

Muhammadiyah's Maqāsid: Integrating Revelation and Science for Civilization-al Resilience.

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Abstrak

Studi ini menelaah bagaimana warga Muhammadiyah—sebagai organisasi Islam modernis terbesar di Indonesia—memaknai dan merespons hubungan antara otoritas keagamaan dan pengetahuan ilmiah selama pandemi COVID-19. Berdasarkan pendekatan kualitatif, kajian ini mengidentifikasi tiga pola epistemologis—Afirmasi Integratif, Resistensi Puritanikal, dan Negosiasi Selektif—yang dibentuk oleh interaksi antara komitmen doktrinal, polarisasi identitas politik, dan fragmentasi pengetahuan dalam ekosistem digital. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa istilah “epistemologi Muhammadiyah” tidak dimaknai sebagai atribut melekat pada organisasi, melainkan sebagai konstruksi analitis yang menggambarkan orientasi epistemologis yang diinstitutionalisasikan dalam kerangka Islam Berkemajuan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa kecenderungan epistemologis para anggota tidak bersifat seragam maupun statis, tetapi selalu terbuka terhadap reinterpretasi dan negosiasi seiring perubahan sosial, politik, dan teknologi. Meskipun memberikan kerangka teoretis yang kuat, batasan temporal dan historis kajian ini membatasi kemampuan untuk menilai perubahan jangka panjang. Artikel ini berkontribusi pada diskursus tentang pemikiran Islam kontemporer dengan memperlihatkan bagaimana aktor-aktor Muslim modernis merundingkan otoritas, rasionalitas ilmiah, dan autentisitas keagamaan dalam situasi krisis serta kompleksitas era digital.

Kata Kunci: Epistemologi Islam, Muhammadiyah, Covid-19, Maqashid Syariah, Islam Berkemajuan, Rasionalitas Etis

Abstract

This study examined how members of Muhammadiyah, Indonesia’s largest modernist Islamic organization, interpreted and negotiated the relationship between religious authority and scientific knowledge during the COVID-19 pandemic. Drawing on a qualitative design, the analysis identified three distinct epistemological patterns—Integrative Affirmation, Puritanical Resistance, and Selective Negotiation—each shaped by the interaction of doctrinal commitments, political identity pressures, and the fragmented digital information environment. The study clarified that the notion of “Muhammadiyah’s epistemology” functions not as an attribute of an institution, but as an analytical construct that captures an institutionalized orientation toward harmonizing revelation and reason within the framework of Progressive Islam. The findings demonstrate that epistemological tendencies among members are neither uniform nor static; rather, they remain open to reinterpretation, contestation, and adjustment in response to social, political, and technological forces. Although the study offers a theoretically grounded account of epistemological dynamics within a major Muslim organization, its temporal and historical boundaries limit the assessment of long-term transformations. The article contributes to broader debates on contemporary Islamic thought by illuminating how modernist Muslim actors negotiate authority, scientific rationality, and religious authenticity under conditions of crisis and digital-era complexity.

Keywords: Progressive Islam; epistemology; Muhammadiyah; scientific authority; religious authority; COVID-19; digital knowledge; political identity; modernist Islam; epistemological patterns.

Background

The Covid-19 pandemic generated an epistemological crisis within contemporary Islamic thought, particularly concerning the relationship between *tawakkal* (trust in God) and *ikhtiar* (human effort), as well as between spiritual surrender and scientific responsibility. Since the initial spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus through religious activity clusters in 2020, Indonesian Muslims confronted a dilemma between the performance of communal rituals and the preservation of life as a primary objective of Islamic law (*maqashid syariah*). This dilemma marked an epistemological struggle concerning how Muslims interpret the relationship among faith, rationality, and social responsibility when facing a global health crisis that demanded evidence-based scientific responses. The pandemic became a convergence point between theology and science across various religious traditions globally, revealing a universal tension between ritual obligations and public health imperatives. ¹This issue extended beyond the realm of practical jurisprudence

1 Scott Greer et al., *Coronavirus Politics* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michi-

to address more fundamental questions regarding how revelation interacts with modern science in constructing contemporary Islamic knowledge. This dilemma marked an epistemological struggle concerning how Muslims interpret the relationship among faith, rationality, and social responsibility when facing a global health crisis that demanded evidence-based scientific responses.

Similar phenomena occurred globally, demonstrating that the pandemic became a convergence point between theology and science across various religious traditions. The Tablighi Jamaat gathering in Malaysia that became a transmission cluster, the rejection of social restrictions by church communities in South Korea, and debates surrounding religious freedom in the United States revealed a universal tension between ritual obligations and public health imperatives.² The Indian government identified religious activities as primary sources of viral transmission, while in Indonesia, the Ministry of Health recorded 1,146 clusters by September 2020, predominantly originating from Islamic boarding schools and worship activities (*nasional.tempo.co*, 23/11/2020).³ This situation indicated that the pandemic constituted not merely a health crisis but also a crisis of meaning that compelled religious communities to reexamine their epistemological foundations in understanding the relationship between spirituality and social responsibility.⁴ Within the Islamic context, this crisis tested the capacity of Islamic epistemology, which had historically integrated revelation (*naql*) and reason (*'aql*), to navigate the scientific and ethical complexities of the modern era.

The Indonesian government's response through the establishment of the Task Force for the Acceleration of Covid-19 Response and the issuance of Government Regulation in Lieu of Law Number 1 of 2020 reflected efforts to integrate public health and economic stability.⁵ Nevertheless, these policies generated tensions between state authority and religious authority in interpreting emergency situations. The mobilization of the Indonesian National Armed Forces, National Police, and State Intelligence Agency in enforcing health protocols demonstrated the dominance of a security approach that potentially influenced how society understood religious compliance.⁶ Mietzner (*gan Press*, 2021), 15-18, <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.11927713>.

2 Greer et al.

3 Tempo, "Kemenkes: Kasus Baru Covid-19 Didominasi Kluster Pesantre," 2020, <https://www.tempo.co/politik/kemenkes-kasus-baru-covid-19-didominasi-kluster-pesantren-579573>.

4 Greer et al., *Coronavirus Politics*.

5 Riyanti Djalante et al., "Review and Analysis of Current Responses to COVID-19 in Indonesia: Period of January to March 2020," *Progress in Disaster Science* 6 (April 1, 2020): 1-9, <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.PDISAS.2020.100091>.

6 Djalante et al.; Mayling Oey Gardiner and M. Amin Abdullah, *Ragam Perspektif Dampak Covid-19*, 2021, 45-72 <https://books.google.co.id/books?hl=en&l>

(2020) emphasized that anti-science populism and religious conservatism contributed to weakening the effectiveness of science-based policies.⁷ Consequently, the pandemic became not only a test of state capacity but also of the vitality of Islamic epistemology in responding to the challenges of modernity that required a synthesis between transcendental values and instrumental rationality.

From an Islamic perspective, the pandemic generated an urgency to reaffirm the principles of *maqashid syariah*, whereby the preservation of life (*hifzh al-nafs*) constitutes one of five fundamental objectives of Islamic law (*al-Dharuriyat al-Khams*) that must be prioritized above ritualistic practices. This principle formed the foundation of the Indonesian Ulema Council Fatwa Number 14 of 2020 and the Circular Letter from Muhammadiyah Central Leadership regarding worship procedures during emergency conditions, which emphasized that postponing congregational worship did not represent a weakness in faith but rather an actualization of *maqashid syariah* itself.⁸ However, acceptance of these religious guidelines varied; some segments of society stressed the importance of collective rituals as religious identity, while others prioritized scientific rationality based on epidemiological data.⁹ This diversity of responses reflected the epistemological spectrum within contemporary Islam in interpreting the balance between spiritual and material dimensions, between submission to divine will (*tawakkul*) and human responsibility to exert effort through reason and knowledge.

Muhammadiyah, as a modernist Islamic movement historically committed to rationality and science, responded to the pandemic with a paradigm

r=&id=7qBOEAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&dq=Harkrisnowo+dalam+Oey-Gardiner+dan+Abdullah+(2021),&ots=PN1wcvkrhR&sig=6aMfkid8jDby7Tb1u29uHu_MKX8&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=Harkrisnowo dalam Oey-Gardiner dan Abdullah (2021)%2C&f=false.

7 Marcus Mietzner, "Populist Anti-Scientism, Religious Polarisation, and Institutionalised Corruption: How Indonesia's Democratic Decline Shaped Its COVID-19 Response," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 39, no. 2 (August 5, 2020): 227–49, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1868103420935561>.

8 Muhammadiyah Official Website, "Edaran Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah Nomor 02/Edr/I.0/E/2020 Tentang Tuntunan Ibadah Dalam Kondisi Darurat Covid-19," 2020, <https://en.muhammadiyah.or.id/download/edaran-pimpinan-pusat-muhammadiyah-nomor-02-edr-i-0-e-2020-tentang-tuntunan-ibadah-dalam-kondisi-darurat-covid-19/>; MUI, "Penyelenggaraan Shalat Jum'at Dan Jamaah Untuk Mencegah Penularan Wabah Covid-19," 2020, <https://mui.or.id/baca/fatwa/penyelenggaraan-shalat-jumat-dan-jamaah-untuk-mencegah-penularan-wabah-covid-19>.

9 Dadang Darmawan et al., "Sikap Keberagaman Masyarakat Menghadapi Wabah COVID-19," *Religious: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama Dan Lintas Budaya* 4, no. 2 (May 30, 2020): 115–24, <https://doi.org/10.15575/rjsalb.v4i2.8596>.

that positioned science as an instrument of ikhtiar that did not contradict theistic principles. The organization regarded the pandemic as a non-natural disaster requiring a science-based response, consistent with its 2015 Disaster Jurisprudence, which asserted that social life represents divine natural law (*sunnatullah*) that must be understood through natural causality.¹⁰ This theological perspective formed the basis for establishing the Muhammadiyah Covid-19 Command Center (MCCC) on March 5, 2020, merely three days following the announcement of the first case, which by October 2021 had distributed assistance valued at Rp 522.7 billion to 45.1 million beneficiaries through hospitals, vaccination programs, and social aid (Muhammadiyah.id, 8/6/2021). This rapid response affirmed the integration of faith, knowledge, and action within the Progressive Islam paradigm that understands civilizational advancement (*tamaddun*) as an integral component of religious mission.¹¹

Despite receiving governmental appreciation (setkab.go.id, 18/11/2020), Muhammadiyah maintained a critical stance toward policies deemed inconsistent with the principle of life preservation. Criticism of new normal policies and relaxation of homecoming restrictions demonstrated that the organization positioned *maqashid syariah* as a meta-criterion for evaluating the validity of public policies, transcending economic or political considerations (Kompas.com, 21/09/2020; muhammadiyah.or.id, 06/03/2020). Haedar Nashir emphasized the importance of leadership based on science and public morality during crisis situations (Republika.co.id, 24/09/2020), consistent with the concept of ethical rationality within Islamic tradition that integrates instrumental rationality with moral-spiritual imperatives. This critical stance demonstrated that mature Islamic epistemology does not passively accept modernity but actively engages in critiquing and reconstructing modernity based on values rooted in Islamic tradition itself.

10 Berita Resmi Muhammadiyah, "Berita Resmi Muhammadiyah : Nomor 03/2015-2020/Rabi'ul Akhir 1439 H/Januari 2018 M," 2018; Suyadi, Zalik Nuryana, and Niki Alma Febriana Fauzi, "The Fiqh of Disaster: The Mitigation of Covid-19 in the Perspective of Islamic Education-Neuroscience," *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction* 51 (December 2020): 101848, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ij-drr.2020.101848>.

11 Agus Kusnadi, "Muhammadiyah Membangun Kesehatan Bangsa: Sehat Badannya Sehat Jiwanya" (MPKU PP Muhammadiyah, 2020); Bertoldus Makur, Ni Luh Putu Agustini Karta, and Laras Oktaviani, "Pengaruh Electronic Word of Mouth Terhadap Kepercayaan Dan Keputusan Pembelian Pada Aplikasi Shopee Mahasiswa Universitas Triatma Mulya," *Jurnal Bisnis Dan Pemasaran Digital* 2, no. 1 (July 6, 2022): 25–38, <https://doi.org/10.35912/jbpd.v2i1.2255>; Ahmad Muttaqin, "Religion, Science, And Culture Amidst the Covid-19 Pandemic: Muhammadiyah's Worship Guidance and Members' Responses," *Al-Albab* 10, no. 1 (July 29, 2021): 3–32, <https://doi.org/10.24260/ALALBAB.V10I1.1904>.

Historical records show Muhammadiyah's consistency in supporting science and public health, including on vaccination issues that frequently encountered resistance among Muslim communities.¹² Muhammadiyah's decision to support Covid-19 vaccination was grounded in the principle of *maslahah* (public welfare) and scientific evidence rather than solely textual considerations (muhammadiyah.or.id, 15/12/2020). Within the polarized socio-political context following the 2019 Presidential Election, the organization maintained its position as an Islamic civil force that remained both adaptive and critical toward the state.¹³ Hefner, Menchik, and Brown affirmed that Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama continued to serve as moral and epistemic anchors in the democratization process and the dissemination of Islamic pluralist values in Indonesia.¹⁴ In this regard, Muhammadiyah emerged as a representation of rational Islam that rejected extremism, fatalistic mysticism, and rigid dichotomies between faith and reason a position reflecting epistemological maturity within the modernist Islamic tradition.

Nevertheless, Muhammadiyah's response also confronted internal challenges in the form of epistemological resistance among certain members. Haedar Nashir expressed concerns on various occasions regarding the emergence of Covid-19 denial, vaccination refusal, and theological arguments that positioned compliance with health protocols as contradictory to trust in God (muhammadiyah.or.id, 22/04/2021). This phenomenon revealed the persistence of dichotomous understandings that separated the spiritual domain from the material domain, whereby modern science was perceived as contradicting faith. Within the context of a fragmented digital information ecosystem, this epistemological resistance was further reinforced by the dissemination of misinformation and conspiracy theories that created alternative religious authorities outside formal institutional structures.¹⁵ Thus, the

12 Kusnadi, "Muhammadiyah Membangun Kesehatan Bangsa: Sehat Badannya Sehat Jiwanya"; Alfredo Morabia, "Faith-Based Organizations and Public Health: Another Facet of the Public Health Dialogue," *American Journal of Public Health* 109, no. 3 (March 2019): 341–341, <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2018.304935>.

13 Suhadi, "Is COVID-19 Muting or Fueling Religious Polarisation in Indonesia?," *New Mandala*, 2020, <https://www.newmandala.org/is-covid-19-muting-or-fueling-religious-polarisation-in-indonesia/>.

14 Gustav Brown, "Civic Islam: Muhammadiyah, NU and the Organisational Logic of Consensus-Making in Indonesia," *Asian Studies Review* 43, no. 3 (July 3, 2019): 397–414, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2019.1626802>; Robert W. Hefner, "Whatever Happened to Civil Islam? Islam and Democratisation in Indonesia, 20 Years On," *Asian Studies Review* 43, no. 3 (July 3, 2019): 375–96, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2019.1625865>; Jeremy Menchik, *Islam and Democracy in Indonesia* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316344446>.

15 James N. Druckman et al., "Affective Polarization, Local Contexts and Public Opinion in America," *Nature Human Behaviour* 2020 5:1 5, no. 1 (November

pandemic became not only a test of Muhammadiyah's organizational capacity but also a critical moment for reflecting upon the effectiveness of institutionalizing Progressive Islam values when confronting epistemological fragmentation in the digital age.

Conceptually, this research presents novelty in its effort to reconstruct understanding of religious responses to the pandemic through the framework of Islamic epistemology, particularly the concept of *wahdat al-'ilm* (unity of knowledge) as developed by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (1993) and the *maqashid syariah* tradition as elaborated by Al-Shatibi (2015) and Al-Ghazali (2020). In contrast to previous studies that highlighted aspects of public policy or the effectiveness of religious organizations in responding to the pandemic (Hosen & Hammado, 2021; Mietzner, 2020; Warburton, 2020)¹⁶, this study employs an Islamic epistemological approach that integrates *bayani* (text-based revelation), *burhani* (rational-demonstrative), and *irfani* (intuitive-spiritual) methods to examine the dialectic between revelation and reason in Muhammadiyah's response to the global crisis. The analytical focus addresses how Muhammadiyah reconstructed religious rationality based on *maqashid syariah* within a context where Islamic epistemological authority was tested by three simultaneous forces: the persistence of religious puritanism that rejected integration with modern science, political identity polarization that contaminated epistemological judgment with ideological sentiments, and the fragmentation of knowledge construction within the digital ecosystem that created epistemological echo chambers.

Accordingly, this research contributes to enriching contemporary Islamic epistemological discourse by offering the perspective that Islam as a civilization of knowledge (*hadarah al-'ilm*) possesses the vitality to integrate revelation and reason, faith and science, tradition and modernity within an ethical rationality framework rooted in *maqashid syariah*. Muhammadiyah's experience in responding to the pandemic demonstrates that when Islamic epistemology becomes systematically institutionalized through organizational structures, education, and cadre development emphasizing *wahdat al-'ilm*, Islam can function as a knowledge system that is responsive, adaptive, and critical toward contemporary civilizational challenges. This novelty (23, 2020): 28–38, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-020-01012-5>; Jeffrey Haynes, "Donald Trump, the Christian Right and COVID-19: The Politics of Religious Freedom," *Laws* 10, no. 1 (January 30, 2021): 6, <https://doi.org/10.3390/laws10010006>.

¹⁶ Nadirsyah Hosen and Nurussyariah Hammado, "Indonesia's Response to the Pandemic," in *Covid-19 in Asia* (Oxford University Press New York, 2021), 307–20, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197553831.003.0021>; Mietzner, "Populist Anti-Scientism, Religious Polarisation, and Institutionalised Corruption: How Indonesia's Democratic Decline Shaped Its COVID-19 Response"; Eve Warburton, "Deepening Polarization and Democratic Decline in Indonesia," 2020, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep26920.8?seq=1>.

positions this study within the larger discursive framework concerning how world religious traditions negotiate their epistemological authority with the authority of modern science when confronting global crises, while simultaneously affirming the relevance of Islamic epistemology as an alternative to both positivistic secularism and fundamentalism that rejects critical rationality.

Materials and Methods

Islamic Epistemological Approach: Integration of Bayani-Burhani-Irfani

This study employed an Islamic epistemological approach that integrated three knowledge methods: *bayani* (revelation-text-based), *burhani* (rational-demonstrative), and *irfani* (intuitive-spiritual) as developed by Al-Jabiri and adapted within the Nusantara Islamic intellectual tradition.¹⁷ The bayani approach was utilized to analyze how religious texts such as fatwas from the Tarjih Council and circular letters from Muhammadiyah Central Leadership interpreted maqashid syariah principles in the pandemic context, particularly the principle of *hifzh al-nafs* (preservation of life) as the highest priority within *al-Dharuriyat al-Khams*.¹⁸ The burhani approach was applied to evaluate how scientific rationality such as epidemiological data and health protocols were integrated into Muhammadiyah's religious argumentation without creating a dichotomy between faith and reason.¹⁹ Meanwhile, the irfani approach was employed to understand the spiritual dimension and humanitarian empathy underlying Islamic philanthropic movements in response to the global health crisis.

The utilization of these three approaches simultaneously constituted a critical response to the dominance of Western hermeneutics in religious studies that tends toward anthropocentrism and neglects the transcendental dimension in knowledge construction. Although this study referenced sev-

17 Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 2nd ed. (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993), 127-132. *Secularisms in a Global Age*, 1993, <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230106703>; Berita Resmi Muhammadiyah, "Berita Resmi Muhammadiyah : Nomor 03/2015-2020/Rabi'ul Akhir 1439 H/Januari 2018 M."

18 Ibrāhīm ibn Mūsā Shātibī, *The Reconciliation of the Fundamentals of Islamic Law* (Garnet Pub., 2015), https://books.google.com/books/about/The_Reconciliation_of_the_Fundamentals_o.html?id=ScXIngEACAAJ.

19 Muhammad Iqbal, "The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam," 2013, 277, https://books.google.com/books/about/The_Reconstruction_of_Religious_Thought.html?hl=id&id=uCh14nl09jkC; Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*, University of Chicago Press, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226702803.001.0001>.

eral concepts from philosophical hermeneutic traditions²⁰ and critical discourse analysis,²¹ these approaches were positioned as technical analytical tools for reading discursive structures rather than as the primary epistemological framework. Unlike Gadamerian hermeneutics that positions humans as the center of textual interpretation, the Islamic epistemological approach employed in this study affirmed that revelation remains *qath'i* (definitive) in its fundamental principles, while human reason functions in the contextualization (*ijtihad*) of contemporary issues that are *zhanni* in nature.²² Consequently, this study did not merely adopt Western methods but performed an Islamization of methodology by positioning maqashid syariah as the primary parameter in analyzing the epistemological validity of religious responses.

Data Sources and Analytical Corpus

The analysis in this study was grounded in three primary source categories that formed the corpus of Muhammadiyah's religious discourse in responding to the pandemic. First, official organizational documents encompassing fatwas from the Tarjih and Tajdid Council of Muhammadiyah Central Leadership, circular letters from Central Leadership regarding worship procedures under Covid-19 emergency conditions, Muhammadiyah's Disaster Jurisprudence guidelines²³, and organizational policies related to the establishment of the Muhammadiyah Covid-19 Command Center (MCCC). These documents were treated as official representations of Muhammadiyah's institutional epistemology that integrated maqashid syariah with public health imperatives.

Second, public statements and religious reflections delivered by organizational leaders, particularly Muhammadiyah Central Leadership Chairman Haedar Nashir, in various forums such as Muhammadiyah Central Leadership Ramadan Religious Gatherings, inaugurations of branches and sub-branches, and media interviews. These statements were significant because they reflected the organization's epistemological concerns regarding the emergence of Covid-19 denial and vaccination refusal among some members, while simultaneously reaffirming Muhammadiyah's commitment

20 Hans-Georg. Gadamer, "Truth and Method," 2013, 623, https://books.google.com/books/about/Truth_and_Method.html?id=SkdMAQAAQBAJ.

21 Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis* (Routledge, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315834368>. 308-415

22 Imam Abū ʿāmid Al-Ghazālī, "Iʿyāʾ ʿulūm Al-Dīn," 1937, <https://archive.org/details/Ihya1937/Ihya-1937-V001/>; Wael B. Hallaq, "The Impossible State : Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament," 2013, 256.

23 Berita Resmi Muhammadiyah, "Berita Resmi Muhammadiyah : Nomor 03/2015-2020/Rabi'ul Akhir 1439 H/Januari 2018 M."

to rationality and scientific authority (muhammadiyah.or.id, 22/04/2021; 16/04/2021; 29/03/2021).

Third, narratives and discourses circulating in the public sphere through mass media, online news portals, and social media ecosystems that reflected Muhammadiyah members' discursive practices in interpreting the pandemic and its management policies. These narratives encompassed theological arguments that positioned fear of Covid-19 as contradictory to fear of God, rhetorical questions such as "why should worship follow WHO's school of thought," and accusations that the pandemic constituted part of a global conspiracy. These discourses were treated not as raw data concerning individual opinions but as manifestations of epistemological tensions between dichotomous spiritual-material understandings and integrative understandings that bridge revelation and reason.

Beyond these three primary categories, this study also referenced secondary literature encompassing studies on Muhammadiyah's response to the pandemic²⁴, comparative studies on religious organizations and Covid-19 across various traditions (Bawidamann et al., 2020; Taragin-Zeller et al., 2023; Akhter et al., 2022), and theoretical literature on classical and modern Islamic epistemology.²⁵ This secondary literature functioned as a conceptual framework for interpreting the epistemological dynamics manifested in Muhammadiyah's response.

Analytical Methods: Ta'wil, Qiyas, and Discursive Critique

Analysis in this study was conducted through a synthesis between the method of ta'wil (contextual interpretation) within the Islamic exegetical tradition and discursive critique for reading argumentative structures. The ta'wil method was applied by identifying how key concepts such as ikhtiar, tawakkal, maqashid syariah, masalah, and hifzh al-nafs were articulated within Muhammadiyah's religious discourse.²⁶ Unlike literalist approaches that only read apparent meanings (*zhahir*), the ta'wil method enabled re-

24 Muttaqin, "Religion, Science, And Culture Amidst the Covid-19 Pandemic: Muhammadiyah's Worship Guidance and Members' Responses"; Suyadi, Nuryana, and Fauzi, "The Fiqh of Disaster: The Mitigation of Covid-19 in the Perspective of Islamic Education-Neuroscience."

25 Al-Ghazālī, "I'ṣyā' ʿulūm Al-Dīn "; Shāṭibī, *The Reconciliation of the Fundamentals of Islamic Law*; Ibn Khaldun, "The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History," *Beytulhikme An International Journal of Philosophy* 8, no. 1 (2018): 413–25; Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*; Al-Attas, "Islam and Secularism"; Iqbal, "The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam"; Hallaq, "The Impossible State : Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament."

26 Al-Ghazālī, "I'ṣyā' ʿulūm Al-Dīn "; Shāṭibī, *The Reconciliation of the Fundamentals of Islamic Law*.

searchers to excavate substantive meanings (*maqsid*) from religious texts by considering the historical, sociological, and epistemological contexts underlying them.

To identify argumentative patterns and epistemological structures, this study employed the principle of *qiyas* (analogical reasoning) as a comparative method within the *ushul fiqh* tradition. Through *qiyas*, this study compared Muhammadiyah's response to the Covid-19 pandemic with the same organization's responses to previous health crises, such as the measles-rubella vaccination controversy and the avian influenza pandemic, to identify epistemological consistency in organizational positions.²⁷ This comparative analysis was also extended to the global context by comparing response patterns of modernist Muslim communities in Indonesia with those of other religious communities across various parts of the world.

The employment of discursive critique in this study (Fairclough, 2013; van Dijk, 2015) was not intended to adopt the positivistic or secular constructivist epistemology dominant in Western discourse analysis traditions. Conversely, discursive critique was positioned here as a technical tool for dismantling hidden linguistic structures and argumentative patterns within religious narratives, while maintaining the principle of *tawhid* as the ontological and epistemological paradigm. In this perspective, discursive critique functioned to identify how epistemological tensions such as the contradiction between "fear of Covid-19" versus "fear of God" reflected dichotomous understandings inconsistent with the principle of unity of knowledge (*wahdat al-'ilm*) within Islamic tradition.²⁸ Thus, this method remained within the framework of Islamic epistemology that emphasizes integration between revelation (*naql*) and reason (*'aql*) as two complementary rather than contradictory sources of knowledge.

Through the synthesis of *ta'wil*, *qiyas*, and Islamized discursive critique, this study successfully identified three primary epistemological patterns in Muhammadiyah's response: (1) a scientific-theological affirmation pattern that integrated the imperative of life preservation (*hifzh al-nafs*) with trust in epidemiological findings; (2) a puritanical resistance pattern that marginalized scientific *ikhtiar* by prioritizing the dimension of *tawakkal* and spiritual surrender; and (3) a selective negotiation pattern that accepted certain aspects of health protocols while maintaining specific ritual practices. These three patterns were not treated as static sociological typologies but rather as a dynamic spectrum representing epistemological dialectics in contemporary Islamic civilization.

²⁷ Kusnadi, "Muhammadiyah Membangun Kesehatan Bangsa: Sehat Badannya Sehat Jiwanya"; Morabia, "Faith-Based Organizations and Public Health: Another Facet of the Public Health Dialogue."

²⁸ Al-Attas, "Islam and Secularism."

Epistemological Reflexivity and Study Limitations

This study was conducted with full awareness of the researcher's epistemological position in the meaning construction process. Following the principle of *adab* in the Islamic scholarly tradition, the researcher acknowledged that interpretations produced in this study constitute the result of *ijtihad* that is *zhanni* in nature and open to discussion and critique by the scientific community.²⁹ Nevertheless, the fundamental principles underlying the analysis such as the priority of *hifzh al-nafs* in *maqashid syariah* and the obligation to exert effort using reason and knowledge constitute principles that have been widely agreed upon within the Islamic *fiqh* and *kalam* traditions.

This study possessed several limitations that required acknowledgment. First, the analytical focus on Muhammadiyah as a representation of modernist Islam in Indonesia meant that study findings could not be directly generalized to the entire spectrum of Islamic organizations in the Nusantara, much less to the global Muslim context. Second, reliance on formal documents and public discourse meant that this study could not capture nuances of religious practice at the grassroots level that might differ from official organizational narratives. Third, the analytical period limited to 2020-2021 meant that this study could not yet evaluate the long-term impact of Muhammadiyah's epistemological response on the sustainability of the Progressive Islam movement. Nevertheless, these limitations did not diminish the validity of study findings within the established context: reading epistemological dialectics in modernist Muslim community responses to the global health crisis as an illustration of how Islamic tradition negotiates its authority with modern scientific authority.

Islamic Epistemological Approach: Integration of Bayani-Burhani-Irfani

This study employed an Islamic epistemological approach that integrated three knowledge methods: *bayani* (revelation-text-based), *burhani* (rational-demonstrative), and *irfani* (intuitive-spiritual) as developed by Al-Jabiri and adapted within the Nusantara Islamic intellectual tradition.³⁰ This methodological choice responds to the critical need for an analytical framework that can adequately capture the complex interplay between religious authority and scientific rationality during the COVID-19 pandemic a phenomenon observed across various religious traditions globally.³¹ Recent scholarship has demonstrated that religious responses to the pandemic cannot be un-

²⁹ Al-Attas.

³⁰ Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, "Islam and Secularism," *Comparative Secularisms in a Global Age*, 1993, <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230106703>.

³¹ Donald Heinz, "COVID-19 and Religion," *Religions* 2023, Vol. 14, Page 478 14, no. 4 (April 3, 2023): 478, <https://doi.org/10.3390/REL14040478>.

derstood through secular epistemological frameworks alone, as they involve fundamental questions about the nature of divine will, human agency, and the relationship between faith and empirical knowledge.³²

The bayani approach was utilized to analyze how religious texts such as fatwas from the Tarjih Council and circular letters from Muhammadiyah Central Leadership interpreted maqashid syariah principles in the pandemic context, particularly the principle of hifzh al-nafs (preservation of life) as the highest priority within al-Dharuriyat al-Khams.³³ This textual analysis was informed by comparative studies on how religious communities across different traditions have navigated similar tensions between ritual obligations and public health imperatives.³⁴ The burhani approach was applied to evaluate how scientific rationality such as epidemiological data and health protocols were integrated into Muhammadiyah's religious argumentation without creating a dichotomy between faith and reason.³⁵ This integration reflects what Taragin-Zeller et al. (2024) identify as "tailoring science for religious publics," wherein scientific knowledge is translated through religious frameworks to enhance acceptance and compliance.³⁶ Meanwhile, the irfani approach was employed to understand the spiritual dimension and humanitarian empathy underlying Islamic philanthropic movements in response to the global health crisis.

The utilization of these three approaches simultaneously constituted a critical response to the dominance of Western hermeneutics in religious studies that tends toward anthropocentrism and neglects the transcendental dimension in knowledge construction. Although this study referenced several concepts from philosophical hermeneutic traditions³⁷ and critical discourse analysis,³⁸ these approaches were positioned as technical analytical

32 Tanya Pieterse and Christina Landman, "Religious Views on the Origin and Meaning of COVID-2019," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 77, no. 3 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.4102/HTS.V77I3.6283>.

33 Ibrāhīm ibn Mūsā Shāṭībī, *The Reconciliation of the Fundamentals of Islamic Law* (Garnet Pub., 2015) 234-237, https://books.google.com/books/about/The_Reconciliation_of_the_Fundamentals_o.html?id=ScXIngEACAAJ.

34 Heinz, "COVID-19 and Religion." 2-5

35 Muhammad Iqbal, "The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam," 2013, 277, https://books.google.com/books/about/The_Reconstruction_of_Religious_Thought_78-82.html?hl=id&id=uCh14nl09jkC.

36 Lea Taragin-Zeller et al., "The Four 'R's: Strategies for Tailoring Science for Religious Publics and Their Prices," *Public Understanding of Science (Bristol, England)* 33, no. 7 (October 1, 2024): 902, <https://doi.org/10.1177/09636625241229415>.

37 Hans-Georg. Gadamer, "Truth and Method," 2013, 623, 265-270 https://books.google.com/books/about/Truth_and_Method.html?id=SkdMAQAAQBAJ.

38 Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis* (Routledge, 2013), 308-415 <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315834368>.

tools for reading discursive structures rather than as the primary epistemological framework. Unlike Gadamerian hermeneutics that positions humans as the center of textual interpretation, the Islamic epistemological approach employed in this study affirmed that revelation remains qath'i (definitive) in its fundamental principles, while human reason functions in the contextualization (*ijtihad*) of contemporary issues that are zhanni in nature.³⁹

This methodological positioning is particularly salient in the Indonesian context, where religious organizations like Muhammadiyah have historically functioned as mediators between Islamic tradition and modern rationality.⁴⁰ As Widiyanto (2020) demonstrates, the intersection of religion and COVID-19 in Indonesia has been significantly shaped by the "post-truth" information ecosystem, wherein competing epistemological authorities scientific, religious, and political vie for legitimacy.⁴¹ Consequently, this study did not merely adopt Western methods but performed an Islamization of methodology by positioning maqashid syariah as the primary parameter in analyzing the epistemological validity of religious responses.

Data Sources and Analytical Corpus

The analysis in this study was grounded in three primary source categories that formed the corpus of Muhammadiyah's religious discourse in responding to the pandemic. First, official organizational documents encompassing fatwas from the Tarjih and Tajdid Council of Muhammadiyah Central Leadership, circular letters from Central Leadership regarding worship procedures under Covid-19 emergency conditions, Muhammadiyah's Disaster Jurisprudence guidelines⁴², and organizational policies related to the establishment of the Muhammadiyah Covid-19 Command Center (MCCC). These documents were treated as official representations of Muhammadiyah's institutional epistemology that integrated maqashid syariah with public health imperatives.

Second, public statements and religious reflections delivered by orga-

39 Imam Abū ʿāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-Dīn* (Cairo: Dar al-Shaʿb, 1937), 1:45-47; Wael B. Hallaq, *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 156-159.

40 Tristia Riskawati et al., "Faith-Driven Leaders in a Non-Theocratic Country: Internalizing Muhammadiyah Values in Local Governance," *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Administration*, October 10, 2025, 1-24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23276665.2025.2571898>.

41 Asfa Widiyanto, "Religion and Covid-19 in the Era of Post-Truth: The Case of Indonesia," *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 18 (December 1, 2020): 1-12, <https://doi.org/10.24035/IJIT.18.2020.176>.

42 Berita Resmi Muhammadiyah, "Berita Resmi Muhammadiyah : Nomor 03/2015-2020/Rabi'ul Akhir 1439 H/Januari 2018 M," 2018.

nizational leaders, particularly Muhammadiyah Central Leadership Chairman Haedar Nashir, in various forums such as Muhammadiyah Central Leadership Ramadan Religious Gatherings, inaugurations of branches and sub-branches, and media interviews. These statements were significant because they reflected the organization's epistemological concerns regarding the emergence of Covid-19 denial and vaccination refusal among some members, while simultaneously reaffirming Muhammadiyah's commitment to rationality and scientific authority.

Third, narratives and discourses circulating in the public sphere through mass media, online news portals, and social media ecosystems that reflected Muhammadiyah members' discursive practices in interpreting the pandemic and its management policies. These narratives encompassed theological arguments that positioned fear of Covid-19 as contradictory to fear of God, rhetorical questions such as "why should worship follow WHO's school of thought," and accusations that the pandemic constituted part of a global conspiracy. These discourses were treated not as raw data concerning individual opinions but as manifestations of epistemological tensions between dichotomous spiritual-material understandings and integrative understandings that bridge revelation and reason.

Beyond these three primary categories, this study also referenced secondary literature encompassing studies on Muhammadiyah's response to the pandemic⁴³, comparative studies on religious organizations and COVID-19 across various traditions, and theoretical literature on classical and modern Islamic epistemology.⁴⁴ This secondary literature functioned as a conceptual framework for interpreting the epistemological dynamics manifested in Muhammadiyah's response.

Analytical Methods: Ta'wil, Qiyas, and Discursive Critique

Analysis in this study was conducted through a synthesis between the method of ta'wil (contextual interpretation) within the Islamic exegetical tradition and discursive critique for reading argumentative structures. The ta'wil method was applied by identifying how key concepts such as ikhtiar, tawakkal, maqashid syariah, masalahah, and hifzh al-nafs were articulated

43 Ahmad Muttaqin, "Religion, Science, And Culture Amidst the Covid-19 Pandemic: Muhammadiyah's Worship Guidance and Members' Responses," *Al-Albab* 10, no. 1 (July 29, 2021): 3–32, <https://doi.org/10.24260/ALALBAB.V10I1.1904>; Suyadi, Zalik Nuryana, and Niki Alma Febriana Fauzi, "The Fiqh of Disaster: The Mitigation of Covid-19 in the Perspective of Islamic Education-Neuroscience," *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction* 51 (December 2020): 101848, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdrr.2020.101848>.

44 Al-Attas, "Islam and Secularism."

within Muhammadiyah's religious discourse.⁴⁵ Unlike literalist approaches that only read apparent meanings (*zhahir*), the *ta'wil* method enabled researchers to excavate substantive meanings (*maqsid*) from religious texts by considering the historical, sociological, and epistemological contexts underlying them.

To identify argumentative patterns and epistemological structures, this study employed the principle of *qiyas* (analogical reasoning) as a comparative method within the *ushul fiqh* tradition. Through *qiyas*, this study compared Muhammadiyah's response to the Covid-19 pandemic with the same organization's responses to previous health crises, such as the measles-rubella vaccination controversy and the avian influenza pandemic, to identify epistemological consistency in organizational positions.⁴⁶ This comparative analysis was also extended to the global context by comparing response patterns of modernist Muslim communities in Indonesia with those of other religious communities across various parts of the world.

The employment of discursive critique in this study was not intended to adopt the positivistic or secular constructivist epistemology dominant in Western discourse analysis traditions. Conversely, discursive critique was positioned here as a technical tool for dismantling hidden linguistic structures and argumentative patterns within religious narratives, while maintaining the principle of *tawhid* as the ontological and epistemological paradigm. In this perspective, discursive critique functioned to identify how epistemological tensions—such as the contradiction between “fear of Covid-19” versus “fear of God”—reflected dichotomous understandings inconsistent with the principle of unity of knowledge (*wahdat al-'ilm*) within Islamic tradition.⁴⁷ Thus, this method remained within the framework of Islamic epistemology that emphasizes integration between revelation (*naql*) and reason (*'aql*) as two complementary rather than contradictory sources of knowledge.

Through the synthesis of *ta'wil*, *qiyas*, and Islamized discursive critique, this study successfully identified three primary epistemological patterns in Muhammadiyah's response: (1) a scientific-theological affirmation pattern that integrated the imperative of life preservation (*hifzh al-nafs*) with trust in epidemiological findings; (2) a puritanical resistance pattern that marginalized scientific *ikhtiar* by prioritizing the dimension of *tawakkal* and spiritual surrender; and (3) a selective negotiation pattern that accepted certain aspects of health protocols while maintaining specific ritual practices. These three patterns were not treated as static sociological typologies but rather as

45 Al-Ghazālī, *Iḳyā' ulūm al-Dīn*, 1:45-47; Shā'ibī, *The Reconciliation of the Fundamentals of Islamic Law*, 1:234-237.

46 Agus Kusnadi, “Muhammadiyah Membangun Kesehatan Bangsa: Sehat Badannya Sehat Jiwanya” (MPKU PP Muhammadiyah, 2020).

47 Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 127-132.

a dynamic spectrum representing epistemological dialectics in contemporary Islamic civilization.

Epistemological Positioning and Conceptual Clarification

This study was conducted with full awareness of the researcher's epistemological position in the meaning construction process. Following the principle of *adab* in the Islamic scholarly tradition, the researcher acknowledged that interpretations produced constitute *ijtihad that is zhanni* in nature and open to critique.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, fundamental principles underlying the analysis such as the priority of *hifzh al-nafs* in *maqashid syariah* constitute widely agreed-upon principles within Islamic fiqh and kalam traditions.

It is crucial to clarify that "Muhammadiyah's epistemology" does not imply that an organization possesses epistemology in the philosophical sense, as epistemology is inherently a cognitive framework held by individual persons, not institutions. The term operates as analytic shorthand for the dominant epistemological orientation institutionalized through Muhammadiyah's educational system, religious programs, and leadership discourse. This collective orientation—shaped historically by K.H. Ahmad Dahlan and subsequent reformist thinkers—is articulated through the Progressive Islam (Islam Berkemajuan) paradigm, which integrates revelation and reason, scriptural fidelity and contextual interpretation, and spiritual commitment with scientific rationality.⁴⁹ This institutional epistemology functions as an ideal type in the Weberian sense rather than uniform reality, as individual members internalize, negotiate, or contest it differently based on their intellectual background, generational location, political exposure, and engagement with digital-era religious authorities.⁵⁰

Study Limitations

This study possessed several limitations across four dimensions:

First, scope limitation: The analytical focus on Muhammadiyah as one modernist Islamic organization meant that findings could not be generalized to the entire spectrum of Indonesian Islamic organizations (such as Nahdlat-

48 Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 2nd ed. (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993), 45-52.

49 Ahmad Jainuri, "Ideologi Kaum Reformis : Melacak Pandangan Keagamaan Muhammadiyah Periode Awal ," 2002, https://lib.stitmuabdya.ac.id/index.php?p=show_detail&id=1592.

50 Max Weber, *Economy and Society. An Outline of Interpretative Sociology*. Berkeley, Economy and Society. An Outline of Interpretative Sociology. Berkeley, 1978, https://books.google.com/books/about/Economy_and_Society.html?id=pSdaNuIaUUEC.

ul Ulama or Salafi movements) or the global Muslim context. Second, data limitation: Reliance on formal documents and public discourse meant the study could not fully capture grassroots religious practices that might differ from official organizational narratives. Ethnographic dimensions of how ordinary members—particularly in rural areas—interpreted and enacted institutional guidelines remained underexplored. Third, temporal limitation: The analytical period (2020-2021) meant the study could not evaluate long-term impacts of Muhammadiyah’s epistemological response. Whether epistemological tensions identified during the pandemic such as vaccine resistance or skepticism toward scientific authority persisted or dissipated in subsequent years remains an open empirical question requiring longitudinal research. Fourth, historical limitation: While acknowledging Muhammadiyah’s modernist genealogy, the study did not fully examine how colonial legacies and postcolonial state dynamics shaped its epistemic frameworks. The adoption of Western-style education and modern science during the Dutch colonial period produced a dual dynamic: it served as anti-colonial assertion—demonstrating Muslim intellectual capability—while simultaneously reflecting internalization of Eurocentric knowledge hierarchies. In the postcolonial era, Indonesia’s developmentalist policies and state reliance on scientific expertise further reinforced Muhammadiyah’s rationalist discourse and evidence-based practices. By not fully interrogating these structural influences, the study did not capture how debates concerning “faith and science,” “tradition and modernity,” and “religious versus scientific authority” have been shaped by broader historical processes. A genealogical approach would be needed to illuminate how these historical dynamics continue to structure contemporary epistemological configurations within Muhammadiyah.

Despite these limitations, the study’s validity remained robust within its established context: analyzing epistemological dialectics in modernist Muslim responses to global health crisis as an illustration of how Islamic tradition negotiates its authority with modern scientific authority. The insights possess analytical transferability to other contexts where modernist Islamic movements confront similar tensions between religious authenticity and scientific modernity.

Results and Discussion

Epistemological Spectrum of Islam in Responding to Crisis: Between Revelation, Reason, and *Ikhtiar*

The Covid-19 pandemic compelled Muslim communities to rearticulate the fundamental relationship between faith and reason, *tawakkal* and *ikhtiar*, revelation and science. Within the Muhammadiyah context, this articulation

constituted not merely a practical jurisprudential matter concerning worship procedures during emergencies but rather a manifestation of a deeper epistemological dialectic concerning how Islam as a knowledge system (*ma'rifah*) responds to modern civilizational complexities. Analysis of Muhammadiyah's religious discourse identified three epistemological patterns forming the spectrum of contemporary Islamic understanding: an integrative affirmation pattern uniting maqashid and science, a puritanical resistance pattern maintaining spiritual-material dichotomy, and a selective negotiation pattern attempting to bridge both. These three patterns were not static typologies but rather dynamic representations of modern Islam's struggle in negotiating tradition with rationality imperatives.

Integrative Epistemology: Maqashid Syariah as Bridge Between Revelation and Science

Muhammadiyah's institutional response to the pandemic demonstrated how mature Islamic epistemology could integrate revelation (*naql*) and reason (*'aql*) without falling into dichotomous reductionism. This pattern was grounded in the principle of *hifzh al-nafs* (preservation of life) as one of *al-Dharuriyat al-Khams* that, within the maqashid syariah tradition, was understood not merely as a legal norm but as an ontological imperative affirming the sacredness of human life.⁵¹ Within this framework, scientific ikhtiar such as health protocols, vaccination, and physical distancing policies were not viewed as threats to tawakkal but rather as actualization of human responsibility as khalifah entrusted to preserve life.

The establishment of the Muhammadiyah Covid-19 Command Center (MCCC) merely three days following the government's announcement of the first case demonstrated internalization of an epistemology that positioned science as an instrument of worship (*'ibadah bi al-'ilm*). The mobilization of 86 hospitals, 455 universities, and distribution of assistance valued at Rp 522.7 billion to 45.1 million beneficiaries by October 2021 (Muhammadiyah. id, 8/6/2021) constituted not merely a pragmatic humanitarian response but a manifestation of the Progressive Islam paradigm that regarded civilizational advancement (*tamaddun*) as an integral component of religious mission. This paradigm aligned with Muhammad Iqbal's thought emphasizing that Islam demands an active attitude toward reality rather than fatalistic submission that ignores the law of causality (*sunnatullah*) established by God in the universe.

More epistemologically significant was how Muhammadiyah formulated fatwas and policies based on a synthesis between bayani methods (textual interpretation), *burhani* (rational-scientific analysis), and *irfani* (spiritual

51 Shāṭibī, *The Reconciliation of the Fundamentals of Islamic Law*.

empathy). Fatwas concerning postponement of congregational worship were not based solely on textual evidence but on contextual reading (*ta'wil*) that considered epidemiological data, consultation with health experts, and reflection on the substantive objective (*maqsid*) of religious rituals themselves.⁵² This approach rejected rigid literalism while avoiding secularism that separates religion from public life, offering a middle path reflecting the maturity of Islamic epistemology that has transcended tradition-modernity dichotomies.⁵³

Most crucially, however, was Muhammadiyah's critical stance toward state policies deemed to disregard the principle of life preservation. Criticism of new normal policies and relaxation of homecoming restrictions (Kompas.com, 21/09/2020; muhammadiyah.or.id, 06/03/2020) demonstrated that integrative epistemology did not entail blind subordination to state authority or scientific authority. Conversely, *maqashid syariah* functioned as a meta-criterion for evaluating the validity of public policies and scientific findings. In this context, Muhammadiyah displayed what Hallaq (2013) termed ethical rationality within Islamic tradition: rationality inseparable from moral and spiritual imperatives, distinct from the instrumental rationality dominant in Western modernity.

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52 Berita Resmi Muhammadiyah, "Berita Resmi Muhammadiyah : Nomor 03/2015-2020/Rabi'ul Akhir 1439 H/Januari 2018 M"; Suyadi, Nuryana, and Fauzi, "The Fiqh of Disaster: The Mitigation of Covid-19 in the Perspective of Islamic Education-Neuroscience."

53 Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*.

54 Shāṭibī, *The Reconciliation of the Fundamentals of Islamic Law*.

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Puritanical Resistance: Persistence of Spiritual-Material Dichotomy

The second pattern that emerged was puritanical resistance to scientific approaches, which viewed restrictions on religious rituals as threats to faith purity. This pattern was grounded in dichotomous understandings separat-

⁵⁵ Berita Resmi Muhammadiyah, "Berita Resmi Muhammadiyah : Nomor 03/2015-2020/Rabi'ul Akhir 1439 H/Januari 2018 M"; Suyadi, Nuryana, and Fauzi, "The Fiqh of Disaster: The Mitigation of Covid-19 in the Perspective of Islamic Education-Neuroscience."

⁵⁶ Wael B. Hallaq, *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 156-159.

ing the spiritual domain (*ruhani*) from the material domain (*jismani*), wherein the former was perceived as superior and the latter as inferior.⁵⁷ Within this logic, compliance with health protocols was interpreted as “fear of Covid-19” reflecting weak *tawakkal* toward God. Rhetorical argumentation such as “why should worship follow WHO’s school of thought?” reflected rejection of modern scientific epistemological authority deemed contradictory to revelatory authority.

Epistemologically, this resistance pattern constituted a manifestation of what Fazlur Rahman (2017) termed neo-literalism: the tendency to understand revelatory texts literalistically without considering historical and sociological contexts and the substantive objectives (*maqasid*) of Islamic teachings. Unlike classical literalism that still maintained the *ijtihad* tradition, contemporary neo-literalism tended to reject critical rationality and close the door of interpretation (*insidad bab al-ijtihad*), thus producing rigid Islamic understandings unresponsive to contemporary challenges. In the pandemic context, this neo-literalism manifested in vaccination refusal with arguments of “unclear halal status” despite MUI and Muhammadiyah’s Tarjih Council having issued fatwas affirming vaccination benefits based on emergency and necessity principles.⁵⁸

Sociologically interesting was that this puritanical resistance emerged not only among those traditionally considered conservative but also within segments of the Muhammadiyah community historically committed to Islamic modernism. This phenomenon revealed the complexity of contemporary Islamic epistemology that could not be understood through simple dichotomies between modernist versus traditionalist or progressive versus conservative.⁵⁹ Puritanical resistance in the digital era was more shaped by fragmentation of religious authority and proliferation of social media misinformation creating alternative epistemologies outside formal institutional

57 Ahmad Najib Burhani, “Treating Minorities with Fatwas: A Study of the Ahmadiyya Community in Indonesia,” *Contemporary Islam* 8, no. 3 (September 23, 2014): 285–301, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-013-0278-3>; Muhammad Fuad Zain and Abdul Basit, “Islam Syariat: Reproduksi Salafiyah Ideologis Di Indonesia,” *El-Aqwal : Journal of Sharia and Comparative Law*, November 22, 2024, 167–82, <https://doi.org/10.24090/el-aqwal.v3i2.12589>.

58 Amos Sukamto and S. Panca Parulian, “Religious Community Responses to the Public Policy of the Indonesian Government Related to the Covid-19 Pandemic,” *Journal of Law, Religion and State* 8, no. 2–3 (December 16, 2020): 273–83, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22124810-2020006>; Nur Shofa Ulfiyati and Akh. Syamsul Muniri, “Perbedaan Sanksi Bagi Pelaku Zina Dalam Hukum Pidana Islam Dan Hukum Pidana Positif,” *USRAH: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Islam* 3, no. 2 (October 14, 2022): 80–94, <https://doi.org/10.46773/USRAH.V3I1.482>.

59 Muttaqin, “Religion, Science, And Culture Amidst the Covid-19 Pandemic: Muhammadiyah’s Worship Guidance and Members’ Responses.”

structures.⁶⁰ In this context, conspiracy theories about the pandemic as “global anti-Islamic engineering” functioned as counter-narratives providing alternative meanings to the crisis while reinforcing religious identity perceived as threatened by secularism and globalization.

From the perspective of classical Islamic epistemology, this puritanical resistance reflected misunderstanding of the concepts of *tarwaqquf* (epistemological caution) and *ta'aqqul* (critical use of reason) emphasized by scholars such as Al-Ghazali and Ibn Khaldun. Al-Ghazali (2020) in *Al-Mustashfa* affirmed that although revelation constitutes the highest knowledge source, human reason possesses an important role in understanding the law of causality (*'ilm al-asbab*) operating in the universe. Ibn Khaldun (2015) further emphasized the importance of empirical observation (*mushahada*) and rational analysis (*qiyas 'aqli*) in understanding social and natural phenomena. Rejection of epidemiological findings and scientific data in the name of “*tawakkal*” actually contradicted the classical Islamic scholarly tradition that highly valued empirical observation and logical reasoning.

Selective Negotiation: Epistemological Hybridity at the Intersection of Tradition and Modernity

The third pattern was selective negotiation that accepted certain aspects of health protocols while maintaining specific ritual practices. This pattern reflected complex hermeneutic processes whereby Muslim communities attempted to balance public health demands with the need for continuity of religious identity.⁶¹ Practices such as conducting Friday prayers with strict health protocols or accepting vaccination while still believing that true healing comes from God demonstrated that the majority of Muslims did not live within rigid dichotomies between faith and science but rather in hybrid spaces continuously negotiating both.

Epistemologically, this selective negotiation constituted a manifestation of what Al-Attas (1993) termed the process of *ta'dib* (spiritual and intellectual education) that continuously unfolds in Muslim life. Unlike the integrative affirmation pattern reflecting institutional epistemological maturity, selective negotiation reflected a process of becoming at individual and local community levels—a process not always linear and often filled with internal tensions.

60 Druckman et al., “Affective Polarization, Local Contexts and Public Opinion in America”; Haynes, “Donald Trump, the Christian Right and COVID-19: The Politics of Religious Freedom.”

61 Mohammed. Arkoun and Robert D. Lee, *Rethinking Islam Common Questions, Uncommon Answers* (Routledge, 2019), https://books.google.com/books/about/Rethinking_Islam.html?hl=id&id=8B-eDwAAQBAJ; Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *Reformation of Islamic Thought: A Critical Historical Analysis* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 112-115.

In this context, epistemological hybridity was not a failure in internalizing Progressive Islam values but rather a natural expression of dialectics between text (*nass*) and context (*waqi'*), between teaching ideality (*mabadi'*) and social reality (*ahwal*).

What was interesting about the selective negotiation pattern was the emergence of creative practices combining religious rituals with public health concerns. Jogokariyan Mosque in Yogyakarta that kept the mosque open for congregational worship while providing free oxygen services and disinfectant facilities demonstrated how social solidarity and humanitarian empathy could be integrated into religious practices without sacrificing health prudence principles.⁶² This practice reflected deeper understanding of maqashid syariah that focused not only on preserving individual life but also on maintaining social cohesion (*hifzh al-jama'ah*) and concern for others (*tarahum*) as fundamental values in Islam.

However, selective negotiation also contained epistemological risks, particularly when selectivity was based on subjective or pragmatic considerations without clear maqashid frameworks. For instance, acceptance of vaccination accompanied by skepticism regarding its safety and halal status without strong scientific basis reflected epistemological fragmentation wherein institutional authority (MUI and Muhammadiyah fatwas) no longer served as the sole reference for the Muslim majority.⁶³ This phenomenon revealed challenges faced by modernist Islamic movements in the digital era, where democratization of access to religious information did not always produce epistemological enlightenment but often instead deepened fragmentation and relativism.

Dialectics of Puritanism, Political Identity, and Digital Knowledge Construction

These three epistemological patterns did not emerge in a vacuum but were shaped by dialectics among three major forces: religious puritanism, political identity, and knowledge construction within the digital ecosystem. Religious puritanism emphasizing purification of Islamic teachings from “innovations” and Western influences tended to produce skeptical attitudes toward modern science perceived as products of secular civilization.⁶⁴ In the pandemic context, this puritanism manifested in arguments that compliance

62 Wael B. Hallaq, *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 156-159.

63 Kusnadi, “Muhammadiyah Membangun Kesehatan Bangsa: Sehat Badannya Sehat Jiwanya.”

64 Burhani, “Treating Minorities with Fatwas: A Study of the Ahmadiyah Community in Indonesia”; Zain and Basit, “Islam Syariat: Reproduksi Salafiyah Ideologis Di Indonesia.”

with health protocols constituted a form of *"tasyabbuh"* (imitating unbelievers) that must be avoided. This logic reflected reductionist understandings of the concepts of jahiliyyah and jahili that did not distinguish between civilizational products of a technical-instrumental nature and ideologies contradicting tawhid.

Political identity complicated epistemological dialectics by making evaluations of pandemic policies contaminated by political polarization following the 2019 Presidential Election. In Jakarta and several other urban areas, attitudes toward government policies were often determined by political affiliation rather than purely epistemological considerations.⁶⁵ This phenomenon demonstrated how contemporary Islamic epistemology could not be understood apart from the socio-political context shaping it. When public health policies became politicized, religious responses to those policies also became politicized, thus obscuring boundaries between ijhtihad based on maqashid syariah and political positioning wrapped in religious rhetoric.

The digital information ecosystem exacerbated epistemological fragmentation by creating what are termed epistemic bubbles and echo chambers wherein individuals and groups were only exposed to information confirming their pre-existing beliefs.⁶⁶ In religious contexts, social media had given birth to alternative authority figures celebrity preachers, religious influencers, and dakwah accounts offering alternative religious interpretations outside traditional ulama structures or formal religious institutions. This democratization of authority possessed positive aspects in opening broader public participation spaces in religious discourse but also negative aspects in spreading interpretations lacking strong epistemological foundations and tending toward sensationalism.

Muhammadiyah's response to this epistemological fragmentation was to strengthen public education and religious literacy based on Progressive Islam values. However, the effectiveness of this strategy was highly dependent on cadre development capacity and the organization's epistemological credibility in the public eye.⁶⁷ In contexts where institutional authority continued to erode through information democratization and social fragmentation, the primary challenge was not merely producing epistemologically sound fatwas or policies but ensuring that these intellectual products could be effectively

65 Warburton, "Deepening Polarization and Democratic Decline in Indonesia"; Mietzner, "Populist Anti-Scientism, Religious Polarisation, and Institutionalised Corruption: How Indonesia's Democratic Decline Shaped Its COVID-19 Response."

66 Druckman et al., "Affective Polarization, Local Contexts and Public Opinion in America."

67 Muttaqin, "Religion, Science, And Culture Amidst the Covid-19 Pandemic: Muhammadiyah's Worship Guidance and Members' Responses."

communicated and accepted by increasingly plural and critical communities.

Implications for Reconstructing Contemporary Islamic Epistemology

Muhammadiyah's experience in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic offers important lessons for reconstructing Islamic epistemology in the 21st century. First, this study affirms that the integration of revelation and reason, faith and science, is not only possible but also constitutes a theological imperative rooted in the *maqashid syariah* tradition. The dichotomy between spiritual and material domains that persists in certain contemporary Islamic understandings must be dismantled through education emphasizing the unity of knowledge (*wahdat al-'ilm*) and the unity of existence (*wahdat al-wujud*) within the framework of tawhid.⁶⁸ From this perspective, modern science does not threaten faith but rather represents one of the ways humans read ayat kawuniyyah (the signs of God in the universe) that is complementary to reading ayat qur'aniyyah (the signs of God in the Quran).

Second, this study demonstrates the importance of institutionalizing integrative epistemology through systematic organizational structures, education, and cadre development. Muhammadiyah's success in mobilizing rapid and science-based responses to the pandemic was inseparable from the organization's long tradition of building educational, health, and social institutions grounded in Progressive Islam values.⁶⁹ In this context, institutionalization does not merely entail creating bureaucratic structures but rather constitutes a process of internalizing epistemological values into organizational culture and daily religious practices through continuous ta'dib.

Third, this study underscores the urgency of developing critical epistemological literacy among Muslims, particularly in confronting the fragmentation of religious authority and the proliferation of misinformation in the digital era. Epistemological literacy encompasses not only the ability to distinguish valid information from invalid information but also the capacity to understand how knowledge is produced, validated, and transmitted within both Islamic tradition and modern science.⁷⁰ In this context, Islamic education must transcend the passive transmission of doctrinal knowledge toward the formation of critical consciousness capable of conducting epistemological *ijtihad* when facing contemporary challenges.

Fourth, Muhammadiyah's response demonstrates that mature Islamic epistemology must possess an ethical-critical dimension that enables it to

68 Al-Attas, "Islam and Secularism."

69 Ahmad Jainuri, "Ideologi Kaum Reformis : Melacak Pandangan Keagamaan Muhammadiyah Periode Awal," 2002, https://lib.stitmuabdy.ac.id/index.php?p=show_detail&id=1592.

70 Iqbal, "The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam"; Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*.

evaluate not only the validity of knowledge but also the moral and social implications of applying that knowledge. Muhammadiyah's criticism of government policies that disregarded life preservation shows that *maqashid syariah* functions as a meta-criterion enabling Muslims to adopt critical positions toward both state authority and scientific authority when these contradict Islamic ethical-spiritual imperatives. In this context, Islam does not merely accept modernity passively but rather engages actively in critiquing and reconstructing modernity based on values and principles rooted in Islamic tradition itself.

Finally, this study affirms that Islamic epistemology constitutes a living and dynamic project rather than a closed and static system. The dialectic among patterns of integrative affirmation, puritanical resistance, and selective negotiation reflects the vitality of Islamic thought that continues to grapple with fundamental questions concerning the relationship between God and humans, revelation and reason, tradition and change. From this perspective, the epistemological crisis generated by the Covid-19 pandemic does not signify Islamic failure but rather represents a critical momentum for re-reflecting upon and strengthening the epistemological foundations that enable Islam to remain relevant and responsive to civilizational challenges in the 21st century.

Results and Discussion

Epistemological Spectrum of Islam in Responding to Crisis: Between Revelation, Reason, and Ikhtiar

The Covid-19 pandemic compelled Muslim communities to rearticulate the fundamental relationship between faith and reason, *tawakkal* and *ikhtiar*, revelation and science. Within the Muhammadiyah context, this articulation constituted not merely a practical jurisprudential matter concerning worship procedures during emergencies but rather a manifestation of a deeper epistemological dialectic concerning how Islam as a knowledge system (*ma'rifah*) responds to modern civilizational complexities. Analysis of Muhammadiyah's religious discourse identified three epistemological patterns forming the spectrum of contemporary Islamic understanding: (1) integrative affirmation uniting *maqashid* and science, (2) puritanical resistance maintaining spiritual-material dichotomy, and (3) selective negotiation attempting to bridge both. These three patterns were not static typologies but rather dynamic representations of modern Islam's struggle in negotiating tradition with rationality imperatives.

bility as *khalifah* entrusted to preserve life.

Institutional Mobilization: MCCC as Epistemological Praxis

The establishment of the Muhammadiyah Covid-19 Command Center (MCCC) merely three days following the government's announcement of the first case demonstrated internalization of an epistemology that positioned science as an instrument of worship (*'ibadah bi al-'ilm*). The mobilization of 86 hospitals, 455 universities, and distribution of assistance valued at Rp 522.7 billion to 45.1 million beneficiaries by October 2021⁷² constituted not merely a pragmatic humanitarian response but a manifestation of the Progressive Islam paradigm that regarded civilizational advancement (*tamaddun*) as an integral component of religious mission. This paradigm aligned with Muhammad Iqbal's thought emphasizing that Islam demands an active attitude toward reality rather than fatalistic submission that ignores the law of causality (*sunnatullah*) established by God in the universe.⁷³

However, the effectiveness of this institutional response in countering fragmented digital counter-narratives was uneven. While MCCC's scientific authority resonated strongly among educated, urban Muhammadiyah members with high institutional trust, it struggled to penetrate epistemological echo chambers dominated by celebrity preachers and social media influencers who framed pandemic policies as Western conspiracies.⁷⁴ Three factors limited MCCC's reach:

1. Communication asymmetry: Official institutional channels (websites, printed circulars, formal *pengajian*) could not match the viral velocity and emotional resonance of WhatsApp conspiracy videos and Telegram groups.
2. Epistemological crisis of institutional authority: In the digital age, religious authority is no longer monopolized by formal institutions but fragmented across multiple competing sources—each claiming authentic Islamic knowledge.
3. Political contamination: Government association with MCCC initiatives created suspicion among politically oppositional segments who

⁷² aanadianto, "Muhammadiyah Telah Mengelontorkan Lebih Dari Rp 346 M Untuk Penanganan Covid-19 Di Indonesia | Muhammadiyah," 2021, <https://muhammadiyah.or.id/2021/06/muhammadiyah-telah-mengelontorkan-lebih-dari-rp-346-m-untuk-penanganan-covid-19-di-indonesia/>.

⁷³ Iqbal, "The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam."

⁷⁴ Wdiyanto, "Religion and Covid-19 in the Era of Post-Truth: The Case of Indonesia."

perceived pandemic policies as instruments of state control rather than public health imperatives.

Synthesis of Bayani, Burhani, and Irfani Methods

More epistemologically significant was how Muhammadiyah formulated fatwas and policies based on a synthesis between bayani methods (textual interpretation), burhani (rational-scientific analysis), and irfani (spiritual empathy). This tripartite integration deserves emphasis because the irfani dimension is often neglected in analyses that focus solely on text-reason dialectics.⁷⁵

The specific function of irfani in pandemic fatwa formulation was to incorporate the spiritual suffering of the ummah alongside epidemiological data and textual evidence. For example, when the Tarjih Council deliberated on suspending congregational prayers during Ramadan 2020—an emotionally wrenching decision—the irfani approach enabled leaders to acknowledge the profound psychological and spiritual pain (ghaflah, spiritual alienation) experienced by Muslims separated from communal worship.⁷⁶ This empathetic recognition did not negate the scientific imperative to prevent viral transmission but rather framed the policy as a temporary sacrifice rooted in compassion (rahmah) for the community’s holistic well-being, not merely physical health.

Thus, the *irfani* method functioned as an emotional-spiritual bridge that prevented the *burhani* (scientific) rationale from appearing cold, technocratic, or insufficiently grounded in Islamic values. It humanized the epistemological integration by centering the lived experience of believers navigating unprecedented crisis.

Critical Stance Toward State Policies: Maqashid as Meta-Criterion

Most crucially, Muhammadiyah’s critical stance toward state policies deemed to disregard the principle of life preservation revealed the dual nature of its critique. Muhammadiyah’s criticism of “new normal” policies and relaxation of homecoming restrictions (*mudik*) was rooted in both dimensions:

1. Critique of state competence (lack of scientific rigor): The organization argued that the government prematurely eased restrictions without sufficient epidemiological justification, contradicting WHO guidelines and risking exponential transmission.

⁷⁵ Al-Attas, “Islam and Secularism.”

⁷⁶ Muttaqin, “Religion, Science, And Culture Amidst the Covid-19 Pandemic: Muhammadiyah’s Worship Guidance and Members’ Responses.”

2. Critique of moral prioritization (prioritizing economy over *hifzh al-nafs*): More fundamentally, Muhammadiyah accused the state of subordinating the sacred imperative of life preservation to economic expediency and political pressure from business elites.

This dual critique clarifies the exact role of *maqashid* as a meta-criterion: it functions simultaneously as an empirical validity check (are policies scientifically sound?) and a moral priority framework (do policies honor the hierarchy of Islamic values?). In this context, Muhammadiyah displayed what Hallaq (2013) termed ethical rationality within Islamic tradition: rationality inseparable from moral and spiritual imperatives, distinct from the instrumental rationality dominant in Western modernity.⁷⁷

Critically, this integrative epistemology did not entail blind subordination to state authority or scientific authority. Rather, *maqashid syariah* functioned as a transcendent reference point enabling the organization to maintain critical distance from both political power and scientific technocracy when these contradicted Islamic ethical-spiritual imperatives.

Puritanical Resistance: Persistence of Spiritual-Material Dichotomy

The second pattern that emerged was puritanical resistance to scientific approaches, which viewed restrictions on religious rituals as threats to faith purity. This pattern was grounded in dichotomous understandings separating the spiritual domain (*ruhani*) from the material domain (*jismani*), wherein the former was perceived as superior and the latter as inferior.⁷⁸ Within this logic, compliance with health protocols was interpreted as “fear of Covid-19” reflecting weak *tawakkal* toward God. Rhetorical argumentation such as “why should worship follow WHO’s school of thought?” reflected rejection of modern scientific epistemological authority deemed contradictory to revelatory authority.⁷⁹

The concept of “weak *tawakkal*” among those who followed health protocols specifically functioned as a political and social control mechanism within puritanical groups in three ways:

1. Boundary policing: Labeling compliance with scientific protocols as “weak faith” served to demarcate community boundaries, distin-

⁷⁷ Wael B. Hallaq, “The Impossible State : Islam, Politics, and Modernity’s Moral Predicament,” 2013, 256.

⁷⁸ Ahmad Najib Burhani, “Treating Minorities with Fatwas: A Study of the Ahmadiyya Community in Indonesia,” *Contemporary Islam* 8, no. 3 (September 23, 2014): 285–301, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-013-0278-3>.

⁷⁹ Muhammad Fuad Zain and Abdul Basit, “Islam Syariat: Reproduksi Salafiyah Ideologis Di Indonesia,” *El-Aqwal : Journal of Sharia and Comparative Law*, November 22, 2024, 167–82, <https://doi.org/10.24090/el-aqwal.v3i2.12589>.

- guishing “true believers” (who reject state/scientific authority) from “compromised Muslims” (who accommodate secular knowledge).
2. Moral hierarchization: It established an implicit hierarchy of piety, wherein those who continued congregational worship despite pandemic risks were valorized as possessing superior *iman*, while cautious individuals were stigmatized as deficient in trust in God.
 3. Ostracization dynamics: This rhetoric socially ostracized science-compliant individuals, creating peer pressure to conform to puritanical norms even among those privately convinced by epidemiological evidence. Fear of being labeled “weak in faith” compelled performative religiosity that prioritized communal visibility over personal or public health.
 4. Thus, the “weak *tawakkal*” discourse operated not merely as theological disagreement but as disciplinary power (in Foucauldian terms) that regulated behavior through shame, exclusion, and the threat of spiritual illegitimacy.⁸⁰

Neo-Literalism and the Closure of Ijtihad

Epistemologically, this resistance pattern constituted a manifestation of what Fazlur Rahman (2017) termed neo-literalism: the tendency to understand revelatory texts literalistically without considering historical and sociological contexts and the substantive objectives (*maqasid*) of Islamic teachings.⁸¹ Unlike classical literalism that still maintained the *ijtihad* tradition, contemporary neo-literalism tended to reject critical rationality and close the door of interpretation (*insidad bab al-ijtihad*), thus producing rigid Islamic understandings unresponsive to contemporary challenges.⁸²

In the pandemic context, this neo-literalism manifested in vaccination refusal with arguments of “unclear halal status” despite MUI and Muhammadiyah’s Tarjih Council having issued fatwas affirming vaccination benefits based on emergency (*darurah*) and necessity (*hajah*) principles.[26] From the perspective of classical Islamic epistemology, this puritanical resistance reflected misunderstanding of the concepts of *tawaqquf* (epistemological caution) and *ta’aqul* (critical use of reason) emphasized by scholars such as Al-Ghazali and Ibn Khaldun. Al-Ghazali affirmed that although revelation constitutes the highest knowledge source, human reason possesses an important role in understanding the law of causality (*ilm al-asbab*) operating in

80 Michel Foucault, *Viviane de Santana Paulo A Migração Como Expansão Da Realidade e Renovação Das Culturas*, 1969. 195-228.

81 Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*, University of Chicago Press, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226702803.001.0001>.

82 Rahman.

the universe. Ibn Khaldun further emphasized the importance of empirical observation (*mushahada*) and rational analysis (*qiyas 'aqli*) in understanding social and natural phenomena.

Organizational Breakdown and Digital Misinformation Susceptibility

Sociologically significant was that this puritanical resistance emerged not only among those traditionally considered conservative but also within segments of the Muhammadiyah community historically committed to Islamic modernism.⁸³ This phenomenon revealed the complexity of contemporary Islamic epistemology that could not be understood through simple dichotomies between modernist versus traditionalist or progressive versus conservative.

What specific organizational or communication breakdown within Muhammadiyah allowed these members to become susceptible to digital misinformation and conspiracy theories that ran counter to the official institutional line? Four interrelated factors explain this vulnerability:

1. Generational digital divide: Older Muhammadiyah leaders (60+ years) who dominated formal decision-making structures were less adept at digital communication and social media engagement compared to younger, tech-savvy members who consumed religious content primarily through Instagram, YouTube, and Telegram.
2. Weak local branch integration: Members in rural or peripheral branches with limited direct contact with central leadership relied heavily on informal digital networks for religious guidance, creating epistemological gaps where alternative authorities (celebrity preachers, transnational Salafi networks) filled the vacuum.
3. Insufficient counter-narrative infrastructure: While Muhammadiyah produced scientifically grounded fatwas, it lacked a strategic digital communication apparatus capable of translating complex epistemological arguments into emotionally resonant, viral-ready content that could compete with sensationalist conspiracy theories.
4. Political polarization spillover: Post-2019 electoral polarization created ideological fractures within Muhammadiyah, wherein members aligned with opposition politics became predisposed to distrust government-endorsed health policies and, by extension, the organization's official stance supporting those policies.

Thus, the organizational breakdown was not primarily doctrinal (Muhammadiyah's theological position remained clear) but rather communicative and structural—a failure to effectively transmit institutional epis-

⁸³ Muttaqin, "Religion, Science, And Culture Amidst the Covid-19 Pandemic: Muhammadiyah's Worship Guidance and Members' Responses."

temology across generational, geographic, and digital divides in an era of fragmented information ecosystems.

Selective Negotiation: Epistemological Hybridity at the Intersection of Tradition and Modernity

The third pattern was selective negotiation that accepted certain aspects of health protocols while maintaining specific ritual practices. This pattern reflected complex hermeneutic processes whereby Muslim communities attempted to balance public health demands with the need for continuity of religious identity.⁸⁴ Practices such as conducting Friday prayers with strict health protocols or accepting vaccination while still believing that true healing comes from God demonstrated that the majority of Muslims did not live within rigid dichotomies between faith and science but rather in hybrid spaces continuously negotiating both.⁸⁵

Analytical Distinction from Puritanical Resistance

How does Selective Negotiation analytically differ from Puritanical Resistance? The key distinction lies in epistemic stance and motivational logic:

Dimension	Puritanical Resistance	Selective Negotiation
Epistemic stance	Ideological certainty; absolute prioritization of textual authority over empirical evidence	Pragmatic flexibility; context-dependent balancing of religious and scientific knowledge
Motivational logic	Driven by ideological conviction and conspiracy theories (e.g., pandemic as anti-Islamic plot)	Driven by individual convenience, local context, and practical necessity
Attitude toward institutional authority	Rejects both state and religious institutional authority (MUI, Tarjih Council fatwas)	Selectively accepts institutional authority depending on personal judgment and community norms

⁸⁴ Ben Bland, "Politics in Indonesia: Resilient Elections, Defective Democracy," *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies* (Taylor and Francis Ltd., September 2, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1080/00074918.2018.1549918>.

⁸⁵ Heinz, "COVID-19 and Religion."

Relationship to scientific evidence	Actively dismisses or reinterprets scientific data to align with preconceived theological commitments	Acknowledges scientific validity but subordinates it to situational religious or social priorities

Thus, Selective Negotiation is not a diluted form of Puritanical Resistance but rather a distinct epistemological mode characterized by fluidity and contextual adaptation rather than rigid ideological commitment.⁸⁶ While Puritanical Resistance is dogmatic (rejecting science on principle), Selective Negotiation is situational (accommodating science pragmatically while preserving religious identity markers).

Epistemological Risks: Subjectivity vs. Fragmentation

What is the most significant epistemological risk associated with this pattern? The primary risk is dual-faceted:

1. Risk of subjectivity (convenience-based selectivity): When individuals pick and choose which protocols to follow based on personal comfort rather than coherent ethical frameworks, epistemological integrity erodes. For example, accepting vaccination (low personal cost) while rejecting mask mandates (higher discomfort) reflects arbitrary selectivity lacking principled *maqashid* reasoning.[39]
2. Risk of fragmentation (erosion of institutional authority): More fundamentally, Selective Negotiation signals the declining binding power of formal religious institutions (MUI, Muhammadiyah Tarjih Council) as sole arbiters of Islamic knowledge. When individuals feel epistemically authorized to override institutional fatwas based on subjective judgment, it accelerates the democratization—and fragmentation—of religious authority in the digital age.[40]

However, this pattern also contains constructive potential: creative practices like Jogokariyan Mosque in Yogyakarta—which kept the mosque open for congregational worship while providing free oxygen services and disinfectant facilities—demonstrated how social solidarity and humanitarian empathy could be integrated into religious practices without sacrificing health prudence principles.⁸⁷ This practice reflected deeper understanding of *maqashid syariah* that focused not only on preserving individual life but also

⁸⁶ Pieterse and Landman, “Religious Views on the Origin and Meaning of COVID-2019.”

⁸⁷ Ary Widiyanto et al., “An IAD Framework Analysis of Social Forestry Institutional Transformation: A Case of Forest Areas with Special Management (KH-DPK) in Indonesia,” *Social Sciences & Humanities Open* 12 (January 2025): 101928, <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.SSAHO.2025.101928>.

on maintaining social cohesion (*hifzh al-jama'ah*) and concern for others (*tarahum*) as fundamental values in Islam.

The epistemological challenge, therefore, is not to eliminate Selective Negotiation (which may be inevitable given human diversity) but rather to channel it toward *maqashid*-informed hybrid practices rather than arbitrary, self-serving compromises.

Dialectics of Puritanism, Political Identity, and Digital Knowledge Con-

These three epistemological patterns did not emerge in a vacuum but were shaped by dialectics among three major external forces: (1) religious puritanism, (2) political identity polarization, and (3) digital knowledge fragmentation.

Figure 2: Force-Pattern Interaction Diagram

Figure 2 visualizes the dynamic relationship between the three external forces and the three epistemological patterns. Religious puritanism primarily drives Puritanical Resistance but also influences Selective Negotiation when puritan discourse stigmatizes full compliance with health protocols. Political identity contamination affects all three patterns: it can reinforce Integrative Affirmation among pro-government members, fuel Puritanical Resistance among opposition-aligned members, and create ambivalence in Selective Negotiation. The digital ecosystem both fragments authority (weakening Integrative Affirmation's institutional basis) and amplifies puritanical counter-narratives (strengthening Resistance and complicating Negotiation).

Religious Puritanism as Epistemic Framework

Religious puritanism emphasizing purification of Islamic teachings from "innovations" (*bid'ah*) and Western influences tended to produce skeptical attitudes toward modern science perceived as products of secular civilization.⁸⁸ In the pandemic context, this puritanism manifested in arguments that compliance with health protocols constituted a form of "*tasyabbuh*" (imitating unbelievers) that must be avoided.[46] This logic reflected reductionist understandings of the concepts of jahiliyyah and jahili that did not distinguish between civilizational products of a technical-instrumental nature (e.g., vaccines, epidemiology) and ideologies contradicting tawhid (e.g., secularism, materialism).⁸⁹

Classical Islamic scholarship recognized this distinction: technological borrowing from non-Muslims (*isti'arah*) was permissible and even encouraged when it served Islamic objectives (*masalih*), whereas adopting belief

⁸⁸ Weber, *Econ. Soc. An Outl. Interpret. Sociol.* Berkeley.

⁸⁹ Zain and Basit, "Islam Syariat: Reproduksi Salafiyah Ideologis Di Indonesia."

systems contradicting divine sovereignty was prohibited. The puritanical collapse of this distinction represents epistemological regression rather than authentic retrieval of tradition.

Political Identity as Epistemological Contaminant

Political identity complicated epistemological dialectics by making evaluations of pandemic policies contaminated by political polarization following the 2019 Presidential Election. In Jakarta and several other urban areas, attitudes toward government policies were often determined by political affiliation rather than purely epistemological considerations. This phenomenon demonstrated how contemporary Islamic epistemology could not be understood apart from the socio-political context shaping it. When public health policies became politicized, religious responses to those policies also became politicized, thus obscuring boundaries between *ijtihad* based on *maqashid syariah* and political positioning wrapped in religious rhetoric.

Digital Ecosystem as Epistemological Fragmentor

The digital information ecosystem exacerbated epistemological fragmentation by creating what are termed epistemic bubbles and echo chambers wherein individuals and groups were only exposed to information confirming their pre-existing beliefs. In religious contexts, social media had given birth to alternative authority figures—celebrity preachers, religious influencers, and *dakwah* accounts offering alternative religious interpretations outside traditional *ulama* structures or formal religious institutions.

How did fragmentation of religious authority specifically empower the Puritanical pattern over the Integrative one in the public sphere? Three mechanisms explain this dynamic:

1. Emotional resonance advantage: Puritanical messages framing pandemic restrictions as religious persecution or global conspiracies exploited fear, anger, and identity threat—emotions that trigger higher engagement and virality than the measured, evidence-based discourse of formal institutions.
2. Algorithmic amplification: Social media algorithms prioritize sensational, divisive content over nuanced, balanced analysis, systematically favoring puritanical counter-narratives over institutional epistemologies.
3. Credibility inversion in crisis: During crises marked by state incompetence and elite hypocrisy (e.g., officials violating their own health protocols), anti-establishment voices gained credibility by positioning themselves as authentic truth-tellers against corrupt institutions—

even when their claims lacked epistemic rigor.

Thus, puritanical figures did not necessarily use social media better than official institutions in a technical sense, but their messages were structurally more compatible with the emotional, participatory, and anti-institutional logic of digital media ecosystems. Their narratives offered simplicity, certainty, and identity affirmation in a moment of existential anxiety psychological goods that scientifically complex, institutionally cautious Integrative epistemology struggled to provide.

Muhammadiyah's response to this epistemological fragmentation was to strengthen public education and religious literacy based on Progressive Islam values. However, the effectiveness of this strategy was highly dependent on cadre development capacity and the organization's epistemological credibility in the public eye. In contexts where institutional authority continued to erode through information democratization and social fragmentation, the primary challenge was not merely producing epistemologically sound fatwas or policies but ensuring that these intellectual products could be effectively communicated and accepted by increasingly plural and critical communities.⁹⁰

Implications for Reconstructing Contemporary Islamic Epistemology

Muhammadiyah's experience in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic offers crucial lessons for reconstructing Islamic epistemology in the 21st century:

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⁹⁰ Riskawati et al., "Faith-Driven Leaders in a Non-Theocratic Country: Internalizing Muhammadiyah Values in Local Governance."

constitutes a process of internalizing epistemological values into organizational culture and daily religious practices through continuous *ta'dib*.

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Fourth, Muhammadiyah's response demonstrates that mature Islamic epistemology must possess an ethical-critical dimension that enables it to evaluate not only the validity of knowledge but also the moral and social implications of applying that knowledge. Muhammadiyah's criticism of government policies that disregarded life preservation shows that *maqashid syariah* functions as a meta-criterion enabling Muslims to adopt critical positions toward both state authority and scientific authority when these contradict Islamic ethical-spiritual imperatives. In this context, Islam does not merely accept modernity passively but rather engages actively in critiquing and reconstructing modernity based on values and principles rooted in Islamic tradition itself.

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Muhammadiyah's experience demonstrates that Islam as a civilization of knowledge (*hadarah al-'ilm*) possesses the vitality to remain relevant and responsive to global crises, provided that Muslim communities can maintain the ethical-critical dimension rooted in *maqashid syariah* as a meta-criterion for evaluating knowledge validity and the moral implications of its application. The path forward requires not abandoning Islamic epistemological tradition but rather deepening, contextualizing, and digitally adapting it to meet the challenges of an interconnected, information-saturated, crisis-prone

21st century.

Conclusion

This study has shown that the epistemological responses of Muhammadiyah members during the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be understood apart from the interplay between religious doctrine, political identity, and the digital circulation of knowledge. The three epistemological patterns identified—Integrative Affirmation, Puritanical Resistance, and Selective Negotiation—illustrate the range of ways in which individuals navigated tensions between scriptural authority and scientific expertise. While the organization officially promotes an integrative approach grounded in the Progressive Islam paradigm, individual members frequently diverged from this orientation, demonstrating that epistemology belongs fundamentally to persons rather than institutions.

The findings indicate that these epistemological tendencies are driven by broader social forces. Religious puritanism reinforced literalist resistance, political polarization both intensified and destabilized epistemic positions, and digital fragmentation weakened traditional authority structures while amplifying counter-narratives. These dynamics produced patterns that were fluid, hybrid, and at times contradictory, reflecting the contemporary challenges faced by Muslim communities as they negotiate competing forms of expertise and legitimacy.

Although the study provides insight into these dynamics, it remains limited by its temporal focus on the early pandemic period and by its partial engagement with the historical legacies that shaped Muhammadiyah's modernist orientation. Colonial educational policies, postcolonial developmentalism, and long-standing debates on science and religion continue to frame current epistemological debates, yet fall beyond the study's primary scope. Future research that adopts a longitudinal or genealogical approach would allow for a deeper understanding of how these epistemic negotiations evolve across time and across different social strata within the organization.

Despite these constraints, the study contributes meaningfully to discussions on Islamic thought and modernity by illustrating how a major Muslim organization and its members engage with scientific rationality under the pressure of public-health crisis, political identity struggles, and digital-era transformations. The patterns revealed here may hold analytical relevance for other modernist Muslim movements confronting similar tensions in diverse sociopolitical contexts.

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