SUFISM AND THE CONTENTION OF VALUE IN THE PUBLIC SPACE

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Abstract: Contention of discourse does dominate the feature of our modern public space. But contention of value, while it is subtle and may not be discernable, is more essential. What appears at the surface is actually the result of what happens within. This paper discusses the problem of value contention in the public space, particularly by giving attention to the way that Sufism's value may be involved in it. It brings forward multiple premises. On the one hand, it argues against the Western proposition that public space, especially in its rational and critical form, can only emerge in the Western setting. On the other, it problematizes the so-called Islamic public space that, while it is rational and critical, becomes a battlefield like a sphere to which religious values fall victim. In this whole situation -the paper argues- Sufi strategy to stay away from public space while at the same time making an internal consolidation to preserve its ontological security, is the proper way. Sufism itself became a victim of the free public space when it is involved directly in it, especially where secularism and liberalism prevail. Various new forms of Sufism, such as neo-sufism, hybrid-sufism, urban-sufism, and the like, are not expression of its ability to adapt to new situation but a manifestation of its failure to preserve its essence.

Keywords: Sufism; public space; contention; value.

Introduction

Contention of value in an open manner has been the very trait of modern society. The fact that modern society is mostly democratic, egalitarian, and supportive of free media, including social one, is the reason why this society is prone to value contention. This contention is particularly common in the public space by virtue of it being a convenient point of convergence for individuals.

By definition, public space is that in which contention of values, and not only of discourse, takes place. In this space, every person is free to express his/her view. It is the space where everyone has the same access to information as well as the same room to speak up. There is no monopoly in this space, nor is there domination by certain groups over others.

Three forms of public space are readily observable, namely cultural, political, and religious. This work focuses on the last one without denying the possibility of there being a relationship with the other two. Religion is assumed in this work as a commodity, or else as an object of debate. Religious communities, in the meantime, are subjects that use the public space either to express their religiosity or denounce other forms of religious expression.

Apart from there being an increasing understanding among people of different affiliations or different faith, the most noticeable phenomenon in our modern public space is that of animosity. At home, as anywhere, narratives on religion, including Islam, are varied ranging from the defensive to the offensive. These narratives by no means are friendly to each other. Even the most-educated participants in the public space, especially in social media, can be annoyingly stubborn and arrogant.

The object of this study is public space as a platform of contention for religious values. On the other hand, studies on the contention of discourse are abundant and do not need to be expanded. Particular attention will be given to Sufism and its position vis-à-vis the issue at hand. Four basic premises underlie this research, a) that public space is where values, and not merely discourses,

contend against each other; b) that in the public space, Islam has been presented in at least two ways, the one is integrative while the other is disintegrative; c) that Sufism is faced with a dilemma between distancing itself from the public space to preserve its ontological security, or getting involved in it but running the risk of losing the battle; d) that Sufism has also a third option namely getting involved partially in the public space by means of association with another party such as government or social organization. In each option, the paper argues, Sufism faces an awkward situation.

Public Space and the Contention of Value

Public space is the opposite of private space or family space. Although public by its nature, this space is nonetheless not the same as -say- the space of the state, government, or society. Public space lies in between the private and social space.[1]

Public space may be defined as a space of social life where people may freely meet, interact, and share ideas and feelings in a process that leads to the contention of value. In this space, everyone has equal access to information and knowledge, just as everyone has the same authority to express his/her view. Free conversation is one of the main traits of this space. Because it is a shared and common arena, in this space, all participants usually discuss topics of common interests such as the problem of norm, value, social welfare, social habit, and attitude.

Conversation in this space is open and free. People talk to each other, not in the ways neighbors would talk to their fellow neighbors; traders to their customers; leaders to their subjects; teachers to their students; or parents to their children. The level of freedom in this space is so high that lawlessness is often felt as the only law in it. Moral standard cannot be set properly. The only etiquette that may be found in it is the sense of self-control.

By this standard, Jürgen Habermas is correct in saying that public space is the product of liberal culture. To be more precise, it is an extension of the 16th-century European concept of the nation-

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[1] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Translation Thomas Burger (Massachusetts: Cambridge, 1989), xi

state.[2] The liberal freedom that the Renaissance and Reformation philosophers taught has the greatest share in the way modern public space is formed. Liberal values have found their expression not only in the Europe-inspired nation-state and modern market economics but also in the public space.[3]

Dale F. Eickelman agrees with Habermas that the basic concept of liberal public space came from Europe. But he differs from him in identifying the period when this phenomenon emerges. For him, the notion of public space came into existence in the 18th century at the hand of Immanuel Kant.[4] Eickelman also notes that Kant and Habermas have a lot in common; the fact that might help the latter to believe that it is the former that pioneered the idea of public space and not the 16th philosophers. For Eickelman, while Kant believes that the main ingredient of public space is "critical, rational and free debate", for Habermas, it is "critical, rational and free opinion".

The difference between "debate" and "opinion" is important. The word "debate" implies that there are parties involved, while the word "opinion" means otherwise. This is to say that while for Kant, public space is heterogeneous, for Habermas, it is homogeneous. In Kant's model, there may be a dialogue in the public space, while in Habermas's there cannot. What is expected from Habermas's model is the process of indoctrination, rather than dialogue, in this space. Habermas's model may be seen as part of ideological propaganda to subdue non-European cultures under the guise of freedom and liberalism. It is for this reason that Habermas's philosophy is readily classified as Euro-centric. Kant's philosophy was Euro-centric too, when dealing with issues such as the concept of reason.

Euro-centrism is common in European philosophy including in the studies related to public space. John Dewey, for instance, in his *The Public and its Problems*, distinguishes between modern Europe and primitive others. He contended that secular liberalism has changed the West and made it superior to the rest. Other cultures and

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[2] Michael E. Gardiner, "Wild Public and Grotesque Symposiums: Habermas and Bakhtin on Dialogue, Everyday Life and the Public Sphere", *The Sociological Review* 52, no. 1 (2004). https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.2004.00472.x.

[3] To some extent, the idea of public space resembles the concept of civil society. See Dale F. Eickelman, "Foreword: The Religious Public Sphere in Early Muslim Societies", in Miriam Hoexter, Shmuel N. Eisenstadt and Nehemia Levtzion (eds.), *The Public Sphere in Muslim Societies* (New York: SUNY, 2002), 2

[4] Ibid.

traditions are left behind due to their belief in myth. Dewey does believe in religious values. But paradoxically, this value is not originated in religion. It is born out of men's own intellectual exercise.[5]

Interestingly, unlike Kant dan Habermas, Dewey accepts the idea that civilizations other than the West may produce public space distinctive to the Western ones. In his discourse, the idea of public space has nothing to do with society being modern or traditional. Any society, as long as it is a form of collectivity, can have public space.[6]

This egalitarian aspect of Dewey's philosophy receives warm support from the likes of Shmuel N Eisenstadt and Wolfgang Schluchter. Based on Dewey, the two developed a premise that culture is the product of dynamic interaction between various elements of society. As long as there is an interaction, culture -and consequently public space- will emerge.[7] Within this spirit, Eisenstadt and Schluchter rejected Euro-centrism. Unfortunately, soon after that, they were trapped in a Euro-centric attitude when they accepted the belief that liberal secularism should be at the center of public space instead of religion.

In the final analysis, therefore, most Western liberal-secular thinkers accepted Euro-centrism, according to which religion is the occult of non-European tradition and has no room in modern society.[8]

This line of argument is commonly found in the field of philosophy and in other areas as well. While accepting the notion of religion, Emile Durkheim, the father of the modern sociology of religion, believes that it functions only in traditional societies to harvest solidarity.[9] Peter Berger, on his part, argues that religion is the "social construction" of man, hence having no metaphysical origin.[10] While Jonathan Z. Smith contends that religion is the product of

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[5] John Dewey, *The Public and its Problems* (New York: Henry Holt, 1927), 110.

[6] Ibid., 33.

[7] Shmuel N. Eisenstadt and Nehemia Levtzion, "Introduction", in Miriam Hoexter, Shmuel N. Eisenstadt and Nehemia Levtzion (eds.), *The Public Sphere in Muslim Societies* (New York: SUNY, 2002), 9.

[8] John Bramble, *Modernism and the Occult* (New York: Palgrave, 2015), 1.

[9] Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, Translation Joseph Swain (UK: The Free Press, 1965).

[10] Phillip E. Hammond, "Peter Berger's Sociology of Religion", *An Interdisciplinary Journal* 52, no. 4 (1969).

history, or the "product of man's search to understand himself and his surroundings".[11] Smith sometimes went further by saying that religion existed only in the mind of academicians as a model of analysis to apprehend man's position in society.[12]

This discourse of anti-religion, as it were, can be expected from Max Weber, known for his "disenchantment" thesis that religion will perish vis-à-vis modernity.[13] The list of Western scholars that support the "disenchantment" thesis is very long and includes the likes of John Rawls, Michael Walzer, Ernest Gellner, Charles Taylor, Bernard Lewis, Samuel Huntington, and many others.

The logical consequence of this phenomenon is that, as Habermas noted, "men of religion would find it difficult to practice their religion and reconcile their religious belief with civil commitment".[14] For Talal Asad in the meantime, "to live in modern time is difficult not only because religion has been secularized but also because science is no longer attached to religion.[15]

Souleymane Bachir Diagne is more blatant in his explanation of this consequence, particularly as far as Islam is concerned. For him, "liberal secularism is a deliberate attempt to distance Islam from society.[16] Distancing Islam—or any religion for that matter—from society means that religion borrowing Habermas, "is not supposed to get involved in value-production processes, reflect the public inclination or facilitate agreements among people in society."[17]

The dichotomous ideals of liberal secularism that alienated religion from the public space should be dealt with seriously, not only because these views represent a predicament in the social study of

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[11] Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982).

[12] Ibid.

[13] Abdul Kadir Riyadi, "Weberian Sociology and the Portrait of Contemporary Sufism Study", *Teosofia: Indonesian Journal of Islamic Mysticism* 9, no. 2 (2020). DOI: 10.21580/tos.v9i2.7864.

[14] Jürgen Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere", *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (2006). https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0378.2006.00241.x.

[15] Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 206.

[16] Souleymane Bachir Diagne, "A Secular Age and the World of Islam", in Mamadou Diouf (ed.), *Tolerance, Democracy and Sufis in Senegal* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2013), 36-52.

[17] Hedi, "Agama dalam Masyarakat Post-Sekularisme Jürgen Habermas", *Pangkaran* 3, no. 2 (2019). DOI: https://doi.org/10.14421/panangkaran.2019.0302-07.

religion but also because they have become the predominant school in the field.

Against this controversy, a group of scholars comes up with a contending thesis proposing that alienating religion from public space has never been a success story. Jose Casanova, for instance, by dealing with Islam, proves that this religion is strong in politics and economics. Its contribution in these areas, and in others as well, is too apparent to negate.[18] With its own standard and qualification, Islam created a unique form of public space emphasizing more on values as the basis of social interaction. Islam is not a private religion, he would argue. In the realm of politics, it presented itself as an alternative form of governance, while in the realm of economics, it brings a moral standard in dealing with wealth, welfare, and justice.[19]

Paula G. Pinto, on his part, speaks of what he calls "Islam as a public religion", showing that this religion has never been private and exclusive. The strength of Islam lies in its ability to inculcate a sense of identity not only individually but also collectively.[20]

John Esposito is in agreement with Pinto that Islam has the capacity to form and reform society. But while Pinto tends to look at this capacity in terms of reforming society from above, Esposito looks at it from below. Esposito is interested in the way Muslims "Islamize society" by means of social media.[21]

All this is to say that the notion of religion being disenchanted is not always true. The truth is quite the reverse; religion is not only capable of staying intact within modernity but also well-equipped, as in the case of Islam, with sufficient ingredients.

On this basis, the academic study of religion should not problematize whether society needs religion or not or whether religion can survive or not. It should rather focus on how religion functions socially. Such a study should then go further by

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[18] Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994).

[19] Ibid., 5-6.

[20] Paulo G. Pinto, "The Limits of the Public: Sufism and the Religious Debate in Syria", in Armando Salvatore and Dale F. Eickelman (eds.), *Public Islam and the Common Good* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 181-204.

[21] John L. Esposito, "Introduction: Modernizing Islam and Re-Islamization in Global Perspective", in John L. Esposito and François Burgat (eds.), *Modernizing Islam: Religion in the Public Sphere in Europe and the Middle East* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 2.

investigating the values of religion and how they work in society. Some steps may be taken toward that end such as a) exploring the basic concept of value in religion, b) how does religious value inform individual and collective action, c) how does action inform social interaction, d) how does social interaction shape social system, culture, and tradition. In this whole framework, religion is at the top of the hierarchy, producing, controlling, and determining the social system.

An approach such as this is idealistic. It stands in direct opposition to the liberal-secular approach, which negates the social function and role of religion. Within this idealistic approach, other social factors such as culture, politics, and economics may play their role as complementing factors. This is not to say that this approach is theocratic. It is rather to say that according to this approach, society, including public space, must not be value-free.

Two Faces of Islam in the Public Space
a. *Premises on the Contention of Value*

Contention in its various form may take place whenever there is an action that provokes a reaction. An action that stimulates reaction is normally the controversial one or that transgresses rules and regulations or that suppresses or oppresses others.

Tension or contention between values can happen when one imposes his/her values upon others. Differences in values and failure to respect other values may also cause tension. Misunderstanding other people's values and the misconduct resulting in it is the major cause of tension in society. Proper conduct toward values is therefore required if harmony is to prevail.

In modern times, as in any period of human life, each individual has values to uphold. No individual is neutral in this regard. In the case where people lose their sensitivity to respect other values, tension is easily burnt out.

Contention may be defined as "an act of competing in order to win something or to achieve a certain position". Tension in the meantime may be defined as "an act of refuting certain things such as culture, tradition or values resulted in an unrest". The contention is another form of tension. Both may lead to conflict depending on its level and circumstances. Competition is, however, not the only factor of contention, just as refutation is not the only factor of tension.

Scholars try to explain this by referring to at least three forms of contention and consequently tension.

First, political contention. The generally accepted theory on this is that political contention and also tension happens because of competition to win people's votes. A contention of this sort may also take place because of misunderstandings on certain political agendas and ideologies. In a liberal democracy, freedom and transparency are the main values that should be upheld. The prevalence of the opposite values in traditional societies and their complementing values of authoritarianism and patriarchy may spark conflict. This difference between modern and traditional values, according to Ernest Gellner, in fact, represents the main reason why Western and Islamic societies clash against each other. For Gellner, Muslim societies do not acknowledge freedom or respect differences. Muslim public space has never been free, rational, and critical.[22] Islam rejects the basic concept of society because Islam is theocratic, whose teachings emanate from God rather than from society.[23]

The second form of contention is a media-based one, the explanation of which may be found in the theory of communication. Here, public space is understood as having to do with the increase in the quality of education and the advent of communication media.[24] The media offers faster means of communication. Religious values are also disseminated in a faster mode through it. Individuals are becoming free-agent to create their own space and get involved in it. They can invent their own authority and exercise it often at the expense of the public interest. Where individuals are free and authoritative, religion loses its grip and power.

The third form of contention finds its explanation in the theory of public philosophy. Three premises are introduced by this theory, namely, a) the pluralist premise, b) the cultural cosmopolitanism

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[22] Bryan S. Turner, "Orientalism and the Problem of Civil Society in Islam", in Asaf Hussain, Robert W Olson, and Jamil A. Qureshi (eds.), *Orientalism*, *Islam and Islamists* (Vermont: Amana Book, 1984), 25-27.

[23] Ernest Gellner, *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and Its Rivals* (England: Penguin, 1994), 64, 71.

[24] Reinhard Schulze, *A Modern History of the Islamic World* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

premise, and c) the normative premise.[25] This last one will be dealt with in the last section of this paper.

The first premise implies that the ontological difference in society results naturally in the variety of public spaces. This variety results in there being a distinctive discourse, narratives as well a set of value systems. A society with a strong religious and moral sense will uphold religious and moral values. And the opposite is quite true. Tradition and customary habits are also determinant in this context and are capable of creating traditional values such as parent-child ties, person-to-person relations, deference to authority, and the like.

The distinctive nature of the social system in each society illustrates the heterogenous character of social interaction. The secular Western society, for example, will consequently interact with one another within the framework of secular ideals. So also with non-secular society. In most Islamic societies, for instance, public space is built and constructed upon the foundations of Islamic values.[26]

The second premise in meantime implies that individual and collective actions are determined by the prevailing norm and value in society. This premise stands in sharp contrast to the mainstream Western proposition whereby it is believed that norm and value, instead of producing social processes, are the product of these processes. The fact that each society follows norms and values, is enough to argue that society is dependent upon value, and not vice-versa.

A concrete example of religious values having a function in producing, even controlling, social action is that of Islam's *amr ma'rūf nahy munkar* (enjoining right and forbidding wrong). Michael Cook wrote a marvelous work on this showing that across Islamic history, Muslim scholars have been involved in dealing with social issues by virtue of this concept.[27]

Dale F. Eickelman and Armando Salvatore, on their part, attempted to prove the social function of Islamic value by investigating the concept of welfare (*maṣlaḥa*) as a tool to realize the

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[25] Michael J. Sandel, *Public Philosophy: Essays on Morality in Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

[26] Karin Willemse and Sylvia I. Bergh, "Struggles over Access to the Muslim Public Sphere: Multiple Publics and Discourses on Agencies, Belonging and Citizenship", *Journal of Contemporary Islam* 10 (2016). https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-016-0367-1.

[27] Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

common good.[28] John L. Esposito is also interested in doing the same by arguing that Islam's political values prompted the reform movements across the Islamic lands.[29]

The list of studies along this line is quite long. Among these is Robert W. Hefner's works on aspects of Muslim life in Indonesia; Michael Peletz's study on Islam in Indonesia, Malaysia, and South East Asia; Ahmed Rashid's research on Islamic resurgence in Central Asia; the works by Colin Clarke, Steven Vertovec and Ceri Peach on the history of Islam in Europe; research by Tarik Modood and Pnina Werbner on Islam and multiculturalism in the "Blue Europe"; the works by Stefano Allievi and Jorgen S. Nielsen on Euro-Islam; Alev Cinar's idea concerning the dynamics of Islam, modernity and secularism in Turkiye, and many more.

b. The Other Side of Religion

The social function of religious value, it is important to note, is not always constructive. It may also be, especially when understood wrongly, destructive. It is here that the two faces of religion in society occur. Religious values connote not only solidarity, harmony, and accord but also, when interpreted incorrectly, disintegration, conflict, and discord. Hence, in conflict resolution study, religion is upheld as one of the three sources of conflict apart from economy and power.[30]

The involvement of religion among the contending values in society is, therefore, not always on a positive note. Religion itself has nothing to do with the conflict. But some factors dragged religion to become seemingly part, and even source, of contention such as the conflicting ways of understanding the messages of religion, blind fanaticism, and using religion for political purposes.

Put together, these factors may form a tradition or school of thought that compete with one another for dominance or at least for recognition. It seems legitimate to argue that each school of thought in Islam -be it theological, jurisprudential, or philosophical- has some sort of fanaticism that contributes to conflict in Islamic societies. Historically speaking, the conflict between various schools of thought in Islam is too apparent to repudiate. In theology, there were the

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[28] Eickelman dan Salvatore, "Muslim Publics".
[29] John L. Esposito, "Political Islam and the West", *JFQ Forum* Spring (2000), 49-55.
[30] Peter Coleman, Morton Deutsch, and Eric C. Marcus (eds.), *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000).

Khawarijites, the Shi'ites, the Mu'tazilites, and the Sunnis. While in jurisprudence, there were the Hanafites, the Malikites, the Shafi'ites, and the Hanbalites.

What is noticeable about these schools is that they form not only distinctive discourses and intellectual traditions but also groups and communities independent of each other. These communities develop their own value system emanating from the teaching of their school, each claiming to be the most authoritative.

Almost all of these groups wrap their discourse, tradition, and value system in normative vocabularies, hence creating a dividing line between one another. This has been -and is still- the main character of schools of thought in Islam across history.

The contemporary Islamic schools of thought, however, bear different names. But the nature of contention and tension remains the same. There are for instance the Salafis, Islamists, anti-Islamist, Post-Islamist, Jihadists, Takfirists, and the like. Sadek Hamid maintains that these groups are not only different in their cover but also in their content. They are socially—and indeed intellectually—polarized not only because of their different method of understanding religious texts but also because of their "distinctive collective action". [31] This collective action has something to do with the values they uphold such as the value of sacrifice for the sake of religion and the value of "rejoining good and forbidding wrong". In their effort to implement these values, some of these groups committed violence and terrorism.

Esposito, in his study, speaks of groups such as the conservative, neo-traditionalist, reformist, and secular. At the same time, John O. Voll uses the terms adaptationist, conservative, individualist, and fundamentalist.[32] Tariq Ramadan speaks of scholastic traditionalism, literal Salafis, reformist salafi, reformist-political salafi, liberal rationalists, liberal reformists, and the Sufis.[33]

In a more concise manner, Khaled Abou el-Fadl, mentions only three groups, namely the Islamist-traditionalist, the secular, and the

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[31] Sadek Hamid, *Sufi, Salafis and Islamists: The Contested Ground of British Islamic Activism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016), 9.

[32] John Obert Voll, *Islam: Continuity and Change in the Modern World* (UK: Routledge, 2019).

[33] Tariq Ramadan, *Islam and the Arab Awakening* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

moderate.[34] The first holds the view that Shariah is an all-encompassing system of life, the source of all social and political values. The second is the total opposite of the first, which promotes the idea that the Quran, or else the Shariah, is not the sole source of human values. Western civilization brought forth comprehensive values such as freedom, equality, and justice that ultimately changed the course of human life.

The third group, in the meantime, stands in between, as might be expected. Its position is often problematic as it has no principles to hold. It adopts the idea that democratic values such as freedom, equality, and justice are not in contradiction with Islam. Human rights values are also the same values that Islam teaches.

The contention of values between these different groups is already apparent. Armando Salvatore and Dale F. Eickelman argue that such contention is represented by the "secular and religious Muslims", especially on the issue of democracy and *Khilafah*.[35] The Salafis are also fond of fighting the seculars to purify the doctrines of Islam from -in the words of Henri Lauziere- "the ironies of modernity".[36]

All this is to say that public space in Islamic society is conflictual or dynamic, to say the least. It is the platform for different values to compete. Although there is an abiding and universal value in Islam, such as the value of the Oneness of God, there are nonetheless complementary values that Muslims agree to disagree.

There are at least three forms of contention in the Islamic public space, namely a) contention among Muslims on their respective values, such as between the secular and religious Muslims, b) contention within one single Muslim group, and c) contention between Muslims and non-Muslims.

In the first instance, the contending parties still share common values emanating from Islam, whatever we may call it. But their "different modes of thought", borrowing Seyla Benhabib, made them

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[34] Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Selamatkan Islam dari Muslim Puritan*, Translation Helmi Mustofa (Jakarta: Serambi, 2005).

[35] Armando Salvatore and Dale F. Eickelman, "Preface: Public Islam and the Common Good", in Armando Salvatore and Dale F. Eickelman (eds.), *Public Islam and the Common Good* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 1. See also Ainur Rofiq al-Amin, *Membongkar Proyek Khilafah Ala Hizbut Tahrir di Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2012), 2.

[36] Henri Lauziere, *The Making of Salafism: Islamic Reform in the Twentieth Century* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2016).

set apart from one another.[37] This means that a universal religious value does not guarantee that tension or contention will not happen. On the practical and pragmatic level, people of the same religious background may be involved in what Carool Kersten calls "the constant contest for society and ideas".[38]

In the second instance, the contention is rather subtle. From the outset, such contention may not be threatening. But if it persists, it may endanger the future of the group. In Indonesia, some organizations collapsed because of their inability to compete externally and manage the conflicting values internally. The demise of the Indonesian Muslim Scholar Association (ICMI) is a clear case in point.

In the final instance, the tension is too direct to handle. The cause of many unstoppable feuds between various people of faith is a fundamental difference in their religious beliefs. This kind of tension is dangerous if it continues. In Indonesia as in many other parts of the Islamic world, feuds between Muslim and Christian debaters are rampant on Youtube channels.

In many of these cases, public space resembles a battlefield where participants onslaught each other. It is identical to the infringement of not only individual and collective dignity but also of value itself. In a threatening situation such as this, refraining from social involvement becomes important. This is the essential ingredient of Sufism to which we are now turning.

Sufism: The Silent Value in the Public Space

It has been mentioned above that the public philosophy has three premises in the public space, two of which have previously been discussed. In this remaining passage, the third one will be dealt with, which is the premise of normativity. This premise emphasizes the notion that norm and value represent a structure upon which meaning is constructed by means of human action. This premise is important as a tool to understand the position of Sufism as a form of structure.

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[37] Robert Asen, "Seeking the Counter in Counterpublics", *Communication Theory* 10, no. 4 (2000), 426. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2000.tb00201.x.
[38] Carool Kersten, *Islam in Indonesia: The Contest for Society, Ideas and Values* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

There are two variables in this premise. First is the idea that norm, like value, is a structure. Second is the idea that it is around structure that meaning is constructed by means of human action. Within this scheme, norm and value produce action, while action produces meaning. The reverse is not preferred whereby, as many Western scholars argue, meaning produces action, and action produces norm and value. If that is the case, then it would mean that norm and value are "false certainty", borrowing Ludwig Wittgenstein. They are relative and subjective because individuals would find no certainty to refer to as grounds for their actions.

As part of religion, the task of Sufism is to manufacture value. Its doctrine is not only theoretical but also practical. The concept of asceticism (*zuhd*), for instance, is not only about directing one to have spiritual consciousness. It is also about guiding one to have an ascetic practice.

In the modern study of Sufism, an approach such as this is not common. A study by Abdul Hamid el-Zein for example employs an anthropocentric approach and assumes that Islam, Sufism included, has no value in itself. Value in religion is imported from the outside. In his words, religious value is "a form of articulation concerning the structural relationship in the religious community and is the product of relational processes in society".[39]

It may be understood, therefore, that value is not inherent within religion. It is dependent upon social processes to take place. Without these processes, there could be no value. It implies that Islam, and any religion for that matter, has no power to influence human action, let alone to produce meaning. By virtue of religious value being the result of social processes, it has consequently no absolute character in it. It is relative and subject to change following the changing character of these social processes.

Values furthermore are seen as interrelated and interdependent. No value can stand on its own without being influenced and shaped by other values. In concrete terms, an anthropocentric approach looks at all values as equal, regardless of their sources. Religious values are therefore the same as -say- secular ones.

In cultural study, an approach such as this is helpful as a tool of analysis. But in religious studies, it stands the risk of misapprehending

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[39] Dale F. Eickelman, "A Search for the Anthropology of Islam", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 13, no. 3 (1981), 363.

religious facts and phenomena. What is needed is therefore, the more normative or idealistic approach that appreciates the idealistic dimension of religion; an approach that acknowledges its inherent value and at the same time helps to understand its relationship with other values in society.

In social science, Dina Le Gall has tried to do just this. She investigates the historical dynamics of the Sufis and shows how it shaped the way the Sufis act in society. She focuses on a wide range of issues to showcase her theory including the geopolitics of the Sufis, their mode of communication, their travel, religious practices, the way they teach, modes of thinking, patronage, the way they relate to the past, the relationship between the murid and murshid, and also the relationship with other Sufis.[40]

In this whole exercise, Le Gall is guided by the idea that Sufism as a source of value does produce action, and that action in its turn, produces meaning. Sufism is not dependent upon social processes, but these processes are in fact dependent upon it. That is not to say, that the values of Sufism are not related to other values. In its operation, these values are in continuous interaction with others, but the values of Sufism remain grounded as the essential anchorage in Sufis' life.

In certain cases, these seemingly absolutistic values produce an exclusive set of actions. Indeed, many Sufis are exclusive in the sense that they created their own public space as a means of delivering their message to their fellow disciples.[41] Although a great deal of Sufis are social and political activists, traders, teachers, lecturers, and public figures, their basic nature remains exclusive. Their exclusivity is, however, meant to protect their values against external intruders.

The life of Izzuddin b. Abdul Salam can serve as the clearest example of Sufi's exclusivity.[42] Another example is the Chistiyah Sufi Order in India, known for its non-political approach.[43] Then Burhaniyah Sufi Order in Egypt, which according to Pierre-Jean

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[40] Dina Le Gall, *A Culture of Sufism: Naqshabandis in the Ottoman World* 1450-1700 (New York: SUNY, 2005).

[41] See for instance, Alexander Papas, *Handbook of Sufi Studies* (Holland: Brill, 2021).

[42] Muḥammad al-Zuḥaylī, *al-ʿIzz b. ʿAbd al-Salām* (Damaskus: Dār al-Qalam, 1992).

[43] J.E.A Johansen and Muhammad Talib. 2022. "Sufism and Politics", *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Islamic World: Oxford Islamic Studies Online*, accessed on February 2022.

Luizard, follows a non-involvement approach in the public space to preserve its orthodoxy.[44]

The fact is that having such exclusivity has kept the Sufis away - to a large extent- from social distraction. What is apparent is that the Sufis are among the few to have succeeded in preserving their values against the onslaught of liberal secularism.[45] The structure that keeps them together is built upon the uniformed values developed over a long period of time, values well-known in the teachings of Sufism such as repentance, abstinence, renunciation, poverty, patience, and gratitude. This uniformed value is meaningful to maintain what Charles Taylor calls "collective ontological security".[46]

When it comes to social and public involvement, the Sufis remain protective of this ontological security. If they have to get involved in public space, they will do so in an indirect manner. Thus, since the 18th century, when the Sufis began to be more open, they get active in social life by means of affiliation with other organizations such as madrasas and *fiqh* schools of thought. Some Sufis would participate in the fight against the colonials by way of cooperation with external authorities such as tribal leaders, as in the case of the Qadiriyah Order in Algeria and the Sanusiyah Order in Libya.[47] During the Ottoman Empire, they are associated with traders, armies, and soldiers to play their political and social roles.[48]

In the modern context, where life becomes more complicated, the Sufis adopted the same strategy with a certain form of risk to pay. In an urban context, they are affiliated with the *futuwwa* organization to reach out to the youth.[49] Their involvement in this respect is still limited to the fields of education and preaching (*da'wa*) during religious gatherings in places of worship.[50] They are apparently not

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[44] Pinto, "The Limits of the Public". 187.

[45] See for instance, V.V.S. Manian, *Sufism and Secularism* (New Delhi: Aayu Publications, 2022).

[46] Charles Taylor, "Modernity and the Rise of the Public Sphere", *The Tanners Lectures on Human Values* 14 (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1993), 203-260.

[47] Fait Muedini, "Sufism and Anti-Colonial Violent Resistance Movements: The Qadiriyah and Sanusiyah in Algerian and Libya", *Open Theology* 1 (2015), 134-145.

[48] Nehemia Levtzion, "The Dynamics of Sufi Brotherhood", Editor Miriam Hoexter, Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, Nehemia Levtzion (eds.), *The Public Sphere in Muslim Societies* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002), 110.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid.

active in public debates on issues relating to public interest, such as the issue of public order, common good, religious tolerance, conversion, corruption, democracy, and the like.

In other cases, there are Sufis that decided to get involved socially in the public space directly and in a total manner. From here, three strategies of Sufi involvement in the public space may be discerned. First, the strategy of distancing themselves from the public space; second, the strategy of partial involvement by associating themselves with other groups; third, the strategy of total involvement.

The first option implies that the Sufis will remain intact and capable of maintaining its role as structure in producing value at least for their in-group affiliates. But this option will also mean that the Sufis are elusive and fail to interact socially in the public space.

The second choice in the meantime means that the Sufis will also be able to preserve their internal ontological security, to some extent. But it implies that Sufism undergoes what may be called a "civilizing process" in which Sufism is turned from being *ṭarīqah* into a mere *ṭā'ifa*.[51] *Ṭarīqah* is a structure where values are produced and become the guiding principles for the in-group associates, while *ṭā'ifa* is a grouping where people meet and converge for worldly interests.

Interestingly, the list of concrete examples of this "civilizing process" is long. In Egypt, for instance, during the Arab Spring followers of some Sufi Orders initiated to establish a political party in collaboration with some politicians. Two parties are formed, namely *Ḥizb Taḥrīr al-Miṣrī* (Egyptian Independence Party), and *Jabhat al-Iṣlāḥ al-Ṣūfī* (Sufi Reformist Wing). Prior to that, the Sufis of Egypt were affiliated with the government and, under the full patronage of the President, established *al-Majlis al-A'lā li al-Ṭuruq al-Ṣūfiyah* (The Highest Council of Sufi Orders).[52] This "bureaucratization and politicization of Sufi Order" as Michael Gilsenan calls it, resulted in the religious role of Sufi Orders being replaced by the government.[53]

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[51] On the term "civilizing process" see Norbert Elias, *The Germans: Power Struggle and the Development of Habitus in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Boston: Polity, 1997). On the shift of Sufism from *ṭarīqah* to *ṭā'ifah*, see Richard M. Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapor 1300-1700: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

[52] Jonathan Brown, *Salafis and Sufis in Egypt* (USA: Carnegie Endowment, 2011), 12.

[53] Michael Gelsinan, *Saint and Sufi in Modern Egypt: An Essay in the Sociology of Religion* (England: Clarendon, 1973).

In Algeria, the same development also took place where during the presidency of Abdul Aziz Bouteflika (reigned 1999-2019), the Sufis took full advantage of the close patronage of the President and formed an organization called the National Association of Zawiyah. This organization is established to help the government eradicate radical political Islam.[54] Previously, the Sufis did the same during the reign of President Houari Boumediene (reigned 1976-1978) in Algeria and President Habib Bourguiba (reigned 1957-1987) in Tunisia.[55]

Some Sufis in Senegal made a social contract with local communities and the government to win political contests. The power relation that they established is aimed at the mutual interest, where the Sufis acquire power and the community earns money.[56]

Another example is in Turkey, where Sufi-oriented Gulen Movement is extensively used by its leader, Fethullah Gulen for his political end. As Florian Volm found, Gulen manipulated this movement to build his "new image" as an ideal leader not only for Turkey but also for the whole Islamic world. By virtue of his political ambition, Gulen is popularly known as sufi-ish, an abbreviation of Sufi-selfish[57]

The emergence of what some scholars have called neo-Sufism, hybrid-Sufism, urban Sufism, engaged Sufism, cosmopolitan Sufism, social Sufism, positive Sufism, actual Sufism, popular Sufism and the like is another example of this civilizing processes. Each of these terms refers to a particular process in which transformation and reduction within Sufism have taken place. Hence, the concept of neo-Sufism indicates that Sufism has accepted the ideals of reform movements and resulted in it being reduced to becoming a mere system of morality.[58]

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[54] Thomas Joassin, "Algerian Traditional Islam and Political Sufism", in Mark Sedgwick and Francesco Piraino (eds.), *Global Sufism: Boundaries, Narratives and Practices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 209-224.

[55] Zidane Meriboute, *Islam's Fateful Path: The Critical Choices Facing Modern Muslims*, Translation John King (London: IB Taurus, 2009), 13.

[56] Mamadou Diouf, "The Public Role of Good Islam: Sufi Islam and the Administration of Pluralism", in Mamadou Diouf (ed.), *Tolerance, Democracy and Sufis in Senegal* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2013), 1-34.

[57] Florian Volm, "The Making of Sufism: The Gulen Movement and its Effort to Create a New Image", in Mark Sedgwick dan Francesco Piraino (eds.), *Global Sufism: Boundaries, Narratives and Practices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 177-192.

[58] Khairudin al-Junied, *Hamka and Islam: Cosmopolitan Reform in the Malay World* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2018).

The idea of hybrid Sufism means that Sufism has accepted the projects of Islamic revivalism on the one hand and the notion of local wisdom on the other. The result of this move is that Sufism is now associated with certain forms of spirituality that have no theological and epistemological bases in Islam.[59] Then the idea of urban-Sufism, which means that Sufism has compromised with the projects of Islamic neo-modernism, and resulted in it being reduced to a mere form of "spirituality of the urban middle class".[60] Finally, the concept of engaged Sufism denotes that it has compromised with modernity. This resulted in Sufism being incorporated into the values of secularism, pluralism, and multiculturalism on the one hand and into the idea of the unity of all religions, ala Western tradition on the other.[61] The same civilizing process is true with other terms.

The third option in the meantime implies that a more devastating civilizing process will happen if Sufism participates totally in the public space, especially where secularism and liberalism are dominating. Recent studies show that in secular societies, Sufism stands the risk of becoming a form of New Age Spirituality, as in the case of Inayat Khan and Muhammad Raheem Bawa Muhaiyadden in the United States and Idries Shah in England.[62] It may also turn out to be a kind of popular culture, as in the case of the Javanese Sufism that turned to be spiritual syncretism (*kebatinan*) in Central Java.[63]

Among these choices, the first seems to be the most rational one on the ground that it is in line with the nature of Sufism and may guarantee its ontological security. The only question that hangs in the balance is, should Sufism be developed from mere individual piety into social activism? If so, how can that be done?

To answer the question, one must keep two points in mind. First, any transformation of Sufism must not betray its quintessence as the spiritual dimension of Islam that emphasizes the moral

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[59] Ahmad Muttaqin, "From Occultism to Hybrid-Sufism: The Transformation of an Islamic Hybrid Spiritual Group in Contemporary Indonesia", *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 4, no. 1 (2014). DOI: 10.18326/ijims.v4i1.81-104.

[60] Julia Day Howell, "Sufism and the Indonesian Islamic Revival", *The Journal of Asian Studies* 60, no. 3 (2001), 701-729. https://doi.org/10.2307/2700107.

[61] J. Hamer, "The Soul of Islam: Writing and Publishing as Engaged Sufism", *Journal of Islamic Studies* 26, no. 1 (2007). DOI: 10.4314/jis.v26i1.39920.

[62] Shobhana Xavier. "Disordering".

[63] Robert Irwin, "Global Rumi", in Mark Sedgwick and Francesco Piraino (eds.), *Global Sufism: Boundaries, Narratives and Practices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 15-34.

consciousness of individuals. Second, the transformation may be undertaken on its secondary -rather than primary- aspect.

A good example of this transformation is what Abdul Qadir Isa has done. At the most basic level, he defines Sufism as "the collective moral consciousness of the Muslim community shaped by the principles of Shariah".[64] The basic foundation of Sufism represented in Shariah, and its most fundamental ingredient represented in moral consciousness has not been removed. Important variables are added in this definition, namely the notion of collectivity and the Muslim community. Sufism is here seen as a communal -and not simply personal- entity. It is treated as a moral structure not only for individuals but also for the community.

Concluding Remarks

The contention of values in the modern era is open and resulted in society being divided. The complexity inherent within it poses not only a problem but also a threat. Such threat may be seen from the fact that society has been inflicted by what social phycologist called confirmation-bias assumption, with which individuals look at themselves in terms of the in-group favoritism effect and judge others in terms of the out-group homogeneity effect.

The first "effect" is about looking at the collective self in a positive manner, while the second "effect" is to do with negatively judging the collective others.

Sufism in this whole context chose to stay away from the public space in order to preserve its ontological security and maintain its spiritual function as a value-producing structure. But when Sufism did choose to get involved in the public space, it does so by standing at the risk of losing some of its ingredients, especially against the might of secularism and liberalism.

Internally speaking, Sufism, in most cases, is capable of building a value-based society. But once it interacts with other forces, a different scenario occurs. The complex nature of public space has taught the Sufis that getting involved in society and public space requires that the most basic principles of Sufism be upheld. What the Sufis can do to contribute to society is not to participate in direct contention of values. What they can do is consolidate internally, keep

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[64] 'Abd al-Qādir 'Īsā, *Ḥaqāiq 'an al-Taṣawwuf* (Aleppo: Maktabah 'Irfān, 1993), 473-477.

Sufism intact as meaning-production power, and produce discourses that can influence the formation of public space.

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