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## BETWEEN *SUNNAH* CURRENCY AND SUFI DOCTRINE: Mediating and Negotiating the Gold Dinar and Silver Dirham on Digital Platforms by the Indonesian Murabitun

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**Abstract:** The Murabitun World Movement promotes the gold dinar and silver dirham as authentic Islamic currency tools. However, their vision of establishing an independent Islamic currency is rejected by the socio-political dynamics of the communities' home countries. Using Talal Asad's theory of Islam as a discursive tradition, the study investigates the local practices of the Murabitun among Indonesian Muslims, with particular attention to their cultural identity. This study relies much on online data and cyber resources. The Indonesian Murabitun actively promoted the circulation of the gold dinar and silver dirham as an Islamic currency at the *Pasar Muamala* (exchange market) in Madiun and Yogyakarta. The Indonesian Murabitun movement was initially established in Depok, West Java by Zaim Saidi with his creation of the *Pasar Muamala*. After Zaim Saidi was formally charged with violating the currency law, his movement lose much its influence. However, utilizing the dynamics of the socio-political landscape, this movement has continued to be actively involved in promoting the gold dinar and silver dirham currency—as an alternative transaction tool alongside the regular currency—on digital media platforms.

**Keywords:** Murabitun; Dinar; Dirham; Digital; Mediation; Negotiation.

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## Introduction

The historical Murabitun movement has its origins in the North African dynasty of the Murabitun or Almoravids which established its rule in present-day Morocco in the 11<sup>th</sup> century after developing and spreading its own religious and political ideology and Sufi order. However, the Murabitun movement that is the subject of this study is the Murabitun World Movement, an Islamic movement founded by the Scottish revert Abdalqadir as-Sufi (born Ian Stewart Dallas; 1930-2021) in Spain,<sup>1</sup> which has communities in 21 countries, including UK, Germany, Italy, Mexico, Malaysia, and Indonesia and about 10,000 followers.<sup>2</sup> This Sufi Order is officially based in Cape Town, South Africa.<sup>3</sup>

Although the movement is primarily a social and intellectual movement, several studies showed that it is also a political movement focusing on restoring correct *ṣakāt* practices as part of the *Shari'a* (Islamic law).<sup>4</sup> According to Sedgwick, the Murabitun movement was a formidable political force in the 11<sup>th</sup> century and formed a successful *jihād* movement in North Africa and Muslim Spain (al-

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<sup>1</sup> Ken Chitwood, "Murabitun World Movement," in *Encyclopedia of Latin American Religions*, ed. Henri Gooren (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 1–4, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-08956-0\\_286-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-08956-0_286-1).

<sup>2</sup> Nils Bubandt, "Murabitun: Global Sufism and World Transformation," last modified 2021, accessed August 8, 2022, <https://sufism.au.dk/research>; Óscar Pérez Ventura, "Movimientos Islamistas En Espana: El Movimiento Mundial Murabitun, Conversos al Islam En Al-Andalus, Instituto Espanol de Estudios Estrategos," *ieee.ee*, Oktober 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Muhammed Haron, "Da'wah Movements and Sufi Tariqahs: Competing for Spiritual Spaces in Contemporary South (Ern) Africa," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 25, no. 2 (August 1, 2005): 261–285; Muhammed Haron, "Evaluating and Comparing the Murabitun and Haeriyyun: Reflections of Contemporary South African Sufism," in *Transnational Sufism in Contemporary Societies: Reconfiguring Practices, Narratives and Boundaries* (Presented at the Transnational Sufism in Contemporary Societies: Reconfiguring Practices, Narratives and Boundaries, Cini, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> Hans Visser, "The Lure of Gold and Silver: Dinars and Dirhams for the 21st Century," in *The Workshop on Non-Capitalist Islam: Yesterday's Ideology or New Horizon? Oriental Seminary* (Presented at the Workshop on Non-Capitalist Islam—Yesterday's Ideology or New Horizon? Oriental Seminary, Germany: University of Cologne, 2016), 5.

Andalus).<sup>5</sup> The community's vision of fundamental transformation as expressed by the Murabitun was characterized by Gebauer as 'indigenous millennialism' in the form of a peaceful economic-based political movement.<sup>6</sup> According to him, the Murabitun promised a new era of freedom, moral rule, and the coming of a caliphate as millenarian salvation. This finding is in line with Bubandt's view who stated that today's Murabitun *tamhid* is a 'post-secular utopia'. He added that it is fair to say that the Murabitun dream of creating a future society in complete unity with God but brought about by direct human planning that de-secularizes the modern millennium. According to Bubandt, the secular vision of modernity that emerged from religious millenarianism has been re-enchanted.<sup>7</sup> In this sense, the modern Murabitun is a synthesis of the spiritual dimension and the material world, which is formulated through the globalized economy.

The people's conversion to Islam, which is the main vision of the present-day Murabitun World Movement, has been taking place in the conflict-ridden Mexican state of Chiapas for about ten years.<sup>8</sup> Garvin observed that the Murabitun have come into conflict with the local community due to their radical views and have been accused of disrespecting the indigenous culture and being too authoritarian.<sup>9</sup> Being a socio-political Islamic movement it is similar to other Islamist groups that call for the complete Islamization of all aspects of personal and public life. This finding supports Rogozen-Soltar's view that the group represents a form of Islamic extremism, although his

<sup>5</sup> Mark Sedgwick, *Western Sufism: From the Abbasids to the New Age* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 237.

<sup>6</sup> Matthias Gebauer, "Indigenous Millennialism: Murabitun Sufism in the Black African Townships of South Africa," in *The End(s) of Time(s) Apocalypticism, Messianism, and Utopianism through the Ages*, ed. Hans-Christian Lehner (London: Brill, 2021), 328; Bill Maurer, "Engineering an Islamic Future: Speculations on Islamic Financial Alternatives," *Anthropology Today*, 2001, 10.

<sup>7</sup> Nils Bubandt, "Gold for a Golden Age: Sacred Money and Islamic Freedom in a Global Sufi Order," *Social Analysis* 53, no. 1 (January 1, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Avedis Hadjian, "The Muslims of Mexico in the Shadow of Zapatistas," *International Business Times*, last modified September 20, 2013, accessed April 7, 2023, <https://www.ibtimes.com/gods-chiapas-mexican-muslims-shadow-zapatistas-1407812>; Ashley E. Dunn, "Desconocido: Conversion to Islam in México" (International Studies Honors Project, 2017), accessed April 7, 2023.

<sup>9</sup> N. Garvin, "Conversion & Conflict Muslims in Mexico," *ISIM Review* 15, no. 1 (2005): 18–19.

study focused on the conversion phenomenon. According to him, conversion is a multi-scaled project that propels transformation from the individual to the Spanish nation-state and a global Islamic utopia.<sup>10</sup> Murabitun is also affiliated with ETA (Euzkadi ta Akatazuna), other groups in the Middle East, and also the Zapatista Army of National Liberation.<sup>47</sup> ETA is a militant group in the Basque Country, located in northern Spain and Southwestern France, that advocates for Basque nationalism and separatism. It was established in 1959 and transformed from a cultural organization to a paramilitary group that carried out a series of violent acts such as bombings, assassinations, and kidnappings across the Spanish territory, with a particular focus on the Southern Basque Country. ETA's primary objective was to achieve independence for the Basque Country, and it played a significant role in the Basque National Liberation Movement and became the most prominent participant in the Basque conflict.<sup>12</sup>

Previous studies and investigations conducted on the same topic have indicated that the Murabitun group is associated with extremist right-wing Islamic sects, anti-Semitic, and deviant sects. In addition, an investigation by *Scotland on Sunday* Newspaper has revealed that the Murabitun group, under the leadership of Abdalqadir as-Sufi, has links to the Hizbut Tahrir organization<sup>13</sup> and regularly praised Hitler as the last mentioned name was also classified as anti-Semitic. The Newspaper describes Murabitun as follows:

Dallas has regularly praised Hitler, lauding his great genius and great vision; He denies that six million Jews died in the Holocaust and berates Jews who perpetually whine about the alleged massacre of their people for the crime of usury in the

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<sup>10</sup> Mikaela Rogozen-Soltar, "Murabitun Religious Conversion: Time, Depth, and Scale among Spain's New Muslims," *Anthropological Quarterly* 92, no. 2 (2019): 509–539.

<sup>11</sup> Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Canada, "Mexico: A Group Named Murabitun (or Possible Alternate Spellings) Based in Spain, Its Affiliations with ETA (Euzkadi Ta Akatazuna) and Other Groups in the Middle East; Its Presence in Chiapas, and Its Links with the Zapatistas" (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, February 28, 2002), accessed April 7, 2023, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3df4be7020.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Cameron Watson, *Basque Nationalism and Political Violence: The Ideological and Intellectual Origins of ETA* (Center for Basque Studies, University of Nevada, Reno, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> SOS Investigation, "Shadow World of a Sect," *Scotland on Sunday* (Scotland, November 4, 1995).

Thirties; Dallas supports Jihad struggle against Jewish controlled bank; Murabitun has a link with Hizbut Tahrir, a violent Muslim group which has intimidated and attacked opponents on college campuses across Britain.<sup>14</sup>

The investigation contradicts the beliefs of “right-wing” Islamic groups, particularly the Salafi group, who considered the Murabitun to be a heretical sect.<sup>15</sup> This is unsurprising because both Salafi Wahabi and Murabitun have different ideological roots. Salafi Wahabi refers to a modernist-puritan ideology, whereas Murabitun refers to a modernist-Sufi ideology.

The other studies focused on the philosophical aspect of the teaching of the Murabitun. Some studies proposed that its leader Abdalqadir As-Sufi is influenced by Western philosophers such as Heidegger, which is revealed in the group’s principal teachings.<sup>16</sup> Bocca-Aldaqrre argued that the Murabitun is an eclectic Sufi group that uses Islamic and non-Islamic sources to incorporate Sufi doctrines and existentialist ideas.<sup>17</sup>

Several studies suggest that the dominant studies on the Murabitun focus on its role in the context of Western secular society and religious conversion. In contrast, this article focuses on the role of the movement in the context of Indonesian society, which is neither completely secular nor completely Islamic. However, this study provides new insights into the emergence of the Murabitun in Indonesia, particularly in terms of its ability to accommodate itself within the local context. Its aim is to investigate the Sufi values that are reflected in their social and economic aspirations for Indonesian Muslims through mediating Sufi teachings and identity negotiations.

Using Talal Asad’s theory of Islam as a discursive tradition, the study investigates the local practices of the Murabitun among Indonesian Muslims, with particular attention to their cultural

<sup>14</sup> SOS Investigation, “Revealed: He Leads an Extreme and Anti-Semitic Islamic Sect, He Believes Hitler Was A Great Man - and Now He’s Back Ni Scotland,” *Scotland on Sunday* (Scotland, November 12, 1995).

<sup>15</sup> Salafi Manhaj, “Al-Muraabitoon World Soofe Movement” ([www.salafimanhaj.com](http://www.salafimanhaj.com), 2005).

<sup>16</sup> Syed Mustafa Ali, “Heidegger and the Islamicate: Transversals and Reversals,” ed. Kata Moser, Urs Goesken, and Josh Michael Hayes (Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), accessed August 8, 2022, <http://oro.open.ac.uk/59077/>.

<sup>17</sup> Francesca Bocca-Aldaqrre, “A Tariqa for the West: The Murabitun Movement between Sufi Eclecticism and Financial Activism,” *Studi Magrebini* 19, no. 2 (December 27, 2021): 237–265.

identity.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, this study used ethnography and ethnography (i.e., qualitative social media research) giving particular attention to online data and cyber resources. The Indonesian Murabitun actively promoted the circulation of the gold dinar and silver dirham as an Islamic currency at the *Pasar Muamala* (exchange market) in Madiun and Yogyakarta. Their online activities were observed on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. The group's verified social media accounts were used to obtain and analyze the data using the thematic approach or ethnographic method, with particular reference to Spradley.

### The Indonesian Murabitun and the *Pasar Muamala*

Prior to the emergence of the Murabitun movement in Indonesia, some Malaysian Muslims had joined the Murabitun World Movement in 1976. According to Mohd. Faizal Harun, Malaysians met with Abdalqadir as-Sufi in London, UK, who invited Sidi Zuhaimi, Sidi Umar Muhammad Shani, Muhammad Dimiyati, and others to meet his teacher, Shaykh Muhammad Ibn al-Habib in Morocco and seek his blessing (*baraka*). Soon later, Sidi Umar returned to Malaysia and started to propagate the *ṭariqa* in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. In 1981, the group established their first *zawiya* (religious center) in Kuala Lumpur and a second in Hangi.<sup>19</sup> In 1990 Shaykh Abdalqadir as-Sufi visited Malaysia received an honorary doctorate from University Sains Malaysia (USM) in 2001 and met with the prime minister of Malaysia, Mahathir Mohamad. In 1999 the Indonesian and Malaysian Murabitun began to build a closer relationship. The first Indonesian Murabit (the name of Murabitun follower) was Ahmad Iwan, one of three young Javanese who attended the annual gathering of the Darqawi Sufi order in Tangiers, Morocco.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Talal Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam* (Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1986); Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (JHU Press, 2009).

<sup>19</sup> Mohd Faizal Harun, *Tasawuf dan Tarekat Sejarah Perkembangan dan Alirannya di Malaysia* (UUM Press, 2014), 234; Abuzuhri, "Perkembangan Jemaah Darqawi Nusantara," *Debu Marifa Nursantara*, last modified April 8, 2007, accessed August 4, 2022, <https://abuzuhri.wordpress.com/2007/04/08/perkembangan-jemaah-darqawiyya-nusantara/>.

<sup>20</sup> Abuzuhri, "Perkembangan Jemaah Darqawi Nusantara."

Examining the practices of the Indonesian Murabitun, it was observed that the Sufi group was involved in the same spiritual activities as branches of the Murabitun World Movement elsewhere, such as organizing group *dhikr*, promoting the gold dinar and silver dirham, and criticizing Indonesian monetary policy. Zaim Saidi's community performed the ritual by reading the *dhikr* taken from the Diwan of Muhammad Ibnu al-Habib,<sup>21</sup> a specific *wird* (litany) used by the Shadhili-Darqawi Sufi order.

Although the establishment of the Indonesian Murabitun in the early 2000s was closely linked to their promotion of the gold dinar and silver dirham as a legitimate Islamic currency, its appearance in Indonesia's public sphere was also marked by the rise of Islamic populism which influenced public opinion on their religious identity. The Murabitun is known as a religious movement that promotes the use of the gold dinar and silver dirham as an accepted medium of exchange in economic transactions and the distribution of *zakāt* funds. This study found that public opinion is in line with the empirical evidence gathered. The Indonesian Murabitun are engaged in some economic activities such as *Wakāla* (agency) and *Pasar Muamala* (exchange market). *Wakāla* is a Dinar Dirham Center for the distribution of the Islamic Gold Dinar (IGD) and Islamic Silver Dirham (ISD) and for the exchange of IGD and ISD with Indonesian Rupiah (IDR). It also acts as a physical gateway for e-Dinar, payments to third-party vendors, transfers between account holders, payment system consulting for *qirād* and *e-qirad*, and facilitates e-market. The *Pasar Muamala* become a field for buying and selling various physical commodities.

The existence of *Wakala* and *Pasar Muamala* support each other. *Wakāla* is a provider of IGD and ISD in collaboration with ANTAM (a member of the Indonesia Mining Industry). In addition, *Wakāla* acts as a regulator of the circulation of its use, while the *Pasar Muamala* serves as a practical arena for buying and selling transactions, in addition to distributing *zakāt* funds. It is generally believed by the Murabitun that a *zakāt* distribution that is adjusted to the gold dinar

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<sup>21</sup> Muhammad Ibn al-Habib, *Diwān Bughayut al-Murādīn al-Sāirīn wa Tuḥfat al-Salīkīn al-ʿArīfīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Ṣadīr, 2001); Muhammad Ibn al-Habib, *The Diwān of Shaykh Muhammad Ibn al-Habīb*, ed. Murtada al-Boumas-houli and Abdassamad Clarke (South Africa: Iqra Agencies Ltd., 2017).



and silver dirham measurements is more accurate and must be directly received by those entitled to it.

The use of the gold dinar and silver dirham, as insisted upon by the Murabitun, has a strong religious foundation and can be traced back to the practice of the people of Medina (*'amal abl al-Madīna*) upon which the Prophet's Sunnah is founded. According to the Murabitun, this traditional practice is described in detail in the *Muwatta'* of Imam Malik (711–795),<sup>22</sup> one of the earliest references of Islamic law.

### Using Digital Platforms to Mediate the Principal Teachings

According to Meyrowitz, there are three aspects of communications media: media as conduits, language, and environment.<sup>23</sup> Media also plays a significant role in the development of religion. According to Hjarvard, media work as agents of religious change. For example, religious rituals are transmitted through media, particularly online media.<sup>24</sup> In many cases, the customary practices of religious events are performed virtually.

On the other hand, the presence of online media can also shift the role of central religious figures, as the authority of religious figures receives less attention in the public sphere. Media are a tool for accessing spiritual resources but also became a field for contesting religious content. In some cases, online media can shift the physical religious habituation when they are performed virtually, thus replacing the old tradition. In this sense, argued Hjarvard, media can become agents of religious change.<sup>25</sup>

Some scholars identify this phenomenon as a mediatization of religion.<sup>26</sup> By way of media, especially online media, religion has

<sup>22</sup> Aziz El Kobaiti Idrissi, "Juhūd Muslim al-Gharb fī al-Ta'rif bi Muwatta' Mālik wa Madhhabih: al-Shaykh al-Briṭānī al-Muslim 'Abd al-Qādir al-Šūfī (Ian Neil Dallas) Nūḍajan" (Morocco, 2009).

<sup>23</sup> Joshua Meyrowitz, "Images of Media: Hidden Ferment and Harmony in the Field," *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 3 (1993): 55–66.

<sup>24</sup> Stig Hjarvard, "The Mediatisation of Religion: Theorising Religion, Media and Social Change," *Culture and Religion* 12, no. 2 (June 1, 2011): 119–135.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. Tabah Maryanah and Lilih Muflihah, "Comparison of Religious Identity Politics Reporting on Depok Muamalah Market," *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research* 628 (2021): 413–425.

<sup>26</sup> Hubert Knoblauch, "Benedict in Berlin: The Mediatization of Religion," in *Mediatized Worlds: Culture and Society in a Media Age*, ed. Andreas Hepp and Friedrich Krotz (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2014), 143–158, accessed August 4, 2022,

become more publicly visible and accessible, especially in secular communities.<sup>27</sup> Hjarvard argued that the massive growth of religious expressions, such as religious belief, agency, and symbols, are influenced by the working of media.<sup>28</sup> This data indirectly makes religious communities respond to the media as a significant reality in modern religious life.

The Murabitun seem to have readily responded to the emergence of online media, particularly social media. Through social media, the principal teachings can be publicly communicated and received, and new followers can be invited. According to Bubandt, this *tariqa* is highly active on the internet promoting the use of the gold dinar and silver dirham as a global and legitimate Islamic currency.<sup>29</sup>

In the Indonesian context, this study found that the Murabitun propagate their central teachings on several social media accounts affiliated with them; for example, on YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Through these social media channels, leaders and community members publish various content, news releases, responses to multiple state policies and socio-economic issues, and lectures. In addition, social media is also used as a medium for documentation and publication of routine *dhiker* activities that are performed together online, thus connecting the various members in different countries in a virtual space. This finding is consistent with Saeed et al., who indicated that media is not only the source of

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<sup>27</sup> [https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137300355\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137300355_9), Stig Hjarvard, "Mediatization and the Changing Authority of Religion," *Media, Culture & Society* 38, no. 1 (January 1, 2016): 8–17.

<sup>28</sup> Tim Hutchings et al., "Global Perspectives on Religion, Media and Public Scholarship," *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture* 9, no. 2 (October 23, 2020): 118–164; Knoblauch, "Benedict in Berlin"; Wendi Bellar and Heidi A. Campbell, "Reading Religion in Internet Memes," *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture* 2, no. 2 (Desember 2013): 1–39; Heidi Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media* (Routledge, 2010); Heidi Campbell, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds* (Routledge, 2012); Knut Lundby, "Theoretical Frameworks for Approaching Religion and New Media," in *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*, ed. Heidi A. Campbell (New York: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>29</sup> Hjarvard, "Mediatization and the Changing Authority of Religion."

<sup>30</sup> Bubandt, "Murabitun."

information but also depicts society's inclination towards their ideology, beliefs, and customs.<sup>30</sup>

In this mediatization effort, the group was faced with various uncertain political situations, impolite behaviour of internet users (netizens), and criticism from the mainstream media. It seemed that what was experienced by Zaim Saidi and his followers was a skewed assessment of Islamic minority group activities by the secular and thus heavily biased mainstream media. Even though the reality is diverse, active Islamic groups are often generalized as being puritan or extremist. Thus, it was not surprising that the Indonesian Murabitun became an easy target for public attacks and were publicly stigmatized as a *Khilāfa* (caliphate) group, radical Islamists, and fundamentalists.

This development occurred within the context of two opposing camps in Indonesian society, one being pro-government and the opposition. Both political camps constituted the residual of the 2019 presidential election, where Islamic moderatism confronted Islamist groups or those in line with Islamic populist movements. The Indonesian Murabitun seemed to reflect the spirit of Islamic reformation in the economic sphere and publicly responded to the allegations that they were a radical Islamist group.

The second challenge is related to the lack of etiquette exhibited by internet users. According to the Microsoft survey on the Digital Civility Index, the Indonesian internet community is a highly impolite community and is prone to hate speech. Since the Murabitun discussed controversial Islamic issues online, they were bound to be at the receiving end of such negative and hostile reactions. On the other hand, the social dynamics of cyberspace are often unpredictable, and third parties can take easily advantage of religious issues to gain public attention and make profits.

The Indonesian Murabitun responded to their online critics and seemed to take this open opposition to their views as a challenge in strengthening community identity and their teaching. Through social media channels, the group members provided constructive feedback in the form of short comments. Overall, the group uses the public media space to continue their mediatization efforts in the local community. The results also indicate that the media's function as a

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<sup>30</sup> Muzammil Saeed, Syed Iftikhar Ali Gilani, and Farasat Rasool, "The Mediatization of Sufism: A Content Analysis of Urdu Newspapers," *Al-Qamar* 4, no. 2 (2021): 121–134.

conduit plays a significant role, as proposed by Meyrowitz.<sup>31</sup> The Murabitun use the media to deliver content for their followers and engage in discussions with their opponents.

However, the group's social media activity subsided when Zaim Saidi was formally accused of violating the currency law. There are indications that the Indonesian government moved to disable several of its official websites at the time. For instance, the official website of Amir Zaim Saidi<sup>32</sup> could not be accessed; the publishing website for the Indonesian gold dinar and silver dirham community<sup>33</sup> was also no longer accessible. In addition, official social media channels such as the "Amirat Nusantara" YouTube channel were removed, as were their social media accounts on Instagram and Facebook. Given that online presence is vital for the existence of any group or organization, this is certainly a strong indication that the government decided to suppress any activity until the court proceedings were completed.

Interestingly, as soon as Zaim Saidi was acquitted by the court in October 2021, he and his followers reappeared on social media networks to document their case and provide a counter-narrative. This study obtained data from the new YouTube channel "Zaimsaidi Official" and several other social media accounts through which the Indonesian Murabitun have rebuilt their online presence and continue to promote the gold dinar and silver dirham as an Islamic currency with renewed vigor and enthusiasm. Through official accounts, including YouTube,<sup>34</sup> and Facebook,<sup>35</sup> Zaim Saidi also promotes his books that represent his ideas and thoughts. He uses those media in documenting various activities, such as seminars, public lectures, or talk shows. This reaffirms that the media is a powerful way to mediate their ideas and principles teaching of Murabitun.

## Indonesian Murabitun and Islamic Populism: A Negotiated Identity

Seen as a global movement, the Murabitun was founded by Abdalqadir As-Sufi as mentioned earlier. Abdalqadir As-Sufi is the

<sup>31</sup> Meyrowitz, "Images of Media," 55–56.

<sup>32</sup> [www.zaimsaidi.com](http://www.zaimsaidi.com)

<sup>33</sup> [www.pustakaadina.com](http://www.pustakaadina.com)

<sup>34</sup> "Zaim Saidi - YouTube," last modified 2023, accessed April 8, 2023, [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCeERFkVgRQzHRDfiAGGY\\_Xg](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCeERFkVgRQzHRDfiAGGY_Xg).

<sup>35</sup> "Zaim Saidi - Facebook," last modified 2023, accessed April 8, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/zaim.saidi.7>.

disciple of Muhammad ibn al-Habib (d. 1972) and he became a *muqaddam* of a Sufi order (*ṭarīqa*) called the Qadiriyya Shadhiliyya Darqawiyya Habibiyya. A *Muqaddam* refers to a disciple or dervish who follows the Sufi path and has received permission from their spiritual mentor (also known as a *shaikh*, *pir*, or *murshid*) to aid in instructing other learners on this path. On closer examination, it can be observed that the origins of the teachings of this Sufi order can be traced back to this community.

Examining Abdalqadir as-Sufi's biography in more detail, Haron noted that Abdalqadir as-Sufi was a Scottish playwright and actor who reverted to Islam in 1967. His acceptance of Islam took place under the spiritual guidance and mentorship of Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Habib al-Filali, a Sufi master of the Darqawi order in Morocco. Abdalqadir as-Sufi was also influenced by the Qadiri and the Shadhili Sufi orders.<sup>36</sup> His group is also referred to as the Habibi-Darqawi-Shadhili Sufi order, as he was a disciple of Shaykh Muhammad ibn Habib.<sup>37</sup> The affiliation of many Western Sufis with several Sufi orders prompted Hermansen to characterize the Murabitun as a hybrid, perennial, transplant which seems to be a common feature in Europe and North America.<sup>38</sup>

The chain of the Qadiriyya Shadhiliyya Darqawiyya Habibiyya *ṭarīqa* from 'Abd al-Qadir al-Sufi to Prophet Muhammad can be drawn as follows: 'Abd al-Qādir al-Ṣūfī, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥabīb, Muḥammad b. 'Alī, al-'Arabī al-Huwwārī, Muḥammad al-'Arabī, Aḥmad al-Badawī, al-'Arabī b. Aḥmad al-Darqawī, 'Alī al-Jamāl, 'Arabī b. 'Abd Allah, Aḥmad b. 'Abd Allah, Qāsīm al-Khaṣṣasī, Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allah, 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Fāsī, Yūsuf al-Fāsī, 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Majdhūb, 'Alī al-Dawwār, Ibrāhīm al-Falham, Aḥmad al-Zarrūq, Aḥmad al-Ḥadramī, Yahyā al-Qādirī, 'Alī Wafā, Muḥammad Wafā, D. 'ūd al-Bakhilī, Aḥmad Ibn 'Aṭā' Allah, Abū al-'Abbās al-Mursī, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī, 'Abd al-Salām b. Mashīsh, Muḥammad b. Ḥarāzīm, Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ, Abū Madyān al-Ghawth,

<sup>36</sup> Haron, "Da'wah Movements and Sufi Tariqahs," 286; Haron, "Evaluating and Comparing the Murabitun and Haeriyun: Reflections of Contemporary South African Sufism," 13.

<sup>37</sup> Aziz El Kobaiti Idrissi, *Islamic Sufism in the West* (Diwan Press, 2013); Idrissi, "'Ḥūd Muslim al-Gharb fī al-Ta'rīf bi Muwaṭṭa'."

<sup>38</sup> Marcia Hermansen, "The 'Other' Shadhilis of the West," in *The Shadhiliyya*, ed. Eric Geoffroy (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2005), 479.

‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, Abū Sa‘īd al-Mubārak,<sup>48</sup> Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ḥukkarī, al-Tartūsī, al-Shiblī, al-Junayd, al-Sarrī al-Saqāṭī, Ma‘rūf al-Karkhī, Daūd al-Ṭāī, Ḥabīb al-Ajamī, Ḥasan al-Basrī, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, and Prophet Muhammad. We retrieved this information from Abdalqadir’s work *The Book of Tawhid*<sup>39</sup>, and it can also be accessed through the official website of the Murabitun *ṭarīqa* (<https://shaykhabdalqadir.com/about/>)<sup>40</sup><sup>5</sup> and “The Darqawi Way: The Letters of Shaykh Mawlay al-‘Arabi ad-Darqawi” of Muhammad al-Arabi Ibn Ahmed Ad- Darqawi which is translated by Aisha Bewley.<sup>41</sup>

Regarding the Indonesian Murabitun, they are not known as a Sufi group or *ṭarīqa*; rather, they are known as a dinar dirham movement. They are primarily an economic reform movement that promotes IGD and ISD as a counter-exchange tool to IDR. Zaim Saidi is regarded as the central figure who criticizes conventional banknotes and global capitalism.<sup>42</sup> Only one article<sup>43</sup> investigated the role of Zaim Saidi and his group, which was published in an Indonesian online news provider.<sup>44</sup> The author had been affiliated with the Murabitun himself and visited their center in Cape Town, South Africa where Shaykh Abdalqadir as-Sufi acts as the appointed *murshid*.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Abdalqadir As-Sufi, *Jalan Menuju Allah: Tawhid Futunwa Hubb*, trans. Zaim Saidi (Depok: Pustaka Adina, 2015).

<sup>40</sup> Abdalqadir As-Sufi, “About,” *Shaykh Dr. Abdalqadir as-Sufi*, last modified 2023, accessed April 7, 2023, <https://shaykhabdalqadir.com/about/>.

<sup>41</sup> Muhammad Al-Arabi Ibn Ahmed Ad-Darqawi, *The Darqawi Way: The Letters of Shaykh Mawlay al-‘Arabi Ad-Darqawi*, trans. Aisha Bewley (Diwan Press, 1980).

<sup>42</sup> Zaim Saidi, *Euforia Emas: Mengupas Kekeliruan dan Cara yang Benar Pengembangan Dinar, Dirham, dan Fulus agar Sesuai al-Qur’an dan Sunnah* (Jakarta: Pustaka Adina, 2011); Zaim Saidi, *Kenali Ke Dinar: Tinggalkan Riba Tegakkan Muamalah* (Yogyakarta: Delokomotif, 2012); Zaim Saidi, *Ilusi Demokrasi: Kritik dan Otokritik Islam Menyongsong Kembalinya Tata Kehidupan Islam Menurut Amal Madinah* (Jakarta: Penerbit Republik, 2007); Zaim Saidi, *Tidak Syar’inya Bank Syariah di Indonesia dan Jalan Keluarnya Menuju Muamalat* (Yogyakarta: Delokomotif, 2010).

<sup>43</sup> Zaim Saidi is not widely recognized in academic Sufi circles; however, outside Indonesia his name as mentioned as a representative of the Nusantara region for the Qadiri-Shadili-Darqawi order.

<sup>44</sup> Zaim Uchrowi, “Zaim Saidi, Dinar & Sufisme,” *Tempo*, last modified February 10, 2021, accessed August 3, 2022, <https://kolom.tempo.co/read/1431443/zaim-saidi-dinar-sufisme>.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

Indeed, there is strong evidence that Zaim Saidi and his community belong to the Murabitun World Movement. Zaim Saidi seems to have a close relationship with one of Abdalqadir as-Sufi's successors in the person of 'Umar Ibrahim Vadillo, a Spanish revert and gold dinar activist, as evidenced in his meeting with either 'Umar Ibrahim Vadillo or Abdalqadir as-Sufi himself in South Africa, Morocco, and Indonesia. Zaim Saidi also translated some of their works into Indonesian.

The core teachings and practices of the Indonesian branch of the Murabitun do not differ much from that of the Habibi-Darqawi-Shadili Sufi order. It focuses on the teachings of 'Umar Ibrahim Vadillo, Abdalqadir as-Sufi, and Muhammad Ibn al-Habib.<sup>46</sup> For example, in Ketapang Regency, West Kalimantan Province, Murabitun implemented its economic program and transmitted the three primary works of Abdalqadir as-Sufi.<sup>47</sup>

However, while preserving the core teachings of the global Murabitun movement, the Indonesian Murabitun modified their activities to suit the local context. This change is evident in their involvement in the *Pasar Muamala*, their relationship with other Islamic groups, and their response to local political issues, particularly in term of ethnic and religious sentiment in Indonesian Gubernatorial and Presidential elections, which caused political polarization.<sup>48</sup>

First, in terms of *Pasar Muamala*, the Indonesian Murabitun has utilized it as a medium of transactions in accordance with the *Sunna*. Transactions at the *Pasar Muamala* are conducted using gold dinar, silver dirham, and banknotes (paper money). Zaim Saidi explains that transactions at the *Pasar Muamala* are currently in a transitional period, where it is not yet feasible to fully abandon the use of banknotes (paper money). In other words, the Indonesian Murabitun efforts to establish the gold dinar and silver dirham as exchange instruments for their transactional activities are implemented gradually. It seems that

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<sup>46</sup> Ibn al-Habib, *Diman*; Abdalqadir As-Sufi, *Sultāniya* (Cape Town: Madinah Press, 2002).

<sup>47</sup> Abdalqadir As-Sufi, "The Re-Establishment-of Islam in West Borneo," *Shaykh Dr. Abdalqadir as-Sufi*, July 20, 2018, accessed August 7, 2022, <https://shaykhabdalqadir.com/8215/>.

<sup>48</sup> Nathanael Gratias Sumaktoyo, "Ethnic and Religious Sentiments in Indonesian Politic: Evidence from the 2017 Jakarta Gubernatorial Election," *Journal of East Asian Studies* 21, no. 1 (March 2021): 141–164.

they try to negotiate their vision with the current Indonesia social and economic situation.

*Second*, in relation to their relationship with other Islamic groups, the rise of Islamic populism in Indonesia has also influenced their identity as an Islamic group. This phenomenon initially emerged during the 2017 regional governor election in Jakarta and the following presidential election in 2019 when the commodification of Islamic symbols has dominated the public discourse. Modern Islamic movements which have a mission to reform Islamic teachings are often associated with populist Islam and, to a lesser extent, with fundamentalist and *khilafa* groups. In the midst of this situation, the public stigmatize the Indonesian Murabitun as a populist Islamic group and even a radical Islamic groups due to their vision of establishing Islamic economic reform, particularly in using gold dinar and silver dirham as a currency.<sup>49</sup> Despite facing this stigma, the Indonesian Murabitun continue to educate society through teachings that emphasize proper Islamic leadership (*sulṭāniya*) and Islamic economics (*muamala*). They also built the relation to broader Indonesian Islamic group such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, the two largest Indonesian mass Muslim organizations, to get public attention and acceptance.

*Third*, The Indonesian Murabitun responded to the increased political polarization by maintaining their identity as a Sufi community; they organized traditional Sufi events such as congregational *dhikr* and observed their internal spiritual and social hierarchy. Following the *ṭariqa* tradition, the spiritual leader assumes the position of the *amīr* who directs all activities in the community, including its economic activities such as exchanging dinars and dirhams, determining the selling price, and distributing the funds to

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<sup>49</sup> Candra Yuri Nuralam, "Pasar Muamalah Dinilai Berupaya Bangkitkan Sistem Khilafah," last modified February 7, 2021, accessed April 9, 2023, <https://mediaindonesia.com/megapolitan/383098/pasar-muamalah-dinilai-berupaya-bangkitkan-sistem-khilafah>; KumparanNews, "Apa Kata Zaim Saidi soal Pasar Muamalah Dikaitkan dengan Khilafah?," *kumparan*, last modified 10 February 2021, accessed April 9, 2023, <https://kumparan.com/kumparannews/apa-kata-zaim-saidi-soal-pasar-muamalah-dikaitkan-dengan-khilafah-1v9CeyX1tRj>; Khalifatul Azizah, "Gejala Khilafah dari Tren Pasar Muamalah," *IslamRamah.co*, February 6, 2021, accessed April 9, 2023, <https://www.islamramah.co/2021/02/5168/gejala-khilafah-dari-tren-pasar-muamalah.html>.



the *wakāla* branches. Zaim Saidi is the appointed *amīr* of the Indonesian Murabitun and the *amīr* of the main *wakāla* of Nusantara.

To preserve the genuine character of a *ṭarīqa* the Murabitun organize daily ritual activities performed in their *ṣūfiyya*, the residences of their members, or local mosques. They carry out *dhikr* sessions with special provisions and read the *madh* (praises of the Prophet). During their community gatherings, they usually recite the *Mafāṭih al-Wird*,<sup>5</sup> the *Dīwān* of Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Habib as well as the *Shifā*<sup>50</sup> of Qadhī ‘Iyadh (1149) or the *Qaṣīdat al-Burda*<sup>51</sup> of Imam al-Busīri (1213–1294). Following the Sufi tradition, praising the Prophet is a central theme to enliven the heart and purify one’s faith.<sup>52</sup> Another essential element of the *ṭarīqa* is the obligatory oath of allegiance (*bay‘a*) to establish the bond between the *murīd* and the *murshid*.<sup>53</sup>

The Murabitun successfully negotiate their religious identity in accordance with the social rejection of their movement. The emergence of the Indonesian Murabitun caused a certain degree of consternation and even outright rejection by the public in response to their initiative to replace banknotes with gold and silver coins following the *Sunna*. Despite the many criticisms their move received from the public, the group responded positively by providing detailed explanations and positive perspectives.

To distinguish their community from the many other Islamic movements that flourish in the country, the Murabitun are part of the dinar dirham movement, which has a long history in Indonesia. It seems that they make a conscious effort to negotiate their distinctive identity by emphasizing the historical link between the Muslim sultanates of the past and the use of gold dinar and silver dirham currency.<sup>1</sup>

The Indonesian Murabitun have built their own narrative about the role of the gold dinar and silver dirham in the Islamic kingdom of Nusantara (*Kerajaan Islam Nusantara*) based on authentic historical records. In addition, Zaim Saidi and his followers frequently visit the

<sup>50</sup> al-Qāḍī Abū al-Faḍl ‘Iyadh, *al-Shifā’ bi Ta’rif Ḥuquq al-Muṣṭafā* (Dubai: Jaizah Dubai al-Dawliyyah li al-Qur’ān al-Karīm, 2013).<sup>20</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Sharaf al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Sa’īd al-Būṣīri, *al-Burdah*, 1987.

<sup>52</sup> Abdalqadir As-Sufi, *The Book of Tawhid* (Madinah Press, 2022), 46.

<sup>53</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, “The Origins and Development of Sufi Orders (Tarekat) in Southeast Asia,” *Studia Islamica* 1, no. 1 (1994): 1–23.<sup>11</sup>

historical palaces that are still preserved in this area, such as the sultanates of Ternate,<sup>54</sup> Bintan,<sup>55</sup> Langkat,<sup>56</sup> Cirebon,<sup>57</sup> Tanjungpura Darussalam,<sup>58</sup> and Ketapang.

The negotiation process can also be observed in how they preserve the identity of their Sufi order through their distinctive attire, which distinguishes them from other local *ṭarīqa*. The Murabitun can be readily identified by their traditional Moroccan attire including the *tarbūsh* (i.e., felt hat with silk tassel). Although wearing the *tarbūsh* is not mandatory for all members, it is often worn by the attendees of larger community events. The author of this study witnessed this practice when visiting a Shadilli-Darqawi *ṣawīya* in Melbourne, Australia, at the end of 2022. Amid the secular society, Shadilli-Darqawi followers still maintain their identity including in clothing symbols.

The negotiations continued until the leader (*amīr*) of the Indonesian Murabitun was declared acquitted and released by the law of the Indonesian government. Following the formal acquittal of Zaim Saidi, the group resumed their activities to promote the gold dinar currency in Indonesia; however, without challenging the status quo. Their use of the IGD and ISD is legal in trade transactions as long as they do not violate the legal provisions set by the government and the use of the official currency. However, the scale of such activities has markedly decreased, and the community has demonstrated greater flexibility in navigating the dynamic socio-

<sup>54</sup> *A Conversation with Sultan Mudaffar Sjah II on the Return of Dinar and Dirham to Ternate*, 2013, accessed April 7, 2023,

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=27AIYZ9fUxU>; *Seminar Tentang Dinar Dan Dirham Di Kesultanan Ternate*, 2019, accessed April 7, 2023,

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Md9OFUq4jW0>.

<sup>24</sup> *Dinar Kesultanan Bintan Adalah Dinar Yang Sab*, 2020, accessed April 7, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ndRWdDdRcOU>.

<sup>3</sup> *Kesultanan Langkat Gelar Pasar Muamalah Langkat Terima Koin Dinar Dirham*, 2020, accessed April 7, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=92I8-tbXVa0>.

<sup>57</sup> Muhamad Syahri Romdhon, "Dinar Berlogo Kasultanan Kasepuhan Diluncurkan - Inilah.Com," last modified December 6, 2012, accessed February 12, 2023, [https://www.inilah.com/dinar-berlogo-kasultanan-kasepuhan-diluncurkan;Bagaimana Cara Kita Memutar Dinar Dirham Kita \(Pasar Muamalah Kesultanan Kacirebonan\)](https://www.inilah.com/dinar-berlogo-kasultanan-kasepuhan-diluncurkan;Bagaimana Cara Kita Memutar Dinar Dirham Kita (Pasar Muamalah Kesultanan Kacirebonan)), 2022, accessed April 7, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PpaV17sgjKs>.

<sup>58</sup> *Peluncuran Koin Dinar Dirham Mangkunegeri Tanjungpura.*, 2022, accessed April 7, 2023, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FCE\\_Z5eD7Z8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FCE_Z5eD7Z8).

political landscape in Indonesia. The dinar dirham movement continues to be motivated by the spirit of reviving the *Sunna* and the charitable practices of the people of Medina (*'amal abl al-Madinah*) which remains a central aspect of their socio-economic activities.

### **Concluding Remarks**

This study has briefly outlined the development of the Murabitun *ṭarīqa* in Indonesia, which differs from that of its European and North African branches. In Indonesia, the Murabitun have established a close connection with the Sufi teachings and the already established dinar dirham movement. The group disseminates the teachings of the *ṭarīqa* and mobilizes the support of their followers mediated through online media, particularly social media channels used as conduits, language, and environment. These new interactive platforms have opened new possibilities for discourse creation and interpersonal engagement and changed the way of distributing their ideas, even in more unfavorable circumstances.

The Indonesian Murabitun were also required to negotiate their identity as a Sufi group in the face of rising Islamic populism. They preserved their identity by maintaining Sufi rituals and doctrines while facing a considerable degree of negative publicity and public criticism.

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