

INTERIM REPORT FROM THE FIELD

Tariqah Naqshabandi Bayanullah (TNB):

Localization of a Global Sufi Order in Lombok, Indonesia

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Tariqah Naqshabandi Bayanullah¹ (TNB) is a local branch of the global Naqshabandi order centered in Padamara, East Lombok, Indonesia. It has branches in cities on other Indonesian islands: Surabaya in East Java, and Makassar, Pare Pare, and Gowa in Sulawesi and on Sumbawa.² This report is based on interviews with the Syekh (Syiril Fakra', the current leader of the *tariqah* (Sufi Order), members of his family, and followers from Lombok, Sulawesi and Java; observation of his reception of a group of pilgrims; a religious talk (*pengajian*) in a village; and on an informal lesson delivered to several of his sons. It focuses on TNB's origins and history, the life story of Syekh Syiril Fakra', TNB's religious orientation, views of other Islamic groups and non-Islamic religions, and its socio-political orientation.

TNB is not associated with other branches of the Naqshbandi tariqah including those common in South Asia or the Naqshbandiyya Nazimiyya Sufi Order of America led by Syekh Hisham Kabbani that has devotees throughout Southeast Asia. It is a strictly local branch of the global order with a *silisilah* (line of spiritual transmission) that branches off from others three generations ago. It is based largely on oral tradition transmitted in the family of the founder of the tariqah, Syekh Syiril Bayanullah, who lived in the early to mid-nineteenth century. It is not currently possible to determine the exact dates of his birth or those of his son and successor Syekh Syiril Burhani. Syekh Syiril Fakra' is over ninety years old but does not know the year of his birth. TNB's primary text is a Sasak language palm leaf manuscript (*lontar*) referred to as *Markum*.³ Local leaders also have typescript versions, but these are not publically available. It does not rely on any Arabic language texts. It is also distinguished by references to Javanese traditions concerning Syekh Siti Jenar, a sixteenth century saint executed for teaching the doctrine of the unity of being (Arabic: *wahdat al-wujud*, Javanese: *manunggaling kawulo gusti*) in public settings (Massignon 1982, 287; Florida 1995; Soebardi 1975; Woodward 1989).⁴

Origins and History

TNB traces its origins to an unnamed Yemeni Naqshabandi saint who came to Lombok in the late eighteenth century (Ho 2006).⁵ According to oral tradition his teacher ordered him to journey to Lombok and find an orphan boy crying near a mosque. From here forward there are two versions of the story. According to one, the Yemeni traveler found the boy near Masjid Bayan Beleg in Bayan. This is said to be the oldest on the island. Bayan is often described as the gateway through which Islam came to Lombok. Another version states that he was found near Masjid al-Falah in Songkak. This is a seventeenth-century mosque and is also said to be one of oldest on the island and about which there are many legends. One is that the tree from which the central post was cut was so strong that when it was still a sapling a cow tried, but failed to bite it in half. Another is that it was built by a student of the Javanese *wali* (saint) Sunan Kalijaga who was instrumental in bringing Islam to Java (Sunyoto 2014). His students are said to have brought Islam to many parts of Indonesia. Another states that it was not built by humans: It rose from the ground like a tree or blew in on the wind from East Java.

All versions of the story link the establishment of the new branch of TNB to historically and symbolically important sites or persons. This grounds the new tariqah in tradition, helping to establish it as a distinctively Lombok form of Sufism. Major rituals are conducted at the graves of Syekh Syiril Bayanullah and his successors. In this respect TNB is what Voll and Kazua (“Sufism”) refer to as a shrine tariqah, i.e., one centered on a saint’s grave.

The Yemeni saint adopted the orphan, initiated him into the Naqshabandi Tariqah and designated him as his successor with the name Syekh Syiril Bayanullah. He is said to have acquired great mystical powers. He could appear in several places at the same time, speak and read Arabic without formal instruction, and is said to have traveled to Mecca in spiritual (*batin*), but not physical form and had the power to predict the future.

The TNB *silsilah* (chain of spiritual transmission) begins with the Prophet Muhammad, passing, as do all Naqshabandi *salasil*, through Abu Bakr the first Caliph and Baha’-ud-Din Naqshband Bukhari (1318–1389). From there it leads to the Yemeni Syekh. Syekh Fakra’ could not provide further details. It is, therefore, not possible to determine from which branch of the Naqshabandi TNB he descends. TNB is highly unusual because it is rural and peasant based, while throughout the nineteenth century the Naqshabandi Tariqah was primarily an elite movement (Van Bruinessen 1990). Villagers were more strongly attracted to the Qadiriyyah wa Naqshabandiyyah order formed by the fusion of the Naqshabandi and Qadiriyyah by Syekh Ahmad Khatib ibn ‘Abd Al-Ghaffar (1803–1875) in 1878 (Van Bruinessen 1992). It is now the largest

and most influential Sufi order in Indonesia. Consequently many Indonesians trace spiritual descent from both Baha-ud-Din Naqshband and Muhyidin Abdul Qadir al-Jilani (1077–1166) the founder of the Qadiriyyah order. Syekh Fakra' was emphatic that he is not affiliated with this tariqah, and preserves the "true" Naqsabandiyah teachings.

Shaykh Syiril Fakra'

Syekh Syiril Fakra', the current leader of TBN, is more than ninety years old. He is in good health, mentally alert and speaks articulately on religious and other topics. He does not know Arabic, but is fluent in Indonesian as well as his native Sasak. He knows many Arabic *do'a* and *zikr* (prayers and ritual mentioning of Allah's name) and can recite portions of the Qur'an from memory. He knows some Dutch and Japanese. He attended a local *Sekolah Rakyat* (primary school) during the Dutch colonial era but did not study at a *pesantren* (traditional Islamic boarding school). He received religious instruction entirely from his father. He has four wives, twenty-one children and more than fifty grandchildren. His children self-identify as "child number X from wife number Y." He travels extensively in Lombok, Sulawesi, and Java. He is always accompanied by one of his sons.

Syekh Syiril Fakra' is an absolute spiritual authority for those within the tariqah. His followers are extremely devoted regarding him as a source of both authority and blessing (*barakah*). He is not an *alim* (Muslim scholar) but followers come to him for *fatawa* (legal opinions). One stated: "If, as some people say, he goes to hell, at least I will be with him." He appoints regional and local leaders based on his perception of their spiritual progress. He also ascertains and validates the progress of tariqah members on the spiritual path. Progress is publically acknowledged at gatherings in which members request guidance and advice on their spiritual progress and other matters. He also distributes *barakah* to his followers in the form of holy water. Visitors bring bottles of water when they come to his house. They hand the bottle to him and he spits into it and returns it.⁶ At *pengajian* he prepares many liters of it that are distributed to the entire community.

Despite his advanced age Syekh Fakra' has not designated a successor. This will not be known until after his death when, it is believed, one of his sons or grandsons will display spiritual signs of having been chosen by Allah to lead the tariqah.

Religious Profile

TNB describes itself as being a "*suluk tariqah*." The literal meaning of the term *suluk* is path. In a religious sense it refers to the mystical path leading to direct knowledge and experience of Allah. It is not currently possible to determine



Figure 1. Syekh Syiril Fakhra' Receiving Followers. Photo by author.

the degree to which TNB's religious profile corresponds with those of other branches of the Naqshbandi Tariqah. This will require in-depth analysis of the *Markum* and/or themes in religious talks (*pengajian*).

One of the Syekh's children described the TNB as being similar to Javanese *kebatinan* movements. These are mystical movements based on diverse Muslim teachings and traditions that circulate widely in Javanese and other Indonesian societies (Peacock 1986). Another described it as being, in some ways, similar to the Sufism of the fifteenth century Javanese saint Siti Jenar, who was executed for publically teaching the monistic doctrine of *wahdat ul-wujud* (unity of being). He explained that for this reason it was necessary to be careful about speaking too openly about TNB's mystical teachings because to do so "might be dangerous."

What follows is a description of TNB's religious profile based on interviews with the syekh and some of his children and followers:

- **Metaphysics** TNB is based on an understanding of *tauhid* (unity of Allah) resembling Ibn al-'Arabi's teaching of *wahdat al-wujud* (the unity of being) which identifies the human soul with the divine essence (*zat*). The goal of the mystical path is to discover/realize the presence of the true self (*mencari jati diri sebenarnya*) that is *zat Allah*. Another formulation is to discover the *Keesaan Allah* (oneness of Allah/*tauhid*) within us. One of the Syekh's children stated that this is a secret (*rahasia*) teaching and that it could be dangerous to speak of it in public because

some people think it is deviant (*sesat*) (Chittick 1994).⁸ In a lesson for his sons Syekh Fakra' stated:

Allah does not have place or form, but it is obligatory to search for him. Some people say that he can be found in the sky above the seven heavens, but the Qur'an says: "Allah is closer to you than the vein in your neck." Allah can be found in the hearts of the faithful (*mukmin*). They are the *Baitullah* (house of Allah). Whoever knows himself knows Allah.⁷ Some people get stressed looking for Allah, but all that you need to do is look into yourself. Where is Allah? How can you even ask that? Don't look in the sky. Look into yourself."

- **Mystical Practice and the Mystical Path** Self-realization is accomplished by overcoming passion (Indonesian: *nafsu*, Arabic *nafs*) that bind us to worldly (*dunia*) reality. TNB teaches that there are four types of *nafsu* (see Schimmel 122):

Nafsu Amarah — Anger. Syekh Fakra' associates *nafsu amarah* with evil. He stated: "People who are dominated by this kind of *nafsu* love evil and hate good. This is what drives them to kill, steal, and to use black magic." *Nafsu amarah* is the domain of Iblis, the Devil. *Shari'ah* is the way to overcome it.

Nafsu Lawamah — Greed. Syekh Fakra' explained that people dominated by this type of *nafsu* want to do good things including praying and fasting. They are, however, motivated by desire for personal gain. This can be either material, a quest for power, or be a concern with going to heaven. It causes egotism. *Nafsu Lawamah* is the domain of *jinn*. It can be overcome with performing the *tariqah*.

Nafsu Mutmainah — Peacefulness. This is associated with *ikhlas* (sincerity), praying, and practicing other *'ibadah* (ritual) only for the sake of Allah without any concern for personal benefit. It is not being concerned about heaven and hell. It is the domain of angels.

Nafsu Kamila — Perfection. This state is associated with knowing Allah (*makrifat*). It is the domain of prophets.

One of the syekh's daughters explained that Allah likes *Nafsu Mutmainah* and *Nafsu Kamila* but not *Nafsu Amarah* and *Nafsu Lawamah*. She continued that we are obligated to search for *nafsu benar* (the true *nafsu*). The mystical path begins with *nafsu amarah* and leads to *nafsu kamila*. It is also



Figure 2. Women are Full Participants in the Tariqah. Photo by author.

a progression through four stages: *Shari'a*, *Tarekat*, *Makrifat* and *Hakekat*. One of the syekh's sons explained that this was similar to the progression in the educational system from elementary to graduate school.

- **Textuality** — TNB maintains that *Markum* contains the essence of the Qur'an. In *pengajian*, Syekh Syiril Fakra' reads and explains portions of this text in a combination of Sasak and Indonesian. TNB does not stress the memorization or recitation of the Qur'an or study of classical Arabic texts. Syekh Fakra' explained that Arabic, Sasak, and Indonesian are the same and that Allah understands all languages. He also stressed that *ilham* (inspiration) is a better source of religious knowledge than books because it comes directly from Allah. He said: "You can read many books, and even if you understand them, not know Allah."
- **Shari'a** — One of the syekh's children stated that TNB is "within *Shari'a*." The meaning of *Shari'a* is restricted to *'ibadah* (ritual), life cycle rituals such as marriage and funerals and matters of *halal* and *haram*. TNB followers are not as devoted to prayer (*shalat*) as many other Sasak Muslims. At an afternoon/evening gathering some broke for the *Maghrib* and *'Isya* prayers. Syekh Fakra' and most others did not. One explained that prayer takes many forms and that ideally we should pray constantly and that even "*ngopi*" (drinking coffee) can be

prayer. Syekh Fakra' was critical of prayer (*shalat*) that is not performed with the correct intention. He said; "If you pray and are only looking for blessings (*pahala*) and worldly desires, it does not matter." One of his children stated: "*Shalat* without *tariqah* is empty (*kosong*). *Tariqah* without *shalat* is impossible." Life cycle rituals are as much a part of Sasak culture as they are of Islam. TNB is deeply engaged with Sasak culture and custom (*adat*). They do not follow patrilineally biased *Shari'a* inheritance rules. Property is divided equally among male and female heirs because "gender is on the surface, in a *batin* (spiritual) way we are all the same."

- **Zikr** — Syekh Fakra' is critical of the long *zikr* used by many Muslims and of the traditional practices of reciting *shalawat* and *do'a*. He thinks that there is no point to long *zikr* such as repetition of "*la ilaha illa'llah*" because: "We all know that." When a mosque near his house began broadcasting the popular *Shalawat Badar* over loudspeakers he commented: "That is just a recording and they probably don't know what it means. The real *shalawat* is in your heart." TNB uses only a short *zikr* "*Allah hu*" which should come "from the heart." He was especially critical of the Qadiriyyah-Naqshabandi *tariqah* on this point. Here TNB is in keeping with more general Naqshabandi practice.
- **Pesantren** — Very few children from TNB families study at *pesantren*. None of Syekh Syiril Fakra's children have. They have all studied at government schools. Some have attended Indonesian public universities. Religious education is conducted on an informal basis within the TNB community, by local leaders or by the Syekh himself. One of his children explained that *pesantren* education was not important because of its emphasis on *fiqh* (Islamic law). Unlike most other Indonesian Muslim religious leaders, Syekh Fakra' does not have any *kitab kunning* (classical Arabic Islamic texts) in his house.
- **Keramat and Do'a** — TNB is not focused on miracles or pilgrimage to graves and other holy (*keramat*) places other than the graves of its own syekhs. Several members explained that stories of miraculous events "are not rational" and that most including those concerning the history of Masjid al-Falah are only mythology. Syekh Fakra' and TNB also discourage *do'a* (supplications) asking for worldly success, although several of his children stated that *do'a* for health are acceptable. This is in keeping with the *tariqah's* strong focus on the quest for knowledge and experience of Allah to the exclusion of all else.
- **Dakwah** — TNB relies almost exclusively on *pengajian* and word of mouth transmission to spread its message. *Pengajian* that are held in villages



Figure 3. Food Prepared by Women of the Tariqah and Blessed by Syekh Fakra'. Photo by author.

often attract people who are initially merely curious and who are subsequently attracted by the syekh's charisma. They routinely attract several hundred people. Some followers mention that they have sought out Syekh Fakra' after he appeared to them in dreams. He typically gives people new names when they join the *tarekat*. TNB does not engage in mediated *dakwah*. It does not publish books or magazines and does not have an Internet or social media presence.

- **Holy Days** — The holy days TBN values most highly are different from those of many other Indonesian Muslims. The two 'uyud, 'Id al-Fitri at the end of *Ramadan* and 'Id al-Adha, the feast of sacrifice at the conclusion of the *Haj*, are not occasions for major celebrations. *Isra Mi'raj*, which commemorates the Prophet Muhammad's night journey from Mecca to Jerusalem, his ascent to heaven and return to Mecca, *Maulid al-Nabi*, which commemorates the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, and the *haul* commemorating the anniversary of the death of Syekh Syiril Bayanullah are more important. On these occasions thousands of TNB followers visit his grave and that of his son and successor Syekh Syiril Burhani in Padamara. It has not yet been possible to observe these events.
- **Interfaith Relations** — Syekh Fakra' explained that all religions including Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity have the same goal, but follow

different paths to reach it. One of his sons explained that it is impossible to know about a person's moral and ethical status from the religion that she or he follows and that there are Hindus who are more ethical than many Muslims. He explained that "Islam is peace (*selamat*) and this can come from any religion." Hindus sometimes visit Syekh Fakra' seeking blessing. TNB does not make active efforts to convert people of other faiths.

- **Intra-Islamic Relations** — TNB is not affiliated with any Lombok or nationally based Muslim organizations. Syekh Fakra' and several of his children were critical of other Muslim groups, including Nahdlatul Ulama and Nahdlatul Wathan for being excessively concerned about heaven, hell, and blessing, and about using religion to seek wealth and status. Syekh Fakra' explained: "How can they know about heaven and hell? Have they been there? Maybe even the angels don't know. Only Allah can know." He was also very critical of TV preachers. He stated that: "Many of them are not sincere, are filled with sin (*dosa*). They are more interested in sex, narcotics, and money than they are in Allah." He also criticized other Muslim groups for being insufficiently open to individual experience. One of his daughters described Salafism as a *tariqah* that stopped at the level of *Shari'a* and stated that Salafis need to find a more advanced one. TNB does not approve of the Ahmadiyah movement because it teaches that there was a prophet after Muhammad. One of the syekh's sons said that many people who follow "*gerakan keras*" (harsh groups) are actually only "identity card Muslims." Despite these critical attitudes, TNB does not engage in *takfir*. Some other Muslims in Lombok have accused TNB of being deviant (*sesat*), crazy (*gila*), and even of being linked to sorcery and black magic (*sihir, ilmu gelap*). Syekh Fakra' vehemently denied these accusations.

Social-Political Profile

TNB is exceptional because it is non-political and discourages engagement with worldly affairs. This is motivated by the teaching "we are dirty (*kotor*) because of the world (*dunia*)," and the belief that "death before death" and "death to the world" are elements of the mystical path. Syekh Fakra' said: "It is easy to find wealth and power and also easy to lose them. You never lose 'ilmu (religious knowledge)."

Syekh Fakra' lives very simply in a sparsely furnished house in a compound built by his grandfather. There are old couches in the front reception room but only straw mats and inexpensive carpets in other rooms. His son's house that is located near the TNB grave complex is similar. According to one of his

children, Syekh Fakra' does not like to sit on expensive carpets. He does not own a car. Several of his children and followers noted that he could be very rich because of his prestige but that he chooses not to be.

He has not encouraged his children to pursue careers that would lead to wealth and status and few have done so. Only one is a government employee—a position that brings economic security and status in rural Indonesian communities. This reflects TNB's focus on the search for Allah and its teaching that the world is dirty (*kotor*) and dominated by *nafsu*.

In Lombok, Muslim leaders are powerful political figures. The democratic transition of 1998 increased their political influence when candidates began to come to them seeking endorsements in return for donations. Syekh Fakra' does not endorse candidates or accept donations. He questions how spiritual political 'ulama' are and if they actually link law and mysticism (*fiqh* and *tasawwuf*). He strongly opposes religious/political violence stating that: "ISIS and suicide bombers are not Muslims. How can these people who kill, rape, and do other evil things call themselves Muslims?" This is an exception to his general principle of rejecting *takfir*.

Conclusions

TNB is a highly localized branch of the global Naqshabandi Tariqah. It is more than a century old and cannot be described as a response to modernity. Nor is it a product of national level religious debates that have characterized Indonesian Islam since the late colonial era. It is very consistent in attempts to interpret recent trends including the politicization of Islam and the emergence of Salafism and violent extremism in terms of its core teachings, especially the quest for discovering Allah within oneself and the rejection of worldly ambitions. To fully explore the religious and social dimensions of TNB will require additional fieldwork.

End Notes

¹The more universal spelling of the order's name, Naqshbandi, is spelled here "Naqshabandi" with a middle "a" to reflect local pronunciation and spelling. The variation in local spelling applies to several terms and names in this report. In most cases, the standard transliteration is easily recognized in the spelling and pronunciation of the local Indonesian variant.

²For an overview of the Naqshbandi order see: Weismann I. 2007.

³Sasak is the indigenous language of Lombok.

⁴Siti Jenar is often referred to as the Javanese al-Hallaj, the Persian Sufi executed in 922, for making similar pronouncements. Massignon considered him to be among al-Hallaj's "survivors."

⁵There were well-established relationships between Sufis and other Muslim scholars in Yemen and what is now Indonesia at this time.

⁶This is a common practice in Indonesia.

⁷These are among the most common Sufi aphorisms about closeness to Allah and are shared by many Sufi tariqahs and by Indonesian Muslim mystics not affiliated with tariqahs.

⁸This doctrine has long been the topic of contentious debate in Naqshabandi and other Sufi circles.

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