

# Modern Sufism in Turkey: A Study of the Thought of Said Nursi and Fethullah Gulen

Muhammad Ulil Albab<sup>1</sup>. Nurwahidin<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universitas Indonesia Depok, Indonesia; email: [mhdualbab@gmail.com](mailto:mhdualbab@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> Universitas Indonesia Depok, Indonesia; email: [nurwahidin@ui.ac.id](mailto:nurwahidin@ui.ac.id)

Received: date; Revision: date; Accepted: date; Published: date

**Abstract** : The advancement of technology and the development of time, in fact, don't make sufism become deserted enthusiasts. Sufism is often considered an alternative way of embroidery in the modern era. This is inseparable from the fact that Islamic puritanism echoed by Salafi-Wahabi groups is considered to give birth to new humanitarian problems. Although it was also once considered a barrier in the progress of Islam by Modernists, it is undeniable that the need for sufism in society seems to never die. While in the Arab region the existence of sufism is threatened because it is considered contrary to the idea of Islamic puritanism and is considered a barrier in the progress of Islam, sufism in Turkey actually gets direct opposition from ultra-secular rulers. This makes sufi leaders in Turkey must transform the teachings of sufism. Through this article, the author seeks to display the patterns and approaches of a new sufism in Turkey, which came to be known as modern sufism. The authors base this study from the analysis of Said Nursi and Fethullah Gulen's thoughts on sufism. The authors conclude that the pattern and approach of modern sufism in Turkey is carried out without tariqah. Nevertheless, the order transformed into an Islamic movement by adopting a state-legalized organization. It is also a form of adaptation carried out by sufi figures in Turkey as a measure of anticipation of the repressive actions of ultra-secular rulers against the followers of the order.

**Keywords:** : *Modern Sufism; Turkey; Said Nursi; Fethullah Gulen.*

**Corresponding Author:**

**Nama:**

Afiliasi; email

## 1. Pendahuluan

Technological advances and developments of the times have not made Sufism desolate in its demands. Sufism is even often considered an alternative way of practicing Islam in the modern era (Engineer 2005). This is inseparable from the fact that Islamic puritanism echoed

by the Salafi-Wahhabi group is actually considered to give birth to new humanitarian problems. Although it was also once considered an obstacle to the progress of Islam by the Modernist group, it is undeniable that the need for Sufism in society never seems to die (Voll 2007).

From the results of the research of several academics, Sufism is actually considered to be experiencing its revival period (Bruinessen and Howell 2007). Even some circles that previously tended to be anti-Sufism began to show the spirit of Islam with Sufism, even though with different styles and models of approach. This new style and model of approach in Sufism is considered a form of adjustment in response to the criticism and attacks that are often raised by the Salafi-Wahhabi group as well as by the Modernist group against Sufism (Howell 2009). Even in the last century, the phenomenon of Sufism with this new pattern and model of approach has developed rapidly in various parts of the world. The spirit of Sufism with this new style and model of approach is often referred to as "actual Sufism", "transformative Sufism", or "modern Sufism" (Khozin 2000).

The pattern and model of modern Sufism approach indeed tend to be different from classical Sufism. One of the most striking differences lies in the existence of the concept of tarekat, where conventional Sufism cannot be separated from the concept of tarekat, while Sufism actually offers a pattern and model of the Sufism approach without having to be tied to the concept of tarekat. This then attracted the author's interest to highlight the thoughts of several figures to dissect the pattern and approach of modern Sufism. Among these figures are Said Nursi and Fethullah Gulen. The reason for the selection of these figures is the fact that modern Sufism in Turkey, whose notabene is the country of origin of the two figures, in turn developed into a social movement. This is inseparable from the role of the two figures in spreading Islam with the style and model of the modern Sufism approach in Turkey.

## **2. Research Results**

### **2.1. Anti-Sufism Discourse**

In the West, the study of Sufism has attracted the interest of academics. This is inseparable from the contact of the West with the Islamic world. According to some circles, interest in the study of Sufism has emerged since the Middle Ages (Schimmel 1975). Although some others consider that the beginning of the study of Sufism in the West only began in the eighteenth century. Despite these differences, the study of Sufism is in great demand to this day.

It is different from the Islamic world which has actually begun to promote the rejection of Sufism. The rejection of Sufism in the Islamic world became more intense in the nineteenth century. Criticism and attacks on Sufism continue to emerge from various sides of its teachings, especially from the Salafi-Wahhabi and Modernist groups. The ideas of these two groups then spread to all regions of the Islamic world. The spirit of Islamic purification brought by these two groups clearly shook the Islamic world.

Basically, the discourse against Sufism has started since the emergence of Ibn Taymiah. Ibn Taymiah criticized a number of Sufism teachings that he considered to be contrary and had gone out of the corridor of the Qur'an and hadith. Some people then consider Ibn Taymiah's criticism as a form of his rejection of Sufism. In fact, if you look more closely, Ibn Taymiah never rejected Sufism as a whole, but only some of his teachings are considered to have deviated from the Qur'an and hadith. Thus, Ibn Taymiah basically accepted the teachings of Sufism while still in the corridor of the two shari'a guidance. More specifically, Ibn Taymiah

only rejected the teachings of Sufism as developed by al-Hallaj, Ibn Arabi, Ibn Sab'in, and other figures with their teachings. Meanwhile, the teachings of other Sufism figures who focus on cleansing and purifying the soul, are still acceptable to him (Ansari 1985; Sirriyeh 2003).

The figure of Ibn Taymiah himself then became an inspiration for many anti-Sufism circles in the next generation. One of them is Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab, whose notabene is the originator of Salafi-Wahhabi teachings. Unfortunately, Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab's view of Sufism was more extreme than his predecessor because he rejected the teachings of Sufism outright. He opposed all teachings to the practice of Sufism, even condemning his followers as polytheists. According to him, Sufism has not only come out of the corridor of the Qur'an and hadith, but has also been entered by foreign elements from outside Islam (Alatas 2009).

On the other hand, a number of Modernist figures, such as Jamaluddin al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, and Muhammad Rashid Ridha, also rejected the teachings of Sufism. However, their rejection of Sufism was due to the fact that they considered that its teachings could hinder the progress of Islam in an effort to rival the progress of the West. According to them, Sufism is the root of Islam's decline. Sufism is considered not in line with the use of ratios, inactive in facing the reality of life, and too concerned with the hereafter so as to withdraw its followers from social life. These factors were then considered to be the cause of the backwardness and weakness of Muslims (Sirriyeh 2003).

Departing from the rejection by the Salafi-Wahhabi group and the Modernist group, some academics then suspected the fading of the charm of Sufism in the community. According to Ernest Gellner (1992), sooner or later, Sufism will disappear from the face of the earth. Even if it survives, Sufism will only survive in rural areas or in underdeveloped areas. This is due to the spirit to become modern, so that they must adopt a rational way of life which results in the erosion of Sufism teachings which tend to be conventional (Bruinessen and Howell 2007).

Meanwhile, J. Spencer Trimingham predicted the dimming of the mystical aspects of Sufism due to the existence of secular thought and the accompanying social changes. Furthermore, according to him, although Islam remains a religion adhered to, it is only based on considerations of the implications of its social and cultural aspects, while its spiritual aspect is weakening, so that the afterlife is no longer the main goal (Trimingham 1971).

Seeing this, some followers of Sufism try to improve themselves by fostering the spirit of renewal in the body of Sufism. Sufism is expected to continue to exist in society and be able to adapt to the times. The teachings of Sufism began to be updated in order to compete with the ideas of anti-Sufism. Some of the teachings of Sufism that are often considered deviant and deviant from the Qur'an and hadith have also begun to be cleaned up (Sirriyeh 2004). This update aims to make Sufism which previously tended to be closed to be more active in social life, and even Sufism is expected to be a social driving force. This renewal of Sufism, in the language of Fazlur Rahman, came to be known as "neo-sufism" (Rahman 1979).

In general, the characteristic of this renewal in the body of Sufism lies in the purification of its teachings which is based on the morals and behavior of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him). The followers of Sufism are encouraged to emulate the way of life of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) in all things. As a form of love, they are also advised to recite more salawat to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him). The teachings of Sufism which are directly related to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) then make anti-Sufism people unable to speak because of the reference to his teachings which are directly relied on the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him). This then made some figures dedicate their teachings directly to the

figure of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), and even initiated the Muhammadiyah institute, whose notabene does not attribute his teachings to one of the figures or murshid like the institutes in general, but directly dedicates it to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him).

Arabi Darqawi, one of the Sufism figures from Morocco, sought to reform the teachings of Sufism, especially in the Shari'ah order, by emphasizing the praxis oriented aspect of practice (Bouasria 2015).

Mustafa Bakri, in the Khalwatiah order, renewed Sufism by inviting his followers to be actively involved in social and political upheavals in their respective regions. Through this active involvement, they are expected to have an important role in society, so that Sufism is not only considered as a mere spiritual teaching, but also as a form of resistance movement against Western colonialism and imperialism. This can be seen in the role of the followers of the Caliph in the Urabi Revolution in Egypt. Initially, their movement was limited to protesting against the British policy of imposing taxes that were too high and not willing to pay workers' salaries. This movement then expanded to a national scale. In turn, the Khalwatiah order became the driving force of the resistance against British imperialism in Egypt (Cole 1999).

Purification efforts by basing their teachings on the morals and behavior of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) were also carried out by Ahmad bin Idris in his reform of Sufism, especially in the Idrisiah tariqat. Its renewal focused on moral and spiritual teaching. He made the Idrisiah tarekat play a role in driving social life. This teaching as well as social mission was then spread by his successors to all corners of the world (O'Fahey 1990).

One of the successors of Ahmad bin Idris was Muhammad Sanusi who later founded the Sanusih order, which was widely spread in the North African region, especially in Libya. The renewal of Sufism carried out by Muhammad Sanusi in the Sanusiah order was triggered by his concern about the decline of the Islamic world and the erosion of the spiritual aspect of Muslims. His teachings foster awareness of the importance of unity and shared political integrity. The Sanusiah Order then played a role as the driving force for resistance against Italy in Libya, Britain in Egypt, and France in Algeria.

In addition to the Sanusia order, in the North African region, especially in Algeria, there is also Ahmad al-Tijani who made reforms in the teachings of the Tijaniah order by focusing on the social aspect. He encouraged his followers to participate in social life and not to abandon worldly affairs.

Mawlana Khalid also renewed Sufism in the Naqshbandiah order by developing the teachings of Ahmad Sirhindi which emphasized the sharia aspect. This teaching then became the driving force for resistance against the oppression of the rulers in various regions. One of them was against the Russian rulers, with Shamil, one of the murshids of the Naqshbandiah order, as a key figure (Gammer 2004; Hamid 2007).

Apart from the Salafi-Wahhabi and Modernist groups, the rejection of Sufism also emerged from the Secular group, such as the one initiated by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk in Turkey. He banned Sufism completely, not even giving any space to the teachings of Sufism in Turkey. Apart from political factors, Sufism is considered not in line with the understanding of rationalism and postivism that it developed in an effort to build the modern Turkish Republic. According to him, Sufism is a stumbling block that can prevent Turkey from building a modern country. As a result, several Sufism figures from Turkey such as Said Nursi and Fethullah Gulen had to transform their Sufism teachings.

## 2.2. *Perkembangan Tasawuf di Turki*

Until the early nineteenth century, Sufism was still one of the efforts of the Muslim community during the Ottoman Empire to build individual spirituality. Some of them practice Sufism by following an order. Even so, those who are not attached to them still consider themselves to have converted to Sufism. Sufism can be found in almost all areas of the Ottoman Empire. Even a scholar is very synonymous with Sufism. Therefore, Sufism could then develop rapidly until it became a culture of society at that time.

Among the most influential tarekat during the Ottoman Empire was the Naqsyabandiah order, especially under the figure of Mawlana Khalid. When many institutes invite their followers to be lonely and alone, Mawlana Khalid actually invites his followers not to distance themselves from the world. Mawlana Khalid even invited people in the circle of power to follow the teachings of Islam. The relationship between the rulers of the Ottoman Empire and the mursyids of the Naqshbandiah order was also very good. The mursyid of the Naqshbandiah order tried to maintain the suppression of Islamic law in the community. For them, if Islamic law has been enforced, then the behavior of the people, even the rulers and their ranks, can be improved. This teaching was then passed down from generation to follow the followers of the Naqshbandiah order (Yavuz 2003b).

Entering the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire began to establish diplomatic relations with European nations. Since then, the Ottoman society considered that the West had made rapid progress in the field of science and technology. Meanwhile, the Islamic world, including the Ottoman Empire, is seen to be weakening. This can be reflected in how the scientific passion in the Islamic world is starting to fade. Many scholars no longer contribute new knowledge, but have been quite satisfied with what is in their midst. In addition, the practice of shamanic began to develop in the Muslim community, with many individuals who are considered figures in Sufism as the shamans. The tarekat also began to be considered only as a religious ritual. This then expanded to the point that Sufism was considered no longer rational, even the cause of the bad conditions that occurred.

This bad condition then forced Sufism figures to transform their teachings. In the majority of Arab regions, Muslims are invited to return to pure Islam by following the teachings of pious salafs. Meanwhile, in the Ottoman Empire, Sufism figures assessed that the decline of the Islamic world was motivated by the fading of scientific passion in the Muslim community and the lack of modern-style management in the body of the tariqat. This then became the basis for Sufism figures in the Ottoman Empire to transform their teachings by keeping up with the times, in contrast to the majority of their colleagues in the Arab region. The steps taken by Sufism figures in the Ottoman Empire are expected to change the way Muslims view Sufism (Silverstein 2011).

In 1826, the Janissary, the elite force of the Ottoman Empire, staged a revolt. Sultan Mahmud II then dissolved the Janissary and restricted the movements of the Bektashi order, which was widely followed by these elite forces. He even issued a decree requiring followers of the Bektashi order to wear certain clothes as a special sign for them. Over time, this decree slowly had an impact on other institutes as well. Each institute and its followers must be administratively registered in the state register, even to what clothes each institute and its followers wear (Yavuz 2003b).

In 1908, the opposition Young Turks demanded that Sultan Abdul Hamid II guarantee political freedom for all Ottoman society. The Ottomans, the majority of whom were followers of the tarekat, were divided into two camps, some of them still supporting Sultan Abdul Hamid II and others supporting the movement of the Young Turks. Support for the Young Turks was based on the policies of Sultan Abdul Hamid II who curbed the tarekat,

whose notabene controlled the Ottoman hinterland. In addition, Sultan Abdul Hamid II also repeatedly threw a number of tarekat figures into exile. Even a number of Naqsyabandiah figures, whose notabene were supporters of Sultan Abdul Hamid II, were also exiled. Upon his return from exile, some of the murshids of the Naqshbandiyah order, such as Mohammed Essad Safvet-Effendi, for example, turned to support the Young Turks against Sultan Abdul Hamid II. Mohammed Essad Safvet-Effendi is one of the mursyid of the Naqsyabandiah order who is also active as a magazine editor and chairman of the organization of the mursyid association of the order. When Mohammed Essad Safvet-Effendi served as a councillor in 1904, he supported the abolition of the caliphate and the expulsion of the entire ruling family of the Ottoman Empire (Yavuz 2003b).

In 1923, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk officially established the Republic of Turkey. Initially, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk had no problems with the tarekat. Instead, he formed a coalition with the followers of the tarekat in mobilizing the masses to support his ideas. In 1924, the Ministry of Sharia and Waqf, which had only been established in 1920, was abolished at the suggestion of secularists in the ruling circle. His position was later replaced by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. This is due to the conspiracy with the West in opposing the nationalist movement. Since its establishment, the Ministry of Religious Affairs has regulated all matters regarding the appointment and dismissal of imams, khatib, dai, muazin, mursyid tarekat, and zawiyah managers. The shaykh (mursyid) of the tarekat is designated as a government employee who is paid by the state. This is actually also true in the tradition of the Ottoman Empire. Unfortunately, the state's recognition of the tarekat and zawiyah did not last long (Silverstein 2007).

In 1925, Said al-Kurdi, one of the leaders of the Kurdish Naqshbandiah order, revolted against the ultra-secular government of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk following the dissolution of the caliphate. Mustafa Kemal Ataturk was not happy with the rebellion and reacted violently. His fury peaked so that he bombarded Said al-Kurdi's forces until they were beaten back. Not only that, every party involved in the rebellion was arrested and sentenced to death (Olson 1989).

It did not stop here, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk's anger continued until he proposed the closure of zawiyah. This had become a fierce debate in Parliament. Finally, in 1925, the government officially closed the zawiyah and banned the tarekat (Silverstein 2007). Even the usual calls for Sufism figures are officially banned. Also robes and imamah are not allowed to be worn except by those who are on duty. Zawiyah who have a mosque is only functioned as a mosque, while those who do not have a mosque are converted into schools. Some zawiyah that cannot be used at all are then auctioned, where the proceeds of the sale will go into the state treasury (Silverstein 2011). Mustafa Kemal Ataturk's repressive measures were motivated by his fear of the institutes, which he considered to be able to mobilize his followers to gather strength against the newly established Turkish ruling regime, as Said al-Kurdi did. In addition, nationalists in the ruling circle considered that the teachings of Sufism were full of superstitions, so that they could prevent society from becoming rational and could hinder the progress of the Republic of Turkey.

Di tengah tekanan dari rezim pemerintah yang ultra-sekuler dan bertindak represif terhadap tarekat, para tokoh tarekat terpaksa harus melakukan transformasi dalam ajaran tasawuf. Mereka memiliki cara tersendiri dalam hal ini, berbeda dengan mayoritas rekan-rekan mereka di wilayah Arab. Mereka tidak menggunakan cara kekerasan sebagaimana banyak ditemukan di wilayah Arab. Meskipun demikian, cara yang mereka gunakan berhasil

membuat tasawuf tetap eksis di Turki, bahkan mengakar selama berabad-abad, baik secara kultural maupun dalam jalur politik (Komecoglu 2014).

Meanwhile, after the failure of Said al-Kurdi's uprising against the ultra-secular government of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the Naqshaybandiah order changed its strategy. They resigned from the political stage, even disappeared from the public sphere. All of his teachings are practiced in secret. Some of their routines were transferred to the mosque, by wrapping themselves as ordinary mosque worshippers. Nonetheless, they can do their activities in peace. Even some of them are able to polish dhikr, so that from the outside it does not appear as an institutionalized religious ritual. Even though they are active in secret, the followers of the Naqsyabandiah order and other orders who use similar methods can survive. Their number is increasing day by day. In turn, they also played an important role in the transformation of the Republic of Turkey from an ultra-secular state into a pro-Islam state in the 1950s. They have also given color to the political stage to this day (Yavuz 2003b). They also contributed the best cadres in the political arena, such as Necmettin Erbakan and Recep Tayyip Erdogan (Cornell and Kaya 2015). The Naqshbandiah order even became the basis for the birth of four Islamic movements in Turkey in the 1970s. One of them is the Nurcu movement, which was founded by Said Nursi (Yavuz 2003a, 2003b).

Although it only experienced relaxation in the 1980s, a number of institutes began to dare to return to appear in the public sphere. This also makes the followers of the tarekat increase compared to before. Uniquely, in order to be considered official by the state, the institute adopts a form of organization that is legalized by the state, such as foundations or cultural institutions (Bruinessen 2014).

### 2.3. *Said Nursi and Modern Sufism*

Said Nursi was born in a family of Sufi followers. His father was one of the followers of the Naqsyabandiah order. Therefore, the characteristics of his Sufism thought were greatly influenced by the teachings of the Naqshbandiah order, especially from Baha al-Din al-Naqsyabandi, Ahmad Sirhindi, and Khalid al-Baghdadi (Serif Mardin 1989). In addition, his thinking was also heavily influenced by several other famous Sufism figures, such as Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, Jalal al-Din al-Rumi, and so on (Kuru and Kuru 2008). In his writings, Said Nursi often quotes the thoughts of these figures.

Nevertheless, Said Nursi stated that he was not a follower of one of the institutes. He emphasized that the main murshid he followed was not the figures of Sufism, but the Qur'an. According to him, the path to the stage of essence is enough to be passed with the guidance of the Qur'an and follow the morals and behavior of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), in contrast to the conventional view that the path to the stage of essence must be taken through the stages of tarekat. This greatly illustrates how the characteristics of modern Sufism embraced by Said Nursi, where Sufism does not mean that you have to be close (Kuru and Kuru 2008).

The emergence of the idea of Sufism without being radical developed by Said Nursi cannot be separated from the environmental conditions in which he grew up. He lived in an era in which there was a fierce debate among academics about the issue of the tarekat which was considered to be the factor causing the decline of Islam. In addition, the Ottoman Empire was also intensively adopting Western science. At the same time, Western academics who follow the philosophy of materialism are intensively attacking the joints of Islamic teachings. This is considered a serious threat by him, so a rational Islamic approach is needed to counter this view. On the other hand, he also lived during the reign of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk who

strictly forbade the existence of the tarekat with an iron fist approach. So there is a possibility that Said Nursi did not adhere to it because he avoided the repressive actions carried out by the regime of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

Although not affiliated with any order, Said Nursi and his followers still experienced oppression by the Turkish rulers. They consider the existence of Said Nursi and his followers to be a threat to the sustainability of the ultra-secular government. Their persecution was based on the accusation that Said Nursi and his followers were trying to form an order, the notabene of which was forbidden at that time. The political repression carried out by the government made Said Nursi repeatedly imprisoned, even exiled. As a result of these repressive actions, many of his followers began to withdraw from the public sphere. Nevertheless, they continued to communicate with Said Nursi, spreading his works, especially *Risale-i Nur*, and creating a network of readers of his works secretly. This hidden movement in turn became a social movement commonly known as the Nurcu movement (Afsal 2015).

*Risale-i Nur* is indeed the main handle of Said Nursi's followers. He encouraged his followers to always adhere to *Risale-i Nur*. He himself once stated that *Risale-i Nur* could be their spiritual teacher and guide. He once said, "We are the disciples of *Risale-i Nur*." In fact, he claimed to be a student of *Risale-i Nur*. Gradually, the one who is considered the source of reference for the Nurcu movement is no longer Said Nursi, but *Risale-i Nur* (Karabasoglu 2003). Since *Risale-i Nur* has become a solid foundation in their movement, some scholars have come to consider the Nurcu movement to be a text-based community (Yavuz 2003a).

Thus, it can be concluded that Said Nursi never left Sufism at all. However, he did not take tarekat as his way of Sufism. At least, he only takes his spiritual values, without being affiliated with any order. He is also a figure who highly upholds Islamic law, prioritizes the Qur'an, and makes the morals and behavior of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) as a role model for his thought. Even though he was not a believer, he still appreciated the teachings of Sufism as long as it was still in the corridor of the Qur'an and hadith (Yavuz 2003a).

After Said Nursi died, his Sufism ideas continued to live on. The Nurcu movement then fragmented to give birth to a number of other movement groups. One of them is the Gulen Movement founded by Fethullah Gulen.

#### 2.4. *Fethullah Gulen and Modern Sufism*

A number of academics state that the figure of Fethullah Gulen is a follower of Sufism. This is reflected by Fethullah Gulen who in almost all aspects of his thinking emphasizes the cleanliness of intention and clarity of heart (Barton 2005). Elisabeth Ozdalga (2000) even emphasized that Fethullah Gulen made the tradition of the Naqshbandiah order as the main reference. However, his thinking was more influenced by the thoughts of Said Nursi (Kim 2008; Saritoprak 2003).

The similarity in the pattern and model of the approach to Sufism between Fethullah Gulen and Said Nursi is that both of them are Sufists, but not Sufism. According to Fethullah Gulen, Sufism is different from the tarekat, where Sufism is purely an Islamic teaching, while the tarekat is only a product of history. The pattern and model of the approach to Sufism is to follow the morals and behavior of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), not by practicing certain teachings and rituals of the tarekat. For him, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) was a very perfect figure to emulate.

Fethullah Gulen has never separated between Sufism and sharia. However, Sufism must not contradict the sharia. For him, Sufism and sharia are like two sides of a currency that



complement each other. In fact, he considered that the concept of tarekat as the second stage after the sharia to achieve the essence, as many followers of the tarekat believed, was an inappropriate concept. The reason is because from this concept will emerge a perception that a person cannot jump directly to the essential stage of the sharia stage, without going through the stage of tarekat. Meanwhile, according to him, a person who has walked the path of sharia can immediately reach the stage of essence, without having to go through the stages of tariqat. Even one can walk the spiritual path to the essence without the help of a spiritual teacher, because the guide to the essence is only the Qur'an and hadith (Unal and Williams 2000).

Fethullah Gulen actually considers that the position of Sufism in Islam is essentially the core of the teachings, while the position of sharia is the wrapping. A true Muslim must establish harmony between the two, because whoever only cares about the wrapper without paying attention to the contents will end up in dry scriptualism. According to him, Sufism is also the answer to the problems of modern society that is experiencing spiritual drought. Therefore, Sufism needs to be raised in the midst of modern society with little adjustment, as is the case in the concept of Sufism without having to follow certain teachings and rituals of the tarekat (Kim 2008).

According to Fethullah Gulen, Sufism is not only limited to a matter of spirituality, but also related to social life. If for some circles, Sufism is considered a factor that causes the decline of Islam, can cause a passive attitude, and make its adherents isolate themselves from social life, in fact, for him, Sufism is a spiritual practice that merges itself in society by actively playing a role in social life. He gave the example of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) who came down back to earth, even though he had met God directly in the event of mikraj. He continued, that in his daily life, the Prophet and his companions never stood alone or distanced themselves from society, but instead actively participated in social life (Kim 2008).

In Fethullah Gulen's view, the spiritual value obtained from Sufism must radiate out in social life. Spiritual piety does not stop only at oneself, but also at its social aspect. The value of this social piety requires followers of Sufism who have tasted spiritual pleasures to maintain social order. After enjoying spiritual pleasure, they must give birth to people's awareness of God's presence in the midst of the many problems they are facing. They are required to be able to maintain that spiritual consciousness through their active role in social life. Thus, it is very visible that Fethullah Gulen in his Sufism thought does not separate the affairs of the world from the affairs of the hereafter. Sufism must play an active role in every step of a person's life in this world, even though at the same time he is preparing himself for the life in the hereafter (Kim 2008).

The spiritual value obtained from Sufism must also be realized in the form of self-service to the community. Thus, the pinnacle of a person's spirituality does not stop at himself, but is manifested in social life. Furthermore, according to Fethullah Gulen, Sufism must play an active role in maintaining world peace through dialogue between beliefs and by maintaining the value of tolerance (Khamami 2002). This idea is inseparable from his concept of inclusive and loving Sufism (Kim 2008). This concept, in the future, succeeded in playing its role as a liaison between the East and the West in finding common ground, and was even considered an alternative solution in overcoming humanitarian problems (Kim 2008).

The most basic human problem in the modern era today is the loss of a sense of concern between fellow humans, thus causing the rampant hatred and enmity. According to Fethullah Gulen, the only way to mitigate this is to re-cultivate the bonds of love and tolerance between

fellow human beings. Both can be present through Sufism. With Sufism, animal orgasm in humans can be controlled. By controlling animal orgasm, one has eradicated one of the greatest causes of conflict between human beings (Gulen 2000).

This concept of thought is a reflection of Fethullah Gulen's thinking on Sufism which is in conflict with modernization. In contrast to the Modernist group who often corner Sufism as a threat to the decline of Islam, it actually presents the concept of Sufism that can remain alive in the midst of the progress of the modern era with the teachings of love, tolerance, and mutual care included in it (Gulen 2004).

Thus, it can be concluded that in his unique concept of Sufism, Fethullah Gulen seems to invite all Muslims to put one foot on the values of Sufism and the other foot on modernization. He did not take the concept of classical Sufism in its entirety, but he did not abandon it either. He only took a few concepts that he thought could be collaborated and adapted to modernization. Through this collaboration and adaptation, he offers the concept of modern Sufism, where a person who practices Sufism does not have to follow certain teachings or rituals. In addition, one must not only be satisfied with personal piety, but must also develop it into social piety. Fethullah Gulen's ideas of modern Sufism were then developed and inherited by his followers through the Gulen Movement which he founded himself.

## 2.5. *Sufism Said Nursi and Fethullah Gulen in Indonesia*

In Indonesia, the debates and discourses of Islamic thought that occur in the Middle East and in the West are more of interest by academics than the debates and discourses of Islamic thought that have emerged in Turkey. One of the factors causing it is the problem of unfamiliar language, in contrast to the Middle East which uses Arabic and the West which uses English. On the other hand, many Indonesian academics consider that the experience of Islam in Turkey is not so relevant, even not needed by the Indonesian people.

Towards the end of the twentieth century, Muslim academics from Turkey were only beginning to be known by the Indonesian people. Precisely when the Refah Partition (Refah Party), under the leadership of Necmettin Erbakan, won victory in 1997. Since then, the debate and discourse of Islamic thought from Muslim academics from Turkey has begun to be in demand in Indonesia. This interest grew stronger when the Adelet ve Kalkinma Partition (Justice and Development Party), under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, won victory in 2002. However, the influence of Muslim academics from Turkey is still inferior to the influence of the thinking of academics from the Middle East and the West.

On the other hand, the debate about Sufism in Turkey is more due to the internal debate factor among their own academics. In addition, the presence of rationalist academics such as Abdullah Cevdet, Celal Nuri, Besir Fuad, Baha Tevfik, and so on. This also resulted in the thought of Islamic puritanism initiated by figures such as Jamaluddin al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, and Muhammad Rasyid Rida not so resonated (Bruinessen 2014).

It is different from Indonesia, where the debates and discourses of Islamic thought that occur in the Middle East and in the West almost always echo among Muslim academics from Indonesia. The ease of establishing contact between Indonesia and the Middle East and the West is believed to be the factor causing the great influence of the Middle East and the West in the debate and discourse of Islamic thought in Indonesia. This then makes academics in Indonesia more easily influenced, so they are more interested in bringing debates and discourses of Islamic thought from academics from the Middle East and West to Indonesia. Therefore, it is not surprising that the pattern and model of the modern Sufism approach in the Turkish style is very rare in Indonesia (Bruinessen 1999).

### 3. Conclusion

Since the time of the Ottoman Empire, Sufism has been the culture of the Turkish Muslim community to build individual spirituality. Some of them practice Sufism by following an order. The rapid development of Sufism at that time, in turn, made Sufism a community culture.

A major change occurred when the ultra-secular ruler Mustafa Kemal Atatürk founded the Turkish Republic. Initially, he had no problem with the tarekat. Instead, he formed a coalition with the followers of the tarekat in mobilizing the masses to support his ideas. This situation continued at least until Said al-Kurdi, one of the leaders of the Kurdish Naqshaybandiah order, revolted against the government. He then bombarded Said al-Kurdi's troops until they were beaten back. Any party involved in the rebellion was arrested and executed by him. He even proposed the closure of zawiyah. In 1925, the government finally officially closed the zawiyah and banned the tarekat.

In the midst of pressure from the ultra-secular government regime and repressive actions against the tarekat, the leaders of the tarekat were forced to transform in the teachings of Sufism. This transformation of the teachings of Sufism is then known as modern Sufism. Sufism figures in Turkey, such as Said Nursi and Fethullah Gulen, transformed the teachings of Sufism in a unique way. They developed the concept of Sufism without being discouraged. For them, Sufism is by following the morals and behavior of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), not by practicing certain teachings and rituals. This concept then had a lot of interest in Turkey. In turn, this transformation of Sufism developed into a social movement, such as the Nurcu, founded by Said Nursi, and the Gulen Movement, founded by Fethullah Gulen.

Award: The author gives his deep appreciation and gratitude to Mr. Nurwahidin, as the supervisor in writing this scientific article, for the knowledge that has been given, both during his S2 lectures and from his books, writings, and lectures. The author also gave his next appreciation to the Department of Middle East & Islamic Studies and the lecturers in it.

Conflict of Interest: The author declares that the results of this research that have been conducted are free from conflicts of interest from certain parties who may claim the results of their research.

### References

- Afsal, V. V. 2015. "Islamic Thought in India and Turkey: A Comparative Study of Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi and Bediuzzaman Said Nursi." Jawaharlal Nehru University.
- Alatas, Ismail Fajrie. 2009. "Securing Their Place: The Ba'alawi, Prophetic Piety, and the Islamic Resurgence in Indonesia." National University of Singapore.
- Ansari, M. Abdul Haq. 1985. "Ibn Taymiyyah and Sufism." *Islamic Studies* 24(1).
- Barton, Greg. 2005. "Progressive Islamic Thought, Civil Society, and the Gulen Movement in the National Context: Parallels with Indonesia." in *Islam in the Contemporary World: The Fethullah Gulen Movement in Thought and Practice*. Rice University.
- Bouasria, Abdelilah. 2015. *Sufism and Politics in Morocco: Activism and Dissent*. New York: Routledge.
- Bruinessen, Martin van. 1999. "Controversies and Polemics Involving the Sufi Order in Twentieth-Century Indonesia." in *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, edited by F. de Jong and B. Radtke. Leiden: Brill.
- Bruinessen, Martin van. 2014. "Secularism, Islamism, and Muslim Intellectualism in Turkey

- and Indonesia: Some Comperative Observation.” in *Ketika Makkah menjadi Las Vegas: Agama, Politik, dan Ideologi*, edited by M. Tirta. Jakarta: Gramedia.
- Bruinessen, Martin van, and Julia Day Howell. 2007. “Introduction.” in *Sufism and the Modern in Islam*, edited by M. van Bruinessen and J. D. Howell. New York: I. B. Tauris.
- Cole, Juan R. I. 1999. *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East: Social and Cultural Origin of Egypt’s Urabi Movement*. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press.
- Cornell, Svante E., and M. K. Kaya. 2015. “Political Islam in Turkey and the Naqshabandi-Khalidi Order.” *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 19:39–62.
- Engineer, Ashgar Ali. 2005. *On Developing Theology of Peace in Islam*. New Delhi: Sterling Publisher.
- Gammer, Moshe. 2004. *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar: Shamil and the Conquest of Chechnya and Daghestan*.
- Gellner, Ernest. 1992. *Postmodernism, Reason, and Religion*. London: Routledge.
- Gulen, M. Fethullah. 2004. *Toward a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance*. New Jersey: The Light, Inc.
- Hamid, Muhammad. 2007. *Imam Shamil: The First Muslim Guerrilla Leader*. Kuala Lumpur: The Other Press and Islamic Book Trust.
- Howell, Julia Day. 2009. *Indonesia’s Salafist Sufism*. Singapore: S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies.
- Karabasoglu, Metin. 2003. “Text and Community: An Analysis of the Risale-i Nur Movement.” in *Islam at the Crossroads*, edited by Ibrahim M. Abu Rabi.
- Khamami, A. Rizqon. 2002. “Dialog Antariman Dalam Perspektif Fathullah Gulen.” *Religio: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama* 2(1):1–19.
- Khozin. 2000. *Muhammadiyah Dan Rekonstruksi Spiritualitas Islam: Suatu Kajian Bentuk Dan Praktek Tasawuf Muhammadiyah*. Malang: FAI Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang.
- Kim, Heon Choul. 2008. “The Nature and Role of Sufism in Contemporary Islam: A Case Study of the Life, Thought, and Teachings of Fethullah Gulen.” Temple University.
- Komecoglu, Ugur. 2014. “Islamism, Post-Islamism, and Civil Islam.” *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 16:16–32.
- Kuru, Zaynep Akbulut, and Ahmet T. Kuru. 2008. “Apolitical Interpretation of Islam: Said Nursi’s Faith-Based Activism in Comparison with Political Islamism and Sufism.” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 19(1).
- O’Fahey, R. S. 1990. *Enigmatic Saint: Ahmad Ibn Idris and the Idrisi Tradition*. Illionois: Northwestern University Press.
- Olson, Robert W. 1989. *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion: 1880-1925*. Texas: University of Texas.
- Ozdalga, Elisabeth. 2000. “Worldly Asceticism in Islamic Casting: Fethullah Gulen’s Inspired Piety and Activism.” *Critique* 17.
- Rahman, Fazlur. 1979. *Islam*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Saritoprak, Zeki. 2003. “Fethullah Gulen: A Sufi in His Own Way.” in *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: Gulen Movement*, edited by M. H. Yavuz and J. L. Esposito. New York: Syracuse University Press.
- Schimmel, Annemarie. 1975. *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*. The University of North Carolina Press.
- Serif Mardin. 1989. *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey*. New York: SUNY Press.
- Silverstein, Brian. 2007. “Sufism and Modernity in Turkey: From the Authenticity of Experience to the Practice of Discipline.” in *Sufism and the Modern in Islam*, edited by

- M. van Bruinessen and J. D. Howell. New York: I. B. Tauris.
- Silverstein, Brian. 2011. *Islam and Modernity in Turkey*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Sirriyeh, Elizabeth. 2003. *Sufi and Anti-Sufi: The Defence: Rethinking and Rejection of Sufism in The Modern World*. London: Routledge Curzon.
- Sirriyeh, Elizabeth. 2004. "Sufi Thought and Its Reconstruction." in *Islamic Thought in The Twentieth Century*, edited by S. T. Farouki and B. M. Nafi. New York: I. B. Tauris.
- Trimingham, J. Spencer. 1971. *The Sufi Orders in Islam*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press.
- Unal, Ali, and Alphonse Williams. 2000. *Advocate of Dialogue*. Fairfax: The Fountain.
- Voll, John O. 2007. "Contemporary Sufism and Current Social Theory." in *Sufism and the Modern in Islam*, edited by M. van Bruinessen and J. D. Howell. New York: I. B. Tauris.
- Yavuz, M. Hakan. 2003a. "Islam in the Public Sphere: The Case of the Nur Movement." in *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: Gulen Movement*, edited by M. H. Yavuz and J. L. Esposito. New York: Syracuse University Press.
- Yavuz, M. Hakan. 2003b. *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*. New York: Oxford University Press.



© 2024 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY SA) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>).