

Sufi Reasoning in the Academic Space: The Dialectic of Suryalaya TQN's Da'wah in Facing Modern Intellectual Skepticism

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Abstract:

Modernity, which is expected to shift the spiritual dimension, has actually given rise to a spiritual turn among educated urban communities. In Indonesia, the Qadiriyyah wa Naqsyabandiyyah (TQN) Suryalaya Order has demonstrated its ability to maintain and expand its base of followers from academics, professionals, and intellectuals. This study aims to analyze the dialectic of TQN Suryalaya's da'wah in responding to modern intellectual skepticism, examine the construction of the Sufi epistemology it developed, and explain the process of epistemic synthesis that occurs among educated urban students. The study used a qualitative approach with a hermeneutic phenomenological design within a critical-constructivist paradigm. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews, participant observation at dhikr assemblies and halaqahs, and analysis of primary documents, including TQN teachings and recordings of da'wah lectures. The analysis was conducted using thematic and critical discourse analyses. The results show that intellectual skepticism towards Sufism encompasses epistemological, theological, and pragmatic dimensions. TQN Suryalaya builds a hierarchical Sufi epistemology through the concepts of 'ilm al-yaqin, 'ain al-yaqin, and haqq al-yaqin, thereby encouraging the emergence of integrative rationality as a synthesis of scientific reason and spiritual experience. This finding shows that TQN Suryalaya's da'wah develops a strategy of intellectualizing Sufism through epistemic dialogue with modernity, enriching the study of urban Sufism in Indonesia.

Keywords: dialectic of da'wah; intellectual skepticism; integrative rationality; Sufi epistemology; urban Sufism.

INTRODUCTION

Modernity, within the classical theoretical framework, is conceptualized as a macro-sociological movement that consistently erodes traditional religious authority and replaces it with the dominance of instrumental rationality. (Kersting et al., 2020) describes the dynamics of this shift in social order through the concept of *Entzauberung der Welt*, or the disappearance of worldly charm, a condition in which spiritual

institutions lose their crucial role as guides to public life and the primary cognitive framework of modern humans. Meanwhile, (Comte, 2022) He developed a linear construction of three levels of human civilizational development, placing the positive-scientific phase as the pinnacle of civilizational achievement, gradually shifting theological and metaphysical orientations. This deterministic framework of thought provided the epistemic foundation for strengthening the secularization consensus that dominated discourse on the sociology of religion until the end of the second half of the 20th century.

The sociological reality of the 21st century actually shows empirical manifestations that contradict these classical theoretical projections. In recent times, researchers in the sociology of religion have begun to note signs of a social reversal termed desecularization (Davie et al., 1999) or the post-secular turn (Habermas, 2010). This crucial phenomenon indicates the resilience of religious institutions, which are not merely able to survive in the private sphere but are also experiencing intensive revitalization amidst the lives of advanced, highly educated societies. More deeply, Sufism, as a manifestation of the inner dimension of Islam, is showing signs of a very significant revival. Academic research has noted an increase in membership of Sufi communities in urban areas of Europe, North America, and Asia, with follower demographics dominated by professional and intellectual groups (Werbner, 2003).

The sociological dynamics in Indonesia display a distinctive articulation of the rise of urban spiritualism. The momentum of social transformation following the 1998 reforms triggered a shift in religious structures marked by the emergence of a highly educated urban Muslim middle class characterized by intellectual advancement and a search for a deeper spiritual dimension (Fealy & White, 2008). Amidst the diversity of Sufi articulations, the Qadiriyyah wan Naqsyabandiyyah (TQN) Suryalaya Order emerged as a crucial focus of academic attention due to its success in reaching a significant number of educated and professional circles. The Suryalaya Islamic Boarding School in Tasikmalaya, founded in the late 19th century by Sheikh Abdullah Mubarak bin Nur Muhammad (Abah Sepuh) and reaching its peak under the leadership of Sheikh Ahmad Shohibulwafa Tajul Arifin (Abah Anom), has transformed into a center of spirituality that transcends geographical boundaries and social stratification (Hidayat, 2026).

The construction of classical theoretical thought regarding the reduced role of religion has been proven to be refracted when confronted with shifts in contemporary spiritual behavior in the modern era. The initial assumption that places scientific rationality as the sole substitute for dogmatic belief does not seem to fully reflect the complexity of human cognitive awareness in urban centers. The presence of spaces of encounter between intellectualism and spiritual traditions shows that the drive to fulfill existential needs remains strong amidst the rapid modernization of the social order. This phenomenon dismantles the single view of total secularization, while also demonstrating that the existence of modern educational institutions and scientific progress does not automatically eliminate individual attachment to metaphysical institutions or teachings.

The existence of urban spiritual movements, as demonstrated by the Suryalaya TQN, reaffirms the flexibility of traditional religious institutions in responding to the demands of the times. The penetration of spiritual influences across social stratification demonstrates that the appeal of spiritual teachings is no longer limited to rural communities or traditionalists. The strengthening of religious ties among urban intellectuals provides a clear picture of the restructuring of the interaction between modernity and religiosity. Thus, the dialectic between instrumental rationality and the need to seek inner values continues dynamically, creating a new religious landscape that is inclusive, adaptive, and remains relevant in accompanying the development of modern human civilization.

These modern religious dynamics give rise to an epistemological paradox that urgently requires scientific study. On one dimension, there is a group of educated urban communities conditioned in a tradition of critical thinking, based on empirical evidence, and oriented towards the accuracy of rational reasoning. On the other dimension, these individuals voluntarily engage in self-awareness within a Sufi community that bases its knowledge authority on the epistemology of the qalbi, such as kasyf (revelation of spiritual secrets), dzaug (achievement of inner intuition), and 'irfan (intuitive knowledge) as valid forms of truth. The phenomenon of the coexistence of two theoretically contradictory epistemological frameworks within a single structure of individual consciousness underlies scientific questions regarding the strategy of TQN Suryalaya as a da'wah institution in bridging this epistemic tension.

Intellectual skepticism toward the dimensions of Sufism is not a new phenomenon in the history of Islamic thought. Doctrinal tensions between jurists and followers of the Sufi tradition have characterized religious discourse since the Middle Ages. However, in the current era of contemporary modernity, religious skepticism has taken on new forms and orientations, no longer centered solely on textual debates but rather

on modern scientific criteria that demand empirical evidence, falsifiability testing, and consistent logical reasoning (Heer, 1993). Muslim academics, deeply ingrained in modern educational traditions, often question claims of Sufi accomplishments such as the existence of *karamah* (miracles), *musyahadah* (spiritual transformations), and other mystical experiences, which they deem lacking the objectivity of empirical verification.

Such complex epistemological conditions place the Suryalaya TQN in a very specific missionary challenge. Unlike Sufi communities that choose to withdraw from the dialectics of modernity or simply make superficial adjustments, the Suryalaya TQN demonstrates a more dynamic and dialectical response to the skeptical discourse of educated groups. However, the form and mechanisms of this dialectic between scientific rationality and religious mysticism have not received in-depth and systematic study in the current discourse of religious social science literature.

This research is specifically designed to bridge the theoretical gap. Using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach integrated within the framework of the critical-constructivist paradigm, this research focuses on three main areas of exploration: (1) analyzing the dynamics of intellectual skepticism that emerged in the TQN Suryalaya's da'wah activities in the academic space, (2) mapping the architecture of Sufi epistemology formulated by TQN Suryalaya as a response to the critique of modern rationality, and (3) describing the process of encounter and negotiation of epistemic synthesis that took place in the consciousness of TQN Suryalaya's educated students.

This research has academic significance that goes beyond the scope of micro-theoretical studies. Amid the growing gap between traditional religious thought and modern scientific rationalism, a comprehensive understanding of the strategies of Sufism's encounter with modernity makes a significant contribution to the formulation of a model of da'wah that is inclusive, dialogical, and relevant to the character of contemporary educated society.

The relationship between Sufism and modern civilization has long been a central issue in contemporary Islamic studies. Early debates in this area were dominated by narratives that positioned Sufism as a tradition that must submit to the rules of modernity or risk being eliminated from the public sphere. In *Islam and Modernity*. (Rahman, 2024) he presents a systematic critique of the phenomenon of neo-Sufism, a popular Sufi practice that he deems neglects ethical and social responsibilities in favor of pursuing individual spiritual fulfillment. This critique reflects the view of Islamic modernism, which considers the Sufi dimension a major obstacle to the advancement of Muslim civilization.

The confrontational view that places the spiritual tradition as an entity that is in conflict with the progress of modern civilization has undergone a very fundamental theoretical dismantling since the 1990s. (Howell et al., 2001) through field investigations that act as an introductory study of the dynamics of the phenomenon of urban Sufism in Indonesia succeeded in providing empirical evidence regarding the ability of this Islamic mystical tradition to adapt and develop very rapidly in the space of modern urban life through various articulations of new manifestations. Based on this sociological exploration, Howell articulated a conceptual thought termed flexible orthodoxy, namely a form of flexibility of Sufi teachings in embracing and allocating space for the diversity of intellectual backgrounds of its followers without sacrificing the depth of its inner substance.

The presence of a conceptual formulation regarding the flexibility of Sufi doctrine in the context of urban educated society further strengthens the argument developed by (Heer, 1993) in his work *Knowledge and the Sacred*. Nasr's theoretical thinking firmly emphasizes the epistemological capacity of Sufism in offering solutions to the cognitive crisis and the existential emptiness of humankind triggered by the dominance of modern secularism. The synergy between sociological findings at the ground level and this reading of religious philosophy indicates that the esoteric dimension of Islam does not only function as a form of escape from the currents of modernity, but also exists as an intellectual and spiritual instrument capable of providing new meaning to the cognitive awareness of modern society that is in the midst of the siege of instrumental rationality.

In a global social landscape map, (Werbnier, 2003) also presents consistent empirical findings through evidence of the success of Sufi communities in the United Kingdom in maintaining and strengthening their religious existence amidst the environment of young Muslims who are educated based on Western traditions. This ethnographic investigation confirms that exposure to the modern education system and the values of Western rationality does not necessarily eliminate the need for attachment to traditional spiritual institutions. The continuity of spiritual practices in this diaspora space indicates a dynamic negotiation of identity, where

the values of Islamic spirituality continue to find relevant and functional articulation in guiding the social and moral lives of educated generations in a secular society.

Simultaneously, (Knysh, 2010) in his work *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History* provides a systematic mapping of the diversity of adaptation strategies developed by various contemporary Sufi institutions and movements in responding wisely to the challenges of modern civilization. This historical-analytical explanation shows that the rise of contemporary spirituality is not a sociological coincidence, but rather the result of a planned and adaptive articulation of da'wah. The success of Sufi organizations in transforming the language of traditional doctrine into a more communicative form of delivery allows these mystical teachings to remain widely accessible, while also being able to answer the intellectual skepticism that has emerged in the academic and contemporary public spheres.

The existence and spread of this spiritual awakening phenomenon can be theoretically explained through the enlightenment of the conceptual framework of re-enchantment formulated by (Jenkins, 2000) as a fundamental correction of Weber's classical secularization thesis. This theoretical perspective affirms the understanding that the journey of modernity does not automatically eliminate the sacred dimension from the space of human consciousness, but rather stimulates the birth of new forms of articulation of religious experience and awareness. This dynamic proves that the process of social modernization does not always lead to the erosion of religiosity, but rather triggers a process of reconfiguration in which sacred values find a forum for articulation that is in harmony with the cognitive development of urban society.

This theoretical articulation framework regarding the encounter between the dimensions of Sufism, the characteristics of educated groups, and the dynamics of urban modernity ultimately lays a crucial conceptual foundation for reading the main focus of this article. The success of the tarekat institution in bridging academic rationality with the depth of inner epistemology provides a strong foundation for examining in depth how this dialectic works in the practical realm. Based on the interweaving of theoretical arguments and empirical maps that have been presented, this introductory section emphasizes the importance of conducting a more comprehensive academic investigation into the epistemological strategies of Sufi da'wah institutions in integrating critical scientific reasoning with the experience of spirituality in the consciousness of contemporary educated society.

METHOD

This research design is fundamentally built on the foundation of a critical constructivism paradigm that combines the ontological assumptions of social constructivism with critical analytical power regarding the dynamics of power relations in the process of knowledge production. At the ontological level, reality is not understood as a single, objective entity, but rather as a form of social construction that is continuously shaped, maintained, and interpreted by actors directly involved in the space of meaning-making interactions (Berger & Luckmann, 2016). In the epistemological dimension, the researcher does not position himself as a neutral observer who is objectively separated from the object of study, but rather places self-awareness as an active participant in the opening of a process of shared understanding. The addition of a critical dimension is carried out to ensure that the focus of the analysis does not stop at a mere descriptive depiction of the phenomenon, but rather moves to deeply unravel the mechanisms of power relations at work behind the formation of da'wah discourse and patterns of response to the penetration of intellectual skepticism.

The methodological steps in this study apply a qualitative framework articulated through a hermeneutic phenomenological design. The choice of phenomenology is based on the main focus of the research, which centers on exploring the structure of life experiences and the construction of meanings built by TQN Suryalaya actors when faced with the discourse of skepticism of educated groups, rather than focusing on measuring statistical distributions or testing causal generalizations (Moustakas, 1994). Meanwhile, the unification of hermeneutical dimensions that refer to the tradition of thought (Gadamer, 2004) is applied to accommodate the methodological fact that the process of human understanding always takes place within the context of a particular horizon of meaning. Researchers and informants both bring their own horizons of understanding and background knowledge, where both horizons must undergo a process of fusion and dialogical mediation through a series of intensive scientific interpretations.

The empirical data collection process in this study relies on three complementary primary data sources. The first primary data source was in-depth interviews with twelve informants who were selected through purposive sampling based on a series of measurable criteria: (a) active members of TQN Suryalaya with a

minimum membership of three years, (b) a minimum formal educational background of undergraduate level (S1), and (c) being in the productive age range of 25 to 55 years. Data collection through these interviews lasted for a duration of between 60 and 120 minutes for each exploration session. The interaction was guided by a semi-structured interview instrument that provided flexibility for researchers to explore in depth the dimensions of the informants' experiences, perceptions, and arguments contextually.

The second primary data source was realized through participant observation activities carried out consistently over a period of six months in various religious activities of TQN Suryalaya. This participant observation included direct involvement in dhikr assemblies, Islamic study halaqah forums, and academic discussion spaces involving TQN members with intellectual backgrounds. The observation implementation focused on recording the dynamics of verbal and non-verbal interactions, with special attention paid to moments when critical questions or skeptical views arose and how the articulated responses constructed by community actors. In order to maintain the level of data accuracy and minimize the potential for memory bias, the preparation of field notes was carried out systematically and in stages immediately after each observation session was completed.

Secondary data sources are integrated through a comprehensive document analysis of various literature and textual artifacts of the TQN Suryalaya teachings. This analysis encompasses a critical reading of the main reference books of the tarekat, especially the monumental works of Abah Anom such as *Uqudul Juman* and *Miftah al-Sudur*, recordings of lectures and religious studies that are generally published, as well as a range of previous academic literature that examines the existence of the TQN Suryalaya. The processing of these secondary sources carries a very crucial methodological function in providing a solid historical, doctrinal, and textual contextual foundation for the interpretation of empirical findings obtained from the process of in-depth interviews and field observations.

The data analysis procedure was designed through three mutually reinforcing layers of analysis to produce a complete understanding. The first layer used thematic analysis techniques that refer to the six-stage procedure from (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which includes initial exploration to familiarize the data, the preparation of initial coding, the search for potential themes, reviewing the structure of the themes, defining specific theme names, and the final mapping in the writing of the report. This series of systematic processes produced a thematic map that structuredly represents the dominant patterns of meaning within the empirical data set.

The second layer of analysis applies a critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach that adopts a three-dimensional framework model (Fairclough, 2013), namely the dimensions of text, discourse practice, and social practice. In the text dimension, exploration focuses on dissecting lexical choices, argument formation structures, and rhetorical strategies used in lectures and public statements by TQN Suryalaya actors. In the discourse practice dimension, the examination is directed at the mechanisms by which a religious discourse is produced, disseminated, and consumed within the internal environment of the community. In the social practice dimension, the analysis aims to uncover the relationship between the discourse structure of TQN Suryalaya and the conditions of the socio-epistemic context that surrounds it on a broader scale.

The application of the third layer of analysis is realized through a hermeneutic interpretation procedure that bases its framework on the principle of the hermeneutic circle (hermeneutic circle) initiated by (Gadamer, 2004). This analytical reasoning flow moves in a spiral and continuously between efforts to interpret specific parts of the empirical data with an understanding of the overall context of the discourse that surrounds it. This interpretative movement also brings together the content of religious doctrinal texts with the empirical reality found in the field, while simultaneously mediating between the subjective horizon of understanding owned by the informant and the horizon of critical thinking brought by the researcher. The application of this hermeneutic spiral movement opens up opportunities to achieve a deep level of understanding regarding the true meaning of Sufi spiritual experience for urban intellectual communities, especially in its dialectical relationship when faced with various forms of epistemological challenges of contemporary modernity.

To ensure the validity of the data and the validity of the resulting scientific findings, this qualitative research applies four pillars of academically tested methodological confirmation strategies. The first confirmation strategy is realized through the triangulation technique of data sources, in which all information material sourced from the results of in-depth interviews, participant observation records, and textual document reviews are mutually validated and cross-confirmed. The application of this layered verification aims to test the level of consistency of findings from various different data collection techniques, while minimizing the potential for a single interpretation of the phenomenon under study. Through the alignment between these types of

information sources, the reliability of the empirical data construct can be maintained consistently, so that the analytical foundation built has a strong internal validity in describing the dynamics of the research object.

The steps to strengthen the validity of the data in the second strategic pillar were actualized through a systematic member-checking mechanism for the participants in the experience. The researcher submitted a draft of the initial findings and a summary of the interpretive narrative to several key informants to obtain counter-confirmation, substantive corrections, and assurance of the alignment between the analytical descriptions compiled by the researcher and the original intent as experienced by the informants. This participatory verification process was crucial in maintaining the purity of the data and preventing it from being distorted by the researcher's academic bias. Through this confirmation space, research subjects were empowered to evaluate the accuracy of the interpretation of their inner experience narratives, ensuring that the scientific reconstruction presented in the final report truly reflected the perspectives and depth of the informants' spiritual experiences authentically.

The third pillar of the data validity strategy is realized through the presentation of rich and detailed descriptions (thick descriptions) in scientific reports. Researchers comprehensively outline the social background, interaction dynamics, cultural context, and conceptual nuances surrounding each empirical finding in the field. This in-depth and contextual narrative aims to open up transferability opportunities for other researchers or academic readers who wish to apply a similar interpretive framework to socio-religious research contexts with similar characteristics. Meanwhile, the fourth pillar of the strategy is implemented through the creation of a tightly structured audit trail. This step documents each stage of methodological decisions, data processing flow, and coding logic taken throughout the research process in a transparent and identifiable manner.

This series of qualitative analysis steps is complemented by the explicit and consistent application of researcher reflexivity throughout the empirical material processing stages. The researcher consciously examines and considers her personal epistemological position, intellectual background, and initial theoretical assumptions to avoid interfering with or undermining the authenticity of the meaning conveyed by the informants. The researcher's emotional involvement and subjective views are critically controlled through periodic reflexive note-taking throughout the analysis process. Maintaining this critical distance ensures that the interpretation of the phenomenon of urban spirituality remains focused on the dynamics of informant consciousness, so that the conclusions drawn are a pure representation of the social reality being studied without the interference of the researcher's personal bias.

The comprehensive integration of rigorous data validation strategies and high methodological transparency guarantees the holistic quality of the research. The presence of data triangulation, informant verification, contextual details, a traceable audit trail, and researcher self-reflexivity collectively form a stronghold of the validity of scientific findings that are responsive to academic principles. The overall analysis and theoretical reconstruction produced in this research are ultimately accountable for their scientific quality and have strong validity within the academic discourse of religious social science. This robust methodological framework ensures that the proposed contributions are not merely speculative but are grounded in a solid foundation of empirical evidence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Anatomy of Intellectual Skepticism towards Sufism

Empirical research on the dynamics of the acceptance of religious teachings shows that the intellectual skepticism towards Sufism faced by the Qadiriyyah wan Naqsyabandiyyah (TQN) Suryalaya Order cannot be categorized as a monolithic phenomenon. This scientific rejection or doubt is manifested in three substantively different typologies, where each form of doubt is not always present in isolation. In the reality of individual consciousness, these three forms of skepticism often operate simultaneously and interact with each other, influencing the cognitive framework of academics and educated professionals. The complexity of the structure of this doubt demands analytical precision to unravel how the critical reasoning of urban society interacts with the truth claims of Islamic spiritualism.

The first form of this typology of doubt is epistemological skepticism, a fundamental doubt about the validity of Sufi knowledge claims when measured by the criteria of modern science. This type of skepticism was most prevalent among informants with formal educational backgrounds in science and technology. The characteristics of exact education, which emphasize empirical measurability, form a strong bulwark of

rationality in responding to spiritual experiences. This skepticism was reflected in the experience of a civil engineering academic who questioned the boundary between the validity of spiritual revelation (*kashf*) and the phenomenon of altered states of consciousness produced by repeated meditation or physical relaxation techniques.

These critical questions from exact science academics reflect the high level of internalization of modern scientific epistemological standards within their cognitive consciousness. The positivistic tradition of thought demands objective, measurable, and reproducible evidence by external parties. This standard requires a clear separation between the interpretation of individual subjective experiences and claims of objective reality. When claims of inner enlightenment are presented without empirical testing instruments equivalent to scientific methods, the critical reasoning of this educated group intuitively positions such mystical experiences as mere psychological products, rather than direct access to ultimate metaphysical truth.

The second form encountered in this encounter is theological skepticism, a form of doubt rooted within the Islamic tradition itself, particularly from the perspective of Salafi-reformist thought. This theological framework views various Sufi practices and doctrines as forms of religious innovation (*bid'ah*) lacking a valid argumentative basis in the texts of the Qur'an or Sunnah. Several informants confirmed that they had been intensively exposed to anti-Sufi discourse within campus religious organizations before finally interacting with TQN Suryalaya. The experience of a former lecture *da'wah* activist demonstrates how the discourse of heresy against the Sufi order briefly dominated his thinking, until a comprehensive historical reading revealed the unclear basis of these accusations.

The third form of this spectrum of doubt is pragmatic skepticism, which focuses on questions about the relevance and effectiveness of Sufism amidst the demands of modern urban life. Those espousing pragmatic skepticism do not focus on metaphysical truth or the validity of Sufi doctrines, but rather question the concrete usefulness of mystical teachings in addressing professional competition and complex social problems. A statement by a financial professional confirms this doubt by questioning the concrete contribution of spiritual practice to addressing poverty, corruption, and social inequality. This view criticizes the tendency toward spiritual retreatism, which is seen as neglecting the responsibility for real social transformation.

An investigation into the dynamics of intellectual skepticism in an academic context demonstrates that the presence of scientific doubt is not always a permanent barrier to one's involvement in the Sufi tradition. For some academics, skepticism actually serves as a unique entry point to explore spiritual teachings directly. The urge to independently test spiritual claims is a primary motivation leading them to enter the tarekat environment. This phenomenon of personal examination aligns with findings (Werbner, 2003) regarding the characteristics of educated Muslims in the diaspora, whose approach to the Sufi tradition is no longer based on submission to traditional religious authority, but rather through a process of personal experimentation and verification.

Field data exploration also revealed that the intensity and form of skepticism are closely correlated with the informants' disciplinary backgrounds. Informants from the natural sciences tended to express epistemological skepticism that was technical, analytical, and focused on verification methodology. In contrast, informants from the social sciences and humanities traditions developed a form of skepticism that was deconstructive. This latter group was more critical in questioning the structure of power relations, ideological struggles, and institutional interests at work behind the formation of Sufi discourse and practices in the public sphere.

The differentiation of doubts based on academic backgrounds demands a varied and precisely articulated response strategy for Islamic preaching from the Suryalaya TQN. This typology of skepticism emphasizes that a single, indoctrinating approach is no longer effective in engaging urban, educated groups. Islamic preachers within the Suryalaya TQN are required to possess hermeneutical sensitivity in distinguishing whether a critical question arises from epistemological anxiety, theological considerations, or pragmatic demands for justice. The success of establishing an equal dialogue depends on the ability of the tarekat institution to present explanations that align with the language and academic framework of its followers.

The interaction between academic critical reasoning and inner epistemology ultimately created a highly dynamic space for epistemic dialogue within the Suryalaya TQN community. The presence of professionals and academics, bearing the baggage of scientific skepticism, prompted a restructuring of the delivery of tarekat teachings. Spiritual experience was no longer presented as dogmatism, closed off from proof, but rather opened up as a realm of exploration of inner rationality whose validity could be tested through structured

personal experience. This dialectic demonstrated that scientific rationality and Islamic mysticism could enrich each other without sacrificing the methodological integrity of each knowledge tradition.

The encounter between diverse disciplinary backgrounds and the Suryalaya TQN tradition has helped erode the dichotomous perception that has long separated the academic world from the world of Sufism. Students with undergraduate degrees do not immediately abandon their critical reasoning upon entering the spiritual development space, but instead use their analytical skills to understand the profound meaning of the tarekat's teachings. The integration of the sharpness of critical thinking and the silence of dhikr (remembrance of God) produces a new profile of religiosity in urban areas. The existence of educated Muslims who are able to combine modern scientific criteria with a commitment to the practice of the tarekat demonstrates the epistemological flexibility of Sufism in responding to the demands of the times.

Overall, the anatomy of intellectual skepticism toward Sufism within the Suryalaya TQN environment demonstrates that scientific doubt is not a threat to be eliminated, but rather a starting point that can be transformed into the energy of a profound spiritual search. The diversity of typologies of skepticism encompassing epistemological, theological, and pragmatic dimensions reflects the maturity of thought in contemporary urban Muslim society. Through an inclusive and adaptive dialogue mechanism, Suryalaya TQN has successfully bridged the gap between academic rationality and esoteric needs, while simultaneously affirming Sufism's position as one of the pillars of Islamic intellectualism that remains relevant amidst the rapid development of modern civilization.

The Sufi Epistemological Architecture of TQN Suryalaya

1. Hierarchy of Knowledge as a Foundation

One of the most significant findings in this study confirms that TQN Suryalaya does not merely teach the practice of dhikr instrumentally, but rather builds a coherent and hierarchical epistemological architecture as an intellectual foundation for its followers. This knowledge architecture is systematically structured on three levels of understanding which are a form of TQN's contextual adaptation of the classical concepts of the Qur'an and the Sufi tradition: 'ilm al-yaqin (knowledge based on cognitive information and argumentative proof), 'ain al-yaqin (knowledge achieved through direct observation), and haqq al-yaqin (the highest knowledge obtained through total unification between the learning subject and the known object). This tiered formulation provides a solid framework for mapping the scope and depth of human knowledge attainment.

What is very interesting to observe is how TQN Suryalaya operationalizes this epistemological hierarchy in a dialogue with modern intellectuals. TQN's preachers do not reject or belittle the validity of 'ilm al-yaqin, but instead explicitly acknowledge that scientific-discursive knowledge has a legitimate and crucial position in the order of life. The scientific argument they construct asserts that modern science operates at the fundamental level of 'ilm al-yaqin, while Sufism offers accessibility to more sublime levels, namely 'ain al-yaqin and haqq al-yaqin. Through this mapping, Sufism is not positioned as a competitor to science, but rather as a domain that complements and surpasses the achievements of science in a comprehensive hierarchical structure of knowledge.

This epistemological strategy has proven highly effective in responding to the blows of epistemological skepticism because it does not get caught up in trying to win debates in the arena determined by the epistemology of modernity, namely positivistic empirical proof and purely rational argumentation. Instead, TQN Suryalaya cleverly shifts the meta-question regarding the boundaries of what criteria can be recognized as valid knowledge. This epistemological maneuver runs parallel to the view (O'Sullivan, 2017) regarding grammatical change in language games: a process that focuses not on losing or winning within the same rules of the game, but rather on the courage to introduce new, fundamentally different rules of the game.

2. The Role of the Body as Epistemology

The second crucial finding in this study is closely related to the central role played by physical practice, particularly through the ritual of talqin dzikir, within the epistemological framework of TQN Suryalaya. Talqin dzikir, understood as spiritual transmission from the mursyid to the murid through a process of physical initiation and consistent repetition of recitations, functions not only as a formalistic religious ritual, but also as a manifestation of embodied epistemology. Inner knowledge is no longer seen as a mere abstraction of thought, but is deeply internalized into the individual's biological and psychological structure through repeated physical engagement.

This conceptualization has a very strong theoretical resonance with the argument (Merleau-Ponty & Smith, 1962) regarding the body as the primary subject of perception that precedes reflective consciousness, and is intertwined with the thought (Bourdieu, 1990) about habitus as a disposition deeply embedded in the body. In the context of TQN Suryalaya, Sufi knowledge cannot be fully grasped only through rational intellectual discourse, but must be incorporated into the five senses and body through intensive practice. A TQN badal with a medical background likens dhikr to medical therapy, where the benefits will never be truly understood simply by reading the theory, but must be practiced repeatedly until it becomes integrated with the body's response pattern to reality.

This argument regarding physical involvement implicitly undermines modernity's strict dichotomy that separates objective knowledge (which is claimed to be universally communicable) from subjective experience (often dismissed as personal and lacking epistemological value). TQN Suryalaya successfully positions the experience of dhikr as a legitimate and valid form of knowledge, even though it cannot be intersubjectively verified within the narrow criteria of positivism. This position is deeply rooted in the tradition of experiential philosophy, which has a long and recognized track record in the history of human thought, while also providing a legitimate space for the validity of esoteric knowledge amidst the currents of contemporary rationalism.

3. Dialectical Preaching Strategy

The results of this study systematically identify four dialectical preaching strategies consistently employed by TQN Suryalaya actors in dealing with skepticism among educated circles. The first strategy is the intellectualization of Sufism, namely the use of philosophical arguments, scientific references, and analogies of modern science to build cognitive bridges with the academic world. TQN preachers skillfully utilize neuroscientific findings regarding the effects of meditation on brain waves, transpersonal psychology research, and philosophical phenomenology as communicative entry points for skeptical audiences. This approach reflects the concept of legitimation from (Berger & Luckmann, 2016), namely a theoretical process in building cognitive justification for the social reality being constructed.

The second strategy implemented is an experiential invitation, an open invitation to skeptical groups to directly experience and practice dhikr without having to first agree with all theological doctrines. A slogan repeatedly echoed in TQN Suryalaya's da'wah activities emphasizes the principle of trying and experiencing firsthand before passing judgment. This strategy is highly tactical because it successfully shifts the burden of proof from endless discursive debate to direct, personal, empirical experience—an approach that is truly in tune with the spirit of modern empiricism, even though the object of observation is in the inner realm.

The third strategy is realized through a form of authority reconstruction, namely the process of reframing the image of classical Sufi scholars such as Al-Ghazali, Ibn Arabi, and Jalaluddin Rumi so that they are no longer perceived as irrational mystical figures. Instead, TQN Suryalaya presents these historical figures as a line of great intellectuals who mastered the philosophy, logic, and science of their time before ultimately choosing the path of Sufism as the ultimate enlightenment. This framing framework effectively succeeded in rebuilding the intellectual legitimacy of Sufism in the eyes of the academic community that upholds the superiority of critical reasoning.

The fourth strategy is urban contextualization, actualized through the implementation of various TQN Suryalaya activities in highly flexible formats and locations that are adaptive to the lifestyles of urban professionals. Holding halaqah assemblies in office areas, conducting interactive zikir webinars, establishing tarekat communities on social media, and delivering sermons using inclusive religious language that is easily understood by the highly educated are the main pillars of this strategy. This contextual adjustment ensures that Sufism is no longer viewed as a foreign, exclusive, or outdated tradition, but rather presents itself as a highly relevant, functional, and contemporary spiritual option for modern humans.

The four dialectical preaching strategies implemented by TQN Suryalaya ultimately form an inclusive model of encounter between the world of Sufism and modern rationality. Through a combination of a solid theoretical foundation, evidence based on direct experience, the restoration of the image of historical figures, and adaptation to urban spaces, TQN Suryalaya is able to break down the fortress of skepticism without having to sacrifice the authenticity of its spiritual teachings. This synthesis proves that Islamic esoteric epistemology has a very strong vitality in responding to and integrating the values of rationality, while providing answers to the thirst for spirituality amidst the dynamics of a highly educated society.

The series of epistemological transformations and strategies for adapting da'wah demonstrated by TQN Suryalaya provide a clear picture of Sufism's capacity to meaningfully navigate the challenges of the modern

era. Spiritual knowledge is no longer isolated in the realm of esotericism, closed off from critical criteria, but is transformed into a form of integrative rationality capable of addressing the existential anxieties of educated humans. This success not only confirms the existence of the tarekat in the public sphere but also contributes a new discourse to the discourse on the relationship between religion and modern science, where spiritual silence and the sharpness of critical reasoning can harmoniously combine to shape contemporary human consciousness.

Epistemic Negotiation and Synthesis

1. Integrative Rationality as a Key Finding

The most original finding of this study identifies the existence of a cognitive pattern that operates consistently among students of the Qadiriyyah wan Naqsyabandiyyah (TQN) Suryalaya Order with intellectual backgrounds, a phenomenon that the researchers formulate as integrative rationality. This concept refers to the construction of a subjective epistemological framework that does not oppose scientific reasoning and Sufi reasoning, but rather unites them in a coherent hierarchical order by positioning both knowledge systems as legitimate ways of knowing for different realms of reality. This cognitive approach allows academics to maintain their intellectual integrity while embracing the depth of Islamic spiritual experience as a whole.

The construction of integrative rationality is distinctly different from the mere symptom of cognitive compartmentalization, a psychological state in which a person holds two contradictory beliefs in separate mental compartments without any attempt to reconcile them logically. This phenomenon also differs from the practice of syncretism, which superficially and uncritically mixes elements from two traditions of knowledge. Integrative rationality is a form of active synthesis produced through a continuous process of intellectual reflection, the primary impetus of which is driven by experiential evidence that provides direct justification for various Sufi metaphysical claims.

An informant working as a researcher at a national science institution described his epistemological condition in a highly articulate manner. His confession emphasized that his involvement in the tarekat tradition did not cause him to ignore the rules and strict methodology of scientific research. Nevertheless, his critical awareness acknowledged the existence of a certain realm of reality beyond the reach of modern scientific instruments, a door to which is opened through the practice of dhikr. This characteristic of knowledge is not categorized as irrational, but rather a form of highly precise trans-rational awareness. This explanation aligns with the concept of traditional science formulated (Heer, 1993), namely a scientific framework that recognizes its limitations and opens itself to metaphysical dimensions.

2. The Process of Forming Integrative Rationality

Empirical data investigations show that the formation of integrative rationality is not a sudden cognitive event, but rather a process of conscious evolution that occurs through several measurable stages. The first stage begins with the emergence of an initial epistemological crisis, namely a phase when individuals realize that the sophistication of scientific rationalism is inadequate to answer the most fundamental existential questions about the meaning of life, the purpose of existence, and the nature of the self. This moment of crisis is generally triggered by the dynamics of profound personal experiences, such as the loss of a loved one, career failure, or the emergence of psychological saturation with the materialistic lifestyle in urban areas.

The second stage continues with the intellectual exploration phase, where individuals begin to delve into Sufism literature, works of Islamic philosophy, and neuroscientific studies on meditation as a bridge to building rational arguments for their spiritual inclinations. This phase plays a crucial role because it provides cognitive proof that the choice to practice a tarekat does not conflict with their identity as academics. The most dominant reading materials at this stage include Heer's thoughts, Murata and Chittick's works on the Islamic worldview, and translated texts by Al-Ghazali. This literature search successfully restores the intellectual legitimacy of the search for the esoteric dimension of religion.

The third stage is actualized through practical initiation, namely the moment of the first experience in practicing the Suryalaya TQN dhikr, which is often interpreted as a transformative turning point. Many informants who initially harbored high skepticism acknowledged that the initial dhikr experience presented very real empirical-spiritual evidence that could not be ignored, even though they remained critical of certain theological interpretations. This direct evidence confirms the view (James, 1910) regarding religious

experience as an independent empirical data that has its own evidential weight, apart from the construction of formal theological interpretations that accompany it.

The fourth stage emerges in the form of epistemological reconstruction, a process in which individuals gradually reconstruct a cognitive framework capable of uniting Sufi experience with their intellectual identity. The success of this unification is driven by the existence of the Suryalaya TQN community, which provides vocabulary, logical arguments, and a supporting collective narrative. The presence of this tarekat community operates as a plausibility structure, as conceptualized by (Berger & Luckmann, 2016), namely a social order that makes the construction of spiritual reality feel reasonable, valid, and cognitively defensible in everyday life.

3. Discussion of Findings in the Context of the Literature

This formulation of integrative rationality contributes several fundamental theoretical implications for the development of secularization studies and contemporary Sufism studies. At the first level, this finding strengthens the thesis (Davie et al., 1999) on the phenomenon of desecularization as well as the argument (Taylor, 2007) regarding the secular era as an age of authenticity, where spiritual values are embraced through a process of conscious reflection and not merely a passively accepted tradition. TQN students with academic backgrounds are a real manifestation of this contemporary spiritual agent, whose decision to turn to Sufism is born from deep critical reflection.

On a second level, these findings revise common assumptions in Islamic studies in Indonesia, which tend to automate a sharp dichotomy between modernist-rationalist Islam and traditionalist-Sufi Islam. The mindset of highly educated TQN students demonstrates that such a categorization oversimplifies a complex sociological reality. These academics are able to embrace the principles of modern intellectualism and the depths of Sufi esotericism in a unified synthesis. This confirms the study (Howell et al., 2001) on the religious dynamics of the Indonesian Muslim middle class, which cannot be rigidly categorized as traditional versus modern.

At the third level, the concept of integrative rationality offers a more in-depth and nuanced analytical alternative compared to various previous theoretical frameworks, such as the idea of bricolage (Lévi-Strauss & Keck, 1962), the phenomenon of spiritual shopping (Roof, 2001), and the concept of multiple religious belonging (Cornille, 2010). Unlike bricolage, which tends to be random and eclectic, integrative rationality gives rise to a highly ordered epistemological hierarchical structure. This concept also differs from the consumerist-oriented pattern of spiritual shopping, because integrative rationality results in the formation of strong religious commitments and the transformation of character (*habitus*) that endures permanently.

Overall, the epistemic synthesis achieved by the students of TQN Suryalaya confirms that the encounter between modernity and Sufism does not always result in cognitive clashes. The presence of integrative rationality demonstrates the human mind's ability to bridge scientific calculations with spiritual experiences without sacrificing one or the other. This phenomenon marks the birth of a new type of rationality in the contemporary era, a perspective that positions science and Sufism as two complementary instruments of knowledge in uncovering the complexities of human reality and the universe.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

The substantive strength of this research lies in the depth of analytical exploration fostered by the adoption of a hermeneutical phenomenological design, carefully combined with a variety of empirical data collection techniques. The researcher's involvement in a continuous participant observation scheme over a six-month period provided crucial methodological accessibility. This extended observation period enabled the researcher to capture every subtlety in the dynamics of social interactions, body language, and symbolic nuances that would otherwise be missed if data collection relied solely on a single interview instrument. This intensive participant observation revealed the complexity of religious behavior that occurs behind the community's ritual routines.

The rigorous use of triangulation techniques through the alignment of data from in-depth interviews, field observation records, and the exploration of textual document artifacts directly contributes to strengthening the credibility of scientific findings. Cross-confirmation between these data types serves to minimize the researcher's subjective bias while also testing the consistency of information conveyed by the participants in the experience. The unification of these three empirical sources forms a mutually reinforcing evidentiary construct, so that the resulting theoretical reconstruction has a very strong factual foundation.

This methodological excellence ensures that the findings regarding the cognitive patterns of Suryalaya TQN students are based on systematically validated realities in the field.

This scientific investigation is not without several structural limitations that need to be transparently underlined in writing the final report. The main obstacle stems from the limited focus of the research locus on one TQN Suryalaya community in a specific geographic area. This contextual limitation means that the empirical findings obtained cannot be claimed as an absolute representation of the entire institutional realm of TQN Suryalaya, which in sociological reality has a membership network that stretches across national and international scales. The diversity of socio-cultural characteristics in other branches of the tarekat has the potential to display forms of local responses and adaptation patterns that differ from those in the location studied.

The inherent qualitative nature of this research design fundamentally impairs statistical generalization across the entire population. Phenomenological exploration is not designed to produce quantitative causal evidence, but rather to establish a degree of analytical transferability to other sociological contexts with similar structural conditions and subject characteristics. Another limitation arises from the selection of research subjects, which only included individuals who ultimately decided to join the Suryalaya TQN. This sample design fails to capture the perspectives of intellectuals who remain skeptical and choose not to enter the tarekat tradition.

The limitations in the scope and orientation of the research subjects provide a unique interpretive space for the development of future socio-religious research. This limited scope of research is not a weakness that invalidates the validity of the findings, but rather a marker of the internal validity limits of the analytical constructs that have been developed. Mapping these methodological limitations clarifies which domains have been explored in depth and which still require further exploration. Openness to these limitations is an essential part of academic accountability in maintaining intellectual honesty.

The analytical transferability of this qualitative research output provides a valuable conceptual framework for other academics studying urban mysticism. Analyzing a group that has successfully integrated into the Suryalaya TQN environment provides a deeper understanding of the psychological and epistemological mechanisms underlying the acceptance of esoteric traditions by modern reason. An explanation of this group's cognitive dynamics provides a solid theoretical foundation for comparing the knowledge synthesis process in other urban spiritual communities. A comprehensive understanding of this selected group serves as an important stepping stone for reconstructing a theory of the intersection of religion and modernity.

Implications and Recommendations

The results of this study have two highly strategic implications, encompassing both conceptual and practical domains. Theoretically, the formulation of the concept of integrative rationality can be offered as a fresh and potentially novel analytical framework for further development. This concept provides a relevant lens for examining similar spiritual revivals in various urban Sufi communities, both within urban Indonesia and the broader Southeast Asian region, which is also experiencing accelerated urbanization and a massive increase in educational attainment.

On a practical level, the findings of this research present a very direct level of relevance for the formulation and reconstruction of Islamic da'wah strategies in the contemporary era. The dialectical da'wah model practiced by TQN Suryalaya, which coherently integrates an intellectual approach, an invitation to examine direct experience, the restoration of historical authority, and adaptation to urban lifestyles, can serve as a valuable framework for da'wah organizations. This model offers a more effective orientation for religious communication to reach highly educated groups with a tendency to think critically and independently.

The importance of adopting this dialectical model of da'wah becomes even more apparent in light of the rapid demographic growth of educated Muslims in Indonesia's urban centers, a group often feeling unreached by conventional forms of religious discourse. Da'wah approaches that tend to be dogmatic, one-way, and unresponsive to rationalist issues often foster alienation between intellectuals and formal religious traditions. The success of TQN Suryalaya in engaging academics demonstrates that a da'wah language that is friendly to critical thinking and respects inner experience can elegantly bridge this gap.

This research formulates urgent theoretical and practical recommendations for Islamic higher education institutions to integrate Sufi epistemological studies more structuredly into their curricula. The

tradition of Islamic esotericism should no longer be narrowly positioned as a historical artifact of past thought or a passive cultural memorization. Instead, Sufism should be presented as a contribution of philosophical thought that has a highly relevant bargaining power in responding to contemporary epistemological debates, particularly regarding the dynamics of the limits of human knowledge and the existential crisis of meaning in the modern era.

Efforts to restore Sufi epistemology to the academic realm of higher education play a crucial role in bridging the cognitive gap that remains wide open. Academic reality reveals a profound gulf between the richly spiritual Islamic intellectual tradition and modern scientific discourse oriented toward a materialistic-positivistic paradigm. This dichotomy often isolates the potential for dialogue between measurable scientific reasoning and esoteric spiritual wisdom in the process of constructing knowledge.

Establishing a constructive dialogue between these two traditions of knowledge has the potential to create mutually enriching epistemic intersections. Through this dialectical encounter, scientific rationality can gain a depth of ethical-metaphysical meaning that guides the utilization of science, while Sufi experiences gain a structured, communicative, and rationally tested space for articulation within the academic community. This curriculum reorientation is projected to produce a generation of intellectuals who not only master modern research methodologies but also possess profound spiritual sensitivity.

Mainstreaming Sufi epistemology in academic circles is also a crucial strategy for restoring the integrity of the holistic Islamic scholarly tradition. A critical reading of classical mystical works can spark the emergence of a new paradigm capable of addressing the challenges of contemporary civilization in a more balanced manner. Thus, the integration of Sufism into Islamic higher education is not merely an addition to course material, but rather a fundamental reconceptualization in building an adaptive, transformative, and globally competitive Islamic scholarship.

CONCLUSION

The intellectual skepticism of educated urban communities towards Sufism is manifested in three main dimensions, namely the epistemological dimension that questions scientific measurability, the theological dimension that criticizes the validity of doctrine, and the pragmatic dimension that demands social effectiveness. As a dialectical response, the Qadiriyyah wan Naqsyabandiyyah (TQN) Suryalaya Order builds a structured Sufi epistemological architecture that transcends rigid dogmatism. This structure is arranged through a hierarchy of knowledge from 'ilm al-yaqin, 'ain al-yaqin, to haqq al-yaqin, while simultaneously positioning the ritual of talqin dhikr as a form of embodied epistemology that internalizes spiritual understanding directly into the individual's psychic and physical dimensions.

The success of the Suryalaya TQN da'wah is supported by four adaptive dialectical strategies, including the intellectualization of Sufism through modern scientific dialogue, experiential invitation, reconstruction of the intellectual authority of classical ulama, and contextualization of activities in urban environments. This combination of strategies has proven effective in breaking down the fortress of skepticism without sacrificing the authenticity of Islamic esoteric teachings. This dialectical process encourages the birth of integrative rationality in educated students, namely a cognitive pattern that does not oppose scientific reasoning and Sufi experience, but rather unites them within a harmonious and coherent epistemological hierarchical framework.

The theoretical implications of these findings enrich the sociological discourse on the phenomena of desecularization and flexible orthodoxy, while simultaneously dismantling the rigid dichotomy between modernist-rationalist and traditionalist-Sufi thought in Indonesia. Practically, Suryalaya's TQN strategy offers an inclusive and dialogical da'wah framework for highly educated groups. This study recommends that Islamic universities critically reintegrate Sufi epistemology into their curricula to bridge the gap between modern science and Islamic esoteric traditions. Despite its limitations in the specific locus and sample of integrated groups, this study's findings provide a solid analytical basis for transferability to the study of modern urban spirituality in Southeast Asia.

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