

MUSLIM INTELLECTUALS' INSIGHTS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF ALTERNATIVE SOCIAL SCIENCE IN THE MALAY-INDONESIAN CONTEXT

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Abstract: This article aims to examine the interaction between social science and tradition in Malay-Indonesian scholarship, with a particular focus on the perspectives of Muslim intellectuals. This interaction is represented by two approaches: autonomous social science and prophetic social science. The article argues that both approaches have their distinct inclinations in perceiving and formulating theoretical foundations. These inclinations are shaped by their unique qualities, alternative values, intellectual stances, and thinking styles. Moreover, during the process of development, they are influenced by various factors that give them their distinct characteristics, such as autonomy, a problem-based approach, and a strong commitment to rethinking society and driving change and transformation. The social concept of Islam Nusantara represents this development. It is a collection of arguments and practices of Islam adopted by Muslims in Nusantara, which have shaped patterns of social relations and cohesiveness through communicative actions throughout a specific historical epoch in the region. The article also highlights two essential factors that significantly shape these approaches: the dominant schools of thought in social science and the peculiar Malay-Indonesian traditions. While Western social sciences have played a central role in understanding certain concepts, Malay-Indonesian traditions have contributed significantly to shaping the paradigm of local scholars.

Keywords: Autonomous social science; prophetic social science; diagnostic social science; alternative social science; Malay-Indonesian traditions; multiple modernities.

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Introduction

Critical investigations into the functions, relevance, and values are considered crucial for reevaluating concepts and theories within the realm of social science. These inquiries offer the opportunity to examine social concepts within specific societies and regions. Some argue that a theory that proves functional in particular contexts may lose its significance when applied to other places. For instance, Weber's theory of capitalism appears relevant when applied to modern European countries, but its degree of relevance diminishes when applied to certain areas in China, India, and Southeast Asia.¹ When assessing the applicability of a theory, scholars should emphasize not only its theoretical formation (epistemology) but also engage in critical-philosophical reflection. This reflective approach, often referred to as the "reflexive turn," according to Salvatore, aids in discovering a functional path and direction for contextualizing the theory.² The "turn" implies the need for elaborating genealogical inquiries as well as engaging in critical and comparative studies.³ This elaborate project of the "reflexive turn" is necessary to establish the origins of concepts and their ideological values.⁴

However, this reflection is not without its challenges. Modern social sciences have predominantly developed under the influence of European scholarship, which has often enjoyed unrestricted access to

¹ Syed Hussein Alatas, "The Weber Thesis and South East Asia," *Archives de Sociologie des Religions*, 8e Année, no. 15 (1963): 21-34. <https://doi.org/10.3406/assr.1963.1719>.

² Armando Salvatore, *The Sociology of Islam: Knowledge, Power, and Civility* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2016), 1.

³ Karl Mannheim, *Essay on the Sociology of Culture: Collected Works, Volume Seven* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 91.

⁴ Robert S. Lynd, *Knowledge for What?: The Place of Social Science in American Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), ix.

the invention of concepts and theories.⁵ While these concepts and theories may possess universal validity in a general and abstract sense, their historical and concrete manifestations are conditioned by temporal, spatial, and cultural frameworks.⁶ Historically, they have been integral components of Western civilization, at times claimed as “the global” perspective.⁷ Consequently, the Western social sciences have exerted significant dominance, shaping how social concepts and theories are perceived and interpreted in other regions such as Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.⁸ This influence stems from the disparities between the academic traditions of the West and other regions, each distinctively characterized by their own differences and complexities in political, economic, military, and cultural contexts.⁹ Additionally, the profound impacts of colonialism, which have shifted from the center to the periphery, have further contributed to this reality.¹⁰

This historical fact, indeed, warrants critical examination. However, it is essential to avoid solely focusing on the issue of civilizational domination and colonialism. While acknowledging their significance, it is equally important to consider the emergence of resistant thought against Western scholarship (Occidentalism). These factors are not relatively unimportant and should be given due consideration.¹¹ Yet, it is crucial to give due consideration to the universal virtues of the West, particularly concerning the development of social science. This perspective acknowledges that Malay-Indonesian scholars can learn from the West, as its global influence is not an exclusive representation of the entire globe but rather a part of

⁵ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 325.

⁶ Syed Hussein Alatas, “The Autonomous, the Universal and the Future of Sociology,” *Current Sociology* 54, no. 1 (2006): 8. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392106058831>.

⁷ Michael Kuhn and Hebe Vessure, “Critical Thought about Global Social Sciences,” in Michael Kuhn and Hebe Vessure (eds.), *The Global Social Sciences: Under and Beyond European Universalism* (Stuttgart: Ibidem Press, 2016), 9.

⁸ Said, *Orientalism*, 97.

⁹ Johann P. Arnason, “East and West: From Invidious Dichotomy to Incomplete Deconstruction,” in Gerard Delanty and Engin F Isin (eds.), *Handbook of Historical Sociology* (London: Sage Publication, 2003), 220.

¹⁰ Immanuel Wallerstein, *Unthinking Social Science: The Limits of Nineteenth-Century Paradigms* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1991), 237.

¹¹ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1993), 377; Syed Farid Alatas, “Academic Dependency and the Global Division of Labour in the Social Sciences,” *Current Sociology* 51, no. 6 (2003), 599. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00113921030516003>.

it. Moreover, it is important to recognize that “the global” in this context does not imply a singular meaning but encompasses diverse civilizations, allowing for the existence of multiple modernities.¹² For instance, values such as independence, freedom of conscience and thought, autonomy, equality, and justice are universal values not limited to the West but have evolved over time in various regions across the globe.

While acknowledging the significance of dichotomizing between the West and other regions or the center and the periphery, it is crucial to critically assess its relevance within the scope of this examination. Undoubtedly, the exploration of traumatic memory residues that ideologically emphasize the narrative of “Eastern victims of Western oppression” will elicit critical responses from intellectual perspectives influenced by post-colonialist modes of thought.¹³ It is important to emphasize that acknowledging the problems and influences of colonization does not imply undermining their significance. It is imperative to address and mitigate these problems and influences accordingly. In conjunction with these efforts, a reconsideration of diverse conceptions of cosmopolitanism within the framework of multiple modernities may pave the way for a potential trajectory in the development of social science, encompassing various locations, particularities, vernaculars, temporalities, intellectual backgrounds, and notably, traditions as the most influential elements.¹⁴

In this context, the term ‘traditions’ refers to the fundamental element that underlies perspectives in social science. However, it is important to note that these traditions are neither immutable nor static; they are dynamic entities with the potential to generate creative insights.¹⁵ According to Salvatore, “...Tradition should not be understood as non-reflexive, primordial culture, but more dynamically, as the ensemble of practices and arguments that secure the social bond and provide cohesiveness to human communities of

¹² Arnason, “East and West”; Salvatore, *The Sociology of Islam*, 23.

¹³ Ibid., 232.

¹⁴ Mannheim, *Essay on the Sociology*, 100; Tariq Ramadan, *The Quest for Meaning: Developing a Philosophy of Pluralism* (London: Allen Lane, 2010), 22-25.

¹⁵ Shahrudin Maaruf, “Some Theoretical Problems Concerning Tradition and Modernization among the Malays of Southeast Asia,” in Yong Mun Cheong (ed.), *Asian Tradition and Modernization Perspectives from Singapore* (Singapore: Time Academic Press, 1992), 242-244.

varying scale.”¹⁶ So, practically, tradition has facilitated communicative actions, transfer of knowledge, and socio-political contestations by social agencies. When the social process of tradition has occurred, some assert that it is “understood as a creative link, as the triumph of memory over the power of time.”¹⁷ In the context of this inquiry, traditions of the Malay-Indonesian world are encouraged to creatively elaborate on concrete social situations and problems since they “can only have a positive value if they are based on the creative tendencies in society.”¹⁸ At the same level, social science understanding must consider the essentials of tradition.¹⁹ Based on this point, therefore, it is important to offer examinations and reflections on two major alternatives of engagement of social science and tradition in the Malay-Indonesian context.

This article provides an intellectual reflection on the significance of integrating social science and tradition within the framework of Malay-Indonesian scholarship. Its objective is to shed light on the thought process employed by Muslim intellectuals in the region. Consequently, it aims to pave the way for the advancement of social science by exploring potential avenues for contributing to its overall progress and development on a broader scale.²⁰ This article contends that the Malay-Indonesian tradition offers an alternative perspective within the realm of social science, which exhibits a distinct inclination toward perceiving and formulating certain concepts. This inclination is shaped by unique qualities, alternative values, intellectual stances, and thinking styles among scholars. As a result of these factors, this alternative perspective tends to be autonomous, problem-oriented, and transformative, as it actively engages with social change and transformation. In examining this perspective, the article considers two conceptual approaches:

¹⁶ Armando Salvatore, “Tradition and Modernity within Islamic Civilisation and the West,” in Muhammad Khalid Masud, Armando Salvatore, and Martin van Bruinessen (eds.), *Islam and Modernity: Key Issues and Debates* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 5.

¹⁷ Nikolai Berdyaev, *Towards a New Epoch* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1949), 85.

¹⁸ Karl Mannheim, *Man and Society in the Age of Reconstruction* (London: Routledge, 1940), 14; Azhar Ibrahim, *Contemporary Islamic Discourse in the Malay-Indonesian World: Critical Perspective* (Petaling Jaya: SIRD, 2014), 32.

¹⁹ Syed Hussein Alatas, “Religion and Modernization in Southeast Asia,” *European Journal of Sociology* 11, issue 2 (1970): 265-269. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003975600002083>.

²⁰ Alatas, “The Autonomous”, 7-23; Salvatore, *The Sociology of Islam*.

autonomous social science and prophetic social science. It is essential to discuss the relevance of both approaches in the overall dynamics of social theory development.

Autonomous Social Science

The concept of autonomous social science was originally proposed by Syed Hussein Alatas (b. 1928 – d. 2007), a renowned sociologist, Muslim intellectual, and social activist from Malaysia. Although his concept has not gained the same level of recognition as Karl Marx's critique of capitalism in *Das Kapital* (1867), it holds significant importance and is found throughout Alatas' extensive body of work. Notably, two of his papers, "The Development of an Autonomous Social Science Tradition in Asia: Problems and Prospects" (2002) and "The Autonomous, the Universal, and the Future of Sociology" (2006), prominently emphasize this perspective.²¹ The application of this concept can be traced through his books, "Intellectuals in Developing Societies" and "The Myth of the Lazy Native: A Study of the Image of the Malays, Filipinos, and Javanese from the 16th to the 20th Century and Its Functions in the Ideology of Capitalism," both published in 1977.²²

Alatas defines autonomous social science as a conceptual viewpoint encompassing "the linking of social science research and thinking Asian problems."²³ It is essential to note that the mention of Asia does not imply an endorsement of cultural nativism. Rather, it signifies that Asian scholars have the opportunity to leverage their traditions to make valuable contributions to addressing the issues faced by their own societies or communities.²⁴ This concept necessitates a profound moral commitment and unwavering

²¹ Syed Hussein Alatas, "The Development of an Autonomous Social Science Tradition in Asia: Problems and Prospects," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 30, no. 1 (2006): 150-157. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685310260188781>.

²² Syed Hussein Alatas, *Intellectuals in Developing Societies* (London: Taylor Francis, 1977); Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native: A Study of the Image of the Malays, Filipinos, and Javanese from the 16th to the 20th Century and its Functions in the Ideology of Capitalism* (London: Frank Cass and Co., 1977).

²³ Alatas, "The Development", 151.

²⁴ Alatas, *Intellectuals*, 85.

intellectual conviction. It primarily functions at the level of intellectual reflection, where its optimum role is realized.²⁵

The foundation of the concept of autonomous social science lies in the universal values that emerge from religion, cultural traditions, local wisdom, and the ethical principles governing social life and behavior. These values serve as a collective set of moral guidelines, illuminating the intellectual perspective of scholars as they engage in the examination, evaluation, consideration, and formulation of specific concepts. This intellectual endeavor is of paramount importance, as it enables these values to actively shape the inclination of social science thinking. When these values, such as freedom, independence, autonomy, equality, and justice, are reflected and incorporated into intellectual works, they contribute to a reflective and theoretical approach to problem-solving within society. This endeavor stands as a pivotal aspect in shaping the conceptual framework of autonomous social science.²⁶ Hence, as emphasized by Karl Mannheim, the concept of social science should be both diagnostic and reconstructionist, as social scientists bear social responsibilities that urge them to actively engage in the social process and establish an organic connection with society.²⁷

In the application of the concept of autonomous social science, the cultivation of creative and critical thinking plays a crucial role. Such thinking becomes particularly important in addressing two key challenges: the tendency of intellectual thinking to become stagnant when social scientists confront difficult and complex problems, and the earnest effort required to critically question prevailing ideas that are often accepted uncritically, without adequate justification.²⁸ This creative and critical thinking is also important because it can (a) give injection of the development of idea; (b) ensure that the false thing should be fixed; (c) emphasize clarity than ambivalence; (d) uncover the ideological deviation; (e) give new meaning persistently and

²⁵ Syed Hussein Alatas, "Social Science," in John L. Esposito, *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of Modern Islamic World*, Vol. 4 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 86.

²⁶ Syed Hussein Alatas, *Philosophy and Practical Life in Southeast Asia* (Kuala Lumpur: Department of Malay Studies, University of Malaya, 1964), 14.

²⁷ Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), 42.

²⁸ Azhar Ibrahim, "Tradisi Kritis dalam Pemikiran Keagamaan dan Keintelektualan Muslim," *Tafkir: Jurnal Pemikiran Kritis Keagamaan dan Transformasi Sosial* 1, no. 1 (2009): 6.

dynamically to the social concepts that have been applied.²⁹ In the word of Erich Fromm, “critical thinking is...an approach to the world... [which] stands in the service of life, in the serving of removing obstacles to life individually and socially which paralyze us.”³⁰ Without adopting this stance, scholars often encounter challenges in critically understanding both complex problems and the prevailing ideas that may be obscured by specific socio-political and cultural biases. For instance, excessive reliance on consuming concepts or theories without effectively applying them to achieve their intended goals, and a lack of attention to the significance of connecting scholarly work with society, inevitably restricts the full potential of scholars.

Highlighting the significance of creativity and critical thinking, it is essential to recognize that social scientists must avoid becoming hindered by excessive reliance on a singular perspective. Such dependence can undermine essential virtues such as freedom, independence, and autonomy. Alatas further suggests that Asian scholars can benefit from studying and learning from the Western experience. He highlights this further, “In the Western world, the autonomous tradition is decisive and vigorous, and the demarcation line between general universal sociology and the autonomous studies of subjects peculiar to specific Western countries is clearly observed.”³¹ The invention process of social science in the West is argued to be free from any kind of domination by external influence. In the context of pre-colonial period, in the Muslim hemisphere, Alatas mentions that Ibn Khaldun’s social science is also autonomous. He eloquently argues that “It was sociology born out of a historical setting unimpeded by the domination of a hegemonic external intellectual tradition from a previous colonial power.”³²

Prophetic Social Science

The concept of prophetic social science was introduced by Kuntowijoyo (b. 1943 – d. 2005), an esteemed litterateur, Muslim intellectual, social activist, and professor of social science at Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) in Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Erich Fromm, *The Art of Listening* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 163-169.

³¹ Alatas, “The Autonomous”, 8.

³² Ibid., 10.

Kuntowijoyo's ideas on prophetic social science can be explored through his notable works, namely "Muslim without Masjid" (*Muslim Tanpa Masjid*) (2001) and "Paradigm of Islam: Interpretation for Action" (*Paradigma Islam: Interpretasi untuk Aksi*) (2001; new edition 2008).³³ In contrast to Alatas, Kuntowijoyo's concise exposition of prophetic social science can be discovered in his most recent book, "Islam as Science: Epistemology, Methodology, and Ethics" (*Islam sebagai Ilmu: Epistemologi, Metodologi dan Etika*) (2008).³⁴ However, it is worth noting that the practical implementation of Kuntowijoyo's concept is often absent, despite his publication of numerous literary works encompassing novels, short stories, poetry, and critical literary essays that reflect his intellectual inclination.³⁵

The concept of prophetic social science refers to a form of social science that draws inspiration from prophetic values, particularly within the Islamic tradition.³⁶ This concept emphasizes the significance of social change and transformation, as Kuntowijoyo asserts that Islamic teachings encourage Muslims to actively participate in endeavors aimed at social development.³⁷ Furthermore, this concept does not solely focus on the normative aspects of Islamic teachings but also takes into consideration the empirical, historical, and temporal dimensions of Islam.³⁸ In developing his concept, Kuntowijoyo also recognizes the value of Western historical works. Scholars such as Snouck Hurgronje, Schrieke, Pijper, and Clifford Geertz provide him with valuable insights regarding empirical methods of social research, even though he is cognizant that their scholarly works are not politically value-free.³⁹ This is similar to transformative social science, which involves the exploration of religious teachings and theology to formulate social concepts or theories. This approach has been popularized by theologians such as

³³ Kuntowijoyo, *Muslim tanpa Masjid* (Bandung: Mizan, 2001); Kuntowijoyo, *Paradigma Islam: Interpretasi untuk Aksi* (Bandung: Mizan, 2008).

³⁴ Kuntowijoyo, *Islam sebagai Ilmu: Epistemologi, Metodologi dan Etika* (Yogyakarta: Tiara Wacana, 2006).

³⁵ Alatas, *The Myth*.

³⁶ Heddy-Shri Ahimsa, *Paradigma Profetik: Mungkinan? Perlukah?* (Yogyakarta: Universitas Gadjah Mada, 2011), 6.

³⁷ Kuntowijoyo, *Muslim Tanpa Masjid*, 357-376.

³⁸ Kuntowijoyo, *Islam sebagai Ilmu*, 85.

³⁹ Kuntowijoyo, *Muslim Tanpa Masjid*, 103-105.

Gustavo Gutierrez, John Sobrino, and Cornel West.⁴⁰ Or social scientists like Joe R. Feagin, Hernán Vera, and Kimberley Ducey.⁴¹ While the former focuses on elaborating critical social sciences through the reformulation of theological discourse, aiming to translate the religious spirit into a catalyst for social and political change, the latter endeavors to develop alternative social sciences that draw upon universal religious values. The purpose of these alternative social sciences is to actively apply these values in order to stimulate social and political transformations.

This concept comprises two fundamental pillars of ideas. The first pillar involves a modern reconstruction of religious thought, serving as the philosophical foundation of the concept.⁴² This reconstruction is enriched through the reflections of two prominent figures in philosophy, namely Muhammad Iqbal and Roger Garaudy.⁴³ Both emphasize that the prophetic vision is oriented toward serving humanity, particularly marginalized groups (*mustad'afin*), and finds manifestation through socio-historical actions.⁴⁴ It requires a heightened consciousness of prophetic ideals, which should be distinguished from Sufistic consciousness. The prophetic consciousness underscores the importance of manifesting love for God in daily social life, social development, and social transformation. In contrast, Sufistic consciousness primarily emphasizes the individual worship of God.

The second is some selected Western social concepts, namely “Thomas S. Kuhn’s ‘paradigm’, Levi’s Strauss’ ‘structuralism’, Peter L. Berger’s ‘objectification’ and Antonio Gramsci’s ‘relative

⁴⁰ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1988); John Sobrino, *No Salvation Outside the Poor: Prophetic-Utopian Essays* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2008); and Cornel West, *The Cornel West Reader* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 1999).

⁴¹ Joe R. Feagin, Hernán Vera, and Kimberley Ducey, *Liberation Sociology* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

⁴² Mark R. Woodward, “Talking across Paradigm: Indonesia, Islam, and Orientalism,” in Mark R Woodward (ed.), *Toward a New Paradigm: Recent Developments in Indonesian Islamic Thought* (Arizona: Arizona State University Press, 1996), 6.

⁴³ Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2012) and Roger Garaudy, “Filsafat Kenabian,” *Janji-Janji Islam* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1985), 135-167.

⁴⁴ Kuntowijoyo, *Paradigma Islam*, 564; Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2012), 99; Garaudy, “Filsafat Kenabian,” 135-167.

autonomy’.”⁴⁵ There are some points in elaborating on these concepts: (1) Kuntowijoyo reflects that this concept is not a “normal science”,⁴⁶ but dynamic science which is ready to be evaluated and examined critically to find many possibilities of creating breakthroughs or something fresh and new;⁴⁷ (2) To invent the “prophetic *weltanschauung*” scholars should select the certain relevant resources since the resources strongly determine the quality of the paradigm;⁴⁸ (3) The resources of the paradigmatic thought of the prophetic social science is constituted from not only the Muslim society and relevant academic works but also scriptural resources, especially the Qur’ān.⁴⁹ Consequently, Islam here is not viewed as a religion *per se* but as knowledge or science that is very valuable to enrich the paradigm. Indeed, it does not mean that Kuntowijoyo affirms the constitution of pseudo-scientific work since he is neither ideological nor narrow-minded when considering it; (4) Kuntowijoyo agrees with the insightful notion of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman in defining social reality as useful resources, since “reality is socially constructed and that the sociology of knowledge must analyze the process in which this occurs”;⁵⁰ (5) This concept has a constructive and pragmatic purpose that attempt to generate the ideals of social transformation. In this point, the idea of “relative autonomy” has its role, mainly to “understand the traits and functioning of any religion within a definite society.”⁵¹

Through this intellectual elaboration, furthermore, Kuntowijoyo develops three concepts of social science (civil society, historical activism, and the importance of prophetic consciousness) and three prophetic principles (humanization, liberation, and

⁴⁵ Kuntowijoyo, *Islam sebagai Ilmu*; Pradana Boy ZTF, “Prophetic Social Sciences toward an Islamic-Based Transformative Social Sciences,” *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 1, no. 1 (2011), 104. <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v1i1.95-121>.

⁴⁶ Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: The Chicago University Press, 1970), 23.

⁴⁷ Kuntowijoyo, *Muslim Tanpa Masjid*, 106.

⁴⁸ Kuntowijoyo, *Islam sebagai Ilmu*, 21-22.

⁴⁹ Kuntowijoyo, *Muslim Tanpa Masjid*, 106.

⁵⁰ Kuntowijoyo, *Paradigma Islam: Interpretasi untuk Aksi*, 577; Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Penguin Group, 1991), 13.

⁵¹ Kuntowijoyo, *Paradigma Islam*, 69-70; Otto Maduro, “New Marxist Approaches to the Relative Autonomy of Religion,” *Sociological Analysis* 38, no. 4 (1977): 367. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3710119>.

transcendence).⁵² These three concepts are derived from the Qur'ān Surah 'Āl 'Imrān (verse 110), "You are the best *ummah* produced for mankind. You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allah." Following this verse, the concepts: (1) the scriptural identification on the best *ummah* (societies, communities, peoples, tribes, and nations) means this is imperative to attempt to develop the civil society based on the prophetic consciousness;⁵³ (2) developing civil society should be understood as creative efforts of creating history which could be achieved through social activism;⁵⁴ (3) the prophetic consciousness is the critical consciousness on the ethical calling of religion which encourages and engages human and society to be more active in serving humanity;⁵⁵ (4) "enjoin what is right" means how to accomplish the mission of humanization or "humanizing human" in this contemporary time and situation;⁵⁶ (5) "forbid what is wrong" means how to join to the efforts of liberation and at the same time to fight against the dehumanistic, dominant and hegemonic structures in terms of social, economy, politics and culture;⁵⁷ (6) "believe in Allah" which means the transcendence of the spiritual awareness of human on what religion names as the God.⁵⁸ They are the ideas that creatively formulate the concept of prophetic social science.

The Development of Alternative Social Science in the Malay-Indonesian Context

The autonomous social science and prophetic social science possess distinctive orientations that contribute to the dynamic development of social science. This contribution operates on two levels: intellectual reflection and conceptual formation. As a result,

⁵² Kuntowijoyo, *Muslim Tanpa Masjid*, 357.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁵⁴ Kuntowijoyo, *Paradigma Islam*, 480.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 564.

⁵⁶ Kuntowijoyo, *Muslim Tanpa Masjid*, 366-369; Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2000), 87-124; Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2007), 37-52.

⁵⁷ Kuntowijoyo, *Muslim Tanpa Masjid*, 369-372; Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1988); Ali Asghar Engineer, *Islam and Liberation Theology: Essays on Liberation Elements in Islam* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1990).

⁵⁸ Kuntowijoyo, *Muslim Tanpa Masjid*, 372-375; Kuntowijoyo, *Islam sebagai Ilmu*.

certain characteristics, such as being problem-based, autonomous, and engaged in social change and transformation efforts, have emerged. These characteristics significantly shape the intellectual stance, clarity, mode of thought, and applicability of concepts. Consequently, the orientations, forms, and perspectives in this context differ to a significant degree from social sciences rooted in Western traditions.

The concepts of autonomous social science and prophetic social science have the potential to introduce “alternative paths” in the development of social science, which has long been dominated by Western scholarship. These concepts possess characteristics such as being problem-based, autonomous, and attentive to social change and transformation. These alternative paths aim to break free from the influence of dominant Western perspectives, as they acknowledge the diverse societal issues, traditions, ideals of modernity, and scholarly directions present in different contexts. It is important to critically examine the problem of domination and the distinctions between Western and non-Western social concepts, although there may be some similarities.⁵⁹ However, it is crucial to deepen this critical evaluation and expand the boundaries of critique. Understanding the problems at hand and offering viable solutions, for instance, are valuable endeavors.

The fundamental issue regarding the domination of scholarship lies in the lack of capacity and enthusiasm for critical thinking. In the case of Malays and Indonesians, scholars often lack the reflective ability to consider alternative perspectives. They frequently find themselves trapped in the application of Western theories, unaware of their applicability, functionality, and most importantly, their disconnection from the realities of their own societies. Numerous works in anthropology and sociology, as highlighted in “Social Science and Power in Indonesia” edited by Vedi R. Hadiz and Daniel Dhakidae (2005),⁶⁰ serve as prime examples of uncritical inclinations within social science. These works were predominantly produced to fulfill the orders of rulers, dating back to the colonial era until the 1990s. During the New Order era in Indonesia, under the firm grip of the Suharto regime, social science research was directed toward legitimizing the state development project. The roles of economists,

⁵⁹ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*.

⁶⁰ Vedi R. Hadiz and Daniel Dhakidae (eds.), *Social Science and Power in Indonesia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2005).

particularly those who graduated from the University of California, Berkeley, were significant in this regard.⁶¹ A similar situation can be observed in Malaysia, where several academic works are primarily generated to serve the political interests of those in power. Unfortunately, these works overly rely on irrelevant theories that fail to explain the social problems of society.⁶² In response to this concerning trend, Alatas emphasizes that “the phenomena of servility and intellectual bondage are not the same as genuine creative assimilation from abroad.”⁶³

The attribute of “alternative” in the concepts of Alatas and Kuntowijoyo emphasizes functionality, diagnostic capability, rootedness in society, and an orientation toward solving societal problems.⁶⁴ This stands in contrast to dominant views in social science that often prove to be inapplicable, irrelevant, and dysfunctional. Furthermore, the “alternative” aspect implies being rooted in tradition, such as Islam in the case of Kuntowijoyo, which enables independent and diagnostic thinking to identify the central problems within society that require immediate resolution. Moreover, it carries an orientation to actively transform culture, tradition, and even society toward improved conditions and situations.⁶⁵

Furthermore, it is essential to address the central questions: “What is the main challenge?” and “What are the obstacles or problems we face in confronting this challenge?” It is evident that these alternative concepts did not emerge out of thin air. Throughout the colonial era in the Malay-Indonesian world, spanning Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia, and continuing into the present era of globalization, Western dominance has prevailed in the domain of scholarship. Whether in the form of Orientalism, Eurocentrism, or other manifestations, the influence of the West has been pervasive. During the colonial era, social science works were deliberately

⁶¹ Ibid., 2-30.

⁶² Alatas, *Intellectuals*; Alatas, *The Myth*.

⁶³ Syed Hussein Alatas, “Academic Imperialism,” in Syed Farid Alatas (ed.) *Reflections on Alternative Discourses from Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Centre for Advanced Studies and Pagesetters Services, 2001), 36.

⁶⁴ Syed Farid Alatas, *Alternative Discourse in Asian Social Sciences* (New Delhi and London: Thousand Oaks and SAGE Publications, 2006), 82; Pradana Boy ZTF, “Prophetic Social Sciences toward an Islamic-Based Transformative Social Sciences,” *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 1, no. 1 (2011): 115.

⁶⁵ Soedjatmoko, *The Primacy of Freedom in Development* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985).

produced to serve colonial interests, while in contemporary times, they have been shaped by globalism, nativism, and even Islamism. Unfortunately, misguided responses to Western domination have fostered resentment, and the underlying problems remain unresolved.⁶⁶ One notable example is the scholarship within the post-colonialism framework, where the primary focus often revolves around disproving the detrimental effects of “Orientalism” on colonized subjects. The efforts of prominent post-colonialists predominantly involve presenting “Occidentalism” as a reactionary response, aiming to counter the project and discourse of Orientalism. However, a concerning trend has emerged, characterized by the promotion of nativism, cultural chauvinism, and Islamism in academic circles. Some scholars within this trend tend to prioritize the development of concepts or knowledge rooted solely in their own traditions while outright rejecting any influence from the West.⁶⁷ The worst is emerging the symptom of intellectual slavishness. This inclination brings into the academic trend of academism, objectivism or neutralism, positivism,⁶⁸ and definitely, Eurocentrism. In this case, everything should be totally considered in the frameworks and the ideals of the West.⁶⁹ In simple terms, we encounter two distinct problems: internal and external. The internal problem stems from our own intellectualism and mentality, while the external problem has been shaped by the historical legacy of colonialism.

In this complex context, Syed Hussein Alatas criticizes scholars who fail to cultivate a critical awareness, referring to them as having fallen into the trap of captive minds. According to him, the traits of a captive mind include: (1) “it is alienated from major issues in society”; (2) “it is fragmented in outlook”; (3) “uncreative and incapable of raising original problems”; (4) “a way of thinking dominated by Western thought in an imitative and uncritical manner”; and (5)

⁶⁶ Azhar Ibrahim, *Menyanggah Belunggu: Kerancuan Fikiran Masakini* (Petaling Jaya, Malaysia: SIRD, 2016).

⁶⁷ Syed Farid Alatas, “Some Problems of Indigenization,” *Working Papers*, Department of Sociology, NUS, (1999): 9-10; Syed Farid Alatas, “The Discourse of Indigenization, Definitions, Criteria, and Pitfalls,” *CAS Research Paper Series* no. 17, Singapore (1999).

⁶⁸ Shyama Charan Dube, *Social Sciences in Changing Society* (Lucknow: Lucknow University Press, 1973).

⁶⁹ Ralph Pieris, *Social Development and Planning in Asia* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1976), 107-125.

“incapable of devising an analytical method independent of current stereotypes.”⁷⁰ Captive minds are not limited to just Malay scholarship but are also prevalent in Indonesia. To address this issue, a critical and diagnostic perspective is crucial in order to unravel and overcome the constraints of such thinking. In this way, it is important to consider Mannheim’s assertion to break this “block of thinking”. Actually, scholars must have “(1) the ability to identify and being affected by a particular problem of issue confronting the society; (2) the ability to determine and define the problems that emerged; (3) the ability to analyze the problems from various dimensions; (4) the ability to offer viable solutions to solve the problems; and (5) the courage to challenge the existing ideas that have caused the aggravation of the problems confronted.”⁷¹

However, the contextualization of the notion of alternative social science requires a careful approach. This can be achieved through three essential steps: Firstly, it is necessary to understand and analyze the most significant historical episodes within the Malay-Indonesian society that have successfully fostered social civility, cohesiveness, and order. By examining these episodes, valuable insights can be gained for the construction of a social epistemology. Secondly, the historical depictions should be evaluated through the lens of autonomous social science (prophetic social science) to determine their suitability as primary sources of constructing social epistemology. This evaluation will help ascertain whether these depictions can serve as reliable data for the development of alternative social science. Lastly, it is imperative to foster critical awareness among scholars and intellectuals, encouraging their active participation in the independent development of social science. This entails breaking away from the dominance of grand theories originating from Western social science and instead focusing on the practical application of local knowledge to effectively address societal problems in the region. By doing so, alternative social science has the potential to inspire and drive meaningful social change.

⁷⁰ Syed Hussein Alatas, “The Captive Mind and Creative Development,” in Seah Chee-Meow (ed.) *Asian Values and Modernization* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1977), 77.

⁷¹ Karl Mannheim, *Freedom, Power, and Democratic Planning* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951), 4; Azhar Ibrahim, “The Making of Progressive Religion,” *Islam, Religion and Progress: Critical Perspective* (Singapore: The Reading Group, 2006), 24.

Yet, in order to effectively energize the transformation aimed by alternative social science, it is crucial to move beyond mere theoretical patterns and focus on the practical realization of its contextualization. This requires a clearer depiction of how alternative social science can be implemented in the context of Malay-Indonesian society. By providing a practical project, it becomes possible to activate social engineering that is guided by a deep understanding of the evolution of autonomous social science. Such a depiction can be unearthed from a specific episode of the region's historical epoch, one that has been widely recognized and embraced by society. In the modern era, an example of this is the practice of Islam Nusantara by Muslims in the region. Islam Nusantara represents a collection of arguments and practices of Islam adopted by Muslims in the Nusantara peninsula, which have shaped patterns of social relations and cohesiveness through communicative actions throughout a specific historical epoch in the region. It is an expression of Islam that has profoundly influenced the development of society and culture. In essence, Islam Nusantara serves as a crucial element in the production of Nusantara social science. By acknowledging and integrating the principles of Islam Nusantara, alternative social science can be enriched and take into account the unique socio-cultural context of the Malay-Indonesian society. This integration fosters a deeper understanding of the society and allows for the formulation of more relevant and effective strategies for social change and transformation.

In this context, "Islam" is not viewed as a transcendental religion disconnected from the social history of a particular society. Instead, it is understood as a historical and empirical set of arguments and practices that have influenced the societal dimensions of the region. From an anthropological perspective, Islam Nusantara has emerged as a result of the historical reality and socio-intellectual dialectics between Muslims and the scripture (revelation). Muslims in this region have studied and embraced Prophetic values from the scripture and other Islamic sources such as hadith and traditions. When the social life of Muslims is guided and developed based on the principles of Islam Nusantara, and when this social development fosters social order and contributes to the emergence of Nusantara civilization, it can be argued that the Muslim society in the region is practicing the Islamic values of prophetism. Through the lens of prophetic social science, it is recognized that a society practicing the

values of prophetism aims to strengthen social civility within its own social fabric. This strengthening project, inspired by prophetic consciousness and Islamic teachings (Islam Nusantara), can only be achieved through concrete social activism. In their pursuit of this activism, Nusantara Muslims actively participate in the agenda of humanization and the fight against dehumanization in various aspects of life, including social, political, and economic domains. Moreover, the practices of Islam Nusantara exhibit distinct characteristics compared to other practices found in Muslim-majority countries, particularly in the Middle East. While Islam Nusantara generally embraces principles of peace, tolerance, pluralism, multiculturalism, and harmony, the realities of Islam and Muslims in Middle Eastern countries are often marked by tensions, conflicts, and inhumane conditions. Therefore, the practices of Islam Nusantara can be viewed as a valuable source of knowledge production. The Nusantara society and its societal patterns offer insights that can autonomously contribute to the production of a unique social epistemology. By recognizing and studying the dynamics of Nusantara society, alternative social science can develop a special body of knowledge that is rooted in the local context and can effectively address the challenges and complexities of the Malay-Indonesian society.

Indeed, despite the potential for contextualizing the notion of alternative social science and drawing from the tradition of Islam Nusantara as a primary scientific ingredient, there is a lack of awareness among scholars in the region regarding the essentials of producing alternative social epistemology and, consequently, the development of alternative social science. To address this, there is a need to launch a campaign to promote the notion and garner broader support from the public. This campaign should also aim to encourage local scholars and intellectuals to actively participate in the constructive process of producing social science that aligns with the principles of alternative social epistemology. Furthermore, it is crucial to foster critical and intellectual discussions surrounding the notion of alternative social science. These discussions should delve into paradigmatic issues, scientific approaches, methodologies for scientific analysis, considerations for data collection, classification, and selection, as well as conceptual and theoretical debates. By engaging in these discussions, scholars and intellectuals can deepen their understanding of the notion and refine their approaches to

producing alternative social science. Through comprehensive and rigorous intellectual engagement, a stronger foundation can be built for the development of alternative social science in the Malay-Indonesian context. This will not only enhance the scholarly discourse but also contribute to the formulation of effective strategies for addressing societal challenges and fostering meaningful social changes.

Indeed, the trajectory of engaging social science and tradition, drawing intellectual insights from Muslim scholars in the Malay-Indonesian world, and attempting to contextualize alternative social science (autonomous and prophetic social science) is open and accessible for any social scientist who is committed and dedicated to addressing these issues. The concepts of autonomous and prophetic social science provide valuable inspiration for those seeking to develop “alternative” approaches to social science that break free from the domination of Western social science and traditions. While the realization of this project requires further sharing, elaboration, and contestation, it is encouraging to recognize that the groundwork has been laid. Scholars and intellectuals who are passionate about this endeavor can build upon the existing concepts and frameworks, contribute their own insights, and engage in rigorous intellectual discussions to advance the development of alternative social science in the region. By embracing the principles of autonomous and prophetic social science, social scientists can explore new avenues of knowledge production, challenge existing paradigms, and offer fresh perspectives on societal issues. This intellectual journey holds the potential to foster a more inclusive, contextually relevant, and transformative social science that addresses the specific needs and challenges of the Malay-Indonesian context.

Concluding Remarks

Autonomous social science and prophetic social science hold great significance in the context of Malay-Indonesian scholarship as they embody the engagement between social science and tradition. These concepts emerged as responses to the dominance of Western social science, which was historically shaped by colonialism and Orientalism. They aim to challenge this domination and address the complex issues that have arisen within scholarship, such as globalism, nativism, Islamism, chauvinism, academism, objectivism, positivism,

and Eurocentrism. In this context, two fundamental problems exist, the general social problems of society and the problems within scholarship itself. It becomes clear that these problems cannot be effectively solved without critical intellectual reflection. The concepts of autonomous social science and prophetic social science offer three key characteristics that enable the questioning, problematization, and potential resolution of these issues: autonomy, a problem-based approach, and a strong commitment to rethinking society and driving change and transformation. These characteristics reflect the inclination of alternative social science rooted in the Malay-Indonesian tradition. This invention holds significant potential to inspire social scientists worldwide to establish independent, autonomous, and cosmopolitan intellectual perspectives. However, the implementation of these concepts and inventions faces challenges. The successful realization of these ideas as a scientific project relies on critical awareness, creative initiatives, and strong efforts of local scholars and intellectuals. The way in which they address these challenges remains an open question, and their actions will determine the extent to which the contextualization of these concepts can be effectively carried out.

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