



**PROPAGATING PURITAN ISLAM IN SURAKARTA:  
READING THE BIOGRAPHY OF ABDULLAH  
THUFAIL SAPUTRA**

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**Abstract**

*Abdullah Thufail Saputra, a Pakistani-Javanese descendant, was one of the most influential figures in the spread of puritan da'wah in Solo in the 1970s and 1990s. He founded the Majlis Tafsir Al-Qur'an, which is now the largest and most massive Islamic organization in Solo. This study uses a qualitative approach. This study is complemented by essential elements such as observations, as well as in-depth interviews with some of Thufail's closest people. This study also examines some of the necessary documents, especially Thufail era brochures, MTA study recordings, and other documents. This study tries to explore Abdullah Thufail's intellectual journey, starting from his traditional educational background, changing his outlook from a traditional person to later becoming a Salafi-puritan, his missionary struggle, and how he founded and developed the MTA. This paper also discusses the struggle of MTA in accepting the sole principle of Pancasila and how MTA subsequently changed orientation after joining the New Order circle in 1984. The author also argues that the doctrine of zakat and jihad, which Thufail interpreted, became the central pillar for further MTA da'wah.*

**Keywords:** *Abdullah Thufail Saputra, Traditionalism, Puritanism, MTA.*

## Abstrak

Abdullah Thufail Saputra, seorang keturunan Pakistan-Jawa, merupakan salah seorang tokoh terpenting penyebaran dakwah puritan di Solo pada 1970 hingga 1990an. Ia mendirikan Majelis Tafsir Al-Qur'an yang kini menjadi organisasi Islam terbesar dan paling massif di Solo. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif. Hasil pengamatan, demikian pula wawancara mendalam terhadap beberapa orang terdekat Thufail serta analisis dokumen, terutama brosur-brosur era Thufail, rekaman-rekaman pengajian MTA serta dokumen-dokumen lainnya, telah membentuk bagian penting dalam kajian ini. Artikel ini mencoba mengeksplorasi perjalanan intelektual Abdullah Thufail, mulai dari latar belakang pendidikan dia yang tradisional, perubahan pandangannya dari seorang tradisional hingga kemudian menjadi seorang salafi-puritan; perjuangan dakwahnya dan bagaimana dia mendirikan dan mengembangkan MTA. Tulisan ini juga mendiskusikan pergulatan MTA dalam menerima asas tunggal pancasila serta bagaimana MTA kemudian mengalami perubahan orientasi pasca bergabung ke dalam lingkaran Orde Baru pada 1984. Juga penulis berargumen bahwa, doktrin zakat and Jihad yang diinterpretasikan Thufail pada kenyataannya menjadi penopang utama bagi dakwah MTA selanjutnya.

**Kata Kunci:** Abdullah Thufail Saputra, tradisionalism, puritanism, MTA

## INTRODUCTION

Surakarta or Solo is known as a place of the development of various radical Islamic groups. Muhammad Wildan, in his study, mapped radical groups in Solo. According to him, since the fall of the New Order in 1998, various radical groups have emerged such as the Ngruki boarding school, Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI), Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), Front Pemuda Islam Surakarta (FPIS), Laskar Jundullah, Laskar Hizbullah Sunan Bonang, Hawariyyun, Brigade Hezbollah (part of JI), Barisan Bismillah, Al-Islah, Gerakan Pemuda Ka'bah (Kaaba Youth Movement), and Komite Aksi Penanggulangan Akibat Krisis (Crisis Response Action Committee (Kompak)). These groups have a puritan ideology.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, Baydhowi, in his study, said that violence, religious based conflict, and radicalism had become a trend in the contemporary era of Solo.<sup>2</sup>

Abdullah Thufail Saputra-a successful trader of Pakistani-Javanese descent- is one of the most influential figures in the spread of puritan da'wah in Surakarta. He is a close friend of Abdullah Sungkar, a founder of Jemaah

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<sup>1</sup> Muhammad Wildan, "Mapping Radical Islamism in Solo: A Studi of the Proliferation of Radical Islamism in Central Java." *Al-Jamiah: Journal of Islamic Studies*, Volume 46 no. 1, p. 35-69.

<sup>2</sup> Zakiyudin al-Baidhowi, *Dinamika Radikalisme dan Konflik Bersentimen Agama di Surakarta*, *Studia Philosophica et Theologica*, Vol. 1, No. 2 2010.

Islamiyah (JI), a group often accused of being the leading terrorist network in Southeast Asia. Abdullah Thufail later founded the Majelis Tafsir Al-Qur'an (MTA) in 1972. Unlike Abdullah Sungkar and puritan groups in Solo, Abdullah Thufail tends to avoid violence in carrying out his da'wah. Through MTA, he spread da'wah by teachings, especially tafsir, and fostering the Islamic community intensively. MTA, founded by Thufail, later became the most developed puritan Muslim group in Surakarta. Thufail also became the leading ideologist for MTA. However, there is hardly any study of Thufail's intellectual biography. It seems that the only study of Abdullah Thufail, even then it does not independently study him, --as it is examining three figures at once, Abdullah Sungkar, Abdullah Marzuki, and Abdullah Thufail-- is Muthohharun Jinan's study, "*Tracing the Roots of Islamic Puritanism Ideology: Biographical Survey of Three Abdullah*."<sup>3</sup>

However, a fundamental weakness of the Jinan study is the mistake of identifying Thufail teachers as Shia. Figures such as Habib Hud and Habib Assegaf Yun, who were identified as Shia and considered influential on Thufail's Imamate leadership concept, were actually traditionalist Muslim figures in Solo. It seems that Jinan uses the perception of some reformist Muslim groups in Solo who tend to generalize Habibs as Shiites. Likewise, among current MTA member, as a founder of MTA, Thufail's figure seem to get less attention. His name is not mentioned in the current MTA publications, either in the form of interpretations, brochures, and books. However, MTA's interpretation and most of the brochures published by the organization are Thufail's work.<sup>4</sup>

This article attempts to describe and read the intellectual biography of Abdullah Thufail, starting from the change in his views from a traditionalist background to later becoming a Salafi-puritan, as well as his struggle in establishing and developing MTA. This article also examines Thufail's thought, which became essential support in the MTA movement: the doctrine of zakat, and jihad. This research uses a qualitative approach. In-depth interviews conducted with several people near Thufail. Analysis of documents, especially with Thufail era brochures, as well as MTA Morning Jihad records, will take an essential part in this study. The author also interviewed figures from both modernists and traditionalist groups in Solo. Likewise, the presence of the author in Solo for an extended period - the author lived in Solo from 2005 to

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<sup>3</sup> . See Muthohharun Jinan, "Melacak Akar Ideologi Puritanisme Islam: Survey Biografi atas Tiga "Abdullah," *Jurnal Walisongo*, vol. 22, No. 2 (2014), p. 387-391.

<sup>4</sup> About the history of MTA's tafsir, see Muhammad Asif, "Sejarah Tafsir MTA (Majlis Tafsir Al-Qur'an)," *Jurnal Al-Itqan*, Vol 1, No. 1 2015.

2013 to allow him to establish much contact with MTA members -- was quite helpful in understanding this subject.

### 1. Abdullah Thufail Saputra: A Brief Biography

Indonesian historian M.C Ricklefs mentions Abdullah Thufail Saputra as one of the three main actors of the Islamic purification movement in Surakarta in the 1970s and 1980s,<sup>5</sup> in addition to Abdullah Sungkar - a figure who would later become the leading figure and ideologist of the Jamaah Islamiyah (JI); Abdullah Marzuki, founder of Tiga Serangkai Group, the largest publisher in Solo, Central Java, and founder of the puritan ideological Islamic boarding school, Assalam. There is another name that is no less important, Abdullah Baraja, who later had a close relationship with MTA, but perhaps because of his less well-known name, he is rarely discussed.

First of all, the author will explain the life history of Abdullah Thufail Saputra. Abdullah Thufail is the son of a cleric from Pakistan, Thufail Muhammad, with a mother from Pacitan, East Java. Thufail was born in 1927 AD. A source also mentioned Abdullah Thufail's father, Thufail Muhammad, was formerly a soldier from Pakistan who was assigned to his homeland. However, for some reason and interest after seeing the lives of Muslims in Indonesia, he was finally drawn to settle in Indonesia.

Abdullah Thufail's primary education was undertaken at Taman Siswa and Muhammadiyah Elementary School in Batu, Pacitan, East Java. From there, he took religious education in the boarding school in Tremas, Pacitan, East Java, a respected and scientific base boarding school for traditionalist Muslims. After graduating from Tremas, he was taken by his parent to Surakarta and put into Manbaul Ulum, which is also based on traditional boarding school. Previously, while in Tremas, he had married a woman named Fatimah from Tanjung village, Kebon Agung, Pacitan, East Java.<sup>6</sup> During his time in Manbaul Ulum, he also deepened his religion and Arabic knowledge with Habib Hud, the owner and founder of the Choir mosque, Palugunan, Pasar Kliwon sub-district, Surakarta, which was a traditionalist Muslim figure in Solo who came from the Sayyid circles. Besides, Thufail also studied with his father.

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<sup>5</sup> MC. Ricklefs, *Mengislamkan Jawa: Sejarah Islamisasi di Jawa dan Penentangannya dari 1930 sampai Sekarang* (Jakarta: Serambi, 2013), p. 301.

<sup>6</sup> Suprpto, "Penasiran MTA (Majlis Tafsir Al-Qur'an): Studi Analisis Penafsiran Surat Al-Baqarah 1-39 Oleh Ustadz Abdullah Thufail Saputo", Thesis, STAIN Surakarta, 2009, p. 77.

Thufail have also studied from several Habibs in Pasar Kliwon, Solo. A source also mentioned that Abdullah Thufail had studied with Kiai Umar, one of the founders of the Al-Muayyad Islamic boarding school, Mangkuyudan, Solo, although not for long.<sup>7</sup> Of all the teachers mentioned are all scholars from traditionalist circles. Habib Hud, besides a pious scholar, is also a respected Sufi. Likewise, Abdullah Thufail's father, Thufail Muhammad, he also has a "traditional" style. In daily practice, he is also a Sufi. Even a one of traditionalist figure in Solo, Habib Muhsin Al-Jufri, described Thufail Muhammad as a *tariqa* figure.

As a pious, Thufail Muhammad emphasized the importance of religious education to his son, Abdullah Thufail. It is said that one time while pointing towards a series of classic books in a cupboard, Thufail said to his son: "In this age, you must be able to master these books".<sup>8</sup> That is perhaps what motivated Thufail to be serious enough in exploring religious knowledge.

Abdullah Thufail's attention to the Qur'an and the da'wah of Islam was enormous. To realize the mission of teaching and preaching, he later established MTA. In the early days of the establishment of MTA, Abdullah Thufail opened branches in areas around Surakarta, including in the districts of Nogosari, Boyolali, Polanharjo, Juwiring, Klaten, Gemolong, and Sragen.<sup>9</sup> Long before establishing the MTA, in 1966, Abdullah Thufail was elected as the head of the KKPI (Koordinasi Kesatuan Pemuda Islam, Coordination of Islamic Youth Unity), which was formed by seven Muslim youth organizations, as a follow-up in dealing with the remnants of the PKI (Indonesian Communist Party).<sup>10</sup>

Unlike his best friend, Abdullah Sungkar - the founder of JI or Jemaah Islamiyah - who holds that Islam must be preached through *harakah* (movement),<sup>11</sup> Abdullah Thufail has a different view. For Abdullah Thufail, the da'wah should be emphasized more on the development of the ummah through the teaching of religious knowledge, especially the Qur'an. From this, Abdullah Thufail began actively teaching religious knowledge, especially the Qur'an and

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Habib Muhsin al-Jufri and ustad Heri in 2012. Both are public figures from the traditionalist side in Solo.

<sup>8</sup> This story told by one of Thufail's pupil, Surapto, when the author was interviewing him in 2012.

<sup>9</sup> See the profile page on [www.mta-online.com](http://www.mta-online.com).

<sup>10</sup> See Yoyok Mugiarno, MTA's General Secretary, "*Beda Boleh, Putus Silaturahmi Jangan*," Jawa Pos, April 14, 2011. This article was a response to Chairman of PBNU, Prof. Dr. Said Aqil Siraj's article, "*Menyikapi Kegarangan Puritanisme*" which was also published in the same newspaper, April 5, 2011.

<sup>11</sup> See Muthohharun Jinan, "Melacak Akar Ideologi Puritanisme Islam: Survey Biografi atas Tiga "Abdullah", *jurnal Walisongo*, vol. 22, No. 2 (2014), p. 387-391.

its tafsir in various regions around Solo. He used to went to Gemolong, a sub-district of Sragen regency, Central Java, and also several other regions, to teach religious knowledge to the people. In the early 1970s, for example, he used to convey tafsir studies in Gemolong 2 times a week: Thursday night and Sunday night. Even though the Solo-Gemolong distance must be at least within an hour, in this case, a student of Abdullah Thufail, who followed his study since 1974 stated that it was not uncommon until late night Abdullah Thufail had just finished his gathering, and only then returned to Solo.<sup>12</sup> Gemolong, around 30 km northwest of Solo, then become an essential center for MTA, at least the second after Solo, which is the main base of MTA.

In addition to teaching religious knowledge to various regions around Solo, Abdullah Thufail also opened a *kajian* (islamic gathering) in Solo that would later be called *Gelombang Tujuh Malam* (the 7 Night Wave). Names such as Ahmad Sukina, Dahlan Hardjotaruno,<sup>13</sup> Suprpto, Hadi Bowo Yuwono, and Haedar Makarim were alumni of the wave. The *kajian* was carried out in classical and opened in 1976. The *kajian* will usually begin with the teaching of the tafsir of Surah Al-Baqarah starting from the first verse. Students focused on the deepening of religion, especially tafsir, and also prepared to be sent to various regions. There, students or participants will be taught tafsir which has been designed thematically. However, it should be noted here, although Abdullah Thufail's teachings on tafsir and religious sciences are intensively taught, Thufail is considered to be inadequate in equipping his students with the Arabic grammar (*ilmu alat* or tool science).<sup>14</sup> Abdullah Thufail's students acknowledged this. However, this can be understood because the orientation of Abdullah Thufail's recitation is how to make the content of the Qur'an simple and then be practiced in daily life. The results of this interpretation study were first published in 1980.

Abdullah Thufail's *kajian* was initially carried out by focusing on particular issues or themes; this was mainly applied in the *Gelombang Tujuh Malam*. However, later on its development, as it was considered ineffective, the gathering changed to question and answer based model. This model is considered more effective because it can directly answer questions about religious issues from

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Suprpto in Serengan, Solo, Mei 1, 2012. Suprpto followed Abdullah Thufail's teaching since around 1974 when he was young until around the 1983s.

<sup>13</sup> He was the second figure in the MTA in the Ahmad Sukina era, and was the MTA representative for MUI Solo, before finally leaving MTA after.

<sup>14</sup> The definition of *ilmu alat* here is linguistics such as Nahwu, Shorof, and also sciences such as Usul Fiqh, Usul Hadith, and also Ulumul Qur'an. Interview with Suprpto, Solo, 2012.

participants. The current era of MTA later adopted this question and answer model. In this stage, MTA is purely referred to as a science council oriented to how Islamic teachings, especially the Qur'an, can be conveyed to the people and then practiced. Abdullah Thufail was a gemstone expert and also a wealthy family man. He has several sons, including Munir Ahmad, Uwaiz, and one daughter, who was later married to his loyal student, Haedar Makarim.

Traditionalist circles are not too concerned with Thufail. When Abdullah Sungkar in the 1960s strongly protested the ceremony of Sekaten Gulungan<sup>15</sup> - the Surakarta court tradition to welcome the arrival of *Maulid* - to be paraded in the Great Mosque of Surakarta, instead, Thufail then collaborated with the manager of the Great Mosque. Thufail, together with MTA members, were also instrumental in curbing illegal traders around the mosque when previously the manager felt overwhelmed in controlling it.<sup>16</sup> Although perhaps Thufail also disagrees with some of the traditions that developed in the Solo palace, he never showed confrontational rejection. Although a puritan, Thufail is also known to understand Javanese philosophy and culture.

Suprpto, one of his students, who faithfully followed his da'wah, recalled the figure of his teacher as a person who was "hard in preaching, but had a gentle and loving heart." Several times when the author interviewed him, he often described the struggle of preaching with the teacher and other students like the life of the first generation of Islam; Prophets and Companions.

## 2. From a Traditional to Puritan

Previously, it needs to be explained that the term puritanism here refers to a paradigm in Islam which considers that Muslims in their historical development have deviated from the true teachings of Islam and by only returning them to the right path, they can be accepted by God. Khaled Abou el-Fadl referred to this paradigm as being built by Muhammad bin Abdullah Wahhab, known as Ibn Abdul Wahhab (d. 1206 H / 1792 AD).<sup>17</sup> Ibn Abdul Wahhab considers that the teachings of Islam have been tainted with practices such as Sufism (Islamic mysticism), *tawassul* practice, and others. He also condemned the tradition of

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<sup>15</sup> The strong protest from Abdullah Sungkar against Sekaten's implementation then raised the resistance from the Keraton (aristocracy of) Solo.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Ustadz Muhtarom, the Tabsir Anom of the current Surakarta palace, Solo, 2013.

<sup>17</sup> See Khaled Abou el-Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremist* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers Inc., 2005), p. 45.

the jurisprudence of fiqh, rejected rationalism, and called on Muslims to return to the actual teachings.

Traditionalism refers to Islam, which is still bound by the authority of the ulama both in the field of Islamic law - by adhering to one of the four fiqh schools: Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hambali. They are also willing to accept Sufism to become part of Islamic teachings. In Indonesia, traditional Islam is usually characterized by boarding schools, teaching "kitab kuning" (means yellow books), and tariqa.<sup>18</sup>

We have mentioned before that the family background and educational background of Thufail is closer to traditionalist Muslims. So far, it has not been known why Abdullah Thufail later changed course and tended to be puritan. Most likely, he was influenced by the ideas of reformers from puritans such as Muhammad Abduh and his student, Rasyid Ridha. It can at least be seen from the frequent Thufail quoting these two figures in his interpretation of the Qur'an.

Another allegation is the presence of Abdullah Thufail's contact with several modernist-puritan Islamic mass organizations, such as the DDII (Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia, Indonesian Islamic Da'wah Council) founded by Muhammad Natsir. At least this was reinforced by Abdullah Thufail's joining the DDII management structure. Abdullah Thufail is said to have been the chairman of DDII in Bali.<sup>19</sup>

DDII itself is said to be one of three organizations that correctly received financial support from Saudi Arabia, which is known as a significant supporter of Wahhabism, besides Al-Irsyad and Persis (Persatuan Islam, Islamic Unity).<sup>20</sup> Muhammad Natsir, the founder of DDII, was educated by a Persis figure, A. Hasan, who is often known to be very steadfast in spreading puritan doctrines that are identical to Wahhabi doctrines. Natsir had also been a high-ranking Rabithah Alam al-Islam member, founded by the Saudis to promote Wahhabi teachings to various parts of the world. Abdullah Thufail is said to admire Muhammad Natsir much.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> For more, see Zamakhsyary Dhofer, *Tradisi Pesantren: Studi tentang Pandangan Hidup Kiai* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1982).

<sup>19</sup> Information about Abdullah Thufail's involvement in the management of DDII Bali was delivered by Suprpto, one of his loyal pupils.

<sup>20</sup> Greg Fealy dan Antonio Bubalo, *Jejak Kafilah: Pengaruh Radikalisme Timur Tengah di Indonesia* (Bandung: Mizan, 2007), p. 97.

<sup>21</sup> MC Ricklefs, *Mengislamkan Jawa ...*, p. 302.

Ahmad Sukina, Thufail's successor, stated that MTA thinking was very similar to Persis' thinking.<sup>22</sup> As is well known, Persis identified themselves identically with the puritan teachings developed by Ibn Taymiyyah, which was then continued by Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab. It was acknowledged by Rafid Abbas,<sup>23</sup> A leader of the Persis Islamic boarding school in Bangil, East Java.

Hamid Algar, an Islamic Studies expert from the University of California, considers Rasyid Ridha as well as his teacher, Muhammad Abduh, to have a Salafi tendency that is similar to Wahabi. At least, Algar continued, Salafism and Wahhabism had several similarities, especially in the attitude of looking down on all new practices that occurred after the generation of Salaf as-Salih - which generally refers to the first three generations of Muslims -; reject Sufism; and see no need to follow fiqh schools in Sunni circles. In fact, according to him, Rasyid Ridha was once accused of being a person who introduced Wahhabi teachings in his homeland, Syria.<sup>24</sup>

From here, perhaps we can also refer to the genealogy of Thufail thought. At least some crucial doctrines have similarities between MTA and Wahhabi doctrines.<sup>25</sup> Likewise, according to Dawam Raharjo, the doctrine of purification of monotheism, with the consequent eradication of *bidah* and *khurafat*, in general, is sourced from Wahhabi teachings.<sup>26</sup>

However, it is not easy to identify changes on Abdullah Thufail thought. It is clear that the changes did not happen suddenly but experienced a long struggle. As a small example, Abdullah Thufail still maintains the *sayyidina*<sup>27</sup> (means my lord) affixes to the prophet Muhammad and his senior friends.<sup>28</sup> Even though current MTA leaders tend to avoid the term. The term *sayyidina*, at least so far, has been used to distinguish between modernists and traditionalists. Modernists are often characterized as not wanting to mention the term;<sup>29</sup> On

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 302.

<sup>23</sup> Rafid Abbas, *Ijtihad Persatuan Islam* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2013), p. 68. This paper has initially been Rafid's dissertation at IAIN Sunan Ampel, Surabaya. Rafid Himself is a Persis activist who is also a permanent lecturer at STAIN Jember.

<sup>24</sup> Hamid Algar, *Wahhabisme: Sebuah Tinjauan Kritis* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 2008), p. 92.

<sup>25</sup> Related to this, see Moh. Asif, "*Penafsiran Majelis Tafsir Al-Qur'an terhadap Ayat-Ayat Teologi*" Thesis, IAIN Surakarta, 2012).

<sup>26</sup> Iskandar Zulkarnaen, *Gerakan Ahmadiyah di Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2005), p. 272.

<sup>27</sup> Associated with this designation, Khaled Abou el-Fadl even said that Wahhabi puritan groups strongly condemned the affix, even categorized as an idolatrous act. See Khaled Abou el-Fadl, *Sejarah Wahhabi dan Salafi*, translated by Helmi Mustofa (Jakarta: Serambi, 2015) p. 16.

<sup>28</sup> In some places, Thufail also uses the term *sayyidina*. For example, in interpreting Al-Baqarah: 149-150, Abdullah Thufail quoted Ali's name by saying: "Sayyidina Ali RA ever mentioned ..." See *Tafsir Surat Al-Baqarah Ayat 142-176*. Solo: Yayasan Majelis Tafsir Al-Qur'an, 2008.

<sup>29</sup> Modernist figures who use the term seem only HAMKA, a Muhammadiyah figure who

the contrary, traditionalists are characterized as who always using the term as a form of respect. Besides, Thufail is also known as a heavy smoker<sup>30</sup> a habit that is usually shunned by Puritan Muslims, even Thufail's successor, Ahmad Sukina, later - referring to Muhammadiyah - proclaiming the prohibition of cigarettes. However, Thufail's puritanical orientation is most clearly seen when he openly attacks practices held by traditionalist, such as *tawassul* and *taklid*.<sup>31</sup>

Ricklefs said that Thufail was a modernist by giving a large portion of reason to understand Islamic sources.<sup>32</sup> It seems that the author does not agree with that. Thufail formulated the interpretation of the Qur'an very literally. He even, in some ways like most puritans, seemed to ignore the role of reason in understanding the text of the Qur'an. In interpreting Al-Baqarah: 173, regarding food that is forbidden; for example, he limits that what is forbidden by the Qur'an is only four kinds: carcasses, blood, pigs, and animals slaughtered without the name of God. From here then, he is different from the mainstream of Muslims. He stated that all types of animals are allowed to be consumed, including frogs and snakes, except four kinds mentioned above. Perhaps based on this view, the Solo people would later accuse MTA of allowing eating dog meat.<sup>33</sup>

In addition to teaching Tafsir, Thufail formulated his religious views through what he called "Brosur" (brochures) which were issued once a week. The brochures were then taught to all MTA members and provided provisions for teachers to be sent to various regions. The brochure will later become a reference in every *Jihad Pagi* (Pengajian Ahad Pagi, Sunday morning gathering), a public presentation held every Sunday morning.<sup>34</sup> For MTA followers, the brochure is a

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is often considered to have an ideological affinity with traditionalists.

<sup>30</sup> The testimony of Thufail's smoking habit was conveyed by one of his pupils, Suprpto. He revealed that Thufail often said: "I cannot think if I do not smoke."

<sup>31</sup> In this case, Thufail strongly condemned the practice of *taklid* and denounced it as an act of godless to other than Allah. See the Surakarta Islamic Study Majelis Brochure, "Hal Taklid (Ke 1)", p. 2, no date and year published. Around 1974-1979 MTA was merged into one with Abdullah Marzuki's council and later given the name of *Majelis Pengajian Islam*. At that time, the official MTA brochure was also merged and published in the name of *Majelis Pengajian Islam*. The model of publishing brochures in the study is the custom of MTA, and this is not the case with Abdullah Marzuki's followers. Despite the merger with Abdullah Marzuki, MTA still plays a vital role in publishing brochures.

<sup>32</sup> MC. Ricklefs, *Mengislamkan Jawa*, p. 302.

<sup>33</sup> The accusation at least began to develop in the Solo community since 2007. The first author himself had lived in Solo from 2005 until the end of 2013. In the early days, the author lived there; the author participated in seeing and feeling the polemic about MTA in the Solo community. MTA's accusation of justifying dogs has been circulating at least in the Solo community since at least 2007. The polemic about dog meat obstruction was assessed by Sunarwoto, "Radio Fatwa: Islamic Tanya Jawab Programmes on Radio Dakwah" *Al-Jami'ah Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 2 (2015), p. 240-278.

<sup>34</sup> For example, based on the study of the Brochure issued in the Ahmad Sukina period, almost entirely a reproduction of the Thufail period, except for a few themes such as terrorism and

vital reference; its position only under the Qur'an and hadith. We can understand the religious views of Thufail and MTA through these brochures.

### 3. **Majlis Tafsir Al-Qur'an (MTA)**

Abdullah Thufail, Abdullah Marzuki, Abdullah Sungkar, and his other friends, Abdullah Ba'asyir, are close friends. Abdullah Thufail's closeness to Abdullah Marzuki was probably due to having the same background: from the same area, Pacitan, and both of them came with traditionalist background. However, Thufail then tends to preach and work in religious teaching, as he later founded MTA. While his best friend, Abdullah Marzuki, or who is often known as Pak Dullah, focused on the business world by developing the Tiga Serangkai publisher. Abdullah Marzuki and his wife moved to Solo in 1968 to develop his book business.

During its development, Tiga Serangkai, was a small bookstore, later became one of the major publishers. Began from his success managing this publication, Abdullah Marzuki founded the Assalam modern Islamic boarding school in 1982, which was then followed by international Islamic-based schools named Al-Firdaus. Even though they have a traditionalist background, perhaps because they do not have such friend from traditionalist circle, in establishing Assalam, Abdullah Marzuki then relied on Abdullah Sungkar who was a Gontor alumnus. As stated by Aminah Abdullah, Abdullah Marzuki's wife, when he founded Assalam,

“In that same year, we went to many parties to be asked as a leader. Among them, KH. Abdullah Sungkar and KH. Jamaluddin. We admire the famous Gontor boarding school. Also, Al Mukmin boarding school, Ngruki.”<sup>35</sup>

Later, both the Assalam Islamic boarding school and the Hypermart Goro Assalam shopping center (which also founded by him) became an important center for the spread of puritan teachings. At least since 2006, Goro Assalam has been the center of an Islamic book exhibition in Solo. At least three times a year, Islamic book exhibitions are held there and are always flooded with books from Salafi and Wahhabi circles, posters, and also VCDs about jihad and the struggle of Muslims in various countries such as Palestine, Afghanistan, Chechnya, and others. At least until 2013 books by Indonesian Wahhabi authors, Hartono

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brochures that sharply criticize and attack the practice of “Yasinan” through the study of hadiths about reciting Yasin.

<sup>35</sup> Alberthiene Endah, *Edupreneurship Hj. Siti Aminah Abdullah* (Solo:Tiga Serangkai, 2010), p. 167.

Ahmad Jaiz and Mahrus Ali, who frontally attacked traditionalist' practices, have always been the most popular books that can be found at every booth.

Another Abdullah, Abdullah Sungkar, who was also a close friend of Abdullah Thufail, later founded the Jamaah Islamiyah - a network often labeled as a terrorist organization - after leaving Kartosuwiryo's DI (Darul Islam) in 1992. This organization was founded after a change of leadership in DI because of its incompatibility with other DI leaders.<sup>36</sup> This step was followed by Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, who later also joined JI.

Ricklefs said the emergence of Islamic groups in the 1970s had a close relationship with the political situation in Solo. At that time, Solo was still the basis of the remnants of the communist party, and this then became a motivator for Muslim figures in Solo to establish study groups and religious groups. Ricklefs described it as follow:

“Surakarta was one of the strong PKI bases at the end of the Sukarno period. In October 1965, the mayor of Surakarta was a communist and expressed his support for the coup that took place in Jakarta. Many PKI members and sympathizers from the abangan community, and also the people of Chinese descent, lost their lives and property in the violence that followed the failed coup attempt. Afterward, the Islamization efforts were intensified, with more lectures being held.”<sup>37</sup>

The emergence of MTA can also be seen in this context. Before establishing MTA, in 1966, Abdullah Thufail became the head of the KKPI (Islamic Youth Unity Coordination), an Islamic youth organization tasked to dealing with the remnants of the PKI.<sup>38</sup> With the help of some of his colleagues who were both merchants: Abdullah Baraja Abror, Abdullah Sungkar, and Abdullah Marzuki, he founded MTA.

Abdullah Thufail Saputra founded MTA on September 19, 1972, as an institution of study, appreciation, and practice of the Qur'an. However, this organization was officially incorporated as a legal entity on January 23, 1974, as a *yayasan* (foundation), not as a mass organization (community organization), or political party.<sup>39</sup> The forerunner to the establishment of MTA began with a commentary review conducted by Abdullah Thufail in

<sup>36</sup> See “Melacak Akar Terorisme di Indonesia,” the December 22 issue of *Tempo* newspaper, December 22, 2013. The article is a review of the book *The Root of Terrorism in Indonesia: From Darul Islam to Jemaah Islamiyah*, by Solahudin.

<sup>37</sup> M.C. Ricklefs, *Mengislamkan Jawa: Sejarah Islamisasi Jawa dan Penentangannya dari Tahun 1930 hingga Sekarang* (Jakarta: Serambi, 2013), p.300.

<sup>38</sup> Yoyok Mugiatno, MTA' General Secretary, “Beda Boleh, Putus Silaturrahmi Jangan,” *Jawa Pos*, April 14, 2011.

<sup>39</sup> Suprpto, “Penafsiran MTA ...,” p. 64. See also MTA' profile on [www.mta-online.com](http://www.mta-online.com).

Semanggi village, Pasar Kliwon, which later received a good response from the surrounding community.

On its official website, MTA said that the establishment of MTA was motivated by the anxiety of Abdullah Thufail against Muslims condition, which, according to him, was marginalized. In Thufail's view, the condition of such Muslims was because of their distance from the Qur'an. So to free Muslims from marginalization, according to Thufail, Muslims must return to the Qur'an. From here, Abdullah Thufail then held a study of Tafsir, which later became the forerunner to the establishment of MTA.<sup>40</sup>

In the beginning, MTA itself did not want to be a separate group or organization among other existing mass organizations. That is the reason why in time when MTA was founded, it chose the legal entity as a *yayasan*. Even in the guide book orientation period for new students of MTA high school in 2005, it was stated that:

“MTA is not desired to be an illegal institution, it is not desired to be a separate organization/organization amid existing Islamic organizations, and it is also undesirable to become an underbouw of certain organizations. To fulfill this wish, the chosen form of legal entity is the foundation.”<sup>41</sup>

However, it was Ahmad Sukina who was later considered to have brought the *yayasan* to become like mass organizations such as Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU): a matter that was contrary to Thufail's initial ideals.

From the beginning, Abdullah Thufail Saputra always called for Muslims to return to the Qur'an because, for him, Muslims would only be able to implement emancipation if they wanted to return to the Qur'an. Muhammad Wildan, in his study, briefly mentioned that the ultimate goal of the establishment of MTA is to free Muslims from various forms of practices that are considered as heretical and superstitious.

However, as Ricklefs pointed out, in contrast to Ahmad Sukina, Abdullah Thufail tended to be neutral towards disputes between modernists and traditionalists.<sup>42</sup> The figures from traditional circles in Solo, especially from the *pesantren* (traditional Islamic boarding school) and *Habib* circles, were not too concerned about MTA when Thufail led it. However, it was different when MTA was led by Ahmad Sukina, who was then considered to open a “new round” of debate between modernist-puritan and traditionalists, which was at

<sup>40</sup> See MTA's profile on [www.mta-online.com](http://www.mta-online.com).

<sup>41</sup> See “Buku Panduan Masa Orientasi SMA MTA 2005”, p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> M.C Ricklefs, *Mengislamkan Jawa ...*, p. 303.

least considered finished in the late 1990s.<sup>43</sup> However, both MTA in the Thufail and Ahmad Sukina periods tended to avoid physical anarchism in achieving the da'wah goals.

During Abdullah Thufail's leadership, MTA tended to focus on religious teaching through the teachings that he delivered himself, especially about the Qur'an and tafsir. The emphasis is then continued so that the study participants practice the results of the study. Thus, MTA does not claim to be a mass organization like other mass organizations such as Muhammadiyah and NU. In Abdullah Thufail's period, MTA was less well known in the community, and its scope was limited to the Solo and surrounding areas. In fact, in Pacitan, East Java, the area where Abdullah Thufail was born, MTA was only able to enter and be inaugurated in 2006, during Ahmad Sukina's leadership.

In its development stage, around 1974-1979, MTA to be later merged into one with Abdullah Marzuki's group, who is also a friend of Abdullah Thufail. The combination of the two groups is called the MPI (*Majelis Pengajian Islam*, Islamic Study Council). In this stage, the MTA name was abolished. Nevertheless, after a split, MTA then stood alone again. So far, the background to the division between MTA and Abdullah Marzuki's group is unknown. Allegedly due to differences in views between the two. Ricklefs said Abdullah Marzuki and his wife Aminah Abdullah still held fast to their traditional views.<sup>44</sup> Despite the fact, he was the founder of Assalam, known as the basis for modernist-puritan education in Solo.

Besides being known as the preacher or cleric, Abdullah Thufail is also a merchant who usually travels to various regions in Indonesia. Allegedly he had lived for several years in Bali and held the position of chairman of DDII.<sup>45</sup> There he also briefly married a resident. Perhaps from here, it can also be understood why the MTA da'wah model would later be similar to DDII in terms of sending preachers to regions. Abdullah Thufail died on September 15, 1992. Several years before his death, MTA had succeeded in establishing its first formal educational institution, MTA High School, in Semanggi, Pasar Kliwon, Solo, in 1987.

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<sup>43</sup> Almost all traditional group leaders in Solo interviewed by the author showed this attitude.

<sup>44</sup> Lihat M.C Ricklefs, *Mengislamkan Jawa...*, h. 305. Ricklefs said that both Abdullah Marzuki and his wife, Aminah, had both attended at the leading traditional boarding school in Pacitan, Termas Boarding School. Likewise, both the father of Mazuki and Aminah were also adherents of the Naqshbandiah order. Abdullah Marzuki himself had participated in the tarekat.

<sup>45</sup> See Suprpto, "Penafsiran MTA...", p. 78.

Abdullah Thufail, in addition to calling for Muslims to return to the Qur'an, he also sought to free the people from what he considered to be called *taqlid a'ma* (blind imitation). In this case, Abdullah Thufail said:

“Those in worship to Allah are still mixed with several kinds of actions which make it idolatrous to God. Good deeds are still mixed with various deeds of heresy, by not following the sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad, and in the struggle to buy the religion of God is still following (this paper is written as is) To RA'YU ( follow human opinion), and not follow the revelations of the Qur'an and the sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad SAW.”<sup>46</sup>

Unlike other Islamic organizations such as Muhammadiyah, NU, and the like, MTA does not have AD ART (statute and bylaw) to elect their general chairman. Therefore, Abdullah Thufail led MTA until the end of his life since he founded this institution. Abdullah Thufail's successor, Ahmad Sukina, might also lead MTA until the end of his life. MTA does not have terms such as Congress, MUNAS (*Musyawarah Nasional*, National Conference) and MUSDA (*Musyawarah Daerah*, Regional Conference), because every week all MTA branch leaders throughout the country usually hold meetings after attending the *Jihad Pagi*. Every MTA branch leader was required to come to Solo, to take part in the *Jihad Pagi*. Then together, they hold a meeting consisted of regional and branch representatives from all over Indonesia. Branches which originating from far areas, such as Medan and Kupang, are not required to be present every week.<sup>47</sup>

Wildan even considered the MTA organization based on an immature concept. Likewise, the absence of rules in MTA to elect a general chairperson, according to him, will make the current MTA chairperson, Ahmad Sukina, lead MTA for the rest of his life, like his predecessor, Abdullah Thufail.<sup>48</sup> However, he did not seem to realize that MTA had an effective organizational management system. With the presence of all regional leaders and MTA branches in *Jihad Pagi*, the agenda and instructions of the central leadership could be immediately conveyed to all members. Usually, after *Jihad Pagi*, they will hold leadership meetings to discuss the development of MTA in various regions, formulate strategies, and solve the problems they faced, or will face. Branch leaders will forward MTA policies in a particular study meeting which is carried out in all branches once or twice a week. Study meeting at this branch (*Pengajian*

<sup>46</sup> Majelis Tafsir Al-Qur'an, *Tafsir Al-Qur'an Surat Al-Baqarah Ayat: 42-141* (Solo: Yayasan Majelis Tafsir Al-Qur'an, tanpa tahun), p.64.

<sup>47</sup> See Ahmad Sukina on his “*Jihad Pagi*” on MTA radio, September 17, 2006.

<sup>48</sup> Muhammad Wildan, “Mapping Radical ...”, p. 50.

Cabang) is mandatory for all MTA residents, and at each branch, attendance will be recorded. In this branch study, residents will pay zakat, infaq, and other funds, all of which support the MTA mission (this will be discussed at the end of this article).

#### 4. MTA, the New Order and the Development of Further Da'wah

The nuances and orientation of the MTA began to change in the early 1980s, where between 1983 and 1984, Abdullah Thufail decided to accept Pancasila and join the New Order ruling party, Golkar. At that time, the political situation was indeed experiencing an escalation. This escalation began with the desire of the New Order authorities to make Pancasila the sole principle of all parties and existing social organizations. President Soeharto conveyed this desire in his address to the DPR on August 16, 1982.<sup>49</sup> The single principle is only intended for political organizations, but in its development, it is also mandatory to be included in the principles of all social organizations, as reaffirmed by the president at the Golkar National Conference on October 20, 1982:

In order to strengthen the position of social organization in the life of the state and society, we also need to emphasize that all social organizations have only one principle, Pancasila. This will be regulated in the legal norms that are currently being prepared.<sup>50</sup>

The new order, backed up by ABRI (*Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia*, Armed Forces of the Republic of Indonesia) and Golkar, began promoting the importance of Pancasila as the only principle for all political parties and community organizations in 1982. The aim was to secure Pancasila as a national ideology while simultaneously eliminating various ideologies that were considered threatening included communism and Islam.<sup>51</sup> The government policy was then promulgated in 1985, where all political parties and all social organizations were required to make Pancasila the only ideological principle. As a result, van Buinessen, for example, mentions the Tanjung Priok case in September 1984, in which hundreds of Muslims were shot by the army when protesting against the government.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> See Sua'idi Asy'ary, "The Role of Muslim Groups In Contemporary Indonesian Nationalism: A Studi of the Nahdlatul Ulama Under the New Order 1980s-1990", Thesis, Institut of Islamic studies McGill University, 1999, p. 85-87.

<sup>50</sup> Syarifudin Jurdi, *Muhammadiyah dalam Dinamika Politik Indonesia 1966-2006* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2010), p. 228-229.

<sup>51</sup> Sua'idi Asy'ary, "The Role of Muslim ...", p. 79.

<sup>52</sup> See Martin Van Bruinessen, *NU: Relasi-Relasi Kuasa, Pencarian Wacana Baru*, trans. Farid Wajidi (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 1994), p. 112-113.

It seems that Abdullah Thufail predicted changes in national circumstances. From here, he then took a step that contradicted his principles; accept Pancasila and join the government party, Golkar. Abdullah Thufail's move was considered a *siyasah da'wah* (political strategy) to secure himself and to continue carrying out his da'wah activities under the support of the authorities. Although when joining Golkar Thufail argued that it had to be done and was considered part of the *siyasah da'wah*, some Thufail students were disappointed. Some of them later resigned from the group study because they felt the *thaghut* had deceived their ustad.<sup>53</sup> Likewise, if we consider the making of Pancasila as a single principle, it contradicts the concept of *al-syirk fi al-ahkâm*, which was formulated by himself. This concept says that one of the categories of shirk is to accept "man-made" law beyond the laws outlined by God.<sup>54</sup>

Abdullah Thufail's accommodative attitude towards the government was even earlier than Muhammadiyah, which only accepted Pancasila as a single principle in 1985. This attitude also clearly contradicted the attitude of his political mentor Muhammad Natsir who remained adamantly rejecting Pancasila as the sole principle. Together with his follower, Ja'far Umar Thalib, Natsir was involved in efforts to reject the single principle. However, due to the political situation which endangered him, Ja'far Umar Thalib then fled to Pakistan. There, he studied at the Al-Maududi Institute. Upon his return to Indonesia, Ja'far would later established Laskar Jihad.<sup>55</sup> The argument we have made above clearly shows that the process of accepting Pancasila by MTA was not done voluntarily, as proposed by Ricklefs, who even thought Pancasila was in line with MTA doctrine.<sup>56</sup>

With the acceptance of Pancasila as the only principle, changes were seen in the MTA's brochures that became their official publication. If at first, the MTA brochures only discussed religious issues, but when affiliated with Golkar, the

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<sup>53</sup> When commenting on the attitude of his teacher, Suprpto, for example, mentioned the reason for leaving MTA because "ustad telah terpedaya oleh *thaghut* (the Thaghut has deceived ustad)." However, Suprpto, for example, as well as another name, Hadi Bowo Yuwono, even though they had left the MTA they continued to practice the teachings taught by their teacher. When the author met at his house in April 2012, Suprpto still kept hundreds of brochures and study notes obtained from Thufail. He also said that whenever he encountered problems surrounding religious matters, he referred to the sources.

<sup>54</sup> See Muhammad Asif, *Majlis Tafsir Al-Qur'an (MTA): Dinamika, Sejarah dan Pencarian Wacana* (Malang: Madza Publishing, 2016), p 201-204. See also *Tafsir MTA Surat Al-Baqarah ayat 142-176*, p. 123-125.

<sup>55</sup> Ja'far Umar Thalib, speaking at the Solo-Ambon Peace Teleconference held by the Wahid Institute in collaboration with Peace Tech, Solo, June 12, 2009. In Ambon the main speaker was Nasir Abbas, who was a former JI (Jamaah Islamiyah) leader. The first author attended the event.

<sup>56</sup> Ricklefs, *Mengislamkan Jawa*, p. 303

MTA brochures turned into discussing the problems of state and society, as well as health issues. At least the authors found about 60 special editions that were published on these themes, which was named “Ilmu Kemasyarakatan” (Social Sciences). It discussed several themes related to state relations with society, supervision, justice, defense, protection, workers’ rights, and what they called Islamic Socialism and criticism of communism.<sup>57</sup>

Thus it seems that MTA is also trying to direct its members always to support government policies. For example, the following MTA statement supporting the New Order development program: “Pelita (*Pembangunan Lima Tahun*, Five-Year Development) contains the belief that the future of humanity is in human hands themselves. Pelita is the background of various development plans.”<sup>58</sup>

Abdullah Thufail’s incorporation into Golkar in particular, and the New Order government in general, also marked an essential change in the future attitude of religious MTA as well as a shift towards several essential doctrines in the MTA, including the concept of *thaghût*. The attitude and views of MTA, which initially tended to refuse to obey the government which deemed unlawful and unwilling to apply Islamic law, experienced a shift after Thufail joined the New Order environment. The *thaghût* doctrine, which was one of the essential doctrines in the MTA, seems to have undergone a radical evolution,<sup>59</sup> even now tends to be ignored by MTA residents.

The affiliation of MTA into the Golkar Party later escorted Abdullah Thufail’s successor, Ahmad Sukina to become a member of the DPRD of Solo during the New Order, although it did not last long. However, it seems that Ahmad Sukina is now trying to deny the existence of MTA’s closeness to the New Order, in a Morning Jihad study at the end of 2013 - when the author was present -, he rejected the question of a resident who asking about the history of MTA’s closeness with the New Order.

In the era of Ahmad Sukina’s leadership, some of Abdullah Thufail’s senior students did not join MTA. Among the names are Dahlan Tri Harjono - who is Ahmad Sukina’s senior brother -, Hadi Bowo Yuwono, Suprpto,<sup>60</sup> a

<sup>57</sup> Islamic Socialism and MTA’s criticism of communism, for example, are discussed in the brochure themed “Ilmu Kemasyarakatan” edition 44th, November 3, 1985.

<sup>58</sup> Majelis Tafsir Al-Qur’an, brochure April 29, 1984 edition, p. 2-3.

<sup>59</sup> See, for example, Suprpto’s statement when commenting on the attitude of his teacher, “Ustadz has been deceived by thaghut.” Interview with Suprpto, Solo, 2012.

<sup>60</sup> It should be noted here that there are two names of Suprpto. One was a senior student of Abdullah Thufail but then left the MTA when Thufail joined Golkar, and this was intended. While Suprpto, who is now in MTA, is a much more junior person but has a quite strategic position in

favorite student of Abdullah Thufail who was later taken as a son-in-law Haidar Makarim, Munir Ahmad who is also Abdullah Thufail's son, as well as several other names. Haidar Makarim, along with several other Abdullah Thufail students, even established the MTA Bayangkara, as a rival MTA even though it later dimmed and did not develop. Whereas during Abdullah Thufail's time, Haedar was said to be the most generous person and donated the most funds to MTA. He has also bought a building MTA, the Mawar building, near Matahari Singosaren, Solo. Long before taking place at the Gedung Ahad Pagi located on Jl Ronggo Warsito 111 A Surakarta, MTA activities were held by the building purchased by Haidar. However, it seems that they have never openly expressed their opposition to the MTA leadership of the Sukina era, but it seems they had severe problem between their relations.

There also seems to be something contradictory if we look at the life of the eldest son of MTA founder, Munir Ahmad. The fact that as a son of Abdullah Thufail, and as a graduate of Al-Azhar University, Munir's life was overwhelmed by economic difficulties. Munir did not have a permanent job until his death. However, if we look at the rapid economic development in the lives of MTA leaders today, we will find it hard to believe on it. Munir did not become an MTA member, as well as Abdullah Thufail's other family member. Munir Ahmad died on August 14, 2012, right in Ramadan.

So far, it is not yet known how suddenly Ahmad Sukina appeared to become the MTA chairman after Thufail's death. The absence of AD / ART to choose leaders makes it even more unclear. Nevertheless, Ahmad Sukina, even though he was considered not to have a strong background in Islamic sciences,<sup>61</sup> succeeded in bringing MTA from a local organization and was less well known to be an organization that was quite well known and had representatives and branches in almost all provinces in Indonesia. At the end of March 2012, MTA claimed to have 52 representatives and 222 branches in all regions of Indonesia, marked by the inauguration of representation in Kampar Riau.<sup>62</sup>

Whereas previously in 2007, MTA claimed to only have branches in 25 provinces, with 128 branches and only about 100,000 members throughout

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MTA, namely as a member of the Tim Keilmuan (Scientific Team). He is an alumnus from the Tafsir Hadith Department, IAIN Surakarta.

<sup>61</sup> Ahmad Sukina is a graduate of FKIP Muhammadiyah University, Surakarta. He began his career as a private driver from Abdullah Sungkar. There are allegations that Sungkar delivered his introduction to Abdullah Thufail.

<sup>62</sup> See "Pegukuhan Perwakilan MTA ke-52 di Kabupaten Kampar Riau" on [www.mta-online.com](http://www.mta-online.com). This article downloaded from the website on April 26, 2011, at 10:58.

Indonesia.<sup>63</sup> In the Morning Jihad dated April 29, 2012, the MTA said that around 7,000 participants from various regions were followed and listened to online by MTA residents residing in Malaysia, Korea, Japan, and East Timor.<sup>64</sup> On December 27, 2015, at the Silatnas event in Gelora Bung Karno, Jakarta, 109 new representatives, and branches were inaugurated, and now they have a total of 539 representatives throughout Indonesia.<sup>65</sup> At least in the last ten years, MTA has become the fastest growing organization by continuing to increase the number of its members and continue to increase infrastructure. However, it must be recognized that the concentration of MTA members remains in the ex-residency area of Surakarta.

MTA is now clearly the most successful Islamic organization in terms of the number of members, compared to other organizations in Solo.<sup>66</sup> Even now, it must be recognized amid a declining trend in large organizations such as Muhammadiyah, in Solo precisely, MTA has become the fastest growing and most active organization. Here, the effectiveness of MTA's radio, MTA FM, plays a vital role. The tendency to increase the enthusiasm and religious awareness of Muslims recently seems to be successfully answered by MTA radio. Muslims, especially in Solo and its surroundings, tend to want practical answers around the problem of religious practices in Islam. By utilizing the advancement of communication technology, MTA has succeeded in appearing to be the most effective organization in attracting the masses, although in the field, it often happens intrigue, conflict, friction, even "fighting," especially with traditionalist sides.<sup>67</sup>

## 5. Zakat and Jihad: The Primary Backers of the MTA Da'wah

Zakat for MTA is a fundamental doctrine. Aside from being considered as one of the pillars of Islam, for MTA, Zakat becomes the primary support for their da'wah activities. Perhaps in the absence of zakat funds taken from its members, MTA will find it challenging to develop their da'wah.<sup>68</sup> The doctrine

<sup>63</sup> Muhammad Wildan, "Mapping Radical ...", p. 51.

<sup>64</sup> The author attended the recitation on that date. At that time, the recitation was attended by the secretary of the Central Java MUI, Prof. Ahmad Rofiq, as well as representatives from the Central Java Regional Indonesian Broadcasting Commission (KPID).

<sup>65</sup> See [www.mta.or.id](http://www.mta.or.id).

<sup>66</sup> Muhammad Wildan, "Mapping Radical ...", p. 51.

<sup>67</sup> See Muhammad Asif, *Majlis Tafsir Al-Qur'an*, p. 150-172. See also (Muallim 2012; Trihartono 2015). About how the da'wa strategy of MTA see Ilyya Muhsin and Muhammad Ghufiron, "Geliat Puritanisme Islam di Indonesia: Menyibak Tabir di Balik Gerakan Majelis Tafsir Al-Qur'an (MTA) dalam Perspektif Sosiologis" *INFERENSI Jurnal Sosial Keagamaan*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2018.

<sup>68</sup> We do not know for sure how much the potential for zakat from MTA residents - in this case, MTA seems to be very closed. A lecturer at the IAIN Surakarta Sharia faculty, Zumar

of jihad also supports this doctrine. MTA divides jihad into two, namely *jihad bil amwal* - jihad with wealth - and *jihad bil anfus* - jihad with body and soul -. The following is the statement from MTA:

“However, in fact, jihad consists of two elements, namely *jihad bi amwal* and *jihad bi anfus*, which is not understood; usually only *jihad bi anfus* has done a lot. If *jihad bi amwal* is well lived and practiced, Muslims will not be short of funds to finance their activities”.<sup>69</sup>

Thufail, in contrast to the majority of Sunni ulama,<sup>70</sup> formulated the conception that every Muslim must issue *zakat māl* (zakat of wealth) with no restrictions on *haul* and *nisab*. It means that there is no limit to the minimum amount of wealth to be issued zakat, and does not have to wait a year to issue it. Based on this concept, every MTA member is subject to the obligation to pay zakat. Zakat is taken 2.5% of their income. Even at the time of Thufail, *warga khususi* (exclusive members) were levied a more significant amount, up to 10%. Zakat payment can be done once a month or once a week, even every day - especially for traders and other entrepreneurs - through their respective branches.

The funds are deposited to the central MTA through the branch where the member are. Those who work as farmers apply to agricultural zakat, which is paid at each harvest. Zakat which was collected from all members, directly managed by MTA headquarters to fund their da'wah. Besides, other sources of funds came from members' infaq. Although this system is not required, it is very emphasized for MTA member. There is also a *Dana Kesanggupan* (potential fund) the latter of which is charged members when MTA is carrying out a development program. The construction of the quite magnificent Sunday Morning (Ahad Pagi) Building<sup>71</sup> on Ronggo Warsito 111A street, Solo, is said to

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Aminuddin, for example, when he was about to take a dissertation on zakat at MTA, was forced to change his study object because the research permit he entered did not receive a response from MTA. Nevertheless, regarding the potential for MTA zakat, at least we can give a rough idea if every citizen pays Rp. 50 thousand, then MTA will collect Rp. 25 billion per month. It is estimated that the number of MTA residents is between 500 thousand to 1 million in 2014.

<sup>69</sup> “Sekilas Tentang Yayasan Majelis Tafsir Al-Qur'an” in *Buku pedoman masa orientasi sekolah SMA MTA tahun 2005*, p. 8

<sup>70</sup> On the issue of Nisab, for example, the cleric of the current era, Shaykh Yusuf Qardhawi said: “Provisions that wealth affected by the obligation of zakat must be agreed upon by scholars, except for agricultural products, fruits, and precious metals.” Similarly, haul, according to him, has become an agreement of the scholars. See Yusuf Qardhawi, *Hukum Zakat*, trans. Dr. Salman Harun, dkk. (Jakarta: PT Pustaka Litera AntarNusa, 2007), p. 149-163. Similarly, about the haul. The scholars require the existence of haul in zakat treasure. See Ibnu Rusyd, *Bidāyah al-Mujtahid*, juz 1 (Surabaya: Toko Kitab Al-Hidayah, t.th), p.196. Qaradawi said, the Khulafa Rashidin - the four caliphs - was also applying the concept of haul and Nisab for zakat mal.

<sup>71</sup> This building inaugurated by SBY (former Indonesia president) in 2009.

be supported by the latest system. The effectiveness of MTA funding sources can be guaranteed because the commitment and compliance of majority of MTA members. For them, by practicing MTA doctrines - including paying zakat - means practicing true Islamic teachings.

Ahmad Sukina said, "Thank God, all the MTA residents have taken this opinion. It means that every fortune can be tasted ... There is more, namely professional charity ...

For us, profession ... everyone has a profession. Even as a pedicab driver, you have a profession, right! Well, you have to pay zakat... how many days do you get, if you get twenty thousand, then spend two and a half percent of twenty thousand ... God willing, will be fertile, will be enough .... but you have to be sure, do not try, God does not want to be tried. *Faman shya'a fal yu'min, waman shya'a fal yakfur*, if you believe, carry it out, if not, then you are infidels ... <sup>72</sup>

The funds paid by the members managed to finance all the MTA missionary interests such as developing buildings, erecting satellite radios to TV stations, funding and paying ustad, funding plane tickets for branch leaders outside Java every week to come to Solo, and part of it is channeled as business capital for MTA residents in need. It seems that Thufail's successor, Ahmad Sukina, later managed to control all of it well in the interests of massive MTA propagation. Now MTA has a da'wah network throughout Indonesia and has a reliable radio station that can be accessed in all regions in Indonesia.<sup>73</sup> The author also sees in terms of fund management. Perhaps MTA is the most established organization in Indonesia, at least only under Muhammadiyah.

## Conclusion

From previous discussions, we can see the journey of a person with a family background or traditional education and then turn into a Salafi-puritan. Abdullah Thufail Saputra clearly has a transparent background - both in education and family - as a traditionalist Muslim. Thufail's change towards puritan occurred because of intense interaction both with figures and works of puritan Muslims. Nevertheless, the change did not happen suddenly, and Thufail experienced the struggle as we described.

When establishing the MTA, it was clear that Thufail's purpose for MTA was to conduct da'wah through teaching, not to become a mass organization, especially a competitor, for traditionalist groups. MTA seems to have

<sup>72</sup> MTA's Sunday Jihad, Agustus 24, 2008.

<sup>73</sup> This section is mainly based on the author's observations and interviews with several young MTA activists, including Khoirun Nisa.

undergone various processes in the search for identity. Thufail's acceptance of the single principle of Pancasila in the 1984s also did not occur sincerely but was considered as part of the *siyasa da'wah*, although without they realized it would later bring MTA to various fundamental changes until now. Seeing the development of MTA now, it may be an illustration of how a puritan movement can combine the various potentials they have: doctrine, militancy, effective fund management, and a sophisticated da'wah strategy utilized to carry out massive expansion of da'wah. Although MTA today claims they have never relied on their religion to any particular figure - including Thufail -, it is Thufail who laid down the MTA ideology.

The doctrine of zakat is a significant buffer for the current MTA movement. Likewise, MTA's obedience in paying zakat will continue to be a capital for the expansion of the MTA mission. Even with excessive self-confidence, the current MTA leader, Ahmad Sukina, aspires to continue to expand and massively promote one-color Islam - puritanic versions - to all directions, regardless of regional or territorial barriers. According to the authors' observations, at least until 2012, they also seem wanted to openly challenge the existence of traditionalist circles. However, the authors remain convinced, that MTA as an entity, is not constant, can experience and accept changes, as we have seen in its history.

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