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SUFISM, SPIRITUAL PERFORMATIVITY AND THEOLOGICAL CONTESTATIONS: PARALLELISMS OF THE ACEH AND PERAK SULTANATES ACROSS THE CENTURIES

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ABSTRACT

Since the thirteenth century, longstanding connections between tariqa (Sufi Orders) and Malay Sultanates brought new Islamic knowledge and practices which were fused with local traditions. The coming of Islam also brought the nobat musical ensemble and religious-related musical practices. From the court of Pasai, North Sumatera, the ensemble later spread to other parts of the Malay world and was still played in the succeeding Aceh sultanate in the early seventeenth century. Evidence for this exists in the court manual, Adat Aceh, which details the use of music in royal religious processions and the practice zikir by the Sultan and his subjects. The Sufi spiritual performativity continued in the 1980s at the court of Perak with the introduction of the Naqshbandi Haqqani tariqa, where certain devotional-musical practices such as zikir, qasida, and mawlid were occasionally performed. However, the nobat was not used in these Sufi practices but replaced by percussion-based musical ensembles. Both these Naqshbandi Sufi tariqa were theologically contested, and their esoteric doctrines were considered blasphemous by those with religious power. This article examines the parallel existence of two Malay sultanates in different times, their connections to branches of Sufi tariqa, musical practices and the contestations that ensued.

Keywords: Sufism, music, Aceh, Perak, contestations

SPIRITUAL AWARENESS AND SUFI ISLAM

The fall of the Abbasid caliphate in 1258 resulted in a rise in Islamic awareness across Muslim lands (Fatimi 1963: 92). This led to an increase in missionary (*da'wah*) work by Sufi *tariqa* of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, from Iran, Central Asia, and India through long established trade networks across the east Indian Ocean (Johns 1961; Milner 2008: 41; Laffan 2011: 5–19; Moin 2012: 34). In the aftermath of the Mongol invasion of Baghdad, Moin (2012: 34) notes that:

> "mystical brotherhoods in Iran and Central Asia began breaking out of their monastic shells and reaching out to the masses. Sufi orders absorbed local saint cults, Sufi shrines became important centres of pilgrimage and social life, and Sufi leadership became hereditary. The result was a tremendous increase in the material, cultural, and martial resources commanded by Sufi leaders, their kin, and their devotees".

This era of spiritual awareness and mysticism also saw increasing "competition and interdependence between mystics and kings, of Sufi politics and royal saintliness, in which religion shaped, and was shaped by, royal tastes and rituals" (Moin 2012: 34). This idea of mystic-king interdependence was later adopted by Malay courts in Southeast Asia with the introduction of Islam. Malay sultans were attracted to the religion not only due to the existence of Sufi mystics but also the economic potential and prestige associated with bigger Muslim empires. The religion became the new rallying point of Muslim traders and certain sultanates—through connections with Middle Eastern caliphates—in gaining a foothold in economically growing Malay entrepots with a promise of economic prosperity, political influence and inclusion into the Muslim *ummah* or brotherhood (Van Leur 1955: 112). The relationships between the Malay sultanates and influential Muslim polities happened in an interconnected Islamic world across the Indian Ocean, where the interlocking political, economic, and social network provided the impetus in which Malay arts and culture were developed.

While acknowledging the change forged by Islam across the region, there are also the underlying elements of continuity with previous eras. The Indians' presence in the Malay world was well established from the past two millennia, and the land of the *Kelings* (Indians) had long been viewed with admiration by the Malays due to their advanced civilisation (Harrison 1957: 9–20). Through these same networks, scholars from

the Middle East and South Asia began introducing a new belief system, Sufi-based Islam (see Hadi 2010). Later, local Muslim scholars began to study abroad in places such as Gujarat, Cairo, and Mecca, bringing back new knowledge and sometimes controversial ideas. As an integral part of certain sects of Sufism, music played an important role in court culture and continued with its symbolic and spiritual functions intact. Music, either for entertainment, spiritual or ceremonial purposes, was accommodated and allowed by Sufi *sheikh*[1] and *mufti*. The controversy was not so much about the adoption of Sufi music and spiritual performativity of the practices, but the underlying esoteric doctrine of certain influential leaders of the Sufi orders which was viewed by many as a threat to mainstream Islam.

This article argues that there was a continued mystic-king interdependency through *tariqa* practices in Malay courts which included Sufi spiritual performativity and music. There were theological contestations and sustained religious-political tension that seems to indicate a power interplay between the state and Sufi politics. The aim of this article is to first, examine the presence of *tariqa* Sufism and identify key religious figures in two Malay sultanates i.e., seventeenth century Aceh and twentieth and twenty-first century Perak. Second, is to investigate Sufi spiritual practices which involved the use of music and third, analyse the theological contestations of state-sanctioned religious homogeneity. This research is based on textual analysis of early Malay literature and a six-month fieldwork covering the states of Kedah, Pulau Pinang, Kuala Lumpur, and Selangor. It also involved participating in Naqshbandi-Haqqani *tariqa* gatherings, attending performances, and conducting interviews with its followers.

SUFI *TARIQA*

The Coming of Islam, Pasai and *Nobat*

The coming of Islam to the Malay world is often attributed to the trading connections between Southeast Asia, India, and the Middle East (al-Attas 1969; Drewes 1985; Azra 2006). In the *Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai* (Jones 1987),[2] it is mentioned that Merah Silu, ruler of Pasai, was miraculously converted after meeting Prophet Muhammad in a dream and was later taught by Sultan Muhammad, a ruler turned Sufi *fakir* from India (*Pasai* 30: 8). There is also the mention of *nobat* in installing Pasai's first ruler:

> "Then the Sultan wore the complete state attire, a gift from Mecca, for he is to be drummed (installed). Then all the nobles sat in rows facing the *nobat* 'Ibrahim Khalil' [and] the herald stood up holding the sword and all the officers carrying their own. Then the installation drum was beaten and all the instruments sounded" (*Pasai* 32: 3).

The use of the *nobat* then became the symbol of Malay customs and ceremonies in installing Sultans and marking religious occasions, including prayer times. It was the "soundmark" of Sultans and their tributary states in demarcating territorial boundaries and influence (Andaya 2011; Raja Halid 2018a). Pasai's connection to the Islamic kingdoms in India was evident when Ibn Battuta, acting as an envoy of the Sultan of Delhi, visited the sultanate during the reign of Sultan Malik al-Zahir (r. 1297–1328). On arrival, he was received by a certain Amir Daulasa, a Pasai court official he met earlier in Delhi. During his stay, Ibn Battuta noticed that the Sultan was a pious Muslim of the Shafie *madhab* (school of thought) and noted the similarities between the court entertainments of Pasai and India (Gibb 1929). He recalled:

> "We dismounted at the usual place (where the lances were) and the sultan rode into the palace, where a ceremonial audience was held, the sultan remaining on his elephant opposite the pavilion where he sits (at reception). Male musicians came in and sang before him, after which they led in horses with silk, caparisons, golden anklets, and halters of embroidered silk" (Gibb [tr.] 1929: 276).

Pasai's tradition continued in Aceh and music was still part of court culture. Details on the use of music in Aceh's *adat istiadat* (customs and ceremonies) were documented in the *Adat Aceh,* a seventeenth century court chronicle (Drewes and Vorhoeve 1958; Takeshi 1984; Raja Halid 2021). Music, either for entertainment or ceremonial purposes, was an important element in Malay courts throughout the region and was documented in court chronicles such as the *Hikayat Patani* (see Raja Halid 2018a) and *Sejarah Melayu*.

Aceh and Sufism in the Malay World

With the demise of the Melaka sultanate and the annexation of Pasai in 1524, Aceh began to establish itself as the centre of Islamic scholarship, and more importantly took over the mantle of Malay supremacy, famously becoming known as *Serambi Mekah* or the veranda of Mecca. The Aceh

sultanate continued with the traditions of Pasai and acknowledged the latter's role as the centre of Muslim scholarship and propagation in the region (Andaya 2001).

The Aceh sultanate was well connected to the Islamicate[3] world across the Indian Ocean and became part of an international network of Sufi masters and *tariqa*. Many *ulama* and scholars made their name as advisors or *mufti* under the patronage of not only the Acehnese palace but many others throughout the Malay world. The partnership between a Sufi master and *tariqa* to a Muslim leader, Sultan or Caliph could also be seen in sixteenth century India, when rulers such as Mughal Emperors Babur (1483–1530) and Humayun (1508–1556) were dependent on Sufi mystical knowledge for political guidance.[4] There were also rivalries among Sufi masters in India from the Naqshbandi and Shattari *tariqa* in gaining political favours from their rulers (Moin 2012).

Early Sufi *tariqa* in the Malay world included the Ahmadiyyah, Shadhiliyyah, Qadiriyyah, Shatiriyyah (Shattari), Sammaniyyah, and Naqshbandiyya (Naqshbandi) (Md Nor 2009; Yusoff and Engku Alwi 2015). The influence of Sufi thoughts and ideas are clearly evident in early Malay literature. Scholar and writer Hamzah al-Fansuri (d. 1527–1530) was one of the most important figures in Acehnese Muslim history. A proponent of the *wujudiyyah* doctrine, he was credited as the inventor of the Malay *syair* or poems and was part of the *tariqa* of 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani in Ayutthaya, Siam, also known as the Qadiriyyah *tariqa*. Notable Sufi *ulama* included Abdullah Burhanpuri of the Shattari *tariqa* and Shamsuddin Sumatera'i from the Naqshbandi *tariqa* (see Rastam et al. 2015).

The Perak Sultanate, Sufism and Music

Perak was established in 1528 by Sultan Muzaffar Shah, son of Sultan Mahmud Shah, the last ruler of Melaka. Like Melaka and Pasai, Perak was ruled according to the traditional Malay political hierarchy which included the presence of religious scholars or *ulama* who were most likely Sufis from a certain *tariqa*. This can be seen through the practice of *zikir* and *maulud* (or *maulid*) during the reign of Sultan Iskandar Zulkarnain (r. 1752–1765) as narrated in the *Misa Melayu* (Raja Chulan 1962):

> "Then all of them read together the *maulud* and do the *zikir.* Then the sound in the palace was too loud with people reading the praises to the Prophet *salla 'llahu alaihi wa-sallama* and *zikir* Allah and *baligh*

> *nasib* and different kinds of praises. After the reading of the *maulud*, all of them went in to pledge allegiance to His Royal Highness" (*Misa Melayu* 95: 13, translated by author).

The *Misa Melayu* offers no clear mention of the post of *mufti* or *qadi* (chief judge) in the Perak court, other than the general term of *ulama* or *imam* among the subjects. According to the State Mufti Department, the post of state *mufti* officially began in 1935, during the reign of Sultan Iskandar Shah (r. 1918–1938) with the appointment of Haji Muhammad Zain bin Muhammad Amin (www.mufti.perak.gov.my). However, there was an *ulama* from West Sumatera by the name of Muhammad Saleh al-Minangkabawi who was said to be the Sheikh al-Islam or *mufti* of Perak during the reign of Sultan Idris Shah I (r. 1887–1916). After Aceh, West Sumatera or Minangkabau land, was well known to be the centre of Islamic learning in the seventeenth century. The earliest *tariqa* that had a presence here were the Shatiriyyah Sammaniyyah, Rifaiyah and Naqshbandiyyah (Fatthurahman 2008). It is not surprising if Muhammad Saleh al-Minangkabawi belonged to one of these *tariqa* and imparted his Sufi knowledge and practices to his students in Perak.

Today Perak is ruled by Sultan Nazrin Shah, the 35th Sultan of Perak. The sultanate maintains many of the *adat istiadat* or customs and ceremonies used by the Melaka sultanate centuries ago. Like many other Malay courts in the region, music was used in the Perak court for entertainment, customs, and ceremonies. The eighteenth-century text *Misa Melayu* mentions that the *nobat* was used to install rulers, celebrate royal weddings, and accompany royal processions. As narrated in the *Misa Melayu*:

> "And after the grave has been covered and the tombstone erected, [the sultan] was then carried with the accompaniment of *gendang, negara, nafiri, serunai* and state umbrellas while offering charity along the way" (*Misa Melayu* 59: 6, translated by author).

The *Misa Melayu* also documents the repertoire of the Perak *nobat* which remains the same to this day. However, there is no indication of the *nobat* being performed in Sufi *zikir* sessions or large processions similar to what was documented in Aceh in the seventeenth century. The *nobat* continued to be performed but its function as an entertainment ensemble was later stopped in the early twentieth century. This change in the ensemble's function was due to the impact of colonisation and influence of western

culture throughout many of the Malay courts in the Malay Peninsula. New forms of western entertainment such as music and dance were introduced in the Malay courts, including brass bands. In the 1960s, Sultan Idris Shah (r. 1963–1984) formed a big band called the RIShah, and with the sultan himself as a saxophone player and composer. His son Raja Iskandar Zulkarnain, the current Raja Di Hilir of Perak, continued with his own band at his palace in Ipoh. Today, while there is no official band for entertainment within the palace and for official functions, the Radio Televisyen Malaysia (RTM) Orchestra would normally be invited to perform.

The *nobat* remains as a ceremonial ensemble during royal installations and marking religious occasions such as the coming of Ramadan and Syawal.[5] However, like Aceh more than four centuries earlier, a new spiritual sound would be heard in the palace in Kuala Kangsar, introduced not by a palace *ulama*, but a member of the royal household. These sounds of *zikir* and religious music would reignite the Sufi-*tariqa*-based Islamic teachings and practices prevalent throughout the Malay world for centuries. This time it was a branch of the Naqshbandi Sufi or *tassawwuf tariqa*, known as the Naqshbandiyya Al-Aliyyah Sheikh Nazim al-Haqqani Sufi Order or simply the Naqshbandi Haqqani Sufi Order.

The Naqshbandi Haqqani Sufi Order

The Naqshbandi Sufi order or *tariqa* is not new to the Malay world. It has been around for centuries and has longstanding historical connections with Malay monarchs in the region (Riddell 2001; Laffan 2011; Yusoff and Engku Alwi 2015). The later emergence of a branch of the *tariqa*, the Naqshbandi Haqqani Sufi Order, sparked interest among western scholars, especially looking into its growing influence in Europe and the United States (Böttcher 2006; Vidich 2000; Nielsen 2003; Draper 2004; Schmidt 2004; Damrel 2006; Stjernholm 2011). Led by a spiritual leader, Sheikh Nazim Haqqani, the *tariqa* has a global reach, including Southeast Asian countries like Malaysia and Indonesia. However, little has been published on the *tariqa*'s presence in Malaysia (but see Farrer 2009). Farrer (2009: 35) views the Haqqani Sufi movement as being "elite, royal, serious, and secretive, yet porous and playful, and these combined features add to its mysterious intrigue and appeal". The *tariqa* has a modern and urban feel to it, and there are elements of style and sophistication. For example, many of the members gather around Bangsar and Damansara, two of the most affluent areas of the country and wear bohemian-style Muslim clothing.

Members of the movement was estimated at around 800–1,000 in 2008 in Malaysia (Farrer 2009: 37) and the number could have risen considerably now. Gatherings are conducted at the *zawiyah* (Sufi lodge), occupying two double-storey houses at Bukit Damansara, a wealthy neighbourhood at the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur.

Sheikh Nazim Adil al-Qubrusi al-Haqqani (1922–2014) was a Turkish-Cypriot Muslim scholar and Sufi. He was "commanded" by the Grand Sheikh Abdullah Dagestani to spread Islam and Sufism to Europe. Sheikh Nazim was made spiritual leader of the Naqshbandi *tariqa* after the death of Sheikh Dagestani in 1973. His *tariqa* was later known as the Naqshbandi Haqqani Sufi Order. As part of his mission, Sheikh Nazim regularly visited London especially during Ramadan and conducted his activities primarily at Shacklewell Lane and Peckham Mosques. His teachings and charisma attracted many followers from around the world, including the Sultan of Brunei, who contributed greatly to the *tariqa*'s cause. Among the growing number of followers was a young prince from Perak, Raja Ashman Shah who would later become the Caliph of the Naqshbandi Haqqani Sufi Order of the Eastern Region.

The Royal Caliph

The late HRH Raja Ashman Shah (1958–2012) was the second son of Sultan Azlan Shah (1928–2014) and younger brother of the present Sultan of Perak, Sultan Nazrin Shah. Like many other privileged princes of Malaysia's royal households, Raja Ashman studied abroad, and took economics and law in the UK. He was later appointed as Raja Kecil Sulong Perak in 2010, fourth in line to the Perak throne. According to those close to him, Raja Ashman was interested in Sufism at an early age and continued when he was studying in London. His family did not take his "unorthodox" Islam seriously and thought his passion for Sufism would fade away. But it did not and it got stronger. Raja Ashman wanted to bring back Sufism into the palace which he saw as being too westernised. Like many other Perak royals, he loved music and the performing arts, especially theatre. This was evident when Raja Ashman or Ku Ash as he was fondly known, used to support a small musical theatre performance called "Melodi Kota" which I was involved in 1994. He attended our rehearsals and could be seen playing the guitar. This passion for music could also be seen during his *tariqa*'s regular *zikir* sessions. This was the first time I met Mustapha Mahidin, who wrote the script for the theatre and one of the earliest followers of the *tariqa*.

Raja Ashman met Sheikh Nazim Haqqani in the 1980s in London and invited him to the palace in 1986 where the *Zikir Khatam al-Khwajagan* was held (Mustapha, personal communication, 3 March 2019). This *zikir* is an important practice of the *tariqa* and is performed two hours before sunset on a Thursday or Friday night, done sitting with the Sheikh in a congregation. His devotion and close relations with Sheikh Nazim resulted in Raja Ashman being appointed as the caliph of Sheikh Nazim Haqqani of the Eastern Region. Despite the *tariqa* being viewed as "royal" and "elitist", Raja Ashman began gaining followers from all backgrounds, especially among urban youths who were attracted to the prince's charisma, humble personality and in one his disciple's words, "divinely inspired wisdom". One of them was journalist and actor Mustapha Mahidin, who met Raja Ashman and later Sheikh Nazim himself in Kuala Lumpur in 1987, where he pledged allegiance (*ba'iah*) to the Grand Sheikh. Mustapha or Sir Moose to his close friends, would then attend Sheikh Nazim's annual gatherings in London during Ramadan for nine consecutive years, including gatherings in Germany, Holland, Turkey, and Cyprus. Various *zikir* were used during these early gatherings but they did not include any *maulid* (songs in praise of Prophet Muhammad) and playing of instruments. Although often associated with music, not all Sufi *tariqa* employ music in their gatherings and *zikir* sessions. This is a safer and careful approach considering the diverse Islamic backgrounds and sects of Sheikh Nazim's followers.

SUFI PERFORMANCE AND PERFORMATIVITY

Music, Dance and Sufism

Although there are differences of opinions among Sufi Orders, music and dance have always been an integral part of many *tariqa* (Sultanova 2011; Federspiel 2007; Md Nor 2009). Sufi *zikir* or *Dhikr* (remembrance) sessions are normally accompanied by *maulid* or *hadrah* (songs in praise of the Prophet Muhammad) and many would get into a trance-like state of spiritual enjoyment. *Zikir* can be both a performance and a performative utterance, an illocutionary act that has a perlocutionary effect on the interlocutor (Austin 1962). In Malay communities along the Straits of Melaka, silent *zikir* is practised by *zapin* dancers in coordination with bodily movements and musical pulse[6] (Md Nor 2009). In Turkey, the Mevlevi Sufi Order is

well known in practicing the whirling form of *zikir*, accompanied by music in a ceremony called *sama'* (listening). This ceremony involves the reading of poetry, singing of *maulid,* playing of musical instruments, and dancing.

As performative act, the *zikir* is a series of locutions recited in remembering and glorifying God by repeatedly reciting certain words or phrases such as *la illaha illallah* (there is no god but Allah). This is part of the *shahadah*, an oath of a Muslim's belief in Allah and His messenger the Prophet Muhammad. Other *zikir* may include the utterance of various names of Allah such as *al-Ahad* (the One) and *al-Haq* (the Truth). This methodical and rhythmic repetition reaffirms one's belief in Allah and His Oneness (*tawhid*) which is the basis of Islamic theology. Sufis believe that *zikir* brings a person closer to Allah and to immerse oneself in His presence. However, the frequency and selection of words or phrases vary between Sufi *tariqa* and could be unique only to a particular Sheikh.

Sufi vocal music and *naubat*[7] ensembles are also prevalent in the Indian subcontinent and performed in *dargas* (shrines) of Sufi saints in present day India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. *Qawwali* is one example of Sufi music which is performed in Sufi shrines but has now gained mainstream popularity and international following. *Qawwali* songs are derived from poems penned by Sufi masters, in praise of the Prophet and saints. They are normally sung with such devotion as to induce a state of ecstasy and "oneness" with God. The coming of Islam to the Malay world saw new religious customs and ceremonies introduced with local traditions accommodated, including the use of music.[8] This is documented in many early Malay literature such as the *Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai*, *Sejarah Melayu*, *Hikayat Patani*, and *Adat Aceh* between the fourteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The Procession and *Zikir* in Aceh

Royal procession to the mosque was an important part of the *adat istiadat* (customs and ceremonies) of the Acehnese court in the seventeenth century. Weekly Friday prayers, *'Eid al-Adha* and *'Eid al-Fitr* celebrations were symbols of the Sultan's power and greatness. Sultan Iskandar Muda's (r. 1606–1636) procession was reportedly accompanied by about 200 elephants and 4,500 men (Foster 1934). The *adat istiadat* was detailed and documented in the *Adat Aceh* (Drewes and Vorhoeve 1958) where the use of music is mentioned:

> "Then from there Keujruen Geundrang Seri Udahna Kembaran (royal officer) asks for the piece 'Ragam Adani tabal Paduka Seri Sultan' (musical piece) be played, then his majesty's command is conveyed by Megat (royal officer) to Keujruen Geundrang Seri Udahna Kembaran (royal officer), then asks that the piece 'Gendang Berangkat' (musical piece) be played as was done in ceremonial customs previously" (*Adat Aceh* 51a: 10–11, 51b: 1–4, translated by author).

Similar to the *'Eid al-Fitr* celebration, the procession was accompanied by the "noisy" "Gendang Berangkat" but was overshadowed by the sounds of religious chanting:

> "All those accompanying on the left and right side of the elephant ridden by Kadi Malikul Adil were chanting the *takbir* and *zikirullah* with such loud voices, the fluency of their tongues and gracefulness was their voices were indescribable. According to the narrator of this story, the Sultan no longer heard the loud instruments anymore due to him listening to those voices reciting the *takbir* and *zikirullah*, while the Johan Syah Alam himself was reciting the *zikirullah* using prayer beads made of glittering precious stones of multiple colours, then his highness was in the state of extreme infatuation, feelings of fulfilment and ecstasy in manifesting the greatness of Allah and His magnificence, his highness is His caliph (*AA* 66b: 5–11, 67a: 1–6, translated by author).

The sultan's obliviousness to the accompanying music narrated here shows his deep religious ardour, initiated by the *zikir* or repeated chants of his subjects. This shows the Sufi influence in the procession where *zikir* is performed together with the playing of music. The *Adat Aceh* also describes the different songs and instruments used throughout the ceremony. For example, it is mentioned that as in the *'Eid al-Fitr* ceremony, once the procession reached the entrance of the mosque, the piece "Ragam Siwajan" was played (*AA* 83a: 5–6). The drums (*genderang*) and all other instruments (*segala bunyi-bunyian*) then parted from the main procession and moved to the right (*AA* 83b: 1–3). Another piece called "Ragam Kuda Berlari" was then played continuously while the Sultan made his way into the mosque greeted by state nobility and finally by Kadi Malik al-Adil (*AA* 83b: 9–10). Once the Sultan was inside the curtained royal enclosure of the mosque to perform his recommended prayers, the music stopped playing.

After the congregational prayers, the ritual of the sacrifice was performed during which the instruments of the ensemble are clearly stated:

> "then among the many *fakih* was an old one standing in front of the sacrificial animal observing its veins and at that particular moment, the gong, drums, medeli, ceracap started to play the song Kuda Berlari and the *nafiri* and *serunai* and margu were blown with such loudness, then after the song stops, Syah Alam cut the neck of the sacrificial animal until blood oozed out a little and the knife was immediately held by Sheikh Shamsuddin without lifting it from the neck of the animal and Sheikh Shamsuddin then completed the slaughter" (*AA* 89b: 5–11, 90a: 1–4, translated by author).

I have explained previously (Raja Halid 2021) that in these processions of the Sultans of Aceh, the royal *nobat* was used, together with other ensembles playing both "noisy" ceremonial music and "melodious" tunes. What is interesting is the inclusion of the *zikir* in these religious processions, illustrating a fusion of Hindu-Buddhist-based Malay court culture and Islamic religious elements. Processions were part of royal culture in previous Hindu-Buddhist Malay polities such as Langkasuka, which was under the influence of Srivijaya in the eighth century. It is mentioned in Chinese records that drums, banners, flags, and fly whisks were used to accompany the king who rode on an elephant while shaded by a white parasol (Wheatley 1961: 254). Similar processions could be seen centuries later in Aceh for ceremonial and religious purposes such as installations and *'Eid* celebrations where music was involved.

The above paragraph from the *Adat Aceh* also mentions the existence of a *fakih* (a scholar in Islamic law) and *Kadi Malik al-Adil* (Chief Judge the Just) named Sheikh Shamsuddin. This crucial mention shows the existence of a powerful post appointed by the Sultan, a post which exists to this day in all the sultanates in Malaysia. This religious scholar advises the Sultan and determines the religious trajectory of the state.

The Haqqani Maulid Ensemble

Being a music lover, Raja Ashman was fascinated with Malay percussion instruments such as the *kompang* and *rebana* (Hafidzar, personal communication, 19 August 2018, Sungai Petani, Kedah). He wanted to bring back the musical aspect of Sufism and formed a musical group called

the Haqqani Maulid Ensemble in the early 1990s, based in Kuala Lumpur. The group comprised of 10 to 15 male musicians and singers, playing mostly percussion instruments such as the Malay *rebana* and *kompang*, and the Arab *darbuka* drums. The repertoire is based on poems taken from the *Kitab Diba'i* and other traditional religious songs but played and sung in a "Malay" way, that is, without using Arabic maqams and style of singing. The *Kitab Diba'i* is a book of poems written by Abdurrahman Ad-Diba'i (1461–1537), a scholar from Yemen, relating to the life of Prophet Muhammad.

In 1991, during one of his yearly meetings with Sheikh Nazim Haqqani in London, Raja Ashman brought his Maulid ensemble to perform there and managed to get Sheikh Nazim's blessing and approval. This Malaysian *maulid* group then inspired groups from Pakistan, Turkey, Morocco, and other Muslim countries to perform their musical interpretations or versions of these traditional songs praising the Prophet Muhammad (Mustapha Mahidin, personal communication, 3 March 2019). Besides *maulid*, the ensemble also accompanies the *hadrah* which involves rhythmic chanting and recitation of religious poems with bodily movements which include whirling.

Instruments such as guitar, violin, clarinet, and flute were added later by a different batch of musicians. However, these instruments were not played in the presence of Sheikh Nazim, possibly due to the generally accepted Islamic ruling prohibiting the use of string and wind music instruments. The inclusion of *maulid* and *hadrah* into the *zikir* gatherings attracted many young *murid* (students) into the movement. One of them was Hafiz, from Kuala Lumpur, who joined the movement in 1995 after attending a gathering with Sheikh Nazim. He used to work in a discotheque and felt "troubled" and "empty", and was looking for a way out (Hafiz, personal communication, 9 September 2018, Kuala Lumpur). In Islam, places such as discotheques and night clubs, where alcohol are served, are considered sinful places to patronise and work. Music connected him with the *tariqa* and he then joined the Haqqani Maulid Ensemble as a *darbuka* player. Hafidzar, another member of the group, feels that music could soften one's heart and prevents a person from making harsh decisions (Hafidzar, personal communication, 19 August 2018, Sungai Petani, Kedah). He was referring to the more "extreme" interpretation of Islam that prohibits music and is often associated with Wahabbism, which also opposes Sufism.

However, not every young person in the *tariqa* agrees with the use of musical instruments in a religious gathering. Sam began attending the Naqshbandi Haqqani *zikir* sessions in Ipoh, Perak at the age of 15 in the early 1990s. Related to the prince, Sam felt "happy" with the *zikir* gatherings until the *maulid* and *hadrah* were included in the sessions. He felt it was "strange" to have these performances in a religious ritual and left after seven years (Sam, personal communication, 11 February 2020, Ipoh, Perak). Hafidzar argues that although music was not generally used in *zikir* sessions within the Malaysian context, it does not mean that it is *haram* or forbidden. He further adds that one has to look into the history of the Sufi movement in Mecca and other Muslim countries to understand the role of music in getting a Muslim closer to God.

The Haqqani Maulid Ensemble became well known within the global Naqshbandi network and recorded several albums. The ensemble began to perform at the Perak palace and after the *nobat* and western big band, a new spiritual sound emanates in the Iskandariah Palace in Kuala Kangsar, Perak. They are also sought after to perform at weddings and other religious gatherings outside of the *tariqa*'s boundaries. A splinter group later emerged in Sungai Petani, Kedah, which claimed to be part of Raja Ashman's group.

THEOLOGICAL CONTESTATIONS

Sheikh Shamsuddin al-Sumatera'i and the Wujudiyyah

Shamsuddin al Sumatera'i or Sumatrani was the Grand Mufti of Aceh. Also known as Shamsuddin of Pasai, he served under Sultan Saidil Mukammil (1596–1604), Sultan Ali Riayat Shah (1604–1607) and Sultan Iskandar Muda (1607–1636). Sheikh Shamsuddin was mentioned by English travellers James Lancaster in 1602 and John Davis and Dutch Frederick de Houtman (1603) in their travelogues to the Acehnese court. There were suggestions that Sheikh Shamsuddin inducted Sultan Iskandar Muda into the Naqshbandi Sufi *tariqa* but there was no mention of the Sultan pledging allegiance (*bai'ah*) to any Sheikh (Riddell 2001; Laffan 2011). He was a student of Hamzah Fansuri who introduced the *Wujuddiyah* (pantheism) doctrine which was propagated earlier by a number of Sufi scholars such as Ibnu 'Arabi, Abu Yazid al-Bisthami, Mansur al-Hallaj, and al-Rumi.

Sheikh Shamsuddin later developed the idea of *Martabat Tujuh* (Seven Stages) as a path towards God. The Grand Mufti was sent by Sultan Iskandar Muda on a military mission to attack the Portuguese in Melaka in 1630 but the Sheikh never returned. Sheikh Shamsuddin al-Sumatera'i died in battle and was buried in Melaka.

Sheikh Shamsuddin was succeeded briefly by Kamal al-Din, a local scholar. His position was challenged by Nuruddin al-Raniri a scholar from Gujarat of Hadrami descent. Al-Raniri was critical of Shamsuddin's *wujudiyyah* theology, which was being advanced by Kamal al-Din in Aceh and thought it deviated from the orthodox Sunni thought. The *wujudiyyah* (literally means existence) or *wahdatul wujud* (unity of existence) doctrine suggests that God is immanent with His creations which is the opposite of the transcendence nature of God as believed by most Muslims. A series of debates between al-Raniri and Kamal al-Din in front of Sultan Iskandar Thani (1636–1641) were held. The unrepentant Kamal al-Din was accused of being deviant and apostate by al-Raniri and was executed. Books written by Shamsuddin and Hamzah Fansuri were burnt in front of the grand mosque (Laffan 2011). This was similar to what happened to Mansur al-Hallaj (858–922), a Sufi poet and teacher who was best known for his saying "*ana al-haq*" (I'm the Truth). Since Al-Haq is one of the 99 names of Allah, many interpreted al-Hallaj as claiming divinity and he was executed.[9]

Sufi *tariqa* continued with their presence in Malay sultanates centuries later and theological contestations ensued. In nineteenth-century Terengganu for example, Fansuri's *wujudiyyah* doctrine was prevalent in the state and this was viewed with great concern by Sultan Zainal Abidin III (r. 1881–1918). He instructed Syed Abdul Rahman, known as Tok Ku Paloh, an influential Sufi *ulama* and court advisor, to monitor and stem the spread of any deviant teachings in the state. Given the authority by the Sultan, Tok Ku Paloh went on to arrest a teacher from a deviant *tariqa,* paraded him in public and threatened him with capital punishment unless he repented (*bertaubat*) (Yusoff and Engku Alwi 2015). Tok Ku Paloh, a Sufi from the Naqshbandi al-Ahmadiyyin *tariqa*, even listed numerous *tariqa* considered deviant in Terengganu which included the Rafidiyyah, Kharijiyyah, Qadariyyah, and Jabariyyah (ibid). Decades later, a different branch of the Naqshbandi *tariqa* would later emerge in another Malay sultanate, Perak, but not without its fair share of contestations and controversies.

Fatwa Against the Haqqani Sufi Order

The Naqshbandiyya Al-Aliyyah Sheikh Nazim al-Haqqani Sufi Order was viewed with suspicion and even contempt by many Muslims in Malaysia, despite the fact that the Naqshbandi *tariqa* has been around in the Malay world for centuries. Certain practices such as the *maulid* and *hadrah*, where the *jemaah* or congregation move or dance to the sounds of musical instruments while doing *zikir* is seen as an innovation (*bid'ah*) from the true teachings of Islam. Finally, during the 48th Muzakarah (conference) of the Fatwa Committee of the National Council for Islamic Religious Affairs Malaysia held on 3 April 2000 the Sheikh Nazim al-Haqqani Sufi Order was discussed. The Conference decided that the Sufi Order led by Sheikh Nazim contradicts the creedal doctrine of the *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah* (Sunni Islam) and deviates from the teachings of Islam. Practitioners of this Order were asked to repent at once and all states were required to issue a fatwa that was gazetted which decrees that the *tariqa* led by Sheikh Nazim was unlawful (*haram*) and must not be practiced by Muslims as it is a deviation from the true teachings of Islam.[10] However, under the Malaysian constitution, religious matters are under the purview of individual states and the Sultan acts as the head of Islam. Although being the highest Islamic body in the country, the Islamic Development Department of Malaysia or JAKIM, which oversees all matters pertaining to Islam in the country, has limited authority to regulate Islamic affairs in each state (Teoh 2017). Any fatwa or edict in the state needs the endorsement of the Sultan and of the 40 fatwas listed by the Perak Mufti Office, the Naqshbandi Haqqani Sufi Order is not one of them (www.mufti.perak.gov.my). The state's edicts (with the Sultan's support) were more concerned with the growing influence of Wahhabism[11] and Shiism[12], and a few small-time deviant groups. It is generally known that Sufi *tariqa* are staunchly opposed to Wahhabism and there were efforts by the Naqshbandi Haqqani Sufi Order to stem its influence in the state (Mohamed Osman 2014).

Although technically "banned" by the National Fatwa Council, the *tariqa* continues with its activities in Perak and Kuala Lumpur. Congregation prayers, *tahlil*, *zikir*, and *maulid* sessions are still being conducted at the *zawiya* or Sufi lodge at Bukit Damansara. The Haqqani Maulid Ensemble also continues to perform at weddings and religious events. The Sufi-influenced *maulid* performances (also known as Yahanana) are now gaining popularity with the support of popular "Habib Sheikhs"

from Indonesia such as Habib Umar bin Muhammad, Habib Ali Zaenal Abidin, and Habib Syech bin Abdul Qodir Assegaf. These Habibs were even endorsed by top Malaysian political leaders and can be seen as an effort to curtail the influence of Wahhabism, which is often linked to global terrorism (Ahmad 2016). The preoccupation with this new "threat" overshadowed the Malaysian state's contestations against the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order, but currently, the *fatwa* is still in effect. The global Naqshbandi Haqqani Order is now led by Sheikh Nazim's son Sheikh Mehmet Adil while the Malaysian chapter remains without a spiritual leader but is currently run by Raja Ashman's sister.[13]

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the parallel existence of two Sufi orders, the spiritual performativity involved and the contestations that ensued (see Table 1). It also looked into the longstanding connections between *tariqa* Sufism and Malay Sultanates since the thirteenth century and noted that the coming of Islam to the region was most likely through the efforts of Sufi scholars and *fakir*. This was based on close readings of early Malay literature such as the *Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai* and *Adat Aceh*. For centuries there was a sustained mystic-king interdependency that made the Sultan, although not an *ulama*, a "religiously sanctioned authority". The Naqshbandi *tariqa* is one of the oldest Sufi orders in the Malay world but there were different sub-orders with their own esoteric knowledge and practices. In comparison, on both occasions, there were central figures, with knowledge, power, and charisma in leading their followers. In the case of Sheikh Shamsuddin, being the state *mufti* and adviser in Islamic matters, he was close to the Sultan. Raja Ashman on the other hand, was the son of the Sultan, in line to the throne. Although both figures belonged to the Naqshbandi *tariqa*, they were of different sub-orders (*wujudiyya* and Haqqani). Looking at the mystic-king interdependency, in the case of Raja Ashman, he was both mystic and "king", considered a "royal saint" or *Waliyyullah,* but was still deferential to Sheikh Nazim Haqqani. He could be considered as an intermediary between his father Sultan Azlan Shah and Sheikh Nazim, who was awarded the *Pingat Darjah Kebesaran Azlanii* (DKA) by the Perak palace in 2009. The medal is normally awarded to members of the Perak royal family and signalled the official royal sanctioning of the *tariqa* in Perak.

The coming of Islam also introduced spiritual performativity through the use of *zikir*, music and dance. The *nobat* musical ensemble and religious related musical practices were fused with local court traditions and became important parts in official state celebrations and rituals. Performances were held in relation to religious occasions, in the case of Aceh grand processions were organised to celebrate the two *Eid's*, accompanied by the music of the *nobat* and other ensembles together with *zikir*. It could be seen as a public display of the Sultan's power and his religious conviction. The *nobat* continued to be played in Perak and to a certain extent continued with the customs of Aceh but the ensemble was not used in any of the *zikir* or *maulid* sessions of the Naqshbandi-Haqqani *tariqa*. Instead, a newly-formed percussion-based ensemble[14] was used and performed in a closed environment, within closed circles, rarely at the palace but in Bukit Damansara, Kuala Lumpur, usually on Thursday nights and *tahlil* (prayers for the deceased) events.[15] The Haqqani Mawlid Ensemble uses songs derived mostly from *Kitab Diba'i* and also performs publicly at weddings and religious events across the country.

There were theological contestations in seventeenth century Aceh and twenty-first century Perak, involving ibn Arabi's wujudiyyah doctrine of pantheism as practiced by Sheikh Shamsuddin and his disciples, and later Sheikh Nazim Haqqani's Sufi teachings which were seen as deviant. In Aceh, Sheikh Shamsuddin's teachings were contested by an influential *ulama*, Sheikh Nuruddin al-Raniri and in the case of Perak and Malaysia, by the National Fatwa Committee—both were considered deviant for different reasons. However, the fatwa was not implemented at state level and the Naqshbandi-Haqqani Sufi Order in Malaysia continues with their activities and no arrests or prosecutions were reported. This was due to issues of federal-state religious bureaucracy, palace endorsement of the *tariqa* and more pressing threats of Wahhabism and Shiism.

Currently the *tariqa* quietly continues with their activities but still clinging to its constructed identity. Yet, there is a constant sense of fear among members of the *tariqa* due to the *fatwa* and possible persecution. They bonded together and formed what Olivier Roy calls "neo-brotherhood" (2004), using social media, WhatsApp to communicate and spread their message. The continued support and patronisation of the *tariqa* by the Perak royal family gives its followers hope and security to continue what they believe as the true path towards peace and happiness in this world and the hereafter.

Table 1: The comparison of two Sufi orders between the centuries

Time	Seventeenth Century Aceh	Twentieth and twenty-first Century Perak
Tariqa/Doctrine	Naqshbandi (Wujuddiyah)	Naqshbandiyya Al-Aliyyah Sheikh Nazim al-Haqqani
Reigning Sultan	Sultan Saidil Mukammil (1596–1604) Sultan Ali Riayat Shah (1604–1607) Sultan Iskandar Muda (1607–1636)	Sultan Azlan Shah (1984–2012)
Sheikh/Leader	Sheikh Shamsuddin al-Sumatera'i	HRH Sheikh Raja Ashman
Teacher	Hamzah Fansuri	Sheikh Nazim Haqqani
Contested by	Al-Raniri	National Fatwa Council
Spiritual Practices	*Zikir*	*Zikir*, *Maulid*, *Hadrah*
Music	*Nobat* and wind ensemble	Maulid ensemble
Instruments	*Gendang*, *Nafiri*, *Serunai*, Gong, Medeli, Ceracap, Margu	*Rebana*, *Kompang*, *Djembe* and occasionally guitar, violin and clarinet were used

COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

All participants involved in this research consented to be interviewed and their statements published.

NOTES

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1 In the context of this article, a "sheikh" refers to the leader of a Sufi *tariqa* or sect, a *mufti* or *kadi* (judge) is someone appointed by the sultan or state and could also be a Sufi leader. In the case of Aceh, the *mufti* was a leader of a Sufi *tariqa.* Sheikh Nazim Haqqani was a Sufi leader and *mufti* of Turkish Cyprus.

2 Quotations of early Malay literature used in this article are derived from the Malay Concordance Project, accessed through http://mcp.anu.au.edu.

3 Islamicate here refers to region in which Muslims are culturally dominant but not necessarily directly associated with the religion Islam.

[4] Sufi sheikhs are known to have "divinely-inspired knowledge" and their advice are sought after by political leaders in making important political decisions.

[5] The Perak *nobat* is not used in a Sufi-based religious ritual as practiced in Aceh but marks certain religious occasions.

[6] Silent *zikir* is reciting the *zikir* in the heart and not verbally uttering it.

[7] The ensemble is spelled as "naubat" in the Indian subcontinent, the reason of not using a standardise spelling is to differentiate the two.

[8] For example, ceremonies in the Perak palace still maintain certain Hindu-Buddhist customs but overseen by the state *mufti* while accompanied by the Islamic *nobat* ensemble. The *nobat* ensemble itself saw the inclusion of the gong in certain sultanates, an instrument which is ubiquitous in the region.

[9] All of them were Sufis but with different interpretations, *wujudiyyah* is a Sufi belief of a particular *tariqa*.

[10] According to the *fatwa*, the *tariqa* is considered deviant due to, among others, the belief in the powers of *awliya* or saints who could be called upon for help, blind following or *taqlid* of a caliph or Sheikh, veneration of graves and the use of false *hadith* (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) (www.abuanasmadani.com).

[11] Wahhabism is a hardline and puritanical form of Sunni Islam practiced mainly in Saudi Arabia and a growing number of Muslim countries. The term Wahab is derived from the name of an eighteenth century Arab religious scholar who wanted to purify the religion from *bida'ah* (innovation) rituals which included certain Sufi practices. This ideology is considered a threat to the mainstream *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah* doctrine practiced in Malaysia.

[12] Shiism or Shia Islam is a one of the two main branches of Islam, practiced mainly in Iran and a small minority in Pakistan and the Arab Peninsula. Constituting 10%–15% of Muslims worldwide, Shiites believe that Prophet Muhammad had designated Ali as the first Caliph or Imam. Shiism runs contrary to what Sunni Muslims believe and is not recognised in Malaysia although there is a growing number of followers.

[13] No action has been taken by religious authorities towards the *tariqa* and is not considered a real threat as compared to Shiism and Wahabbism. Furthermore, members are comparatively small in numbers.

[14] Percussion instruments are accepted in Islam as lawful but are not generally used in a *zikir, maulid* or *tahlil* sessions, especially in a mosque or *surau* (small mosque). Although the Sufi lodge is situated near to a mosque, members of the *tariqa* do not pray there since their practice of *zikir* or *tahlil* would not be accepted and allowed by the mosque committee or other congregants. So, they have to practice within their own circles, within a closed environment.

[15] In Islam, Friday is considered a holy day when compulsory congregational prayers are held. As in the tradition of the Jews, a new day starts after sundown, hence Thursday nights are considered *malam Jumaat* or the night before Friday when religious activities such as recitation of the Qur'an, *zikir* and *tahlil* prayers are encouraged to be done.

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