When Executives Chant Dhikr

If you want to see executives and (retired) high functionaries chanting dhikr, confusion of faith, reading the Qur’an together, and enthusiastically listening to religious sermons, go to Jakarta. You will find these activities in hovels, such as starred hotels and convention centres. They are not practicing certain rituals of sufism, but attending short courses of sufism, in which they are trying to enjoy the magnificence of this particular brand of Islam. To be able to participate in such activities, they must spend significant amounts of money and have time to spare.

By Norheidi Hasan and Ahmad Syafyi Mufid

The engagement of executives and members of the upper-middle class in chanting dhikr constitutes a trend that has gradually become a new symbol of elitism. This tendency can be traced back to the 1970s when one of the most popular sufis outside of Jakarta, the Qadiriyyah wa Naqsabandiyah, organized training courses for preachers in Jakarta. These training courses involved not only prominent Muslim scholars, but also a number of high-ranking Muslim military officials, including A.H. Nasution, H. Sudirman, Alamsjah Ratuprawiranegara, A. Soleiman and Ali Murtopo. The Qadiriyyah wa Naqsabandiyah quickly attracted a large following among elites and members of the middle class. Its centre of activities was well established in various places in Jakarta and surrounding.

The success of the Qadiriyyah wa Naqsabandiyah was followed by another sufist order, the Naqsabandiyah, which was led by Kaduran Yahya. This particular sufist order also found fertile ground in Jakarta, appealing particularly to certain political elites (see Howell, 2001). The smaller sufist orders, including Tijaniyah, Idnistiyyah, Alawiyah, Satriyah and Shadiliah, lost no time in competing with them, and succeeded in gaining a great deal of influence within the middle class in Jakarta. Later, new sufist orders, such as Haqanni — which aggressively developed its transnational network — also began to take root among Jakarta’s middle class.

The proliferation of sufism among members of the middle class in Jakarta became more pronounced at the beginning of the 1990s, when the presence of Islamic symbols in the public sphere became more prominent. It was facilitated by the emergence of contemporary religious communities, whose growth was not significantly disturbed by the outbreak of the economic and political crisis which followed the collapse of the New Order regime. Different types of contemporary Islamic communities have rigorously competed to offer various courses of sufism, whose basic elements comprise chanting dhikr, reciting the Qur’an, and listening to religious sermons. Paramadina, Tazkiya Sejati, and Darut Tauhid are among such communities that have gained increasing popularity among executives and (retired) high functionaries.

The Paramadina was established by a number of progressive Muslim intellectuals in collaboration with Muslim entrepreneurs. Prominent Muslim leaders and successful entrepreneurs, including Nurcholis Madjid, Dawam Rahardjo, Utomo Damanjaya, Atridin, and Fachmi Idris, from the core of the Paramadina community, which has evolved into an urban-elite religious institution. The Paramadina created a number of Islamic study programmes specifically designed for executives, professionals, practitioners, functionaries, and other members of the middle class. In line with the growing interest in sufism among its participants, the Paramadina designed a programme called Paramadina Eksekutif, which consists of a number of study sessions. After the Paramadina had gained considerable success, Jalaluddin Rahmat, in collaboration with a number of businessmen, established the Tazkiya Sejati, offering educational programmes on sufism for members of the upper-middle class. The Tazkiya Sejati has an office in Patra Kuningan, an elite area of Jakarta, and incorporates such elements as dhikr, salatut (prayer for Muhammad), inshirah (thinking, and ichhitya (free choice). Its participants believe that dhikr is the primary principle on which Muslims should rely, in the sense that God is the only facilitator of spiritual activities. The mission of the Tazkiya Sejati declares that its mission is to fill the ‘spiritual void’ of the urban people through its programme, ‘Manajemen Qalbi’ (the management of heart), whose aim is to manage and maintain a positive way of knowing God.

The Paramadina, Tazkiya Sejati, Darut Tauhid provided a model for similar institutions that have appeared more recently, such as Makrifat, Laqa Allah, and Zakya Maqtal. It quickly gained popularity through the support of ANTV, a private television station in Jakarta which broadcasts its activities. Twice a month on Saturdays ANTV airs ‘ALTERNATIF’, which contains an interactive dialogue and transfer of the so-called hyper-metaphysical energy by reciting the words of Allah Akbar repeatedly.

The phenomenon of modern sufism, a debated, but widely used term, cannot be dissociated with the rapid social changes arising from the process of modernization. The developments of education, communication media, urbanization, and national political integration undoubtedly play a highly crucial role in introducing secularization and new forms of communicative knowledge. Such a process has been accelerated by the vagaries of globalization, which drive people to resent the loss of control over their lives, over their societies, over their states, and above all over their fate on Earth. Within the accelerated process of modernization, that which Castells calls the ‘internal colonization of the life-world and penetration of economic and administrative rationality into everyday life’ is inevitably felt by many people (Castells, 1987).

Modern sufism is particularly appealing for members of the middle class, who feel the effects of modernization directly — at their workplaces, in the cities, in the urban centres. The Darut Tauhid includes dhikr, thinking, and ichhitya (free choice). Its participants believe that dhikr is the primary principle on which Muslims should rely, in the sense that God is the only facilitator of spiritual activities. The mission of the Darut Tauhid declares that its mission is to fill the ‘spiritual void’ of the urban people through its programme, ‘Manajemen Qalbi’ (the management of heart), whose aim is to manage and maintain a positive way of knowing God.

The Paramadina, Tazkiya Sejati, Darut Tauhid provided a model for similar institutions that have appeared more recently, such as Makrifat, Laqa Allah, and Zakya Maqtal. It quickly gained popularity through the support of ANTV, a private television station in Jakarta which broadcasts its activities. Twice a month on Saturdays ANTV airs ‘ALTERNATIF’, which contains an interactive dialogue and transfer of the so-called hyper-metaphysical energy by reciting the words of Allah Akbar repeatedly.

The Paramadina was established by a number of progressive Muslim intellectuals in collaboration with Muslim entrepreneurs. Prominent Muslim leaders and successful entrepreneurs, including Nurcholis Madjid, Dawam Rahardjo, Utomo Damanjaya, Atridin, and Fachmi Idris, from the core of the Paramadina community, which has evolved into an urban-elite religious institution. The Paramadina created a number of Islamic study programmes specifically designed for executives, professionals, practitioners, functionaries, and other members of the middle class. In line with the growing interest in sufism among its participants, the Paramadina designed a programme called Paramadina Eksekutif, which consists of a number of study sessions. After the Paramadina had gained considerable success, Jalaluddin Rahmat, in collaboration with a number of businessmen, established the Tazkiya Sejati, offering educational programmes on sufism for members of the upper-middle class. The Tazkiya Sejati has an office in Patra Kuningan, an elite area of Jakarta, and incorporates such elements as dhikr, salatut (prayer for Muhammad), inshirah (thinking, and ichhitya (free choice). Its participants believe that dhikr is the primary principle on which Muslims should rely, in the sense that God is the only facilitator of spiritual activities. The mission of the Tazkiya Sejati declares that its mission is to fill the ‘spiritual void’ of the urban people through its programme, ‘Manajemen Qalbi’ (the management of heart), whose aim is to manage and maintain a positive way of knowing God.

The Paramadina, Tazkiya Sejati, Darut Tauhid provided a model for similar institutions that have appeared more recently, such as Makrifat, Laqa Allah, and Zakya Maqtal. It quickly gained popularity through the support of ANTV, a private television station in Jakarta which broadcasts its activities. Twice a month on Saturdays ANTV airs ‘ALTERNATIF’, which contains an interactive dialogue and transfer of the so-called hyper-metaphysical energy by reciting the words of Allah Akbar repeatedly.

The Paramadina was established by a number of progressive Muslim intellectuals in collaboration with Muslim entrepreneurs. Prominent Muslim leaders and successful entrepreneurs, including Nurcholis Madjid, Dawam Rahardjo, Utomo Damanjaya, Atridin, and Fachmi Idris, from the core of the Paramadina community, which has evolved into an urban-elite religious institution. The Paramadina created a number of Islamic study programmes specifically designed for executives, professionals, practitioners, functionaries, and other members of the middle class. In line with the growing interest in sufism among its participants, the Paramadina designed a programme called Paramadina Eksekutif, which consists of a number of study sessions. After the Paramadina had gained considerable success, Jalaluddin Rahmat, in collaboration with a number of businessmen, established the Tazkiya Sejati, offering educational programmes on sufism for members of the upper-middle class. The Tazkiya Sejati has an office in Patra Kuningan, an elite area of Jakarta, and incorporates such elements as dhikr, salatut (prayer for Muhammad), inshirah (thinking, and ichhitya (free choice). Its participants believe that dhikr is the primary principle on which Muslims should rely, in the sense that God is the only facilitator of spiritual activities. The mission of the Tazkiya Sejati declares that its mission is to fill the ‘spiritual void’ of the urban people through its programme, ‘Manajemen Qalbi’ (the management of heart), whose aim is to manage and maintain a positive way of knowing God.

The Paramadina, Tazkiya Sejati, Darut Tauhid provided a model for similar institutions that have appeared more recently, such as Makrifat, Laqa Allah, and Zakya Maqtal. It quickly gained popularity through the support of ANTV, a private television station in Jakarta which broadcasts its activities. Twice a month on Saturdays ANTV airs ‘ALTERNATIF’, which contains an interactive dialogue and transfer of the so-called hyper-metaphysical energy by reciting the words of Allah Akbar repeatedly.

The Paramadina was established by a number of progressive Muslim intellectuals in collaboration with Muslim entrepreneurs. Prominent Muslim leaders and successful entrepreneurs, including Nurcholis Madjid, Dawam Rahardjo, Utomo Damanjaya, Atridin, and Fachmi Idris, from the core of the Paramadina community, which has evolved into an urban-elite religious institution. The Paramadina created a number of Islamic study programmes specifically designed for executives, professionals, practitioners, functionaries, and other members of the middle class. In line with the growing interest in sufism among its participants, the Paramadina designed a programme called Paramadina Eksekutif, which consists of a number of study sessions. After the Paramadina had gained considerable success, Jalaluddin Rahmat, in collaboration with a number of businessmen, established the Tazkiya Sejati, offering educational programmes on sufism for members of the upper-middle class. The Tazkiya Sejati has an office in Patra Kuningan, an elite area of Jakarta, and incorporates such elements as dhikr, salatut (prayer for Muhammad), inshirah (thinking, and ichhitya (free choice). Its participants believe that dhikr is the primary principle on which Muslims should rely, in the sense that God is the only facilitator of spiritual activities. The mission of the Tazkiya Sejati declares that its mission is to fill the ‘spiritual void’ of the urban people through its programme, ‘Manajemen Qalbi’ (the management of heart), whose aim is to manage and maintain a positive way of knowing God.

The Paramadina, Tazkiya Sejati, Darut Tauhid provided a model for similar institutions that have appeared more recently, such as Makrifat, Laqa Allah, and Zakya Maqtal. It quickly gained popularity through the support of ANTV, a private television station in Jakarta which broadcasts its activities. Twice a month on Saturdays ANTV airs ‘ALTERNATIF’, which contains an interactive dialogue and transfer of the so-called hyper-metaphysical energy by reciting the words of Allah Akbar repeatedly.