



The Experience of Struggling to Understand Islamic Studies in Indonesia: An Autobiographical Outlook

Description

Muslim and non-Islamic scholars have been interested in studying Islam since its emergence. The concept of *'ilm* becomes a central point in understanding Islamic tradition and thought. Scholars need to explore and understand how the idea of *'ilm*. The history of Islamic thought has influenced humankind's perspective for more than 13 centuries.

For example, Fazlur Rahman (1997) describes Islam in his work entitled *Islam*. In this work, Rahman explains the various dimensions of the Islamic religion. H.A.R. Gibb (1962) also did the same thing when explaining Islam under *Mohammedanism*. Another piece that comprehensively explains Islam is Carl Brockelmann (1939) in his work entitled *History of the Islamic Peoples*. It is said that this book is "The first one-volume history in English giving the story of all the Islamic states and peoples from the beginning to the present day."

In addition, there is also the work of Marshall G.S. Hodgson (1979), which consists of 3 volumes that examine Islam, from its early days to the 19th century AD. The results, scholars in the West, both Muslim and non-Muslim, tend to want to present Islam in one stage of history and the dialectic that occurs in it. For example, the emergence of various encyclopedias published by Western publishers contributes to understanding Islam. All these efforts imply how deep an understanding of Islam and Muslims is.

I have never finished exploring the literature on Islamic studies. Here, it can be stated that work on this topic is still developing, along with the times. Therefore, since taking an undergraduate degree in 1996 until 2022, when it has been almost 25 years, the process of exploring works in Islamic studies continues to be carried out. Many pieces were collected, limited to Indonesian, English, and Arabic.

These works show the broad scope of fields of knowledge related to Islamic and Muslim studies. However, there are more and more works on Islam and Muslims. The conflicts in the Muslim region, especially the Middle East, have never been extinguished, which raises a question: Why do Islamic and Muslim studies not help build peace in the Muslim region?

Looking for answers to the questions above, of course, seems to want to find a point of connection between Islamic studies and the current.

State of the Islamic ummah. Scholars who are experts in Islamic studies, such as Bernard Lewis, try to explain that Islam does not follow the times, so Islamic behavior destroys the order of world peace (Lewis 2002; Lewis 2003). Meanwhile, some scholars say that Islamic politics has failed in the contemporary context.

The most critical thesis is the view that Islam is a threat to the world, as stated by Samuel P. Huntington. This thesis was submitted by Olivier Roy (1996). Likewise, the view says what form the world order would be if Islam did not exist in the 6th century AD. These views argue that Islam is a “problem” in global demand. Therefore, I often ask whether these views are the basis of the argument for carrying out various disturbances in the Middle East region.

In 1924, the Ottoman Caliphate collapsed. At that time, the world entered the era of modernization or Westernization. The distance between the Prophet’s age and the Islamic Caliphate’s collapse is 13 and a half centuries, to be exact. The failure of the Islamic caliphate led to various efforts to revive Islam to the surface. However, it should not be one of the principal axes of world power. Thus, Islamic movements emerged when Islam fell, trying to revive Islam. The distance between the rise of the West through the Age of Enlightenment and the collapse of the Islamic Caliphate is more than two centuries.

From the Enlightenment Era until the fall of Islam, the West carried out the process of occupation in all corners of the Muslim world, including Indonesia. The power of the West in “controlling” the world today has been running for more than four centuries. Islam and Muslims have been made into objects, not subjects, during that period. The distance between the fall of the Islamic caliphate and the year 2024 is about 100 years.

There are some characteristics in the last 100 years: First, the revival of the Jewish spirit, which is marked by the emergence of the Zionist protocol, which has produced a paradigm of world civilization from among the Jewish society. The success of the Jews was when they became “Western” and established the state of Israel. This event indicates a conflict playing out in the history of the world. In the beginning, the chaos that occurred between Christianity and Islam was changed to Islam versus Judaism.

Second, the power of Islam is no longer able to serve as an axis of world power, which is driven by countries in the Middle East.

When Islam fell in the era of the Ottoman Caliphate, one of the ideologies that emerged was the communist ideology, which later developed in the Russian region. The emergence of this communist ideology, almost simultaneously with Hitler’s desire to wipe out the Jewish race in Europe. Since then, Jews have succeeded in integrating themselves into the West and have been at the forefront of producing knowledge, especially in the social sciences and humanities. Unsurprisingly, internationally known social engineers are partly affiliated with the Jewish faith. Here, what is exchanged later is that the West is against Islam, not Hitler’s behavior model towards Jews (Feldman 2007).

The emergence of Jewish consciousness in Western history in the last century shows how Islam has become a global threat. Restructuring the world order makes Islam an object, a legacy of Eastern studies known as Orientalism. For example, an attempt to criticize the West, which is highly respected, was carried out by Edward Said, who does not believe in Islam. He wanted to critique the West’s attempts to treat the East. However, Said’s work did not become the primary basis for understanding Islam and Muslims in the Middle East (Said 1996).

Therefore, the study of Orientalism and Islam and Muslims has become an academic reproduction that is carried out to understand Islam continuously. In other words, knowledge about Islam, produced by non-Muslims, is then used as a new standard of understanding of Islamic teachings, especially in the West. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, for example, conducted a study on several orientalist who were instrumental in presenting Islamic spirituality (*Sufism*). This, of course, has attracted sympathy towards Islam, where some orientalist embraced Islam because of their spiritual and intellectual journey (Nasr 2011; Nasr 2010).

Two of the most respected Orientalists in the study of Sufism are Louis Massignon and Henry Corbin. Some scholars of Sufism in Islam tend to be studied and studied by the works of non-Islamic scholars, to be introduced to the Western world (CW Ernst 1997) (CW Ernst 1996) (CW Ernst 1994) (A. Schimmel 1975) (A. Schimmel 1994) (A. Schimmel 1982).

However, studies of ‘ulama who contribute to hardline Islamic movements tend not to be “released” just like that until “notes” are given about the impact of this thought in the Islamic world. Therefore, the study of Ibn Taymiyyah and Abdul Wahhab tends to lead to the study of the Islamic movement to prove that there are grounds for using violence in Islam.

I do not want to examine all aspects of the work of scholars on Islam and Muslims, but to see how the scope of Islamic studies is extensive. I will assume that “Islam as ...”. So far, almost all scholars have tried to describe Islam from various perspectives. Some are interested in exploring it. From a historical perspective, the term Islamic History emerged. Some are interested in seeing the side of the movement. It is not surprising that the time of the Islamic Movement arises. The concept of “Islam as ...” is Islam that has undergone a process of reasoning by humans, which is one of the beliefs of the faith tradition of the Prophet Abraham.

In this context, Islam can cover all aspects of life through the instructions contained in the Qur’an. Standardized behavior was practiced by the Prophet Muhammad during his Sunnah. These sources must be read in a linguistic context, namely Arabic. Thus, Islam is a *din*, not an *agama*.’ The term ‘*agama*’ does not come from Arabic but is from the tradition of Hindu beliefs.

My encounter with Islamic studies started in childhood (Kamaruzzaman 2014). The conflict in Aceh has sent people to various parts of the world. The social revolution has brought some of the Acehese royal family to the island of Java. Aceh’s war with the Netherlands led several Acehese to the Malay Land. They are scattered, from Kedah to Johor. The conflict between GAM and the Republic of Indonesia has also brought Acehese to several countries. Therefore, I have studied, understood, practiced, and written about Islam since childhood while witnessing the conflict in my hometown.

I studied Islam from madrasas, special senior high schools, and universities in Islamic studies by focusing on Islamic legal thought, politics, and movements. Since my Master’s and doctoral degrees, I have struggled more with work in English rather than Indonesian. Through this study, I was able to travel to various countries. Islamic studies have also given me multiple local, national, and international awards. In short, Islam has given me its function. However, I certainly have not done much for my self-function towards Islam. Almost half of my life has been devoted to studying Islamic studies.

In my experience of studying Islam, I have struggled a lot with non-Muslim works, especially in English. I rarely read the books of classical and contemporary Muslim scholars. However, I have several books (*kitab*s) as part of Muslims’ intellectual and spiritual history. One thing that fascinated me was the energy and power of the writing tradition carried out by the ‘ulama. They produce volumes of work. Therefore, in several works, I do not dare to make a very sharp criticism

of the work of the ‘ulama as an effort to raise my intellectual identity. I only read the works of these ‘ulama’ without a substantive review process. The quality of my knowledge is far from that of these Islamic scholars.

For example, the book *al-Muwa???’* by Imam Malik is a guidebook for Muslims containing hadiths that almost all refer to the Prophet or the Prophet’s wife (Aisyah r.a.). This book provides a relatively systematic narrative of life guidance based on the Sunnah of the Prophet. The ‘ulama are to provide a systematic academic responsibility for every expression or understanding of the Prophet. Regardless of any criticism from scholars, the writing model of the *al-Muwa???’* provides a clear picture of the sense of responsibility of an ‘ulama in composing an academic work.

The other job is *al-Ris?lah*, the work of Imam Shafi’i. This book is the earliest in Islamic intellectual history in *ushul fiqh*. When the book is opened and examined, it shows the depth of Imam Shafi’i’s knowledge of logic, where he always refers to the Qur’an and Sunnah when finding the rules of *ushul* in each chapter. One of the ‘ulama who faithfully wrote the works of Imam Shafi’i was al-Rabi’ ibn Sulaiman, who wrote this book, along with another of Imam Shafi’i, al-Umm. Despite the socio-historical criticism of Imam Shafi’i by Wael B. Hallaq (1993:600), he admits that:

Shafi’i’s *Ris?la[h]* embodies his legal methodology and has, in our view, gained the distinction of being the first attempt to synthesize the disciplined exercise of human reasoning and the complete assimilation of revelation as the basis of the law.

The two examples above show not the influence but how the scientific methods are used by the ‘ulama in producing their work. There are tens to thousands of works of ‘previous scholars,’ with the same spirit. Regardless of their imagination regarding spiritual experiences, the academic and scientific experiences they experience should be a separate note in understanding the Islamic intellectual tradition. In explaining about shari’ah, Khaled Abou El Fadl (2005:33) provides a narrative that may emphasize how the academic situation of the Islamic ummah:

To help visualize the phenomenon I am describing, perhaps I should mention my library on Islamic law. It contains about fifty thousand titles, most written before the sixteenth century and as early as the ninth century. The books in this library represent a variety of *approaches, schools of thought, and opinions* written over several centuries. Many of the titles are multivolume – in fact, some titles contain as many as fifty volumes in print.

From my experience of understanding Islamic studies, I would argue that dealing with thousands of literary works is not easy. This is why I do not dare over-critique the Islamic intellectual tradition. A broad scope of exploration must be explored before a comprehensive study of Islam is carried out.

I know my academic weaknesses, such as my inability to enter holistically the Islamic horizon I present in this study. To overcome this, I explore the intellectual aspects of Islam that previous Islamic scholars have produced. Every part of this horizon has also produced some scholars and works I have yet to obtain. Therefore, I endeavor to present data from the results of scholars to explain “Islam as ...”

This separation of “Islam as ...” is based on the literature in Islamic studies. I classify “Islam as ...” into several topics, namely: Islam as Din, Islam as a Science, Islam as Ethics, Islam as Philosophy, Islam as Art, Islam as Spiritual, Islam as Standards of Conduct, Islam as Culture, Islam as Law, Islam as Interpretation, Islam as History, Islam as Politics, Islam as Economy, Islam as Education, and Islam as Civilization. These topics will become meaningful discussions in understanding “Islam as...” Then, I sort and select these topics to be described

holistically. Of course, among these topics, there are interrelationships with each other. For this reason, overlapping cannot be avoided, mainly when the epistemological basis of each concept is explained.

The division above is not “Islam is ...”, but “Islam as ...”, which seeks not to provide a standard definition but to explain aspects of Islam in every part of human life. The explanation of what is understood and practiced by humans is the focus of this study. After more than two decades of studying Islamic studies, there have been so many explanations about “Islam is ...” and “Islam as...” So, literature on Islamic studies dominates my academic exploration. When reading Islamic studies that try to explain the negative aspects, they mostly start with “Islam as...” understood and practiced by humankind.

However, not a few scholars have been attempting to decipher the genuine Islam as stated in the Qur'an and al-Sunnah. The two most authoritative sources refer to Allah's said and said by the Prophet Muhammad SAW. These two things can be categorized as “Islam is ...” As for the rest, it is “Islam as ...” as understood by humans after the Prophet SAW. M. Quraish Shihab, in listing someone to interpret the Qur'an, mentions there are 15 conditions. Each of these conditions is also a separate science requiring learning time. Therefore, to explain “Islam as ...” is not as easy as imagined. The way to do this is to continuously understand and explore various aspects of the teachings of Islam itself.

The six aspects that force Islam to operate in space and time imply that the future of this belief is very concerning. Suppose you look at

The history of the arrival of the Prophet Muhammad, who was revealed to be an ignorant society. In that case, one of the dogmatic hopes among Muslims is the presence of Imam Mahdi and Prophet Isa a.s. Who are the two essential figures to resolve conflicts in this world? The Doctrine of Imam Mahdi and Prophet Isa a.s. If it is paid attention to, it is of great concern to the international community, especially within the West itself (Voll 1979) (Warburg 1995) (Dekmejian and Wyszomirski 1972).

If you look at the life of the Prophet and the great scholars, the figure of Imam Mahdi still has many question marks, especially regarding who the actual figure of Imam Mahdi is. The question is, how is the figure of Imam Mahdi present in an era like this? Did he come as a savior? Is the current inspiration for Muslims? Was he present who had divine help? Was he present as a model for the presence of the prophets? Does he present himself as a 'charismatic cleric with a following? What will the West do if the figure of Imam Mahdi is present in this world? So far, Muslim figures are spiritualists, really not bothered by the West.

It is considered that the presence of Imam Mahdi, as in the era of the Prophet, is very likely to have been known, just like the experience of the Prophet, which Christian and Jewish spiritualists already knew. Today, as explained above, Islam is the fastest-growing belief system globally. The contribution of scholars in Islamic scholarship cannot be ignored. The development of Muslims is expected to grow, along with information, communication, and technology.

For nearly 14 centuries, Islam has always taken various forms, explaining every moment that passes. This is where our role in writing Islam is always understood. If Islam is placed in space and time, it still flies into “a milky way of human thought.” For example, the Qur'an, which is the word of God, will still be in the context of space and time of human consciousness. Regardless of human behavior trying to deny faith in Allah, the Qur'an will still be read and then interpreted.

As Khaled Abou El Fadl explained above, the works that appear are always seen as representing a school of thought that has existed in Muslim history. For example, Sunni and Shia groups are the major Muslim sects. Islamic law has various schools of thought, although the most famous are only 4.

There are several different and contradictory schools of thought in the study of theology, such as the study of *tasawwuf*, which are 'practical and philosophical, along with the various tarekat. When responding to the collapse of the Islamic caliphate in Ottoman Turkey, multiple schools and movements emerged, exerting influence today among Muslims. Different schools of thought regarding the compatibility between Western progress and Islam in responding to Western domination exist.

In fact, in responding to concepts from the West in the form of nation-states, thinkers also have their views, which sometimes collide not only at the philosophical level but also at the level of followers (Esposito 1985) (Esposito 1984) (Esposito 1997) (Esposito 1985). 1983) (Esposito and Voll 2001). Islamic scholars also do not have the same sentence when considering the local culture, which has been the journey of Islam for almost 14 centuries.

The Christian faith is five centuries older than Islam and has been established in Europe. Islam is also present, trying to "Islamicize" Europe. However, politically, Islamic forces must leave the region. Islamic civilization still influences Europe today. However, Islam is not included as the basis of ideological power. Because the West has systematized the world order, Islam must adapt to the interpretations of science and ideology developed in Western countries.

As a spiritual and intellectual force, Islam is allowed to take part. Meanwhile, as an ideology and political force, Islam absolutely should not be given space. One of the current impacts that have emerged is that the West has ransacked almost all the centers of Muslim civilization in the Middle East in various ways (Fisk 2006). As a result, repeating Islamic writing has several uniform characteristics.

First, the concepts from the West are forced to be used to understand the Islamic ummah.

Second, the countries that became the basis of Muslim civilization were forced to be eliminated, both within and outside.

Third, scientific figures can produce their works if they do not provide the power and spirit to awaken the Islamic Khilafah. In other words, scientists are expected to be without palaces and parliaments and not even allowed to be close to the core forces in the struggle for Islam as an ideological and political force.

Fourth, in structuring the world order, Islam must be left as a threat (Huntington 1997; Huntington 1991). Almost all literature regarding the future history of humankind places Islam as an "enemy" to be wary of (Gore 2013; Kaku 2012; Mahbuni 2013; Schmidt and Cohen 2014).

Fifth, Muslim countries that can carry out the modernization process and assist the process of Western capitalization tend to be left as "friends" of Western allies. However, if you carry out the process of mobilizing the power of Islamic ideology, then the country will be torn down.

Sixth, the conflict between internal Muslims, because of various sects, tends to be carried out massively to destroy Muslim countries. The fighting between Sunnis and Shiites and between ethnic groups in the Middle East is a potent recipe for stopping the central powers in the Middle East.