

Internalizing Living Sufism in Minangkabau Civil Society: A Nurcholish Madjid Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The current research paper investigates the internalization of Living Sufism in Minangkabau civil society from the point of view of Nurcholish Madjid's Islamic philosophy. Here, Living Sufism is interpreted as the manifestation of Sufi moral and spiritual principles in the daily social life rather than a purely individual or ritualistic phenomenon. This research was based on the qualitative library research methodology involving the descriptive-analytical approach. To collect data, the document analysis method was applied in regard to the main works by Nurcholish Madjid and other books and scholarly articles related to Sufism, civil society and Minangkabau socio-religious traditions. Sources were analyzed by highlighting the key concepts, classification of Sufi and civil-society values and their interpretation from the standpoint of Minangkabau socio-cultural context of *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah*. Research results showed that according to Nurcholish Madjid's philosophy, Sufism should be viewed as the basis for the ethical civil Islam (Islam keadaban) that implies spirituality expressed by the means of social justice, inclusiveness, moral responsibility and participative nature of communal activities. Thus, in the Minangkabau context, the internalization of Sufism can be illustrated conceptually by such values as *musyawarah* (deliberation), *gotong royong* (mutual assistance), ethical governance of *nagari*, and sincerity, modesty, moderation, compassion, and social accountability. They act as moral and social assets, which enhance social cohesion, responsible leadership, conflict management, and civic engagement. The research findings show that Living Sufism offers a useful ethical model that links Minangkabau Islamic-cultural practices to Madjid's idea of inclusive and moral civil society.

1. INTRODUCTION

Spirituality and its relationship to social affairs continue to be a vital topic of discussion in modern Islamic thought. Religion in Muslim societies does not merely serve as a framework of personal beliefs and rituals; instead, it serves as an ethical guide for establishing social relations that are just, responsible, tolerant, and cooperative. Such ethical guidelines are often linked to the concept of civil society, where the role of citizens is to create civilized and morally responsible societies (Mustaniruddin, Afriyadi, & Bakar, 2020). In the Indonesian Islamic discourse, the concept of civil society has been particularly associated with the historical experience of Medina and the development of a social order characterized by equality, deliberation, social responsibility, and respect for diversity (Astuti, 2012). The other Muslim intellectuals in Indonesia who have contributed to the development of such discourse include Nurcholish Madjid, who stressed the

point that Islamic religiosity should be conceived in terms of substance and not just forms or ideology. The concept of civil society advanced by Madjid centers on moral responsibility, openness, justice, and the recognition of human dignity in the context of Islamic ethics. In this context, it can be said that the spiritual aspect of Islam should not be detached from social responsibility. Thus, Madjid's thinking offers an important intellectual ground for exploring the link between Sufism and civil society (Afif, 2015).

It is also connected with the idea of Living Sufism. Traditionally, Sufism has been understood as a practice of individual spiritual cleansing, mysticism, dhikr, asceticism, and creation of proximity to God. Nevertheless, modern interpretations of Sufism suggest that spiritual experience needs to be reflected in social and moral conduct as well. So, Rahman (1984) insists that spirituality needs to be tied to social reality, while Nasr (2020) defines Living Sufism as a way of life which forms the connection between human beings, God, society, and the rest of the universe. Thus, the social value of Sufi virtues like sincerity, compassion, modesty, moderation, wisdom, and self-control comes from their manifestation through justice, solidarity, accountability, and caring for others. Living Sufism's social significance is especially pronounced in the case of the Minangkabau people. For centuries now, Minangkabau society has managed to build an interface between Islamic doctrines, customary rules, and societal structures, as is seen in the Minangkabau cultural philosophy, which is *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah*. This concept means that Islamic doctrines and customs are interwoven into the same ethics framework. Therefore, religious values are not only meant to be practiced privately, but they are also part of the community's activities and social relations. Cultural practices like *musyawarah*, *gotong royong*, social accountability, and ethical leadership within the *nagari* institution make a relevant cultural setting through which Sufi values can be analyzed in relation to social ethics. Previous researches have focused on civil society in Islam with regards to concepts like democracy, pluralism, social justice, and participation (Anjum, 2012; Giri, 2012; Hashmi, 2007). Other previous researches have also focused on the connection between Sufism, spirituality, and modern social life and the role that ethics of religion may play for promoting peace, tolerance, and responsibility (Saepullah, 2021; Walton, 2013). Researches about Nurcholish Madjid have been conducted on his thoughts about civil society, inclusivity of religion, democracy, and Islamic modernity. However, all these topics have been studied separately.

Therefore, there is still a certain gap in terms of how the substantial Islamic thought of Nurcholish Madjid can be utilized in the analysis of the internalization of Living Sufism in the social and cultural environment of Minangkabau civil society. The literature review conducted

above has not adequately addressed the question of how the Sufi ethical values can go from being spiritual values to becoming communal ethics and social institutions, especially in a cultural context where Islam and *adat* are closely linked together. Furthermore, there has been a lack of scholarly attention devoted to the issue of how Madjid's concept of morally based civil society relates to the Minangkabau practices of discussion, joint responsibility, ethical leadership, moderation, and solidarity. This is an important question to answer because it allows one to analyze Sufism not only as a theological and mystical tradition, but also as an ethical tradition. From this observation, this research looks into the internalization of Living Sufism among the Minangkabau people through the prism of Nurcholish Madjid's Islamic theory. This research specifically looks at the relation of Madjid's spirituality and civil Islam, as well as the values that are present in the lives of the Minangkabau community. This is not a study of Sufism as an individualistic spirituality, but rather a study of Living Sufism that sees Sufism not only as a spirituality but as a transformation of values into social ethic like sincerity, moderation, compassion, sense of responsibility, justice, and communal solidarity. In this way, this research attempts to contribute to the study of Indonesian Islamic theory.

2. METHODS

The research used a qualitative research design based on the use of library research employing a descriptive analysis method. This was because the research sought to interpret and analyze the concepts and not collect quantitative and field data. The main concepts analyzed were those of Nurcholish Madjid regarding Islam, which included sufism, substantial religiosity, civil Islam, civil society, pluralism, social justice, and spirituality and social responsibility. These ideas were subsequently examined in relation to the internalization of Living Sufism within the socio-cultural context of Minangkabau society. The data consisted of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources included selected works of Nurcholish Madjid that directly address Islamic spirituality, civil society, religiosity, humanitarian values, and the ethical dimensions of Islam, including *Menuju Masyarakat Madani* (Madjid, 1996). and other relevant works included in the study. Secondary sources consisted of scholarly books and journal articles discussing Living Sufism, Sufism and social ethics, Islamic civil society, Nurcholish Madjid's thought, and the socio-religious characteristics of Minangkabau society. Sources concerning Minangkabau were particularly used to identify the relationship between Islamic values, customary principles, communal practices, and the philosophy of *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah*. The sources were selected purposively according to their relevance to the research focus. Four main criteria were applied in the selection process. *First*, the sources had to discuss one or more of the principal themes of the study, namely Nurcholish Madjid's Islamic thought, Sufism or Living Sufism, civil society, or Minangkabau Islamic-cultural traditions. *Second*, preference was accorded to Madjid's writings which directly include notions about spirituality, morality, social responsibility, inclusivity, and civil society. *Third*,

secondary sources of literature were included if they gave any conceptual understanding, interpretation, or context for relating Sufi ethics to civil society and the life of the Minangkabau community. *Fourth*, sources that had no direct relevance to the problem of study and had no conceptual connection between living Sufism, the views of Madjid, and Minangkabau civil society were excluded from the main body of research.

The data were collected using document analysis. This process included the identification of the relevant literature, reading and analyzing of the texts chosen, noting down important concepts and ideas, and categorizing information based on the analytical themes. Special focus was placed on concepts like spiritual purification, *ikhlas* (sincerity), *rahmah* (compassion), *tawāḍu'* (humility), *tawassuth* (moderation), *muhasabah* (self-reflection), justice, tolerance, social responsibility, and participation. In relation to the Minangkabau culture, there was also emphasis on concepts like *musyawarah*, *gotong royong*, ethical leadership, communal responsibility, and the relationship between *adat* and *syarak*. Data analysis has been done in several stages. The first one involved conceptual identification, which entailed identifying the main ideas of Madjid with respect to Sufism, substantive Islam, civil society, and social ethics. The second stage involved thematic classification where the identified concepts were classified into different themes such as spirituality-society balance, moral internalization, social responsibility, inclusiveness, justice, and civic engagement. The third stage involved interpretive analysis where it has been investigated whether the identified concepts can be used to explain Living Sufism as spirituality expressed in social behavior, not just mysticism. The fourth stage involved contextual analysis whereby the identified conceptual themes have been related to the socio-cultural values and practices of Minangkabau people especially those based on *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah*. Within these steps, the research does not seek to prove the ethnographic evidence about the religious activities of the Minangkabau people. Instead, it seeks to establish a theory through which one can interpret Living Sufism in relation to Minangkabau civil society using Nurcholish Madjid's model of substantive Islam. The limitation in the methodology of the study is critical to note since the results of the analysis are an interpretation based on textual information and not firsthand observations or interviews.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Reassessing Nurcholish Madjid's Conception of Sufism and Civil Society

Nurcholish Madjid contributes to the debate on Sufism and civil society mainly in that he attempts to shift spirituality from the purely private realm into the realm of public ethics. According to Madjid, religiosity cannot be assessed by way of ritual practice or religious affiliation alone but also must involve justice, tolerance, responsibility, dignity of the human person, and involvement in social affairs (Madjid, 1999, 2005). Seen in this light, Sufism becomes socially significant in that spirituality involves ethical results in interpersonal and inter-community relations. This viewpoint

differs substantially from views about Sufism that focus on personal experience or disengagement from society. In terms of later discussion, Madjid's view can be seen as part of "social Sufism" where spirituality is a source of public virtue and not something through which one tries to withdraw from society. This idea was proven by Howell (2001) who showed that Sufism in Indonesia has been involved in broader religious and social changes throughout history. Therefore, Madjid's view is significant because it provides a normative justification for understanding Sufism as compatible with civic participation, social reform, and modern public life. Nevertheless, there are limitations to Madjid's conceptualization which need to be addressed. In general, his perspective presupposes that the presence of internalized spiritual values automatically implies socially responsible behavior. However, the connection between spiritual transformation and establishment of just civil society does not always follow this logic. An individual can have a high level of religiosity without participating in the process of fighting for social justice and freedom from oppression. At the same time, one can demonstrate ethical conduct in public life through legal and political processes as well as secular morality without the involvement of Sufi spirituality.

As such, Amin Abdullah's paradigm of integration-interconnection can serve as a good contrast. While Abdullah (2007) stresses the importance of relating knowledge about religion to other aspects of life including social, cultural, and intellectual dimensions, Madjid denies the idea of any division between spirituality and social accountability. However, unlike Abdullah, Madjid takes an ethicist, rather than a methodologist perspective. Abdullah's paradigm serves as an epistemology of connecting different types of knowledge, while Madjid's model is based on transformation of religious consciousness in moral terms. The main advantage of the model proposed by Madjid is its capability to offer ethical guidance; however, it cannot sufficiently explain the process of institutionalization of individual spirituality. The same limitation is evident in Madjid's perception of civil society. The pluralism, tolerance, democracy, justice, and humanitarian values, which Madjid stresses, represent an inclusive interpretation of Islam that is highly pertinent to a heterogeneous society. However, civil society cannot exist merely due to the moral goodness of its members. Rather, it requires legal safeguards, institutions, social justice, and possibilities for public engagement. Therefore, it becomes apparent that the current paper should consider the Madjid's interpretation of Sufism not as an explanation of the mechanisms of civil society but as an ethical underpinning of civil society. This distinction matters. Madjid is at his most convincing when he speaks about the virtues needed to ensure that civil society does not turn into a purely procedural one. Democracy, law, and the civic order may operate in a purely formal way, yet still be open to corruption, intolerance, domination, or exclusion unless citizens and leaders have a sense of ethics. In this context, it is correct when Madjid says that without morality, the structures are insufficient. However, the same holds true in the opposite direction: spirituality and ethics without structures may simply be a form of personal virtue.

The universality of civil society proposed by Madjid needs to be critically discussed as well. The fact that Madjid's approach pays much attention to such concepts as justice, equality, peace, tolerance, and humanitarian principles helps incorporate the ideas of Islamic ethics into a pluralist public domain, which does not mean that everyone should belong to the same religion (Madjid, 1999, 2013). It is one of the most significant advantages of this theory since it allows avoiding exclusivity of Sufism as a spiritual identity. In addition, universalization of Sufi ethics presupposes its translation into common values. What this means is that the social importance of Sufism does not lie in the adoption of Sufi beliefs by society, but whether values developed from the spirituality of Sufism can serve to produce universally understood ethics of compassion, truthfulness, moderation, justice, and responsibility. In light of this critical reading, what emerges from this work is that the current study adopts the approach whereby Madjid's ideas will be relevant when seen in the context of normative and interpretive perspective. This is because his ideas show the reason why spirituality has to have social implications and also offers the ethics that can be used to evaluate civil society. Nevertheless, these ideas cannot be taken as sufficient empirical evidence to prove that Sufi spirituality leads to tolerant or democratic societies.

3.2 Internalization of Living Sufism in Minangkabau Context

The context of Minangkabau culture is suitable for an examination of the interpretive capacities of Madjid's views insofar as there has been a historical interaction between Islamic and customary values in the framework of the concept "Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah." Research on Minangkabau culture shows that religious and customary values are not necessarily perceived as two different normative systems, and they may interact in defining the social ethics of communal practices (Fithri, Hadi, & Mawaddah, 2023). Thus, it is possible to consider the phenomenon of Living Sufism not only from the perspective of formal belonging to a certain tarekat, but also through the process of internalizing spiritual values. In the literature reviewed in this study, certain practices of the Minangkabau that could serve as a point of correspondence for Sufi ethics include *musyawarah*, which is related to restraining the individual ego and sense of collective responsibility, *gotong royong*, which embodies mutual concern and solidarity, and leadership practice in *nagari* institutions, which could also be viewed through the prism of responsibility and wisdom (Shalihin, 2014). These practices can be associated with such principles of ethics as *ikhlaṣ* (sincerity), *tawāḍu'* (humility), *rahmah* (compassion), *tawassuth* (moderation), and self-restraint that are important in the framework of the studied Living Sufism. However, such a correspondence is to be understood carefully. The presence of *musyawarah*, *gotong royong*, sense of community, and leadership based on ethics does not imply that these are derived directly from the internalization of Sufism. They may come from *adat*, kinship system, Islamic law, politics, or other social factors. To label every form of Minangkabau communal ethics as "Living Sufism" would risk reducing the complexity of Minangkabau social and religious history.

Hence, the current research does not posit that the communal practices of the Minangkabau people amount to empirical evidence of Living Sufism. Rather, this paper suggests that the communal practices of the Minangkabau offer a conceptual space in which Sufi values of ethics can be understood and explored. The difference is important. In the current work, Living Sufism is considered as a tool of analysis for understanding the process of translation of spiritual values into social ethics, whereas the extent to which such translation occurs empirically should be studied. It also increases the relevancy of the substantial Islam of Madjid. Madjid insists that religiosity must be considered through the ethical substance and not through external signs only (Madjid, 2005). In the case of Minangkabau society, the meaning of Sufism cannot only be seen in terms of the presence of the *tarekat*, *dhikr*, and other mystical organizations. It could also be studied in terms of the ethical effects of the spiritual values in the public and communal lives of people. Based on this understanding, the significant thing is not just whether a certain practice is officially a part of Sufism or not but whether the spiritual orientation of religion affects one to be honest, moderate, compassionate, just, and responsible towards others. Madjid's framework thus offers an advantage of being able to connect universality with cultural specificity within the Minangkabau situation. His notion of Islam engaging with socio-cultural conditions without losing the universal ethical element of itself (Madjid, 2013) mirrors the relationship between the *adat* and *syarak* concepts. Unlike the framework which pits the Islamic spirituality against the local culture, this approach allows for the articulation of Islamic ethics in culturally specific sociocultural forms.

However, at the same time, this connection of the universal principles of Islam and the particular tradition should not be idealized either. After all, any society, including the Minangkabau society, is marked by contradictions and discussions concerning both religion and adat. Hence, *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah* cannot be automatically considered the proof of the implementation of the ethical principles of Islam in practice. The distinction should be made between cultural values and real-life practices. It is exactly where the value of Madjid's model lies – it can be used to evaluate the social practices based on their ethical outcomes of religiosity, rather than on their religious and cultural legitimacy. The social dynamics of *Sufi* and *tarekat* discussed by Azwar (2015) further support the idea that Sufism in Minangkabau is not merely an individual mysticism. However, the existence of Sufi traditions does not necessarily mean the impact these traditions have on civil society of today. Social relevance of Sufi traditions depends on the interpretation of the spiritual traditions, practice of spiritual discipline and its relationship to social concerns of the community. Therefore, it is the process of spiritual discipline becoming ethical disposition and later social action that should be considered as the most meaningful way to understand Living Sufism. According to the above interpretation, Living Sufism may be understood as a three-level process. The first level is spiritual internalization through discipline, sincerity, humility, contemplation, and consciousness of accountability towards God. The second level is ethical translation, wherein

spiritual dispositions affect inter-personal interactions through empathy, moderation, truthfulness, justice, and respect for others. Thus, there is social articulation, where ethical dispositions become relevant to social practice such as consultation, mutual aid, dispute resolution, responsible leadership, and active participation in public affairs. The above understanding does not purport that all the three levels have been empirically established among the Minangkabau society; instead, it represents an understanding that can inform future empirical study. Therefore, Minangkabau cannot merely be considered a “living laboratory” of Sufism without any further explanation. The aforementioned statement will definitely go beyond the scope of information presented within this research. Instead, one may say that Minangkabau presents a case worth considering while trying to understand how the Sufi ethics could be socially internalized due to the cultural traditions existing in this society.

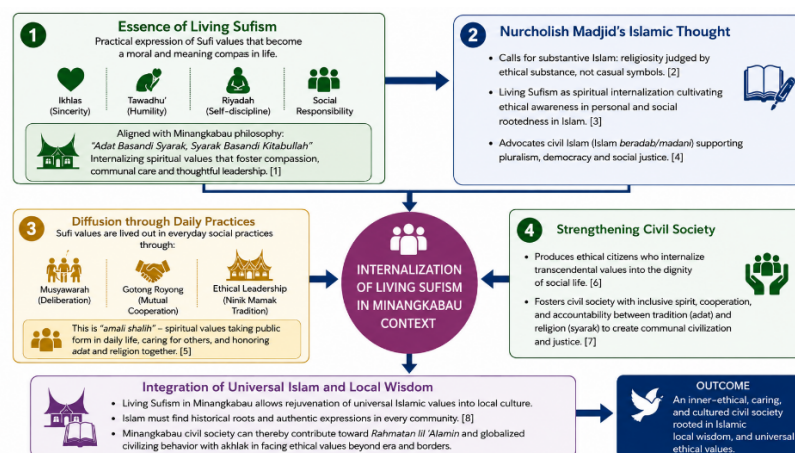


Figure 1. Internalization of Living Sufism in Minangkabau Context

3.3 Contemporary Relevance and Analytical Implications

The importance of Madjid's ideas today is the emphasis he makes on the necessity that the religiosity produces ethical effects which go beyond individual spirituality. In societies with social polarization, exclusivism, materialism, declining sense of community, and lack of trust towards institutions, the ethical potential that can be derived from the Sufi tradition can be instrumental in fostering social responsibility. However, this potential cannot be exaggerated. The Sufi ethics cannot replace legal changes, good governance, economic equality, and democracy in general. What they can do is give an ethical guidance to those institutions. The view of spirituality as something which can transform civil society, but not solve structural social problems differentiates the study from an idealistic approach to Madjid. It recognizes the importance of spirituality in the sense that spirituality possesses great potential to enrich civil society through the enrichment of the ethical base of civic life; yet, at the same time, it holds that spirituality alone is not enough to solve structural social problems. Within the Minangkabau setting, this implies that the values of Living Sufism should be studied not only as cultural values, but also on the basis of their concrete expression in social relationships and social institutions. In the future, empirical research can be done regarding the interpretation of these values by religious authorities, *ninik mamak*, *alim ulama*, young people,

women, and *nagari* institutions. It will be possible to study whether these values affect the process of deliberation, conflict resolution, leadership, social solidarity, and coping with social changes.

In other words, the primary conclusion that can be drawn from this theoretical research is not that Living Sufism has already been empirically proved to influence Minangkabau civil society. On the contrary, what has been demonstrated here is that the substantial Islamic theory developed by Nurcholish Madjid is an efficient but limited tool for analyzing the potential transformation of Sufi spirituality into civic ethics. The efficiency of the theory is rooted in the link between spirituality and social morality, while the limitation consists of the lack of adequate explanations. The internalization of Living Sufism in the civil society of Minangkabau is thus to be viewed as an interpretive framework as opposed to an empirically established condition. In this interpretive framework, the cultural values and practices of Minangkabau are the possible points of articulation between spirituality and civic virtue, and the theory of Madjid is the evaluative framework against which this articulation is to be measured.

4. CONCLUSION

In this research, the correlation between civil society and Sufism as a living entity has been examined using the framework of Islamic philosophy represented by Nurcholish Madjid. Through this framework, importance has been given to the integration of spirituality in society as regards the spiritual aspect of modern society. There is a very important research question in this regard that needs to be looked into in the course of this research as regards Sufism as an individualistic quest dealing with mysticism. This study attempts to redefine Sufism as a dynamic spiritual practice that leads to building a civil society. The implications of this study suggest that the concept of civil society is understood in a broader way by Nurcholish Madjid, encompassing moral and ethical values within society in general, including justice, tolerance, pluralism, and social responsibility. In understanding civil society, Madjid draws from the Medina Charter and Islamic teachings that civil society in Medina is compatible with democracy, encompassing diverse cultures and religions within its ideals. According to this interpretation of civil society, democracy, human rights, and Islam become compatible and strengthen each other when placed on moral and ethical soil.

Furthermore, this research reveals that the living Sufism in Madjid's concept bridges the spiritual and social aspects of humanity. The mentioned Sufistic virtues of *ikhhlāṣ* or sincerity, *rahmah* or mercy, *hikmah* or wisdom, *muhasabah* or self-intropection, and *tawassuth* or moderation are not only addressed within the individuals in terms of their spirituality and/or religiosity but are also necessary in the making of socially responsible individuals in their capacity as agents of peace, justice, and social cohesion in their contexts. Sufism in its new role as the aforementioned force, hence, becomes the means to advance the solidarity and/or governance in civil society. It is also

apparent from the study that Madjid's paradigm of civil society has a universal outlook. This is because he maintained that civil society is not specifically an Islamic institution but a common human paradigm that can be used to bring about cooperation between persons of various religions. This is very relevant to the modern age in which the world is experiencing globalization, social polarization, religiosity, and lapses in morality. This is because Madjid's paradigm of Sufism as a way of life presents an alternative worldview that puts forth morality as an ideological guide to life that is not incompatible with democracy.

Despite these achievements, this research is fully cognizant of the following limitation, which offers potential venues for subsequent research. First of all, this current research is more conceptual and focused on the ideational/normative aspects of the ideas of Nurcholish Madjid. Its empirical implications and applications to particular societal and political realities have not yet been addressed. Subsequent research may investigate, from this perspective, how the "living Sufism" is applied and practiced at the societal and civic level, maybe in the fields of education, social movements, religious institutions, and public policies. A second path to be hopefully pursued by other research is the comparison with other Muslim intellectuals, with other Sufi movements, and maybe with other spiritual traditions outside of the Islamic one. A third path is the investigation of the debates and tensions between spirituality and secularism and the implications of the power of the state at the societal and political levels. In sum, internalization within Minangkabau civil society shows the relevance of Nurcholish Madjid's substantive Islamic thought. Spirituality, internalized as lived ethics, can form a basis of civilized, inclusive, and morally strong society. This model dispels dichotomies of mysticism and modernity but shows instead that Sufism can function as a constructive force in nurturing civil society rooted in both tradition and critical Islamic thought.

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