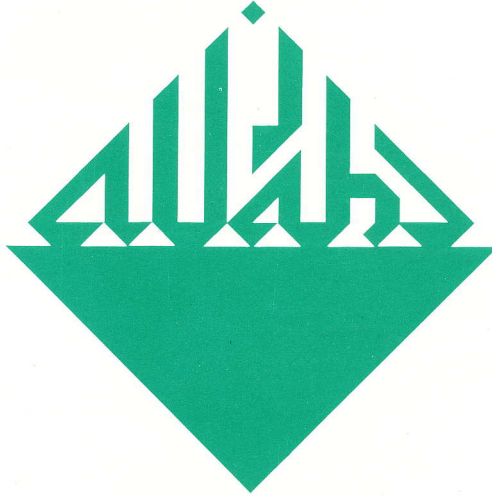


# STUDIA ISLAMIKA

INDONESIAN JOURNAL FOR ISLAMIC STUDIES

Volume 8, Number 2, 2001



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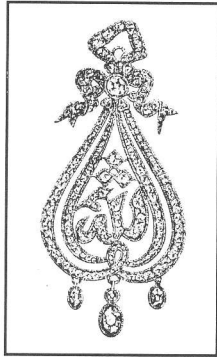
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STUDIA ISLAMIKA (ISSN 0215-0492) is a journal published by the Center for the Study of Islam and Society (PPIM), IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta (STT DEPPEN No. 129/SK/DITJEN/PPG/STT/1976) and sponsored by the Department of Religious Affairs of the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

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STUDIA ISLAMIKA has been accredited by The Ministry of National Education, Republic of Indonesia as an academic journal.



## The Future of Islamic Studies in Indonesia In Appreciation of IAIN-McGill Cooperation

Fu'ad Jabali

*D*ating from the establishment of the early Islamic kingdoms, Islam has been practiced in Indonesia for at least seven centuries. Through a gradual and continuous process, Islam has found its way into the hearts of the majority of Indonesians. This success is mainly due to the institutions that have been involved in studying and socializing Islam, including those newly established institutions such as IAIN (State Institute for Islamic Studies). Mosques and pesantren are of course the old institutions whose significant contribution to the development of Islam and the Muslim community are beyond doubt. Madrasah, which function in a similar manner to mosques and pesantren, are also important institutions, particularly in bridging the gap between Islam and modernity. But it is only at IAIN that a higher level and more sophisticated study of Islam is conducted in Indonesia. It is a natural expectation that IAIN will play a leading role in social transformation and community development in the face of complex challenges. Two issues thus become significant in IAIN's development: first, strengthening and broad-

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ening Islamic studies to the extent that IAIN becomes a leading institution (nationally and internationally) in such a context; and second, establishing Islamic studies that are instrumental in community development.

That the study of Indonesian Islam has been marginal in the academic world is already known. It is only in recent years that scholars of Islam have acknowledged that their over-emphasis on the study of Islam in the Middle East has not only presented to them with an incomplete picture of the world of Islam, but has also led them to misunderstand the world of Islam in its entirety. Some scholars have tried to correct this. Michael Gilson, for example, whose book *Recognizing Islam* has been criticized for being inconsistent with its mission (the purpose of the book was to end the overemphasis of (Western) scholars on the Arab characters of Islam but it ignored Islam in South East Asia, including in Indonesia where about 200,000,000 Muslims live), has started a project to study the Hadrami community in Indonesia. This is of course only the beginning of a long journey to gain a better understanding of the richness of Indonesian Islam.

However, even if Michael Gilson's and others' projects of a similar purpose or consequence (i.e. to bring Indonesian Islam to the world of academia), is successful, it still suffers from its own bias. That is that it still treats Indonesian Islam as an object. This raises the old question of 'Orientalism'. Edward Said has criticized Westerners' study of Islam in the Middle East, which he calls Orientalism. According to Said, the Middle Eastern reality, in which Islam is dominant, has been reduced into images suitable for the Western audience. 'The East' is thus a Western construct. According to Said, the Middle East has been portrayed as passive, incapable of understanding and presenting themselves, and thus this is why the West came to rescue and help to present the East, and thus to make it exist.

Could Said's criticism be avoided by changing the object of study from the Middle East to South East Asia? Unlike the Middle East, South East Asia has a less problematic relationship with the West. Indonesians, like other people of the countries in this region, indeed were part of the Western colonial empires (from the 17th century until the beginning of the 20th century). But they never engaged in the Crusades. Neither did they experience the Western political excess that is evident in the Middle East, especially in Palestine. Having fewer (historical and political) burdens, Indonesia may be a better home for the study of such things as sociology and anthropology. Scholars from these disciplines can do their research in

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*Indonesia without being too worried about the issue of Orientalism. But to what extent can the non-existence of such political factors guarantee objectivity? This is of course not a simple question. Neither is 'objectivity' a simple issue.*

*In returning to the issue of the 'East' as a passive object, compared to the Middle East, Indonesia is more problematic. The Middle East, even though it has been presented in such a passive light, used to be a centre of world civilization. Indonesia, on the other hand, has never held such a position, a position in which the West came to learn how to perform surgery and to understand Aristotle. Thus as far as the development of Islamic studies is concerned, compared to Indonesia, the Middle East has provided scholars with rich materials such as buildings, coins, and manuscripts. From this perspective, Indonesian Islam seems to be less inviting. However, perhaps the real challenge in studying Indonesian Islam is the fact that it is not yet been fully explored.*

*Another issue that needs to be addressed, particularly for Indonesians, is to find the link between academic development in centres of Islamic studies in Indonesia and existing social problems. In this context, it is worthwhile noting the relationship between knowledge and power, a relationship propagated in particular by Foucault whose works inspired Said to write Orientalism. Far from being neutral, knowledge has been used not only to gain understanding but also to exercise control. Snouck Hurgronje is a case in point in illustrating this nexus in the Indonesian context. Being appointed as the Dutch Colonial adviser on native affairs, one of the main tasks of which was to maintain order and control especially among Indonesian Muslims, he committed himself to learning about Islam in Indonesia. His advice certainly played a significant role in the formulation of Dutch policies on Indonesian Muslims.*

*If knowledge has been used to control communities, by the same token, it is also powerful in changing them. There is a strong belief that in Indonesia, Islam has played a significant role in shaping the thoughts and deeds of the people. This claim is often used to preserve the position of Islamic values in the community, and even to demand a more active role for them in social and political spheres. However, from another perspective, this argument also means that Islam, or a misunderstanding of it, can cause the destruction of a community, and that its re-construction can be achieved through a more appropriate understanding of Islam. Muhammad Iqbal's *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* was likely an expression of the same concern, and similar works have also been pub-*

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lished in Indonesia. Good government, poverty reduction, civil society and democracy are among the crucial problems in Indonesia that need to be addressed, and in fact, in this context, Islam is used as a means of solving such problems. IAIN Jakarta has been involved in research, workshops, seminars, the production of publications, and other such projects with institutions such as The Ford Foundation and The Asia Foundation, which share as their basic assumption the potential to establish a better community through religion.

Having two roles, namely being an active subject in developing Islamic studies as well as using these Islamic studies as a means of transforming the Indonesian community into a better one, those involved with IAIN have been engaged in long term planning to achieve such goals. It is worth mentioning here the joint project between Indonesia (in this case the Minister of Religious Affairs MORA and in particular IAIN) and Canada (in this case CIDA, through McGill University), who have been working for 10 years to develop IAIN through human resource development, facilities improvement, and strengthening national and international networks. There are of course other projects that have been realized at IAIN, but it is only the Indonesia-Canada Project that has been intensively involved in the long-term development of IAIN. Further, the two governments are planning another 5 years program of IAIN development.

The outcomes of the Project are quite significant in enhancing IAIN development. To highlight one example in the human resource development program: within the 10 years of the project 210 IAIN lecturers have received scholarship from the Project (12 PhDs in Islamic Studies, 90 MAs in Islamic Studies and in Library Science, and the rests are in other programs such as visiting PhD researchers, short term intensive courses, post-doctoral programs, fellowships and training). Over the next 5 years, there will be another 10 PhD scholarships in the fields of education and social sciences, and 22 MAs in social works, pure science, library science and education. Those graduates are instrumental in building IAIN networks both at the national and international levels. The shift of Islamic studies in the West from the Middle East to the 'peripheral' countries has seen Indonesia (an significant Islamic country outside the Middle East in terms of the Muslim population) become an exciting place for the study of Islam. This change has intensified students of Islam desire to come to Indonesia to gain a greater understanding of Islam. The increasing arrival of international academics and the usefulness of this for IAIN's academic development requires people who share both language and knowledge tradi-

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tions. The McGill graduates, as well as graduates from other universities in the West, have acted as good mediators. IAIN, the rightful heir of Islamic traditions in Indonesia, is thus connected to and engaged with a wider academic circle.

The richness of the academic traditions that international researchers, professors and students bring to Indonesia will in turn create a better atmosphere for the realization of the program currently developed by MORA and IAIN, that is to incorporate non-Islamic fields and programs into IAIN curriculum. In the case of IAIN Jakarta, its status will officially change from an institute to a university while other IAIN campuses will become IAINs 'with a wider mandate'. IAIN Jakarta will soon become UIN (Universitas Islam Negeri, State Islamic University), and open departments of non-Islamic studies, while other IAIN campuses will open non-Islamic studies departments which directly support the development of Islamic studies in the existing faculties. The success of this program will much depend on the ability of IAIN to developing networks with other universities, both nationally and internationally, in which 'secular' science are strong, and in developing its human resources in such a way that their expertise lie in both Islamic studies and secular sciences. The latter consideration has inspired the Indonesia-Canada Project to send IAIN lecturers who have strong backgrounds in Islamic traditions to study social sciences both at MA and PhD levels. This is partly to promote better academic works on and the adoption of better tools of analysis of Islam and Muslim communities. For example, an anthropologist who understands Islam and who works among the Muslim community will potentially produce better work than merely an anthropologist who does not understands Islam.

The existence of IAIN campuses throughout Indonesia assists in the process of socializing the idea of opening up IAIN to non-Islamic curriculum. There are 14 IAIN campuses scattered over 14 cities in the following province: Aceh, Medan, Padang, Jambi, Riau, Lampung, Palembang, Jakarta, Bandung, Yogyakarta, Surabaya, Semarang, Banjarmasin and Makassar. Although this does not include the 32 STAIN campuses (or State Islamic Academies), it represents a wide and rich cultural diversity. The current tendency of academics to pursue their academic discourse at the local level where 'local knowledge' can be gleaned is well accommodated for in the IAIN system.

Returning to the issue of the shift of Islamic studies in the West from the Middle East to peripheral countries, as far as Indonesia is concerned,

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*this means that Indonesia can provide such academics with the wide range of alternatives. Thus far, the study on Islam in Indonesia has mainly focused on and been geographically limited to Java and Sumatra. Other localities are still wide open for similar studies. Here, IAIN could act as a good partner in accessing local knowledge on Islam. IAIN Jakarta, being aware of this potential, has been involved in setting up research centres throughout the IAIN system, and recruiting young scholars to work toward the achievement of this goal. Interestingly, it is here that one can see the fruits of the 10 years work of the Indonesia-Canada Project. The McGill graduates have become active facilitators in the strengthening of local IAIN campuses.*

*The fact that IAIN students are largely drawn from villages, where Islamic institutions such as pesantren, madrasah, mosques, and local mass Muslim organizations are strongest, is another important advantage in IAIN's development. The students, as well as the lecturers, share similar values with their communities, giving them easier access to the wealth of local cultures and tradition. The world of manuscripts is a good case in point. If one is to understand local Islam, local manuscripts are certainly a good source of consultation. But those manuscripts, being written a long time ago and inherited from generation to generation, and usually being associated with distinguished religious leaders of the past, are often treated with sanctity. Not everyone has access to these manuscripts, as they are often kept by the local people, in some cases wrapped with white cloth and only opened on certain occasions and for specific purposes. When it comes to the manuscripts, people from different places and with different traditions are often met by the locals with reservation and even suspicion. In this situation, IAIN students can be of great assistance. With the values and traditions that they share with their community as well as their mastery of Arabic and Islamic traditions, they may facilitate access to such manuscripts.*

*It is also this close relationship between IAIN students and lecturers and their local communities that aids IAIN's ability to work within the community. Students largely come from rural villages where the majority of Indonesians, who are not only marginalized geographically, but also politically, socially and economically, live. As such, IAIN is a strategically placed institution for community development. In light of this, the Indonesia-Canada Project will develop a strategy to improve study programs that meet community needs over the next 5 years. Three departments, namely the Faculty of Dakwah (Community Development), the*

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*Faculty of Tarbiyah (Education), and the Faculty of Adab (Letters), have been chosen for improvement for obvious reasons. Those faculties are the most closely attached to the community. The Faculty of Dakwah is designed to produce community workers who understand the religion and culture of their own community, and to work with these understandings to produce a better future. The Faculty of Tarbiyah aims to produce teachers, particularly for the Madrasah, while the Faculty of Adab, in this case its Department of Information and Library Studies, aims to produce good librarians who can improve the libraries of the Madrasah, mosques, and other institutions, including Muslim mass organizations. It is an understanding shared by IAIN academics that community problems would be solved more effectively through education. Going back to the relationship between knowledge and power, or between knowledge and action, IAIN's efforts to link IAIN curriculum development with the development of Madrasah is an appropriate move.*

*The aims of making Indonesia a global centre for Islamic studies, and making Islamic studies an instrument for social changes in Indonesia were well addressed during the "Islam in Indonesia: Intellectualisation and Social Transformation" conference in November 2000. The conference, which was sponsored by MORA and CIDA, hosted international scholars such as Andrée Feillard from France, James J. Fox and M.C. Ricklefs from Australia, Richard W. Bulliet and Robert W. Hefner from the USA, William R. Roff (Scotland), Nico Kaptein (The Netherlands), Thierry Hentsch and R. Phillip Buckley from Canada, Chandra Muzaffar (Malaysia) and Azyumardi Azra, M. Atho Mudzhar, Bahtiar Effendy, and Muchtar Buchori from Indonesia. Some thoughtful, sometimes provocative, notes were presented, triggering lively discussion.*

*The discussion on Islamic studies in Indonesia is a case in point. In his paper, Azyumardi Azra outlined how the two main traditions of Islamic studies (Eastern and Western) interact with each other, and showed how this situation is influential in moving Islamic studies in Indonesia from a normative to an historical, sociological and empirical approach. The strong historical link between Indonesian and Middle Eastern Ulama (Islamic scholars) not only proves that the terms 'peripheral' and 'unorthodox' Islam are not applicable to Indonesian Muslims, but also demonstrates that Indonesian Muslims are familiar with, and indeed strong in, the Islamic traditions developed during the classical period of Islam including Arabic language. With this strength, Indonesian Muslims have been successful in defending themselves from Western colonial and secu-*

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lar ideologies, and moreover, in positioning these Western worlds - including that of academia - under the control of their Islamic consciousness, and creatively incorporating them into the development of their religious understanding. Hence James J. Fox's challenge that "to understand many of the social transformations that are now occurring in Indonesia requires a considerable understanding of Islam" is well met by Indonesian, particularly IAIN, students. For IAIN students, this brings double benefits: to achieve self-understanding and to help others (that is Western academics) to understand them, that is, the Muslim community. For Fox, this mutual need is fruitful and should be followed by affirmative action. Based on his long engagement with studies on Indonesia, he makes the following personal confession: "I see a particular value in recruiting for anthropological research in Indonesia a core of students with an understanding of Islam who can undertake investigations appropriately attuned to the richness and varieties of the Islamic traditions that exist within Indonesia."

The same can be said for textual studies. After forty years of studying Javanese history, using particularly literary works, M.C. Ricklefs has gradually become aware of the fact that "the content of Dutch sources reflects a combination of disinterest and ignorance of Islam." He was surprised to discover that the court of Pakubuwana II was a major centre of Sufi piety. "This research led me to realize that Islam was in fact a far more significant factor in Javanese history than I had previously recognized." Moreover, if Islam plays a significant role in shaping the Javanese community, then it is natural to argue that any efforts to understand the Javanese community, and in fact any community in Indonesia where Islam is dominant, is defective unless Islam is taken into account. The same is true for community development. Any efforts to develop the community will be potentially ineffective if Islam is ignored. To this end, the arguments of Fox and Ricklefs are well founded.

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