> Ali Mas'ud Kholqillah, *Pemikiran Tasawuf K.H. Saleh Darat Al-Samarani: Maha Guru Para Ulama Nusantara* (Surabaya: Pustaka Idea, 2018), 1–4.

<sup>7</sup> Azra, *Jaringan Ulama Timur Tengah Dan Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII Dan XVIII: Melacak Akar-Akar Pembaruan Pemikiran Islam Di Indonesia*.

<sup>8</sup> Achmad Muzammil Alfian Nasrullah, "Jalan Panjang Tasawuf: Dari Tasawuf Awal Hingga Neo-Sufisme," *Spiritualita* 5, no. 1 (June 30, 2021): 26–41, <https://doi.org/10.30762/spiritualita.v5i1.297>.

<sup>9</sup> Nasuha, "Model Penelitian Sejarah Islam Jaringan Ulama Timur Tengah Dan Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII Dan XVII (Azyumardi Azra)."

<sup>10</sup> Nur Kafid, "Sufisme Dalam Dinamika Kehidupan Masyarakat Muslim Kontemporer," *Mimbar Agama Dan Budaya* 37, no. 1 (2020): 27–38, <https://doi.org/10.15408/mimbar.v0i0.18232>.

describe the network formation between Sufi scholars in the Middle East and the Nusantara and to reveal the dynamic development of Sufi teachings in Indonesia.

### **The Network of Scholars in the Spread of Islam in Nusantara**

The history of the entry of Islam into Indonesia is inseparable from the history of the role of Sufism and tariqas. The Islamization of Indonesia occurred when Sufism and tariqahs became the dominant thought patterns in the Islamic world. Sufism also played a significant role in converting Indonesians to Islam, as the first people to bring Islam to the Archipelago were those who had studied Sufism in their own countries. Their Sufism was influenced by the teachings of Ibn Arabī, Abdul Qādir al-Jailanī, and others, including wujudiyah and various tariqas, which continue to this day. During this period, prominent Sufi scholars emerged, including Ḥamzah al-Fanṣūrī, Shamsuddīn As-Sumatranī, Abdur Raūf, Sheikh Burhanuddin Ulakan, and Nuruddīn al-Ranirī.<sup>11</sup> Some opinions suggest that Islam had begun to spread in the Archipelago, with evidence ranging from the discovery of graves to the kingdom of Perlak (established around the 9th century). However, throughout the Archipelago's history, Islam's development, especially in the Sumatra region (in this case, Aceh), became rapid and highly influential from the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. This was because the form of Islam developed during this century was mystical Islam or Sufism, which easily acculturated with local cultures.<sup>12</sup> In other words, Islam spread widely in the Archipelago due to the role of the Sufis.

They succeeded in converting a large number of people. The main factor in their success was the ability of the Sufi scholars to present Islam in an attractive package, especially by emphasizing changes in local religious beliefs and practices. How significant did the Sufis play the role in the process of Islamization?<sup>13</sup> This is not surprising when considering the Islamization theory of A. H. Johns, an expert on Islam in Southeast Asia, who explains that, especially since the 13th century, it was the Sufi teachers or Sufi scholars who most influenced the course of Islamization in the Archipelago. In the context of the Archipelago, particularly in Java, Sufism was easily accepted by society. In many aspects, Sufism aligned with the religious practices and worldviews of the Javanese people who previously adhered to Hindu-Buddhist beliefs. Therefore,

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<sup>11</sup> Suteja Ibnu Pakar, *Tasawwuf Di Nusantara Tadarus Tasawwuf Dan Tarekat* (Cirebon: Aksarasatu, 2016), 21–22.

<sup>12</sup> Dudung Abdurrahman and Syaifan Nur, *Sufisme Nusantara* (Yogyakarta: Ombak, 2018), 11–12.

<sup>13</sup> Pakar, *Tasawwuf Di Nusantara Tadarus Tasawwuf Dan Tarekat*, 10–11.

Islam could not have spread widely in the Archipelago without the Sufistic path.<sup>14</sup>

### **Sufism and Its Historical Development**

The growth and development of tasawwuf teachings are the same as the growth and development of Islam itself. This is considering that the existence of tasawwuf or Sufism is the same as the existence of Islam itself. Essentially, the teachings of Islam have a tasawwuf character. In the fourth century of the Hijri calendar, tasawwuf grew rapidly and reached its golden peak because the philosophical elements increasingly influenced the form of tasawwuf due to the translation of many philosophical texts into Arabic. It is recorded in history that the emergence of the term tasawwuf began in the middle of the 3rd century H when Abū Hāshim al-Kuḥī used it by placing the word al-shuḥfī behind his name. However, long before, there were practices referred to in the life of Sufism, such as asceticism, caution, trust in God, and love.<sup>15</sup> As stated by Hamka, tasawwuf in Islam arose since the emergence of Islam itself grew and developed in the soul of Islam's founder, Prophet Muhammad SAW, and drew its water from the Qur'an itself.<sup>16</sup> Even before being appointed as a Prophet, historical facts show that the personality of Prophet Muhammad SAW before his appointment reflected the characteristics and behaviour of Sufi life by performing meditation (*tahannuth*) in the Cave of Hira and his straightforward daily life, besides spending time in worshipping and drawing closer to Allah SWT.<sup>17</sup> In the history of the development of this teaching, what initially arose were indeed ascetics starting from the Prophet and then the companions (*aṣḥāb*) who distanced themselves from worldly life by fasting during the day and praying and reciting the Qur'an at night, like Abdullah bin Umar, Abu al-Darda', and Abu Zar al-Ghifari.<sup>18</sup> The development of Tasawwuf was then continued by the tabi'in (the companion

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<sup>14</sup> Pakar, 14.

<sup>15</sup> M. Amin Syukur, *Menggugat Tasawuf; Sufisme Dan Tanggung Jawab Sosial Abad 21* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 1999), 7–8. and also look at that quoted in Ulya, "Tasawwuf Dan Tarekat: Komparasi Dan Relasi," *ESOTERIK* 1, no. 1 (2015): 147–65, <https://doi.org/10.21043/esoterik.v1i1.1286>.

<sup>16</sup> Hamka, *Perkembangan Dan Pemurnian Tasawwuf* (Jakarta: Media Group, 2016). and also look at Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Tasawwuf Dulu Dan Sekarang*, trans. Abdul Hadi W.M (Yogyakarta: IRCiSod, 2020), 50.

<sup>17</sup> Harun Nasution, *Islam Ditinjau Dari Berbagai Aspeknya* (Jakarta: UI-Press, 1985), 71.

<sup>18</sup> Awaliah Musgami, *Tarekat Dan Mistisme Dalam Islam* (Makassar: Alauddin University Press, 2013), 2.

followers), among whom was Sayyid al-Imam al-Hasan al-Basri, a tabi'in scholar, who established the first Tasawwuf study group in the city of Basrah.

Tasawwuf then continued to develop through subsequent generations, leading to the emergence of famous scholars, experts, and Sufi figures who were always remembered and written in golden ink in Tasawwuf history for their extensively studied teachings. Among them, for example, was Dzu Al-Nūn Al-Miṣrī (772 -860 AD), known as a Sufi, developing the theory of gnosis (ma'rifah). The second was Abū Yazid Al-Buṣṭāmī, the first to use the term fana' and known for his theory of 'al-Ittiḥād'—a stage in Tasawwuf where the lover and the beloved become one. The third was Abū al-Qāsim al-Junāid al-Baghdādī, known for systematizing various Tasawwuf tendencies and trying to Islamize Tasawwuf terms with terms from the Quran. The fourth figure was Ḥusāin bin Manṣūr al-Ḥallaj (858-922 AD), known for the doctrine of 'Hulul'— the belief in the unity of servant and Lord. Next, Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushairī (d. 465 AH/1072 AD) was a prominent Sufi from Ahli Sunnah, known for his work, al-Risālah. Then, Imam al-Ghazālī, living at the end of the classical period (650-1250 AD) and into the disintegration period (1000-1250 AD), was known as a Sufi scholar basing his Sufi views on the Qur'an and Hadith directly and indirectly. He was finally titled hujjah al-Islam, integrating Fiqh and Tasawwuf, and Sharia and truth (haqiqah), as a moderate Sufi figure with his phenomenal work 'Ihya Ulum al-Din.'<sup>19</sup>

The other famous Sufi figures before Imam al-Ghazali include Al-Hāris ibn Asad al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243 AH/637 AD), Abū Nashr al-Sarrāj (d. 378 AH/988 AD), and Al-Kalābādzī, Abū Abd al-Rahmān al-Sulamī (d. 421 AH/1021 AD). Additionally, there was Ibn 'Arabī, known in the East as Ibn Arabi and in the West as Ibn Suraqah, Muhyiddīn, famous for his doctrine of 'Wahdat al-Wujūd.' Next, Abd al-Karim ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Abd al-Karīm al-Jillī (1365 – 1428 AD) is renowned for his Sufistic theory on the perfect man (*al-Insān al-Kāmil*).<sup>20</sup> Subsequently, the other ones, like Sheikh 'Abd. Al-Qādir Jailānī, founder of Tariqah al-Qadiriyyah, born in Jailan or Kailan in 470 AH/1077 AD, and Jalaluddīn Rūmī, a Sufi figure of love born in Balkh (now Afghanistan) in 604 AH/1207 AD, famous for his work 'Fihi Ma Fihi,' Ibn 'Athā' Allah; Shohib Al-

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<sup>19</sup> Suteja Ibnu Pakar, *Tokoh-Tokoh Tasawwuf Dan Ajarannya* (Yogyakarta: Deepulish, 2013).

<sup>20</sup> Pakar.

Hikam, with full name Tāj ad-Dīn Abū Fadhl Ahmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Abd al-Karīm as-Sakandarī, known for his work, al-Ḥikam.<sup>21</sup>

### The Institutionalization of Tasawwuf

The existence of Tasawwuf is inseparable from the tariqah, an element that is always associated with these holy teachings, likened to two inseparable sides of the same coin. The word tariqah in the Munjid Dictionary comes from the Arabic al-tariqah, meaning path, condition, stream, or line on something.<sup>22</sup> According to J. Spencer Trimingham, a tariqah is a practical method to guide or lead a disciple in a planned manner through thoughts, feelings, and actions, continuously controlled towards a series of stages (maqāmat) to feel the essence truly.<sup>23</sup> According to Nasution, tariqa comes from tariqah, the path a prospective sufi must follow to be as close as possible to God.<sup>24</sup> Tariqa then implies the concept of an organization (tariqa), and each tariqa has its own sheikh, ritual ceremonies, and its own forms of dhikr and wirid. However, of the many types of wirid, it seems that there are three most popular and practiced forms in tariqas: wirid of seeking forgiveness (istighfar), wirid of blessings on the Prophet (shalawat), and wirid of remembrance (*dhikr*).<sup>25</sup>

Sufi orders were originally intended as methods pursued by a Sufi towards achieving the highest spiritual attainment, self-purification, or soul cleansing, specifically in the form of intensifying dhikr (remembrance) of Allah with various dhikr practices according to stratification. Then, they have sociologically evolved into a religio-social institution with strong membership bonds from around the 12th century to the present.<sup>26</sup> Trimingham describes the development of Sufism into Sufi orders in three stages. The first stage, khanaqah, involved a teacher and an assembly of students who often moved from place to place, having minimal rules for ordinary life, leading in the 10th century towards the formation

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<sup>21</sup> Munawir, *20 Tokoh Tasawuf Indonesia Dan Dunia*, Buku, 2019.

<sup>22</sup> Louis Ma'luf, *Al-Munjid Fi Al-Lughah Wa Al-'Alam* (Beirut: Dar Al-Masyrik, 1975), 465.

<sup>23</sup> John Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (London: Oxford University Press, Ely House, 1971).

<sup>24</sup> Harun Nasution, *Falsafah Dan Mistisisme Dalam Islam* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1986), 89.

<sup>25</sup> Rivay A. Siregar, *Tasawuf Dari Sufisme Klasik Ke Neo-Sufisme* (Jakarta: RajaGrafindo Persada, 2002), 274.

<sup>26</sup> Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, trans. Ahsin Mohammad (Bandung: Perpustakaan Salman ITB, 1984), 226.

of uniform and non-specific lodges. Guidance under a teacher became an accepted principle. Intellectually and emotionally, it was an aristocratic movement, applying methods of contemplation and individualistic and communal exercises to foster ecstasy. The second stage is *tariqa*, in the 13th century during the Saljuq era, around 1100-1400 AD. This period saw the transmission of doctrines, rules, and methods. The third stage, *ta'ifah*, occurred in the 15th century during the formation of the Ottoman Empire. The *baia* (oath) transmission, doctrines, and organizational rules made Sufism popular. Subsequently, Sufism, which initially was only a form of worship practice taught specifically to specific individuals, in the next stage saw an increase in the number of followers, forming a community that established an exceptional social strength, then leading to the emergence of Sufi organizations preserving the teachings of their sheikhs, such as the Qadiriyyah, Naqshabandiyyah, Shadiliyyah, and the others, with the names of the orders identified with the names of their founding figures. As an organization, Sufi orders have (1) a Mursyid or guide, sometimes also called a Sheikh, (2) a Murid or disciple who is guided on the path to Allah, also known as Salik, and (3) Baiat, which is the oath taken by the disciple from the guiding teacher. Thus, it can be said that organizationally, a Sufi order is an institution, so Trimingham refers to it as a Sufi order based on extraordinary obedience or compliance, institutionalized in the souls of the disciples or members of the order, or fanaticism towards the teacher of the order (Mursyid).<sup>27</sup> The history of the development of Sufi orders records that the orders naturally underwent a long journey, especially those in Indonesia. Undeniably, many Sufi orders organizationally disappeared over time due to a lack of support. Conversely, there are also phenomena of Sufi orders having experienced extraordinary development, recorded as valid orders (*al-tariqah al-mu'tabarah*), and having an unbroken chain (*sanad*) linked to the Prophet Muhammad SAW. Thus, it can be concluded that Sufi orders have two meanings: spiritual education to achieve a certain level of spirituality and an organization established to adhere to a particular Sufi order stream.

## Method

The method used in this research is qualitative descriptive, with a form of library research and content analysis. The data sources include a collection of books and texts covering the Quran, hadith, works of scholars, authored books,

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<sup>27</sup> Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, 3.



the internet, scientific magazines, theses, dissertations, journals, archives, online news, official documents, and so on. The objects and focus of this research are the network of Sufi scholars in the Middle East and the Nusantara, as well as the dynamics of the development of Sufi teachings in Indonesia. The research data consists of words, expressions, phrases, sentences, discourses, meanings, symbols, facts, and values found in the collection of books and texts. The collected data is then analyzed using three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion or interpretation of data.

### **The Structure of the Network of Sufi Scholars in the Middle East and Nusantara**

Islamization and communication between the scholars of the Middle East and Nusantara was generally conducted through trade routes, Sufism, preaching, marriages, arts, culture, and education.<sup>28</sup> A similar observation was reported by Azyumardi Azra in his research about scholars in general, noting at least four aspects: (1) Islam was brought directly from Arabia; (2) Islam was introduced by specific teachers and preachers (muballigh) who were dedicated to spreading Islam; (3) the conversion to Islam of rulers (kings) and (4) the increasing number of Islamic preachers and religious teachers specifically coming to Indonesia in the 12th and 13th centuries AD. Furthermore, he concludes that Islam had entered the Nusantara in the first centuries of the Hijrah, namely the 7th and 8th centuries.<sup>29</sup> Firstly, Islam arrived in Indonesia through the trade routes used by Arab traders. The routes taken by these traders included a sea route from Aden along the west and south coasts of India, a land route from Khurasan, then through Khutan, the Gobi Desert, crossing Sungtu, Nansyu, Canton, then across the South China Sea, and entering the Malay Archipelago through the east coast of the Malay Peninsula. Thus, Islam reached the Malay Archipelago through the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea directly from the Arab lands.<sup>30</sup> The relationship between the Nusantara and the Middle East is a long history that can be traced chronologically; this network involving Muslims in the Malay-Indonesian region and the Middle East has been in place since the early days of

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<sup>28</sup> Abrar M.Dawud Faza, "Dakwah Tarekat Pada Lembaga Pendidikan," *Rekognisi: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Kependidikan* 1, no. 1 (March 28, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.31227/osf.io/kh98c>.

<sup>29</sup> Azra, *Jaringan Ulama Timur Tengah Dan Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII Dan XVIII: Melacak Akar-Akar Pembaruan Pemikiran Islam Di Indonesia*, 32–33.

<sup>30</sup> Wan Husein Azmi, "Islam d Aceh Dan Berkembangnya Hingga Abad XVI," in *Sejarah Masuk Dan Berkembangnya Islam Di Indonesia*, ed. A. Hasymi (Bandung: Al-Ma'arif, 1993), 181–82.

Islam. Muslim traders from the Arab, Persian, and Indian subcontinent who visited the Nusantara islands traded and spread Islam to some extent in the areas they visited. The penetration of Islam at that time seems to have been carried out more by Sufi scholars, especially since the end of the 12th century, arriving in greater numbers in the Nusantara, thus creating communities that Arab sources referred to as *Ashāb al-Jāwīyyīn* (our Javanese brethren) in Haramain.<sup>31</sup> The spread of Islam through Sufism, successfully converting the populace, is acknowledged by most experts due to the Sufis' ability to present Islam in an attractive package by emphasizing changes in local religious beliefs and practices. Additionally, the characteristics of these Sufis include the fact that many of the wandering Sufis were skilled in magic and had the power to heal. Therefore, some Sufi teachers eventually married daughters of the Nusantara nobility, thereby bestowing noble blood upon their children and a divine aura and religious charisma.<sup>32</sup>

Figures considered influential in the spread of Islam in Java are often referred to as the Wali Songo and other Sufi scholars in areas such as Sumatra, Kalimantan, and Maluku. The establishment of Islamic kingdoms in Java with central figures of the Wali, who spread Islam, is inseparable from the conditions in Pasai, a stopover for the spreaders of Islam from Arab lands. When the kingdom of Pasai was declining, and the Portuguese conquered Malacca, three kingdoms emerged to defend the banner of Islam in the Malay Archipelago: Aceh in northern Sumatra, Ternate in Maluku, and Demak in Java. The conversion of the Javanese to Islam, according to Javanese folk stories, is due to the diligent and culturally aware efforts of the Wali Songo, allowing them to achieve significant and astonishing results. They apparently used cultural and educational approaches, traces of which can still be seen today, such as in the performances of shadow puppetry, Islamic education centres like religious boarding (pondok pesantren), mosque architecture and philosophy, spatial planning of government centres, and so on.

Secondly, the network between the Sufi scholars was also motivated by political motives driven by two states or kingdoms in the Middle East and Nusantara, aimed at strengthening their sovereignty and spreading Islam. This is

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<sup>31</sup> Bistara, "Jejaring Ulama Nusantara Dengan Timur Tengah Abad XVII Dan XVIII (Studi Pemikiran Azyumardi Azra)."

<sup>32</sup> A. H. Johns, "Sufism as a Category in Indonesian Literature and History," *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 2, no. 1 (March 24, 1961): 10–23, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0217781100000260>.

evidenced by the Islamic expansion into Persia and the Indian Subcontinent during the Umayyad Dynasty (40-132 AH or 661-750 AD) centred in Damascus, Syria, and the Ottoman Sultanate (1281-1924 AD) centered in Istanbul, Turkey, giving a new impetus to Arab-Persian navigation to explore as far as the Far East. This was the farthest route ever travelled by humans before the Europeans in the 16th century. Middle Eastern Muslims, mostly Arab Persians, in the Nusantara, initially began in the Sriwijaya kingdom, especially on the island of Sumatra. From these Chinese sources, it is clear that there were many Muslims in Sriwijaya, whether as traders, shipowners, or envoys.<sup>33</sup>

It is not only in Sriwijaya where, as the kingdom began to wane, the Arab Persians also shifted eastward to the Minangkabau realm, where the form of Islam influenced by Sufi teachings led the local populace to believe that their first king was a descendant of the Khalifah of Rum (Ottoman) appointed to be a sherif there.<sup>34</sup> The Turks influenced not just this area but the entire Nusantara, with the Ottoman Empire playing a role in the spread of Islam. This was not limited to Turkey alone but also to the Haramayn (the two holy cities of Mecca and Medina). The relationship between the kingdoms of Nusantara and the Middle East was not just with the Ottomans but also with Mecca and Medina. Their diplomacy focused not just on the political realm but more on religious matters, although later, Mecca contributed significantly to the political dynamics in the kingdom of Aceh. Aceh was indeed special in terms of its relationship with the Middle East.<sup>35</sup> Subsequently, Mataram, a major Muslim kingdom in Java, also needed to establish close ties with the Sherif of Mecca, eventually receiving the title of sultan from the ruler of the Holy Land.<sup>36</sup> Prince Rangsang sent a delegation to Mecca in 1051 H for this ultimate goal. The Sherif of Mecca received the Mataram envoy and granted the title of Sultan to Prince Rangsang, who since then used the title Sultan Agung. This diplomatic relationship between the kingdoms of Nusantara and the Middle East was to forge relations with them to gain Islamic legitimacy from the Sherif or the reigning Caliph. Therefore, it is

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<sup>33</sup> Bistara, "Jejaring Ulama Nusantara Dengan Timur Tengah Abad XVII Dan XVIII (Studi Pemikiran Azyumardi Azra)."

<sup>34</sup> Carool Kersten, Zia Anshor, and Dien Cahaya, *Mengislamkan Indonesia: Sejarah Peradaban Islam Di Nusantara* (Tangerang Selatan: PT. Bentara Aksara Cahaya, 2018), 37.

<sup>35</sup> Bistara, "Jejaring Ulama Nusantara Dengan Timur Tengah Abad XVII Dan XVIII (Studi Pemikiran Azyumardi Azra)."

<sup>36</sup> M.C. Ricklefs, *Sejarah Indonesia Modern 1200 – 2004* (Jakarta: Scrambi, 2005), 111.

impossible not to have a significant network of scholars in such intense diplomacy between Nusantara and the Middle East.<sup>37</sup>

Thirdly, the educational motives also form a part of the communication network between Sufi scholars of the Middle East and Nusantara. The scholars in the Haramayn (Mecca and Medina) in the 17th century, often referred to as the two holy cities, occupy a very special place in Islam and the life of the Muslim community. Mecca and Medina also became meeting places for Muslims from various parts of the world. The Haramayn also served as intellectual and educational centres of the Muslim world, where scholars, Sufis, philosophers, poets, businessmen, and Muslim historians met and exchanged information.<sup>38</sup> This is why scholars preferred to seek knowledge in Mecca and Medina, as they offered a more cosmopolitan religious perspective than other Muslim cities. This led to a network of scholars, including Nusantara scholars in the Haramayn. The tradition of scholarship among scholars throughout Islamic history is closely related to religious and educational institutions such as mosques, ribath, and even the houses of teachers.<sup>39</sup> Ibn Battuta, who performed the Hajj twice, in 728 H and 756 H, described Mecca at that time. The cosmopolitan nature of the scholarly network in the 17<sup>th</sup> century is evidenced by two great scholars born outside Hijaz, namely Sayyid Şibghat Allāh bin Rūh Allah Jamal al-Barwajī and Ahmad bin Ali bin Adl Qudus al-Sinnawi al-Misri al-Madani. The two scholars gave rise to important figures in the 17th century, including Nusantara scholars such as Abd Rauf al-Singkili and Syaikh Yusuf al-Maqassari. The Nusantara scholarly network received a strong boost when Ibrahim al-Kurani, the most famous disciple of al-Qushayshi, established his career in Medina after studying in various places in the Middle East. Due to his intellectual prowess and personality, scholars and students from far-off places in the Muslim world attended his study circles to learn from him. Among his most famous students who played a role in the network of scholars were Ahmad al-Nakhli (1044-1130 H), Muhammad Abd Hadi al-Sindi (1138 H), Abd Allah bin Salim al-Basri (1048-1131 H), Ishaq bin Jaman al-Yamani (1096 H), al-Singkili, and al-Maqassari.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Bistara, "Jejaring Ulama Nusantara Dengan Timur Tengah Abad XVII Dan XVIII (Studi Pemikiran Azyumardi Azra)."

<sup>38</sup> Azra, *Jaringan Ulama Timur Tengah Dan Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII Dan XVIII: Melacak Akar-Akar Pembaruan Pemikiran Islam Di Indonesia*, 59.

<sup>39</sup> Bistara, "Jejaring Ulama Nusantara Dengan Timur Tengah Abad XVII Dan XVIII (Studi Pemikiran Azyumardi Azra)."

<sup>40</sup> Bistara.

Similarly, in the 18th century, several Nusantara Sufi scholars who sought knowledge and education from the Middle East, primarily Mecca, and Medina, including Syaikh Ahmad Khatib Sambas from Kalimantan, who integrated teachings of various Sufi orders into a movement for the renewal of Sufism. Among these was the Sammaniyah order, founded by Syaikh Samman, which taught a combination of dhikr techniques, prayer readings, and metaphysical teachings in Medina. In addition, Malay-Indonesian Sufi figures also emerged from the network of Nusantara scholars in the Middle East. Examples include Syihab al-Din bin Abd Allah Muhammad, Kemas Fikr al-Din, Abd al-Samad al-Palimbani, Kemas Muhammad bin Ahmad, Muhammad Muhyi al-Din bin Syihab al-Din, Muhammad Arsyad al-Banjari, Muhammad Nafis al-Banjari, Abd al-Wahan al-Bugisi, Abdal-Rahman al-Mashir al-Batawi, and Dawud ibn Abd Allah al-Fatani. All these Malay-Indonesian figures contributed to the network of Nusantara scholars in the Middle East in the 18th century.

Moreover, Syaikh Hamzah al-Fansuri, born in North Sumatra at the end of the 16th and beginning of the 17th century, traveled extensively from one place to another, particularly to centres of Islamic study and teaching. He visited Banten, Johor, Siam, India, Persia, Mecca, Medina, Jerusalem (al-Quds), and Baghdad. In Baghdad, Hamzah Fansuri joined the Qadiriyyah order. After his travels, it is said that Hamzah Fansuri returned to Aceh, initially teaching in Barus and later in Banda Aceh.<sup>41</sup> The network of Sufi scholars in the field of education between the Middle East and Nusantara continued to expand, producing more Sufi scholars in Indonesia to the present day. Among them are Syaikh Nawawi al-Bantani, Kyai Sholeh Darat al-Samarani, KH. Mohammad Kholil Bangkalan, KH. Achmad Dahlan, KH. Mohammad Hasyim Asy'ari, Habib Lutfi bin Yahya of Pekalongan, a world Sufi leader, and other scholars who have played a role in developing valid Sufi orders (mu'tabarah).

### **The Dynamics of the Development of Sufi Teachings in Indonesia**

The basic components of Islam include Iman (faith), Islam (submission), and Ihsan (ethics). The aspect of Iman gives rise to theology, and the element of Islam provides rise to Sharia law. Meanwhile, the aspect of Ihsan gives rise to the science of morals. In addition to focusing on the purification of the soul, Sufism also has a mission to improve morals. In its development, Sufism has

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<sup>41</sup> Syamsun Ni'am, "Hamzah Fansuri: Pelopor Tasawwuf Wujudiyah Dan Pengaruhnya Hingga Kini Di Nusantara," *Epistemé: Jurnal Pengembangan Ilmu Keislaman* 12, no. 1 (June 29, 2017): 261–86, <https://doi.org/10.21274/epis.2017.12.1.261-286>.

variants such as *akhlaqī* Sufism (morality), *'amālī* Sufism (practice), and philosophical Sufism.<sup>42</sup> The presence of this teaching suggests that there is a group of Muslims who are not satisfied with approaching God through worship, prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage alone.<sup>43</sup> They even practice Sufism to reach Allah in the sense of having a direct gnosis of the Essence of Allah or even aspire to unite with God. The path to reach Allah is called *tariqa*, which aims to follow the path by undertaking spiritual exercises and asceticism, accompanied by consistent practice of *dhikr*.<sup>44</sup> One of the characteristics of the Prophet Muhammad, whom his companions widely emulated, is his asceticism, which is an inspiration for his companions and subsequent generations.

One of the characteristics that led to the emergence of Sufism is that before he was appointed as the Messenger of Allah, the Prophet Muhammad sought solitude in the cave of Hira to achieve peace of soul and purify his heart by drawing closer to Allah for guidance. Although the term 'Sufism' itself was not known in the early days of Islam, many Sufi teachings are derived from the Holy Qur'an and the hadith and are indeed teachings and practices of the prophets.<sup>45</sup> History recorded that the term Sufism emerged in the middle of the 3rd century Hijri when Abu Hasyim al-Kufi (d. 250 H) used the term *al-Sufi* after his name. However, practices associated with Sufism, such as asceticism, piety, reliance on God, and love of God, existed long before.<sup>46</sup> Hamka stated that Sufism in Islam emerged since the inception of Islam itself, growing and developing in the soul of the founder of Islam, Prophet Muhammad SAW, and drawing its inspiration from the Qur'an itself.<sup>47</sup>

By the second Hijri century, groups of Sufis emerged, practicing acts to purify the soul and draw closer to Allah SWT. Sufis then differentiated between Sharia, *Tariqa*, *Haqiqa*, and *Ma'rifa*. According to them, Sharia is about perfecting external acts, *tariqa* is about refining internal acts, *Haqiqa* is practicing all the unseen secrets, and *ma'rifa* is the ultimate goal of knowing the essence of

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<sup>42</sup> Syamsul Bakri, *Akhlaq Tasawwuf: Dimensi Spiritual Dalam Kesejarahan Islam* (Surakarta: EFUDEPRESS, 2005).

<sup>43</sup> Nasution, *Islam Ditinjau Dari Berbagai Aspeknya*, 71.

<sup>44</sup> Simuh, *Sufisme Jawa: Transformasi Tasawuf Islam Ke Mistik Jawa* (Yogyakarta: Bentang Budaya, 2018), 29.

<sup>45</sup> Simuh, 29.

<sup>46</sup> Syukur, *Menggugat Tasawuf; Sufisme Dan Tanggung Jawab Sosial Abad 21*, 7–8; Ulya, "Tasawwuf Dan Tarekat: Komparasi Dan Relasi."

<sup>47</sup> Hamka, *Perkembangan Dan Pemurnian Tasawwuf*, Nasr, *Tasawwuf Dulu Dan Sekarang*, 50.

God.<sup>48</sup> The development was also felt in Indonesia, so almost no historian in Indonesia denies that Sufi values are essential in supporting the successful spread of Islam in Indonesia. The significance of Sufism in the spread of Islam is such that Anthony H. Johns asserted, "Without Sufism, Islam would never have become the religion of Java.

The continuity of Sufi teachings after the Prophet Muhammad SAW was carried on by his companions, especially the Ahlus Shuffah, with one of the most prominent companions and their followers (tabi'in ).<sup>49</sup> Among these followers was Sayyid al-Imam al-Hasan al-Basri, a renowned scholar and a founder of the Sufi study circle in Basrah. His students first included Malik bin Dinar, Thabit al-Banay, Ayyub al-Saktiyani, etc. Other places like Iraq, Khorasan, and others followed the first Sufi school in Basrah.<sup>50</sup> The growth of Islam to Africa, Asia Minor, East Asia, Central Asia, and the countries along the Indian Ocean, including the Nusantara and Indonesia, formed a strong network from upstream to downstream brought by Sufi scholars, known as the Sufis.

Sufism development accelerated along with the changing eras, marked by several phases. The first and second centuries of Hijri witnessed the phase of asceticism (zuhd), as the term Sufi was not yet known. The teachings were still very pure and uninfluenced by philosophical doctrines. During this time, individuals in the Muslim community focused more on worship, paying little attention to worldly matters and living a simple life. Notable figures of this era include Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (died 110 H) and Rabi'ah Al-'Adawiyah (died 185 H). The pioneer of pure Sufi teachings can be seen in the great Sufi, Rabi'ah al Adawiyah (died 185H/801M). Rabi'ah introduced the fundamental tenets of mystical Sufism with her teachings on hubb (the concept of love for Allah) in her poetry about two teachings of love:<sup>51</sup> She emphasized the emotional aspect of love for God, teaching about the love of longing and yearning to meet the beloved, generally referred to as kashf or liqā' ila rabbiha.

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<sup>48</sup> Devi Umi Solehah, "Konsep Pemikiran Tasawuf Falsafi (Ittihad, Hulul Dan Wihdatul Wujud)," *Islam & Contemporary Issues* 1, no. 2 (September 12, 2021): 1–8, <https://doi.org/10.57251/ici.v1i2.53>.

<sup>49</sup> Simuh, *Mistik Islam Kejawen Raden Ngabehi Ranggawarsita* (Jakarta: UI-Press, 1988).

<sup>50</sup> Achmad Muzammil Alfian Nasrullah, "Jalan Panjang Tasawuf: Dari Tasawuf Awal Hingga Neo-Sufisme," *Spiritualita: Journal of Ethics Ans Spirituality* 5, no. 1 (2021): 26–41.

<sup>51</sup> Simuh, *Sufisme Jawa: Transformasi Tasawuf Islam Ke Mistik Jawa*, 29.

In the third Hijri century, the development of Sufi teachings was marked by various categorizations of Sufi knowledge, which generally can be grouped into three categories. They are pure Sufism, ethical Sufism, and metaphysical Sufism or philosophical Sufism.<sup>52</sup> In the fourth Hijri century, the development of this science reached its golden peak as philosophical elements increasingly influenced the form of Sufism due to many philosophical literatures being translated into Arabic. In this century, the distinction between external and internal knowledge was also elaborated in Sufism, divided into four types: the Sharia, Tariqa, Haqiqa, and Ma'rifa.

In Indonesia, the development of Sufism is closely related to the mystical nature of Indonesian culture, allowing Sufism to spread rapidly. Sufism is part of the method of spreading Islamic teachings that share similarities with the religious approaches of Hindu-Buddhism, which was the religious system in Indonesia before Islam. This led to a form of syncretism between Islamic Sufism and Javanese mysticism. From early times, particularly in Java, there was already a distinct spiritual attitude influenced by animism and dynamism prevalent there. The similarity of spiritual practice methods facilitated the spread of Sufism in Indonesia. Sufism has been an instrumental part of the spread of Islam in Indonesia. It can be concluded that Sufism is an inseparable part of Islamic studies in Indonesia. Since the introduction of Islam in Indonesia, Sufi elements have colored the community's religious life, and even today, Sufi nuances remain an integral part of religious practice among many Indonesian Muslims.

However, accepting these teachings was not immediate or universal among Muslim communities. There was dynamism in the development of these teachings, grouping into those sympathetic and believing that Sufism is a teaching of the Prophet and those antipathetic, rejecting the presence of Sufi teachings and orders, particularly in Indonesia, due to no practice from the Prophet. The emergence of Sufism was initially met with suspicion and conflict with scholars of Sharia, as Sufism also tried to interpret religious guidelines from a mystical perspective. This conflict arose due to differing interpretations of evidence from the Quran and Hadith, leading to a division between scholars of Sharia (external) and groups like the Orientalists and the Salafi-Wahhabi movement, such as Louis Massignon, Nicholson, Tulk, and Ibn Taymiyyah and his followers. They not only viewed Sufism as a deviation but also believed it

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<sup>52</sup> Devi Umi Solchah, "Konsep Pemikiran Tasawuf Falsafi (Ittihad, Hulul Dan Wihdatul Wujud)."



originated outside of Islam.<sup>53</sup> The conflict intensified after the emergence of concepts of mystical union from Abū Yāzīd al-Buṣṭāmī and Hallaj's incarnation theory. This concept spread to Nusantara, especially in Java, and is known as *Manunggaling Kaula Gusti* (unification of servant and God) from Sheikh Siti Jenar.<sup>54</sup>

The ultimate goal of following the Sufi *tariqa* is to achieve *ma'rifatullah*, which means knowing and meeting Allah (*liqā'*) through *kashf* (the unveiling of the secret veil) in the inner self of a servant. The concept of *kashf*, in turn, is a characteristic of mystical Sufism emphasizing emotional and irrational love. The philosophical Sufism concept has elicited reactions from the rationalist stream underpinning the development of Islamic theology, philosophy, and Sharia law, where rationalism ultimately leads to formalistic and legalistic cultural behavior. Legalistic rationalism is criticized in Al-Ghazālī's book "*Al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl*." In Javanese mystical teachings, it is known as *manunggaling kawula Gusti*. However, eventually, there was a realization among Sufi adherents themselves that straying too far from Sharia leads to destruction in various misguidances, as the Sufi or mystical path is complex and slippery. This awareness led to efforts to organize a system of Sufism in accordance with Sharia, finally expressed in the book "*Risalah Imam Qushayri*," saying that every Sharia not reinforced by truth (*ḥaqīqa*) is not accepted, and every truth not related to Sharia is futile.

In Indonesia, the Sufi teaching of *Wujudiyah*, brought by Sheikh Hamzah Fansuri and his disciple Sheikh Shamsuddin al-Sumatrani from Aceh, faced intense criticism and rejection by Sheikh Nuruddin Ar-Raniri. He argued that the *Wujudiyah* doctrine was a heretical teaching contradicting the teachings of Islam, which he addressed in his book "*Ma'al-Hayat li ahl al-Mamat*."<sup>55</sup> Understanding the *Wujudiyah* concept introduced by Sheikh Hamzah Fansuri was almost similar to the unification of the servant and God from Sheikh Siti Jenar's doctrine in Java. Discussing the contradiction between Hamzah Fansuri and Ar-Raniry reminds one of the differences between Al-Ghazali and Ibn Rushd, two Muslim intellectuals who contradicted each other in understanding

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<sup>53</sup> Kholqillah, *Pemikiran Tasawuf K.H. Salch Darat Al-Samarani: Maha Guru Para Ulama Nusantara*, 1–4.

<sup>54</sup> Simuh, *Mistik Islam Kejawen Raden Ngabehi Ranggawarsita*.

<sup>55</sup> Simuh.

philosophy. Although their subjects differed, there was a commonality in declaring the other's thoughts as heretical.

This group's rejection of Sufi teachings also continued, particularly towards the practices of *tariqa* (Sufi orders) that are widespread in Indonesia today, regardless of whether they are valid orders (*mu'tabara*) or not. They do not hesitate to assert that the Prophet did not exemplify the practices and lacked strong evidence in the Quran and Hadith. They oppose the idea that *tariqa* is unnecessary because Islam, as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, is already perfect, based on the verse from the Quran in Surah Al-Maidah, verse 3. To further clarify the rejection of *tariqas*, Sheikh Ahmad Khatib, a prominent Indonesian scholar from Minangkabau and a leading Shafi'i Mufti in Mecca, felt it necessary to write a substantial book titled "*Ithār Zaghlul Kādhībīn*," mainly stating that the *tariqas*, especially the Naqshbandiyyah, actually did not originate from the Prophet.<sup>56</sup>

## Conclusion

The network of Sufi scholars between the Middle East and Nusantara was established through trade, Sufism, preaching, marriage, arts and culture, and education. First, Islam arrived in Indonesia via trade routes used by Arab merchants. The two elements led to a more intensive sociological communication relationship between the two parties, marked by intermarriages with local inhabitants, producing generations of quality who inherited and carried on the noble task of developing Islam. Second, the form of the network between the two sets of Sufi scholars was also influenced by political motives driven by states or kingdoms in the Middle East and Nusantara. This is evidenced by the Islamic expansion into Persia and the Indian Subcontinent during the Umayyad Dynasty (40-132 H or 661-750 AD), centred in Damascus, Syria, and the Ottoman Sultanate (1281-1924 AD), centred in Istanbul, Turkey. Third, the network or communication link between Sufi scholars of the Middle East and Nusantara also occurred due to educational factors between both parties. The regions that were the educational centers for Indonesian scholars at that time were the Haramayn, namely Mecca and Medina, Jerusalem in Palestine, and Baghdad in Iraq.

After the Prophet and his companions, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Hijri century, Sufism experienced rapid and significant development, marked by various forms of Sufism emerging at the time, such as ethical Sufism (*tasawwuf akhlāqī*), practical

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<sup>56</sup> Aboc Bakar Atjeh, *Tarekat Dalam Tasawuf* (Kota Bharu: Pustaka Aman, 1979).

Sufism, and philosophical Sufism. Similarly, Sufism quickly spread in Indonesia, and it is closely related to the mystical nature of Indonesian culture. However, the acceptance of these teachings was not smooth or straightforward among specific Muslim communities, viewing them as a part of one dimension of religion. The rejection of Sufi teachings and orders by groups within Islam, known as scholars of Sharia, highlights the dynamic journey of these teachings amidst significant gaps in understanding the evidence from the Quran and Hadith. They include the Wahhabi doctrine and other groups that opposed and classified followers of Sufism as adherents of a deviant sect. The conflict and rejection intensified with the emergence of the mystical union concept from Abu Yazid al-Buṣṭāmī and the incarnation concept from Ḥusāin bin Manṣūr al-Ḥallaj. This case is almost similar to *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti's* (unification of servant and God) concept from Sheikh Siti Jenar. The confrontation between Sheikh Ḥamzah Faṣṣūrī and Nuruddīn al-Ranīrī in Aceh also marked the dynamic development of Sufi teachings. Even tariqas (Sufi orders), which are currently widespread, have not escaped their opposition as practices not exemplified by the Prophet.

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