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Saudi Arabia and Indonesian Networks: On Islamic and Muslim Scholars

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Abstract

This article investigates Indonesian scholars educated in Saudi Arabia, both historically and in contemporary contexts, including those who pursued non-Islamic fields and developed academic careers within Saudi higher education. The study adopts a qualitative approach grounded in historical inquiry and literature-based research. It traces long-standing traditions of scholarly mobility from the Malay–Indonesian world to the Saudi Arabia, particularly the Hijaz, while also mapping the educational networks, career trajectories, and religious orientations of alumni of Saudi Islamic educational institutions. The findings demonstrate that Indonesian Saudi-trained scholars are far from homogeneous. They display considerable diversity in religious orientations, social networks, academic backgrounds, and intellectual commitments. While some are associated with ultra-conservative and militant tendencies, others exhibit more moderate and progressive dispositions. The study further shows that, although the number of Indonesian scholars residing in Saudi Arabia has declined sharply over the past four decades, a new development has emerged: a small but growing group of Indonesian Muslim intellectuals trained in non-Islamic disciplines has begun to secure teaching positions at several Saudi universities. This article contributes to Indonesian Islamic historiography and transnational Islamic studies by foregrounding the plurality and complexity of Saudi-educated Indonesian scholars. It also offers a refined mapping of shifting roles played by these figures in shaping Indonesian Islam, contemporary socio-religious dynamics, and educational developments.

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Keywords:

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Abstrak

Artikel ini meneliti para sarjana Indonesia yang dididik di Arab Saudi, baik secara historis maupun dalam konteks kontemporer, termasuk mereka yang menekuni bidang non-Islam dan mengembangkan karier akademis di pendidikan tinggi Saudi. Studi ini mengadopsi pendekatan kualitatif yang berlandaskan pada penyelidikan historis dan penelitian berbasis literatur. Studi ini menelusuri tradisi mobilitas ilmiah yang telah lama ada dari dunia Melayu-Indonesia ke Arab Saudi, khususnya Hijaz, sekaligus memetakan jaringan pendidikan, lintasan karier, dan orientasi keagamaan alumni lembaga pendidikan Islam Saudi. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa para sarjana Indonesia yang terlatih di Saudi jauh dari homogen. Mereka menunjukkan keragaman yang cukup besar dalam orientasi keagamaan, jaringan sosial, latar belakang akademis, dan komitmen intelektual. Sementara beberapa dikaitkan dengan kecenderungan ultra-konservatif dan militan, yang lain menunjukkan disposisi yang lebih moderat dan progresif. Studi ini lebih lanjut menunjukkan bahwa, meskipun jumlah sarjana Indonesia yang tinggal di Arab Saudi telah menurun tajam selama empat dekade terakhir, perkembangan baru telah muncul: sekelompok kecil tetapi berkembang dari intelektual Muslim Indonesia yang terlatih dalam disiplin ilmu non-Islam telah mulai mendapatkan posisi mengajar di beberapa universitas Saudi. Artikel ini berkontribusi pada historiografi Islam Indonesia dan studi Islam transnasional dengan menyoroti pluralitas dan kompleksitas para cendekiawan Indonesia yang berpendidikan Saudi. Artikel ini juga menawarkan pemetaan yang lebih rinci tentang perubahan peran yang dimainkan oleh tokoh-tokoh ini dalam membentuk Islam di Indonesia, dinamika sosial-religius kontemporer, dan perkembangan pendidikan..

Kata Kunci:

Arab saudi, Indonesia, Islam, Migrasi, Pendidikan Islam

Introduction

Saudi Arabia, in addition to Egypt, has long attracted Indonesian Muslim societies. While Indonesian Muslims travelling to Egypt to learn Islamic sciences started, more or less, at the end of nineteenth century or early

twentieth century (Abaza, 1990; Roff, 1970), they made journies to Saudi Arabia long before that period. In fact, history has noted that Indonesian Muslims have long voyaged to the Arabian Peninsula, particularly Hijaz, either to perform hajj pilgrimage in Makkah, visit the Prophet Muhammad's shrine in Madinah, or pursue Islamic knowledge in the Haramain, before the nineteenth century (Azra, 1992; Rachman, 1850–1950; Al Qurtuby, 2019).

Interestingly, despite the long history of Indonesian Muslims' visits to the Arabian Peninsula for pursuing Islamic knowledge, with few notable exceptions, there is limited scholarly writing and literature in English on Saudi Arabian–Indonesian intellectual networks, the academic contributions of Indonesian Muslim scholars in the Peninsula, and the social roles of these educational travellers in both Saudi Arabia and Indonesia. Previous studies generally focus on three main themes. The first theme is concerned about the enormous influences of Makkah-trained Islamic scholars in the past centuries that contributed to the shape of Islamic teachings, discourses, and Muslim practices in the Malay-Indonesian archipelago (Azra, 2004; Laffan, 2011).

The noted historian Azyumardi Azra, for instance, examined the transmission of Islamic reformation to Indonesia by investigating intellectual networks of the Middle Eastern and the Indonesian-Malay ulama in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries arguing that, among other things, the Haramain-trained Indonesian religious scholars had contributed to the shape of particular Islamic discourses and religious practices in the archipelago Azra, 2004. Following Azra's fine study, Basri investigates Indonesian ulama in the Haramain and the transmission of reformist Islam in Indonesia from 1800 to 1990 (Basri, 1997), while Rachman examines the contributions of Makkah-trained Indonesian Islamic scholars (Javanese: kiais) to the establishment of Java's oldest and respected Islamic boarding schools (known "pesantren") during the 1850s to 1950s.

The second theme is about the role of Saudi-trained Indonesian Muslim students and scholars in introducing and spreading the so-called Salafi *da'wa* movement and some forms of puritanical and reformist Islam in Indonesia (Noer, 1973; Hasan, 2005; Bubalo et. al., 2011). In recent years, particularly after the downfall of dictatorial Indonesian President Suharto in 1998, the country has witnessed the appearance of young men wearing long beards (*lihya*), Arab-style flowing robes (*jalabiyya* or thawab in Saudi), turbans (*imama*), and trousers right to their ankles (*isbal*). Not only men, today's Indonesia has witnessed women wearing *abaya*-type black cloaks (a robe-like dress), along with *niqab* (i.e., a cloth that covers the face as part of the sartorial hijab). Identifying themselves as Salafis, these particular Muslim groups, according to Hasan, are inclined to stand distinctly apart from societies around them. At first, the "Salafi movement" adopted a stance of apolitical

quietism, but in recent years the Salafis have introduced a new trend in Islamic activism in the country (Hasan, 2005).

The third theme deals with Indonesian male menial labor and domestic female workers living and working on harsh informal economic sectors in Saudi Arabia. The literature usually discusses such issues as transnational connection of migration, domestication of labourers, gendered work, the workers' economic contributions for their families, exploitations of workers, among others (Castles and Miller, 1998; Ananta, at. al., 1998; Tirtosudarmo, 2000; Amjad, 1996; Silvey, 2007; Johnson, 2010). More specifically research and scholarship typically discusses female housemaids in relation to issues of hard working / living conditions, human rights violation, sexual assault, non-payment of wages, overwork, or their roles in supporting their family expenses and economies in the country of origin (Rahman, 2004).

Given the overwhelming influx of and issues on Indonesian women migrants abroad, it is hence not surprising if some researchers and scholars of Indonesia have put more emphasis on the study of domestic female workers than of educational-intellectual migrant groups. Until recently, Indonesian Muslim educational travellers such as teachers, scholars, researchers, and students are a largely unreported and under-researched diaspora in Arab and the Middle East, despite the fact that this group has played a major role in shaping the country's Islamic education, cultures, and public discourses. Likewise, some Islamic and Muslim scholars have contributed to Saudi Arabia's education. A narrow emphasis on "unskilled" menial labourers and domestic female workers hence neglects the vitality of Saudi Arabia (or the Arab Middle East more generally) as a strategic target for realizing Islamic educational dreams, religious purposes, entrepreneurial ambitions, and middle-class aspirations.

Unlike most previous and existing studies, this article sketches the history and contemporary development of Saudi Arabian-Indonesian intellectual networks. More specifically, the article highlights trends in the shifting phenomena and the changing nature of the Indonesian educational travellers and scholars in Saudi Arabia in recent decades by focusing on both Islamic scholars and teachers as well as those specializing on non-Islamic studies. This article shows that, first, Saudi Arabia-trained Indonesian Islamic scholars vary enormously in terms of religious orientations, political affiliations, social networks, and academic backgrounds. Secondly, whereas the presence of Indonesian Islamic scholars in Saudi Arabia has declined significantly since the last four decades, new tiny Indonesian Muslim scholars specializing in the field of non-Islamic studies began to emerge and teach in some universities in the Kingdom. This article, among others, aims at examining the diversity, complexity, and changing dynamics of Saudi Arabia's

Indonesian Islamic and Muslim scholars as well as their major roles and contributions in the spread and development of Indonesia's Islam and society.

The article will, hence, complement and fill the gap on the scholarship on Indonesians in Saudi Arabia. This article is based on existing literature and field research that includes interviews and conversations with Indonesian scholars, in addition to analysis, understanding, and interpretation of multiple socio-historical/-political/-cultural events and facts in both Saudi Arabia and Indonesia.

Methods

This study adopts a qualitative–descriptive approach informed by a socio-historical perspective and the framework of transnational intellectual networks. It aims to uncover the diversity, dynamics, and transformations in the roles of *ulama*and Muslim scholars who maintain intellectual ties and scholarly connections with counterparts in Saudi Arabia.

The data are derived from both library research and fieldwork. The literature-based component involves an examination of a wide range of primary and secondary sources, including academic books, scholarly journal articles, selected historical archives, relevant biographical works on *ulama*, and research reports tracing Saudi–Indonesian intellectual genealogies. Fieldwork was conducted through in-depth interviews with scholars, *ulama*, Indonesian students studying in Saudi Arabia, and key informants who have direct experience within these educational networks and intellectual activities.

The data were analyzed using an interpretive qualitative technique that situates empirical and historical findings within their broader political, social, and cultural contexts. This approach enables the study to identify patterns of religiosity, orientations of religious thought and practice, the contributions of *ulama*, and their intellectual affiliations in shaping developments within Indonesian society. Through this methodological framework, the study seeks to offer a balanced and comprehensive account of the complexity of Saudi–Indonesian intellectual networks.

Result and Discussion

The Idea of Rihla and Saudi–Indonesian Contact

One of the main reasons is perhaps because Islam encourages Muslims to make a journey in search of knowledge, which is called *rihla*. Islam recognizes at least four types of journey, namely *hajj* (pilgrimage), *hijra* (i.e., migration to other lands for religious, economic, and political reasons), *ziyara* (i.e., visits to shrines and sacred sites), and *rihla* (i.e., travel for learning or educational travel). Islam highly values the notion of *rihla* or *thalab al-ilm* ("pursuing knowledge"). Several verses of the Qur'an and Hadith have endorsed *rihla*;

thereby, the teaching-learning process (*ta'allum*) through both formal and informal schooling, historically and traditionally, has become a Muslim habit and culture (Eickleman and Piscatori, 1990; Abaza, 1994; Norman, 2004). This is among the rationales of why many Muslims, from past to present, were keen to establish a variety of learning centers and educational institutions as a means of knowledge transformation and distribution (Eickleman, 1992; Hefner and Zaman, 2007). It is significant to underscore that Islam considers *rihla* and *ta'allum* as not only seeking knowledge and wisdom per se but also seeking God's rewards (*makafiyat*) that could guarantee the seekers enter Paradise after their death. The concepts of *rihla* and *ta'allum*, hence, are linked with the idea of *tabarrukan* (seeking blessings from God) and *rida* (Allah compliance) (Roff, 1970; Abaza, 1990).

The idea of *rihla* has also long driven Indonesian Muslims to travel. It is thus not surprising if they made journies for learning and in search of knowledge, not only from region to region in the archipelago but also to other countries since past centuries. Until now, many Muslims have travelled across borders for *thalab al-ilm*. Santri (students of *pondok pesantren*, Java's Islamic boarding school), for example, have travelled to other regions in the archipelago, looking for a fine pesantren and *kiai* (Islamic scholar and cleric) to learn Islam and Islamic sciences. As for foreign countries, one of the favourite destinations to pursue Islamic knowledge is Saudi Arabia. Other Muslim-majority countries that have attracted Indonesian Muslims to study Islamic sciences include Egypt, Yemen, Morocco, Malaysia, Sudan, and Tunisia, among others. Other Indonesian Muslims study Islam in western academic institutions, especially the United States, Australia, Canada, and countries in western Europe.

Even though Indonesian Muslims have long travelled to–and many stayed in–the Arabian Peninsula, there is no exact number or official statistics concerning Indonesians in Saudi Arabia. However, according to Sa'adullah Affandy of the Indonesian Embassy in Riyadh, more than a million Indonesians currently live in Saudi Arabia (Interview with Sa'adullah Affandy, 2020), not to mention hundreds of thousands of hajj and umrah pilgrims who annually travel to the sacred places of Makkah and Madinah. Indonesians who live in present-day Saudi Arabia are the product of a long-established contact between people of the two regions, taking place more intensively in particular since the European colonial times. Due to this lengthy contact, it is not surprising that in contemporary Makkah, there is a district called *Kampung Jawah* ("Javanese Village"), signifying the long presence of Malay-Indonesians in Arabia.

As mentioned earlier, contacts between Arabia, northern (Hijaz) and southern parts (Yemen), and Malay-Indonesian archipelago are ancient, long

before European colonials landed in the Indonesian archipelago (Freitag and Smith, 1997; Azra, 2004). This "tradition" is continued nowadays, albeit for different reasons and purposes. Historically, Arabs, particularly Arab-Hadramis in southern Arabia, who travelled to Indonesia did so mainly for trade, living, or Islamic da'wah. By contrast, Indonesians who voyaged to Arabia, especially Hijaz, were driven by their eagerness to perform the hajj pilgrimage, conduct religious activities in Makkah and Madinah, and learn Islamic knowledge and sciences in the birthplace of Islam and the Prophet Muhammad (Berg, 1989; Douwes, et. al. 1997; Jacobson and Frode, 2009; Laffan, 2011).

In spite of facing many difficulties (for instances, uneasy sea transport, disease attacks, lengthy voyage, limited food, and so forth), the number of Indonesian hajj pilgrims in the past centuries were significant and tremendous. Between 1850 and 1860, there were about 1,600 hajj pilgrims, about 2,600 – 4,600 in the 1870s, and in the 1880s, more than 15 percent of all pilgrims to Makkah were from the Indonesian archipelago. Due to a large number of Indonesian pilgrims, it is not surprising that there were many Indonesians residing in Makkah since past centuries. Although accurate figures on Indonesians in Makkah are hard to find at that time, Christian Snouck Hurgronje (1857–1936), a Dutch scholar of Oriental cultures and languages and Advisor on Native Affairs to the colonial government of the Netherlands East Indies, estimated about 8,000–10,000 Indonesians stayed there in the late nineteenth century. Later on, Snouck Hurgronje stayed in Makkah for a while (under a "pseudonym" Abdul Ghaffar) aiming at studying activities of Indonesians in the city and making a report to the Dutch colonial rule about their activities, especially religious-political activities that might jeopardize the existence of the Dutch government in the East Indies (Hurgronje, 1970). The sending of Hurgronje to Makkah was mainly because of the occurrence of a number of rebellions in Java, Sumatra and other places in the archipelago, led by kiai (religious clerics) and "haji" (returning pilgrims) (Kartodirdjo, 1966).

The pilgrims who stayed in Makkah in turn created small Indonesian enclaves and helped to shape the "*Kampung Jawah*" in this city, as mentioned previously. Located in the district of Shamiah or Shi'ib Ali, the *Kampung Jawah* became one of Islamic training or learning centers, as well as a temporary residence for new Malay-Indonesians arrived in Makkah. Although people from Arabia and Indonesia had travelled long before European colonial times, their travel intensity to these regions took place after the discovery of steamship technology and the openness of Suez Canal in 1869 that made people of the two areas easy to travel by a sea route.

Contacts between Arabia and Indonesia took place not only through informal ways but also formal or official ones. In late 1920s, for example, a small group of Islamic scholars (ulama) affiliated to Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Indonesia's largest Muslim social organization, named Komite Hijaz (Hijaz Committee), visited Saudi Arabia to meet and give a letter of request from NU to King Ibn Saud (1875–1953). The Committee was concerned about some issues related to hajj and other socio-religious situations in Makkah and Madinah following the shifting political regime in Saudi Arabia. Led by renowned and respected ulama KH Abdul Wahab Chasbullah (1888–1971), the committee requested of the King the following: (1) the implementation of four madhhab (a school of Islamic jurisprudence) within Sunni tradition, namely Maliki, Shafi'i, Hanafi, and Hanbali for Muslims in Hijaz; (2) the maintenance of Islamic historical sites; and (3) the announcement to the Muslim world about the cost for hajj pilgrimage, among others.

Moreover, in 1967, Saudi Arabia helped to set up and develop the Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia (DDII—Indonesian Council for Islamic Propagation). DDII was initiated and founded by a leading Islamist figure, Muhammad Natsir (1908–1993), and other former leaders of Masyumi, an Islamist political party banned by President Sukarno in 1960. Due to Natsir's personal closeness and relationships with elite members of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the DDII enjoyed the financial and cultural support for the development of Islamic da'wa activities such as the establishment of mosques, the founding of madrasah, the training of preachers, the distribution of free copies of the Qur'an and other Salafi-related Islamic books, and so forth (Hasan, 2005). All of these activities and publications in turn helped to contribute to the spread of Islamic resurgence and the growth of Islamist groupings in Indonesia that reached its peak following Suharto's collapse in 1998.

Diederich divides the contacts between Arabia and Indonesia into two main phases (Diederich, 2005). The first stage, which continued until the Second World War (WWII), was typified by the predominance of religious contacts, and the second phase (after WWII) was marked by the increased migration of menial labourers seeking employment and "unskilled" jobs. Unlike Diederich's observation, however, I have noticed that the first phase of contact was not only marked by religion but also intellectualism. This is to say that, as depicted below, the reasons for Indonesians who travelled or migrated to Arabia in the first stage were not only for performing religious-spiritual activities such as hajj but also for learning Islamic knowledge and for studying Islamic sciences. After completing hajj rituals, learning, and studying multiple Islamic sciences, some Indonesians preferred to stay in Makkah or Madinah (known as *mukimin*) becoming teachers and scholars who run *halaqah* ("study

circles") for pilgrims and building *rubat* (Islamic boarding schools). Secondly, as for the second stage, Indonesians who travelled or migrated to Saudi in the aftermath of WWII were not only seeking unskilled work but were also looking for professional, skilled jobs, as well as studying various sciences and pursuing degrees in multiple disciplines.

However, it should be noted, during the first stage, most, if not all, Indonesians learned and studied Islamic sciences at multiple formal and informal learning institutions (madrasah, halaqah, *rubat*, and mosques) in Makkah in particular. In the second phase, however, there were three types or groups of Indonesians travelling or migrating to Saudi, not to mention hajj / umrah pilgrims. First, Indonesians who sought "unskilled" jobs (i.e., menial workers) as well as skilled occupations (professional expatriates) working in oil industries, construction companies, hotels, or hospitals. Second, Indonesians who studied Islamic sciences did so in multiple Islamic learning centers: madrasah, mosques, institutes, colleges, and universities. This new trend, for sure, differs from the previous one where Indonesian Muslims learned Islam at informal educational sites, particularly at Makkah's Haram Mosque and Madinah's Nabawi Mosque, or madrasah (Islamic schools).

Since 1980s and 1990s, however, Indonesian students, all through scholarships provided by the Kingdom (but more recently, the scholarship scheme has changed slightly, no longer providing full scholarships), learned Islamic studies at universities and colleges, most notably Umm al-Qura University (Makkah), Islamic University (Madinah), and Imam Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University (Riyadh), among others. Of these three universities, Islamic University of Madinah has been the largest host for Indonesian Muslim students pursuing multiple degrees in Islamic sciences and disciplines such as Islamic Law, Hadith exegesis, and *da'wa* ("missiology"), among others. At present, there are more than 800 Indonesian students at the Islamic University of Madinah. The third group of Indonesians is students who study secular sciences and engineering, mostly at graduate levels (Master and PhD). These types of students mostly study at King Saud University (Riyadh), King Fahd University of Petroleum & Minerals (Dhahran), and King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (Thuwal) (Machmudi, 2011).

On Indonesian Islamic Scholars and Teachers

As noted earlier, Indonesians initially travelled to Makkah mainly for hajj pilgrimage as one of Islam's main pillars and an important religious compulsion. After performing the hajj, the majority of Indonesians returned to their country. However, a small minority chose to stay in Makkah for several reasons. The first reason was to look for jobs in order to get some money to purchase things or provisions for their trip back to their homes in the Malay-

Indonesian archipelago or to pay their debts. Many pilgrims in the past ran out their money and supplies because the journey to Makkah took a long time. To earn some money, some of them worked in date plantations or small shops, while others assisted pilgrims. Some pilgrims even became slaves because they were not able to pay their debts (Hurgronje, 1970). Since recent decades, a great number of pilgrims, after finishing their pilgrimage rituals, deliberately chose to stay in Makkah because they wanted to live (or died) and work there or other places in the Kingdom such as Jeddah, a crowded business city near Makkah, as shopkeepers, bus drivers and other occupations.

The second reason was to study or learn Islamic sciences and at the same time perform religious rituals at Haram Mosque (Makkah) and Nabawi Mosque (Madinah), two most sacred places for Muslims. Muslims believed that performing worship and conducting any religious activities in these two sites, unlike in other places, would be granted by God hundreds of thousands of rewards that could guarantee their entrance into Paradise after their death. The desire for both learning Islam and performing rituals drove some Indonesian Muslims to stay longer in the Haramain. While some stayed months or years before returning to their home country, others lived forever until deceased in Makkah. The type of religious and intellectual nature of contact between Indonesia and Arabia was obvious at least until WWII. This is among the reasons why, in the past, there were a great deal of Indonesian Islamic scholars and teachers in Haramain whose legacy can still be witnessed nowadays (Irsad, 2015; Ulum, 2015).

As for Indonesian Islamic scholars and teachers in Saudi Arabia, there is a big difference between past and present. While in the past there was a great deal of Indonesian Muslim teachers and Islamic scholars who taught in Makkah and Madinah and wrote numerous books (in Arabic or Malay) on Islamic knowledge and sciences, at present it is almost hard to find Indonesian Islamic teachers and scholars in the Kingdom. In addition, whereas in the past centuries, most, if not all, Indonesian teachers and scholars in Arabia focused on Islamic studies, nowadays there are increasing numbers of Indonesian teachers and scholars who teach and write about secular sciences such as math, chemistry, physics, engineering, computer science, aerospace, social sciences, among others. In the past centuries, Indonesian Muslim teachers and scholars taught at non-university formal educational institutions (e.g., madrasah) and informal centers for Islamic learning (e.g., *halaqah* and *rubat*), whereas in the modern era, they teach at colleges and universities across the Kingdom.

Let me briefly highlight some Indonesian Islamic teachers and scholars in Saudi Arabia. Some studies have noted that in the past centuries, there were a great deal of renowned and respected Indonesian teachers and Islamic scholars, who lived and died in Makkah. They played an enormous

role as both teachers and scholars in contributing to the development of Islamic education and discourses in Arabia and beyond. Moreover, Indonesian graduates of Makkah's Islamic schools and learning centers who chose to return to their home country of Indonesia also played a vast role in the process of Islamization as well as in the creation and development of Islamic education, social organization, and Muslim civilization in the country. Further, these scholars and teachers contributed to the founding of *pesantren* that later played a gigantic role in the transformation of Islamic knowledge and the spread of Islamic culture.

Among Arabia-trained renowned Indonesian Islamic scholars and teachers were KH Muhammad Hasyim Asy'ari, KH Ahmad Dahlan, KH Faqih Maskumambang, KH Baidhawi bin Abdul Aziz, KH Wahab Chasbullah, KH Ridwan Mujahid, KH Ma'shum bin Ahmad, among many others. Many of these eminent ulama were involved in the establishment of Nahdlatul Ulama, Indonesia's largest Muslim social organization, on January 31, 1926. Their profound legacies and heritages in teaching students, developing Islamic educational institutions, and producing religious discourses and scholarships can still be witnessed in modern Indonesia, Arabia, and beyond. This is among many reasons why during the eighteenth and early twentieth centuries, Malay-Indonesian teachers and scholars had received great esteem from Arabs and other ethnicities in the Haramaian.

Furthermore, notable Indonesian ulama in the Haramain included the following: Nuruddin al-Raniri, Shamsuddin al-Sumatrani, Abdurrahman al-Sinkili, Arshad al-Banjari, Yusuf al-Makassari, Muhyi Waliyullah Pamijahan, and KH Ahmad Mutamakkin, all of whom lived between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Historian Azyumardi Azra has studied the contributions of these ulama and their roles in the creation of intellectual networks between Arabia and Malay-Indonesian archipelago (Azra, 1992). The following nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were the "golden age" of Indonesian Islamic scholars and teachers in the Haramain. These included the following prominent names: Imam Nawawi al-Bantani, Akhmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi, Kiai Mahfudz al-Turmusi, Kiai Abdul Hamid al-Qudsi, Muhammad Yasin al-Fadani, Muhammad Uhid bin Idris al-Bughuri, Abdullah Dardum al-Fadani, Abdul Ghani al-Bimawi, Asy'ari bin Abdurrahman al-Baweani, Ahmad Nakhrawi al-Banyumasi, Muhammad Zainuddin al-Baweani, Muhammad bin Umar al-Sumbawi, Sayyid Muhsin bin Ali al-Hasani al-Palimbani, Abdul Fattah Rowah, Abdul Qodir bin Abdul Muttolib al-Mandili, Baqir bin Muhammad Nur al-Jukjawi, Abdullah Muhaimin al-Lasemi, Junaid al-Batawi, and many others (Basri, 1997; Rachman, 1997; Al Qurtuby, 2019).

Their students were not only from the Malay-Indonesian archipelago but also from the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia. Their constructive role and contributions in teaching Islamic knowledge and sciences, as well as in writing academic works on Islam that have been used in some academic circles across the Arab regions, South and Southeast Asia, had formerly helped to create a positive image in Arabia about the Malay-Indonesian archipelago. This picture contrasts with contemporary era in which Indonesians in general in Saudi are portrayed as a "coolie class" or "unskilled labourers." Due to limited space, I will only highlight the backgrounds, activities, and contributions of the most famous and influential figures from those noted teachers and scholars.

Imam Nawawi bin Umar al-Bantani (1813–1897) was perhaps the most admired of Indonesia's scholars who had achieved the highest clerical career in Makkah and Madinah. The name "Nawawi" refers to the great ulama in the Medieval Islam, Abu Zakaria Muhyiddin Yahya ibn Sharaf al-Nawawi (known Imam Nawawi, d. 1277) from Nawa, Syria, an influential Shafiite jurist and Hadith scholar. Imam Nawawi authored numerous lengthy works on Hadith, theology, biography, and jurisprudence. Kiai Umar, the father of Imam Nawawi al-Bantani, admired Imam Nawawi and promised to name his son "Nawawi". Born in Tanara of Serang, Banten, in West Java, Imam Nawawi arrived at Makkah in 1828 and soon stayed at Kampung Jawah, a popular district for Malay-Indonesian pilgrims and students. In Makkah, Imam Nawawi studied Islam with both Arab and Indonesian ulama. Among Nawawi's Indonesian Islamic teachers were Junaid al-Batawi, Mahmud bin Kanaan al-Palembani, Abdush Shamad bin Abdulrahman, and Yusuf bin Arshad al-Banjari. As for non-Indonesian teachers who taught Imam Nawawi at Haram Mosque, they included Shaikh Ahmad al-Nakhrawi al-Makki, Shaikh Ahmad al-Dimyathi, Shaikh Hasbullah, Shaikh Zaini Dahlan, Shaikh Abdul Hamid Daghastani, Shaikh Muhammad Khatib Hanbali, among others.

After years of studies on various Islamic disciplines and subjects under the guidance and mentorship of both respected Arab and Indonesian ulama in Makkah, Imam Nawawi taught Islamic sciences first at the Kampung Jawah and later at the Haram Mosque (Masjid al-Haram) upon the agreement of a group of ulama and teachers under the direction of Shaikh Ainur Rafiq. Imam Nawawi's students, it should be noted, were not only from Malay-Indonesian archipelago but also from other parts of the world, many of whom became great scholars, teachers, preachers, and other professions. Some notable Indonesian students of Imam Nawawi included the following notable names: Zainuddin bin Badawi, Abdul Ghani bin Shubuh, Mahfudz al-Turmusi, Asy'ari al-Baweani, Abdul Karim al-Bantani, Jum'an bin Ma'mun al-Tangerangi, Abdul Hamid al-Qudsi, Hasyim Asy'ari, Arsyad Thawil al-

Bantani, Khalil Bangkalan, Umar bin Harun Rembang, among many others. Furthermore, Imam Nawawi's Arab students who later taught at the Haram Mosque included Sayyid Ali bin Ali al-Habsyi, Shaikh Abdul Satar al-Dahlawi, Shaikh Abdus Satar bin Abdul Wahhab al-Shadiqi al-Makki, and so forth.

At the time, his students called Imam Nawawi "*Imam al-Manthuq wa al-Mafhum*", namely an imam or a teacher who comprehends Islamic knowledge and understands ways of teaching the knowledge. Due to his masterful expertise, Imam Nawawi was granted multiple religious titles by Arab ulama, such as "Sayyid al-Ulama al-Hijaz" (The Lord of Hijaz Ulama), "Alim al-Hijaz" (the Scholar of Hijaz), "Imam Ulama al-Haramain" (the Leader of Ulama of Haramain), "Hukama al-Mutaakhirin" (the Last Jurist or Judge), or Shaikh al-Hijaz (the Shaikh of Hijaz). Moreover, Imam Nawawi was appointed as a mufti of the Grand Mosque of al-Haram and earned the highest religious authority in Makkah (Machmudi, 2011; Ulum, 2015). Not only teaching at the Haram Mosque, Imam Nawawi was also invited by Shaikh Ibrahim al-Baijuri, the grand mufti of Egypt, to give a religious lecture at the mosque of Al-Azhar. Because of Nawawi's great contributions in teaching Islamic knowledge the Haram Mosque, Shaikh Abdallah Abdulrahman al-Moalimi in his *A'lam al-Makkiyyin* included him as one of the distinguished teachers and scholars in Makkah's history (Al-Moalimi, 2000).

Imam Nawawi was not only a great teacher but also a truly productive scholar and a prolific writer who, according to Egyptian Islamic scholar Shaikh Umar Abd al-Jabbar, wrote more than 100 books and publications in Arabic on various subjects (Hadith, tafsir or Qur'anic Exegesis, Islamic Law, theology, Islamic history, Arabic grammar, literature, and so forth). Many of his works have been widely used in traditional Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) across Indonesia and beyond, in addition to Makkah, where he ran a *halaqah* (a circle for learning and studying Islam). When I was in pesantren in Central Java, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, I also studied Imam Nawawi's books. Imam Nawawi's monumental work on Qur'anic exegesis is known *Tafsir al-Munir* (2 vols., written in 1866), was examined—and then recognized—by a group of ulama in Egypt and Makkah. In the Islamic Law (fiqh), Imam Nawawi wrote several books including *Fath al-Qarib, Kasyifat al-Saja, Nihayat al-Zain, Sullam al-Munajat, Uqud al-Lujain, al-Aqdu al-Samin, Mirqath al-Shu'ud al-Tashdiq*, among others. His books on theology ('aqidah) and morality (akhlaq) included *Bahjat al-Wasa'il, Fath al-Majid, Tijan al-Durari, al-Najah al-Jadidah, Salalim al-Fudhala, Nashaih al-Ibad*, and so forth. In history, Imam Nawawi wrote *Targhib al-Mustaqim, al-Ibriz al-Dani, Madarij al-Shu'ud*, and *Fath al-Shamad*.

In brief, Imam Nawawi was a legendary figure whose teachings, knowledge, and charisma have inspired many Indonesian Muslims, especially *Nahdliyin* (members of Nahdlatul Ulama). After years of teaching, lecturing, and services for the development of Islam, Imam Nawawi died in 1879 and was buried at Ma'la, Makkah, close to the graveyards of Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani (a medieval Shafi'ite Sunni scholar of Islam and a Hadith expert, d. 1449) and Asma' bint Abu Bakar (d. 692), one of the companions of Prophet Muhammad PBUH.

Another noted Indonesian scholar and a respected teacher in Makkah was Kiai Muhammad Mahfud bin Abdullah al-Turmusi (known, Shaikh Mahfud al-Turmusi, 1868–1920). Born in Termas in the regency of Pacitan, East Java, Shaikh Mahfud was the son of Kiai Abdullah bin Abdul Manan, a Muslim cleric and a leader of Pesantren Termas. It was Mahfud's father who took Shaikh Mahfud to Makkah for hajj when he was six years old and introduced him to respected Indonesian ulama residing in the Kampung Jawah such as Imam Nawawi al-Bantani and Ahmad Nahrawi al-Banyumasi, both of whom were Kiai Abdullah's teachers. After completing hajj, Kiai Abdullah and Shaikh Mahfud went home. But later, when he was 30 in 1897, Shaikh Mahfud, accompanied by his younger brother, Kiai Dimyathi, returned to Makkah (and eventually died there) to continue learning Islamic sciences with several notable scholars at the Haram Mosque including Shaikh Abu Bakar Shatha, Shaikh Abu Bakar al-Sham, Sayyid Hussein bin Muhammad bin Hussein al-Habshi, Shaikh Muhammad al-Sarbini, Sayyid Muhammad Amin bin Ahmad Ridwan al-Madani, among others.

Although Shaikh Mahfud learned and studied various subjects of Islamic sciences, he was most renowned for his expertise in the Hadith scholarship and Islamic law. Like Imam Nawawi al-Bantani described earlier, Shaikh Mahfud al-Turmusi also taught at the Haram Mosque, and his students were not only from the Malay-Indonesian archipelago but also from other regions. Some of his notable non-Indonesian students included Shaikh Habibullah al-Shinqithi, Shaikh Umar Hamdan al-Mahrusi, Shaikh Ahmad Abdullah al-Shami, Qadhi Yahya Aman al-Makki, Shaikh Abdullah Hamid al-Makki, and Shaikh Sa'dullah al-Maimani (a mufti of Bombay). Shaikh Mahfud wrote several books including commentaries of some works on Shafi'i jurisprudence such as *al-Minhaj, Fath al-Wahhab*, and *al-Iqna.* Some of his commentary works were later known as *Hashiyat al-Turmusi*, and written in several volumes. His other publications included *al-Fawa'id al-Turmusiyah fi Asma al-Qira'ah al-'Asriyah* (Qur'anic reading skills), *Manhaj al-Nazhar fi al-Manzumat Ahl al-Athar* (methodology of Hadith), and *al-Siqayah al-Mardiyah fi Asma fi al-Kutub al-Fiqhiyah Ashab li al-Shafi'iyah* (the encyclopaedia of Shafi'i jurisprudence school).

In a commentary on the legacy of Shaikh Mahfud al-Turmusi, KH Maimun Zubair (1928-2019) said that he was "*Shaikh al-mashayikh al-alam wa qudwah al-anam min al-ulama al-barizin fi al-qorni al-rabi 'ashar*" ("the professor of professors and a role model for people in the fourteenth century of Hijri") Irsad, 2015; Ulum, 2015. KH Maimun Zubair was one of key leading religious figures who has been a main channel for Indonesian students to study at Makkah's Islamic learning centers, especially at the Ma'had Sayyid Muhammad Alawi al-Maliki al-Makki.

Another outstanding scholar who deserves to be mentioned in this article was Ahmad Khatib bin Abdul Latif al-Minangkabawi (1860–1916). Born among the Minangkabau people of West Sumatra and dying in Ma'la, Makkah, Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi (known Shaikh Khatib Minangkabau), like Imam Nawawi Banten and Shaikh Mahfud Termas, was a celebrated teacher and a prolific author. For many years, after studying at Makkah under the mentorship of Arab and Indonesian ulama, he taught at the Haram Mosque (as well as becoming an imam of the mosque there) and had many students from different parts of the world. Shaikh Khatib's Indonesian students in particular had played a gigantic role in transforming Islamic knowledge into Indonesian settings and in developing Muslim education and organization in the archipelago.

Some of Shaikh Khatib's notable students who later played a tremendous role in their societies included Abdul Karim Amrullah (Haji Rasul), Shaikh Muhammad Jamil Jambek, Shaikh Sulaiman al-Rasuli, Shaikh Muhammad Jamil Jaho, Shaikh Abbas Qadhi Ladang Lawas, Shaikh Abbas Abdullah Padang, Shaikh Khatib Ali, Shaikh Hasan Maksum, and so forth. The founders of Nahdlatul Ulama (KH Hasyim Asy'ari, 1875–1947) and of Muhammadiyah (KH Ahmad Dahlan or KH Muhammad Darwis, 1868–1923) were also the students of Shaikh Ahmad Khatib Minangkabau. Unlike Imam Nawawi Banten and Shaikh Mahfud Termas, Shaikh Khatib Minangkabau was an expert in multiple subjects and disciplines including astronomy, inheritance, math, geometry, history, besides Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), Islamic legal theory (ushul fiqh), and theology. Shaikh Khatib wrote at least 49 books (in Arabic and Malay) on these subjects, including *Raudat al-Hussab fi A'mal Ilm al-Hissab, al-Jawahir al-Naqiyah fi al-A'mali al-Jaibiyah, Hasyiyat Nafahat ala Syarh al-Waraqatuhar*, among many others.

Shaikh Muhammad Yasin bin Isa al-Fadani (born and died in Makkah, 1916–1990; hereafter Shaikh Yasin) was another Makkah's eminent teacher and Islamic scholar of Indonesian origins, whom anthropologist Martin van Bruinessen called "Begawan [Maestro] Sumatra," (Bruinessen, 2015) referring to the ancestral root of Shaikh Yasin, namely Padang of Sumatra island. Like other Indonesian ulama at Makkah at the time, Shaikh Yasin also

learned under the guidance of Arab and non-Arab ulama, including Indonesians, such as Shaikh Mahfud Termas (East Java), Shaikh Abdullah Uhid Bogor (West Java), Shaikh Mahmud bin Uqid Padang (Sumatra), Sayyid Muhsin al-Musawa (Sumatra), among others. Some sources said that Shaikh Yasin studied Islam at Makkah with hundreds of Muslim scholars (*ulama* and *fuqaha*) from many regions: Hijaz, Yaman, Egypt, India, Syria, Thailand (Pattani), among many others; it is hence not surprising that later he became a noted scholar of Islam whose intellectual works are able to shine many students from different parts of the world.

Shaikh Yasin wrote some 97 books (some said a hundred), all of which used an excellent, systematic classical Arabic (*fushah*), on multiple disciplines and themes, particularly Hadith, Arabic grammar / linguistic, Islamic Jurisprudence (*fiqh*), Islamic Legal Theory (*ushul fiqh*), and astronomy (*falak*). Many of Shaikh Yasin's works have been widely used as references in many Indonesian pesantren (Islamic boarding schools), Islamic schools, and universities, including Al-Azhar University (Egypt) and Umm al-Qura (Makkah). Because of Shaikh Yasin's exhaustive knowledge and his masterpiece on Hadith, many Islamic scholars granted him a prestigious respected title "*Al-Musnid al-Dunya*" (the expert or scholar of sanad—the chain of narration of Hadith—in the world). A well-known Hadith scholar Sayyid Abdul Aziz al-Ghumari also said that Shaikh Yasin was the "pride of Haramain ulama". Shaikh Yasin's important academic works include *al-Dar al-Mandlud Syarah Sunan Abu Dawud* (20 volumes), *Fath al-A'llam Syarah Bulugh al-Maram* (4 volumes) (both on Hadith), *Bughyah al-Musytaq Syarah Luma' Ab al-Ishaq* (2 volumes), *Hasyiyah ala Asybah wa al-Naza'ir fi al-Furu' al-Fiqhiyyah li al-Suyuthi* (both on fiqh and ushul fiqh), among others. Although a Shafi'ite scholar, Shaikh Yasin was also acknowledged in non-Shafi'i schools of thoughts such as Hanafi, Maliki, and Hanbali.

As a teacher, Shaikh Yasin taught at the Haram Mosque (particularly at the *Bab [Gate] Ibrahim* and *Bab al-Shafa*), Madrasah Dar al-Ulum, and his places at Misfalah and Utaibiyah. Since his specialty was mostly on Hadith, Shaikh Yasin taught many Hadith books within the Sunni tradition, including *Shahih Bukhari, Shahih Muslim, Sunan Abi Dawud, Sunan Al-Tirmidzi, Sunan Ibn Majjah, Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal*, among others. Shaikh Yasin's students were not only from the Malay-Indonesian archipelago but also from other areas of the "Muslim world", many of whom became respected ulama in their countries, and functioned as an "intellectual channel" between their home countries and Hijaz/Arabia.

Shaikh Yasin's notable Indonesian students included KH Ahmad Damhuri (Banten), KH Abdul Hamid (Jakarta), KH Maimun Zubair (Rembang), KH Ahmad Sahal Mahfudh (Pati), KH Ahmad Muhajirin

(Bekasi), KH Syafii Hadzami (Jakarta), KH Ahmad Muthahar (Demak), KH Zayadi Muhajir, Tuan Guru M. Zaini Abdul-Ghani (Kalimantan), among many others. Moreover, non-Indonesian prominent students of Shaikh Yasin that later became celebrated Muslim figures in the world included, among others, Sayyid Umar bin Muhammad al-Yamani, Prof. Dr. Ali Al-Shobuni, Dr. M. Hasan al-Dimasyqi, Shaikh Ismail Zain al-Yamani, Prof. Dr. Ali Jum'ah, Shaikh Hasan Qathirji, Prof. Dr. Umar Hashim, Shaikh Ramzi Sa'ad al-Din al-Shami, and Sayyid Muhammad Alawi al-Maliki.

It is imperative to note that Shaikh Yasin not only taught students and wrote scholarly works but also pioneered the founding of Makkah's Indonesian schools and women's education. As depicted earlier in this article, Shaikh Yasin was among the founders of Madrasah Dar al-Ulum in 1934, the first Indonesian school at Makkah, which became an educational base for Malay-Indonesian students in Hijaz. Shaikh Yasin not only participated in the building of this school but also was actively involved in fundraising, teaching, and later serving as a principal of this school. Shaikh Yasin, moreover, also founded (1) Ma'had al-Muallimat al-Ahliyat, a non-formal Islamic boarding school, and (2) Madrasah Ibtidaiyah li al-Banat al-Ahliyah, a special school for female students located at Shami'ah, Makkah. Shaikh Yasin affirmed that schooling for women is an obligation in Islam, arguing that since a woman has responsibility to teach her children then she needs to be educated. How can a woman educate her children if she never gets education? This was the primary question behind Shaikh Yasin's support for female education.

The founding for this female school in 1957 was driven by the enthusiasm of girls and women who informally learned Islam with Shaikh Yasin in his house. Interestingly, Shaikh Yasin's wife, Nyai Aminah, also established a learning center for women, named Jam'iyyah Khairiyah. This name was dedicated or attributed to the wife of Kiai Abdullah Muhaimin Lasem (b. 1890), namely Khairiyah Hasyim, the daughter of KH Hasyim Asy'ari (1875 – 1947), who was the founder of Nahdlatul Ulama and the grandfather of the late Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid. In 1942, Khairiyah Hasyim initiated and established a female school, named Madrasah Khuttab al-Banat, which might be the first female school in Arabia (Irsad, 2015; Ulum, 2015). In 1955, this school was transformed into a government school by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Conclusion

A few conclusions can be drawn as follows. Although religion has traditionally been the strongest motivation for Indonesian scholars and teachers, past and present, in Saudi Arabia, religion for sure is not the only factor and motivations, particularly for contemporary Indonesians taught (or teaching) in

the Kingdom. In the past centuries, especially before Indonesia gained independence in 1945, Indonesian scholars and teachers who dedicated their life and academic career in Hijaz or the Haramain were primarily driven by religious motives, namely Muslim obligation to learn (Islamic) knowledge and then teach or share it to other people.

Since they saw teaching-learning process and the search of knowledge (*thalab al-ilm*) as a God's mandate in Islam, they did it with *ikhlas* (literally means "purity", "sincere", or "refining") without getting any payment or salaries from students or any people. To fulfil their living expenses, they mostly brought supplies (money and others) from their home country Indonesia or entrusted someone to bring them during hajj sessions, or worked as a hajj guide or other jobs.

Furthermore, most Indonesians teachers and scholars in the past centuries were mostly from a middle-class background and religious families. Since travelling to Saudi at the time was hard, dangerous, and costly, it is almost impossible for "ordinary Muslims" to voyage to Arabia. They believed that God would "pay" them and reciprocate their sacrifice in teaching-learning activities. What they expected was a ridha Allah.

It is true that Saudi Arabia is a best place for devout Muslims since it is in this Kingdom where Makkah and Madinah are located, but this does not mean that religion and spirituality are the only reasons for driving contemporary Indonesian academic and professional expats in the Kingdom. In brief, there is a changing nature of Indonesian intellectual/educational travellers in Saudi Arabia from past to present. Apart from the shift and differences, however, it is crucial to acknowledge that both past and present scholars have shared the same view, namely they considered (and consider) Saudi Arabia as a source of learning, knowledge, spirituality, and religious wisdoms.

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