

THE CONCEPT OF *DIHLIZ* IN THE SUFI PHILOSOPHY OF KIAI ACHMAD ASRORI AL-ISHAQI: BRIDGING TRADITIONALITY AND MODERNITY IN RELIGIOUS PRACTICES IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

Studies on Nusantara Sufism often treat *tarekat* communities as socio cultural phenomena and overlook their potential as sources of epistemological innovation. This gap limits understanding of how Sufi traditions generate knowledge that negotiates textual authority and spiritual experience. This article examines the concept of *dihliz* in Kiai Achmad Asrori al Ishaqi's *al Muntakhabat* to propose a model of liminal Sufi epistemology. The study uses qualitative literature-based data drawn from *al Muntakhabat* as the primary source, supported by secondary works on Sufism and Nusantara intellectual history. The analysis combines hermeneutics to interpret textual meaning and anthropology to situate the text as a cultural artefact, supported by Foucault's archaeology of knowledge and Bourdieu's theory of habitus. The findings show three key points. First, *dihliz* functions as an epistemic threshold that regulates the transition between sharia-based normativity and Sufi experiential knowledge. Second, it produces a hybrid epistemology that integrates rational reflection, textual authority, and intuitive insight. Third, *dihliz* shapes an epistemic habitus within the tarekat community, enabling the negotiation of tradition and modernity in contemporary religious practice. These findings demonstrate that *dihliz* offers a conceptual framework for understanding Sufism as a dynamic mode of knowledge production. The study concludes that *dihliz* provides a useful model for strengthening religious literacy, reconciling doctrinal differences, and supporting peace oriented Islamic education. Future research may apply this framework to other Nusantara Sufi texts to map broader patterns of liminal epistemology.

Keywords: Kiai Asrori, *Dihliz* Metaphor, Liminal Epistemology, Nusantara Sufism.

ABSTRAK

Kajian tentang tasawuf Nusantara sering memperlakukan komunitas tarekat sebagai fenomena sosial budaya dan mengabaikan potensinya sebagai sumber inovasi epistemologis. Kesenjangan ini membatasi pemahaman tentang bagaimana tradisi sufistik menghasilkan pengetahuan yang menegosiasikan otoritas tekstual dan pengalaman spiritual. Artikel ini mengkaji konsep dihliz dalam al-Muntakhabat karya Kiai Achmad Asrori al-Ishaqi untuk menawarkan model epistemologi sufistik yang bersifat liminal. Penelitian ini menggunakan data kualitatif berbasis kepustakaan yang bersumber dari al-Muntakhabat sebagai rujukan utama, serta literatur sekunder tentang tasawuf dan sejarah intelektual Nusantara. Analisis dilakukan melalui pendekatan hermeneutika untuk menafsirkan makna tekstual dan antropologi untuk memposisikan teks sebagai artefak budaya, dengan dukungan arkeologi pengetahuan Foucault dan teori habitus Pierre Bourdieu. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan tiga temuan utama. Pertama, dihliz berfungsi sebagai ambang epistemik yang mengatur transisi antara normativitas syariah dan pengetahuan pengalaman sufistik. Kedua, konsep ini menghasilkan epistemologi hibrida yang mengintegrasikan refleksi rasional, otoritas tekstual, dan intuisi spiritual. Ketiga, dihliz membentuk habitus epistemik dalam komunitas tarekat yang memungkinkan negosiasi antara tradisi dan modernitas dalam praktik keagamaan kontemporer. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa dihliz menawarkan kerangka konseptual untuk memahami tasawuf sebagai bentuk produksi pengetahuan yang dinamis. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa dihliz dapat menjadi model untuk memperkuat literasi keagamaan, mendamaikan perbedaan doktrinal, dan mendukung pendidikan Islam yang berorientasi pada perdamaian. Penelitian selanjutnya dapat menerapkan kerangka ini pada teks-teks tasawuf Nusantara lainnya untuk memetakan pola epistemologi liminal yang lebih luas.

Kata kunci: Kiai Asrori, Metafora Dihliz, Epistemologi Liminal, Tasawuf Nusantara.

INTRODUCTION

Sufism in the Indonesian archipelago has often been interpreted through a narrow lens that reduces it to ritual performance, spiritual withdrawal, or a set of ceremonial practices detached from intellectual inquiry. This perception persists despite

scholarly reminders that Sufism should be understood as a paradigm and a school of thought that shapes the identity and historical consciousness of Muslim societies.¹ Anthony H. Johns' contribution is particularly significant because he situates Sufism within the broader category of Indonesian literature and history, demonstrating that Sufi teachings have long played a formative role in the cultural and intellectual landscape of the region. His perspective challenges the assumption that Sufism is merely an esoteric tradition and instead highlights its capacity to generate knowledge responsive to changing historical contexts.²

Within this global discourse, the Indonesian context presents a unique case in which Sufi traditions continue to evolve through dynamic interactions between textual scholarship, spiritual practice, and socio-cultural realities. One of the most compelling contemporary figures in this regard is Kiai Achmad Asrori al Ishaqi, a Sufi master whose intellectual and spiritual authority is widely recognised. As noted by Riyadi,³ Kiai Asrori stands out as one of the few modern Nusantara Sufis who embodies both rigorous suluk practice and a strong inclination toward philosophical Sufism. His work *al Muntakhabat* is exceptional because it is the only recent Nusantara Sufi text written in Arabic with a distinctly philosophical character, drawing from the intellectual legacies of Ibn Arabi and al Ghazali. This positions him within a long lineage of Sufi thinkers in the archipelago, from Hamzah Fansuri and Yusuf al Makassar to Nawawi al Jawi,⁴ although the latter's *al Futuhat al Madaniyyah* is noted to borrow nomenclature rather than substantive philosophical content from Ibn Arabi.

¹ Abdul Kadir Riyadi, "The Concept of Man in Ahmad Asrori's Anthropology of Tasawuf," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 11, no. 1 (2017): 223–46, <http://d.doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2017.11.1.223-246>.

² Riyadi, "The Concept of Man in Ahmad Asrori's Anthropology of Tasawuf."

³ Abdul Kadir Riyadi, *Antropologi Tasawuf: Wacana Manusia Spiritual dan Pengetahuan* (Jakarta: Penerbit LP3ES, 2017), 284–285.

⁴ Riyadi, "The Concept of Man in Ahmad Asrori's Anthropology of Tasawuf."

Despite the intellectual richness of Kiai Asrori's work, scholarly attention to his thought remains limited. Research on him generally falls into two categories. The first focuses on the organisational and ritual dimensions of the TQN al Utsmaniyah, including studies on the motivations of Muhammadiyah members who join the majlis dhikr,⁵ literary reception of his nasheed compositions,⁶ leadership structures such as the role of the imam khususi,⁷ and the relationship between Jama'ah al Khidmah and the Al Fithrah pesantren.⁸ These studies illuminate the social dynamics of the order but do not address the epistemological foundations of its teachings.

The second category examines thematic aspects of his thought, including religious moderation,⁹ anthropological interpretations of Sufi concepts.¹⁰ Sufi dualism,¹¹ cosmology in

⁵ Rosidi Rosidi dan Abdulloh Hanif, "The Motives of Muhammadiyah Community Following the Majlis Dzikir of Al-Khidmah: Case Study of Tarekat Community of al-Qadiriyyah wa al-Naqsyabandiyyah al-Utsmaniyyah," *International Journal of Islamic Thought and Humanities* 2, no. 2 (2023): 210–21, <https://doi.org/10.54298/ijith.v2i2.103>.

⁶ Avita Aniqotul 'Athiyyah dan M. Lutfi Mustofa, "Analysis of 'Nasyid Ibadallah' The Composition of Achmad Asrori Al-Ishaqi; A Hans Robert Jauss Literary Reception Study," *Jurnal Sastra Indonesia* 13, no. 2 (Juli 2024): 154–63, <https://journal.unnes.ac.id/sju/inde.php/jsi>.

⁷ Aly Masyhar dan Abdul Djamil, "The Hierarchical Leadership in Sufi Order: Duties and Positions of Imam Khususi," *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Literature and Muslim Society* 6, no. 2 (Desember 2021): 2528–1224, <https://doi.org/10.22515/islimus.v6i2.5075>.

⁸ Ali Mastur, "Relasi Jamaah Al Khidmah dengan Pondok Pesantren Assalafi Al Fithrah Perspektif Educational Marketing," *El-Banat: Jurnal Pemikiran dan Pendidikan Islam* 13, no. 1 (2023): 6 7–84, <https://doi.org/10.54180/elbanat.2023.13.1.67-84>.

⁹ Muhammad Zakki Muhtar, "Moderasi Beragama dalam Kitab Tasawuf Al-Muntakhabat karya KH. Ahmad Asrori Al-Ishaqi," *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 19, no. 1 (2021): 269–306, <https://doi.org/10.31291/jlka.v19i1.928>.

¹⁰ Riyadi, "The Concept of Man in Ahmad Asrori's Anthropology of Tasawuf."

¹¹ Muhammad Rahmatullah, "Dualisme dalam Kesatuan Untuk Mencapai Ma'rifah Perspektif KH. Asrori Ishaqi," *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf dan Pemikiran Islam* 6, no. 1 (2016): 29–56

comparison with Ibn Arabi¹² and ecological interpretations of the pandemic.¹³ Additional studies explore his views on disaster and his portrayal as a nationalist and moderate Sufi.¹⁴ While these works contribute valuable insights, none address the conceptual significance of *dihliz*, a metaphor that appears to be central to Kiai Asrori's epistemological framework.

This absence constitutes a clear gap in the literature. The metaphor of *dihliz*, which refers to a threshold or liminal space, is not merely a linguistic ornament but a conceptual device that structures Kiai Asrori's negotiation between sharia, philosophical Sufism, and the demands of modernity. His expression "tahta zilal ilm al syariah wa dihliz suluk al tariqah" indicates that *dihliz* functions as an epistemic mechanism that mediates between textual normativity and spiritual experience. Although the concept has been explored in studies of al Ghazali,¹⁵ no research has examined its role in the thought of Kiai Asrori, despite its clear relevance to his intellectual synthesis.

Given this gap, the present study aims to analyse the concept of *dihliz* in *al Muntakhabat* using hermeneutic and anthropological approaches. The objective is to explain how *dihliz* operates as a liminal epistemological model that regulates the production, validation, and negotiation of religious knowledge within contemporary Nusantara Sufism. By situating *al Muntakhabat* as both a textual and cultural artefact, the study seeks to uncover the epistemic logic embedded in Kiai Asrori's synthesis of sharia, suluk, and philosophical reflection.

¹² Ainul Yaqin, "Korespondensi Manusia dan Kosmos dalam Kosmologi Sufisme Ibn 'Arabi dan Achmad Asrori al-Ishaqi," *Living Islam: Journal of Islamic Discourses* 4, no. 1 (2021): 9, <https://doi.org/10.14421/lijid.v4i1.2524>.

¹³ Yaqin, Wahyudi, dan Hadi, "Disaster in Sufi Interpretation: Dialecticalising the Sufistic Trilogy of Abdul Qadir al-Jilani, Ibn 'Arabi and Achmad Asrori al-Ishaqi."

¹⁴ Muhammad Nurush Shobah dkk., "Pancasilais Sufi: Kiai Asrori as a Potrait of Nationalist and Moderate Figure in Disruption Era," *Teosofia: Indonesian Journal of Islamic Mysticism* 13, no. 1 (202M): 19–40

¹⁵ Wahyudi, "Al-Ghazali Tentang Dihliz Sebagai Hermeneutika Imajinatif," 2014

The scholarly contribution of this research lies in introducing *dihliz* as a previously unexamined epistemological construct that reframes Sufism as a dynamic mode of knowledge production rather than a purely ritualistic tradition. The study offers a theoretical innovation by conceptualising *dihliz* as a mechanism of perpetual liminality that enables continuous negotiation between exoteric and esoteric domains. Practically, this framework provides new insights for strengthening religious literacy, reconciling doctrinal tensions, and advancing peace oriented Islamic education in Indonesia.

METHOD

This study adopted a qualitative, literature-based research design because the research question focuses on interpreting the epistemological function of *dihliz* within Kiai Achmad Asrori al Ishaqi's *al Muntakhabat*. Since the concept of *dihliz* appears only in textual form and is embedded within a broader Sufi intellectual tradition, a text centered design is the most appropriate approach for uncovering its meaning and epistemic structure. The combination of hermeneutics and anthropology is selected because it allows the analysis to move between textual interpretation and cultural contextualization. Hermeneutics enables the researcher to interpret the metaphor of *dihliz* within its linguistic, symbolic, and philosophical layers,¹⁶ while the anthropological perspective positions *al Muntakhabat* as a cultural artefact that reflects the system of meaning within the TQN al Utsmaniyah community. This design is therefore well suited to answer the research question concerning how *dihliz* functions as a liminal epistemological model.

The data of this study consist of primary and secondary textual sources. The primary population is the corpus of Kiai Achmad Asrori's writings, with *al Muntakhabat* serving as the central text because it contains his explicit articulation of *dihliz* and his broader Sufi epistemology. Secondary sources include books, articles, and documented narratives that discuss Kiai

¹⁶ Abuy Sodikin Badruzaman, *Metodologi Studi Islam* (Bandung: Tunas Nusantara, 2000), 15.

Asrori's life, teachings, and the development of the TQN al Utsmaniyah. The inclusion criteria are texts that directly explain, interpret, or contextualise Kiai Asrori's Sufi thought, while the exclusion criteria are studies that focus solely on organisational, ritual, or sociological aspects without engaging his conceptual framework. This selection ensures that the analysis remains focused on epistemological content rather than institutional or ritual practices.

The analytical procedure followed three interconnected steps. First, hermeneutic reading is conducted by identifying literal, figurative, and philosophical meanings of *dihliz* within *al Muntakhabat*, following Ricoeur's interpretive progression from explanation to understanding. Second, the text is analyzed anthropologically by situating *dihliz* within the cultural logic of Sufi learning practices,¹⁷ using Geertz's interpretive textual method and Koentjaraningrat's view that cultural analysis can be reconstructed through documented narratives. Third, the analysis is deepened through Foucault's archaeology to uncover the discursive layers behind the production of *al Muntakhabat*, and through Bourdieu's theory of habitus to trace how the concept of *dihliz* shifts from textual metaphor to embodied practice within the tarekat.¹⁸ These steps collectively allow the study to reveal the epistemic structure, cultural function, and liminal dynamics of *dihliz* in Kiai Asrori's Sufi thought.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Finding

Through his work *al-Muntakhabat*, Kiai Achmad Asrori al-Ishaqi introduces the concept of *dihliz* as a liminal Sufi epistemological model that enables the formation of a reflective, dialogical, and adaptive mode of Sufi knowledge. The *dihliz* articulated in this work functions as an epistemic framework that explicitly reconfigures the process of knowing through a

¹⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 71–88.

¹⁸ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd ed. (London: Continuum, 2006), 305–341.

dynamic negotiation between text, reason, and intuition. The validity and coherence of this epistemic model are demonstrated through several layers of analysis, as outlined below:

First, a hermeneutic analysis of the metaphor of *dihliz* in *al-Muntakhabat* demonstrates that Kiai Asrori presents *dihliz* as a form of hybrid epistemology an intermediate model of knowledge that integrates sharia, rationality, and intuition within a dialectical framework. In this context, Kiai Asrori's Sufi epistemology strongly challenges two dominant dichotomies: the exclusivity of intuition commonly associated with esoteric Sufism and the dominance of singular rationalism that characterizes modernist epistemology.

Secondly, anthropological analysis shows that *dihliz* does not merely function as a category of meaning or an epistemic metaphor within the text of *al-Muntakhabat*, but rather constitutes an epistemic mechanism that operates in the lived reality of the *tarekat* community as an epistemic habitus. In this context, *dihliz* functions as a bridging concept that connects the structure of Sufi meaning with the social practices through which knowledge is produced. Its epistemological and social functions position *dihliz* as a mediating concept between the ways in which Sufism generates knowledge and the processes through which spiritual legitimacy is constructed within social structures. This, in turn, reveals Kiai Asrori's epistemology as a model in which meaning and practice mutually shape and reinforce one another.

Thirdly, archaeological analysis demonstrates that *dihliz* functions as a Sufi regime of truth, namely an authority of knowledge that emerges from negotiations between text, reason, and intuition. By positioning sharia as the epistemic horizon and reason as an instrument for validating gnosis, Kiai Asrori presents a model of knowledge that neither grants veto power to spiritual experience alone nor allows rationality to operate without a transcendent moral orientation. Moreover, validation by the *mursyid* is an integral part of this process, determining how spiritual experiences acquire legitimacy and are permitted to circulate within the community. In this way, *dihliz* establishes an epistemic discipline that regulates spiritual experiences, transfor-

ming them into valid knowledge only after they have passed through specific normative procedures.

From this perspective, *dihliz* in Kiai Asrori's project of renewal forms a Sufi epistemology that does not withdraw from social reality, but instead generates a dynamic mode of religiosity through liminal mechanisms that are adaptive to social change. Moreover, *dihliz* functions as a bridging concept that enables the formation of a reflective and dialogical model of knowledge, one that connects text with practice, sharia with spirituality, rationality with intuition, personal experience with social structures, and Sufi tradition with the challenges of modernity. This configuration necessitates a liminal epistemological model that is not yet final and is ongoing, as well productive, and open to new possibilities in the pursuit and understanding of truth.

The findings of this study challenge the established methodological assumption that Islamic intellectual renewal must follow a pattern of epistemic secularisation, whether by separating rationality from spirituality or by reducing religion to a merely private ethical system. Instead, this study positions Nusantara Sufism as an alternative intellectual laboratory; one that does not treat the Sufi tradition as a relic of the past, but rather as a conceptual source capable of generating new epistemic categories relevant to the challenges of the modern world, such as crises of religious authority, post-truth conditions, and the fragmentation of meaning. In this framework, spirituality is not positioned as the opposite of rationality, but as an epistemological foundation that enriches human understanding of truth, authority, and the meaning of religion.

Discussion

***Dihliz* Hybrid Epistemology: A Rational–Sufism Hermeneutic**

The concept of *dihliz* in *al-Muntakhabat* is explicitly stated by Kiai Asrori in the following expression:

تَحْتَ ظِلَالِ عِلْمِ الشَّرِيعَةِ وَدِهْلِيْزِ سُلُوْكِ الطَّرِيقَةِ

" Under the protection of sharia law and at the threshold of *ṭarīqah sulūk*.¹⁹

Hermeneutic analysis to understand the epistemic construction of *dihliz* employs three interpretative steps: (1) literal meaning, (2) symbolic meaning, and (3) horizon reconstruction. This three-layered approach refers to Paul Ricoeur's concept of philosophical hermeneutics, which holds that the meaning of a text advances through stages from explanation to understanding and finally to appropriation.²⁰

In the literal meaning stage, the text is interpreted based on its linguistic structure and lexical references. The phrase "*tahta ṣilāl*" literally means "under the shadow/shade," indicating a subordinate relationship between knowledge and its source of authority. Meanwhile, the word "*dihliz*" etymologically refers to the intermediate space between the gate and the interior of a house a liminal area.²¹ At this stage, the literal meaning shows that *sharia* functions as an epistemological umbrella, while *dihliz* represents a transitional space before entering the inner realm of Sufism. In short, it is a liminal (border) zone marking the transition between the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) and the esoteric (*bāṭin*).²²

Meanwhile, the second step is the symbolic meaning, moves to the level of conceptual metaphor. According to Ricoeur's hermeneutics, metaphor is not merely a linguistic symbol but a creation of a new reality of meaning that transcends its literal reference.²³ In this context, *dihliz* no longer refers only to a physical space but becomes a symbol of the mechanism that guarantees the validity of Sufi experience. It functions as an

¹⁹ Achmad Asrori (al-) Ishaqi, *al-Muntakhabat fī Rabīṭhat al-Qalbiyyah wa Shilat al-Ruḥiyah* Vol. 4 (Surabaya: Kantor TQN Utsmaniyah, 2016), 72.

²⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 71–88.

²¹ Muhammad Ibn Mandzur, *Lisan al-‘Arab*, vol. 5 (Beirut: Dar Shadir, t.th), 349.

²² Wahyudi, "Al-Ghazali Tentang Dihliz Sebagai Hermeneutika Imajinatif."

²³ Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor* (London: Routledge, 2003), 5-6.

epistemic gateway that determines whether a spiritual experience constitutes knowledge or merely subjective impression. Thus, *dihliz* mediates between the rules of *sharia* (textual normativity) and Sufi intuition (subjective experience).

The third step is the reconstruction of the reader’s present horizon with that of the author, borrowing Hans-Georg Gadamer’s framework of the fusion of horizons.²⁴ In this step, *dihliz* can be understood as a liminal epistemic space that reconciles modern rationality and Sufi spirituality without subordinating one to the other. In the contemporary horizon, *dihliz* can be interpreted as an epistemological concept that offers an alternative mode of knowing, neither an empirical positivism that rejects metaphysics nor an absolute spiritualism that ignores epistemic verification. Through this horizon reconstruction, Sufism is understood as an epistemology, not merely as religious ethics.

From these three analytical steps, the interpretation progresses from surface-level textual meaning to deeper ethical and contextual understanding, as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1.
Hermeneutic steps in interpreting *Dihliz*

Hermeneutic Steps	Meaning	Epistemic Impact
Literal	Transitional space	Process toward the inner self
Symbolic	Mechanisms of legitimisation	Filters of experience
Horizon reconstruction	Epistemological model	Negotiation between reason and intuition

Source: Formulation of Paul Ricoeur (Ricoeur, 1976) and Hans-Georg Gadamer’s Hermeneutics (Gadamer, 2006) on the Meaning of *Dihliz*

Thus, *dihliz* is not merely a metaphor, but a transitional space and an operational mechanism of knowledge that regulates the conditions, modes, and validity of spiritual experience.

This interpretation also shifts the prevailing paradigm that positions Sharia as the antithesis of Sufism. Within Sufism itself, this paradigm has led to the emergence of two types of Sufism.

²⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd ed. (Continuum, 2006), 305–341.

Historically, this development stems from the rejection by Sunni scholars of certain Sufi doctrines they considered deviant from Islam, such as the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujūd*. The two resulting types are Sunni Sufism and philosophical Sufism. The first refers to Sufism that adheres strictly to the Qur'an and Sunnah, while the second refers to Sufism that is viewed as containing philosophical teachings originating from outside Islam, such as Greece, Persia, India, and Christianity.²⁵

In Kiai Asrori's view, Sharia is not a barrier to inner experience but functions as an epistemic filter. A spiritual experience is considered valid not merely when it is felt, but only after it has been examined through the epistemic authority of the text (i.e., Sharia). This construction is crucial in contemporary Sufism studies, which often reproduce the false dichotomy between the optional nature of Sharia and the absolutism of intuition.

Furthermore, Kiai Asrori's epistemology moves even more radically through his statement, "*al-ma'rifatu bi al-'aql*" (knowledge can be attained through reason).²⁶ This statement challenges the classical Sufi paradigm that defines knowledge as *ma'rifah dhawqiyyah*, namely intuitive knowledge obtained through *kashf* or divine unveiling. In classical Sufi literature, knowledge is often positioned as supra-rational, something that cannot be reached through reason alone.²⁷ Thus, Kiai Asrori's positioning of reason as a prerequisite for gnosis (*makrifat*) represents a significant epistemological shift that blurs the boundaries between rationality and intuition. From a hermeneutic perspective, this statement signals an epistemological reconciliation in which reason is not an obstacle to gnosis (*makrifat*), but an orienting instrument that directs spiritual experience toward a structure of understanding that can be accounted for. This

²⁵ Kautsar Azhari Noer, "Tasawuf dalam Peradaban Islam: Apresiasi dan Kritik," *Ulumuna* X, no. 2 (Juli 2006): 367–90, <https://doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v10i2.482>.

²⁶ Ishaqi, *al-Muntakhabat fi Rabithat al-Qalbiyyah wa Shilat al-Ruhiah*, vol 1, 18.

²⁷ William Chittick, "Knowledge and the Spiritual Path in Classical Sufism," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* 45 (2009): 25–48.

approach parallels modern analyses that view Sufi epistemology as placing reflective reason as an integral component of the spiritual process.²⁸

Referring to his life story, Kiai Asrori clearly demonstrated this Sufi epistemology. He was a *mursyid* whose guidance is remembered even more strongly than his writings.²⁹ In Indonesia, Kiai Asrori is more widely known as a *mursyid* of a *tarekat* whose followers are spread across the country and abroad. Thousands of his followers can be seen in the large gatherings affiliated with the Al Khidmah organization.³⁰ However, through his work *al-Muntakhabat*, he was able to develop philosophical ideas, and his Sufi thought even approaches the ideas of Ibn ‘Arabi.³¹

In addition, Kiai Asrori also presented himself as a rational philosopher by identifying knowledge as the “first pen” and the “first intellect.” In this regard, he stated that “there are key terms that must be properly understood.” According to him, without first understanding these key terms, one cannot fully grasp the

²⁸ Mohammed Rustom, “Reason and Mystical Knowledge in Islamic Thought,” *Islamic Studies* 57, no. 3 (2018): 321–340.

²⁹ Among those who have conducted research on TQN al-Utsmaniyah under the guidance of Kiai Asrori is Rosidi, who submitted his dissertation to UIN Sunan Ampel in 2020. See Rosidi, “Transformasi Ritual Tarekat Urban al-Qadiriyyah wa al-Naqshabandiyah al-Oesmaniyah” (Disertasi, UIN Sunan Ampel, 2020).

³⁰ Rosidi Rosidi, “Sufisme KH. Asrori Al Ishaqi Sebagai Legitimasi dan Signifikansi Tasawuf Urban,” *Re-centering Islamic Studies: Contemporary Discourses between Revealed Knowledge and Social Sciences* 4 (2024): 136–46, <https://doi.org/10.15642/ICMUST.4.2024.1702>. One of the achievements of the Al Khidmah organisation is its success in attracting members from various ASEAN countries, including Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei, and Thailand. See Dicky Adi Setiawan dan Ainul Yaqin, “Al Khidmah Sebagai Cerminan Transnational Social Movement (Gerakan Sosial Transnasional),” dalam *Ajaran, Kisah, Teladan Maha Guru KH. Ahmad Asrori Al-Ishaqi* (Yogyakarta: CV. Bildung Nusantara, 2025), 27.

³¹ Yaqin, “Korespondensi Manusia dan Kosmos dalam Kosmologi Sufisme Ibn ‘Arabi dan Achmad Asrori al-Ishaqi.”

discussions related to the Muhammadiyah essence, or the essence of Muhammad (*Nūr Muḥammadī*).³²

According to Riyadi, the terms mentioned by Kiai Asrori in his work are well known among early Islamic philosophers and Sufis, such as al-Ghazali, who used them to refer to knowledge. This aligns with Ebrahim Moosa's observation that al-Ghazali frequently emphasised the importance of knowledge by employing the symbols of the pen and the intellect. According to him, al-Ghazali's poems illustrate that knowledge can be symbolised by the pen, because it is through the pen that knowledge is written. Likewise, it can be symbolised by the intellect, because it is the intellect that interprets and understands knowledge.³³

However, Kiai Asrori did not place excessive emphasis on rationalism alone. In *al-Muntakhabat*, he positioned the discussion on the centrality of sharia in Sufism at the core of his work. In this context, Kiai Asrori divides sharia-based knowledge into four categories: (1) *riwayah* knowledge, such as the sciences of transmission; (2) *dirayah* knowledge, such as fiqh and Islamic law; (3) analogical and rational knowledge, such as *kalam* and *uṣūl al-fiqh*; and (4) *ḥaqīqah* knowledge, which represents the highest form of knowledge. Although *ḥaqīqah* is rooted in elevated intuition, it remains an integral component of sharia knowledge.³⁴

Thus, Kiai Asrori's Sufi epistemology challenges two dichotomies: the exclusivity of intuition (associated with esoteric Sufism) and the dominance of singular rationalism (characteristic of modernist epistemology). Instead, he presents a hybrid form of epistemology, an intermediate model of knowledge, that integrates sharia, rationality, and intuition within a dialectical framework. This approach aligns with contemporary academic findings, which suggest that 21st-century Islamic epistemology is

³² Achmad Asrori (al-) Ishaqi, *al-Muntakhabat fī Rabithat al-Qalbiyyah wa Shilat al-Ruhiyah* vol. 1, 28.

³³ Riyadi, "The Concept of Man in Ahmad Asrori's Anthropology of Tasawuf."

³⁴ Ishaqi, *al-Muntakhabat fī Rabithat al-Qalbiyyah wa Shilat al-Ruhiyah*, Vol. 2, 44.

moving toward an integration of reflective spirituality and disciplined rationality.³⁵

Through this reading, *dihliz* can be understood as a rational-spiritual phenomenological space, an “epistemic threshold” that enables consistent interaction between the horizon of sharia, the structure of reason, and the depth of intuition. This hybrid model simultaneously refutes the narrative that Sufism is anti-intellectual or anti-rational.

Anthropological Insight: *Dihliz* as Habitus and Social Epistemic Practice

The three-step hermeneutic approach outlined above literal meaning, symbolic meaning, and horizon reconstruction provides a conceptual framework for understanding the structure of meaning in the text of *al-Muntakhabat*. However, Sufi interpretation does not end at the level of the text alone; it is interpreted, negotiated, and practiced within the social sphere. At this point, the analysis moves from hermeneutics to interpretive anthropology, in line with Clifford Geertz’s emphasis that culture is a web of meanings woven by humans and must be understood through the interpretation of the meanings they assign to their actions.³⁶ Through this framework, *dihliz* is not limited to literal or symbolic significance but becomes a cultural epistemic code; a set of rules, language, and orientations that shape the epistemic behavior of the *tarekat* community.

Thus, there is a shift from hermeneutics to anthropology. Hermeneutics at the level of literal meaning moves into anthropology as a normative category of behavior. Hermeneutics at the level of symbolic meaning shifts into conceptual orientation, while hermeneutics concerned with horizon reconstruction moves toward the negotiation of social practices. The diagram below illustrates this shift from hermeneutics to anthropology:

³⁵ Ismail Lala, “A Phenomenological Reading of Sufi Epistemology: Re-Envisioning Reason and Intuition,” *Religion* 50, no. 4 (t.t.): 603–22.

³⁶ Mark A. Schneider, “Culture-as-Text in the Work of Clifford Geertz,” *Theory and Society* 16, no. 6 (1987): 809–39, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/657539>.

hermeneutics explains meaning, whereas anthropology explains how meaning operates within the social structure of *habitus*. What follows is a theoretical integration of the two, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2.
Approaches of understanding *dihliz*

Approach	Focus	Results
Hermeneutics	Production of textual meaning	How <i>dihliz</i> is understood
Anthropology-habitus	Social performativity	How <i>dihliz</i> is practiced and shapes ways of knowing

Source: *Dihliz* from Ricoeur-Gadamer’s Hermeneutics to Clifford Geertz’s Anthropology (Schneider, 1987) and Pierre Bourdieu’s Habitus (Bourdieu, 1977)

This shift affirms Talal Asad’s view that religious tradition is not merely a matter of textual orthodoxy, but a discursive tradition that is continuously produced, regulated, and negotiated through the social practices that discipline it.³⁷ From this integrative perspective, it is essential that *dihliz* not be understood solely through textual analysis, but be situated within the context of the *tarekat* as an epistemic *habitus*, that is a disposition of knowledge that shapes how the community interprets authority, inner experience, and rationality. This approach aligns with Bourdieu’s framework, which defines *habitus* as a system of socially produced cognitive structures and embodied dispositions.³⁸ In short, inner experiences are shaped by the social structure of knowledge rather than by subjective autonomy alone.

Therefore, from an anthropological perspective, the concept of *dihliz* does not remain at the level of an epistemic metaphor, but generates an epistemic *habitus* for the *tarekat*

³⁷ Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 14–17.

³⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, (Cambridge University Press, 1977), 72–95.

community. Riyadi notes that Kiai Asrori positions human beings as spiritual knowing subjects. From Riyadi’s observations, it is clear that for Kiai Asrori, knowledge is not merely received as dogma, but is attained through experience, awareness, and empirical intuition that culminates in gnosis (*makrifat*).³⁹ In this context, *dihliz*, which is textually associated with the term *sulūk*, can be understood as a stage in the movement of knowledge rather than merely a repetitive ritual within the order.⁴⁰

Still within the framework of this anthropological approach, Kiai Asrori’s epistemology shapes not only modes of thinking but also patterns of behavior within the community. Knowledge is defined by the legitimacy of sharia and rationality, yet it is validated through inner experiences that are socially monitored and rendered accountable within the communal structure. This supports the argument that Sufism produces not only individual forms of knowledge but also epistemic cultural capital. What follows is an integration of text in hermeneutical analysis and practice in anthropological observation, as presented in Table 3.

Table 3.
Dimensions of *Dihliz* analysis

Dimensions of Analysis	Hermeneutic Findings (Text)	Anthropological Findings (Practice)
Sharia status <i>Dihliz</i>	Epistemic authority Transition mechanism	Legitimacy Stage of knowledge transformation
The purpose of suluk	Spiritual movement	Reconstruction of epistemic habitus
Makrifat	Knowledge Production	empirical-inner

Source: *Dihliz* in Hermeneutics-Anthropology Findings

From the foregoing analysis, *dihliz* does not remain merely a category of meaning within the text of *al-Muntakhabat*. Rather,

³⁹ Riyadi, *Antropologi Tasawuf: Wacana Manusia Spiritual dan Pengetahuan.*, 284.

⁴⁰ Riyadi, *Antropologi Tasawuf: Wacana Manusia Spiritual dan Pengetahuan.*, 285.

it functions as an epistemic mechanism operating within the lived reality of the *tarekat* community. In other words, *dihliz* serves as a bridging concept that links the structure of Sufi meaning with social practices that produce knowledge, as articulated by Clifford Geertz. This leads to two further substantive questions: how does *dihliz* transform the Sufi way of knowing, and how is spiritual legitimacy socially reproduced through the text?.

With regard to the first question, the Sufi epistemology proposed by Kiai Asrori shapes how the relationship between sharia, reason, and intuition is understood. It functions as a liminal epistemic space in which inner experiences are interpreted through the frameworks of sharia and reason before they are recognized as knowledge.

In practical terms, *dihliz* transforms the mode of knowing through three mechanisms. First is the discipline of spiritual verification: inner experiences are not automatically regarded as valid, but must undergo a process of evaluation based on sharia texts and reflective reasoning. This mechanism functions as an epistemic filter, akin to what Talal Asad describes as a discursive tradition; one that is supervised and regulated by normative authorities.⁴¹ Second is the internalisation of Sufi rationality. By emphasising *al-ma'rifah bi al-'aql*, Kiai Asrori advances a model of knowledge in which rationality is not positioned in opposition to Sufism, but instead coexists with it. Third is the production of an epistemic *habitus*. From Pierre Bourdieu's perspective, *dihliz* generates a particular *habitus*; a way of thinking and feeling that is inculcated through ritual practice.⁴² Through these mechanisms, *dihliz* operates as a dialectical space of knowing through sharia and knowing through reason, even as practitioners engage in Sufi intuitive experiences.

The function of *dihliz* is also evident in the ways spiritual legitimacy is generated and socially reproduced. *Dihliz* provides a normative framework for determining which inner experiences

⁴¹ Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam.*, 14–17.

⁴² Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 72–95.

are considered valid and which are not. Moreover, *dihliz* regulates the structure of spiritual authority through the reproduction of legitimacy. For instance, by positioning sharia as the epistemic horizon, *dihliz* establishes the rules of Sufi truth. This means that spiritual experiences are deemed valid only when they are subject to the authority of sharia. Within Michel Foucault's archaeological framework, this process can be understood as the formation of an institutional regime of truth.⁴³

Furthermore, knowledge derived from spiritual experiences is not purely personal in nature, but is recognized and validated through social structures such as religious gatherings, pledges of allegiance (*bay'ah*), *rābiṭah* rituals, and hierarchical interactions with *mursyids*. This process demonstrates that Sufi epistemology operates collectively within the social sphere.

Therefore, it is often concluded from Kiai Asrori's statements that Sufism and the *ṭarīqa* are inseparable. As Kiai Asrori stated in the Second Sunday Assembly, "*al-'ulamā' al-ṣūfiyyah al-ṭarīqiyyah*."⁴⁴ This expression indicates that Sufism is intrinsically connected to the *ṭarīqa* (*sulūk*, spiritual ascent), implying that every true Sufi is a member of a *ṭarīqa*, and those who are genuinely committed to the *ṭarīqa* are necessarily Sufis. Kiai Asrori further emphasized that Sufism requires '*ilm al-ḥāl*, that is, knowledge grounded in lived and inward experience perceived by the *qalb* (heart), rather than merely '*ilm al-maqāl*, which is acquired through reading and studying Sufi texts. Consequently, one cannot simply attain the title of "Sufi" through textual learning alone.⁴⁵

Through its epistemological and social functions, *dihliz* emerges as a mediating concept between text and practice, and

⁴³ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Routledge, 2002), 127–131.

⁴⁴ Muhamad Musyafa', "Relevansi Nilai-Nilai al-Tharīqah Pada Kekinian (Studi Penafsiran ayat-ayat al-Qur'an dalam al-Muntakhabat Karya KH. Achmad Asrori al-Ishaqi)" (Disertasi, Pascasarjana UIN Sunan Ampel, 2018), 132.

⁴⁵ Musyafa', "Relevansi Nilai-Nilai al-Tharīqah Pada Kekinian (Studi Penafsiran ayat-ayat al-Qur'an dalam al-Muntakhabat Karya KH. Achmad Asrori al-Ishaqi)." 134.

between hermeneutics and anthropology. It explains not only how Sufism is understood, but also how it is practised. This analysis demonstrates that Kiai Asrori's epistemology constitutes a model in which meaning and practice mutually shape one another, thereby offering an important contribution to contemporary studies of Sufism.

***Dihliz* as Perpetual Epistemic Liminality**

When Kiai Asrori wrote the phrase “the throne under the shadow of Islamic law and the threshold of the path of the *ṭarīqa*” (*taḥta ḡhilāl ‘ilm al-sharī‘ah wa dihlīz sulūk al-ṭarīqa*), he positioned two horizons side by side. The first is *taḥta ḡhilāl ‘ilm al-sharī‘ah*, which represents a normative, rational, and textual horizon. The second is *dihlīz sulūk al-ṭarīqa*, which represents an inner, intuitive, and experiential horizon. By situating *sulūk* within the *dihlīz*, Kiai Asrori indicates a space that is not yet final, unlike the realms of *maqām* or *ḥaqīqah*. This positioning suggests that the pursuit of knowledge does not proceed linearly from *sharī‘ah* to *ḥaqīqah*, but rather unfolds within a liminal space that continuously brings the two horizons into dialogue, negotiation, and reinterpretation. In short, Kiai Asrori is articulating a liminal structure that remains operative throughout his Sufi epistemology.

Read through the lens of Arnold van Gennep's and Victor Turner's theories of liminality, *dihlīz* in this series of statements is not merely a temporary transitional phase that moves the *sālik* from one stage to another, but rather a condition of perpetual liminality. In van Gennep's formulation, liminality is a transitional phase that separates individuals from their previous status before they enter a new social structure.⁴⁶ Turner, however, emphasises that this threshold space possesses an internal dynamic that enables the continuous transformation of meaning and the formation of identity. Contemporary scholarship further develops this insight by arguing that modernity itself is marked

⁴⁶ Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*., 1-20.

by permanent liminality, a condition of existing “in between” without a clearly defined endpoint.⁴⁷

From this perspective, *dihlīz* in Kiai Asrori’s epistemology is not a temporary gateway to essence, but rather a dynamic mode of religiosity. It is a mode or space in which the *sālik* does not move linearly from sharia to essence (*ḥaqīqah*), but instead remains within a threshold that allows for continuous epistemic encounters, reinterpretations, and reconciliations. This approach presents Kiai Asrori’s epistemology as a hybrid model that integrates two horizons of knowledge: the empirical-textual horizon and the inner-spiritual horizon. These horizons do not negate one another; rather, they mutually expand and illuminate each other in the ongoing process of meaning-making.⁴⁸

Furthermore, this analysis demonstrates that *dihlīz* functions as a conceptual bridge mediating between spiritual subjectivity and the *mu’āmalah* worldview, between inner consciousness and broader social structures. Within Talal Asad’s framework, religious experience is always produced within discursive traditions that link internal forms of consciousness with the social practices that regulate them.⁴⁹ Similarly, Clifford Geertz emphasises that religion, as a system of meaning, not only regulates inner perceptions but also shapes social actions and orientations toward the world.⁵⁰ Thus, the threshold space of *dihlīz* does not draw the *sālik* out of the world; rather, it cultivates a reflective and dialogical mode of being in the world.

This constitutes Kiai Asrori’s point of renewal: a form of Sufi epistemology that is not oriented toward escaping social reality, but rather toward engagement with the world through liminal mechanisms that are adaptive to social change. Through

⁴⁷ Alfred Eduard Wajabula, “A Critical Study of Victor Turner’s Liminality, Religion, and Nationality,” *Jurnal Theologia* 34, no. 2 (2023): 245–70, <https://doi.org/10.21580/teo.2023.34.2.17798>.

⁴⁸ Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, 32–38.

⁴⁹ Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 14–17.

⁵⁰ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 87–125.

dihlīz, Sufism appears not as a mode of spiritual withdrawal, but as an epistemological framework that guides inner discipline and social involvement, bridging personal experience with the social construction of knowledge.⁵¹

Archaeology of Knowledge: *Dihlīz* as a Sufi Regime of Truth

Within Michel Foucault's framework, the archaeology of knowledge examines the conditions that allow a statement to function as valid knowledge, not on the basis of its truth value, but on the discursive rules that govern its production and circulation.⁵² From this perspective, *dihlīz* regulates the epistemic conditions that determine how Sufi experiences can be recognised as knowledge. Within this framework, this approach is applied to the statements of Kiai Asrori in *al-Muntakhabāt*;

تَحْتَ ظِلَالِ عِلْمِ الشَّرِيعَةِ وَدِهْلِيزِ سُلُوكِ الطَّرِيقَةِ

"Under the protection of sharia law and at the threshold of *tarīqah sulūk*".⁵³

The statement above points to an epistemic formula that creates the conditions under which Sufi experiences can be accepted as knowledge. From an archaeological perspective, this phrase constitutes a structure of truth that regulates the conditions, limits, and authority of Sufi knowledge. The archaeology of knowledge begins to operate when *dihlīz* is employed to classify various forms of experience into *‘ilm* (teachable knowledge), *dhawq* (spiritual taste that can be guided), and *ḥāl* (personal experiences that are not automatically considered valid).⁵⁴

⁵¹ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 204–231.

⁵² Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 31–39.

⁵³ Achmad Asrori (al-) Ishaqi, *al-Muntakhabat fī Rabithat al-Qalbiyyah wa Shilat al-Ruhiyah* Vol. 4 (Kantor TQN Utsmaniyah, 2016), 72.

⁵⁴ *Ḥāl* (or *aḥwāl*) refers to a condition or state that overtakes the heart of a *sālik* without intention. It is uncertain and unstable and therefore cannot be regarded as an objective experience. This differs from *maqām* (or *maqāmāt*), which refers to levels or stages that a *sālik* deliberately passes

In this case, Kiai Asrori set aside controversial philosophical concepts in classical Sufi discourse that are often highlighted in Sufism studies, largely due to the haste of some researchers in interpreting *syuhūdiyyah* expressions that appear in Sufi texts.⁵⁵ Quoting Sa‘īd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī, statements such as *mā fī al-jubbah illā Allāh* (“there is nothing in the robe but Allah”), attributed to Abū Yazīd al-Buṣṭāmī, have been hastily claimed as representing the doctrinal creed of a Sufi. This has led to the impression that al-Buṣṭāmī was a follower and propagator of the doctrine of *ḥulūl*.⁵⁶ In reality, however, if one carefully examines the essence of such expressions and reviews al-Buṣṭāmī’s life in its entirety particularly his strong emphasis on adherence to the sharia, it becomes clear that this doctrine cannot be regarded as a valid Sufi teaching, nor can it be legitimately attributed to him.⁵⁷

As the phrase *tahta zīlāl ‘ilm al-sharī‘ah* suggests, it automatically establishes a rule that a new Sufi experience can be regarded as knowledge only if it falls under the auspices of sharia. Thus, *dihliz* functions as a Foucauldian grid of specification, a structure that determines what can be recognised as knowledge and what is dismissed as merely subjective experience.⁵⁸

through in the Sufi path. See Abdul Karim al-Qusyairi, *al-Risalah al-Qusyairiyah* (Jakarta: Dar al-Kutub al-Islamiah, 2010), 91-92., and see Erman Erman, Komaruddin Komaruddin, dan Darusalam Darusalam, “Exploring the Tazkir al-Ghabi Manuscript: The Sufistic Pattern of Sheikh Burhanuddin in the Minangkabau,” *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 22, no. 1 (2024): 69–96, <https://doi.org/10.31291/jlka.v22i1.1197>.

⁵⁵ This expression of *Syuhudiyah* is an odd expression that arises from a saint of Allah, and is highly controversial. It is also called *Syathahat*. See Sri Parwanti dkk., “Kajian Sufisme Ortodoks dan Heterodoks Dalam Sastra Melayu,” *Jurnal Bindo Sastra* 7, no. 1 (2023): 7–16, <https://doi.org/10.32502/jbs.v7i1.5327>.

⁵⁶ Ishaqi, *al-Muntakhabat fi Rabithat al-Qalbiyyah wa Shilat al-Ruhiah.*, vol 5, 266.

⁵⁷ Junaidin Junaidin, “Konsep Al-Fana’, Al-Baqa dan Al-Ittihad Abu Yazid Al-Bustami,” *FiTUA: Jurnal Studi Islam* 2, no. 2 (2021): 155–66, <https://doi.org/10.47625/fitua.v2i2.314>.

⁵⁸ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge.*, 44-45.

More specifically, before determining who and in what way a Sufi figure deserves to be called a mursyid; a spiritual guide entrusted with the authority to lead, whose teachings and conduct are considered worthy of emulation, Kiai Asrori analysed the spiritual journey of a *salik* into four categories. First, *salik mujarrad*: the condition of a person who remains at the level of *riyāḍah*⁵⁹ and has not yet ascended to a higher stage. Second, *al-majdhūb al-mujarrad*: the condition of a person whose heart's *hijāb* is removed directly, without undergoing a spiritual journey (*sulūk*). This condition causes the *salik* to lose awareness of himself. Third, *salik mutadārik bi al-jadhbah*: in this category, a person initially undergoes *mujāhadah* (earnest spiritual struggle) and *riyāḍah* as part of the spiritual journey, and then enters a state of unconsciousness similar to that of the second category. Fourth, *al-majdhūb mutadārik bi al-sulūk*: this category is the reverse of the third, referring to a state in which unconsciousness is followed by a return to consciousness.⁶⁰

In this case, Kiai Asrori identified two important conditions that may appear similar but are not synonymous: *ḥālat al-junūn* and *ḥālat al-jadhbah*. *Ḥālat al-junūn* is related to the mind or brain, as the primary factor of *junūn* (madness) is an uncontrolled or disordered intellect. This differs from *al-jadhbah*, which is related to the heart. In this state, a *salik*'s unconsciousness is not caused by mental disorder, but by an overwhelming spiritual attraction that takes control of his inner consciousness and even manifests in his physical body.⁶¹

⁵⁹ *Riyaḍah* is defined as mystical exercises, mental exercises with the effort to make oneself accustomed to not doing things that pollute the soul such as reprehensible deeds, both inwardly and outwardly. See Arif Syibromalisi dkk., "The Concept of At-Tariq Ila Allah (The Path to Allah) According to Sheikh Zakariyya Al-Ansari in The Al-Futuhāt Al-Ilāhiyyah Manuscript," *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 21, no. 2 (2023): 587–614, <https://doi.org/10.31291/jlka.v21i2.1090>.

⁶⁰ Ishaqi, *al-Muntakhabat fi Rabithat al-Qalbiyyah wa Shilat al-Ruhiyah*, vol. 3, 206–207.

⁶¹ Ishaqi, *al-Muntakhabat fi Rabithat al-Qalbiyyah wa Shilat al-Ruhiyah*, vol. 3, 204.

The three psychological stages in this spiritual journey are reminiscent of the concept of *al-farq* and *al-jam'*. Within this *ḥālīyah*, there are three corresponding psychological stages. First, *al-farq*, which refers to the condition in which humans still perceive realities other than Allah Swt. Second, *al-jam'*, a condition in which all realities are perceived as being in relation to Him. At this stage, there is a further level in which a person becomes absorbed and unaware of any reality except Allah Swt alone. Third, *al-farq al-thānī*, a condition that returns a person to conscious awareness. However, this third psychological stage is sequentially higher than the previous two levels, as it integrates spiritual realisation with renewed awareness of multiplicity.⁶²

From this point, Kiai Asrori emphasises that there is a higher stage after a *salik* experiences self-unconsciousness, namely a return to stable consciousness, or a return to embracing the boundaries of *sharia*. According to Kiai Asrori, even a *mursyid* must be a *salik* who has reached a stable condition. This refers to a state in which one is neither veiled by al-Ḥaqq from perceiving creation, nor veiled by creation from the presence of al-Ḥaqq.⁶³ Such a condition is attained only by spiritually perfected individuals, such as al-Junayd and other accomplished *mursyids*. Conversely, Kiai Asrori clearly rejects schools of thought that are constructed upon the ecstatic expressions of Sufi figures who were in states of unconsciousness, such as those attributed to Abū Yazīd al-Buṣṭhāmī and al-Ḥallāj.⁶⁴

The expression *dihliz suluk al-tharīqah* indicates that spiritual experience does not possess authority in and of itself. It must pass through the process of *suluk*, namely ritual discipline and guidance under a *mursyid*. In Foucault's archaeological framework, this corresponds to procedures of validation; internal rules that determine how experiences are assessed and under what conditions they acquire the status of truth.⁶⁵ Therefore, in

⁶² Qusyairi, *al-Risalah al-Qusyairiyah*., 100-101.

⁶³ Ishaqi, *al-Muntakhabat fi Rabithat al-Qalbiyyah wa Shilat al-Ruhiyah*., vol 5, 276-281.

⁶⁴ Ishaqi, *al-Muntakhabat fi Rabithat al-Qalbiyyah wa Shilat al-Ruhiyah*., vol. 5, 266-267.

⁶⁵ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*., 131-133.

Kiai Asrori's Sufism, even someone who is *'ālim* or possesses deep knowledge still requires a mentor or mursyid to guide their spiritual journey (*ṭarīqah*). This is because Sufism, in its true sense, is the science of *al-ḥāl*: a form of knowledge that can only be attained through *ṣuḥbah* (close association) with spiritually perfected individuals and through serving them, as expressed in the phrase *min khidmat al-rijāl wa ṣuḥbat ahl al-kamāl*.⁶⁶

From these descriptions, it is evident that *dihliz* functions as an epistemic foundation in which inner experiences are not considered valid unless they are measured against the limits of Sharia, tested through reason (*al-ma'rifah bi al-'aql*), and validated by a mursyid. This represents the concrete way in which *dihliz* regulates the circulation of truth within the *ṭarīqah*. Furthermore, as Michel Foucault argues, every community operates within a regime of truth namely, a set of rules that determines which truths may circulate and who is authorized to articulate them.⁶⁷ From this archaeological perspective, the metaphor of *dihliz* both reveals and conceals the power relations involved in the formation of Sufi epistemology. It reveals that Sharia continues to function as a legitimate epistemic umbrella, while simultaneously allowing spiritual experience to gain legitimacy without explicitly rejecting the authority of the Sharia tradition. In this way, *dihliz* operates as an "epistemic tactic" that manages the tension between the authority of textual scholars and the experiential authority of mursyids, without resorting to open discursive confrontation.

In the context of Kiai Asrori, *dihliz* functions as a Sufi regime of truth, in the sense that he emphasises the integration of reason (*al-ma'rifah bi al-'aql*) as a means of regulating intuition so that it is not unconditionally free. Rather, spiritual experience is constrained to remain within the horizon of Sharia. As a result, not all mystical experiences are accepted; such as the aforementioned *shaṭaḥāt*, but only those experiences that have passed

⁶⁶ Ainul Yaqin, "Keselarasan Metafisika Sufi dan Fisika Modern (Kajian Pemikiran Tasawuf Achmad Asrori Al-Ishaqi)" (Tesis, UIN Sunan Ampel, 2023), 79.

⁶⁷ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*., 133.

through *dihliz* can be regarded as valid. These are experiences that are framed, directed, and filtered by both Sharia and rationality. In this way, *dihliz* produces epistemic discipline: inner experience becomes knowledge only after undergoing a specific normative process.

By positioning Sharia as the epistemic horizon, reason as a reflective instrument, and intuition as an inner experience that must be guided, *dihliz* presents itself as a mechanism that classifies types of experience (knowledge-*dzauq-hāl*), determines pathways of legitimacy, regulates who has the authority to articulate truth, and stabilises forms of discourse within the *tarīqah*. Accordingly, an archaeological analysis shows that *dihliz* is not merely a spiritual concept, but an epistemic structure that produces Sufi truth and organises the relationship between Sharia, reason, and intuition.

Through multiple layers of analysis hermeneutics, anthropology, liminality, and archaeology, *dihliz* functions as a bridging concept that enables the formation of a reflective, dialogical, and adaptive model of Sufi knowledge. This is because *dihliz* connects text with practice, Sharia with spirituality, rationality with intuition, personal experience with social structures, and the Sufi tradition with the challenges of modernity.

It is here that Kiai Asrori's innovation becomes evident. Sufism, in his formulation, is not a means of escaping the world, but rather an epistemological framework for engaging with complex social realities. The *dihliz* model thus offers an alternative paradigm for Islamic intellectual renewal: a liminal epistemology that is not final or closed, but productive, dynamic, and capable of opening new possibilities for understanding truth.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that *dihliz* in *al Muntakhabat* functions as a liminal epistemological mechanism that directly answers the research question regarding how Sufi knowledge is produced through negotiation between sharia based normativity and spiritual experience. Through hermeneutic and anthropological analysis, *dihliz* is shown to operate as an epistemic

threshold that legitimises the movement between exoteric and esoteric domains, enabling Kiai Asrori to synthesise Sunni Sufism, philosophical reflection, and the demands of modern religious life. The findings demonstrate that *dihliz* is not merely a metaphor but a structural principle that shapes the epistemic orientation of the TQN al Utsmaniyah and frames Sufism as a dynamic mode of knowledge production.

This research is limited by its exclusive reliance on textual data and documented narratives, without field based observation of how *dihliz* is embodied in contemporary Sufi practice. The anthropological dimension is therefore reconstructed through interpretive textual analysis rather than direct ethnographic engagement. In addition, the study focuses solely on *al Muntakhabat* as the primary source, which means that other potential expressions of *dihliz* in oral teachings, ritual practices, or institutional transformations remain outside the scope of this analysis.

Future research may extend this study by examining how *dihliz* is enacted within the lived practices of the TQN al Utsmaniyah community or by comparing its epistemic structure with other Nusantara Sufi texts to map broader patterns of liminal knowledge production. Theoretically, the concept of *dihliz* offers a promising framework for rethinking the relationship between sharia, rationality, and spiritual intuition in Islamic epistemology. Practically, it provides a foundation for strengthening religious literacy, mediating doctrinal tensions, and informing peace oriented Islamic education in Indonesia.

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