# *'Ulamā'* and the Formation of Islamic Knowledge: Learning from Two Historical Experiences in Sumatra

**Jajat Burhanudin**

Faculty of Adab and Humanities, State Islamic University Jakarta
Jl. Ir. H. Juanda No.95, Ciputat Timur, Tangerang Selatan, Banten – Indonesia

*Alamat korespondensi: j.burhanudin@uinjkt.ac.id
DOI: 10.14710/jscl.v7i2.48936

Diterima/*Received*: 13 September 2022; Direvisi/*Revised*: 31 January 2023; Disetujui/*Accepted*: 31 January 2023

***Abstract***

*This article discusses the Islamic experiences in two coastal areas of Sumatra, the east and the west coasts, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The discussions focus one the ways the difference in the systems of politics created the necessary condition for the rise of two expressions of Islam. The existence of Malay kingdoms in the east coast appeared to be a leading factor in establishment of the kingdom-oriented Islam, different from the stateless condition of the west coast which gave rise to the initial substance of Islamic civil society. In reference to the concept of knowledge formation, this article underscores the two important points of difference, the leadership styles of 'ulamā' (Muslim scholars) in the making of Islam and the language expressions they used in their works (kitabs). As such, the study of two areas demonstrates the fact that the real politics appears to have provided the 'ulamā' with circumstantial options to engage in certain settings of discourses.*

***Keywords**: The East Coast; The West Coast; 'Ulamā'; Sumatra; Malay Kingdoms; Minangkabau; Kitab.*

## Introduction

The public knowledge of nowadays Indonesians is not much familiar with the term east coast of Sumatra, at least not as much as its west side. Its changing name into North Sumatra during the colonial time, with its Capital in Medan, seems to have lessened the historical memory of the area among the publics. It is quite different from the west coast, the *rantau* (acquitted territory) of Minangkabau. It was taken as the chief source of, and is closely associated with, the naming of the province, West Sumatra. To be added to this topographic issue is the fact that the two areas are different in term related to the social and religious configurations, which are taken here as the subject of discussions. This is based on the argument that both areas had different historical experiences in the shaping of Islamic leadership and institutions as well as intellectual development.

As will be shown below, the east coast witnessed the supremacy of Malay kingdoms (Deli, Serdang, Langkat, and Asahan) in the making of Islam, which strengthened during the periods of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the Dutch-supported industry of plantation grew considerably. The picture was different from the west coast, where the kingdom of Minangkabau, Pagaruyung, was forced to cease to exist following the victory of the Dutch colonial power over the Padri movement in 1840s. With these experiences, the east and the west coasts evolved into two different grounds for the rise Islamic expressions. The east coast appeared to be the hub of the kingdom (*kerajaan*)-oriented Islam, different from the west coast where the root of Islamic civil society can be observed. This difference was strongly related to the existence of *'ulamā'* (Muslim scholars, sing. *'ālim*); due to different arenas of politics, they had different grounds to perform their religious missions and to establish their careers, becoming the kingdom-appointed religious elites and independent Muslim leaders respectively.

All the points just cited will be discussed, giving strong emphasis to the ways how the two contexts of socio-politics in the east and the west coasts served the necessary conditions for the rise of different articulations of Islam. In reference to the concept of knowledge formation by Talal Asad (2009, 20-24), the articulations of Islam just cited will be explained in two important points, the styles of Islamic leadership and the language of religious texts (*kitabs*). These are taken here as essential aspects of what is stated as the production of Islamic knowledge, and as such were acknowledged significant to be reproduced and elaborated further relevant with the given circumstance in the course of history.

Given to this theoretical notion, the intellectual role of *'ulamā'* is crucial to consider. They are treated here as conscious agents who engaged in the formulation of values in terms that were deep-seated in, but not governed by, the prevailing discourses of the Islamic affairs in the period under this discussion. In this case, the concept of "practice" of post-linguistic turn in historical theory is apt to refer to. Based on the understanding of culture as "a regime of practical rationality", the concept acknowledges the existence of "a space in which a meaningful intersection between discursive constitution and individual initiative occurs" (Spiegel 2005, 20). And the *'ulamā'* were the creative individuals who negotiated the space, with their authority in socio-religious fields, to produce and reproduce Islamic knowledge, and in turn to create the religious orthodoxy for the Muslims of Southeast Asia and Indonesia in particular.

The concept of knowledge production is of specific significance in the studies on Islam in the region. To be more specific, this concept is to enrich the intellectual relation and the transmission which has been a leading topics since it was taken into an extensive study by Azyumardi Azra on the network between Malay-Archipelago and Middle Eastern *'ulamā'* in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (2004), leading it to appear as a chief theme in the contemporary historiography of Islam in Southeast Asia. It should be mentioned here that the classical work of Snouck Hurgronje, *Mekka* (1931), addresses the subject, well-known from his statement that Mecca served "the heart of the religious life in the East-Indian Archipelago". In 1970s, Anthony Johns made a preliminary study on the network as he wrote *Friends in Grace: Ibrahim al-Kurani and Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkeli* (1978). With due regards to the contributions that have been made, the transmission however has led to the rise of thinking which emphasizes a one-way course of transferring Islam from Mecca to Southeast Asia. As a consequence, the complex historical process of institutionalizing Islam in local contexts, which are various in nature, has been undermined.

Taking the east and the west coasts of Sumatra as the research subject, this article is to handle the issue just cited. With the concept of knowledge formation, the ways Islam was institutionalized could be explained well in order to understand the reason that the religion was (and is) variously expressed. And the *'ulamā'* served the conscious agents who engaged in determining the natures of Islam to be practiced and was regarded being religiously the truth to uphold.

**Islamizing the East and West Coasts**

Historically speaking, the two coastal areas under this study were very much related to the kingdom of Aceh. In the east coast, which came to be known as "*tanah Deli*" (the land of Deli), Aceh constituted an important factor in the development of the area, as the kingdom engaged in the establishing of vassal kingdoms of Deli, Serdang, Asahan and Langkat. It was different in the case of the west coast, where Aceh had to deal with the local rulers of *rantau* (acquired territories) under the loose command of Pagaruyung palace in the area of Minangkabau proper, in order to seize local produces as the primary objective. As a result, the influence of Aceh in the east coast laid much in the rise of local kingdoms under the lordship of the then rising super power in the western Archipelago.

Deli is the kingdom to mention here. According local tradition, the origin of the kingdom is attributed to a leading figure Gotjah Pahlawan, a descendant of Muhammad Deri Akbar of Hindustan who served a military commander to

the ruler of Aceh, Sultan 'Alauddin Mansur Shah (1579-1586). Gotjah Pahlawan, whose mother was an Acehnese of Pasai origin, followed his father as he held the same military career and served Sultan Iskandar Muda. In 1612, under the command of the Sultan, he conquered the kingdom of Haru and hence established Deli, leading him to be appointed as an official envoy of Aceh kingdom in the east coast. Iskandar Muda backed his power establishment by bestowing him the titles "Seri Paduka" (His Excellence) and "Panglima Deli" (Commander of Deli), and by providing him with royal regalia (*keris*, sword, and gong) to symbolize the lordship of Aceh to the vassal of the Malay kingdom (Husny 1978, 60-72).

A century later, in 1722, Serdang was founded as another kingdom of the east coast, following the feud of Deli royal family. The exiled Tuanku Umar Johan Alamsyah, with the support of local rulers in the vicinity of Serdang, consolidated his power outside the kingdom of Deli (Erman 2011, 53-54). Like Deli, Serdang in its course shared similar experience of being under the lordship of Aceh. Gotjah Pahlawan is claimed to be the ancestor who laid down the foundation of the kingdom (Pelly et al. 1986, 13-16). In fact, such a political claim of being under Aceh protection was also true with the kingdoms of Asahan and Langkat, despite the historiography of these two Malay polities escribes their origins in different ways from the two kingdom mentioned earlier (Sinar 2007).

Alongside the establishment of the kingdoms, Malay and Islam also grew into the leading culture and religion of the local people. No historical record is found to determine when and by whom Islam was introduced. However, the thing for sure is that Aceh's political power over the areas exerted the strengthening of Islam and Malay culture. Aceh of the time was the home of *Jawi* (Malay in Arabic script) to develop as the *lingua franca* in Southeast Asia, in line with the spread of Islam. The mentioned Malay kingdoms served the bastion of cultural transformation, which is articulated in the case of Deli in a proverb "Aceh is veranda of Mecca, Deli is veranda of Aceh" (Pelly et al. 1986, 41).

In the specific context of the east coast, the push of Islamizing was to be attributed to the kingdoms' management of social plurality. Next to Malay Muslims in the coastal areas, the rulers had to deal with the migration of ethnics from the hinterlands—Karo, Simalungun and Southern Dairi. While maintaining their ethnic origins, the migrated people were urged to blend in Malay culture, as was epitomized in the saying "*masuk Islam*" (converting to Islam), denoting the social and cultural adjustment to the new circumstance of the coast, the hub of Islam and Malay culture. To be mentioned to this respect is the equal civil rights to be granted to those who just "converted to Islam"—such as to own the lands, to participate in socio-religious ceremonies, and to attend certain occasions in royal palace (Pelly et al. 1986, 41-42).

Given to the above facts, the Islamization in the east coast proceeded through the states-led initiatives. Alongside the political consolidation, Islam and Malay culture were adopted to form a unifying force amidst the variety of ethnicity-based social groupings. As a result, none of the *'ulamā'* like Shaykh Ulakan in the west coast—as will be discussed below—is recorded as to have Islamized the people of the area. With this mode of Islamization, the kingdoms in the east coast appear to have crafted a centralized power, in terms of both politics and religion. While in west coast, the political power of Minangkabau palace did not reach the areas of *rantau* created ample space for the rise of independent Muslim leaders to contribute to the Islamizing process.

In fact, the west coast had another story of Islamization. The area is said as to have been visited by the west Asian Muslim traders since the 14$^{th}$ century. The Gujaratis, who looked for gold and pepper, were the main traders. A Portuguese trader who visited the area in 1519 reported that five Gujarati vessels at Barus treated him with hostility (Kathirithamby-Wells 1969, 456). However, the presence of Muslim merchants seemed not to have made great impact in term of Islamization. Until the early 16$^{th}$ century, it was only Tiku whose ruler was rumoured to be a Muslim, while the rulers of Singkel and Pariaman were still heathens (Pires 1944, 160-61).

Intensive Islamization began to occur as Aceh established strong political power with the west coast, which appears to have existed definitively during the reign of Sultan Alauddin Ri'ayat Shah al-Kahar (1537-1571). He for instance appointed his family members as Aceh's key representatives in the regions, to provide the kingdom with manpower in order to enable it exerted control and hegemony over the west coast. In addition to Barus, the ruler of which was married to his sister, Sultan Alauddin also appointed his two sons as the rulers (royal representatives) of Aru and Pariaman, with the titles Sultan Ghori and Sultan Mughal respectively (Kathirithamby-Wells 1969, 457). This Islamizing process continued to advance alongside the establishment of Aceh's political hegemony and strong economic control in the area, which culminated during the reign of the greatest ruler of Aceh Iskandar Muda (1607-1636) (Lombard 1986, 122-123).

Along with the political power, Islamic intellectual network between Aceh and the west coast Sumatra was also well founded. This was testified in the story of a great *'ālim* of Minangkabau of the period, Burhanudin of Ulakan (1646-1704). He is known as to have learned Islam—and followed Sufi order (*tarekat*) of Sattariya— from a celebrated *'ālim* of Aceh, Abdurrauf al-Sinkili (1615-1693). After having studied with al-Sinkili for several years, Burhanudin established *surau*, a Sufi-*cum*-educational institution in Ulakan, which came to be the basis of further Islamization of Minangkabau people (Azra 1990, 64-85). Also, the Ulakan *surau* served to the rising of *shari'ah*-oriented Islam, which intensified in the nineteenth century, providing a foothold for the Padri *'ulamā'* to launch their reform movement (Dobbin 1983).

Although it was located in the coastal area, the Ulakan Surau greatly contributed to the spread of Islam in the mainland of Minangkabau (*darek*). It formed the sole authority regarding religious matters, from where the branches of "Burhanuddin's *suraus*" were established by his pupils in some areas along the trade routes to the villages of Kapas-Kapas and Mensiangan (Padang Panjang), to Kota Lawas, and to the *sawah* areas of southern Agam, in particular to Kota Tua (Dobbin 1983, 124). As a result, from the Ulakan Surau the intellectual network of Minangkabau *'ulamā'* began to establish. Muslims from several parts of Minangkabau came to Ulakan to study Islam. And, following the example of their teacher, they established *suraus* in their own regions—mostly in the villages—when they finished their studies. Shaykh Burhanuddin came to be recognized as the Tuanku of Ulakan, the highest title for a religious teacher in West Sumatra, alongside the title *khalifa* of Shattariyya order (Abdullah 1966, 8-9).

In such condition, the west coast of Sumatra, especially Pariaman, emerged as the gate through which the Islamic influence penetrated the world (*alam*) of Minangkabau. In this respect, the significance of the west coast also lies in the fact that it served the centre of rise of *'ulamā'* who engaged in the mission of Islamizing the people of Minangkabau, leading them to be recognized as one of the leading pillars of Minangkabau society and politics. This position of *'ulamā'* strengthened during the colonial time.

## In the Centre of Colonial Power

In the 19th century, alongside the advance of the colonial power in the East Indies, the west and the east coast of Sumatra had to encounter the rising Dutch political control. And, it should be emphasized, the Dutch colonizing of Sumatra took the forms relevant with the dynamics of local politics. In this respect, the Dutch took two forms of colonization: the engagement in the civil war initiated by the returned *'ulamā'* from Mecca, the Padri, against *adat* authorities of Minangkabau in the west coast, and the political diplomacy to curb the Malay kingdoms in the east coast to pledge being under the Dutch authority.

Regarding the first one, the point to explain is the rising network with Mecca, which took place alongside the economic improvement of the west coast in the 19th century (Dobbin 1983). With this network, the *sharī'ah*-oriented Islam intensified, which led the growth of Islamic activism to cope with the increasing voices on the need of socio-moral improvement of the Muslims (Rahman 1966, 193-194). This 19th century Meccan network was epitomized by the three *'ulamā'* of

Minangkabau who returned from Mecca in 1802: Haji Miskin, Haji Sumanik and Haji Piobang. Inspired by the Wahabi ideas and movement, the Padri *'ulamā'* began to question the *adat* system which had been firmly established in the Minangkabau world. They launched the reform which called for the return to the true Islam based on the Qur'an and Sunnah.

The Padri movement cannot sufficiently be understood in term of religious network. It had strong local context of Minangkabau society of the time, which is rightly described by Taufik Abdullah (1966, 13) as to have been "in a period of transition, with many symptoms of social disintegration beginning to manifest themselves in the forms of social demoralization and deterioration". And, one of the most leading features of the social disintegration was the undermining of political power of the king in Pagaruyung, besides the rising religious centres in the interior which challenged the long-established authority of the esteemed Tuanku of Ulakan in the coast. The picture of Minangkabau as "the supreme seat of civil and religious authority in this part of the East", as William Marsden (2012, 343) portrays, began to change.

All these facts led to the creation of space for the rise of reform by the Padri *'ulamā'*, who tried to resolve the rising tension between the believed religious doctrine and the social environment they encountered. As part of the socio-intellectual dynamic of Minangkabau world (*alam*), the Padri movement is to be comprehended as the internal cultural power to voice the need of social renovation, in which the assimilation of doctrine within the *adat* as the ideal pattern of behaviour constituted the main substance. Nevertheless, this process toward reconciliation had to end with the involvement of the Dutch in 1821, which changed the course of the Padri movement into the war against the Dutch-backed custodians of *adat*, the defenders of old order. The Dutch successfully defeated the Padri. In 1845, all the areas of Minangkabau were under the Dutch power. However, the socio-intellectual dynamics and movement continued to perpetuate in post-Padri period, providing the *'ulamā'* of Meccan network with new arena for the continued mission of Islamizing Minangkabau society, as will be discussed later.

Now the discussion moves to the east coast, where the Dutch expansion of power was also on-going. The Siak Treaty of 1858 was taken to be the political and legal reasoning of the Dutch to mollify the mentioned Malay kingdoms of Sumatra east coast. Signed by Sultan Sayyid Isma'il (1827-1864), the Treaty stipulates not only the subjugation of Siak kingdom under the Dutch, but also the territorial areas of Malay kingdoms—Deli, Serdang, Langkat and Asahan—which were claimed under its aegis since the 18th century amidst the declining Aceh after the death of Iskandar Thani in 1641. In fact, the Malay kingdoms of the period were in-between the two powerful kingdoms of Aceh and Siak, leading them to accept the two kingdoms as their protectors, which was articulated in the well-known saying "*beraja ke Aceh* (having the raja of Aceh) *bertuan ke Siak* (having the lord of Siak). However, from the treaty, the Dutch appears to have declined to recognize the power of Aceh in the political arena of the Sumatra east coast, leaving the sultanate to be the target of its military expedition in 1870.

With the Siak Treaty of 1858, the Dutch authorities undertook political diplomacy to persuade the rulers of Malay kingdoms to accept the treaty, to sign the statement of pledge to be under the Dutch rules. The Dutch resident in Riau, Elisa Netscher, was tasked with the diplomatic mission. In 16 August 1862, he successfully convinced the ruler of Serdang, Sultan Basharuddin (1851-1879) to sign a declaration (*verklaring*), drafted by Elisa Netscher, pledging that Serdang and the territories under its control were subjects to Siak Indrapura under the Dutch East Indies government with all its instructions. Few days later, 21 and 22 August, Netscher also made the same agreement with respectively the rulers of Deli (Sultan Mahmud Perkasa Alamsyah, 1861-1873) and Langkat (Sultan Musa, 1840-1893) (Erman 2011, 57; Sinar 2007, 187).

Asahan had another story. The ruler of the kingdom, Sultan Ahmad Syah, refused to meet Netscher to sign the agreement. Even, just before

Netscher came to Asahan, he invited the British ships to anchor at harbour, making the relationship with the Dutch hostile. This condition worsened with the coming of Aceh armed force to the east coast, with the claim that the areas were still under its protection. Sultan Ahmad Syah decided to fight against the Dutch, which started to deploy a military expedition to Asahan. This lasted until October 1865, as Sultan Ahmad together with Pangeran Adil and Teungku Pangeran Besar Muda came to meet the Dutch delegation, which ended with their exile to Ambon. The Dutch then appointed controller to govern Asahan. However, this tactics seemed not to resolve the main problem of Asahan, where the people of interior areas continued fighting against the Dutch. In 1886, the Dutch returned Sultan Ahmad to Asahan and reinstalled him as the leader with limited power (Ratna 1990; Sinar 2007).

With all those explained, it appears that the east coast of Sumatra were determined to have different courses of history from the west coast. The kingdoms remained to exist amidst the Dutch colonial power, and even strengthened as they gained economic support from the western companies who made huge investment in especially tobacco plantations. The rulers were the traditional legitimate owner of the lands, and therefore they had rights to rent the lands to the companies. This practice intensified as the Dutch since 1870s implemented the policy of Liberal Economy. The demand for lands significantly increased as more companies attracted to invest (Ratna 2012, 540). Consequently, the rulers of Deli, Langkat and Serdang received huge sums for what was called *persen tanah* of the companies paid for the land concession. The rulers and the kingdoms therefore appeared opulent in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Reid 1979, 44-45), which also led them to be able to play leading roles including in the making of religious revival, as will be discussed below.

## The *'Ulamā'* and Islamic Leadership

Turning to the above-mentioned religious network, the west and the east of Sumatra at the turn of the 20th century provide us with strong evidences of the ways how the network seems to have proceeded not in the simple way of transmitting Islam from the Middle East to Southeast Asia. The *'ulamā'* of the period engaged in local dynamics, in the fields of both socio-politics and religion, which greatly contributed to the rise of various natures of Islamic leadership in the region. Although they had the same experiences of learning with the same teachers in the Harm Mosque, the socio-political conditions of the west and the east coast, which was strengthened by the colonial power, led them to appear in a variety of socio-religious and intellectual profiles. In this section, the discussion is directed to present the profiles of the *'ulamā'* in the mentioned areas of Sumatra.

As is assumed, the picture of the east coast *'ulamā'* was much related to the above-portrayed socio-political mapping of the area, where the Malay kingdoms existed as the locus of power exercises. The *'ulamā'* of the east coast, therefore, appeared to be the kingdoms-affiliated religious leaders, whose Islamizing agenda were under the auspices of Malay rulers. Supported by the political notion which views the Malay ruler (*raja*) in a determinant position above the people, signifying the kingdom (*kerajaan*) as "the condition of having *raja*" (Milner 1982), the *'ulamā'* existed as part of ruling elites in the specific field of religious service. The rulers determined administrative positions dedicated to the *'ulamā'* for their mastering of Islamic knowledge. So important was the kingdom for the careers of the *'ulamā'*, that the traditional networks among these Muslim leaders rooted in teacher-student relationship could not emerge to constitute a consolidated socio-political force outside the kingdoms.

One essential point to emphasize is the fact that the power of the Malay kingdoms strengthened during the period under the discussion, in terms of economics, politics, and culture. Boosted by the colonial policy of Liberal Economy, as already discussed, the rulers had extensive revenue which enabled them to perform their expected roles as the *raja*. In this particular respect, the kingdoms provided the *'ulamā'* with

the opportunities of being elevated to hold the rulers-appointed posts, with the main task was to strengthen the Islamic performance of the kingdoms, next to the educating of the Muslims in *pondok* and the writing of religious books (*kitab*). To be included in the list of the careers of *'ulamā'* was the Sufi master who encouraged the Muslims to join the Sufi brotherhood (*tarekat*). All those mentioned can be seen in the stories of the *'ulamā'* in which follows.

Shaykh Abdul Wahab Rokan (1811-1926) is the first *'ālim* to explain. Born in Rokan, an area under the vicinity of Siak Inderapura, Abdul Wahab came from a religious family of Tembusai religious leaders, which provided him with strong Islamic background. He gained his basic education from Minangkabau *'ulamā'* of Tembusai, the most leading of which was Shaykh Muhammad Saleh (1784-1882), who later became a leading figure in the Padri movement in West Sumatra. Another his teacher was Shaykh Muhammad Yusuf, also from Minangkabau, who was later appointed to the position of *muftī* of the kingdom of Langkat (Ilyas 2018, 59-60).

From Tembusai, he continued his Islamic learning in Mecca. The following names are said as the leading teachers during six-year stay in the Holy City: Shaykh Zainī Ahmad Dahlān, the Shafi'i *muftī* of Mecca, Shaykh Muhammad bin Sulaimān Hasbī Allah, Shaykh Zainuddin and Shaykh Rukhnuddin, both were Jawi scholar of Sumatra origin, together with Shaykh Muhammad Yunus of Batu Bara. His another Meccan teacher which is important to note is Shaykh Sulaimān Zuhdi, a leading Sufi master of Naqshbandiyya order in Mecca. He granted Abdul Wahab the title *khalifah* of the Sufi order, which led him to be known Shaykh Abdul Wahab Rokan al-Khalidi al-Naqsyabandi (Ilya 2018, 60-61).

Abdul Wahab returned to Sumatra in around 1854. After short-stay in Kubu, he then moved to other area in Dumai in 1856, where he established contact with *muftī* of Dumai, Shaykh Abdul Muthalib and Sultan Zainal Abidin, to initiate the founding of an institution for Islamic learning. Not much is known about the institution. But, few years later, in 1860, he is reported to have been a teacher in Labuhan Batu, a major city in the east coast of Sumatra. Around ten years later, in 1870s, he moved to Besilam, an area in Langkat, where he started to establish his career as an *'ālim* (Ilyas 2018, 61-62).

In fact, his intellectual picture began to appear from Besilam, which also provided him to have a close relationship with the ruler of Langkat, Sultan Musa Muazzam Shah (1840-1893). In Besilam, Abdul Wahab founded mosques and an institution for learning and Sufi practice of Naqshbandiyya order. He won the ruler's confidence, leading him to gain political support for his mission of Islamizing the people. The Sultan granted Besilam to be a special zone for Islamic affairs, which was transformed in 1883 into an autonomous region with the name Babussalam. Under his leadership, Besilam emerged as an Islamic village where pious practices could be observed, and more importantly as a well-known centre of Naqshbandiyya Sufi order (Tanjung 2017, 315).

Alongside the development of Babussalam, Abdul Wahab became a spiritual leader who had extensive network with the *tarekat* of Naqshbandiyya throughout the countries in Southeast Asia. He is said to have certified more than one hundred of his students and followers to become *khalifah* of Naqshbandiyya Sufi order, on the basis of which they in turn established *tarekat* in their countries (van Bruinessen 1992, 137-138). In the meantime, Abdul Wahab was also granted with the authority to make self-regulations through the board of villagers, locally called "Bab al-Funun", which served the consultation forum to solve the disputed socio-religious affairs (Pelly et al. 1986; Ratna 1990).

Still in Langkat, another *'ālim* to discuss is Shaykh Muahammad Nur Langkat (1879-1943). Born from a Minangkabau father, Shaykh Ismail, who migrated to Langkat and, as the other Minangkabau diasporas in Langkat, became the *'ālim* in the vicinity of the kingdom. After finishing his basic Islamic learning in Langkat, he went to Mecca for the *hajj* and for further study. The time span he spent in Mecca is not identified, but he is said to have learned to such leading Jawi scholars as

Shaykh Ahmad al-Fatani (1856-1906), Shaykh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi (1860-1915), Shaykh Usman Adul Wahab Serawak (1864-1919), and Shaykh Muhammad Yunus Lingga. Muhammad Nur also learned Sufism from Shaykh Wan Ali Kutan Kelantan (d. 1913), a Jawi *'ālim* in Medina, from whom he joined the Naqshbandiyya *tarekat* (Ilyas 2018, 277-278).

The picture of Muhammad Nur began to appear after he returned to his home town in Langkat. In 1918, he was appointed to the position of *qāḍī* (judge) in an area known as Hulu in Langkat. This position led him to engage not only in the solving of disputed religious affairs in the kingdom, but also in the performance of Islamic leadership. As a graduate from Meccan Islamic learning, he had authority to speak for Islam among the elites and the people the kingdom. During his twenty-year of duty (until 1938), he was elevated to the member of a sort of *'ulamā'* board, locally called *Raad Agama* (religious court), which was designed to be a think-thank institution for Islamic issues. Several names are included in the board: Shaykh Abd Allah Afifudin, Shaykh Abd al-Rahim, Tengku Hashim Isha, and Shaykh Abd al-Karim Binjai. The last-mentioned *'ālim* was appointed to be the leader (Ilyas 2018, 279). The board provided the high religious ranking, the *mufti* (Shayk Muhammad Ziyadah) which was responsible for issuing religious edicts (*fatwā*), with advices and considerations to formulate the kingdom's Islamic policies (Ilyas 2018, 278-279).

To be added to the picture of Muhammad Nur is the educator and writer. Nothing is known about his *pondok*, but he is said to have educated several names which later became the respected *'ulamā'* in Langkat. They are among other Tengku Fachruddin, the leader of *Sharī'ah* Council in the kingdom of Serdang, Shaykh Zainal Arifin Abbas, and Shaykh Adul Halim Hasan. Regarding the writer, three works are attributed to Muhammad Nur, namely *Ilmoe Tashauwoef* (the Science of Sufism), *Puasa* (Fasting), and *Hidāyat al-Tullāb li Sa'ādah al-Ahbāb* on Islamic dogma and creed (Ilyas 2018, 279). These works will be dealt with later. The thing to state is that this *'ālim* of Langkat strengthened the profile of *'ulamā'* of the east coast areas of Sumatra.

From Langkat we turn to Deli, another kingdom of the east coast. Here, one of the *'ulamā'* to pay attention to is Shaykh Hasanuddin bin Shaykh Muhammad Maksum, known as Shaykh Hasan Maksum (b. 1301/1882). Born in Medan Labuhan, he came from an elite family (*orang kaya*). His father was a harbour master (*syahbandar*) with the title Datuk. Perhaps he was also knowledgeable in Islam, which sufficed him to give basic education to the young Hasan Maksum while attending the British-modelled *Sekolah Rakyat* in Medan. Afterwards, in 1897, he was sent to Mecca for further Islamic learning, as a continuation to what he had received in his home town under the mentorship of his father (Mona, 7-8; Ilyas 2018, 311-312).

Like other *Jawi* students in Mecca of the period, Hasan Maksum learned Islam from both *Jawi* and Arab *'ulamā'*. Among the *Jawi*, Shaykh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi and Shaykh Ahmad al-Fatani are his teachers, like those of the Malay *'ulamā'* already discussed. The others are Shaykh Abdussalam Kamar, Shaykh Usman Tanjung Pura, Shaykh Abdul Qadir Mandailing, and Shaykh Abdul Hamid Kudus. After around ten years living in the Holy City, Hasan Maksum returned to his home town in Labuhan Deli in 1916, and began pursuing his career as an *'ālim* in the vicinity of Deli kingdom. This started as a religious teacher in Labuhan Deli, and then—with the support of his teacher in Mecca, Shaykh Abdul Qadir Mandailing, who returned to Medan in 1926—Hasan Maksum began to be known as a promising *'ālim* of Deli. And, his name continued being popular among the people, leading him to receive attention of the ruler of Deli, Sultan Makmun al-Rasyid (1873-1924), who then bestowed him the title Imam Paduka Tuan (The Grand Imam) of the kingdom (Mona, 19-20; Ilyas 2018, 313-315).

Further, his new position led Shaykh Hasan Maksum to emerge as a leading *'ālim* in the kingdom of Deli. Besides being the leader of several mosques, including the Grand Mosque al-Mashun, he was also entrusted to be the advisor for the ruler

in Islamic affairs (Ilyas 2018, 315-316). In so doing, Shaykh Hasan Maksum gained ruler's confidence for his mission of guarding the Islamic orthodoxy against the rising reformist voices in Sumatra and Southeast Asia at large. He was defendant of *kaum tua* (old group), the conservative *'ulamā'* in the face of those with the idea and the spirit of reform, known as *kaum muda* or new group (Abdullah 1971; Roff 1967, 56-86). In fact, this conservative response appeared to be the main stream of religious standing of the *'ulamā'* who were affiliated with the Malay kingdoms in the Peninsula (Roff 1967, 74).

The next point to discuss is concerned with the works Shaykh Hasan Maksum produced during his career as an *'ālim* of the kingdom. In reference to the study by Ilyas (2018, 319-321), eighteen *kitabs* are identified as his works, which cover various subjects of Islamic knowledge, ranging from rituals until Sufism and *dhikr* (remembrance to God). To be mentioned in this regards is his contribution in the educating of *'ulamā'* in Deli. Almost all the leaders of Sumatra east coast had experiences studying with Shaykh Hasan Maksum, especially those who later involved in the founding of al-Washliyah in 1930, the biggest Muslim organization in the area (Ilyas 2018, 318).

The above profiles of *'ulamā'* represent the nature of Islamic leadership in the east coast, which was *kerajaan* in orientation, in the sense that the kingdoms served the centres of Islamic dynamics. And the *'ulamā'* emerged as dedicated leaders who gained rulers support for their religious missions. It is different from the picture of *'ulamā'* in the west coast. Existed outside the waning kingdom of Pagaruyung, as already discussed, the *'ulamā'* of the area emerged as civil society actors who engaged in the social and political affairs of Minangkabau Muslims. Instead of colliding with the rulers, they founded their own institutions of *surau* (like *pesantren* in Java) and Sufi order (*tarekat*), on which the religious authority among the Muslims was established.

The portrait of Minangkabau *'ulamā'*, defined here as non-*kerajaan* actors, can obviously be seen in the socio-intellectual history of the area in the last 19th and early 20th centuries, where intellectual debates and controversies constituted a salient feature. The *'ulamā'* involved in the efforts to counter the rising Islamic voices of the reform-minded scholars, *kaum muda*, who criticized the long-established religious practices under the leadership of the guardians of the tradition, which came to be called *kaum tua*. It should be noted that the terms *kamu tua* and *kaum muda*, represented the conservative and the reformist scholars respectively, are strongly associated with the Islamic dynamic in Minangkabau (Abdullah 1971; Noer 1973), and Malay in general (Roff 1967, 56-86), where both emerged as Muslim leaders who engaged in defining Islam for the Muslims of the area. As well, bother presented different perspective of understanding Islamic doctrines, which was also related to the social and cultural background.

The *kaum muda-kaum tua* intellectual encounter is illustrated in the story of a leading *'ālim* of the time, Chatib Ali (Shaykh Khatib Muhammad Ali, 1861-1936). He was born in Parak Gadang in Padang. After having acquired basic Islamic learning in *surau*, Chatib Ali went to Mecca, where he spent twelve years studying Islam (1883-1890 and 1893-1898) from both Arab and Jawi *'ulamā'*. Ahmad Khatib, with whom he had many debates, was one of his main teachers in the Holy City. In 1891, once he travelled to his home town and established a *surau*. In 1898, after he returned from Mecca, he became a teacher in his Surau Muara Labuh, where he began his career as a traditionalist *'ālim* and it strengthened as he joined the circle of *kaum tua* scholars in Padang who were in the mid process of consolidation in response to the expansion of the *kaum muda* movement (Yunus 1981, 20-53; Ilyas 2018, 197-198).

The crucial role of Chatib Ali in the intellectual history of Minangkabau lies in the fact this this *'ālim*, together with Syeikh Mungka (Shaykh Sa'ad ibn Tanta Mungka, 1857-1923), emerged as the first *kaum tua* leaders who engaged in the polemical debates with *kaum muda* group, dealing with among others the issue of the Naqshbandiyya Sufi order (*tarekat*). This began with the *fatwa* (legal opinion) of Ahmad Khatib from Mecca—issued on the basis of the request

(*istifta'*) by a leading reformist leader Abdullah Ahmad (Schrieke 1973, 77)—stating that Naqshbandiyya Sufi order, as practised by Minangkabau Muslims, deviated from the Islamic doctrines and consequently belonged to improper religious innovations (*bid'a*) (Khatib 1965).

The *kaum tua* leaders launched their critical responses to the cited *fatwa* of Ahmad Khatib in his *Izhar Dall al-Kadhibin fi Tashabbuhihim bi al-Sadiqin* (first published in Padang in 1906). Chatib Ali published an Arabic work, with its Malay translation, of a Sufi *'ālim* affiliated to Naqshbandiyya order Shaykh Sayyid Muhammad ibn Mahdi al-Kurdi, *Risāla Naqshbandiyya min al-Dhikri al-Khafi wa al-Rābita wa al-Murāqaba wa al-Daf' al-I'itirād bi dhālik*. This work deals with the issues of Naqshbandiyya order that became the subjects of Ahmad Khatib's denouncement of the order in his *fatwa* (Schrieke 1973, 33; Yunus 1981, 40). While Syekh Mungka wrote *Irgam Unu fi al-Muta'annitin fi Inkarihim Rabita al-Wasilin* and then *Risala Tanbih al-'Awwam 'ala Tagrirat ba'd al-Anam*. These works were dedicated to demonstrating that Naqshbandiyya Sufi order had a strong foundation in Islamic doctrines, the Qur'an and the Sunnah, as well as the practices of the Companions and the *'ulamā'* (Schrieke 1973, 32).

It is worth noting that both Chatib Ali and Syekh Mungka had experiences learning with Ahmad Khatib in Mecca, besides of course other Arab and Jawi scholars. Chatib Ali is said as to have studied with Uthman Fauzy al-Khalidi from whom he received a license to teach the Naqshbandiyya order in West Sumatra (Yunus 1981, 26; Ilyas 2018, 220). Hence, the above debate on the Naqshbandiyya order strongly revealed the rising *kaum tua-kaum muda* conflict, besides pitting the students against their teacher in Mecca. In fact, the reformists' denouncement of Naqshbandiyya marked the beginning of religious conflict in the Minangkabau of the early 20th century (Abdullah 1971, 7-8), which is reminiscent of what the leader of Naqshbandiyya order, Shaykh Isma'il Simabur, had already done in almost the same way to the older Shattariyya order of Ulakan in 1850 (Schrieke 1973, 24-6).

Thus, controversy on Naqshbandiyya order continued. Public debates were held, first in Agam in 1903 and then in Bukti Sarungan in 1905, in which both *kaum tua* and *kaum muda* presented their different views and opinions. Chatib Ali, Syekh Badjang, and Hadji Abbas presented the voices of *kaum tua* group against Abdullah Ahmad, Hadji Rasul, Syekh Djamil Djambek from *kaum muda* (Noer 1973, 220). The subjects discussed in the public debates were also extended. In addition to the Naqshbandiyya order, there arose various subjects ranging from the essential issues of *ijtihad* (legal reasoning) and *taqlid* (blindly following the schools of thought) to trivial issues (*khilafiyya*) like the intention of prayer (*niyyat*), prompting at the grave (*talqin*), visiting graveyard (*ziyarah*), the language of Friday sermon (*khutbah*) (Noer 1973, 22-1; Abdullah 1971, 13-15), and the long-established ritual practice of *berdiri mawlid* (Kaptein 1993, 124-53; Schrieke 1973, 83-84). As in the case of the Naqshbandiyya order, both the *kaum tua* and *kamu muda* remained adamant, holding strongly to their respective religious ideas and practices.

The religious rivalry and conflict between these two groups continued to grow. The formation of the Committee for a Conference of *'Ulamā'* in Minangkabau (Comite Permusjawaratan Ulama Minangkabau) on 19 July 1928—in which both *kaum tua* and *kaum muda* united to refute the colonial regulation of Guru Ordinance—appeared not to end the growing division amongst the Minangkabau Muslim leaders. Instead, they consolidated their respective groups in the formation of permanent organizations. While the *kaum muda* held a conference (20-21 May 1930) and transformed the Sumatra Thawalib Union into the Permi (Persatuan Muslim Indonesia, Association of Indonesian Muslims), the *kaum tua* at the same time (20 May 1930) established Perti (Persatuan Tarbiyah Islamiyah, Association of Islamic Schools) (Abdulah 1971, 135-136; Koto 1997).

In the formation of Perti, a prominent *'ālim* of Tjandung, Syekh Sulaiman Arrasuli (1871-1970), is crucial to explain. Born in Tjandung, Bukittinggi, West Sumatra, Sulaiman Arrasuli came

from a leading *'ulamā'* family of Tjandung. He had his basic education in his father's *surau* in Tjandung, then in many *suraus* in West Sumatra. In 1903, he went to Mecca to receive further Islamic learning, where he studied mainly with Ahmad Khatib. After a four-year period of learning in Mecca, in 1907 he returned to Tjandung and began teaching in a newly-founded *surau*. It was here in Tjandung that he reformed the traditional learning of *surau*, introducing modern elements to the *surau* as the reformist leaders had already done. More importantly, he initiated, together with Syekh Djamil Djaho (b. 1875), the establishing of a strong network among the *kaum tua 'ulamā'* of Minangkabau *surau*, which then became Perti in 1930 (Bakry 1981, 76-85; Koto 1997, 36-39; Abdullah 1971, 135-136).

Under the leadership of Syekh Sulaiman Arrasuli, Perti emerged as the official institution of *kaum tua* for holding their mission of defending traditional Islam in West Sumatra. This heightened with the coming of its leading thinker, Sirodjuddin Abbas (1905-1980), to the top position of this organization in 1935 (Fedespiel 1996, 196-197). He led Perti to emerge as a firmly established institution of *kaum tua* with its main agenda being the formulating of traditional Islam. In addition to re-organizing this association (Koto 1997, 41-43), he engaged in the traditionalist discourse of formulating *ahlussunah waljama'ah* (*ahl al-sunnah wa al-jamā'ah*). One of his books which deserves to mention here is *I'tiqad Ahlussunah Wal-Djama'ah* (1971). This book articulated Siradjuddin's views on traditional Islam and hence confirmed his contribution to elaborating this arising key concept of the traditionalist discourse.

**Texts and Language Styles**

In line with the issues of leadership as already discussed, the difference between the *'ulamā'* of the east from the west coasts was also apparent in styles of language expressions they used in the writing of their *kitabs*. In this respect, the *kerajaan*-centred *'ulamā'* of the east coast appear to have engaged in the production of what is called by Snouck Hurgronje (1931, 272) "literary sphere", denoting the standard of writing *kitabs* which were directed to merely providing the Muslims with the explanations on Islamic teachings. It was different from the expression style of the works of west coast *'ulamā'*, in that they were written in the framework of polemical debate and therefore were laden with activist dimensions.

Of the works of *'ulamā'* in the east coast, *Hidāyat al-Ṭullāb li Sa'ādat al-Ahbāb* by the aforementioned Shaykh Muhammad Nur Langkat is the first text to note here. This work discusses basic Islamic doctrines, which are explained into several issues of among others attributes of God, five pillars of Islamic belief, schools of theology, and of knowing God and some others related to the last issues (*Hidāyat al-Ṭullāb*, 5-63). This work seems to be purported as a resource book for the common people to make them comprehend well basic Islamic doctrines. His another work focuses on fasting and its advantages for Muslims life. In addition to delineating the benefits for those who do fasting, including for healthy reason, this month of Ramadhan also provides the Muslims with the opportunity to have *laylat al-qadr* (night of destiny), which is believed as the special night of God's blessing and mercy, when sins are forgiven and supplications are accepted.

The mentioned works were written in the language relevant for the Malay Muslims in Sumatra, and Southeast Asia at large. Having appeared as small-sized religious treatises, the discussions of these works are simple in nature, straightforward in expression, and freed from any things of polemics and debates. In *Hidāyat al-Ṭullāb*, for instance, all the points are presented in the style of explanation which is reminiscent of *kitab*, in the sense that it was dedicated just to the elucidation of Islamic doctrines. Therefore, nothing is made as an illustration which refers to the real situation of Malay, the audiences addressed, leading the work to speak monologues for its behalf.

The same is also true with the works of an *'ālim* who worked for the kingdom of Deli, Shaykh Hasan Maksum. All of his works, around eighteen, appear as small-sized treatises like those of Shaykh Muhammad Nur, which focus the discussions on

certain subject. In the field of *fiqh*, for instance, few works can be mentioned, namely *Ithāf al-Ikhwān* on the daily practices of devotion (*'ibādah*), written in reference to the request which came to him along his capacity as the grand *muftī* of the kingdom (*Ithāf al-Ikhwān*, 1-3); *Natījah Abadiyah* is the next work to note, which is directed to provide guidance to determine the time of prayers in areas of the east coast, based on the science of astronomy (*'ilm al-falaq*) (*Natījah Abadiyah*, 2); the third work is *Samīr al-Shibyān li Ma'rifah Furūd al-Adyān*, which appears to be an introductory to the subjects of *fiqh* and the foundation of religion (*uṣūl al-dīn*). This treatise was directed to be an amusement for the beginners in Islamic studies who do not understand Arabic, the language of advanced *kitabs* on the subject (*Samīr al-Shibyān*, 3).

In addition to affirming the supremacy of *fiqh*, to be more specific that of *'ubūdiyah* (prescriptions for worship), which appears to be the dominant feature of Islamic discourses in the late nineteenth century (van Bruinessen 1990, 244-245), the above-mentioned works of Shaykh Hasan Maksum strengthened the trend of language style used in religious works of Malay *'ulamā'* in the east coast. They were dedicated to providing the Muslims of especially the kingdom of Deli with Malay sources of Islamic teachings, in order to make them literate in terms of both religious knowledge and practices.

For the reasons already explained, the above intellectual picture could not be found in the language style of the works of *'ulamā* in the west coast, which appear to be in line with the spirit of activism. In this respect, the works of the aforementioned Chatib Ali deserve to be paid attention to at first. As will be apparent below, the works of this *'ālim* were dedicated to counter the rising voice of *kaum muda*, representing the trend of intellectual development in Minangkabau. His work on Naqshbandiyya order, as already discussed, is one example of his engagement in the intellectual milieu of the west coast.

The debate-oriented style can also be gained in his other works, one of which is about *taqlīd*, entitled *Intishār I'tishām fī al-Taqlīd 'alā al-'Awām* (Defending the opinion to affirm the [necessity] of *taqlīd* for the commoners). It was written to counter the ideas of Shaykh Abdul Hamid Asahan in his *Tamyīz al-Taqlīd min al-Ittibā'*, in which he differentiate *taqlīd* (blind imitation) from *ittibā'* (following *'ulamā'* with the knowledge of their thought and the school of law). The first one is associated with the practices of *kaum tua*, while the second is related to *kaum muda*. Defending *kaum tua*, Chatib Ali wrote this work with clear objective, as is obviously expressed in its subtitle *Radd Tamyīz al-Taqlīd min Ittibā'* (Refutation to Distinguish *Taqlīd* from *Ittibā'*). The term "refutation" is used to make the message of this work is clear, that it was directed repudiate an anti-*taqlīd* thinking and hence to counter the idea of Abdul Hamid.

The next work to mention is *Burhān al-Haq* (Proof of the Truth). Its complete title is *Burhān al-Haq: Radd 'ala Tsamaniyah al-Masā'il, al-Jawāb min Su'āl al-Sā'il al-Qāth'iyah al-Wāqi'ah al-Gāyah al-Taqrīb*. It was finished in 1918 and printed in the same year in Padang by Pul Bomar (Ilyas 2018, 212-214). *Burhān al-Haq* deals with eight disputed religious affairs between *kaum tua* and *kaum muda*. The disputed affairs include the gate of *ijtihad* (legal reasoning), the utterance of *niyā'* (intention of praying), *talqīn* (prompting to the dead), building house over the grave, *taqlīd*, Naqhhbandiyya order, determining the beginning of fasting month, and performing Friday prayers in the village. To be noted in this respect is the ways Chatib Ali defended his position of an *'ālim* of *kaum tua*. For Chatib Ali, the religious practices of *kaum tua* had strong ground in Islamic teachings and had been implemented within the Muslims life in the courses of history (Ilyas 2018, 213). All the points mentioned constitute the discussions of the *kitab*, which are presented along the support of *kaum tua* to continue performing the traditional practices of Islam.

Two other works of Chatib Ali were directed to compile the issues debated in the controversies between *kaum tua* and *kaum muda* of Minangkabau, namely *Mau'izah wa Tazkirah* (Instruction and Admonition) and *al-Fatāwā al-'Āliyah* (The Authoritative *Fatwas*). Both provide

us with documentary sources of the Islamic dynamics in Sumatra west coast and the Dutch East Indies at large. The first work records the debate between the two groups of Minangkabau *'ulamā'* in 15 July 1919, on which Chatib Ali, with the support of Shaykh Muhammad Haris Banten, received strong endorsement of traditional *'ulamā'* in Java to guard the established practices of Islam (Ilyas 2018, 209-211). While *al- Fatāwā al-'Āliyah* seems to be a continuation of *Mau'izah wa Tazkirah*, with the advanced support of Meccan *'ulamā'* as the result of a religious consultation Chatib Ali initiated to hold in Mecca in 1341/1923 (Ilyas 2018, 201-203).

The same spirit of debate can also be found in the works of another leading *'ālim* of *kaum tua*, Sulaiman Arrasuli. One of his works to discuss at first is *Pedoman Puasa* (Manual for Fasting). In addition to explaining all important aspects of fasting, the author also deals with debated issue concerning the ways to determine the first day of Ramadhan. In this case, Sulaiman Arrasuli contended the practise of *ru'yah* (seeing new moon [*hilal*] to sign the coming of Ramadhan), instead of *hisab* (a method of calculation) as the *'ulamā'* of *kaum muda* proposed. Another issue is in relation to the number of *raka'āh* (cycles of movement) in tarawih prayer, on which Sulaiman Arrasuli, like other *'ulamā'* of *kaum tua*, firmly held the opinion that the prayer should be performed with twenty *raka'āh*, not eleven as practiced by *kaum muda* (see *Pedoman Puasa*, 2-20). As such, the refutation against the voices of *kaum muda* appears to be the reason of writing this work.

Another work is *Kumpulan Kitab Enam Risalah*, which takes the form, as its title suggests, of a compilation of six treatises (*risalah*) on a variety of subjects. In this respect, special attention is given to the treatise four, which discusses the critical question the *kaum muda* voiced concerning the authority of *kaum tua*, entitled *al-Qaul al-kāshif fī radd 'ala man i'tardha 'alā al-kabā'ir* (The enlightened sayings on the refutation to those who contest the great *'ulamā'*). For Arrasuli, the movement of *kaum muda* to combat what were regarded as un-Islamic influence in religious practices, such as the pronouncing of the intention of prayer (*uṣalli*), are seen being tantamount to reject the sayings of the leading scholars of Shafi'i school. Therefore, the *'ulamā'* of *kaum muda* were illustrated in this work as a little baby who liked the impossible beating the bone of a cow (Arrasuli 1920, 26).

Still in the *Kumpulan*, the treatise five is also relevant with the prevailing discourse of *kaum tua-kaum muda* controversy. Entitled *Ibṭāl huzūz ahl al-'aṣābiyah fī tahrīm qirā'ah al-Qur'ān bi al-a'jāmiyah* (to dismiss the fanatic group by forbidding to read the Qur'an in non-Arabic), this *risalah* is a rejection of Sulaiman Arrasuli to the practise of *kaum muda* scholars who read the Qur'an in Malay translation, especially during the Ramadhan. For him, the translation is different from commentary (*tafsīr*) and therefore it is not equal to the Qur'an. In addition, reading the translation is of potential to lead the Muslims not to acknowledge the miracle (*mu'jizat*) of the Holy Book. Arrasulit argues that there are some verses of the Qur'an which are not allowed to read its translated version, such as the verse al-Fātihah. It is one of the pillars of prayer and therefore it should be read in its original Arabic language (Arrasuli 1920, 29).

With the above examples of Sulaiman Arrasuli, as well as of Chatib Ali, it is clear that the *'ulamā'* of the west coast, in particular those of *kaum tua*, used in their works mentioned the language styles which are polemical in orientation, in the sense that they wrote their works in the special framework of debate with *kaum muda* scholars. As such, while having defended the *kaum tua*, they countered the arguments behind the reform movement of *kaum muda*. The thing important to emphasize is the fact that the polemical debates proceeded in an intellectual milieu that facilitated the *'ulamā'* with ample space to appear as civil society actors, without the involvement of power holders of *kerajaan* as was the case with the *'ulamā'* in the east coast.

## Conclusion

All the discussions above obviously demonstrate the ways the Islamic knowledge was produced and

reproduced in the given socio-political conditions of the east and the west coasts of Sumatra in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The two areas appears to have provided the *'ulamā'* with circumstantial options to engage in two different settings of discourses. The existence of Malay kingdoms in the east coast, which strengthened during the colonial time, created the condition which led the rise of the kingdom-oriented leaders, different from the west coast where non-state actors arose in the arena to lead the shaping of socio-religious entities. As a result, although the *'ulamā'* of both coastal areas emerged as the leaders of *kaum tua,* they nevertheless had different modes of the social and intellectual engagement. This can be gained from the fact that they had different styles of leadership as well as different language expressions in their religious texts, despite they shared the same experiences learning in Mecca.

As such, the traffics of Islamic ideas from Mecca to Sumatra, and Southeast Asia at large, needs an explanation which takes the concept of knowledge formation into account. Instead of emphasizing the important role of the Islamic heartland, attention should be given to the lands below the winds, the sites of translating Islam in local contexts. As the two cases of study show, the local condition of Sumatra appears to have determined the formulation (and reformulation) of knowledge to develop into the accepted religious truth, called Islamic orthodoxy. While acknowledging the important role of Meccan discourses, the mass of Islam in the two coastal areas of Sumatra was in the hands of *'ulamā'*. They struggled to define Islam for Muslims of the areas, along the options available which had strong roots in the socio-cultural and political spheres. Thus, Mecca is important, but local context is crucially central in explaining Islam in Southeast Asia, so is in Islamic practices.

**Acknowledgement**

This article is based on the research report submitted to Pusat Penelitian dan Penerbitan (Centre of Research and Publication) State Islamic University Jakarta. I would like to thank to the Centre who provided me with the research grand from fiscal year of 2022. I also should thank to Imam Subchi as the head of the Centre of Research and Publication.

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