

## **Editorial:**

### **NEW FRONTIERS OF ISLAMIC STUDIES IN INDONESIA**

The period of 1990s is critical in Islamic Studies in Indonesia, as it witnessed a new trend in Islamic intellectualism. Of salient signs of this rise of intellectualism is the transfer of knowledge from some works originally written in Arabic, English, and other languages into Indonesian. Some works by Naşr Ḥamid Abū Zaid of Egypt, ‘Abd Allāh Aḥmad al-Naʿīm of Sudan, Moḥammed Arkoun of Morocco, to mention but few, were translated, reviewed, discussed, and studied by Indonesian students and activists. Classes and circles of students often cited their views in many issues of Islamic studies. Their ideas of Islamic reforms pumped the energy of Indonesian Muslim students to critically (re-read) their own tradition. This led to open a new horizon of Islamic knowledge in the country beyond the traditional view. As far as the trend is concerned, students cannot avoid the scholars’ works as references in their papers.

The new trend contributed to create a new atmosphere in which a new way of teaching Islam was introduced in many major Islamic universities—i.e. IAINs (State Islamic Institutes), STAINs (State Islamic High Education). In response, there was an immediate need to revisit the curriculum of religious studies, among which is the methodological issues. Two leading intellectuals, Amin Abdullah and Atho Mudzhar, rose in Yogyakarta, promoting new approaches in Islamic studies. The two broke the silence among Islamic traditional scholars who hold the old tradition in Islamic studies, offering a relatively new way of seeing the subject of religious studies at least for Indonesian readers.

Amin Abdullah, whose major is Islamic philosophy, revisits Islamic studies taught in Islamic universities, and pinpoints two different approaches: *normatif* (normative) and *historis* (historical approach). The first approach is held by most ‘conventional’ Muslim scholars, who offer

nothing but norms to believe and follow. Abdullah sees that, by using this approach, religion is often positioned as not only a norm but also as an absolute truth, an approach which is no different from that of the believers. He reminds Indonesian scholars to differentiate between their position and those of believers. Abdullah then proposes a new way and approach by which the scholars should treat religion as a subject of study. Religion should be placed in historical context in which interpretation plays a critical role in different places and times.

Another prominent figure during this period was Atho Mudzhar, whose major is Islamic Law and whose ideas can be found in his *Pengantar Studi Islam*. Mudzhar argues that Islamic studies should be seen as an interdisciplinary subject where scholars should adopt some approaches developed by various disciplines in humanities and social sciences. For Mudzhar, Islam is not unique, and never be alone, particularly if the scholars treat the religion as a subject of studies. Islam is no different from other subjects of social sciences and of humanities. Thus, social sciences approaches can be used to see Islam. What is more, some sacred Islamic texts can be read by using linguistic or hermeneutical tools.

Indeed, as scholars of Islamic studies, we do need to acknowledge their contributions, if we want to establish our own school of Islamic studies. Our recent publications in this edition bear witness that indeed the works and ideas of the two scholars, among other Indonesian scholars, have influenced the younger generation of Indonesian scholars.