

## **REFRAMING SUFISM: ABUYA DIMYATI'S EMBODIED SPIRITUALITY AS A MODEL OF RELIGIOUS MODERATION IN CONTEMPORARY ISLAM**

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DOI: <http://doi.org/10.69552/mumtaz.v5i2.3674>

Received:  
July 10, 2025

Revised:  
August 25, 2025

Accepted:  
September 07, 2025

Published:  
September, 2025

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### **Abstract**

This study examines Abuya Dimiyati's Sufism as a model of religious moderation and spiritual wisdom in the modern era. The research is motivated by the growing crisis of spirituality, the rise of religious extremism, and the transformation of religious authority in the digital age. Using a qualitative approach with a library research design, this study analyzes primary sources such as Abuya Dimiyati's teachings, sermons, and documented practices, as well as relevant contemporary scholarly literature. Data were analyzed using content analysis and hermeneutic interpretation to uncover the epistemological, ethical, and social dimensions of his Sufism. The findings reveal that Abuya Dimiyati's Sufism is rooted in akhlaqi Sufism, emphasizing the integration of sharia and haqiqa through ethical transformation and spiritual discipline. His teachings embody four core values of religious moderation: rahmah (compassion), tawazun (balance), zuhud (simplicity), and tasamuh (tolerance). These values function as internal mechanisms of ethical regulation, shaping both individual consciousness and social interaction. Furthermore, his Sufism reflects an "embodied spirituality" that integrates spiritual practice with social engagement, contributing to community harmony. It argues that Abuya Dimiyati's Sufism provides a relevant and integrative response to contemporary challenges, including digital religiosity, polarization, and the crisis of religious authority. The study contributes to the development of Sufism as a contextual and globally relevant paradigm for fostering moderate, inclusive, and humanistic religious life.

**Keywords:** *Sufism; Religious Moderation; Abuya Dimiyati; Spiritual Wisdom; Islamic Spirituality; Modern Era.*



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## Abstrak

*Penelitian ini mengkaji tasawuf Abuya Dimiyati sebagai model moderasi beragama dan kearifan spiritual di era modern. Kajian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh krisis spiritual, meningkatnya ekstremisme keagamaan, serta transformasi otoritas keagamaan di era digital. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi pustaka, dengan sumber data utama berupa ajaran, ceramah, dan praktik spiritual Abuya Dimiyati, serta didukung oleh literatur ilmiah kontemporer yang relevan. Analisis data dilakukan melalui analisis isi dan hermeneutik untuk mengungkap dimensi epistemologis, etis, dan sosial dalam tasawuf beliau. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tasawuf Abuya Dimiyati berakar pada tasawuf akhlaqi yang menekankan integrasi antara syariat dan hakikat melalui transformasi etika dan disiplin spiritual. Ajaran beliau mengandung empat nilai utama moderasi beragama, yaitu rahmah (kasih sayang), tawazun (keseimbangan), zuhud (kesederhanaan), dan tasamuh (toleransi). Nilai-nilai tersebut berfungsi sebagai mekanisme pengendalian diri yang membentuk kesadaran individu dan interaksi sosial. Selain itu, tasawuf beliau mencerminkan "spiritualitas membumi" yang mengintegrasikan praktik spiritual dengan keterlibatan sosial dalam kehidupan masyarakat. Tasawuf Abuya Dimiyati dipandang sebagai model yang relevan dalam merespons tantangan modern seperti religiusitas digital, polarisasi, dan krisis otoritas keagamaan. Penelitian ini berkontribusi dalam pengembangan kajian tasawuf sebagai paradigma kontekstual dan global dalam membangun kehidupan beragama yang moderat, inklusif, dan humanis.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Tasawuf; Moderasi Beragama; Abuya Dimiyati; Kearifan Spiritual; Spiritualitas Islam; Era Modern.*

## INTRODUCTION

The decline of spirituality and the rise of religious extremism in the modern era represent not merely social phenomena but also an epistemological crisis in how religion is understood and practiced. This issue is critically important, as religion, from a theoretical perspective, functions not only as a belief system but also as a mechanism for shaping social ethics and collective cohesion (Casanova, 2023; Jong, 2025; Sadat Rafiei & Asadi Anar, 2025; Setinawati et al., 2025). However, within the context of digital modernity, religious authority has undergone significant disruption, leading to fragmented and decentralized interpretations of religious knowledge (Abusharif, 2023; Andok, 2024; Campbell & Tsuria, 2024; Ichwan et al., 2024). Recent studies indicate that the digitalization of religion has contributed to

the emergence of “algorithmic religiosity,” in which religious practices are shaped more by algorithmic logic than by scholarly authority (Rifat et al., 2024). Consequently, religiosity tends to become instant, reactive, and vulnerable to radicalization. Therefore, there is an urgent need to reconstruct a paradigm of religiosity that integrates spiritual, rational, and social dimensions in a holistic manner.

More specifically, the central problem in contemporary society lies in the reduction of religion to normative practices that lack transformative depth. From the perspective of religiosity theory, this phenomenon can be understood as a shift from “deep religiosity” to “surface religiosity,” where symbols and rituals dominate over the internalization of ethical and spiritual values (Ammerman, 2024). This condition fosters exclusivism and absolutist truth claims, which may lead to social conflict. In pluralistic societies, the inability to manage diversity through inclusive spiritual approaches increases the risk of social fragmentation. Thus, the current religious crisis should be understood not only as a moral crisis but also as a crisis of spiritual depth.

Empirical evidence further demonstrates that Muslim youth increasingly rely on digital ecosystems to construct their religious identities. Social media platforms and religious applications have become new sources of authority, gradually replacing traditional scholars and religious institutions (Berger & Golan, 2024; Bingaman, 2023; Khamis, 2024; Zhang, 2025). However, recent research suggests that digital environments tend to produce “echo chambers” that reinforce ideological biases and narrow religious perspectives (Kabir et al., 2024). This phenomenon contributes to religious polarization and weakens traditions of spiritual reflection. In this context, Sufism, with its emphasis on contemplation, self-purification, and transcendental awareness, emerges as a relevant counter-narrative to superficial and reactive forms of religiosity.

In contemporary academic discourse, Sufism is increasingly positioned as an alternative paradigm for addressing the crises of modernity. Rather than being viewed solely as a mystical practice, Sufism is understood as a system of ethical and spiritual epistemology that integrates inner experience with social reality (Ernst, 2023). Recent studies reveal that core Sufi values—such as universal compassion (rahmah), balance (tawazun), and simplicity (zuhud)—are significantly correlated with the development of moderate and inclusive attitudes (Hasan & Mujahidin, 2023; Mutmainah, 2025). From the perspective of religious moderation theory, Sufism may also function as a mechanism of “inner regulation,” preventing extremism through the transformation of individual consciousness (Mahmood, 2024).

Nevertheless, despite the growing discourse on Sufism as a foundation for religious moderation, several critical limitations remain in existing studies. First, much of the literature remains normative and lacks analytical frameworks that critically engage Sufism within the dynamics of modernity. Second, previous research tends to generalize Sufism without sufficiently exploring local contexts and influential figures who have tangible societal impact. Third, there is a notable gap in linking Sufi practices with contemporary social theories, such as theories of religious agency and spiritual transformation in digital societies (Campbell & Evolvi, 2023). These gaps highlight the need for research that bridges local Sufi traditions with global discourses on spirituality and moderation.

Within this context, the novelty of this study lies in its examination of Abuya Dimiyati's Sufism as a contextual and practice-based model of religious moderation. Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on biographical aspects, this research conceptualizes his teachings as a form of "embodied spirituality," in which spiritual values are manifested through social practices and communal relations. This approach positions Sufism not merely as an individual experience but as a value system that actively shapes moderate and harmonious social structures.

Based on this framework, this study is guided by three main research questions: (1) how is the epistemological construction of Abuya Dimiyati's Sufism formulated, (2) how are the values of religious moderation manifested in his teachings and practices, and (3) how are these values relevant in addressing contemporary spiritual crises and religious extremism? This study aims to develop a theoretical understanding of Sufism as a spirituality-based paradigm of moderation, while also providing empirical contributions through the analysis of Abuya Dimiyati's Sufi practices. The central argument of this research is that Abuya Dimiyati's Sufism represents an integrative model that combines spirituality, social ethics, and religious moderation, offering an alternative epistemological framework for responding to contemporary religious crises.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study employs a qualitative research design using a library research approach. The qualitative design is chosen because the object of the study concerns the interpretation of spiritual concepts, values, and practices that cannot be measured quantitatively but require in-depth understanding and contextual analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Library research is considered appropriate as the study focuses on the conceptual and textual dimensions of Abuya Dimiyati's Sufism, including his teachings, writings, and recorded sermons. This design allows the researcher to explore the epistemological structure and ethical dimensions of

Sufism as a model of religious moderation. Furthermore, the use of qualitative inquiry enables interpretive flexibility in analyzing symbolic meanings and spiritual values embedded in the texts. Although this study is primarily based on library research, the empirical context is centered on the intellectual and spiritual legacy of Abuya Dimiyati in Cidahu, Pandeglang, Banten, Indonesia. This location is selected because it represents the socio-religious environment in which Abuya Dimiyati's teachings were developed and practiced, making it highly relevant for understanding the contextual application of his Sufism. The selection is also based on the significant influence of his pesantren and spiritual network in shaping moderate Islamic practices within the local community.

The research was conducted over a period of approximately six months, from January to June 2025. During this period, the researcher systematically collected, classified, and analyzed relevant literature, including primary and secondary sources. The timeframe was designed to ensure sufficient depth in data exploration and analytical rigor. Data were collected through documentation techniques, focusing on both primary and secondary sources. Primary data include Abuya Dimiyati's written works, transcripts of sermons, recorded teachings, and documented spiritual practices within his pesantren environment. Secondary data consist of scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, theses, and contemporary studies related to Sufism, religious moderation, and Islamic spirituality.

The data collection process involved several stages: (1) identification of relevant sources based on thematic alignment with the research objectives, (2) selection of credible and academically recognized materials, (3) classification of data into conceptual categories such as Sufi values, moderation principles, and social practices, and (4) organization of data for systematic analysis. Digital academic databases and institutional repositories were also utilized to access recent international publications.

This study employs two main analytical methods: content analysis and hermeneutic analysis. Content analysis is used to identify, categorize, and interpret recurring themes and key concepts within the texts, particularly those related to Sufi teachings and moderation values (Krippendorff, 2019). Meanwhile, hermeneutic analysis is applied to explore deeper meanings, symbolic expressions, and contextual interpretations of Abuya Dimiyati's teachings (Gadamer, 2004). The analytical process follows several steps: (1) data reduction through the selection of relevant textual units, (2) thematic coding to identify patterns and relationships, (3) interpretative analysis to understand the underlying meanings, and (4) synthesis to construct a coherent framework of Sufism as a model of religious moderation. This

dual analytical approach enables both descriptive and interpretive depth, aligning with the theoretical orientation of the study.

To ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the findings, this study applies several qualitative validation strategies. First, source triangulation is employed by comparing multiple types of data, including primary texts, secondary literature, and contextual interpretations. Second, theoretical triangulation is used by integrating perspectives from Sufism studies, religious moderation theory, and contemporary social theory to strengthen analytical rigor.

Third, credibility is maintained through careful selection of authoritative and peer-reviewed sources, particularly recent international publications (2023–2025). Fourth, dependability is ensured by maintaining a clear and transparent research process, including documentation of data collection and analysis procedures. Finally, confirmability is achieved by grounding interpretations in textual evidence and minimizing researcher bias through systematic and reflective analysis. Through these strategies, the study ensures that its findings are credible, consistent, and academically robust, thereby contributing reliably to the discourse on Sufism and religious moderation in the modern era.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Reframing Sufism as an Epistemological and Ethical Paradigm

The findings of this study invite a theoretical re-evaluation of Sufism beyond its conventional classification as mystical spirituality. In contemporary Western scholarship, religion is often approached through sociological and anthropological lenses that emphasize structure, agency, and lived experience (Ammerman, 2024; Casanova, 2023). Within this framework, Abuya Dimiyati's Sufism can be interpreted as a form of *lived religion*—where spirituality is not confined to doctrinal belief but enacted through ethical practices embedded in everyday life.

However, this perspective alone is insufficient to capture the depth of Sufism. From an Islamic intellectual tradition, Sufism represents an epistemological system that integrates *'ilm* (knowledge), *hal* (spiritual state), and *'amal* (practice). This integrative structure challenges the modern Western dichotomy between knowledge and ethics. While Western modernity often separates rational knowledge from moral formation, Abuya Dimiyati's approach demonstrates that knowledge is inherently transformative and ethical.

In this sense, his Sufism aligns with Al-Attas' concept of *ta'dib* (holistic education) and Ghazalian ethics, where the ultimate purpose of knowledge is the cultivation of a virtuous self. Simultaneously, it resonates with Mahmood's (2024) theory of ethical formation, which argues that religious agency is constructed

through disciplined practices rather than abstract beliefs. Thus, Abuya Dimiyati's Sufism can be positioned as a bridge between Islamic epistemology and contemporary theories of ethical subject formation.

### **Moderation as Inner Regulation: Between Sufism and Modern Theories of Religion**

One of the most significant contributions of this study is the conceptualization of moderation (*wasathiyah*) as a form of *inner regulation*. In Western discourse, moderation is often framed in political or institutional terms—focusing on governance, tolerance policies, or pluralism frameworks (Taylor, 2023). However, these approaches tend to emphasize external regulation rather than internal transformation.

In contrast, Abuya Dimiyati's Sufism conceptualizes moderation as an internalized ethical disposition rooted in spiritual discipline. This aligns with Sufi psychology, where the purification of the self (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) functions as a mechanism for controlling excessive tendencies. The values of *rahmah*, *tawazun*, *zuhud*, and *tasamuh* identified in this study operate as internal ethical regulators that shape behavior from within.

This finding contributes to ongoing debates in Islamic studies regarding the nature of moderation. While contemporary discourse on *wasathiyah* often remains normative and policy-oriented, this study demonstrates that moderation must be grounded in spiritual transformation to be effective. In this regard, Abuya Dimiyati's model challenges purely institutional approaches to countering extremism, suggesting that sustainable moderation requires the cultivation of inner ethical consciousness.

At the same time, this perspective complements Foucault-inspired analyses of subject formation, where discipline and self-regulation play a central role in shaping ethical individuals. However, unlike Foucault's secular framework, Sufism situates self-regulation within a transcendental orientation toward the Divine, thereby integrating ethical discipline with metaphysical purpose.

### **Sufism and Social Praxis: Beyond the Mystical–Social Dichotomy**

A key debate in both Western and Islamic scholarship concerns whether Sufism is inherently inward-looking or socially engaged. Classical Orientalist perspectives often portrayed Sufism as apolitical and detached from social realities. Even in modern scholarship, Sufism is sometimes framed as a purely personal spiritual path.

The findings of this study challenge this dichotomy by demonstrating that Abuya Dimiyati's Sufism is inherently social. His teachings are not limited to individual piety but extend to community engagement, social welfare, and moral leadership. This aligns with recent scholarship that reconceptualizes Sufism as a form of "social spirituality" that actively contributes to community cohesion (Ernst, 2023).

From a sociological perspective, this can be understood through the lens of social capital theory. Abuya Dimiyati's pesantren and spiritual network function as sites of trust-building, value transmission, and collective identity formation. These institutions provide a counterweight to the fragmentation of modern society, particularly in the context of digital individualism.

In Islamic intellectual discourse, this model resonates with the concept of *khair ummah* (the best community), where spiritual excellence is inseparable from social responsibility. It also reflects the prophetic model, which integrates spiritual devotion with societal transformation. Thus, Abuya Dimiyati's Sufism should not be seen as an alternative to social engagement, but as its ethical foundation.

### **Digital Modernity and the Crisis of Authority: Sufism as Counter-Narrative**

One of the most pressing issues in contemporary religious studies is the transformation of authority in the digital age. Scholars of digital religion argue that authority has become decentralized, shifting from traditional scholars to online influencers and algorithm-driven content (Campbell & Tsuria, 2024). This transformation has significant implications for religious knowledge, often leading to fragmentation and radicalization.

Within this context, Abuya Dimiyati's Sufism offers a compelling counter-narrative. Unlike algorithmic religiosity, which prioritizes visibility and engagement metrics, Sufism emphasizes depth, discipline, and continuity of spiritual transmission (*sanad*). This creates a form of "anchored authority" that is resistant to the volatility of digital culture.

From a theoretical standpoint, this can be interpreted as a tension between two models of authority:

1. Networked authority (fluid, decentralized, algorithm-driven), and
2. Embodied authority (rooted in tradition, ethics, and lived experience).

Abuya Dimiyati's model clearly aligns with the latter, offering stability in an era of epistemic uncertainty. However, this also raises an important question: can such a model remain relevant in digital contexts? This study suggests that rather than rejecting modernity, Sufism must be recontextualized within it. Abuya Dimiyati's

approach demonstrates that spiritual authenticity can coexist with social adaptability, offering a middle path between traditionalism and digital disruption.

### **Toward a Theoretical Contribution: Sufism as Transformative Moderation Framework**

Based on the above analysis, this study proposes a conceptual contribution by framing Abuya Dimiyati's Sufism as a "transformative moderation framework." This framework consists of three interconnected dimensions:

1. Epistemological Dimension  
Sufism as a system integrating knowledge, spirituality, and ethics.
2. Psychological-Ethical Dimension  
Moderation as inner regulation through spiritual discipline.
3. Socio-Practical Dimension  
Spiritual values operationalized in community life and social engagement.

This tripartite model contributes to both Islamic studies and global religious discourse by offering a holistic approach to moderation that transcends purely normative or institutional frameworks.

In contrast to dominant Western approaches that often prioritize structural solutions, this model emphasizes the centrality of inner transformation. At the same time, it moves beyond purely mystical interpretations of Sufism by demonstrating its relevance to contemporary social challenges.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that Abuya Dimiyati's Sufism represents a form of akhlaqi Sufism that integrates spirituality, ethics, and social engagement as a unified model of religious moderation. The values of rahmah (compassion), tawazun (balance), zuhud (simplicity), and tasamuh (tolerance) are not merely doctrinal principles but function as internalized ethical mechanisms shaping individual behavior and social harmony. In this regard, moderation is not positioned as an external or institutional construct, but as a result of inner spiritual transformation grounded in Sufi practice.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study contributes by framing Sufism as a transformative moderation framework that operates across three dimensions: epistemological (integration of knowledge and spirituality), psychological (self-regulation through ethical discipline), and social (application in community life). This model demonstrates that Sufism can serve as a relevant response to contemporary challenges such as digital religiosity, polarization, and the crisis of religious authority. By emphasizing embodied spirituality, Abuya Dimiyati's Sufism

offers a balanced alternative between superficial religiosity and religious extremism.

However, this study is limited by its reliance on library research, which may not fully capture the lived practices of Abuya Dimiyati's followers. Therefore, future research is recommended to adopt empirical approaches such as ethnography, field observation, and in-depth interviews to examine how these Sufi values are practiced in everyday life. In addition, comparative studies across different Sufi figures or regions, as well as interdisciplinary research integrating digital religion studies, would be valuable to further develop Sufism as a global framework for religious moderation in contemporary society.

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