

# Contested Socioreligious Reality: An-Nadzir, a Non- mainstream Islamic Movement in Indonesia

*by* Mustaqim Pabbajah

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# Contested Socioreligious Reality: An-Nadzir, a Non-mainstream Islamic Movement in Indonesia

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*Abstract: This study focuses on An-Nadzir, a non-mainstream Islamic movement in Indonesia. Political openness in Indonesia, a country known for its majority Muslim population, since the initiation of reform in 1998 has significantly influenced the development and survival of such socioreligious movements, as demonstrated in the rise of numerous social movements based on religion. This study is a qualitative one, employing participant observation and in-depth interview techniques to collect data. The presence of An-Nadzir in Indonesian society confirms the existence of diversity in Indonesian religious movements and suggests that such movements encompass not only mainstream Muslim communities, but also non-mainstream ones. An-Nadzir position as a non-mainstream Islamic movement can be seen in its religiosity, values and norms, and religious gatherings and practices.*

*Keywords: Social Movements, Religious Practice, An-Nadzir, Non-mainstream Islam*

## Introduction

The freedom of expression made possible by Indonesia's political reform since 1998 has facilitated the establishment of various socioreligious movements in Indonesia. This includes socioreligious movements that practice religion in ways that are rare in general society, i.e. non-mainstream movements. Such non-mainstream socioreligious movements differ significantly from the current mainstream movements that are recognised by the Indonesian government. Over the years, various religious practices have been identified as splinter religious movements by the Indonesian government, including Islam Jamaah, Ahmadiyah Qadiyan, DI/TII, Mujahidin Warsidi, Shia, Baha'i, Inkarus Sunnah, Jamaah Imran, Gerakan Usroh, and Wahdatul Wujud (van Bruinessen 1992) Other religious movements, such as bilingual prayer, whistling prayer, and the Madi movement, have also come into practice.

The Indonesian government recognises three formal mainstream Islamic organisations, namely: *Nahdhatul Ulama* (NU), *Muhammadiyah*, and *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (MUI). Both NU, with its slogan "*Islam Nusantara*" (Islam of the Archipelago), and Muhammadiyah, with its slogan "*Islam Berkemajuan*" (Progressive Islam), have extensive membership, play important roles in decision making, and strongly influence the religious ideology of Indonesia's Muslim community. Meanwhile, the MUI or Indonesian Council of Islamic Scholars consists of religious leaders (from both NU and Muhammadiyah) as well as Islamic scholars. Structurally, these three organisations are under state control and used by the government to legitimise certain activities, religious practices, and thoughts.

The rise of non-mainstream religious movements has created debate in Indonesian society. On one hand, such movements are considered to deviate from the religious practices and beliefs of mainstream Islamic traditions. On the other hand, these movements are seen as stemming from public disillusionment with the government and mainstream Islamic organisations. According to members of these movements, mainstream Islamic organisations tend to be political and controlled by the government rather than religious or spiritual organisations controlled by the

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faithful themselves. Furthermore, members of non-mainstream Islamic movements assume that mainstream Islamic organisations have failed to promote spiritual development. As such, they must seek other ways (i.e. non-mainstream movements) to fulfil their spiritual needs.

To find objective criteria for defining non-mainstream socioreligious movements, it is necessary to avoid the truth claims and reciprocal blaming practiced by mainstream and non-mainstream movements. For example, mainstream Islamic organisations often claim “truth” because they are recognised by the Indonesian government, while non-mainstream movements do not. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, open-mindedness and inclusiveness are necessary. Sociological, rather than theological, criteria are needed. In sociology, mainstream and non-mainstream religious movements are not absolute and eternal concepts, but rather relative and dynamic. “Mainstream,” in this context, means understood and/or practiced by the majority of Indonesian people (van Bruinessen 1992). Therefore, non-mainstream religious movements are perceived as splintering or deviating from the mainstream. Non-mainstream socioreligious movements reject the dominance of mainstream religious understanding and are used as social protest movements to respond to the political situation. As such, the term “non-mainstream” is used not to legitimise particular religious communities, but as a simplification necessary to ensure the research can remain focused on its material object.

Based on the assumptions above, the researchers would like to examine and analyse the An-Nadzir community as a representative case study of non-mainstream socioreligious movements in Indonesia. As such, this article will examine three topics. First, it will examine the form and the processes of the An-Nadzir movement. Second, it will detail the religiosity of the An-Nadzir community. Finally, the question of the future opportunities and the challenges of An-Nadzir as a non-mainstream Muslim community in global context.

The description and analysis of this article is based on qualitative research conducted within the An-Nadzir community in South Sulawesi. Participant observation and in-depth interviews were conducted during a series of visits between 2012 and 2018. Participant observation was conducted by getting involved in the everyday lives and activities of community members, including both religious and nonreligious affairs. In-depth interviews were conducted to gain an understanding of how the movement came into existence, as perceived by An-Nadzir leaders and members, mainstream religious leaders, community leaders, local government officials, and members of neighbouring communities.

## Socioreligious Movements in Indonesia

The Indonesian government has essentially encouraged openness in its responses to religious organisations’ attempts to accumulate social capital. This reflects the importance of religious values in many aspects of public life, a situation also seen in the protection of religious freedom in the national constitution (Permani 2011). As seen in Turkey, socioreligious movements and their growth highlight that interfaith dialogue has always been an important part of religion (Belci 2018).

One popular non-mainstream religious movement in Indonesia is Ahmadiyyah, which has been one of the most active and controversial modern Islamic movements since its founding in 1889. This movement describes itself as an Islamic reformist movement, and as such its main message is—with a few exceptions—congruent with the message of Sunni Islam. However, these exceptions are sufficient to provoke extreme intolerance toward Ahmadiyyah and its teachings; most controversial is the Ahmadi teaching that the movement’s founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, was a prophet. Rejection of this community is widespread, as its religious practices are perceived as beyond acceptable limits (Connley 2016). However, Ahmadiyyah has been able to survive and expand by involving members of Indonesia’s political elite.

Indonesia has various socioreligious groups that are affiliated with the country’s dominant religion, Islam. These include the Islamic Defenders Front (*Fron Pembela Islam*, FPI), a movement established on August 17, 1998, four months after the resignation of President

Soeharto (1966–1998). This organisation subsequently became part of a coalition of militia groups that started the 212 Movement in 2018. Members of this movement have emphasised Islam in their criticisms of the ruling regime and their demands for regime change (Facal 2019). Such activities have been perceived diversely by members of various circles.

Meanwhile, the two most important mainstream Islamic movements in Indonesia today are NU and Muhammadiyah, which together have some 70 million affiliates. This means that most devout Indonesian Muslims, or even the majority of them, are under the influence of these organisations. NU and Muhammadiyah are considered socially and culturally different, but complementary; indeed, they have more in common than generally recognised and are involved in the same activities. Nonetheless, since the early and mid-twentieth century, these organisations have been seen as having very significant differences. Muhammadiyah is still seen as representing the urban middle class of modern Indonesia, while NU is still associated with a rustic rural community and traditional views (Barton 2014).

In subsequent years, significant Sufi movements emerged. One of these was the *Tabligh Jamaat* movement, which has been active since 1953 but grew most rapidly after 1998. Such movements have avoided open political activities, instead concentrating on encouraging Muslims to be more actively involved in religious rituals. They have specific codes of ethics and fashion for their members and receive membership dues from those in their communities (Rameez 2018). Such movements can be found in all corners of Indonesia and have established broad international networks.

The dynamics of socioreligious life in Indonesia are also marked by the Indonesian Institute of Islamic Dakwah (*Lembaga Dakwah Islam Indonesia*, LDII), which seeks to position itself as an orthodox group. It has established good relations with the state to ensure that it is perceived not as a splinter group, but as mainstream. LDII's participation in important government affairs and interfaith organisations has reinforced its position, and as such its followers are no longer stoned, and its mosques are not demolished (Muhammadiyah 2015).

Salafism is similarly growing rapidly in Indonesia, both through social movements and through Islamic boarding schools. A diverse Islamic revivalist movement, Salafism emphasises the need to emulate the first three generations of Muslims (*Salaf al-Salih*, which they believe consists of the companions of Muhammad, the *tabi'in* [successors] and *Tabi'al-Tabi'in* [successors of the successors]) in every aspect of life. This can be done, they argue, by following the Qur'an and the Sunnah (Chaplin 2018).

Islamic organisations in Indonesia, as with other social movement organisations, do not operate in a vacuum. Their ebbs and flows, dynamics, and strategies are very dependent on the level of openness and the political conditions of regimes and environments in which they are bound. For example, NU and Muhammadiyah have served as the largest and most influential moderate Islamic organisations in the country (Munabari 2017). From the existing literature, it appears that almost all existing socioreligious groups have connections to political actors and state control, which they use to promote their growth and development.

### The Forms and Processes of the An-Nadzir Socioreligious Movement

An-Nadzir, as a socioreligious movement, has four main elements. These are: Islamic propagation, unique religious practices (*maghda*: praying, fasting, and alms), empowering followers through *tausyiah* (preaching) and *dhikr* (remembrances), and movements against mainstream Muslim communities.

Propagation, in this context, refers to the spread of Islam and Islamic teachings. It thus involves questions of how this information can be spread well and effectively in modern society. Islam is a missionary religion and disseminated to societies through missionary activities, without coercion. Islam does not justify others being forced to embrace Islam, neither does it justify the obstruction of Islamic missionary or preaching (*dakwah*) activities.

The *dakwah* of An-Nadzir stresses the creation of a good society through truth and goodness, as commanded by Allah through His Messengers. According to An-Nadzir, to create a good society, one must obey the commands of Allah and the Sunnah of His Messenger. As such, the highest purpose of Islamic propagation is to create a good, lovely, respectful, and lofty society. According to Fazlur Rahman, the community tries to create a society that believes in Allah and His Messengers and humanitarian values in order to maintain egalitarianism and fairness (Harris 1999).

The second element is unique religious practices (*maghda*: praying, fasting, and alms). As a manifestation of *ahlul bait*, the An-Nadzir community tries to “interpret” the worship model of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as its model, relying on the doctrine of its founding father Syamsuri Madjid. This doctrine is not based on certain books; any books are seen as amplifiers, not main sources of information. According to observations, the worship model of An-Nadzir tends to resemble the Shia model, even though community members do not want to be considered Shiites. Similarities to Shia worship can be seen, for example, in their prayer timing, straightening their arms during prayers, *adzan* (call to prayer), and giving of alms; they differ in their fasting. Members of the An-Nadzir community assume that any similarities to the Shia have emerged not as a result of mimicry, but rather because such practices are correct. As stated by Daeng Rangka, the leader of An-Nadzir, “if one is walking in the path of the truth, we must surely meet.”<sup>2</sup>

The third element is empowering followers through *tausyiah* (preaching) and *dhikr* (remembrances). The teaching of An-Nadzir’s religious doctrine is conducted every Friday, using a *tausyiah* model. *Tausyiah* and *dhikr* are done every Friday after prayers, typically at a mosque near Lake Mawang, South Sulawesi. Knowledge is reproduced through the *tausyiah*, using both lecture and question-answer models. The preacher is always Daeng Rangka, who has been responsible for the teaching of An-Nadzir’s members since the death of the movement’s founder, Syamsuri Madjid, in 2006. In his preaching, Daeng Rangka is assisted by Lukman. *Tausyiah* is also conducted to examine the contents of the Qur’an; interestingly, Daeng Rangka does not use any published exegeses of the Qur’an in such sessions.

Last is the socioreligious movement’s opposition to mainstream Muslim communities. In many ways, the mainstream Muslim communities of Indonesia are supported by the authorities, while others are not approved or even branded as heretical. Splinter/non-mainstream movements are usually rejected by the dominant communities and face social and political protest (van Bruinessen 1992). In the context of An-Nadzir, the movement has created a non-mainstream Islamic community in a majority Muslim part of a majority-Muslim country. The Muslim community in South Sulawesi, consisting primarily of a people known as the Bugis-Makassar, tends to follow mainstream Muslim teachings closely. However, in the middle of this community, An-Nadzir has nonetheless emerged, presenting a set of Islamic teachings and practices that differ from those of the surrounding community.

### The Religiosity of the An-Nadzir Community

The religiosity of the An-Nadzir community can be seen in two aspects, namely its religious ideology (as an alternative theology) and its economic activities. An-Nadzir offers an alternative theology in an organised effort to create a new understanding or interpretation of an existing religion. This may be linked to Giddens’ (2010) argument that social movements are collective efforts, outside of established institutions, to pursue common interests and achieve common goals through collective action. A similar notion is expressed by Tarrow (2011): social movements emerge as political resistance when ordinary people join together in opposition to more influential community groups (elites, authorities, etc.).

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with Daeng Rangka, leader of the An-Nadzir community, on January 25, 2015 at 09:00 AM.

Religiosity also influences the economic activities of the An-Nadzir community. Unlike the Indonesian state, which exhibits a tendency for centralised economic activity, the An-Nadzir community perceive economic activity as collective community empowerment. Members of the movement work together to create economic empowerment based on Islamic values. In other words, An-Nadzir members are expected to understand Islamic values and apply them in their daily socioeconomic behaviours (Hikmat 1999). The An-Nadzir community has presented itself as following classical Islamic values by trying to imitate the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), albeit without entirely abandoning modernity. Aside from having a strong religious spirit, they are also concerned with the ethical aspects of life. According to Weber (2005), only modern religions can boost and impassion economic growth. Similarly, Turner (1992) states that the association of religion with dominant motives and attitudes can be found in the social sector of religious tradition. Religion, thus, acts in modern society to motivate believers in their work and other economic activities.

### **The Opportunities and Challenges of Global Change**

This study has identified several opportunities and challenges being faced by the An-Nadzir community in the current era of global change, namely: the freedom to explore their aspirations and be part of a certain (mainstream or non-mainstream) religion, paradoxical reception within society, and the correlation between social piety and social welfare. The ongoing process of democratisation in Indonesia has influenced the emergence of various social and political movements, as mentioned previously. As such, socioreligious movements have been granted the freedom to explore their aspirations and be part of certain mainstream or non-mainstream religions. Between the Dutch colonial era and the New Order regime, socioreligious movements were relatively stagnant; the freedom for self-actualisation, thus, has only been made possible by the opening of Indonesia's economic and political systems since 1998 (Situmorang 2009).

In relation to new socioreligious movements, Tarrow (2011) writes that opportunities for political and social movements arise through policies that lead to changes in society's resources and capacities. Therefore, the rise of socioreligious movements may be attributed to two factors—internal and external. Internal factors, among others, include different ways of interpreting the principal teachings of religion, caused by different paradigms and frames of thinking. Often people will only recognise their own beliefs, understandings, interpretations, and doctrines as correct, while others are branded as absolutely wrong. External factors include the influence of “outside” ideas, such as liberalism, in the understanding of religious texts such as the Qur'an and their means of interpretation.

In relation to religiosity, Emile Durkheim defines religion as a system of sacred beliefs and practices united into one single moral worshiper (Turner 1992). From this definition, two essential elements may be identified as prerequisites for religion: sacred nature and ritual practices. Based on Durkheim's definition, religious movements such as An-Nadzir cannot be separated from the different religious practices used to respond to social realities. This can be seen, for example, in the interpretation of sacred texts through collective action.

The second element is paradoxical reception within society. The existence of the An-Nadzir community in Indonesia, particularly in South Sulawesi, has received various responses (informed by social, cultural, economic, and political backgrounds). The physical appearance, socioeconomic activities, and religious rites of community members have been identified as not being part of mainstream Islam. Alwiuddin, a Muhammadiyah leader in South Sulawesi, stated that the An-Nadzir community is a “splinter” community that has strayed from “real” Islamic teachings and doctrines.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, Abu Bakar Paka responded differently and diplomatically. He argued that An-Nadzir, as an Islamic group should be acknowledged and tolerated, so long as they do not perform activities that disturb society. Actual Islam, according to

<sup>3</sup>Interview with Alwiuddin, a Muhammadiyah leader, on January 21, 2015 at 10:00 AM.



Paka, is when people and communities all feel comfortable living together.<sup>4</sup> Observing these responses, it seems that MUI tends to emphasise similarities more than differences when discussing Islamic groups.

Other responses have come from the local government where the An-Nadzir community lives. According to the local government's head of research and development, Muhammad Idrus Hafid, the An-Nadzir community is part of Indonesian society, and must be given guidance and supervision to avoid doctrines that endanger the integrity and unity of the nation.<sup>5</sup> The relationship between An-Nadzir and the local government are quite good. Government officials often visit the An-Nadzir settlement, and they are warmly welcomed by the community. Indeed, it seems that the local government has responded quite positively to the An-Nadzir community's presence in its jurisdiction. It has particularly appreciated An-Nadzir's success in agriculture.

Last is the correlation between social piety and social welfare in socioreligious movements. In socioreligious movements, religion plays an important role in society; indeed, for Durkheim (1965, 55), "the sacred thing is par excellence that which the profane should not touch, and cannot touch with impunity." Sociologists of religion, such as Emile Durkheim (1915), Max Weber (1922), Joachim Wach (1944), Thomas O'Dea (1966), Peter Berger (1967), R. Stark and C.Y. Glock (1968), and Roland Robertson (1970) have explained religion as a social phenomenon, a social event, and a social system that can be analysed, because it consists of complex norms and rules (Santoso 2007).

Religion, as the foundation of social piety, can resolve the tensions between the ethical and non-ethical aspects of the economic and political structures of the world. It is taken for granted that religion is dominant, or occupies a privileged status, in political organisations (Weber 2005). Indeed, the core of Weber's (2005) concept of social piety asserts that religion or a religious way of thinking does not have to be separated from everyday events and goals, especially since religious action may influence socioeconomic action. Social piety is used to create economic empowerment and meet every day needs, thereby realising social welfare.

Social welfare can be defined as the fulfilment of a person, group, or community's material, spiritual, and social needs. The glory of a people depends on what they do. Similarly, the An-Nadzir community believes that doing certain deeds or working closer to Allah is very important and should be given more attention. Work, in addition to obtaining worldly blessings and pleasures, also guarantees one's blessings and pleasures in the hereafter. Furthermore, the Islamic ethics practiced by the An-Nadzir community in its economic activities are derived from the revelations of Allah. The Qur'an and Sunnah, as fundamental sources of guidance in life and conduct, are central in improving socio-ethical behaviour. Similarly, the An-Nadzir community urges Muslims to work with the goal of pleasing Allah. All in all, it is clear that social piety can normatively and empirically affect economic productivity. Religious teachings, understood comprehensively and holistically, can create an independent society and manifest social welfare.

## Conclusion

The An-Nadzir community is a socioreligious movement that actualises Islamic values in public life, both economic and social. In its religious practices, the An-Nadzir community is clearly distinguished from mainstream Muslim communities, and as such it is sometimes perceived negatively. Nevertheless, theologically, there is no reason to declare An-Nadzir a deviant community. It is not violating the basics of Islamic theology; it only differs in terms of ideology. In this case, the An-Nadzir community, as a distinct group or community, should be recognised and treated equally in social and national life. In other words, the existence of different

<sup>4</sup>Interview with Abu Bakar Paka, a leader of MUI, on January 22, 2015 at 11:00 AM.

<sup>5</sup>Interview with Muhammad Idrus Hafid, Head of Research and Development, Local Government, South Sulawesi, on January 19, 2015 at 08:45 AM.

communities in society should be no big deal. No matter the group or community, it must be treated equally by the state.

The presence of the An-Nadzir community in Indonesia underscores the existence of various religious lives within Islam. This suggests that socio-Islamic movements may not only be mainstream, but also non-mainstream. Such non-mainstream Muslim movements may emerge as a result of three factors. First, people and communities may seek to freely express and explore their religious understandings, both mainstream and non-mainstream. Second, they may seek to reinforce religious understanding in society. Third, they may act in response to mainstream Muslim communities that no longer offer them spiritual satisfaction.

Overall, as a religious community, An-Nadzir has had a positive effect, as it has enabled its followers to develop their economic abilities based on a creative economy. It has also helped local residents manage their land without attempting to make them part of their community. Although An-Nadzir is still passive in spreading its teachings, it remains an open-minded and inclusive community, accepting anyone who comes to visit and inquire about its religious understandings. This attitude also confirms that the An-Nadzir community does not seek to promote its religious teachings openly; rather, it continually strengthens internal capacity through various social and religious activities.

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# Contested Socioreligious Reality: An-Nadzir, a Non-mainstream Islamic Movement in Indonesia

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