



SHAYKH YUSUF AL-MAKASSARI'S SUFI THOUGHT AND THE FORMATION OF ISLAMIC INTELLECTUAL TRADITIONS IN NUSANTARA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the Sufi thought of Shaykh Yusuf al-Makassari and its influence on the Islamic intellectual tradition in the Indonesian archipelago during the seventeenth century. Shaykh Yusuf al-Makassari was one of the most prominent Muslim scholars who played a strategic role in connecting Islamic intellectual networks between the Middle East and the archipelago. This research aims to analyze his intellectual background, identify the characteristics of his Sufi teachings, and explain their influence on the development of Islamic intellectual traditions in Nusantara. The study employs a historical research method with a social-intellectual historical approach. Data were collected through library research by examining books, manuscripts, journal articles, and historical sources related to Shaykh Yusuf and Islamic intellectual history. The findings indicate that Shaykh Yusuf developed a Sunni Sufism emphasizing the integration of sharia, tariqa, haqiqa, and ma'rifa. His teachings promoted spiritual purification while maintaining strict adherence to Islamic orthodoxy. Through scholarly networks, disciples, and written works, his ideas spread widely across the archipelago and significantly contributed to the development of Islamic education, Sufi institutions, and religious literacy. This study concludes that Shaykh Yusuf al-Makassari played an important role in shaping the Islamic intellectual tradition of Nusantara by integrating spirituality, morality, and scholarship within a comprehensive framework of Islamic thought.

Keywords: Islamic intellectual tradition, Nusantara, Shaykh Yusuf al-Makassari, Sufism, ulama networks

INTRODUCTION

The intellectual history of Islam in the Indonesian archipelago cannot be separated from the role of Muslim scholars (ulama) who served as intermediaries between Islamic centers of learning in the Middle East and Muslim communities across various regions of the archipelago. Through educational activities, da'wah, scholarly writing, and the establishment of intellectual networks, these scholars contributed to the transmission of knowledge that shaped the development of Islamic thought in the Indonesian archipelago (Azra, 2013). One of the figures who exerted significant influence on the development of Islamic intellectual traditions in the seventeenth century was Shaykh Yusuf al-Makassari.

Shaykh Yusuf al-Makassari was known as a scholar, Sufi, and resistance figure who maintained an extensive intellectual network. His intellectual journey took him to



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various centers of Islamic learning, including Banten, Aceh, Yemen, Makkah, Madinah, and Damascus. These intellectual experiences shaped a distinctive form of Sufi thought and established him as one of the prominent figures within the seventeenth-century network of ulama in the Indonesian archipelago (Azra, 2013; Hamid, 1994). Through his da'wah activities and scholarly works, Shaykh Yusuf contributed to the development of Islamic intellectual traditions by connecting Sufi teachings with the social life of Muslim communities.

In the history of Islam in the Indonesian archipelago, Sufism played an important role as a means of disseminating religious values and shaping the moral character of society. Various *ṭarīqas* developed and became integral to the religious life of Muslim communities. Among the figures who played a significant role in this development was Shaykh Yusuf al-Makassari, who was known for disseminating Sunni Sufi teachings that emphasized a balance between *sharī'a* and spirituality (Mustafa, 2011; Simuh, 2002).

A number of studies have examined Shaykh Yusuf al-Makassari from various perspectives. Hamid (1994) highlights Yusuf's role as a scholar, Sufi, and resistance figure, while Azra (2013) situates him within the intellectual networks connecting the Middle East and the Indonesian archipelago. Other studies have examined his contribution to the development of *ṭarīqas* and Islamic scholarly traditions (Bruinessen, 1995; Fathurahman, 2006). Nevertheless, studies that specifically connect Shaykh Yusuf's Sufi thought with the development of Islamic intellectual traditions in the Indonesian archipelago remain in need of further elaboration.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze Shaykh Yusuf al-Makassari's life and intellectual journey, examine the Sufi thought he developed, and investigate the influence of this thought on Islamic intellectual traditions in the Indonesian archipelago during the period 1626–1699.

METHOD

This study employs the historical research method with an intellectual social history approach. The historical method is used to reconstruct the life, intellectual journey, and development of Shaykh Yusuf al-Makassari's thought based on the available historical sources. The intellectual social history approach is adopted because it enables the researcher to examine the relationship between an intellectual figure's life experiences, scholarly networks, and ideas within a particular social and historical context (Abdurrahman, 2011).

The research data were obtained through library research utilizing a range of primary and secondary sources concerning the life, thought, works, and influence of Shaykh Yusuf al-Makassari on the development of Islam in the Indonesian archipelago. These sources include books, journal articles, manuscripts, and other scholarly works related to the intellectual history of Islam in the Indonesian archipelago (Kuntowijoyo, 2003).

The research process consisted of four stages: heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. The heuristic stage involved collecting various sources relevant to the research topic. The source criticism stage was conducted to

assess the authenticity, reliability, and credibility of the sources used. The collected data were then analyzed through a process of historical interpretation to develop a comprehensive understanding of Shaykh Yusuf's intellectual journey and the Sufi thought he developed. The final stage, historiography, involved systematically presenting the research findings in the form of a scholarly work (Abdurrahman, 2011).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Background and Intellectual Journey of Shaykh Yusuf al-Makassari

Shaykh Yusuf al-Makassari was born on July 3, 1626 CE, corresponding to 8 Shawwal 1035 AH, in the Gowa region of South Sulawesi. His childhood name was Muhammad Yusuf. He grew up within the Sultanate of Gowa, which at the time had developed into one of the major centers of Islamic propagation in eastern Nusantara. The religious environment of his family and the royal court exerted a significant influence on the formation of Shaykh Yusuf's character and intellectual orientation from an early age (Azra, 2013; Hamid, 1994).

Shaykh Yusuf's early education began with the study of the Qur'an, fiqh, and Arabic. One of the early teachers who played an important role in his foundational education was Daeng ri Atmanga. After completing his basic education, he continued his studies in Cikoang under Shaykh Jalaluddin al-Aidid, a renowned scholar of Hadrami descent. It was during this period that Shaykh Yusuf was introduced to various spiritual teachings and Sufi *ṭarīqa* traditions, which subsequently shaped his intellectual orientation toward Sufism (Hamid, 1994; Mustafa, 2011).

His profound thirst for knowledge encouraged Shaykh Yusuf to undertake a *riḥla ʿilmiyya* (scholarly journey) to various parts of the Islamic world. In 1644, he traveled to Banten, which at the time was one of the major centers of trade and Islamic scholarship in Nusantara. In Banten, Shaykh Yusuf established a close relationship with Pangeran Surya, who later became known as Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa. This relationship not only broadened his intellectual horizons but also strengthened his involvement in the social and political life of the Muslim community during the period (Azra, 2013).

From Banten, Shaykh Yusuf's intellectual journey continued to Aceh. There, he encountered a flourishing Sufi tradition and studied under Shaykh Nuruddin ar-Raniri. This experience had a significant influence on his understanding of the relationship between Sufism and *sharīʿa*. Shaykh Yusuf subsequently continued his journey to Yemen, Makkah, Madinah, and Damascus to deepen his knowledge of various Islamic disciplines, including hadith, fiqh, and Sufism (Azra, 2013; Fathurahman, 2008).

This extensive scholarly journey brought Shaykh Yusuf into contact with a number of prominent scholars of the Islamic world. Among the figures who exerted a significant influence on his intellectual development were Shaykh Nuruddin ar-Raniri, Shaykh Muhammad Abdul Baqi al-Mizjaji, Shaykh Ibrahim al-Kurani, and Shaykh Abu al-Barakat Ayyub al-Khalwati. Through these teachers, Shaykh Yusuf acquired an in-depth understanding of various Sufi *ṭarīqa* traditions while also gaining scholarly authorization and intellectual legitimacy that strengthened his position as a scholar and Sufi (Azra, 2013).

His studies at various Islamic centers of learning also enabled Shaykh Yusuf to establish an extensive transregional intellectual network. He became part of the seventeenth-century network of ulama that connected the Middle East with Nusantara. This network played an important role in the transmission of knowledge, the dissemination of *ṭarīqa* traditions, and the strengthening of Islamic intellectual traditions across various regions of Nusantara (Burhanudin, 2012).

The Sufi Thought of Shaykh Yusuf al-Makassari

The Sufi thought of Shaykh Yusuf al-Makassari occupies an important position in the development of Islamic intellectual traditions in Nusantara. The Sufism he developed was not oriented toward withdrawal from social life; rather, it served as a means of cultivating a Muslim personality capable of integrating spiritual and social dimensions in a balanced manner. In his view, Sufism constitutes a process of spiritual purification aimed at bringing human beings closer to Allah through the control of worldly desires and the cultivation of virtuous character (*akhlāq*) (Mustafa, 2011).

Shaykh Yusuf's Sufi orientation can be categorized as Sunni Sufism or neo-Sufism. This orientation emphasizes the harmony between spiritual experience and adherence to Islamic *sharī'a*. He rejected Sufi perspectives that neglected religious obligations and opposed spiritual practices that contradicted the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah. Accordingly, all spiritual activities must remain grounded in the framework of *sharī'a*, which constitutes the fundamental basis of a Muslim's life (Mustafa, 2011; Hamka, 1984).

One of the central ideas in Shaykh Yusuf's thought concerns the relationship between *sharī'a*, *ṭarīqa*, *ḥaqīqa*, and *ma'rifa*. These four concepts are understood as an integrated whole that cannot be separated. *Sharī'a* represents the outward dimension of religious rules and laws that constitutes the foundation of Muslim life. *Ṭarīqa* refers to the spiritual path through which the *sharī'a* is practiced at a deeper level. *Ḥaqīqa* denotes an inward understanding of truth attained through spiritual practice, while *ma'rifa* represents the highest level of spiritual realization, namely profound knowledge and recognition of Allah (Shaykh Yusuf al-Makassari, 1987).

According to Shaykh Yusuf, one cannot attain *ḥaqīqa* and *ma'rifa* without properly observing the *sharī'a*. He illustrates this relationship through the metaphor of a ship used to navigate the sea. *Sharī'a* is likened to the ship, *ṭarīqa* to the sea that must be traversed, *ḥaqīqa* to the pearl lying at the bottom of the sea, and *ma'rifa* to the process of attaining that pearl. This analogy demonstrates the fundamental position of *sharī'a* in the spiritual journey of a Muslim (Shaykh Yusuf al-Makassari, 1987).

In practical terms, Shaykh Yusuf's thought places particular emphasis on the concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs*, or purification of the soul. In his view, human beings are constantly engaged in a struggle between spiritual impulses and *nafs* or desires that may distance them from Allah. Therefore, a *sālik* (spiritual wayfarer) must engage in *mujāhada*, or earnest spiritual struggle, to discipline and control the *nafs*, while undertaking various spiritual exercises aimed at cultivating a virtuous personality (Hamka, 1984).

The principal method of spiritual purification is dhikr. Shaykh Yusuf placed considerable emphasis on the practice of dhikr as a means of drawing closer to Allah. He distinguished several levels of dhikr, including verbal dhikr, dhikr of the heart, and deeper forms of inward dhikr. Through the consistent practice of dhikr, a Muslim is expected to purify the heart from blameworthy qualities and develop a stronger spiritual consciousness (Shaykh Yusuf al-Makassari, 2007).

For Shaykh Yusuf, the success of Sufi practice is not measured solely by spiritual attainment but also by its transformative effects on everyday conduct. Sufism should produce virtuous character, including sincerity, patience, trust in Allah (tawakkul), and concern for others. Thus, spirituality functions not only as a means of drawing closer to Allah but also as a foundation for moral development and social ethics within the community (Hamid, 1994).

These ideas demonstrate that Shaykh Yusuf's Sufi thought possesses a moderate and constructive character. Sufism is not understood as an individualistic practice that entails withdrawal from social life, but rather as a moral force capable of contributing to the improvement of society. Accordingly, Shaykh Yusuf's Sufi teachings exerted a significant influence on the development of Islamic intellectual traditions in Nusantara.

The Influence of Shaykh Yusuf's Sufi Thought on Islamic Intellectual Traditions in Nusantara

The influence of Shaykh Yusuf al-Makassari's thought on Islamic intellectual traditions in Nusantara can be observed through the dissemination of Sufi teachings, the formation of networks of ulama, the development of Islamic scholarly traditions, and his contribution to the formation of the intellectual identity of Muslim communities in Nusantara. This influence was not confined to his lifetime but continued to develop in subsequent periods.

One of the principal factors supporting the dissemination of Shaykh Yusuf's thought was the network of students and ulama that emerged throughout his intellectual journey. After returning to Nusantara, he expanded his da'wa and educational activities across various regions. His students subsequently became agents in disseminating the Sufi teachings they had received from him. Even after Shaykh Yusuf was exiled by the Dutch colonial authorities to Sri Lanka and South Africa, the transmission of knowledge continued through the networks of his students and the Muslim communities he had cultivated (Azra, 2013).

In South Africa, Shaykh Yusuf is recognized as a figure who played an important role in the formation of the early Muslim community in the Cape Town region. Through his educational and da'wa activities, the Sufi teachings he developed were preserved and transmitted to subsequent generations. Meanwhile, in South Sulawesi, the Khalwatiyah Yusufiyah ṭarīqa developed through his students and became one of the influential Sufi orders in the religious life of local communities (Bruinessen, 1995).

In the development of Sufism in Nusantara, Shaykh Yusuf's thought made an important contribution to strengthening a Sufi tradition grounded in shari'a. He sought to integrate spiritual practices with the teachings of fiqh and hadith, thereby

establishing a balance between the outward and inward dimensions of Islam. This approach helped reinforce the position of Sufism within Muslim religious life while reducing the potential for tension between groups emphasizing sharī'a and those placing greater emphasis on mystical dimensions of Islam (Fathurahman, 2006).

Another significant contribution can be observed in the fields of literacy and Islamic scholarly traditions. Shaykh Yusuf produced a number of important works addressing Sufism, akhlāq, dhikr, and the spiritual journey. These works became references for ulama, santri, and Muslim communities across various regions of Nusantara. Their circulation enriched the local intellectual heritage of Islam and contributed to the development of religious writing traditions within both pesantren communities and Islamic kingdoms (Mustafa, 2011).

Shaykh Yusuf's thought also retains considerable relevance in the context of modern life. His conception of a balance between spirituality and social engagement demonstrates that Sufism need not be understood as an escape from the realities of everyday life. Rather, Sufism can serve as a source of moral values that encourages individuals to participate actively in society. This perspective is reflected in Shaykh Yusuf's own life, as he was known not only as a scholar and Sufi but also as a figure involved in the struggle against colonialism alongside Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa in Banten (Burhanudin, 2012).

Thus, the influence of Shaykh Yusuf al-Makassari's thought on Islamic intellectual traditions in Nusantara extended beyond the spiritual domain to encompass the development of Islamic education, networks of ulama, literary traditions, and the formation of social ethics among Muslim communities. These contributions establish Shaykh Yusuf as one of the significant figures in the intellectual history of Islam in Nusantara.

CONCLUSION

Shaykh Yusuf al-Makassari was one of the prominent ulama of Nusantara who made a significant contribution to the development of Islamic intellectual traditions in the seventeenth century. His upbringing within the Sultanate of Gowa and his intellectual journey to various centers of Islamic learning, including Banten, Aceh, Yemen, Makkah, Madinah, and Damascus, shaped a broad and profound scholarly outlook. Through the network of ulama he established, Shaykh Yusuf served as an important link between Islamic scholarly traditions in the Middle East and the development of Islam in Nusantara.

Shaykh Yusuf's Sufi thought emphasized the integration of sharī'a, ṭarīqa, ḥaqīqa, and ma'rifa as interconnected dimensions of a Muslim's spiritual journey. Sufism was not understood as a form of withdrawal from social life, but rather as a means of cultivating moral character and purifying the soul while remaining firmly grounded in the Qur'an and Sunnah. The Sunni Sufi orientation he developed demonstrates a balance between the spiritual dimension and the normative principles of Islamic teachings.

The influence of Shaykh Yusuf's thought on Islamic intellectual traditions in Nusantara can be observed in the dissemination of Sufi teachings, the development of

ulama networks, the expansion of *ṭarīqa* traditions, and the strengthening of religious literacy. His works and intellectual legacy became an important component in the development of Islamic education and the formation of the intellectual identity of Muslim communities in Nusantara. Shaykh Yusuf al-Makassari can therefore be regarded as a significant figure in the intellectual history of Islam in Nusantara, particularly for his contribution to integrating spirituality, morality, and scholarship within a coherent intellectual framework.

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