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The Tree of Tradition: Using Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Conceptual Framework to Diagnose the Causes of the Current Islamic Crisis

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Abstract

Through the prism of modern Islamic epistemology and the expanding conversation on Islamic intellectual reform in the twenty-first century, this essay offers a conceptual extraction and thematic synthesis of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's landmark work, Traditional Islam in the Modern World (1987). The main contention is that Muslim societies are currently experiencing a crisis that is essentially not just political or sociological but also one of knowledge (epistemological), aesthetics (environmental), and spiritual equilibrium (cosmological). This study systematically identifies three major domains of crisis described in Nasr's work using a qualitative content analysis methodology with a hermeneutic-philosophical approach derived from Gadamer's (1989) and Ricoeur's (1981) frameworks: (1) the erosion of sacred knowledge (al-'ilm al-muqaddas) and its replacement by secular rationalism; (2) the degradation of Islamic aesthetics and the sacred built environment; and (3) the disturbance of cosmic gender relations and spiritual balance in Muslim societies.

Kata kunci:
Epistemologi Islam;;
fundamentalisme;
modernisme; masalah
pengetahuan;
peradaban Islam;
epistemologi
Nusantara; Islam
tradisional; Seyyed
Hossein Nasr

Abstrak

Dengan memetakan segitiga diagnostik Nasr tentang tradisionalisme, modernisme, dan fundamentalisme ke dalam kerangka konseptual yang terstruktur, menjadi jelas bahwa modernisme dan fundamentalisme memiliki satu kesamaan: keduanya menolak kearifan abadi (sophia perennis) yang mendasar bagi tradisi intelektual Islam. Faktor pengorganisasian untuk memahami konsepsi Nasr tentang keutuhan integral Islam adalah citra "Pohon Tradisi," yang terdiri dari akar (usul), batang (prinsip tauhid), cabang (disiplin dan seni Islam), dan buah (peradaban). Menurut temuan, pembaharuan sejati (tajdid) harus datang dari dalam tradisi dan bukan dari pemaksaan luar, dan salah satu aplikasi modern yang paling menjanjikan dari gagasan ini mungkin adalah "epistemologi Nusantara" yang berkembang di pendidikan tinggi Islam Indonesia. Penelitian ini memajukan bidang agama komparatif, filsafat pengetahuan Islam, dan sosiologi intelektualisme Muslim.

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INTRODUCTION

The Muslim world of today is at an unprecedentedly difficult crossroads. Islamic movements, intellectual currents, and sociopolitical formations have proliferated in the late 20th and early 21st centuries; these developments frequently seem contradictory and mutually exclusive. On one end of the spectrum is an unquestioning acceptance of Western secular modernity under the pretext of advancement and reform; on the other is a strict literalism that asserts sole ownership of real Islamic identity. The tradition of *sophia perennis*, the timeless wisdom that Seyyed Hossein Nasr has spent more than 60 years articulating, defending, and applying to the pressing issues of the modern world, lies between these poles and is still largely ignored by both secular scholars and popular religious movements (Nasr, 1987, 2004, 2010).

Born in 1933, Seyyed Hossein Nasr holds a special place in the world of thought. Nasr, who was born in Tehran, received his education at MIT and Harvard (where he studied under scholars like Giorgio de Santillana and Harry Wolfson), and was greatly influenced by the Iranian Traditionalist intellectual milieu of his early years, has acted as a link between the Islamic intellectual tradition and modern Western philosophy of religion and science. In addition to articulating the live resources of Islamic philosophy, mysticism, and aesthetics for the modern world, his work also critically engages Western philosophical presumptions and defends tradition against modernity (Aminrazavi, 2014; Sedgwick, 2004). The main text of this study, *Traditional Islam in the Modern World* (1987), is a thorough statement of his diagnostic and prescriptive vision. It was written at a time when the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the emergence of Salafi-Wahhabi movements were both changing how the world saw Islam.

In order to diagnose the causes of the current Islamic crisis, this article conducts a methodical thematic synthesis of Nasr's fundamental text. Beyond simple textual analysis, this investigation is important because Nasr's conceptual framework provides Muslim scholars, educators, and policymakers with a logical diagnostic tool to help them understand why both modernist and fundamentalist recommendations have failed to produce true Islamic renewal. The distinction is important because Nasr does not oppose intellectual and social development in and of itself. Instead, he contends that any genuine development must come from within the living tradition, from its very roots, rather than being grafted onto it from outside sources that have no natural connection to it (Nasr, 1981; Chittick, 2007). When development breaks away from the foundations of

wisdom, it results in a technically advanced but spiritually hollow imitation of civilization rather than fruit.

Previous research on Nasr has examined his contributions to science and civilization (Nasr, 1993), comparative religion (Schuon, 1984), Islamic philosophy (Aminrazavi, 2014), and environmental philosophy (Nasr, 1996). Few studies, however, have tried to systematically extract his diagnostic framework for the current Islamic crisis, especially from the standpoint of Indonesian Islamic epistemology, where the conflict between secular modernity, normative Islam (syariah), and local tradition (adat) is still highly relevant (Azra, 2006; Hefner, 2000; Woodward, 2011).

The Indonesian case is especially noteworthy because it is the largest country in the world with a majority of Muslims and because the Islamic intellectual tradition has historically achieved a remarkable synthesis with local cultural forms. This synthesis is currently under pressure from both secular modernity and global Salafism. By offering an organized conceptual synthesis of Nasr's diagnostic paradigm and examining its applicability to Indonesian Islamic intellectual discourse, this essay closes that scholarly vacuum.

This study's main argument is threefold: (1) the Islamic crisis is essentially epistemological, stemming from the rejection of the sacred knowledge (al-'ilm al-muqaddas) that once provided Muslim civilization with coherence; (2) it is aesthetic, as evidenced by the devastation of the Islamic built environment and the degradation of the arts; and (3) it is cosmological, as evidenced by the disturbance of the spiritual and social balance between the masculine and feminine cosmic principles. These three categories, placed onto the metaphor of the Tree of Tradition that gives this article its title, make up what this article refers to as the "diagnostic triangle" of Nasr's theory. The article's remaining sections are as follows: Section 2 summarizes the pertinent literature on gender cosmology, Islamic epistemology, and aesthetics; Section 3 outlines the methodology; Sections 4 and 5 offer conclusions and discussion; and Section 6 wraps up.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Islamic Tradition and Perennial Philosophy

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) introduced the idea of philosophia perennis, the perennial or eternal wisdom underlying all genuine religious traditions, into contemporary Western philosophical discourse. He used the term to refer to a collection of metaphysical truths purportedly shared by all philosophical traditions. Agostino Steuco (1497–1548) later developed this idea, and Aldous Huxley's seminal anthology from 1945 popularized it in the

twentieth century. However, this idea received systematic philosophical elaboration within the context of world religions, including Islam, thanks to the Traditionalist or Perennialist school, particularly through the works of René Guénon (1886–1951), Frithjof Schuon (1907–1998), Ananda Coomaraswamy (1877–1947), and their intellectual successor Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Oldmeadow, 2004; Stoddart, 1990). The Traditionalist school is characterized by its insistence that modern Western civilization is a significant departure from the universal standards of traditional civilization, that a transcendent unity underlies the diversity of religious forms, and that this unity can only be perceived through intellectual intuition (as opposed to discursive reason or empirical observation) (Schuon, 1984).

The body of sacred knowledge that transcends historical particularity while expressing via particular religious forms is what Nasr refers to as *al-hikmah al-ilahiyyah* (divine wisdom), or *sophia perennis* in its Latin articulation, within the Islamic paradigm. This knowledge is esoteric in the sense that it necessitates a specific style of receptivity in order to be appropriately received and comprehended; it is not esoteric in the sense that it is purposefully concealed from common believers (Nasr, 2006; Cutsinger, 2002). According to this interpretation, the Quran itself has several levels of significance that are available to those who have mastered spiritual perception (*al-basira al-qalbiyya*, the "sight of the heart"), ranging from the literal (*zahir*) to the innermost (*batin*).

Nasr's contribution is unique in that he explicitly grounds the timeless philosophy within the Islamic intellectual tradition, specifically the schools of Ibn Arabi's *wahdat al-wujud* (unity of being), Mulla Sadra's transcendent wisdom (*al-hikma al-muta'aliyya*), and Suhrawardi's *Ishraqiyya* illuminationist philosophy (Nasr & Leaman, 1996; Corbin, 1993; Walbridge, 2001). This grounding is philosophically significant because it shows that the perennial perspective is latent within Islam's own intellectual heritage, which was methodically developed by generations of Muslim philosophers, theologians, and mystics working within the Islamic intellectual framework, rather than being an external imposition on Islam imported from Western or Hindu sources, as some critics claim (Chittick, 1989).

Fundamentalism, Modernism, and Traditionalism: A Tripartite System
Nasr's ability to clearly distinguish between three different schools of modern Islamic thought—Traditionalism, Modernism, and Fundamentalism—is among his most influential analytical achievements. Even academics who disagree with Nasr's Traditionalist views have acknowledged this tripartite framework as a useful taxonomic tool in comparative Islamic studies (Esposito, 2010; Voll, 1994; Kepel, 2002). For Nasr, traditionalism is more than just conservatism, strict

adherence to historical forms, or opposition to all types of change. Instead, it refers to the living chain of transmission (*silsila*) that links modern Muslim practice to the prophetic paradigm and, via it, to the divine source of revelation. A traditionalist is someone who has access to the sacred sciences and can read the ancient books as living manuals for spiritual practice and metaphysical truth rather than just as historical records (Nasr, 1987).

According to Nasr's diagnosis, modernism is the reduction of the sacred to the purely social or political, the rejection of metaphysics as mere conjecture, and the submission of Muslim intellectual life to the epistemological tenets of Western secular modernity (Sayyid, 1997; Al-Jabri, 1999). The challenge of European colonialism and the seeming supremacy of Western science and technology gave rise to the historical movement known as Islamic modernism in the nineteenth century. Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, and Rashid Rida were among those who attempted to show how Islam could coexist with modern rationalism, reform Islamic schools in accordance with Western principles, and contend that the Quran foresaw the discoveries of contemporary science (Kurzman, 2002). Nasr contends that Islam's metaphysical coherence was sacrificed in order to achieve significant political and social reforms. The Islamic modernists gave up what should never have been given up: the epistemological framework that establishes what constitutes knowledge and what does not, by agreeing to the parameters of discussion established by Western secular rationalism.

According to Nasr's analysis, fundamentalism (or neo-traditionalism, as some scholars prefer, to distinguish it from the American Protestant context in which the term originated), embodied in movements like Salafism, Wahhabism, and various forms of political Islamism, constitutes a paradoxical phenomenon: it shares the modernist rejection of the philosophical and mystical dimensions of the Islamic intellectual tradition while claiming to defend tradition (Roy, 2004; Mandaville, 2007; Azzam, 2006). The modernist demolition of old Islamic epistemology unintentionally coincides with the fundamentalist emphasis on literal text, political activism, and the rejection of Sufism and Islamic philosophy as *bidah* (illegitimate inventions). The vibrant intellectual heritage that formerly gave Islamic culture its conceptual coherence, aesthetic vibrancy, and spiritual depth is severed from Muslims by both modernism and fundamentalism in distinct ways. According to Nasr's diagnosis, this is why both approaches to the current Islamic crisis are insufficient since they deal with the symptoms (political weakness, scientific backwardness, social disintegration) rather than the underlying cause (the loss of divine knowledge).

The Crisis of Epistemology in Modern Islam

Many significant scholars have thoroughly discussed the idea of an epistemic crisis in modern Islam. The issue of epistemological bifurcation in Muslim societies the coexistence of a secular university system based on Western institutions and a religious educational system rooted in traditional Islamic sciences was recognized by Ismail Raji al-Faruqi (1982) with his seminal program of the "Islamization of Knowledge." Al-Faruqi suggested that, in light of the unifying principle of tawhid (divine unity), the entire corpus of contemporary knowledge, including the scientific sciences, social sciences, and humanities, be subjected to Islamic examination and reformation. Nasr's criticism of this program is sharp, even though it has been influential in some institutional contexts (Wan Daud, 1998). It stays within a modernist epistemological framework, attempting to apply Islamic values to secular disciplines rather than challenging the epistemological premises of those disciplines. Rather than challenging the house's fundamentals, it embraces modernity and aims to renovate it with Islamic furnishings.

Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas has offered more radical criticisms, challenging the very tenets of Western educational philosophy as applied to Muslim societies with his concept of ta'dib (education understood as the instillation of proper order or adab, the recognition of one's proper place in the cosmic and social hierarchy) (Al-Attas, 1978, 1993). Al-Attas contends that the primary issue with modern Muslim education is ontological rather than methodological: the lack of understanding of reality's hierarchical structure (al-'alam al-kabir, the big world) and how humans fit within it.

According to Al-Attas and Nasr, the loss of the hierarchical view of knowledge in which revealed knowledge (wahy) and intellectual intuition (kashf) are acknowledged as epistemologically prior to empirical and rational knowledge is the root cause of the crisis in Muslim education. Any true educational reform must start with the restoration of this hierarchy, not just its acknowledgment but also its actual embodiment in the curriculum, pedagogy, and the character of the educator (Wan Daud, 1998; Nasr, 1989).

This epistemological issue takes particular forms in the Indonesian context that have drawn an increasing amount of scholarly attention. There is pressure on the great pesantren of Java, Madura, and West Sumatra to adopt secular academic standards that frequently contradict or simply replace the traditional educational ethos. These institutions once taught the entire spectrum of Islamic intellectual traditions, from Sufi metaphysics and Arabic grammar to Quranic recitation and jurisprudence (Dhofier, 1999; van Bruinessen, 1994). The conversion of Islamic colleges (IAIN/STAIN) into Islamic state universities (UIN) has created new opportunities for interdisciplinary integration, but it has

also created new risks. These include the pressure to produce graduates who are competitive in the secular labor market, to publish in international academic journals assessed by secular epistemological standards, and to adopt research methodologies created within and for the secular academy. According to Nasr's framework, this change need not be harmful if it is accompanied by a strong articulation of the Islamic tradition's epistemological tenets. However, in the absence of such an articulation, it runs the risk of reproducing the same division that it was intended to resolve (Azra, 2006; Mas'ud, 2002).

Islamic Design and the Construction Environment

Numerous academic fields, including art history, architectural theory, religious studies, and philosophy, have extensively studied the connection between Islamic spirituality and beautiful form (Critchlow, 1976; Burckhardt, 1976; Hillenbrand, 1994; Grabar, 1987). The arts were not viewed in the Islamic intellectual tradition as independent manifestations of personal creativity or as ornamental components of the fundamental framework of religious life. Instead, they formed a "visible religion" (*religio visibilis*), which are tangible expressions of the metaphysical ideas that govern harmony, proportion, the relationship between unity and multiplicity, and the ongoing remembrance of God (*dhikr*), which is central to Islamic spirituality (Ardalan & Bakhtiar, 1973; Gonzalez, 2001).

A whole cosmic perspective was expressed in traditional Islamic architecture, from the geometric intricacy of the Alhambra to the towering vaults of the Süleymaniye Mosque, from the delicate wooden screens of Moroccan riads to the painted ceilings of Meccan homes. Through the use of water (reflecting pools and fountains that represent the rivers of paradise), light (filtered through elaborate screens to suggest the luminosity of the divine presence), geometric pattern (embodied the mathematical structure of creation), and calligraphic inscription (making the divine word visible in the space of worship), the mosque in its traditional forms was an embodiment of paradise and a preview of the Garden (*janna*) (Hillenbrand, 1994; Grabar, 1987). The artisans who constructed and embellished these areas were not just technicians; rather, it was believed that they were performing an act of worship. Their expertise (*mahar*, or craftsmanship) was a manifestation of the Islamic belief that excellence (*ihsan*) in everything is a religious duty.

The replacement of this sacred geometry with practical, utilitarian, frequently imported architectural designs that have nothing to do with the Islamic cosmological vision is a manifestation of the contemporary crisis of Islamic aesthetics. Concrete mosques that imitate Ottoman or Saudi-influenced

baroque styles, frequently in settings where these styles have no historical roots, are a sign of spiritual failure as well as a lack of awareness that material form can and ought to embody spiritual principles (Nasr, 1987; Serageldin, 1988). This crisis is especially evident in Indonesia, where standardized imported styles that are detached from the rich local Islamic aesthetic traditions developed over centuries of interaction between Islam and the diverse cultures of the archipelago are replacing traditional mosque forms such as the Javanese joglo, the Acehese vernacular, and the Minangkabau hybrid.

Cosmology, Gender, and the Harmony of Principles

One of Nasr's most philosophically rich and socially significant contributions as well as one of his most contentious is his handling of gender within the Islamic tradition. His method is overtly metaphysical rather than just sociological or legal; instead of starting with legal texts or social structures, he starts with the cosmological ideas that underpin them. The relationship between the masculine and feminine principles is not primarily a social relationship but rather a cosmic one, a fundamental structure of reality rooted in the divine attributes themselves, according to the Islamic Sufi tradition, especially in the ideas of Ibn Arabi and his interpreters (Chittick, 1989; Murata, 1992). The masculine principle is traditionally linked to the divine attribute of Majesty (al-jalal), which is linked to sovereignty, transcendence, law, and the ability to judge; the feminine principle is traditionally linked to the divine attribute of Beauty (al-jamal), which is linked to mercy, receptivity, the capacity for inner depth, and mystical experience (Murata, 1992).

The connection between them should ideally be one of creative tension and mutual completeness rather than dominance or subordination as they are complimentary parts of a same reality rather than distinct domains. Sufi commentators interpret the Prophet Muhammad's famous statement that he was made to love "women, perfume, and prayer" as expressing the cosmic significance of the feminine as a locus of divine manifestation, a place where the divine beauty (al-jamal) becomes accessible to the human spirit (Murata, 1992; Nasr, 1987). The great mystics in the Islamic spiritual tradition have always acknowledged the feminine principle as spiritually essential rather than inferior.

According to Nasr's interpretation, the loss of this cosmological understanding is reflected in the current gender relations crisis in Muslim communities. From the standpoint of Islamic metaphysics, both the secular feminism that aims to eradicate all gender difference as socially constructed and the patriarchal traditionalism that reduces women to legal subordinates are equally reductive: the former ignores the cosmic feminine as a spiritual principle,

while the latter fails to acknowledge that the complementarity of masculine and feminine is rooted in the structure of reality itself rather than social convention. According to Murata (1992), Ahmed (1992), and Wadud (1999), a third approach that Nasr discovers in the Islamic intellectual tradition would respect the complementarity of masculine and feminine without turning complementarity into hierarchy and acknowledge both concepts as essential and equally sacred components of the divine reality made manifest in creation.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a hermeneutic-philosophical methodology and a qualitative research design (Gadamer, 1989; Ricoeur, 1981). Given the philosophical nature of the main topic, the research approach is appropriate: Nasr's work is philosophical argumentation rather than empirical social science, and its proper analysis necessitates a method that can engage with philosophical argument at the level of its own claims and presuppositions. As a methodology, hermeneutic inquiry focuses on comprehending the meaning of texts and discourses using what Ricoeur (1981) refers to as the "world of the text," or the horizon of possibilities that a text opens up for its readers across various historical and cultural contexts, rather than measuring observable phenomena.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr's *Traditional Islam in the Modern World* (1987), which is over 300 pages long and divided into three main sections Islam and its intellectual and spiritual traditions, Islamic civilization and its arts, and Islam in the modern world is the main source of information. Other significant publications by Nasr, such as *Knowledge and the Sacred* (1981, the published version of his 1981 Gifford Lectures), *Islamic Art and Spirituality* (1987), *The Need for a Sacred Science* (1993), and *Islam in the Modern World* (2010), complement this essay. Critical commentary and biographical studies of Nasr (Aminrazavi, 2014; Sedgwick, 2004), comparative studies of the Traditionalist school (Oldmeadow, 2004; Stoddart, 1990), and critical viewpoints from post-colonial theory (Sayyid, 1997) and feminist Islamic scholarship (Ahmed, 1992; Wadud, 1999) are examples of secondary sources.

The hermeneutic approach is based on Gadamer's (1989) concept of the "hermeneutic circle," which holds that comprehending a text necessitates alternating between the text and its context, between the reader's pre-understanding and the text's challenge to that pre-understanding. This method is critically interpretative (assessing the coherence, consequences, and limitations of Nasr's arguments) rather than merely descriptive (summarizing what Nasr says). Since Nasr's text was written in the post-revolutionary Islamic world in 1987 and is being read through the prism of modern Indonesian Islamic

epistemology in 2025, Ricoeur's (1981) concept of "distanciation" the productive distance between a text and its original context that allows new meanings to emerge in new contexts is especially pertinent here. This chronological and cultural distance is a hermeneutic resource rather than a barrier because it allows questions to be posed to the text that might not have been apparent in its original setting.

In accordance with Thomas and Harden's (2008) framework for qualitative evidence synthesis, thematic synthesis was carried out in three steps. Major conceptual nodes, recurrent concepts, important distinctions, central metaphors, and organizational principles were found in the first stage through a close reading of the main text. These nodes were arranged into a diagnostic framework in the second stage, which included the three crisis domains (epistemology, aesthetics, and cosmology) and the tripartite typology (Traditionalism, Modernism, and Fundamentalism). The framework was assessed against secondary literature in the third stage and placed within the Indonesian Islamic intellectual heritage, specifically the discussion of epistemological reform in Islamic higher education. In order to guarantee topic saturation the point at which additional readings of the text stopped generating new thematic categories data analysis used constant comparative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Multiple forms of triangulation were used to guarantee validity: across texts by the same author (e.g., several works by Nasr), across perspectives (e.g., critical and sympathetic commentary), and across contexts (e.g., applying the framework to the Indonesian situation to evaluate its explanatory ability). In keeping with the philosophical nature of its subject matter and the expanding corpus of qualitative research in Islamic education and philosophy of religion, the study's epistemological orientation is explicitly interpretive rather than empirical-positivist (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The proper attribution of ideas and arguments, which is an issue of both academic integrity and respect for the intellectual labor of the scholars whose work is engaged, is the only ethical consideration in this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

The Loss of Sacred Knowledge and the Epistemological Crisis

This analysis's most important conclusion is that Nasr's description of the current Islamic problem is fundamentally epistemological. The main contention of *Traditional Islam in the Modern World* (1987) is that Muslim societies are

facing a knowledge crisis not a lack of information or technical know-how, but rather a loss of the hierarchical understanding of knowledge that once provided Islamic civilization with its coherence, inventiveness, and spiritual vitality. This conclusion is drawn from a careful study of the work's first major section, which is devoted to an explanation of the epistemological underpinnings of the traditional Islamic sciences (al-'ulum al-islamiyyah).

The traditional Islamic epistemological paradigm views knowledge (al-'ilm) as interwoven and hierarchical rather than monolithic. The Quran and the Sunnah represent revealed knowledge (al-'ilm al-ladunni or al-'ilm al-wahy), which is information directly provided by God through prophetic revelation. The ability to directly perceive metaphysical principles through spiritual discipline and what Nasr refers to as the "inner senses" (al-hawas al-batiniyya) is known as intellectual intuition (al-'aql al-kulliy or al-'aql al-fa'al). The foundations are empirical observation ('ilm al-tajriba wa al-hawas al-zahirah) and rational-discursive knowledge ('ilm al-mantiq wa al-'aql al-juz'i). This hierarchy is based on ontological scope and epistemological certainty rather than social status or institutional power. Higher forms of knowledge do not contradict lower ones; rather, they encompass and ground them, providing the metaphysical framework that gives lower forms of knowledge their proper validity and significance (Nasr, 1981; Al-Attas, 1993).

The epistemological revolutions of Descartes, Locke, Hume, and Kant effectively elevated rational-empirical knowledge to the top of the epistemological pyramid and rejected intellectual intuition and revealed knowledge as epistemologically invalid as "mere" faith, feeling, or tradition, unable to produce true knowledge about reality. This is what Nasr refers to as the "desacralization of knowledge." As a result, a positivist epistemology emerged, according to which only knowledge that can be generated by natural science measurement, experimentation, falsification, and inter-subjective verification is legitimate. Muslim reformers in the 19th and 20th centuries unintentionally embraced an epistemological framework that categorically rejects the possibility of revealed or intuitional knowledge, even though they did so with the earnest goal of proving Islam's compatibility with contemporary reason. The ramifications are severe: the traditional Islamic university (madrasa)

is transformed into a secular Western university, producing graduates who may be experts in Islamic law but lack the philosophical and spiritual formation to comprehend the metaphysical principles underlying those laws, and the classical Islamic sciences philosophy (*falsafa*), mysticism (*tasawwuf*), and illuminationism (*ishraq*) are marginalized as pre-scientific.

The investigation of Islamic education in Indonesia by researchers like Azra (2006), Mas'ud (2002), and Suprayogo (2004) strongly aligns with this finding. A microcosm of the larger epistemological drama that Nasr depicts is the evolution of Indonesian Islamic higher education over the past forty years, from IAIN to UIN, and the inclusion of both religious and secular sciences in the curriculum. For Indonesian Islamic higher education, Nasr's framework raises the question of whether this integration is merely institutional (housing Islamic studies and secular academic departments under one roof without true intellectual integration) or truly epistemological (based on a coherent understanding of the relationship between revealed, rational, and empirical knowledge). Based on the evidence that is currently available, it seems that the integration is still primarily institutional rather than epistemological. This structural arrangement has not yet produced a cohesive Nusantara Islamic epistemology that can integrate the two traditions at the level of their underlying principles.

The Sacred Built Environment's Deterioration and the Aesthetic Crisis

The area of Islamic aesthetics and the built environment is the subject of the second significant discovery. This conclusion is drawn from Nasr's extensive reflection on Islamic art, architecture, and the sacred environment in the second major portion of *Traditional Islam in the Modern World* (1987). This section's main contention is that the physical surroundings in which Muslims live, work, and worship are neither aesthetically nor spiritually neutral; rather, they either promote or hinder human spiritual development. As a result, the destruction of the traditional Islamic environment is not just a cultural loss but also a spiritual disaster.

The argument is based on a specific interpretation of the Islamic tradition's link between form and spirit. According to Nasr, in line with Burckhardt (1976)

and Coomaraswamy, traditional Islamic art is iconographic that is, it uses the language of number, proportion, and geometric form to make visible the invisible principles of divine reality rather than decorative or expressive (in the contemporary, Romantic sense of expressing the artist's individual subjectivity). The regular polygons and star patterns of Islamic tilework and stucco, for instance, articulate the relationship between unity (represented by the circle and the point) and multiplicity (represented by the multiplication of angles and figures).

This serves as a visual meditation on the relationship between the One (al-Wahid) and the Many (al-Kathir), which is fundamental to Islamic metaphysics (Critchlow, 1976; Ardalan & Bakhtiar, 1973). Similar to this, the arabesque, an endlessly branching vegetal scroll that graces every surface of ancient Islamic interiors, symbolizes the boundless creativity of the One who creates the infinite variety of creation without being lessened, as well as the limitless generativity of divine reality.

According to Nasr's analysis, the visible face of the epistemological crisis is represented by the destruction of this aesthetic environment in the modern era, the replacement of traditional Islamic cities with modernist urban grids, the demolition of historic mosques and their replacement with functionalist concrete structures, and the abandonment of traditional crafts in favor of mass-produced decorative objects. The craftsman's intuitive comprehension of how material forms express spiritual principles is lost when the holy sciences are lost, and the aesthetic tradition that relied on the Islamic intellectual tradition for its theoretical foundation is also lost when the Islamic intellectual legacy is abandoned. The end result is an Islamic built environment that is, in the strictest sense of the word, spiritually uninhabitable; it actively obstructs the act of remembering God (dhikr) by encircling the worshipper with forms that have nothing to do with the divine reality they are supposed to evoke.

Because Indonesia has incredibly rich traditional Islamic aesthetic traditions that are currently seriously threatened by standardization, commercialization, and the impact of foreign architectural styles, this aesthetic crisis is especially acute in the country. A truly Nusantara Islamic aesthetic that achieves the integration of Islamic spiritual principle with local aesthetic form

that Nasr's framework would recognize as paradigmatically authentic is represented by the traditional mosques of Java, with their layered roofs (tajug) symbolizing the hierarchical structure of the cosmos, wooden columns carved with floral motifs derived from Javanese aesthetic sensibility, and interiors filled with golden light filtered through traditional screens. The quick replacement of these designs with uniform concrete mosques, which are frequently funded by Gulf benefactors who bring their own aesthetic tastes, is not just an architectural shift but also an outward sign of a deeper spiritual and epistemological crisis.

The Disruption of the Balance of Principles by the Cosmological Crisis

The cosmic dimension of Islamic spiritual life, which Nasr refers to as the balance between masculine and feminine principles, between the active and receptive aspects of divine reality, between exteriority (zahir) and interiority (batin), and between the temporal (al-zamani) and the eternal (al-abadi), is the third and final domain of crisis identified in this analysis. According to traditional Islamic understanding, this cosmological balance is not only philosophical conjecture but is ingrained in the very structure of creation and mirrored in the dynamics of spiritual development, the organization of human society, and the structure of ritual practice.

According to Nasr's analysis, this cosmic balance has been upset by both modernism and fundamentalism for distinct but fundamentally related causes. Modernism has successfully eradicated the recognition of the cosmic feminine the dimension of interiority, beauty, receptivity, and compassionate wisdom from public life by reducing human identity to social and economic function and elevating the active, rational, and productive aspects of human existence at the expense of the contemplative, receptive, and interior dimensions. The end result, according to Nasr, is a hypermasculine, activist, utilitarian society devoid of what the Islamic tradition refers to as dhawq (spiritual taste, the ability to perceive the beauty of the divine reality in the forms of creation) and tawakkul (trust in God, the capacity to receive rather than merely to produce). Men and women alike are impacted by this loss: a society that has eradicated the feminine element from its self-concept has degraded everyone's intellectual and spiritual well-being.

In contrast, fundamentalism makes the opposite mistake. It fails to acknowledge the full metaphysical richness of the Islamic understanding of gender complementarity by literalizing and limiting the feminine to specific legal categories by defining woman only in terms of her legal relationship to men (as daughter, wife, and mother) and limiting her social participation to the home. The renowned female Sufi teachers Rabi'a al-Adawiyya, Fatima of Nishapur, and Aisha al-Mannubiyya were examples of spiritual authority that was not only accepted by tradition but also praised as a manifestation of the human spirit its greatest potential. Therefore, the fundamentalist limitation of female religious authority is a truncation of tradition rather than a defense of it, as it eliminates one of its most important aspects. According to Nasr's paradigm, the true Islamic understanding of gender is one of complementarity without subordination, one that acknowledges the full spiritual and intellectual potential of both men and women and celebrates both principles as sacred embodiments of the divine reality.

DISCUSSION

Combining the Three Crisis Domains in the Tree of Tradition

The integration of these three findings results in the metaphor of the Tree of Tradition, which gives this article its title and acts as the organizing heuristic for Nasr's diagnostic vision. This metaphor provides a particularly insightful framework for comprehending how the crisis domains are interconnected. The sacred sciences theology (kalam), jurisprudence (fiqh), spiritual discipline (tasawwuf), and Islamic philosophy (falsafa) are represented by the tree's roots (usul) in this metaphor. These disciplines are nourished by the spiritual water of divine grace (baraka) and the soil of revelation (wahy). The unifying concept of tawhid (divine unity), which gives all Islamic intellectual and artistic life its consistency and direction, is symbolized by the trunk.

The branches stand for the several fields, artistic expressions, and customs of Islamic culture, such as architecture, calligraphy, music, poetry, medicine, and mathematics, each of which expresses a universal principle in a particular area of human experience. The fruit is a metaphor for the civilization itself, the actual reality of Muslim communities at the pinnacle of their historical development: morally upright, intellectually stimulating, artistically beautiful, and spiritually vibrant.

When a tree's roots are cut off from the nutrient-rich soil, its fruit first loses its ability to survive; it becomes hollow, tasteless, and devoid of nutrients. The

disciplines of Islamic culture would then lose their intellectual vibrancy and their link to the metaphysical concepts that formerly drove them as its branches start to wither. The concept of tawhid will be hollowed out by the trunk and reduced to a formula that is repeated without comprehension rather than a lived experience. The civilization's ability to self-renew will eventually collapse, and it will become reliant on outside sources typically Western ones for its intellectual, artistic, and even spiritual vitality. Nasr's diagnosis of modern Islamic civilization is as follows: the living traditions of Islamic art, music, architecture, and philosophy are withering, the trunk has been weakened by the rejection of metaphysics, and the roots have been severed by the adoption of secular epistemology. The fruit of the civilization still survives in identifiably Islamic forms, but it lacks the intellectual coherence, aesthetic beauty, and spiritual life of its classical incarnations

The three crisis areas are mutually constitutive rather than independent of one another. The aesthetic crisis (the devastation of the sacred environment) and the cosmological crisis (the disturbance of spiritual equilibrium) are both caused by and result from the epistemological crisis (the loss of sacred knowledge). The community loses the experiential wisdom (hikmah) of the feminine dimension of the divine reality the wisdom of mercy, interiority, and beauty and becomes more susceptible to the hypermasculine pathologies of aggression, rigidity, and spiritual aridity when sacred knowledge is lost. When the sacred environment deteriorates, the human being is deprived of the aesthetic and sensory supports for spiritual formation, and the capacity for receptivity to sacred knowledge is further diminished. Because the three problems create a self-reinforcing loop, remedies that are solely political, legal, or educational are insufficient because they only target one area while ignoring the others.

Examining the Main Theory: Internal Renewal The research supports the study's main hypothesis that genuine Islamic renewal must come from within the tradition rather than through external imposition with some significant caveats. The evidence from all three crisis domains points to the same conclusion: attempts to resolve the Islamic crisis by rejecting the philosophical and mystical depths of the Islamic intellectual tradition in favor of literal text and political action (Islamism/fundamentalism) or by adopting Western epistemological frameworks in their entirety (Islamic modernism) have not ended the crisis but have, in various ways, made it worse. This is not just Nasr's opinion; an increasing number of Muslim scholars and intellectuals worldwide have come to the same conclusion via rather different routes.

It is important to note that "renewal from within" does not imply isolation from "without." The Abbasid Golden Age, the Fatimid intellectual blossoming in

Egypt, and the Safavid Iranian philosophical renaissance were all times of intense interaction with non-Islamic intellectual traditions (Greek philosophy, Indian mathematics, Persian cosmological mythology, Byzantine art). Because the Muslim scholars engaged with non-Islamic traditions from a position of knowing what they knew and why they knew it, they were able to assimilate what was true and valuable in other traditions without losing their own center of gravity, which made these engagements generative rather than destructive.

The issue with both Islamic modernism and fundamentalism is not that they interact with the outside world, which is important and necessary, but rather that they do so from a position of epistemological insecurity. The fundamentalist rejected the philosophical and mystical depth of the tradition, which would have provided him with the means to interact with it from a position of strength, while the modernist accepted the epistemological framework of secular rationalism.

This discovery points to a unique and possibly innovative course for Indonesia. The capacity for synthesis and integrationthe ability to uphold the fundamental tenets of Islamic faith and practice while constructively interacting with regional cultural forms, international intellectual currents, and current social challengeshas always been a defining feature of the Indonesian Islamic intellectual tradition, as demonstrated by the ideas of individuals such as Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), Nurcholish Madjid (Cak Nur), and more recently, scholars involved in the developing discourse of "Nusantara Islam. This ability to synthesize, which Gus Dur occasionally referred to as the "culture of dialogue" (kebudayaan dialog), is exactly what Nasr's framework would identify as the distinguishing feature of a living tradition: one that is both secure and open.

Limitations and Criticism of Nasr's Framework

Without an honest examination of the veracity and implications of the major criticisms of Nasr's theory, this study would be lacking. Three perspectivesfeminist scholarship, post-colonial theory, and empirical social scienceoffer the most significant critiques.

The feminist critique, best expressed by academics like Leila Ahmed (1992) and Amina Wadud (1999), questions Nasr's portrayal of gender from a philosophical and political standpoint. Philosophers contend that Nasr's identification of the male with action, exteriority, and grandeur and the feminine with receptivity, interiority, and beauty reflects and perpetuates a gender essentialism that is neither historically universal nor metaphysically necessary. Regardless of its metaphysical goals, critics point out that Nasr's paradigm offers logical

justification for social structures that have historically harmed women. This criticism is legitimate, and a thorough response would necessitate a more in-depth discussion of the particular textual and historical arguments of Islamic feminist studies than is feasible within the parameters of this article.

The post-colonial criticism, which was established by academics like Mark Sedgwick (2004) and Bobby Sayyid (1997), challenges the political ramifications of the Traditionalist school's rejection of modernity and elevation of traditional authority. The worry is that Traditionalism might serve as an ideology that justifies elite religious authority against social transformation and democratic participation, even with its sophisticated conceptual equipment. Any application of Nasr's paradigm to modern political circumstances must take this historical criticism seriously. Nasr himself has maintained that traditionalism and social justice can coexist, but that modernism that defines justice only in utilitarian or secular terms is incompatible with traditionalism; the specifics of this claim need to be clarified in future research.

CONCLUSION

Based on the generative metaphor of the Tree of Tradition, this article has provided an orderly theme synthesis of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Traditional Islam in the Modern World. The synthesis has uncovered three interrelated domains of crisis that Nasr identifies in modern Islamic civilization: cosmological (the disturbance of the spiritual balance between the masculine and feminine principles), aesthetic (the destruction of the sacred built environment and the degradation of the Islamic arts), and epistemological (the loss of sacred knowledge and the hierarchy of knowing). The gradual detachment of modern Islamic civilization from the foundations of the timeless wisdom (*sophia perennis*), which formerly provided it with metaphysical coherence, intellectual vitality, aesthetic beauty, and spiritual depth, is a single, all-encompassing crisis that is represented by these three domains rather than separate pathologies.

The study supports its main thesis: genuine *tajdid*, or authentic Islamic renewal, must come from within the tradition, from its living roots, rather than through the external grafting of prescriptions (whether modernist or fundamentalist) that share a common failure: the rejection, in various ways and for various reasons, of the timeless wisdom ingrained in the Islamic intellectual tradition. Islamic modernism and Islamic fundamentalism both make an effort to alleviate the symptoms of the Islamic crisis without addressing its main cause; they trim the tree's withering branches without reestablishing the relationship between the roots and the living soil of revelation and metaphysical truth.

This study's theoretical contribution is the way it articulates Nasr's diagnostic framework as an organized conceptual instrument for Islamic epistemological investigation that may be used in various Muslim cultural situations. The three-domain crisis map (epistemology-aesthetics-cosmology) and the tripartite typology (Traditionalism-Modernism-Fundamentalism), arranged using the metaphor of the Tree of Tradition, provide a logical, internally consistent, and intellectually rich framework for examining modern Islamic intellectual and cultural life. Future studies should empirically test this paradigm against particular institutional and social contexts, such as the pesantren, the Islamic university, and the urban mosque community. They should also interact more methodically with its feminist, post-colonial, and empirical critics.

This study's practical significance is found in its ramifications for Islamic higher education in Indonesia. Indonesia is one of the most promising locations for the development of an authentic, locally rooted Islamic epistemology for the twenty-first century due to its remarkable combination of rich traditional Islamic intellectual and artistic heritage, a sizable and diverse Muslim population, democratic political culture, and an emerging global academic profile. According to Nasr's framework, a truly Nusantara Islamic epistemology would have to be grounded in the sacred sciences, aesthetically represented in the arts and built environment, and cosmologically balanced in its comprehension of the complementarity of the masculine and feminine aspects of divine reality. In the Nusantara soil, the tree of tradition is dormant rather than dead. Indonesian Islamic intellectuals' job is not to plant a new tree, but to care for the existing one, whose roots are deeper than the recent storms of modernity and fundamentalism have been able to reach.

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