



Decolonizing the Muslim Mind: Producing Knowledge Beyond Colonial and Western Epistemic Frameworks

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Abstract:

Contemporary debates on decolonizing knowledge have increasingly highlighted the enduring influence of colonial epistemic structures within global academia. Yet within Muslim intellectual contexts, decolonization is often reduced either to cultural critique or to selective adaptation of Western disciplinary frameworks. This article argues that such approaches remain insufficient, as they fail to address the deeper epistemic conditions through which knowledge is produced, validated, and institutionalized. Decolonizing the Muslim mind, this study contends, requires not merely rethinking inherited paradigms but actively producing knowledge beyond colonial and Western epistemic frameworks. Drawing on Islamic epistemology and the Islamization of Knowledge discourse, the article conceptualizes decolonization as a process of epistemic reconstruction grounded in normative coherence, moral purpose, and metaphysical orientation. It critically examines the secular assumptions underlying liberal social sciences, particularly the claims of value-neutrality and ontological reductionism, and demonstrates how these assumptions shape Muslim intellectual dependency even in post-colonial settings. By articulating the principles of Islamic knowledge production—integrating revelation, reason, and experience—the article proposes an alternative framework that enables epistemic agency without intellectual isolation. The study concludes that Islamic epistemology offers a viable and constructive path toward global knowledge pluralism, positioning Muslim scholarship not as reactive or derivative, but as an active participant in shaping the future of social sciences beyond epistemic hegemony.

Keywords: Decolonization of Knowledge; Muslim Mind; Islamic Epistemology; Knowledge Production; Epistemic Hegemony; Islamization of Knowledge; Social Sciences

1. Introduction: The Epistemic Question of the Muslim Mind

1.1 Colonialism and the Restructuring of Muslim Knowledge

Colonialism's impact on Muslim societies extended far beyond political control or economic exploitation. In addition to imposing foreign systems of governance, colonialism imposed Western concepts of knowledge, rationality, and science. Indigenous knowledge systems and epistemological frameworks were systematically discredited by colonial authorities, who imposed European secular models for organizing educational institutions, disciplinary classification, and standards of intellectual authority.¹²

Not coincidentally, colonial knowledge systems served as instruments of power. They created a hierarchy of epistemologies where Western systems were considered universal and objective, and Islamic knowledge systems were relegated to theology, culture, or tradition, all of which are outside of the realm of "scientific" knowledge.³ Thus, Muslim intellectuals began working within foreign conceptual frameworks when they addressed topics related to Islam.

1.2 From Political Decolonization to Epistemic Dependence

Political decolonization in many Muslim societies did not lead to epistemic independence. Most post-colonial governments retained colonial educational systems, disciplinary structures, and research paradigms and reinforced what has been called epistemic dependence.⁴ Social sciences, in particular, have continued to be taught, researched, and assessed using Western theoretical perspectives and, often, without questioning the underlying ontological and normative assumptions of those theories.

Thus, there is a contradictory state of affairs. Muslim intellectuals may be politically independent, yet they are epistemically dependent. A large portion of knowledge production is focused on achieving validation from Western-based universities, thus creating a tendency to imitate, not innovate. Therefore, the "Muslim mind," here, does not refer to a psychological or cultural entity, but to an epistemic condition, one formed by internalized colonial categories of thought and standards of legitimacy.

¹Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (London: Frank Cass, 1977).

²Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

³Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (London: Frank Cass, 1977).

⁴Syed Farid Alatas, "Academic Dependency and the Global Division of Labour in the Social Sciences," *Current Sociology* 51, no. 6 (2003): 599–613.

1.3 Liberal Social Sciences and the Myth of Value-Neutral Knowledge

One major mechanism of epistemic domination is the liberal social sciences' assertion of value neutrality. Modern social sciences, rooted in Enlightenment rationalism and secular ontology, often present themselves as simply descriptive and objective, and free of any commitment to morality, metaphysics, or telos.⁵⁶ However, recent scholarship has shown that the liberal social sciences are deeply committed to a set of moral visions regarding the nature of humanity, society, and progress.⁷⁸

In Muslim intellectual settings, the unexamined adoption of liberal social sciences has contributed to the erasure of normative questions central to Islamic thought, including *ghāyah* (purpose), moral responsibility, and the relationship between knowledge and ethics. The exclusion of revelation and metaphysics from what can be considered “real” knowledge frameworks further solidifies the secular epistemic system incompatible with the intellectual traditions of Islam.

1.4 Decolonizing the Muslim Mind as an Epistemic Project

Therefore, de-colonizing the Muslim mind (or simply de-colonizing the Muslim) should never be merely a matter of affirming culture, or resisting politics, or representing Muslims within the existing institutional structure of academia; but rather, it must remain an epistemic project. That is to say that the process of de-colonizing the Muslim mind will require more than critique-it will require epistemic reconstruction-to re-articulate the principles, sources, and ends of knowledge from an Islamic epistemology.

The Islamization of Knowledge movement, as outlined by scholars like al-Attas and al-Faruqi, is one of the earliest and most systematic attempts to respond to this challenge by grounding knowledge generation in Islamic metaphysical and moral frameworks.⁹¹⁰ Although often misunderstood or dismissed, this project continues to be very relevant to current discussions of decolonization, epistemic justice, and global knowledge diversity.

This article expands upon and critically develops this movement by arguing that authentic decolonization can occur only by producing knowledge that is both located beyond colonial and Western epistemic frameworks and grounded in norms, methods, and engagement globally without epistemic subordination.

⁵Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings* (New York: Pantheon, 1980).

⁶Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

⁷Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

⁸Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings* (New York: Pantheon, 1980).

⁹Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993).

¹⁰Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi, *Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Work Plan* (Herndon, VA: IIIT, 1982).

2. Methodological Framework: Epistemic Reconstruction as an Approach

2.1 *From Ideological Critique to Epistemic Reconstruction*

Most current writings on Decolonising Knowledge are limited to critique of power relations, colonial legacy, and Exclusions inherent within Dominant Epistemologies. Such critique is essential but is methodologically inadequate for changing knowledge systems. Critique alone deconstructs inherited Frameworks of Reference without providing Principled Alternatives for Producing Knowledge. Moreover, Decolonial scholars themselves have argued that the lack of Constructive Epistemic Foundations threatens to reproduce Dependency under New Terminology¹¹¹².

Therefore, this article identifies Epistemic Reconstruction as its Core Methodological Orientation. Epistemic Reconstruction moves beyond Ideological Resistance by Addressing the Foundational Questions of What Counts as Knowledge, How Knowledge is Validated, and For What Purpose It is Produced. Rather than Rejecting Modern Scholarship Wholesale, it interrogates the Ontological, normative, and Metaphysical Assumptions Underlying Dominant Disciplines and Rearticulates Them through an Alternative Epistemic Framework Grounded in Islamic Intellectual Tradition.

2.2 *Normative Epistemology and the Issue of Knowledge Creation*

An essential component of this methodology is the dismissal of the Positivist Assumption that knowledge can or should be value-neutral. More recently, contemporary philosophy of social science increasingly shows all knowledge practices to be normatively structured by implicit moral visions and conceptions of the human subject.¹³¹⁴ As such, Islamic epistemology makes explicit the normativity of all knowledge practices through integrating ethical purpose and metaphysical orientation into its definition of knowledge.

Thus, this study views knowledge creation as a normative activity rather than as a purely descriptive enterprise. The methodological task is not merely to interpret existing data using Islamic categories, but to re-cast the epistemic premises that guide inquiry itself. This includes

¹¹Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

¹²Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2014).

¹³Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

¹⁴Hilary Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

reconsidering assumptions regarding human nature, social order, rationality, and progress that underlie liberal social sciences but remain incompatible with Islamic moral anthropology.

2.3 Sources, texts, and analytical strategy

In terms of methodology, the article uses a conceptual comparative analytical strategy drawing upon three bodies of literature:

1. classical Islamic epistemology including discussions on knowledge ('ilm), reason ('aql), revelation (wahy) and ethics in works of scholars such as al-Ghazali and Ibn Taymiyyah;
2. modern Islamic thought, particularly the 'Islamization of knowledge' discourse articulated by al-Attas and al-Faruqi, which addresses the problem of Western epistemic domination;
3. contemporary social epistemology and decolonial theory, especially critiques of epistemic hegemony, knowledge-power relations, and academic dependency.

The analytical strategy employed here is not synthetic in the sense of combining diverse traditions together without critical evaluation. Rather, it is selective and evaluative, employing Islamic epistemology as the reference point against which colonial and Western frameworks are evaluated.

2.4 Comparative engagement without epistemic subordination

A major methodological concern addressed in this study is how to engage with Western scholarship without reproducing epistemic subordination. Comparative analysis is often misused either to legitimate Western paradigms or romanticize non-Western traditions. This article avoids both extremes by utilizing what may be termed asymmetrical comparison — a method in which Islamic epistemology functions as the primary framework of evaluation, rather than as an object to be measured against Western standards.

This approach affirms the possibility of intellectual dialogue while rejecting the assumption that Western epistemology constitutes the universal benchmark of rationality. Therefore, this approach aligns with broader calls for epistemic pluralism that recognize multiple rationalities without collapsing into relativism.¹⁵¹⁶

2.5 Scope and Limits of the Method

This Theoretical Framework Is Intentionally Theoretical Rather than Empirical. Its Aim is Not to Provide Immediate Models or Policy Recommendations for Specific Social Science

¹⁵Susan Haack, *Manifesto of a Passionate Moderate* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

¹⁶William E. Connolly, *Pluralism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

Disciplines but to Identify the Epistemic Conditions Necessary for Producing Knowledge Beyond Colonial and Western Frameworks. Empirical Applications in Specific Social Science Disciplines are Identified as Future Research Trajectories Rather than Immediate Outcomes.

Additionally, while the Article Draws Heavily from Islamic Intellectual Resources, it Does Not Claim to exhaust the Diversity of Islamic Epistemological Traditions. Rather, it seeks to develop a Coherent Orientation that Will Guide Further Scholarly Work, Institutional Reform and Disciplinary Reconstruction.

3. Colonial and Western Epistemic Frameworks: A Critical Diagnosis

3.1 Colonial Knowledge and the Production of Epistemic Hierarchies

Colonialism established knowledge hierarchies, as well as political hierarchies, to classify various societies, cultures, and religious groups based on evolutionary and civilizational models where Europe sat at the pinnacle of rationality and civilization. Most of the knowledge about colonized peoples was developed through colonial disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, philology, and history. These disciplines created non-Western epistemologies as objects of study rather than as possible sources of knowledge.¹⁷¹⁸

These processes displaced Islamic knowledge traditions from their position as inclusive frameworks for understanding reality. Islamic sciences were reduced to ritual, theology, or heritage, while “true” knowledge, scientific, social, and political, was defined according to Western secular standards. Thus, the devaluation of Islamic epistemology was not simply marginalization of Islamic epistemology, but rather a reconceptualization of the standards for recognizing legitimate knowledge.

3.2 Secular Ontology & Epistemological Universalism in Western Frameworks

A defining feature of Western epistemological frameworks is the notion of universality via secular ontology. Contemporary Western knowledge systems operate with the assumption that reality may be known independent of theological and metaphysical assertions — assertions relegated to the realm of the private and subjective. Thus, the ontological reductionism described above supports the discipline-specific structure of the modern social sciences — which conceive of human behavior, society, and history as closed systems subject to immanent causal mechanisms.¹⁹

¹⁷Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

¹⁸Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings* (New York: Pantheon, 1980).

¹⁹Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

The expansion of this secular ontology has significantly contributed to the achievement of epistemic hegemony. As noted previously, Western frameworks do not present themselves as historically contingent productions — instead, they present themselves as neutral, rational, and universally applicable methods of acquiring knowledge. Thus, alternative epistemologies — specifically those relying on revelation or metaphysics — are viewed as pre- scientific or irrational. Consequently, this creates a structural asymmetry for Muslim scholars working within a global academic context between the Islamic epistemological presuppositions and the recognition of knowledge.

3.3 Liberal Social Science and the Obfuscation of Normativity

Liberal social science is important in maintaining Western epistemic dominance because it conceals its own normative commitments under the guise of objective and value-free inquiry. While liberal social science claims to provide empirical and descriptive accounts of reality, it is heavily influenced by particular moral anthropologies (e.g., conceptions of humans as autonomous, self-interested, and rational), and teleological assumptions regarding progress, liberation, and social order.²⁰²¹

The obfuscation of normativity is particularly harmful to intellectual traditions grounded in Islam. Islamic epistemology includes both knowledge and ethics and does not separate facts from values. In fact, Islamic epistemology posits that moral purpose is an inherent part of knowing. When Muslim societies adopt liberal social science frameworks without critical reflection, they assimilate epistemological assumptions that foreclose the possibility of examining moral responsibility, metaphysical significance, and ultimate purpose. In this way, this adoption is not simply a neutral analytical exercise, but represents a form of soft epistemic displacement.

3.4 Internalization and Epistemic Dependency

Colonial and Western epistemological frameworks have had a profound impact on post-colonial intellectuals. Epistemic domination occurs not through force or coercion, but through the institutionalization of Western standards of excellence, rigor, and relevance. Typically, assessments of academic success are based on the degree to which individuals adhere to Western theoretical paradigms, publishing outlets, and research methodologies. This reinforces what Alatas (2003) refers to as epistemic dependency.²²

²⁰Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

²¹Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

²²Syed Farid Alatas, "Academic Dependency and the Global Division of Labour in the Social Sciences," *Current Sociology* 51, no. 6 (2003): 599–613.

In the case of Muslim intellectual environments, this dependency results in a reluctance to formulate theories that utilize Islamic epistemological principles and a preference for appropriating Western concepts — even when producing knowledge regarding Islamic social realities. Appropriating Western concepts is frequently justified as prudence or universality; however, it reinforces a hierarchical structure wherein knowledge developed within Islamic traditions is derivative. Therefore, decolonizing the Muslim intellect requires not merely challenging the external structures of domination, but also the internalized assumptions that sustain epistemic subordination.

3.5 Diagnosis and the Need for Epistemic Reconstruction

The diagnosis presented in this section indicates that colonial and Western epistemological frameworks represent not only intellectual tools, but complete systems of knowledge that define reality, legitimacy, and authority. Merely critiquing these frameworks will not be sufficient to supplant their dominance. Likewise, incorporating Islamic concepts into the prevailing disciplinary frameworks will not be sufficient to supplant their dominance. Instead, what is necessary is a transition from accommodating the existing epistemological framework to reconstructing that framework.

This section establishes a basis for the development of an alternative by laying bare the ontological, normative, and civilizational assumptions embedded in the dominant knowledge systems. The subsequent sections illustrate that Islamic epistemology represents such an alternative — not as a nostalgic return to premodern ways of thinking, but as a contemporary framework for generating knowledge outside of the confines of colonial and Western epistemological frameworks.

4. Decolonization Beyond Critique: From Resistance to Production

4.1 The Limits of Critique-Centered Decolonization

Scholarship that is critical and decolonial has been successful in revealing the colonial basis of contemporary knowledge and the structures of power within university-based disciplines. Through historical analyses of who has had authority over the way we understand the world, such critiques have challenged notions of universality and neutrality that were previously assumed.^{23,24} Despite being useful in deconstructing dominant discourses, many critique-centered approaches are unable to develop coherent alternatives for knowledge production.

²³Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

²⁴Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings* (New York: Pantheon, 1980).

This constraint can be particularly damaging in the context of Muslim intellectuals. When critique of the West's epistemic dominance is not complemented by a constructive epistemology, it results in intellectual paralysis or permanent opposition. Without an articulated set of principles for the production of knowledge, the critique of Western epistemological dominance may replace one form of dependency with another since the critique will continue to use Western theoretical vocabulary and be validated by Western systems of evaluation.

4.2 Opposition without Rebuilding: An Intellectual Stalemate

Opposition to epistemic domination is a necessary condition, but not sufficient. When opposition is not linked to rebuilding, it will oscillate between opposition and imitation. In the first instance, knowledge production will be insular and reactive; in the second instance, it will replicate the same hierarchies which the opposition wishes to challenge. Decolonial scholars have recognized this dilemma, noting that the decolonial project must move “from denunciation to enunciation” — from identifying domination to identifying alternative epistemic horizons.²⁵

For Muslim scholarship, opposition without rebuilding will manifest as selective Islamization (adding religious terminology to frameworks of knowledge that are otherwise unaltered), or as culturalist critique disconnected from epistemological foundations. Neither option challenges the foundational ontological and normative assumptions of dominant disciplines. Consequently, epistemic dependence is maintained even though there is rhetorical opposition.

4.3 Authority to Produce Knowledge and the Question of Knowledge Production

Decolonization is meaningful only when it asserts epistemic agency — the capacity of a tradition to produce its own questions, concepts, methods, and criteria of validity. Thus, instead of seeking recognition within the established hierarchies, epistemic agency asserts the authority to define what constitutes knowledge and why. Producing knowledge outside of colonial and Western epistemic frameworks does not signify isolation from global scholarship; rather, it signifies engagement in modern disciplines from a position of normative coherence where Islamic epistemology serves as the guiding principle of inquiry. This orientation of Muslim scholars in the Global South enables them to participate in international scholarly discourse while retaining epistemic independence and the ability to retain ownership over their intellectual wealth so they do not have to convert it into secularized expressions for the sake of foreign validation.

²⁵Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2014).

4.4 Knowledge Creation as a Normative Activity

A major result of moving beyond critique is recognizing that knowledge creation has always been normative. Modern epistemic frameworks generally hide this fact through the notion that values are extrinsic to scientific inquiry. Islamic epistemology reveals that knowledge ('ilm), along with ethics and purpose, are deeply intertwined. In addition to providing an accurate representation of reality, knowledge is understood to be an understanding that guides action toward what is good and what is just.

Thus, decolonizing the Muslim mind requires a process of putting normativity at the center of the study of society. This is not about moral dogma; instead, it involves a clear acknowledgment of the ethical commitments on which all knowledge practices rely. Through transparency regarding its normativity, Islamic epistemology provides a transparent alternative to the implicit moral assumptions present in liberal social science.²⁶

4.5 Moving from Epistemic Critique to Constructive Pluralism

Transcending critique, however, also changes the objective of decolonization to constructive pluralism, as opposed to epistemic replacement. The aim is not to displace Western knowledge with an exclusive Islamic canon, but to pluralize the bases of global knowledge by allowing multiple epistemic traditions to contribute as peers. This view opposes both relativism and universalism: it acknowledges the pursuit of truth, while also acknowledging that various epistemic traditions articulate truth through distinct ontological and moral perspectives.²⁷

Thus, Islamic epistemology does not represent itself as an alternative ideology, but as a comprehensive framework that can generate social knowledge that is morally based, intellectually robust, and globally connected. The next section elaborates upon this claim by describing the fundamental epistemological principles of Islamic knowledge and their relevance to contemporary knowledge production.

5. Islamic Epistemology as an Alternative Knowledge Framework

5.1 Tawhīd and the Unity of Knowledge

The central tenet of Islamic epistemology is the concept of Tawhid (the Unity of God). While Tawhid has been primarily seen as an existential and religious belief, it also serves as an epistemological framework. Tawhid posits a unified reality, a unified body of knowledge, and a unified moral code. Therefore, it does not accept the fragmented worldview of secular modern epistemologies that compartmentalize knowledge into independent domains, each governed by

²⁶Hilary Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

²⁷William E. Connolly, *Pluralism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

its own logic. All forms of knowledge are therefore connected to a unified metaphysical structure that seeks to find the truth and to serve an ethical end.²⁸

As such, the idea of Tawhid directly opposes the notion of separating fact from value, science from ethics, and reason from revelation. From an Islamic viewpoint, these distinctions are constructed as artificial boundaries that suppress the obligation to act ethically when one comes to know something. As such, Tawhid is the ontological basis for a comprehensive view of knowledge that can resist both the extremes of reductionism and relativism.

5.2 Revelation, Reason and Experience as Complementary Sources of Knowledge

In Islam, there are three ways we obtain knowledge - through revelation, reason, and experience. All three methods are equally important and complement each other. For example, when Allah says “there is no compulsion in religion” (Surah Al Baqarah, Verse 256) and you read this verse in the Quran, you know that Allah has made it clear that there should be freedom of religion. So, your faith or belief in God (or lack thereof) is based on Allah's word in the Quran, which is a revelation from Him. As well, if you want to find the meaning of this verse, you need to think about it using your mind and reason (i.e., you need to make sense of it). If you want to know what people thought in the past when they read this verse, then you can learn about their experiences and observations.

This is how Islamic epistemology works. It recognizes Wahee (revelation) as the first and most important way of obtaining knowledge. And because Allah is the One who created the universe and everything in it, Wahee is a reliable way of knowing things about the universe and all its aspects. This means that Wahee is not contradictory to Aql (reason), but rather complements it.^{29,30}

Experiential evidence and observation are also very important. But this type of evidence is always seen within a much larger context of metaphysics and ethics. Evidence does not provide us with a complete picture of the world around us. Therefore, evidence alone cannot tell us what anything else means independent of our moral and metaphysical responsibilities. That being said, Islamic epistemology supports the pursuit of science and understanding in a rigorous and systematic way, while at the same time remaining consistent in terms of values and purpose. And that is an essential feature for producing knowledge that is not part of a colonial and/or Western episteme.

²⁸Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993).

²⁹Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Deliverance from Error (al-Munqidh min al-Dalal)*, trans. Richard J. McCarthy (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2001).

³⁰Ahmad Ibn Taymiyyah, *Refutation of the Conflict Between Reason and Revelation*, vols. 1–2 (Riyadh: Dar al-Kunuz, 1997).

5.3 Knowledge, Ethics and Purpose

A significant component of Islamic epistemology is the idea that knowledge, ethics, and purpose are mutually exclusive. Ilm (knowledge) is not merely factual information devoid of value judgments. Ilm refers to the acquisition of knowledge that contains an element of ethical importance. In fact, there are many examples in classical Islamic literature where knowledge and responsibility (Takleef), accountability, and virtue (e.g. Ma'ruf) are identified as synonymous.³¹ That is, to possess knowledge correctly is to act correctly, and ignorance (Jahl) is considered a form of moral failing.

Unlike the liberal social sciences that tend to bracket off normative issues from their scholarly inquiries, Islamic epistemology cannot bracket off normative questions. According to Islamic epistemology, every form of knowledge frames our moral horizons and shapes our social outcomes. Islamic epistemology explicitly states the normative purposes of knowledge, thus eliminating the implicit normativity that may be inherent in many of the allegedly neutral frameworks.

5.4 Truth, Pluralism, and Disciplined Disagreement

Islamic epistemology holds that truth exists, regardless of whether or not humans are able to comprehend it accurately. The existence of truth leads to the existence of disciplined disagreements (Ikhtilaaf) between various forms of knowledge. These disagreements allow for multiple interpretations of knowledge to coexist within a single epistemological and moral framework. Ikhtilaaf does not result in relativism; instead, it uses methodological rigor, ethical standards, and basic principles to regulate pluralism.³²

In that sense, the Islamic epistemological model is capable of finding a middle ground between the two extremes of modern universalism and postmodern skepticism. On the one hand, the Islamic epistemological model allows for intellectual diversity to flourish, while maintaining standards for truth and rationality. On the other hand, the Islamic epistemological model provides valuable resources for dealing with the globalization of knowledge plurality while maintaining epistemic integrity.

5.5 Islamic Epistemology and Modern Knowledge Production

When Islamic epistemology is fully developed into a coherent system, it will serve as a basis for the creation of new knowledge, and not just the preservation of traditional knowledge. Islamic epistemology will provide a living, dynamic structure for the creation of new knowledge. The integration of metaphysics, ethics, and rational inquiry that is present in Islamic

³¹Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1970).

³²Wael B. Hallaq, *A History of Islamic Legal Theories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

epistemology will permit Muslim scholars to develop solutions to the problems of modern societies, while preserving their intellectual roots free of the influence of secular dogma. Islamic epistemology requires that modern disciplines be reoriented towards different conceptions of humanity, society, and purpose, and therefore does not require that modern disciplines be rejected.

As such, Islamic epistemology offers more than critique - it provides the necessary conditions for creating knowledge that is simultaneously normatively rooted and methodologically plural, and engaged with the global community. The next section will expand on this foundation by describing ways in which knowledge can be produced outside of colonial and Western epistemic paradigms.

6. Producing Knowledge Beyond Colonial and Western Epistemic Frameworks

6.1 Knowledge Production in Islamic Epistemic Perspective

Knowledge is produced in Islam by means of a rational, purposeful endeavor that incorporates a cohesive world-view (ontology), appropriate sources of knowledge (epistemology), and a commitment to morality (axiology). The classical scholarship of Islam recognized knowledge (*'ilm*) as being inextricable from both moral orientation and civilizational objective - two concepts that are diametrically opposed to those of the modern understanding of the value-free production of knowledge.³³³⁴

Knowledge production involves the ability to discern what constitutes an acceptable research question, what assumptions guide the interpretation of evidence, and how knowledge contributes to the development of humanity under the divine moral order. Contrary to the epistemological approach of colonialism and Western paradigms that rely on explanations, predictive modeling, and control in preference for metaphysics and ethics in their inquiry approaches³⁵,

6.2 – Epistemic Autonomy, Not Intellectual Isolation

The generation of knowledge that goes beyond colonial/Western epistemic frameworks does not necessitate an absence of connection with the international scholarly community, nor does it require abandoning empirical standards of scholarship; rather, this would represent epistemic autonomy - the right to be able to critically evaluate those epistemic frameworks which

³³Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1995).

³⁴Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989).

³⁵Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings* (New York: Pantheon, 1980).

are dominant without relinquishing the intellectual bases of Islam as they relate to criteria of legitimacy that are external to themselves.

Al-Attas (1978) argues that the realization of intellectual freedom is not achieved through the unimpeded borrowing of ideas but through the disciplined engagement with one's own worldview.³⁶

Scholars associated with the decolonial movement have pointed out that even after political decolonization, many Muslim countries continue to exhibit forms of epistemic dependency characterized by the unreflective incorporation of Eurocentric conceptual categories and methodologies.³⁷³⁸ Epistemic autonomy in Islam represents a response to this form of dependency not by withdrawing into isolationism but by placing the focus of inquiry back on the ontology and moral commitments of Islam, allowing for equitable participation in global debates rather than simply responding as a peripheral actor.

6.3 Applying Modern Social Sciences without Subjugation

Many modern social science disciplines claim to be universally applicable and methodologically neutral. An extensive body of literature in the sociology of knowledge demonstrates, however, that these disciplines are grounded in historical assumptions concerning human nature and social organization that are secular, liberal, and often colonial.³⁹⁴⁰ Therefore, the production of knowledge beyond Western epistemic frameworks necessitates that these underlying assumptions are subjected to critical interrogation rather than simply applied using disciplinary instruments.

Islamic epistemology permits the selective appropriation of methods and theories while rejecting their implicit claims to ontological and normative truth when these are inconsistent with Islamic teachings. Empirical observation and analytical rigor are not abandoned; instead, they are reinterpreted within a framework that recognizes moral purpose, metaphysical reality, and the accountability of knowledge to ethics. In this manner, Islamic epistemology disciplines modern knowledge rather than censors it.⁴¹

6.4 Criteria for Knowledge Production in Islam

³⁶Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: ABIM, 1978).

³⁷Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America," *International Sociology* 15, no. 2 (2000): 215–232.

³⁸Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

³⁹Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (New York: Anchor Books, 1966).

⁴⁰Raewyn Connell, *Southern Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

⁴¹Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

For the purpose of developing knowledge production systems which may overcome the dominant colonial and Western epistemic frameworks, assessment of the quality of these systems should take place by reference to internal standards of Islamic epistemology, rather than to external canons of academic orthodoxy. In this regard, some possible internal standards might include:

1. Ontological Clarity: Clearly articulated assumptions about the nature of reality, human nature, and social structures.
2. Epistemic Integration: The integration of all three sources of knowledge: revelation, reason, and sensory experience.
3. Normative Coherence: Consonance between the knowledge claims and ethical purposes of the knowledge produced.
4. Moral Accountability: Recognition of the consequences of the knowledge produced for society.
5. Intellectual Rigour: A commitment to disciplined reasoning and methodological transparency.

The internal criteria provide for the transparent articulation of one's epistemic assumptions, while the "value-neutrality" of the external canons conceals the normative commitments and therefore undermines rather than supports the integrity of scholarly work.⁴²

6.5 Knowledge Production as a Process of Civilizational Self-Formation

In the final analysis, the development of knowledge systems beyond colonial and Western epistemic frameworks represents a process of civilizational self-formation. Systems of knowledge define the collective imagination, the moral horizon, and institutional practices of people. When Muslim intellectual activity is dependent upon epistemic frameworks developed outside of Islam, then it risks recreating civilizational dependence, regardless of whether or not there exists formal colonial control.^{43,44}

Islamic epistemic reconstruction permits Muslim societies to articulate their understanding of social order, justice, and human purpose in a contemporary context without surrendering epistemic sovereignty. This project is neither reactionary nor defensive; it is a forward-looking contribution to global knowledge pluralism, adding new epistemic possibilities beyond the confines of secular liberal modernity.

⁴²Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi, *Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Work Plan* (Herndon, VA: IIIT, 1982).

⁴³Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

⁴⁴Hamid Dabashi, *Can Non-Europeans Think?* (London: Zed Books, 2015).

The implications of such epistemic production are perhaps best illustrated in the social sciences, where conceptions of the human person directly influence policy, ethics and governance. For this reason, the next section examines how Islamic epistemology reconceptualizes the social sciences as a field of study with respect to moral purpose, epistemic humility and civilizational responsibility.

7. Reorienting the Social Sciences through Islamic Epistemology

7.1 *The Social Sciences as Epistemic Constructions*

Social sciences, although developed based on empirical data, were developed within certain intellectual, political, and colonial contexts within Europe. As such, there are inherent assumptions in social science disciplines regarding the nature of the autonomous individual, the existence of a secular rational world, notions of progress, and the private nature of religious belief and practice.⁴⁵⁴⁶ Therefore, the ways in which we understand human beings, social structures, and society itself reflect Western experiences and dismiss non-Western civilizational understanding of humanity and society.

In light of this context, from an Islamic epistemological perspective, the social sciences must not just be “used,” but reoriented. The reorientation of social sciences refers to an examination of the ontological and normative foundations of social sciences, not merely in the application of social sciences to Muslim societies. Without reorientation, social sciences can serve as a tool for the continuance of coloniality even if applied by Muslim scholars themselves.

7.2 *Re-centering the Human Subject in Islamic Anthropology*

In the process of reformulating social sciences, there has been an urgent need to re-conceptualize the nature of humans. Social science has long treated humans as autonomous individuals acting in a rational manner in order to maximize their own self-interests. Furthermore, social science has conceptualized humans as being morally independent from one another, whose identity is determined by social constructs without any transcendent references. In contrast to social science's view of humans, however, Islamic epistemology views humans as being morally responsible, interdependent beings existing in a divine and therefore ordered world (fiṭrah, khilāfah, amānah).⁴⁷⁴⁸

⁴⁵Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

⁴⁶Raewyn Connell, *Southern Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

⁴⁷Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1995).

⁴⁸Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002).

This new anthropological paradigm has significant implications for fields such as sociology, psychology, and political theory. Social behavior can be accounted for neither entirely by reference to structural factors nor to individual preference; rather, social behavior must be understood in light of the concept of moral agency, spiritual orientation, and ethical duty. Therefore, reorienting social science means going beyond simple reductionist paradigms of understanding to a much more inclusive anthropology which includes both the moral and the metaphysical.

7.3 Rethinking Society, Power, and Normativity

Most contemporary social theory views norms as socially created conventions based on relationships of power with no ultimate moral base. While critical thinkers have documented how power operates in systems of knowledge⁴⁹, they tend to conclude with relativistic positions that do not provide a framework for making normative judgments. From an Islamic perspective, concerns regarding power exist; however, Islamic epistemology provides a completely alternative position to understand society, power, and norms.

From the Islamic perspective, society is not simply a site of competing interests; rather, it is a moral order that strives to create justice (‘adl), responsibility, and the overall well-being of all members of society. Power should be evaluated not only in terms of control, but also in terms of its ethical justification. Islamic epistemology facilitates the ability to evaluate power in a normatively grounded fashion while avoiding both moral absolutism and postmodern skepticism.⁵⁰

7.4 Methodological Implications of Social Science Research

Reorienting social science does not necessitate abandoning quantitative/qualitative research methods or comparative analysis. What reorienting social science entails is evaluating the ways in which you frame, interpret, and evaluate those methods. All methods are never “epistemologically innocent.” Methods are shaped by assumptions regarding what constitutes valid evidence, what constitutes valid explanation, and what constitutes relevant data.⁵¹

Islamic epistemology promotes methodological pluralism consistent with ethical and metaphysical principles. However, whether you utilize quantitative or qualitative research methods, your interpretations of the findings must always be done through a prism that recognizes the presence of a moral goal and human accountability. This methodology rejects both positivist reductionism and postmodern fragmentation; thereby establishing a middle ground between rigor and meaning.

⁴⁹Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings* (New York: Pantheon, 1980).

⁵⁰Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Shari’ah Law: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2010).

⁵¹Roy Bhaskar, *The Possibility of Naturalism* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1979).

7.5 Towards an Intellectual Project of Islamic Social Sciences

The reorientation presented above demonstrates the potential for social sciences that are Islamic, and not as parallel or sectarian disciplines, but as rigorous disciplines that draw upon Islamic epistemology and engage in global scholarship. As such, Islamic social sciences would not only examine Muslim societies as objects of study, but would develop concepts, theories, and explanations that originate from the Islamic civilization experience.

Therefore, such an intellectual project would represent a departure from previous calls for the Islamization of knowledge,⁵² as it would focus on the process of epistemic reconstruction rather than institutional duplication. Through this process, Islamic social sciences, as defined here, would contribute to the pluralism of global knowledge by expanding the epistemic horizons of social inquiry, and not by withdrawing into intellectual isolation.

The final section will summarize these arguments and describe the broader implications of freeing the Muslim mind through the processes of epistemic liberation and responsible knowledge creation.

8. Conclusion

This paper has suggested that decolonizing the Muslim mind is not a matter of rejecting Western knowledge systems, nor even examining how colonialism has shaped our understanding of history — it's an epistemological challenge. Decolonizing the Muslim mind involves recovering our ability to create knowledge autonomously and responsibly. While epistemic imperialism (the power of the West over other cultures) has been carried out primarily through the establishment of disciplinary norms that assume certain ontologies, anthropology, and values — thus making other forms of knowledge dependent upon the West, this research has illustrated that liberating ourselves from these epistemic constraints requires us to reconstruct knowledge systems based on moral purposes, metaphysics, and civilizationally conscious understandings.

From this perspective, the Islamization of Knowledge can be viewed as an ongoing epistemological reconstruction — and not as an ideology — and can address both the crisis of dependence created by colonial modernity and the intensification of meaning fragmentation caused by postmodern relativism. Through rejection of claims of “value-free” knowledge while avoiding relativistic skepticism — Islamic epistemology provides a reasoned integration of experience, reason, and revelation within a singular epistemological vision. The implications of this epistemological shift — particularly for the social sciences — will be profound because assumptions about humanity, society, and what constitutes normativity directly impact how we think about ethics, public policy, and governance. By grounding the social sciences in Islamic epistemology, we do not seek to establish insulated and/or parallel disciplines, but rather

⁵²Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi, *Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Work Plan* (Herndon, VA: IIIT, 1982).

intellectually vigorous fields which generate concepts, theories, and critiques derived from Islamic civilizational experiences, and contribute positively to a broader global knowledge pluralism. Ultimately, decolonizing the Muslim mind means reclaiming epistemological responsibility — i.e., knowing knowledge as an *amana* (trust) which shapes moral horizons and social realities — and affirming Islamic epistemology as a living, critical intellectual resource which can engage current debates regarding decolonization, epistemic justice, and modernity in ethically informed and world-relevant manners.

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