



DECOLONIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE IN ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL: AN ANALYSIS OF THE EPISTEMOLOGIES OF BAYANI, BURHANI, AND IRFANI AS COUNTER-HEGEMONY

Fathur Rosi Dennismas A¹, Ainul Yakin²

fadhurrosi959@gmail.com¹, yakin4255@unuja.ac.id²

^{1,2} Nurul Jadid University, East Java, Indonesia

Abstract:

This study aims to examine the potential of Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) as spaces for decolonizing knowledge through the epistemological approaches of bayani, burhani, and irfani. These three Islamic epistemologies, as proposed by Muhammad Abid al-Jabiri, offer a unique framework of rationality and serve as an important basis for the formation of an Islamic scientific paradigm. Using a library study method and a hermeneutical analysis approach, this study explores the relevance of these three epistemologies in the context of Islamic boarding school education as a space for resistance to the hegemony of Western knowledge. The results of the study indicate that Islamic boarding schools can act as centers of counter-hegemony through the integration of textual bayani, rational burhani, and spiritual irfani. The synergy of these three epistemologies strengthens the epistemic autonomy of Islam and opens up opportunities for the development of a decolonial educational model characterized by ethical and contextual characteristics.

Keywords: *Decolonization, Islamic Boarding School, Islamic Epistemology, Bayani, Burhani, Irfani, Counter-Hegemony*

INTRODUCTION

The dominance of Western epistemology in the modern academic world has created inequality in the structure of global knowledge. As Alatas argues, epistemic colonialism has led to the definition of "legitimate knowledge" through Western standards, thus marginalizing non-Western intellectual traditions, including Islam (Alatas, 2014). In the Indonesian context, this has impacted the position of Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), which are often viewed as traditional and less scientific (Mannan & Shulhani, 2024).

However, Islamic boarding schools possess a complex system of knowledge, encompassing intellectual, spiritual, and ethical dimensions. Kiai in Islamic boarding schools are not only teachers but also epistemic figures who connect classical texts with social reality (Dhofier, 2011). Thus, Islamic boarding schools have the capacity to develop alternative educational models that challenge the dominance of colonial epistemology (Zohaib Hassan Sain Samsul Huda, Umar Manshur, 2025).

Al-Jabiri divides Islamic epistemology into three main forms: bayani (textual-normative), burhani (rational-empirical), and irfani (spiritual-intuitive) (Al-Jabiri, 1991). These three models can serve as a conceptual basis for decolonizing knowledge in Islamic boarding schools. These three models are

inseparable in the formation of Islamic epistemology. If integrated, they can serve as a conceptual basis for decolonizing knowledge in Islamic boarding schools. This study attempts to analyze this potential by using al-Jabiri's epistemology as a tool for reading contemporary Islamic boarding school scientific practices.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with library research. The primary data sources are primary works related to Islamic epistemology, such as those by Muhammad Abid al-Jabiri, and secondary sources include journals and books on Islamic boarding school education and the theory of decolonization of knowledge (Rahardjo, 2019).

The analysis was conducted using a philosophical hermeneutic approach, which involves reading texts while considering their socio-historical context and underlying philosophical meaning (Ricoeur, 1981). This method allows for a dialectical exploration of the relationship between Islamic epistemological concepts and educational practices in Islamic boarding schools.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Islamic Boarding Schools and Islamic Epistemology

Islamic boarding schools have a system of knowledge rooted in classical Islamic tradition. Their learning structure is text-based (yellow books) and oriented toward developing the morals and etiquette of their students. Within this system, bayani epistemology is the primary foundation because it is rooted in the text and the authority of revelation (Madjid, 1997).

However, the modernization of education demands a rationalization of the curriculum. This is where burhani epistemology plays a crucial role: it teaches logical, empirical, and analytical reasoning without abandoning the normative foundations of Islam. Meanwhile, irfani epistemology enlivens spirituality, making knowledge not only rational but also oriented toward purifying the soul and seeking ultimate truth (Chittick, 2007).

Epistemology as a Decolonization Strategy

The concept of decoloniality rejects the universalism of Western knowledge and recognizes epistemic plurality. Santos (2018) refers to these as "ecologies of knowledge"—ecosystems of diverse and mutually respectful knowledge. In this context, Islamic boarding schools can become autonomous "ecologies of Islamic knowledge" by combining texts, reason, and spirituality within a single system of knowledge.

The integration of bayani, burhani, and irfani can serve as a counter-hegemonic strategy against Western positivist epistemology. Bayani maintains the continuity of revelation, burhani strengthens rational argumentation, and irfani strengthens spiritual ethics. The three form an epistemic synthesis that balances rationality and morality—two elements often separated in modern knowledge systems (Hallaq, 2018).

Islamic Boarding Schools as Spaces for Counter-Hegemony

As community-based educational institutions, Islamic boarding schools can become centers of resistance against the colonization of knowledge in three ways:

- a. Restoration of Tradition – Reviving Classical Islamic Intellectual

Values with a Critical Approach

Restoration of tradition in the context of Islamic scholarship means an effort to revive classical Islamic intellectual treasures in a critical, contextual, and reflective manner, rather than simply dogmatically repeating old traditions. This effort is carried out by exploring the scientific values of classical scholars such as al-Ghazali, Ibn Sina, Ibn Khaldun, and al-Farabi, to reintroduce them in a modern context.

According to Ahmad Ridwan et al., in their study "Classical Tradition in Modern Islamic Education," "the classical Islamic scientific tradition needs to be restored so that it can serve as a source of inspiration for the renewal of modern Islamic education" (Ridwan et al., 2022, p. 45).

This restoration is carried out by maintaining fundamental values such as etiquette, the chain of transmission of knowledge, and the integration of knowledge and practice, while also fostering the ability to think critically about contemporary realities. As explained by al-Attas, the crisis of modern knowledge is caused by the "loss of etiquette" in the education system. Therefore, the restoration of classical values is crucial for restoring the true purpose of knowledge, namely ta'dib (the cultivation of etiquette and wisdom).

Therefore, the restoration of tradition does not mean a literal return to the past, but rather a revitalization of Islamic scientific values such as intellectual honesty, a balance between reason and revelation, and the orientation of knowledge towards the benefit of the community.

b. Integration of Knowledge – Combining the Naqliyyah and Aqliyyah without Dichotomy

Integration of knowledge is an effort to unite revealed knowledge (ulum naqliyyah) and rational knowledge (ulum aqliyyah) within a holistic Islamic epistemological framework.

This approach rejects the dichotomy that separates religious knowledge from worldly knowledge, because in the Islamic view, all knowledge originates from Allah and leads to knowledge of Him.

Mahyuddin Hashim et al., in their article in the Journal of Quran Sunnah Education & Special Needs, assert that "the concept of integrating naqli and aqli knowledge serves to eliminate the dualism in education and return knowledge to its original nature, which originates from revelation" (Hashim et al., 2021, p. 7).

This means that modern science, based on rationality, needs to be guided by the values of revelation to avoid losing its ethical and spiritual dimensions. Similarly, Muhammad Riza Syaifulloh explains that "holistic Islamic education seeks to synthesize both the domains of naqliyah and aqliyah knowledge, to form humans with a balance between spiritual and intellectual intelligence" (Syaifulloh, 2022, p. 15). Thus, the integration of knowledge is not merely an epistemological theory, but also an educational strategy that fosters the unity of knowledge.

Classical figures such as Ibn Khaldun also applied this integrative paradigm. In al-Muqaddimah, he explained that rational knowledge such as philosophy and logic is part of the fardhu kifayah (obligatory duty) because it helps understand God's creation and strengthens religious knowledge. Therefore, reactualizing Ibn Khaldun's views is crucial in designing a contemporary Islamic education system that unites revelation and reason.

c. Spirituality of Knowledge – Making Knowledge a Means of Tazkiyah, Not Merely the Accumulation of Information

The spiritualization of knowledge emphasizes that knowledge is not only for worldly interests, but also as a path to drawing closer to God (tazkiyah al-nafs) and improving human morals. In the Islamic perspective, knowledge without faith and morals can give rise to intellectual arrogance, as criticized by al-Ghazali in *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, who argued that knowledge without tazkiyah only increases humanity's distance from God.

A. Gani (2023) in his article "Sufism Education in the Formation of Spiritual Intelligence and Noble Morals" states that "Sufism education plays a crucial role in restoring the meaning of knowledge as a means of purifying the soul and developing noble morals, not merely as a means of accumulating knowledge" (Gani, 2023, p. 31). True knowledge in Islam must foster moral awareness, empathy, and a sense of social responsibility.

Karnita Sartina (2022) added that the concept of tazkiyyah in Islamic education demands a learning process that "touches the heart and spiritual aspects of students, so that the knowledge gained fosters sincerity and submission to Allah" (Sartina, 2022, p. 12). Thus, the spiritualization of knowledge is the most crucial aspect in balancing the intellectual and moral dimensions of humankind. Furthermore, Islamic boarding schools not only preserve tradition but also build epistemic resistance, namely, knowledge-based resistance to the hegemony of modern knowledge (Naim, 2020).

CONCLUSION

Decolonization of knowledge in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) is a process of epistemic reconstruction aimed at restoring the autonomy of Islamic rationality. Through the integration of bayani, burhani, and irfani epistemologies, Islamic boarding schools can develop a scientific paradigm that is not only normative and rational, but also spiritual and ethical. This model serves as a counter-hegemony to the dominance of Western epistemology and opens up space for the formation of inclusive, humanistic, and decolonial knowledge.

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