

RELIGIOSITY AND SPIRITUALITY IN THE
MODERNIZATION FRAMEWORK
ACCORDING TO SUTAN TAKDIR ALISJAHBANA

Waode Zainab Zilullah Toresano
Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Sadra, Jakarta, Indonesia
Email: waode.zainab.zt@gmail.com

Endang Sri Rahayu
Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Sadra, Jakarta, Indonesia
Email: zainab.endang@gmail.com

Corresponding Author: Waode Zainab Zilullah Toresano

Abstract: The background of this research is the phenomenon of a crisis of human values within the framework of modernization in contemporary discourse, which necessitates 'change'. In Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana's perspective, modernity, on the one hand, has a positive impact because it encourages the realization of progress based on knowledge. On the other hand, according to Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana, modernity can cause problems, such as paradoxes and tragedies. Therefore, modernization impacts religiosity and spirituality, which are inherent in humans. This research aims to analyze religiosity and spirituality within the framework of modernization referring to Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana's point of view. Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana is not only known as an Indonesian litterateur and cultural figure but also as a philosopher familiar with the discourse of philosophy. This research employs a methodology using library research techniques, including collecting, reading, studying, reviewing, dissecting, and researching books and journal articles related to this topic. In conducting this research, researchers utilized a philosophical approach. The result of this research is that Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana's philosophical thought views 'modernity' within the framework of modernization, can place religiosity and

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spirituality in a wise response as a human expression in the search for and journey towards the Holy One/ the Ultimate Reality.

Keywords: Religiosity, Spirituality, Modernization, Philosophy, Religious Studies, Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana

Introduction

The crisis of human values in the era of modernization creates an urgent need to make substantial changes in the social order and individuals. This phenomenon encourages deep reflection on how modernity affects fundamental aspects of humanity, including religiosity and spirituality. This research aims to analyze Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana's thoughts regarding the impact of modernization on religiosity and spirituality. By understanding STA's views, it is hoped that a comprehensive perspective can be found on how humans can navigate the challenges of modernization without losing spiritual and religious essence.

STA, a distinguished cultural figure, writer, and expert in Indonesian grammar, was born in Natal, North Sumatra, on February 11, 1908, and passed away in Bogor on July 17, 1994. STA received a top-tier education, attending Hollandsch Inlandsche School (HIS) in Bengkulu, Kweekschool in Bukittinggi, Hogere Kweekschool (HKS) in Bandung, and earning a master's degree from the High Court School in Jakarta in 1942.¹

According to him, human beings are responsible in shaping and molding civilization or culture. Therefore, the achievement of a civilization or culture reflects a community's capability.² Through the creation of humans, God said that humans would be His caliphs or representatives on earth. Thus, the relationship between humans, the universe, and God is a timeless inevitability. Humans have duties and responsibilities in this world, but in connection with God, as a trust giver.

Unfortunately, in this modern era, Muslims are experiencing degradation compared to the glory days of Islamic civilization. Most Muslims are not dynamic, so they have lost the spirit of Islam. Muslims

¹ Fauzi, Muhammad, (2011), *Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana dan Perjuangan Kebudayaan Indonesia, 1908-1994*. Jakarta: Dian Rakyat. p.6.

² S. Takdir Alisjahbana, (1966), *Values as integrating forces in personality, society, and culture*, Kuala Lumpur: Universiti Malaya. p. 149.

tend to surround themselves with rigid boundaries, thereby regressing like a snail that is afraid of developments around it.³ Based on that, religiosity and spirituality within the framework of modernity refer to STA's point of view as being relevant to the study.

Problem

How does respond of modernization to religiosity and spirituality according to Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana (STA)?

Results and Discussion

1. STA's Thoughts on Modernization

STA's thoughts leaned towards pro-modernization and pro-Western ideologies, often setting him apart from other Indonesian intellectuals. He was deeply concerned with the anti-materialistic, anti-modernization, and anti-Western sentiments among Indonesian intellectuals. In his view, Indonesia needed to address its backwardness by pursuing material wealth, modernizing its thinking, and embracing Western knowledge.⁴

According to STA, modernization is a transformation process that includes changes in social, economic and cultural structures, which are driven by developments in science and technology. Modernization is seen as a means of achieving progress and improving the quality of human life. STA was influenced by Oswald Spengler's thoughts in 1918. Spengler wrote a work entitled "*The Collapse of the Western World*" in which Spengler views great cultures as organisms. STA was influenced by the understanding of cultural unity and identity.⁵

STA admires modernity for its pursuit of progress and continuous advancement driven by science. Unlike pre-modern societies that aim to preserve the status quo, modernity prioritizes scientific and economic values over religious and artistic ones. STA distinguishes between cultures of expression, guided by religious values and community, and progressive cultures, dominated by science and economics. Despite his reverence for modernity, STA acknowledges

³ Alisjahbana, Sutan Takdir et.al. (2021). *Sumbangan Islam terhadap Sains dan Peradaban Dunia*. Bandung: Nuansa Cendekia. p. 23.

⁴ Sutherland, Heather (1968). "Pudjangga Baru: Aspects of Indonesian Intellectual Life in the 1930s." *Indonesia* 6 (2). DOI: 10.2307/3350714. p.122.

⁵ Franz Magnis Suseno. (2005). *Pijar-pijar Filsafat: Dari Gatholoco ke Filsafat Perempuan, dari Adam Muller ke Postmodernisme*. Yogyakarta: Penerbit KANISIUS, pp. 137-138.

its paradox: humans, in their quest to master nature and achieve freedom, become dependent on it, losing the liberty to reflect on their fate. His views align with the Frankfurt School, particularly Horkheimer and Adorno's critiques of rationality.⁶

Modernity is an unstoppable cultural revolution driven by two main factors: the development of a radically new way of thinking characterized by individualism and materialism, and the dense international communication that spreads these ideas globally. Modern individuals reject traditional authority and embrace undeniable sensory reality, making them inherently individualistic. This pervasive way of thinking cannot be contained due to increasing global interactions.⁷

In the Indonesian context, STA believes that modernization should be undertaken with wisdom, respecting local contexts and cultural values to avoid societal paradoxes and tragedies. He critiques approaches that disregard traditions and identities, advocating for the selective integration of Western influences to advance Indonesia. STA sees culture as dynamic, evolving with environmental, technological, and socio-economic changes, and stresses the need to balance modernity with the preservation of essential traditional elements. His work highlights the benefits and drawbacks of modernization on Indonesia's social and economic development, emphasizing the tension between modernity and cultural integrity, and the necessity for harmonious coexistence between the two.

However, in line with his belief that the future of humanity will encompass the values of science, technology, and economics alongside expressive values that seem to be sidelined during the modernization phase, STA asserted that Indonesia's modernization will not culminate in a culture solely dominated by scientific and technological economic calculations. Instead, the quest for a new identity as a modern Indonesian nation does not necessitate abandoning its inherent values. STA emphasized that individuals and groups must recognize the six universal value groups, which vary across cultures.⁸

The configuration of these values determines which ones are dominant and unique to each nation. He was particularly fascinated by

⁶ Franz Magnis Suseno. (2005). *Pijar-pijar Filsafat: Dari Gatholoco ke Filsafat Perempuan, dari Adam Muller ke Postmodernisme*. *Pijar-pijar Filsafat*, p. 138.

⁷ Franz Magnis Suseno. *Pijar-pijar Filsafat: Dari Gatholoco ke Filsafat Perempuan, dari Adam Muller ke Postmodernisme*, pp. 140-141.

⁸ Franz Magnis Suseno. *Pijar-pijar Filsafat: Dari Gatholoco ke Filsafat Perempuan, dari Adam Muller ke Postmodernisme*, p.142.

how art permeates all aspects of life in Indonesian society. For STA, this artistic integration, especially as seen in Bali, epitomizes the Indonesian spirit's genius and aesthetic value. STA's ideals about Indonesia are that Indonesia dares to become a country that is as modern as modern. But in that it maintains its type as a nation that naturally appreciates the aesthetics of becoming a distinctive and unique culture which in its uniqueness can contribute to universal human culture.⁹

2. Relation of Religiosity and Spirituality in Modern Society

Religiosity is the quality of being very or too religious, or reminding you of religious behavior.¹⁰ Meanwhile, spirituality is the quality that involves deep feelings and beliefs of a religious nature, rather than the physical parts of life.¹¹ Religiosity in the STA's view is a deep commitment to spiritual values that are manifested in religious practice. It includes beliefs, rituals, and personal relationships with the Sacred. Meanwhile, spirituality in the STA view is a personal search and experience of the Supreme Reality or the Holy. It is broader than just religious practice, encompassing aspects such as meditation, reflection, and connection with nature.

STA views religiosity as an important moral and ethical foundation in facing the challenges of modernization. Religiosity helps maintain a balance between material progress and human values. Meanwhile, STA emphasizes the importance of integrating spirituality in modern life to find deeper meaning and purpose in life. This can help individuals and society not to get trapped in materialism and hedonism.

Unfortunately, Muslims in this modern era are still stuck in the middle of nowhere. Thus, religiosity and spirituality are only interpreted outwardly. Differences in views in interpreting Islam in religion are also considered heretical. In fact, in this modern era, society is increasingly open because it is very easy to access knowledge from various sources, both online and offline. According to the STA, religiosity can function as a moral control against the excesses of

⁹ Franz Magnis Suseno. *Pijar-pijar Filsafat: Dari Gatholoco ke Filsafat Perempuan, dari Adam Muller ke Postmodernisme*. pp.142-143.

¹⁰ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/religiosity>

¹¹ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/spirituality>

modernization. Religiosity provides an ethical framework that guides human actions in achieving progress without sacrificing human values.

STA's views on the interplay between religiosity and modernization. The authors delve into how STA perceived the relationship between religious beliefs and the processes of modernization in Indonesian society. They analyze STA's writings and perspectives to elucidate his stance on whether modernization and religious values can coexist harmoniously or if they are inherently conflicting. The paper likely examines STA's arguments regarding the role of religion in shaping societal values amidst the challenges posed by modernity. It provides insights into how STA's thoughts on religiosity and modernization contribute to broader discussions within Indonesian philosophy and cultural studies.¹²

3. Culture and Philosophy as Foundations

STA's thinking is relevant in dealing with contemporary issues such as the value crisis, environmental degradation, and social injustice. His holistic approach offers a way to integrate material progress with spiritual and intellectual wisdom. In his great work, *Values as Integrating Forces in Personality, Society, and Culture: Essay of a New Anthropology*, STA analyzed culture from a value perspective. According to him, culture is a manifestation of values. STA, referring to E. Spranger's classification of values, identifies six main values in every culture, namely theoretical, economic, religious, artistic, power and solidarity values. Each of these values is related to the context of identity, utility or usefulness, holiness, expressivity, politics, and cooperation, and has its logic, goals, norms, and realities.¹³

The dominant values in structuring community organizations are the values of power and solidarity. The value of power unites groups through power and rules that support the exercise of that power. However, the value of power is not the only important thing, because the value of solidarity also plays a big role. Solidarity reflects equality, friendship, and cooperation. Therefore, power practices that

¹² Jegalus, N. (2020). Modernizing Religion and Culture: Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana's Philosophical Perspective of Values. *Indonesian Journal of Interdisciplinary Islamic Studies (IJIS)*, 1-22.

¹³ Pusat Data dan Analisa Tempo. *Memoar Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana*. Jakarta: TEMPO Publishing. 2019, p. 92.

tend to be authoritarian need to be balanced by the value of solidarity, which reflects a checks and balances mechanism.¹⁴

Referring to the time of the Prophet Muhammad, Islamic culture developed significantly and continuously in line with the development of thought and the expansion of political power. In this period, we see the influence of culture on the religiosity and spirituality of Muslims at that time. Islam does not deny culture, it even makes culture part of Islam. Thus, a diversity of structures, ideas, and institutions was formed in Islam which became the characteristics of one Muslim community from another. In fact, according to STA, culture has always developed in the Islamic world since the Prophet Muhammad Saw., the Rashidun Caliph, and the Empire. Islamic leaders and intellectuals at that time even absorbed and adopted old cultures that were thousands of years old, such as Persian, Greek, Roman, Indian, and Chinese culture.¹⁵

This phenomenon proves that the development of Islam is closely related to culture; precisely the unification of major cultural elements in one container, namely Islam. Nevertheless, the development of Islamic culture was centered on the Al-Qur'an and Hadith but moved dynamically as an effort to get out of the cultural backwardness of the *jahiliyya* Arab nation. For example, from Persian and Byzantine culture, Islam draws on various systems of state and military organization, as well as various ceremonial and artistic styles. From Greece, Islam took philosophy and science.¹⁶

However, in Islam, the elements acquired are not imitated, but rather developed and given an Islamic form to them. Thus, the development of Islamic civilization was achieved quite rapidly in five centuries. During the heyday of Islam, Islamic experts emerged from various scientific backgrounds, such as religion, science, philosophy, literature, and art. Without a doubt, Islamic civilization eventually became a reference for other civilizations, including the West (Europe).

¹⁴ Pusat Data dan Analisa Tempo. *Memoar Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana*. Jakarta: TEMPO Publishing. 2019, pp. 92-93.

¹⁵ Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana et.al., (2021). *Sumbangan Islam terhadap Sains dan Peradaban Dunia*, Bandung: Nuansa Cendekia, pp.9-10.

¹⁶ Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana et.al., (2021). *Sumbangan Islam terhadap Sains dan Peradaban Dunia*, Bandung: Nuansa Cendekia, pp.10-11.

This can be realized because of the cultural treasures and rationality of Muslims.¹⁷

In this modern context, Muslims who are cultured without denying religiousness and spirituality are people who know the laws of human life and the broad laws of nature and use them in the context of continuous evolutionary progress. In Islam, humans experience evolutionary progress based on intellect which is in line with the dynamics of themselves and the universe. This is referred to in verses 30, 31, and 34 in Surah al-Baqarah, that humans are caliphs on earth.¹⁸

Moreover, apart from culture, philosophy also has a significant role in the progress of Islamic civilization. STA believed that philosophy could save humanity from the dangers of its own progress because it operates without vested interests and attachments that do not align with its main purpose: truth. Philosophy's sole aim is truth, which encompasses the deepest and broadest meanings. By constantly seeking truth, philosophy can elevate humanity from its decline. This represents the nobility of philosophy compared to other human pursuits. Philosophy, dedicated exclusively to truth, surpasses all forms of sectarianism. For STA, nothing is sacred or off-limits; everything is open to intellectual examination. Philosophy is not restricted by any perceived beliefs, dogmas, or similar constraints.¹⁹

Philosophy is a critical discipline that reflects human experiences and responds to human thoughts. It is a philosophical tradition for philosophers to address both the realities faced by human beings and their evolving ideas. The philosopher STA has exemplified this tradition.²⁰ According to STA, philosophy is characterized by the freedom of thought and the unrestrained pursuit of truth. He asserts that "nothing is sacred, nothing is unyielding, everything is brought to the mind and open to investigation." Instead, it should remain open and flexible, allowing for the continuous examination and questioning

¹⁷ Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana et.al., (2021). *Sumbangan Islam terhadap Sains dan Peradaban Dunia*, Bandung: Nuansa Cendekia, pp.11.

¹⁸ Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana et.al., (2021). *Sumbangan Islam terhadap Sains dan Peradaban Dunia*, Bandung: Nuansa Cendekia, pp. 22.

¹⁹ Franz Magnis-Suseno. (2005). *Pijar-pijar Filsafat: Dari Gatholoco ke Filsafat Perempuan, dari Adam Muller ke Postmodernisme*. Yogyakarta: Penerbit KANISIUS, pp. 129-130.

²⁰ Jegalus, N. (2020). Modernizing Religion and Culture: Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana's Philosophical Perspective of Values. *Indonesian Journal of Interdisciplinary Islamic Studies (IJIS)*, 1-22.

of all ideas. STA emphasizes that true philosophical inquiry is independent and free from any initial commitments to specific doctrines or beliefs.²¹

Furthermore, STA examined religion and culture through a philosophical lens, concentrating on values. Rather than exploring the complex interactions between religion and culture, such as their mutual influences, STA focused on modernizing both domains. He was influenced by Eduard Spranger, a German philosopher and educator, who categorized human values into six groups, highlighting the significance of theoretical value. The expression of theoretical value is rationality, which subsequently fosters modernity.²²

The center of STA's philosophical thought is the philosophy of values, as is also revealed in the title of his main work. According to Fate, humans are distinguished from animals because they can judge.²³ According to STA, it is precisely through the evaluating process of the human mind that human behavior is distinguished from animal behavior, and that man, with his consciousness, enters an atmosphere of greater freedom.²⁴

Humans have the freedom to choose their activities because of their intellect. Intellect is the integration of thought, will, and imagination that transforms basic human drives, instincts, and emotions into uniquely human motivations. Intellect forms the foundation of all human cultural life. Therefore, human behavior differs from animal behavior, and natural life differs from cultural life, because culture is an expression of human intellect.²⁵

²¹ STA, "Philosophy for the Future of Humanity", in *Philosophy and The Future of Humanity*, A Quarterly Publication of the Institute for Philosophy and the Future of Humanity, Jakarta: Universitas Nasional, 1991) pp. 1-18.

²² Sumasno Hadi, "Pemikiran Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana tentang Nilai, Manusia, dan Kebudayaan", in *Jurnal Filsafat* Fakultas Filsafat, Universitas Gajah Madah, Vol. 21, No 1 (2011), pp. 1-36.

²³ Franz Magnis Suseno. (2005). *Pijar-pijar Filsafat: Dari Gatholoco ke Filsafat Perempuan, dari Adam Muller ke Postmodernisme*. Yogyakarta: Penerbit KANISIUS, p. 133.

²⁴ Alisjahbana, Sutan Takdir. (1966). *Essay of A New Anthropology, Values as Integrating Forces In Personality, Society, and Culture*. Kuala Lumpur University of Malaya Press. p. 236.

²⁵ Franz Magnis Suseno. (2005). *Pijar-pijar Filsafat: Dari Gatholoco ke Filsafat Perempuan, dari Adam Muller ke Postmodernisme*. Yogyakarta: Penerbit KANISIUS, p. 134.

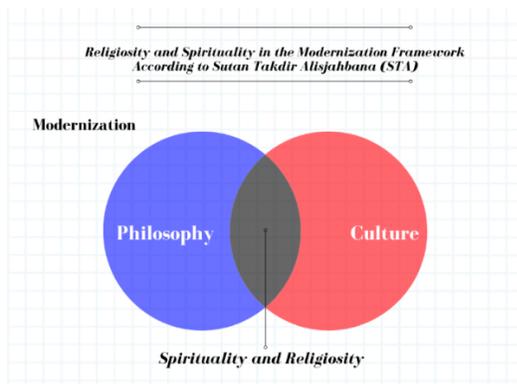
Conclusion

Based on the explanation above, we can conclude:

1) STA's ideology heavily favored pro-modernization. STA's vision emphasized Indonesia's urgent need to embrace modernization decisively, advocating for a transition from a traditional expressive culture to a progressive one. He viewed modernization as a transformative process encompassing social, economic, and cultural changes driven by science and technology, influenced by Oswald Spengler's ideas.

2) STA's perspective distinguishes religiosity as a deep commitment to spiritual values expressed through religious practices, encompassing beliefs, rituals, and personal connections with the Sacred. Meanwhile, spirituality for STA involves a personal quest for profound experiences of the Supreme Reality, extending beyond religious rituals to include meditation, reflection, and communion with nature. STA argues for integrating spirituality into modern life to foster deeper existential meaning. His views on religiosity and spirituality underscore their role in providing moral guidance and shaping societal values amid the ongoing modernization process in Indonesia.

3) In the modernization framework, adherents who embrace culture and spirituality navigate humans to foster ongoing evolutionary progress, guided by intellectual pursuits aligned with universal dynamics. Culture and Philosophy played a crucial role in advancing Islamic civilization by safeguarding against the perils of unchecked progress, focusing solely on truth's pursuit to elevate humanity. In other words, responding to religiosity and spirituality within the framework of modernization according to STA is based on "culture" and "philosophy". This is nothing new in the Islamic world, but unfortunately, nowadays most Muslims are hostile to culture and philosophy because they think it tarnishes the purity of Islam. Therefore, religiosity and spirituality, as a human expression towards the Ultimate Reality based on culture and philosophy. If the explanation above is illustrated in a diagram as follows:



Picture 1: Diagram of Respond of Religiosity and Spirituality in the Modernization Framework

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