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Table of Contents

Document

An Indonesian Islamic University: How is it Possible?

Fu'ad Jabali

An important conference was held in Yogyakarta on September 9th – 11th, 2004 concerning the concept of an Indonesian Islamic University. The conference, hosted by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Indonesia, UIN (Universitas Islam Negeri, State Islamic University) Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, CIDA and McGill University, Canada, through Indonesia-IAIN Social Equity Project (IISEP) was mainly dedicated to laying a strong foundation for the transformation of the two IAINs (i.e. IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta in May 20, 2002 and IAIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta in July 21, 2004) into UINs (Universitas Islam Negeri – Islamic State University)

The transformation from IAIN (Institut Agama Islam Negeri, State Institute for Islamic Studies) into UIN has many significant consequences. First, academically; while in IAIN only Islamic Studies (such as theology, Islamic jurisprudence and exegesis) are developed, in UIN the scope of studies broadens to include 'secular' sciences. UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta has already opened, for example, Faculties of Science and Technology, Psychology, Agribusiness and Medicine. Second, while most of the students of IAIN are mainly from madrasah/pesantren/rural communities, UIN, with its secular faculties, attracts a wider variety of students from a more heterogeneous background.

Having more diverse sciences to develop and a more diverse socio-cultural background of the students to accommodate, the newly established UIN has to face major challenges. Academically, two diverse streams of

science—Islamic sciences on the one hand and 'secular' sciences on the other—are put under one roof. This raises more questions than answers. Socially, the presence of a large number of students from diverse backgrounds pressures the UIN to develop policies both academic and non-academic which are capable of responding to students' needs . While social problems need to be addressed, the conference was dedicated more to answering the academic challenges.

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Indonesia, partly because of its geographical location, has been a meeting place for many different religions and traditions. Trading routes from China and India, up to the 17th Century, had brought people from many different places, including China, India, Arabia and Persia, to the Indonesian islands. From the beginning of 16th century its rich natural resources were more than a good reason for European countries, particularly the Dutch, Portuguese and British, to come also to Indonesia. Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Communism are just some examples of how many great traditions and ideologies found their way to Indonesia and blended with the local cultures and values. Globalization of the 20th century intensifies and complicates these encounters.

One complicated contemporary encounter is between 'Islam' and the 'West'. Needless to say the West ,like Islam, is not homogeneous, though often presented as such. They are widely regarded as two major and antagonistic civilizations. Even more strongly, Samuel P. Huntington claims that the two forces are incompatible and that is why, for him, dialogue is not a future possibility. Others disagree with him, but still consider Islam and West as two separate civilizations. Acknowledging the compatibility of Islam and the West explicitly recognizes the difference between the two. The question then arises about what sort of dialogue is possible between two still distinct civilizations and to what degree they are actually compatible.

As far as Indonesia is concerned, both Islam and the West were originally outsiders. The two have struggled to capture Indonesian minds and hearts. Secularism and Nationalism on the one hand and Islamism on the other are only two forms through which the two forces are in competition. For some thinkers, to maintain its own identity and cultures and to benefit properly from this complex Islam-West encounter, Indonesia must maintain the distance between itself and the two. This is to say that both Islam and

the West should be continuously and critically judged on the basis of the Indonesian context. But what makes the encounter between 'Islam' and the 'West' within the Indonesian context of particular interest is that none of these terms ('Islam', 'West' and 'Islam' and even 'Indonesia') are homogeneous entities.

The Islam that came to Indonesia is an old Islam. Islam was revealed in Arabia in the 7th century. It passed many different cultures and traditions before it finally came to Indonesia. Thus, the Islam that came to Indonesia is an Arabized Islam which has been Indianized, Persianized and, to put it in a more general term, multi-contextualized for centuries. Indonesian Muslims have the same right as other Muslims to contextualize Islam, or to make Islam their own. It is not right to bracket the Middle Eastern Islam and transplant it into Indonesian soil. It needs ownership on the Indonesian part and to achieve it, it should go through a long and sometime tiring process: to establish Islam that belongs to Indonesia not to some other countries or to some other people.

The same is true when it comes to the West. According to a common analysis, particularly after the 18th century the West became the major power of the world, substituting Islam. The West was able to develop new sciences, based on totally different precepts in which human being eventually became the center of interest substituting God and religion. The 20th science is not developed to the service of God, but to that of human beings. Secularization is a common term to describe the break. But what is more, the ability of the West to develop practical science made the West powerful. Colonization and imperialization are the product of this era. As a result, Western science is then associated with Western power and hegemony. These facts, i.e. the fact that science came out of Western history and consciousness and the fact that the West sees itself as superior to other cultures, must be taken into account when looking at social sciences critically.

Needless to say that critical views must also be directed to the concepts, systems and institutions produced by both Islamic and Western civilization. From Islam, people learn important words such as jamā'ah, ummah *(both are usually translated as Muslim community),* khilāfah *(caliphate),* mushāwarah *(consultation) and* madrasah *(educational institution). From the West people learn many things including democracy, civil society, state, general election, and education. The question is then: To what extent all these concepts and institutions, coming from differing civilizations, Islamic and Western alike, should be applied to Indonesian soil? How one can critically and constructively examine some of the concepts and constructs of an Indonesia caught between the West and Islam?*

More questions can of course be put forward, including the following:

1. *Questioning the role of East and West in Islamic Studies and Social sciences respectively. Is Euro-centrism defensible? Is the Islamic Middle East the only authoritative source of the Islamic sciences?*
2. *Questioning the way knowledge is now constructed and categorized. Who decides that one particular concept, culture or civilization is categorized as high, law, thick, thin, mainstream, peripheral, etc. How about modern educational institutions? Why one particular science is attached to one particular faculty and not to the other? How are we going to challenge these constructed concepts?*
3. *Some alternatives for the study of social science and Islamic studies in Indonesia. Is Islamization of knowledge an alternative? Is interdisciplinary Islamic science an alternative? How the latter alternative is going to challenge the thesis proposed by Huntington? Is an Indonesianized West and an Indonesianized East possible? To what extent should the concepts developed by Islamic and Western civilization be adopted in developing Indonesian Islamic studies and social sciences? Should we develop our own distinct concepts? Are there such concepts?*
4. *Current issues in Indonesia. This is to discuss some of current concepts derived from, or associated with, both Islamic and Western civilization. These include* syura, ummah, *democracy and civil society. What is the relation between state and religion? Islamic state in Indonesia? Is fundamentalism 'Islamic' or 'Western' or what? What are the roles of mass Muslim organizations like NU and Muhammadiyah in the complexity of the triangular relationship: Islam, West and Indonesia? During the conference a significant time allocation was dedicated to it.*

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Fifteen speakers, Indonesians and non-Indonesians, plus about two hundred participants attended the conference. In three days they discussed some of the major questions outlined above. Phil Buckley (McGill University, Montreal) presented a paper on "Universities as Imagined Communities"; Ebrahim Musa (Duke University, North Carolina) on "Post-coloniality and Muslim Epistemologies"; Carmen Abubakar (University of the Philipnines) on "Mainstreaming Madrasa Education: Issues and Challenges"; Amina Wadud-Muhsin (University of Virginia) on "The Integral Role of Developing and Mainstreaming Gender Inclusive Analysis in Constructing and Categorizing of Knowledge"; Richard C.

Martin (Emory University, Atlanta) on "Religion and Secularism in the Modern University: Battleground or Symbiosis?"; Bill Rowe (University of South Florida) on "Islamic and Western Culture-Different History, Shared Future: The Engaged University in a Global Environment"; Azim Nanji (The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London) on "Modeling a Muslim University: A Legacy and its Future"; Hasan Hanafi (Cairo University) on "Tradition and Civilizational Renaissance: The Mission of an Islamic International University"; Dale Eickelman (Dartmouth College, Hanover) on "Neither East Nor West: Liberal Arts, the Social Sciences, and the Idea of the Educated Person in an Indonesian Islamic University"; Frederick Denny (University of Colorado at Boulder) on "Global Human Rights and Religious Diversity: an Indonesian Islamic University's Potential for Fostering Mediating Discourses"; Akh. Minhaji (UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta) on "Toward A New Academic Paradigm: The Case of State Islamic University Sunan Kalijaga"; Muhammad Sirozi (IAIN Raden Fatah Palembang) on "Countering Islamic Radicalism in Post-Soeharto Indonesia: Toward East-West Joint Educational Cooperation"; Fauzan Saleh (IAIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya) on "Whither the State Islamic Higher Education in Indonesia: Maintaining Neutrality toward Sectarianism in Academic Life."

The conference was opened by key note speeches delivered by Azyumardi Azra, the rector of UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta and by Amin Abdullah, the rector of UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta. While Azyumardi Azra's presentation was on "From IAIN to UIN: Islamic Studies in Indonesia', M. Amin Abdullah's was on "Islamic Studies, Humanities and Social Sciences: an Integrated Perspective." Both of the rectors not only outlined the development of higher Islamic educations in Indonesia but also discussed how such development was possible and what the major problems and challenges they the two UINs have to deal with. While Azra's approach was more historical and sociological, Abdullah's was more philosophical.

Unitl recentle, there were 14 IAINs (Institut Agama Islam Negeri, State Institute for Islamic Studies) and 34 STAINs (Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri, State Colleges for Islamic Studies) throughout the country. After two IAINs—i.e. IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta and IAIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta—were transformed, two other IAINs (i.e. IAIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung and IAIN Syarif Qasim Riau) will soon follow and become UINs. STAIN Malang, however, was directly transformed into UIN in 2003. This is quite unique, for usually the normal stage of transformation is from STAIN into IAIN then into UIN. Sooner or later all IAINs and STAINs will, in many different degrees and forms, be transformed. Either they will choose to become universities or IAINs with

wider mandate. A close, exclusive, dogmatic and sectarian approach to Islam must be transformed into an open, inclusive, empirical and non-sectarian one. This is a complicated and sensitive undertaking. Lessons learned from UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta and UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta are important in this regard to be shared and discussed critically so that other IAINs and STAINs will not make the same mistakes and undergo a better transformation. It is for this reason that these two rectors were asked to open the conference by delivering their keynote speeches.

International speakers were enthusiastic to learn more from the Indonesian experience of how Islamic institutions such as IAIN/STAIN in Muslim countries cope with contemporary issues. Some of the issues were then further discussed during the rest of the sessions. Amina Wadud-Muhsin highlighted that the collapse of colonial empires had provided Muslim communities an opportunity to reconstruct their nation states and, being Muslims, they naturally used Islam as a reference point for guidance. But soon they realized that the Islam which was available to them was not sufficient for this challenging project. The Muslims, especially in the early stage, decided to borrow from western thought and paradigms but soon realized that in the final analysis these were not really adequate. Ebrahim Musa pointed to the existence of resistance in some circles to foreign knowledge. Historically, Muslim community had faced this kind of problem before. He discussed how the 12th century Muslim thinker Abu Hamid al-Ghazali dealt with the knowledge from other sources and how he integrated it into his formulation about religion. Using al-Ghazali as a model, he further elaborated how such a project would be possible in modern Muslim countries. Particular attention was paid to the issue of Islamization of knowledge and to what extent traditional or Islamic sciences together could be combined with imported sciences to create new hybrid possibilities.

Universities in Muslim countries should have played a critical role in responding to these challenges. However, Azim Nanji revealed that although, according to recent surveys in the Muslim world such as the Arab Human Development Report 2003 and the Times Higher Education survey, November 5, 2004, more universities have been created in the Muslim world in recent decades than at any other period in history, as far as quality is concerned, these universities are left behind the rest of the world on virtually all accounts of best practice. Without the 'best practices' it will be hard for these universities to address dichotomies. Even with best practices , the challenge is still big: how to develop the best practices in an Islamic context on one hand and to deal with the complexity and diversity of indiginous histories on the other. Nanji believed that a Muslim university has a unique opportunity to address issues that face humanity at large

(including poverty, governance and social change) more self-consciously, drawing its inspiration from the rich traditions of Islamic learning that had been developed in different times by different Muslim groups.

The need to develop openness among Indonesian Islamic universities was also emphasized by Dale F. Eickelman. These universities should adapt and develop the best of academic traditions, regardless of origins in the various scientific disciplines, including the social sciences. What is encouraging is that, according to Eickelman, there is "a growing convergence between education in contemporary Islamic universities and in the tradition of liberal arts education as practiced in North American universities. In both traditions, there is a greater focus on achieving a basic understanding of different fields of learning, including the sciences, the humanities, and the social sciences, and of inculcating a "moral education" intended for ethical participation in wider society—in the sense advocated a century ago by Emile Durkheim. In both these traditions of learning, the main focus is on learning to ask better questions rather than reproducing the best answers from the past."

For particular reasons the Indonesian speakers shared a similar view: there is an urgent need to revisit the way Islamic studies are conducted in the IAIN/STAIN system. Akhmad Minhaji looked at the development of the IAIN/STAIN system with the 1997 multi crisis in mind. Being part of the crisis, the system is consequently considered by Minhaji not as part of the solution but as part of the problem. This is critical. He acknowledged that the system have been closely connected to institutions such as madrasah, pesantrens, Islamic study groups, mosques and mass Muslim organizations like NU and Muhammadiyah. Students of IAIN/STAIN are mainly from these institutions and returned to them to work. If IAIN/STAIN is part of the problem then, through its networks, IAIN/STAIN will spread these problems (including the literal understanding of Islam and the propagation of the Islam that is incapable of responding to the community problems) even wider up to the village level where these institutions operate. To avoid this, the way Islam, as well as knowledge in general, is developed in IAIN/STAIN must be revisited in such a way that IAIN/STAIN can provide education for the students that enables them to solve problems. The "Resurgence of Islamic radicalism in Indonesia," Muhammad Sirozi warns, is "due to misperception of some Islamic teachings and the failure of modernization in Islamic educational institutions."

It is beyond this article to articulate all the provocative and thoughtful concepts developed both by speakers and participants during the three day conference. This is only a glimpse of conference proceedings to show the existing gap between what was originally developed during the initial stage

of conference design and the actual discussions. The conference actually has opened the doors to a whole array of thoughts and realities unimagined before. Three days is simply too short to explore these.

The last session was dedicated to analyzing the implications for UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta and UIN Kalijaga Yogyakarta, as well as for the IAIN/STAIN system as a whole. Some recommendations were made. But what is important are the observations made especially by international speakers. Dale F. Eickelman, for example, was so impressed that he said that this kind of forum could only take place in Indonesia: everybody, men and women, Muslims non-Muslims, young and old could express their ideas on Islam freely. Learning from Arab countries, Hassan Hanafi made the same point. Like Eickelman, he believes that Indonesia should play a leading role for better construction of Islam and Muslim community in the future. "Thinking about the idea(l) of an Islamic University is really a hard job, but Indonesia is the right place to do that."

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Index of Articles, 2004

I. Vol. 11, No. 1, 2004

Articles

William R. Roff
Pondoks, Madrasahs and the Production of *'Ulamā'* in Malaysia

Jajat Burhanudin
The Fragmentation of Religious Authority: Islamic Print Media in Early 20th Century Indonesia

Yudi Latif
On the Genesis of Intellectual Crossroads: Early Fragmentation in the Formation of Modern Indonesian Intelligentsia

Abdul Ala
Niqāṭ al-Iltiqā' bain Madhhab al-Taḥdīth al-Jadīd wa al-Ittijāh al-Taqlīdī al-Mutaṭawwir al-Judhūr al-Ma'rifiyyah li Madhhab al-Jauhariyah al-Islāmiyyah wa Intishāruhā fī Indūnīsiyyā

Toto Suharto
Ma'had Ittiḥād al-Islām (Persis) 1984-1996 wa al-Ta'līm al-Qā'im 'alā Di'āmah al-Mujtama'

Book Review

Jajat Burhanudin
Islam dan Negara-Bangsa: Melacak Akar-Akar Nasionalisme Indonesia

Document

Ismatu Ropi
In Search of Principles of Good Governance: Lessons Learned from a Series of Workshops on "Islamic-Western Dialogues on Governance Values"

II. Vol. 11, No. 2, 2004

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