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Negotiating Sufism and Modernity: A Literature Review from the Perspective of the Anthropology of Religion

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Abstract

Modernity is often understood as a condition that promotes rationalization and secularization, thereby potentially diminishing the role of religion in human life. However, the development of contemporary Muslim societies demonstrates a different phenomenon, namely the resurgence of the need for spirituality as a response to various crises associated with modernity, such as the crisis of meaning, individualism, materialism, and moral decline. This study aims to analyze the process of negotiation between Sufism and modernity through a literature review from the perspective of the anthropology of religion. The research employs a qualitative approach using a literature study method based on books, journal articles, and scholarly works discussing Sufism, Neo-Sufism, Urban Sufism, and the anthropology of religion. Data were analyzed, through thematic classification and conceptual interpretation. Rather than depicting modernity as driving the disappearance of Sufism, the reviewed literature suggests that contemporary Islamic spirituality undergoes continuous processes of negotiation, recontextualization, and transformation of religious meaning. This transformation is characterized by the emergence of Neo-Sufism and Urban Sufism, which offer more flexible, inclusive, and socially engaged spiritual practices adapted to modern lifestyle dynamics. Specifically, this article contributes an anthropological reading of how Sufi symbols, authority, and ritual practices are recontextualized to construct adaptive systems of meaning. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that the relationship between Sufism and modernity represents an ongoing cultural negotiation that preserves core spiritual values while addressing contemporary societal needs.

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Introduction

The relationship between religion and modernity is often perceived as characterized by tension, as though the two are inherently incompatible. The statements of Bacon and Bergson, as cited by Rusli Karim (1994), challenge this assumption. Bacon argues that “a little philosophy inclines the human mind toward atheism, but depth in philosophy brings the human mind back to religion,” while Bergson observes that “we can find human societies without science, art, or philosophy, but there has never been a society without religion.” These two statements suggest that religion is closely intertwined with the development of human thought, including the intellectual processes associated with modernity.

The contemporary modern world is characterized, at least in part, by the rapid advancement of science and technology. Phenomena such as the digitalization of information and cultural globalization, reinforced by increasingly convenient access to information, have become unavoidable dimensions of human life. More concerning, however, is that behind these advances, the modern world has also generated phenomena that deserve serious attention, particularly the declining dimensions of human faith, morality, and ethical conduct (Winarni et al., 2025). This condition highlights the importance of religion in accompanying humanity's journey toward modernity.

The challenges confronting the relationship between Islam and modernity did not emerge suddenly. Since at least the twentieth century, many Muslim groups and societies have begun to adopt various models of Western thought and social structures, ranging from forms of state organization to concerns over whether Islamic law (Sharia) could be reconciled with Western discourses of democracy, pluralism, and human rights. While such concerns were emerging among Muslims worldwide, Western scholars and intellectuals were likewise questioning the compatibility of Islam with modernity (Bruinessen & Howell, 2008). Political scientist Samuel Huntington (1997), for instance, raised a similar question regarding the capacity of the traditions maintained by Muslim communities to support the development of democratic societies in the contemporary Muslim world. Huntington's assumption can be understood as reinforcing his prediction that Islam would eventually constitute a distinct and potentially problematic civilizational boundary.

In the twentieth century, the social sciences, in particular, were largely dominated by theories derived from modernization, encompassing both left- and right-oriented approaches. These perspectives reinforced the notion that societies had evolved into what came to be described as “modern societies,” alongside what Max Weber termed “rational forms of social organization.” The mode of thought regarded by modernists as critical and rational provided an intellectual foundation for the emergence of modern corporations and bureaucratic institutions associated with modernity. Consequently, religion came to be perceived as irrational and increasingly less relevant within the framework of modern social life (Bruinessen & Howell, 2007).

The assumption that modernity and religion are often viewed as conflicting domains has contributed to a dichotomy between the two. As Berger argued, secularization was initially understood as a natural consequence of modernization, whereby religion would gradually disappear from social life over time. To understand the argument concerning secularization, it is therefore necessary to examine the historical development and origins

of the term. For Christians, for instance, secularization could be associated with processes such as Christianization, heresy, paganization, and other negatively connoted terms. Among atheists, by contrast, secularization has often been associated with progress, liberation from religion, and freedom of thought. Berger himself defined secularization as “the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols.” Over time, however, Berger came to recognize that this assumption did not correspond to empirical reality. Religion has, in fact, continued to experience a resurgence in various forms across different parts of the world (Reaves, 2012).

The consequences of secularization, which has often been understood as the liberation of human beings from the constraints of religious commitments and values, can also be observed in the modern pursuit of power over nature. Nature is subjected to human control, with its mysteries compelled to be revealed in the pursuit of worldly power and material wealth rather than for the purpose of glorifying God as the Creator of the universe. According to Nasr (1976), this condition has contributed to a crisis of the human individual that ultimately threatens the life of the entire universe as a consequence of human actions. The shortcomings of modernist thought have become increasingly apparent through various forms of crisis, including environmental degradation, anxiety, and other related problems. In response to these crises, Seyyed Hossein Nasr proposed a solution centered on the values of Sufism as an essential dimension of human existence, particularly the divine and spiritual dimensions of life (Fatur Rahman, 2022).

At least three factors have contributed to the renewed interest of modern individuals in the Western world in the spiritual dimension of religion. First is the ideological factor and worldview that individuals embrace; second is the rapid development of science, technology, and industry, which has significantly influenced changes in individual patterns and lifestyles; and third is the declining contribution of the traditional church, which had served as the formal religious institution followed by Western societies for centuries (Sakdullah, 2020). The growing interest in spirituality in the Western world has also had implications for the Eastern world, particularly Indonesia. The resurgence of spirituality among modern individuals is reflected in the growing popularity of dhikr activities held in various settings, including open public spaces, mosques, and even luxury hotels. This phenomenon demonstrates the tendency of contemporary modern societies to seek spiritual orientations as a source of guidance and meaning in life (Usman, 2015).

Furthermore, toward the end of the twentieth century, perceptions of religion began to change rapidly, despite the persistence of several longstanding stereotypes. Intellectuals increasingly promoted the reconciliation of urban Muslim communities with Modernist currents, giving rise to forms of religious practice characterized by Sufi elements. Religious figures such as Hamka popularized the concept of Modern Sufism, encouraging modern Muslims to embrace the essence of “Sufism” as a positive teaching that could be studied and practiced without necessarily committing to the lengthy process of affiliation with a Sufi order (Howell, 2007). This development subsequently became more widely associated with the concept of Urban Sufism, whereby urban communities, despite being occupied with work and family responsibilities, can balance these demands with a more flexible spiritual approach without diminishing the essential teachings of Sufism.

Studies on the interaction between Sufism, Sufi orders (*tariqa*), and modernity in responding to the spiritual crises experienced by modern individuals have been widely discussed and have received considerable attention in Islamic studies literature. In the context of Sufism and modernity, Arrasyid (2020) argues that the teachings of *maqamat* and *ahwal* in the works of Abu Nasr al-Sarraj offer a spiritual oasis and psycho-spiritual guidance for modern society, which is increasingly surrounded by anxiety resulting from entrapment in materialism. At the level of intellectual reconstruction, Muhammad Sakdullah (2020) demonstrates a shift from classical Sufism, which tends to emphasize *uzlah* (self-isolation) and individual asceticism, toward Neo-Sufism. Neo-Sufism is characterized by puritanism and activism and emphasizes the principle of *tawazun* (balance) between individual piety and social responsibility.

Meanwhile, ethnographic field studies have demonstrated how Sufi orders and Islamic spirituality can be connected to both local and urban social life. In his study of the Qadiriyyah Naqsyabandiyah Order (TQN) in Madura, Ach. Shodiqil Hafil (2024) identified the practice of “hybrid dhikr” (*jahr and khafiy*), which can transform a community initially characterized by a relatively harsh disposition into individuals with more courteous and respectful attitudes. In an urban context, Moch. Sodik and B.J. Sujibto (2023) examined young urban Sufism in Yogyakarta, where Sufi practices are carried out in public spaces such as cafes as a response to a crisis of meaning and as a form of resistance to religious formalism. Furthermore, Meita Arinal Haq et al. (2026), through a literature review, analyzed how the Naqshbandiyah Order contributes to the formation of members’ social identity and solidarity by integrating Victor Turner’s theory of liminality with Clifford Geertz’s theory of symbolic systems.

Although previous studies have examined Sufism from various perspectives, including classical textual sources, the reconstruction of Neo-Sufi thought, and ethnographic experiences of local Sufi orders and Urban Sufism, a fundamental research gap remains. Most existing studies tend to separate empirical analyses of particular Sufi communities from doctrinal textual studies concerning modernity. Consequently, there remains a lack of synthesis that holistically maps the process of religious negotiation through the lens of the anthropology of religion. The novelty of this study lies in connecting three principal domains: the analysis of the existential crisis experienced by modern individuals as a source of spiritual needs; the doctrinal transformation from classical Sufism toward Neo-Sufism; and an interpretation of contemporary Sufism as a process of cultural and religious negotiation.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using a literature review as its research design. A qualitative approach was selected because the study focuses on gaining an in-depth understanding, interpreting meanings, constructing ideas, and analyzing relationships within the framework of the anthropology of religion, particularly in explaining the relationship between Sufism and modernity in the development of contemporary Islamic thought, rather than on statistical measurements or quantitative field data (Creswell, 2007). The literature review enables the researcher to reconstruct the historical transformation of Sufism, examine the dynamics surrounding the emergence of neo-

Sufism, and understand the process of negotiation between religious traditions and the social changes generated by modernity.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature search was conducted using multiple sources in order to incorporate nationally and internationally reputable journal articles, classical monographs and printed books, as well as exploratory searches supported by technology. The Scopus database was used to identify internationally reputable scholarly journal articles that had undergone peer review. Library catalogs and printed-book databases, along with direct searches of physical libraries and library catalog databases, were specifically used to access monographs, printed books, and foundational texts. In addition, AI-based search tools were employed as supplementary literature-mapping resources, (such as ChatGPT and Gemini) to explore thematic relationships, map citation networks, and identify relevant studies published in nationally reputable journals indexed by SINTA. The search employed the following combination of keywords: *Tasawuf*, *Sufism*, *Modernity*, *Neo-Sufism*, *Urban Sufism*, and *Anthropology of Religion*. These keywords were used in both Indonesian and English to broaden the range of sources identified.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Selection criteria were established to maintain the quality and credibility of the data.

The inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) indexed scholarly journal articles and academic monographs or books; (2) publications written in Indonesian or English; (3) studies addressing Sufism, Sufi orders (*tariqa*), urban spirituality, or Neo-Sufism in relation to modernity, secularization, or the anthropology of religion; and (4) publications from the previous ten years (2015–2025) for contemporary empirical research and journal articles in order to ensure recency. However, foundational scholarly works considered conceptually or historically significant to this study were retained regardless of their publication year.

The exclusion criteria were as follows: (1) non-academic publications, such as popular news articles, blogs, and media opinion pieces; (2) duplicate articles or documents that were not accessible in full text; (3) sources lacking substantive relevance to the relationship between Sufism, modernity, and religious transformation; and (4) AI-generated recommendations that were fictitious or whose original publications could not be verified.

Data Analysis and Theme Development

The selected literature was subsequently read comparatively, and relevant information was extracted based on several aspects, including representations of modernity, transformations of Sufi traditions, forms of Neo-Sufism and Urban Sufism, and anthropological interpretations of religion. Initial codes were developed based on recurring concepts and arguments identified across the literature. Related codes were subsequently grouped into five main themes, namely: (1) Islam in relation to modernity and secularism; (2) the history and development of classical Sufism; (3) the concept of neo-Sufism; (4) the resurgence of spirituality among modern societies; and (5) anthropological perspectives on changes in religious practices. This thematic classification was intended

to facilitate the analytical process and identify patterns of relationships among the concepts under investigation (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014).

Results

Crisis of Modernity and the Resurgence of Spirituality

Over the past several decades, there has been growing interest in spirituality in various parts of the world, including Muslim societies. Bagir (2005), for example, explains that the search for spirituality in the United States had become increasingly visible since at least the 1960s, as reflected in the emergence of hippie culture. This culture challenged established values and materialism while seeking alternative paths toward inner peace and tranquility. In this context, Bagir's discussion illustrates how certain groups responded to the social and cultural conditions of the time. Suteja (2016), meanwhile, discusses the characteristics of post-industrial societies, in which material prosperity is supported by increasingly sophisticated, mechanized, and automated technologies. However, according to Suteja, material prosperity does not necessarily bring individuals closer to happiness and may instead be accompanied by anxiety and questions concerning the meaning of life. He further relates this condition to the secularization of consciousness and the potential weakening of individual self-control, which may contribute to spiritual and psychological difficulties. Within this strand of literature, the search for an understanding of human existence, including questions about the purpose of life and human destiny, becomes an important dimension of the discussion (Suteja, 2016).

In his critique of modernity, Garaudy (1985) discusses the development of certain strands of Western thought that emphasize human autonomy and the capacity of human beings to solve the problems of the world. Within this perspective, human beings are regarded as free and independent individuals whose relationship with God and nature becomes less central to their understanding of existence. Garaudy associates this orientation with the development of individualism and the increasing emphasis on human control over nature and destiny. From his perspective, the marginalization of spiritual and religious values raises questions about the extent to which human beings can address the problems confronting them through their own capacities alone. He therefore interprets the renewed search for spirituality as one response to the limitations of a worldview that places human autonomy at the center of existence (Garaudy, 1985).

The problem of modernity is also discussed by Muvid (2020), who criticizes a paradigm that places human reason, science, and knowledge in a dominant position, potentially treating them as the primary sources of understanding and progress. In this regard, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, in *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man*, as cited by Amin Syukur (1999), argues that the excessive elevation of science and technology can place human beings at the periphery of their own existence and distance them from an understanding of reality grounded in revelation. This argument reflects Nasr's philosophical and religious critique of modern knowledge when it is separated from its spiritual foundations. Similarly, Al-Munawwar (2004) argues that one consequence of modernity is the weakening of the metaphysical dimension and the role of religion when human life becomes increasingly oriented toward material and worldly concerns. These perspectives highlight the tension between material development and the spiritual dimensions of human existence as discussed in the literature.

In addition to the spiritual crisis discussed above, Muvid (2020) identifies several moral and social problems associated with contemporary life. He describes five aspects of this crisis. First, advances in information technology, when not accompanied by ethical and religious considerations, may be associated with negative practices, including fraud, the dissemination of prohibited content, online prostitution, the spread of hoaxes, incitement, and the manipulation of social relations through social media. Second, in the political dimension, Muvid highlights struggles for power and practices that prioritize particular interests over public values, including corruption and the buying and selling of public offices. Third, in the context of religious plurality, he discusses attitudes that regard one's own religion as the only true religion while dismissing the beliefs of others, potentially contributing to divisions among religious communities. Fourth, in the spiritual dimension, Muvid criticizes excessive orientation toward comfort and material luxury, which, in his view, may reduce opportunities for spiritual reflection and contribute to anxiety, stress, and a lack of meaningful guidance. Fifth, in the ethical dimension, he points to practices that conflict with religious and customary norms. These five aspects represent Muvid's assessment of contemporary moral and social challenges rather than an assertion that such conditions characterize all modern societies (Muvid, 2020).

The various problems discussed in the literature suggest that rational and material progress does not necessarily guarantee the fulfillment of all human needs. As reflected in the perspectives of the scholars discussed above, the inner or spiritual dimension remains an important aspect of human existence. Although modernity provides various forms of convenience in social, economic, and technological life, the relationship between material development and spiritual fulfillment continues to be a subject of discussion. In this context, the resurgence of spirituality can be understood as one response to the challenges associated with modernity, rather than as a uniform reaction experienced by all individuals or societies. Within contemporary Muslim societies, one form of response involves reconsidering the relevance of Sufi values in relation to changing social conditions. This provides a basis for examining how Sufism has been transformed from its classical forms into its contemporary manifestations.

Transformation from Classical Sufism to Neo-Sufism

The term “Sufism” is often associated with the word Shuffah, referring to the Companions who resided in the Prophet's Mosque, or to a group of Companions who lived a simple life and devoted themselves primarily to worshipping Allah. Alternatively, Sufism has also been associated with the word suf, meaning wool, which was commonly worn by early Sufis, or with the word safa, meaning purity. However, the term “Sufism” is more appropriately associated with the spirit of asceticism and devotion to worship demonstrated by the Companions. Terminologically, Sufism is also defined as a field of Islamic knowledge that emphasizes both spiritual and physical dimensions (Faradila et al., 2024). Ultimately, the essence of Sufism lies in the ways through which individuals seek to draw closer to Allah. These practices are not limited to spiritual acts of worship but also encompass social forms of worship and devotion that are carried out consistently (Rozi et al., 2024).

The history and development of Sufism can be divided into several stages, according to Haidar Bagir. First, the stage of zuhud (asceticism), which represents the

early development of Sufism and began from the late first century AH through the second century AH. The concept of *zuhud* first emerged in Medina, Kufa, and Basra. Second, the stage of Sufism, which began in the early third century AH. During this period, the term *zuhud* gradually came to be replaced by the term *tasawwuf* or Sufism. At this stage, Sufi teachings were no longer limited to practical forms of devotion but had also developed theoretical dimensions formulated by early Sufis. New terms emerged within Islamic intellectual discourse, including *maqam*, *ma'rifah*, *tawhid*, *fana'*, *hulul*, and others. Prominent figures in Sufi scholarship also emerged during this period, including Dhu al-Nun al-Misri and Junayd al-Baghdadi. Third, the stage of philosophical Sufism (*tasawuf falsafi*) began around the sixth century AH. At this stage, Sufi thought incorporated both mystical and rational-philosophical dimensions. One of the most prominent figures associated with philosophical Sufism was Ibn Arabi. Philosophical Sufism is also sometimes referred to as *'irfan*, which emphasizes knowledge of God and the underlying reality of existence. Fourth, the stage of Sufi orders (*tariqa*), which began in the seventh century AH and continued thereafter. Although some scholars argue that Sufi orders had already existed during the time of Junayd al-Baghdadi or the Nuriya tradition, this period witnessed a significant expansion of Sufi orders, giving rise to renowned orders that continue to exist today, such as the Qadiriyya Order, founded by Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, and the Rifa'iyya Order, founded by Ahmad al-Rifa'i. Although these orders emerged relatively early, the Naqshbandiyya Order, founded by Muhammad Baha al-Din al-Uwaysi al-Bukhari Naqshbandi, eventually developed one of the largest and most widespread followings (Bagir, 2005).

When discussing the teachings of classical Sufism, the role of Sufi orders (*tariqa*) remains particularly significant, as they provided various methods through which Sufi teachings were transmitted and practiced. Sufi orders became an important instrument in the historical continuity and development of classical Sufism and have continued to exist to the present day. The path of the *tariqa* is undertaken by individuals within an organized framework. The term *tariqa* refers to a specific method followed by a *salik* (a seeker who travels the spiritual path toward Allah) through various *maqamat* (spiritual stages). It can also refer to the method of spiritual guidance provided by a Sufi teacher (*mursyid*) to his disciples, as well as to a form of fellowship among Sufis characterized by the establishment of formal institutions such as *zawiyah*, *ribat*, or *halaqah* (Rosyid, 2018). In practice, Sufi orders are closely associated with *dhikr*, namely the continuous remembrance of Allah through the heart and tongue; *ratib*, the repeated recitation of phrases such as *la ilaha illa Allah*; *muzik*, the recitation of *wird* (liturgical litanies) and poetry accompanied by musical sounds; *menari* (dance), involving bodily movements accompanying recitations to create a state of spiritual devotion; and *bernafas* (breathing), involving the regulation of breathing during the performance of *dhikr* (Rohmah, 2021).

The transformations undertaken by Sufi orders clearly demonstrate how Sufism itself has undergone a transformation from its classical form toward Neo-Sufism. The rituals and practices developed within Sufi orders have acquired social and anthropological dimensions, indicating that these orders have experienced transformation through a range of creative processes that shape culture, communication, and human mobility. The practices and rituals established by Sufi orders are subsequently absorbed and internalized by their followers, enabling them to be adapted to the behavioral patterns and customary

practices of the communities in which they are situated (Nur & Abdurahman, 2017). The transformation of Sufi teachings has now entered the phase of Neo-Sufism, representing a new stage in the dynamics of modern Sufi movements. Based on its characteristics, Neo-Sufism differs from classical Sufism in several respects: first, it rejects extreme Sufi practices, such as excessive and uncontrolled forms of dhikr; second, it rejects excessive veneration of Sufi saints (awliya) and graves considered sacred or endowed with supernatural significance; third, it rejects the controversial doctrine of wahdat al-wujud (the unity of being); fourth, it rejects excessive disciple loyalty and fanaticism toward the mursyid; and fifth, within the framework of Neo-Sufism, the Prophet Muhammad is positioned as the ultimate spiritual guide or shaykh, rather than the awliya or founders of individual Sufi orders (Azra, 2002).

The development of Sufism from its classical form toward Neo-Sufism has been identified by Western scholars as one of the most successful reform movements. This development was characterized by the fact that nearly every major tariqa operating in North and West Africa placed particular emphasis on a pan-Islamic dimension, which could also assume militant forms within their respective movements. In analyses of Islamic activist movements during the early twentieth century, scholars likewise examined Sufi brotherhoods whose historical roots lay within Islamic traditions and which were subsequently identified as “Neo-Sufi” movements. Regardless of whether the designation “Neo-Sufi” is considered appropriate for these activist Sufi orders, Sufi brotherhoods clearly constituted an important force in the Muslim world during this period. Sufi orders provided an organizational foundation for opposition to the expansion of European imperialism in the nineteenth century, extending from Algeria and the Caucasus to Southeast Asia (Voll, 2008).

Discussion

Negotiating Sufism and Modernity in Contemporary Islamic Spirituality

The continued presence of Sufis within contemporary society has emerged as a phenomenon that has surprised many observers. Much of the sociological literature on Muslim societies has traditionally associated Sufism with tariqa communities and ordinary or rural populations. Sufi orders have likewise often been regarded as representing “traditional” elements that are no longer compatible with contemporary social structures. Such perceptions have contributed to broader stigmas surrounding Sufism, both in Western societies and within Muslim communities. This phenomenon calls for a reconsideration of prevailing perceptions of Sufi teachings. This reconsideration is grounded in the observation that, in the twenty-first century, Sufi orders no longer simply represent remnants of traditional societies and cultures. Instead, contemporary Sufi orders have emerged as effective forms of modern and postmodern social organization (Voll, 2007). In this context, it is necessary to identify new analytical frameworks for understanding the continued existence of Sufism and Sufi orders in the modern and contemporary world. The emergence of modernity has not completely eliminated Sufism or Sufi orders; rather, within modern and contemporary contexts, they have undergone transformations that enable them to remain relevant and acceptable to contemporary society.

In the 1960s, Michael Gilsenan advanced an argument concerning the decline of Sufi orders in urban Egypt. He observed a decline in the number of devotees who were actively involved in Sufi orders among approximately sixty tariqa, particularly when compared with the pre-modern period, when a large number of people were affiliated with Sufi orders. He attributed this phenomenon to the declining function of Sufi orders in the process of modernizing Egyptian society. Hoffman, however, challenged this argument, contending that Sufism had not actually experienced a decline in Egypt. By the 1980s, he observed that the number of Sufi orders had in fact increased, not only since the 1960s but throughout the twentieth century. Orders such as the Burhaniyya and Shadhiliyya had successfully produced members who held relatively reformist perspectives on Sufism, emphasizing a moderate form of Sufism grounded in Islamic law (Sharia) (Bruinessen & Howell, 2007).

a. Negotiation Through Institutional Adaptation

The negotiation between Sufism and modernity can also be observed in the development of the Naqshbandi-Haqqani Order in the United States. As the founder of the Naqshbandi-Haqqani branch in the United States, Kabbani sought to establish the Naqshbandi Order as a broad representative body for the American Muslim community, despite conflicts with other Muslim communities. This effort was intended, among other objectives, to counter extremism within the American Muslim community. To further institutionalize this objective, Kabbani established the Islamic Supreme Council of America in 1991. The Council functioned as an authoritative communal body that sought to mediate between the American Muslim community and the United States government. These efforts also sought to demonstrate that Sufism represents an authentic form of Islamic spirituality that should be cultivated rather than abandoned by Muslims (Dickson, 2014).

For this purpose, the Haqqani Sufi order established several organizations dedicated to various da'wah activities. Annabelle Bottcher, as cited in Damrel (2006), describes these institutional elements as an ambitious Sufi religious enterprise. These organizations include: (1) the Sufi order itself, officially known as the Haqqani Sufi Foundation; (2) the As-Sunnah Foundation of America (ASFA); (3) the Kamilat Muslim Women's Organization; and (4) the Islamic Supreme Council of America (ISCA). The latter three organizations are responsible for most of the order's public activities.

ASFA primarily focuses on religious education among Muslims and produces general educational materials introducing the four major schools of Sunni jurisprudence. The foundation aims to educate American Muslims who lack sufficient knowledge of Islamic law and to provide authoritative guidance on legal matters. This objective is considered important because several controversies that have divided American Muslims have been attributed to a lack of understanding of Islamic law. Meanwhile, the Kamilat Muslim Women's Organization is dedicated to addressing various "quality of life" issues faced by Muslim women in the United States and Canada. The organization focuses on domestic issues related to family, health, education, and marriage. It also has initiatives designed to raise awareness among Muslim women about the risks of breast cancer and domestic violence. The Islamic Supreme Council of America (ISCA), meanwhile, is the most prominent, politically active, and controversial of all Haqqani-affiliated organizations. ISCA is committed to two principal objectives. First, it seeks to serve the interests of Islam as a resource for groups and individuals seeking guidance on a range of issues, from Islamic

law (Sharia) to Islamic traditions as they intersect with American culture. This first objective is primarily directed toward the Muslim community itself, with the aim of helping Muslims maintain their faith within a modern secular society. Second, ISCA focuses on the non-Muslim American public. This objective seeks to establish close and proactive cooperation with non-Muslim individuals and organizations in order to present Islam as a religion that upholds moderation, tolerance, peace, and justice. In addition, ISCA is committed to strengthening the values of social service, family love, education, and public responsibility within American society (Damrel, 2006).

b. Negotiation Through Political Engagement

The engagement of Sufism with modernity can also be observed in West Africa and Southeast Asia. In regions characterized by diverse Muslim communities, Sufi orders have long played an important role in addressing social interests, while political leaders have often regarded Sufi shaykhs as their spiritual advisers. In Senegal, for example, Sufi orders have served as important civil society organizations supporting democratic political mobilization and maintaining relationships with state officials. Two Sufi orders have dominated Senegal's religious organizational landscape: the dynamic Muridiyya and the Tijaniyya, which has exerted considerable demographic influence (Villalon, 2007). This can be seen, for example, in the Tijaniyya Sufi order, which employs Sufi music to construct social and racial identities and to commemorate the historical past of Muslim communities in Senegal. For the Tijaniyya, sound serves as a primary instrument through which both personal piety and public expressions of religious identity are performed as part of Muslim identity. By attending to the materiality of Sufi sounds, the erotic and poetic dimensions of the sung texts, and the bodily movements involved in singing, these practices not only cultivate piety but also bring together the spiritual and political spheres within contemporary Muslim communities (Dang, 2017).

A similar phenomenon can be observed in Mali, where a “new Sufi” can readily emerge as an influential religious figure with a large following and congregation. The processes of political, economic, and social liberalization promoted by Sufis have had tangible effects on the practice of Islam in Mali (Soares, 2007). In Malian society, at least 90% of the population identifies as Muslim. However, compared with traditional beliefs, Islam is a relatively recent religion in Mali. Islam only began to spread widely among the population toward the end of the nineteenth century, when Mali was still under French colonial rule. Sufism and reformist movements became defining features of Islam in Mali in the early twenty-first century. As in other Muslim-majority countries such as Senegal, Islam in Mali developed through the adoption of Sufi beliefs and practices. This form of Islam became the most widely disseminated expression of Islam in the country. As a neighboring country to Senegal, Muslim actors in Mali are often compared with Senegalese Sufi orders, which have also been highly influential politically, well organized, and mass-based. However, Malian Sufism is more fragmented and locally oriented, particularly through the Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya orders, which are organized in a decentralized manner (Leininger, 2016).

c. Negotiation Through Reinterpretation of Asceticism

From the perspective of the anthropology of religion, religious practices should not be understood merely as theological doctrines but also as systems of meaning through which human beings interpret and make sense of the realities of their societies. Regardless

of whether a particular belief constitutes a fundamental or peripheral element of an individual's or group's religious worldview, it is undeniable that beliefs throughout the world are sustained by symbolic forms and social arrangements. As Kenneth Burke suggests, the continuity of religion depends on institutions that produce images and metaphors that can subsequently be employed by later generations. This can be illustrated by the proposition that Christianity could exist without Gregory but not without Jesus, Islam could exist without the ulama but not without Muhammad, and Hinduism could exist without the caste system but not without the Vedas (Geertz, 1982). Thus, the continued existence of Sufism in the modern era is not merely attributable to the preservation of religious traditions. Rather, it is also related to the capacity of Sufism and Sufi orders as religious institutions to offer symbols, rituals, and spiritual practices through which individuals can rediscover and reorient the meaning and direction of their lives.

Around the nineteenth century, religious movements within Islam were broadly divided into three groups: Wahhabism, Mahdism, and Sufism/the Revival of the Tariqa. Each of these traditionalist Islamic movements offered a different response to the challenges of the times, and each movement addressed the particular needs of different segments of society. However, the focus here is on the Sufi movement. At least some of the symbols and rituals promoted by the Sufi movement through the tariqa remained visible in public religious life. Dhikr continued to be practiced in many mosques, including the Sacred Mosque in Mecca (until 1917). Likewise, both dervishes and ordinary people in Syria continued to participate in public dhikr on certain special occasions, while the Mawlid al-Nabi festival continued to be celebrated in Omdurman. Nevertheless, by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such rituals were increasingly contested as part of efforts to combat *bid'ah*, challenging almost every aspect of the established order and being regarded as a degeneration of Sufism that was allegedly incompatible with Islam (Trimingham, 1971).

Within the Sufi tradition, the values of asceticism cannot be separated from its spiritual framework. Therefore, the role of Sufism as a form of negotiation needs to emerge in response to the conditions of modernity. The negotiation between Sufism and modernity is also clearly reflected in the thought of Fazlur Rahman, which demonstrates a significant paradigm shift within the tradition of Islamic spirituality, from an ascetic-individualistic model toward a social-ethical orientation. The inner values embedded in Sufism are not eliminated; rather, they are reinterpreted in ethical and contextual terms. *Ikhlas*, which was initially understood as the purity of personal intention, is transformed into moral integrity; *zuhud*, once understood as withdrawal from worldly life, is reconceptualized as a critique of materialism; while *tazkiyat al-nafs*, which traditionally focused on the purification of the soul, is reinterpreted as a form of social ego control. In this way, Sufi values acquire a new function as an ethical foundation for navigating the dynamics of modern life (Sakdullah, et al., 2026). In line with Fazlur Rahman's argument, Hamka, through his concept of "Modern Sufism," argues that Muslims today have become divided and fragmented. Some have become slaves to wealth, loving their possessions more than their religion. Others, Hamka observes, have become slaves to jurisprudence (fiqh), engaging in disputes over matters that could otherwise be compromised. There are also those who have become immersed in khalwah (spiritual seclusion), clothed in Sufi attire and indifferent to worldly affairs because they find a sense of "pleasure" in the solitude of Sufism. Hamka therefore

emphasizes that such a form of Sufism does not originate from the teachings of Islam. According to him, the spirit of Islam is a spirit of struggle and active engagement, rather than one of idleness, weakness, and passivity (Hamka, 2015)

d. Negotiation Through Urban Spirituality

Contemporary Sufism can be observed particularly in urban societies, especially in the Indonesian context. Sufi teachings have increasingly been packaged as a new religion-based industry, driven in part by the urban population's need for spiritual meaning. Urban residents' fatigue with the intense competition of everyday life has opened opportunities for Sufism to develop and enter the realms of mass communication and technology (Suteja, 2016). This phenomenon was also articulated by Hamka through the concept of Modern Sufism. According to Hamka, Modern Sufism refers to a profound religious experience that does not necessarily entail extreme forms of self-isolation (*uzlah*). Rather, Modern Sufism emphasizes the involvement of individuals in social life to a greater extent than earlier forms of Sufism. Thus, one characteristic of Modern Sufism is its tendency to revive salafi activities while cultivating a positive attitude toward life (Madjid, 1995).

The foregoing understanding can be concretely illustrated by examining institutions that embody Sufi values but do not have direct roots in a particular *tariqa* and operate on a mass and commercial basis. Examples include the Indonesian Islamic Media Network (IMaN), the Paramadina Islamic Study Group, and the Tasauf Islamic Centre Indonesia (TICI). These institutions serve as forums for studying and applying Sufi values in everyday life collectively. Another institution with a distinctive orientation is Emotional Spiritual Question (ESQ), led by Ari Ginanjar, whose training concept is reportedly inspired by approaches developed among Christians in Europe and the United States to address the spiritual needs of urban populations (Suteja, 2016). Another particularly interesting phenomenon is the Majelis Dzikir Az-Zikra, led by Muhammad Arifin Ilham, which is notable for employing a new approach to Islamic preaching (*da'wah*). With a large following spread across various cities, Arifin adopted an approach centered on remembering Allah through the recitation of the names of Allah, Qur'anic verses, and expressions of repentance. Arifin guided his followers in understanding the meaning and obligations of human life, with the ultimate aim of seeking blessings from God (Bakti, 2006).

From the perspective of the anthropology of religion, the emergence of Urban Sufism in urban centers is not an isolated phenomenon, but rather the result of negotiation between culture and the recontextualization of religious systems within modern society. Whereas classical Sufism operated through the communal structures of Sufi orders (*tariqa*), Urban Sufism marks the emergence of new forms of spirituality negotiated through the presence of modernity in urban life. Beyond institutional forms, Sufi-oriented institutions that do not have direct roots in established Sufi orders, as mentioned above, have also developed various forms of mass communication, including the promotion of religious teachings through books, advertisements, audio programs, television broadcasts, and the Internet (Suteja, 2016). Since the turn of the century, Indonesian preachers such as Abdullah Gymnastiar (Aa Gym) and Arifin Ilham have attracted thousands of affluent urban residents to religious events broadcast from major mosques. Other television preachers, such as Jefry al-Bukhori and Yusuf Mansur, have subsequently combined talk shows and entertainment with religious messages (Bruinessen & Howell, 2008). This development indicates that social media platforms have increasingly become new sacred

spaces through which individuals can access spiritual teachings beyond geographical boundaries.

Based on the Sufi doctrines that have developed in Indonesia, Gazali and Efendi, as cited in Rosfiyanti et al (2024), classify the typologies of Urban Sufism into several categories, one of which is the orthodox typology. The orthodox typology is closely associated with Sufi orders (*tariqa*), in which the concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs* is practiced through *dhikr* rituals conducted directly in a *zawiyah* (Sufi lodge) under the guidance of a *mursyid* (spiritual guide). However, in response to modernity, Sufi orders such as the Naqshbandi-Haqqani have begun to transform their *da'wah* practices toward digital activities. The Internet has increasingly facilitated the dissemination of this order throughout Indonesia. Followers across the country have access to Indonesian translations of religious materials derived from their primary sources, namely the U.S.-based Naqshbandi-Haqqani websites, including SufiLive.com, Naqshbandi.org, and eShaykh.com. This influence is reflected in the growing presence of foundations and *zawiyahs* that maintain a significant presence on the Internet (Makhasin, 2016).

In the classical Sufi tradition, Sufi orders (*tariqa*) underwent institutionalization based on a lineage of spiritual teachers and the obligation to perform *bai'at* (pledging allegiance). In this context, a prospective disciple would meet directly with a spiritual teacher or *shaykh* to perform the *bai'at* (Bagir, 2005). Similarly, the Naqshbandi-Haqqani order requires *bai'at* for those who wish to join the order. However, prospective disciples seeking to become members of the Naqshbandi-Haqqani order are provided with the option of performing *bai'at* through the Internet while being connected to the nearest *zawiyah*. This alternative was developed to distinguish the Naqshbandi-Haqqani order from classical Naqshbandi practices, in which *bai'at* is subject to certain requirements and may appear relatively complex (Gazali, 2015).

A similar phenomenon can also be observed in the transmission of Sufi knowledge at the transnational level. Such transmission serves to establish the distinctive characteristics of Sufi orders, embody the charisma of the *shaykh*, and regulate the spiritual practices governing the relationship between teacher and disciple. Many Sufi orders are identified by chains of spiritual knowledge that trace their lineage back to the Prophet Muhammad (Katkova, 2020). However, several issues arise when examining the exercise of authority within classical Sufism. Haidar Bagir (2005) identifies at least three such issues. *First*, the authority of the spiritual teacher is absolute, closed, and tends to be inherited. *Second*, the *bai'at* requires the disciple to demonstrate absolute obedience to the teacher. *Third*, there is the question of the authenticity or validity of the *silasila* claimed to be connected to the Prophet Muhammad. Contemporary urban spiritual guides are no longer subject to the same stringent requirements found in classical Sufism. Religious figures, popular preachers, or spiritual training practitioners with modern communication styles can guide urban communities. The use of social media does not necessarily eliminate the authority of Sufi figures. On the contrary, the use of cyberspace can serve to reinforce their teachings and authority (Hidayati, 2022).

Although contemporary Islamic spirituality has its roots in the classical Sufi tradition, in practice it has undergone various adaptations in accordance with the needs of modern society. This phenomenon demonstrates the desire of urban communities to rediscover the spiritual dimension of religion—not merely as a matter of formal

observance, but also as a source of meaning in everyday life. At the same time, the development of Modern Sufism needs to be examined critically, as it cannot be separated from the influence of popular culture, media, and industry, all of which have the potential to reshape the orientation of spirituality itself. Nevertheless, the presence of contemporary Sufism plays an important role in responding to the spiritual needs of modern society, notwithstanding the controversies and criticisms surrounding it. Ultimately, Sufism can be understood as a form of negotiation between Islamic religious traditions and the dynamics of modernity, allowing the values of Sufi teachings to remain alive and relevant amid ongoing social change.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this literature review from the perspective of the anthropology of religion, this study demonstrates that concerns about an absolute separation between religion and modernity, as previously predicted by secularization theory, are not borne out by the lived realities of contemporary Muslim communities. Instead, the presence of modernity in the lives of contemporary Muslims represents a dynamic process of negotiation and transformation between the classical Sufi tradition and the socio-cultural changes of modern society. Modernity, characterized by rationality, secularization, advances in science, technological development, and the increasing prominence of individualism and materialism, has generated various forms of crisis, including a crisis of meaning, anxiety, moral decline, and the weakening of the human spiritual dimension. These conditions have, in turn, become among the factors driving the renewed need for spirituality among individuals.

The transformation from classical Sufism to Neo-Sufism also reflects the response of Islamic spirituality to modernity. Characteristics of Sufism traditionally associated with asceticism (*zuhud*), self-isolation, and rigid *tariqa* structures have increasingly been negotiated into more flexible forms of *tariqa* that adapt to changing times without undermining the essential principles of Sufism. From the perspective of the anthropology of religion, *tariqa* traditions that carry religious symbols have not disappeared under the pressures of modernization; rather, they have been recontextualized into adaptive systems of meaning. The phenomenon of Urban Sufism, the growth of *majalis dhikr* in urban settings, and the emergence of more flexible models of Islamic spirituality demonstrate that modernity does not eliminate Sufism. Instead, it encourages the emergence of new forms of religious institutions that correspond to the characteristics and needs of contemporary society.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in highlighting how the reviewed literature suggests that experiences associated with modernity have contributed to renewed interest in forms of Islamic spirituality, particularly through the framework of Neo-Sufism and Urban Sufism. Nevertheless, this study has limitations, as it is based exclusively on a literature review and therefore cannot directly and comprehensively capture how negotiations take place within institutions characterized by Neo-Sufism. Future research is therefore expected to address this limitation through more in-depth ethnographic studies, particularly by examining variations in religious practices and the social implications of the transformation of Sufism across different contemporary Muslim contexts.

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