

STUDIA ISLAMIKA

INDONESIAN JOURNAL FOR ISLAMIC STUDIES

Volume 13, Number 1, 2006



COMMUNISM DEBATED AGAIN:
THE MUSLIM RESPONSE TO THE IDEA OF REVOKING THE 1966
ANTI-COMMUNISM IN POST-SOEHARTO INDONESIA

Ahmad Suhelmi

KERAJAAN-ORIENTED ISLAM:
THE EXPERIENCE OF PRE-COLONIAL INDONESIA

Jajat Burhanudin

THE REVITALIZATION OF ISLAM IN SOUTHEAST ASIA:
THE CASES OF DARUL ARQAM AND JEMAAT TABLIGH

Alexander Horstmann

STUDIA ISLAMIKA

Indonesian Journal for Islamic Studies

Vol. 13, no. 1, 2006

EDITORIAL BOARD:

M. Quraish Shihab (UIN Jakarta)

Taufik Abdullah (LIPI Jakarta)

Nur A. Fadhil Lubis (IAIN Sumatra Utara)

M.C. Ricklefs (Melbourne University)

Martin van Bruinessen (Utrecht University)

John R. Bowen (Washington University, St. Louis)

M. Atho Mudzhar (IAIN Yogyakarta)

M. Kamal Hasan (International Islamic University, Kuala Lumpur)

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Azyumardi Azra

EDITORS

Saiful Mujani

Jamhari

Jajat Burhanuddin

Fu'ad Jabali

Oman Fathurahman

ASSISTANT TO THE EDITORS

Heni Nuroni

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ADVISOR

Cheyne Scott

ARABIC LANGUAGE ADVISOR

Masri

COVER DESIGNER

S. Prinka

STUDIA ISLAMIKA (ISSN 0215-0492) is a journal published by the Center for the Study of Islam and Society (PPIM) UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta (STT DEPPEN No. 129/SK/DITJEN/PPG/STT/1976) and sponsored by the Australia-Indonesia Institute (AII). It specializes in Indonesian Islamic studies in particular, and South-east Asian Islamic Studies in general, and is intended to communicate original researches and current issues on the subject. This journal warmly welcomes contributions from scholars of related disciplines.

All articles published do not necessarily represent the views of the journal, or other institutions to which it is affiliated. They are solely the views of the authors. The articles contained in this journal have been refereed by the Board of Editors.

STUDIA ISLAMIKA has been accredited by The Ministry of National Education, Republic of Indonesia as an academic journal (SK Dirjen Dikti No. 23a/DIKTI/2004).

Document

Dissemination of Religious Authority in 20TH Century Indonesia

Fuad Jabali

There is a strong ground to say that in the last 20 years Indonesian Muslims are more Islamic. The increasing religiousness of Indonesian Muslims is materialized not only through things 'Islamic' such Islamic political parties, Islamic institutions, Islamic media and even Islamic TV shows and movies but also through their attitudes towards religious figures. It seems that more and more Indonesian Muslims are in need of religious authority. According to PPIM survey in 2004, 98% of Indonesian Muslims though that what the ulama/ustadh said is useful.

When Islamization takes place in such a diverse and complex communities as Indonesians—involving people from different social, economic and educational background—the kinds of religious authority needed are also diversified. One single type of religious authority—that is the one traditionally linked to pesantren and the kitab kuning (yellow books, i.e. the old Arabic books read in pesantrens)—is not sufficient anymore. Hence besides the traditional kyai/ulama Indonesian witnessed the rise of new different types of ulamas. Unlike before, to be an 'ulama one does not have to own pesantren or be a graduate of pesantren or to master the yellow books. Those who cannot read Arabic properly can even be called kyai.

The diversification of religious authority in Indonesia reflects not only the variety of Islamic orientation of religious communities in Indonesia but also shows the inability of the old religious authority to respond the increasing problems that the Indonesian Muslims communities have to deal with. Radical Muslims including Imam Samudra clearly does not show any respect to scholars/ulama such as the NU ulama, because, to

him, they are unable to properly respond the suffering of the Muslims community in countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan. To him, the only authoritative ulama, whom Muslims should follow, are the ulama in the frontier (ulama mujahid). While others, however, prefer to turn to religious figures whose words are in line with their deeds although their knowledge of Islamic traditions is rather limited.

The rise of new types of ulama begs us to see again the whole concepts of 'Islamic knowledge' ('ilm) and genealogy of knowledge (silsilah). Although '-l-m, the root of ulama, means 'knowledge' in general, ulama has always been associated with 'Islamic' knowledge. In fact in Islamic classical books, the word 'ilm solely refers to Islamic knowledge, that is the knowledge based on revelation. Rational interpretation to the Qur'an, or knowledge that is not directly derived from the Qur'an, will be called ra'y. The Mu'tazilites, with whom the late Harun Nasution, Nurchalish Majid and other Indonesian modernists thinkers are associated, is called ahl al-ra'y, the rationalists. However, the complexity of modern reality more and more requires the involvement of rationalism. Hence limiting 'ilm to only the revelation-based knowledge is not sufficient.

As for the genealogy of knowledge, first of all it must be understood that, since 'ilm is traditionally associated with revelation based knowledge, it is logical to assume that a strict criteria in transmitting religious knowledge is applied. When it comes to revelation, for some Muslims, they are expected to simply 'accept' it and to be passive. The Qur'anic expression 'We hear and we obey' (sami'na wa ata'na) is often used to describe the relation between Muslims and revelation. In order to guard the authenticity of religious knowledge, the transmitter must be trustworthy. That is to say that the religious authority is not merely all about knowledge, it is also about integrity, self control and obedience to God's laws. Since revelation is complete, nothing must be added to it. Those who tried to add new things to Islam will be blamed as heretics. His innovations are called bid'a. Every bid'a is gone astray (dalalah), as one Prophetic tradition says.

Needless to say that, because of the wish to guard the purity of religious knowledge, then the process of transmission must be kept clear from all innovations. Every act of transmission must be guaranteed by ijazah, which states that the bearer of the ijazah had learnt face to face with the ulama who issued the ijazah and that his knowledge has been accurately transmitted. The ulama-ness of an ulama is measured not by his ability to add something new to the Islam but by his ability not to add anything to it. Ijazah is a symbol through which the spiritual relationship between the ulama and their students is established. It is believed that a student who

read a kitab without a teachers, and therefore without ijazah, his teacher is the satan.

Since Islam is originally from the Middle East, religious authority, especially during the early period, is closely connected to the Arabs. Thus some Muslims make an argument that the purity of Islam equals to Arab Islam. Midle East is considered as the right place to study Islam. Some Indonesian Muslims even consider the Middle Eastern ulama as the only authoritative figures in Islam. The Indonesian Salafi have this kind of view. One might no agree with them but the fact is that the Indonesian ulamas directly and directly had been connected to the Middle Eastern ulamas.

Twentieth century Indonesia is indeed marked by the breakdown of traditional views. Pesantren is forced to accommodate modern educational system by establishing madrasah. Besides Kitab Kuning, the students now also learn secular subjects including math, biology and physics. Pesantren then is not always associated with religious knowledge. There are also conscious efforts top broaden the term ilm. Unlike the traditional ilm, the new ilm includes secular sciences. That is to say that just like fiqh and theology, math and biology is also part of Islam and therefore it is obligatory to Muslims to master them. But the consequence is that, if ilm include non--Islamic knowledge, then it is not enough to know only religious sciences to become ulama and it is also possible for those who know none-Islamic sciences to become members of Majelis Ulama Indonesia, for example.

It is to comprehensively address such a complicated nature of religious authority that a conference was hold by PPIM (Pusat Pengkajian Islam dan Masyarakat, Centre for the Study of Islam and Society) in collaboration with IAS (International Institute for Asian Studies), ISIM (International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern Wolrd) and KITLV. The main question to address is how religious authority in 20th century Indonesia is disseminated. Although the focus is Indonesia, the discussion itself and the paper presented, covered a wide area including public debate on religious authority in Morocco, Islamic authority in Europe and redefinition of religious authority among South Asian Muslims. This is to provide a comprehensive and comparative picture before critically looking at Indonesian Islam.

One other important issue the participants paid attention was the case of an Indonesia's previous Minister of Religious Affairs, who was put to jail charged of corruption. Being traditional Islamic scholar, a sayyid and an Islamic university lecturer, he is one of the authoritative figures in Indonesia and his case, therefore, shows how a religious authority can be seriously challenged by the community. Another case in point was made

to see how such a person who was “being in a position of authority” or “having authority” had to struggle to maintain his position—the position which has never been unquestionably accepted. This time involved Ahmad Surkati, another sayyid from Sudan who was invited by an Arab community in Indonesia to teach in schools belong to Jamiat Khair. Being an ulama, Ahmad Surkati was also consulted especially by Arab community on religious issues. However, when his answers to the question posed were not in line with the existing practices then he was abandoned.

It is to remember though that, especially among the Sunnite Muslims community, the view of ulama is not binding. So the refusal toward Ahmad Surkati’s religious authority is not unique. But this exactly confirms that (a) community has actually the right to choose which ulama to follow and (b) ulama have to struggle to establish his authority.

The same thing took place in other part of the world: South Asian. Like Indonesian Muslims, Muslims in this part of the world are actively involved in deciding whose religious authority to follow. In the beginning of the 20th century the Sufis and the ulama, the traditional holders of religious authority, started losing their connection with the new reality. In the middle of the 20th century the incapability of the traditional religious authority finally gave rise to the new one: the laymen Jinnah and Maududi. It is the two who lead South Asian Muslims to have a new Islamic state Pakistan in 1956. The medieval caliphate mode,¹ which was propagated by the traditional ulama, failed to accommodate the modern South Indian reality.

The European Muslim community provides other interesting case in point to see how religious authority is negotiated. Living in totally different cultural context, Muslims in Europe were faced with unprecedented problems. But to whom they turn? It is only natural they would turn to ulama in their original home countries. But the problems is that those ulamas, living outside Europe, are not equipped with enough understanding about European history and culture, an understanding which is badly needed if they are to issue a legal decision on issues faced by those European Muslims. The challenge is then how to produce local European ulamas. However, once they were produced, they still have to struggle to assert their authority. The tendency of the European religious authority to choose taysir (facility) and to uphold minimalist orthodoxy in issuing their fatwa can potentially be used to deligitimize their ulama-ness. The need to maintain Islamic identity in one hand and to be part of European community on the other makes it more challenging to hold religious authority in Europe.

Modernization of traditional Islamic institutions, the spread of literacy, open access to education and information and the limit of traditional concept of 'ilm and ulama have lead to the rise of new kinds of ulama. While the traditional ulama are still in authority, they no longer hold a monopoly. They share their authority with the emerging ulamas whose background are different from theirs.