Between Sufism and Marxism: Social Religious Movements in Twentieth Century Minangkabau

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Abstract

The Sufi movement in Minangkabau in the 20th century was influenced by Marxism. In some Muslim scholars' views, Marxism could not possibly be in line with Islam. On the ground, Islam and Marxism were able to act in dialectic as a weapon against colonialism that hit the entire Muslim society at the time. In Minangkabau, which has an Islamic view of life, the ideology of Marxism spread rapidly and captured the attention of the public, including the Sufis. To analyze this study uses the theory of social action by Max Weber, which is divided into four types, traditional action, affective action, instrumental rationality, and value rationality. Based on the traditional type, the Sufis tried to follow their teachers, as well as the tradition of the Padri, who went against colonialism. Through affective actions, the Sufis demonstrated a strong emotional bond to the system that exists in the Sufi tradition. Using instrumental rationality, they were consciously able to carry out the resistance rationally after seeing the available resources. In terms of rationality of value, the Sufis want to receive the reward for their jihad (mujahada), as had been done by the other Sufis before them.

Keywords: Marxism, Minangkabau, Social Action, Sufism

Abstrak

Gerakan Kaum Sufi di Minangkabau abad ke-20 dipengaruhi oleh Marxisme. Dalam beberapa pandangan Sarjana Muslim, Marxisme tidak mungkin dapat sejalan dengan Islam. Namun dalam kenyataan di lapangan, Islam dan Marxisme mampu berdialektika sebagai senjata untuk melawan kolonialisme yang melanda seluruh

Kata kunci: Marxisme, Minangkabau, Tindakan Sosial, Sufisme

Introduction

In the 20th century, the Islamic reformation movement emerged after the end of the Padri War (1803-1838) in Minangkabau. This movement began after the return of the disciples from Syaikh Ahmad Khatib Al-Minangkabawi (1860-1916) to Nusantara. In Minangkabau itself, this movement was initiated by Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah (HAKA, better known as Haji Rasul, 1879-1945) by establishing the Thawalib School (1911) in Padang Padang with a reformist-modernist ideology, as was the Muhammadiyah movement in Java (Djamal, 2002). Later, some scholars named this movement the ‘Kaum Muda’ because it gave rise to a reformist idea that wanted to return Islam to the Qur’an and Sunnah. This movement was also influenced by the movements carried out by Jamaluddin Al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh (Abdullah, 2009). On the other hand, a different idea emerged led by Syaikh Sulaiman Arrasuli (1871-1970) as an opposite representation of what was later called the ‘Kaum Tua’. The Kaum Tua preferred to maintain Islam without abolishing customs.

Haji Rasul and Syaikh Sulaiman Arrasuli had their followers because of their different ideologies. As mentioned by Apria Putra (2018), Haji Rasul tended to oppose the practice of Tariqa (the spiritual path of individual sufi) that developed in his village, as well as what was taught by his teacher, Syaikh Ahmad Khatib Al-Minangkabawi. While Syaikh Sulaiman Arrasuli had a different view, Syaikh Sulaiman Arrasuli himself practiced and bribed the Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah. At the same time, the ideology of Marxism emerged in the land of Minangkabau (1920s) along with the development of the Sarekat Islam (S.I.) stream “Merah (red)” in Semarang, led by Semaun Cs. Sufyan (2017) discussed this
issue in his book entitled “Menuju Lentera Merah: Gerakan Propagandis Komunis di Serambi Mekah, 1923–1949 (Towards the Red Lantern: Communist Propaganda Movement in the Veranda of Mecca, 1923–1949),” which describes the journey of Haji Batuah (1895-1949) with all the titles that he possesses and can attract the attention of the public following the understanding of the ‘red’. Immediately, the ideology of Marxism tends to contradict the life view of the Minangkabau people, *adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi Kitabullah*.

How did the Sufis in Minangkabau respond to the ideology of this movement during the discourse between the *Kaum Muda* and the *Kaum Tua*? Why did some of the Sufis join this movement? Is the *tasawuf* they are doing contrary to Marxism’s ideology? This paper will analyze the social actions of the Sufi in Minangkabau in response to the growing ideology of Marxism, which seemed to be lost in the discourse between the *Kaum Muda* and the *Kaum Tua*. Fikrul Hanif Sufyan (2021), in his book “*Gejolak Sosial di Sumatra Barat: Islam Modernis dan Komunis, 1915-1930*,” presents a discourse between the *Kaum Muda* (modernist) and the *Kaum Tua* streams and the communist groups. The book is already offensive about Islam and Communists but has not specifically described the role or position of the Sufi in the discourse. The sophisticated viewpoint as well as the concept of jihad from the perspective of neo-Sufism combined with the ideology of communism (*kuminih*) are the focus of the study in this paper.

Besides, there is also a study conducted by Michael Kemper (2007) on jihadist leaders with a Marxist spirit for the national political agendas in Algeria and Dagestan. The article is entitled “The Changing Images of Jihad Leaders: Shamil and Abd al-Qadir in Daghestani and Algerian Historical Writing”. There are also writings by Oskar Verkaaik (2004) with the title “Reforming Mysticism: Sindhi Separatist Intellectuals in Pakistan” about the Sufi separatist movement in South Pakistan. Another article about the Sufi rebellion was written by Abd Salam (2005) with the title “*Pemberontakan Gandor 1895: Sebuah Perlawanan Kaum Sufi terhadap Kekuasaan* (Gandor Rebellion 1895: A Sufi struggle against power)”. This movement was led by Tuan Guru Bangkol with the Tarekat Qadiriyya wa Naqshabandiyya stream to fight against the Dutch colonial government over tax policy. The harsh tax policy and the strict surveillance of the teachers of tariqa (*murshid*) led to the rebellion.

The study of the Sufi movement with the ideology of Marxism became the focus of this discussion, especially in Minangkabau before the independence of the Republic of Indonesia. The movement of the Sufis with the ideology of neo-Sufism
before the emergence of Marxism is also a comparison in the analysis. This study looked at the position of the Sufis in Minangkabau with the approach of social action developed by Max Weber. The analysis used is related to the theory explained in the research method.

**Method**

This research uses qualitative methods with library research sources such as books, research articles, and journals as data sources. The necessary data relating to the theme of *tasawuf* (mysticism), history, Marxism, and the history of Minangkabau in the 20th century the data are collected and analyzed in depth. Sufism became the main topic of discussion in this study because it dealt with the Sufi movement. Several other disciplines of science are also needed to analyze this research, such as history and sociology.

For the analysis to be more focused in this study, the theory of social action as argued by Max Weber is used. From a social science perspective, Weber compares the structure of several societies by understanding the reasons why society acts and observing events after events in sequence that affect the character of the society. To avoid being impressed with generalizations, Weber divides classification into four types of action. First, the traditional action. Second, there is the affective action. Third, there is value in rational action. Fourth, instrumental rational action (Jones et al., 2016).

Besides, since the Sufi in this study is identical to a movement, there are three questions to answer based on Burke, et al. (2015) perspective. First, who’s moving? Who leads and follows him? Whether it is a politician or a religionist. Second, what things are adopted (created) to a common goal? Third, what makes one movement more successful than the other? These questions are answered in the discussion of this paper.

**Sufism: A Concept in a Social Perspective**

In general, the Sufis are those who practice the teaching of Islamic esotericism that emphasizes the purity of heart. Specifically, in a certain sense, the Sufis are those who are involved in a particular framework in the *murshid-salik* relationship. The relationship between teacher and student can be seen from a sociological perspective as a form of social movement. Indeed, the Sufis seem more individualistic because of the rituals performed with a very individual purpose. However, the system of beliefs in rites has the social impact of practices carried out
collectively. So is Emile Durkheim’s view of collective consciousness through the mechanisms of a Sufi ritual (Abdurahman, 2015).

In Weber’s view, as Jones et al., (2016) mentioned, humans do something because they decide to their goal. Social conditions are created by obstacles. Human beings try to understand the obstacles and find a way out of them. The Sufi has the potential to engage in social-political movements in the local and global spheres in search of a way out of a problem. Such social movements are found in some cases in the local sphere, especially in the movement against colonialism (Abdurahman, 2015).

Such religious positions, by historians or sociologists, are associated with religious political functions as a tool for minorities to oppose, protest, and criticize politics (Abdurahman, 2015). The Sufi people in this study also have their dynamics. They will strive to get out of the obstacles that exist to the desired goal. Such a goal can be achieved by a social action that has a certain meaning behind a certain one. The religious aspect remains a priority in a way that cares about social conditions.

**Sufism in Minangkabau: Neo-Sufism and Spirit of Jihad**

In general, as in Aceh, the process of Islamization in Minangkabau is also heavily influenced by Sufism (Azra, 2017). *Surau Ulakan* was founded by a disciple of Syaikh Abdurrauf Al-Sinkili, known as Syaikh Burhanuddin, and became the center of development in the Tariqa Shattariyya, especially in the coastal region. This *Surau* had pupils who came from the villages, who then also taught the *tariqa* in the inland (*darek*) of Minangkabau. Besides the Shattariyya, the Tariqa Nasqshabandiyya also developed first and was brought by a Muslim scholar (*ulama*) from the Samudra Pasai to the inland (*darek*) of Minangkabau.

One of the Shattariyya leaders and one of the students of Syaikh Burhanuddin Ulakan, Tuanku Nant Tuo (*IV Angkek*) combined the two dimensions of Islamic teaching to become more balanced, between *sharia* and *haqiqa* (Sufism). Therefore, the activity was well-liked by the community at the time and attracted many students from other regions. The reforms made by Tuanku Nan Tuo not only received sympathy but resistance from various regions because of the controversy surrounding the doctrine of seven dignity known as ‘*martabat tujuh*’ (Azra, 2017).

Subsequently, the reformation movement was influenced by Wahabism after the return of three Hajis from Mecca: Haji Sumanik, Haji Miskin, and Haji
Piobang who were later known as the Padri (Azra, 2017). This movement continued to develop with an orientation to eliminate superstition, bid’ah, and khurafat that developed in Minangkabau until the outbreak of the Padri War against the indigenous people (Kaum Adat). The journey of the Padri War got a lot of drama until the Dutch colonial entry into the war as a third party. The Dutch colonialists helped the indigenous people in the battle against the Padri until the Indigenous realized that they had indeed fought with their brothers. The Padri War turned into a war against the Dutch colonial until the appearance of Tuanku Imam Bonjol as the last leader of the Padri.

According to Apria Putra (2019), the Padri did not leave Sufism. They are affected only by movement, not by creed (akidah) or mazhab. However, after the Padri War ended, a movement of renewal emerged in terms of Islam. One of the core figures of the reform movement is Syaikh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi, who is a Muslim scholar who very much holds al-Sunnah. Everything that is contrary to this source will be strongly opposed by him through his disciples who return to Nusantara.

Before Marxism appeared in Minangkabau, anti-colonialism was also demonstrated by the Nusantara community with the concept of jihad created by the Sufi figure in some of his books, as was done by Abdul Samad Al-Palimbani. Jihad in al-Palimbani’s view is not meant for individual interests only, but in the physical sense to counter colonialism (Azra, 2013). Al-Palimbani was one of the pioneers who developed the principles of neo-Sufism. Neo-Sufism as described by Fazlur Rahman is an attempt to reconstruct the socio-morality of Muslim society rather than the previous one which is highly individualistic (Azra, 2013).

The influence of neo-Sufism means Rahman reaches Nusantara with the existing networks. The Sufi characters who appear to uphold the spirit of neo-Sufism are Muhammad Nafis Al-Banjari, Daud Al-Fatani, and Al-Palimbani. Some of their works were banned from circulating in the Dutch Colonial because of jihadist themes. When the Dutch Colonial discovered that the doctrine of tariqa had led to resistance, the leaders of tariqa began to be watched. The war between the Dutch Colonial and the long-running Padri Movement led by the Sufi affiliated with the tariqa (Azra, 2013). The spirit of jihad seemed to fade after the defeat of the priests. The teachings of pantheism tend to be liked by the Dutch colonial because they practice death before death. So, the spirit of jihad disappeared little by little. But not everybody’s like that. Syaikh Ismail Simabur was expelled from the Minang land because of his threats to colonialism (Hamka, 1984).
That spirit (jihad) reappeared when the Dutch Colonial imposed a burdensome tax on society. Ken Young (1994) explicitly explains that the Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah and Syattariyah streams made anti-tax political movements until a revolt occurred in 1908, even though the uprising succeeded in suppressing it. But that anti-colonial attitude continues to be avenged and awaits a little spark of fire to revive it.

Furthermore, Syaikh Ahmad Khatib was a follower of the Shafi’I madhab, whose fate was based on the principles established by Imam al-Syafi’i. However, in some cases, he turned out to be against the understanding adopted by most of the followers, one of which is about the ability to conduct the practices of tariqa, as many Muslim societies in Minangkabau do. For him, tariqa is a matter of heresy (bid’ah), for which there is no source of teaching in the Qur’an and Sunnah. So, he strongly refused, even though the Shafi’I madhab did not forbid him (Putra & Ahmad, 2011).

According to a report—as quoted by Delier Noer (1996) in his book ‘The Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia, 1900-1942’, the Islamic reformers in Indonesia (including Syaikh Ahmad Khatib) often quoted a phrase of Imam Shafi’i that reads, “If you find in my book a deviation from the Prophet's Sunnah, then follow the Sunnah and leave my opinion.” In different editions but with the same meaning, Shafi’i’s statement on this matter can be found in his Book ‘Al-Risalah’ which has the following meaning, “A person’s words and actions should be in accordance with the Qur’an and the Sunnah, and if a scholar's opinion is contrary to the Sunnah of the Prophet, Let that opinion be abandoned when the conflict is realized and let the Sunnah of the Prophet be obeyed. Because if he doesn't do that, it can't be forgiven”.

Looking for the Very Essence Between Islam and Marxism

Islam is the religion of humanity and recognizes the existence of God. Meanwhile, Marxism tends to deny God’s existence for certain reasons. This is the debate over the disagreement of some Muslim scholars with Marxism. Mohammad Emarah (2018), for example, once wrote reasons for his disagreement with the ideology of Marxism. His disagreement was based on the thinking of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd (1943-2010), who interpreted religious texts from the point of view of Marxism. According to Emarah, it’s a very dangerous thing.

Emarah remembers that the matter exists and lives by itself and does not need God to create it. This argument was delivered by Murad Wahbah. He denies
that every nation when they are in a state of weakness, seeks to create gods, yet when in a strong religion they destroy (forget) gods. Any defense of the existence of God, however beautiful and good intention it is, is still a defense that leads to regression because the world and all its contents are merely things and matter that do not need God to create and regulate it. This is the concept that expresses Marxism’s hostility to religion and philosophy (Emarah, 2018).

At that stage, Emarah (2018) concluded that Marxism was not necessary to carry out a revolution in Egypt because it was considered dangerous. However, this is still the view of Muslim scholars in Egypt to secure their country. In other Muslim countries, the ideology of Marxism continued to prevail, including in Indonesia, until it gained a strong position before the 1965s. Emarah’s views are not much different from those of Ali Shariati (1933-1977) in his criticism of Marxism, especially about religion (Yusuf, 1991). Strictly, Shariati concludes that Islam is not in harmony with Marxism which is based on materialistic unbelievers, sinners, and anti-Gods. Shariati’s position on rejecting Marxism is still questionable, especially when talking about Islamic Socialism.

Marxism cannot be used fully until its ontological aspects are deeply purifying religion (Al-Fayyadl, 2015). In the epistemological aspect, Marxism can help people recognize and get out of the problem. The obvious point of encounter is from the axiological aspect because the aim is to eliminate the injustice as well as the inequalities that occur. Marxism is necessary under certain conditions. A person like Husayn Muruwwa (1910-1987), who pioneered the ideas of revolution and liberation ideology, tried to exclude religion to narrow the gap between ideal Islam and social reality. Similarly, with Sufism, Muruwwa considers Sufism to appear as a social phenomenon that has nothing to do with Islam. Muruwwa’s position with such ideology is very much hated by some and liked by others (Riyadi, 2020).

On the other hand, Kuntowijoyo who lived in the New Order (in Indonesia), read Islamic values with secular glasses. The Marxism that the New Order hates can be brought to life by Kuntowijoyo in his writings (Makin, 2019). In fact, in a country with a Muslim majority, including in pre-independence Indonesia, Marxism is well received and a powerful weapon against colonialism. Some have indeed brutally rejected this ideology with the emergence of the Islamic reform movement. In Minangkabau itself, Marxism spread so rapidly (1920s) that it was followed by some Sufi groups (Sufyan, 2021).
In 1915, it was the starting point of the spark being restarted by the characters called “S.I. Merah”. In Minangkabau, this “Merah” movement is centered on Padang Panjang as a crossing city of various ideologies because of its strategic location. The terms Marxism and Communism are not introduced. The term is just a system, not an ideology to be fooled out of because it will be contrary to Minangkabau’s own life. They then made a formulation that was acceptable under the name of ‘kuminih’(Sufyan, 2021). As the saying goes, lain padang lain belalang-lain lubuk lain ikannya, and the ideology of Marxism is adapted to the way of life of Minangkabau (Sufyan, 2017). Local Marxists assure that kuminih is not an atheist movement, but an Islamic movement to free the people from imperialist capitalism based on the Qur’an and Hadith.

According to some research, in 1926-1927 there was a rebellion in Silungkang (a district in West Sumatra) by a communist group. Amri Marzali (2020) mentioned that the uprising was a revolutionary Islamic movement, while the PKI (Communist Party of Indonesia) was only coordinating in rebellion. Marzali called the rebellion a jihad fi sablillah by the Serekat Rakyat (SR), not communist. Propaganda is carried out in Islamic institutions by religious teachers, in surau and mosques, of course some of them are affiliated with Tariqa.

The Social Action of Sufis in Minangkabau

In the previous section, it was discussed about Sufism from the social perspective, the meeting point between Sufism and Marxism, as well as the history of the movement of Sufism in Nusantara in general and Minangkabau in particular. The Sufis rebellion had reached its peak before the rise of Marxism in Minangkabau (1908). Meanwhile, Marxism emerged in Minangkabau in the 1920s. That is, the 1908 Sufi movement, which was failed by colonialism as mentioned by Young (1994), still leaves great anger on the part of the society.

In this section, using the theory of social action, analyzed the motives and purposes of the Sufi—which is the object of research—in moving with the ideology of Marxism. Social action—in Weber’s view—is meant when one acts not only performing but also placing himself in the thinking environment and behavior of others. There are at least four types of social action that can be analyzed, traditional action, affectual action, instrumental rational action, and value rational action.

First, traditional action. In this theory, all actions are determined by habits that have been rooted from time to time and are preserved from one generation to
the next. In the tradition of Islam (Sufism), a disciple (salik) will always follow the teacher (murshid) in every practice commanded. In the Sufism tradition with a certain flow of Tariqa, the murshid-salik relationship is very influential in making movements. The Islamic tradition with the Sufism pattern has strong roots in Nusantara, including in Minangkabau. The strength of this tradition will be the greatest capital to the desired goal. Colonialism was a common enemy of society at the time, especially after the defeat of the Padri. The public is also tormented by a blackmailing tax policy. The cooperation of the hoofd with the Dutch colonial side has caused the leaders of the Tariqa to engage in rebellion in the physical sense and jihad in the religious sense.

Traditional action that roots this into a considerable political force and can influence the community around it, of course for humanitarian purposes. It was a growing belief at the time that the Sufi, especially those with a pantheistic understanding, tended to prefer transcendental worship. This criticism is also presented by A.A. Navis in his short story entitled “Robohnya Surau Kami”. In traditional acts, the Sufi Movement is a form of continuing the spirit of jihad or mujahada as many Sufis persistently practice. The spirit is not without the figure of a murshid of Tariqa, neither from the streams of Naqshabandiyya nor Shattariyya. The subsequent formulation of "kuminih" is a combination that revives the spirit of jihad, while reviving the ideology of communism.

Second, affective action. Actions are determined by the conditions and the emotional orientation of the actors. The emergence of the Sufi and the Padri War is one of the proofs of their emotional attitude. The actor who plays, in this case, the leader of the Sufi continues to engage in Islamic da’wa so that the emotion remains stable in the face of colonialism. In 1908, before Marxism entered Minangkabau, the Sufi leaders succeeded in arousing that emotional outcome despite the defeat in carrying out the tax policy movement. At least they are being charged to understand the social-political and economic realities that are becoming increasingly corrosive. They are required to act realistically, to generate appropriate awareness. The introduction of Marxism into Minangkabau automatically revives the emotion that once existed. The emotions were re-created by the leader of the Sufi in a new formulation, as triggered by Haji Batuah, namely kuminih. Haji Batuah was the son of a Sufi figure who spread the Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah in Minangkabau.

Third, instrumental rational action. Actions aimed at achieving objectives that are rationally calculated and pursued by the actors concerned. The Sufi
movements must be rational. Haji Batuah and his members have made various efforts to gather strength, attract sympathy, disseminate newspapers, and assure that the formulation of *kuminih* can defeat the capitalism of the Dutch colonization power. According to Sufyan (2017), propaganda is running as it should with the ultimate goal against the Dutch East Indies Government. The question that the Dutch colonization is an unfaithful government, an aggressive capitalism, a tax-killing belasting that kills the people, and the ruling head of the government is a perfect propaganda to be fought against. This propaganda is thought to be successful and measurable rationally is true.

Fourth, the rationality of value. Rational action based on value is carried out for reasons and purposes that are related to values believed personally without considering the prospects that relate to the success or profitability of the action. The Sufi who participated in the movement must have a certain view of the meaning of a struggle, as they usually do when called *mujahada* to get closer to God. The values are vertical and necessary in a horizontal form. The Sufi movement is the way to get the values as intended.

Besides, the former Muslim scholars did the same thing, against unjust colonialism, not being humanistic. The Padri War lasted long enough to be a good example for them. The struggle of the Padri against the invaders despite defeat remains considered a good value. For the Sufi to get a *ma’rifa*, it would take a long struggle and a long process, as did the fight against colonialism. Long before that, as has been quoted by Haji Batuah to launch his propaganda, Islam hates injustice. In *da’wa*, The Prophet Muhammad called for the same thing. The Muslim scholars and the Islamic warriors (*mujahid*) also call for the same thing. Certainly, the values considered good are always their benchmark in action.

**Conclusion**

The Sufi movement in the Minangkabau of the 20th century was colored by the ideology of neo-Sufism and Marxism, which was previously influenced by the concept of *jihad* from the current neo-Sufism. The 1908 rebellion was initiated by the Sufi with all their power, although it was considered a failure. As for the rebellion of 1926-1927, it was already colored with Marxist ideology. The ideology of Marxism and the help of the PKI is only for coordination.

These actions can be analyzed in at least four types, first, traditional acts, in which the Sufis attempt to preserve the previous traditions commonly carried out by the Sufis. Second, affective actions, where the emotional Sufi are tested to
arouse the spirit of jihad against cruel colonialism. Third, instrumental rationality, where the Sufis have measured the ability of the resources, they possess to carry out resistance. Fourth, is value rationality, where Sufi has certain views on acting that have good values for life.

References


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