

Transnational Religious Movement in Current Indonesia: A Case Study of Turkish UICCI

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I. Introduction

Globalization and the communication revolution have allowed vastly increased flows of ideas and people across the Islamic world, generating new social forms. As is well known, these include transnational social movements and organisations originating in the Middle East and now stretching across the globe, as far as East and Southeast Asia. Indonesia as the Muslim majority country provides opportunity spaces for the establishment and development of Islamic activism. What is little known is that some of the most active transnational Islamic movements in Indonesia are from Turkey. Unlike earlier transnational Islamic revival movements of Arab and Persian origins, which since the 1970s have been predominantly fundamentalist, the new-comer Turkish-origin organizations reveal a different approach to Islamic revival that is more 'moderate' than many of the movements from the Middle East and that makes the Turkish movements more easily accepted, not only by local Muslim communities in Southeast Asia but also by governments in the region.

My thesis project focuses on the lesser known of the major Turkish piety renewal movements, the Süleymancis. So far studies of their movement have mostly focused on the Islamic teachings (*dawah*) of their spiritual leader, Süleyman Hilmi Tunahan. In contrast, this work reports on the organisational history and shape of the Süleymancis as a transnational organisation.

II. Questions and Methods

This thesis looks specifically at development of the Turkish origin transnational movement in Indonesia, based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Indonesia and Turkey in 2012 and 2013. It examines what motivated the Süleymancis to grow beyond a national movement to a transnational organisation and how the Süleymancis selected Asian countries and cities as sites for branches. It also analyses how the organisation seeks to maintain its identity and values across the globe while at the same time adopting some local values. This research suggests that the concept of 'opportunity structures' can help explain the kinds of adaptations the organisation makes to local conditions in new regions of the world.

III. Results

After doing the ethnography in 2012-2013, on three islands in Indonesia involving nine branches of the UICCI, the author came to the conclusion. The Süleymancis has become a transnational religious organization as a result of religious advice of the spiritual leader as well as the availability of opportunity spaces among the Turkish diaspora overseas. In addition, there are three patterns regarding the establishment of the UICCI branches in Indonesian cities. The first is initiated and supported by global Süleymancis. This is how the UICCI Rawamangun, the UICCI Pasar Minggu, the UICCI Pejaten, the UICCI Ragunan, and the UICCI Aceh Pusat were formed. The second pattern is initiative from local Indonesian Muslims. The examples of this phenomenon are the UICCI Pangkalan Bun and the UICCI Medan. The last pattern is an institutional transfer facility from a local Indonesian organization to be used by the UICCI. The UICCI Aceh Besar bears evidence of this.

IV. Conclusions

When the movement came to non-Turkish diaspora, as it did in like Indonesia, it needed new opportunity spaces to find a good 'market', not only to sell the 'products', but also to help them to grow. By understanding the history of the establishment of the Indonesian Süleymancis branches in some cities, which show different patterns, it can be argued that the Süleymancis have found new local opportunity spaces. They have extended the market to non-Turkish background Muslims and by maintaining a positive outlook towards the opportunity; the Süleymancis have enjoyed a degree of success in Indonesia.

This thesis puts forward an advanced phase of 'opportunity spaces' theory, which has been developed by Hakan Yavuz when explaining the rise of the Islamic social movement in Turkey. While Hakan underlines the role of Turkish Muslims, it will be argued that when it comes to a transnational movement and when the Turkish community is not visible, it is possible to adjust the opportunity in the form of local people. Indeed, this is an inevitability when the diaspora of Turkish Muslims is not available.

Figure 1 – UICCI Boarding schools in Indonesian cities

