ISLAMIZING MYSTICISM:

Tarekat, Santri, and the Collapse of Syncretism in Suharto's Indonesia

Rhonny Riansyah[1*], Bambang Hermanto[2], Irwandra Salayan[3]

[1,2,3]Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau, Indonesia

Correspondence author: Email: rhonny.riansyah@gmail.com; Tlp. +62 813-6548-4831

KEYWORD	ABSTRACT
Tarekat, Charismatic authority, Discursive tradition, Decoloniality, New Order	This article examines the transformation of Sufi orders (tarekat) in Indonesia during the New Order regime by analyzing the rationalization and bureaucratization of mystical Islam within the logic of the modern state. Using Max Weber's theory of charismatic authority, Talal Asad's concept of discursive tradition, and decolonial perspectives from Quijano and Mignolo, this study demonstrates that the relationship between the state and Sufi communities is not merely a process of co-optation, but a complex negotiation of power and knowledge. The cases of TQN Suryalaya and JATMAN show how Sufi leaders strategically institutionalized their networks while maintaining spiritual authority at the grassroots level. While this transformation legitimized Sufism in the eyes of the state and mainstream Muslim society, it also contributed to the erosion of syncretic traditions that had long characterized local Islam. However, through tactics of epistemic delinking, many tarekat retained their autonomy, allowing mystical practices to persist beneath the surface of formal religious structures. This study argues that the Islamization of mysticism in Indonesia is not a linear process of purification, but a contested field of tradition, modernity, and resistance. It offers a nuanced understanding of how local religious actors navigate state hegemony while preserving alternative forms of spiritual knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

The New Order era in Indonesia (1966–1998) witnessed a profound reconfiguration of religious expressions, power dynamics, and identity politics within the Muslim majority society (Asmar, 2020). Among the most remarkable yet underexamined transformations during this period was the unique evolution of Sufism (*tarekat*). It shifted from peripheral, often syncretic, mystical traditions into increasingly orthodox, bureaucratized, and politically co-opted institutions. This transformation, alongside the rise of a self-consciously Muslim urban middle class and the broader project of Islamization, redefined the religious landscape of postcolonial Indonesia (Agustino & Agus Yusoff, 2014).

Historically entangled with Javanese mysticism, local cosmologies, and syncretic ritual practices, Sufism had long existed on the margins of *santri* Islam, often coexisting with *abangan* spirituality. However, under the New Order regime's developmentalist and depoliticizing agenda, the collapse of syncretic belief systems—particularly those linked to the *abangan* and *kebatinan* movements—was strategically orchestrated through both cultural pressure and institutional engineering (Bruinessen, 2003). While Suharto's government initially remained suspicious of

political Islam, it eventually forged alliances with emerging Muslim actors, including Sufi leaders who commanded loyal mass followings, legitimizing Sufi orders as social discipline and moral governance instruments.

The transformation of Sufi orders during this period was not merely spiritual but deeply structural and political. As Martin van Bruinessen argues, the process of rationalization and bureaucratization of Sufi orders brought them closer to the logic of the state, aligning mystical Islam with the machinery of governance and electoral mobilization (Bruinessen, 1994: 92–93). Tarekat such as the Qadiriyya wa-Naqshbandiyya under charismatic leaders like Kiai Musta'in Romly and Abah Anom were gradually incorporated into formal associations, party-affiliated networks, and even Golkar's corporatist framework. This resulted in the emergence of what van Bruinessen aptly calls '*Sufi bureaucrats*' (ibid., p. 105), highlighting the significant political implications of this transformation.

This transformation had two significant implications. First, it signaled a paradigmatic shift in the religious field—from fluid, hybrid spirituality toward a more shari'a-oriented, state-approved religiosity. The so-called *santrinisasi* (Islamization) of former *abangan* communities was not driven by reformist ulama alone, but also by charismatic Sufi leaders who embraced *orthodox mysticism* while shedding their syncretic roots. Their influence was instrumental in this process (Beatty, 2001; Howell, 2001). Second, it created new tensions between charisma and institutionalization, especially as personal spiritual authority clashed with bureaucratic norms of leadership, succession, and organizational control. The case of PPTI (Partai Politik Tarekat Islam), which fractured after the death of its founder Haji Jalaluddin, illustrates the fragility of institutional Sufism in the absence of charismatic cohesion (Wahyuni, 2017).

More broadly, this paper argues that the New Order's religious modernity was not simply substituting *secular nationalism* for religious traditionalism, but a reconfiguration of mysticism through the lens of state power and Islamic orthodoxy (Mujiburrahman, 2006). What emerged was neither a complete purification of Sufism nor a full syncretic resilience, but a hybrid form of Islamized mysticism, politically docile yet spiritually potent, embedded within the machinery of state-civil society relations.

This study draws on Martin van Bruinessen's foundational work, *Saints, Politicians and Sufi Bureaucrats* (Bruinessen, 2020), and extends the analysis through decolonial historiography and political sociology. It focuses on the collapse of syncretism as a political and spiritual force and the simultaneous rise of *tarekat*-based santri Islam in Java and Sumatra. By analyzing key figures, institutional transformations, and state–Sufi interactions, this paper aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how mysticism became an arena for religious renewal and political negotiation in late-20th-century Indonesia.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study employs an interdisciplinary approach to analyze the transformation of Sufi orders (*tarekat*) during Indonesia's New Order era, situating Sufism as a contested arena, spiritually and politically. As its core analytical lens, the study integrates Max Weber's theory of charisma and rationalization, Talal Asad's concept of discursive tradition, and a decolonial historiographical framework to reassess the position of Islamic mysticism within the configuration of the postcolonial nation-state.

Charisma and Rationalization (Max Weber).

In *Economy and Society*, Max Weber (2018) delineates three forms of legitimate authority: legal-rational, traditional, and charismatic. Historically, Islamic *tarekat* in Indonesia has aligned most

closely with charismatic authority—legitimacy derived from the personal spiritual aura of a leader rather than formal office or codified law.

In modern society, however, this charismatic authority tends to undergo processes Weber terms *rationalization* and *institutionalization*. Within the context of *tarekat*, this transformation is evident in establishing formal foundations, registered organizations, bureaucratic structures, and involvement in electoral politics. This transition shifts authority from the personal charisma of spiritual leaders to institutional frameworks. Thus, *tarekat* leaders are no longer solely spiritual guides; they also operate as bureaucratic managers, program directors, and political actors.

Weber's approach is particularly relevant for understanding figures such as Abah Anom and K.H. Musta'in Romly, who—as Martin van Bruinessen (2020) noted—managed their *tarekat* as both spiritual communities and rational organizations integrated into the modern state apparatus. However, Weber also cautions that such rationalization may erode the original charismatic legitimacy unless regenerated through new forms of legitimation.

Discursive Tradition (Talal Asad).

Talal Asad's (1981) concept of discursive tradition enriches this analysis by conceptualizing Islam not as a monolithic or fixed entity, but as a historically situated discursive formation shaped by practice, institutions, and power. In *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam* (Asad, 2017), he critiques approaches that reduce Islam to normative texts, emphasizing instead that what is labeled "Islam" is always constituted through diverse social practices.

Through this lens, *tarekat* in Indonesia is not merely a local manifestation of universal Sufism but Islam mediated by specific historical and political conditions. The transformation of *tarekat* into bureaucratic organizations is not solely a response to modernity, but a manifestation of the state's broader project to construct a "disciplined," "manageable," and politically non-subversive Islam.

From this perspective, Sufism under the New Order experienced structural shifts and a fundamental transformation in meaning and function. "Mystical Islam" often emerged through discursive negotiations between the state, *tarekat*, and *santri* communities. Thus, changes in Sufi practices should not be understood purely in spiritual terms, but as embedded in—and shaped by—power dynamics and discourse.

Decolonial Historiography (Arivia, 2022).

A decolonial historiographical framework challenges colonial and nationalist historiographies that have marginalized heterodox religious practices such as *tarekat*, *kebatinan*, and syncretism. Mainstream histories of Islam in Indonesia have typically been written from the perspective of normative and scripturalist Islamic modernism, within which *tarekat* are often framed as irrational, unproductive, or obstacles to progress.

The decolonial perspective interrogates these narratives by emphasizing that local spiritual traditions—including syncretic *tarekat*—possess their internal logic and autonomy in generating meaning, community, and sustainable life practices. Under the New Order, where religion was subjected to the developmentalist logic of state control, the transformation of *tarekat* can also be read as an adaptive strategy to survive within the apparatus of the modernizing state.

In this view, the rationalization of *tarekat* is not merely an instance of state co-optation but a complex negotiation and resistance strategy. In many cases, Sufi leaders did not simply submit to state logic, but rather appropriated it to expand their influence and ensure the continuity of their spiritual communities.

By integrating these three theoretical frameworks, this study offers a nuanced analysis of the changing form, meaning, and function of *tarekat* in Indonesia during the New Order. Charismatic authority is illuminated through Weberian theory; the shifts in religious meaning and practice are

unpacked via Asad's discursive tradition; and the decolonial approach deepens the broader cultural-political dimension. Together, these frameworks allow for a reading of *tarekat* transformations not merely as religious shifts, but as epistemic and political reconfigurations within the modern history of Indonesian Islam.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative approach, as the subject matter is inherently interpretive and demands an in-depth understanding of the social, cultural, and religious meanings embedded in the transformation of Sufi institutions in Indonesia during the New Order period. This approach allows for a more flexible exploration of the dynamics between religion, the state, and power, avoiding numerical data's reductionism and statistical generalization's pitfalls.

Specifically, the study employs library research as its primary method, focusing on historical discourse analysis of academic texts that examine the relationship between *tarekat* (Sufi orders), bureaucracy, and politics in Indonesia. The central text analyzed is Martin van Bruinessen's seminal work, *Saints, Politicians and Sufi Bureaucrats* (2020), which remains one of the most authoritative studies on the rationalization and bureaucratization of *tarekat* during the New Order regime. This text is not merely used as a reference but is treated as a "primary source" subjected to critical analysis to examine how *tarekat* underwent epistemic, social, and political transformations.

In reading this work, the researcher does not simply extract direct quotations but deconstruct its theoretical assumptions, narrative structures, and underlying conceptual frameworks. This analysis is then contextualized within the broader landscape of Indonesian Islam, particularly about postcolonial social change, the consolidation of religious identity, and the politics of representing mystical Islam.

In addition to van Bruinessen's work, the study incorporates a wide range of relevant academic literature drawn from Islamic studies, the sociology of religion, political anthropology, and decolonial theory. The researcher refers to key texts such as Talal Asad's (2017) writings on Islam as a discursive tradition, Max Weber's (2018) work on charismatic authority and rationalization, and recent scholarship that examines the political engagement of *tarekat* and the transformation of Sufism in modern Muslim societies.

Overall, the research employs an **analytical-interpretive** method. The researcher interprets religious and social phenomena captured in the literature through the lens of the established theoretical framework. This interpretation is not value-neutral; it is consciously situated within a **critical approach**, which foregrounds power relations as an integral dimension of religious discourse and institutional development.

The primary data consist of academic documents and scholarly texts that trace the evolution of *tarekat* and Sufi networks, as well as how these entities were positioned—or positioned themselves—within the framework of the modern state. These texts are read contextually, with attention to their content and the historical, political, and social contexts in which they were produced.

Through this approach, the study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how *tarekat* has transformed not only in institutional form but also in their social and political significance. Once operating within relatively autonomous spiritual domains, *tarekat* have increasingly emerged as public actors—interacting with the logic of bureaucracy, rationalization, and state co-optation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

From Charisma to Structure: The Rationalization of Sufi Orders Under State Supervision

One of the most distinctive features of the transformation of Sufi orders during Indonesia's New Order period was the shift from an authority rooted in spiritual charisma to one structured bureaucratically (Nuzulia, 1967). In Weberian terms, this phenomenon can be understood as the rationalization of charismatic authority, wherein the legitimacy of leadership was no longer solely based on mystical experiences or spiritual influence, but also on organizational management, administrative compliance, and institutional relations with the state (Bruinessen, 1995).

Transformations led by figures such as Abah Anom (TQN Suryalaya) and KH Musta'in Romly (Rejoso) reflect a significant shift in the form of authority within Sufi organizations—from spiritual charisma to rational and bureaucratic institutional structures. As noted by Martin van Bruinessen (2007), these leaders established well-structured organizations: they founded legal foundations, developed hierarchical administrative systems, established pesantren with official permits, and forged close partnerships with state bureaucratic networks.

From the perspective of Max Weber (1965), this transformation can be seen as a form of *routinization of charisma*—a process by which power based on personal and spontaneous charisma is redirected into more stable and institutionalized forms (Gerth & Mills, 1985). At this stage, authority, which once stemmed from an individual's spiritual capabilities and scholarly reputation—such as Abah Anom's role as a spiritual guide (mursyid) and master of *dzikir*—was formalized through foundation management, control of education, and administrative regulation of the follower community.

However, it is important to note that this process is not merely technical administration but an epistemic transformation. The rationalization of charismatic authority within these orders entailed the incorporation of modern state logic into the spiritual body of the community—for instance, by aligning pesantren curricula with national education standards, registering religious organizations legally, and participating actively in state forums and electoral politics. In other words, the transformation affected not only the form but also the operational logic and value systems of these orders.

Using Talal Asad's framework, this transformation is not simply a matter of adaptation but a reconstruction of Islam as a discursive tradition, continuously negotiated within the context of power. Within this framework, orders like TQN Suryalaya no longer function solely as exclusive spiritual communities but become key actors in the state's project to construct an Islam that is "orderly," "rational," and non-subversive to national stability (Haryono, 2022). Abah Anom, for instance, was known as a Sufi leader who supported the New Order's moral campaign and maintained a close relationship with the Golkar political party. This illustrates that these orders were not only being adapted by the state but were also actively adapting themselves to gain political legitimacy and access to resources.

As Asad (2017) argues, Islam is never free from power relations, and religious practices such as Sufism must be understood as part of a discursive field shaped by interactions between religious authority, state structures, and dominant social norms. The transformation of TQN and other Sufi orders is therefore not merely bureaucratization, but the production of a new form of Islam—Sufistic Islam affiliated with the state's agenda.

Nevertheless, in the postcolonial context of Indonesia, this transformation cannot be divorced from colonial legacies that viewed Islam as a subject of administrative control (Turner, 2005). Hence, a decolonial approach is necessary to interpret this transformation not only as state co-optation but also as a survival and negotiation strategy within dominant power systems.

As emphasized by Quijano (2021) and Mignolo (2021), knowledge relations in postcolonial

societies are always marked by tensions between the impositions of modernity (e.g., the nation-state, formal law, technocratic rationality) and epistemic resistance by local actors. In the case of Sufi orders, Abah Anom and KH Musta'in Romly were not passive in the face of the state; rather, they strategically employed the logic of the state to expand the influence of their orders and sustain their presence within modern Muslim society. The use of legal foundations, organizational SOPs, and even participation in Golkar's campaigns can be read as a form of *double movement*: accommodation to dominant systems and reproduction of Sufi values within new spaces (Mignolo, 2012).

Thus, what appears to be the rationalization of Sufi orders is actually a contested arena where charisma, orthodoxy, and survival strategies intersect within systems of power. This also explains why Sufi orders continue to attract urban followers seeking spiritual meaning, even after undergoing processes of "modernization." Charisma has not disappeared—it has been repositioned as symbolic authority recognized by both the state and society.

However, this process is far from neutral. Rationalization often implies domestication, whereby the ascetic and mystical values of Sufi orders are disciplined to align with national religious projects and development morality. In other words, the state permits Sufism to flourish as long as it remains "orderly," "organized," and does not challenge political authority. Within this framework, Sufi orders have evolved from charismatic movements into semi-state religious institutions, whose function more closely resembles social control than spiritual resistance.

Islamizing Mysticism: Sufi Orders and the Erosion of Cultural Syncretism

The transformation of *tarekat* (Sufi orders) in Indonesia has not only occurred at the institutional level but also within their theological and cultural substance. Historically, many *tarekat* operated within a transitional space between Islamic orthodoxy and local traditions—such as *kejawen*, *kebatinan*, and pre-Islamic cosmologies. However, during the New Order regime, the state's emphasis on "pure Islam" and its efforts to homogenize spiritual diversity contributed to the erosion of syncretic forms of religiosity that were previously accepted and coexisted peacefully (Abdurrahman, 2018).

The term *santrinisasi* (santrinization) in Indonesian Islamic studies refers to the transformation of religious culture from syncretic, localized forms of Islam (often labeled *abangan*) toward more normative, scriptural, and *fiqh*-oriented expressions (Bruinessen, 1994a). Within the *tarekat* context, this process is evident in the shift of Sufi communities from local mystical elements and non-orthodox spiritual practices toward integration with mainstream *santri* Islam.

This transformation cannot be divorced from the active interventions of state actors and civil society during the New Order era. The Ministry of Religious Affairs, formal Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), and religious organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and the United Development Party (PPP) systematically constructed the narrative that "true Islam" is scientific, orderly, and governed by *fiqh*. As a result, the previously fluid and mystically expressive nature of *tarekat* practices was gradually realigned with codified *shari'a* principles (Faisal, 2020).

From Talal Asad's perspective (1986), this process reflects the discursive reconstruction of religious tradition under institutional power. Islam, in Asad's framework, is not a fixed or monolithic entity, but one continuously shaped by historical conditions, authority structures, and social practices. Therefore, the "Islamization" of *tarekat* is not merely doctrinal purification but the outcome of religious meaning-making within specific political and social contexts.

The *santrinisasi* of Sufi orders has unfolded through two key processes: **First**, the normalization of Sufism within Islamic legal frameworks. Once autonomous in its teachings, Sufism has been reinterpreted through the lens of mainstream *fiqh*. Devotional practices such as *dhikr* and ritual invocations have been regulated, adjusted, and even standardized. Certain orders have been labeled *mu'tabarah* (legitimate) by institutions like JATMAN, while others deemed

eccentric or syncretic have been classified as deviant (Mubarok, 2022).

Second, the purging of local mystical elements perceived as un-Islamic. Practices associated with *kejawen*—including *semedi* (meditative fasting), ritual observances tied to the Javanese calendar, use of *jimat* (talismans), and ancestor veneration resembling animistic rites—have been systematically eliminated (Elmansyah, 2016; Hadi, 2022). In many communities, such elements have been replaced with *kitab kuning* (classical Islamic texts), *maulid*, *shalawat*, and *fiqh*-based study circles, which are considered more consistent with normative Islamic identity.

From a decolonial perspective, this process can be read as an epistemic project marked by ambiguity. On one hand, it seeks to reinforce Islamic identity as resistance to colonial legacies that marginalized Sufi practices. On the other, it reproduces the logic of colonial modernity by establishing a hierarchy between "authentic Islam" and "deviant Islam," privileging textual Islam over experiential Islam.

In other words, the *santrinisasi* of Sufi orders presents a paradox: it strengthens their legitimacy within the national Islamic framework while simultaneously eroding the rich plurality of religious expressions historically embedded in local and communal spirituality. Sufi orders that once served as inclusive, mystical, and tolerant spaces are now circumscribed by legalistic formalism and ideological conformity.

Furthermore, this transformation reveals how the New Order's project of Islamization extended beyond state institutions and formal education into the heart of Islamic spirituality. Sufi orders ceased to be purely spiritual communities and became instruments of hegemonic modern-Islamic subject formation—shaping "disciplined" Muslim citizens aligned with state-modern ideals.

As Talal Asad (1986) reminds us, religion is always a product of discursive production under conditions of power. Thus, the transformation of Sufism is not merely a theological shift but a reflection of the hegemonization of normative Islamic discourse within the matrix of state power. Sufi orders have not simply been modernized, but re-Islamized in alignment with official religious narratives.

The bureaucratization and normalization of Sufism during the New Order elevated its status in the eyes of both the state and mainstream Muslim society. Reformed Sufi orders were seen as strategic partners in national moral development and political stability. *Mursyid* (Sufi masters) were positioned as moral exemplars, integrated into religious organizations, and enlisted in national campaigns such as the Islamic Preaching Movement (*Gerakan Dakwah Islamiah*) and the promotion of *ukhuwah Islamiyah* (Islamic solidarity).

Yet this legitimization has not come without epistemic and cultural consequences. Alongside the rationalization of Sufi orders, many local spiritual practices—once organically embedded in regional Islamic communities—have been delegitimized or symbolically erased. Practices such as local-language incantations, ancestral pilgrimages with indigenous rites, *semedi* on the eve of Suro, and other Hindu-Buddhist or Javanese mystical legacies have been gradually marginalized in the name of *shari'a* purity.

This confirms what Talal Asad (1993) termed the *politics of authorized tradition*—religious traditions are never autonomous from power but are subject to classification, validation, and marginalization. The state and formal Islamic institutions have become active agents in defining the boundaries of acceptable religious discourse, including within the realm of Sufism.

As a result, the rich tapestry of *Nusantara* Sufism—expressed in diverse languages, symbols, and spiritual practices—is at risk of being reduced. Tarekat identity is becoming increasingly homogenized: Arab-centric in *dhikr*, *pesantren*-centric in education, and *fiqh*-centric in religious authority. Yet the history of Islam in the *Nusantara* reveals that its vitality has stemmed from a

creative dialogue with local cultures, not from enforced uniformity. The historical flourishing of Islam in Minangkabau, Aceh, Banten, and Cirebon cannot be separated from this dynamic interaction between *tasawuf* and indigenous traditions.

From a decolonial standpoint, this homogenization can be seen as an extension of colonial epistemic legacies—where local knowledge systems are persistently labeled as "unscientific," "magical," or "un-Islamic" if they deviate from modernist or Arab-centric frameworks. The Islamization of *tarekat* via *santrinisasi*—although often framed as a resistance to secular Western influence—paradoxically replicates colonial logic by eliminating plural meanings and experiences in favor of ideological uniformity.

As a result, local communities that once found spiritual refuge within the inclusive ethos of Sufi orders have become alienated. They no longer see their cultural selves reflected in *tarekat* rituals now shaped by *fiqh*-based legalism and detached from their indigenous roots. Affective, participatory, and dialogical spiritualities have been supplanted by formalistic, legalistic, and exclusive modes of religiosity.

Thus, the very process intended to strengthen *tarekat* has produced a paradox: expanding state and organizational legitimacy while simultaneously curtailing the spiritual pluralism that historically enriched Indonesian Islam. This echoes Talal Asad's thesis that modern religion not only disciplines practices but also simplifies the diversity of religious experience into a manageable, measurable discourse.

Sufi Orders as Arenas of Negotiation: Between Co-optation and Autonomy

At first glance, many Sufi orders may appear compliant—fully co-opted by state agendas—but deeper analysis reveals that the relationship between *tarekat* and the state was by no means unilateral (Qodir & Rosidi, 2019). In practice, numerous Sufi leaders engaged in strategic negotiations to preserve their spiritual autonomy while interfacing and maneuvering within state power structures.

Martin van Bruinessen (2007) incisively observes that organizations such as JATMAN (*Jam'iyyah Ahlith Thariqah al-Mu'tabarah al-Nahdliyyah*) did not merely serve as co-optation objects under the New Order; instead, they acted as politically active agents leveraging the space provided by the regime. At times, JATMAN cultivated relationships with political parties like PPP and even Golkar, particularly through NU-affiliated *tarekat* figures closely aligned with those parties. These affiliations were calculated—they enabled *tarekat* to gain access to resources, legal protection, and influence within religious and social bureaucratic networks (Nuesse & Parsons, 1960).

However, this relation was ambivalent. On one hand, participation in formal politics made *tarekat* appear as obedient state partners. On the other hand, the same engagement was used to expand social networks and reinforce spiritual legitimacy at the grassroots level. Internally, within JATMAN and similar structures (Umar, 2021), charismatic and mystical practices—such as congregational *dhikr*, *bai'at*, spiritual licenses (*ijazah*), and seeking blessings from *mursyid*—were preserved even as the organization presented itself as bureaucratic and formal externally.

This phenomenon can be explained through the lens of covert cultural resistance, as developed in decolonial theory by Aníbal Quijano and Walter Mignolo. In this perspective, resistance in postcolonial societies often does not manifest as open defiance but as discreet negotiation within hegemonic systems. Local actors—like *tarekat* leaders—may appear to follow state rules while simultaneously preserving and reproducing their own cosmology, spiritual values, and practices beyond full state control.

James L. Peacock's research (Johns & Peacock, 1981) similarly shows that Javanese *tarekat* never fully submitted to state political structures. Although they did not openly reject formal authority, *tarekat* leaders continued to run spiritual education systems grounded in personal master–

disciple relationships, inner experiences, and charismatic hierarchies beyond administrative rationalization.

In many *tarekat* communities, spaces for *dhikr* remain subaltern zones that provide meaning, tranquility, and spiritual solidarity beyond what state narratives afford. Even though organizations like JATMAN are integrated into NU and linked to political parties, the spiritual life of *tarekat* communities persists in characteristic forms: special nights of *dhikr*, *khataman wirid*, spiritual journeys (*rihlah ruhaniyah*), and the intimate bonds between *mursyid* and disciple that cannot be supplanted by formal structures.

Talal Asad (2003) describes such practices as part of a "habitual embodied tradition"—religious expressions that resist reduction to doctrine or institutions, maintained through routine, affective experience, and existential closeness within the community. In the *tarekat* context, this is their locus of strength: structurally modern, yet spiritually traditional.

In other words, the *tarekat*–state relationship during the New Order was not simply one of domination, but better understood as negotiation and epistemic tactics. *Tarekat* adapted superficially for continuity and expanded influence, but maintained spiritually resistant values against secular state modernism.

The case of Abah Anom (TQN Suryalaya) clearly exemplifies this dynamic. Although he maintained close ties with Golkar and openly supported New Order policies, he preserved the spiritual legacy of Sheikh Sulaiman Zuhdi, offering deeply personal spiritual education based on *dzikr khafi* and one-on-one spiritual guidance. Indeed, Pesantren Suryalaya evolved into a *tarekat*-based drug rehabilitation center—showing that a strategy of "tame outwardly, radical inwardly" can be a savvy response to a hegemonic yet opportunistic regime.

A major contribution of decolonial approaches in religion and politics studies is their avoidance of a binary between domination and resistance—between co-optation and revolt. Rather than viewing co-optation as the end of agency, this perspective provides new conceptual spaces to see how local actors—here, *tarekat* communities and leaders—still negotiate their position within a hegemonic power structure.

This resonates with Aníbal Quijano's concept of the *coloniality of power* (Gandarilla Salgado et al., 2021), which argues that even after formal colonial structures collapse, their epistemic and power relations persist through knowledge systems, social organization, and economic frameworks (Quijano, 2000). Yet Quijano also emphasizes local agency's role in rearticulating their position—not through direct confrontation, but through strategic maneuvering in available spaces.

Under the modern state—including during the New Order—*tarekat* did not simply passively submit but often repositioned themselves as active agents, repositioning strategies contextually. Walter Mignolo terms this process *delinking*: the ability of communities to disengage from dominant logics without full withdrawal. Delinking does not mean isolation but the creation of alternative spaces within existing systems (Mignolo, 2011).

In the Indonesian *tarekat* case—such as JATMAN or TQN Suryalaya—this delinking is evident in their ability to use state-legal structures (legal entities, ties with political parties, bureaucratic networks) without losing core epistemic and spiritual identity. Beneath their modern exterior, they maintain Sufi values like *dhikr*, *tawajjuh*, *bai'at*, and charismatic master-disciple relations that cannot be reduced to legal or bureaucratic rationality.

Thus, institutional transformation did not automatically entail total subordination, but could also be a productive compromise—where local actors reconfigure strategies to survive, expand influence, and even reshape discursive boundaries around what constitutes "legitimate Islam" or "formal Islam."

This understanding is vital to challenge modernist or secular liberal assumptions that view traditional religious institutions as passive entities waiting for external reform. Through a decolonial lens, we appreciate how local communities manage power spaces using their own strategies—elusive in grand institutional narratives but effective at community and spiritual experience levels.

Therefore, when observing *tarekat* like TQN Suryalaya establishing foundations, allying with Golkar, or supporting New Order initiatives, we must refrain from immediately labeling them as "defeated by the state" or "tools of power." Instead, we should ask: How did such orders retain their core even under hegemonic pressure? Here, the decolonial framework gives us the conceptual tools to understand that co-optation is not an endpoint, but a turning point in strategic negotiation and meaning-making.

CONCLUTION

This study has shown that the historical relationship between Persia (Iran) and Thailand should not be viewed as marginal; rather, it is an integral part of Asia's longstanding cosmopolitan networks that existed long before the advent of Western colonialism. Through the key figure of Sheikh Ahmad Qomi, it becomes clear that Persian Islamic values influenced not only the spiritual aspects of Thai society but were also deeply integrated into the Thai people's political power structure, visual aesthetics, and culinary identity.

Sheikh Ahmad Qomi represents more than just an individual within the Persian diaspora; he serves as a cultural agent of hybridity, creating what Homi Bhabha (1994) describes as a "third space"—a location where Persian and Thai identities intersect, merge, and give rise to new socio-political configurations, such as the Bunnag family. This process of hybridity illustrates that cultural fusion does not diminish identity. Instead, it represents a productive contamination that fosters cultural richness and innovation.

Moreover, this study emphasizes the importance of reinterpreting the grand narratives of Asian history by repositioning Asian actors—like Persia—as active and participatory subjects. In this context, the relations between Iran and Thailand can serve as a model for understanding egalitarian and non-hierarchical intra-Asian connectivity. Additionally, it provides a foundational framework for advancing the decolonization of knowledge in Southeast Asian studies.

REFERENCES

Abdurahman, D. (2018). Diversity of Tarekat Communities and Social Changes in Indonesian History. *Sunan Kalijaga: International Journal of Islamic Civilization*, *1*(1). https://doi.org/10.14421/skijic.v1i1.1217

Agustino, L., & Agus Yusoff, M. (2014). From New Order to Reformasi: Indonesian Subnational Politics in the Post-New Order Era. *Jurnal Hubungan Internasional*, *3*(1). https://doi.org/10.18196/hi.2014.0042.13-24

Arivia, G. (2022). Menumbuhkan Analisis Dekolonialisasi di Indonesia: Studi Pemikiran Toety Heraty, Kartini, dan Siti Roehana, Sebuah Refleksi Kritis Filosofis dan Feminis. *Jurnal Perempuan*, *27*(2). https://doi.org/10.34309/jp.v27i2.694

Asad, T. (1981). Ideology, class and the origin of the Islamic state. *Economy and Society*, *10*(4). https://doi.org/10.1080/03085148100000013

Asad, T. (2017). The idea of an anthropology of Islam. *Archives de Sciences Sociales Des Religions*, *180*(4). https://doi.org/10.4000/assr.29724

Asmar, A. (2020). Old Order, New Order, NU Order (Existence of NU Today). *Journal of Nahdlatul*

Ulama Studies, *1*(2). https://doi.org/10.35672/jnus.v1i2.210-216

Beatty, A. (2001). Varieties of Javanese Religion: An Anthropological Account. *American Ethnologist*, *28*(4).

Bruinessen, M. Van. (1994a). The origins and development of Sufi orders (tarekat) in Southeast Asia. *Studia Islamika*, *1*(1).

Bruinessen, M. Van. (1994b). The origins and development of sûfî orders (Tarekat) in Southeast Asia. *Studia Islamika*, *1*(1). https://doi.org/10.15408/sdi.v1i1.864

Bruinessen, M. Van. (1995). Kitab Kuning, Pesantren, Dan Tarekat: Tradisi-Tradisi Islam Di Indonesia. In *Mizan: Vol. II*.

Bruinessen, M. van. (2020). Saints, Politicians and Sufi Bureaucrats: Mysticism and Politics in Indonesia's New Order. In *Sufism and the 'Modern' in Islam*. https://doi.org/10.5040/9780755607983.ch-006

Bruinessen, M. Van. (2003). Post-Soeharto Muslim Engagements with Civil Society and Democratization. *English*.

Elmansyah, E. (2016). DAKWAH SUFISTIK DI ERA DIGITAL. *Al-Hikmah*, *10*(1). https://doi.org/10.24260/al-hikmah.v10i1.547

Faisal, M. (2020). SUSUR GALUR TAREKAT NAQSABANDIYAH DI KEPULAUAN RIAU BERDASARKAN KITAB KAIFIYAH AL-DZIKIR 'ALA THA-RĪQAH AN-NAQSABANDIYAH AL-MUJADDIDIYAH AL-AHMADIYAH. *PERADA*, *3*(1). https://doi.org/10.35961/perada.v3i1.65

Gandarilla Salgado, J. G., García-Bravo, M. H., & Benzi, D. (2021). Two Decades of Aníbal Quijano's Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism and Latin America. *Contexto Internacional*, *43*(1). https://doi.org/10.1590/s0102-8529.2019430100009

Gerth, H., & Mills, C. W. (1985). *From Max Weber :Essays in Sociology*. Oxford University Press.

Hadi, A. (2022). Peran Tokoh Tasawuf dan Tarekat Nusantara dalam Dakwah Moderat. *Ad-DA'WAH*, *20*(1).

Haryono, S. D. (2022). WACANA RASIALISME DALAM SOSIOLOGI MAX WEBER. *Jurnal Pendidikan Sosiologi Dan Humaniora*, *13*(2). https://doi.org/10.26418/j-psh.v13i2.55007

Howell, J. D. (2001). Sufism and the Indonesian Islamic Revival. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, *60*(3). https://doi.org/10.2307/2700107

Johns, A. H., & Peacock, J. L. (1981). Purifying the Faith. The Muhammadijah Movement in Indonesian Islam. *Pacific Affairs*, *54*(3). https://doi.org/10.2307/2756824

Mignolo, W. D. (2012). Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking. In *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*. https://doi.org/10.1215/0961754x-9-3-551

Mignolo, W. D. (2021). The Politics of Decolonial Investigations. In *The Politics of Decolonial Investigations*. https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478002574

Mubarok, F. (2022). Konsep Neo Sufisme dalam Pengembangan Moderasi Beragama di Indonesia. *Iktisyaf: Jurnal Ilmu Dakwah Dan Tasawuf*, *4*(1). https://doi.org/10.53401/iktsf.v4i1.73

Mujiburrahman. (2006). Feeling Threatened : Muslim-Christian Relations in Indonesia's New Order. In *Feeling Threatened : Muslim-Christian Relations in Indonesia's New Order*. https://doi.org/10.5117/9789053569382

Nuesse, C. J., & Parsons, T. (1960). Structure and Process in Modern Societies. *The American Catholic Sociological Review*, *21*(3). https://doi.org/10.2307/3708616

Nuzulia, A. (1967). TAREKAT NAQSYABANDIYAH DI INDONESIA. *Angewandte Chemie International Edition*, *6(11)*, 951–952.

Qodir, Z., & Rosidi, I. (2019). Popular Islam: A Contemporary Phenomenon in Indonesia. *Asia Pacific Journal on Religion and Society*, *Vol. 3*(2).

Quijano, A. (2021). Colonialidad del poder, eurocentrismo y América Latina. In *Cuestiones y horizontes*. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1gm019g.31

Turner, B. S. (2005). *Menggugat Sosiologi Sekuler : Studi Analisis Atas Sosiologi Weber* . Suluh Press.

Umar, A. J. (2021). Being Tolerant and Nationalist Sufi: A Social Movement Study of JATMAN (Jam'iyyah Ahl al-Thariqot al-Mu'tabarah an-Nahdliyyah) and Habib Luthfi. *ESOTERIK, 7*(2). https://doi.org/10.21043/esoterik.v7i2.12746

Wahyuni, Y. S. (2017). Refining Traditional and Modern: A Literary Study of Indonesian Sufism and Neo-Sufism from Pesantren. *DINIKA : Academic Journal of Islamic Studies, 2*(1). https://doi.org/10.22515/dinika.v2i1.299

Weber, M. (1965). *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*. Unwin University Books.

Weber, M. (2018). Economy and society: An outline of interpretive sociology (an excerpt). In *Ekonomicheskaya Sotsiologiya* (Vol. 19, Issue 3). https://doi.org/10.17323/1726-3247-2018-3-68-78