

Women, Urban Sufism, And Religious Expression The Narrative Of The Identity Of The Taklimassemblyaz-Zahra Sukoharjo Central Java Indonesia

Mibtadin¹, Lilis Patimah², Zainal Habib³, Rosidin⁴

¹UNS Surakarta, mibtadianisahmad@staff.uns.ac.id

²UNU Surakarta, lilispatimah74@gmail.com

³UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, zainalhabib77@gmail.com

⁴The Research Centre of Harmony and Religious Moderation, National Research and Innovation Agency, Indonesia, nazalnifa@yahoo.co.id

Abstract

Taklim assembly Az-Zahra as an urban Sufism movement has become an interesting phenomenon, appearing amid the strengthening of the Islamism movement in Sukoharjo. Az-Zahra became a medium to express the moderate religion of Aswaja an-Nahdliyah. How is the religious expression developed by Az-Zahra. This study uses a sociological approach to religion that places religion as social behaviour. Descriptive qualitative research, collecting data through observation of Az-Zahra activities. In-depth interviews with leaders and congregations of Az-Zahra, and recorded documents regarding the history and activities of Az-Zahra. Data analysis using an interactive analysis model includes data reduction, data delivery, and conclusions. The presence of Az-Zahra in the public space of Sukoharjo as a cultural movement for the formation of religious discourse and preserving the traditions inherited by previous scholars. Az-Zahra develops the main values in the form of a religious pattern that is moderate, tolerant, respects plurality, and stays away from fanaticism. This value counters the narrative of the Islamism movement that carries the ideology of violence in Sukoharjo. Az-Zahra has an important role in empowering the congregation through various religious activities which are then transformed into the wider community. Az-Zahra carries moderate Islam that puts forward the principles of tawassuth, tawazun, and ta'adulas a friendly form of Islam that is typical of Nusantara Islam.

Keywords: MT Az-Zahra, Religious Expression, Women, Urban Sufism, Moderate Islam

Preliminary

After the 1998 reform, there was a rapid increase in the social, political, and religious activities of Muslims in Indonesia. One of them is the phenomenon of the spiritual awakening of urban communities. The public is always treated to religious activities, either directly or through electronic medicine and social

media. Such as Arifin Ilham with Ad-Dzikra, Aa Gym with hearth management, Yusuf Mansur through the magic of giving, Jefri al-Bukhari with his distinctive voice, Haryono with his alternative dhikr, and others are not foreign to the people of Indonesia. They are figures who have a great influence on the spiritual development of urban communities. Among academics, Amin Syukur, with his

Sufism consultations, received a good response from the community. The presence of dhikr and prayer assemblies, alternative medicine, and Sufism consultations became a new phenomenon for the revival of the spirituality of urban communities known as urban Sufism. The religious activities above become a medium of da'wa for urban communities. They use traditional religious concepts that are packaged with a new delivery model (Jamil, 2007).

The proliferation of urban Sufism is not limited to big cities such as Jakarta, Surabaya, and Bandung, but also spreads to various areas such as the great Solo, including Sukoharjo. Sukoharjo is well-known as a pluralistic region and a district that has produced many Islamism activists. Sukoharjo became famous because of the Al-Mukmin Ngruki Islamic Boarding School. In Sukoharjo also rapidly growing religious organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Muhammadiyah, Lembaga Dakwah Islam Indonesia (LDII), Majelis Taklim Alquran (MTA), Salafi, Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI), Jamaah Ansar Tauhid (JAT), Laskar groups, Jamaah Anshar Syariah (JAS), taklim assembly Al-Hidayah, the al-Madinah community, and the many recitation councils that thrive in this district (Aijudin, 2008).

One of the phenomenal taklim assembly in Sukoharjo is Az-Zahra. This taklim assembly was adored by Mrs. Nyai Lilis Patimah, also the caretaker of the Khalifatullah Singo Ludi Islamic Boarding School, which was established in 2018 with hundreds of worshipers spread across in Mojolaban and its surroundings. Az-Zahra's routine activities are monthly recitations, pilgrimages to the guardian's grave, Khatmil Qur'an, and reading of Barzanji's birthday, prayers, and others at the Khalifatullah Singo Ludi Islamic

Boarding School Mojolaban. As an taklim assembly as well as urban sufism, Az-Zahra became an interesting phenomenon, because Sukoharjo is known as an area that gave rise to the Islamism movement. Az-Zahra was present during a wave of Islamism that was symptomatic in Sukoharjo. Az-Zahra is also a medium to represent the togetherness of religious groups who have the Islamic understanding of Aswaja an-Nahdliyah in Sukoharjo. The Nadliyin, abangan, and other communities merged into one in Az-Zahra. With the principles of tawazun, tasamuh, and ta'adul, the congregation of Az-Zahra has a moderate, tolerant, and plural religious attitude.

In the sociology of religion, the religious movement of Az-Zahra is interesting to study more deeply because Sukoharjo is a district that is famous for the emergence of Islamism movements, sects, and groups. Az-Zahra was present amid strong Islamic radicalization in Sukoharjo (Fanani, 2002), indirectly giving colour in expressing religious spirituality based on local wisdom, countering narrative and ideology, and promoting religious moderation. Traditional and abangan Islamic circles merged into one in the Az-Zahra forum. As a social movement, the existence of MT Az-Zahra goes hand in hand with other urban Sufism such as Hubbun Nabi led by KH Abdullah Faishol, Al-Hidayah under ustadz Sony's care, all urban Sufism represents Islamic identity and nationality in the activities held.

Az-Zahra as urban sufism in the perspective of the sociology of religion plays a role in strengthening the religious education of the Sukoharjo community, especially mothers through religious activities to give Islamic colour through tausyiah, diplomas, wirid, dhikr, other sufistic practices, and getting closer to God (taqarub ila Allah) so that the congregation

is protected from radicalism, violence in the name of religion, and terrorism that can threaten national unity. In addition, Az-Zahra is a medium for character building and good character based on Aswaja as manhja al-fikr prioritizing the values of tawassuth, tasamuh, adan tawazunas well as having national insight by fostering a sense of love for the homeland that puts forward the principle of hubbul wathon minal iman.

Az-Zahra has a major contribution in developing human resources for the congregation as well as moderate religious behaviour. Its contribution is the process of nation character building through the expansion of access to and equitable distribution of religious education for mothers. Az-Zahra becomes a bulwark in maintaining national and religious integrity by placing morals as the foundation of social life that teaches patience, compassion, and sincerity. Az-Zahra places Islam as a social ethic, which is a form of concern for morality for the sake of creating social harmony. Az-Zahra became a medium for character building carried out through empowering the spirituality of urban communities. In every religious activity, Az-Zahra emphasizes the two mandates it carries, namely the mandate of al-diniyyah and wathoniyyah. The existence of Az-Zahra tries to build a civilized society based on Islamic and Indonesian values. Az-Zahra is an urban Sufism managed by Muslim women and plays a role in building the empowerment of Sukoharjo women both socially, economically, culturally, and religiously because they are the pillars of the state ('imadul bilad). Departing from the above background, this article explores how the narrative of Az-Zahra's identity and the religious expression of its congregations through activities carried out from the perspective of the sociology of religion.

Method

Research on Az-Zahra Mojolaban Sukoharjo is descriptive qualitative research. It is expected to be able to reveal the meaning that exists from the thoughts and actions of the object of research (Strauss and Corbin, 2007). For the delivery to be more open and natural, it is presented with an analytical descriptive model. Data collection was carried out in three ways (Sutopo, 1998): first, direct observation on the activities of Az-Zahra. Second, in-depth interviews with leaders, congregations, and interested parties with Az-Zahra. Third, record documents regarding the history, movements, and implications of Az-Zahra. Data analysis through interactive analysis model includes data reduction, data delivery, and concluding (Saidi, 2004; Faishol, 2007). The conclusions obtained were tested for truth and validity in two ways, namely data triangulation and informant review.

This study uses a sociological approach to religion, where religion is seen as an act and a social fact, which is something real, observable that influences people's behaviour (Sodik, 2006). Religion becomes part of the real-life of its adherents which can be seen in their daily lives, ideas, activities, and works (Wach, 1943). Religion is seen as a belief system that is embodied in certain social behaviours (Tischler, 1990, Connolly, 2020). The sociological approach of religion studies the social aspects of religion (Suprayoga, et al, 2003), where religion is seen as a belief system that is manifested in certain social behaviours (Kahmad, 2002). Religion is related to human experience, both as individuals and as groups so that every behaviour that is played is always related to the belief system of the religious teachings he adheres to. Individual and social behaviour

is driven by internal forces based on previously internalized religious values. Subjective religion can be objectified in a variety of expressions that have a certain structure that can be understood (Wach, 1943). The esoteric dimension of religion cannot stand alone but is related to other dimensions outside of itself, namely the social structure where a belief is manifested by its adherents in the practice of everyday life (Kahmad, 2002).

Discussion

Az-Zahra, Public Space, and Formation of Religious Discourse

Sukoharjo Regency together with Wonogiri, Klaten, Boyolali, Sragen, and Karanganyar are buffer areas for Surakarta, in terms of social, economic, cultural, and religious aspects. Sukoharjo became a fertile "field" for Islamism marked by the number of Islamic boarding schools, educational institutions, and halaqah to sow intolerant ideologies. Sukoharjo there are various Islamic boarding school, there are 54 Islamic boarding school with different ideologies, educational styles, and characters. This makes Sukoharjo's Islamic colour very diverse, namely NU, Muhammadiyah, Wahhabi, and Salafi. Some of these Islamic boarding schools are classified as large Islamic boarding school and have a strong influence in the formation of Islamic discourse in the Sukoharjo community such as Al-Mukmin, Al-Ukhuwah, Darul Hijrah, and Imam Syuhada. The existence of pesantren provides support for the socio-religious movement of the Islamism group in Sukoharjo (Mibtadin, 2018b).

The presence of Islam in public spaces is seen as the spread of Islamic symbols and values in society by utilizing open access. Public space, whether real or virtual, is used together with the

community to communicate and negotiate ideas and interests, including religious interests (Hardiman, 2009). Discourse on religion in the public sphere contains a political dimension, where various social forces try to publicly articulate their interests to the state (Habermas, 1991). An increasingly democratic public space where the symbol of Islam comes with a variety of expressions and orientations, outside the ideological and political face, Az-Zahra was born. The appearance of Az-Zahra in the public space of Sukoharjo became a counterweight to the movement as well as a counter to the discourse of the Islamism movement that dominated religious discourse in the community. The presence of Islamism in the public sphere is not directly considered a threat to democracy itself. Their existence is not monolithic, but plural-like politics in all civilizations (Hefner, 2000). Az-Zahra is here to articulate Islam amid globalization. If Islam is not articulated in the public sphere, it is contrary to the value of democracy itself (Hasan et al., 2011).

Az-Zahra was originally initiated by KH Agung Syuhodo who is the founder of the Khalifatullah Singo Ludi Islamic Boarding School who wanted a continuous study of the book. This wish has not been realized until his death on August 26, 2017. Nyai Hj Lilis Fatimah as a wife and caretaker of the Islamic boarding school after the death of her husband, realized this hope starting with the taklim assembly on February 2, 2018 under the name Az-Zahra. This taklim assembly completes the existence of the Islamic boarding school after 17 years of existence was quickly recognized by several Muslim figures in Soloraya because KH Agung Syuhodo was a preacher. Several Muslimat figures began to join, including Nyai Maskuri and Hj Edi, NU Surakarta, Hj Marni, Muslimat NU Bekonang, even the advisor to this MT was

originally Hj Sujiatmi Notomiharjo, mother of President Joko Widodo. This taklim assembly is committed to empowering the congregation so that in terms of *ubudiyah* it is following *sharia* to achieve the pleasure of Allah SWT. Az-Zahra tries to balance *habl min Allah* and *habl min nass* to make Islam a *rahmatan li'alam* towards the salvation of the world and the hereafter.

For Az-Zahra, public space is understood as a place for discourse and collective action on religious freedom. The public sphere requires religion because, without it, the public sphere seems "naked" of morality and the meaning of life. In many places, the revival of religion in the public sphere is compatible with democracy and civic politics (Hasan et al., 2011). Az-Zahra encourages Islam to enter deep into the public sphere so that it can access that space properly so as not to threaten pluralism, democracy, and society. The presence of Az-Zahra in the public space of Sukoharjo is a form of religious expression, both symbols, identity, and Islamic values in society by taking advantage of open political opportunities. The open space for contestation does not get the appreciation of mainstream Islamic groups by consolidating themselves in managing strategies. On the other hand, openness is well utilized by the Islamism group to show force and push the ideological agenda amid the plurality of national life. As a result, the sense of moderate nationalism and religiosity began to be marginalized by the strengthening of religious radicalism in the public sphere.

Socio-religious reality influenced the emergence of Az-Zahra, namely a form of response to the problems of social, Islamic, and national reality in Sukoharjo and its surroundings. In terms of religious discourse, Az-Zahra offers a soft humanist approach as a form of response to the

diversity of Islamist groups that prioritize violence, intolerance, and dryness from spirituality. This council assessed that the existence of NU's traditional Islam was threatened, especially religious practices such as *shalawat*, the birthday of the Prophet (*maulid ar-rasul*), *yassinan*, *tahlilan*, were sued and even tried to be suppressed by Islamism groups. Since its appearance in the public space in 2018, Az-Zahra has intensively held religious movements that are guarding the tradition such as periodic visits to the graves of the guardians, *shalawatan*, *tahlilan*, *khotmil Alquran*, recitations, and other cultural activities. According to Wictorowicz, a movement with a set of social movement agents has certain political goals. They are rational actors, respond to stimuli, and form the same movements as other actors in the world (Wictorowicz, 2012).

The dynamic development of Az-Zahra is due to the existence of social capital such as Islamic boarding school culture, trust, authority owned by Hj Lilis, KH Agung Syuhodo, *majlis* administrators, and congregations. The main objective of Az-Zahra is the strengthening of female *ulama* as well as the formation of moderate religious discourse to stem the rate of ideological development of Islamism groups in Sukoharjo. Az-Zahra as an institution has become a medium for framing moderate religious discourse used by Lilis and mainstream groups to transform and mobilize potential into actual mobilization through religious practices in convincing the congregation and the wider community so that they are encouraged to make changes. The framing process is a conscious effort to form a common understanding of the world and themselves for socio-religious change in society. Framing aims to struggle for discourse and meaning in society

(Mibtadin, 2018a). Framing is done to convey discourse to the public, both through the media and other socialization spaces that can make people involved in the movement (Situmorang, 2007).

Az-Zahra in the formation of moderate, tolerant, and dialogical Islamic discourses uses a lecture/tausyah approach, studies of fikih and hadith books, recitations, leaflets, distribution of practices/diplomas, and reading of prayers and khotmil Alquran, as well as other framing media. This was done by Az-Zahra as a strategy to gain support from mainstream Islamic groups, especially NU. Az-Zahra offers religious moderation as a rational choice amidst the strengthening of Islamism in Sukoharjo. The existence of this assembly has become social groups that fill Sukoharjo's public space to voice moderate religious discourse. In the public sphere, religious discourses fight each other to dominate each other, so framing is a form of social negotiation with other social groups in formulating the expected social order, namely the prosperous Sukoharjo community with a moderate religious pattern. Religious activities with the Islamic Nusantara style model of Az-Zahra are a form of preserving the traditions inherited by Walisongo, in addition to the anxiety of several local figures on amaliyah and NU traditions which are considered as *laisa minal Islam* by Islamism groups. Since its inception, Az-Zahra has been in the house of the Khalifatullah Singo Ludiro Islamic Boarding School which is the residence of Lilis Fatimah. The monthly recitation activities and other religious spirituality of Az-Zahra were attended by hundreds of worshippers, especially Muslim women. This is proof of the role of "bu nyai" (mother nyai) Lilis Fatimah as a magnet so important in empowering her congregation.

The presence of Az-Zahra in public spaces is to offer *Islam rahmatan lil 'alamin* by forming religious discourses through monthly recitations, habituation of dhuha prayers, pilgrimages to the grave, Islamic holidays, khotmil Alquran, dhikr and shalawat, as well as strengthening the congregation's socio-economic network. This is in line with Az-Zahra's vision, which is to become a centre for the study of science, whether religious or general, based on the Qur'an, Hadith, Ijma', and Qiyas for Muslim women to become women who believe, fear, have the knowledge and have the noble character become a qualified Muslim. Although there are many similar taklim assembly in Sukoharjo, Az-Zahra has its own identity that distinguishes it from the others. Az-Zahra in terms of membership is open and fluid, for all Muslim women as long as they have an interest in maintaining ancestral traditions and understanding Aswaja Islam. Because the existence of Az-Zahra amid the currents of puritanism and the violent ideology of Islamism groups that offer textual normative religion and is not friendly to local culture. Through its religious activities, Az-Zahra offers a new colour in religion, namely spirituality wrapped in local wisdom.

Az-Zahra in the theory of social movements appearing in the public sphere is principally driven by three things, resources (resources), motivation, and the political environment (Mibtadin, 2017). In social movements these resources can be in the form of material, mass media, legitimacy, authority, identity, and institutional (Tarrow, 1998). Az-Zahra has material resources in the form of pilgrims with all their potential, both economic, social, cultural, religious, and political. On the other hand, the existence of the Khalifatullah Singo Ludiro Islamic Boarding School and several other Islamic

boarding school with Aswaja NU ideology scattered in Sukoharjo such as Darul Hikmah Gatak, Darussalam Kartasura, Darul Ikhsan Polokarto, Al-Fattah Kartasura, PPTQ Manik Mulya Tanggul Kartasura, and Al-Muayyad Windan became media for framing in campaigning for moderate Islamic discourse. Meanwhile, the non-material resources in the form of the authority of "mother nyai" owned by Lilis Fatimah became a node that was able to move the strength of her congregation to carry out cultural resistance as a form of counter ideology to the Islamism group.

Az-Zahra with several well-known local figures such as Hj Sujatmi, Nyai HJ Maskuri, HJ Lilis, and the name KH Agung Syuhodo (late) through their authority were able to encourage the growth of moderate religious awareness of their congregations. The existence of Lilis Fatimah as a leading figure "women cleric" becomes an agent and Az-Zahra as a structure to drive social change in a society based on religious morality. Only women can understand the condition of Muslim women themselves, so Lilis Fatimah can communicate and understand the language of her congregation to convey the message of the importance of moderate religious patterns. This was done by Lilis Fatimah through Az-Zahra, apart from forming religious discourse, she also countered the narrative and Islamism movement, increased radicalism, and acts of intolerance in the name of religion in Sukoharjo. The existence of this majlis is an effort to strengthen the congregation's religiosity and prepare to have religious knowledge and be integrated with the public. The most important thing is to conduct regeneration so those female clerics appear who are expected to be able to preserve Aswaja an-Nahdliyah.

In principle, the presence of Az-Zahra in the public space of Sukoharjo is based on two principles, namely: first, the formation of moderate religious discourse so that it can encourage the seed of moderate Muslims; and second, the development of a civic culture which is closely related to the local wisdom of the MojolabanSukoharjo community. Civil culture is understood as values, norms, and moral guides in society that respect basic aspects of democratic discourse such as humanity, tolerance, equality, pluralism, human rights, respect for minorities, and independence. The moderate Islamic values ultimately encourage Islam as a religion that plays in the realm of civil society, which is to become moral reasoning for community development. In the realm of civil society, Az-Zahra encourages Islam to play an active role in providing solutions to various humanitarian and social problems without having to discriminate against other groups or religions. This is done by Az-Zahra by building a network between taklimassemblies to strengthen the congregation's economy. According to Tocqueville, religion is seen as an institution in the realm of the superstructure, transcendent, and influences the creation of conditions that are considered truly ideal by its adherents. Religion has never become dominant through a single religious group, including legitimizing political movements as the only truth. Religion must be relevant to the times (as-shalih likuli zaman wa al-makan), he must not lose the transcendence of his life. The more it is identified with certain institutional arrangements, the more religion is considered to lose its transcendent value (Leege and Kellstedt, 2006).

The presence of Az-Zahra is a form of resistance to Islamism which carries the

ideology of takfiri-puritanism. Since the 1998 reformation, in Sukoharjo and the great Solo, many ideological Islamism movements have emerged that offer violent approaches to counter mainstream discourse. According to Hefner, the presence of an ideological Islamic movement in the public sphere is not directly considered a threat to democracy itself. This is because the existence of Islam in the public sphere is not monolithic, but plural like politics in all civilizations (Hefner, 2000). The emergence of Islamism groups as a form of resistance to traditional cultural-religious movements such as NU which carries mainstream discourse. As a result, tensions arise between the Islamism movement and the wider community who have authority and orthodoxy. They want to show their existence frontally to people who consider them to be marginalized (Mibtadin, 2018b). With a truth claim, they feel that they are the most correct, the most authoritative in giving religious interpretations. Although public support for them is low, the presence of Islamism can be one of the factors that radicalize society into intolerance (SETARA Institute, 2010).

All religious activities of Az-Zahra are used as references and media for propaganda to encourage the growth of moderate religious awareness of the congregation in Sukoharjo. They use traditional religious concepts that are packaged with new methods and delivery models. This new approach is intended to invite the congregation and the people of Sukoharjo to bring the reality of life closer to the reality of divinity. The presence of assemblies of dhikr as alternative medicine and spiritual consultation has become a separate phenomenon for the spiritual awakening of urban communities in Indonesia (Jamil, 2007).

Az-Zahra, Character Building, and Empowering Women

As its vision and mission, Az-Zahra has a major role in building an advanced and civilized society, nation, and country, both through religious, economic, and cultural education. This is formulated in the principle of *liyatafaqqahu fi-ad-din*, namely developing religious thought and *liyundziru qaumahu* related to social and nationality, namely forming personality. Az-Zahra is part of the NU carriage that carries the discourse of Islam Nusantara as an effort to preserve local traditions that exist in society. According to Said Aqil, related to the community, NU has several roles: first, character building so that people have a responsibility to God, society, and the state. Second, nation-building through character building is the basic capital for state development so that a strong personality is realized, has a national identity, and is civilized. Third, build a critical attitude (criticism building) in the government based on the principle of 'amar ma'ruf nahi munkar and ethical and not political considerations' (Siraj, 2013). Therefore, MT Az-Zahra through his religious activities emphasizes the importance of character building and nation-building as a point of view in solving today's humanitarian problems such as moral decline and the erosion of national character and identity. Az-Zahra's hope is the formation of a civilized, cultured, and advanced society on the basis of *hubbul wathon minal iman*.

Az-Zahra has become a character-building medium through empowering community spirituality such as recitations, prayers, pilgrimages, and other NU religious traditions. According to Lilis Fatimah, there are two mandates that must be fulfilled by Az-Zahra, namely the mandate of *al-diniyyah* and *al-*

wathoniyyah therefore the taklim assembly seeks to build character and national identity through empowering women to have a major contribution to increasing faith and social strengthening. Therefore, Az-Zahra tries to encourage women's intensive involvement in the socio-religious aspect. So far, Az-Zahra has become an active media campaigning for discourses on citizenship, human rights, gender equality, political rights, and religious rights.

Az-Zahra is part of the cultural movement built by Lilis Fatimah and the Khalifatullah Singo Ludi Islamic Boarding School to encourage the growth and development of knowledge society, especially in the religious field. Az-Zahra as a cultural movement places limits on ethics and morality. Az-Zahra as a "tool" to instil critical awareness in the community, especially Muslim women congregations by positioning Islam as a moral force in encouraging the process of social change. With the reality of a pluralistic society, the ability to find common ground is crucial in empowering civil society (Wahid, 1994). There are several strategies of Az-Zahra in empowering the women of its congregation through three stages, namely: first, mapping the problems of Muslim women, including strengthening the economics of the existing congregations for those who allow it to be developed. Second, mobilizing the potential of the Muslim women of Az-Zahra according to their respective fields. Third, in the future, it is hoped that the congregation will have the capacity for independence. As the initial goal of forming Az-Zahra, this assembly focused on empowering the congregation to be directed at developing moderate religious education, embracing da'wah, women's fiqh, family education, national issues, and strengthening local culture. This is done by Az-Zahra to foster

awareness and independence of the community on the basis of strengthening civic culture as a form of character development and identity of al-diniyyah and al-wathoniyyah congregations.

MT Az-Zahra in empowering the women of the congregation places Islam as an instrument of empowerment by creating public spheres such as recitations, majelis taklim, pilgrimages, routine studies, and the development of economic networks for business. In empowering civil society, Islam is understood as a public religion (public religion) considering that the public context of religion is no longer the state or society but in civil society (Baso, 2006). Religion in strengthening civil society by emphasizing the empowerment of the lower class is carried out by keeping a distance from the state even though it does not deny its existence (Mibtadin, 2018b). The great power of the state can be balanced by the strength of community independence by placing Islam as a social ethic for the people of Mojolaban Sukoharjo where MT Az-Zahra developed. The empowerment of Az-Zahra women is based on the vision of social transformation, cultural renewal, and awareness of community rights in state life. Through strengthening the congregation's economy, Az-Zahra leads to a just social structure, demands society be dynamic, develops populist leadership, and provides opportunities for the emergence of female clerics. With the empowerment of women by Az-Zahra, it is hoped that there will be independence for Muslim women where human rights are upheld, togetherness, and mutual respect are carried out to carry out national work that places Islam as a social ethic.

Az-Zahra in placing Islam as a social ethic there are two things, namely: first, Islam as a source and vision of

morality. Islam in Az-Zahra is not only placed as a source of conflict and only as a guardian of morality because it will kill the initiative and creativity of the Muslims themselves. Az-Zahra through his religious activities wants Islam to be a religion that is always present in the community, borrowing Sudarminta's term so that religion is more dynamic and able to play a role in the struggles of human life (Sudarminta, 1991). Second, Islam in Az-Zahra is understood as a giver of a sense of peace that can support the process of human civilization. The sense of peace arises from the belief that God is the measure of world harmony, where religious truth is explicitly related to values. This approach encourages religious people to be open to each other and learn from each other so that Islam can become a meaningful religion for living together (Mibtadin, 2018a).

Az-Zahra in his recitation, places Islam as a social ethic on two things, namely: first, Islam as a source and vision of morality. Islam is only placed as a guardian of morality and sich, and if religion functions only in this aspect, it can kill the initiative and creativity of Muslims themselves. Az-Zahra through his religious activities wants Islam to be a dynamic religion and able to play a role in the struggles of the life of the Sukoharjo community. Second, Islam as a giver of peace has an important function in supporting the process of civilizing society. A sense of peace arises from belief, Allah SWT is a measure of world harmony, where the truth of Islam is explicitly related to human values. With this approach, it encourages religious people to be open to each other and learn from one another so that Islam can become a meaningful religion for life together (Mibtadin, 2017). Az-Zahra places Islam as a social ethic as well as spirit in carrying out the

socio-religious transformation of its congregations in order to build a tolerant, civilized society and respect local values. Because Az-Zahra with the Khalifatullah Singo Ludiro Islamic Boarding School has the legitimacy that is deeply rooted in the life of the people of Mojolaban Sukoharjo. With this social capital, Az-Zahra is able to make an important contribution in the process of forming the character of the nation and state. It is not surprising that Az-Zahra has a dynamic and progressive character in realizing "Islam Nusantara", namely Islam that is in synergy with local culture.

According to Lilis Fatimah, Az-Zahra develops Islamic and Indonesian values to provide social capital to the congregation so that they can appreciate the differences that exist. The integration of the Khalifatullah Singo Ludiro Islamic Boarding School, Az-Zahra, and the Mojolaban Sukoharjo community can form a close system where the community is bound by the nuances of religious ideology with the Aswaja an-Nahdliyah pattern. Lilis added that several Islamic values developed by Az-Zahra underlie life practices such as sincerity, patience, and the benefits of living in the community. In carrying out the process many encounters with various communities, attitudes, characters, and interests. These diverse social realities encourage the people of Mojolaban Sukoharjo to be able to live in mutual respect, help each other, and peacefully coexist.

Az-Zahra through religious activities educates people's lives through religious education as tarbiyah ar-ruhaniyyah (spiritual education) and tazkiyatun an-nafs (self purification) is expected to be able to make a real contribution to realizing a just and civilized society. Az-Zahra made a real contribution related to the morals of society, especially

women as 'imadul bilad (country pillar) The display of moderate, friendly, and distinctive Islam from the Nusantara model of Az-Zahra is carried out by taking into account the objective conditions of a pluralistic society, without compromising the basic teachings of Islam. Thus, the women of Az-Zahra congregation have an open religious understanding that puts forward the value of brotherhood, both al-ukhuwah al-diniyyah, al-wathaniyah, and al-insaniyah. The friendly Islam model of Az-Zahra is expected to be able to shape the character and identity of the nation that is polite, open, and avoids exclusive and radical religious understanding because it can break the unity and integrity of the nation and state. The Khalifatullah Singo Ludiro, Lilis Fatimah, and Az-Zahra Islamic boarding schools position themselves as agents of socio-religious change by taking an active role in solving existing problems. Religious education through Az-Zahra plays an important role as a determinant of improving the quality of congregational religious education. Az-Zahra makes a real contribution to the community in educating the nation's life by providing religious education services to the community. Lilis Fatimah with Az-Zahra through their religious activities emphasized that religious education is not only limited to epistemology but is also applied. The display of friendly Islam is not solely for academic purposes, but to improve the quality of faith and the life of the people of Mojolaban Sukoharjo who are moral and civilized.

Az-Zahra, Contra Narrative Islamism, and Religious Expression

Lilis Fatimah, the management and congregation of Az-Zahra realized that Sukoharjo is a district with a pluralistic population so it is vulnerable to socio-religious conflicts. The existence of

vulnerabilities that exist is due to the "less mature" of each religion to respect each other's different beliefs, including internally. Az-Zahra offers a new way of religion by prioritizing the human and spiritual side that is packaged with local Sukoharjo values. Through his religious activities, Az-Zahra criticizes the religious reasoning of the Islamism group which prioritizes bayani reasoning, which tends to be symbolic, formalist, and uses violence so as to reduce the universal value of religion itself. Religion is placed as legitimacy for political interests, prioritizing truth claims so as to distance Islam from its own substance as. Islamism groups also use Islam as an ideological basis for inhumane acts that cause rahmatan lil'alamin religious siltation and even destroy Islam itself. With a symbolic and ideological religious model, making Islam loses its touch of the essence as a universal value that teaches a sense of peace for human life. Given the religious reality above, Az-Zahra tries to dismantle his religious discourse through a friendly critique of epistemology and religious methodology.

The urban Sufism movement by carrying out the spirituality of humanity offered by Az-Zahra is the paradigm in line with the traditions and amaliyah an-nahdliyah, even strengthening NU's cultural base at the grassroots level. Az-Zahra as part of the Islam Nusantara carriage has a tendency and orientation that departs from ideological values in seeking change within and outside NU. Therefore, Az-Zahra can be grouped into a progressive cultural NU, namely the NU community that actively preaches Islam rahmatan lil'alamin by prioritizing human spirituality as a basic Islamic value. The existence of dhikr and shalawat assemblies ideologically based on NU culture develops the values of tawazun, tasamuh,

ta'adul, tafahum, and taghyir (Mibtadin, 2018a). Az-Zahra encourages the understanding and religious expression of its congregations even further through a vision of morality and friendly Islam not only aimed at fellow worshipers but the wider community. This is intended to strengthen their position in the midst of the wave of Islamism ideology that is currently symptomatic in Sukoharjo which carries a black and white way of religion with a bayanioriented pattern and is oriented towards past lives.

All religious activities of Az-Zahra that carry friendly Islam must be in contact with communities outside of themselves that are religiously ideological to develop Aswaja understanding. The role and position of Lilis Fatimah as a key actor driving Az-Zahra are very important in changing religious discourse and expression, including in building internal networks with other communities outside of herself such as JAMURO, JAMURI, KH Abdul Karim Ahmad Pesantren Az-Zayadi Surakarta, KH M Asvin Abdurrahman Pesantren Darur Ridlo Ponorogo, PC Muslimat NU Sukoharjo, Community of women clerics, JP3M (jami'ah Supervisor for Women's Islamic Boarding School and Mubalighah) and other cultural communities. Through the network built by Lilis, she can encourage Az-Zahra as a religious movement with an urban Sufism model to exist, be dynamic, and have strong bargaining power in the Sukoharjo community.

The existence of Lilis Fatimah with Az-Zahra made NU's cultural power base in Sukoharjo even stronger. Az-Zahra through the discourse of friendly Islam was able to maintain NU's religious pattern on its path as an engaging tradition, namely moderate Islam, not extreme right (ghuluw), and the extreme left (ladiniyah). Through manhaj al-fikrtawassuthis able to

push the women of Az-Zahra and Nahdliyin congregations out of their traditional boundaries which have been the labels attached to NU society, the way of thinking is more modern and even beyond modernity itself. The pattern and pattern of social movement through the urban Sufism model of Az-Zahra is basically inseparable from its social-cultural basis, namely as the guardians of the tradition of the ulama and the guardians of al-muhafidha 'ala qadhim as-shalih wa al-akhdu bi al-jadid al-ashlah. With progressive friendly Islam, Lilis Fatimah and Az-Zahra became "agents" who moved the religious social structure of NU residents, and there were many significant changes in the perspective, religious practices, and religious expressions of the women of Az-Zahra congregation and the community NU itself.

The people of Sukoharjo, especially Nahdliyin, recognize the figure of Lilis Fatimah as an academic as well as a religious social activist who is committed to the development of moderate religious discourse. Az-Zahra is a form of a praxis of the social religious movement of Lilis Fatimah by placing Islam as the epistemological basis to build human spirituality that is sensitive to social change. This discourse puts forward the importance of "new spirituality," namely an attitude that is more concerned with social piety than individual piety. Through religious activities, Az-Zahra Lilis tries to revive the prophetic elan of religion, so that the congregation is not only spiritually pious but also can live side by side, love each other and be harmonious. Because Islam is a religion that has concern for social issues, the purpose of Islam itself is to encourage social transformation and human solidarity in society. In the sociology of religion, studying the social aspects of religion (Suprayogo, et al, 2003), religion is seen as a belief system that is

manifested in certain social behavior (Kahmad, 2002).

The most important thing from Az-Zahra's vision is the effort to bring Islam closer to its function as a view of life to humanize humans by prioritizing the welfare of its congregation. Islam encourages the existence of benefits in life as summarized in *al-maqashid al-syariah* which includes *al-kuliyat al-khamsah* namely *hifdz ad-din*, *hifdz an-nafs*, *hifdz al-'aql*, *hifdz an-nash*, and *hifdz al-amwal* (Suaedy, 2000). The friendly Islamic discourse of the Az-Zahra model becomes important as an ideological foundation to build a tolerant society in the midst of religious pluralism in Sukoharjo based on respect for universal human values. The friendly Islamic formulation is based on a strong understanding of Islamic teachings and is directed towards tolerance and social harmony. The friendly Islam model of MT Az-Zahra encourages Islam not only to be understood from the aspect of doctrinal belief but rather to practice for universal humanity.

The religious expressions of the Az-Zahra congregation with friendly Islam are beyond symbols that are based on their cosmopolitan-universal Islamic ideas. Universal and tolerant values in Islam for Az-Zahra are the contents of Islamic teachings that prioritize concern for humanitarian issues. As a religious expression, Az-Zahra is doing social work and strengthening the economy of the congregation. With the spirit of sincerity and honesty, the religious teaching of the Az-Zahra model can have a "life force" in various spaces of social life. Therefore, the religious practice of the Az-Zahra model is understood as a friendly Islam which wants this religion not only to be displayed with its symbolic ideological face. Islam is integrated in the daily life activities of the congregation by prioritizing respect,

strengthening brotherhood, respect, and tolerance. Building social piety through Az-Zahra can be practiced as human spirituality for empowerment and improving the quality of people's lives in an effort to transform religious social in Sukoharjo and its surroundings. Religion is seen as a belief system that is embodied in certain social behavior (Kahmad, 2002).

The presence of Az-Zahra in the Sukoharjo public space brought a sufistic religious pattern in the midst of ideological symbolic diversity and a wave of strong radicalism in this district. Through this Sufistic religious style, Az-Zahra tries to give a new nuance to the existing religious life as well as to counter the narrative of the Islamism group. Az-Zahra offers a religion that is peaceful, moderate, and *tasamuh*, all directed to the concept of transcendental anthropomorphism as a manifestation of human beings. This is an attempt by Az-Zahra to carry out a dynamic process of Islamic teachings, namely to ground the teachings that have skyrocketed into moral values that are present in the midst of people's lives.

Az-Zahra encourages Islam to appear as a public ethic or in Gus Dur's terms "social ethics" which puts forward two things. First, Islam is a source and vision of morality. So far, Islam has been widely misused for the political interests of certain groups, has become a source of conflict, and is limited to guarding morality and *sich*. If Islam is placed in this aspect, it will kill the initiative and creativity of the Muslims themselves, giving the impression of becoming a static religion. Az-Zahra wants Islam to be a dynamic religion capable of playing a role in real life. Second, Islam is a giver of peace. Islam has an important value in the process of human civilization. The sense of peace arises from the belief that God is the measure of world harmony because faith must be lived

humanely through the practice of social life where religion is understood as religious behavior (Mibtadin, 2018b).

Az-Zahra by developing a sufistic religious pattern presupposes a dynamic religious understanding accompanied by an interpretation of teachings according to the local context of the Sukoharjo community. This is motivated by readings obtained from the interaction of religious awareness which gave birth to a religious style of "practical Sufism" that is needed by the community based on wisdom. Az-Zahra chose the model of a religious movement to strengthen faith in the teachings of his religion and as khalifatullah fi al-ardh who was never separated from his socio-religious role. Islam must be placed on the basis of the congregation's awareness process and be critical of forms of social injustice, marginalization, discrimination, and social disharmony. The process of implementing spirituality in the praxis of social life can be seen from the appreciation made by the Az-Zahra congregation for the differences that exist in the Sukoharjo community. The social piety displayed by Az-Zahra departs from his high commitment to universal Islamic values and understanding of Ahl as-Sunnah wa-al al-Jamaah as a madzab as well as a manhaj who has the ability to build the values of social harmony, tolerance, balance (tawazun), and build the basis of social harmony a just political life (ta'adul), egalitarian and democratic (syura').

Az-Zahra is a Sufism movement from the universal Islamic tradition as well as the peak of the essence of spirituality itself, both personal and social. As a "small" sufistic learning medium, Az-Zahra is a form of spiritual life that governs all religious organisms in Islam, and the roots of its teachings can be found in the Alqur'an and hadith. MT Az-Zahra in his

recitation teaches to suppress the lust for self gradually as an effort to become the real self towards al-insan al-kamil (plenary man). The women of A-Zahra congregation with religious activities such as recitation, dhikr, prayers, pilgrimages, and others throw away bad habits and demean the human dignity of others. They believe that by participating in religious activities they can always feel the presence of God, escape from the entanglements of the world, and not be complacent with the world. Spiritually they realize that there is something that most principle of existence is to make a spiritual journey (suluk) from the outer to the inner, from anthropocentric to a transcendent center. According to Nasr, the importance of Sufism because rejection of God occurs at the psychic/inward level, and not born, because the soul must be trained and disciplined in such a way as possible (Nasr, 1983).

Az-Zahra becomes a spiritual space for strengthening faith or monotheism, is expected to be able to encourage congregations to be tolerant and respect locality. Faith is a multidimensional concept that includes activities to create meaning (meaning production) (Fowler, 1981). Tawhid or faith is part of activities that are relational and form relationships between subjects, the others, and shared centres of value and power. At this point, faith manifests itself outwardly in the form of an open attitude and raises awareness of respect for others. This worldview creates an open attitude with a willingness to accept the truth that comes outside of him even though it comes from different groups. Through the religious activities offered by Az-Zahra, it becomes a means of instilling an attitude of harmony and respect for the rights of others to its congregation. The spiritual maturity of this congregation encourages openness to

fellow human beings and mutual respect but cannot be separated from a critical attitude as a form of guidance from God, to borrow Fowler's term is referred to as a sense of religion, namely "sense of oneness."

This social piety is the ultimate goal of Az-Zahra as the embodiment of a sense of oneness to encourage critical religious attitudes of the congregation. Fowler sees this as a manifestation of faith as a "living belief" (*lebensglaube*) which always moves dynamically towards the best values, namely as a way to God. An effort is in the form of a continuous process without stopping, which occurs in daily activities in real life (Fowler, 1981). Az-Zahra is a process of searching for the spirituality of the path to Allah SWT, with a dynamic lifestyle that demands cooperation between worshipers in goodness through the right path (*shirat al-mustaqim*). The women of Az-Zahra congregation in Fowler's terms are called "religious persons," persons of mature faith.

Az-Zahra is an alternative space for spirituality seeking for urban communities with all the limitations of religious and cultural understanding to internalize Islamic values. The presence of Az-Zahra tries to complement the spiritual dimension of urban society, especially women who get less attention from religion, even becoming an empty space left by the ulama. Az-Zahra has become a medium for learning the Koran of Sufism for cleansing the heart, and a means of getting closer to Allah SWT in order to achieve *mahabbah* to Him while at the same time improving the morality of the congregation. According to Bourdieu, religious people are motivated by a motive to obtain capital even in the internal context of their own religion (Ichwan, et al., (ed.), 2013). Religion is used as liberation

discourse and the embodiment of harmonization of inter-religious relations that are humanist and anthropocentric. MT Az-Zahra in principle encourages religious patterns based on a noble character in responding to the plurality of nationalities and religious movements in Sukoharjo. In sufism, it is known as *takhalluq bi al-akhlaqillah* and monotheism as core values that lead to the principles of equality, brotherhood, democracy, and pluralism.

As a "minor sufistic" movement, Az-Zahra is an achievement tool to meet Allah SWT individually even though it is done in the congregation, from God transformed into real life, namely the Sukoharjo community. According to Whitehead (Whitehead, 2009), religion is solitude in a community. The display of Az-Zahra's religious activities is a form of maintaining Islamic tradition based on monotheism and all its manifestations in daily life. All methods and practices of the life of the Az-Zahra congregation do not separate between contemplative life and active life and encourage individuals to participate in community life. The sufistic movement of Az-Zahra emphasizes the deep perennial esoteric religious appreciation without isolating oneself (*uzlah*) from the existing reality. Living the sharia without the *thariqah* life is impossible, just like the body without the soul, and the *thariqah* without the sharia can be compared to the soul without the outward appearance, and unable to survive and manifest itself in the world (Nasr, 1986).

The religious practice practiced by the Az-Zahra congregation is basically a form of conformity between contemplation and action, which is manifested in prayer, *dhikr*, and moderate religiosity. This is an effort to get to *al-insan al-kamil*, which is to become a creature that has various levels of existence so that he is able to become a

mirror for His name and attributes. Az-Zahra strives to form a complete and holy human being, within himself, including the universal human person, where his congregation always brings God to life in all activities in society. Az-Zahra encourages his congregation to always base their lives on God by prioritizing Sufism as a practice of Sufism or living Sufism. Az-Zahra in principle wants to present Islam with a calm, harmonious face, universal love, and humanism. Az-Zahra as a sufistic movement for deradicalization is understood as an effort to form an inclusive character in its congregation, by prioritizing two things. First, Sufism in its universal sense is both perennial and universal; and second, Sufism also emphasizes the character of pluralism, dialogue, and respect for the existing diversity.

The social piety of the Az-Zahra model in principle encourages the congregation to behave humanely, namely the attitude of loving each other among humans (*habl min nass*) as a manifestation of loving Allah SWT (*habl min Allah*). Therefore, Az-Zahra emphasizes the existence of humanitarian ethics that can be a guide in human life so as not to act arbitrarily to others. Cultivating a "sense of humanity" or a sense of humanity, empathy, compassion, and sympathy is a manifestation of religion in the context of social behavior. Religion is seen as a belief system that is embodied in certain social behaviors (Tischler, 1990). Human ethics serves to create patterns of relationships between individuals, social groups, and even nationalities as summarized in *ar-ruh al-insaniyah*, *ar-ruh al-wathoniyah*, and *ar-ruh at-ta'adudiyah*. Az-Zahra with its religious activities teaches a caring and responsive attitude to humanitarian issues which are considered as important as rituals to God. Concern and willingness to defend

fellow human beings is a sign of piety for the congregation of Az-Zahra in line with the phrase: love what is on earth, surely those in the sky will love you.

So far, Az-Zahra carries a religious pattern with a friendly face, namely the face of Islam regardless of the nuances of fanaticism, exclusivism, and radicalism. Az-Zahra's presence can be a Sufistic alternative in the form of religious practices that are inclusive, peaceful, and tolerant. As a form of religious practice as promoted by Az-Zahra, it is based on the discourse of locality and plurality values as a medium to increase awareness of mutual respect, respect, and tolerance to avoid conflicts and threats to the integration of the Sukoharjo community. Az-Zahra is an effective medium to introduce different religious understandings in creating a harmonious, peaceful, and balanced life between different elements and mass organizations in Sukoharjo. Religious practice with the Sufistic style of the Az-Zahra model is directed so that the congregation can be tolerant and inclusive, providing a foundation of character for the congregation to be humble, generous, friendly, and polite in respecting the different. Az-Zahra cultivates a tolerant and inclusive attitude to life because this is the result of a simple behavior, namely those who want to criticize themselves for their limited understanding and religious experience.

Strengthening tolerant and inclusive religiosity with the "minor Sufistic" approach of the Az-Zahra model is a process of individual transformation to be able and willing to see existing differences as something worthy of respect and appreciation. The background of the Singo Ludiro Islamic Boarding School, the education of Hj Lilis, and the recitation (*tausyiah*) provided by the *kyai* to the congregation are an increase in the breadth

of insight into religious knowledge, and this is important for the congregation as a ladder that leads them to achieve an inclusive and tolerant religion. Az-Zahra as a Sufistic movement emphasizes the existence of a tolerant and inclusive attitude that is built on the basis of humility, acknowledging the limitations of understanding, and avoiding excessive truth claims. With the Sufistic model, Az-Zahra gives priority to the importance of controlling emotions in responding to existing differences. The tolerant and inclusive attitude of the congregation emphasizes the values of wisdom and manifests universal love among others in a society full of differences (Mibtadin, 2018b).

Az-Zahra in terms of religion places Islam as behavior by developing sufistic values to its congregation. This is done as an effort to form al-akhlak al-karimah (noble conduct) congregation which is manifested in faith, politeness, friendly and peace-loving. To get to that morality, several discourses were developed: first, citizenship, related to the quality of individuals, both their rights and obligations as citizens; second, compassion, an attitude of caring for the suffering and sadness of others, being able to respond to their feelings and needs. Third, courtesy, behaving politely and in soft language as a manifestation of respect for others; fourth, fairness, behave fairly, free from group fanaticism. Fifth, moderation, avoiding radical views and irrational actions; sixth, respect for others, respect the rights and obligations of others; seventh, respect for the creator, appreciate everything that God has given, stay away from all prohibitions and carry out all His commands. Eighth, self-control, being able to control oneself from emotional, anarchic, and various actions that harm others; and ninth, tolerance, respecting

differences (Samani, et al., 2001). Islam as a polite, friendly, and respectful social behaviour can suppress hatred and violence in the form of non-violent and violent activities. The development of friendly Islam with the Az-Zahra model is a counter-narrative of religious discourse criticism to minimize purification discourse and theology of violence built by Islamism groups. The development of friendly Islamic discourse and social piety of Az-Zahra is the implementation of religion as practical behaviour in a pluralistic society like Sukoharjo Az-Zahra with a sufistic approach puts forward Islamic and universal values, violence is not fought with violence, but through tenderness and compassion.

Closing

Sukoharjo is an important district in socio-religious discourse because it has long been the basis of Islamism and moderate groups. One of the local cultural-religious movements in Sukoharjo that is developing rapidly is Az-Zahra. Taklimat assembly is an urban Sufism movement as a form of preserving religious traditions which has become a legacy of previous scholars. Az-Zahra developed a friendly Islamic discourse, namely a religious pattern that is moderate, tolerant, open, respects plurality and stays away from fanaticism. This value counters the narrative of the Islamism group that carries the ideology of caliphate, purification, and theology of violence. The presence of Az-Zahra in public spaces has a significant role in strengthening diversity through empowering the congregation and then transforming it into the wider community. Az-Zahra is the front line in empowering women through religious education at the family level, which is the basic basis for strengthening Islam. Through its religious activities, Az-Zahra builds cultural resilience by strengthening

spirituality as spiritual training for self-control in the midst of a hedonistic life.

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