

Neo-Sufism among Modernist Muslims In Java: A Case Study of The Muhammadiyah Elites

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the views, approaches, and practices of Sufism among Muhammadiyah elites in Java, both at national and local levels. The data come from field research supported by library sources, focusing on Muhammadiyah elites as the case study. Using Fazlur Rahman's neo-Sufism theory and Max Weber's concept of social action, this study seeks to examine the perspectives, approaches, and practices of Sufism among Muhammadiyah elites. The findings indicate that Muhammadiyah elites distinguish between the teachings of Sufism and formal Sufi orders (tarekat); one does not need to belong to a particular tarekat to be considered a Sufi. Two main patterns of engagement with Sufi teachings are identified: First, Collective approach: Sufism is practiced and taught through religious channels such as majelis ta'lim (study circles), community groups, training sessions, and regular weekly/monthly gatherings. Second, Individual approach: Practiced personally by elites, emphasizing dhikr (remembrance of God), asceticism (zuhd), tawassul bi al-'amal (seeking closeness to God through righteous deeds), and reading the manaqib (biographies) of Kiai Ahmad Dahlan. The study shows that by filtering the core teachings of Sufism, Muhammadiyah has created a distinctive style of Sufi practice—retaining outward forms while adapting the inner dimensions to align with its doctrinal understanding of the spiritual path.

INTRODUCTION

In the early period of its movement, Muhammadiyah was quite aggressive in combating various forms of polytheism, which it referred to as the TBC disease (takhayul superstition, bid'ah religious innovation, khurafat baseless beliefs). The term "TBC" itself is an abbreviation of the medical term "tuberculosis," one of the most feared contagious diseases. Muhammadiyah deliberately used this term to attach a negative stigma to anything associated with shirk (polytheism) (Nakamura, 2021). Because of this stance, Muhammadiyah was often labeled as an Islamic organization that paid little attention to the inner, spiritual dimensions of Islam such as Sufism, so that the organization founded by Ahmad Dahlan came to be regarded as a successful Islamic purification movement in Indonesia (Peacock, 2016).

According to Herman L. Beck, evidence that Muhammadiyah tends to distance itself from Sufism can be seen, for example, in the case of a former rector of IAIN Pontianak, who was also a

member of Muhammadiyah, and who in 1985 once disparaged the Sufism promoted by various Sufi orders (tarekat) (Beck, 2019). Mitsuo Nakamura, in his research on the Muhammadiyah movement in Kotagede, the birthplace of the organization, found a vis-à-vis relationship between traditionalist Muslims and reformist Muslims. Traditionalist Muslims are categorized as those who still uphold Javanese principles, while the latter are categorized as Muslims who reject Javanese culture and firmly adhere to the principles of the Qur'an and the Sunnah. In his study, Nakamura referred to these two groups as "gado-gado Muslims" and "true Muslims" (Nakamura, 2021).

Many local community rituals were sharply criticized by Muhammadiyah as religious practices that deviate from Islamic teachings, such as dhayang, punden, and forms of worship considered to be shirk (polytheism). In addition, the tradition of wasilah often practiced by members of Sufi orders also drew criticism from Muhammadiyah. This is because Muhammadiyah believes that prayers should be directed solely to God Almighty, without intermediaries from pious individuals, such as invoking Shaykh 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jailani in the selamatan tradition. For Muhammadiyah, Islam is an egalitarian religion, and praying through wasilah amounts to venerating individuals (Ibn Chamim et al., 2003).

Muhammadiyah's strong rejection of TBC (takhayul superstition, bid'ah religious innovation, and khurafat baseless beliefs) cannot be separated from the role of its leaders at the national level. Around the 1930s, Muhammadiyah's leadership was largely dominated by Minangkabau figures rather than Javanese ones (Burhani, 2010; Ricklefs, 2013). They were generally intolerant toward local cultural practices, considering them to have tainted the purity of religion. This was not unique to Muhammadiyah; during those years, many educated circles from the modernist camp also rejected anything related to mysticism, including Sufism. For modernists in general, Sufism was seen as a cause of the decline and backwardness of Islam. The conflicts among Sufi orders each claiming to be the most representative were viewed as further evidence of the backwardness of the Muslim community itself. In that era, one Muhammadiyah figure who openly attacked Sufi practices was Haji Rasul, or Haji 'Abdul Karim Amrullah (Hamka's father). Among the targets of his criticism toward Sufis or Sufi orders was the Naqshbandiyya order. Beck notes that although Haji Rasul considered Sufism (mysticism) important, he still rejected the Naqshbandiyya. One of the teachings he opposed was the concept of rabita the mediation between a created being and the Creator (Beck, 2019).

However, not all Muhammadiyah figures rejected Sufism. Many of them actually promoted and reintroduced Sufism in its true sense. One well-known figure was Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah, better known as Hamka, the son of Haji Rasul. In his groundbreaking spiritual thought, Hamka championed a form of Sufism different from the popular version of his time. He called it "Modern Sufism" (Amrullah, 2018). Hamka's thought on Modern Sufism urged Muslims to ground the core values of Sufism in the midst of an accelerating process of modernization, where humanity could risk losing its essence due to the relentless advance of technology and information. According to Nurcholish Madjid, Hamka's idea of Modern Sufism was rooted in spiritual concepts such as: *tawhīd*, meaning the purest form of monotheism; personal responsibility in understanding religion: *taqarrub*, meaning drawing closer to God by deeply internalizing the true meaning of worship prescribed by religion; *akhlāq al-karīmah*, noble character and moral integrity; and active involvement in worldly social issues and life (Madjid, 2008). The Minister of Religious Affairs (1971–1978), Mukti Ali also a Muhammadiyah member once even defended Sufism due to the widespread hostility toward it among modernist groups (Beck, 2019).

Only a limited number of studies have explored how Muhammadiyah elites reinterpret Sufism within the framework of modernist Islam. Nakamura, in another of his findings, stated that Muhammadiyah tended to accept a form of Sufism that placed greater emphasis on morality. According to him, Muhammadiyah had an open perspective and concern for spiritual life. This was evident in the Sufi-like practices observed by Muhammadiyah figures, even though these practices differed from those commonly embraced by traditional Sufi adherents. Some ways of life, such as zuhd (asceticism), ikhlas (sincerity), sabar (patience), and tawakkul (trust in God), were understood as a simple way of living, almost entirely free from worldly ambitions (Mulkhan, 2000; Nakamura, 1980).

This is in line with Mark R. Woodward's view that such differences stem from the interpretation of a single set of cultural/religious axioms, including: (1) the oneness of God (tawhīd); (2) the Sufi distinction between the inner (bāṭin) and the outer (ẓāhir); (3) the Qur'anic and Sufi view that the relationship between humanity and divinity should be understood as that between kawula (servant) and gusti (Lord); and (4) the concept of the microcosm and macrocosm shared by both Sufi and Hindu traditions (Woodward, 1999). Ahmad Jainuri observed that the issue does not lie in the rejection of Sufi teachings per se, but rather in the difference between Muhammadiyah's understanding of Sufism and that of other groups. An individualistic ritual of withdrawing from the world is transformed and reformulated by Muhammadiyah into something positive for the benefit of the community. Meanwhile, mysticism that merely leads to an ascetic world is not accepted by Muhammadiyah (Jainuri, 2021).

The above literature indicates an appreciative attitude of Muhammadiyah toward Sufi teachings. In various scholarly works, the relationship between Muhammadiyah and Sufism has been widely studied, while the forms of practice and approaches to Sufism within Muhammadiyah have received relatively little scholarly attention. Therefore, this study further explores the practices and patterns of approach to Sufism among Muhammadiyah elites at both local and national levels, as well as the rationalization behind these practices.

METHODS

Methodologically, this article is the result of field research. The study employs a case study approach, which treats the subject or object under investigation as a case. A case study can be understood as a method for investigating or examining an event concerning a person or individual in an integrative and comprehensive manner in order to gain an in-depth understanding of that individual and their problems (Arif, 2022; Samsu, 2017). In this research, the "case" refers to the practices and views of Muhammadiyah elites toward Sufi teachings: the extent to which they understand Sufism as a necessity in life, and how they apply its teachings in their daily lives. The theoretical framework used in this study is divided into two categories: (1) Grand Theory The author adopts Fazlur Rahman's Neo-Sufism perspective to examine Muhammadiyah elites' views and understanding of Sufi teachings. Neo-Sufism refers to a form of fundamentalist Islam that appreciates Sufi values or Sufi teachings that are sensitive to social realities (Rahman, 1966). (2) Middle Theory The author uses Max Weber's theory of social action, which emphasizes the subjectivity of individuals regarding their actions. In this case, the author applies the type of value rationality. This theory views the actions

of individuals or groups as being based on values such as ideology, ethics, aesthetics, religion, and so forth (Ritzer & Douglas J, 2011).

The data in this study were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive analysis model, in which the analytical process is carried out simultaneously with the data collection process. Interactive analysis consists of three components: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Arif, 2018; Nugrahani, 2014). The detailed procedures of the data analysis in this study are explained as follows:

Data reduction: a process carried out by sorting, simplifying, and focusing the raw data collected from various sources. In this study, the raw data refer to interview materials obtained from several Muhammadiyah elites at both the national and local levels. These raw data consist of the views of Muhammadiyah elites on Sufi teachings and the Sufi practices they engage in within their daily lives. Data presentation: In this study, the data are presented in the form of narrative text to integrate the information collected. This presentation is carried out after the data have been reduced, allowing them to be analyzed systematically and conclusions to be drawn. Once the data were reduced, the author organized the identified data into thematic sub-sections of the study and connected them to the theoretical frameworks used namely, neo-Sufism as the grand theory and Max Weber's theory of action as the middle-range theory. Conclusion drawing and data verification: This stage constitutes the final phase of the research. Conclusion drawing is the result of data analysis presented descriptively and grounded in the research framework. After reaching conclusions, the next step is verification, both in terms of their meaning and their validity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Muhammadiyah: Sufi Akhlak Without Tariqah

In Sa'ad Ibrahim's view, the teachings of Sufism seek to make a person inwardly pure. According to him, this is related to the very term *tasawuf* itself, derived from (*tasawwafa – yatasawafu – tasawwufan*), which carries the meaning of striving to become pure. In other words, Sufism essentially means a strong effort to purify the human soul by drawing as close as possible to Allah Almighty. In this sense, Sufism is regarded as an absolute necessity (S. Ibrahim, Interview, 2024). In the context of Muhammadiyah, according to Masyitoh Chusnan, the form of Sufism accepted by Muhammadiyah emphasizes good conduct, or what in Islamic teachings is often referred to as *akhlaq*. Thus, the kind of Sufism embraced by Muhammadiyah is one that highlights the importance of cultivating noble character (M. Chusnan, Interview, 2023).

This indicates that Muhammadiyah practices Islamic spiritual teachings, such as Sufism, as a means of drawing closer to Allah, but not in a complicated manner for example, through prescribed numbers of *wirid* (chants), formal initiation (*bai'at*), or total attachment to a particular *tarekat* (Sufi order). Therefore, the style of Sufism within Muhammadiyah is often referred to as Neo-Sufism, or borrowing Khozin's term, transformative ethical Sufism (*tasawuf akhlaki transformatif*). In general, Sufism is understood as a teaching that seeks to draw the servant closer to God, and in certain stages, even to unite with Him. Hence, it is not surprising that a *salik* (spiritual seeker) or follower of a Sufi order usually undertakes various practices and stages (*maqamat* and *ahwal*) in pursuit of union with God. However, for Muhammadiyah, Sufism is practiced in a more practical way, emphasizing work ethic and *akhlaq al-karimah* (noble character) in everyday life (Khozin, 2013).

This view is reinforced by the argument of Sudarnoto Abdul Hakim, Deputy Chairman of the International Relations Division of PP Muhammadiyah. According to him, the Sufi character of Muhammadiyah lies in the moral and ethical teachings of its founders, or what has been formulated in Muhammadiyah's official document as Kepribadian Muhammadiyah (the Muhammadiyah Personality). However, Hakim argues that the manifestation of Sufism and the Muhammadiyah Personality is different. Although both emphasize spiritualism, in practice Muhammadiyah does not strictly observe Sufi teachings in the way that traditional Sufi practitioners do. The term kepribadian (personality) itself, Hakim explains, essentially refers to *akhlaq* (morality), which reflects the identity of Muhammadiyah. In the Muhammadiyah Personality, particularly in the eighth point, for instance, it is stated that Muhammadiyah members should be able to cooperate with any Islamic group in spreading the teachings of Islam. This concept is often associated with the notion of ethics in Muhammadiyah (S. A. Hakim, Interview, 2023).

In its view of *tarekat* (Sufi orders), Muhammadiyah distinguishes between *tarekat* and *tasawuf*. Muhammadiyah believes that achieving moral perfection does not necessarily require strictly following Sufi teachings by joining particular *tarekat*. Nevertheless, there is no official document or statement from Muhammadiyah that either prohibits or encourages its members to join a *tarekat*. In other words, Muhammadiyah regards an individual's spiritual depth as a personal matter (S. A. Hakim, Interview, 2023; S. Ibrahim, Interview, 2024). However, as an Islamic organization, Muhammadiyah still provides avenues for its members to strengthen their faith (*iman*) and devotion (*taqwa*) to Allah through various routine programs—such as weekly study circles, Sunday morning lectures, regular gatherings (*pengajian*) at the branch, district, and central levels, and other activities. In fact, in the history of the organization, specifically in 1995 CE, Muhammadiyah once carried out a national agenda called the spiritualization of sharia. This initiative served as a critique of the rigid practice of “pure Islam” that focused solely on legal or juristic aspects of Islamic law (*sharia*). This agenda carried two main ideas: first, the justification of the concentration on sharia and, second, the renewed interest in the spiritual dimension of Islam, which has long been cultivated within Sufi teachings. According to Amin Abdullah, as cited by Mulkhan, the concept of TBC (superstition, heresy, and false beliefs *takhayul*, *bid'ah*, *khurafat*), which once served as the basis for Muhammadiyah's rejection of Sufism, has in fact changed significantly from the earlier period when Muhammadiyah was first established. Furthermore, Amin explains, the emergence of new socio-cultural and scientific approaches to issues like TBC has also shifted the meaning of TBC compared to how it was defined several decades ago. These developments in knowledge and socio-cultural contexts demand new *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) from Muhammadiyah, which need not always be limited to jurisprudence (*fiqh*) or *sharia* (Mulkhan, 2000b).

According to Hasnan Bachtiar, a member of the Council for Cadre Development and Human Resources (MPKSDI) of the Central Board of Muhammadiyah, and author of the book *The Discourse on Muhammadiyah Neo-Sufism*, Muhammadiyah's non-affiliation with particular *tarekat* (Sufi orders) is closely related to its agenda of *tajdid* (renewal) (H. Bachtiar, Interview, 2023). In Muhammadiyah's official documents, *tajdid* or renewal is defined in two dimensions. First, the dimension of purification, which seeks to ensure that every Islamic teaching derives its authority solely from the Qur'an and the Sunnah. By upholding the principle of returning to the Qur'an and the Sunnah, Muhammadiyah emphasizes pure monotheism (*tauhid*). This dimension is applied by Muhammadiyah in matters of creed (*aqidah*) and worship (*ibadah*). Second, the dimension of modernization, which seeks to foster among Muslims an open, critical, inclusive, and progressive

outlook (PP Muhammadiyah, 2009). Such a perspective, it is argued, would be very difficult to maintain if one were bound to a particular religious group or order such as a *tarekat* (H. Bachtiar, personal communication, 2023).

The book *Tanya Jawab Agama* published by Suara Muhammadiyah also discusses the issue of Muhammadiyah's relationship with Sufism, particularly with Sufi orders (*tarekat*). Muhammadiyah holds the view that Sufism is not the pinnacle of one's faith. Faith, in its broader understanding, does not only encompass spirituality but also its implementation in practice. This is clearly stated in several Qur'anic verses such as al-Anfal 2, as-Sajdah 15–18, at-Tawbah 71, al-Hujurat 15, an-Nur 62, an-Nisa 64, and many others (PP Muhammadiyah Majelis Tarjih, 2003). However, the book does not explicitly state that Muhammadiyah distances itself from Sufi orders or prohibits its members from joining them. The book mentions:

“We can understand that Sufism which does not deviate from the Qur'an and the Sunnah, and which remains connected with noble character (*akhlakul karimah*) and correct belief (*i'tiqad*), is good. However, determining which form is truly in accordance with the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah requires careful observation... Muhammadiyah does not base its religious practice on the practices of the aforementioned orders (*tarekat*), but instead calls for practicing religion in accordance with the guidance of the Qur'an and the Prophetic Sunnah, using reason as encouraged by the Qur'an and the Sunnah. For this reason, we continually study and re-examine our understanding and practice of religion, so that it may become ever more perfect” (PP Muhammadiyah Majelis Tarjih, 2003).

This view differs from that of Zubair et al., who argue that Muhammadiyah regards *tarekat* positively as long as its teachings are in line with the Qur'an and the Sunnah, oriented toward the perfection of morality (*akhlak*) and sound creed (*aqidah*) (Zubair et al., 2023). Meanwhile, Herman L. Beck also suggests that Muhammadiyah's attitude toward Sufism and *tarekat* may shift depending on social and political contexts, the spiritual needs of Indonesian Muslims, and the stance of certain figures within the central leadership. Consequently, Muhammadiyah's policy is fluctuating. He states that anyone who wishes to assess Muhammadiyah's position on Sufism and *tarekat* must take into account Muhammadiyah's history, which shows that as long as Sufism and *tarekat* remain obedient to the Shari'ah and encourage the realization of good character, they will be accepted by Muhammadiyah. Conversely, Sufism and *tarekat* will be rejected if they become increasingly heterodox and heteropractic (Beck, 2014). In line with this statement, according to Abdul Munir Mulkhan, Muhammadiyah's commitment to the ethical and spiritual substance of Sufism is evident in its reality at both national and local levels. However, there is no figure of a *murshid* who possesses a genealogical hierarchy connected to the Prophet, nor are there stages of *maqam* to achieve mystical union with God. Likewise, there is no chain of *wasilah* as found in *tarekat*, which connects followers to local *murshid* or higher ones. Within this movement, there are figures believed to possess greater piety than the average members. Centered on such pious individuals and institutions of piety resembling *tarekat*, followers are closely bound together in a collective effort to attain God's pleasure and nearness (Mulkhan, 2000).

Interestingly, according to sources obtained by the author, although the tradition of Sufism is not formally introduced in Muhammadiyah, some Muhammadiyah elites have in fact undergone *bai'at*. However, the author was unable to obtain information on the names of those elites who had taken *bai'at*, except for a few. This phenomenon is very rarely found within the culture of an organization that is, by nature, a modernist group. As for the motivation behind such experiences,

they were largely driven by the backgrounds of some Muhammadiyah elites who were academics, such as historians, anthropologists, and others. This in fact reflects the personal openness and tolerance of Muhammadiyah elites toward Sufi practices—or, perhaps more precisely, a form of personal appreciation for Islamic esotericism, which emphasizes inner spiritual experience. Of course, such experiences are different from what is felt by adherents of the *tarekat* (S. A. Hakim, Interview, 2023).

The Sufism Approach Patterns of Muhammadiyah Elites

At the very least, the phenomenon of Islamic religiosity that appreciates Sufi teachings among Muhammadiyah elites and activists has shaped two patterns of approach: the collective approach and the individual approach. The first approach usually manifests Sufi teachings in the form of spiritual development programs in *majelis ta'lim*, communities, regular monthly and weekly study sessions, upgrading, training, refreshing, job training, member training, and so on. In this context, Sufi teachings are incorporated into those programs or activities. Meanwhile, the second approach is realized and practiced by individuals or elites themselves, by applying the ethical teachings of Sufism such as repentance (*tawbah*), patience (*sabr*), asceticism (*zuhd*), contentment (*qana'ah*), trust in God (*tawakkul*), steadfastness (*istikamah*), and others.

First, the collective approach. This can be seen in the Majelis Ta'lim al-Islam in Serang City, a study group established by A.S. Hassan, one of the key Muhammadiyah figures in Serang City who also founded Muhammadiyah in Tirtayasa, Serang Regency. There were two patterns used in his da'wah: first, through general preaching, namely through lectures, sermons, Friday khutbahs, *majelis ta'lim*, and others; second, through education, both formal and non-formal, by initiating the establishment of Muhammadiyah schools in Tirtayasa as well as in Pontang. According to the account of Manar Mas Muhammadiyah, one of his sons, in Serang City it was quite rare to find a Muhammadiyah figure who could serve as both an effective preacher and a competent educator (M. Mas, Interview, 2024).

In its early days, the Majelis Ta'lim al-Islam adopted a curriculum similar to that of a pesantren. At that time, there were two forms of pesantren: *pesantren mukim* (boarding) and sorogan (*individual tutorial*). Although MT al-Islam was organized in the form of a *majelis*, in practice it functioned much like a *pesantren*. In other words, the participants of the study sessions were essentially *santri* who also resided there, and its congregation reached a broader audience. At the beginning of his leadership of this institution, the congregation was limited and fixed, using a batch system. However, this system did not last long; by the third batch, a shift began to occur, with the congregation becoming more diverse. Many people from the surrounding community started joining the Majelis Ta'lim al-Islam, including traders, teachers, school educators, and civil servants who enjoyed religious study (M. Mas, Interview, 2024). It seems that this shift in the congregation, his migration, and his experiences in da'wah allowed A.S. Hassan to distinguish himself as both a Muhammadiyah activist and a preacher in general. Yet, it is easy to discern that the *manhaj* he practiced was that of Muhammadiyah. Even so, from the very first period until today, the background of the al-Islam congregation has been quite diverse—while most are indeed Muhammadiyah members, not a few come from Persis and NU. This is the uniqueness of Majelis Ta'lim al-Islam (M. Mas, Interview, 2024).

When delivering lessons at the Majelis Ta'lim al-Islam, A.S. Hasan would usually do so by engaging in *tadabbur* of the Qur'an reading the verses one by one, then translating them and

explaining their meaning. He would typically mention the verses first, and only afterward translate and clarify the intended meaning of their interpretation. In these study sessions, the congregation was encouraged to always draw closer to Allah by staying close to the Qur'an and remembering Him. For this reason, the lessons often incorporated teachings of *tawhid*, *tawakkul* (trust in God), *sabr* (patience), *mahabbah* (love of God), and *muraqabah* (awareness of God's presence) (Hassan, 2024). Thus, elements of Sufism borrowing Mitsuo Nakamura's term were taught within the study circles of Muhammadiyah elites.

In another place, such as within the Padhang Makhsyar Community, these Sufi elements appear more clearly. The Padhang Makhsyar Community was founded by Nurbani Yusuf, the Chairman of the Muhammadiyah Regional Leadership (PDM) of Batu City. In addition to being active in various social activities, he is also a lecturer at the University of Muhammadiyah Malang (UMM). Nurbani Yusuf recounted that he greatly admired the leadership of A.R. Fachruddin, who served as Chairman of the Central Board of Muhammadiyah from 1968 to 1990. For him, Pak AR as he was affectionately called was the last cultural *kiai* that Muhammadiyah had. Under Pak AR's leadership, Muhammadiyah grew rapidly and was able to establish dozens, even hundreds, of charitable enterprises, ranging from schools, hospitals, and orphanages to many others. The greatness of Muhammadiyah during that period was inseparable from the charismatic leadership of Pak AR, who was simple, ascetic (*zuhd*), and possessed a Sufi character. Perhaps it is this attitude that Nurbani Yusuf seeks to emulate in his current role as Chairman of the Muhammadiyah Regional Board in Batu City.

"I once met Pak AR. I saw his aura as that of a wali (saint). He served as Chairman of the Central Board for four and a half terms. During his leadership, hundreds of universities were established. That was his *karamah* as a cultural *kiai*. He was only a Group 2 KAU (civil servant)," (N. Yusuf, Interview, 2024).

Nurbani Yusuf, as the mentor of the community, explained that he always employs cultural approaches, including a Sufi approach. This is because such approaches may resonate more closely with the religiosity of Indonesian society, especially in his village. For instance, he said that a Muhammadiyah mosque should have a recognizable sign that clearly identifies it as a mosque. In addition, when a mosque recites *shalawat* before prayer times, it effectively signals to outsiders that there is a mosque there. Unfortunately, the tradition of *shalawat* in Muhammadiyah is less prominent compared to that in NU. He remarked:

"What Muhammadiyah has not been able to reach so far, I am able to reach. Just look, Muhammadiyah's da'wah has been very quiet. By doing this and that, I can reach a wider community. This means that people of various social statuses, educational backgrounds, and economic levels can all come into the mosque. We can perform dhikr together, pray together. But if I only rely on *majlis 'pikir'* (schools, universities, etc.), then only certain groups of people will be able to take part" (N. Yusuf, Interview, 2024).

In various events of the Padhang Makhsyar Community, he always accustomed himself and his congregation to performing various forms of dhikr, much like rituals in the Sufi tradition. For example, at every Muhammadiyah *milad* celebration, the Padhang Makhsyar Community always holds a kind of thanksgiving event. What is interesting about this event is its program structure, which resembles Sufi gatherings, featuring its own rituals: reciting the *iftitah* 111 times, completing the recitation of the Qur'an (*khataman al-Qur'an*), reciting *istighfar* 1000 times, reciting *shalawat* 1000 times, praying for and seeking forgiveness on behalf of Muhammadiyah scholars, and reciting the *manakib* (hagiography) of Kiai Ahmad Dahlan (N. Yusuf, Interview, 2024).

The Sufism Practices of Muhammadiyah Elites Doing Zikir

In matters of dhikr, Muhammadiyah essentially places the practice of dhikr as a personal affair that is not regulated in a binding manner for its members. As stated by Sa'ad Ibrahim, dhikr is a matter of the relationship between a servant and his Lord. This differs from Sufi practitioners, who are obliged to recite dhikr in specific numbers and at specific times, according to the order (*ṭarīqa*) they follow (Atjeh, 1993; Bruinessen, 1992). However, Muhammadiyah does provide guidance for its members in performing dhikr, based on the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah, as outlined in the book *Tuntunan Zikir dan Doa* published by the Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid of Muhammadiyah (MTT PP Muhammadiyah, 2017).

In line with Sa'ad's statement, Nurbani Yusuf explained that the dhikr practices he understands are also not those carried out with strict regulations, such as fixed numbers, specific times, or designated places. According to him, *wirid* and dhikr are good recommendations from Islamic teachings to attain tranquility by reciting the names of Allah, the Exalted (N. Yusuf, Interview, 2024).

This stands in contrast to what was practiced by Ahmad Saifuddin Hasan, a Muhammadiyah elite in Serang City. He maintained specific forms of dhikr and *wirid* practices, which he often shared with his congregation. According to his son, Manar, his father frequently distributed particular *wirid* or devotional recitations to his followers. However, he would also practice these *wirid* himself, giving the impression that they did not carry mystical elements that, in the tradition of Sufism, usually establish a distance between the shaykh and the disciple (M. Mas, Interview, 2024). Manar explained why his father had the ability to carefully select *wirid* in accordance with the teachings of the Prophet. This, he said, was rooted in his father's earlier education at the Cibeber Islamic Boarding School in Cilegon, Banten, which was culturally affiliated with the traditionalist (NU) milieu. In fact, Manar noted, his father once served as a *badal* or assistant to a kiai, tasked with writing wafaq (amulets, talismans, and the like). It is therefore unsurprising that he was quite familiar with such esoteric knowledge. His encounter with Muhammadiyah traditions, however, enabled him to develop the capacity to filter between two currents: the modernist and the traditionalist (M. Mas, Interview, 2024). One example of this was in the matter of *wirid* and *wafaq*. As Manar revealed:

On the other hand, he was also equipped with the knowledge and skills of 'ilm al-ḥikmah, such as the ability to write wafaq. It is said that the late Ahmad Saifuddin once served as a *badal* or assistant to a kiai, tasked with writing wafaq. Because of this, he became well known for his proficiency in composing such "esoteric writings" wafaq, amulets, and the like. However, his journey in Cibeber did not stop there. It continued in other places, with greater involvement in Muhammadiyah. This was what eventually made him a unique figure like NU, yet very much Muhammadiyah (M. Mas, Interview, 2024).

Thus, in the matter of dhikr and *wirid*, there are differences in practice among Muhammadiyah elites. However, these differences are not essential, since Muhammadiyah elites understand dhikr and *wirid* as Islamic practices that are encouraged not only for Muhammadiyah members but also for Muslims in general. In other words, the importance lies in performing dhikr and *wirid* as a way of remembering Allah, the Exalted, in order to attain peace of mind.

Ascetic Practice (*Zuhd*)

According to Sa'ad Ibrahim, *zuhd* in Muhammadiyah is understood as the liberation of the soul from worldly entanglements, without leading to despair toward worldly matters. It is impossible for humans to physically detach themselves from material needs such as food, drink, and other necessities. However, when a person remains mentally or intellectually bound by worldly concerns, their soul will not be able to attain closeness to Allah, the Exalted (S. Ibrahim, Interview, 2024).

This attitude is practiced by Muhammadiyah in everyday life. Thus, it is not about wanting to become a Sufi and then adopting *zuhd*, but rather, for Muhammadiyah, *zuhd* must be an integral part of a Muslim's life. Such an attitude was reflected in the life of A.S. Hasan, a Muhammadiyah elite in Serang City. As a preacher and Muhammadiyah activist in Serang, he devoted much of his life to the struggle of Muhammadiyah particularly in Serang and its surrounding areas ranging from building educational institutions, strengthening Muhammadiyah's charitable enterprises, to running the Majelis Ta'lim al-Islam. This demonstrates that he was a sincere figure in striving for the cause of Allah, the Exalted. Manar recounted that his father was a humble Muhammadiyah activist, firmly committed to his religious faith. His lifelong dedication was truly devoted to religious and social benefit (M. Mas, Interview, 2024). According to Manar, his father once served as a member of the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) of Serang City, but he only accepted the position due to encouragement from the organization and the community so that he could live more decently. However, during his tenure as a DPRD member, A.S. Hasan never owned a car, as might be expected of an official. He only acquired one after he was no longer serving as a DPRD member (M. Mas, Interview, 2024).

This selfless attitude seems to reflect the legacy of earlier Muhammadiyah figures such as Ahmad Dahlan, Ki Bagus Hadikusumo, Hamka, and A.R. Fachruddin, who were all known for their *zuhd* (Mulkhan, 2007). It should be noted, according to Manar, that Muhammadiyah in Serang City stands between two orientations: Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta and Muhammadiyah Jakarta. A.S. Hasan was among those who admired Muhammadiyah leaders from Yogyakarta, such as Azhar Basyir, Ki Bagus Hadikusumo, and A.R. Fachruddin. He gladly and often shared with his congregation stories of the exemplary character, *zuhd*, and sincerity of A.R. Fachruddin during his tenure as Chairman of the Central Leadership of Muhammadiyah. Manar recounted:

“As far as I observed, he very often spoke about Muhammadiyah figures from Java rather than those from Jakarta. He frequently told stories about A.R. Fachruddin, Azhar Basyir, and others, and this influenced his own style and example in preaching and engaging in Muhammadiyah activities. He often recounted how simple Pak A.R. Fachruddin was during his time as Chairman of the Central Board of Muhammadiyah, when he still sold gasoline by the liter at his home. That shows his admiration, and it was something that also shaped him,” (M. Mas, Interview, 2024).

***Tawasul bi al-'Amal* (Seeking Nearness to God through Good Deeds)**

One of the Sufi traditions that has been deeply practiced in the Muslim tradition of the Nusantara is the practice of *tawassul*, whose ultimate purpose is directed to Allah, the Exalted. This tradition positions a charismatic Muslim figure, or one believed to possess supernatural powers, as a mediator to Allah (Huda, 2020).

According to Sa'ad Ibrahim, the tradition of *tawassul* in Muhammadiyah is not directed toward individuals, as in the case of Sufi orders. Muhammadiyah consistently practices *tawassul* through righteous deeds. The word *tawassul* itself means “connection,” thus everything that is connected to

Allah, the Exalted. For Muhammadiyah, the means (*wasilah*) to Allah is none other than one's own deeds (S. Ibrahim, Interview, 2024). This view is closely tied to Muhammadiyah's historical tendency to avoid religious fanaticism or blind submission to the opinions of certain individuals regarded as *awliya* 'Allah (friends of God). According to Masyitoh, the position of a wali is indeed recognized as *warathat al-anbiya* ' (the heirs of the prophets), but not to be venerated. Many Indonesians, however, tend to venerate the graves of the *wali*. The principle upheld is that the living should pray for the deceased, including the *wali*. Muhammadiyah firmly rejects sanctifying or deifying anything (M. Chusnan, Interview, 2023). Therefore, the paradigm of thought that has developed within Muhammadiyah is a *non-madhab* paradigm not in the sense of rejecting madhabs altogether, but in the sense that Muhammadiyah draws upon the opinions of various scholars, selecting the best among them, and contextualizing these views for contemporary life (S. Ibrahim, Interview, 2024).

From its very inception, Muhammadiyah emerged as an enlightenment or renewal movement (H. Bachtiar, Interview, 2023). This understanding of *tajdid* was then manifested by Muhammadiyah through charitable works, raising awareness among individuals and communities by establishing schools, hospitals, clinics, orphanages, and other forms of social activism. This is also closely related to Muhammadiyah's *tajdid* (renewal) agenda (Anwar, 2018; Nashir, 2015).

In the Qur'an, the word '*amal* (deed) is mentioned 360 times. This illustrates that God places great emphasis on the importance of deeds in religion. According to Haedar Nashir, the concept of '*amal* in Islam has a very broad dimension both material and spiritual, worldly and otherworldly. '*Amal* is also connected to the functions of worship and the human role as God's vicegerent (*khilafah*) on earth. '*Amal* relates to human actions, whether good or bad. It is also associated with work or effort. '*Amal* is tied to reward, both in this world and in the Hereafter. It is always coupled with faith, and even linked to the patterns of life in this world as well as to the reward of goodness and the ticket to enter Paradise in the Hereafter. Therefore, '*amal* in Islam must be framed within righteousness so that it becomes '*amal salih* (righteous deed), and at the same time realized in conjunction with faith (Nashir, 2010)

Reading Manakib of Kiai Ahmad Dahlan

Explicitly, the tradition of *manakib* writing and reciting biographies in the sense of venerating an individual has never really taken root in Muhammadiyah, or is almost nonexistent (Jannah, 2019; Keaney, 2013). However, this does not mean that Muhammadiyah entirely rejects it. In reality, there are traditions resembling Sufi *manakiban* found within Muhammadiyah circles. The difference lies in how it is practiced compared to what is commonly done by Sufi orders. Nurbani Yusuf, mentor of the Padhang Maksyar Community, explained that what is referred to as the *manakib* of Kiai Ahmad Dahlan in their gatherings is the reading of his biography and the exemplary values he embodied during his lifetime, especially in establishing Muhammadiyah. Thus, in this context, *manakib* means reading the biography of Ahmad Dahlan to the congregation.

"*Manakib* is biography. In practice, it is simply reading stories of Kiai Ahmad Dahlan's exemplary deeds, such as when he mortgaged his wealth for Muhammadiyah. So, *manakiban* means reading the biographies of scholars in this case, KH Ahmad Dahlan. It is written down and narrated to the congregation, including his birth and important dates. As for the Prophet, that is referred to as *sīrah*," (N. Yusuf, Interview, 2024).

The reading of Ahmad Dahlan's biography may refer to the work written by Muhammad Sudja' titled *Stories about Kiai Haji Ahmad Dahlan: Notes of Haji Muhammad Sudja'*, published directly

by Suara Muhammadiyah. As is well known, Sudja' was a direct student of Ahmad Dahlan. Throughout his life, he recorded the messages and journey of his teacher from his family lineage, childhood and adolescence, his struggles, up to the end of his life. This book can be considered authentic in portraying the life of Ahmad Dahlan because it was written by his own student (Hadjid, 2018). In addition to Sudja's work, there is also the book by KRH. Hadjid entitled *Seven Philosophies and Seventeen Groups of Qur'anic Verses*, which reflects Ahmad Dahlan's teachings. These two books serve as important references for Muhammadiyah members in understanding the life and teachings of Ahmad Dahlan as the founder of Muhammadiyah.

The Puritan Ethic of Muhammadiyah Elites

In Max Weber's theory of social action, particularly action based on value rationality, an individual acts in accordance with certain values and principles. Such actions are carried out for reasons and purposes that are personally grounded in value-based convictions, without consideration of the chances of success or failure (Turner, 2009). Weber's orientation lies in the actor's motives and goals. Therefore, according to Weber, a worldview is shaped by social actions that possess specific aims, whether at the individual or collective level (Sumintak & Sumirat, 2022).

This form of social action correlates with the Puritan ethic of Muhammadiyah, which is often referred to as Muhammadiyah's form of Sufism. The Islamic organization founded by Ahmad Dahlan in 1912 is known as a wealthy organization, yet its elites are remarkably simple in their way of life. Sukidi, in his article, *Max Weber's Remarks on Islam: The Protestant Ethic among Muslim Puritans*, identifies a parallel between Muhammadiyah and the Protestant Reformists, particularly the Calvinists, regarding an ascetic lifestyle that, in certain aspects, resembles that of the Sufis. In Max Weber's terminology, there are two categories of asceticism. The first is *inner-worldly asceticism*, associated with the Calvinists, who applied ascetic principles to transform the world in accordance with their religious beliefs. The second is *other-worldly asceticism*, which is limited to monastic, yogic, or contemplative traditions and does not aim at transforming the world. Protestants, especially Calvinists, and Muslim Puritans, including Muhammadiyah, both adopted what Weber calls the mentality of inner-worldly asceticism. The Calvinists employed this mentality to reshape the external world, ultimately giving rise to the spirit of capitalism. Likewise, Muslim Puritans such as Muhammadiyah practice Islamic asceticism without withdrawing from worldly affairs. They view ascetic meaning as a driving force for engaging with and responding to a changing world (Sukidi, 2006).

Amin Abdullah, in another of his writings, also touches upon this issue. He refers to it as the Muhammadiyah ethic, which is more clearly reflected in the exemplary behavior of the movement's elites than in its written concepts. According to him, *ihsan*, *tasawuf*, and *irfani* constitute essential foundational elements for shaping the Muhammadiyah ethical model. The integration of these three produces a form of religiosity reminiscent of what Ahmad Dahlan taught: an ethic of compassion and loving-kindness. The Muhammadiyah ethic has, in fact, been articulated in an ideological–practical formulation known as the *Pedoman Hidup Islami Warga Muhammadiyah* (PHIM), or the Islamic Life Guidelines for Muhammadiyah Members. This guideline contains a set of Islamic values and norms derived from the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah, which serve as patterns for the daily conduct of Muhammadiyah members—whether in personal life, family, society, organizational affairs, management of charitable enterprises, business, professional development, national life, environmental stewardship, the advancement of science and technology, or the development of arts

and culture each reflecting the values of *uswatun hasanah* (exemplary conduct). Within the PHIM, the personal qualities expected of Muhammadiyah members are described through the categories of *muslim*, *mu'min*, *muhsin*, and *muttaqin* (Baidhawiy, 2017).

In Muhammadiyah's perspective, *akhlak* (moral character) is indeed a fundamental core value that must be reflected in the behavior of every Muslim individual. Therefore, as emphasized by Ahmad Jainuri, the slogans frequently invoked within the movement are those that embody the ideals of noble character, such as "speak little, work much" (*uswah hasanah*), "give life to Muhammadiyah, do not seek a living from Muhammadiyah" (*ikhlas*, sincerity), "enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong" (Islam), and *fastabiqu al-khairat* (doing righteous deeds). These slogans shape the character and conduct of Muhammadiyah members, cultivating a social ethos that has become the organization's distinctive hallmark namely rationality, openness to change, receptiveness, hard work, punctuality, long-term orientation, honesty, steadfast commitment to truth, patience, and other similar virtues (Jainuri, 2021).

Haedar Nashir also introduces a Muhammadiyah ethical model grounded in *ihsan*, following the exemplary conduct (*uswah hasanah*) of the Prophet Muhammad practiced by KH Ahmad Dahlan. Haedar Nashir proposes a framework of *ihsan* and noble character that includes virtues such as *al-zuhd* (ascetic restraint), *al-wara'* (scrupulousness), *al-futuwwah* (chivalrous generosity), *al-shaja'ah* (courage), *al-iffah* (moral chastity), *al-haya'* (modesty), *al-hilm* (forbearance), *al-'afw* (forgiveness), along with other essential values for living a virtuous life (Baidhawiy, 2017). *Ihsan* in interpersonal relations gives rise to prophetic social relations social interactions modeled on the noble moral values taught and exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). When social relations are grounded in *ihsan*-based virtues, Muhammadiyah is able to construct an alternative behavioral model that radiates progressive piety or *spiritualitas ihsan berkemajuan*. This is a form of spirituality that holistically integrates the values of *aqidah*, *ibadah*, *akhlak*, and *mu'amalah duniawiyah*. Such a spiritual model produces individual piety on the one hand and collective piety on the other, ultimately forming a systematic and prophetic form of religiosity.

This Puritan ethic appears to be a distinctive characteristic of Muhammadiyah elites and leaders, particularly in Java. In Malang, Nurbani Yusuf one of the Chairpersons of the Muhammadiyah Regional Leadership in Batu City explained that the mosque currently used by the community is his personal endowment, intended to support the Muhammadiyah movement by facilitating its mission of preaching and disseminating Muhammadiyah values. Muhammadiyah's da'wah has long been known for its assertiveness and strong orientation toward *fiqh* and *shari'ah*. For this reason, he has chosen more Sufistic approaches so that Muhammadiyah becomes more easily accepted by the surrounding community. These efforts include reintroducing the recitation of *shalawat* before the call to prayer for the obligatory prayers, organizing regular study circles with a Sufistic orientation to encourage closeness to God, and enlivening the commemoration of Muhammadiyah's anniversary by recalling the struggles of Ahmad Dahlan during the organization's early development. These are among the efforts he undertakes to introduce Muhammadiyah in ways that can be more readily understood by the general public (N.Yusuf, Interview, 2024).

Elsewhere, the Majlis Ta'lim al-Islam, founded by Ahmad Saifuddin Hassan one of the Muhammadiyah elites in Serang City also frequently allocates his own land as an endowment for Muhammadiyah's da'wah. For him, education and teaching are not only the responsibility of the organization but also a personal obligation. Thus, he chose a path of service by establishing the Majlis

Ta'lim in order to reach all segments of society, whether from traditionalist or modernist backgrounds. Indeed, according to the account of his son, Manar, he often prioritized the needs of the ummah and Muhammadiyah over his own family.

His dedication to da'wah did not appear to result in economic well-being for himself. Preachers of that era (the 1990s) often struggled intensely in their missionary efforts without seeking personal gain, and this affected the economic condition of their families. As a result, he was advised to migrate to the capital in order to improve his personal economic situation. According to many accounts, it was considered improper that someone of his caliber did not own a house and other basic necessities. His relocation to Serang ultimately became possible through the support of benevolent individuals (M. Mas, Interview, 2024).

Masyitoh, a Muhammadiyah elite and 'Aisyiyah activist, is also an inspirational figure for young women in 'Aisyiyah. Her path of service within the organization has been long and deeply rooted, particularly in the field of education. Her passion and dedication in Muhammadiyah eventually led her to become the Rector of the University of Muhammadiyah Jakarta, where she is recorded as the first woman to serve as rector within the entire network of Muhammadiyah universities (PTM) across Indonesia. Her lifelong service to Muhammadiyah reflects a spirit of sincerity in striving and contributing to the movement. It is therefore unsurprising that she has held various organizational roles, both structural and cultural, including positions in UMJ, the Early Childhood Educators Association (HIMPAUDI), KOWANI, and 'Aisyiyah (M. Chusnan, Interview, 2023). This illustrates how Muhammadiyah elites remember and draw closer to God: by increasing righteous deeds in this world with the ultimate aim of attaining the Hereafter. Thus, the *wasilah* (means) to God is not expressed through ritualistic religious practices, but through beneficent acts and righteous contributions for the welfare of the ummah.

In this context, Sufi practices are understood by Muhammadiyah elites as value-oriented social actions in the Weberian sense. These Sufi teachings are not directed toward material attainment, mystical experiences, or charismatic authority; rather, they emphasize intrinsic values such as moral purity, *tazkiyatun nafs*, simplicity, and closeness to God. Therefore, Muhammadiyah's Sufi practice represents a form of *wertrational* action, in which spiritual conduct is guided by value-based convictions rather than instrumental considerations. This value rationality is what shapes Muhammadiyah's Sufism into an ethical and modern form, free from magical elements and aligned with the model of neo-Sufism as conceptualized by Fazlur Rahman.

Rationalization of Purification

Abdul Munir Mulkhan, in his study, explains that the growing tendency to appreciate the spiritual dimension within sharia, or a model of Sufism, has caused these purified formal sharia regulations to become more relaxed. Thus, it can be said that this program of spiritualizing sharia marked either the beginning of Muhammadiyah's appreciation of Sufi teachings, or conversely, the expansion of tolerance toward syncretic Islamic practices (Mulkhan, 2000). This indicates that Muhammadiyah's purification does not contradict the core teachings of Sufism. According to Azaki Khoiruddin and Aulassyahied, the concept of purification in the era of Ahmad Dahlan was more about spiritualization, rationalization, and pragmatism (Khoirudin & Aulassyahied, 2023).

First, spiritualization: the foundation of Ahmad Dahlan's concept of purification was the "purification of the soul." To achieve this, Ahmad Dahlan introduced the concept of the "pure heart"

as the basis for understanding Islamic teachings. In his view, the intellect is used to attain the highest knowledge, which he referred to as the unity of life. Such knowledge can be achieved through a critical and open attitude, making use of reason as a fundamental necessity of human life, along with consistency in upholding the truth of reason grounded in a pure heart. The purity of thought, he believed, is attained by purifying the heart. A pure inner self, in turn, gives birth to an ethic of compassion (love), tenderness of heart (mercy) toward the poor (du'afa') and the oppressed (mustad'afin) in society (Baidhawiy, 2017). Ahmad Dahlan's view of religion also contained a spiritual tendency that echoed the thought of Muhammad Abduh. According to Shihab, the perspectives of Abduh and Ahmad Dahlan show similarities in terms of rational and shar'i Sufism. The orientation of Ahmad Dahlan's Sufism was the purification of the heart by remembering Allah through tafakkur (reflection), muhasabah (self-evaluation), and muraqabah (self-vigilance) (Shihab, 1998). Moreover, in his understanding, remembering Allah is practiced through prayer (shalat) as a means of cleansing the soul from base desires and attaining inner peace and purity. Therefore, for Ahmad Dahlan, the essence of religion is humanity's spiritual inclination oriented toward perfection and purity, leaving behind materialistic orientations. Practicing religiosity is the way and process of "ascending to the paradise of perfection and purification from the influence of materiality." Dahlan urged people to avoid the blindness of humanity. From here, the Sufi orientation in Ahmad Dahlan's thought emerges. He further emphasized that adherence to the sharia is merely the outer layer of spiritual obedience, which he called the pure conscience, equal to the clarity of reason (Mulkhan, 2000). The pure heart was not only the foundation of understanding Islam, but also the root of worship and the basis for social and religious life. This pure heart, he argued, is what liberates a person from illiteracy. For this reason, Ahmad Dahlan's great project of purification was not merely to eradicate "TBC" (takhayul, bid'ah, khurafat), but to foster self-reliance by eradicating illiteracy.

Second, purification in the sense of rationalization. According to Kuntowijoyo, there were three challenges faced by Muhammadiyah in its early years: modernism, traditionalism, and Javanese tradition. Modernism was addressed by establishing schools, hospitals, universities, and so forth. Traditionalism and Javanese tradition were countered through tabligh. This was used as resistance against the mystification of religion and the monopoly of religious authority by the ulama. Dawam Rahardjo stated that Dahlan realized his da'wah field was the middle class society; therefore, he presented Islam as a religion that was easy to understand and practice. This shows that Dahlan was in fact engaged in an effort of "rationalization" by eliminating what he considered bid'ah and superstition. Hence, the issue of purification influenced by Wahhabism and Rasyid Ridha's thought during Ahmad Dahlan's era is better understood as an awareness of the role of the ummah in social life, rather than merely a struggle to eradicate TBC (takhayul, bid'ah, khurafat) (Jainuri, 2021).

Third, purification in the sense of actualization or pragmatism. Dahlan, by many observers, is often described as a scholar who emphasized the importance of religious praxis, which he manifested in the Muhammadiyah movement. Thus, he is frequently regarded more as a man of action than a man of thought. At that time, the Muhammadiyah movement had a socio-religious orientation that concentrated only on the fields of education (schooling), health (healing), and community empowerment (feeding) (Baidhawiy, 2017).

Therefore, Ahmad Jainuri stated that in its early years, Muhammadiyah's frequently echoed slogan was "speak little, work much." This slogan became an emotional and popular symbol that attracted the masses. The conviction embodied in this slogan inspired Ahmad Dahlan and the entire

Muhammadiyah leadership to believe in Muhammadiyah's goals. They believed this slogan could drive the upholding of Islamic moral values. Hence, "speak little, work much" was not an empty phrase. They realized that Muhammadiyah's objectives could not be achieved merely by interpreting the values of Islamic teachings, but also required tireless hard work. In Muhammadiyah literature, Ahmad Dahlan is upheld as an example because of his sincerity, hard work, and other personal wisdom. Hadjid recorded Ahmad Dahlan's words on the importance of working and acting with sincerity, quoting the sayings of Sufi scholars: "All human beings are dead (dead in their feelings), except the scholars, namely those who possess knowledge. And the scholars are in confusion, except those who act. And those who act are all in fear, except those who are sincere and pure," (Jainuri, 2021).

Hyung-Jun Kim emphasized that Ahmad Dahlan's religious authority was the result of his efforts to reinterpret the teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith into praxis. Therefore, although he did not receive Islamic education under the guidance of renowned scholars and did not possess mystical powers as a source of traditional authority, he was nevertheless able to successfully establish Muhammadiyah as the second largest Islamic organization in Indonesia. For Ahmad Dahlan, understanding the holy scriptures could not be achieved merely by memorizing and interpreting them. More important than that was concrete action practicing the teachings of Islam so that they could bring benefit to the whole society (Kim, 1970).

Tafsir, Chairman of the Regional Leadership of Muhammadiyah (PWM) Central Java, in his study, interprets purification not always as "textualization," but more appropriately as "authentication" (Tafsir, 2022). This is in line with the Second Century Muhammadiyah Thought Statement: Through its enlightenment movement, Muhammadiyah continues to carry out its mission of da'wah and tajdid to present Islam as a teaching that fosters moderation (wasatiyyah), builds peace, appreciates diversity, upholds the dignity of both men and women, enlightens the life of the nation, upholds noble character, and advances human civilization. Muhammadiyah's commitment demonstrates the character of a dynamic and progressive Islamic movement in responding to the challenges of the times, without losing its identity and authentic Islamic references. Terms such as tajdid, sunnah sahihah, development of the times, science, technology, progressiveness, open ijtihad, freedom from the confines of madhhab, appreciation of reason, arts, and culture, are expressions that reflect dynamism, optimism, creativity, and interpretative thinking (PP Muhammadiyah, 2010). According to Tafsir, these expressions reflect the progressive character of Muhammadiyah's thought. In fact, expressions in various Muhammadiyah documents that point to dynamism are far more prevalent than those that emphasize purification (Tafsir, 2022).

Meanwhile, in returning to the Qur'an and the Sunnah, Muhammadiyah approaches it through contextual interpretation. The meaning of Sunnah itself in Muhammadiyah's thought is not understood textually, but rather through historical investigation and examination of its chain of transmission (sanad). This is in line with Fazlur Rahman's understanding of Hadith and sunnah sahihah. According to Rahman, only a small number of the existing Hadiths are truly the words and actions of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him); the majority are consensual statements (ijma') from the early generations of Muslims. In Rahman's view, the Prophet's Sunnah is better understood as a guiding concept rather than something containing absolute and specific content. He also explained that Sunnah is a behavioral term: in practice, no two cases share the exact same situational background morally, psychologically, or materially thus the Sunnah must be interpreted

and adapted accordingly. That is why Rahman emphasized the necessity of studying Hadith not only from the aspect of sanad but also from its historical context (Rahman, 1995). With this understanding of Sunnah, Muhammadiyah views purification not as textualization, but rather as authentication—seeking the authenticity of Islamic teachings that truly originate from the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Therefore, Tafsir asserts that purification in Muhammadiyah's understanding is the pursuit of authenticity.

Thus, it is quite clear that, referring to the understanding of purification as explained above, Muhammadiyah's doctrine of purification is also able to accommodate the teachings of Sufism. For this reason, some Muhammadiyah elites understand that Sufism has never been in conflict with the doctrine of purification within Muhammadiyah. In fact, some of them even encourage Muhammadiyah to become more familiar with Sufism. There are several reasons for this: first, Muhammadiyah's official documents demonstrate the organization's openness toward Sufi teachings. Although the term Sufism is not explicitly used, many equivalent concepts can be found in those documents. Second, Ahmad Dahlan's own behavior and attitude reflected a deeply spiritual approach to religion, such as his views on a "pure heart," purification of the soul (*tazkiyat al-nafs*), clarity of mind, and so on. This also shows that Ahmad Dahlan was a scholar who emphasized the importance of spiritual depth. Dahlan even asserted that adherence to the sharia was merely the outer shell of a spiritual obedience, which he referred to as a pure conscience, equated with the clarity of the intellect.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Muhammadiyah elites hold a relatively open view toward Sufism.. In their perspective, Sufi teachings are understood as emphasizing moral refinement. The stages on the path to perfection (*maqāmāt* and *aḥwāl*) in the Sufi tradition are believed to be the way toward attaining *ma'rifatullāh* (gnosis of God). However, Muhammadiyah distinguishes between *tasawwuf* and *ṭarīqah*. For Muhammadiyah, to become a Sufi, one does not need to follow a particular *ṭarīqah*. If a *ṭarīqah* is meant as spiritual training to draw closer to Allah, then Muhammadiyah has its own way through spiritual development within the framework of study circles (*majelis ta'lim*), community groups, and regular gatherings, whether monthly or weekly, at levels ranging from local branches to the central leadership.

There are two patterns of approach among Muhammadiyah elites in practicing *tasawwuf*. First, *tasawwuf* is practiced and taught through religious activities such as study circles (*majelis ta'lim*), community groups, training programs, weekly and monthly gatherings, and other similar activities. This first pattern is referred to as the collective approach. The second pattern is that *tasawwuf* is practiced and emphasized by the elites or individuals themselves. Such practices include *dhikr*, living in asceticism (*zuhd*), *tawassul bi-al-ʿamal* (seeking closeness to God through good deeds), and reading the *manāqib* of Kiai Ahmad Dahlan. This second pattern is referred to as the individualist approach.

This study expands the understanding of modern Islamic movements that integrate both spiritual dimensions (Sufi ethics) and rationality. Sufi teachings have become an integral part of Muhammadiyah's ideology. Although Muhammadiyah is not explicitly close to Sufi teachings, it nevertheless manifests them in the form of moral teachings found in its official documents, such as the Islamic Life Guidelines for Muhammadiyah Members (PHIM) and the Muhammadiyah Personality (Kepribadian Muhammadiyah). The filtering of the core elements of Sufism has enabled

the creation of a style and practice of Sufism distinct from common Sufi practices where the outward form is maintained, while the inner dimension is adapted to the understanding of Sufism embraced by Muhammadiyah. This study has limitations in comprehensively assessing whether other modernist Islamic movements also adopt Sufi-oriented practices similar to Muhammadiyah. Therefore, future research would benefit from examining comparative perspectives and Sufi practices among modernist Islamic figures, such as those in Persis, al-Irsyad, and other Salafi-oriented groups in Indonesia.

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