COMPARATIVE RELIGION

Its Growth and Development in Indonesia

ASLAM SA'AD

SUKA-Press

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADIA : Akademi Dinas Ilmu Agama (State Academy of Religious Studies)
B.C. : Before Christian era
BPUPKI : Badan Usaha Penyelidik Persiapan Kemerdekaan Indonesia (The Investigating Committee for Preparatory Work for Indonesian Independence)
C.E. : Christian era
FKUB : Forum Kerukunan Antar Umat Beragama (Forum for the Harmony of Interreligious Community)
IAHR : International Association of the History of Religions
IAIN : Institut Agama Islam Negeri (State Institute of Islamic Studies)
ICRS : Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies
IKIP : Institut Keguruan Ilmu Pendidikan (Institute of Teacher Training and Education Science)
INTERFIDEI : Institute for Inter-faith Dialogue in Indonesia
ITB : Institut Teknologi Bandung (Institute of Technology Bandung)

NEI : Netherlands East Indies
PGA : Pendidikan Guru Agama (Religious Teachers Education)
PHIN : Pendidikan Hakim Islam Negeri (State Edecution Institution for Islamic Judiciary Offices)
PPKI : Panitia Persiapan Kemerdekaan Indonesia (The Committee for the Preparation of Indonesian Independence)
PTAIN : Perguruan Tinggi Islam Negeri (State Higher Islamic Colleges)
PTIJ : Perguruan Tinggi Islam Jakarta (Institute of Islamic Studies Jakarta)
SIT : Sekolah Islam Tinggi (Higher Islamic College)
UGM : Universitas Gajah Mada (Gajah Mada University)
UII : Universitas Islam Indonesia (Indonesian Islamic University)
UIN : Universitas Islam Negeri (State Islamic University)
UKDW : Universitas Kristen Duta Wacana (Duta Wacana Christian University)
UNJ : Universitas Negeri Jakarta (State University of Jakarta)
VOC : Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (The United East India Company)

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TRANSLITERATION

’	ء
B	ب
T	ت
Th	ث
J	ج
ḥ	ح
Kh	خ
D	د
Dh	ذ
R	ر
z	ز
s	س
sh	ش
ṣ	ص
ḍ	ض
ṭ	ط
ẓ	ظ
‘	ع

gh	**غ**
f	**ف**

q	**ق**
k	**ك**
l	**ل**
m	**م**
n	**ن**
h	**ه**
w	**و**
y	**ي**

VOWEL

Short Vowels Long Vowels

Fatḥah	ـَ		Long *Fatḥah*	ا	**ā**
Kasrah	ـِ		Long *Kasrah*	ي	**ī**
Ḍammah	ـُ		Long *Ḍammah*	و	**ū**

DIPHTONG

ay	**يا**
aw	**وا**

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Since time immemorial, Indonesia has been known as a great, amiable home to major world religions such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Catholicism, and Protestantism. In addition to these officially state-recognized religions, a plentiful variety of tribal and indigenous beliefs, ethnic groups, cultures, arts, and local languages have also been existent and alive there for centuries. In such a plural society as Indonesia, religious diversity is seen as a serious matter that requires appropriate handling and management; otherwise, if poorly treated, it would be very likely to engender interreligious violence and intolerance.[1]

The portrait of the relationship between different religious believers in most parts of the country before independence was,

1 See, Herman L. Beck, "A Pillar of Social Harmony: the Study of Comparative Religion in Contemporary Indonesia," in *Modern Societies & the Science of Religions: Studies in Honor of Lammert Leertouwer,* edited by Gerard Wiegers and Jan Platvoet, (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2002), 332.

in general, coloured by a significant degree of conviviality and yet traces of interreligious tensions and clashes were sporadically found. These cases occurred more often than not in the predominantly Muslim regions, usually involving two parties: Muslim and Christian communities.[2] Meanwhile, interreligious relations in Indonesian post-independence became more complicated and, unfortunately, the cases of interreligious conflict and clashes during this period increased in frequency.

Inapt measures to deal with religious diversity are likely to result in interreligious tensions and violence that in turn can lead to real threats to the national integrity and security interests. In view of this, many Indonesian Muslim practitioners of education were very aware that academic training in Comparative Religion[3] can play a pivotal role in edifying their fellow Muslims' mind-sets about the importance of having a better understanding and mutual respect for religious others. In relation to this, in 1960 Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN, State Islamic University) Sunan Kalijaga established

2 Some historical accounts on this issue can be found for instance in, M.C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia since c. 1200*, (California: Stanford University Press, 3rd edition, 2001); Ricklefs, *Polarising Javanese Society, Islamic and Other Visions,* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2007); and Sutarman S. Partonadi, *Sadrach's Community and Its Contextual Roots, A Nineteeth Javanese Expression of Christianity,* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988).

3 There are still voices expressing dissent concerning whether Comparative Religion is by definition different from, and only a branch of *Allgemeine Religionswissenschaft,* which literally means General Science of Religion, or is simply another name for the same field of science. For the latter, *Allgemeine Religionswissenschaft* can be dubbed with various names as the Study of Religion, the Comparative Study of Religion, the Scientific Study of Religion, the Phenomenology of Religion, the History of Religion, and Religious Studies. They can be used interchangeably, but still refer to the same definition.

the Department of Comparative Religion, a progressive step of great relevance to the national interests of building and promoting interreligious tolerance, peace, and harmony within the pluralistic society of Indonesia.[4] Ever since then, the University has become a fertile academic ground for the Comparative Religion discipline to grow and thrive quite well. Moreover, the University's efforts to set up the Department of Comparative Religion have been emulated by many other Islamic institutions of higher learning linked to Perguruan Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri (PTAIN, the state institutes of Islamic studies).[5]

The goal of incorporating Comparative Religion into the University's curricular is not simply to improve the scholarship and theoretical works in the discipline, but rather to improve the institution's role and contribution in building and strengthening

4 Fuad Jabali and Jamhari, eds., *The Modernization of Islam in Indonesia, an Impact Study on the Cooperation between the IAIN and McGill University,* (Jakarta and Montreal: Indonesia-Canada Islamic Higher Education Project, 2003).

5 UIN Sunan Kalijaga, previously named IAIN Sunan Kalijaga, is a part of Perguruan Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri (PTAIN, the State Institutes of Islamic Studies). PTAIN is a large system of state institutes of Islamic higher learning that represents 8 UINs (Universitas Islam Negeri, State Islamic University), 14 IAINs (Institut Agama Islam Negeri, State Institute of Islamic Studies), and 32 centres of Islamic higher learning with college status called STAIN (Sekolah Tinggi Islam Negeri, State College of Islamic Studies). In addition, there also are a number of institutes and colleges of Islamic studies run by private educational institutions or foundations. Both state and private academic institutions are supervised by Direktorat Pendidikan Tinggi Islam (DITRJEN DIKTIS, the Directorate of Institutes of Islamic Studies) which is attached to the Directorate General of Islamic Education under the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia. The eight current UINs are, in fact, a later result of the transformation of IAINs from institutional status into university status. This transformation was initiated in the 2000s.

the culture of interreligious dialogue, cooperation, and tolerance.[6] As a result, the perseverance of the UIN scholars in fostering Comparative Religion has brought the University to be a reputable centre for comparative religious studies in Indonesia.[7] As such, the teaching of Comparative Religion in tertiary institutions is believed to equip students with tools of critical analysis, to shape their better understanding of other religions, and to "widen the intellectual and spiritual horizons of students by bringing to them…deeper dimensions of life and culture in the dreams and faith by which men live."[8]

Historically speaking, the Comparative Religion discipline is not something new to Indonesian Muslims. In the 1930s, or three decades before UIN Sunan Kalijaga founded the Department of Comparative Religion, some Islamic secondary schools and colleges in West Sumatra started to introduce the discipline to their students. In addition, in fact, Nūr al-dīn al-rānīrī (d. 1658), a prominent Muslim scholar who lived during the Acehnese sultanate of the seventieth century, wrote a book entitled *Tibyān fī ma'rifat al-adyān,* which extensively expounds upon the history of world religions, although afterwards not any work on similar topics was written in Indonesia until the early twentieth century. Al-Rānīri's work

6 Azyumardi Azra, "The Making of Islamic Studies in Indonesia", in *Islamic Studies in World Institutions of Higher Learning,* edited by Abd. Samat Musa, Hazleena Baharun, and Abd Karim Abdullah, (Kuala Lumpur, Islamic University College of Malaysia, 2004), 31. See also Azyumardi Azra, *Pendidikan Islam: Tradisi dan Modernisasi Menuju Milenium Baru,* (Jakarta: Logos Wacana Ilmu, 1999), 169-70.

7 Jabali and Jamhari, eds., *The Modernization of Islam in Indonesia,* 140.

8 Joseph. M. Kitagawa, "The History of Religions in America," in *The History of Religions Essays in Methodology*, edited by Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959), 30.

very likely received influence from classical Muslim scholarship in Comparative Religion as presented by classical Muslim thinkers such as Abū rayhān al-bīrūnī (972-1052),[9] Abū Muhammad 'alī ibn hazm (994-1064),[10] and 'Abd al-karīm al-shahrastānī (1086-1153),[11] to mention just few, who left a great legacy of works on the discipline.

The flourishing field of Comparative Religion in the Muslim world of the Middle Ages was triggered, in part, by the vibrant interaction among Muslim-Jewish-Christian scholars and their insightful deliberations on interfaith issues.[12] However, the interest of Muslims in studying the multiplicity of religions was obviously rising out of the two main sources of Islamic teachings: the Quran and the

9 Abū rayhān al-bīrūnī, *Al-Āthār al-baqiyyah 'ān al-qurūn al-khāliyyah*, edited by P. Azkaci, (Tehran: Miras al-Maktub, 2001). This book was translated by Edward C. Sachau into *The Chronology of Ancient Nations: An English Version of the Arabic Text of the Athar al-baqiya of al-Biruni or Vestiges of the Past*, (London: W.H. Allen & Co. 1879). Another work of al-Bīrūnī is *Tahqīq mā li al-hind min maqūlah maqbūlah fi al-'aql al-mardūlah*, edited by Edward C. Sachau (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1925) was translated also by Edward C. Sachau into *Alberuni's India: An Account of the Religion, Philosophy, Literature, Geography, Chronology, Astronomy, Customs, Laws, and Astrology of India about AD 1030,* (Delhi: Low Price Pub.), 2 vols.

10 Research on Ibn Hazm's views on other religions has been done by Ghulam Haider Aasi. See Ghulam Haider Aasi, *Muslim Understanding of Other Religions-A Study of Ibn Hazm's Kitāb al-Fasl fī al-Milal wa al-Ahwā' wa al-Nihal,* (Pakistan: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Islamic Research Institute, 1999).

11 'Abd al-karīm al-shahrastānī, *Al-Milal wa al-nihal,* edited by Amīr 'Alī Mahnā and 'Alī Hasan Fā'ūr, (Bairut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1993).

12 Ismail R. al Faruqi, "Foreword", in *Trialogue of the Abrahamic Faiths,* edited by Ismail R. al Faruqi, (Virginia: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1991), ix.

traditions of the Prophet Muhammad.[13] The plethora of works on the history of religions generated by medieval Islam is considered to be, as Franz Rosenthal points out, "one of the great contributions of Muslim civilization to mankind's intellectual progress."[14]

Many scholars opine that Comparative Religion is a Muslim invention while other scholars hold a view that it is a Western creation by referring to Friedrich Max Mueller (1823-1900) as the founding father of the modern study of religions based on his work, *Introduction into the Science of Religion,* published in 1872.[15] The UIN scholars concerned with Comparative Religion suggest that Muslim traditions of religious studies need to adopt the constructive aspects of Western traditions of comparative religious studies, especially in terms of the application of modern methodologies such as Phenomenology, History, Anthropology, Philosophy, Sociology, Psychology, and Linguistics. The use of modern analyses and approaches will give much benefit in understanding the complex religious data being studied.

The study of religions is always linked to the wider contexts of social, cultural, and political dynamics in the society, as such because it is "part of a greater project of the critical study of society."[16]

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13 Ghulam Haider Aasi, "Muslim Contributions to the History of Religions," in *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences,* vol. 8, no. 3, 1991, 409-421.

14 Franz Rosenthal, "Preface," in Bruce B. Lawrence, *Shahrastānī on the Indian Religions,* (Mouton: Mouton & Co., 1976), 5.

15 Joachim Wach, *The Comparative Study of Religions*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 1; See also, Dominic Corrywright and Peggy Morgan, *Get Set for Religious Studies,* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 206), 43.

16 Abdulkader Tayob, "The Study of Religion and Social Crises, Arab-Islamic Discourse in Late Twentieth Century", in *New Approach to the Study of Religion,* edited by Peter Antes, Armin W. Geertz, and Randi R. Warne,

The Comparative Religion discipline develops through empirical reciprocity and is epistemologically constructed and affected by the historical, social, cultural, economic, and political surroundings.[17] In line with that, the discipline, as a part of human understanding of scientific activities, may not be separated from "its complex relations with society, the state, and the economy."[18] It is within such an epistemological context that the development of Comparative Religion in Indonesian institutions of Islamic higher learning can be well understood and presented.

In 1960, Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN, State Islamic University) Sunan Kalijaga, previously named Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN, State Institute of Islamic Studies) Sunan Kalijaga was the first Islamic institution of higher learning in Indonesia to establish a Department of Comparative Religion. Ever since then the University has continued to dedicate a significant contribution to the improvement of scholarship in Comparative Religion

(Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), vol. 1, 104. See also, Hans G. Kippenberg, "Rivalry Among Scholars of Religions: The Crisis of Historicism and the Formation of Paradigm," in *Historical Reflections*, vol. 20, no. 3, 1996, 387.

17 Jacques Wardenburg, "Observations on the Scholarly Study of Religions as Pursued in Some Muslim Countries," in *Numen,* vol. 45, no. 3, 1998, 235-257. See also, Jacques Wardenburg, "Islamic Studies and the History of Religions," in *Scholarly Approaches to Religion, Interreligious Perceptions and Islam,* edited by Jacques Wardenburg, (Bern: Peter Lang, 1995), 413-451; W.A. Bijlefeld, "Islamic Studies Within the Perspective of the History of Religions," *The Muslim World,* LXII, 1972, 1-11; Charles J. Adam, "The History of Religions and the Study of Islam," in *The History of Religions: Essays on the Problem of Understanding,* edited by J.H. Kitagawa, M. Eliade and C.H.Long, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 177-193.

18 Kapil Raji. *Relocating Modern Science, Circulation and the Construction of Knowledge in South Asia and Europe, 1650-1900.* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 10.

and constantly promotes the discipline as a full-fledged field of knowledge at the academia. UIN Sunan Kalijaga, therefore, is seen as exemplary for other institutions of Islamic higher learning in developing the Comparative Religion discipline and is recognized as one of the preferred centres for comparative religious studies in Indonesia. Furthermore, in following UIN's academic steps, many of the state institutes of Islamic studies across the country also established departments of Comparative Religion. Suffice it to say that the present state of comparative religious studies in many of the state institutions of Islamic higher learning in Indonesia is quite indebted to the role played by the University.

The growth and development of the Comparative Religion discipline in the particular context of UIN Sunan Kalijaga is inextricably intertwined with the wider context of Indonesia's social, cultural, and political dynamics. It can be argued accordingly that the founding of the Department of Comparative Religion at the University has been, to some extent, an academic response to the conditions of plurality in Indonesia as a great home to major world religions (Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Confucianism, and Buddhism) and to hundreds of traditional, indigenous beliefs and practises, as well.

The success that UIN Sunan Kalijaga has achieved in fostering Comparative Religion can be seen through the discipline's manifestations in three academic aspects. Firstly, the UIN educational system focusing specifically on the methods used in studying and teaching the discipline in academic coursework, the curricular and syllabic design of the subject, as well as other academic policies conducive to fostering scholarship in the discipline. Secondly, the community of the UIN scholars concerned with Comparative Religion that has played a pivotal

role in cultivating and maintaining the discipline as an outstanding field of knowledge. Thirdly, the UIN scholars' ideas and thoughts regarding certain topics in comparative religious studies such as the notion of the origins of religion, the issue of religious truth claims, the methodology and approaches used in religious studies, and the purpose of studying Comparative Religion.

The following questions provide an unequivocal direction to this research: What were the socio-historical contexts and factors that inspired and drove the emergence and development of the Comparative Religion discipline in Indonesia? How did the Comparative Religion discipline grow and thrive within the academic setting of UIN Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta? What are the opinions and views of the Muslim scholars at UIN concerning certain selected topics in Comparative Religion?

This study aims to acquire a relatively intact portrait of the historical setting of the emergence and development of Comparative Religion studies in Indonesia; to find appropriate ways of improving the methods of teaching and learning the Comparative Religion discipline that meet the needs of Indonesian Muslim scholars and students of religious studies; and to determine the trends of intellectual orientation among the UIN Muslim scholars associated with Comparative Religion.

As the title of this work suggests, it will be confined to the analysis of how the Comparative Religion discipline grows and thrives within a particular context of Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta. In such a way, this study tries to approach and unequivocally discuss some relevant topics such as how the University's educational system is applied in maintaining and cultivating Comparative Religion; the role of the University scholars in dealing with the discipline; and the views

and thoughts of those scholars regarding certain topics frequently discussed in Comparative Religion.

This research is important and timely to be done for several reasons: this work will enhance the research and studies concerning how the Comparative Religion discipline has been cultivated and developed within the academic milieu of Islamic higher learning institutions in Indonesia. Indeed, despite the long familiarity of Indonesian Muslim scholars with religious studies, the development of Comparative Religion in Indonesian centres of Islamic higher learning has not yet been systematically addressed and methodologically studied, therefore this study is considered significant and timely, but still it merits further research.

This study can be a source of reference from which scholars of religious studies, in particular, and social workers, in general, can benefit when they have to deal with challenging facts concerning interreligious issues and socio-cultural diversity. Sensitive interfaith issues cannot be taken for granted, so a better understanding of them and appropriate approaches to them are highly required in order to anticipate and counter the negative effects that may arise from managing a culturally and religiously plural society. This study is expected to be a valuable document of the history of Comparative Religion in Indonesia.

This study is consciously designed to be qualitative and hence relies chiefly on interpretative[19] and descriptive analyses.[20] Two methods of survey are employed: historical and philosophical. Meanwhile, the procedures for gathering the sources of data are built

19 Max Travers, *Qualitative Research through Case Studies*, (London: Sage Publication, 2001), 0-10.

20 Robert A. Stebbins, *Exploratory research in the social sciences*, (California: Sage Publications, 2001), 29.

on library study and empirical investigation through interviews. Interviews with several of the UIN Muslim scholars, as well as with the policymakers at the university are necessary as secondary and supporting sources of research data.

Historical survey[21] is employed to explore the socio-historical contexts such as the realities of socio-cultural-religious diversity and socio-ideological-political dynamics that surround the context of the founding of UIN Sunan Kalijaga and the inception of the Department of Comparative Religion in the university. The analysis of Indonesian Muslim scholarship in Comparative Religion and the instruction of Comparative Religion in Islamic secondary schools and colleges prior to the establishment of UIN are also scrutinized. These facts can serve as a backdrop to the present study as well as to what Alparslan Acikgeng called the "*environmental context* for science,"[22] which can be seen as one factor, among others, that has inspired and driven the emergence of the discipline of Comparative Religion in PTAIN, in general, and at UIN Sunan Kalijaga, in particular.

According to Acikgeng,[23] a body of scientific nomenclature is shaped and developed by a community of scientists and scholars. With this in mind, one can see through a historical point of view and then develop a clear understanding that the discipline of Comparative Religion should also be treated as a body of scientific nomenclature that is cultivated and developed at UIN.

21 Alexander R. Thomas and Polly J. Smith, *Spotlight on Social Research*, (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2003), 8. See also, Verma, R. K. and Gopal Verma, *Research Methodology*, (New Delhi: Commonwealth Publishers, 1989), 16-24.

22 Alparslan Acikgeng, *Islamic Science Towards a Definition,* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1996), 73.

23 Ibid, 94.

UIN, as an educational institution and its community of scholars of Comparative Religion, is held to have a direct influence on the epistemological construct of the discipline. Accordingly, the development of the Comparative Religion discipline at UIN very much relies on the contribution made by UIN as an educational institution, on the one hand, and by its community of Muslim scholars, on the other.

Together with the historical survey, philosophical analysis[24] is also applied to examine the opinions and views of the UIN scholars concerning certain selected topics in Comparative Religion. It seems difficult for any study to discover how the Comparative Religion discipline develops in the academic setting of UIN Sunan Kalijaga without surveying how the UIN scholars concerned with Comparative Religion deal with issues pertinent to the discipline. This point is important to be addressed as it confirms Cemil Ekdogan's opinion that "the history of ideas correlates with the intellectual history in traditional history."[25]

Furthermore, the sources of data for this present work are based in part on library study. The library study is carried out by searching a number of libraries and research institutions from which books, papers, articles, research reports, and academic theses relevant to this topic of study can be acquired. Among the very significant parts of the primary sources for this research are books, papers, articles, and dissertations produced by the UIN scholars, especially those who have been trained in the Comparative Religion discipline at UIN Sunan Kalijaga. As an ancillary source

24 Rob Fisher, "Philosophical Approach," in *Approaches to the Study of Religion*, edited by Peter Connolly (London: Cassel, 1999), 105-134.

25 Cemil Ekdogan, *Science in Islam & the West*, (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC and IIUM, 2008), 6.

of data, interviews with seventeen scholars of the University will obviously enrich this research. Also included in the sources of data are treatises, archives, documentation, historical accounts, and other forms of publication regarding the curricular system, as well as the methods of studying and teaching Comparative Religion applied at UIN Sunan Kalijaga.

The growth and development of Comparative Religion can be examined through the discipline's manifestations into four academic aspects: material production, education institution, an organized body of scientists (practitioners), and scientific worldviews.[26] To this point and of these four aspects, the last three seem to be more appropriate to be used as a theoretical basis to frame how Comparative Religion has continued to flourish for several decades at UIN Sunan Kalijaga. The analysis of the development of the Comparative Religion discipline at the University will be focused on its educational system applied in teaching the subject, the role of the UIN scholars in dealing with comparative religious studies, and the thoughts and views of the UIN scholars concerning selected topics and issues often discussed in the discipline.

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26 Pervez A. Hoodbhoy, *Islam and Science, Religious Orthodoxy and the Battle for Rationality*, (London: Zed Book Ltd., 1991), 29. Hoodbhoy said, "How one measures science, or scientific progress, naturally depends on what one means by science. Nevertheless, it is useful to identify four key ways in which science manifests itself in the contemporary world: (1) As a major factor in the maintenance and development of the productive process needed to sustain society; (2) As a collective and organized body of practitioners (scientists) who are professionally engaged in its full-time pursuit; (3) As a major element of the educational system within a society; (4) As one of the most powerful influences moulding people's beliefs and attitudes towards the universe – the scientific worldview, which employs a methodological procedure wherein observation, experiment, classification and measurement are used to drive knowledge."

Based on the researcher's reading of scholarly work pertaining to the topic of the development of Comparative Religion in Indonesia, very few articles and books that cover subjects relevant to this study have been found. In his article, Karel A. Steenbrink,[27] a noted Dutch scholar of religious studies in Indonesia, elaborates upon the salient characteristics and features that belong to the contents of several books and works on Comparative Religion produced by Indonesian Muslim scholars from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. Another Dutch scholar, Herman L. Beck, wrote an article entitled "A Pillar of Social Harmony: the Study of Comparative Religion in Contemporary Indonesia".[28] While examining the role of a comparative study of religion in propelling and nurturing social harmony between communities of different faiths in Indonesia, Beck's article provides an extensive analysis of Mukti Ali's works, especially his role in promoting socio-religious harmony and coexistence, interfaith dialogue, and cooperation between religions.

Another article by Johan H. Meuleman,[29] compiled in a book co-edited by Herman L. Beck and Burhanuddin Daya, pays special attention to the importance of the anthropological facts of Islamic living traditions in Indonesia. He proposes these Islamic living traditions as an advantageous field of research that the comparative study of religion can take for its own benefit. However, Meuleman

27 Karel A. Steenbrink, "The Study of Comparative Religion by Indonesian Muslims," *Numen,* vol. 37, no. 2, 1990, 141-164.

28 Beck, "A Pillar of Social Harmony."

29 Johan Hendrik Meuleman, "Intisari, Konteks, dan Kenyataan Islam atau Pola Islam yang Berbeda: Suatu Lapangan Penelitian bagi Ilmu Perbandingan Agama di Indonesia," in *Ilmu Perbandingan Agama di Indonesia dan Belanda,* edited by Burhanuddin Daya and Herman Leonard Beck, (Jakarta: INIS, 1992), 121-127.

warns that this kind of study needs to be methodologically vigilant to avoid what he regards as the trap of anthropological differences in Islamic traditions.

Also relevant is an article by Burhanuddin Daya[30] that is part of a chapter of the book that he edited with Herman L. Beck. Daya elucidates, in general, about the existence of Comparative Religion in Indonesia and the methods of study used in teaching the subject in classrooms with special reference to IAIN Sunan Kalijaga Jogjakarta and Mukti Ali. He also offers a general explanation of the methodologies and approaches often applied in the study of Comparative Religion. In the last six pages of the article, Daya illustrates very concisely the field of Comparative Religion in Indonesia.

Furthermore, a short article written by Alef Theria Wasim Bilal entitled "Prospek Pengembangan Ilmu Perbandingan Agama di IAIN"[31] relates the comparative study of religion as an academic subject with the field of Islamic studies at IAIN (State Institutes of Islamic Studies). Another important article written by Abdullah Saeed entitled "Towards religious tolerance through reform in Islamic education: The case of the state institute of Islamic studies of Indonesia,"[32] portrays the educational reform being undertaken in IAIN institutions and how the study of Comparative

30 Daya, "Kuliah Ilmu Perbandingan Agama pada Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN)," in *Ilmu Perbandingan Agama di Indonesia dan Belanda,* edited by Burhanuddin Daya and Herman Leonard Beck, (Jakarta: INIS, 1992), 183-186.

31 Alef Theria Wasim, "Prospek Pengembangan Ilmu Perbandingan Agama di IAIN", *Al-Jami'ah,* no. 39, 1989.

32 Abdullah Saeed, "Towards religious tolerance through reform in Islamic education: The case of the state institute of Islamic studies of Indonesia", *Indonesia and the Malay World*, vol. 27, no. 29, 1999, 177-191.

Religion was considered among the important subjects integral to the reform efforts. In addition, Saeed describes the significant effects and contributions made by the reform movement in the entire educational system of IAIN in Indonesia, especially in the making and spawning of Muslim leaders committed to promoting interreligious tolerance and harmony within Indonesian society.

An article entitled "The Ahmadiyya and the Study of Comparative Religion in Indonesia: Controversies and Influences"[33] is also germane to our discussion of literature review for this present work. In this article, Burhani divulges how the Ahamadiyya literature on Christianity has influenced Indonesian Muslims' views and understanding about other religions, especially Christianity. It was found that many of books and works on Comparative Religion authored by Indonesian Muslim scholars have extensively made use of Ahmadiyya literature on Christianity as their references.

In addition, a book authored by Fatimah Husein[34] is clearly of relevance to the discussion about the role that IAIN plays in the making of a more religious and culturally harmonious society. In this book, which was originally a dissertation submitted to Melbourne University, Husein mentions IAIN as an important academic place in which a large generation of Indonesian Muslim youth can study and explore their own faith, and that of others, in very dynamic and open-minded ways of thinking and reasoning. She believes that it is through an Islamic education institution, such as IAIN, that Indonesians as a nation can produce generations of

33 Ahmad Najib Burhani, "The Ahmadiyya and the Study of Comparative Religion in Indonesia: Controversies and Influences," in *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations,* vol. 25, no. 2, 2014, 141-158.

34 Fatimah Husein, *Muslim-Christian Relations in the New Order Indonesia: The Exclusivist and Inclusivist Muslims' Perspectives*. (Bandung: Mizan, 2005).

Muslims at the forefront of peace and harmony in this pluralist country.

Amin Abdullah's book, *Studi Agama Normativitas atau Historisitas?*,[35] as its title may suggest at a glance, is expounding on the significance of advancing religious studies in Indonesia. He emphasised that the application of contemporary methodologies such as Anthropology and Phenomenology in approaching religious data is essential in order to achieve a better understanding of religious and cultural plurality as human phenomena. In this book, Abdullah also tries to relate modern perspectives of religious studies with Islamic religious studies. In a nutshell, this book provides a little hint about the relevance of Islamic studies equipped with modern approaches and methodologies applied in general (secular) sciences. Another of Abdullah's works, *Islamic Studies di Perguruan Tinggi, Pendekatan Integratif-Interkonektif,*[36] dedicates a great deal of analyses on various topics concerning the fundamentals of epistemological unity between Islamic and general sciences, the philosophical basis of Islamic sciences, the paradigm shift in the interpretation of sacred texts, and the ideas of reform in Islamic philosophy. It is worth noting that Abdullah does not give specific explanations about the contribution that the Comparative Religion discipline can give for the improvement of Islamic studies in the state institutions of Islamic studies.

Futhermore, in terms of the production of books and work related to Comparative Religion, IAIN institutions and UIN Sunan Kalijaga have done little despite the fact that the discipline has

35 M. Amin Abdullah, *Studi Agama, Normativitas atau Historisitas?* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2011).

36 M. Amin Abdullah, *Islamic Studies di Perguruan Tinggi, Pendekatan Integrarif-Interkonektif*, (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2010).

been taught for over six decades in these academic institutions. This is plainly admitted by A. Mukti Ali as he claimed in his *Ilmu Perbandingan Agama di Indonesia*[37] that after about twenty-five years since his first book, *Ilmu Perbandigan Agama (Sebuah Pembahasan tentang Methodos dan Sistima)* was published in 1964, sadly, not even one book on the methodology of Comparative Religion has been written, not even in Bahasa Indonesia, let alone in English or Arabic. In this book, as its title suggests, Ali concisely explains the early context of the establishment of the Department of Comparative Religion in the system of IAIN and PTAIN and afterwards, he lays out the influence of Western Orientalist studies on Islam in Indonesia dominated by the Dutch scholarship interested in the religion and have, to a large extent, undoubtedly been a consequence of Dutch colonization of the country for over 350 years.

Nevertheless, in reality, academic issues pertinent to comparative religious studies as well as the role played by the state institutes of Islamic studies in dealing with the issues of interreligious relations in the society, have been an interesting topic that attracted considerable attention of many contemporary Indonesian Muslim scholars. One of the very prominent of them is Azyumardi Azra, the former rector of UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, who has authored numerous books and articles, published in both national and international journals concerning Islam in Indonesia, in particular, and many related contemporary issues, including Islamic educational matters. However, as far as his books and works can reveal, none comprehensively addresses how Comparative Religion in its limited definition as a field or discipline of science grows and flourishes in the academic setting of state institutes of

37 A. Mukti Ali, *Ilmu Perbandingan Agama di Indonesia,* (Yogyakarta: IAIN Sunan Kalijaga Press, 1990).

Islamic studies in Indonesia.

To this point, it can be argued that the scholarly body of literature on the Comparative Religion discipline in Indonesia remains undeveloped. Studies on various aspects of this topic, therefore, need to be addressed. Suffice it to say that research on this subject in Indonesia is extremely limited and scant, as so far, no comprehensive study has been carried out on how Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia, their scientific activities, and their scholars under the sway of their worldviews, contribute to the Comparative Religion discipline. Accordingly, this research aims to fill the gap that has previously been neglected.

CHAPTER TWO

THE EMERGENCE OF COMPARATIVE RELIGION IN INDONESIA: SOCIO-HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Human knowledge, to some extent, is unlikely to be divorced and isolated from the social context in which it grows and thrives.[1] In this respect, like all forms of knowledge, human understanding of religion is also intertwined with the human situation, as affirmed by Faruqi in his sublime statement that "The physical, geographic, socio-economic, political, aesthetic, and ideational facts surrounding revelation actually constitute a decisive factor in our understanding of revealed truth…God does not operate in a vacuum. He uses the facts of history, the realities of the human situation as a matrix or carrier of the divine message."[2]

Both Kuhn's and Faruqi's epistemological points of view have been of great use for this part in analysing how the discipline

1 Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 196.

2 Ismai'il Raqi A. al Faruqi, *Christian Ethics, a Historical and Systematic Analysis of its Dominant Ideas,* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1967), 13-14

of Comparative Religion emerges and grows in Indonesia and how it has become entangled with social, cultural, and political circumstances. In addition, knowledge in general, as Kuhn argues, is transmitted and cultivated through education and, at the same time, it is socially constructed.[3] Accordingly, educational institutions play a substantial role in cultivating and developing comparative religious studies. However an educational institution is important, great legacies in the forms of written work on the discipline of Comparative Religions are no less significant for the further comparative religious studies in Indonesia.

Cultural-religious Diversity and Socio-political Dynamics

Indonesia is made up of roughly seventeen thousand islands – large and small, inhabited and uninhabited – and hundreds of ethnic groups and local languages. This archipelagic country has, from time immemorial, been well known for its convivial receptivity to a diversity of cultural and religious influences from outside and has, therefore, been a friendly home to a variety of major world religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, and Confucianism, as well as other religiously tribal, indigenous beliefs and practices.[4]

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3 Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 196.

4 Historically speaking, as clearly proven through their epitomes in the Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms of the Sailendras dynasty, Pajajaran, and Majapahit, three of which were in Java (7th-14th century AD), and Srivijaya in Sumatra (7th century AD), Hinduism and Buddhism can be held to be the oldest religions to have an influence on the Malay-Indonesian world. Around the twelfth century, brought by mixed waves of cultural persuasion, intermarriage, commercial pressures and even, to some extent, political (sword) forces, Islam came into the region, and, startlingly, after only three

To judge from the strewn anthropological and archaeological evidence, some scholars of Indonesian history assume that the main form of religiosity that early Indonesians of the prehistoric era (before the Christian era/B.C.) adhered to was animism. This religious form is characterized by a belief that inanimate objects, trees and all living creatures are actually alive.[5] In addition, its adherents observe the traditions of worshiping ancestors, spirits, and objects as well as practise magic.[6] Indonesian animism believes that ancestral spirits could bring both good and bad consequences to human life and, therefore, a number of rituals are carried out during certain occasions such as marriage, births, deaths, and harvest time. The performance of the rituals is intended either to honour the good spirits, which could bring about good things, such as health, fertility and prosperity in people's lives, or to appease bad ones that may cause illness, fear, and even death.[7]

The animistic system of belief was existent and deeply rooted in the ancient Indonesian worldview for several centuries before the Christian era. However, from about the first century of the

centuries, spread and won the majority of the hearts of the population. Meanwhile, the advent of Christianity onto the Indonesian scene took place along with the arrival of European colonialists in the East Indies in 1511s. See M.C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia since c. 1200*, (California: Stanford University Press, 3rd edition, 2001), 3-17; Karel A. Steenbrink, *Dutch Colonialism and Indonesian Islam,* translated by Jan Steenbrink and Henry Jansen, (Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V., 1993).

5 Alwi Shihab, *The Muhammadiyah Movement and its Controversy with Christian Mission in Indonesia*, (Ph.D. thesis, Temple University, 1995), 4.

6 Koentharaningrat, "Javanese Religion," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion,* edited by Mircea Eliade, (New York, 1987), 559-563, as quoted in Sutarman S. Partonadi, *Sadrach's Community and Its Contextual Roots, A Nineteeth Javanese Expression of Christianity,* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988), 19.

7 Shihab, *The Muhammadiyah Movement*, 4.

Christian Era (C.E.), and thenceforward, the country experienced successive infiltration by four different strands of religious tradition: Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity. The influence that each of these religions had on Indonesian religious life was so tremendous and deep that one may perceive at a glance that the animistic beliefs in the archipelago seem to have vanished. This, perhaps, has its basis of justification in the fact that when the contemporary Indonesian government began to recognize only four religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity) it obliged each of its citizens to adopt and embrace one of them. Nevertheless, certain expressions of animism are, in fact, still alive and can be found in many parts of Indonesia, even until today.[8]

Brought by Indian traders who came by sea travel to Indonesia and then settled in its ports in about the first century C.E., Hinduism found that the region provided fertile soil for its growth and development. In addition, especially between the sixth and fourteenth centuries, Hinduism achieved its peak of influence in many minor and powerful kingdoms in the region.[9] It is important to note that during this period of time, Hinduism was not the only Indian religion to be imported into the archipelago and adhered to by a great number of its population, as it was in fact overlapped by another, Buddhism, which also took hold and exerted a tremendous impact on the religious and cultural life of both the people and the Indonesian courts.[10] One cannot deny the

8 Henry Chamert-Loir and Anthony Reid, (eds.), *The Potent Dead: Ancestors, Saints and Heroes in Contemporary Indonesia,* (Crows-Nest NWS and Honolulu: Allen & Anwin and University of Hawai'i Press, 2002). See also, Shihab, *The Muhammadiyah Movement*, 5.

9 Robert L. Brown, "Indonesia and the Malay Peninsula," in *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*, (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004), 370-372.

10 Shihab, *The Muhammadiyah Movement*, 6.

fact that their major impact is so evident that it can be perceived in the varied systems of religious traditions, in architectural and literature expressions, in the concept of kingship, and in the ways of managing and legitimizing the states and royal courts.[11] We need to keep in mind that they not only added new elements to the existing ancient Indonesian culture and religiosity, but, at the same time, much of the Hindu-Buddhist religious elements interacted and blended with the indigenous cults or, to borrow Steenbrink's term, "ancient folk customs (*adat*) and folk religion,"[12] through the process of absorption and acculturation.[13]

As far as the inter-religious relation between Hinduism and Buddhism is concerned, historians of Indonesia have found unshakable proof that both religions coexisted in Indonesia for centuries in harmony and peace despite their differences.[14] The two religions enjoyed equal high esteem and privilege from the rulers in almost all the Indonesian courts. Take for instance one of the largest empires in Indonesia, the Sriwijaya, founded on the Musi River of modern Palembang in the southeastern part of Sumatra, which has been a great patron of Buddhism, and yet its initial establishment was buttressed by Hinduism. For about seven centuries, from the seventh to fourteenth centuries, Sriwijaya was an important centre of Buddhist learning,[15] where an international

11 Herbert Feith, "Indonesia," in *Governments and Politics of Southeast Asia*, edited by George McTunan Kahin, (New York: Cornel University Press, 1964), 184 (183-278).

12 Steenbrink, *Dutch Colonialism,* 98.

13 I-Tsing, *A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practiced in India and the Malay Archipelago,* translated by J. Takakusu, (Oxford: Clarendom Press, 1896), 1-20, as quoted by Shihab, *The Muhammadiyah Movement*, 15.

14 Partonadi, *Sadrach's Community,* 19.

15 Feith, "Indonesia," 185.

community of Chinese monks came and resided to study with Indian preachers. However, it is important to recognize that in the empire, as in most of the 'Indianized' states in Southeast Asia, Brahmanism (Hinduism) and Buddhism were blended with each other.[16] In addition, the peaceful relation between Hinduism and Buddhism was very much evident in most of the Javanese royal courts, as many Brahmas (upper cast Hindu) and Bhiksus (Hindu or Buddhist monks) periodically visited Java at the request of its rulers.[17] These two religions reached the height of their greatness with the founding of such Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms as the Sailendras dynasty in Central Java, which was erected during the eighth century and lasted until the tenth century, and the Majapahit kingdom in East Java, which rose at the end of the thirteenth century until it finally came to an end in the early sixteenth century[18] following the rise of Islamic sultanates that swept across most parts of the Indonesian archipelago.

As with the arrival of Hinduism and Buddhism, which were warmly welcomed, Islam also first came to the Indonesian archipelago through the route of peace and conviviality. Unfortunately, due in part to the deficiency of archaeological evidence and reliable written records, several fundamental questions about precisely when and where Islam first entered the archipelago and why the religion was only adhered to by a large number of Indonesians in the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, have been among the points of obscurity among historians. As a result, many scholars of Indonesian history have not reached a unanimous conclusion in

16 Nicholas Tarling, (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 286.

17 Partonadi, *Sadrach's Community,* 19. See also, Feith, "Indonesia," 184.

18 Ibid.

respect of the above questions.

Scholars who show special concern about the process of Islamisation in Indonesia point out that, in fact, before Islam came and took hold in the region, there had been a trade relationship between Arabia and the Indonesian archipelago through established maritime trade routes. Several seaport cities in the Indonesian archipelago, especially during the zenith of the Sriwijaya kingdom, became points of meeting between travellers and traders coming from Arabia, Persia, India and China.[19] M.C. Ricklefs suggests that, in view of the fact that from the period of the third Caliph of Islam 'Uthman ibn 'Affān (644-655) Muslim envoys from Arabia came to the Chinese court, Islam must have been present in maritime Southeast Asia in the seventh century. Emissaries with Arabic names and several thousand Muslim traders visited China between at least the ninth and the mid-twelfth centuries. Even so, the coming of foreign Muslims to the region during the seventh century is hardly historically solid evidence to draw the conclusion that the Islamic kingdom existed and that a large-scale conversion of local people to Islam occurred at the time.[20] However, suffice it to say that during this century, Islam was likely to have been accepted by a relatively small segment of Indonesians. This can be corroborated by the fact that, as early as the first century, Karala, located on the Malabar Coast of southwest India, had been a commercial port where traders from Sumatra, Malaya, and China as well as Muslim traders from Arabia and the Persian Gulf region interacted.[21] However, only between the

19 Shihab, *The Muhammadiyah Movement*, 20.

20 Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia since c. 1200,* 3.

21 Mark R. Woodward, *Islam in Java Normative Piety and Mysticism in the Sultanate of Yogyakarta,* (Arizona: The University of Arizona Press, 1989), 55.

late thirteenth and sixteenth centuries did Islam grow quickly, first in North Sumatra, and, from there, it swiftly expanded eastward as far east as Moluccas with most of the Indonesian kingdoms adopting it as the official religion.[22]

The rapidity of Islam's spread across the archipelago was made possible by various factors such as trade, politics, intermarriage, and of course religious preaching and teaching, and perhaps others. These factors provided significant contributions in making the new faith attractive to the Indonesian people. In addition, Ricklefs points out that the international commercial network was of great significance in thrusting Indonesians into contact with Islam, as was intermarriage between Muslim foreign traders and the local communities.[23] Although from the sixteenth century Islam became the dominant religion in Indonesia, in reality, it did not clear away the older elements of the previous religions of animism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Instead, in many parts of Indonesia a variety of syncretistic belief systems are still alive among the indigenous people that absorb certain ritual elements of other religions and mingle them with their own ancient traditions. This form of syncretistic religion can be found in its obvious epitome in what is called "the religion of Java" or Javanese religion (*agama jawi* or *agama luri*), which is characterized by a synthesis between the peasant ancestral traditions, the practice of magic, the belief in spirits, and certain elements of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam.[24]

22 Feith, "Indonesia," 186-187. See also, Shihab, "The Muhammadiyah Movement," 20.

23 Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia since c. 1200,* 15.

24 Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java,* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, Inc., 1961), 38. See as comparison, Koentjaraningrat, "Javanese Religion," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion,* edited by Mircea Eliade, (New York, 1987), 559; M.C. Ricklefs, *Mystic Synthesis in Java, a History of Islamization from the*

In large part, the process of Islamization in Indonesia, especially among the Javanese, owes its great success to the role and contribution of the Sufis (Islamic mystics). The swift spread of Islam in the archipelago, Mukti Ali suggests, was facilitated by the accommodative, tolerant attitude of the Sūfīs towards Hindu elements as well as many of the traditional usages and habits. This may appear incongruent with the core teachings of Islam, devoid of the knowledge and critical insights among Indonesians about the real difference between Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and their local beliefs, also accounted for their massive receptivity to the new faith.[25] It is important to recognize that the Sufis' role, *inter alia*, in disseminating Islam was their astuteness and wisdom in interpreting some aspects of Hindu-Buddhist culture and making them conform to the Islamic framework and the fundamentals of Islam. There was an interweaving between certain aspects of Islam with Hindu-Buddhist elements and Javanese religious traditions, and, through this form of religious interplay, Islam became a widely accepted religion and thus received a colossal following among Indonesians.[26]

The role of Muslim traders and Sūfīs was undoubtedly one of the most important aspects of Islamization in Indonesia and is often taken for granted as evidence that Islam spread across the archipelago by a peaceful process. Not surprisingly, the fact that there is no proof of Islam having been imposed onto Indonesian soil by any foreign military expeditions has been drawn on by some scholars to corroborate the above opinion. However, one may infer

Fourteenth to the Early Nineteenth Centuries, (Norwalk: East Bridge, 2006); Stephen C. Headly, *Durga's Mosque, Cosmology, Conversion and Community in Central Javanese Islam,* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2004), 361.

25 Mukti Ali, *Alam Pikiran Islam Modern di Indonesia,* (Yogyakarta: Yayasan Nida, 1971), 5, 27. See also, Shihab, *The Muhammadiyah Movement*, 21-22.

26 Ibid.

that once Islam was officially adopted and recognized to be the state religion, instances of which can be seen through the flourishing of Islamic kingdoms from as early as the thirteenth to eighteenth century in Sumatra and Java, Islam was sometimes brought and spread from one area to another area by warfare. Even though the main objective of the expansion of these Islamic kingdoms to other areas was much more akin to achieving dynastic, strategic, and economic causes than to spread Islam, in reality Ricklefs said, "Islamization often followed upon conquest;" and then he concluded, "Islam was spread in Indonesia not only by persuasion and commercial pressures, but by the sword as well." [27]

In the beginning of the sixteenth century, Christianity,[28] under the auspices of the colonialist power of Portugal, had sown its seed in some eastern parts of Indonesia. This coincided with the rise of the Islamic kingdoms in the Malay Peninsula and many parts of Indonesia, following the fall and gradual disappearance of the Hindu-Buddhist courts in Sumatra and Java. The coming of the Portuguese into the archipelago was, in fact, not only driven by curiosity, a spirit of adventure, as well as motives for commerce and trade, but moreover was blended with missionary zeal to convey and preach the Gospel and Catholicism to the

27 Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia since c. 1200,* 17. The evidence and examples of this abound, although this may ignite some disagreement.

28 Christianity is used here as a general term to refer to both Roman Catholicism and Protestantism or Calvinism. In the context of the Christianization in the eastern parts of Indonesia during the early sixteenth century this was indebted to the Missionary work of a few devoted Roman Catholic priests brought by two Catholic nations – Portugal and Spain. Meanwhile Protestantism or Calvinism refers to Dutch Reformed Christianity as the dominant religion in the Netherlands.

heathens[29] as well as, according to Herbert Feith, to "wage the world-wide battle against Islam."[30] One can safely say that the wave of Christianization in Indonesia went hand in hand with the spirit of colonialism.

Immediately after successfully conquering Malacca in 1511, which marked the initial grip of the European imperialism in the Malay-Indonesian world, the Portuguese (by the end of the same year) took further steps, expanding their control and influence into what is called Maluku (the Moluccas), the 'Spice Islands' of East Indonesia, and the surrounding islands, such as Tertane, Tedore, Morotai, and Ambon, including the Lesser Sundanese Islands. In conjunction with this effort of paving the way for the expansion of commerce and trade, Christian Missionary endeavours in these islands were also made. This effort was initiated by several Portuguese voyagers and desperadoes, among the most prominent of which was the Spanish Saint Francis Xavier (1506-1552), a co-founder of the Jesuit Order with Saint Ignatius Loyola.[31]

Saint Francis Xavier had been the leading missionary and among the earliest who laid a firm foundation for the Catholic mission in Ambon, Ternate and Morotai. However, during this period, Catholic mission activities in East Indonesia gained modest success. To mention just a few, in the period from 1540-1565 there were around 70,000 Catholic converts in the Ambon region; from 1559 to 1605 Dominican priests achieved some success in Christianizing about 50,000 inhabitants of the islands of Solor and Flores; during his period as captain of Ternate (1537-

29 Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia since c.1200,* 25-27. See also, Partonadi, *Sadrach's Community,* 24.

30 Feith, "Indonesia," 187.

31 Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia since c.1200,* 25-32.

1540), Antonio Galvao had attracted many eastern Indonesians to adhere to Catholicism; Antonio de Paiva had converted several Bugis-Makassar rulers into the new faith.[32] However, this religious expansion then, in fact, become sluggish from 1560 onward during which time the Portuguese power in the region started to suffer a gradual decline, which, accordingly, led to a decrease in the membership of the Catholic Church .

During the late sixteenth century the Portuguese in Ambon were faced with a worsening situation and hard pressure launched by local enemies, such as the Hituese. On 23 February 1605, a fleet of VOC[33] (*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, the United East India Company), in alliance with the Hituese, attacked and seized the Portuguese fort in Ambon. The success of the VOC in capturing the forts put an end to Portugal's almost-century long dominance in much of Maluku. Thereafter, the Dutch (the VOC) also took a firm stance in their attempt to arrest the Catholic missionaries, then exclude them from the region, and convert local Catholics to Dutch Reformed Christianity.[34]

The arrival of the Dutch colonialists into the archipelago in 1595 opened a new episode for another wave of Christianization.

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32 Anthony Reid, "Islamization and Christianization in Southeast Asia: The Critical Phase, 1550-1650," in *Southeast Asian in the Early Modern Era, Trade, Power, and Belief,* edited by Anthony Reid, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 151-179.

33 The VOC was a trading company that belonged to the Dutch and was established on 20 March 1602. The company operated in the so-called Dutch Indies (Hindia Belanda, now Indonesia) from 1605 when it first arrived in Ambon until the Dutch government abolished it in 1799 following the French annexation of Holland in 1795.

34 Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia since c.1200,* 25-28; Partonadi, *Sadrach's Community,* 25; Reid, "Islamization and Christianization," 161.

Just like the Portuguese, the Dutch came into Southeast Asia with similar interests: lust for trade and zeal for evangelism.[35] While the former carried out a mission to hoist and spread the flag of Roman Catholicism, the latter was burdened with the responsibility of disseminating Protestantism or Calvinism. The story of missionary activities in the Dutch Indies during three and half centuries of the Dutch colonialism was coloured by ups and downs. In general, the success of the Dutch Christian missions in making some headway among Indonesians was quite modest and not so spectacular, albeit not entirely futile.

For the first two centuries, from the seventeenth to the eighteenth, the VOC's religious policy turned out to be the root of disillusionment among many of the Dutch Christians, both in their homeland and in the Dutch Indies. The Dutch Churches, which were mostly established in the large cities, made meagre attempts to proselytize indigenous people and convert them to Christianity; but rather that they serve their European Christians. We can identify at least two main factors that might have contributed to the lack of determination among the Dutch Christian missionaries to convert the indigenous people during these two centuries.

The first is that the VOC's political and economic agendas, on the one side, came into conflict with the sincere interests of the evangelizing Indonesians, on the other. This conflict of interest seemed to have led the VOC to sacrifice the latter for the sake of keeping political power and commercial gains firm, a step being taken to avoid negative economic consequences that might occur due to anti-Christian sentiments arising among the predominant Muslim people. The VOC was more concerned with

35 Partonadi, *Sadrach's Community,* 25.

the protection of commercial and economic gains than with the conversion of Indonesians to Christianity. As one example of this, one agreement the VOC had made with certain native rulers of the Muslim sultanates, which was deemed unpopular to many of the Dutch Christians, was that the VOC prohibited Muslims converting to Christianity and banned Christian missions from working in the predominantly Muslim areas. This policy was made in order to maintain a close commercial relationship with the native rulers they colonized and to avoid further tensions that might endanger the economic interests of the Dutch. On the other hand, this obviously inhibited and gave little advantage to the progress of Christianity; and, as a result, the religion only grew in the areas where Islam had few or no adherents.[36] However, this policy of being neutral and showing indirect support to Christian endeavours to convert Indonesian Muslims lasted until the mid-nineteenth century.

The second factor, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, occurred when the Netherlands applied a set of policies and regulations in which religious affairs were directly administered and supervised by the Dutch government. This meant that there was no separation between the Church and state. As a result, the Christian missions were looked upon as merely Dutch government enterprises and as such, only one aspect among the VOC's core concerns of politics and economics. This policy also hampered the Christian missionary movement for quite a long

36 Partonadi, *Sadrach's Community,* 27; Shihab, *The Muhammadiyah Movement*, 32; Alexander R. Arifianto, "Explaining the Cause of Muslim-Christian Conflicts in Indonesia: Tracing the Origins of *Kristenisasi* and *Islamisasi,"* in *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations,* Vol. 20, No. 1, 2009, 73-89. See also, C.A.O. van Nieuwenhuijze, "Religious Freedom in Indonesia" *The International Review of Mission,* Vol. 40, 1951, 99-100.

time until the VOC was eventually abolished in 1799, or five years after France annexed the Netherlands in 1795.[37] With the conquest of Holland by France, some major changes took place in the Dutch government policies concerning many issues both in the homeland and the Dutch Indies. For instance, it was during this period of the Napoleonic wars that the Dutch began to put into effect a policy separating the Church from the state. From the time when the abolition of the VOC was enacted in 1799, the Dutch government took over the control of the Dutch Indies from the VOC and put the region under the direct command of the authorities they deployed there. In the meantime, after defeating both France and the Netherlands, the British invaded Java and established a brief interruption of rule within the Dutch period from 1811 to 1816.[38] These occurrences all became a watershed and a defining moment for the future advance of Christian mission activities in Indonesia.

From the beginning of the nineteenth until the twentieth century, both the Catholic and Protestant missionary work in Indonesia went through unprecedented development. During this period in the Netherlands, Britain, and some other European countries, a variety of both state and privately funded missionary societies, groups, and organizations were mushrooming, stimulated by a nascent mixture of Christian idealism and the spirit of evangelical revival combined with a sense of adventure. In addition, the concept of the separation of the state and the Church was of great significance to the swift increase in Christian efforts for spreading and preaching the Gospel in a large number of countries, including in the Dutch Indies. It was thanks in part to the above-mentioned secular concept that the Dutch colonial

37 Shihab, *The Muhammadiyah Movement*, 33-34.

38 Ibid., 33-37.

government made no discrimination or favouritism in terms of the work of Catholic and Protestant missionary institutions in their colonies. During these two centuries, the Dutch Christian mission institutions were aggressively sending a huge number of missionaries to different parts of the Dutch East Indies.[39] Given the fact that Islam was embraced by the vast majority of Indonesians, who mostly lived in cities and trading centres across the country, the Dutch colonial government led and supported Christian missionary efforts to work in rural and remote areas. By Christianizing rural, tribal communities living in the hinterland areas in Sumatra, Java, Borneo, Sulawesi, Maluku, and lesser Sundanese islands, the Dutch hoped to create Christian ethnic enclaves as "boundaries" to divide Muslim areas. For example, in North Sumatra, Batak Christians were engineered to segregate Aceh Muslims from Malay Muslims; in North Sulawesi, Tobakus Christians were used to break up Buginese Muslims; in East Java, Christians of Tengger were exploited to divide Javanese Muslims. These enclaves were created by the Dutch colonialists as "buffer zones" to curtail and halt the rapid growth of Islam.[40]

In reality, the relationship between Christianity and other religions, which was previously established for centuries in many parts of Indonesia, like Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam, was coloured by a significant degree of conviviality and harmony in certain areas, and yet it was also sporadically adorned with conflict and clashes, especially in the predominantly Muslim regions. Since their early arrival in the archipelago in the sixteenth century, Christian missionary efforts occasionally encountered strong

39 Partonadi, *Sadrach's Community,* 24-53.

40 Arifianto, "Explaining the Cause of Muslim-Christian Conflicts", 77; See also, Shihab, *The Muhammadiyah Movement*, 33-36.

challenges, high resistance, and even harsh hostility in regions in which Islam was predominant. To mention just a few examples, on the island of Solor, a palm-trunk fortress, built in 1562 and used by Dominican Catholic priests to commence the Christianization of the local population, was attacked and burned down by Javanese Muslims. Not only Javanese Muslims, but also the populace of Solor, themselves, repeatedly displayed strong resistance to the Portuguese and their religion.[41] In addition, the case of harsh resistance to Christianity by Muslims occurred several times in Java in the 1880s. During this period, between 1882 and 1884, some Christians attending Sunday services were persecuted, many Christians were expelled from their villages, and nearly all the churches of Sadrach's community[42] were burned down.[43]

Nevertheless, scholars of inter-religious relations in Indonesia suggest, indeed, there is enough proof to conclude that the overall condition of the relationship between the adherents of Islam and Christianity and between the followers of all religions in Indonesia was positive and harmonious, although it may still be far from achieving the lofty ideal of inter-religious coexistence.[44] This conclusion seems to be built on a perception widely held by many that Indonesians have a long-tradition of religious tolerance and

41 Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia since c. 1200,* 28.

42 A rather comprehensive research about Sadrach's community has been conducted by Sutarman S. Partonadi for his dissertation defended in the Free University in Amsterdam. The dissertation was published with the title *Sadrach's Community and its Contextual Roots, a Nineteenth Javanese Expression of Christianity,* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988).

43 Ricklefs, *Polarising Javanese Society, Islamic and Other Visions,* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2007), 118.

44 Steenbrink, *Dutch Colonialism,* 148. See also Naipaul, *Among the believers, An Islamic Journey,* (New York: Vintage, 1982).

tend to show heartfelt respect for one another's religious differences. Furthermore, the fact that many Indonesians have a tendency to synthesize and merge their religious beliefs with elements coming from other religious traditions, as has been alluded to in previous pages, is frequently employed as a standpoint to maintain the view that Indonesia is an inter-religiously harmonious country.

If we turn our attention to the portrait of inter-religious relationships, especially between Islam and Christianity in Indonesia's post-independence, it seems to be more complex than before independence. Talking about inter-religious coexistence in the country after independence would definitely involve such delicate, interrelated issues as geographic, economic, social, culture, and politics, all of which should be placed within the framework of the unity of Indonesia as one sovereign nation. Moreover, the project of modernization initiated by the Dutch government since the nineteenth century added to the complexity of inter-religious interactions in Indonesia. Within this process, Indonesia was dragged into the borderless stage of global interaction, in which crucial issues taking place in Indonesia, thanks in part to a ground-breaking transportation system and communication technology, can quickly capture the concern of the international community, and, in reverse, important happenings occurring in other countries would easily impinge on the Indonesian nation.

By the time Indonesia proclaimed its independence in 1945, Islam had been embraced by about ninety per cent of its citizens and Muslims had therefore had a considerable role in the nation's struggle to overthrow both the Dutch and the Japanese colonial powers. In March 1942, the Japanese took over the Dutch administration, and colonized Indonesia over three years until

1945. In March 1945 the Japanese set up BPUPKI (Badan Usaha Penyelidik Persiapan Kemerdekaan Indonesia), the Investigating Committee for Preparatory Work for Indonesian Independence, which was inaugurated on 28 May 1945. Comprising 62 members from different religious and ideological backgrounds, the committee was accorded the task of formulating the philosophical basis of the Indonesian state.[45] Of course, this part of the thesis is not meant to go into more detail about the historical background of how the philosophical foundation of the newly established state was drafted through long and even dreary deliberations by Indonesia's founding fathers. However, it is important to note that the discourse on the philosophical basis appropriate for an independent Indonesia has been a marked sign that epitomized the controversial and pressing matter of the relationship between religion and state.

With regard to the issue of the relationship between religion and state, the Indonesian leaders in the committee became polarized into two groups, each of which contended and stood for two differing models of state. The first group consisted of individuals who supported a vision that Indonesia should be a nationalistic and secular state, a model of state that, in their view, could equally guarantee the rights of all Indonesian citizens, both the majority and minority groups. The supporters of this group belonged to diverse religious backgrounds and of whom most were Muslims, for instance, Soekarno, Mohammad Hatta, Mohammad Yamin, together with some Christians, such as Johannes Latuharhari and Samuel Ratulangie. However, the second group was shored up by Islamic leaders coming from conservative and modernist camps

45 Fatimah Husein, *Muslim-Christian Relations in the New Order Indonesia, the Exclusivist and Inclusivist Muslims' Perspective,* (Bandung: Mizan Pustaka, 2005), 72-78.

(e.g. A. K. Muzakkir, Harun Rasjidi and Kasman Singodimedjo) as well as the traditionalist camp, such as Wahid Hasjim.[46] The latter group demanded that the Indonesian state should be anchored on a strong Islamic basis.

After long, tedious debates, on 22 June 1945, the committee of 62 gave birth to the Preamble of the 1945 Constitution, which is also well known as the Piagam Jakarta (the Jakarta Charter). Afterwards, the committee continued their discussions in several meetings to outline the structure of the state and its constitution. A famous phrase in the 1945 Constitution's Preamble, which contains seven words that read: "dengan kewajiban menjalankan syariat Islam bagi pemeluknya" (with the obligation for adherents of Islam to practice Islamic law), was a key point of disagreement among the committee members. Objection to the phrase was put forward not only by Christians, like Johanenes Latuharhary, but also some Muslims; for instance, Wongsonegoro (b. 1897), a liberal Muslim Javanese, and Husein Djajadiningrat (b. 1886), the first head of the Office for Religious Affairs, also showed disapproval of the seven words. The phrase, in their judgment, could engender fanaticism, as it would be taken to mean allowing the state authority to oblige Muslims to practice their religion or to implement Islamic law by force.[47]

A few days before the declaration of independence, BPUPKI was dissolved, and, as its replacement, a similar body named PPKI (Panitia Persiapan Kemerdekaan Indonesia/the Committee for the Preparation of Indonesia's Independence) was set up on 14 or 15 August 1945. One of the most challenging questions raised in several meetings held by both BPUPKI and PPKI hitherto was whether Indonesia should be an Islamic state or a secular state.

46 Arifianto, "Explaining the Cause of Muslim-Christian Conflicts," 78-79.

47 Husein, *Muslim-Christian Relations in the New Order Indonesia,* 72-78.

Just the next morning after the declaration of independence, PPKI made an important decision to remove any Islamic formula from the Constitution.[48] The decision was made at the suggestion of Muhammad Hatta (d. 1980) after an informal discussion that he had the same day with some representatives of the Muslim group, like Ki Bagus Hadikusumo and Wahid Hasjim. This fact indicates that although by the time of independence, nine out of ten Indonesians were Muslims, surprisingly, the nation's founding fathers agreed not to create an Islamic state. Nevertheless, in recognition of the role of religion, the Preamble of Indonesia's 1945 Constitution clearly avows the state's commitment to fostering religion, but without being trapped into a theocratic state having a strong tendency to cleave to only one religion and become indifferent to the others, nor a secular one in which religion was divorced from the state.[49] However, the fundamental ideas within the present national ideology of Indonesia, named *Pancasila* (Five Principles),[50] were obviously squeezed out and extracted from the 1945 Constitution's Preamble that recognizes religions as "very important elements of nation-building."[51]

48 This decision included some alterations to the 1945 Constitution, for example, the deletion of "the seven words" stated in its Preamble (the Jakarta Charter), the requirement that the President should be a Muslim should be changed to "the president is a native Indonesian," and the word *Muqaddimah* (which is derived from Arabic) should be altered to *Pembukaan.* Ibid.

49 Ibid.

50 The Pancasila is comprised of: (1) belief in the One Supreme God or monotheism; (2) just and civilized humanism; (3) the unity of Indonesia; (4) democracy; (5) social justice.

51 Nurcholis Madjid, "In Search of Islamic Roots for Modern Pluralism: The Indonesian Experience," in *Toward a New Paradigm, Recent Development in Indonesian Islamic Thought,* edited by Mark R. Woodward, (Arizona: Arizona State University, 1996), 91.

Between 1955 and 1959, the political parties in the Constituent Assembly opened the door for re-examining the philosophical basis of Indonesia and deliberating a new constitution of the Republic. At the time, political turmoil emerged as the politicians in the Constituent Assembly fell into three contested differences of political ideology: nationalism, communism or socialism, and Islamism. The first group, the nationalists were adamant about their firm political conviction that the Pancasila is the final philosophical foundation of the state; the second, the Communists aspired to founding a Socialist-Marxist state, as epitomized by the Soviet Union; and the third, many of whom were conservative Muslims, sought to revive their idea of reinstating the Jakarta Charter and imposing Islamic law as the foundation of the Republic. The conflicting arguments put forward by the respective groups were irreconcilable so much so that their deliberations came to a deadlock until President Soekarno, backed by the military, resolved the crisis on 5 July 1959 by releasing a decree declaring that the Republic should return to the 1945 Constitution with the Pancasila as the final philosophical foundation, but without the Jakarta Charter.[52] Even though the Pancasila was ultimately decided and agreed upon to be the permanent ideology of the state, and, thus, would never be open to any negotiation for amendment, the issue of the religion-state relations in Indonesia has, at best, been an incessant and animated controversy, especially in the domain of intellectual discourse.

Unlike in most Western countries including the United States of America, where the separation of church and state is officially justified and warranted by secular laws, policies

52 See Madjid, "In Search of Islamic Roots for Modern Pluralism," 90; Arifianto, "Explaining the Cause of Muslim-Christian Conflicts," 80.

and regulations, Indonesia never identifies itself as a secular or theocratic state. A particular religion is accordingly neither assumed as an official identity of the state as it is in religiously based countries, such as Islam in Saudi Arabia and Catholicism in Spain, nor is it clear of all state authority intervention.[53] Even so, all Indonesian citizens are highly encouraged to individually choose and adhere to one of the six government-recognized religions: Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. As a result, since religion in Indonesia is not entirely detached or secularized from the state authority, the six religions are given their respective offices in the Ministry of Religion, "in the form of a general directorate, commensurate with its social and religious scopes of activities."[54]

The great multiplicities of religions and belief systems, which are held by many to be a God-given human reality, have been a precious treasure of the Indonesian archipelago. In view of that, it is safe to say that religion, or what in its broader sense is called expressions of religiosity and spirituality, occupies a special place within both the collective and individual consciousness among the Indonesian population. However, in such a pluralistic society, religion has often been seen as one of the crucial yet intricate issues to be dealt with, for instance, in terms of how communities of different faiths coexist harmoniously, pay due respect to one another's differences in values and modes of life, and forge ways to tolerate and accept the differences in peace.[55] Unfortunately, the intricacy and complexity of

53 Lorraine V. Aragon, *Fields of the Lord, Animism, Christian Minorities, and State Development in Indonesia*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), 5

54 Madjid, "In Search of Islamic Roots for Modern Pluralism", 91.

55 John R. Bowen, *Islam, Law, and Equality in Indonesia an Anthropology of Public Reasoning*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 3.

religious diversity becomes even more convoluted when entangled with politically and economically vested interests among religious groups.

From among the various religions, belief systems and values, people can actually find glittering pearls and paths of spirituality, which they can observe and pursue in order to brighten up and enlighten their hearts, to purify their souls, and to put an end to the plight of human beings. On the other hand, unfortunately, there are religious bigots, who work and act irresponsibly by manipulating and abusing religious diversity with the aim of provoking friction, tension, and even violent clashes among religious followers. In this ominous circumstance, people are beleaguered by the oft-shadowing dread of harsh conflicts and confrontations that occur not only between the followers and adherents of various religions, but also between those who belong to one particular faith.

The portrait of inter-religious conflicts in the Indonesian context has been made up for the most part by a long record of tension and conflict between Muslim and Christian groups, and very little has been documented about conflicts between the former and the followers of religions other than Christianity. Disharmony in Muslim-Christian relations and between religious groups has, in general, been instigated by abundant complex causes, some of which are believed to have no direct connection with religion, but with such things as politics, economics, and culture. Meanwhile, there are only a few minor factors that are associated with religion or even fewer that "at least seem to have strong religious overtones."[56]

56 Azyumardi Azra, "Islam and Christianity in Indonesia: the Roots of Conflict and Hostility," in *Religion and Culture in Asia Pacific Violence of Healing?"* edited by Joseph A. Camilleri and Larry Marshall, Vista Publication), 85-92. Azra records that hostility and violence between Muslim and Christian groups originated from a combination of the following factors: 1.

In the late 1960s, the early years of Soeharto's New Order government (1965-1998), Indonesia was tested with some incidents of religious tension and conflict. In June 1967 a church in Meulaboh, West Aceh, was burned down by a group of local Muslims. The tragedy was triggered by the construction of the church inside a Muslim compound in which the number of Christian residents was few. About five months afterwards, on 1 October 1967, a group of Muslim youth in Makassar, South Sulawesi, attacked several Christian buildings (churches and schools) and burnt some Bibles. On 30 November 1967, in response to the above backdrop, Soehareto's administration initiated an Inter-religious Consultation Forum (Musyawarah Antar Agama) in Jakarta. The forum was attended by 20 participants representing distinguished Muslim, Protestant, and Catholic leaders to discuss and find a solution to crucial issues concerning Muslim-Christian relations. The forum can be said to have achieved success on one point, namely, in that all its participants agreed to establish an Inter-religious Consultation Board as a mediation institution to cope with inter-religious issues. However, somehow, many consider the forum to have failed, as Christian leaders disagreed with another point of its recommendation draft that religious propagation should not be aimed at people who had already embraced a certain religion, and, therefore, religious missionary activities could only be allowed to

Circulation of publications containing either plans for religious expansion or materials considered to be blasphemous by either religion and its prominent figures; 2. Aggressive expansion of religious propaganda; 3. Use of house or construction of new building for religious worship; 4. Adoption and implementation of certain government regulations considered to have limited religious propaganda or to have discriminated against either religion; 5. Public display of religious rituals and celebrations; and 6. Mutual suspicions relating to the role of religion in the Indonesian nation-state.

target Indonesians who had not yet become adherents of the five officially sanctioned religions at that time (Islam, Christianity, Protestantism, Hinduism, and Buddhism).[57]

Muslim-Christian relations in Indonesia, both before and after independence, have not always been adorned with gloominess, and there have been up-and-down patterns of encounter between the two communities. In 1965-1966, during the transitional period from Soekarno's administration to Soeharto's New Order regime, both religious groups stood hand in hand alongside the army in the fight against the Communists and Communism.

The Legacy of Muslim Scholarship in Comparative Religion

The current ambiance of Islamic religious knowledge in today's Malay-Indonesian world has its roots in the legacy of Muslim scholarship which flourished in the seventeenth century sultanate of Aceh. During this period, the regions of Aceh and North Sumatra, as a whole, held a crucial position as a highly attractive and dynamic ground for Islamic traditional institutions of learning and provided a favourable scholarly condition for a variety of schools and streams of Islamic thought to proliferate and even to vie with one another in a responsible manner.[58]

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57 Husein, *Muslim-Christian Relations in the New Order Indonesia,* 127-30; Mujiburrahman, *Feeling Threatened, Muslim-Chrisitian Relations in Indonesia's New Order,* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 41-48. For further exploration of this issue, see Sudjangi, *Pembinaan Kerukunan Hidup Umat Beragama: 50 Tahun Kemerdekaan Republik Indonesia,* (Jakarta: Departemen Agama R.I., 1995/1996).

58 Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia, Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern 'Ulama' in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,* (Honolulu: Allen & Unwin and University of

It comes as no surprise that, at that time, the regions of Aceh and North Sumatra attracted many prominent Muslim scholars to come for study. Among the most fêted of them, to name just a few, are Hamzah al-fansūrī (d. 1527), Shams al-din al-sumatrānī (d. 1630), Nūr al-dīn al-rānīrī (d. 1658), Abd al-ra'ūf al-sinkīlī (d. 1693), and Muhammad yūsūf al-māqassārī (1626-1692). Their salient contribution to developing the great tradition of Islamic knowledge and accelerating the spread of Islam in most parts of the archipelago is undeniable. They laid down such a robust foundation of Muslim scholarship that, in part, its fruit can be observed through the profuse work they left, which mainly deal with various fields of Islamic knowledge, such as *Tafsīr* (Quranic exegesis), *Hadīth* (Prophetic traditions), *Fiqh* and *Usul al-fiqh* (Jurisprudence), *Kalām* (Theology), *Akhlāq* (Ethics), *Tasawwuf* (Sufism), *Mantiq* (Logic), and *al-Adyān* (History of Religion). With respect to the history of religion, it is worth noting that Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī is believed to be "the first *'alim* ever in the Malay world to write a work on comparative religion," [59] as there were no Muslim scholars living prior to the twentieth century who devoted such an energy as he did to expound Islam in a comparative viewpoint with other religions.

Born in the coastal region of Gujarat, named Rānīr (Randir in today's India), Nūr al-dīn muhammad ibn 'alī ibn hasanjī al-hamīd al-shāfi'i al-ash'arī al-aydarūsī al-rānīrī was said to inherit the hybrid blood of a Malay mother and a Hadramī migrant father. Although there is no historical account that shows the exact date he

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Hawai'i Press, 2002), 52-86.

59 Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism,* 68. See also, Karel A. Steenbrink, "The Study of Comparative Religion by Indonesian Muslims," *Numen,* vol. 37, no. 2, 1990, 141.

was born, it was likely to have been towards the end of the sixteenth century. He died in his place of birth, Rānīr, on Saturday, 22 Dhu al Hijjah 1068/21 September 1658.[60] Writing no fewer than 29 works which concern a wide range of Islamic and general knowledge, from *Kalām*, *Fiqh*, *Tasawwuf*, *Hadīts*, to History and Comparative Religion, he was renowned as having a multifaceted personality including that of Sūfī, theologian, jurist, preacher, man of letters, and politician.[61]

Al-Rānīrī wrote about comparative religion extensively in a book entitled *Tibyān fī ma'rifat al-adyān,* and again explained the same subject in several passages of his voluminous work, *Bustān al-salātīn*. The former, the book *Tibyān,* was written according to the pattern of writing applied in al-Shahrastānī's well-known book, *Kitāb al-milal wa al-nihal*. As in the *Kitāb al-milal,* he began the first part of *Tibyān* with a discussion on the world's major religions, but not including Islam. In this part, he took up the topic by first exploring religions that were deemed to be non-scriptural (non-revealed), which was followed by an explanation about the scriptural (revealed) religions of Judaism and Christianity. The second part of *Tibyān* is especially allotted to a description of Islam, including its 72-splinter sects that were considered to have deviated from the straight path of Sunni-belief.

Meanwhile, al-Rānīrī's other book, *Bustān al-salātīn*, is a very lucid illustration of his profound expertise in the field of Islamic historiography. This work can be said to be quite excellent in that it successfully displayed the universal context of human history and introduced Islamic historiography to Malay audiences. In addition, what makes this book distinctive is that it initiated what Azra calls

60 Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism, 54, 62.*

61 Ibid., 65.

"a new form of Malay historical writing", as it is written by drawing on and following several patterns and traditions of Islamic classical historiography.[62] The *Bustān al-salātīn* comprises seven books and it is only in several passages of the second book that the topic relating to Comparative Religion can be found.

Significantly, based on a close scrutiny of the catalogue of Arabic, Malay, and Javanese manuscripts, Steenbrik concluded that al-Rānīrī's work *Tibyān fī ma'rifat al-adyān* can be regarded as the only book of Comparative Religion to circulate in the Malay-Indonesian world from the seventeenth until the early twentieth centuries.[63] And it was only in the second half of the twentieth century that many Indonesian Muslim scholars and intelligentsia began to devote themselves to intellectually dealing with inter-religious issues. Some of them, as a result, embark on authoring books and literature concerning religions other than Islam.

There were a number of books regarding inter-religious issues which were written by Indonesian Muslim scholars during the late colonial era and the early years of Indonesian independence. However, based on the thorough inspection of bibliographical sources for the present study, it is found that the very precursory work on the discipline of Comparative Religion during this period was *al-Adyān,*[64] which was authored by Mahmud Junus (1899-1982), an alumnus of al-Azhar University, Cairo. This book is perceived as a remarkable work for it was written in the Arabic language and used as a main reference in a number of Islamic colleges for teachers' education in Padang during 1930s. *Al-*

62 Ibid., 68.

63 Steenbrink, "The Study of Comparative Religion," 142-143

64 The book I use here is the the 5th edition of *Al-Adyān*, (Bukit Tinggi: Al-Maktabah al-Sa'diyyah, 1972)

Adyān was given as a subject matter for the students of the highest grades whose language of communication in their classrooms was Arabic.[65]

Al-Adyān, according to Steenbrik, is simple and interesting in terms of its writing style as well as its orientation in comparative religious studies. In the first two and half pages of this book, Yunus starts with the explanation of the definition of religion or, in the specific term he used, *tadayyun* or religiousness, and followed it by discussing the types of religions. Yunus defines religiousness as "the natural inclination of man to believe in the existence of power which holds control and domination over both natural and human forces." This religiousness is a primordial quality of mankind which stems, initially, from the idea of polytheism or the plurality of gods since the earliest times of primeval human beings. Later on, as time passes, with the advanced power of rationality and knowledge, man ends up with firm evidence for the monotheistic idea that there is only one god as the prime cause and the creator.[66]

Yunus classifies religion into two varieties: spiritualistic and materialistic religions. The spiritualistic religion consists of three groups: the theistic religions whose adherents worship the mighty gods; the cult of ancestors' spirits and the like; and the cult of natural powers. He goes on to divide the theistic religions into two categories: the first, monotheistic religions, which include Zoroastrianism (the religion of ancient Persians), Buddhism (the religion of Indian and Chinese people), Judaism, Christianity, and Islamic religion; the second, polytheistic religions, which include the religions of ancient Egypt, Phoenix, Ashur, Babylon, Greece,

65 Mahmud Yunus, *Sedjarah Pendidikan Islam di Indonesia,* (Jakarta: Pustaka Mahmudiah, 1960), 108

66 Yunus, *Al-Adyān*, 3

Rome, and Brahmanism. Meanwhile, the materialistic religion is the one whose followers worship effigies, statues, idols, and the like.[67]

In the subsequent pages, Yunus explicates the major world religions by discussing at first Zoroastrianism and following it with Sabean religion, Brahmanism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Fetishism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Islam is the last religion to be expounded upon due to the extent of description which is lengthier than that applied to other religions. What makes this work fairly interesting is that it closes the discussion about Islam with the critical analysis of the Ahmadiyyah and the teachings of theosophy. In this point, Yunus shows strong criticism and disagreement against the Ahmadiyyah, especially with regard to the issue of prophecy of its founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. Meanwhile, as to the topic of theosophy, Yunus is of the opinion that it can be viewed and treated as religion, philosophy, and knowledge at once, and, therefore, he reminds Muslims that, by studying the teachings of theosophy, they are expected to really be aware and cautious if it is not in accordance or conflicting with Islam.[68]

Furthermore, compared to the work of al-Rānīrī's *Tibyān fī ma'rifat al-adyān* and Yunus' *al-Adyān,* the work of Muslim scholars concerning inter-religious issues, published during the early years of Indonesian independence until the first decade of the New Order administration, varies in terms of the methods and themes chosen to portray various religions. While the work of al-Rānīrī and Yunus expose and describe the world major religions in general, the books and literature authored by Muslim scholars on different religions that circulated during the second half of the

67 Ibid., 5

68 Ibid., 58-77

twentieth century were mostly preoccupied with the comparison between Islam and Christianity.[69]

Examples of the work on inter-religious issues of this kind, which were published during this period, can be found in the literature written by Muslim scholars like Hasbullah Bakry (1925-1998) and M. Arsjad Thalib Lubis (1908-1972), who deserve to be discussed. Hasbullah Bakry was a South Sumatran Muslim scholar who worked as a spiritual adviser for the military from the 1950s until the 1970s. Bakry once worked as an advocate and was an active member of Muhammadiyah, and in 1970 he was associated with GUPPI, the Association for Renewal of Muslim education. Additionally, he lectured in Islamic colleges in Yogyakarta and Jakarta.[70]

A prolific writer, Hasbullah Bakry has published a number of books which address a variety of scholarly themes, such as philosophy,[71] theology, and comparative religion. In addition, Bakry's books dealing with the topic of inter-religious issues apparently fall into two categories. First, a number of Bakry's work is exclusively preoccupied with the comparison between Islam and Christianity. In this way, Islam and Christianity are deliberated in such a way in which the convictions and views of the two religions about certain issues are juxtaposed and contrasted with each other. The method of comparison is used in Bakry's work in order to defend Islam from Christian attacks, as well as to validate the truth of Islam as the last

69 Ahmad Najib Burhani, "The Ahmadiyya and the Study of Comparative Religion in Indonesia: Controversies and Influences," in *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations,* vol. 25, no. 2, 2014, 141-158.

70 David Bourchier and Vedi R. Hadiz, eds., *Indonesian Politics and Society*, (London: Routledge, 2003), xvi.

71 Hasbullah Bakry, *Di Sekitar Filsafat Scholastik Islam*, (Solo: AB Siti Sjamsijah, 1965); *Sistimatika Filsafat*, (Jakarta: Widjaya, 1981).

religion and Muhammad as the last prophet. To support his position, Bakry tried to show the superiority of Islam to Christianity and other religions, as well, by demonstrating that Christian doctrines contain inherent logical inconsistencies, on the one hand, and contradict the Qur'ān, on the other.[72] Some of Bakry's books of this kind are *Nabi Isa dalam al-Qur'an dan Nabi Muhammad dalam Bybel,*[73] *Jesus dalam Pandangan Islam dan Kristen,*[74] and *Al-Qur'an sebagai Korektor terhadap Taurot dan Injil.*[75]

Unlike Bakry's books of the first type, his other book entitled *Ilmu Perbandingan Agama*[76] is devoted to elucidating the major world religions in general. Thus, in this book, Bakry does not confine his explanation only to two certain religions, yet he instead expounds upon various religions in a descriptive manner, without comparing the strength and weakness of one religion with those of other religions. However, apart from the above two categories, Bakry's books were used as reference textbooks for comparative religious studies in Islamic higher education institutions and other Islamic academies,[77] and his works have obviously been of great value and contribution to the existence

72 Ismatu Ropi, "Muslim-Christian Polemics in Indonesian Islamic Literature," in *Islam and Chrisitian-Muslim Relation,* vol. 9, no. 2, 1998, 217-229. See also, Burhani, "The Ahmadiyya and the Study of Comparative Religion," 148.

73 Hasbullah Bakry, *Nabi Isa dalam Al-Qur'an dan Nabi Muhammad dalam Bybel,* (Solo: Ab. Sitti Sjamsijah, 1959).

74 Hasbullah Bakry, *Jesus dalam Pandangan Islam dan Kristen,* (Surabaja: Japi, 1965).

75 Hasbullah Bakry, *Al-Qur'an sebagai Korektor terhadap Tourot dan Injil,* (Surabaja: Yapi, 1966).

76 Hasbullah Bakry, *Perbandingan Agama,* (Jakarta: Widjaya, 1986).

77 Burhani, "The Ahmadiyya and the Study of Comparative Religion," 141-158

of comparative religious studies in the Indonesian context.

Comparative Religion in Islamic Schools and Colleges

As was noted earlier, comparative studies of religions have in fact been quite long known to Malay-Indonesian Muslim scholars. Their acquaintance with the field of study dates back to approximately the second half of the seventeenth century, the time Nūr al-dīn al-rānīrī published *Tibyān fī marifat al-adyān,* which extensively expounds the history of world religions. Despite that, according to Steenbrink, no reliable historical accounts are available to prove that since the second half of the seventeenth even until the early twentieth century, the discipline has been included as an academic subject matter to be taught in the Islamic traditional educational system, which is more popularly known as Pesantren in Indonesia.[78] It was only since the early 1930s that some Islamic secondary schools and colleges in West Sumatra began to introduce and add the discipline of Comparative Religion into their academic curriculum.[79]

In the years prior to Indonesian independence, almost all of the religious educational institutions, both elementary and secondary levels, were established and organized independently by either individuals or private associations. These religious schools were growing well and vying with general (secular) schools founded and managed by private and state institutions. The subject of religious studies was not allowed to be given in the general schools until the country achieved its independence in 1945, a turning point from when religious education went through rapid change

78 Steenbrink, "The Study of Comparative Religion," 147.

79 Mahmud Yunus, *Sejarah Pendidikan Islam di Indonesia,* (Jakarta: Pustaka Mahmudiah, 1960), 108.

and transformation.[80] However, the signs of the early attempts to modernize religious schools actually started to be felt since the early twentieth century in West Sumatra.[81]

One of the main features of the educational transformation in the region of West Sumatra is the incorporation of "secular" subjects into the curriculum of religious schools, as well as the use of Arabic and English, in addition to Bahasa Indonesia, as the media of instruction. The teaching of the discipline of Comparative Religion in a number of religious colleges and secondary schools in the region seems to be the immediate result of the educational reform launched by a group of Muslim reformists, which was also often called the Kaum Muda movement.[82] The recent returnees from Cairo, along with the

80 Burhanuddin Daya, *Gerakan Pembaharuan Pemikiran Islam: Kasus Sumatra Thawalib,* (Yogyakarta: Penerbit Tiara Wacana, 1990), 182.

81 Taufik Abdullah, *Schools and Politics: The Kaum Muda Movement in West Sumatra 1927-1933,* (New York: Cornel Modern Indonesia Project, Cornel University, 1971), 207-216.

82 The Kaum Muda is an epithet used to refer to a reformist group of Muslim educated young scholars (ulama) in West Sumatra, whose roots date back to the reformist or renewalist religious ideas that were circulating and transmitted by the networks of Muslim scholars (ulama) in the seventeenth to nineteenth century Malay-Indonesian world. Since the beginning of the 1900s, the Kaum Muda movement launched agendas for modernization directed at the purification of Islamic religious practices and social changes, including religious school reform. Defined as the symbol of progress and modernity, the Kaum Muda, which means "young people," is the opposite of the Kaum Tua, meaning "a group of the old", the symbol of conservative and traditionalist Muslim scholars. Among the strongest supporters of the movement were graduates of Middle-eastern tertiary institutions, especially in Cairo, Egypt. Therefore, they were often called "Cairo returnees," as most of them were Al-Azhar graduates. See Abdullah, *Schools and Politics*, 1-10; See also Azyumardi Azra, Dina Afrianty, and Robert W. Hefner,

cooperation of the Western-educated intellectuals, were a crucial part of the Kaum Muda movement's efforts at integrating religious knowledge and general (secular) sciences.[83] The main goal of the movement in modernizing religious schools was, among other things, to bridge the intellectual gap between Muslim modernist scholars, on the one hand, and Western educated persons, on the other. Accordingly, this innovative strategy was expected to enable those religious schools to produce Muslim intellectuals who have balanced and integral competence in both religious knowledge and secular subjects.[84]

Two religious schools, al-Jami'ah Islamiah, founded on the 20th of March 1931 in Sungayang, Batusangkar, and Normal Islam (Kulliah Mu'allimin Islamiah), built on the 1st of April 1931 in Padang, both of which were led by Mahmud Yunus, introduced their students to such subjects as the history of religions and the history of the world. The book *al-Adyān*, authored by Mahmud Yunus, was used as a textbook at Normal Islam. Likewise, the curricular plan of Diniyah Putri (Religious School for Females) Padang Panjang mentioned the history of religions as a subject of study to be taught for one hour to the school's students of the highest grade, that is, grade 3 of the three-year junior secondary level.[85] Meanwhile, the task of teaching Comparative Religion in those schools was

"Pesantren and Madrasa: Muslim Schools and National Ideals in Indonesia", in *Schooling Islam, The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education*, edited by Robert W. Hefner and Muhammad Qosim Zaman, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 182-5.

83 Daya, *Gerakan Pembaharuan Pemikiran Islam,* 83-84. See also, Azyumardi Azra, Dina Afrianty, and Robert W. Hefner, "Pesantren and Madrasa: Muslim Schools," 182-5.

84 Abdullah, *Schools and Politics*, 209.

85 Yunus, *Sedjarah Pendidikan Islam,* 109.

performed mostly by Middle Eastern university graduates, such as Muchtar Luthfi (1901-1950) and Iljas Ja'cub (1903-1958), who studied at and graduated from tertiary institutions in Cairo, Egypt. Even so, it is important to note that, as Nakamura reveals, not all of the Indonesian students in Egypt attended Islamic religious studies at Al-Azhar University and that some of them were in fact enrolled at Cairo University and studied the field of Comparative Religion there.[86]

The wind of educational reform that overwhelmed many Islamic institutions of secondary and higher learning in West Sumatra then flowed into and affected the Islamic institutions of learning in Java. The most progressive efforts at modernizing Islamic religious schools in Java were pioneered by the Muhammadiyah, one of the largest modernist Islamic organizations in Indonesia, since 1912, and then, around two decades later, the organization was running 316 schools in Java and the nearby island of Madura. The Muhammadiyah applied the model of school management practiced by the Dutch and Christian schools. In the 1920s, several Islamic traditionalist learning centres, widely known as Pesantren (Islamic boarding school), also began to implement pedagogical and curricular reform. They operated a modern system of school management and provided general (secular) subjects, such as foreign languages, Mathematics, History, Geography, Biology, and some others, including Comparative Religion, together

86 Mitsuo Nakamura, "Professor Haji Kahar Muzakkir and the Development of the Muslim Reformist Movement in Indonesia," in *Religion and Social Ethos in Indonesia,* edited by B.R. Anderson, M. Nakamura, M. Slawet, (Monash: Monash University, 1977), 7. See also Mona Abaza, *Changing Images of Three Generations of Azharites in Indonesia*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993), 10.

with religious studies highlighted in the Pesantren.[87] One of the indications that the modernization of education took place in religious schools during the formative years of the Indonesian nation can be seen through their willingness to incorporate the general sciences in their curriculum. However, with regard to the question of whether Comparative Religion has been deemed a necessary subject to include in part of the curricular plan of educational reform in Islamic traditionalist schools (Pesantren), seems to have its answer in what Karel A. Steenbrink implies – that the discipline has "never had a strong position in the traditional education system in Indonesia."[88]

In relation to Steenbrink's conclusion, we correspondingly found that Mahmud Yunus records only one Islamic boarding school (Pesantren) that introduced its students to Comparative Religion. This Islamic school, widely known as Pesantren Persatuan Islam (Persis), was located in Bandung, West Java. It was founded in March 1936 (1 Dhu al-hijjah 1354) by A. Hasan (1887-1958), a Muslim modernist thinker, and his colleague, M. Natsir (1908-1993), a prominent political leader of the same stream of Muslim modernism, who lent considerable support by serving as the Persis adviser. After three years of operation, Persis, with its 25 active students, was moved to Bangil (March 1940), East Java. In December 1941 when the Second World War broke out, the Pesantren was closed down, but fortunately, on the 3rd of October 1951 (1 Muharram 1371) it was eventually revived. The record of the 1961-academic syllabus of the Persis

87 Azyumardi Azra, Dina Afrianty, and Robert W. Hefner, "Pesantren and Madrasa: Muslim Schools," 182-5; See also Zamakhsyari Dhofier, (1999), *The Pesantren Tradition: The Role of the Kyai in the Maintenance of Traditional Islam in Java*, (Tempe: Arizona State University), 77-115.

88 Steenbrink, "The Study of Comparative Religion," 147.

in Bangil reveals that the subject named in the introduction of other religions was given as a part of general sciences.[89]

Furthermore, the educational networking of Persatuan Umat Islam (PUI), Islamic Society Association, is also worth noting as it played a very significant part in reforming religious schools since the 1920s, in West Java, in particular. Until the 1950s, the association ran almost 400 Islamic religious schools (madrasahs), one of which was a six-year secondary school system named SGI (Sekolah Guru PUI), across the region. Comparative Religion, as stated in the SGI's 1958 academic curriculum, was included as an elective subject and given to its students of grades V and VI in that the religious school was deliberately designed for teacher candidates. The reference book used for this subject was *al-Adyān* by Mahmud Yunus. Furthermore, no less relevant to be taken into account is an Islamic boarding school, known as Ma'had Rashīdiyyah (Rashīdiyyah Islamic Boarding School) in Amuntai, Kalimantan, in that it taught its students the subjects related to aspects of Comparative Religion. Ma'had Rasyīdiyyah, established in 1928 by H. Abdur Rasyid (1884-1934), a graduate of Al-Azhar University, provided its students with *Tabaqat al-Umam* (The Stratification of Societies), as mentioned in its 1952 syllabic plan.[90] Although not entirely the same as the introduction of other religions, as the one that was taught in Persis, the subject of *Tabaqāt al-Umam* expounds upon topics somewhat relating to relevant issues in comparative religious studies.

It was not long after independence, or more precisely, since the early 1950s, that the newly established government of Indonesia, particularly under the responsibility of the Ministry

89 Yunus, *Sedjarah Pendidikan Islam,* 298.

90 Ibid., 350-351.

of Religion, expanded in many parts of the country the founding of various forms of Islamic learning institutions, from elementary and secondary schools to college and university systems. At the level of secondary school systems, the government established religious schools, named PGA (Pendidikan Guru Agama), which were designed with the six-year (junior and senior) grade system to educate religious teacher candidates. In addition to PGA, there were also PHIN (Pendidikan Hakim Islam Negeri), state religious schools, which were set up with a three-year (senior) grade system to train students and prepare them to fill the posts and employment in religious judiciary offices. In PGA schools, Comparative Religion, along with Philosophy, is given to students of advanced levels (those of grades V and VI) while in PHIN schools, Comparative Religion was added as an elective subject and taught to students of grades II and III.[91]

The progressive endeavours made by private and state institutions, as has in part been alluded to above to improve both the quantity and quality of the religious secondary schools, have definitely been a starting point that inspired the emergence of Islamic institutions of higher education in Indonesia. In this respect, it is important to note that Sekolah Islam Tinggi (SIT), a private institute of Islamic studies, founded in 1940 by Persatuan Guru-guru Agama Islam (PGAI, a Muslim teachers association) in Padang, West Sumatra, seems to be the first Islamic institution of higher learning to exist in Indonesia. The SIT formally operated since 9 December 1940, but sadly shut down in March 1942 as a result of the Japanese invasion that year.[92]

Following the emergence of the SIT in Padang, several

91 Ibid., 367-395

92 Ibid., 117

Islamic centres of higher education began to be set up in other parts of Sumatra, as well as in Java. Some of these Islamic higher learning institutions incorporated Comparative Religion into their curriculum. On 14 November 1951 Yayasan Wakaf Perguruan Tinggi Islam Jakarta, a private foundation of Islamic higher education in Jakarta, established Perguruan Tinggi Islam Jakarta (PTIJ, Institute of Islamic Studies Jakarta). In 1959, PTIJ was changed to the Islamic University Jakarta with two faculties: Faculty of Law and Social Sciences, and Faculty of Economics and Company. The institute originally had one faculty, the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences. PTIJ's 1951 academic report reveals that the institute taught its students at the doctoral level a subject called "Other Religions and Faith."[93] The teaching of Comparative Religion at the university level in the 1950s can also be found at the Perguruan Tinggi Islam Cokroaminoto (Institute of Islamic Studies Cokroaminoto) in Surakarta. Academic courses in the faculty of Islamic studies at the institute show that Comparative Religion is given to its first year students.[94] Meanwhile, there was another private institute of Islamic studies in South Sumatra, namely, Perguruan Islam Tinggi Palembang that also became an important part of Islamic higher learning that introduced the field of Comparative Religion in its curriculum. In response to the students' need for a balanced competence between general and religious studies, this institute, which only had the one faculty of Islamic Law, set up modern sciences such as English, French, Sociology, Philosophy, and Comparative Religion, as part of its academic courses. The discipline of Comparative Religion was taught to its second year students. PTIP appeared more advanced

93 Ibid., 315-318.

94 Ibid., 262-266.

compared to other institutes of Islamic studies in terms of the teaching-learning process, as, to some extent, it provided its students with freedom in their study activities rather than applying a method of rote learning.[95]

In September 1951, the Indonesian government founded Perguruan Tinggi Agama Islam (PTAIN), the State Institute of Islamic Studies, in Yogyakarta. The foundation of this institute was in compliance with government decree number 34, 1950, issued and signed by the President of the Republic of Indonesia on 14 August 1950. Intended for undergraduate studies, PTAIN required four years as the minimum length of time needed by each student to complete a programme of study. PTAIN, which at the time, consisted of only three faculties: *Tarbiyah* (Islamic education), *Qada*' (Islamic Law), and *Da'wah* (Islamic Mission), was aimed at educating students in order to have a depth of understanding and profundity in Islamic religious knowledge. The course of Comparative Religion was taught in the Departments of *Da'wah* and *Qada*'.[96]

Furthermore, about six years after the establishment of PTAIN (1951) in Yogyakarta, Indonesia's Ministry of Religion initiated the foundation of Akademi Dinas Ilmu Agama (ADIA), the State Academy of Religious Studies, in Jakarta which commenced its first academic year on 17 June 1957. Like PTAIN, ADIA was intended to train civil servants and provide them with academic and practical expertise in Islamic sciences. The course of Comparative Religion was given to its second and third year students from its two faculties: *Syariah Islam* (Islamic Law) and *Sastra Arab* (Arabic Literature). In addition to these two faculties, ADIA also opened

95 Ibid., 213-215.

96 Ibid., 396-404

a special class for Military Religious Advisers.[97] PTAIN and ADIA were embryos of UIN Sunan Kalijaga, as well as other state Islamic universities, institutes and colleges operated by the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia. As in both aforesaid academic institutions, the discipline of Comparative Religion also occupied a special place in those state institutions of Islamic higher learning and among the most prominent in developing and advancing comparative religious studies is UIN Sunan Kalijaga.

Concluding Remarks

There have been many determining factors that considerably reinforced the substantial attempts to introduce the discipline of Comparative Religion into the Indonesian institutions of Islamic learning. These factors can be categorized as cultural, social, and political in nature, among the most seminal of which can be particularly traced in the growth of religious schools in Indonesia and the reform of religious education that took place during the first half of the twentieth century. The educational transformation in religious schools had a profound impact on how Comparative Religion has been cultivated and nurtured as an important subject of study which for years has been taught in many secondary and higher institutions of Islamic learning. Indubitably, these religious schools served as nurseries for the discipline to remain alive in Indonesia even until today.

In addition to the reform efforts made in the religious education institutions, other factors, such as cultural, social, and political dynamics have also been crucial to the further development of Comparative Religion in Indonesia. In fact,

97 Ibid., 404-408

these latter factors have been somewhat influential in arousing the nascent interest among the practitioners of Islamic religious education to absorb and include the discipline of Comparative Religion into the curriculum of their schools and colleges. Viewed from the perspective of the history of knowledge, the existence of the discipline of Comparative Religion and its interlocking with wider cultural, social, and political contexts can be found in its theoretical footing in the epistemological hypothesis that human thought, from which all knowledge and sciences are generated, may not work in a vacuum and thus, are inseparable from the circumstances surrounding society, culture, and politics.

As has been briefly pointed out in the preceding passages, the early appearance of comparative religious studies in Indonesia has been represented especially by Nūr al-dīn al-rānīrī's masterpiece, *Tibyān fī ma'rifat al-adyān,* which was first published in the seventh century. This work marked a brilliant intellectual dynamic that coherently corresponded to the existing context of religious diversity, a religious setting that has for centuries been prevalent in the Malay-Indonesian world. However, it was only in the first half of the twentieth century that al-Rānīrī's legacy has been followed by Muslim scholars such as Hasbullah Bakry, M. Arsjad Thalib Lubis, Mahmud Yunus, and many others, who wrote relevant work on comparative religious studies. Some of these were lecturers responsible for the task of teaching the discipline of Comparative Religion in the state institutions of Islamic higher learning.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CURRICULUM AND SYLLABUS OF COMPARATIVE RELIGION AT UIN SUNAN KALIJAGA

UIN Sunan Kalijaga: A Brief Historical Setting

The historical origins of Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Sunan Kalijaga, as has been explained in passing in Chapter Two, can be traced by looking back at its initial stage which began to take shape in the 1930s and 1940s, the final years of Dutch colonialism in Indonesia. Indeed, during that time, ingenious efforts had been made by a group of leading Muslim figures to realize their aspiration of establishing a higher institution of Islamic learning. However, the Muslim struggle to actualize this noble goal resulted from hindrances and restrictions imposed by the Dutch administration. Under Dutch colonialism, the educational institution in the Netherlands East Indies (NEI) was treated as a means to reinforce social class and status distinctions, as well as a catalyst for competitive power struggles. Driven by a feeling of Western superiority, the Dutch created boundaries between the civilized West and the uncivilized East. In addition, it was

seemingly for that reason that the Dutch colonialists relentlessly tried to enact discriminatory policies concerning educational matters on their colonial subjects. This gloomy context provides a backdrop that is quite relevant to our understanding of the early attempts by Muslim leaders to develop education for their Muslim fellows during the first four decades of the twentieth century; before Indonesian independence.[1]

Sometime in the 1920s, the colonial administration started to establish a number of higher learning institutions in Bandung and Jakarta; for instance, Technische Hoogeschool (renamed Institut Teknologi Bandung, Institute of Technology Bandung), Rechts Hoogeschool (a college for law studies) and Geneeskundige (a college for medical students); the latter two were located in Jakarta. However, in terms of student admissions, the Dutch colonialists applied unfair rules in that these colleges were projected to cater exclusively for students coming from among the Dutch and elite Indonesian families. Conversely, ordinary indigenous people had little chance to enrol and for Muslim people it could be even harder to gain access and pursue advanced studies in the Dutch-owned colleges.[2]

1 Yudi Latif, *Indonesian Muslim Intelligentsia and Power,* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2008), 56-58.

2 Waryani Fajar Riyanto, *Integrasi-interkoneksi Kelimuan, Biografi Intelektual M. Amin Abdullah (1953-…), Person, Knowledge, and Institution,* (Yogyakarta: Suka Press, 2013), 559-510. For further discussion, see also, Balitbang P&K, *Pendidikan di Indonesia 1900-1974,* (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1976), 40-41; Departemen Agama, *Perguruan Tinggi Agama Islam di Indonesia: Sejarah Pertumbuhan dan Perkembangan,* (Jakarta: Departemen Agama Direktorat Jenderal Kelembagaan Agama Islam, 2003), 6; M. Amin Abdullah, *Transformasi IAIN Sunan Kalijaga Menjadi UIN Sunan Kalijaga,* (Yogyakarta: UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2006), 6; Latif, *Indonesian Muslim Intelligentsia*, 56-58.

The reality of the abovementioned educational bias gave rise to serious concerns among prominent Indonesian Muslim figures such as Dr. Satiman Wirosandjojo (1889-1970), Muhammad Natsir (1908-1993), Muhammad Hatta (1902-1980), and others. Therefore, they constantly fostered a vibrant optimism that they would someday create a modern Islamic institution of higher learning, one that was expected to be able to meet the Muslim *Ummah*'s need for higher education and also serve as a centre of excellence. In *Pedoman Masyarakat* magazine, no. 15, year IV, 13 April 1938, Wirosandjojo expressed his opinion in an article concerning the significance of founding an Islamic college, or what he called "Pesantren Luhur" (Higher Islamic Boarding School). His opinion captured the attention of many Muslim intellectuals and leaders, such as Muhammad Natsir, Muhammad Hatta, and K.H. Kahar Muzakkir (1921-1965). In response to Wirosandjojo's article, Natsir wrote an article "Sekolah Tinggi Islam" (Higher Islamic College) in Pandji Islam magazine (June 1938).[3] Both Wirosandjojo and Muhammad Hatta arrived at a similar conclusion about which they unanimously agreed and deemed as the *raison d'être* for the establishment of an Islamic higher college: Firstly, chief among the reasons to set up this institution was that Muslim society in reality suffered from backwardness and retardation in education compared to the non-Muslim society. Secondly, the Muslim society needed to be aware and learn that the progress and advancement that the non-Muslim society had achieved in education were the result of their endeavours to adopt the Western education system. Thirdly, there was a need to bring and push Islamic education in order to have a profitable link

3 H.A. Soetjipto and Agussalim Sitompul, *Sejarah Pertumbuhan dan Perkembangan Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) al-Jami'ah,* (Yogyakarta: Lembaga Pengabdian pada Masyarakat, IAIN Sunan Kalijaga, 1986), 11-25.

and connection with international networks. Fourthly, the Islamic education system should give particular consideration about its local content.[4]

In the late 1930s, Wirosandjojo initiated the establishment of "Pesantren Luhur" (Islamic Higher Boarding School) in Solo. Unfortunately, this pioneering work was very short-lived and was shut down in 1942 when the Japanese began to occupy Indonesia and embed their grip of military force in the region.[5] However, this failure did not dishearten or dissuade many of the prominent Muslim figures such as Muhammad Hatta, Muhammad Natsir, K.H.A. Wahid Hasyim (1914-1953), and K.H. Mas Mansyur (1896-1946) from founding Sekolah Tinggi Islam (STI, Higher Islamic College). Accordingly, under the leadership of Muhammad Hatta, a group of Indonesian Muslim leaders and intellectuals established an Islamic College named Sekolah Tinggi Islam (STI) in 1945. Unfortunately, this college also collapsed by the time the independence of Indonesia was proclaimed on 17 August 1945. When the government of the newly founded Indonesia, due to the second Dutch colonial invasion, moved its capital city from Jakarta to Yogyakarta, the former STI in Jakarta was also relocated to the same city and then reopened on 6 April 1946.[6]

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4 Ibid; See also, Fuad Jabali and Jamhari, eds., *The Modernization of Islam in Indonesia, an Impact Study on the Cooperation between the IAIN and McGill University,* (Jakarta and Montreal: Indonesia-Canada Islamic Higher Education Project, 2003), 3-4; Riyanto, *Integrasi-interkoneksi Kelimuan, 559*-510.

5 Jabali and Jamhari, *The Modernization of Islam in Indonesia,* 3; See also, M. Dawam Rahardjo, *Intellektual Inteligensia dan Perilaku Politik Bangsa Risalah Cendekiawan Muslim,* (Bandug: Penerbit Mizan, 1993), 56.

6 Jabali and Jamhari, *The Modernization of Islam in Indonesia,* 3-9; See also, A. Hasjmy, *Mengapa Umat Islam Mempertahankan Pendidikan Agama dalam*

Furthermore, on 22 March 1948, the status of STI was elevated to university level and renamed Universitas Islam Indonesia (UII, Indonesian Islamic University). An important part of this transformation was the creation of four faculties: Religion, Law, Economics, and Education. Alongside this transformation, the initiators of STI seemed to be faced with certain epistemological questions. Firstly, on the one hand, when the UII offered the faculties of general sciences (Law, Economics, and Education), it was imperative to associate the word "university" with "Islam", as indicated in the name of Universitas Islam Indonesia; by this means, Islam was still maintained as the basic system of education. On the other hand, the making of the Faculty of Religion along with other faculties of general sciences, implies that Sociology, Philosophy, History, and other general subjects could not be covered in "Islamic sciences". From this perspective, "Islamic sciences" were seen to contain only certain subjects, such as Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) and Usūl al-dīn (Islamic Theology). Secondly, in some respects, the UII's policy to open faculties of general sciences did not reflect what was envisaged by the founding fathers of STI, specifically Wirosandjojo and Hatta, about an Islamic institution of higher education in which Islam needed to be studied in a comprehensive way by using various approaches including Sociology, History, and Philosophy. Nevertheless, inasmuch as the UII's academic system supports students of the Faculty of Religion to receive extensive exposure to other general sciences offered in Faculties of Law, Economics, and Education, this would not cause Islamic sciences to be returned into its own "box" and alienate Islam from its adherents. Moreover, the integration of Islamic sciences and general sciences in one system of educational institution could

Sistem Pendidikan Nasional, (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1979), 31-32.

help broaden the Muslim *Ummah*'s understanding of Islam and enable them to overcome all the challenges and problems arising from social changes [7]

In 1950, the Indonesian government offered a proposal to the stakeholders of UII that UII's status could be changed from a private-supported university to one that was state-run. The proposal was accepted with one requirement that the University still be maintained under the administration of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Given this requested condition, eventually the government, through regulation No. 34/1950 issued on 14 August 1950, decided to omit and remove the Faculty of Religion from UII and transform it into a state institution of Islamic higher education, called Perguruan Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri (PTAIN, State Higher Islamic College). As stated in its academic statute, one of the goals to be accomplished by the PTAIN was: "to provide advanced teaching and become a centre of developing and deepening knowledge of Islamic religion; and, in order to achieve that goal, a foundation is set down to shape a civilized, skilled person who has consciousness of responsibility towards the prosperity of Indonesian society in particular and that of the world in general, based on Pancasila, as well as on Indonesian values of nationalism, culture, and reality." PTAIN was officially inaugurated on 20 September 1951 in Yogyakarta, and since then, the college was equipped with three faculties of Islamic sciences: Tarbiyyah (Education), Qadā' (Law), and Da'wah (Islamic Mission).[8]

7 Jabali and Jamhari, *The Modernization of Islam in Indonesia*, 9-10.

8 Akh. Minhaji, *Tradisi Akademik di Perguruan Tinggi*, (Yogyakarta: SUKA-Press, 2013), 52; ; See also, Hasjmy, *Mengapa Umat Islam Mempertahankan,* 31-32; Riyanto, *Integrasi-interkoneksi Kelimuan,* 564-567; Jabali and Jamhuri, *The Modernization of Islam in Indonesia*, 11.

In addition, it is important to note that the foundation of PTAIN was taking place shortly after the government on 19 December 1949 transformed Balai Perguruan Tinggi Gajah Mada (Gajah Mada Education Institute) into a state-owned university which was named Universitas Gajah Mada (UGM, Gajah Mada University). Furthermore, it was seemingly for that reason that the Faculty of Education in UII was pulled out and then attached to this newly established institution of UGM. This policy raised the presumption that UGM was formed in order to meet the demands of the nationalist groups, while PTAIN was seen as the government's reward to the Muslim groups. The government policy concerning the making of these two different education institutions: UGM and PTAIN, has been characterized by many as dichotomist if not totally secularist in nature, in the sense that UGM was representing a secular and general model of higher education, while PTAIN was regarded as an icon of Islamic religious higher education.[9] This dualistic policy in fact has much to do with the existence of two Indonesian ministries that serve as official umbrellas to govern and manage two different types of education: the Ministry of Education, on the one hand, was charged with the task of administering and controlling secular and general educational institutions, while the Ministry of Religious Affairs, on the other, was responsible for nurturing and overseeing Islamic religious education.[10]

From the 1950s onwards, the demands of the Muslim *Umah* for Islamic higher education was on the rise and coincided with

9 Minhaji, *Tradisi Akademik di Perguruan Tinggi*, 51-56; Jabali and Jamhuri, *The Modernization of Islam in Indonesia*, 11.

10 Minhaji, *Tradisi Akademik di Perguruan Tinggi*, 53-54; See also, Jabali and Jamhari, *The Modernization of Islam in Indonesia*, 11.

the growing number of fresh graduates from the Pondok Pesantren (Islamic Boarding Schools) and Islamic senior high schools. In response to the demand, in 1957 or about seven years after the establishment of PTAIN, the government set up another Islamic higher education institution located in Jakarta and named it Akademi Dinas Ilmu Agama (ADIA, State Academy of Islamic Studies). The academy was intended to educate and equip civil servants with academic expertise and practical skills, as well as to prepare them to be religious educators and teachers in secondary high schools, in their respective vocational, general, or religious schools. There were three faculties offered by ADIA when it was first opened: Pendidikan Agama Islam (Islamic Religious Education), Sastra Arab (Arabic Literature), and Penyuluh Ruhani Militer (Military Religious Advisors).[11] The Ministry of Religious Affairs continued to carry out institutional and academic reforms in the whole system of Islamic higher education. PTAIN and ADIA both were categorized as college and academy as they had less than three faculties of Islamic sciences. The status of college and academy was normally lower than that of institute and university, which operate with four or more faculties or disciplines. The number of students enrolled in these two institutions, PTAIN and ADIA, increased from year to year, they came from various provinces across the country, as well as from neighbouring countries like Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand. In view of that, not long after ADIA was founded, the government issued regulation No. 11/1960 which decreed that PTAIN and ADIA be merged and its status elevated into a new institution named Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN, State Institute of Islamic Studies). The official inauguration of the

11 Hasjmy, *Mengapa Umat Islam Mempertahankan,* 32-33; Minhaji, *Tradisi Akademik di Perguruan Tinggi,* 52-53.

newly founded IAIN took place on 24 August 1960 in Yogyakarta and Professor R.H.A. Soenarjo (1916-1996) was appointed to be its first rector. The institute was opened with four faculties of Islamic studies, which were located separately in two different cities: two were located in Yogyakarta: Faculties of Usūl al-dīn and Sharī'ah, which were respectively chaired by Dr. Muchtar Yahya (1907-1996) and Professor T.M. Hasby Ash-Shiddieqy (1904-1975); and the other two were based in Jakarta: Faculties of Tarbiyah and Adab, which were respectively chaired by Dr. Mahmud Yunus and H. Bustomi Abdul Gani (b. 1912).[12]

IAIN then developed rapidly and this led many Muslim communities in various provinces to appeal to the government to open the institute, or at least some faculties as its branches, in their respective regions. In response to the demand of the Muslim community, Masjlis Permusyawaratan Rakyat Sementara (MPRS, the Provisional House of People's Assembly) issued a recommendation endorsing that the government establish IAIN in other provinces. In conformity with this recommendation, IAIN expanded its role by setting up faculties of various disciplines scattered in various provinces outside Yogyakarta and Jakarta: West Java, Central Java, East Java, Banda Aceh, Palembang, Nusa Tenggara, Maluku, and Papua. However, the government realized that its strategy to centralize IAIN in Yogyakarta and Jakarta had been among the main factors that made the institute unable to fulfil as much as possible the need of the Muslim *Ummah* who wanted their children to pursue Islamic advanced studies in the IAIN system. In order to improve the service of IAIN to society, the government continued with transformative endeavours by issuing

12 Jabali and Jamhari, *The Modernization of Islam in Indonesia*, 11-12; Hasjmy, *Mengapa Umat Islam Mempertahankan*, 36-37.

Regulation No. 49 in 1963 to ordain the splitting of IAIN into two different institutions: one, the IAIN in Yogyakarta, was renamed IAIN Sunan Kalijaga, and the other IAIN in Jakarta, was renamed IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah. The two IAINs also agreed to take on the division of responsibility of coordinating and controlling the faculties that existed in various provinces. "IAIN Sunan Kalijaga took charge of coordinating all the faculties in Central Java, East Java, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Nusa Tenggara, Maluku, and Irian (Papua), while IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah was responsible for coordinating all the faculties in Jakarta, West Java, and Sumatra."[13]

IAIN developed significantly, which seemed to have pushed the government to make innovative efforts to provide the Muslim *Ummah* with a quality institution of Islamic higher learning. Following the inauguration of IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, which occurred at the same time as that of IAIN ar-Raniry Banda Aceh on 5 October 1963, other new institutions of IAIN subsequently emerged in several provinces. The increased number of IAINs, to some extent, resulted from Government Regulation No. 27, dated 5 September 1963, which allowed the establishment of a new IAIN through the fusion of three faculties of various disciplines. This is a likely explanation why, within about ten years, 1964 to 1973, eleven new IAINs emerged across the country: IAIN Raden Fatah Palembang (October 1964), IAIN Antasari South Kalimantan (22 November 1964), IAIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya (July 1965), IAIN Alauddin Makassar (28 October 1965), IAIN Imam Bonjol Padang (21 November 1966), and IAIN Sultan Thaha Saefuddin Jambi (1967), IAIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung (28 March 1968), IAIN Raden Intan Lampung (28 October 1968), IAIN Walisongo Semarang (1 April 1970), IAIN Syarif Qosim

13 Jabali and Jamhari, *The Modernization of Islam in Indonesia*, 13

Pekan Baru (September 1970), and IAIN North Sumatra (19 November 1973).[14]

Not surprisingly, by 1973, the number of IAINs across the country had amounted to 112 and the government realized that this could be both positive and challenging at the same time. This gave hope that the greater the number of IAINs throughout the country, the easier the students coming from remote cities and villages could access Islamic advanced learning. However, this could result in difficulties in coordinating and controlling the performance and quality of the institutes, especially those located in remote areas. For example, in terms of student admission, if unqualified students were easily accepted due to less strict or uncontrolled standards of admission, the reputation of the IAINs could suffer. Another factor that the government faced with regard to the rapid proliferation of IAINs was the issue of limited budget to shore up the long-term sustainability of the institutes.

To anticipate the consequence of the rapid growth of IAINs, in 1975 the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which was at the time led by Abdul Mukti Ali (1923-2004), made a firm decision by shutting down a large number of IAINs and faculties in very remote areas and, instead, giving an operational licence to only 13 of the 112 IAINs. This policy proved to have a significant effect in forcing the institutes to apply better standard procedures for the selection and admission of students. In addition, it also had a positive impact on the government, which became more prudent and thrifty in its spending on the annual budget for the IAINs. During his tenure as the top official in the Ministry of Religious Affairs from 1971 to 1978, Abdul Mukti Ali (henceforth to be cited as Mukti Ali) carried out considerable reform not only in his office, but also throughout

14 Ibid.

the entire system of IAINs. There is no doubt that the present development of the IAINs owes a lot to the role played by Mukti Ali in transforming them into prestigious centres of Islamic higher learning. He has been successful in embarking on creative attempts at modernizing the IAINs. Take, for instance, the introduction of "an urban culture characterized by the type of plural and inclusive environment necessary for exposing students to modern thoughts and attitudes." [15]

From 1975, the total number of 14 IAINs throughout Indonesia remained unchanged until the government converted IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta to be Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN, State Islamic University) Syarif Hidayatullah in 2002.[16] According to Azra, the discourse and aspiration about the conversion of that specific IAIN into a university had been discussed since the 1970s during Mukti Ali's tenure as the Minister of Religious Affairs. Unfortunately, the aspiration was difficult to actualize due to unconducive political circumstances under the authoritarian regime of Soeharto.[17] The notion about the relevance of developing the IAIN into a university was raised again in 1994 when the Ministry of Religious Affairs, headed by Dr. H. Tarmizi Taher (1936-2013), issued an official decree about the necessity to examine the prospect of transforming the status of IAIN from that of an institute to that of a university.[18] At least two reasons underlie this notion: firstly, as a response to the development of national

15 Ibid., 15-17.

16 Riyanto, *Integrasi-interkoneksi Kelimuan,* 576-577.

17 Azyumardi Azra, "From IAIN to UIN: Islamic Studies in Indonesia," in *Islamic Studies and Islamic Education in Contemporary Southeast Asia,* in Kamaruzzaman Bustamam-Ahmad and Patrick Jory, (Kuala Lumpur: Yayasan Ilmuwan, 2011), 43.

18 Riyanto, *Integrasi-interkoneksi Keilmuan,* 576-577.

education in which the Ministry of Education began to transform several state institutes; for example, Institut Keguruan Ilmu Pendidikan (IKIP, Institute of Teacher Training and Education Science) Jakarta, was converted into a university becoming Universitas Negeri Jakarta (UNJ, State University of Jakarta), and also IKIP Yogyakarta became Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta (UNY, State University of Yogyakarta). Secondly, the conversion of the IAIN into a university was perceived by many Muslim scholars as a good herald that their long envisaged epistemological vision about the integration between religious and secular education, as well as the Islamization of science, would become a reality.[19]

IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta was the first among the IAINs to move towards the grand design proposed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs to create a prestigious system of Islamic higher education. Following the step that IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah took in 2002, two years afterwards, or in 2004, IAIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta metamorphosed into a new Islamic centre of higher learning, which was renamed Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN, State Islamic University) Sunan Kalijaga. Within less than ten years, a number of IAINs in several provinces moved in the same direction as IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta and IAIN Sunan Kalijaga. The year 2002, the birth year of UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, was a momentous watershed in the course of the IAINs, since this occurred about fifty years after the establishment of PTAIN in 1950, and shortly after Indonesia entered into the era of reformation, when the chains of the authoritarian regime were torn apart, in the wake of Soeharto's stepping down from his presidency in 1998.

19 Ibid.

The System of Teaching-Learning at UIN Sunan Kalijaga

1. The Curriculum and the Methods of Study

The curricular structure and method of study to be used in Islamic institutions of learning have long been a topic of discussion among Indonesian Muslim scholars from the first time they proposed the foundation of Islamic higher education in the 1930s.[20] There was a strong awareness that a well-designed curriculum and methodology of study would exert an equally significant influence as other components of teaching-learning activities in providing good quality education for the Muslim *Ummah*, which, in turn, would be expected to generate a group of Muslim graduates that have better standards of devoutness, knowledge, and skills.

The Indonesian Muslim figures that embarked on pioneering projects in creating an Islamic college during the final years of Dutch colonialism began formulating subject matter for instruction and discipline of knowledge to be taught in the institution once it was established. This is a compulsory step, as anyone involved with and aspiring to build good quality education cannot go further without formulating a well-planned and designed curriculum and method of study that is suitable to the academic environment of the would-be Islamic learning institution.

Satiman Wirosandjojo, the initiator of the Islamic college or Islamic Higher Boarding School (Pesantren Luhur) in Solo in the 1930s, contended that it is instrumental for the Islamic system of higher learning to be related to the domestic world, on the one hand, and the international world, on the other. Therefore, he suggested that the institution should include in its curricular

20 Jabali and Jamhari, *The Modernization of Islam*, 5-9.

design local content that belongs to the indigenous heritage, such as Javanese mysticism (ilmu kebatinan) and Hinduism (old religion prior to the advent of Islam), and ingeniously mingle it with academic subjects affiliated with the international world, such as the English language, the history of religion, and an introduction to philosophy.[21] Furthermore, Wirjosandjojo's proposal on the curriculum design for Islamic higher education gained support from other Muslim intelligentsia. Among those who shored up his ideas were Muhammad Natsir and Muhammad Hatta. With respect to the importance of planning the curricular in a higher education institution Stark and Lattuca confirmed that "the selection of knowledge, skills, and attitudes to be acquired reflects one's views about the purposes of collegiate education."[22]

In his article entitled *Sekolah Tinggi Islam*, published in *Pandji Islam,* June 1938, Natsir described that in Jakarta, there was *Muhammadiyah,* an Islamic religious mass organization, which started founding a higher education institution equipped with some general faculties, for instance, trading, economics and industry that were considered as "Western" in nature, on the one side, and yet, on the other, this institution still retained Islam to be its academic vision and mission. In addition, in the same period, other Islamic institutions of higher learning were founded in Surabaya and Solo, which all have much in common in terms of placing Islam as their academic footing and incorporating modern sciences into their curricular design.[23]

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21 Ibid., 5.

22 Joan S. Stark and Lisa R. Lattuca, *Shaping the College Curriculum,* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1997), 12.

23 Riyanto, *Integrasi-Interkoneksi Keilmuan,* 560; See also, Jabali and Jamhari, *The Modernization of Islam*, 3-4.

Likewise, the aspirations of Muslim scholars to adopt the modern disciplines of knowledge into the curricular structure in Islamic higher education found sound articulation in Muhammad Hatta's speech delivered at the inauguration ceremony to mark the commencement of Universitas Islam Indonesia (UII) on 10 March 1948. The UII, as was revealed earlier, was a product of latter development of the former Sekolah Tinggi Islam (STI, Islamic Higher College) having been shut down in the wake of the Japanese invasion in 1942. Hatta, in his speech, subsequently known as "the Memorandum of Hatta," asserted that within the academic environment of STI, religion could be observed and discerned on the basis of knowledge about philosophy, history, and sociology. He believed that the collaboration between religion and history would broaden religious views and soften religious sensitivity. Moreover, Hatta also stressed that the reciprocally constructive tie between religion and sociology would help sharpen one's religious standpoint when dealing with the fellow communities they look after.[24]

One of the excellent points in Hatta's speech was his vision of STI, which he expected to be an academic crater in which religion and knowledge could be integrated, in that he clearly stated that "In STI religion and knowledge meet in a collaborative ambiance in order to guide the people towards prosperity.[25] With respect to the core of the abovementioned message of Hatta, the existence of a Comparative Religion Department is obviously indispensable to the role the university could play to create an academic environment that is able to accommodate and cultivate, in creative ways, the complex interplay between the noble values

24 Ibid., 564.

25 Ibid.

of religion and the value of knowledge.

The Department of Comparative Religion was an integral division of the Faculty of Usūl al-Dīn. The dean of the faculty at that time, Prof. Muchtar Yahya, was the one who first took the initiative to establish the department, and, in order to realize this proposal, he appointed Mukti Ali to prepare and design its curricular plan. As alluded to earlier, being the first to head the department, Mukti Ali seemed to find this institution arable ground to sow and disseminate his knowledge and experience about the discipline of Comparative Religion. In addition, starting from this department, Mukti Ali made a constant effort to develop his thought about comparative religious studies and to nurture his commitment to fostering inter-religious harmony and peace.

1.1. Undergraduate Studies

The Faculty of Usūl al-Dīn was officially opened in 1960, together with the inauguration of IAIN Sunan Kalijaga, according to the decree issued by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, no. 43/1960. The faculty was equipped with four departmental divisions: Da'wah (Islamic Mission), Tasawwuf (Islamic Mysticism), Philosophy, and Comparative Religion. Over the course of time, some of these four departments underwent change, some remain in existence until today while the others were, for several reasons, closed or removed and transformed into an independent faculty. In 1970, the Department of Da'wah was withdrawn from the Faculty of Usūl al-Dīn since its status was changed and elevated to be the Faculty of Da'wah, meanwhile the Department of Tasawwuf was shut down due to the sharp decline in the number of students enrolled therein.[26]

26 <http://ushuluddin.uin-suka.ac.id/major/pa> (accessed on 17 December 2014).

At present the Department of Comparative Religion, along with the other three departments (Theology and Philosophy, Qur'anic Interpretation and Hadīths, and Sociology of Religion), still remain an important part of the Faculty of Usūl al-Dīn. The department was designed with an academic vision that is to be a centre of excellence and distinction for the study of religion (religious studies) with the aim of integrating and developing the sciences of Usūl al-Dīn and those of Social-Humanities. The above academic vision is translated into four educational missions the department needs to achieve: first, to carry out education and learning activities in the field of the study of religions in order to generate religious scholars who have expertise in religious studies as well as sensitivity to socio-religious problems; second, to conduct research in order to apply and develop theories concerning religious studies; third, to improve the role and involvement of religious studies in solving humanity's problems for peace; fourth, to build trust for the purpose of building mutually beneficial cooperation with various parties which is aimed to create networking at the local, national, and international levels. All in all, the Department of Comparative Religion was set up with the goal to produce and mould professional scholars possessing highly qualified expertise in religious studies, as well as a commitment towards the Islamic paradigm and Indonesian patriotism.[27]

Since its inception in 1960 to the present time, the academic courses carried out by the Comparative Religion Department have only been provided for full-time undergraduate students, while the postgraduate courses in the field of comparative religious studies, which will be explored later in the next sub-chapter, have been

27 Ibid. See also, Jurusan Perbandingan Agama UIN Sunan Kalijaga, *Struktur Kurikulum Jurusan Perbandingan Agama UIN Sunan Kalijaga Tahun 2013*.

conducted independently by a different institution named Program Pascasarjana (Postgraduate Programme). The students who choose a major in the discipline of Comparative Religion need at least four years or eight semesters to complete their undergraduate studies and, by the time they finish their academic journey, they will be awarded a degree, namely S.Th.I. (Sarjana Theologi Islam) or Bachelor of Islamic Theology.[28]

The components of the courses offered to undergraduate students of the Department of Comparative Religion, based on the curricular plan of the academic year 2013, consisted of 68 subjects that can be classified into two categories. The first set of 53 required core courses must be taken by the students, and the second set of 15 elective core courses are optional in the sense that the students should take only some of the subjects stipulated in the list of courses. Furthermore, the structure of the required core courses is divided into certain categories as follows:

General core courses (GCC): 1. Pancasila (Five Principles of Indonesian Ideology), 2. Kewarganegaraan (Civic Education), 3. Indonesian language, 4. English language, 5. Logics.

General institutional courses (GIC): 1. Arabic, 2. Al-Qur'an/Al-Hadīth, 3. Fiqh/Usūl al-Fiqh, 4. Tauhid, 5. Akhlāq-Tasawwuf, 6. The history of Islamic civilization and local culture, 7. Introduction to Islamic studies, 8. Philosophy of Science, 9. Kuliah Kerja Nyata (Community service).

Special institutional core courses (SICC): 1. Islamic philosophy, 2. History of religion, 3. Thematic interpretation of the Qur'an on religion, and 4. Introduction of Sociology-Anthropology.

Main special core courses (MSPCC): 1. Introduction

28 Ibid.

to religious studies, 2. World religions, 3. Thematic study of al-Hadīth on religions, 4. Research methodology, 5. General philosophy, 6. Orientalism and Occidentalism, 7. Indonesian Islam, 8. Comparative study of religion 1, 9. Comparative study of religion 2, 10. Philosophy of religion, 11. Anthropology of religion, 12. Psychology of religion, 13. Sociology of religion, 14. Phenomenology of religion, 15. Judaism, 16. Christianity, 17. Hinduism, 18. Buddhism, 19. Research methodology of religion 1, 20. Research methodology of religion 2, 21. Management of socio-religious conflict, 22. Interreligious relations, 23. Confucianism, 24. Japanese religion, 25. New religious movement, 26. Perkembangan Teologi Kristen Modern (the development of modern Christian theology), 27. Religious symbolism, 28. Research proposal writing, 29. Skripsi (a shorter type of thesis).

Supporting special core courses (SSCC): 1. Psychology of Islam, 2. Sociology of Islam, 3. Hermeneutics, 4. Praktek Kerja Lapangan (Community development), 5. Qira'atul Kutub (Arabic text reading), 6. Reading text (English).

The following are the elective special core courses (ESCC): 1. Minority religious community, 2. Religion and gender, 3. Religion and globalization, 4. Religion and contemporary issues, 5. Religion and peace, 6. Cross cultural and religious communication, 7. Leadership, 8. Social pathology, 9. Religion in the Indonesian context, 10. Religion and the media, 11. Cultural studies, 12. Entrepreneurship, 13. Indonesian local religion and culture, 14. Spirituality and mysticism of religion, and 15. Teaching-learning design.[29]

Each subject specified in both the required core courses and elective core courses is worth credit hours and most of them

29 Ibid.

are given 2 credit hours. Only a few subjects are valued with different credit hours from 3 to 6. Take for example Christianity, PKL (Praktek Kerja Lapangan or community development), KKN (Kuliah Kerja Nyata or community services), Skripsi; the first three subjects are valued with 4 credit hours, while Skripsi is worth 6 credit hours. Each student specializing in comparative religious studies should take all the subjects specified in the list of required courses (about 53 subjects), which are equal to 126 credit hours, as well as some, or at least 9, of the 15 optional subjects that are available in the ESCC, which are equal to 18 credit hours.

According to the rule issued by the Department of Comparative Religion, in order to accomplish undergraduate studies within four academic years (eight semesters), every student is required to pass 62 courses consisting of 53 core courses, as well as at least 9 elective core courses. These 62 courses are equivalent to 144 credit hours.[30] Moreover, most of the 62 courses are provided to students from semester 1 when they start their first academic year until semester 7 (the first half of the fourth year), while during semester 8 (the second half of the fourth year) they have 2 subjects to take: KKN (Community development) and Skripsi (a lesser form of thesis).[31] As far as the 62 courses offered to the students of the undergraduate degree programme are concerned, there is little doubt that the students would be quite burdened with these subjects as they would have to take about 7 to 8 subjects in every semester to finish their studies.

The structure of the curriculum and, more specifically, the design of the courses offered, play a very important role as the framework and planning by which any educational institution is

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

able to measure the possibilities with regard to the directionality, continuity, and success of the teaching-learning process. In addition, they are also very important as an academic mirror for the institution to gauge its endeavours to preserve the academic values it upholds, as well as to achieve its long-term goal. Given this fact, it is worthwhile to understand the epistemological perspective that underlies the structure of courses constructed by the Department of Comparative Religion at UIN Sunan Kalijaga, as shown above.

With respect to this epistemological perspective, it is worth noting that this philosophical issue has been quite germane to both the scholarly vision and the role of some UIN figures such as Mukti Ali, Amin Adullah, and some others. These scholars fervently encouraged the use of modern scientific methodologies in understanding and approaching any religious data and highlighted the relevance of integrating the contemporary fields of humanities and social sciences with Islamic studies.[32] Moreover, by embarking on the academic work of integrating secular disciplines into its curricular structure, the university has been walking hand in hand with the agenda for the reform and modernization imposed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the state Islamic higher education system over the past four decades.[33] As a result, UIN Sunan Kalijaga, in particular, becomes arable ground in which the awareness about the relevance of the use of modern social sciences as tools of critical enquiry and an inclusive approach towards socio-political and religious issues has been well developed among

32 Abdullah Saeed, "Towards Religious Tolerance Through Reform in Islamic Education: The Case of the State Institute of Islamic Studies of Indonesia," *Indonesia and the Malay World,* vol. 27, no. 79, 1999, 177-191.

33 Richard G Richard G. Kraince, "Islamic Higher Education and Social Cohesion in Indonesia," *Prospects,* vol. 37, no. 3, (2007), 345-356.

its faculty members and students.

The Department of Comparative Religion, in its guidelines regarding the programme of per-semester course activity[34] and its curricular syllabus,[35] emphasizes what is called, among other things, "the concept of integration-interconnection" between various disciplines of sciences. This concept should be applied in every teaching-learning activity, for instance, in the syllabic design used in the teaching of a subject of study named Hubungan Antar Agama (HAA/Inter-religious Relation); one of the subjects pertaining to comparative religious studies, as mentioned in the list of courses above. As a part of the humanities and social sciences, it is instrumental for the field of Interreligious Relations to be equipped, enriched, and linked with various contemporary disciplines.

With respect to the epistemological concept of integration-interconnection between different subjects of study, the students of Interreligious Relation would be introduced to the critical enquiry and inclusive approaches used by various disciplines. Accordingly, for anyone to achieve an unbiased understanding about how communities of multi-faith and multicultural societies can coexist in peace and harmony, and how they deal with conflicts and clashes, they need to use, to a certain extent, some tools of analysis and methods of investigation employed in such fields as Anthropology of Religion, Sociology of Religion, Phenomenology of Religion, History of Religion, Psychology of Religion, and others. In addition, as part of the Islamic higher learning system,

34 Kelompok Kerja Akademik UIN Sunan Kalijaga, *Rencana Program Kegiatan Perkuliahan Semester*, (2005); Kelompok Kerja Akademik UIN Sunan Kalijaga, *Silabus Kurikulum Program Studi Perbandingan Agama*, (2005); Kelompok Kerja Akademik UIN Sunan Kalijaga, *Rencana Program Kegiatan Perkuliahan Semester*, (2006).

35 Ibid.

the subject of Interreligious Relations should resort, in the first place, to the fundamental sources of Islamic teachings, namely, the standpoints of the Qur'an and the Hadīths on the issues concerned.[36]

Within this epistemological perspective, as has been briefly described above, all the subjects of the courses in the Department of Comparative Religion have to be treated as integral parts of an organic system in which no one academic area of study can be taught and studied in isolation and detached from each other. There are three aspects that can be used to measure whether this notion of integration-interconnection is successfully applied in any fields of knowledge, including the discipline of Comparative Religion.[37]

The first, the concept of integration-interconnection needs to be visibly translated into the level of syllabus of courses and curriculum structure. This is related to how the content of a field of knowledge includes diverse topics and the interconnection between one topic with another is significant for the enhancement of a discipline of knowledge. The second, the concept of integration-interconnection needs to be translated into the level of methodology through the application of different methods of study, analysis, and approach. At this level, it is important for comparative religious studies to draw on methodologies that are applied in various disciplines of sciences. The third, the viability of the concept of integration-interconnection, would become more visible when it is well implemented on the ground, in every step of teaching and learning activities.[38]

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

As far as the third aspect is concerned, it is quite interesting to explain that the Department of Comparative Religion continues to maintain the relevance of creative ways that lecturers can use when they teach courses on comparative religious studies. In addition to the very traditional models of instruction, in which lecturers and students usually perform face-to-face learning in the classrooms, the students of Comparative Religion are also given the opportunity to do various fieldwork. A form of fieldwork that the students often practice is to visit the places of worship of different religions such as Buddhist temples, Confucian monasteries, and Christian churches. During the fieldwork, the students will learn about many interesting topics related to interreligious issues through discussion and mutually-symbiotic interaction with leaders and followers of different faiths.[39] In addition, the two subjects of study encapsulated in the list of courses of the Comparative Religion Department: Praktek Kerja Lapangan/Community Development Observation) and KKN (Kuliah Kerja Nyata/Community Development Service) can also be considered as a part of fieldwork.

1.2. Postgraduate Studies

Historically speaking, the School of Postgraduate Studies at UIN Sunan Kalijaga came into existence in about 1983, twenty years after the university was established. The foundation of the school was based on the decree of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, no. 26/1983. This decree was later reconfirmed by the same ministry office through the issuance of two decrees in 1997: no. 208 and no. 95.[40]

39 Khoirul Dzikri, interview by the author, Yogyakarta, on 3 May 2012.

40 <http://pps.uin-suka.ac.id/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=185&Itemid=29>
(accessed on 17 December 2014).

However, prior to the official enactment of decree no. 26 in 1983, two academic workshops were held as academic training for upgrading the quality of the university lecturers, as well as in preparation for the establishment of what is today called the Postgraduate Programmes. The first workshop called Postgraduate Course (PGC) took students about 3 months to finish the study, while the second one named Studi Purna Sarjana (SPS, Postgraduate Study) was held over a 9-month period of study. It is worth noting that the initiator of the school of Postgraduate Studies at UIN Sunan Kalijaga was Mukti Ali who, at the time, felt considerable concern about the fact that the mastery of modern scientific methodology, foreign language skill, and spirit of study of most of the lecturers at the university was of low quality.[41]

According to its official website, the UIN Postgraduate Programme is aimed at producing scholars with a Master's and Ph.D. degree in Islamic studies who have strong expertise in both the methodology and actual-inclusive disciplines of knowledge within the framework of the humanistic-transcendental transformation of society. This goal has been elaborately broken down into a quite outstanding set of vision and mission. The school's vision is to create a Postgraduate Programme that is outstanding and excellent in terms of developing and integrating Islamic studies and sciences for the advancement of human civilization.[42]

Meanwhile, the mission of this Postgraduate Programme is as follows: 1. To develop inter-connective, integrative, transformative,

41 M. Damami, Syaefan Nur, Sekar Ayu Aryani, Syafa'atun al-Mirzanah, "H.A. Mukti Ali: Ketaatan," in *Agama dan Masyarakat,* edited by Abdurrahman and et al, (Yogyakarta: IAIN Sunan Kalijaga Press, 199), 31*;* Riyanto, *Integrasi-interkoneksi Kelimuan, 636.*

42 <http://pps.uin-suka.ac.id/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=185&Itemid=29>
(accessed on 17 December 2014).

and multicultural education and instruction at the Master's and Ph.D. levels ; 2. To develop inclusive, transcendental Islamic and scientific worldviews; 3. To improve research on Islam and the sciences, as well as to contribute to human civilization; 4. To advance human civilization within the framework of Islamic values and Indonesian diversity; 5. To develop cooperation with various parties in order to improve the quality of the Postgraduate Programme's academic performance and its service to the society.[43]

Furthermore, unlike the Department of Comparative Religion, which is a part of the Faculty of Usūl al-Dīn, the Postgraduate Programme is not directly linked with any Faculty at UIN Sunan Kalijaga; hence, it organizes almost all of its administrative and academic affairs independently of other faculties. The Postgraduate Programme offers two levels of study – Master's and Ph.D. – each level of which offers different study programmes. In the Master's degree studies, there are six study programmes, each of which consists of what is called "the concentration of study." Similar to the Master's level, in the Ph.D. program, studies there are also several study programmes with various concentrations of study. To describe in more detail, the following is the explanation of both Master's and Ph.D. degree studies.[44]

The Master's degree studies consist of six study programmes: 1. Religion and Philosophy (with five concentrations: Islamic Philosophy, Qur'anic and Hadīths studies, Religious Studies and Conflict Resolution, Science of Arabic Language, History of Islamic Civilization), 2. Islamic Education (with five concentrations: Islamic Thought of Education, Management and Policy in Islamic Education, Arabic Language Education, Islamic Religious

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

Education, Islamic Guidance and Counselling), 3. Islamic Law (with four concentrations: Family Law, Sharī'ah Banking and Finance, the Study of Politics and Administration in Islam, Business Law and Sharī'ah), 4. Interdisciplinary Islamic Studies (with two concentrations: Social Work, Library and Information Sciences), 5. Education for Islamic Elementary School Teachers (with three concentrations: Sciences in Islamic Elementary School, Islamic Religious Education in Islamic Elementary School, Class Teacher in Islamic Elementary School), 6. Education for Early Childhood Education and Kindergarten Teachers.[45] The Ph.D. degree studies are made up of three study programmes: 1. Islamic Studies (with six concentrations: Islamic Studies, Islamic Economics, History of Islamic Civilization, Islamic Education, Science of Law and Islamic Social Institution, the Study of Islamic Politics and Government), 2. Sharī'ah Economics, 3. Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies (ICRS). [46]

From a brief perusal of the abovementioned study programmes, it gives quite a clear sign that the course of study, which directly relates to the comparative study of religions can only be found at the Master's level degree programme, namely in a concentration called "Religious Studies and Conflict Resolution." According to Wiwin Siti Aminah, who did her Master's studies at the Postgraduate Programme of UIN Sunan Kalijaga with a concentration in Interreligious Relations and currently works with Institut DIAN/ Interfidei,[47] this concentration was actually a replacement for a relatively similar concentration, namely, "Interreligious Relations", which had previously been taught for three years, but was closed

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 <http://www.interfidei.or.id/index.php?> (accessed on 23 February 2015)

due to low enrolment of students.[48] Meanwhile, unlike the Master's degree programme, there is no concentration that focuses on the discipline of Comparative Religion for a Ph.D. Nevertheless, the students of the Ph.D. programme are given freedom to choose the topic for their dissertation based on their own interest of study and accordingly, some of them wrote their dissertations concentrating on comparative religious studies.

2. Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies (ICRS)

As has been mentioned above, ICRS is considered as a part of the Postgraduate Programme of UIN Sunan Kalijaga. However, in fact, this institution is not only part of the university *per se*, it is also a product of joint efforts between three tertiary institutions: UIN Sunan Kalijaga, Gajah Mada University (UGM), and Duta Wacana Christian University (UKDW). ICRS only offers a Ph.D. programme in inter-religious studies and therefore, its position is quite unique to UIN Sunan Kalijaga, as well as to the other two universities (UGM and UKDW).

The history of the Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies (ICRS) dates back to 6 October 2006, when the rectors from the three leading universities in Yogyakarta: Gajah Mada University (UGM), UIN Sunan Kalijaga, and Duta Wacana Christian University (UKDW), jointly signed a Memorandum of Understanding to mark an agreement on establishing a consortium that offers an integrative, interdisciplinary Ph.D. programme in inter-religious studies. The consortium, which is attached to and located in UGM's Graduate School, was actually preceded by the Centre for Religious and Cultural Studies (CRCS) for Master's

48 Wiwin Siti Aminah, interview by the author, Yogyakarta, on 10 September 2014.

degree students. Although CRCS was independently founded in 2000 by the Graduate School of UGM, the institution of ICRS is supported and sponsored by three different universities that represent different orientations of religiosity: Muslim, Christian, and national-secular.[49]

In accordance with its academic vision, which is "to be an outstanding, excellent, internationally respected graduate program and research centre in inter-religious studies,"[50] ICRS also elaborates upon a set of missions as follows:

> "To create an interdisciplinary, an inter-religious dialogue between scholars from different religious, academic, and cultural backgrounds in the study of religion; to educate Indonesian and international teachers, leaders and scholars of religion who are skilled in cross-disciplinary and inter-religious communication; to produce outstanding research and publications that promote inter-religious understanding of the role of the religions in the world; to promote international cooperation between universities and maintain international standards of academic excellence and fiscal responsibility; to develop Indonesian resources that support national and international reconciliation, justice and peace." [51]

From the abovementioned vision and mission of ICRS, it can be concluded that this institution has undoubtedly been a centre for comparative religious studies *par excellence*. However,

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49 <http://icrs.ugm.ac.id> (accessed on 28 December 2014). See also, Bernard Adeney-Risakotta, "A New Approach to Christian-Muslim Relations: Inter-Religious, International and Interdisciplinary Studies in Indonesia," *Asian Christian Review,* vol. 2, no. 2&3, 31-35.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

the imperative standing of ICRS in the area of religious studies is inseparable from the role and contribution of scholars from the three universities (UGM, UIN Sunan Kalijaga, and UKDW) that have shored up its existence from the very beginning.

In order to implement its vision and mission, all the curricular programmes of study at ICRS are dedicated to enhancing the students' knowledge in the study of religions, as well as improving their understanding of the multifaceted fact of humans' religiosity and spirituality.[52] All the courses and most of the programmes affiliated with ICRS are conducted in English and, in addition, all its students are given the opportunity to do one semester for conducting research (sandwich programme) at a leading foreign university. Although it is still in the early phase of existence, ICRS has been academically appealing to international students. They come from various backgrounds of religion and

52 1. Cultural and Historical Studies of Religion; 2. History of Religion in Indonesia; 3. Religion and Contemporary Issues (Part I), Topic: *Violence and Religion and Gender*; 4. Religion and Contemporary Issues (Part II), Topic: *Religion and Violence in Indonesia with gender and peace perspectives*; 5. Global Citizenship and Religious Movements in Modern History; 6. Interpretation of the Bible and the al-Qur'an; History of Religion in Indonesia (Part I), Topic: Prehistory to 1900; 7. History of Religion in Indonesia (Pat II), Topic: from 1900 to the Present; 8. Philosophical Hermeneutics; 9. Cultural and Historical Studies of Religion; 10. Religion and Contemporary Issues: Religion and Popular Culture; 11. Religion and Contemporary Issues: Religion and Poverty; 12. Comparative Interpretation of Sacred Texts; 13. Interpretation of Sacred Texts: Making Sense of Violent Texts in the Scriptures; 14. Religion, Politics and Identity; 15. Interpretation of Sacred Texts: God, Nature and Scripture; 16. Religion and Identity; 17. Religion and Civil Society; 18. Classical Theories for the Study of Religion in Indonesia; Religion and Human Rights; Interpretation of Sacred Texts: Religion and Politics in Sacred Texts; Religion and the State in Southeast Asia. Ibid.

nationality. By 2014, the international students enrolled in ICRS came from several countries including China, the Philippines, the United States of America, Egypt, Serbia, Poland, Singapore, Vietnam, Myanmar, Gambia, Sierra Leone, and India.[53]

The Role of UIN Scholars of Comparative Religion

1. Abdul Mukti Ali

In respect of the achievement, as well as the institutional and academic progress of UIN Sunan Kalijaga today, one might not ignore or demean both the personal and professional touch of Mukti Ali, be it directly or indirectly. A well-mannered, modest and knowledgeable teacher, Mukti Ali was widely acknowledged to be an inspiring personality who continuously and vigorously promoted, during the forty years of his service as a teacher at UIN Sunan Kalijaga, the importance of constantly carrying out a comprehensive reform of the entire academic and institutional system of the university. One of the most significant contributions Mukti Ali made in the course of the reform lies in his proposal and support to make the discipline of Comparative Religion, in particular, and comparative approaches in Islamic religious studies, in general, the academic icon of UIN Sunan Kalijaga. Indeed, Mukti Ali achieved considerable success in gradually bringing the university into nationwide fame as a respected centre for comparative religious studies in Indonesia.

Mukti Ali, whose name at birth was Boedjono, was born in the village of Balun Sudagaran to H. Abu Ali and Hj. Khadijah in 1923. Balun Sudagaran is a rural area in the regency of Cepu, in the province of East Java, and has long been known as a home to many

53 Ibid.

well-off merchants and trader families. The fifth of six siblings, Mukti Ali was raised in a devout Muslim family; his father was a tobacco trader and his mother a clothing and garment vendor. The parent-child relationship in this household was built on and bound by the sense of mutual affection and respect. Mukti Ali and his siblings were educated and shaped in an environment that paid homage and reverence to their parents, and yet at times, these children showed anxiety towards their parents, especially to their father. Hence, quite often they did not even dare to chat with their parents, unless at the request of the latter.

Abu Ali's humble family gave a great deal of attention to the meaning of education for children, no matter what kind of school they would attend, as this family applied no discrimination between religious and general (secular) education, or favoured one over the other. During his childhood, like many other children, Mukti Ali attended a Dutch elementary school in the morning and went to the mosque or a religious teacher's home close to his for learning and reciting the Quran in the afternoon. After passing the Klein Ambtenaar Examen, a final exam as a requisite for study completion and graduation at the school, Mukti Ali was sent by his father to an Islamic boarding school, known as Pesantren Termas, which was located in the regency of Pacitan, about 170 km south of Cepu. At this Pesantren, he pursued secondary high studies and it was here that his given name Boedjono was changed to Abdul Mukti Ali (A. Mukti Ali).

Mukti Ali spent many years in his religious studies at Pesantrean Termas. His experience of learning at the Islamic boarding school was very influential on the formative period of his life, as well as had a lasting impression and deeply rooted leverage on his heart. The method of teaching and learning applied

at the Pesantren, since it was first established in 1830, usually took the form of what is called the *halaqa* (study group), in which the teacher sits in the centre surrounded by students sitting in a circle or half circle and learning the material by rote.[54] This way of instruction remained unchanged until the Pesantren, in 1932, began to initiate educational reform, for example, as can be seen in the use of a classroom method (the system of *madrasah*), which was considered new and modern, but still combined with the previously existing method of *halaqa*; these two modes of learning have been preserved until today.[55]

During his period of study at the Pesantren, Mukti Ali was enrolled in both systems – *madrasah* (classroom) and *halaqah*. The subjects taught at the Pesantren mostly concerned Arabic and its branches, such as *Nahwu*, *saraf* and *Balāghah*, as well as other varieties of Islamic traditional knowledge, such as *Fiqh* and *Usūl fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence and the source of the law), *Hadīth* (Prophet traditions), *Tasawwuf* (Islamic mysticism), and *Tafsīr* and 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān (Quranic exegesis and Quranic studies). The materials taught in the *halaqah* were based mostly on Islamic classical books, which are traditionally known in Indonesia as *kitab kuning*, "yellow books", whereas the lessons in the system of *madrasah* were adopted from modern Arabic books. When Mukti Ali reached the level of advanced studies, he came to be more acquainted with the classical books of mysticism and logic, such as *al-Hikam* by al-Samarkandy and *Mihak al-Nazar* by Imam al-Ghazālī.[56]

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54 Giora Eliraz, *Islam in Indonesia,* (Brighton, Sussex Academic Press, 2004), 7.

55 Damami et al, "H.A. Mukti Ali: Ketaatan, Kesalehan dan Kecendekiaan," in *Agama dan Masyarakat,* 9, 14.

56 Ibid., 9-10.

In addition to his formal enrolment as *santri* (student) at Pesantren Termas, Mukti Ali also undertook religious studies in some other Pesantrens in Java on a temporary basis, especially during holiday seasons like during the month of Ramadan. This tradition of study was commonly performed by, in Hefner's term, peripatetic religious students who wandered from one Muslim scholar (*kyai*) to another in different Pesantrens in order to master "a kitab under the guidance of a scholar renowned for his expertise in that text."[57] Mukti Ali was greatly impressed by his study experience at Pesantren Termas, and held a strong conviction that the model of education applied at many Pesantrens in Indonesia was among the best in edifying and shaping the student's character and personality. The educational system in the Pesantrens could effectively help theirs students comprehend and foster the principles of personal and public piety, and infuse these values into their hearts.

After completing his studies at Pesantren Termas in the early 1940s, Mukti Ali and many of his fellow youth at that time were stirred by the spirit of the struggle for Indonesian independence, and the feeling of nationalism inspired him to get involved in the socio-political movement. In 1947, Mukti Ali was elected as a Member of Parliament (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat/the council of people's representatives) for the constituency of the regency of Blora, however, one year later, he abandoned his membership in the Parliament and became interested in pursuing tertiary studies in Pakistan.

Unfortunately, he failed to realize his ambition to study

57 Robert W. Hefner, "Islamic Schools, Social Movements, and Democracy in Indonesia," in *Making Modern Muslims,* edited by Robert W. Hefner (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 61.

abroad, because, in 1948, the Dutch colonialists came back to Indonesia and launched a second invasion by occupying the capital city of Yogyakarta. Driven by his patriotic sentiment, Mukti Ali joined Angkatan Perang Sabil, which was headquartered in West Yogyakarta and, at the same time, he registered as a student at STI until 1949. In 1950, Mukti Ali and his brother, Suwito, made the pilgrimage to Mekkah, however, after performing the ritual, they went their separate ways; Suwito headed back to Indonesia, while Mukti Ali travelled by sea to Pakistan. Mukti Ali enrolled at the Faculty of Arabic at Karachi University, majoring in Islamic history. After about five years of pursuing his graduate studies at the university he eventually earned his doctorate degree in 1955. While preparing to go back to Indonesia, Mukti Ali received an offer from Anwar Haryono (a former head of Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah/DDI in Jakarta) that suggested that he cancel his plan to return to Indonesia, and, instead, depart for Canada to embark on Master's studies at McGill University on a scholarship granted by the Asian Foundation.

In response to the suggestion, Mukti Ali, without hesitation, took the chance and registered as a graduate student at the Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University. He considered it a good opportunity and something that later on made him conversant with Western perspectives of Islamic and religious studies presented by first-hand sources of Orientalism. In fact, in the university Mukti Ali not only studied with such well-known orientalists as Cantwell Smith and Bagley, but also with visiting professors from Muslim countries such as Muhammad al-Bāhī of Egypt and Niazi Berkes of Turkey. During Mukti Ali's experience of overseas studies, he forged an intense academic relationship with Cantwell Smith, as well as with other orientalists, who

proved to have a deep influence on his career. This experience also began to kindle his keen interest in comparative studies of religion, a discipline he had hardly known during his graduate studies in Pakistan. Mukti Ali admitted that he learned a lot from Cantwell Smith's attitude and stance on tolerance towards religious differences. In addition, he was impressed with the comparative approaches and holistic methodology used in scrutinizing and analysing every object of study during the coursework and teaching-learning processes at McGill University.

After finishing his Master's studies at McGill University in 1957, Mukti Ali went back to Indonesia and, at the request of K.H. Faqih Usman, former Minister of Religion of Republic of Indonesia, he was designated as a civil servant posted at the Ministry of Religious Affairs office in Jakarta. Despite his main responsibility as an administrative staff at the ministry's office, he also spared time for teaching both at PTAIN in Jogjakarta and ADIA in Jakarta. After the two college institutions in 1960 were fused together and became IAIN Sunan Kalijaga centralized in Yogyakarta, Mukti Ali was asked by Prof. Muchtar Yahya, the Dean of the Faculty of Usūl al-Dīn in IAIN, to design and prepare the founding of the department of Comparative Religion. Moreover, immediately after the department formally came into existence, Mukti Ali was appointed as its head, although he was still living in Jakarta. In 1964, Mukti Ali moved from the capital city of Jakarta to Yogyakarta because he was given the extra duty of Vice Rector of IAIN Sunan Kalijaga, even though he still held his previous position as the Head of Department of Comparative Religion.

Mukti Ali was a typical active, dynamic, and open-minded personality and his ideas gained wide acceptance from various communities coming from different backgrounds of religion,

culture, and politics. In fact, Mukti Ali was not only renowned as an energetic figure inside the centres of higher education, but he also received wide recognition as a social activist beyond the walls of the campuses. During his tenure as teacher at IAIN Sunan Kalijaga, Mukti Ali always tried to make innovative endeavours to improve the quality of the whole system of IAIN. He was widely known as an inspiring educator by his fellow teachers and students, and was always motivating them to practise such values as discipline in study, determination in pursuing the highest academic degree, and productivity in writing. Mukti Ali was a role model in implementing these values before preaching it to others, as he himself was a prolific writer, disciplined in his study, and determined in his job.[58]

Concerned that the condition of the Muslim *Ummah* was being left behind in terms of intellectual, social, political, and economic developments, compared to most of the developed Western countries, Mukti Ali highlighted that reform in Islamic education was the inevitable key to transforming and ameliorating the poor condition of the Muslim world after being freed from hundreds of years of Western colonization.[59] Education could also evoke the renewal of Islamic thought, through which the Muslim community would be able build a better understanding of Islam and its relation with the religious others, to create a mutually beneficial relationship between Islam and the state, and to cope with the community's backwardness in education, economics, and politics. Through the renewal of Islamic thought, the community would discover in their own religion genuine values and solutions

58 Damami et al, "H.A. Mukti Ali: Ketaatan," in *Agama dan Masyarkat,* 29-32.

59 Mukti Ali, *Beberapa Persoalan Agama Dewasa Ini* (Jakarta: Penerbut Rajawali, 1981), 281.

as alternative answers to many of the crucial issues they faced. Furthermore, Mukti Ali believed that his commitment to the renewal of Islamic thought would be more viable and bring efficacy if disseminated through scholarly media and forums, such as teaching, writing books and papers, seminars, discussion groups, workshops and the like, instead of socio-political, socio-religious, and other communal organizations.[60]

In 1967, Mukti Ali initiated a small circle of discussion called the "Limited Group" (in English), which was regularly held in his own house every Friday evening. This small group was a dynamic forum in which some progressive Muslim youth, like Djohan Effendi (1939-2017), Ahmad Wahib (1942-1973), Muhammad Dawam Rahardjo (1942-2018), Kuntowijoyo (1943-2005), Wajiz Anwar, Kamal Muchtar, and others, met and discussed many urgent issues faced by the Muslim *Ummah*. Some former activists of this group later played a glaringly central role as mouthpieces of the renewal movement of Islamic thought in Indonesia. In this regard, Greg Barton identified this "Limited Group" as among the forerunners of the renewal movement of Islamic thought, which was clearly confirmed by Muhammad Dawam Rahardjo, a former active participant of the group, who admitted that the ideas for renewal of Islamic thought were a topic often deliberated upon in the "Limited Group" about three years before Nurcholish Madjid's ideas of Islamic neo-modernism surfaced in the early 1970s.[61] In addition, in this small group, Mukti Ali began to lay

60 A. Singgih Basuki, *Pemikiran Keagamaan A. Mukti Ali,* (Yogyakarta; SUKA Press, 2013), 73; See also, Damami et al, "H.A. Mukti Ali: Ketaatan," in *Agama dan Masyarkat*, 31-32.

61 Greg Barton, *Gagasan Islam Liberal di Indonesia: Pemikiran Neo-Modernisme Nurcholish Madjid, Djohan Effendi, Ahmad Wahib dan Abdurrahman Wahid,* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1999), 55; Singgih, *Pemikiran*

down the grounds for his future pioneering agenda to deal with interreligious matters, a topic matching his personal concern as well as his interest of study when he was doing his Master's degree programme in McGill University, Canada. However, the fate of the "Limited Group" was quite short, only surviving for about four years until its founder was appointed Minister of Religious Affairs in 1971.

Mukti Ali's appointment to lead the Ministry of Religious Affairs was actually only to replace the unfinished halfway period of leadership of K.H. Muhammad Dachlan (1909-1977), hence, his tenure in the post lasted only about three years from 1971 to 1973. After the first general election under the New Order administration was held in 28 March 1973, Mukti Ali was again designated to head the office for the second term from 1973 until 1978.[62] He was considered to be the right person to manage the Ministry of Religious Affairs, partly because of his academic background in Islamic religious studies, and also because of his stance on backing the ideas of Islamic neo-modernism were seemingly in line with the administration's ideology of Pancasila and its development goals.[63] It is important to note that when Mukti Ali started to become a part of the new ruling regime of the New Order, the government was still at the early stages of political and economic consolidation. However, within eight years of his service in the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA), Mukti Ali was regarded as successful in implementing the MoRA agendas; for example,

Keagamaan, 74-77; M. Dawam Rahardjo, *Intelektual Inteligensia*, 281. For further discussion on this topics, see also, Donald James Porter, *Managing Politics and Islam in Indonesia,* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), 52.

62 Basuki, *Pemikiran Keagamaan,* 25.

63 Ibid., 25.

to embark on modernizing Islamic educational institutions, maintaining interreligious harmony and dialogue, enlightening and enhancing the discourses of state-religion relations, and so forth.[64]

To be appointed to the top position in the state's ministry, as admitted by Mukti Ali, was beyond his estimation, but it did not really give him a feeling of satisfaction that he derived from teaching-learning activities.[65] Upon completion of his term in the office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in 1978, Mukti Ali returned to Yogyakarta, going back to his roots as an academic and educator at the campus of IAIN Sunan Kalijaga. Within this academic atmosphere, Mukti Ali had more time to observe his old routine of writing, teaching and discussing, which he had left for quite a long time. Mutkti Ali retired from his position as a professor at IAIN Sunan Kalijaga in 1988 and despite being a pensioner, he was able to retain his productivity in teaching and writing until 2000 when he totally quit his academic activities. Mukti Ali passed away in 2004, leaving great legacies of integrity, sincerity, knowledge, and, above all, spirited dedication to his faith, nation, society, and family.

2. Post-Mukti Ali

Perhaps one of the most imperative legacies that Mukti Ali left to UIN Sunan Kalijaga is his contribution in introducing, cultivating, and nurturing the discipline of Comparative Religion. After more than half a century, the Department of Comparative Religion, since it was first created by the institution in 1960,

64 Basuki, *Pemikiran Keagamaan,* 24-29; Damami et al, "H.A. Mukti Ali: Ketaatan," in *Agama dan Masyarkat*, 34-37.

65 Damami et al, "H.A. Mukti Ali: Ketaatan," in *Agama dan Masyarkat*, 34.

was replicated by various Islamic higher education institutions across the country, especially those under the supervision of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The discipline's reputation is now widely acknowledged to be an academic milestone of the University. This rapid progress reflects positive and challenging facts. It is positive in that there is an increasing tendency among both the UIN Muslim scholars and students to be broadminded so that they do not need to feel worried about studying Comparative Religion and its auxiliary subjects, as well as other modern social sciences. It is challenging because the sustainability of Comparative Religion and its ability to survive in the future relies very much on the extent to which the scholarship in this field is fostered, enhanced, and improved by all the stakeholders of the university.

With regard to the challenging phenomena above, it is obviously the responsibility of the scholars in Islamic centres of higher learning to foster and develop the discipline of Comparative Religion, in particular, and Islamic religious sciences, in general. With this in mind, Mukti Ali, as the one who initiated the inclusion of the discipline in the curricular structure of IAIN Sunan Kalijaga in 1961, proved his profound commitment to paving the way to improve both the quantity and quality of the UIN human resources concerned with Comparative Religion. With his inspiring guidance and dedicated mentorship, aligned with his serious efforts to reform the educational system of the University, Mukti Ali succeeded in guiding the University's scholars and galvanizing them to be his surrogates in the field of comparative religious studies.

However, the UIN scholars who followed Mukti Ali's steps are few in number. This scarcity actually resulted from the fact

that among the scholars and students of Comparative Religion in the university there were only a few who had the necessary skills to understand foreign languages and modern sciences, such as Sociology, Anthropology, Archaeology, and so on.[66] The UIN scholars who later on were considered as Mukti Ali's successors of the first generation were those who had been studying with him directly during their undergraduate and postgraduate studies. Among the prominent of those scholars were Burhanuddin Daya (1938-2014), Alef Theria Wasim, and Djam'anuri. These three scholars were deployed to serve as professors at the same institution – the Department of Comparative Religion – under the Faculty of Usūl al-Dīn.

Burhanuddin Daya pursued both his undergraduate and postgraduate studies at UIN Sunan Kalijaga and his doctoral dissertation focused on an Islamic school's role in the renewal movement of Islamic thought in West Sumatra. If viewed merely through Daya's published doctoral thesis,[67] it may lead to a somewhat haphazard assumption that it would be less proper to position him in the list of the University's scholars whose academic expertise is the discipline of Comparative Religion. However, it would be wrong to overlook Daya's area of interest in comparative religious studies for several reasons. First, Daya took charge of teaching the core subject of *Judaism* in undergraduate studies for more than forty years, out of his dedication to the Department of

66 Mukti Ali, "Ilmu Perbandingan Agama di Indonesia," in *Ilmu Perbandingan Agama di Indonesia (Beberapa Permasalahan)*, edited by Zaini Muhtarom and et al, (Jakarta: INIS, 1990), 5-6.

67 Burhanuddin Daya, Sumatra Thawalib dalam Gerakan Pembaharuan Pemikiran Islam di Sumatra Barat, (Ph.D. thesis, UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 1988). Daya's thesis was published with the title *Gerakan Pembaharuan Pemikiran Islam,* (Yogyakarta: Tiara Wacana, 1990).

Comparative Religion. Second, in order to maintain his extensive experience of researching and teaching the course on *Judaism,* Daya authored a book entitled *Agama Yahudi*.[68] Third, Daya was actively involved in community services both at the local and national levels, which dealt with interreligious matters, such as in Forum Kerukunan Antar Umat Beragama (FKUB, Forum for the Harmony of Interreligious Communities).[69]

Like Daya, Alef Theria Wasim also spent almost all of her period of tertiary education, from undergraduate to postgraduate studies, at UIN Sunan Kalijaga. To earn her doctoral degree she did research on a classical book *Tibyān fī Ma'rifat al-Adyān* by Nūr al-Dīn Muhammad ibn 'Alī ibn al-Hasanjī al-Hamīd al-Shāfi'ī al-Ash'arī al-Aydarūsī al-Rānīrī, by applying at least two methodological approaches, historical and philological.[70] Wasim's areas of specialization not only covered Islamic studies, comparative studies of religion, and the history of religion, but also philological studies of religious texts and the psycho-socio-anthropology of religion. Furthermore, Wasim played an important role in advancing comparative religious studies at UIN Sunan Kalijaga and, therefore, she has received scholarly acknowledgement at both the national and international levels. She has also been recognized as Indonesia's representative and one of the Steering Committee members of the Women Scholars Network (WSN), a non-governmental organization established under the auspices of the International Association of the History of Religions

68 Burhanuddin Daya, *Agama Yahudi*, (Yogyakarta: Bagus Arafah, 1982).

69 Burhanuddin Daya, interview by teh author, Yogyakarta, on 22 September 2011.

70 Alef Theria Wasim, *Tibyān fī Ma'rifat al-Adyān, Suntingan Teks, Karya Intelektual Muslim, dan Karya Sejarah Agama-agama Abad ke-17,* (Ph.D. Thesis, IAIN Sunan Kalijaga, 1996).

(IAHR). IAIHR was founded to push the involvement of women scholars concerned with religious studies in scholarly exchange, academic cooperation, and friendship.[71]

Another scholar of UIN Sunan Kalijaga who dedicated most of his life to researching and teaching in comparative religious studies was Djam'annuri. He earned his doctoral degree at the university with a dissertation he defended in 1996 focusing on Ibn Hazm's views on the Old and New Testaments based on his book *Al-Fasl fī al-Milal wa al-Ahwā' wa al-Nihal*.[72] Since his appointment as lecturer in 1982, Djam'annuri was tasked for several years with lecturing on several subjects, such as the Methodological Research of Religion, Hinduism, Islamic studies, and the Study of the Quran and Prophet Traditions (al-Hadith). In addition to his academic work inside UIN, Sunan Kalijaga, Djam'annuri was also actively engaged in community services outside the campus, including in FKUB. In the 1990s, under the auspices of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Djam'annuri, together with Burhanuddin Daya and many other scholars of religious studies from various universities, established a non-governmental organization named Lembaga Kerukunan Umat Beragama (LKUB, Institute for Interreligious Harmony). Like FKUB, this institution is a forum where people of various religious backgrounds come and discuss topics relating to interreligious issues. The topics usually cover such issues as how to formulate resolutions to interreligious conflicts, to thwart the reoccurrence of social-religiously motivated clashes, and to provide aid to people who become the victims of the aftermath of socio-religious conflicts.

71 <http://www.iahr.dk/wsn/steering.html> (accessed on 4 December 2014).

72 Djam'annuri, *Ibn Hazm (994 – 1064 M.), Tentang Perjanjian Lama dan Perjanjian Baru (Studi Kitāb al-Fasl fī al-Milal wa al-Ahwa' wa al-Nihal),* (Ph.D. Thesis, IAIN Sunan Kalijaga, 1996).

Yet, while FKUB as an informal forum still exists in many parts of Indonesia, unfortunately the fate of LKUB is, in fact, unclear.[73]

It is worth noting that today's nationwide reputation of UIN Sunan Kalijaga as a leading centre of comparative religious studies cannot be set apart from the contribution made by the abovementioned three scholars. In addition, the discipline of Comparative Religion in the University gained more strength and received an injection of fresh blood from the UIN scholars who returned to their academic home upon completing their studies abroad; and among the noted of the returnee scholars was Amin Abdullah. While Burhanuddin Daya, Alef Theria Wasim and Djam'annuti are considered as Mukti Ali's successors of the first generation, Amin Abdullah seems to be the most celebrated among those of the second generation.

Amin Abdullah graduated from Pondok Pesantren Modern Gontor (secondary high school) in 1972 and finished his undergraduate studies from the Department of Comparative Religion, Faculty of Usul al-Dīn, at IAIN Sunan Kalijaga in 1982. Three years afterwards, together with Komaruddin Hidayat (the present rector of UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta), Abdullah was sponsored by the Ministry of Religious Affairs to pursue a PhD programme, majoring in Islamic Philosophy at the Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Middle East Technical University (METU), Turkey.[74] Abdullah's dissertation was published

73 Djam'annuri, interview by the author, Yogyakarta, on 20 October 2011.

74 Riyanto, *Integrasi-Interkoneksi Keilmuan,* 574-575; See also, Budi Handrianto, *50 Tokoh Islam Liberal Indonesia Pengusung Ide Sekularisme, Pluralisme, dan Liberalisme Agama,* (Jakarta: Hujjah Press, 2007), 132-133; M. Amin Abdullah, *Pendidikan Agama Era Multikultural Multi-Religius* (Jakarta: PSAP Muhammadiyah, 2005), 191; <https://aminabd.wordpress.com/perihal/> (accessed on 7 December 2014).

in Turkey with the title *The Idea of Universality of Ethical Norms in Ghazali and Kant* and was translated into Indonesian and published with the title *Antara Al-Ghazali dan Kant: Filsafat Etika Islam.*[75]

Amin Abdullah is an energetic, active scholar who hitherto achieved distinctive accomplishments both in the academic field and in community service. As a social activist, Abdullah served as a chairman of the central management board of the Muhammadiyah Islamic organization between 2000 and 2005. He was Rector of UIN Sunan Kalijaga for two consecutive terms of service, from 2002 to 2010, which obviously brought him nationwide recognition. The highest position that Abdullah achieved was, to a certain extent, a result of his achievement and contribution in creating a vibrant academic climate in the University. Many said that Abdullah was among the few UIN scholars who wielded essential leverage on the present development of comparative religious studies at the University. Therefore, it is understandable why some claimed that Amin Abdullah is the true heir of Mukti Ali's legacy, given his earnest efforts to promote Mukti Ali's ideas concerning the importance of applying modern approaches and methodologies, both in Islamic studies and comparative religious studies. In addition, he shows robust commitment to living up to the noble values and principles of dialogue, tolerance, and harmony between peoples of various faiths for which Mukti Ali also stood for during his years of service in UIN and the Ministry of Religious Affairs.[76]

Abdullah is a progressive thinker as well a prolific writer. As a

75 Amin Abdullah, *The Idea of Universality of Ethical Norms in Ghazāli and Kant,* (Ankara: Turkiye Diyanet Vakvi, 1992); Amin Abdullah, *Antara Al-Ghazāli dan Kant: Filsafat Etika Islam,* (Bandung: Mizan, 2002).

76 Alim Roswantoro, interview by the author, Yogyakarta, on 21 August 2014.

prolific writer, his work and writings include several books, as well as articles in academic journals and the mass media. In addition, Abdullah has been a visiting professor in a number of universities across the country and has delivered numerous presentations, lectures and talks in various forums – seminars, conferences, and workshops – at both the national and international levels. His scholarly interest spans the fields of Islamic and Religious Studies, Islamic Philosophy, Islamic Epistemology, and Hermeneutics. Abdullah's stance, as has been conveyed through his writings and statements and expressed on many occasions, covered such delicate issues as the use of hermeneutics and other modern Western methodologies to approach and analyse Islamic sacred texts, the truths claimed by different religious people, the reconstruction of Islamic thought and theology, the idea of religious pluralism and inclusivism, and many others, which ignited some controversies among the Muslim *Ummah*. [77] This is a likely explanation why, since then, there have been a number of Indonesian Muslim scholars who launched harsh criticism of Amin Abdullah's opinions concerning the aforesaid matters and, conversely, why there have also been a large number who stood by and supported his position.

The other UIN scholars who came after Amin Abdullah and who have been intensely embarking upon cultivating and advancing the discipline of Comparative Religion are Fatimah Husein and Syafa'atun Al-Mirzanah. Fatimah Husein has been a professor in the Department of Philosophy since 1990. She earned her Master's degree from McGill University, Canada, in 1997 and, seven years afterwards, she obtained her PhD from the University of Melbourne, Australia. One of her important contributions to

77 Adian Husaini, *Hegemoni Kristen-Barat dalam Studi Islam di Perguruan Tinggi,* (Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2006), 136-142.

enriching comparative religious studies in UIN is her work entitled *Muslim-Christian Relations in the New Order Indonesia: The Exclusivist and Inclusivist Muslims' Perspective,*[78] which is actually an adaptation of her doctorate dissertation. Fatimah Husein has been very concerned about how instrumental it is for people of different faiths to build and strengthen ecumenical dialogue and amicable cooperation, which are among the very determining factors in the creation of interreligious tolerance and harmony.

In the discussion about the UIN scholars who centre their scholarly enterprises on the discipline of Comparative Religion, we should not overlook the role of another scholar, Syafa'atun Al-Mirzanah, who has been very earnest in promoting her fairly distinctive discourse on inter-faith dialogues which is examined and explored with special reference to the Islamic traditions of Sufism and Mysticism. Her academic specializations are in Sufism, interfaith dialogue, and comparative mysticism. Al-Mirzanah gained a double degree for both her Masters and her Doctorate. She obtained her first Master's degree from UIN Sunan Kalijaga and the second from the Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago, where she later achieved her first doctorate degree (Ph.D.), while her second doctorate degree (Doctor of Ministry/D. Min.) was acquired from the Catholic Theological Union, Chicago. Al-Mirzanah has been a visiting professor in a number of national and international universities. She taught Women and Islam at the Catholic Theological Union, Chicago; was a visiting professor at Georgetown University, The Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Affairs in Washington DC; and lectured in Islamic Studies at Sanata

78 Fatimah Husein. *Muslim-Christian Relations in the New Order Indonesia: The Exclusivist and Inclusivist Muslims' Perspective,* (Bandung: Mizan Pustaka, 2005).

Dharma Catholic University in Yogyakarta, Indonesia.[79]

Al-Mirzanah is a prolific writer and an active researcher who has authored several books and written numerous articles in journals and newspapers. She has travelled to various countries such as Turkey, the Netherlands, Germany, Rome, Spain, Korea, Lebanon, Iran, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Malaysia, France, and the USA for her research and in taking part as either a presenter or participant in many conferences on interfaith dialogue and human rights issues. She is also affiliated with the American Academy of Religion, the Ibn 'Arabī Society, and the Fellowship of Reconciliation, in the USA. She is a faculty member of ICRS (Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies) that runs an international Ph.D. programme, at Gajah Mada University, Yogyakarta, and has been a research coordinator for the Institute for Inter-faith Dialogue in Indonesia (INTERFIDEI), Yogyakarta.[80]

Furthermore, the subject of comparative religious studies, in reality, has been of great interest not only to the UIN scholars whose undergraduate studies backgrounds were in the Faculty of Usūl al-Dīn, and, especially, the Department of Comparative Religion, but also to those who have an academic background in faculties outside of Usūl al-Dīn, for example, the Faculties of Tarbiyyah, Sharī'ah, and Da'wah. The role played by the UIN scholars whose faculty basis is not Usūl al-Dīn has also been quite significant in promoting the discipline of Comparative Religion and its appeal to prospective students. Among the recognized scholars of this kind, to mention some, are Abdul Munir Mulkan, Hamim Ilyas and Waryono Abdul Ghofur.

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79 <http://www.rumiforum.org/luncheon-speaker-series/when-mystic-masters.html> (accessed on 10 December 2014).

80 Ibid.

Abdul Munir Mulkan is a professor in the Faculty of Tarbiyyah, and yet his academic interest often includes Islamic mysticism and issues of religious pluralism, a subject of study that seems to go beyond the topics that normally belong to the science of education. Mulkhan has written no less than 70 books and numerous articles in journals and newspapers. He is of the opinion that the matter of relations between communities of different faiths is something genuine in the life of humans and that it has nothing to do with the discipline of Comparative Religion, in particular and, therefore, everyone can show more concern about interreligious issues regardless of his or her academic background. Between 2007 and 2012, Mulkhan was a member of the National Commission of Human Rights of Indonesia during which time he frequently dealt with many cases related to the issues of persecution towards religious minority groups.[81]

As mentioned earlier, Hamim Ilyas and Waryono Abdul Ghafur can be added to the list of the UIN scholars concerned with comparative religious studies, despite their faculty base outside its traditional home, Usūl al-Dīn. Hamim Ilyas is a professor in the Faculty of Sharī'ah and completed his doctorate studies at the University in 2002 with a dissertation research on Muhammad 'Abduh's and Rashīd Ridā's views on the people of the book with special reference to their exegetical work *Tafsīr al-Manār.*[82] Ilyas is an activist in Muhammadiyah, one of the largest Islamic mass organizations in Indonesia, where he regularly delivers religious sermons and is among the UIN scholars who highlight

81 Abdul Munir Mulkan, interview by the author, Yogyakarta, on 12 April 2012.

82 Hamim Ilyas, *Pandangan Muslim Modernis terhadap Non-Musim (Studi Pandangan Muhammad 'Abduh dan Rasyid Rida terhadap Ahli Kitab dalam Tafsir al-Manar,* (Ph.D. Thesis, IAIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2002).

the importance of harmonious, peaceful relations between communities of various religions.

Like Hamim Ilyas, Waryono Abdul Ghofur also regularly provides religious preaching to Muslim communities, in addition to his formal career as a professor at UIN Sunan Kalijaga. He is currently the Dean of the Faculty of Da'wah, a faculty that is usually assumed to be a ground for producing religious preachers. Abdul Ghafur spent his entire period of tertiary training at UIN Sunan Kalijaga and accomplished his doctorate degree with the research topic concerning the concept of *millah* of the Prophet Ibrāhīm according to the Shī'ite cleric Sayyid Husain al-Tabātabāī in his work.[83] Abdul Ghafur has been actively engaged in various events held by the Institute for Inter-faith Dialogue in Indonesia (INTERFIDEI), Yogyakarta, which involves communities of different faiths. In addition, he also serves as a regular lecturer in the Studi Islam Intensif (SITI, Intensive Study of Islam), a study club regularly held by a number of Christian priests and pastors in University Kristen Duta Wacana (UKDW, Duta Wacana Christian University).[84]

Concluding Remarks

The foregoing historical analysis revealed that the present UIN Sunan Kalijaga was simply a continuation, and later transformation, of previously traditional state colleges and institutes of Islamic studies called PTAIN, ADIA, and IAIN.

83 Waryono Abdul Ghafur, *Millah Ibrāhīm dalam al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, (Yogyakarta: Bidang Akademik UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2008).

84 Waryono Abdul Ghafur, interview by the author, Yogyakarta, on 10 September 2014.

Meanwhile, the incorporation of the field of Comparative Religion into syllabic structure of UIN Sunan Kalijaga was also not new in the sense that the discipline has been introduced and taught in Islamic tertiary institutions for decades or since the 1930s, long before the University was set up in 2004.

However, it was since 1960 that Comparative Religion was used as the name of department along with other three departmental divisions: Da'wah, Tasawwuf, and Philosophy, all of which became parts of the Faculty of Usūl al-Dīn. The Department of Comparative Religion continues to exist until today and has been the academic icon of UIN Sunan Kalijaga, for which the University becomes noted as a centre of academic excellence in comparative religious studies. The Department of Comparative Religion is only provided for undergraduate studies and yet some subjects related to the discipline have also been given to post-graduate students. For post-graduate studies in comparative religious studies, UIN Sunan Kalijaga, in cooperation with Gajah Mada University and Duta Wacana University, created what is called ICRS (Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies) which offers a Ph.D. programme for both national and international students.

The reputation enjoyed by UIN Sunan Kalijaga as a centre for scholarly religious studies has been of contribution given in a great part by Mukti Ali, a distinguished scholar of Comparative Religion, who initiated the establishment of Department of Comparative Religion at the University in 1960. Therefore, he is well-known as the father of Comparative Religion in Indonesia. Mukti Ali's footsteps have been followed by the next generation of UIN scholars concerned with Comparative Religion, such as Burhanuddin Daya, Alef Theria Wasim, Djam'annuri, Amin Abdullah, and others. The role played by the UIN scholars after

Mukti Ali is central to the improvement in comparative religious studies at the University, as well as to the advancement of theoretically intellectual discourses and actual, practical work on inter-religious issues.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE UIN SCHOLARS' VIEWS ON INTER-RELIGIOUS ISSUES IN COMPARATIVE RELIGION

This section is devoted to the critical examination of the thoughts and views of UIN Sunan Kalijaga scholars on selected topics which are frequently addressed in the discipline of Comparative Religion. The topics to be explored here will concern such important issues as the origins of religion, claims of religious truth, methodology and approaches in Comparative Religion, and the purpose of studying Comparative Religion. In this respect, the discussion on such topics can help depict intellectual trends of the UIN scholars in dealing with, for example, the controversies between the ideas of evolutionism and the role of revelation as responses to the questions of the origins of religion; the debate between the notions of religious exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism with respect to religious truth claims; and the differences between Muslim and Western traditions of religious studies, as well as the objective of learning Comparative Religion.

The Origins of Religion

Scholars of comparative religious studies give particular emphasis that anyone who wishes to scientifically examine the origins of religion is required to be prepared at the outset with a working definition of what religion is, a definition that is "provisional in character and subject to modification."[1] The need to attain a sound understanding of the origins of religion rests partly on such a crucial question as to how, when, and why humankind first came to believe in an entity or entities called God or gods or, in E.B. Tylor's term, "spiritual beings."[2]

The answers to the above question, to which many theorists of religion have tried to respond, diverge greatly according to the approaches they employ in analysing any religious facts observed. There have been at least two competing theories to which many contemporary scholars of religious studies often refer when encountering such a question as to how, when, and why humankind, since its earliest stages of existence, came to formulate "the belief in and worship of a God or gods, or any such system of belief and worship."[3] One is the theory of evolution and the other is the theory of revelation. In this context, it is quite interesting to scrutinize how the issue of the origins of religion has been discussed by the UIN scholars.

In a meeting held to mark the commencement of the academic year of IAIN Sunan Kalijaga on 1 September 1961, Mukti Ali

1 Peter Conolly, "Introduction," in *Approaches to the Study of Religion,* edited by Peter Conolly, (London: Cassell, 1999), 5.

2 Daniel L. Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 26.

3 Conolly, "Introduction," in *Approaches to the Study*, 5.

delivered a public lecture on "Asal-usul Agama" (the origins of religion).[4] The topic seemed to be something new to most of the UIN Muslim scholars at the time. On that occasion, Mukti Ali elucidated upon the evolutionary theory of religion, a theory that tries to discover how religion began, analysing from the earliest, simplest form of religion and then tracing the route it takes from the beginning until the present time.[5] The theory of evolution was founded and developed by a number of 19th century Western experts in Ethnology, Anthropology, History, and Sociology such as E.B. Tylor, J.G. Frazer, Emil Durkheim and many others. Those scholars, driven by great fascination with the structures of the earliest human societies, especially with those of "primitive" society, concluded that all forms of human society have been undergoing evolutionary progression during which they gradually grew and evolved from the less simple and "primitive" form into the more complex and more rational.[6]

Seen and treated just as other living creatures, religion too is not exclusive of being subject to painstaking observation and examination by the advocates of evolution. Using scientific or cognitive approaches, the evolutionists postulate that the essence of religion is believed to occur at the beginning in the forms of polytheism and animism, "the belief in living, personal powers behind all things", as the earliest mode of human religiosity, which can be found in the entire human history.[7] Thus, the original religion of humankind came into existence as a product of a

4 A. Mukti Ali, *Asal Usul Agama,* (Yogyakarta: Yayasan Nida, 1969).

5 Pals, *Eight Theories,* 45-46.

6 David N. Gellner, "Anthropological Approaches," in *Approaches to the Study*, 10-11.

7 Pals, *Eight Theories*, 26.

long, evolutionary chain from animism through polytheism and then to monotheism as the final point. It is built on the natural assumption that the early people in all human history employed and developed the same methods of reasoning in acquiring their first religious ideas as the way of thinking they made use of in all other dimensions of their lives. Hence, the belief in spiritual and supernatural beings was affected by and dependent on natural causes. Religion, since it arose as a corollary of the response of all prehistoric peoples to a set of circumstances, changes over time along with human intellectual evolution.[8] In brief, humans' modes of religiosity and their religious thinking and behaviour arise due to a number of evolutionary factors (biological, cultural, socio-political, etc.).[9] The notion that humans' intellectuality and thought evolve gradually through natural stages enjoys a special place as a critical element in the evolutionary theory of religion. According to the evolutionist hypothesis, the ideas of religious monotheism have been simply a phase of human thought that came later than polytheism.[10]

The appearance of this theory was seen by some UIN scholars as a great challenge to the age-old belief that religion and the religious ideas of monotheism, in particular, are revealed by God through His messengers.[11] Mukti Ali was cogently opposed to the evolutionary thesis of religious monotheism. According to

8 Ibid., 26, 46, 47.

9 Harvey Whitehouse, "Cognitive Evolution and Religion: Cognition and Religious Evolution," in *Issues in Ethnology and Anthropology,* vol. 3, no. 3, 2008, 35.

10 Pals, *Eight Theories*, 47.

11 A. Mukti Ali, *Asal Usul Agama,* (Jogjakarta: Jajasan Nida, 1969), 16; See also M. Amin Abdullah, *Islamic Studies di Perguruan Tinggi, Pendekatan Integratif-interkonektif,* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2010), 93.

Mukti Ali, the evolutionary theory of religion gained support not only from modern scholars whose academic expertise included ethnology, anthropology, and sociology, but unfortunately, also from some intellectuals who were adherents of religion, like E.D. Soper, of the Christian faith. What follows is a citation from Soper's book *Religion of Mankind*, as quoted by Mukti Ali:

"Christians, Jews, and Mohammedans alike assumed a primitive divine revelation, and that settled the whole question… The difficulty with this exceedingly fascinating picture is that it rests on no solid foundation of fact. The Bible makes no clear statement which would lead to this conclusion. When man began to play his part he performed religious acts and engaged at times a religious ritual; so much is evident, but nothing is said as to origins. That man received his religious nature from God is very plausible, but that differs widely from the statement that he came into life furnished with a full set of religious ideas. The theory of evolution presents us with a very different account of early man, an account which makes belief in a mere or less complete revelation incongruous"[12]

Mukti Ali's stand on this issue is obvious as he asserted that the hypotheses the evolutionary theory of religion has constructed are definitely against and are unacceptable to the basic principle of Islam that religion primordially sprung from God's revelation. He insisted that if it is accepted as true that Adam, about which the three monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam unanimously hold the same belief, was the first prophet God ever sent down and provided him with a divine revelation, it plainly

12 This passage was quoted by Mukti Ali, *Asal Usul*, 13. See also, A. Mukti Ali, *Ilmu Perbandingan Agama (Sebuah Pembahasan tentang Methodos dan Sistima),* (Jogjakarta: Jajasan Nida, 1969), 21.

makes no sense that God sent Adam with a message that exhorts mankind to associate anything else with Him.[13] To strengthen his views concerning the role of revelation, which is believed to exist as early as humankind began to have religious conceptions, Mukti Ali has benefitted greatly from the works authored by a number of Western scholars, such as Wilhelm Schmidt, Andrew Lang, and Paul Radin, which bluntly oppose evolutionism and support what is called primitive monotheism. Mukti Ali points out that Andrew Lang was the first among the modern Western anthropologists to stress that monotheistic ideas can be found even in primitive savages, as Lang proved that for the indigenous people of Kamschatka:

"The first Man is the son of the Creator, and it is about the origin of the idea of the Creator, not of the first Man, that we are inquiring. Adam is called the son of God in a Biblical genealogy, but, of course, Adam was made, not begotten…We shall show that certain low savages are as monotheistic as some Christians. They have a Supreme Being, and the distinctive attributes of Deity are not by them assigned to other beings, further than as Christianity assigns them to Angles, Saints, the Devil, and strange as it appears, among savages, to mediating 'Son'. It is not known that, among the Adamanese and other tribes, this last notion is due to missionary influence."[14]

The monotheistic ideas of God, according to Mukti Ali, may not be acquired through evolutionary process, otherwise religion can be said to be a mere product of human thought. Religion is

13 Mukti Ali, *Asal Usul*, 19.

14 Andrew Lang, *The Making of Religion,* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1898), 179, 181. A part of the above citation can be seen also in Mukti Ali (1969), *Ilmu Perbandigan, 24.*

not a cultural entity produced by the power of human intellect, but conversely it is religion and not human intellect that guides and provides the latter with the direction of how it has to be used and where it ought to go. Nevertheless, Mukti Ali holds the opinion that in addition to the divine information, God has revealed through sacred religious scriptures, the power of intellect, which can also serve as a means for human beings to achieve the conception of the oneness of God.[15]

In his strong rebuttal towards the evolutionary ideas of religion, Mukti Ali argued that if the belief in the one God arose due to evolutionary progression, which therefore entails a never-ending process of growth and movement from the belief in the many or plural gods and spiritual beings (polytheism and animism) towards the last form, that is, the faith in the one God, this will bring about a critical question, why does the process of evolution stop at an end-point (monotheistic ideas of God) and not move and transform towards another form of belief that differs from both monotheism and polytheism or animism? Therefore, Mukti Ali regards both animism and polytheism as a deviation from the monotheistic ideas of the one God.[16] With all the arguments Mukti Ali has put forward above, he is convinced that the logic behind the evolutionary theory of religion is indefensible.

It is interesting to note here that although Mukti Ali firmly rejects the evolutionist viewpoint and holds without reserve religiously conventional perspectives concerning the origins of religion, he conveyed the fact that Muhammad 'Abduh (1849-1905) is among the few great Muslim thinkers who conceded that

15 Mukti Ali, *Asal Usul, 20*.

16 Ibid.

evolution may somewhat occur in the process of God's revelation.[17] Muslim intellectuals of the same line of thought as 'Abduh were quite small in number, but included Rashid Ridla (1865-1935), Ameer Ali (1849-1928), and Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938). Mukti Ali cautions any one to be careful in reading the abovementioned Muslim scholars' thoughts on the relation between Islam and the notion of evolution since the issue can mislead and cause misunderstanding.[18]

Muhammad 'Abduh, in his *Risālat al-Tauhīd*, pointed out that God's revelation was delivered to all of His prophets and messengers through evolution.[19] More precisely, God's revelation evolved through a process in which God sent down a chain of prophets and messengers and provided them with divine messages that accord with the intellectual level of people to whom each messenger was addressed. Some of God's prophets were occasionally chosen for a limited period of time and some others were dispatched only to a certain group of people. This means that the earliest messengers were considered as national prophets, due to their limited coverage of role as they spoke "in such a way that people of their own age and society could understand."[20] However, this evolutionary process of God's revelation ended by the advent of Prophet Muhammad s.a.w. as the final and universal messenger of all times and for all human beings.

It is important to emphasize that certain religious tenets within God's revelation that evolve and change over time only

17 Ibid., 16. See also B.J. Boland, *The Struggle of Islam in Modern Indonesia,* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982), 207.

18 Mukti Ali, *Asal Usul*, 16; Mukti Ali (a), *Ilmu Perbandingan*, 27.

19 Ibid.

20 Boland, *the Struggle of Islam,* 207.

include *shari'ah* (practices of worship, rituals, laws, and so forth) but not the monotheistic conceptions of God. The teachings brought by one prophet were, therefore, as diverse in their form and expression as those brought by another prophet. However, the notion of evolution is never workable in human conceptions of monotheism, since all of God's prophets of all eras bring and call towards a single goal, that is, the belief in and worship of the same one God. This core of the divine revelation, which has been imparted to all of His messengers, never changes and has, in perpetuity, been the same up to the final Prophet Muhammad s.a.w., and will remain so for all time.[21]

Religious Truth Claims

Since time immemorial, human beings have been greatly eager to search for a truth they perceive as the final purpose of life, even though they would eventually come to discover and realize that there unfurls before them a multitude of paths and vehicles towards the truth as their ultimate ideal. The ways and means human beings employ to pursue the truth can be witnessed by their manifestation in the multiplicity of human expressions of spirituality and rationality. It is important to clarify that such things as science, philosophy, economics, culture, politics, and, to some extent, religious traditions are only human paths to find the truth. Moreover, each of these human expressions possesses its own measurements and standards in gauging the truth and, in turn, each will ultimately fall into its own truth claim.

Very often, especially in the Western epistemological view, the truth that is found in the religious discourses, on the one side,

21 Mukti Ali, *Asal Usul*, 16. Mukti Ali (a), *Ilmu Perbandingan*, 27.

is confronted with that found in the non-religious discourses (science, philosophy, culture, and politics), on the other. Moreover, the contrast between both sides has inexorably ended up in their respective exclusive claim as being the only pathway to enlightenment, salvation, and liberation. This perception is anchored in epistemological conjecture that the truth claims embraced by the former (the religious discourses) are to some degree lacking rational grounds while those held by the latter (the non-religious discourses) are thought to be rationally reckonable and decidable. Or, in Brunsveld words "In Western society, furthermore, religious claims are frequently thought to lack rationality, while the truth of non-religious claims is thought to be rationally decidable".[22]

Despite that, in reality, not only does the clash of truth claims take place between religious and non-religious discourses, but it can also be quite easily found to occur more severely between aficionados and devotees of various religions as well as among groups, sects, and denominations within one religion. The conflict and contestation of the religious truth claims, which arise due to the differences of religious beliefs and practices that exist either within one religion or between various religions, has been one of the crucial topics that draws the studious attention of the UIN Muslim scholars concerned with comparative religious studies. To look in detail at how the Muslim scholars at the University cope with the issue of religious truth has much relevance to the present research in order to be able to figure out the development of the discipline of Comparative Religion in Islamic institutions of higher

22 Neik Brunsveld, "One Notion of Religious Truth? Hilary Putnam's Conceptual Truth and the Justification of Religious Propositions," in *Religion in the Public Sphere,* edited by Neik Brunveld & Roger Trigg, (Utrecht: Ars Disputandi, 2011), 200.

learning in Indonesia.

Since the early 1960s, there has been an authentic awareness burgeoning among the UIN Muslim scholars that religious and cultural diversity is an age-old historical fact that has long been alive across Indonesia and it should be looked at and treated with genuine respect and reverence as a national asset.[23] The problem of religious diversity has of course posed many serious questions to re-join and deal with, some of which concern how different faiths, despite their sharp dissimilarities in religious beliefs and practices, can relate to each other and live side by side in harmony and peace. Other questions have something to do with how and why each religion claims to be the only one that is true and even the only true way to salvation and enlightenment. The concept of truth is very central to all world major religions as it is inseparable from the concept of salvation, deliverance, and enlightenment after life. The opposing truth claims made by various religious traditions are often perceived and even held responsible; however, it is still contentious, as one of the very instrumental roots of religiously motivated rivalries, clashes, and conflicts.

As far as the relationships between religions are concerned, the UIN Muslim scholars seem to be in unanimous agreement that tensions and conflicts between religious groups can only be thwarted from occurring and becoming worse if those involved in the conflicts show sincerity and willingness to work together fruitfully and earnestly for the benefit of humanity. This requires a determination from all those concerned to reciprocally entrench amicable interaction and positive cooperation based on cordial esteem and mutual trust. In this regard, Mukti Ali affirms, "peace

23 M. Amin Abdullah, *Studi Agama, Normativitas atau Historisitas?* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2011), 5.

and justice could only be preserved if there reigns the notion of cooperation rather than competition, brotherhood instead of hostility, and trust in place of prejudice."[24] In line with Mukti Ali's aforesaid position, Amin Abdullah goes further by stressing that it is scientifically imperative for peoples of different faiths to have a good capacity to view, hear, learn, understand, and empathize with each other's theological niche of truth and their depth of religiosity more closely in order to avert religious conflicts.[25] This corresponds to Wach's thought that it is essential for everyone to make a sincere effort to understand religions other than his or her own, however, he warned that this also implies no oversimplification and that "it is all said with the simple formula: let us share."[26]

To live in a nation with cultural, racial, ideological, religious differences like Indonesia must be very challenging. In such a religiously diverse world, we need to have an open-minded perspective that a man of religion cannot be ignorant and exclusive of the existence of those embracing other religions. It is only through a positive and constructive corporation between people of different faiths that the harmony of inter-religious relationship can be created. One of the very tricky issues with respect to inter-religious relationships is about religious claims to the truth, since one's view of religious truth would certainly have a real impact

24 Mukti Ali, *"Dialogue between Muslims and Christians in Indonesia and its Problems,"* (Unpublished paper presented in Ajaltoun Consultation, 16-2 March 1970).

25 Abdullah, *Studi Agama,* 73.

26 Quoted by Joseph M. Kitagawa, "Introduction, the Life and Thought of Joachim Wach," in Joachim Wach, *The Comparative Study of Religions*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), xlii. See also, Joachim Wach, "Comparative Study of Religion," in *The Philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan,* edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp, (New York: Tudor, 1952).

on his/her view of the relationship between various religious traditions. Over the last few decades, the fact of differences between religions has received widespread attention and appreciation among the UIN Muslim scholars. There are three patterns of approach and attitude that people of religion commonly take as their standpoint in response to the polemical issue about how the truth claims by various religions are confronted with each other: exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism.

Most religious believers in almost all great world religions have a strong tendency in the first place to "the claim to exclusivity in matters of faith."[27] In this extreme position of exclusivism, one sees and believes that his/her own religion is the only one that is true, and there is no valid path to salvation beyond it. Many people consider that exclusivism is something very natural and logical and they would regard it as illogical to think that there is one true religion, but that it does not belong to them. However, this way of thinking would not work when applied to certain religious traditions such as polytheism, tribalism, and henotheism. Neither polytheism, which recognizes many gods, nor tribalism, which focuses on worshiping ancestors and spirits, can be categorized as exclusivist. Polytheism may worship different gods and, similarly, many tribal religions worship different ancestors and spirits.[28] Unlike in the above-said religions, the adherents of monotheistic religions, like Judaism, Christianity and Islam, have much clearer tendencies towards the exclusivist religiosity more than those practicing polytheism, tribalism, and henotheism.

From the interviews conducted with some of UIN's Muslim

27 Gary E. Kessler, *Studying Religion, an Introduction through Cases*, (Boston: McGraw Hill), 322.

28 Ibid., 323.

scholars of comparative religious studies, it is found that many of them show strong consent with the ideas of religious exclusivism. They suggest that every Muslim needs to have this model of religiosity and use it as a paradigm of attitude and approach when dealing with the issue of Islamic truth and encountering the truth claims of different religious traditions. From the exclusivist point of view, it can be said that there is no truth outside of Islamic religion and this, therefore, means that in order to obtain salvation, deliverance, and enlightenment one should become a Muslim.

In line with this spirit of exclusivist religiosity, Burhanuddin Daya believes that "Islam is the truest among the other religions" and therefore he asserted that religions beyond Islam are basically only good while Islam is at once true and good. Although Daya clearly claims that Islam is the absolute truest, he shows a strong reluctance to claim that the other religions are false, and is averse to disparage, downgrade, and ridicule the other religions.[29] In confirmation of Daya's position, Fauzan Naif, who had extensive academic experience studying with Mukti Ali from undergraduate through postgraduate studies, argued that if every religion claims to be true and good, does Islam have the right to the claim of being the truest and best religion without negating and belittling the existence of the other religions?[30]

As also acknowledged by the other UIN scholars, Fauzan Naif often witnessed that Mukti Ali frequently stated that every Muslim should believe Islam to be the absolutely truest religion and yet, at the same time, pay due respect to the existence of the religions of

29 Burhanuddin Daya, interview by the author, Yogyakarta, 22 November 2011.

30 Fauzan Naif, interview by the author, Yogyakarta, 15 November 2011.

others.[31] This testimony is true since Mukti Ali himself said:

"Indeed, to assume that one religion is absolutely true is not a wrong assumption. I do even think that one should assume, and even believe, that the religion he/she embraces is the truer, and other people are also welcome to believe that his/her religion is the truer. Calamity will emerge if one believes that his/her religion is the truer and therefore others should follow the religion he or she adheres to."[32]

According to Djam'annuri, talking about the issue of religious exclusivism in Islam is not very easy. Djam'annuri acknowledges that there is some sort of dilemmatic view in terms of how the truth of Islam is confronted by the truth claimed by other religions. Many Muslim and non-Muslim scholars alike view and acknowledge that religions that came before Islam contain some extent of truth, and yet, Islam is believed to be the apex of the chain of those religions. This view raises such a crucial question as to whether religions prior to Islam can be considered valid or not. Djam'annuri finds in this question as something problematic which is not easy to answer. However, he highly stresses that every Muslim should hold a strong belief that Islam is the absolutely true religion and yet, at the same time, should have open-mindedness and authentic readiness to pay genuine respect for and create good communications and relationships with those who embrace religions other than Islam.[33] Mukti Ali argues that unless mutual respect and understanding are genuinely maintained between people of different religions, the idea of religious exclusivism, in which one claims his religion as the only true one while seeing the religions of others as false and then

31 Ibid.

32 Mukti Ali (b), *Ilmu Perbandingan Agama*, 54.

33 Djam'annuri, interview by the author, Yogyakarta, 20 October 2011.

tries by any means to convert the others into his religion, could jeopardize inter-religious harmony and tolerance.[34] The extreme form of religious exclusivism is based on the belief that religious truth, genuine revelation, and authentic salvation are only found in the one and only one religion and not in the other ones. Ian Barbour said, "Here the claim is that there is only one true religion and all others are simply false."[35] Or, in other words, the exclusivist approach to religions would say "that God as known within one particular religion, namely one's own, is the real God and that all the others are unreal."[36]

Meanwhile, with regard to the issue of how Islam is seen within the context of its encounter with other religions, it is somewhat justifiable for every Muslim to claim that Islam is the absolutely true religion and the religions of others are false, because some verses in the Quran, as the first basic source of Islamic teachings, provide an open room for an interpretation that validates an extreme type of exclusivist religiosity. As a theological term, exclusivism is quite new to Islam, but its theological content belongs to characteristics similar to that in some of the Quranic verses which have often been interpreted and used in order to maintain the exclusivist view of Islam, such as in the following verse: "The Religion before Allah is Islam (submission to His Will): Nor did the People of the Book dissent therefrom except through envy of each other, after knowledge had come to them. But if any deny the Signs of Allah, Allah is swift

34 Mukti Ali, *Kulijah Agama Islam,* (Jogjakarta: Jajasan Nida, 1970), 23.

35 Ian Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science,* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1991), 84.

36 John Hick, "A Pluralist View," in *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World,* edited by John Hick and et all, (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 39.

in calling to account."[37] Also, another verse of al-Qur'ān seems to have a similar tone: "If anyone desires a religion other than Islam (submission to Allah), never will it be accepted of him; and in the Hereafter he will be in the ranks of those who have lost (All spiritual good)."[38] Nevertheless, a tendency towards exclusivism is not typical of Muslims' attitude *per se*. In fact, this feeling of exclusivism and superiority has even been quite dominant among religions outside Islam, especially among the adherents of the so-called monotheistic religions, such as Judaism and Christianity.[39] In relation to that, Karl Rahner, an influential Catholic theologian even confirms the exclusivist character of Christianity by saying that "…no other religion – not even Islam – maintains so absolutely that it is the religion, the one and only valid revelation of the one living God, as does the Christian religion".[40]

Historically speaking, some scholars of comparative religious studies opine that religious exclusivism was first developed by Karl Barth whose ideas of exclusivist religiosity represent what Paul Knitter calls the "conservative evangelical model."[41] In the theological tendency of this kind, salvation, true revelation, and authentic encounter with God can be only found in and through Jesus Christ. Christianity's attitude towards the religious others has

37 A. Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'ān: Text, translation and commentary*, (Maryland: Amana Corporation, 1989), Ālu 'Īmrān: 19.

38 Ibid., Ālu Īmr'ān: 85.

39 Zulkarnaini, *Yahudi dalam Al-Quran (Teks, Konteks dan Diskursu Pluralisme Agama),* (Ph.D. thesis, UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2004), 336.

40 Karl Rahner, "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions." In *Christianity and Plurality: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, edited by Richard J. Plantinga, (London: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1999), 288-303.

41 Paul Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Towards the World Religions* (New York: Orbis Books, 1986), 81-86.

frequently been embodied in the Roman Catholic Church's axiom "*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*" (no salvation outside the Church), which means that "all those outside the Church are excluded from salvation."[42] By this attitude, interreligious dialogue and encounters with non-Christian religions are often intended as an occasion and attempt to marginalize the religions of others and to categorize them as false. As usual, this model of exclusivist religiosity can be found in many of the Christian missionary activities loaded with agendas to persuade and convert the adherents of non-Christian religions to that of Christianity. In this way, Christianity is believed to be the only true religion that can save the lost souls of other religious followers.[43]

Scholars of comparative religious studies realize that the extreme form of religious exclusivism can become "a short step to religious intolerance, contempt for the practices of others, self-righteous pride, and a refusal to engage in serious dialogue with those of other faiths."[44] In such intolerant inter-religious relations, theological teachings, and doctrines which underlie the idea of religious exclusivism have been prone to be exploited by religious bigots to promote, or at least to justify, religious conflicts. Critics of absolutism in religious truth often give a reminder that such a view:

42 Martin Forward, *Inter-religious Dialogue, a Short Introduction,* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2001), 41.

43 Kemal Ataman, *Understanding Other Religions: Al-Biruni's and Gadamer's 'Fusion of Horizons,'* (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2008), 7-8.

44 Kessler, *Studying Religion*, 324. However, the tendency towards religious intolerance can be found in all world religions as it is more a result of human's reading, understanding and interpretation of religious texts than as the actual, genuine meaning of religious texts itself. See as comparison, Abdul Salam Muhamad Shukri, "Islam and Tolerance: An Overview of Some Discourses on Tolerance and Intolerance of Islam," *International Journal of the Humanities*, vol. 20, no. 8, 2008, 27-34.

"Led to intolerance, crusades, inquisitions, religious wars, and the rationalization of colonialism. The grim history of Christian persecution of Jews is one consequence of such absolutism. Religious imperialism is particularly dangerous in a nuclear age"[45]

Taking these unintended consequences of religious exclusivism into consideration, some scholars of religious studies put forward an alternative approach which is called religious inclusivism in order to avert, or at least reduce, inter-religious conflicts that may be caused by the conflicting truth claims of various religions.

While religious exclusivism is built on a theological paradigm that truth and salvation can only be obtained in one religion or, in other words, only one of the many religions is fully true and salvific and hence, the other religions are considered invalid and no salvation exists in them, religious inclusivism seems to stand in a very different direction. For example, although both religious exclusivism and religious inclusivism share the same view that there exists a truth in one religion, they differ concerning another point regarding the possibility of truth in other religions. While the former assumes that there is one and only one religion that is a true, valid way to salvation and other religions are invalid, the latter holds that "truth is most clearly and fully expressed in one religion, but other religions also contain truth, although in a partial or hidden way."[46]

Historically speaking, religious inclusivism reflects as a theological paradigm of Roman Catholicism with regard to the

45 Barbour, *Religion in an Age,* 84.

46 Kessler, *Studying Religion*, 330. For further discussion of this issue, see Adian Husaini, *Exclusvism and Evangelism in the Second Vatican Council (A Critique in Light of the Ad Gentes and the Nostra Aetate),* (Kuala Lumpur:), 17-38.

relationship of Christians with other religions.[47] The views of religious inclusivism were first formulated during the Second Vatican Council, in which the council spawned what is popularly known as the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra Aetate*) on 28 October 1965.[48] Any discussion of religious inclusivism will, as usual, refer to Karl Rahner, one of the most prominent theologians of contemporary Catholicism, who wields great influence on the spread of the Catholic inclusivity views on non-Christian religions, be it before or after the Council.[49]

Some, if not most Muslim scholars and students of comparative religious studies at UIN Sunan Kalijaga, are apparently conversant with the notion of religious inclusivism. In this context, it is worth mentioning that Amin Abdullah can be said to be among the very vocal, influential supporters of religious inclusivism. According to Amin Abdullah, every religion possesses a right to claim to be absolutely true since each religion highlights the importance of what he calls the "history of salvation". Therefore, Abdullah suggests that every Muslim is commanded to claim that Islam is the absolutely true religion, and yet, at the same time, this truth claim must be accompanied by a better, just understanding that Islam also acknowledges the possibility that salvation and enlightenment may be found in the other religions.[50]

To shore up his view on this issue, Abdullah makes use of both sociological and theological arguments. By theological arguments, Abdullah argues that it is clear that Islam, as affirmed by some

47 Ataman, *Understanding Other Religions*, 15.

48 <http://www.cin.org/v2non.html>. (accessed 20 December 2014)

49 Ataman, *Understanding Other Religions*, 15.

50 Amin Abdullah, interview by the author, Yogyakarta. 11 November 2011.

verses of its Holy Book al-Quran,[51] recognizes that all those who believe in the one divine being, Allah, and the last day, and do righteous, good deeds are true believers, and, therefore they will receive the grace of Allah. By sociological arguments, Abdullah asserted that a plurality of race, ethnicity, language, value systems, culture, and religious belief systems must be seen as a social fact that exists, since it is as old as their primeval presence in the world.[52] Therefore, the multiplicity of society is not merely a unique characteristic of modern civilization, but it has been in existence since the very ancient period of human history.[53] Thus, to reject the plurality of human life means to deny the very nature of humanity.

The scriptural basis to which the UIN scholars often refer and use as their theological foothold to justify the ideas of religious inclusivism can be found in the two following verses of al-Qur'ān, which say:

> "Those who believe [in the Qur'ān], and those who follow the Jewish [Scriptures], and the Christians, and the Sabians, any who believe in God and the Last Day, and work righteousness, shall have their reward with their Lord: on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve."[54]

> "Those who believe (in the Qur'an), those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), and the Sabians and the Christians,- any who believe in Allah and the Last Day, and work righteousness,- on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve."[55]

51 The Quranic, Al-Baqarah: 62.

52 Amin Abdullah, interview by the author, Yogyakarta. 11 November 2011.

53 Abdullah, *Studi Agama,* 72.

54 Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'ān: Text,* al-Baqarah: 62.

55 Ibid., al-Maidah: 69.

The above Quranic verses have been construed by some contemporary Muslim intellectuals by using a hermeneutical approach in order to corroborate what they believe as a unique Islamic view that the People of the Book (*Ahl al-Kitāb*), those whom the Qur'an cites as having received the divine revelation, may have, to some extent, a valid way to the eschatological deliverance.[56] The Islamic view of inclusivism, which may emanate from such a hermeneutical approach to the aforesaid Quranic verses, can be seen in its influence even in some Western sources. Take for example in the work of Cyril Glassé who has been quoted by Madjid as saying "Thus, some Muslims believe as a matter of course that Christians do not attain to heaven, while others concede that Christians achieve salvation."[57] With a relatively similar tone, yet with some degree of simplification, a Western scholar of religious studies Gary E. Kessler said that, "The Quran recognizes all true believers in one divine being as religiously correct, whether or not they are Muslims."[58] This, as such, is only because of the fact that Islam, as the Quranic verses above implied, has been vindicated to have a greater propensity to include and acknowledge the truth of religions outside Islam, including the religions of the People of the Book.

Along with Amin Abdullah, there are other UIN scholars that share the principles of religious inclusivism. Ajat Sudrajat, who earned his doctorate degree from UIN Sunan Kalijaga and currently holds the position of the Dean of the Education Faculty

56 Nurcholish Madjid, "Islamic Roots of Modern Pluralism, Indonesian Experiences," in *Studia Islamika*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1994, 55-78.

57 Ibid. See, Cyril Glassé, "Ahl al-Kitāb," in *The Concise Encyclopaedia of Islam,* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991).

58 Kessler, *Studying Religion*, 323.

in Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta (UNY), consents to the notion that those embracing religions other than Islam may still have a chance to obtain soteriological salvation. Like Amin Abdullah, Sudrajat also strengthens his arguments about religious inclusivism by making use of the Holy Qur'an, Chapter Two, verse 62. When confronted with the question of whether Islam is the only one true religion and how a Muslim should view other religions and their attitude towards them, Sudrajat insisted that every Muslim should be confident and convinced that Islam is the true religion. Despite that, he added further, the truth of religions outside Islam, especially religions that share the same Abrahamic roots of monotheism, can be justified as long as their core concept of divinity has not gone astray from the genuine, absolute monotheism.[59]

The readiness that some of the UIN scholars have in dealing with the ideas of religious inclusivism and rendering it into an Islamic context was influenced to some significant extent by their academic experience of being acquainted with modern discourses developed in the discipline of Comparative Religion, as well as the contemporary approaches, methodologies, and analytical instruments applied in the field. In his examination of Islamic insight about the issue of eschatological salvation, Syafrudin interprets several verses in al-Qur'an with regard to the issue by utilizing hermeneutics as a tool of inquiry.[60] Syafrudin realises that there have been differing opinions among the Muslims about the good tidings promised for the non-Muslims (Jews, Christian, and Sabians) as clearly expressed in al-Qur'ān 2:62, 5:69 and 3:199, and this has raised three questions. First, whether the literal

59 Ajat Sudrajat, interview by the author, Yogyakarta, on 16 March 2012.

60 Syafrudin, *Islam dan Keselamatan dalam al-Qur'ān (Memaknai Kembali Pesan al-Qur'an),* (Ph. D. Thesis, UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2009).

expression used in these verses is meant to simply be mere praise or a real salvation. Second, is the salvation promised in the verses addressed to all the religions coming prior to and after the advent of Islam? Third, does the salvation declared in the verses include the liberation and enlightenment in the worldly life and the hereafter, at once, or either in only one of both?[61]

The use of hermeneutics in interpreting and analysing the Quranic discourses on peace and salvation has brought Syafrudin to come up with the conclusion in response to the above said questions that the concepts of peace and salvation in Islam are inclusive and tolerant in nature. He goes on to state that the Quranic views on salvation are not confined to the Muslim *Ummah* only, yet it rather includes all the believers and the righteous among the non-Muslims as well.[62] According to Syafrudin, "those verses (of al-Qur'an) above offer an insight that salvation may be given to all the adherents of the different religions and this is in effect until today."[63] Moreover, he believes that one who perceives that the Qur'anic vision of salvation is addressed just to the Muslims would tend to have an intolerant attitude towards the religious others, and vice versa, an inclusivistic understanding of the Qur'anic salvific views would result in more of an inter-religious sense.[64]

Some of the UIN scholars who stand along the lines of the principles of religious inclusivism go even further by saying that even though Islam is held to be the last and the seal of the religions that have previously been sent down to human beings, this does not necessarily mean that the existence of Islam is to

61 Ibid., 157-158.

62 Ibid., 162.

63 Ibid., 158.

64 Ibid.

abrogate those preceding religions. Take for instance Abdul Mustaqim, who earned his doctorate degree from the University and currently works as a lecturer at the University. He sought to comprehend the intention of the Qur'anic verse 19 of chapter 3 and other similar ones (Q. 3:85, Q. 5:3) to try and understand from a different perspective from what has commonly been held in most of the classical interpretations of al-Qur'an. In Abdul Mustaqim's opinion, Islam is of course the absolutely true and last religion, but it was not revealed with the aim of nullifying the religions, such as Judaism and Christianity, which came before it.[65]

The question of whether the Qur'anic verses 3:85 and 5:3 are intended as *naskh,* which means to abrogate the other Qur'anic verses of 2:62, 5:69, and 3:199 has also been raised and discussed by Zulkarnaini in his dissertation.[66] Zulkarnaini found that most of the classical Muslim scholars ('ulamā') hold the view that the former verses are aimed to annul the latter ones. Nevertheless, he discovers the opposite opinion suggested by Ibn al-Jawzī. Zulkarnaini quoted Ibn al-Jawzī as arguing that the rule of *naskh* cannot be applied to the Qur'anic verses that have the characteristics of *khabar* (news), but instead it can be applied to the ones relating to the matters of *halāl* (lawful) and *harām* (unlawful). Yet, Ibn al-Jawzī expounds that the intention of the Qur'anic verses regarding the salvation of the religious others is addressed to the Jews and Christians living before Prophet Muhammad. Or, if the target of these verses is concerning those living at the time of the Prophet, they must already be accepting and having faith in him, and committing no corruption (*tahrīf*) over their religions. However, according to

65 Abdul Mustaqim, interview by the author, Yogyakarta, on 10 September 2014.

66 Zulkarnaini, *Yahudi dalam Al-Qur'ān*, 333-339.

Zulkarnaini, like most of the classical Muslim 'ulamā', irrespective of whether they agree or disagree with the application of *naskh* over the above Qur'anic verses, Ibn al-Jawzī's views on the religions outside Islam has been theologically exclusivist in the sense that Islam is the absolutely true and saving religion and the others are false and not a path to eschatological salvation.[67]

In his examination of the notion of religious truth claims, Abdul Mustaqim argues that "There is the Absolute Truth (with a capital letter T), which belongs only to Allah, while we (as humans) are all only able to grasp little truths (with a small letter). The reason for this is logically simple in that Allah is the unlimited being while we are the limited creature."[68] By this philosophical perspective, Abdul Mustaqim firmly emphasizes that Islam, which is revealed as a manifestation of the Absolute Truth, the Ultimate Reality, is the absolutely true religion, and yet, on the other hand, he asserts that since the Absolute Truth was revealed in very diverse forms of religion and because of human inadequacies to comprehend the Absolute Truth in a comprehensive way, the religions outside Islam also have, to a certain extent, a right to obtain the truth and gain salvation.

Moreover, Abdul Mustaqim said that no one has the authority to negate and annihilate the truth claims of various religions. This contention has been affirmed by Waryono Abdul Ghafur, another UIN scholar quoting Quraish Shihab's opinion on this issue, that it is the nature of religions to be diverse and multiple in terms of their theological foundation and ways of worship. In addition, people of religion are not entitled to be absolutist in their claims to the

67 Ibid.

68 Abdul Mustaqim, interview by the author, Yogyakarta, on 10 September 2014.

truth and salvation, since it is the absolutely prerogative of Allah, the only one, who would finally decide which of the religions He is pleased with and which of them are false.[69]

Abdul Mustaqim dubbed his understanding of religious truth as "the open concept of religious truth claim," one that he distinguished from what he called "the final, closed concept of religious truth claim." By the former, Abdul Mustaqim explains, a Muslim needs to understand and differentiate between the core of Islam as *dīn*, which is stable and unchanging, and the human knowledge and expression about Islam as *tadayyun*, which is unstable, moving, shifting, and diverse.[70] It is worth mentioning that the arguments of Abdul Mustaqim's about his religious inclusivism rest upon a number of the Qur'anic verses, such as verses 5:48,[71]16:93,[72] and others, which imply that the plurality of religions is a given as the *Sunnat al-lāh,* the way and plan of Allah.

69 Ghafur, *Millah Ibrāhīm,* 422. See also, M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir al-Misbah, Pesan, Kesan dan Keserasian al-Qur'an,* (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2000), vol. V, 208-209.

70 Abdul Mustaqim, interview by the author, Yogyakarta, on 10 September 2014.

71 "To hee We sent the scripture in truth, confirming the scripture that came before it and guarding it in safety: so judge between them by what Allah hath revealed, and follow not their vain desires, diverging from the Truth that hath come to thee. To each among you have We prescribed a law and an open way. If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His Plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to Allah; It is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute". See, A. Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'ān: Text…,* al-Maidah: 48.

72 "If Allah so willed, He could make you all one people: but He leaves straying whom He pleases, and He guides whom He pleases: but ye shall certainly be called to account for all your actions. See, Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'ān: Text,* al-Nahl: 93.

Accordingly, although it might not be possible for the different religions to come to a common meeting point due to their diversity of theological foundations, Abdul Mustaqim suggests that there is still one thing that people of various religions can have in common and share, which is what al-Qur'ān calls *fa'stabiq al-khayrāt*, "so strive as in a race in all virtues." It is to this standpoint that all people of multi-religious traditions are acquiescent to a common truth of such good deeds, virtues, and values as wisdom, integrity, justice, sincerity, helping those in need, committing no sins or evil deeds, and so forth and so on.[73]

The Islamic perspective of religious pluralism, according to Hamim Ilyas, is genuinely rooted in the very nature of Islam as *rahmatan li al-'ālamīn*, "As a mercy for all creatures,"[74] a description used by the Qur'an in order to define and characterize the glorious, affectionate personality of Prophet Muhammad.[75] This perspective corresponds to the fact that Prophet Muhammad has been ordained to propitiate and reconcile between the People of the Book, who were in dispute over the issues of theological truth claims, and to invite them into what al-Qur'ān depicts as "common terms" (*kalimatun sawāun*):

> "Say: 'O people of the Book! Come to common terms as between us and you: That we worship none but Allah; that we associate no partners with Him; that we erect not, from among ourselves, Lords and patrons other than Allah.' If then they turn back, say ye: 'Bear witness that we (at least) are Muslims

73 Abdul Mustaqim, interview by the author, Yogyakarta, on 10 September 2014.

74 Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'ān: Text,* al-Anbiyā':107.

75 Hamim Ilyas, interview by the author, Yogyakarta, on 16 February 2012.

(bowing to Allah's will)'".[76]

In Zulkarnaini's view, the above verse which concerns the invitation of the Qur'an addressed to the People of the Book, requesting them to come to and follow the common ground: to worship none but Allah and associate no partners with Him, is reflecting the inclusive nature of the Qur'an.[77] In addition, to substantiate his views on this issue, Zulkarnaini points out that among the very reasons why the Qur'an, as can be found in several verses, often launches harsh criticism against Judaism and Christianity, is not only because of their strong tendency to be exclusive towards each other,[78] but rather because the Qur'an bears a divine mission that is to include and bind the People of the Book into the common commitment to monotheism and virtues connecting humans with their Creator and with one another.[79]

From the above descriptive narration, it can be concluded that both religious exclusivism and religious inclusivism show clear consent to some issues in relation to religious diversity, and yet, on the other hand, they differ in other issues. First, they equally highlight that there is only one religion, which is, "in some sense, closer to the truth about matters of God/Ultimate Reality and salvation/liberation than other religions."[80] In addition, they similarly subscribe to the view that only one's own religion is truer

76 Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'ān: Text*, āl ʿ Imrān: 64.

77 Zulkarnaini, *Yahudi dalam Al-Qur'ān*, 339.

78 Ibid., 340.

79 M. Amin Abdullah, "Muslim-Christian Relations: Reinventing the Common Ground to Sustain a Peaceful Coexistence in the Global Era," a paper presented at the Gülen Conference in Melbourne, on 15 July 2009.

80 Chad V. Meister, *Introducing Philosophy of Religion,* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 26.

and closer to the truth than the religions of others, and, moreover, these irreconcilable claims to the truth have resulted in and shaped the differences between those religions. With this in mind, the UIN Muslim scholars, be those whose tendency is towards religious exclusivism or religious inclusivism, are in fact bound by the same conviction that Islam is the true, salvific religion. This theological position is held by most religious believers, irrespective of their preference, whether they are religiously exclusive or inclusive.

Second, in addition to the above parallels they agree upon, the supporters of religious exclusivism and religious inclusivism differ in responding to the question as to whether or not the other religions outside the one true religion contain truth and so can be true paths to salvation/liberation. For religious exclusivists, it is clear that "fundamental truth is found only in one religion, and salvation/liberation is also exclusive to that one true religion."[81] This means that the religions of others are false and excluded from eschatological deliverance and liberation. In contrast, religious inclusivism affirms that the divine truth does exist and manifest fully in one religion, which has the privilege to be a true pathway to salvation. However, at the same time, it also acknowledges that a lesser degree of truth probably exists in the other religions and thus salvation and liberation may also be found in them.[82]

The issues regarding the incompatibility of truth claims among the many religious traditions has led modern scholars of religions to reckon and formulate an approach that can be used as an alternative to the two models of religious exclusivism and inclusivism. The reason being is that these two models are perceived as no longer adequate to discern and explain the complicated

81 Ibid., 28.

82 Ibid.

issue of religious truth claims among the adherents of different faiths. So, they propose what is known as religious pluralism as an alternative. Nevertheless, it is notoriously difficult to make a clear-cut definition of what religious pluralism is, since the term has no single meaning. The definitions of religious pluralism given by scholars of religion vary widely according to their respective preferences academically, religiously, and ideologically.

Religious pluralism may be equated to mere religious diversity (plurality) and both of these words can be used interchangeably. Furthermore, many scholars of religion try a more philosophically sophisticated definition, given the fact that religious plurality alone is too plain and simple when it is simply meant as "recognition of the fact that there are different religions and faiths in a society or a country."[83] Instead, religious pluralism requires what Diana L. Eck called "the cultivation of public space where we all encounter one another."[84] With this in mind, religious pluralism goes beyond the acknowledgement and toleration of different religions and, rather, it must be entrenched with persistent attempts among the followers of different faiths to create a mutually better understanding and engagement with one another.[85]

In this respect, it is important to refer to John Hick, one of the most noted philosophers of religion and the most eminent advocate of religious pluralism. The straightforward argument

83 Mun'im Sirry, "'Compete with One Another in Good Work': Exegesis of Qur'an Verse 5.48 and Contemporary Muslim Discourses on Religious Pluralism," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations,* vol. 20, no. 4, 2009, 423-438.

84 Diana L. Eck, "The Challenge of Pluralism," *Nieman Reports,* vol. XLVII, no. 2, 1993. <http://www.pluralism.org/articles/eck_1993_challenge_of_pluralism> (retrieved on 14 January 2104).

85 Ibid.

of religious pluralism that John Hick puts forward in relation to his critique of religious exclusivism and inclusivism relies on his suggestion that every religion needs to transform its dogmatic perspective of salvation and liberation from the self-centredness into Reality-centeredness. Concerning this issue, Hick stated that:

"…this is the central concern of all the great world religions. They are not primarily philosophies or theologies but primarily ways of salvation/liberation. And it is clear that salvation, in this sense of an actual change in human beings from natural self-centredness towards a re-centring in the Divine, the Ultimate, the Real, is a long process – though there are often peak moments within it – and that this process is taking place not only within Christianity but also, and so far as we can tell to a more or less equal extent, within the other great traditions."[86]

The ideology of religious pluralism marks a paradigm shift about religious truth claims from a paradigm of religious exclusivism and inclusivism, as has been previously explained, into a paradigm that acknowledges that there is the plurality of the equally same true paths to salvation which may exist in various religions. In this respect, John Hick said, "God as known to Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and others represents different manifestations in relation to humanity, different "faces" or "masks" or *personae* of God, the Ultimate Reality."[87]

Religious pluralism as an ideology has been an interesting topic of discussion among the UIN scholars. However, this subject becomes even more challenging when examined and deliberated within the Indonesian context of inter-religious relations and

86 John Hick, *Christian Theology of Religions,* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), p. 18.

87 Hick, "a pluralist view," 39.

state-religion relations. However, it is not part of the present work's interest to delve in more detail about these two issues, although they may be mentioned in passing here and there. Instead, this section seeks to discover how the UIN scholars argue about religious pluralism in its relation to the two previous approaches (religious exclusivism and inclusivism) to the truth claims of different religions. In a number of works and writings of the UIN scholars of religious studies, the terms "religious pluralism" and "religious inclusivism" are both sometimes used interchangeably, albeit frequently without thorough, clear elucidation about what they really mean by these terms.[88]

The use of the term religious pluralism in any written and spoken expression could lead to misunderstanding among its audiences. However, this misconception would hardly occur if this term is explained in enough detail and defined as merely the reality of multiple religious traditions living in a society. As has been previously alluded to in brief, inasmuch as religious pluralism has different definitions given by different scholars, to adopt it into the Islamic context and use it as an approach to religions other than Islam is debatable. Recently, the ideas of religious pluralism, along with that of secularism and liberalism, have become a contentious topic among Indonesian Muslims.

Following the issuance of religious *fatwā* No. 7/MUNASVII/MUI/11/2005 by the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) on the banning of such worldviews as religious pluralism, secularism, and liberalism, the issue of religious pluralism became an even

88 Abdullah, *Islamic Studies,* 339; A. Mukti Ali, "Ilmu Perbandingan Agama, Dialog, Dakwah dan Misi," a paper presented in Seminar Indonesia-Belanda tentang Ilmu Perbandingan Agama (Indonesia-Netherlands Seminar on the Comparative Study of Religion), Yogyakarta, on July 16-20, 1990; Ghafur, *Millah Ibrāhīm,* 420-425.

more widely heated polemic.[89] This religious edict is grounded in the view that the theological underpinning of these worldviews are utterly incompatible with the fundamentals of Islam, as well as were considered to be a menace to the Islamic faith of the Muslim *Ummah*. Indeed, long before the religious *fatwa* was issued by the MUI, the concept of religious pluralism has been a subject of controversy among many Indonesian Muslim scholars, including those who serve as teachers at UIN Sunan Kalijaga and other state centres of Islamic higher learning.[90]

The interviews with a number of the UIN scholars conducted for this research show that none of them agree with the pluralist definition of religious truth claims that "ultimately all world religions are correct, each offering a different path and partial perspective vis-á-vis the Ultimate Reality."[91] Take for example Amin Abdullah's response when asked about what he means by religious pluralism, a term that he has sometimes used interchangeably with religious plurality in a number of his works, but without clear distinction and an in-depth clarification. He said that what he means by the two terms is simply to refer to its etymologically generic definition which is more about a matter of acknowledgement of religious diversity as a social fact, rather than as a matter of philosophical dispute about theological truth claims between different religious traditions.[92] According to Abdullah, religious diversity

89 Husaini, *Hegemoni Kristen-Barat,* 101-132.

90 For further discussion of this topic, see Syamsuddin Arif, *Orientalis dan Diabolisme Pemikiran,* (Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2008), 116; Husaini, *Hegemoni Kristen-Barat,* 101-132.

91 Meister, *Introducing Philosophy,* 26.

92 Amin Abdullah, interview by the author, Yogyakarta, on 11 November 2011.

> "…is about fact and reality, and not about theological differences. It means that on the level of theology, we have to admit that every religion has its own rituals that differ from one religion to others. On the social level, pluralism is more than 'admitting' differences; we need active engagement between communities to build togetherness/cooperation. Only by cooperation the nation will grow better."[93]

Amin Abdullah opines that the notions of truth claims and eschatological salvation are very central and therefore, inevitably, must be present in every religious tradition. Religious truth claims are theologically monolithic in nature in that each religion would claim itself as absolutely true and salvific, and at once exclude other religions from sharing the truth claim. Nevertheless, Amin Abdullah also points out that the Qur'anic verses address the issue of human religiosity with four different perspectives: some verses of the Qur'an speak and assert about the oneness of humanity; some of them acknowledge the existence of social, cultural, and ethnic diversity; others display the characteristics of religious exclusivism; and yet several others reflect the spirit of religious inclusivism.[94]

Considering the foregoing Qur'anic perspectives, Amin Abdullah is of the opinion that it is important to put and bind all of them together, rather than to pick one or two and leave the others. Based on his sound understanding of a modern hermeneutical approach to the Qur'an, he argues that the diversity of religions

93 Amin Abdullah and Syafa'atun Almirzanah, "Celebrating Differences through Dialogue in Indonesia. The Significance of Understanding Religions Today," in *Muslim Christian Relations Observed, Comparative Studies from Indonesia and the Netherlands,* edited by Volker Kuster and Robert Setio, (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsantalt GmbH, 2014), 343-344.

94 Ibid.

needs to be perceived as a social fact but without annihilating the theological truth claims as the core belief of each religion. In such a way of understanding, to treat all religions as equal before the law and state would give much benefit for the creation of interreligious harmony and cooperation.[95]

In his paper for the Indonesian-Netherland's Seminar on the Comparative Study of Religions in 1990, Mukti Ali elaborated the challenges the people of various religions are facing in the global world and insisted on the significance of Comparative Religion for inter-religious dialogue as well as for religious missionary work. He used the term "religious pluralism" in the paper in order to affirm the plurality of religions as an undeniable fact in every society and yet his analysis of interreligious relations was nevertheless totally controverting certain worldviews, like that of pantheism and religious syncretism, which share with religious pluralism a philosophical view that all religions are equally valid paths to salvation.[96]

Any thought that suggests the necessity to create a new religion as a right way to build better interreligious relations, by adopting elements from the existing different religions and tying them into a synthesis, is unjustifiable and unacceptable. To Mukti Ali, all religions are deeply ingrained in their respective historical roots, entrenched in distinct fundamental beliefs, which may not be shared by one religion with another, albeit there may be some similarities among them that make them appear similar, in reality they are not.[97]

As mentioned earlier, all of the UIN scholars interviewed for

95 Ibid.

96 Mukti Ali, "Ilmu Perbandingan Agama, Dialog,"

97 Ibid.

this research disagree with the ideas of religious pluralism. Like Mukti Ali, Amin Abdullah, and his other colleagues, Burhanuddin Daya is unequivocal in his criticism and rejection of religious pluralism which acknowledges not only the significance of religious tolerance, but also the ideas of religious relativism which claim that all religions equally provide truth and deliver salvation. Daya, in fact, not only stands against religious pluralism, but he also shows a firm resistance to religious inclusivism. He voices a harsh caution that these two secular worldviews, instead of giving benefit to the Muslim *Ummah*, have been very tricky and carry more threat and danger into the world of Islamic faith. As a Muslim scholar who holds up the exclusivist truth of Islam, Daya points out the verity of Islam as implied in the famous Arabic adage *al-Islām ya'lū wa lā yu'lā 'alayh,* which is depicting Islam as superior and nothing else is superior to it."[98]

Methodology and Approaches in Comparative Religion

The significance of the application of contemporary methodologies in approaching and analysing the world of religion has long caught the attention of Muslim scholars at UIN Sunan Kalijaga. From the very beginning, since first assigned with the pioneering tasks of cultivating and fostering the Department of Comparative Religion at the University in 1963, Mukti Ali often called upon both Muslim scholars and students of religion to develop and enhance their academic proficiency with modern methodologies and approaches employed in the discipline of Comparative Religion. In his public speech delivered in the Forth Dies Natalis ceremony of IAIN Sunan Kalijaga in 12 July 1964,

98 Burhanuddin Daya, interview by the author, Yogyakarta, 22 November 2011.

Mukti Ali accentuated that:

> "The theories and sciences of religion, the culture and civilization of the West, or Occidentalism, must be developed within the milieu of Indonesia's Islamic society. 'Self-isolationism' must be eliminated from Indonesia's Muslim intelligentsia community, and with this Occidentalism we would be able to enter into dialogue with the Western world."[99]

In 1990, or about quarter-century after his above speech was published in 1964, Mukti Ali was lamenting and expressing his disappointment that during this period of time, from 1964 to 1990, no single book had been written by UIN scholars about the methodology for the comparative study of religions.[100]

Apparently, Mukti Ali's expression of discontent with the poor productivity of the UIN scholars of comparative religious studies has inspired some scholars, like Amin Abdullah and others, to reanimate the spirit of advancing the discipline of Comparative Religion at the University. According to Amin Abdullah, contemporary studies of religions are facing major challenges posed by the complexity of a multi-religious and multi-cultural society everywhere in the world. By taking the modern context of Indonesia as a point of departure, he further emphasizes that it may no longer be adequate to analyse and construe such a pluralistic nation as Indonesia by simply relying on the theological, normative, and doctrinal instruments of approach. Therefore, it is instrumental for comparative religious studies in Indonesia to be equipped with historical and critical methodologies of research

99 Mukti Ali (a), *Ilmu Perbandingan Agama,* 32.

100 A. Mukti Ali (b), *Ilmu Perbandingan Agama di Indonesia,* (Yogyakarta: IAIN Sunan Kalijaga Press, 1988), 6.

and strengthened with interdisciplinary approaches adopted from different areas in the social sciences.[101]

The need to incorporate scientific methodology into the curricular design of Comparative Religion is also affirmed by Adjat Sudrajat who earned his Ph.D. degree from the UIN Sunan Kalijaga and recently became the dean of the Education Science Faculty in UNY (Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta/State University of Yogyakarta). He views that the application of scientific methodology in comparative religious studies would help researchers and scholars of religion maintain, to a significant extent, their objectivity and impartiality in their approach to religious data.[102]

Furthermore, scholars of religion, especially those engrossed with the ideas of scientific positivism, argue that comparative religious studies must include not only methodologies of inquiry and tools of analysis practiced in social sciences, but also incorporate those exercised in natural sciences. By putting religious studies within the perspective of natural sciences, any religion or religious data in question should be treated and observed by drawing on research techniques and methods of experiment applied to the realm of organic and inorganic creatures.[103]

However, Mukti Ali has a different stance on the issue just mentioned pointing out that the application of natural sciences methodology into the area of religious studies has long been questioned, even by modern scholars of religion such as Henry Bergson, Edmund Husserl, Rudolf Otto, Friedrich *von Hüge*l, and others. Modern scholars of religion regard experimental and

101 Abdullah, *Studi Agama,* 4-7.

102 Ajat Sudrajat, interview by the author, Yogyakarta, on 16 March 2012.

103 Mukti Ali (b), *Ilmu Perbandingan Agama,* 60-61.

quantitative techniques of research used in natural sciences as very positivistic and strong-minded with a quantifiable degree of objectivity, which is obviously opposing the nature of religious phenomenon, which is very subjective and private. Mukti Ali underlined that the tenacity of the hypothesis, which generalizes that scientific approach, by itself is sufficient to be applied in the study of religions, is no longer defendable.[104]

In respect of the teaching of the Comparative Religion discipline in Islamic higher learning institutions, Mukti Ali cogently suggests that the discipline of theology should also be included as an auxiliary discipline into the curricular structure of comparative religious studies. Islamic Theology, in particular, occupies a central place not only within the level of Islamic higher learning institutions, but also in the whole system of Islamic education. Mukti Ali argues that it is quite necessary for comparative religious studies to review its relationship with the other disciplines of sciences, including with Theology. [105] To support his standpoint on the importance of theology as an auxiliary discipline to enrich Comparative Religion, Mukti Ali quotes Hendrick Kraemer as saying that:

> "Only theology, if rightly understood, is able to produce that attitude of freedom of the spirit and of impartial understanding, combined with criticism and evaluation transcending all imprisonment in preconceived ideas and principles as ultimate standards of reference."[106]

104 Ibid. See also, Wach, *The Comparative Study,* 15.

105 Ibid.,52.

106 Ibid. See also, Hendrick Kraemer, *Religion and the Christian Faith*, (Cambridge: James Clark Co., Ltd., 2002), 53.

If Kraemer's opinion is true, according to Mutki Ali, it means that only those who see and study a religious tradition "from the inside" are competent in understanding the religion being observed. Yet, this does not necessarily mean that they have to ignore and disregard the validity of research outcomes generated in comparative religious studies.[107] In line with Mukti Ali's opinion above, Amin Abdullah asserts that the hard core of human religiosity, in fact, lies within what is called theological beliefs and normative doctrines of religion.[108] This implies that the discipline of Comparative Religion in its approach to any religion as an object of research, however scientific and rational the method of analysis used in the discipline is, may not neglect theological dimensions as the hard core of human religiosity. To substantiate this issue in question, Erik Borgman and Stephan van Erp rightly state that:

"Theology should be an integral part of religious studies, in as far as religious communities are embodiment of theologies. At the same time, religious studies should be 'succeeded' by theology, in as far as theology studies the embodied practices of faith in the world"[109]

Theology in general, no doubt, occupies a special place in every discussion of comparative religious studies. Theology and the comparative study of religion are both strongly linked, and yet the nature of the relationship between the two disciplines is highly complex. Some scholars of religion consent to the view that the field of Comparative Religion emerged from Theology while others

107 Ibid.

108 Abdullah, *Studi Agama,* 9.

109 Erik Borgman and Stephan van Erp, "Theology as the Past and Future of Religious Studies, an Incarnational Approach," in *Theology and Religious Studies in Higher Education,* edited by Darlene L. Bird and Simon G. Smith, (New York: Continuum, 2009), 56.

definitely differ in perceiving the nature of that relationship, given the fact that "By some, religious studies and theology are seen to be complementary, by others they are seen to be opposed."[110] Based on the historical context of how the two subjects developed and interacted in Christianity, Frank Whaling concluded, "Religious studies in its modern form arose from within the bosom of Christian theology and distanced itself from it by politeness or revolt."[111]

Meanwhile, the growth of Islamic theology and religious studies that took place in the Muslim world of scholarship seems to have a certain pattern in common with that happening in the Christian world in the sense that the tradition of studying and teaching religions other than Islam was rooted and inspired by Islamic doctrinal foundations. The Holy Quran and the Traditions (sayings and practices) of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.), the two main sources of Islamic tenets and credos, provide Muslims with a theological guideline concerning how they should respectfully deal with the other faiths. Accordingly, Stanton is right when pointing out that: "No scripture in the world teaches such a 'comparative religion' as the Quran."[112]

However, the nature of human religiosity is extremely complex, so it is barely possible for any field of science, which

110 Frank Whaling, "Theological Approaches," in *Approaches to the Study of Religion,* edited by Peter Connoly, (London: Cassell, 1999), 226.

111 Ibid., 227. See also, "Introduction," in *Theology and Religious Studies in Higher Education, Global Perspective,* edited by Darlene L.Bird and Simon G. Smith, (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2009), 2.

112 Quoted by Kamar Oniah Kamaruzzaman from Weitbrecht Stanton, *The Teaching of the Qur'an,* (New York: Biblo and Tannen Booksellers and Publishers Inco., 1969), 71. See Kamar Oniah Kamaruzzaman, *Early Muslim Scholarship in Religionswissenschaft*, (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 2003), 8.

came into existence as a product of the innately limited power of a human's reasoning, to obtain an all-inclusive picture of humanity's spiritual faculty. Considering the fact that the epistemological basis of Islamic Theology has actually been somewhat influenced by humanity's response to certain social, cultural, and political conditions, Amin Abdullah opines that this approach must also have limitations to achieve a comprehensive understanding about religion.[113] He then maintains that Islamic Theology in its approach to any religious data needs to collaborate with other scientific methodology and develop its tools of research by taking as much as possible of the beneficial elements provided by various disciplines of modern sciences such as Sociology, Phenomenology, Linguistics, Philology, Psychology, Anthropology, and so on.[114]

As far as the scientific method of comparative religious studies is concerned, Mukti Ali explains that the term "scientific" must be well understood, otherwise it may be misleading. Re-echoing Joachim Wach's explanation about the scientific studies of religion, Mutki Ali reveals a double meaning that belongs to the term scientific: one is in its narrower sense, which refers to the methods of research applied in the so-called natural sciences, and the other is in its broader sense, which means "any procedure which works with logical and coherent discipline from clearly indicated premises."[115] According to Mukti Ali, each of these two methods bears some weaknesses and what is accordingly needed is how to integrate and develop both of them into a new synthesis

113 Abdullah, *Studi Agama,* 121-122.

114 Ibid., 133-134.

115 Mukti Ali (b), *Ilmu Perbandingan Agama,* 60. See also, Wach, *Comparative Study,* 14.

of methodology in religious studies.[116]

In truth, the comparative study of religion is not the only valid way to study religions, because it is only one of the many different approaches, like Philosophy of Religion, History of Religion, Psychology of Religion, Sociology of Religion, and Theology.[117] This variety of approaches to a religion could provide a valuable advantage, which is complementary and instrumental to one another. From a historical approach, in order to understand a religion one must trace and analyse how the religion in question emerged and grew throughout its historical development. Additionally, the role of religious ideas and institutions, as well as other forces within the religion, has to be critically examined by historical interpretation. However, the historian is never working alone without receiving any help and influence from different approaches. This means that in order for the historian of religion to explore and scrutinize religious facts of the past, they would have to take a benefit from the factual and literary evidence provided by archaeological and philological research.[118]

Furthermore, while historical analysis of course becomes an indispensable component in comparative religious studies, the work of the historians of religions has been made reachable to a wider audience by the contributions of the painstaking work of linguists and archaeologists. In addition, the approach of psychology of religion supplies the study of religions with valuable information about the inner and outer dimensions of religious experiences displayed by the behaviour and deeds of the individual

116 Mukti Ali (b), *Ilmu Perbandingan Agama*, 60.

117 Ibid., 54.

118 Wach, *The Comparative Study of Religion*, 21-22; Mukti Ali (b), *Ilmu Perbandingan Agama*, 60-61.

and groups of people of religion. In addition, the analysis of social and economic interaction within religious communities has also added very colourful subtleties to the religious studies.[119]

Still, it is worth mentioning that among the most important approaches applied in the study of religion is Phenomenology, founded by Edmund Husserl, and later on was developed by scholars of religion such as Max Scheler, Rudolf Otto, Gerardus van der Leeuw, and others. Husserl considered this approach as "a strictly philosophical discipline with the purpose of limiting and supplementing the purely psychological explanation of the process of the mind." To approach and grasp religious facts through Phenomenology a researcher would have "To let manifestations of the religious experience speak for themselves rather than to force them into any preconceived scheme."[120]

The interconnectedness between the different approaches used in religious studies, as described briefly above, represents a clear picture of how religion(s) as an object of scientific research becomes a meeting point through which various areas of science share and contribute valuable information of religious facts. In this respect, Mukti Ali realized that it is obviously significant for comparative religious studies to be sustained not only with various modern methods including historical, archaeological, philological, sociological, and phenomenological approaches, but also with Theology. Mukti Ali considered the method that integrates the study of religion with Theology a more apt way to understand a religion, since it is a form of understanding an object of research from within, a way of understanding which he called the "dogmatic

119 Wach, *The Comparative Study,* 23.

120 Ibid., 24.

approach".[121] Mukti Ali dubs this integrated method and approach in Comparative Religion with "scientific-cum-doctrinaire," a term that has an equivalent meaning with "religio-scientific" (*ilmiah-agamis*).[122]

In his explanation about the so-called "scientific-cum-doctrinaire" approach, Mukti Ali points out that there are three things that determine the place of a researcher of religion in the midst of the disciplines of humanities: First, religious reflection, which means that one has to have a religious reflection on his īmān (faith) followed by action and deed in accordance with the īmān. According to Mukti Ali, Īmān differs from just a belief, while the former must result in an action, the latter does not. Second, the expression of īmān within a concrete situation means that religious action must be seen as part of the expression of īmān. Third, the religious attitude, by which one should have a commitment and direction towards developing the religious people.[123]

Mukti Ali emphasizes that in using the religio-scientific or scientific-cum-doctrinaire approach, a researcher of religion must be strongly adherent to and reflective of his or her religion so that the researcher would face and approach the objects of research through his or her religious perspective and attitude. He claims that this model of research differs considerably from that in the Sociology of Religion and Psychology of Religion. Through this model of approach, a researcher becomes a subject that is involved in researching his or her own faith. In this regard, Mukti Ali

121 Mukti Ali (b), *Ilmu Perbandingan Agama,* 52.

122 Ibid. 64. See also, Faisal Ismail, "Paving the Way for Interreligious Dialogue, Tolerance, and Harmony: Following Mukti Ali's Path," *Al-Jāmi'ah,* vol. 50, no. 1, (2012).

123 A. Mukti Ali, *Beberapa Persoalan Agama Dewasa Ini,* (Jakart: Rajawali Presss, 1981), 329-331.

further maintains that "Objectivity and neutrality are no longer the main criteria in the process of such research, but the "subjective" judgement becomes the determining criterion"[124] and this seems to have a very similar tone to "the idea that Theology is confessional and Religious Studies neutral is an oversimplification."[125]

In terms of the question of what kind of religious research objects the "scientific-cum-doctrinaire" approach would address, Mukti Ali suggests that there are four points that need to be considered: religious institutions as can be seen in part, for instance, in Islamic 'ibādah (fasting, *salāh*, *zakāh*, and others); religious relations as can be seen in the relations either between individuals or groups in one religion, or between those among different religions; religious functions, which concern the question of how religion influences the life of people and society; and religious documentation and texts to provide information about a religion through various means such as photographs, statues, archives, buildings and others.[126]

In addition to the particular attention he gave to the issue of the research object, Mukti Ali also discusses the type of field research that he deems as being more applicable for the "scientific-cum-doctrinaire" approach. He asserts that this approach would be more viable if applied in the so-called grounded research or action research, as this type of research combines and integrates social work, on the one hand, which is aimed to influence and change a certain social condition, with research work, on the other, which

124 Ibid.

125 Denise Cush, "Religious Studies *versus* Theology Why I'm still Glad that I Converted from Theology to Religious Studies," in *Theology and Religious Studies in Higher Education,* edited by Darlene L. Bird and Simon G. Smith, (New York: Continuum, 2009), 21.

126 Mukti Ali, *Beberapa Persoalan*, 334.

is intended to acquire a relatively more reliable knowledge and information about the religious society studied.[127]

The idea put forward by Mukti Ali about the "scientific-cum-doctrinaire" approach, which embodies the amalgamation of comparative religious studies with Islamic Theology, is compatible with the academic platform of UIN Sunan Kalijaga to incorporate modern sciences and integrate them into Islamic studies. As has been mentioned earlier, the spirit of interrelating Islamic sciences and modern sciences has actually been emerging along with the inception of the state Islamic higher learning institutions during the 1960s. Recently, this spirit has been voiced more clearly by Amin Abdullah whose role in promoting the idea of the integration and interconnection of Islamic sciences and modern sciences is quite profound and significant.

The objectives of Learning Comparative Religion

To discuss the objective and the purpose that UIN Sunan Kalijaga wishes to achieve through the teaching of Comparative Religion, it would be useful to review how the University's scholars discuss the purpose and the objective of studying Comparative Religion. It is worth noting that among the UIN scholars concerned with comparative religious studies, only a few of them wrote relatively extensive work concerning this issue, among those are Mukti Ali and Amin Abdullah.

Mukti Ali considered the discipline of Comparative Religion as a profound and deep undertaking that the world of science made as a way to understand the inner life and the realm of thoughts

127 Ibid., 333.

of mankind.[128] In this way, religion is not perceived as merely a historical narrative as it contains a deep and sacred message for life and it is "deeply concerned with man's inner life and his faith in the divine order of things. It primarily fulfils the spiritual aspirations of man."[129] However, religions have been studied and explored in different ways for centuries, so comparative religious studies have provided different perspectives and tools of research for modern man to arrive at a better understanding of the nature of religion.[130]

One of the important facts about humanity's knowledge of religion is that religious diversity is sometimes considered by some as a cause of tension and conflict between people of different religious backgrounds. For Mukti Ali, the knowledge of religious plurality is of immense value not only for those who work as Islamic preachers, but also worthwhile for every Muslim to study. By studying Comparative Religion, a Muslim would discover commonalities between Islam and other religions. He claims that, for a Muslim, the importance of carrying out a comparison between various religions is twofold: first, to prove the superior aspects of Islam over other religions; and second, to reveal that religions coming before Islam were basically a preparatory chain for the coming of the ending, inclusive truth of Islam.[131] In addition, Mukti Ali views that when a Muslim makes a comparison between Islam and other religions, there will spring in his or her heart a feeling of sympathy for those who do not yet accept any religious truth,

128 Mukti Ali (a), *Ilmu Perbandingan,* 38.

129 Ramesh Chandra Pradhan, *Language, Reality and Transcendence, an Essay on the Main Strands Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy,* (Florida: Brown Walker Press, 2008).

130 Dominic Corrywright (ed.), *Get Set for Religious Studies,* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 41-42.

131 Mukti Ali (a), *Ilmu Perbandingan Agama*, 38-39.

which, in turn will evoke a sense of responsibility to propagate the truth of Islam to people at large.[132]

Many Muslims still take on the conviction that to study religion or religions other than one's own will have not benefit to his or her faith, and that the only valid way for anyone to understand religion is by becoming an insider rather than an outsider. To some extent, Mukti Ali does not concur with this opinion, as he believes that one can obtain ample advantage by approaching and studying religion both from the inside as its adherent and from the outside as its spectator. He says that there are many Muslims who can categorically comprehend the core of Islam as their venerated religion inasmuch as they study different religions by comparison.[133]

Mukti Ali is of the view that the growth and the core of Islam would be more profoundly understood if a Muslim also tries to construe the development and the fundamentals of other religions.[134] According to Amin Abdullah, it would be a noble effort for any religious people to reinterpret the teachings of their religion and then, in addition, to communicate their religion together with the religion of others. By doing so, it does not necessarily mean that to study the position of the religion of others is to convert them into one's own religion.[135] Instead, Mukti Ali explains further that often, by making a comparison between Islam and other religions, it may reveal the luminosity of the key elements of Islam, which, in turn, will deepen and strengthen a Muslim's faith in the true teachings of Islam and bring back the glorious values of Islamwhich have

132 Ibid., 39

133 Ibid.

134 Ibid.

135 Abdullah, *Studi Islam*, 73.

hitherto been forgotten and unattended.

Among the salient advantages that a Muslim can acquire by the comparative study of religions is that it would entrench the conviction of the finality and adequacy of Islam plainly explicated in al-Qur'ān. Mukti Ali affirms that the universality and sufficiency of Islam can be well construed from its various dimensions: Qur'anic, ethical, philosophical, and pragmatic. Thus, he asserts, there is no longer a necessity for new interpretations about what Islam is. What is needed today is the capacity to excavate and unveil the teachings of Islam, which have for centuries been buried and abandoned, and then to render them into terminologies easy to fathom.[136] In so doing, the relationship with other religions would help a Muslim to learn how to employ easy, simple terminologies of Islam and be aware that the teachings of Islam, which are in truth far from being complicated, have sometimes been blanketed with terminologies that confuse and perplex the common people who have little knowledge and expertise about Islam.[137]

Nevertheless, Mukti Ali admits that Comparative Religion might become detrimental to the Islamic faith if misused or incorrectly applied. Therefore, if this were the case, the Muslim apologetics would need to find more appropriate ways of defending and fortifying Islam. However, if this field of knowledge is used in a correct way, it would create a great advantage for the development of Islam and, in such a way, Islamic missionary endeavours would become much stronger and progressive than ever before.[138]

The greater responsibility that the comparative study of religion takes up today, according to Mukti Ali, is to be in line with

136 Mukti Ali (a), *Perbandingan Agama*, 40.

137 Ibid.

138 Ibid., 39.

the modern context of scientific and technological developments. The world we live in today has become like a small village in which the space and distance that separate and isolate people, nations, and civilizations from one another has been narrowed thanks to the major inventions in transportation and communication technology, phenomena that have never been experienced in past centuries.[139] No society and culture can live in absolute isolation as a way to avoid a symbiotic interaction between various peoples on earth. It is also the case with religion in that the interplay between religious communities is unstoppable.

When the relationship between individuals, religions, and ideas becomes closer, it could be mired in misunderstanding, misperceptions, and so on. It is often that when misunderstanding, misperceptions as well as the lack of tolerance prevail, tensions, clashes and even violent conflicts can easily happen between people of different faiths. Mukti Ali argues that Comparative Religion would have direct relevance on the real lives of people if it is engaged with and put within the perspective of the present context of a plural society in which the encounter between ideas, thoughts, and religions can easily occur.[140] Like other UIN scholars, Mukti Ali does believe that comparative study of religion is a crucial key to the creation of a better mutual understanding and respect among people of different religions.[141] His Master's studies mentor, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, pointed out that a knowledge of faith other than one's own represents one's personal quality and that "a sympathetic appreciation of this quality may, at least in part, be derived from having adherents of that

139 Ibid., 40.

140 Ibid.

141 Ibid.

faith as informants and perhaps even as friends."[142]

According to Mukti Ali, studying Comparative Religion must be based on the purpose to create a world filled with peace and harmony, so he opposes the idea that "science is for science" and, in its place, he insists that "science is for religious observance." What he means by this is that studying the field of Comparative Religion is a religiously motivated effort to establish a harmonious and peaceful life among people of various faiths. This is obviously related to the fact that Comparative Religion as a subject of academic training at UIN Sunan Kalijaga, just as in almost all higher learning institutions in Indonesia, is considered as a medium of Islamic religious propagation and not only as a part of purely scientific undertaking.[143]

It is worth noting that, for Mukti Ali, the comparative study of religion, as part of religious observance, can be seen in its implementation in religious dialogue and mission. To associate the study of religion with the objective of building inter-religious peace and harmony through dialogue at the local, regional, and international levels, be it bilateral or multilateral, has long been practiced. However, the issue of blending religious studies with religious dialogue and mission has often been problematized by many scholars of religion.[144] Their objection to the interfusion of the two fields relies on the opinion that the comparative study of religions is an objective, universal and rational science, and based on firm experimental evidence, while religious dialogue

142 Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Comparative Religion: Wither-and-Why?" in *The History of Religions, Essays in Methodology*, edited by Micea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 38-39.

143 Mukti Ali (b), *Ilmu Perbandingan Agama*, 52, 67; See also A. Mukti Ali, "Ilmu Perbandingan Agama, Dialog".

144 Ibid.

and mission, by contrast, are perceived as "subjective, parochial, emotional, and based on traditions or authorities that disagree with each other."[145]

To live side by side within the spirit of peace and values of tolerance between various groups of religious adherents is an absolutely good, noble social life, but this cannot yet be considered to be a form of inter-religious dialogue. Inter-religious dialogue is not just about sharing information about which the teachings of various religions are alike and different. Inter-religious dialogue is not an academic study of religion, nor is it an effort to unify all religions to be one new religion. Mukti Ali also warns that inter-religious dialogue is not an attempt made by any adherent of religion to force the audiences and counterparts of dialogue to believe in and be convinced about one's faith, let alone to convert religious others into his or her religion.[146]

Mukti Ali emphasizes that dialogue is not about conversation and discussion between two persons, because the term dialogue, which is made up of "dia" and "logue" has nothing to do with "duo" which means a pair of things. Dialogue is derived from the word "dia-leghe," which means talking, conversing, discussing, pondering, and arguing about matters in order to move and work together in solving a problem.[147] In this regard, Mukti Ali envisages inter-religious dialogue, which is more than simply a deliberation and contention in order to win and excel over one another, as communication between religious believers, as a shared pathway to

145 Barbour, *Religion in an Age,* 3.

146 Mukti Ali, "Ilmu Perbandingan Agama, Dialog".

147 A. Mukti Ali, "Agama, Moralitas dan Perkembangan Kontemporer," in *Agama dalam Pergumulan Masyarakat Modern,* edited by Mukti Ali, (Yogyakarta: PT. Tiara Wacana Yogya, 1998), 7.

achieve truth and cooperation in the work for the common interest. It is an encounter between the adherents of religion which is not based on sentiments of either low self-esteem or superiority, or any hidden agenda or objective."[148]

Furthermore, Mukti Ali explains that inter-religious dialogue could take place in diverse forms of activities, such as in a living reality dialogue which takes place in the daily lives of people of various faiths, such as in schools, families, armed forces, public offices, cultures, industries, and others. Inter-religious dialogues can also be found in social work and charities in which people of different religions work hand in hand to help people in need and those who suffer from poverty, starvation, being refugees, and so on. Other forms of inter-religious dialogues are at times performed in academic fields, such as in theological discussions, fieldwork in religious sites, and so forth. Likewise, Mukti Ali regards *Doa Bersama*, inter-religious prayer, as a form of inter-religious dialogue in which people of various religions assemble and each religious envoy performs the ways of prayer and supplication differently according to their respective theological conviction. He states that although the adherents of religions in the congregation do not follow each other's practices of prayer, they may share the same intention and goal.[149]

As has been mentioned previously, in addition to inter-religious dialogues, religious mission is also an important objective of studying Comparative Religion. All religions, according to Mukti Ali, have the right to spread and preach the truth they embrace, at least to those who share the same religion, either through dialogue or mission work. Despite that, he warns that both dialogue and

148 Mukti Ali, "Ilmu Perbandingan Agama, Dialog".

149 Ibid.

mission should not be infiltrated with or diverted for a hidden agenda to induce the followers of different religions and convert them into one's own religion. Therefore, Mukti Ali articulates attitudes that a Muslim needs to have when studying religions other than his own:

A Muslim must not forget and ignore al-Qur'ān as the core source of knowledge of other religions as well as that of the Islamic faith and Muslim rules of conduct. Hence, it is imperative that a Muslim deem this sacred book as being superior to the scriptures of other religions.

Awareness that many historical facts indicated in al-Qur'ān, which have been denied for a long time, are now approved and confirmed by historical and archaeological discoveries.

The teachings of al-Qur'ān are congruent with social context and order while, to some extent, many other religious scriptures have lost their efficacy and worth in society.

Al-Qur'an is a sacred book in which the idea of pure monotheism is stressed. To have ample knowledge of Islamic monotheism is highly required for every Muslim interested in understanding other religions. In addition, other skills such as foreign languages are also important for Muslims who immerse themselves in the study of religion.

The goal of Islam as a religion of *da'wah*, just as other missionary religions of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity, is of course to disseminate the teachings of Islam to all mankind. A Muslim should have the spirit of respect and sympathy when approaching and dealing with the religions of others and only through this way do people of religion understand each other's glorious values.

It is a great mistake for a Muslim, when approaching the

religion of others, to simply try to find its weakness. In addition to knowing the weakness of other religions, one also has to be honest and shrewd in learning their strengths and goodness.[150]

Concluding Remarks

There are some issues in comparative religious studies that have been drawing the UIN scholars' attention, such as the origins of religion, religious truth claims, methodology and approaches in Comparative Religion, and the objectives and benefits of learning Comparative Religion. Mukti Ali, the founder of the Comparative Religion Department at UIN Sunan Kalijaga, seems to be at once the first and the last among his colleagues and successors to raise the topic of the origins of religion in the 1960s because from then on, none among his colleagues and successors has written about it or discussed it in depth. Mukti Ali opposes the evolutionary theory of religion as it is definitely against and unacceptable to the basic teaching of Islam that religion has been given to humankind through God's messengers and His revelation.

The issue of religious truth claims between different religions has been among the most controversial topics of discussion in this chapter. Some of the UIN scholars hold an exclusive view of religious truth which claims that there is only one religion (Islam) as the true and truer and excludes other religions from the truth and eternal salvation in the day after. Some others embrace the idea of religious inclusivism which says that there is one true religion (Islam) and yet other religions may have a certain degree of truth and a right to salvation and deliverance in the afterlife. Meanwhile, most of the UIN scholars define the term 'religious

150 Mukti Ali (a), *Ilmu Perbandingan Agama*, 32-34.

pluralism' loosely as simply a fact of religious plurality, instead of giving it a quite strict definition that all religions are the same and equally true.

Meanwhile, concerning modern methodologies and approaches to be applied in comparative religious studies, the UIN scholars consider it as important as religious theology. They have come to the conclusion that (Islamic) religious theology needs to be integrated and interconnected with contemporary methodologies and approaches used in Western traditions of religious studies. They agree with what Mukti Ali called "scientific-cum-doctrinaire" as an alternative approach that integrates Islamic religious theology and scientific methodology. Furthermore, with regard to the objective and benefit of studying Comparative Religion, the UIN scholars unanimously agree that comparative religious studies must be intended to implement both religious dialogue and mission (*Da'wah*), as well as to create inter-religious peace and harmony among people and groups of different faiths.

CHAPTER FIVE
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter seeks to analyse the potential, qualitative findings that can possibly be discovered from the entire analyses and discussions presented in the foregoing chapters. It would be of significant relevance for this part to take into account the facts of how the discipline of Comparative Religion has grown and continues to thrive at UIN Sunan Kalijaga, as well as intertwines with the wider context of Indonesian socio-historical dynamics. In addition, this segment will consider how the development of the discipline at the University has brought about the fundamental issue of integrating and interconnecting Islamic traditions of religious studies with modern Western traditions of comparative religious studies. Furthermore, the prospect of learning Comparative Religion at the University will also be an interesting subject of deliberation in this section.

Comparative Religion in Indonesian Socio-historical Context

What has been explained and discussed at length in the preceding chapters on issues concerning the origins and growth of the field of Comparative Religion in Indonesia cannot be divorced from the wider contexts of socio-religious, political, and cultural dynamics in Indonesia. Similarly, the present state of the discipline of Comparative Religion at UIN Sunan Kalijaga and its further developments have been inextricably intertwined with, and influenced by, the same dynamics in the wider context of Indonesia. Therefore it is no exaggeration to say that the present existence of comparative religious studies at UIN Sunan Kalijaga needs to be seen as the quintessence of epistemological legacy of Comparative Religion that Al-Rānīrī had bequeathed to us through his work *Tibyān fī ma'rifat al-adyān* in the seventieth century. In addition, the establishment of the Department of Comparative Religion at the University in the 1960s could also be considered as a chain and continuation of academic traditions initiated by many Islamic schools and colleges of higher education in the first half of the twentieth century.

With this in mind, one would agree that man's understanding and knowledge about religion(s) are not exempted from the external dynamics of society, culture, politics and economics. This epistemological framework is supported by a contemporary sociological theory of knowledge that a human's thoughts cannot be separated from and, to an extent, have even been constructed and influenced by the surrounding social, political, and cultural circumstances. Drawing from Karl Mannheim's perspective of the sociology of knowledge, we reach the conclusion that human thought has never been a result of a pure abstract contemplation,

since no man thinks exclusively as a solitary person. In this respect, Mannheim rather convincingly remarks:

"It is more correct to insist that he participates in thinking further what other men have thought before him. He finds himself in an inherited situation with patterns of thought which are appropriate to this situation and attempts to elaborate further the inherited modes of response or to substitute others for them in order to deal more adequately with new challenges which have arisen out of the shifts and changes in his situation."[1]

This sociological fact gives a clear clue that human thought is shaped by a situation in which patterns of thought and modes of response to the surrounding world correspond with the existing circumstance. Thus, man's knowledge may not be severed or disconnected from what Mannheim calls "the context of collective action"[2] in a society. Modern sociologists affirm that "all human thought is historically and culturally situated, that is, anchored in socio-historical context…all knowledge is relational and can be understood only with reference to these socio-historical circumstances"[3] and that, in Mannheim's words, "no human thought…is immune to the ideologizing influence of social context."[4]

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1 Karl Manheim, *Ideology and Utopia, an Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 3.

2 Ibid.

3 Renate E. Meyer, Kerstin Sahlin, Marc J. Ventresca and Peter Walgenbach, "Ideology and Institutions: Introduction," in *Institutions and Ideology,* edited by Renate E. Meyer et al., (Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2009), 1-16.

4 Peter L. Berger, Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge,* (London: Penguin Book Ltd., 1991), 21.

The above perspective of the sociology of knowledge can be of great use for this study to shed light on the influence that social, political, and cultural dynamics have on the growth and development of the discipline of Comparative Religion in the Indonesian context. Further discussion on this point can begin by looking more closely at the seventieth century Malay scholar Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī, a distinguished *Shaykh al-Islām* with multifaceted expertise in Islamic religious studies,[5] as has been discussed at length in Chapter Two. An avid reader, al-Rānīrī must have greatly benefited from standard books written by other leading Islamic studies authorities. Additionally, his living experience of interaction with Hinduism had brought him to an interesting notion about the religion which is quite different from that of most of *'ulamā'* of his time. In this regard, it is no exaggeration to come to a conclusion that al-Rānīrī's thought closely corresponds with the thought models of other Muslim scholars who lived prior to him and his contemporaries, as well as with the social and cultural surroundings in which he lived.

In his work on *Kalām* and *Tasawwuf*, for instance, al-Rānīrī often refers to al-Ghazālī, Ibn 'Arabī, al-Qunyāwī, al-Qāshānī, al-Fīrūzābādī, al-Jīlī, 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Jāmī, Fadl Allāh al-Burhanfūrī and other prominent scholars. As for the reference that al-Rānīrī makes use of for his study in Islamic jurisprudence, he is often found referring to the standard books of the Shāfi'ī School such as *Kitāb al-Anwār* of al-Ardābilī, *Minhāj al-Tālibīn* of al-Nawāwī, *Fath al-Wahhāb bi Sharh Minhāj al-Tullāb* of Zakariyyā al-Ansārī, *Hidāyat al-Mukhtasar* of Ibn Hajar, *Nihāyat al-Muhtāj*

5 Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia, Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern 'Ulama' in the Seventieth and Eighteenth Centuries,* (Honolulu: Allen & Unwin and University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 65.

(*ilā sharh al-minhāj* of al-Nawawī) of Shams al-Dīn al-Ramlī and other books.[6] Another of al-Rānīrī's work, *Bustān al-Salātīn*, which was composed in seven volumes, follows different structures of writing applied in various books by Muslim historians. The first volume of the *Bustān al-Salātīn* is written according to the pattern of *Qisas al-Anbiyā'* by al-Kisā'ī, while the second follows the writing style of al-Tabarī's *Tarīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*, and the last five books are planned in the writing outline akin to that of al-Ghazālī's *Nasīhat al-Mulūk*.[7]

Regarding al-Rānīrī's thought on Comparative Religion, some researchers notice that his *Tibyān fī Ma'rifat al-Adyān* and al-Shahrastānī's *Kitāb al-Milal wa al-Nihal* share some characteristics, especially in terms of the writing outline. Since the latter was produced much earlier than the former, it is very likely that al-Rānīrī adopted some of the writing characteristics applied in al-Shahrastānī's *Kitāb al-Milal*. However, in terms of content, the *Tibyān* seems to have ideas similar to those developed in Abū Shahūr al-Salīmī's *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*.[8] Furthermore, as far as al-Rānīrī's thought on Comparative Religion is concerned, his accounts on this topic mostly reflect the generally established Islamic views on religions other than Islam. This has been observed and verified by Steenbrink in that al-Rānīrī's opinion about Christianity is founded more on the common Islamic traditions of comparative religious studies than on his own experience.[9]

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid. 68. See also Karel A. Steenbrink, "The Study of Comparative Religion by Indonesian Muslims," *Numen,* vol. 37, no. 2 (1990), 142-143; Karel Steenbrink, *Dutch Colonialism and Indonesian Islam,* translated by Jan Steenbrink and Henry Jansen, (Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V., 1993), 128-129.

9 Steenbrink, *Dutch Colonialism,* 129.

With regard to the characteristics of al-Rānīrī's work, Azra states that they are, to some extent, polemical and in some cases apologetic in nature.[10] In some of his polemical work, al-Rānīrī's condemnation of those adhering to Ibn 'Arabī's concept of *Wujūdiyyah* was a matter of heated controversy in the Acehnese Sultanate during the reign of Sultān Iskandar Thānī in the first half of the seventeenth century. Ibn 'Arabī's teaching of *Wujūdiyyah*, which claims among others that *al-'ālam huwa allāh, huwa al-'ālam* (the universe is God and He is the universe), according to al-Rānīrī, is obviously opposed to the absolute principle of the oneness of God. Al-Rānīrī was bitter toward the theosophical doctrine of *Wujūdiyyah* and charged its protagonists with heresy (*zindiq*) and polytheism (*kufr*) for having strayed from the straight path of Islam. He even condemned them to death if they showed no repentance. For a time, supported by the Acehnese ruler Sultān Iskandar Thānī, al-Rānīrī was successful in convincing the Sultān to issue a decree for the execution of obdurate followers of the *Wujūdiyyah* and the wholesale burning of the doctrine-related books in front of the Banda Aceh grand mosque.[11] It is clear that al-Ranīrī's treatment of the theosophical concept of *Wujūdiyyah* was not only polemical, but also apologetic. In this point, al-Rānīrī obviously epitomises an indomitable advocate of Ash'arī's doctrine of unlikeness between God and the universe and God's ultimate transcendence vis-á-vis human's immanence.

Another of al-Rānīrī's works regarded as polemical in character can also be recognised through his view on Hinduism,

10 Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism*, 63.

11 Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism*, 63-64. See also Nicholas Tarling (editor), *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia,* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 540.

about which his opinion varies from that of other general Muslim scholars. While Muslim scholars regarded Hinduism as an 'earthly religion,' believed to be a human creation and therefore must be distinguished from "religions of the book," the ones directly revealed by God through His messengers, al-Rānīrī takes quite a different stand on the issue. By identifying the word Brahman with the prophet Ibrāhīm (Abraham), al-Rānīrī developed the notion that Hinduism can be considered a "religion of the book."[12] Al-Rānīrī's impression of Hinduism is fairly sympathetic that he categorises it as "religion of the book," just like Christianity and Judaism on the one side, yet his conception of the scriptures of these religions seems highly contentious. He holds that the Christian and Jewish scriptures are forgeries and the Rama narrative in Hinduism contains only pointless stories. Moreover, with regard to the scriptures of these religions, al-Rānīrī said that someone in a condition in which water is unavailable for ritual cleansing after a visit to the toilet can use the printed papers of the scriptures unless the name of God is written on them."[13]

By looking at al-Rānīrī's polemical and apologetic work as has briefly been reviewed above, there has been a factor that contributes in one way or another to his intolerant attitude towards certain teachings of Islamic mysticism or Sufism and their followers, as well as to religions other than Islam. Some scholars said that al-Rānīrī's rigid character is somehow related to the past context of India's interreligious life in which conflicts and tensions occurred quite often between the Hindu majority and the Muslim minority. Therefore, it is argued that this interreligious hostile life must have sown seeds of little tolerance into elements of both

12 Steenbrink, *Dutch Colonialism,* 129.

13 Ibid., 128.

societies and accordingly, al-Rānīrī can be said to be a corollary of such a society.[14]

The above description that hints at the apologetic and rigid characteristics of al-Rānīrii's work on Comparative Religion is seen as a consequence of socio-religious and socio-historical contexts surrounding his era. Similarly, by putting this hint in the context of modern Indonesian, one can say that the methods, themes, and writing styles applied by Muslim scholars in their books and work concerning Comparative Religion would be properly understood if they were portrayed through and put in the perspective of the social, political, cultural, and intellectual situations of their times. Throughout Indonesian history, the relation between interreligious communities, especially between Muslims and Christians, has sometimes been coloured and blanketed with the dialectic of cooperation and clash, collaboration and conflict, respect and hostility, tolerance and tension, as well as dialogue and contempt.[15]

Historically speaking, the nationalist and religiously neutral groups, as well as multi-religious communities, Muslims and Christians alike, have contributed collaboratively to the struggle for

14 Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism,* 64.

15 Ismatu Ropi, "Muslim-Christian Polemics in Indonesian Islamic Literature," in *Islam and Chrisitian-Muslim Relation,* vol. 9, no. 2, 1998, 217-229. See also, Alexander R. Arifianto, "Explaining the Cause of Muslim-Christian Conflicts in Indonesia: Tracing the Origins of *Kristenisasi* and *Islamisasi*," in *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations,* vol. 20, no. 1, 2009, 73-89; Ahmad Najib Burhani, "The Ahmadiyya and the Study of Comparative Religion in Indonesia: Controversies and Influences," in *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations,* vol. 12, no. 2, 2013, 141-158. For more discussion on this issue, see B.J. Boland, *The Struggle of Islam in Modern Indonesia,* (Leiden: The Hague-Martinus Nijhoff, 1982), 224-242, Alwi Shihab, *The Muhammadiyah Movement and its Controversy with Christian Mission,* (Ph.D. dissertation, Temple Universty, 1995); See also, Steenbrink, *Dutch Colonialism,* 98-123.

Indonesian independence. They have equally stood in the forefront of the fight against the Dutch and Japanese colonial powers. Furthermore, two decades after Indonesian independence, they have been united since 1965/1966 being the allies of the army in their attempts to exterminate the Communists and Communism.[16] However, the relations between religious communities were not always glossy and smooth, and have been interrupted and stained by conflicts, tensions, and hatred, especially between Muslim and Christian groups.

The fierce rivalry for social, economic and political interests has been among the key triggers for the occurrence of clashes, disharmony, and hostility between Muslim and Christian communities. In addition, theological divergence was identified as an equally influential factor to instigate and worsen the interreligious conflicts and tensions. During the first half of the twentieth century and until the early years of the New Order administration, there were a number of Muslim and Christian authors that produced numerous publications and literature intended to theologically defend and attack one another.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, nineteenth century Indonesia is regarded as the period when the wave of Christianization reached its zenith and is dubbed as "the age of mission."[17] Nevertheless, since the twentieth century, the evangelical work could not infiltrate, or at least was very slow to penetrate, the predominantly Muslim areas in the archipelago due to strong resistance and challenges engendered by Muslim communities. Since this situation has

16 Boland, *The Struggle of Islam,* 224-225; Steenbrink, *Dutch Colonialism,* 144; Mujiburrahman, *Feeling Threatened, Muslim-Christian Relations in Indonesia's New Order*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 27-28.

17 Steenbrink, *Dutch Colonialism*, 98.

resulted in misfortune and hardship for the Christian community whereby they experienced slow growth in the country, a number of Christian authors published theological attacks on the core of Islamic doctrines. Among the Christian authors whose works contain disparaging remarks on Islam are Hendrik Kraemer, J.J. ten Berge, and F. L. Bakker among others.[18] In his description about the criticism of Christian intellectuals against Islam, Mukti Ali said, "The attacks levelled against Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'an and against the teachings of Islam in general by the Christian intellectuals in their writings and speeches is the source of the gnawing offence to the Muslims."[19]

In response to such an aggressive attitude toward Christian missionary activities as can be found through their publications which were noticeably offensive to Islam, a number of Indonesian Muslim scholars published books and literature to defend Islam from the misconceptions provoked by Christians. We can take as an example the publications by Hasbullah Bakry[20] and M. Arsjad Thalib Lubis,[21] as discussed briefly in Chapter Two, which apparently reflect the uneasiness and the feeling of being threatened by the misinterpretations of Christianity about Islam, as well as the aggressive efforts of Christianization in several parts of Indonesia. Hasbullah Bakry's work, *Nabi Isa dalam Al-Qur'an,* was actually written as a reply to F.L. Bakker's *Tuhan Yesus*

18 Steenbrink, *Dutch Colonialism,* 111, 118.

19 A. Mukti Ali, *Dialog Antar Agama,* (Yogyakarta: Yayasan Nida, 1970), 40.

20 Hasbullah Bakry, *Nabi Isa dalam Al-Qur'ān dan Nabi Muhammad dalam Bybel,* (Solo: Ab. Sitti Sjamsijah, 1959),

21 Muhammad Arsyad Thalib Lubis, *Perbandingan Agama: Kristen dan Islam,* (Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Melayu Baru, 1982).

dalam Agama Islam,[22] in which Bakker conveys his opinion that Muhammad had received the influence of Christian doctrines during the early formative period of Islam and that the Prophet was sent down only for the Arabs, just as Moses for the Jews, and Jesus for the Christians.[23]

Moreover, Bakry's book was devoted to the extensively critical discussion about crucial topics in Christian teachings such as the nature of Mary (Maryam), the alleged alterations experienced by the Bible, the Trinity, the crucifixion of Jesus, the apostle Paulus, the Prophet Muhammad in the Bible, and others. Meanwhile, the topics discussed in Bakry's book are also elaborated in Arsyad Lubis' *Perbandingan Agama: Kristen dan Islam,* with the latter discussing a broader range of Christian dogmas such as original sin, the atonement, salvation, Islamic and Christian views on the books of Taurāt and Zabūr, the holiness of prophets, and others.

It is important to note that both Hasbullah Bakry and M. Arsyad Thalib Lubis, in discussing subjects on Christian dogmas, applied a critical reading of Christian scriptures and sources (the Bible, the Gospels, the literatures of Christian missionaries in Indonesia) and analysed and compared the subjects by referring to the Qur'ān and, if any, the Prophetic traditions and the opinion of Muslim 'ulamā. With this analytical and comparative approach, Bakry and Lubis sought to demonstrate the false claims and logical inconsistencies found in the biblical texts, on which Christian doctrines are based, regarding such topics as the concept of Trinity, the authenticity of the Bible, the crucifixion of Jesus, and others.

22 F.L. Bakker, *Tuhan Yesus dalam Agama Islam*, (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 1957); Boland, *The Struggle of Islam*, 228; Fatimah Husein, *Muslim-Christian Relations in the New Order Indonesia, the Exclusivist and Inclusivist Muslims' Perspectives*, (Bandung: Mizan Pustaka, 2005), 84.

23 Ropi, "Muslim-Christian Polemics," 222.

Within this kind of study, the inadequacies and weaknesses of Christian teachings and the logical contradictions between the Bible and the Qur'ān and Islamic beliefs, are displayed in order to affirm and justify the truth of Islam and its superiority to Christianity and other religions.

Furthermore, based on the above described attitude of Muslim authors concerning religions other than Islam, some scholars of Comparative Religion, including Bolland and Beck, concluded that the genre of work of Bakry and Lubis falls into a category of publication that is apologetic and polemical in character.[24] They critically indicate that rather than intending to build a mutual understanding and harmony between religious people, the role of the comparative study of religion in the hands of apologist Muslims was aimed at creating, "effective weapons with which missionaries could defeat other religions and at the same time increase confidence among adherents of their own religion."[25]

The criticism that scholars of religious studies directed at such an apologetic and polemical genre of literature pertaining to different religions cannot be overlooked; however, it is to be understood properly by looking at the socio-historical context in which those works on Comparative Religion were written. In this regard, the apologetic and polemical attitude of Muslim communities towards Christianity was considered fair given the fact that during the early years of Indonesian independence until towards the collapse of

24 Herman L. Beck, "A Pillar of Social Harmony: The Study of Comparative Religion in Contemporary Indonesia," in *Modern Societies & Science of Religion: Studies in Honour of Lammert Leertouwer,* edited by Gerard Wiegers and Jan latvoet, (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 334; See also, Boland, *The Struggle of Islam,* 229; Burhani, "The Ahmadiyya and the Study of Comparative Religion," 152

25 Burhani, "The Ahmadiyya and the Study of Comparative Religion," 152.

Soekarno's administration (often named the Old Order regime) in 1965, there were, as Bakry pointed out, hundreds, even thousands, of young Muslims who converted to Christianity. This was taking place during the period of transition when the leadership of Churches and Christian missions was handed over from foreigners to native Indonesian Christians. Concerned with this challenging situation, Hasbullah Bakry stated that his book was intended to help Muslim families protect their children from missionary efforts, which could drag them into Christianity.[26]

Another factor to have influenced and shaped the apologetic and polemical attitudes of Muslim scholars of Comparative Religion was the work on Christianity written by Ahmadiya members such as Al-Hajj Lord Headly,[27] Khwaja Nazir Ahmad,[28] and Khwaja Kamaludin.[29] In his *Nabi Isa dalam Al-Qur'an,* Bakry used the work of Khwaja Nazir Ahmad and Al-Hajj Lord Headly as references, while Lubis put Kamal-ud-Din's *The Sources of Christianity* in the list of references for his *Perbandingan Agama.* The writing style used in the Ahmadiyya books on Christianity is apologetic and polemical in nature and this model has certainly influenced the way Muslim scholars such as Bakry and Lubis deal with Christianity.[30] For the Muslim authors, this apologetic and

26 Bakry, *Nabi Isa dalam Al-Qur'an,* 144.

27 Al-Hajj Lord Headly, *The Affinity between the Original Church of Jesus Christ and Islam,* (Woking: Trust for the Encouragement and Circulation of Muslim Religious Literature, 1927).

28 Khwaja Nazir Ahmad, *Jesus in Heaven on Earth,* (Lahore: Azeez Manzil, 1952).

29 Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din, *The Sources of Christianity,* (Ohio: Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat Islam, 1997). Actually, this book has been translated into bahasa Indonesia, but it is hardly possible to track.

30 Boland, *The Struggle of Islam*, 228.

polemical method is justified as a means to object to the torrent of insults ceaselessly unleashed by Christian intellectuals against Islam and Muslims and which, according to Mukti Ali, "contains little more than lies and slander clothed in highly provocative, abusive, and even obscene language."[31] So, the approach of this kind is helpful for Muslim preachers (*dā'ī*) in order to arouse confidence in the superiority of Islam, to defeat other religions, to win the heart of converts, as well as to hamper Christian missionaries that aggressively proselytise and preach their religion in the midst of a Muslim society. [32]

Nevertheless, there were changes and developments in the socio-historical contexts in which the field of Comparative Religion grows and thrives, so that the methods and approaches that scholars of Comparative Religion use in dealing with other religions also changed and developed. The example of how the function of the study of religions changed according to the shifting context of Indonesian society can be perceived in the fact that the characteristics of views on other religions and inter-religious issues, which the scholars of Comparative Religion held during the early years of Indonesian independence, were quite different from that which belonged to the scholars of Comparative Religion under the New Order administration.

As has been indicated above, the study of Comparative Religion during the early years of Indonesian independence until the late 1960s was characterised by its apologetic and polemical views on other religions. Yet, this approach changed following the ascension into power of the New Order administration in 1967, when Soeharto was appointed as acting president and president

31 A. Mukti Ali, *Dialog Antar Agama,* (Yogyakarta: Yayasan Nida, 1970), 40.

32 Burhani, "The Ahmadiyya and the Study of Comparative Religion," 146

the following year. Since then, the new government introduced the agendas of modernisation and development, especially in economic, social, and political fields, including in education. The government also paid special attention to national unity and the stability of economic, political, and social structures as a requisite condition to ensure that development goals could be successfully achieved.[33]

In order to avoid the threat of inter-religious tension and conflict, which was very likely to put the unity of Indonesia and its national developmental goals in jeopardy, the new government held the Inter-religious Consultation Forum (*Musyawarah Antar Agama*) on 30 November 1967 which involved some 20 noted Muslim, Protestant, and Catholic leaders. Through this forum, the government expected to find possible solutions to create inter-religious peace and harmony as a common ground and an important prerequisite for national unity and economic and political stability in the country.[34] The government proposed three key points with respect to inter-religious issues. First, the preclusion of any compulsion in religion; second, the prohibition against any form of proselytization among people already embracing one of the five officially acknowledged religions;[35] third, the common commitment to building social tolerance among people of different religions.[36]

The government's vision of the relevance of inter-religious tolerance and harmony to national developmental objectives

33 Beck, "A Pillar of Social Harmony," 339.

34 Husein, *Muslim-Christian Relations*, 127-130; Mukti Ali, *Dialog Antar Agama,* 42.

35 Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Buddhism, and Hinduism.

36 Beck, "A Pillar of Social Harmony," 339.

became even more visible when Mukti Ali was appointed as Minister of Religious Affairs in 1971. The appointment took place a few days after he presented a talk (in English) on "Religion and Development in Indonesia," on 3 September 1971, at the Goethe Institute, Jakarta.[37] According to Hassan it was due to Mukti Ali's "posture as a tolerant reformist-oriented Muslim and an advocate of pragmatism" that he was entrusted with this politically high ranking position for two consecutive periods.[38] However, among other factors, Mukti Ali's academic expertise in the comparative study of religion and his backing for the renewal of Islamic thought, which were ostensibly consistent with the government's ideology of *Pancasila* and its modernisation and development efforts, were seen to be the most deserving causes for his appointment in the post.[39]

Accordingly, in the hands of Mukti Ali as Minister of Religious Affairs, the Indonesian government has been considered successful in bringing UIN Sunan Kalijaga and other state Islamic higher education institutions to implement government agendas of building and keeping inter-religious harmony. State institutions of Islamic higher learning played a significant role in maintaining harmony and peace between people and groups of different religious faiths as a *sine qua non* of ensuring national integrity and success of national developments. With the position Mukti Ali held as a top leader in the office in charge of religious affairs at the national

37 See, M. Damami at al., "H.A. Mukti Ali: Ketaatan," 34;A. Mukti Ali, *Religion and Development in Indonesia,* (Yogyakarta: Yayasan Nida,).

38 Muhammad Kamal Hassan, *Muslim Intellectual Responses to "New Order" Modernization in Indonesia,* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1982), 75.

39 A. Singgih Basuki, *Pemikiran Keagamaan A. Mukti Ali,* (Yogyakarta: SUKA Press, 2013), 25; Beck, "A Pillar of Social Harmony," 340.

level, he emphasised the importance of Comparative Religion to be implemented as "a constructive way to build up a harmonious society,"[40] which was a necessary condition for Indonesia to be able to achieve its national interests. His perspective on this issue is visible in a number of his books on the relations between religion, modernisation, and development.[41] Mukti Ali's stand regarding the significant role in which religious communities, regardless of their faith affiliations, can play for the sake of national interests is clear as evidenced by his statement:

> "The adherents of religious communities need to act together and in solidarity with all men of goodwill in the quest for development… irrespective of their religious affiliations. Such common involvement should enable the religious communities to move out of their religious ghettos and narrow communal interests to wider concepts and experience of community on local, national and world level."[42]

Mukti Ali's approach to other religions has been deemed novel in the sense that it was quite different from that held by the previous generation of Muslim scholars of Comparative Religion, especially Bakry and Lubis, who lived in a situation in which inter-religious interactions were formed within an atmosphere beset with mutual suspicion, harsh competition, and apologetic and polemical discourses. In the hands of the former, the discipline of

40 Beck, "A Pillar of Social Harmony," 334.

41 A. Mukti Ali, *Religion and Development in Indonesia,* (Yogyakarta: Yayasan Nida, 1971); A. Mukti Ali, *Agama dan Pembangunan di Indonesia,* (Jakarta: Biro Humas Depag RI, 1972); A. Mukti Ali, *Beberapa Persoalan Agama Dewasa Ini,* (Jakarta: Rajawali, 1981).

42 Mukti Ali, Religion and Development, 21.

Comparative Religion became further oriented towards creating religious harmony, supporting national development, and upholding the unity of the nation. Meanwhile, in that of the latter, the discipline was treated as a means to implant in its students and the missionary activists a set of knowledge and strategies of how to vanquish other religions and demonstrate the superiority of one religion over another.[43] This latter approach to various religions is reactive and provides no room for constructive dialogue and mutually beneficial relations.

From our painstaking study of Mukti Ali's educational background as well as his academic and political careers, it can be concluded that the method he used in dealing with the issues regarding the relations between religions, and that between religion and development and modernisation, was proactive rather than reactive. With regard to the issue, Mukti Ali often asserted that through Comparative Religion one can learn how to treat various religions in a proactive manner, in the sense that one should put aside all sorts of prejudices, as well as emotional and polemical attitudes towards any religion different from his/her own. In this respect, he emphasised the significance of discovering the exalted treasures and goodness to be found in every religion and promoting cooperation between the followers of various religions grounded in mutual understanding, respect and appreciation.[44]

Similarly, with regard to the second issue concerning Mukti Ali's outlook on the relation between religion and development, there is no doubt that he was progressive given his belief that the Indonesian agendas of modernisation and development can

43 Burhani, "The Ahmadiyya and the Study of Comparative Religion," 149

44 A. Mukti Ali, *Ilmu Perbandingan Agama,* (Yogyakarta: Yayasan Nida, 1970), 42-43

only be achieved if there is, "close and unqualified collaboration of all religions and faiths of Indonesia."[45] Moreover, Mukti Ali's Master's degree at a leading Western tertiary institution, as well as his involvement as the highest rank official in the Ministry of Religious Affairs, attests to his constructive role in dealing with the issue. After all, it is worth noting that Mukti Ali's progressive views on the relation between religion and modernization can be seen in his perseverance and earnestness in adopting and accepting contemporary approaches utilised in the discipline of Comparative Religion as positive elements of modernity and then introducing and incorporating them into the curricular structure of state institutes for Islamic studies.

Mukti Ali's ideas about the significance of modern methodologies to be used both in comparative religious studies, as well as in Islamic studies, have been a precious legacy that he has left to the next generation of Muslim scholars of Comparative Religion. The UIN Muslim scholars after Mukti Ali such as Amin Abdullah, Djam'annuri, Al-Mirzanah, and others, have benefitted significantly from his intellectual heirlooms. And, at the same time, they have also been hitherto demonstrating hard work and determination in carrying and performing their responsibilities toward cultivating the legacy for the benefit of students of Comparative Religion at UIN Sunan Kaliaga, in particular, and for the Muslim *Ummah,* at large.

Muslim and Western Traditions of Religious Studies: Towards Integration of Knowledge

There is palpable evidence to show that Mukti Ali's

45 Mukti Ali, *Religion and Development,* 22

suggestion that modern methodologies and approaches applied in the discipline of Comparative Religion need to be adopted and integrated into the curricular system of Islamic tertiary institutions were not, in a sense or *in toto,* unique and new. The ideas about the importance of modern sciences to be included in and combined with Islamic religious studies have also been proposed and strongly stressed by Indonesian Muslim scholars prior to him including Wirjosandjojo, Hatta, and Natsir when aspiring to establish Islamic institutions of higher learning in the 1930s.[46]

However, what makes Mukti Ali's position remarkable is that he was not simply an initiator, but he took steps by actively and directly articulating ideas about how modern methodologies used in Comparative Religion should be integrated with Islamic theological fundamentals, especially Islamic theology. Mukti Ali's constant efforts to amalgamate modern scientific methodologies such as history and sociology developed in Western traditions of religious studies with dogmatic approaches that have been long established in theological traditions of Islamic studies, led him to come up with what he claimed as a synthesis method called the "scientific-cum-doctrinaire" or "religio-scientific" method.[47]

This model of synthesis reflects Mukti Ali's critique of partiality or one-sidedness generally embedded in the tools of inquiry and approaches applied by both Western orientalists and Muslim traditional scholars (*'ulamā'*) to Islam. According to Mukti Ali, the scientific model of analysis commonly used by Western orientalists in their study of Islam has failed to arrive at an intact, integral understanding about the truth of Islam. "As a

46 See footnotes 50 to 53 in Chapter Three.

47 A. Mukti Ali, *Metode Memahami Agama Islam,* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1991), 32

consequence, their research results were interesting, yet in reality they did not understand Islam in an integrated way."[48] On the other side, Muslim traditional *'ulamā'* have achieved little success to make their interpretations of Islam viable in the concrete life of society. This is not because of their lack of knowledge about Islam, but in Mukti Ali's view, it is due to their tendency to understand Islam doctrinally or dogmatically and, even worse, is wedded with their inability to connect Islam with the realities of social life. Consequently, it is understandable why there has been a common assumption, Mukti Ali stated further, that Islam is still deemed far from having genuine compatibility with modernisation and that Muslim society, as a result, has always been backward and left behind in terms of modernisation and development in economics, politics, and science-technology.[49]

Another important notion put forward by Mukti Ali, which is quite germane to his proposal about the synthesis methodology called "scientific-cum-doctrinaire" or "religio-scientific," was his suggestion that Islamic higher educations need to develop and teach Occidentalism. This notion arose when Mukti Ali presented a talk on *"Ilmu Perbandingan Agama (Sebuah Pembahasan tentang Metodos dan Sistima)*[50] at the fourth *Dies Natalis* of IAIN Al-Jami'ah Al-Islamiyah Al-Hukumiyah in 1964. Mukti Ali's suggestion about the importance of teaching and developing Occidentalism derived from his concern over the fact that the Eastern world, its people, cultures, and religions, including Islam, have been intriguing

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

50 Mukti Ali's talk at this event was published as a book with the same titled. See, A. Mukti Ali, *Ilmu Perbandingan Agama di Indonesia,* (Yogyakarta: IAIN Sunan Kalijaga Press, 1988), 6.

subjects of exploration and investigation by Western orientalists over several centuries, particularly after the sixteenth century. Unfortunately, in Mukti Ali's view, most if not all orientalists failed to achieve an unbiased understanding of Islam and therefore, their views on the religion were distorted and full of prejudices and negative judgments.[51]

Orientalism was not purely a creation of academic work as it has at times been led for the sake of Western colonial interests and sometimes blended with hidden Christian missionary agendas.[52] However, there is no doubt that Orientalism has also been seen by many scholars as having a somewhat positive contribution to knowledge.[53] Mukti Ali harshly criticises Orientalism for being partial in its treatment of religions of the East or being a tool of imperialism, yet he still expresses special appreciation for Western orientalists and scholars of religions. He asserts that credit must be given to Western scholars for their vibrant role in discovering Eastern religions as a scientific subject of research and observation in modern academic disciplines, so they also deserve appreciation for their contribution for coaching and guiding Eastern scholars in Western leading universities.[54]

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51 Mukti Ali, *Metode Memahami Agama,* 32.

52 Relevant to this regard is the following Montgomery Watt's statement, "Sometimes the Christian missionary takes to strategic thinking of a military type, and considers that knowledge of other religions will assist him toward his goal of making converts." See Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Revelation in the Modern World* (London: 1972), 62.

53 Derek Hopwood, "Albert Hourani: Islam, Christianity and Orientalism," in *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vo. 30, no. 2 (2003): 127-136.

54 A. Mukti Ali, "Ilmu Perbandingan Agama di Indonesia," in *Ilmu Perbandingan Agama di Indonesia (Beberapa Permasalahan),* edited by W.A.L. Stokhof, (Jakarta: INIS, 1990), 10. See also, A. Mukti Ali, *Ilmu*

When Mukti Ali, in 1964, raised the issue of the relevance of Occidentalism to be studied and developed by Indonesian students and scholars of Comparative Religion, the *raison d'ĕtre* that seemed to bring Mukti Ali to this idea was his epistemological interest to find the right and appropriate response that Muslim scholars of religious studies have to give in dealing with the many challenges, attacks, and prejudices launched by Western orientalists in their work regarding Islam.[55] No one can deny that Western orientalists for centuries have been successful in their scientific efforts to mine gigantic treasures of knowledge about Islam and Eastern civilizations. Yet, it must be admitted that the ramifications of their study of Islam and Eastern civilizations are still far from adequate. The failure of Orientalism to achieve a true understanding of the East, especially the Muslim world according to Mukti Ali, has been a result of several factors such as the lack of skill in Arabic language and literature, the absence of knowledge and teachings of Islam, the dearth of know-how about Muslim culture and societies, the deficiency of ideas and aspiration of Eastern societies, and more importantly, their feelings of superiority over Eastern nations.[56]

The position of the Muslim world has been weak when facing and dealing with intellectual challenges and attacks posed by the West. However, the wind of change and hope for the advancement of sciences, culture, and civilization in the Muslim world can be boosted by strengthening the role of Muslim scholars through the upgrading and enhancement of their knowledge and competence about Islamic tenets and Western sciences of

Perbandingan Agama, (Yogyakarta: Yayasan Nida, 1970), 28-32.

55 A. Mukti Ali (b), *Ilmu Perbandingan Agama di Indonesia*, (Yogyakarta: IAIN Sunan Kalijaga Press, 1988), 43.

56 Mukti Ali (a), *Ilmu Perbandingan Agama, 29-30*.

religions, culture, and civilization.[57] In this regard, Mukti Alli highly encourages Indonesian Muslim scholars, especially those in charge of educating and teaching in state institutes of Islamic studies, to study Occidentalism and to develop and spread it among the Indonesian Muslim society.[58] As has been mentioned in Chapter Three, Occidentalism became a subject taught in the Department of Comparative Religion. However, since Mukti Ali first came up with the importance of Occidentalism in 1964, there has only been one book specifically concerned with Occidentalism and was written by his student, Burhanuddin Daya.[59]

Mukti Ali defines Occidentalism as theories and sciences about religions, culture, and civilization that exist and flourish in the Western world. Occidentalism is the inversion, or the opposite, of Orientalism. In simple words, Orientalism means Western attempts to approach and comprehend the East, especially the Muslims and their faith, by studying Islamic sciences and literature, Arabic, and other Eastern languages.[60] Orientalism, in its classical form, was very close to and has been a part of colonial ideologies such as Imperialism, Racism, Nazism, and Fascism in the West. In Orientalism the East becomes the object studied by the West and conversely, in Occidentalism, the East becomes a subject for studying the West. Mutki Ali views Occidentalism as an entry point for Muslim scholars to enter into the Western sciences of religions, culture, and civilization. By having adequate expertise

57 Mukti Ali, "Ilmu Perbandingan Agama di Indonesia," in *Ilmu Perbandingan Agama,* 10.

58 Mukti Ali (a), *Ilmu Perbandingan Agama di Indonesia*, 32.

59 See, Burhanuddin Daya, *Pergumulan Timur Menyikapi Barat: Dasar-dasar Oksidentalism,* (Yogyakarta: SUKA Press, 2008).

60 Ibid., 29-30.

in this discipline, the Indonesian Muslim intelligentsia would be able to scrape off "self-isolationism," to become involved in the mutual interaction and interdependence among international communities and to engage in dialogue with Western societies.[61]

The above depiction gives us a clue about how Mukti Ali persevered in his attempt to adopt and introduce Occidentalism and the scientific methodologies of contemporary social sciences applied in the discipline of Comparative Religion into Islamic institutions of higher education, especially in UIN Sunan Kalijaga. His attempt seemed to be anchored to an epistemological objective, as alluded to earlier, which is to integrate Western traditions of religious studies into Islamic traditions of Comparative Religion. Mukti Ali was successful in introducing the UIN scholars to modern approaches applied in the discipline of Comparative Religion, as well as in raising their spirit of seeking out the other disciplines of modern sciences. As far as the use of modern methodologies to Islamic studies is concerned, Mukti Ali emphasises the relevance of scientific methodology not only for those engaged in academic research, but also for the Muslim Ummah. Therefore, it is highly required for Muslims, being the majority in Indonesia, to comprehend and understand their own religion properly through correct methods.[62]

The notion of incorporating and integrating Western traditions of religious studies into Islamic traditions of Comparative Religion, as put forward by Mukti Ali, became a great task and challenge for the next generation of the UIN scholars. Djam'annuri,

61 Ibid., 32.

62 A. Mukti Ali, "Metodologi Ilmu Agama Islam," in *Metodologi Penelitian Agama, Sebuah Pengantar,* edited by Taufik Abdullah and M.Rusli Karim, (Yogyakarta; Tiara Wacana, 1989), 46. See also, Mukti Ali, *Metode Memahami Agama,* 30.

who is in charge of teaching Hinduism, Comparative Studies of Religious Texts, and History of Conflicts and Religious Peace, strongly suggested that UIN scholars concerned with Comparative Religion rethink and then reformulate the relationship between the two epistemological perspectives in order to make Mukti Ali's thought about "scientific-cum-doctrinaire" become more viable or workable both theoretically and practically. Therefore, Djam'annuri proposed what is called "Islamic Comparative Study of Religion," in which he believes the fundamentals of Islamic faith and doctrines may not be abandoned and should be maintained by Muslim scholars and students of Comparative Religion when exploring and analysing other religions or comparing one religion with another. At the same time, rationality and objectivity, which are strongly required and emphasised in the scientific study of religions, have to be considered in order to enrich and strengthen Islamic comparative study of religion. By this, religious phenomenon should be allowed to speak for itself while final assessment and judgment on them may be given based on mutual respect and an academically sympathetic point of view. However, Djam'annuri was aware that the task of cultivating and developing the project of epistemological integration between Islamic studies has not been as easy as one can imagine and think. He realised that the scholarship of comparative religious studies at UIN Sunan Kalijaga could not be considered successful since it was not yet able to produce a scientifically verifiable design for the Islamic comparative study of religion.[63]

Among the generation of UIN scholars after Mukti Ali, Amin Abdullah has been widely known to be the most active in promoting and disseminating the notion of integration and

63 Djam'annuri, interview by the author, Yogyakarta, 20 November 2011.

interconnection between Islamic studies and modern sciences. Some UIN scholars acknowledge Amin Abdullah to be one of the most competent heirs of Mukti Ali due to his strong commitment to developing the epistemological foundations of UIN Sunan Kalijaga by constantly striving towards formulating methodologies appropriate for Islamic studies, as well as to redesign the models of integration and interconnection between Islamic studies and modern sciences. Amin Abdullah argues that Islamic scholarship in state institutes of Islamic studies, including in UIN Sunan Kalijaga, has still been unable to go beyond the epistemological horizon of Islamic disciplines of knowledge which is traditionally confined to such fields as Kalām, Falsafah, Tasawwuf, Hadīth, Tārīkh, Fiqh, Tafsīr and Lughah.[64]

According to Amin Abdullah, the challenges brought forth by modernity need to be perceived and managed through new scientific approaches and methodologies. He is convinced that the contemporary issues in today's modern civilized world have been untouched by, or missing from, the epistemological horizon of the traditional Islamic sciences.[65] Furthermore, the discrepancy between the classical Islamic disciplines and the new Islamic sciences that have benefited from modern social sciences, humanities, and natural sciences has inspired some UIN scholars like Mukti Ali, Amin Abdullah, and others to stress the necessity for UIN Sunan Kalijaga to cultivate and develop integration-interconnection between Islamic disciplines and modern sciences.

It is important to mention that the present existence of Islamic integration-interconnection of knowledge being cultivated at UIN

64 Amin Abdullah, *Islamic Studies di Perguruan Tinggi, Pendekatan Integratif-Interkonektif,* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2010), 107-108.

65 Ibid., 109.

Sunan Kalijaga has borne fruit and prompted further development of the ideas proposed by Mukti Ali in the early 1960s, as well. As explained in Chapter Four, Mukti Ali suggested that UIN scholars should be well informed and knowledgeable of Western traditions of religious studies in which modern approaches and methodologies applied in the study of religions have long been established.[66] In view of this, the introduction and the teaching of the discipline of Comparative Religion in the early 1960s into the University can be said to be the first trigger for the academic community to strive further to observe and develop the project of Islamic integration-interconnection of sciences. What is also interesting is that this project of Islamic integration of knowledge has created the academic atmosphere of UIN Sunan Kalijaga involving the two epistemological horizons of Islamic and Western traditions of religious studies.

By making the discipline of Comparative Religion the starting point for the Islamic integration of knowledge, Mukti Ali put forward this epistemological project as the synthesis methodology called "scientific-cum-doctrinaire" or "religio-scientific." He asserted that a religious approach which is "dogmatic" and theological in character needs to be accompanied with the scientifically objective approaches of History, Archaeology, Philology, Sociology, Phenomenology, and others.[67] In line with the above, Amin Abdullah continued Mukti Ali's academic efforts to adopt Western epistemological properties and implant them into Islamic methodology and approach for studying religions. He stated that in order for the

66 See Chapter Four, pages 143-153.

67 A. Mukti Ali, *Ilmu Perbandingan Agama di Indonesia*, (Yogyakarta: IAIN Sunan Kalijaga Press, 1990), 64. See Chapter

study of religion to be accomplished with a relatively more reliable outcome, there must be three kinds of approaches, "namely the doctrinal-theological, the cultural-sociological, and the critical-philosophical approaches in the unified--not in the separate--entities."[68] In order to be able to work out as a methodological framework for both religious and Islamic studies, these unified approaches must be practiced and operated as a critical dialogue in the form of what Amin Abdullah called the "hermeneutical circle":

> "Between those three approaches based upon religious texts (*naql*, *bayani*; subjective, theological doctrine) and sociological context which deal with the cultural, sociological and institutional construction of human civilization, and the ethical, critical and transcendental aspect of being religious (*al-falsafat al-ūlā*; fundamental and critical philosophy)"[69]

It has been well realised by the authorities and stakeholders of UIN Sunan Kalijaga that the epistemological blueprint for Islamic integration of knowledge would greatly depend on the quality of academic scholarship in various fields of Islamic studies and modern sciences. Therefore, under the auspices of the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA), since the 1980s the University has sent many of its lecturers and academic staff to pursue advanced studies in leading Western universities with the expectation that through this

68 M. Amin Abdullah, "Analytical Perspective in the Study of Religious Diversity: Searching for a New Model of Philosophy of the Study of Religions," in *Religious Harmony: Problems, Practice and Education,* edited by Alef Theria Wasim, Abdurrahman Mas'ud, Edith Franke, and Michael Pye, (Yogyakarta: Oasis Publisher, 2005), 41-42.

69 Ibid., 44.

international programme, scholarship in both comparative religious studies and Islamic studies developed at UIN Sunan Kalijaga could meet quality standards and, accordingly, would receive national and international recognition. The University policy to train its academic staff and lecturers in some Western universities was made in order to produce academically qualified researchers and lecturers with good competence in research methodology. Furthermore, it is important to make clear that despite all the political and financial support accorded by the state authorities (MoRA), this does not mean that the UIN academic steps to introduce its academic staff and students into the discipline of Comparative Religion and other modern Western traditions of religious studies was free from controversy and dissent.

There have been a number of Indonesian Muslim scholars such as H.M. Rasyidi, Adian Husaini, and Sohirin Mohammad Solihin, to mention just a few, who launched severe criticism with regard to UIN's endeavour to implement Western approaches and methodologies into Islamic traditions of religious studies. This criticism seems to have its very nucleus in Mukti Ali's initiative to resuscitate the modern discipline of Comparative Religion at the University, as well as in his support for the renewal of Islamic thought. Some Muslim scholars accused Mukti Ali of having hidden agendas to infuse Western liberalism into Indonesia. This accusation was built on the reality that Mukti Ali was among the first Indonesian Muslim scholars who steadfastly promoted an initiative to duplicate the system of Islamic studies run at McGill University and to apply it in Indonesian state institutes of Islamic studies.[70] This academic effort is believed by some Muslim scholars as an entry point for

70 Sohirin Mohammad Solihin, *Emergence and Development of Liberal Islam in Indonesia: a Critical Evaluation,* (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press, 2009), 48.

Western liberalism to infiltrate the Islamic system of education and the social and cultural system of the Muslim *Ummah*.

The instruction of comparative religious studies at the state institutes of Islamic studies across Indonesia cannot be separated from the influence of Western orientalism. This influence is believed to be brought by Mukti Ali who showed special esteem for Wilfred Cantwell Smith, one of his orientalist mentors during his pursuit of a Master's degree at McGill University.[71] Furthermore, within the discussion forum of "Limited Group" initiated by Mukti Ali in Yogyakarta in the early 1960s, the ideas of secularism, religious pluralism, and Islamic thought reform, which are considered to receive influence from Western liberalism, were among interesting topics frequently discussed in the group. According to Solihin, this discussion group generated some young Muslim thinkers as defenders and protagonists of liberal thought in Indonesia.[72]

The opponents of Mukti Ali's idea for the reform of Islamic thought take Ahmad Wahib's book *Pergolakan Pemikiran Islam*[73] as an example that this trend of Islamic thought has proved to bring more harm than good to the Muslim *Ummah* and Islamic faith.[74] Ahmad Wahib was Mukti Ali's disciple and an active participant involved in the "Limited Group" discussion forum. H.M. Rasyidi criticised Mukti Ali for writing the preface for Ahmad Wahib's book. Rasyidi asserts that Mukti Ali's condescension to show

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid., 49. See also, Adian Husaini, *Hegemoni Kristen-Barat dalam Studi Islam di Perguruan Tinggi,* (Jakarta: Geman Insani Press, 2006), 65-66.

73 Ahmad Wahib, *Pergolakan Pemikiran Islam, Catatan Harian Ahmad Wahib,* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1981).

74 Adian Husaini, "Liberalisasi: Tantangan bagi Peradaban Islam," in *Islam Liberal, Pluralisme Agama dan Diabolisme Intelektual,* edited by Adian Husaini, (Surabaya: Risalah Gusti, 2005), 45.

sympathy toward a thought that has aroused controversies has been very much deplored.[75] The following, for instance, is seen by some critics as a strange statement made by Ahmad Wahib:

"Oh, if only the left hand of Muhammad held a book of al-Hadith, while in his right hand there was no the revelation of Allah (al-Qur'ān), thus I would firmly say that Karl Marx and Frederich Engels are greater than that messenger of God. The brain of these two men which is extraordinary and their devotion which is unusual as well, would convince everyone that the two great men are the dwellers of the first level of heaven, together with the Messengers and Martyrs."[76]

A number of Mukti Ali's disciples and students received harsh criticism for controversial statements they made concerning certain issues in intellectual discourses in Islam. Amin Abdullah, who followed his mentor's footsteps in developing and fostering comparative religious studies at UIN Sunan Kalijaga as well as in implementing contemporary Western approaches and methodologies of religious studies into Islamic studies, has not been exempted from criticism. Some critics view that Mukti Ali and his followers' agendas of adopting and integrating Western

75 M. Dawam Rahardjo, *Intelektual Inteligensia dan Prilaku Politik Bangsa: Risalah Cendekiawan Muslim*, (Bandung: Penerbit Mizan, 1993), 57.

76 The complete words of the above translation: "Wah, andaikata hanya tangan kiri Muhammad yang memegang kitab, yaitu al-Hadits, sedang dalam tangan kanannya tidak ada Wahyu Allah (al-Qur'an), maka dengan tegas aku akan berkata bahwa Karl Marx dan Frederich Engels lebih hebat dari utusan Tuhan itu. Otak kedua orang itu yang luar biasa dan pengabdiannya yang luar biasa pula, akan meyakinkan setiap orang bahwa kedua orang besar itu adalah penghuni surge tingkat pertama, berkumpul dengan para Nabi dan Syuhada." See, Ahmad Wahib, *Pergolakan Pemikiran Islam*, 98. This exert was also cited by Husaini, see in Husaini, "Liberalisasi: Tantangan," 45.

model of religious studies with Islamic studies have been weighted with scientifically unfounded tendencies. In this regard, an excessive preference is clearly perceived by the critics in the fact that UIN scholars involved in this program of Islamic integration of knowledge eulogise and overly admire Western traditions of religious studies as more systematic and rational so much so they, in addition, intensely criticise –if not disparage– the traditional system of approaches and methodologies applied in Islamic studies.[77]

It is relevant to mention that one modern Western methodology of religious studies that mesmerizes many of UIN scholars of comparative religious studies is Hermeneutics. Their fascination with this contemporary methodology for the exegesis of sacred texts seems to have led them to take its assumptions for granted. They absorb ideas and thoughts on contemporary hermeneutical approaches to religious sacred texts as advanced by Western liberal thinkers like Immanuel Kant, Paul Ricour, Habermas, Michel Foucoult, Antonio Gramci, and others without proper criticism. Moreover, they try to apply them into their understanding of al-Qur'ān and other Islamic sacred texts. For example, Amin Abdullah has been severely condemned for making baseless haphazard accusations about the role the Quranic interpretation and its exegesis have played in establishing and maintaining the status quo.[78] In relation to this issue, Amin Abdullah has been quoted as saying:

"Even most of the (Quranic) interpretation and exegesis

77 Sohirin Mohammad Solihin, *Emergence and Development of Liberal Islam,* 84-85. See also, Husaini, *Hegemoni Kristen-Barat,* 137.

78 Husaini, *Hegemoni Kristen-Barat,* 137.

> sciences which have been inherited so far by the Islamic *Ummah*, consciously or not, have been taking part in maintaining the status quo, and the decadence of Islamic *Ummah* morally, politically, and culturally."[79]

The following is another of Amin Abdullah's statements that has ignited criticism from Muslim scholars:

> "From the empirical-historical studies of religious phenomena, it has been acquired an input that religion is indeed full with many "interests," which are attached into religious teachings as well as into the body of religious knowledge itself…If so, it would be so difficult to find a religion without being tied up with institutional "interests," power, and other certain interests, no matter how high (mighty) may be the social and transcendental values carried by those interests… the dimensions of sacredness (*taqdīs al-afkār al-dīniyyah*) contained in religion have added difficulty to this issue. In this respect, all religious discourses and issues which are actually profane in nature (*mu'āmalah ma'an al-nās*) become sacralised."[80]

79 See, Ilham B. Saenong, *Hermeneutika Pembebasan,* (Jakarta: Noura Books, 2002), xxv-xxvi.

80 "Dari studi empiris-historis terhadap fenomena keagamaan diperoleh masukan bahwa agama sesungguhnya juga sarat dengan berbagai "kepentingan" yang menempel dalam ajaran dan batang tubuh ilmu-ilmu keagamaan itu sendiri…Jika memang demikian halnya, maka sangat sulit menjumpai sebuah agama tanpa terkait dengan "kepentingan" kelembagaan, kekuasaan, dan interest-interest tertentu, betapapun tingginya nilai transcendental dan social yang dikandung oleh kepentingan tersebut… Unsur sakralitas yang termuat dalam agama menambah rumitnya persoalan. Dalam hal ini, semua wilayah perbincangan dan persoalan keagamaan yang sebenarnya bersifat profane (mu'amalah ma'a al-nas) ikut-ikutan disakralkan." See, M. Amin Abdullah, "Pengantar," in

In the above statement, there is a tone of generalisation that religions and its sacred texts are always weighted with worldly personal interests of the authors of the texts. In his rebuttal to Amin Abdullah, Husaini argues that this oversimplification is contradicting the Islamic epistemological point of view since this sweeping statement is so broad that it can be used to generalise that in all religions the production of religious texts is always intertwined and entangled with the personal interests of their authors. In Islam, in order to achieve the highest level of scholarship, especially in the fields of Islamic knowledge such as in Hadīths, Quranic exegesis, and others, a Muslim scholar is required not only to have adequate expertise in these fields of knowledge, he or she has to have the highest quality of morality and spirituality. Unlike in the Muslim world, this requirement has never been well considered in Western sciences.[81]

However, all criticism and disagreement vis-à-vis the cultivation and teaching of comparative religious studies, as well as the agenda of Islamic integration of knowledge at UIN Sunan Kaliaga, as has been presented above may not dismantle the significance of this epistemological undertaking. The UIN Muslim scholars, especially those concerned with Comparative Religion and Islamic integration of knowledge can benefit from various sources of knowledge, including from Western sciences. This objective can be pursued as long as they can genuinely appreciate and not disparage their own traditional heritage of Islamic religious studies in a way that is as equally fair and balanced as they are able to take advantage from the positive aspects of modern Western sciences.

Metodologi Studi Agama, edited by Ahmad Norma Permata, (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2000), 2-3. See also, Husaini, *Hegemoni Kristen-Barat,* 138.

81 Husaini, *Hegemoni Kristen-Barat,* 139.

The Prospect of Studying Comparative Religion

UIN Sunan Kalijaga has continued to teach Comparative Religion for the past fifty years thereby underscoring its importance to the University. Its advancements in Comparative Religion have rendered UIN among the foremost Islamic institutions of higher education for integrating Islamic sciences with modern Western sciences.[82] Likewise, comparative religious studies at UIN Sunan Kalijaga have contributed significantly towards promoting inter-religious tolerance and dialogue as well as strengthening peace building and harmony between various religious and cultural communities.

The academic steps which UIN Sunan Kalijaga has taken since the 1960s to adopt and incorporate Comparative Religion into its curriculum have hitherto been relatively advantageous to the improvement of both academic and inter-religious discourses in modern Indonesia. Nevertheless, the whole development of comparative religious studies at the University has not always displayed a cosy, smooth account of scholarship. The UIN scholars' attempts to develop Muslim scholarship in comparative religious studies have faced many challenges. It is worth mentioning that the main factor *inter alia* which has gravely hindered the University's scholarship in the discipline, according to Mukti Ali, is that most UIN scholars concerned with Comparative Religion do not have adequate scholarly expertise enabling them to generate and produce cutting-edge theories and research methodologies

82 Waryani Fajar Riyanto, *Integrasi-interkoneksi Kelimuan, Biografi Intelektual M. Amin Abdullah (1953-…), Person, Knowledge, and Institution,* (Yogyakarta: Suka Press, 2013), 637-653.

concerning comparative religious studies.[83]

Mukti Ali also points out several practical causes which he considers as factors hampering the development of Comparative Religion at UIN Sunan Kalijaga. He claims, the poor quality of the University's scholarship in the field of comparative religious studies was somewhat affected by the lack of scholarly materials such as books, journals, and other academic resources related to Comparative Religion. Another factor which Mukti Ali has also been concerned with was that most UIN scholars seldom conduct scholarly research and rarely attend intellectually intense discussions about comparative religious studies. These two factors have been aggravated by their deficiency in foreign languages skill, especially English and Arabic, not to mention the general paucity of materials in Bahasa Indonesia.[84]

Furthermore, Mukti Ali argued that the abovementioned factors are entangled with factors that are theoretically more fundamental on one hand and on the other hand they evidently wield impact on the presently ill-fated development of comparative religious studies in Indonesia. Some of those fundamental factors include such things as a long established undercurrent of mysticism within the religious life of Indonesian society; the

83 A. Mukti Ali, *Ilmu Perbandingan Agama di Indonesia*, (Yogyakarta: IAIN Sunan Kalijaga Press, 1990), 67.

84 Ibid., 6. See also, A. Mukti Ali, *Beberapa Persoalan Agama Dewasa Ini,* (Jakarta: Rajawali Pers, 1981), 325; A. Mukti Ali, "Ilmu Perbandingan Agama di Indonesia," in *Ilmu Perbandingan Agama di Indonesia (Beberapa Permasalahan),* (Jakarta: INIS, 1990), 3-5; M. Damami, Syaefan Nur, Sekar Ayu Aryani, and, Syafa'atun Al-Mirzanah, "H.A. Mukti Ali: Ketaatan, Kesalehan dan Kecendekiaan," in *Agama dan Masyarakat,* edited by Abdurrahman, Burhanuddin Daya, and Djam'annuri, (Yogyakarta: IAIN Sunan Kalijaga Press, 1993).

thoughts of Indonesian Muslim scholars (*'ulamā*) putting more emphasis on and being weighted with normative approaches applied in Islamic *fiqh* and jurisprudence; the upsurge of the spirit of Islamic propagation (Islamic *da'wah*) following the Communist uprising in 1965; the appearance of Islamic religious philosophy and theological thoughts introduced by modern Muslim thinkers, specifically Harun Nasution. These socio-religious factors seem to draw influence from the established Islamic traditional sciences such as Islamic mysticism, *Fiqh* and Islamic jurisprudence, *Kalām* (Islamic theology), *Da'wah* (Islamic propagation), and so on. Mukti Ali said that these Islamic disciplines provide no sufficient room for comparative analysis and approaches to any religious data under scrutiny so that they, in a sense, became impediments for the discipline of Comparative Religion to thrive and progress very well in Indonesia. Likewise, other deterrents are worth mentioning for their negative effects on the development of comparative religious studies. Firstly, there is the widely held belief that the discipline epistemologically originated from and is rooted in Western sciences. Secondly, most Indonesian students and scholars of comparative religious studies have limited academic expertise in the various fields of sciences necessary as auxiliary disciplines to the field of Comparative Religion such as history, sociology, anthropology, archaeology, as well as the languages of sacred religious texts.[85]

The factors just mentioned above have inhibited the development of Comparative Religion and raised a critical question of whether the discipline remains relevant to UIN Sunan Kalijaga and other Islamic institutions of higher education. Despite all the aforesaid challenges, which may appear to have negatively affected

85 Mukti Ali (b), *Ilmu Perbandingan Agama,* 7-8.

the future prospect of the discipline, there are many UIN scholars who harbour optimism that the field of Comparative Religion will be unquestionably significant as an academic subject of study in Islamic institutions of higher learning. In this regard, Mukti Ali claimed that although Comparative Religion in Indonesia does not yet occupy an equally outstanding reputation enjoyed by that in many developed countries, it has nevertheless been perceived as a constructive effort toward inter-religious dialogue between people and community groups of various religions.[86]

The relevance of developing and nurturing Comparative Religion in Indonesian centres of Islamic higher education needs to be connected and contextualized with the national development agendas. Mukti Ali asserts that the teaching of the Comparative Religion discipline is of great use for the Indonesian nation to achieve the constructive goals of inter-religious dialogue.[87] Teaching and studying religions must be linked with the objective to create a harmonious and peaceful life among adherents of different religions and to bind all diverse groups and communities as a united Indonesian nation. However, this goal is certainly opposed to the view that any fields of knowledge, including Comparative Religion, must be subject to a scientifically objective goal as reflected in an axiom that "science is for science" or "art is only for art." However, for Mukti Ali, Joachim Wach's and Frieferich Heiler's point of view is true that harmony of life among diverse groups of religious communities is a logical consequence of studying and learning religious diversity.[88]

Many UIN scholars share Mukti Ali's stand on the issue of the

86 Ibid., 71-72.

87 Ibid., 72.

88 Mukti Ali, "Ilmu Perbandingan Agama," 11.

prospect of teaching and learning comparative religious studies at UIN Sunan Kalijaga. According to Fatimah Husein, this University, along with other state Islamic institutions of higher learning, has to serve and function with the sheer responsibility to formulate an academic framework and offer unbiased answers and solutions for coping with many perplexing problems of religious diversity.[89] In such a religiously and culturally plural nation as Indonesia, communal conflicts and clashes, from the lenient to the violent, are regular occurrences involving diverse groups of people and communities with various religious and cultural backgrounds. Although such conflicts and clashes are mainly grounded in political, social, and economic vested interests and strife rather than inflicted by religiously-triggered differences, religion is foremost perceived as fuelling resentment and animosity. It is in such a context of religious diversity that Ajad Sudrajat claimed that Comparative Religion and other related disciplines must continue to be taught in UIN Sunan Kalijaga. The teaching of comparative religious studies has a significant role in training and equipping its students with an academic capacity enabling them to comprehend the locus of their own religion within society and its relation with other religions. Moreover, from the Islamic perspective, Comparative Religion is of paramount importance for the enhancement of its students' spirituality, for the goodness of the Muslim *Ummah*, as well as for the expansion of Islamic propagation (*da'wah*).[90]

Similarly, a voice of optimism about the significance of Comparative Religion as a subject taught at UIN Sunan Kalijaga has also been expressed by Syamsiatun, presently the director of Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies (ICRS). She argues

89 Fatimah Husein, interview by the author, Yogyakarta, 16 May 2012.

90 Ajat Sudrajat, interview by the author, Yogyakarta, 16 February 2012.

that in the contemporary globalised society there is no fundamental issue in politics, society, and culture that is independent from the influence of religion. Human life in all its dimensions is intertwined. With this in mind, Syamsiatun concludes that religion, as reflected in some of its doctrines and tenets, is also loaded with politically, socially, and culturally vested interests. She adds that teaching Comparative Religion is expected to foster in the minds and hearts of its students a sense of vigilance for the possible threats that may arise from inter-religious relations and install a sense of moral imperatives to give a meaningful contribution to society, to look at interreligious issues logically, to not be easily inflicted by inter-religious conflicts and differences, and not to use religious issues for self-vested interests, and so forth.[91]

Moreover, some of the UIN scholars interviewed for this research expressed a growing concern over the issue of student employment upon graduating from the Department of Comparative Religion. This issue is a challenge to scholars, lecturers, and university authorities. Alim Roswantoro realised that the level of employment for fresh graduates from the Department of Comparative Religion and the Faculty of Usūl al-Dīn is generally very low. According to Roswantoro, this is related to the fact that the focuses and fields of study given by the Department are quite limited, which include only such confined scholarly expertise as inter-religious relations, religion and peace, inter-religious conflict and violence, inter-religious dialogue and cooperation, and so on.[92] Meanwhile, this academic expertise seems to have no lucrative job market since it does have little "link and match" with the most needed fields of employment outside campus which are more often available to those skilled in

91 Syamsiatun, interview by the author, Yogyakarta, 30 March 2012.

92 Alim Roswantoro, interview by the author, Yogyakarta, 21 August 2014.

economics, business and management, education, medical sciences, technology and information sciences, and many others.

The limited employment for fresh graduates of the Department of Comparative Religion is among the factors detracting students from enrolling in comparative religious studies at UIN Sunan Kalijaga. In this regard, Ustadzi Hamzah admitted that the number of students registered and enrolled in the Faculty of Usūl al-Dīn is smaller compared to that admitted in the Faculties of Tarbiyyah (Education) and Sharī'ah (Islamic jurisprudence) and other faculties.[93] In this respect, it is relevant to take the figure of graduates of Usūl al-Dīn Faculty 2012-2014 (Table 1) as an example of the difference of the number of students enrolled in each department in the Faculty of Usūl al-Dīn. During the three consecutive academic years of 2012 to 2014, the number of students enrolled in each of the Departments of Comparative Religion (CR), Sociology of Religion (SR), and Philosophy and Religion (PR), was smaller than that enrolled in the Department of Quranic Sciences and Exegesis (QSE). This can be understood by looking at Table 1 below illustrating the number of students of the Faculty of Usūl al-Dīn who graduated and were inaugurated from 2012 to 2014 according to each department.

93 Ustadzi Hamzah, interview by the author, Yogyakarta, 26 August 2014.

Table 1

Graduated and Inaugurated Students of Usūl al-Dīn Faculty UIN Sunan Kalijaga 2012-2014. [94]

No	Department	2012		2013		2014	
		Graduated	Inaugurated	Graduated	Inaugurated	Graduated	Inaugurated
1	PR	22	20	17	15	36	37
2	CR	24	22	35	36	30	30
3	QSE	79	76	92	95	93	92
4	SR	26	26	38	38	30	30
Total		151	144	182	184	199	199

Given the unfortunate low student enrolment in Comparative Religion, Singgih Basuki suggested that the Department re-orientates its strategy toward student admission by emphasising academically high credentials as prerequisites to recruit prospective students with high qualifications, albeit small in quantity. Through this re-orientation, the academic objectives of the Department have to be transformed and reflected in scholarly excellent programs in order to ameliorate the quality of students' capacity as a means to generate graduates with high aptitude as thinkers, intellectuals, scholars and academics, rather than to augment students' quantity and create graduates that position themselves more as employment seekers.[95]

In addition to the limited job market, Hamzah added two factors that may prevent prospective students from enrolling

94 See, the appendix: Grafik Mahasiswa Lulus and Wisuda Fakultas Ushuluddin 2012-2014.

95 Singgih Basuki, interview by the author, Yogyakarta, 26 August 2014.

into the program.[96] Firstly, there has been a negative image of the Faculty of Usūl al-Dīn related to some people's perception that the education system of UIN Sunan Kalijaga is not Islamic for its willingness to introduce Western traditions of religious studies which they perceive as having nothing to do with Islam. In their view, Western traditions of religious studies and all related subjects, for instance Comparative Religion, philosophy, hermeneutics and others, are not Islamic as they originate from an epistemological basis of free reasoning instead of Islamic thinking. Ahmad Muttaqin confirms[97] this unfortunate image of UIN Sunan Kalijaga, particularly toward the Faculty of Usūl al-Dīn. Secondly, according to Hamzah, within the last ten years the quality of management, services, and facilities provided by the Faculty of Usūl al-Dīn, as well as many other faculties at UIN Sunan Kalijaga, have been quite poor, especially when the institution began to transform from an institute (IAIN Sunan Kalijaga) into a university (UIN Sunan Kalijaga) in 2004. This poor condition deteriorated further in the aftermath of a massive earthquake devastating the city of Yogyakarta in 2006. Despite these troubling facts, authorities at UIN Sunan Kalijaga have shown robust commitment toward transforming the University into a leading centre of comparative religious studies in Indonesia.

Concluding Remarks

The development of the discipline of Comparative Religion at UIN Sunan Kalijaga has been influenced by and intertwined with the wider context of Indonesian socio-historical circumstances.

96 Ustadzi Hamzah, interview by the author, Yogyakarta, 26 August 2014.

97 Ahmad Muttaqin, interview by the author, Yogyakarta, 22 August 2014

The present existence of the discipline at the University can be seen as an actual continuation of al-Rānīrī's legacy from the seventieth century, *Tibyān fī Ma'rifat al-Adyān*. Moreover, there is no doubt that the plurality of religions and cultures, as well as the socio-political developments in Indonesia, has brought a real impact on the progress of comparative religious studies at UIN Sunan Kalijaga. The appointment of Mukti Ali as a top ranked official in the Ministry of Religious Affairs in 1971 inspired the UIN scholars to be scholarly active in responding to inter-religious issues as a manifestation of their support of the government's agendas of modernization and development.

In addition, the UIN scholars of Comparative Religion have also been challenged with a controversy over the issue of the adoption and application of modern Western methodologies and approaches in comparative religious studies. In response to this issue, the UIN scholars convincingly claim that not all contemporary Western methodologies are in contradiction with traditional methods applied in Islamic religious studies. Therefore, they are of the opinion that contemporary Western sciences, to some extent, can be integrated with Islamic traditional theology.

Another challenging issue, *inter alia*, which the UIN scholars of Comparative Religion have recently been facing is about the future prospect of teaching and learning Comparative Religion at the University. This is especially related to the fact that student enrolment in the Department of Comparative Religion has decreased in recent years, mostly affected by a widely held assumption that the Department has not been promising for the potential students due to the employment availability and job market for its fresh graduates are quite limited.

CONCLUSION

Comparative Religion as an academic discipline taught for years at Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN, State Islamic University) Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta, may not be separated from the wider context of Indonesia's cultural, social, and political dynamics. The Comparative Religion discipline, as a product of human thought, always intertwines with and has been, to a certain degree, constructed by the surrounding socio-cultural and socio-political circumstances. This fact sheds light on the importance of social, political, and cultural factors that have direct or indirect influence on the growth and development of comparative religious studies in Indonesia.

An important factor that makes this discipline academically unique and appealing is a Muslim legacy on Comparative Religion left by Nūr al-dīn al-rānīrī, an Indian-born Muslim scholar who lived during the seventeenth century sultanate of Aceh. Al-Rānīrī has bequeathed to Indonesian Muslims a precious legacy of literature on Comparative Religion entitled *Tibyān fī Ma'rifat al-*

Adyān; therefore he has been depicted by Azra as "the first *'alim* ever in the Malay world to write a work on Comparative Religion." However, from the eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries, there has been no Muslim scholar who fostered the discipline as al-Rānīrī did until the late period of colonialism and the early years of Indonesian independence, when a number of Muslim scholars such as Mahmud Yunus, Hasbullah Bakry, and M. Arsjad Thalib Lubis started producing books on this subject.

In the 1930s a number of Islamic secondary schools and colleges in West Sumatra carried out educational modernization. Among the important agendas of this academic reform was the incorporation of general (secular) sciences: History, Mathematics, Geography, English, Comparative Religion, and others, into their learning institutions' curriculum. Corresponding to the spirit of educational reform and modernization, some of these Islamic learning institutions started introducing the discipline into their students.

The wind of academic reform and modernization also took place in all of the state institutes of Islamic studies that flourished in the 1970s. In 1960 University Islam Negeri (UIN, State Islamic University) Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta, established the Department of Comparative Religion. Since then the University has become a fertile ground for the Comparative Religion discipline to flourish and to reach a point that makes it recognized as a preferred centre for comparative religious studies in Indonesia. In this context, the present development of the Comparative Religion discipline in many of the state Islamic institutions of higher learning in Indonesia is much indebted to the role played by UIN Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta.

There are several factors that have significantly contributed to

the success of UIN Sunan Kalijaga in developing the Comparative Religion discipline. Firstly, the UIN scholars, as an organized body of intellectuals, have been an important part in cultivating and fostering the discipline at the University. In this respect, A. Mukti Ali was the prominent scholar whose role in nurturing comparative religious studies at the University is unquestionable. Mukti Ali's contribution and legacy have been continuously maintained by the generation of Muslim scholars after him such as Burhanuddin Daya, Djam'anuri, Alef Theria Wasim, Amin Abdullah, and more others. Secondly, the celebrated reputation of comparative religious studies at the University is, to a very significant extent, a result of an educational system applied at the academia. In the University's educational system, both Islamic and Western traditions of comparative religious studies were given a special yet balanced portion as reflected in the curricular structure and syllabic design of the Comparative Religion discipline. Thirdly, the intellectual discourses regarding selected topics in religious studies such as the origins of religion, religious truth claims, methodology, and approaches in comparative religion, as well as the objectives and benefits of studying comparative religion, have been of great use and significance to the intellectual dynamics of the UIN scholars concerned with comparative religious studies. As this study suggests, the UIN scholars have demonstrated open-mindedness and a flexible aptitude in adapting to the positive aspects of up-to-date approaches and methodologies developed in Western traditions of religious studies.

The influence of Western traditions of religious studies on the atmosphere of scholarship in Islamic religious studies at UIN Sunan Kalijaga has been taking place concurrently with the return of the UIN scholars from their postgraduate studies in

Western universities. They highlighted the importance of Western perspectives of religious studies to be integrated with their own heritage of Islamic religious studies. The UIN scholars believe that by integrating Western approaches and methodologies of religious studies and Islamic traditions of religious studies, Muslim scholars and students can absorb constructive dimensions of the former for the benefit of the latter. Meanwhile, some believe that Western methodologies of religious studies applied in Islamic studies will bring more harm than good to the Islamic faith of Muslim students. Notwithstanding, the development of the Comparative Religion discipline at UIN Sunan Kalijaga never seems to be free from controversy and even resistance.

The prospect of teaching and learning the comparative study of religions at UIN Sunan Kalijaga has faced challenging issues. Among the crucial issues, to mention just a few, is the problem of the declining number of students enrolled in the Department of Comparative Religion. This issue is often seen as related to the limited job market for fresh graduates from the Department. Despite that, many of the UIN scholars concerned with Comparative Religion are of the opinion that the discipline should be maintained and taught at UIN Sunan Kalijaga. This is based on the belief that the Comparative Religion discipline could play a crucial role in implanting into the hearts and minds of its students the worth of upholding inter-religious tolerance and dialogue, as well as arousing the commitment to promoting and building peace and harmony among people of various religions and cultures. Moreover, from the Islamic perspective, the Comparative Religion discipline is held to be of paramount importance for the enrichment of its students' spirituality for the betterment of the morality of the Muslim *Ummah,* as well as for the expansion of

Islamic propagation (*da'wah*).

Seen from various aspects and conditions required for a qualified academic research, the present study is still far from adequate. It is greatly realized that there are many shortcomings and weaknesses that can be found here and there in this study, be it in terms of methodology used, logical sequences of reasoning, focus of the study, academic standards of language, and so on. Despite that, this research provides open rooms and various perspectives concerning the possibility of conducting further research on related topics. Since the focus of this study is only directed at the development of the Comparative Religion discipline within a particular context of UIN Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta, the focus of this research can be extended into, for instance, the comparison between the developments of the Comparative Religion discipline in various Islamic universities in different countries.

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Interviews

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Abdul Mustaqim, interview by the author, Yogyakarta, 10 September 2014.

Ahmad Muttaqin, interview by the author, Yogyakarta, 22 August 2014

Ajat Sudrajat, interview by the author, Yogyakarta, 16 March 2012.

Alim Roswantoro, interview by the author, Yogyakarta, 21 August 2014.

Amin Abdullah, interview by the author, Yogyakarta. 11 November 2011.

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Hamim Ilyas, interview by the author, Yogyakarta, 16 February 2012.

Khoirul Dzikri, interview by the author, Yogyakarta, 3 May 2012.

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Siti Syamsiatun, interview by the author, Yogyakarta, 30 March 2012.

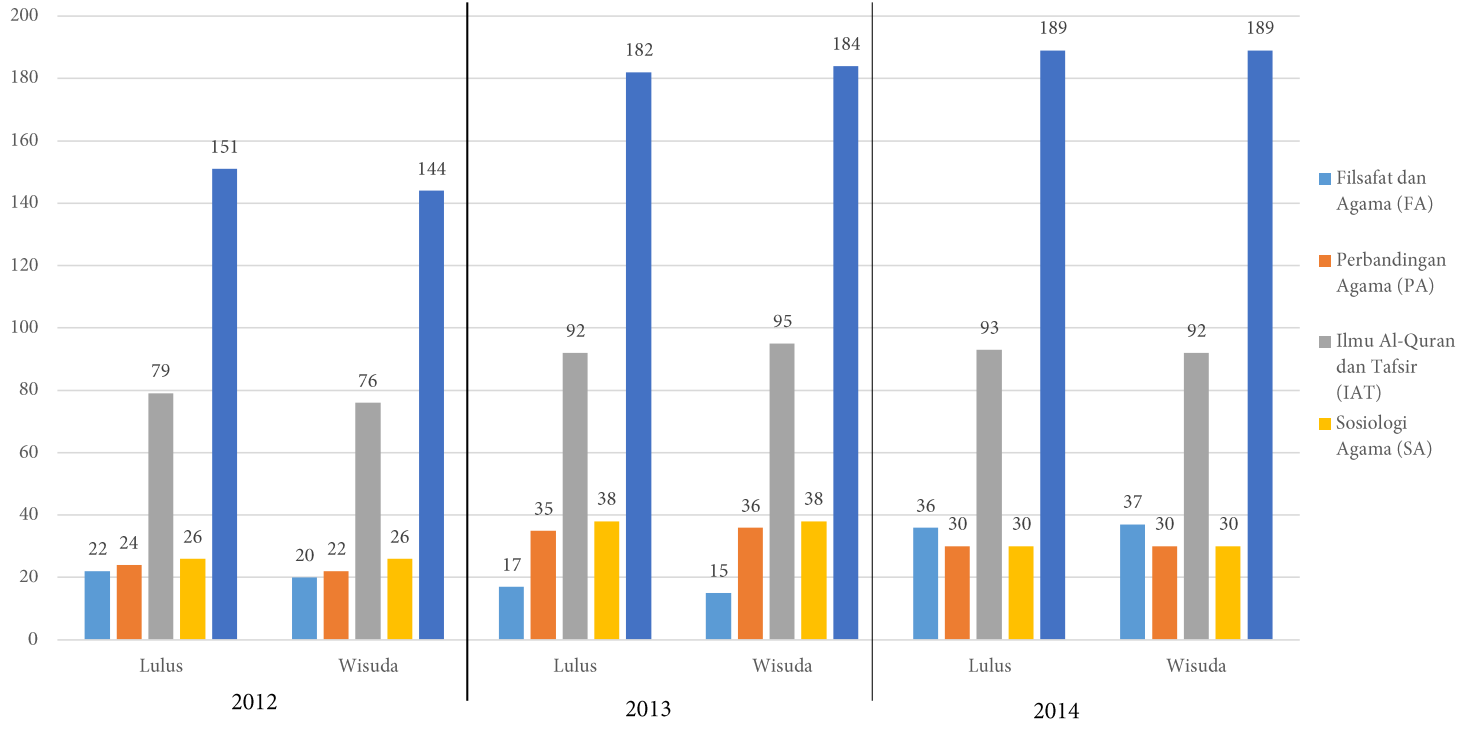
Ustadzi Hamzah, interview by the author, Yogyakarta, 26 August 2014.

Waryono Abdul Ghafur, interview by the author, Yogyakarta, 10 September 2014.

Wiwin Siti Aminah, interview by the author, Yogyakarta, 10 September 2014.

APPENDIX

GRAFIK MAHASISWA LULUS DAN WISUDA 2012-2014
FAKULTAS USHULUDDIN UIN SUNAN KALIJAGA YOGYAKARTA
(CHART OF GRADUATED AND INAUGURATED STUDENTS OF USUL AL-DIN FACULTY 2012-2014)



COMPARATIVE RELIGION

Its Growth and Development in Indonesia

Comparative Religion as an academic discipline taught for years at Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN, State Islamic University) Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta, may not be separated from the wider context of Indonesia's cultural, social, and political dynamics. The Comparative Religion discipline, as a product of human thought, always intertwines with and has been, to a certain degree, constructed by the surrounding socio-cultural and socio-political circumstances. This fact sheds light on the importance of social, political, and cultural factors that have direct or indirect influence on the growth and development of comparative religious studies in Indonesia.

An important factor that makes this discipline academically unique and appealing is a Muslim legacy on Comparative Religion left by Nūr al-dīn al-rānīrī, an Indian-born Muslim scholar who lived during the seventeenth century sultanate of Aceh. Al-Rānīrī has bequeathed to Indonesian Muslims a precious legacy of literature on Comparative Religion entitled Tibyān fī Maʿrifat al-Adyān; therefore he has been depicted by Azra as "the first 'alim ever in the Malay world to write a work on Comparative Religion." However, from the eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries, there has been no Muslim scholar who fostered the discipline as al-Rānīrī did until the late period of colonialism and the early years of Indonesian independence, when a number of Muslim scholars such as Mahmud Yunus, Hasbullah Bakry, and M. Arsjad Thalib Lubis started producing books on this subject.

***

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