



THE EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND OF *IMAMS* AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO THEIR RECOGNITION AS RELIGIOUS LEADERS: THE CASE OF INDONESIAN MUSLIM COMMUNITY IN THE NETHERLANDS

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Abstract

The Netherlands is one of European countries whose population with Islamic background has been increasing significantly. Statistical data show that there are around one million Muslims in this country or around six per cent of total population of the Netherlands. Some Muslim communities in this country came from Southeast Asia including Indonesia. The number of Muslim population from Indonesia was estimated to be around 200,000 out of 400,000 Dutch population with Indonesian background. This certainly necessitates the involvement and role of religious leaders who are able to serve the need and interests of Muslim community with Indonesian background in this country. One of the important issues needs attention is the educational background of these religious leaders. Therefore, this paper describes the following: what is the educational background of the imams and how this contributes to their recognition as religious leaders by Muslim community with Indonesian background in the Netherlands. It argues that the different patterns of educational background of imams among Indonesian Muslims in the Netherlands have significantly contributed to their recognition as respected religious leaders by their community.

Key words: *Religious leaders, Imam, Indonesian Muslims in the Netherlands, Educational Background.*

Abstrak

Dalam perkembangan kontemporer, Belanda merupakan salah satu negara Eropa di mana jumlah penduduknya yang berlatar belakang Islam mengalami peningkatan yang tinggi. Data statistik menunjukkan bahwa penduduk dengan latar belakang Islam berjumlah sekitar satu juta orang atau sekitar enam persen dari total populasi Belanda yang berjumlah sekitar tujuh belas juta orang. Penduduk Muslim ini sebagian berasal dari Asia Tenggara termasuk Indonesia. Penduduk Muslim asal Indonesia diperkirakan berjumlah sekitar 200.000 orang dari sekitar 400.000 orang yang berlatar belakang Indonesia. Kenyataan ini menuntut keterlibatan dan peran pemimpin agama dalam melayani kebutuhan dan kepentingan umat Muslim asal Indonesia di negeri kincir angin ini. Salah satu hal yang menarik untuk dikaji dari para pemimpin agama ini adalah latar belakang pendidikan dan keilmuan mereka sehubungan dengan tugas-tugas keagamaan mereka. Karena itu, tulisan ini berupaya untuk mendeskripsikan pola latar-belakang pendidikan pemimpin keagamaan masyarakat Muslim asal Indonesia yang mana kemudian bisa dilihat kredibilitas dan kompetensi mereka dalam melayani umat. Artikel ini berargumen bahwa latar belakang pendidikan para *imam* asal Indonesia secara signifikan mempengaruhi pengakuan mereka sebagai pemimpin agama yang dihormati oleh komunitas Muslim asal Indonesia di Belanda.

Kata Kunci: Pemimpin Agama, Imam, Muslim Indonesia di Belanda, Latar Belakang Pendidikan.

Background

Statistical data show that by January 2002, Muslims in the Netherlands numbered about 890,000. This number is 260,000

higher than that in 1995. It indicates that Muslims constitute 5.5% of the 16 million of the total population in the Netherlands. This increase has resulted from the accelerated

growth in the rate of immigration from Muslim countries and the birth of the second generation of Muslims with non-Western background living in the Netherlands. Most Muslims in this country have non-Western background. Muslims of Turkish origin constitute the largest group of Muslims with nearly 310,000 people. Those with a Moroccan background, about 275,000 people, are the second largest group. Both groups account for the two-thirds of the total number of Muslims in the Netherlands.¹

Some Muslim communities in the Netherlands came from Southeast Asia including Indonesia. Yet, there have not been statistical data about the number of Muslims from Indonesia. It was estimated that, in 2001, the number of Indonesians in the Netherlands was around 400,000 people. There were about 140,000 people belonging to the first generation and 260,000 belonging to the second generation.² If we assume that at least 50% of them are Muslims, reflecting that the Muslim percentage in their country of origin is about 80% of the total population, there are around 200,000 Muslims with an Indonesian background in the Netherlands. If this is so, they constitute the third largest group of Muslims in the Netherlands.

As in Muslim community in general, the *imams* (religious leaders) of Indonesian Muslim in the Netherlands play a key role in the preservation and nourishment of the religious life of their fellow-countrymen. They traditionally conduct and lead daily prayers, perform ceremonial tasks, and give religious courses and spiritual counselling for their community. In addition to their

religious functions, since there is a need to create a social network based on common identity within a new and non-Muslim environment, they also perform the function of the custodians of the socio-cultural values of the country of origin.³

Based on my interviews with some *imams* of Indonesian Muslim community in the Netherlands, this paper examines the pattern of educational background of the *imams* and how it contributes to their recognition as religious leaders by their community. Here it will describe their education in a wider sense, formal and informal, religious and secular. This paper attempts to answer the following questions: What are their educational backgrounds? Do these contribute to *imams'* involvement in Islamic *da'wa* (propagation) activities and to their recognition as religious leaders by their community? Pertinently, examining their education will reveal the specific characteristics and positions of the religious leaders of Indonesian Muslim communities in the Netherlands.

This paper focuses its analysis on the *imams* of four Indonesian Muslim congregations in The Hague (Den Hague), Ridderkerk and Amsterdam. As far as this paper is concerned, there are eighteen figures that are entrusted to perform the socio-religious tasks of *imams*. For the purpose of this paper, six *imams* were chosen as the respondents. They are regarded the most prominent and respected *imams* who have played important roles in the preservation and enhancement of socio-religious values among their community. They are two *imams* of Al-Hikmah mosque of Persatuan Pemuda Muslim se-Eropa (PPME [Association of Muslim Youth in Europe]) in The Hague,

¹www.cbs.nl/en/publications/articles/webmagazine/2002/ accessed on 27 March 2003.

²Maarten Alders, "Classification of the Population with a Foreign Background in the Netherlands," www.cbs.nl/ accessed on 27 March 2003.

³ W. A. R. Shadid & P.S. van Koningsveld, "Islam in The Netherlands: Constitutional Law and Islamic Organizations," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 16, No. 1, 1996, 116, 121.



one *imam* of Rukun Islam mosque, also in The Hague, one imam of the Bayt al-Rahmān mosque in Ridderkerk, and two imam of the Amsterdam branch of the PPME. As far as my preliminary research is concerned, the other twelve *imams* share the same characteristics of religious leadership of the chosen six *imam* in addition to exemplifying the same patterns of educational backgrounds. Before moving on to the description of their educational background, it is necessary to explain the term *imam* as understood by the Muslims and as it is used in this paper, and the education of religious leaders in the Indonesian context.

Imam

Definition

The term *imam* (*imām*) in the Qurʾān designates the attribute of prophets such as that of Abraham (al-Baqara [2]: 124), the revelation which was descended to Moses (46: 12), and the record of deeds which will be presented to man in Hereafter (36:12).⁴ For Muslims, the word *imam* refers to the title of the head of a group in the community. For instance, it is used to designate the founders of Schools of Islamic Law and the head of certain sectarian movements. It is also an honorific title as in Imam al-Ghazzālī.⁵ Furthermore, the term *imam* is defined by both Sunni and Shiite Muslims as the title of the leader or ruler of Muslim community. Here the term indicates one who exercises the general leadership, governance, or rule in both religious and political affairs.⁶

Among the Shiite Muslims, the term acquires special significance in that they

regard an *imam* as the legitimate leader of Muslim community whose recognition is an essential article of faith. The term specifically refers to the title and spiritual function of ‘Alī and his descendants through Fātima, the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad. The majority of Shiites regard the twelve figures as the successors to the Prophet. They are credited with having not only the right to rule the community but also the supreme authority in all matters of jurisprudence and Qurʾānic interpretation. They also believe that there can be only one *imam* at a time. However, their disagreement about the identity and the function of the *imam* has resulted in their splitting into various sects with different doctrines.⁷

As far as this paper is concerned, by *imam* I mean the leader of *salāt al-jamāʿa* (congregational prayers) in a mosque or prayer hall, either for a regular function or a particular occasion. An *imam* leads the prayers by standing in front of the rows of worshippers. This definition accords with the etymological sense of *imam* as “one who stands in front.” In fact, however, in addition to this regular task an *imam* assumes the functions of religious leader, spiritual counsellor and guardian of socio-cultural values of the country of origin. The *imams* fulfilling such definition and functions will be the focus of this paper.⁸

Men entitled most to be imams

The Muslim jurists (*fuqahāʾ*) provide us with the rank of men entitled most to hold the function of *imam*. According to the Hanafites, the ruler of a Muslim community, the judge and the regular *imam* of a mosque are in the top ranks of those men who are eligible to act as *imam*. The next in the rank is one who is most knowledgeable in the rules

⁴Hamid Algar, “Imam,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, John L. Esposito, editor in chief, Vol. 2, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), h. 182.

⁵Cyril Glasse, “Imām,” in his *The Concise Encyclopaedia of Islam*, (London: Stacey International, 1989), h. 186.

⁶Algar, “Imam,” 182; Glasse, “Imām,”186.

⁷Algar, “Imam,” 182-3; Glasse, “Imām,”186.

⁸Algar, “Imam,” 182; Glasse, “Imām,”186.

of *salāt* among the Muslim community. Should such a person not be available, the best among them in reciting the Qur'ān should precede to lead *salāt*. The next in the rank is the most devout man. If he is not available, the oldest man in the community should assume the function. Then, the best among them in behaviour and conduct should assume the function of *imam*. If they are all equal in those qualities, the community appoint one of them its *imam* based on an agreement made by its members.⁹

The Malikites hold the opinion that the ruler of a Muslim community or his deputy is the person entitled most to be the *imam* of the community. The regular *imam* of a mosque should act as *imam* when the ruler is not available. The most knowledgeable among them in the rules of *salāt* constitutes the next rank. If he is not available, one who has a thorough knowledge in the hadīth (the Prophetic tradition) should exercise the function. By default of any other, the most learned in the Qur'ān and the best versed in the reciting the Qur'ān should assume the function followed by the most observing one of religious duties in the next rank. The earliest converts to Islam, members of the most honourable clans like the Quraysh, and the best in behaviour and attitude are in the next ranks.¹⁰

For the Shafi'ites, the ranking of those entitled most to act as *imam* is as follows: the ruler of a Muslim community, the regular *imam* of community mosque, the settler, the most learned in religious knowledge, the best-versed in reciting the Qur'ān, the best in behaviour and conduct, the earliest migrant to Medina, the earliest convert to Islam, a

member of the most honoured clan, a man with the most impeccable life-history, the cleanest in dress, one with the most beautiful voice in reciting the Qur'ān, the best in physical appearance, and a married man. Should these people be equal in the abovementioned qualities, the community should appoint someone their *imam* by considering some important criteria such as devoutness and maturity.¹¹

The Hanbalites also maintain that a ruler is at the top rank of the list of those entitled most to be *imam* followed by the regular *imam* in the next rank. If such persons are not available, the best in reciting the Qur'ān or the most learned deserves to act as an *imam* for his community. The next in the rank are the best in reciting the Qur'ān but who has some learning, the one who is best only in reciting the Qur'ān, and the most learned in the rules of *salāt*. If everyone has the same qualities and esteem, the oldest in age should be the one to hold the function of *imam*. If he is not available, the ranking is as follows: one who belongs to the most honourable family, the earliest migrant to Medina, and the most devout in observing religious obligations.¹²

The abovementioned ranking indicates that public political positions and knowledge of Islamic sciences and religious devoutness constitute the most important requirements. However, the new and unique circumstances imposed by Dutch, non-Muslim society has resulted in a situation in which men with thorough religious knowledge are more important and appropriate to the new environment. Hence, the study of the educational background of Indonesian *imams* in the Netherlands is precious in its own right.

⁹Wahbat al-Zuhaylī, *al-Fiqh al-Islāmi wa Adillatuh*, (Dimasq: Dar al-Fikr, 1997), Vol. 2, h. 182-3; 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Jazīrī, *al-Fiqh 'alā al-Madhābīb al-Arba'a*, (Istanbul: Hakikat Kitabevi, 1990), Vol. 2, 428.

¹⁰al-Zuhaylī, *al-Fiqh al-Islāmi*, 184; al-Jazīrī, *al-Fiqh 'alā al-Madhābīb.....*, h. 428.

¹¹al-Zuhayli, *al-Fiqh al-Islāmi*, 184-5; al-Jazīrī, *al-Fiqh 'alā al-Madhābīb.....*, h. 428.

¹²al-Zuhayli, *al-Fiqh al-Islāmi*, 185-6; al-Jazīrī, *al-Fiqh 'alā al-Madhābīb.....*, h. 429.

Imam (Religious Leaders) 's Education in the Indonesian Context

In Indonesia, Muslim religious authorities are known with different terms. For example, they are called *ajengan* in Sundanese speaking provinces of West Java and Banten, *kyai* in Javanese speaking provinces of Central and East Java, and *tuan guru* in Kalimantan, Sulawesi and Nusa Tenggara Barat. However, perhaps due to a Java-centred policy, there is a tendency to adopt *kyai* as a single term to designate religious leaders among Muslim communities of different regions in Indonesia. They generally hold the traditional functions of a religious leader-scholar in Muslim community.¹³ Their education plays an important role in their recognition as the religious leader by community. To pursue their career, these religious leaders have to study at a specific institution of Islamic learning. Dhofier provides us with valuable information regarding the pursuit of learning that is traditionally undertaken by candidate religious leaders. The following description is mainly based on Dhofier's work.¹⁴ First, at the age of five they learn to memorize some short *sura* (plural: *surat*) of the last *juuz'* of the Qur'an. This knowledge is purported to provide them with the foundation for basic Islamic rituals, particularly *salat*. When they are seven or eight years old, they study how to read the Arabic alphabet and gradually to recite the Qur'an properly according to the rules of *tajwid* (the science and art of reciting the Qur'an). Their parents usually teach them this basic skill after *salat al-maghrib* (sunset prayer). Should their parents not be educated in religious knowledge, they study with a teacher in his house or at a mosque in his

village. They normally stop this basic learning when they are regarded to be adequately skilled in reciting the Qur'an.

Then, they progress to study basic Islamic knowledge with a teacher in the mosque in their neighbourhood. They usually begin with the study of the so-called 'instrumental science', namely Arabic language, focused on *nahw* (Arabic grammar) and *sarf* (Arabic morphology). The knowledge of this science is necessary for the study of the books on the more advanced Islamic knowledge. In addition, they also study the basic works on *tawhid* (Islamic doctrine), *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), *hadith* (the Prophetic tradition), *akhlak* (Islamic ethics) and *tarikh* (Islamic history).

In the system of learning in this primary religious education, the subjects are given according to the capability of individual student. In general, a student comes to his teacher who reads out some words or lines of the Qur'an. He in turn repeats as exactly as possible what his teacher says. If the text is Arabic, the teacher not only reads it but also translates it into his vernacular language. The student has to read the text properly and translate it as exactly as his teacher does. The teacher repeats it several times until his student is able to read the text in the proper way. He progresses to read the lines of the following passages if he has acquired sufficient skill to read those being dealt with. This kind of learning system is known as *sorogan* in the *pesantren* scholarly tradition.

Given aptitude, perseverance and financial support, the students continue their studies in *pesantren*. Now they are called *santri*, those who learn in *pesantren*. Initially, they study basic Islamic knowledge that is presented to beginners. At the beginning, the subjects they study might be the same as those they have obtained in their earliest periods of learning. But, the books are more

¹³ For further information on *kyai*, see Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *Tradisi Pesantren, Studi tentang Pandangan Hidup Kyai* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1985), h 55.

¹⁴ Dhofier, *Tradisi Pesantren....*, h. 18-33; 51-60.

advanced and the level of complexity is higher than that of the previous ones. Hence, at first they are admitted to the elementary level of the *pesantren* learning tradition. With proven ability and skill, they move to the higher level of learning. At this level, they are usually taught more subjects that are specifically given to the advanced students. They include *tafsir* (Qur'anic interpretation), *tasawwuf* (Islamic mysticism), and *mantiq* (Aristotelian logic), in addition to the abovementioned regular subjects.

In general, *santri* are divided into two categories. First, *santri mukim*: students who lodge at the *pesantren* because they have come from distant areas. They spend their time studying without being involved in the activities of daily life. Those who have been there for a long time are appointed to the task of transferring their knowledge to less knowledgeable students. Hence, generally the longer a *santri* remains in a *pesantren* the more respected he is. Second, *santri kalong*, namely students who do not stay at the *pesantren* as they come from areas surroundings the *pesantren*. They attend the religious learning at certain times (usually before *salat al-maghrib* and *salat al-subh* [dawn prayer]). After that, they go back to their homes. The popularity of a *pesantren* can be seen in the number of *santri mukim* who study there. A prominent *pesantren* usually has more *santri mukim* than *santri kalong*. In contrast, the less-known *pesantren* attract fewer students wishing to learn and lodge there. In other words, in a popular *pesantren* the number of *santri mukim* is greater than that of *santri kalong*.

The teaching system in the *pesantren* generally makes use of the so-called *bandongan* system. The students form a circle comprising of five to five hundred people. They listen to a teacher who reads out, translates, and clarifies the meaning of a text on Islamic knowledge being dealt with. Every

student concentrates on his own book and makes notes on the meaning. The students are not required to understand the content of the book they deal with. This circumstance arises from the fact that the teacher usually reads the book quickly and gives no clear translation. Therefore, the students finish reading a short Arabic text within a matter of weeks. This learning system is only suited to the advanced students because it requires that they have acquired appropriate skills in basic Islamic knowledge, particularly Arabic grammar.

It is interesting to note that students in the *pesantren* are always being urged to broaden their knowledge as much as possible. Hence, it is common that after they have finished their study in one *pesantren* they go to another *pesantren* to pursue a more advanced level of knowledge and to study specific knowledge in which the *pesantren* is specialized at. Like the peripatetic scholars in medieval Europe, they move to one *pesantren* to another until they have a thorough knowledge and the necessary skills to be religious leaders and to establish their own *pesantren*. These days, students can study higher Islamic learning at a university such as Institute Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN [State Islamic Institute]) and Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN [State Islamic University]), which are funded and governed by the ministry of religious affairs, and private Islamic universities. The pursuit of learning usually ends with the journey to Mecca to study the higher religious sciences in the shadow of the Ka'ba, in addition to undertaking the hajj. The perception that perfect Islamic knowledge can only be obtained in the centre of the Muslim world lies at the root of this practice. Besides, making the hajj is not only the expression of one's devoutness, but also culturally and politically prestigious.

If a student is considered to have achieved thorough Islamic knowledge and the necessary skills, he is taught to establish his own *pesantren*. Generally, after he has pursued knowledge in some *pesantren*, his last teacher trains him especially in the skills required to direct a *pesantren*. He is often involved in meetings of the elite of the *pesantren* who have an important function in making decisions. His last teacher guides him in his steps to establish a new *pesantren* in another village or region. At the beginning, his teacher usually provides him with some students who have studied in his last *pesantren* to become his first students. If he is a good leader in addition to a sound knowledge, he gradually attracts the people who wish to study Islamic knowledge at his *pesantren*. The number of young Muslims who are interested in studying in his *pesantren* either as *santri mukim* and *santri kalong* grows significantly. If the *pesantren* is successful, people will begin to regard him as their *kyai* and he becomes an influential figure of the society economically and politically.

The Characteristics of Religious Leadership among Indonesian Muslims in the Netherlands

As far as my research is concerned, religious leadership among Indonesian Muslims in the Netherlands is different from that in their home country as well as that of Muslims from other countries of origin like Turkish and Moroccan Muslims.¹⁵ First of all, the leadership is collective in nature in that the functions of *imam* are undertaken by the board of directors of a mosque or association chosen by the members of congregation. There is no single *imam* entrusted with specific tasks of conducting religious services

and giving instruction. A qualified *imam* carries out his tasks, such as delivering *kebutba* (speech given before *salāt al-jum`a* [Friday prayer]) and religious courses, taking turns with other *imam* according to a schedule arranged by the board.

Moreover, religious services and courses are conducted on a voluntary basis by the qualified persons from the community.¹⁶ Most *imam* work in an office or run their own business. Religious courses, in general, are offered to the community during weekends and on special occasions in Islamic calendar such as in the Fasting Month *Ramadān*. *Imam* are recruited from qualified persons in community who have lived in the Netherlands for a long period of time. But, on certain occasions, like during *Ramadān*, the board invites teachers from outside the community or from their home country to deliver religious courses.

Although most of them have obtained religious knowledge and followed courses in their home country, they are not professional *imam* who came to the Netherlands with purpose of meeting the spiritual needs of their fellow countrymen.¹⁷ Most of them are in paid employment or are businessmen. As a result, the *imam* are relatively independent of intervention from the government of the home country. What is more important is that they are able to conduct their tasks appropriately in Dutch circumstances

¹⁶ Shadid & Van Koningsveld, "Islam in The Netherlands....," h. 116.

¹⁷ Regarding the *imams* of Moroccan community in the Netherlands, a study by Khalifa has shown that *imams* are recruited from and were educated in religious learning in their country of origin. They were trained in religious knowledge to be professional *imam* for their community. See Mohsen Abdel-Aty Haredy Khalifa, *The Educational Background of Moroccan Imam and their Functions in the Netherlands*, research paper, Seminar "Problem and Methods of Islamic Studies", The Empirical Study of Islam in Contemporary Western Europe, Program Islamic Studies, Leiden University, 2000.

¹⁵ For more information about the characteristics of religious leaders in other Muslim communities in the Netherlands, see Shadid & Van Koningsveld, "Islam in The Netherlands....," h. 120-22.



because they have a degree of proficiency in Dutch language as well as adequate understanding of the history and culture of Dutch society.

The Educational Background of Indonesian Imam the Netherlands

Early Stage of Imams' Education: Family

My study reveals that Indonesian *imams* in the Netherlands were born and raised in a religious family and in a community where religious values were preserved and Islamic teachings were observed. Since childhood, they had been introduced to Islamic values and teachings. Their parents played an important role in the establishment of their religious awareness. Haji Olong, who belongs to the first generation of Indonesian people migrated to the Netherlands in 1951 and is currently the head of the board of *imams* of the Bayt al-Rahmān mosque in Ridderkerk, was born in Central Moluccas in 1934. He was raised in a family where he obtained his first Islamic knowledge and experiences. His father was descendant of the first Arabs from Hadhramawt who propagated Islam in Moluccas Island after they arrived there *via* Tuban in East Java. He belonged to the elite tribe in his village where Muslims constituted the majority of population and the number of Christians was about 200. As I have implied, it was his family that introduced him basic Islamic teachings and rituals. The community in turn provided him with more advanced religious knowledge and experience.¹⁸

The same holds true for Hambali Maksum, the most respected *imam* of Al-Hikmah mosque and one of the founders of Persatuan Pemuda Muslim se-Eropa (PPME [Association of Muslim Youth in Europe]). Born into a devout family in Solo, Hambali acquired his early religious

education from his parents. The Islamic rituals practised in his family life contributed to his internalisation of Islamic values. Besides, the *santri* community in his village strengthened his religious awareness. All this later influenced his parents' decision to send him to an Islamic school for his formal education.¹⁹ Naf'an, another prominent *imam* of al-Hikmah mosque, was also brought up in a religious family that provided him with an important stage in his religious understanding and experience. Moreover, the neighbourhood where he lived in Kudus, a town that is known for its *hafiz* (one who is learned in memorizing the Qur'ān), helped strengthen his religious consciousness. Like Hambali, it was family life determined his father's decision to send him to a religious school in addition to his secular schooling.²⁰

Muhammad Syukur of the Javanese-Surinamese Rukun Islam mosque again represents *imams* who obtained the same pattern of religious education. He was born into a devout family in Watampone, Central Sulawesi (Celebes), in the eastern part of Indonesia. He was brought up in a family where religious values were introduced to all members at an early age even though his father was the principal of a secular primary school in his village. Moreover, he was much closer to his grandfather who was the director of Watampone branch of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. When his father died, his grandfather took on the responsibility of teaching him religious knowledge. He obtained his early religious education through intense contact with his grandfather who often took him to religious gatherings and lectures in his hometown.²¹

¹⁸ Interview with Haji Olong, 1 November 2002.

¹⁹ Interview with Hambali Maksum, 25 January 2003.

²⁰ Interview with Naf'an, 25 January 2003.

²¹ Interview with Muhammad Syukur, 11 March 2003.



Two *imams* of Amsterdam branch of PPME also exemplify the same model of religious leaders of Indonesian Muslims in the Netherlands. The first is Sulhan Musoffa who was born in Kudus (Central Java). Owing to his early religious education in this town, he is known among his fellow-countrymen as one who is well versed in reciting the Qur'ān.²² The other *imam*, Budi Santoso, was born into a devout peasant family in Jombang (East Java), a town which is known for *pesantren* life and *santri* community. In addition to his socio-religious activity, he runs his own business. He is now the head of board of Amsterdam branch of PPME.²³

Three Patterns of Imams' Educational Background

As far as my research is concerned, no *imam* was educated entirely in a secular school or in a religious school. Most *imams* obtained knowledge of both secular and religious sciences. Most of them studied secular knowledge in the morning schools and obtained religious knowledge in an Islamic school or in a so-called *pengajian* (a form of religious learning in which students establish a circle around their teacher) in the afternoon. Only one *imam* pursued his education in religious schools, from his primary school to university.

Having collected information regarding their education, I propose to classify the Indonesian *imams* into three categories. The first category consists of *imams* who studied in religious schools from their primary school up to and including university. The second category comprises those who studied both secular education and religious knowledge in formal schools. *Imams* who acquired secular knowledge in state-sponsored schools and

studied religious knowledge in informal learning institutions constitute the last category.

Hambali Maksum represents *imams* with the first pattern of education. He studied in Islamic religious schools at all stages of his formal education. Besides, he pursued Islamic knowledge for one year in a *pesantren* in his hometown, Solo (Central Java). He finished his primary and secondary education in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI [Islamic Primary School]) and Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs [Islamic Middle School]) respectively, both were in Solo. For high school, he attended Madrasah Menengah Tinggi (MMT; Islamic High School) in Yogyakarta. He said that the curriculum used in this high school consisted of 50 percent Islamic knowledge and 50 percent secular knowledge. Those who graduated from the school were regarded as having acquired the same status with those at a secular high school in that they could enrol in a religious-oriented university or a state-sponsored secular university.

After he had finished his high school, he went to Mecca to pursue higher Islamic knowledge at Jāmi'a Dār al-'Ulūm (University of Dār al-'Ulūm). Since his Islamic high school diploma was not recognized by the Dār al-'Ulūm, he was only admitted to high school. But, the religious learning he had acquired in Indonesia helped him finish his study in two years, one year faster than regular students. Then, in 1970 he pursued his higher education in the University of Baghdad. He was admitted to the faculty of Shari'a wa al- Lughah (Islamic Law and Language). In contrast to Dār al-'Ulūm where he had studied before, the University of Baghdad was a place of secular higher learning. The university, for example, adopted a co-educational system in which male and female students sat in the same

²² Interview with Sulhan Musoffa, 1 December 2002.

²³ Interview with Budi Santoso, 5 January 2003.



classroom, a system of education that was forbidden in Dār al-‘Ulūm and other Arab universities. As part of his curriculum, he was given *imam* and *kbatib* training in his fourth year. In 1974, he graduated with bachelor diploma from the university.

The same year, Hambali arrived in the Netherlands where he later worked in The Hague to make a living. Since his fellow countrymen recognized him as a person who had an adequate knowledge of Islam and who was a graduate of an Islamic university, they urged him to serve the spiritual needs of Indonesian Muslims as well as propagating Islam in the Dutch community. Together with other alumni from Islamic universities in the Middle East and those who were concerned with Islamic *da`wa*, he initiated a meeting whose purpose was to carry out religious services and to teach Islamic knowledge. The meeting was initially held once a week and more frequently during the fasting month *Ramadān*. When the number of people who attended the congregation increased, a need was felt for an organized religious gathering. In the 1980s, then, a socio-religious organization, PPME was established. Hambali was appointed the second head of its board after its first head, Abdurrahman Wahid, had to leave for Indonesia after he had held the position for just three months. Most of the activities of the association are now carried out in al-Hikmah mosque in The Hague.

Hambali is regarded as the most respected *imam* among the PPME members. He acts as the *imam* of the *salāt al-magrib* and *‘ishā* (evening prayer) on Saturdays and Sundays as the PPME only holds socio-religious activities at weekends. During *Ramadān*, he is called upon to be *imam* of the *salāt al-tarāwih*. He delivers *khatba*, acts as the *imam* of the *salāt al-jum`a*, and gives Islamic courses in al-Hikmah mosque and to the

Indonesian embassy congregation in The Hague and other towns in Europe.²⁴ In addition, he gives lectures on Islamic learning on the occasion of religious ceremonies such as the *Mawlid* and *Isrā’ Mi`raj*. Since the religious leadership among Indonesian Muslims is collective in nature, he carries out these tasks taking turns with other religious leaders.

Indonesian Muslims in the Netherlands also have religious leaders who exemplify the second pattern of education, namely those who were educated in both secular and Islamic schools. The first one that should be mentioned here is Naf’an who has been living in the Netherlands for more than twenty years. He finished his primary, middle and high schools in state-run schools in his hometown, Kudus (Central Java). Since his childhood, he had passionately pursued Islamic knowledge. After morning school, he went to the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in his pursuit of Islamic knowledge. In this madrasah, he learned such subjects as *tawhid*, *fiqh*, Arabic grammar, and other basic fields of Islamic knowledge. When he was in the secular middle school, he studied the intermediate level of Islamic sciences at the Madrasah Tsanawiyah. He continued to attend the same dual education while at high school at which time he studied advanced knowledge of Islam at the Madrasah Aliyah. During his pursuit of learning in Indonesia, he also studied in a *pesantren*. But, I was not well informed about which *pesantren* and in which period he studied.

²⁴ The present Indonesian ambassador to the Netherlands decreed that the embassy congregational in The Hague was abolished in January 2003. The ambassador considered religion a part of private life of community, which should be separated from public affairs of the state. It was community, not the state, which should govern the religious matters. As a public service institution, the embassy should be free from interests and activities of any particular group of community.



He pursued the higher learning at the Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN [the State Islamic Institute]) in Yogyakarta. He was admitted to the faculty of Adab (Arabic literature). But, he did not finish his study as he dropped out in the third year. In 1971, he decided to leave for Baghdad to study at University of Baghdad. Like Hambali, he studied at the faculty of Shari`a. Among the subject offered to students was *imam* and *khatib* training which he followed in the fourth year. He graduated with the title of bachelor from the university in 1974.

He came to the Netherlands in 1974. Besides his daily work, he serves his co-religionists by being engaged in *da`wa* activities. Joining forces with Hambali and other leading figures, he was involved in the establishment of the PPME. He acts voluntarily as the *imam* at the *salat al-`asbr* (afternoon prayer) and the *salat al-maghrib* and gives religious instruction at weekends in the PPME mosque, al-Hikmah. During *Ramadan*, when the intensity of religious services and instruction is higher, besides these tasks, he acts as the *imam* at the *salat tarawih* taking turns with other *imams* according a schedule drawn up by the board of mosque. He delivers *khotba* and acts as the *imam* at the *salat al-jum`a* in al-Hikmah and the Indonesian embassy congregation in The Hague (before it was closed down by the present ambassador. See footnote 24). He occasionally teaches Islamic knowledge once fortnight at religious gatherings in other cities such as Rotterdam, Breda and Tilburg.

Another figure who represents the same pattern of education is Sulhan Musoffa, the most respected *imam* at the Amsterdam branch of the PPME. He attended Sekolah Dasar (primary secular school), in his hometown, Kudus. In the afternoon, he studied religious primary education at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyyah. While in junior high

school, he went to Madrasah Tsanawiyah to pursue his middle Islamic education. In this school, he studied such books as *Nabw al-Wadib* by `Alī Jārim and Mustafā Āmīn, a basic book on Arabic, and *al-Taqrīb* by Abū Shujā` bin Husayn al-Isfahānī, *Fath al-Qarīb* by Shams al-Dīn bin Qāsim al-Ghazzī, and *Fath al-Mu`īn* by Zayn al-Dīn bin `Azīz al-Malibārī, the basic works on *fiqh* that are widely used in the pesantren curriculum. Likewise, when he was in the secular high school, he went to Madrasah Aliyah to study higher Islamic education in the afternoons. Later he went on tertiary education at a secular university in his hometown. But he dropped out of the university when he was in the first year.

In the early 1980s, Sulhan came to the Netherlands for the purpose of making a living. He worked in a steel company in Groningen and later in Amsterdam. In the same period, he began to be engaged in *da`wa* activities. His spirit of *da`wa* initially arose when some of his colleagues asked him to teach them how to perform *salat*. He felt that by serving the needs of his fellow countrymen he had a chance to refresh his own religious knowledge that had been neglected for a long period of time. To improve his Islamic knowledge, he often orders books which are commonly used in religious learning in Indonesia. He initiated the establishment of a religious gathering for the purposes of teaching basic Islamic practices and knowledge. When the number of his students increased rapidly, together with Budi Santoso and other leading figures, he established the Amsterdam branch of the PPME. His tasks include conducting the *salat al-zuhr* (noon prayer) and the *salat al-`asbr* and giving courses on Islamic knowledge in PPME weekly activities. In *Ramadan*, he only occasionally acts as the *imam* because the community usually invite a qualified teacher



from Indonesia for the whole month. In the monthly gatherings, Sulhan also gives religious instruction in turn with other teachers according to a schedule that is arranged by the board.

Haji Olong of Bayt al-Rahmān mosque, Budi Santoso of the Amsterdam branch of the PPME and Muhammad Syukur of Rukun Islam mosque represent the third category of *imams* who went to secular schools, but also obtained religious knowledge in informal learning institutions. Haji Olong began his primary education in a Dutch colonial public school in his hometown, in the Central Moluccas. He spent five years studying secular knowledge in the school. In the afternoon, he pursued basic Islamic knowledge in a small *pesantren* in his village. It seemed that he did not learn in the *pesantren* in a traditional way in which a student stayed and studied there. He went to the *pesantren* at the time of *salāt al-maghrib* and went back to his house after *salāt al-‘isha’*. At the *pesantren*, he was presented *tawhīd*, *fiqh*, Arabic grammar, and other basic Islamic knowledge. In the field of *fiqh*, he studied *Safinat al-Najā’* of Sālim bin Sāmīr al-Hadramī, a popular basic work on Islamic ritual in the *pesantren* curriculum in Indonesia. He acquired his basic Islamic sciences at this local religious learning besides at his house from his parents.

After he finished primary school, Haji Olong went to Banjarmasin (South Kalimantan) to pursue more advanced level of education. One of his reasons for going to this town was because he had some relatives living there. This was a very common reason among Indonesians who were seeking a place to secure their life in diaspora. In this town, he went to a Dutch junior high school. He went to a high school in afternoon because he had to work early in the day. But, he did not go to either a secular or an Islamic

university to pursue the more advanced learning. During his junior and senior school periods, his eagerness to pursue Islamic knowledge was unabated. He kept improving his Islamic knowledge by studying by himself books on Islam and attending religious instruction held in the town.

He came to the Netherlands 1951. He has worked at the Indonesian embassy in The Hague since 1956. In 1975, he was officially appointed *penghulu*, an officer who is responsible for serving the religious needs of Indonesian Muslims in the Netherlands. His tasks relate to the religious services and the application of Islamic values such as marriage, circumcision (*kehitān*) and funerals. Owing to his prominence as a man of deep religious knowledge among Muslims with Moluccan background, he was also appointed head of board of the Bayt al-Rahmān mosque in Ridderkerk. He is one of the regular *imam* of the mosque in that he leads the daily prayers, the Friday prayer, *‘id al-fitr* (the festival celebrated on 1 Shawwāl after a month-fasting of Ramadān) and *‘id al-adhā* (the major festival celebrated on 10 Dhu al-Hijja). He occasionally undertakes such tasks in other mosques with Indonesian background such as al-Hikmah and the Indonesian embassy congregation. In addition, on certain occasions he gives courses on Islamic doctrine if he is invited to do so by his fellow-countrymen.

Budi Santoso of the Amsterdam branch of the PPME also exemplifies the same pattern of educational background as that of Haji Olong. He did his primary education in a state-run primary school in his hometown, Jombang (East Java). In the afternoons, he studied basic Islamic knowledge with a local religious teacher in the mosque of his village. This learning usually started after the *salāt al-maghrib* and continued until the *salāt al-‘isha’*. The main



subjects presented were the reciting of the Qur'ān and basic Islamic doctrine. While studying in the junior and senior schools, in the same way he built up his knowledge of other basic Islamic sciences such as *fiqh* and Arabic. He pursued his tertiary studies in the Universitas Darul Ulum in Jombang. He was enrolled in the faculty of agriculture. But, he dropped out in the third year. He also said that he tried to enlist in the army. He could pass all the formal selection criteria, but he failed to be accepted a soldier because he was the only candidate from a peasant family. He had no money to bribe the selection committee as the other candidates had done.

Budi came to the Netherlands in 1990 to run an Indonesian restaurant business. He began to be engaged in *da'wa* when he felt that he was called to meet the spiritual needs of his fellow-countrymen in Amsterdam. In his eyes, they showed a great hunger to acquire Islamic knowledge and to observe their religious obligations. As he admitted, although he has no thorough knowledge of Islamic sciences, he attempt to serve them with what he knew about religious knowledge and practices. He considered a socio-religious organization the best way to meet their need for socio-religious activity. Therefore, he initiated the establishment of Amsterdam branch of the PPME of which he is currently the chairman of the board. His choice was based on the fact that Indonesian Muslims in Amsterdam have the same socio-religious background with those of the PPME in The Hague. Besides doing these organizational tasks, he also acts as the *imam* at the *salāt al-zubr* and the *salāt al-'ashr* every Sunday and occasionally at the *salāt al-tarāwih* during Ramadān.²⁵ On the basis of a schedule drawn up by the board, he also delivers religious

courses about basic Islamic teachings once a month.

The last religious leader of this educational pattern is Muhammad Syukur of the Rukun Islam mosque in The Hague. Like the abovementioned two *imams*, he studied secular knowledge in state-run schools and obtained his religious knowledge in informal sessions of religious learning. After he had studied at morning primary school, in the afternoons he went to study Islamic knowledge given in a mosque in his village. Among the Islamic sciences he learned were *tanbīd*, Arabic grammar, and *fiqh*. He studied the *Ajurūmiyya* by Abū 'Abd Allāh bin Ajurum, a basic work on Arabic grammar. He said that he could memorize it without understanding its meanings. In *fiqh*, he studied *al-Safinat al-Najā'* by Sāmīr al-Hadramī. He also finished his junior and senior education at secular schools. During this period, he continued to pursue Islamic knowledge by studying at the Sekolah Menengah Islam (SMI [Middle Islamic School]) in his hometown. When he was in high school, he also studied Islamic knowledge on his own and attended religious courses and gatherings. He never studied *kitab kuning* (an Indonesian term used to designate Islamic books in Arabic script regardless of the language) in *pesantren*.

Then, he went to Manado (North Sulawesi) to continue his higher learning at the Institut Ilmu Keguruan and Kependidikan (IKIP [Institute for Teacher Training and Educational Studies]). He only studied in the college for one year. He then decided to go to Jakarta to continue his studies at the IKIP in Jakarta. He graduated from the institute in 1966. During this period, he participated in the Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam (HMI [Association of Muslim students]). In order to improve his Islamic knowledge he studied Islamic books

²⁵ Because Amsterdam branch of the PPME does not have its own premises, its members rent a Moroccan primary school for one day [Sunday] a week and for a whole month during Ramadān.



by himself and made contact with the Dewan Dakwah Islam Indonesia (DDII [Indonesian Assembly of Islamic propagation]).

In 1967, he won a scholarship from the University of Cologne in Germany to study the master's programme in education. He was admitted to the Educational Psychology programme. Since the university did not recognize his IKIP diploma, he had to take a four year-undergraduate programme. During his studies in Germany, he often attended Islamic courses held in a mosque of Turkish Muslims. In 1971, he completed his studies and obtained a diploma in educational psychology.

Syukur went to the Netherlands in 1971 not long after his graduation from the University of Cologne. He did not seek work in educational field; he worked for an insurance company until he retired because of ill health at the end of the 1990s. His devoutness and spirit of *da'wa* have motivated Syukur to serve his co-religionists even since his arrival in the Netherlands. He was involved in the establishment of the PPME with Hambali and Naf'an. He was appointed to the editorial staff of the PPME-sponsored magazine that was concerned with spreading Islamic values among Indonesian Muslims in the Netherlands. He gave a radio religious course, *Mimbar Jum'at*, on the Radio Nederland in Hilversum for thirteen years until it was closed down because of a possible shortage of funds.

Owing to the lack of religious teachers among Surinamese-Javanese Muslims in The Hague, Syukur has been involved in socio-religious activities in Rukun Islam, a mosque which was established by the community, since 1985. He said that he commenced his religious services in Rukun Islam when his daughter's Qur'anic teacher asked him to substitute for him as the *imam* at a *salat*. Because he was well versed in reciting the

Qur'an and had religious educational background, the community appointed him *imam* and Qur'anic teacher. Since religious leadership of the community is voluntary and collective in nature, he does not act as the *imam* at every *salat*. He normally acts as the *imam* of the *salat al-maghrib* and the '*ishā'*. Sometimes he performs the function at the other three *salat* as well. He is also entrusted to be *imam* at the *salat al-tarāwih* during Ramadan and at the *salat 'id a-fitr* and *adhā*. Besides, Syukur teaches the science of Qur'anic reciting to children in Rukun Islam and at the house of a staff member of the Indonesian embassy in The Hague. He also delivers *khutba* at the *salat al-jum'a* in al-Hikmah mosque and to the Indonesian embassy congregation taking turns with other *imams* according to a schedule drawn up by the head of administrative affairs at the embassy. He occasionally answers questions on religious matters posed to him by the community. However, this is not his main task. In fact, another *imam*, Tasremi, holds the function of religious counsellor. Since the 1990s he has also been active in the ICCN, a foundation that is concerned with spreading Islamic values through translation into Dutch and publication of Islamic books.

The educational backgrounds described above reveal that all the *imams* were brought up in a devout family and in a religious-oriented community so that they could not help but learned Islamic knowledge and observe Islamic obligation. Like other children in their village, at their early age they learned basic Islamic doctrines and rituals, memorized some short *sūra* for ritual purpose and learned how to recite the Qur'an in a proper way. First, Hambali characterizes the model of *imams* who were educated only in religious schools from his primary up to his university education. Moreover, he studied Islamic knowledge in *pesantren* for one year.



Naf'an and Sulhan exemplify the model of *imams* with dual educational background. They were educated in religious and secular schools from their primary education up to their higher education. Naf'an continued his tertiary learning in a state-funded institute for Islamic studies in his homeland and later in an Islamic university in Baghdad. In contrast, Sulhan went to a secular university and dropped out in the first year. Olong, Syukur and Budi represent the model of *imams* who learned Islamic knowledge in a village mosque or a small *pesantren* in the afternoon after they had attended secular schools in the morning. In this respect, they can be categorized as what are called *santri kalong*. These three *imams* pursued their formal education in secular schools. Olong did not continue on to university while the others, Syukur and Budi, progressed to study in a secular university. Nevertheless, to acquire more advanced Islamic knowledge, they also studied by themselves through reading Islamic books and attending religious courses.

Their educational backgrounds also show that no one of these *imams* was educated in the traditional way that is normally followed by would-be religious leaders in their home country. No one was specifically trained and traditionally educated in his home country to be a religious leader. When they came to the Netherlands, they were faced with unique circumstances that were different from those back home. These circumstances, consequently, necessitated their engagement in Islamic *da'wa* activities in this non-Muslim country.

Outstanding among these specific circumstances is the fact that Indonesian Muslims in the Netherlands showed an eagerness to learn about Islamic knowledge and to observe religious obligations while they lacked qualified religious teachers who

could meet the needs of their spiritual enthusiasm. The sincere requests made by these fellow-Muslims as well as a call from within themselves persuaded these *imams* to serve their fellow-countrymen by leading religious services and giving courses. They began to engage in Islamic *da'wa* activities like performing religious services and giving religious courses and lectures to both adults and children. When they showed their deep involvement in *da'wa* and the quality of their knowledge, the community gradually recognized them as their religious leaders. In this respect, it is clear that Islamic education they obtained in their home country contributed to their commitment to *da'wa* activities as well as to their recognition as *imams* by their community. In addition, it is important to stress here that these *imams* also continue to work or run businesses to support their lives. Being aware of these unique circumstances, they base their *da'wa* activities on collective, voluntary and independent religious leadership.

Conclusion

To sum up, the *imams* of Indonesian Muslims in the Netherlands represent the community of their fellow-countrymen who have come to this country with the purpose of making a better life. They were chosen from the members of Indonesian communities who have been living in the Netherlands for a long period of time. This has encouraged them to cultivate and reinforce their ability to perform their tasks. This is helped by the fact that they have a good command of Dutch language and an adequate understanding of Dutch culture and history.

Looking at their educational backgrounds, no *imam* was trained in the sort of religious education that is traditionally attended by candidate religious leaders in

their home country, Indonesia. Nevertheless, they have acquired a good basic Islamic knowledge and have observed Islamic rituals since their earliest years. Religious family life and circumstances provided them with opportunities to learn basic sacred knowledge and to practise Islamic rituals. They can be divided into three categories based on their educational patterns. First, *imams* who were educated in religious-oriented schools from the earliest stage of their education. Owing to their thorough religious knowledge, these *imams* are regarded the most respected persons in their community. Second, those with dual education in that they learned both in religious and secular schools. This group represents the minority of *imams* among Muslims with an Indonesian background in the Netherlands. Third, *imams* who were taught in a secular school but also pursued religious knowledge in proper establishment. These *imams* improved their Islamic knowledge through self-study by reading Islamic books and attending religious courses. This group represents the majority of *imams* among Indonesian Muslims in the Netherlands.

Although initially they did not come to the Netherlands with the purpose of meeting the religious needs of their fellow-countrymen nor were they educated in any special training for religious leaders, these *imams* have become involved in Islamic *da'wa* activities for their community, regardless of their religious educational backgrounds. The specific circumstances of their country of diaspora and the unique nature of Indonesian society necessitated them to preserve, nourish and enhance the spiritual life of their fellow-countrymen. Therefore, the characteristics of their religious leadership are collective, voluntary and independent of the intervention of the government of their country of origin. In this respect, their

educational backgrounds, particularly the religious learning they obtained in their family life in their home country, contributed to their enthusiasm to serve their co-religionists voluntarily by providing religious knowledge and services, strongly motivated by their religious obligation to practise Islamic *da'wa*.

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