

The Naqshbandi Order and the Internalization of Sharia Values: A *Maqāṣid al-Shari'ah* Framework in Secular Turkey

Helmi Syaifuddin,¹ Angga Teguh Prastyo,² Baharuddin,³ Abu Bakar⁴

Abdul Ghaffar,⁵ Fahim Khasani,⁶ Yusuf Bahri Gundogdu⁷

UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, Indonesia^{1,2,3,4,5,6}

Ondokuz Mayıs University, Turkey⁷

Email: helmi.syaifuddin@uin-malang.ac.id

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Abstract: This study examines the internalization of Sharia values within secular Turkish society through the *maqāṣid al-shari'ah* framework. It focuses specifically on the Naqshbandi Sufi order, one of the most influential Sufi movements in contemporary Turkey. The research is based on qualitative data collected from 12 participants, consisting of Naqshbandi sheikhs, senior disciples, community educators, and active members in Istanbul, Ankara, and Konya. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, direct observation of dhikr assemblies and community activities, documentary analysis, and review of academic literature and podcasts related to Sufism and Sharia. Content analysis was conducted using four analytic categories: leadership charisma, institutional networks, pedagogical practices, and community-based religious activities. Data validity was strengthened through triangulation across interviews, observations, and documentary sources. The findings reveal that although the Naqshbandi order maintains a strong ethical and spiritual foundation, deeper internalization of Sharia values still requires sustained cross-community dialogue, institutional capacity building, and the development of interpretive frameworks that bridge classical Islamic traditions and modern scholarly frameworks. The study concludes that cultivating *shari'ah* values in a secular national context requires balancing respect for tradition with adaptation to contemporary social challenges, thereby fostering ethical, contextually relevant, contextually relevant, and sustainable forms of spiritual and social practice.

Introduction

Sufi orders, such as the Naqshbandi in Turkey, play a strategic role as non-state actors by promoting moderate spirituality to reduce the escalation of identity politics and maintain a balance between Islamic Sharia values and the principles of secularism. Turkey, with a population of approximately 85.6 million (Hürriyet Daily News, 2025), faces challenges due to the growing influence of religious institutions, such as the Diyanet and Imam-Hatip schools, on public policy. This phenomenon has driven a process of Sharia Islamization in the public sphere, which risks clashing with the foundations of modern Turkish secularism (Çaksu, 2025). This ideological contestation is visible in both formal policy and public discourse, exemplified by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's decision to convert Hagia Sophia from a museum into a mosque. However, the management of the site drew criticism, as tourist

behavior was deemed to diminish its substantive Sharia value. In such a context, Sufi orders are seen as social forces capable of functioning as a counterbalance by emphasizing moderate Sharia and humanist *maqāṣid* principles, thus harmonizing Sharia values with Turkey's socio-political dynamics.

Sufi orders in Turkey face serious challenges within the strong reality of secularism. Limited public space for religious preaching, restrictive secular regulations, and competition with both political Islamic movements and Western modernism present obstacles to their survival (Guner, 2021; Ozgur, 2012; Zubaida, 1996). In response, some orders have forged cultural and social alliances with social movements, local communities, and public figures to sustain the relevance of Sharia values. Yet without a *maqāṣid*-oriented framework, such strategies risk co-optation by political agendas or entrapment in the commercialization of spirituality, which could undermine the authenticity of their teachings (Auda, 2008). *Maqāṣid al-shari‘ah* provides an orientation emphasizing public welfare, justice, and the protection of the dignity of both the orders and their followers. It also upholds a clear division of roles among the *shaykh* (*mursyid*), senior disciples, and the broader community in transmitting Sharia values through the structured cultivation of knowledge, ethics, and spirituality (Padela, 2022). This approach is crucial to prevent the exploitation of Sufi orders for non-spiritual ends while safeguarding the authenticity of *maqāṣid al-shari‘ah* amidst the challenges of a secular society.

Since the early nineteenth century, Sufi orders in Turkey have operated within a landscape of continuous state intervention that gradually restricted their autonomy, beginning with the loss of financial and administrative independence in 1812, an early disruption of *hifż al-māl* (the protection of wealth and institutional independence) (Yüksek, 2021). Although these historical developments are significant, their importance lies not in the chronology itself but in how they generated enduring tensions that continue to shape the contemporary role of Sufi orders. During the Second Constitutional Era, mounting criticism from Western-oriented intellectuals and Islamist circles framed Sufism as an obstacle to social progress (Silverstein, 2009), prompting Sufi elites to initiate internal reforms as early efforts to preserve *hifż al-dīn* (religion) and *hifż al-‘aql* (reason) amid rapid modernization. Atatürk's wartime engagement with Sufi leaders during the War of Independence likewise illustrated how spiritual authority could align with the protection of *hifż al-nafs* (life). However, the 1925 ban on Sufi orders following Sheikh Said's rebellion fundamentally reshaped the religious landscape, compelling Sufi communities to rethink their strategies for survival within a secular republic (Akgündüz, 2011). Their varied responses demonstrate that modernization did not simply suppress tradition; it forced the orders to renegotiate the *maqāṣid* to sustain Islamic values. The urgency of this research arises precisely from these long-standing tensions. Understanding how contemporary Sufi orders reinterpret the *maqāṣid* today is crucial for explaining their adaptive capacities and their evolving role within Turkey's modern religious landscape.

The challenges of internalizing Sharia values in secular Turkish society manifest in several forms that can be grouped into distinct categories. First, there is the challenge of youth identity, marked by the growing tendency of some Muslims—particularly adolescents—toward atheism due to identity crises and clashes with family values and social environments (Atac & Adler Jr., 2025). Second, the challenge of political and legal repression, where both the expression of openness to Islam and its rejection may pose serious threats, including criminalization, social exclusion, and even violence from family or the state (Çalı & Demir-Gürsel, 2023). Third, the challenge of socio-religious fragmentation, visible in the differences in Islamic practices among traditional Sunni, Sufi, reformist, and Shi‘a communities, which often result in interpretive variations that can escalate into debates over Sharia legitimacy (Albayrak, 2019). Fourth, the challenge of the inability to fully implement Sharia, as human limitations and the conditions of secular modernity prevent many Muslims from adhering to all legal and traditional demands of Islam (Lattanzio, 2022). Thus, the internalization of Sharia values in Turkey faces major obstacles not only from external secular pressures but also from internal dynamics within the Muslim community itself.

Strategies for internalizing Sharia values in secular Turkish society cannot be understood merely as textual discourse in classical *turāth* works but rather as a living and dynamic social process (Rock-Singer, 2020). Core values such as justice, equality, and order emerge from social experience, then evolve into theories, ideologies, social programs, and movements that influence the formation of laws, constitutions, and institutions. This process unfolds through reciprocal relations: ideas trigger social change, which are then debated again in the public sphere via media, discussions, critiques, protests, and compromises, ultimately giving rise to new ideas (Strang & Soule, 1998). Thus, the internalization of Sharia in Turkey functions as an evolving cycle, demonstrating that Sharia thought is not merely present but is actively reproduced within the interactions of secular modern society.

The internalization of Sharia values in Turkey primarily occurs through Islamic intellectual spaces that operate within a secular social landscape. These spaces consist of networks of social movements, such as the Diyanet and various Republican-era organizations, which actively shape the dynamics of contemporary Islamic thought (Yavuz, 2003). Consequently, analytical approaches that limit the discussion to specific figures, classical textual traditions, or Sufi orders are insufficient to capture the complexity of this process. Existing literature largely overlooks this broader intellectual field, namely, the socio-intellectual arena that has been functioning within Turkey’s secular society since the 1940s (White, 2002). Emphasizing this literature gap is crucial because many observers, especially those outside the field, often misunderstand Sharia internalization as synonymous with *turāth* scholarship or Sufi ritual practices. In reality, it refers to a much wider socio-intellectual domain in which Islamic-oriented ideas are circulated within the modern secular context of Turkey.

Studies on the internalization of Sharia values in society have previously tended to emphasize either the normative-legalistic aspects or the Sufi dimensions detached from the political sphere. For instance, some

research highlights Sufism as an ascetic practice focusing on the inner dimension, while others underscore the role of Sufi scholars merely in legitimizing political power. Within the framework of *maqāṣid al-shari‘ah*, however, the internalization of Sharia values in society can be traced through three complementary domains. First, internalization within the domain of external authority (*hifż al-māl* and *hifż al-nafs*), namely the effort to maintain social order, security, and the protection of communal property through the Sufis' relationship with political authority and the safeguarding of zawiya institutions (Akhlaq, 2023; Carlucci, 2021; Köseoğlu, 2022). Second, internalization within the domain of inner authority (*hifż al-dīn* and *hifż al-‘aqd*), emphasizing spirituality, moral guidance, and the role of Sufis in ensuring the well-being of the soul and providing ethical legitimacy for the community in facing secular and political challenges (Kawanishi, 2024; Vicini, 2017; Yalcinkaya, 2025). Third, internalization in the domain of Sufi socio-political roles (*hifż al-nasl*), visible in the function of Sufis as mediators of conflict, critics of injustices such as excessive taxation and confiscation of property, and ascetic exemplars reinforcing justice and social cohesion (Abu-Manneh, 1982; Atçıl & Markiewicz, 2024; Kuran, 2001).

Thus, the role of the Sufi order demonstrates that Sufism is not merely an ascetic path but a comprehensive means of preserving the *maqāṣid al-shari‘ah* by balancing external authority, inner authority, and social praxis. This study departs from earlier scholarship by offering a categorization of three interrelated domains of Sharia internalization external, internal, and socio-political within the perspective of *maqāṣid al-shari‘ah*. Through this approach, Sufism is understood not only as a spiritual practice or political legitimization but as a comprehensive mechanism that maintains equilibrium between legal, spiritual, and social dimensions in the dynamics of Muslim societies.

The strategies of Sharia value internalization in Turkey have emerged as both intellectual and social movements seeking to free themselves from the hegemony of Western knowledge, culture, and secularism, and to construct a model of society, political thought, and worldview rooted in Islam. These movements are grounded in both classical and modern Islamic traditions, yet they remain in dialogue with Western and secular thought, thereby forming a complex dynamic. The spectrum of Sharia values they promote is diverse, ranging from orthodox Sunni conservatism of the *Naqshbandiyya*, Qur'an-based Islamism, internationalist ummatic Islamism, and Muslim feminism, to the idea of an Islamic state (Dalacoura, 2021). Despite differences in orientation, what unites them is the shared attempt to break free from Western epistemic-cultural domination and to articulate modes of thought rooted in the internalization of Sharia values. Hence, the issues often discussed in these spaces go beyond classical religious sciences such as fiqh or hadīth, and extend to broader questions of civilization, justice, authenticity/yerlilik (local rootedness), morality, the West and Westernism, Islamism, nationalism, modernity, Ottomanism, and imperialism (Göle, 1998).

The internalization of Sharia values in secular Turkish society cannot be separated from the historical chronology that illustrates how Islamic ideas were transformed into social institutions. Since the 1990s, the process of institutionalization gave rise to knowledge centers such as BİSAV and İLAM

(Hakkımızda | İlimi Araştırmalar Merkezi, 2017), which later expanded into networks of foundations and universities, including Şehir University in 2010 (Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2025). This development not only marked the shift of Islamic discourse from discussion spaces into institutional realms but also reflected the diversity of intellectual traditions, from the Sufism of al-Ghazali to the rationalism of Ibn Rushd, that shaped the direction of Sharia internalization. Nevertheless, the strategies of applying Sharia values in secular Turkish society continue to face challenges, and this study seeks to identify patterns and mechanisms most effective in ensuring their sustainability.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical method to examine the internalization of Sharia values through the *maqāṣid al-shari‘ah* framework within secular Turkish society. The data sources consist of primary and secondary materials collected through literature review, interviews, and direct observation conducted between July 27 and August 10, 2025. Secondary data include literature on Sufi orders, studies of key Naqshbandī figures, and relevant podcasts and webinars. Although ritual practices such as dhikr assemblies are acknowledged within the literature, they function solely as contextual information rather than primary units of analysis, as this research focuses on the socio-intellectual field where Islamic meanings are produced and negotiated. This methodological design enables a comprehensive analysis of how Sharia values are internalized beyond ritual settings, particularly within modern intellectual and social spaces in Turkey.

Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with 12 informants, consisting of Naqshbandi order leaders, senior followers, and young members across Istanbul, Konya, and Ankara. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their active involvement and knowledge of Sharia-related teachings and further expanded using snowball sampling to include additional key participants. Secondary data consist of academic literature, books, and official regulations regarding Sufi orders and Sharia. Data analysis was carried out through content analysis, beginning with data reduction, followed by coding and categorization of key themes related to Sharia internalization, Sufi orders, and secular Turkish society. The interpretation stage applied the *maqāṣid al-shari‘ah* perspective to synthesize findings across data sources. Data validity was maintained through triangulation of interviews, literature, and podcasts, ensuring accuracy, relevance, and comprehensiveness. This analytic process allowed the study to generate a holistic understanding of the practices and challenges of Sharia internalization within secular Turkish society.

Results and Discussion

Dynamics of Sufi Orders and the Internalization of Sharia Values in Secular Turkey

The figures, social bases, and influence of various Sufi orders in Turkey not only play an important role in the spiritual life of society but also serve as significant cultural and political forces. Through movement networks, social

activities, and political influence, these orders contribute to the internalization of Sharia values into the everyday lives of Muslims in Turkey. Thus, the dynamics of Sufi orders can be understood as one of the main instruments in preserving religious traditions while simultaneously responding to the challenges of modernity. The following table illustrates the connections between prominent figures, their Sufi order affiliations, and the forms of influence they exercise within society. In this way, it becomes evident that the internalization of Sharia values in Turkey occurs not only in the ritual-spiritual domain but also through organizational networks, social activities, and the charismatic leadership embodied by Sufi order figures.

Table 1: Figures, Sufi Orders, Base Cities, and Their Influence in Turkey

No.	Name	Sufi Order/ Movement	Base City	Main Influence
1	Mehmed Zahid Kotku (1897–1980)	İskenderpaşa (Naqshbandi-Khalidi)	İstanbul (Fatih)	Mentor of Islamic politicians (Erbakan, Erdoğan); integration of Sufi order and politics; early base of the AKP (English, 2020).
2	Mahmut Ustaosmanoğlu (1929–2022)	İsmailağa Community (Naqshbandi)	İstanbul (Fatih)	Large social base; influence on Imam Hatip schools; conservative da‘wa movement (Türkçe, 2022).
3	Süleyman Hilmi Tunahan (1888–1959)	Süleymancılar (Naqshbandi-Khalidi)	İstanbul & Anatolia	Network of Qur'an courses; formation of a religious middle class; base of the Islamic movement (Review, 2021).
4	Fethullah Gülen (1941–)	Hizmet Movement (Nurcu)	Ankara (early), later global diaspora	Thousands of schools and universities worldwide; bureaucratic dominance 1990–2010; opposition after 2016 (Review, 2016).
5	Necmettin Erbakan (1926–2011)	Political Islam (rooted in İskenderpaşa)	Ankara (national politics)	Founder of Milli Görüş; bridge between Sufi order and Islamic party politics; conservative ideology (van Bruinessen, 2021).
6	Şeyh Nazım Kibrisî (1922–2014)	Naqshbandi-Haqqani	İstanbul & Lefke (Cyprus)	Transnational order; attracted disciples in Europe, Asia, and the

				Americas (Cornell & Kaya, 2015).
7	Ken'an Rifâî	Rifâî – Mevlevi	Istanbul	Modern reformer of Sufism; academic and cultural influence; established cultural institutions (Şenay, n.d.).
8	Mevlevi Order (anonymous, inherited from Rumi)	Mevleviye	Konya	Sema ritual (Whirling Dervishes); global symbol of Turkish Sufism; religious tourism attraction (Rifâî et al., n.d.).
9	Mahmud Sami Ramazanoğlu (1892–1984)	Erenköy Community (Naqshbandi)	Istanbul – Adana	Philanthropic charity and business networks; shaped conservative religious family structures.

Source: Author's creation.

Table 1 presents the major leaders of Turkish Sufi orders along with their institutional bases and areas of influence. This overview helps clarify how Sufi networks function as socio-intellectual forces that shape the internalization of Sharia values within modern secular Turkey. Although the listed figures come from different branches of the Naqshbandi or Nurcu movements, they share three common features. First, each order establishes a strong organizational base in key urban centers such as Istanbul, Ankara, and Anatolian cities, which become the hubs of its religious activities. Second, each figure exercises influence within a specific societal domain—ranging from political mentoring (İskenderpaşa), conservative social mobilization (İsmailağa), educational networks (Süleymancılar), and global bureaucratic reach (Hizmet), to Islamic political ideology (Millî Görüş). Third, and most importantly, Sharia value internalization occurs not only through spiritual rituals or dhikr assemblies, but also through broader socio-political mechanisms such as leadership charisma, institutional networks, educational systems, and policy influence. These patterns indicate that Sufi orders in Turkey function as socio-intellectual actors whose impact extends far beyond ritual practice, shaping how Sharia values are integrated into everyday life within a secular national framework.

Historical Trajectories and Intellectual Pathways in the Internalization of Shari‘a Values in Modern Turkey

The leaders of major Sufi orders function as key agents in the internalization of shari‘a values, as their spiritual authority, educational practices, and community networks provide institutional and intellectual channels through which these values are preserved, interpreted, and embedded in social life. This process cannot be separated from the long history of both repression and the revival of Islamic institutions in Turkey. As

explained by Arya Nakissa, during the 1920s-1930s almost all mosques and madrasas were closed, while under the Soviet era only two Islamic institutions, the Mir Arab Madrasa in Bukhara and the Imam Bukhari Institute in Tashkent, were allowed to operate. Yet, from the 19th century to the early 20th century, this region had once been an important center of knowledge, culture, art, and Islamic movements, giving rise to the idea of Pan-Islamism as a collective vision of the ummah to resist colonial imperialism. Although severe political repression and forced secularization weakened the social role of Islamic institutions, the historical legacy and the social capital embedded within networks of ‘ulama’, intellectual traditions, and communal solidarity continued to serve as a durable foundation for the internalization of shari‘a values in the modern era.

In this context, Sufi orders, particularly the Naqshbandiyya, served as alternative social platforms capable of preserving the continuity of shari‘a values through spiritual practices, informal movements, and community solidarity networks. The social capital cultivated through these orders enabled the Turkish Muslim community to preserve its Islamic identity despite political pressures. By the mid-20th century, Islamic institutions and Sufi networks began to re-emerge, reaffirming Islam as a moral, social, and political force within the landscape of modern Turkey. Thus, the revival of Sufi networks and Islamic institutions not only demonstrates their resilience but also paved the way for the development of Islamic intellectualism that seeks to reinterpret shari‘a values within the framework of *maqāṣid al-shari‘a*.

The process of internalizing shari‘a values in Turkey can be traced through the dynamics of Islamic intellectualism that developed across several historical periods. Each period reveals distinct strategies and emphases, yet all remain grounded in *maqāṣid al-shari‘a* as the primary orientation in responding to the challenges of modernity and secularism. In the first period, the internalization of shari‘a values took place through an emphasis on spiritual and moral dimensions, aligned with the *maqāṣid* of preserving religion (*hifż al-dīn*) and preserving life (*hifż al-nafs*). Necip Fazıl revived the tradition of al-Ghazālī with a critique of Western philosophy, which he argued neglected spirituality, and instead proposed the concept of *ruhçuluk* (spiritualism) as the foundation of the state’s service to its people. He interpreted the Sufi spirit of love (*ask*) and ecstasy (*vecd*) as ethical motivation for building social justice and political legitimacy (Ertunç & Göksu, 2024). On the other hand, Nurettin Topçu stressed *maqāṣid* in the aspect of social justice (*hifż al-māl* and *hifż al-ird*), linking Anatolian Sufism (*tasavvuf Anadolucu*) with Ibn Rushd’s philosophy to resist capitalism and the moral crisis of the West. Through a bottom-up approach, he emphasized that local communities could serve as engines for realizing shari‘a values without dependence on political authority.

In the second period, the internalization of shari‘a values shifted toward a stronger emphasis on the *maqāṣid* of economic justice (*hifż al-māl*) and the protection of the Muslim collective (*hifż al-ummah*). The introduction of international Islamic ideas from Sayyid Qutb and Abul A‘la Maududi through *Hilal* magazine strengthened anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist orientations, framing them as threats to the dignity of the ummah and the

independence of Muslim societies (Üstün Külük, 2025). Local Sufi-oriented movements underscored the importance of moral and cultural autonomy, while Qur’ān-centered internationalist Islamist movements sought to uphold a transnational *ummatic* orientation. Meanwhile, state-centered groups and the Naqshbandiyya accommodated *sharī‘a* values through integration with capitalism and political structures. This contestation illustrates that *maqāṣid al-shari‘a* during this phase were articulated through multiple strategies: some rooted in local spirituality, others emphasizing global solidarity, and still others seeking legitimacy within the framework of the modern state (Calabro, 2017).

Sufi Agency and the Maqāṣid-Driven Internalization of Sharī‘a in Modern Turkey

The internalization of *sharī‘a* values in Turkey found one of its most significant expressions through the role of Sufis and the tradition of *taṣawwuf*, which, within the framework of *maqāṣid al-shari‘a*, serves to preserve religion (*hifż al-dīn*), protect life (*hifż al-nafs*), and uphold social justice (*hifż al-māl* and *hifż al-īrđ*). One of the key figures in this process was Necip Fazıl, who was not only renowned as a poet but also recognized by many contemporary Muslim intellectuals as a pioneer of Islam-based political ideology in Turkey. He combined the spirituality of *taṣawwuf* with socio-political critiques of secularization and Westernization, constructing a framework of Sufi political thought rooted in the tradition of al-Ghazālī. His use of the concepts of love (*asķ*) and ecstasy (*vecd*) was not merely religious expression, but was interpreted as ethical motivation for the state to serve its people aligned with *maqāṣid* in realizing the common good (*maṣlahā*). Although many intellectuals did not fully agree with his political vision, they nonetheless acknowledged Necip Fazıl’s role as one of the earliest drivers of resistance against the secular paradigm, as well as a figure who revived the role of *taṣawwuf* in shaping the horizon of modern Islamic political thought in Turkey. Thus, the internalization of *sharī‘a* values that he advanced through *taṣawwuf* did not stop at the spiritual level, but extended into the intellectual and political arena, paving the way for the emergence of a more organized Islamic discourse.

This momentum found its clearest articulation in Necip Fazıl’s works and his intellectual networks, particularly those tied to the Naqshbandiyya order, which shaped an Islamic political paradigm grounded in *maqāṣid al-shari‘a*. Through his magazine *Büyük Doğu* and his work *Fikri ve İctimai Tarih Boyunca Batı Düşüncesi ve Tasavvuf İslami* (1982), Fazıl emphasized that *hifż al-dīn* (preserving religion) was not limited to ritual worship but also entailed ideological resistance to the dominance of Western thought (Okay, 1992). His ideas on love, spiritual ecstasy, and steadfastness were rooted in *hifż al-nafs* (protecting life) and *hifż al-īrđ* (preserving dignity), as they stressed the cultivation of a spirited, courageous, and dignified human character within the framework of *taṣawwuf*. At the same time, his critique of Western modernity—which he regarded as producing a spiritual crisis—also pointed toward *hifż al-‘aql* (preserving intellect), demanding clarity of thought and spiritual depth as the foundation of political and social life (Kısakürek, 2017). From this perspective, the Sufism internalized by Fazıl was not merely a

spiritual path but also an ideological tool for constructing a just socio-political order (*hifz al-‘adl*). It is therefore unsurprising that he later became a central ideological inspiration for the next generation, including President Erdoğan, in formulating a synthesis between Islam, politics, and Turkish modernity.

Fazıl sought to construct an alternative intellectual paradigm and political ideology based on Sufi-Islam, which can be described as political Sufism. He interpreted love (*as̄k*) as the primary concept of legitimacy love for God and the journey toward Him, which, in his view, represented the very essence of Islam itself (Kılıç & Yavuz, 2022). With love as its foundation, he asserted that the spirituality of *taṣawwuf* should not remain confined to personal worship but must serve as an ethical motivation for society and the state to realize the common good (*maṣlahā*). However, the *Büyük Doğu* project also contained a dilemma: while promoting *maqāṣid* such as *hifz al-dīn* (preservation of religion) and *hifz al-‘ird* (protection of dignity), it simultaneously pushed for the establishment of a highly rigid and tightly regulated social order, especially in relation to gender roles and family life. Within this vision, every individual, particularly men, was required to remain steadfast on the path of Sufi love, Islamic devotion, and the struggle for Islamic political goals. Thus, the internalization of shari‘a through *taṣawwuf* became both a spiritual foundation and an ideological instrument in shaping the modern socio-political order of Turkey.

Based on zawiya membership data, it is evident that the strategies of Sufi orders in internalizing shari‘a values within secular Turkey were carried out in alignment with the principles of *maqāṣid al-shari‘a*. The presence of members from multi-faith and multi-ethnic backgrounds illustrates an effort to safeguard *hifz al-nafs* by creating a safe space across identities, as well as *hifz al-nasl* through the strengthening of social cohesion across communities. This diversity is reflected in the participation of an Orthodox patriarch of the Kalalani tradition and several Catholic priests, whose connection with the Greek community encouraged certain Christian adherents to also frequent the zawiya. The involvement of both women and men in this circle marked a commitment to social equality as part of protecting the dignity of family and future generations. The participation of *Seyhüllislams* alongside artists such as calligraphers (*hattat*) and intellectuals indicated the role of *hifz al-dīn* in safeguarding religious legitimacy, as well as *hifz al-‘aql* through the cultivation of intellectual discourse and openness to art and culture. Meanwhile, the composition of members from the educated elite reflected a strategy of protecting *hifz al-māl*, since the sustainability of the zawiya depended on strong socio-economic resources. In this way, the social practices of the zawiya demonstrated how shari‘a values could be inclusively internalized, balancing spirituality, rationality, and social harmony within the context of secular modernity.

Maqāṣid-Oriented Sufi Pathways and the Heart-Centered Internalization of Shari‘a in Modern Turkey

The experience of one follower of the Sufi order, Hakan Menguc, demonstrates how the internalization of shari‘a values does not stop at formal rituals but becomes rooted in a heart-based awareness that seeks God through

love and gentleness. He rejected the path filled with quarrels and affirmed that faith must not arise from a mere “copy-paste” of doctrines, but from conviction genuinely felt in the heart. His search led him through a range of readings, from critical works on Islam to atheist writings, but what he encountered was nothing but endless conflict. This disillusionment turned his attention to Eastern philosophies like Hinduism, Buddhism, and Zen, which, despite their differences, placed greater emphasis on inner peace. Ultimately, he found a common thread in *taṣawwuf*: the path to God is not through debate and logic but through clarity of heart, love, and inner awareness. This story illustrates that the internalization of shari‘a in the Sufi path means nurturing a living faith within the heart—one that guides toward love and gentleness, not endless disputes.

The internalization of shari‘a values through the lens of *maqāṣid al-shari‘a* becomes clear in Hakan Menguc’s realization that the purpose of religion is not merely to preserve outward symbols but to safeguard peace of the soul (*hifż al-nafs*), nurture the intellect (*hifż al-‘aql*), strengthen faith (*hifż al-dīn*), and cultivate love in life. He once witnessed gatherings filled with disputes over outward legalities, beards, robes, halal-haram boundaries, and accusations of heresy and damnation that only produced conflict, coercion, and mutual condemnation. From this arose an awareness that the essence of religion could not possibly be such, since the path to God must be rooted in the heart, in love, and in gentleness. Refusing to simply “copy-paste” inherited teachings, he chose to read more broadly, far beyond what he had been taught, until he eventually returned to the spiritual roots of *taṣawwuf*. By learning to play the *ney* and reflecting on the works of Rumi, Yunus Emre, and Hacı Bektaş Veli, he discovered that a Sufi chooses to stand outside of disputes, striving only to feel God within the heart, not to prove truth through logic. Like the fragrance of a flower that needs no explanation yet can immediately be recognized, faith for him is a feeling alive in the heart. This represents a form of shari‘a internalization in the *maqāṣid* approach: presenting religion as a path of serenity, love, and inner connection with God.

The Sufis, particularly among the elite, gradually became aware of their institutional decline and responded with internal reforms, such as forming civil society associations and publishing journals as an effort to safeguard *hifż al-dīn* through spiritual and intellectual renewal, while also protecting *hifż al-‘aql* by opening spaces for critical discourse. During the War of Independence, the alliance between Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and Sufi leaders reflected an orientation toward *hifż al-nafs*, the defense of life and the homeland. Yet, following the establishment of the Republic, the Sheikh Said Rebellion (1925) became the state’s justification for banning Sufi orders and their public symbols, a move that forced Sufis to renegotiate the *maqāṣid* whether in outright resistance, active support, or compromise strategies to preserve the continuity of *hifż al-dīn*, *hifż al-māl*, and *hifż al-nasl*. Unfortunately, this diversity of responses has often been overlooked in early scholarship, though several scholars such as Mustafa Kara (Tek, 2010), Brett Wilson (Wilson, 2013), Brian Silverstein, and Amit Bein (Bein, 2011) have highlighted the importance of understanding religious authority and Sufi orders within the context of state modernization.

The sharī‘a values embodied by Kenan Rıfai during the early Republican period of Turkey demonstrate how Islamic tradition can be constructively transformed within a secular order without losing its ultimate objective—preserving the public good (*maṣlahah*). The principle of ‘adl (justice) was reflected in his rejection of the monopoly of religious interpretation by specific groups, thereby ensuring that religion continued to serve as a foundation for social justice without dominating the political sphere (*hifż al-dīn* and *hifż al-nafs*) (Kılıç, 2019). The aspect of ḥidq (transparency/honesty) appeared in his openness to Western languages, arts, and philosophy, illustrating that Muslim identity could be authentically expressed in the modern public sphere (*hifż al-‘aql*). Kenan’s support for the banning of Sufi orders in 1925 can be understood as a form of mas’ūliyyah ijtimā‘iyyah (social responsibility), aimed at preventing fragmentation and safeguarding social harmony (*hifż al-nafs* and *hifż al-nas*) (Bruinessen, 2024). Thus, his thought remains relevant for secular Turkish society, as it presents religion as a source of ethics, welfare, and social cohesion, while simultaneously supporting modernization without neglecting the *maqāṣid al-shari‘a*.

Sufi Social Imaginaries and the Maqāṣid-Oriented Internalization of Sharī‘a within Turkey’s Secular Modernity

The internalization of sharī‘a values represents a set of principles and practices that serve as a foundation for Turkish society in understanding and experiencing the Islamic world within a secular context. This transformation has unfolded through strategies of internalization employed by various Sufi orders, which integrate the objectives of *maqāṣid al-shari‘a* with modern social realities. The daily social practices of Sufis, from religious rituals and study circles to socio-economic activities, shape a collective narrative that revives Islamic identity without transgressing the boundaries of secular state law. By utilizing Sufi movements as vehicles of value transmission, Sufi leaders succeeded in constructing a new social imaginary that enables society to view sharī‘a values as an integral part of public ethics (Taylor, 2004). This approach not only preserves the relevance of Sufism in the modern era but also strengthens a collective consciousness aligned with an Islamic moral order within the secular Turkish context.

Within the framework of the social imaginary, Sufis envision the process of internalizing sharī‘a values in secular Turkish society by constructing collective ideas that reinforce broader social interactions. This effort is realized through the public sphere as a space for education, interaction, and the socialization of sharī‘a values outside the direct control of the state, thereby shaping a societal vision that positions sharī‘a values alongside secular life in a more egalitarian manner (Fahrowi, 2023). This public sphere functions as a strategic arena for Sufi orders to instill sharī‘a values while simultaneously building new social relations based on trust between society and the state. Sufi leaders thus carry a social responsibility to develop a social imaginary consistent with the transformation of Turkish society, allowing the objectives of *maqāṣid al-shari‘a* to be harmoniously integrated into the secular state context (Turam, 2011).

The Tanzimat reforms (1839–1876) marked the beginning of the opening toward secularism in Turkey, as secular movements gained space and reduced the dominance of religiously based movements. A major shift occurred in 1928, when the clause declaring Islam as the state religion was removed from the constitution, thereby transforming societal identity from a religious community into citizens rooted in Turkish secular nationalism (Lewis, 1961). In this process, all structural and symbolic ties to the Ottoman caliphate were abolished (Berkes, 1964). These conditions compelled Sufi orders to formulate new strategies for internalizing shari‘a values grounded in *maqāṣid al-shari‘a*, ensuring their continued relevance and lived experience within the framework of the secular state.

The life of Turkish society continues to be marked by contestation between the influence of Islamic values and secular values, producing a fragmented identity between being Muslim citizens and secular citizens (Kandiyoti, 2012). Secularism is often perceived as an unfinished project, thereby fueling ongoing debates. Within this dynamic, shari‘a values are frequently reduced to instruments of elite politics for maintaining dominance and power, particularly in the arena of electoral politics. In response, Sufi orders organize strategies of internalizing shari‘a values based on *maqāṣid al-shari‘a* by avoiding the politicization of religion and ensuring that they do not clash with the established framework of secular values.

The Rifā‘iyya order, under the guidance of the *murshid* Sayyid Muhammad Mardini and operating within the *Evlad-ı Resul İlim ve İrfan Derneği*, emerged as a response to collective dissatisfaction with the process of internalizing shari‘a values, which was perceived as not yet effectively grounded in social life (Khamami, 2016). This condition encouraged the formation of a collective consciousness that subsequently became the basis for constructing a strong group identity that bound its members together. The continuity of this movement was supported by significant internal factors, including a clear and well-coordinated organizational structure, charismatic yet strategic leadership, an ideology that provided both direction and legitimacy, and mobilization strategies that utilized media, mass action, and social networks (Ali et al., 2022). In its early stages, mobilization efforts were carried out by gathering support both from followers spread across the field and through social media. At its peak, the movement emphasized harmonization and ongoing negotiation, implemented through concrete activities and digital spaces. Ultimately, this process culminated in the institutionalization of the Turkish Sufi movement with a modern and harmonious character. Its impact was evident in the significant transformation of understandings of the internalization of shari‘a values, although the effects were more dominant at the level of cognitive awareness. Nevertheless, the movement preserved Islamic continuity and strengthened its base, becoming increasingly massive (Burak-Adli, 2024).

Sufi Orders as Vehicles of Maqāṣid-Based Shari‘a Internalization and Modern Rationality in Contemporary Turkey

The success of the Rifā‘iyya movement under Sayyid Muhammad Mardini’s leadership did not rely solely on religious sentiment, but also on the

ability to mobilize available resources. A well-structured organization, charismatic leadership, and broad social networks functioned as strategic capital for ensuring the continuity of the movement. The use of social media as a mobilization arena also became an important instrument for expanding the reach of *da‘wah*, generating sympathy, and strengthening internal solidarity (Silverstein, 2009). At the same time, the ideological legitimacy derived from Sufi and shari‘a values provided both a moral foundation and justification for their collective activities.

The Rifā‘iyya can be understood not merely as a traditional religious movement, but as an entity responding to socio-political change by prioritizing issues of identity, values, and the meaning of life within the context of Turkish modernity (Özdalga, 1999). Their transformation from a ritualistic *tariqa* group into a social actor active in the public sphere reflects the shift in orientation of contemporary Sufi movements from spiritual exclusivity toward engagement in socio-political arenas. The final stage of the movement, which points toward institutionalization, demonstrates efforts to construct an organizational form capable of synergizing with the structures of modern society without abandoning its Sufi roots (Yükleyen, 2008). Thus, the Rifā‘iyya illustrates a model of adaptation that combines the continuity of Islamic tradition with modernization strategies of movement-building, generating an influence that is not only cognitive but also shapes the broader socio-religious landscape of Turkey.

The internalization of shari‘a values through the approach of *maqāṣid al-shari‘a* is clearly reflected in Sufi *tariqa* movements, which function as a medium for the emergence of a new rationality that bridges the Ottoman cultural heritage with Turkish modernity. The Sufi orders can be understood as vehicles for safeguarding both *al-dīn* (religion) and *al-aql* (reason), as they do not stop at mere emotional affection but cultivate a living intellect sensitive and oriented toward public welfare (Yüksek, 2021). In this context, modern Turkish figures situated at the crossroads of Western culture and Ottoman heritage are not directed toward empty nostalgia or blind admiration of the West, but rather toward efforts at synthesizing shari‘a values. Thus, Sufi orders often perceived as irrational, actually give rise to a new form of rationality that unites intellect and affection (Kardas, 2023). From this vantage point, the internalization of shari‘a values must be rooted in Turkey’s cultural reality and national foundations, making them not only spiritually relevant but also contextually embedded within modern socio-cultural dynamics.

Within this framework, Sufi *tariqa* movements cannot be understood merely as romanticized stories of Islamic revival, but rather as philosophical Islamic movements operating on the plane of *maqāṣid al-shari‘a* to preserve human dignity (*hifz al-nafs*) and to foster spiritual purification. Through experiences of decline, these Sufi movements emphasize self-awakening toward spiritual freedom, a process aligned with the objectives of shari‘a in shaping balanced human beings in terms of reason, soul, and emotion (Arifin, 2021). Their self-identification as “masters” recalls the concept of *insān kāmil*, the perfected human who does not succumb to suffering but instead affirms it as a path toward the creation of new values. From this point, Sufi movements

emerge as transformative pathways linking shari‘a with existential renewal. The internalization of shari‘a through Sufi practice is manifested in spiritual and ethical cultivation that liberates individuals from the shackles of suffering while generating a new rationality (Sayed et al., 2020). This rationality safeguards religion (*hifz al-dīn*), intellect (*hifz al-‘aqd*), life (*hifz al-nafs*), and human dignity, thereby making Sufi orders not only spiritually significant but also an ethical foundation for modern life.

The internalization of shari‘a values in Sufi movements can be understood as an effort to preserve religion, intellect, life, and human dignity, while at the same time bridging tradition and modernity. Emerging from personal experiences within the Sufi tradition, these movements function as ethical-spiritual mediums capable of fostering critical reason while remaining rooted in shari‘a values (Rubaidi et al., 2023). This method not only strengthens religious identity but also speaks powerfully to the most pressing intellectual challenges facing contemporary Muslims. The internalization of shari‘a values does not remain in exclusive spaces but moves across boundaries, engaging with diverse modes of thought and bringing the insights of tradition into wider global conversations.

The question that then arises is: how Muslims can respond to contemporary challenges if religious movements remain locked within the frameworks of the past. And how can Islamic traditions interact with modern life, particularly in the Turkish context, without rethinking the concept of shari‘a internalization? For centuries, Muslim intellectual life stood at the forefront of knowledge firmly rooted in classical religious disciplines while remaining open to broader worldly knowledge (Humaini, 2008). However, the rupture between tradition and modern knowledge systems now demands reconstruction. Therefore, the internalization of shari‘a within Sufi movements can be concluded as a creative and critical process that strives to bridge the classical heritage with modernity, such that shari‘a not only functions to safeguard transcendental values but also provides direction for the intellectual and civilizational renewal of the Muslim community.

Maqāṣid-Based Shari‘a Internalization in Contemporary Sufi Movements

The internalization of shari‘a values becomes the key to ensuring that Islamic teachings remain relevant in facing the challenges of the times, particularly in the fields of knowledge, society, and culture. Major transformations have taken place in the world since Islam developed as an intellectual tradition some 400 years ago, during which time Islamic scholarship was always at the forefront in interpreting religion, culture, history, and law as part of civilization (Kamaruzaman & Omar, 2016). However, with the rise of Western traditions and their dominance, Muslim intellectual leadership, especially in theology, law, culture, and values, often became trapped in outdated frameworks, producing a dissonance with modern knowledge. The postcolonial world has given rise to new realities demanding a more dynamic integration of knowledge, yet many Muslim thinkers who engage with issues of values, gender, history, and identity often find themselves alienated from the modern context. Therefore, the internalization of shari‘a values through *maqāṣid* must be directed toward knowledge

integration, as emphasized by great scholars from al-Farabi to al-Ghazali, who highlighted that all forms of knowledge reinforce and interconnect with one another. The contemporary challenge is not the collapse of tradition, but the artificial boundaries that separate the internalization of shari‘a values from modern life (Supriadi, 2017). Thus, a maqāṣid-oriented internalization of shari‘a entails the Muslim community’s ability to manage knowledge integratively, so that religious values may be contextually present, transcending old dichotomies, and continuing to serve as a solid foundation in addressing contemporary issues.

Through the maqāṣid al-shari‘ah approach, the internalization of shari‘a values must be understood as a dynamic process that not only preserves religious principles but also links them with justice, rationality, and human sustainability. Historical experience shows that knowledge has never been neutral but is always tied to power and justice (Ramli, 2017). Western knowledge is indeed laden with elements of power, but it should not be wholly rejected; rather, it must be critically appropriated so that it can be integrated into the framework of shari‘a values, thereby generating stronger intellectual outcomes. For this reason, Muslims require a more sophisticated maqāṣid-based approach, one that is capable of critiquing their own tradition while also absorbing positive elements from outside through the development of analog thinking, a perspective that views knowledge as a continuous spectrum rather than a binary opposition (Mohadi, 2023). Unfortunately, many Muslims remain trapped in knowledge segregation or a kind of epistemic apartheid: they accept modern science in medicine and engineering but reject modern insights in ethics, history, and selfhood, thereby creating a “stagnant past” as a response to contemporary issues. This condition fosters a harmful form of intellectual schizophrenia that undermines both the internalization of shari‘a values and the needs of today’s Muslim community (Mulizar & Syafieh, 2021). Hence, the true form of shari‘a internalization lies in contextual epistemic integration, the ability to connect the legacy of Islamic tradition with the challenges of modernity so that maqāṣid al-shari‘ah can serve as a guiding framework that is solution-oriented, critical, and relevant across time.

The internalization of shari‘a values through the *maqāṣid al-shari‘ah* approach within Sufi *tariqa* movements underlines the importance of preserving continuity of tradition while simultaneously responding to the needs of the present. Sufi orders represent one of the world’s oldest and most enduring religious movements, which today have begun to develop in new forms integrated with multiple disciplines taught under a single framework. These movements possess a high degree of literacy in internalizing shari‘a values and in engaging deeply with classical Islamic traditions (Ismail, 2012). However, their weakness lies in insufficient connectedness to contemporary life, making it difficult for the knowledge they cultivate to engage with present realities. Therefore, Sufi orders as institutions of shari‘a internalization must remain cosmopolitan, open, and non-defensive in facing the pressures of modernity. A closed attitude toward contemporary knowledge rooted in colonial legacies when some scholars chose to preserve old knowledge as a form of resistance is no longer relevant today (Çaksu, 2025). What is required instead is knowledge integration, enabling Sufi movements to act as bridges

between classical tradition and modern intellectual needs. In this way, the internalization of shari‘a values within Sufi *tariqa* can be realized through the integration of tradition and modernity in harmony with the maqāṣid al-shari‘ah, ensuring that knowledge is not only preserved but also rendered beneficial for the Muslim community and for civilization as a whole.

A contextual form of shari‘a value internalization can be understood through the maqāṣid al-shari‘ah approach, an effort to preserve religion, reason, life, property, and lineage while remaining open to dynamics that evolve with the times. Within this framework emerges a highly significant concept: critical traditionalism, which stems from the awareness that Turkish society possesses a long intellectual heritage, including religious traditions that store practices, knowledge, and intergenerational experiences as a vast reservoir of reference (Esenbel, 2011) (Pahutar et al., 2024). Yet when tradition ceases to be relevant, no longer “breathing fresh air” but merely recycling “stale air,” it enters a crisis that threatens its continuity. Tradition, therefore, remains necessary, but not in a sacred or final form; rather, it must be positioned as a critical source of wisdom: tradition has the right to speak, but not the right to veto. A living tradition is a cross-century conversation that recognizes the diversity of Islamic practices across time and space while safeguarding the core commitment to shari‘a values (Budi et al., 2020). Thus, to love tradition also means daring to critique it, to pose difficult questions, and to cultivate constructive *ikhtilāf* as taught in the Qur‘an, so that differences may become productive rather than empty oppositions. Accordingly, the internalization of shari‘a values from the perspective of critical traditionalism entails presenting tradition as a dynamic spirit open to critique yet firmly grounded in maqāṣid al-shari‘ah as the primary orientation for the continuity of the ummah.

The internalization of shari‘a values through the maqāṣid approach fosters critical awareness to continue researching, questioning, and seeking answers, thereby generating a new reflective discipline relevant to contemporary needs. This process demands that shari‘a internalization not remain at a purely normative level but instead articulate, examine, and open dialogical spaces within an ever-changing global reality (Qodir & Sight, 2023). However, we face a significant challenge rooted in the colonial era: while some Muslims pursued science and technology to participate in modern civilization, other ulama, educators, and spiritual mentors remained within religious traditions. This discontinuity produced two poles: first, those defensive of old knowledge who built protective walls against “contamination”; second, those fluent in secular modern life but spiritually disconnected, making it difficult to relate their expertise to Islamic tradition (Nur, 2018). Thus, the true form of shari‘a internalization emerges when a bridge is built between religious knowledge and modern life, so that neither negates the other but rather synergizes to realize the objectives of maqāṣid al-shari‘ah in the lives of Muslims in Turkey.

The internalization of shari‘a values through the maqāṣid approach requires a serious effort to bridge religious tradition with dynamic social realities, such that shari‘a is present not only as a normative code but also as an ethical way of life that secures communal welfare. In the Turkish context,

where numerous Sufi orders exist, the boundaries between religious tradition, broader society, and academia are not particularly rigid, creating fertile opportunities for building mutually reinforcing dialogues (Olson, 2018). Through such dialogues, academics can contribute critical perspectives to society, while Sufi orders provide spiritual depth, resulting in enriching interactions. To this end, a cultural hermeneutics is required, a renewed reading of culture and lived experiences in modern society that is capable of bringing Islamic tradition into conversation with the challenges of secular Turkish society (Ahmadi & Hefni, 2019). In this way, the internalization of shari‘a values can unfold comprehensively: not rigid or estranged from its time, but alive as a guide that preserves *maṣlaha* (public good) and justice in accordance with the objectives of maqāṣid al-shari‘ah.

The internationalization of shari‘a values through the maqāṣid al-shari‘ah approach requires openness, critical reflection, and the capacity to link religious traditions with the challenges of contemporary life. From lived experience, we see a transformation that enables individuals to become more open and humane, showing that isolation and the absence of dialogue constitute one of the greatest challenges in the internalization of shari‘a values (Fasya, 2022). Nevertheless, it remains essential to stay receptive to insights of genuine worth. As the Arab proverb says, *“What cannot be attained in full should not be abandoned in whole.”* Building on this principle emerges the concept of De-thinking, derived from the metaphor of the *portico* of a traditional Persian house, a liminal space between the inside and outside. This metaphor reflects the current position of Muslims: neither fully within tradition nor entirely outside of it, but situated in an inter-traditional space of knowledge and civilization. This liminal space becomes fertile ground for experimentation, discovery of new possibilities, and adaptive applications of shari‘a value internalization. The issue of decolonizing knowledge that arises here is not only relevant to the Islamic world but also global in scope, demanding a critical approach—one that neither rejects wholesale nor accepts blindly (Fauzi, 2022). The challenge is how to transform awareness from mere pain, rejection, and grievance into a process of productive reconstruction. The solution lies in cultivating positive energy: fostering self-confidence, granting empowerment, equipping individuals with knowledge, mastering languages, and recognizing the plurality of ways of knowing and learning. Thus, the internalization of shari‘a values in modern societies, including secular Turkey, can unfold in a manner that is living, adaptive, and contextual—aligned with global challenges while safeguarding the core commitments of shari‘a.

Conclusion

The methodological framework of this study demonstrates that the internalization of shari‘a values within Turkey’s secular context, particularly among the Naqshbandī order, occurs through intertwined spiritual, pedagogical, organizational, and socio-intellectual mechanisms embedded in active social interaction. Empirical data from interviews and observations reveal that these mechanisms enable the translation of Islamic norms into everyday practice despite the constraints of a secular state structure. Accordingly, this study identifies specific socio-intellectual processes that

mediate the incorporation of sharī‘a values into lived experience. From a legal perspective, the findings yield several implications. First, the internalization of sharī‘a values among Sufi communities operates within the boundaries of the Turkish Constitution (Articles 2 and 24), which upholds secularism while protecting religious freedom. Second, the informal religious education and community-based instruction observed within the Naqshbandī order intersect with regulatory frameworks such as the Associations Law (Dernekler Kanunu) and the supervisory authority of the Diyanet, indicating the need for clearer legal pathways for community-based religious education.

In response, this study proposes three policy recommendations: (1) clarifying the legal status of community-based religious education by establishing guidelines that distinguish cultural-spiritual formation from prohibited informal schooling; (2) fostering institutional collaboration between Sufi communities and the Diyanet to ensure constitutional compliance while allowing space for spiritual expression; and (3) developing state-supported capacity-building programs that bridge classical Islamic scholarship with modern social-scientific insight in line with maqāṣid al-shari‘a and public welfare (maṣlaḥa). By situating Sufi practices within Turkey’s legal and institutional landscape, the study shows that the effective internalization of sharī‘a values depends on balancing respect for tradition with adherence to modern legal norms, enabling a more sustainable expression of religious life within the secular Republic.

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