

PESANTREN AND MODERNITY IN INDONESIA: MA'HAD ALY OF KUNINGAN

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Abstract: In Indonesia where the majority of the population is Muslims, pesantren that has thrived since the arrival of Islam to the shore of the archipelago is still out of the central field of the national educational system. As such, pesantren was and is forced to continually be aware with ongoing new educational developments in the country as the result of modernisation and globalisation. The foundation of Ma'had Aly is one of the ways taken by the pesantrens to response to the current developments within Muslim communities, to define or even maintain their central roles as well as to preserve their tradition in such a modernised and globalised Indonesia. By exploring the foundation of Ma'had Alys in Kuningan as a case study, this article closely elaborates how the pesantren world engages these processes both in their cirricular settings and practices and provides how it negotiates with the ongoing changes within its surrounding communities.

Abstrak: Di Indonesia yang mayoritas penduduknya adalah Muslim, pesantren yang telah berkembang sejak kedatangan Islam di nusantara masih “terpinggirkan” dari sistem pendidikan nasional. Dengan demikian, pesantren dipaksa untuk terus menyikapi perkembangan pendidikan yang sedang berlangsung sebagai hasil dari modernisasi dan globalisasi. Pendirian *Ma'had Aly* adalah salah satu cara yang diambil oleh pesantren untuk menanggapi perkembangan saat ini dalam masyarakat Muslim, untuk menentukan atau bahkan mempertahankan peran sentral mereka serta untuk melestarikan tradisi mereka dalam kontek modernisasi dan globalisasi di Indonesia. Dengan mengeksplorasi dasar Ma'had Alys di Kuningan sebagai studi kasus, artikel ini menjelaskan bagaimana dunia pesantren melibatkan proses ini baik dalam pengaturan dan praktek kurikulum mereka dan memberikan bagaimana melakukan negosiasi dengan perubahan yang sedang berlangsung dalam masyarakat sekitarnya .

Key Word: Pesantren, modernity, Ma'had 'Ali Kuningan

INTRODUCTION

When we talk about Islamic Education in particular and education in general in Indonesia, pesantren¹ and other similar educational institutions like Meunasah, Surau and Dayah in Sumatra should be put at the front page of the magazine. Pesantrens have been playing pivotal roles in transmitting Islamic teachings and strengthening people's religious loyalty to Islamic principles² as well as in a certain moment becoming as a source of identity for whole Indonesian Muslim societies. Considering education as an important part of how a society engages modernisation and globalisation, Pesantrens have to rightly response to the ongoing changes within their communities aiming at preserving their long standing stature and traditions but not yet in contradictory with the current trends of modernisation and globalisation. This article elaborates the current stance of pesantrens in Indonesia along with the rise of so-called Ma'had Aly and takes the foundation of Ma'had Aly of Kuningan of West Java as its case study.

Changing Features of Pesantren

There are arrays of types of pesantrens thriving in Indonesia. Yet, in general, there are two kinds of pesantrens. The first is those maintaining or at least claiming to have their traditional system of Islamic education focusing on learning classical Islamic texts known as *kitab kuning* (yellow books) like Pesantren Sidogiri. This type pesantren is called as a *salafiyah* or

¹ It should be underlined since the inception that the term pesantren, which derives from the root word "santri" and means the place of the santri, had its origins from the Indonesian pre-Islamic time. It functioned as a Hindu-Buddhist monastery where later religious functionaries got special trainings and courses on religious subjects and others related to religious services. Azyumardi Azra, *Islam in the Indonesian World: An Account of Institutional Formation*, (Bandung: Mizan, 2006), p. 69-70.

²Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *Tradisi Pesantren: Studi tentang Pendangan Hidup Kiyai*, (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1982), p. 17.

clasicist pesantren. The second is those already implementing a sort of more modern system of education like Pesantren Gontor and has been known as a *khalafiyah* type pesantren. From both of them are those added with state-standarised schools (or madrasah) like Pesantren Situbondo and Pesantren Darunnajah and those without formal schools like Pesantren Sidogiri and Pesantren Gontor.

With this state in mind, the number of pesantrens widespread in Indonesia increased from time to time. In 1977, Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA) mentioned 4,195 pesantrens with about 677,384 pupils. 20 years later, the number doubled reaching reached 9,388 with around 1.7 million students and in 2004 climbed into 14,647³. In 2011, MORA reported there are 15,485 (excluding those in West Kalimantan and Maluku). In a term of types, from those numbers, the new pesantrens are mostly of those with the availability of schools, while those solely relying on the pesantren system in contrast suffer from a decline except certain cases like Pesantren Gontor and Pesantren Sidogiri. In addition, the arrival of the *salafy* (fundamentalist in contrast to *salafiyah*) movements in the country in the last 1980s and early 1990s also bolstered the rise of new pesantrens through which the new feature of pesantren with the *salafy* religiously outlook came to surface and gave further complexities of pesantren.

Historically, many assume that pesantren as a centre of Islamic learning is as old as the introduction of Islam in Java⁴. In

³Jajat Burhanuddin, *Islamic Knowledge, Authority and Political Power: The Ulama in Colonial Indonesia*, Unpublished Ph.D Dissertation, (Leiden University, 2007), p. 2.

⁴Debates on the earliest rise of the pesantren have been profound. Added to the view claiming the pesantren is early as the first Islamization projects in Java is the idea that pesantren was firstly set up as the early as fifteenth century as being underscored by Dhofier. Far different from that notion, Martin van Bruinessen was convinced that pesantren firstly rose in 18th century based on the existance of pesantren Tegalsari, Ponorogo, funded in 1742 and to be the oldest existing pesantren. Zulkifli, *Sufism in Java: The*

the heydays of Islamic kingdoms, pesantren leaders worked together with the sultans in spreading Islamic teachings to their people. Princes and princesses learnt Qur'an and other religious treaties under the guidance of the pesantren kiyai appointed by the sultan. As rewards, the sultanates sponsored the setting up a sort of pesantren typed Islamic education outside the palace to educate such larger communities as in the case of the Sultanate of Mataram.

Pesantren in a certain episode of the Indonesian history also became the backbone of people's resistant movements against the Dutch colonial power. The intrusion of the infidel Dutch over the Islamic kingdoms had forced a number of prominent religious leaders within the courts who opposed to this political interference to do *uzlah*, a moving away from the centre of the palace into remote villages where they built their own pesantrens. Through their teachings, sermons and particularly charisma, the kiyai showed their objection against the Dutch and, in many occasions, drove people to directly clash with the colonial government as in the case of 1888 revolt in Banten⁵.

Despite their pivotal roles in the past, pesantren had in fact to face great challenges no longer from the infidel and alien rulers but from their fellow government after Independence. The Old Order government predominantly secular in nature just neglected them in the framework of structuring their national education system. No a single word of pesantren or that related to it mentioned in the first enacted law on education no. 4, 1950. Worse than ever, religious lessons in public schools as well as universities were put as optional subjected to the parents' will

Role of the Pesantren in the Maintenance of Sufism in Java, (Leiden; INIS, 2002), p. 2

⁵Martin van Bruinessen, "Shari'a Court, Tarekat and Pesantren: Religious Institutions in the Banten Sultanate," *Archipel* 50, Paris, (1995), p. 168-169.

viewing that religious inclination was to be a part of private choices⁶.

Likewise, the New Order government coming to power in the late 1960s further put pesantrens at odd when it forced them to adopt its “anti-traditionalism” policies in line with its basic ideology known as “modernisation and developmentism”. Confronted with such unfavourable, pesantrens took soft steps as to survive and continue to provide both educational and religious services for communities. They began opening schools along with the inclusion of secular subjects. This decision was to be seen as the most possible way for the pesantrens to respond or negotiate with the “modernisation” of Indonesian society⁷ forcefully advocated by the New Order government in 1970s and early 1980s.

In considering such cases, the pesantrens that adopted schools however took different approaches in constructing the relationship between schools and pesantren. Pesantren Darussalam of Ciamis and Pesantren of Cipasung gradually but steadilyb loss their grip after runing their madrasah for years. All

⁶Didin Nurul Rosidin, *From Kampung to Kota: A Study of the Transformation of Mathla'ul Anwar 1916-1998*, Unpublisehd Ph.D Dissertation, (Leiden University, 2007) p. 80-81.

⁷The introduction of madrasah system is not totally new in the pesantren millieu. In 1920s, Hasyim Ash'ary launched a six year long Madrasah Salafiyah put side-by-side the long-established pesantren in which students learned some secular subjects like Dutch, history, geography and mathematics. In the following years, a number of pesantren founded madrasah typed educational system like pesantren Krapyak, Yogyakarta, Pesantren Tambak Beras and Rejoso, both in Jombang. The opening of madrasah styled institution with the pesantren complex, according to Burhanudin was “a part of ...reformulating the tradition in the new framework of modernity.” Jajat Burhanuddin, *Islamic Knowledge ...*, p. 238-239. The clear contrast was that in the past, the curricula were independently designed by the madrasah that mostly put religious subjects as the major elements, while under the New Order time, madrasah was obliged to totally adopt state designed curricula that in fact put religious subjects as the minor elements (only 30 out of 100% of the total subjects and learning hours).

of their santri, a term for pesantren pupils, are enrolled in the madrasah but not all madrasah students are subjected to take part in the pesantren learning activities. Unlike both pesantrens, Pesantren Situbondo whose schools ranging from kindergarten up to university levels applies a slightly different approach. It is still able to hold its commanding role by obliging all school and university students to take morning religious lessons in the pesantren and also gives freedom for its santri to be or not be enrolled in one of the existing schools.

Above all, in spite of such different approaches taken by the pesantren, the addition of the formal schoolings has affected those pesantrens in a number of fields. The government takes greater control over educational processes that that of pesantrens, prominently the restriction of the number of hours previously designed for the traditionally religious subjects. This has put the pesantrens in a dilemmatic position to take such decisions as the learning schedule. As such, the pesantren leaders no longer expect to produce what they call as a true quality of *kyai*, a term used to name those respected and charismatic ulama, rather be satisfied to have their pupils who just have at least the morality of *kiyai*.

In matters of facing the government educational policies, there are still pesantrens that decline from adopting or being a part of the formal system. They instead firmly maintain their “original” system with all consequences including the invalidity of their graduate certificates before the government. Pesantren Gontor is furthermore very ambitious in its plans to have a thousand branches widespread around the archipelago. Pesantren Sidogiri, one of the oldest pesantrens in Java founded in 1745 takes the same approach sticking on its *salafiyah* method of learning as being inherited from its founding fathers. It only teaches religious subjects with the uses of *kitab kuning* and of the

*sorogan*⁸, *bandongan* or *wetonan*⁹ as its methods of teaching. Being out of the formal system of schooling, both pesantrens successfully build their fame as ten thousands of pupils coming from different parts of the country and even from abroad study there¹⁰.

However, not all of the last type of pesantrens is able and ready to cope with those consequences. Many small *salafiyah* pesantrens in fact faced heavy burdens as parents and potential disciples set more demands to the pesantrens. Parents often observe whether or not the pesantrens could provide a legal certificate of school graduation issued by the government by which their children could continue further studies into higher levels. The failures of the pesantrens to rightly respond to this demand bring about the steadily diminishing number of people enrolled in the pesantrens and even, in some instances, caused the total closure of pesantren like in the cases of Pesantren Ciwedus¹¹ and Pesantren Nurhasanah of Cirebon.

⁸*Sorogan* is a method of teaching used in pesantren in which a student personally study a subject under the direct guidance of a teacher. Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *Tradisi Pesantren...*, p. 28.

⁹*Bandongan* or *Weton* is another method of teaching applied in pesantren through group method in which a group of students ranging from five to five hundred students or even more depending on the significance of the subjects as well as the fame of the kiyai (teacher) listened to a teacher who read and translate as well as frequently explain a certain Arabic text. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

¹⁰There are other famous pesantrens that stayed away from the government designed system of education like Pesantren Tegalrejo, Pesantren Lirboyo, Pesantren Sarang dan Pesantren Maslakul Huda Kajen Pati. Marzuki Wahid, "Ma'had Aly: Nestapa Tradisionalisme & Tradisi Akademik yang Hilang," in Journal *Tashwirul Afkar*, No. 11, (2001) Jakarta: PP Lakpesdam NU, p. 5.

¹¹Didin Nurul Rosidin and Dadit Herdikiagung, "Peningkatan Peran Pesantren dan Perguruan Tinggi Agama Islam dalam Pengembangan IPTEK", in Dadit Herdikiagung and Sobirin Malian (eds.) *Pengembangan Legislasi IPTEK Seri II*, (Yogyakarta: Total Media, 2009), p. 36.

In addition, an economic factor plays a role in the decline of the *salafiyah* pesantren. In the past, the pesantren could ask their students to work in the fields to support the economic ventures of the pesantren as well as the *kiyai* families, due to which they were free from any charges for the dorm and other expenses. Nowadays, it is hard for the pesantren to do so as parents demand more hours of learning for their children with the consequences they should pay rooms and other fees. The pesantrens in their income then depend on regular payments from students' parents. The declining number of students means the lower income the pesantren could collect. As such, the *kiyais* are forced to go out from the pesantren more frequently for search for additional incomes and leave the pesantren well unattended. A further impact is the quality of teaching and learning in the pesantren degenerating and, in many cases, the teaching process totally ceases.

It is peculiar to say that on the one hand, the number of pesantren grows as shown up by the data presented by MORA. On the other hand, many pesantrens, mostly if not totally the *salafiyah* ones have to terminate their teaching activities with one or other reasons. The inability to negotiate with modernisation launched by the government and the failures to maintain their statures before Muslim communities in general are among the factors of decline, not to mention the economic obstacles faced by many leaders of those *salafiyah* pesantrens.

THE RISE OF MA'HAD ALY: A GENERAL OVERVIEW

As early as 1980s, pesantren leaders began aware about the mounting pressures faced by the pesantren world as the immediate impacts of the modernisation projects launched by the New Order government¹². They, hence, started seeking new ways

¹²Karel Steenbrink, *Pesantren, Madrasah, Sekolah: Pendidikan Islam dalam Kurun Modern*, (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1986), p. 103.

for them to appropriately bring the pesantren to continue at the front stage within the enduring changes of educational systems in the country. Since then, a bulk of meetings, discussions and debates leaders were widespread among Muslim leaders and were organised by a variety of groups and institutions. Some proposals soon came to surface and one of them was the foundation of the Ma'had Aly (pesantren based Islamic higher education).

In the Workshop of Muslim Intellectuals held by the Central Board of the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (Indonesian Religious Scholars Board or MUI) in 1985, TB Hasan Basri representing the MUI of West Java Province presented a proposal for the foundation of Ma'had Aly in Indonesia. He started his speech by mentioning almost similar issues like those mentioned above as the main causes of how significant the Ma'had Aly was for the sake of the *ummat* interests as well as the quality improvement of pesantren alumni¹³. Those pesantren alumni aiming at upgrading their expertise in religious knowledge could pursue their further study in the Ma'had Aly.

In this proposal, Hasan Basri surprisingly underscored the idea of the integration of both religious and secular subjects. He, more than we might assume, included local languages as a part of obligatory subjects for the ulama cadres to learn. The sound of the proposal was nonetheless too ambitious in which he projected that in 2000, there would be at least 35 Ma'had Aly type intitutions spreading around the country to serve the increasing needs of qualified ulama in their respected regions. Not to forget to convince the audience in such a high profile meeting, Hasan Basri named two important pesantrens in West Java, Pesantren Miftahul Huda of Tasikmalaya and Pesantren Darul Arqom of

¹³KH. TB. Hasan Basri, *Pra-MUNAS MUI 1985: Proposal Pendidikan Ma'had Aly (Pendidikan Tinggi Badan Kerjasama Pondok Pesantren Jawa Barat*, a paper presented at the Lokakarya Cendekiawan Muslim Pra-MUNAS MUI, 18-19 Juli 1985.

Bekasi, which he considered to be the ideal prototype of the Ma'had Aly¹⁴.

However, the notion of establishing Ma'had Aly was soon nowhere to be found. Only in 1990 was that notion came to reality thanks to the opening of the Ma'had Aly in Pesantren Salafiyah Syafi'iyah Situbondo, East Java or well-known as Pesantren Situbondo. Following the anniversary of the death of Kiyai Syamsul Arifin, the founder of Pesantren Situbondo, As'ad Syamsul Arifin, one of the most senior and charismatic figures within NU circle and the pesantren world as well as the supreme leader of Pesantren Situbondo invited such a number of NU's prominent thinkers as Sahal Mahfuzd, Ali Yafie, Masdar Mas'udi and others to a national symposium organised by the Pesantren. The result of the meeting was the need to set up Ma'had Aly aimed at improving the quality of pesantren alumni that severely degenerated due to the adoption of the state designed system of education¹⁵. According to Marzuki Wahid, the foundation of this Ma'had Aly clearly comes from a growing awareness among pesantren leaders about the real need of the pesantren to have a higher standard of its education¹⁶ in such a well-orchestrated modernised Indonesian Muslim communities.

Still unconvincing with his own influence did KH As'ad ask more supports both from other venerated kiyais in the NU's elite ranks particularly Kiyai Ali Maksum of Pesantren Krapyak and those of Middle Eastern ulama such as Syekh Yasin bin Isa Al-Fadany, Sayyid Muhammad bin Alawiy al-Maliky, Syekh Isma'il bin Utsman al-Yamany. Soon after he received clear supports from those figures, Kiyai As'ad in 1990 officially opened the Ma'had Aly with its concern in the field of Islamic law and

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Anonymous, *Profil Ma'had Aly PP. Salafiyah Syafi'iyah Sukorejo Situbondo*, n.p., n.d., p. 3.

¹⁶ Marzuki Wahid, "Ma'had Aly ...," p. 9.

Jurisprudence (*Fiqh Ush al-Fiqh*)¹⁷. The selection of this study program was not surprising considering the reputation of Kiyai As'ad as the progenitor of the post-fiqh thought that heavily put "the consideration of public goods (*masalah al-mursalah*) as the guiding principle for determining authoritative Islamic teachings".¹⁸

In a line with that underlined in the MUI proposal, this new Ma'had Aly also provided some secular subjects including western philosophy, sociology and research methodology in addition to religious subjects as the primary lessons. Preserving its traditional identity and heritages, the Ma'had Aly of Pesantren Situbondo in many ways up to now still endorses its pesantren basic style of uniform like wearing *sarong* along with *peci*, a malay traditional hat, applies both *sorogan* and *bandongan* as its teaching methods and uses the classical texts of Islamic law with of course higher standard like *Fath al-Wahhab* and *Fath al-Mu'in*. All students take three years of study at the Ma'had Aly before being officially graduated, due to which the Ma'had Aly only recruits new students in every three years.

Following the step of Kiyai As'ad, some pesantren leaders took the same initiatives as they established a sort of Ma'had 'Aly styled higher pesantren institutions. Kiyai Zainal Abidin of Pesantren Al-Munawwir of Krapyak, Yogyakarta, for example founded his Ma'had Aly in 1993. Another example was Pesantren Al-Hikmah of Sirampog, Central Java, whose leader, Kiyai Masruri, launched his Ma'had Aly in 1997¹⁹. In addition to those Ma'had Aly linked with a certain pesantren, there are also a number of Ma'had Aly attached or founded by Islamic universities like that in UIN Malang, East Java, and that in IAIN Walisongo Semarang

¹⁷Anonymous, *Profil Ma'had Aly PP. Salafiyah Syafi'iyah Sukorejo Situbondo*, n.p.,n.d., p. 4. See also at <http://www.salafiyah.or.id>

¹⁸Micheal Feeney, *Muslim Legal Thought in Modern Indonesia*,(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 200.

¹⁹ Marzuki Wahid, "Ma'had Aly ...", p. 6-7.

and others. In 2011, MORA reported that there are 25 new Ma'had Aly scattered around the country. However, close observations show that some of them are just on the boardname without any clear activities like that of Pesantren Darussalam Ciamis, Pesantren Dar al-Tauhid Cirebon and others²⁰.

The foundation of Ma'had Aly was not without further questions. The government in fact seems fail and is too late to give appropriate and expected responses, in spite of the fact that Amin Haedari, a former director of the pesantren affairs of MORA, in many occasions declared the strong willingness of the government to support Ma'had Aly²¹. After several meetings with some important leaders of the existing Ma'had Aly from 1995, in 2001, MORA issued a Ministerial Decree on the Ma'had Aly. A year later, MORA published a book titled *Petunjuk Pelaksanaan Pengembangan Lembaga Pendidikan Ma'had Aly* (A Guidance for the Development of the Ma'had Aly Education Institutions). However, both the decree and the book did not clearly state the formal recognition of graduate certificates of Ma'had Aly like that enjoyed by graduates of MORA-affiliated Institutes for Islamic Studies (*Institut Agama Islam* or IAI).

Only in 2004 did MORA issue a special decree recognising graduates from the Ma'had Aly of Pesantren Situbondo and put them yet equivalent with those graduates of the Master Program at the IAI. Nonetheless, this legal recognition was not without prerequisite. Instead, since the Ma'had Aly of Pesantren Situbondo was also attached to the IAI Ibrahimy founded by the Pesantren in 1968, all Ma'had Aly students were and are also

²⁰The foundation of Ma'had Aly in Pesantren Mamba'ul Ma'arif Denanyar was initiated by Kiyai Aziz Masyhur but was only run for two years since most of students left their study unattended and preferred to continue their further study at either University of Darul Ulum or IKAHA, both located in Jombang. Marzuki Wahid, "Ma'had Aly ...," p. 7.

²¹ The Wahid Institute, "Memecah Kebekuan Regenerasi Ulama," <http://www.wahidinstitute.org/pdf-docs/GatraEdisi-IV.pdf> p. 4.

students at the existing faculties at the IAI. Thanks to that fact, it could be safely concluded that the MORA did not fully legalised the Ma'had Aly as an independent education institution rather strengthened the position of the IAI instead. Thus, it is difficult to see the MORA recognise other Ma'had Alys that are not affiliated with any of the IAIs either private or state owned ones. Moreover, the failure of the MORA to formally put the Ma'had Aly as a part of the national education system package still poses the board of Ma'had Aly in a delimmatic situation in respect to the question on the legal recognition of the Ma'had Aly along with its graduate certificates.

Another cause is that up to now hindering the development of Ma'had Aly is the absence of a single standard referred to by all Ma'had Alys in the fields of institutional aspects, academic rules and curricula. It is in this matter that the MORA as stated in the book of the *Petunjuk Pelaksanaan Pengembangan Lembaga Pendidikan Ma'had Aly* makes an excuse for not having legalised Ma'had Aly as an independently formal higher education institutions. The plurality of Ma'had Aly according to Marzuki Wahid is a general phenomenon in the pesantren world. He states pesantrens as a sub-culture referring to the concept popularised by KH Abdurrahman Wahid tend to be independent from one to another in driving their education system. It is the wisdom of the kiyai that plays a decisive role in outlining the system to be adopted by the pesantren. In other words, it is the kiyai and their pesantren that mostly decide what form and setting of Ma'had Aly to be founded and run. For instance, Ma'had Aly of Pesantren al-Hikmah Sirampog takes the Qur'anic and Prophet Tradition Studies (*Tafsir Hadits*) as its study program with only two years of study compared to three years in Pesantren Situbondo²². So, like

²²Marzuki Wahid, "Ma'had Aly ...", p. 9.

in the case of the pesantrens, the government faces difficulties in responding such diverse institutions²³.

In terms of legal standing is not relevant for those Ma'had Alys attached or affiliated to formal universities or colleges. All students of Ma'had Alys of both UIN Malang and IAIN Walisongo are also students of those state-owned universities. The same also happened to Ma'had Alys that have had a joint cooperation with one or more formal higher educations. Pesantren Al-Hikmah of Sirampog has joined Higher School for Islamic Studies Sholahuddin Al-Ayyubi (*Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Sholahuddin Al-Ayyubi* or STAISA) in Jakarta. All students of Ma'had Aly of Pesantren Sirampog are also registered as students of the STAISA²⁴ and thus receive formal certificates not as graduates of the Ma'had Aly but that of the STAISA.

MA'HAD ALY KUNINGAN

Kuningan is one of the 26 existing districts in West Java with more than 1 million people living in this area. Here was the place where the Linggarjati Agreement between Indonesia and the Dutch made a ceasefire agreement in the last months of 1946. This agreement proves Kuningan's pivotal role in the history of Indonesian independence struggle. Geographically, Kuningan is located at the mountainous areas with fresh air that make it up as one of the most important foreign but mostly domestic tourist destinations in West Java as well as most suitable for a center for education.

²³This issue was also underscored by the Current Minister of Religious Affairs when he gave a general lecture in the launching of Ma'had Aly of the Pesantren Sai'dud As-Siddiqiyah in Jakarta. He stated that Ma'had Aly should set up a nationally unified system of education applied for all existing Ma'had Alys through which the government and societies could refer to. Yet, at the same time, they still maintained their particular features like pesantren in general. See at <http://www.kemenag.go.id/>

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Nowadays, there are a number of higher education institutions like *Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam* (Higher School for Islamic Studies or STAI) Al-Ihya, *Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Kesehatan Kuningan* (Higher School for Health Science of Kuningan or STIKKU) and Universitas Kuningan (Kuningan University or UNIKU)²⁵, which constitutes as the largest Higher Education Institution in Kuningan with more than 4000 students. Students in those colleges come not only from Kuningan but also from other surrounding districts like Ciamis, Majalengka, Cirebon and even Brebes of Central Java. In 2010 was Ma'had Aly added as a new higher education institution.

In the field of religious education, like in other regions, there two institutional types, madrasah, either with a purely religious education known as Madrasah Diniyah or a mixture of religious and secular education known as General Madrasah, and pesantren. Since my focus is on pesantren, it is not my concern here to discuss about madrasah at any details, although many madrasahs are also belonged to pesantrens. Based on the report presented by the local office of MORA in 2007, there were 313 pesantrens spread around Kuningan district with more than 33.000 pupils²⁶.

However, from those pesantrens are only small numbers of them that could be considered as big pesantrens with more than 100 students enrolled and staying in the dorms like both salafy-oriented Pesantren Husnul Khotimah and Pesantren Al-Multazam,

²⁵UNIKU was as the result of the fusion of four three previously existing colleges in 2003 including the *Sekolah Tinggi Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan* (Higher School for Teacher Training and Education Science or STKIP), the *Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Ekonomi* (Higher School for Economics Science or STIE), The *Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Kehutanan* (Higher School for the Forest Science or STIK) and the *Sekolah Tinggi Manajemen Informatika dan Ilmu Komputer* (Higher School for Computer Science or STIKom). <http://uniku.ac.id/sejarah.html>.

²⁶Departemen Agama Kabupaten Kuningan, *Daftar Pesantren di Wilayah Kabupaten Kuningan*, (Kuningan: Departemen Agama Kuningan, 2007), p. 2.

Gontor-styled Pesantren Al-Ikhlās, and Situbondo-typed Pesantren Ainur Rafiq and Pesantren Al-Mutawally. Except Pesantren Al-Ikhlās, those above pesantrens run either state-affiliated madrasah or schools. Other pesantrens like Sidogiry-typed Pesantren Riyadul Hida and Pesantren Nurul Huda only have less than 100 or even tens of students from whom many of them are belonged to what popularly so called *Santri Kalong* (literary means Bat Student), a term designed for those who study religious subjects at Pesantren only at night but do not stay at the dorm.

In Kuningan like elsewhere in Java, the introduction of pesantren went back to the history of Islamisation of Kuningan people by Sunan Gunung Jati, one of the holy nine saints who brought Islam to Java well-known as Walisongo. The significance of the pesantren as the most important center for Islamic learning peaked in the 19th century through the roles of Kiyai Hasan Maolani or Kiyai Mas Daka (born in 1781) and his disciples. A number of important figures like Kiyai Nurhakim and Kiyai Malangyuda were among his santris. With the growing influence enjoyed by these three figures did bring the Dutch colonial government, which was cautious with any potents of native resistance, to take harsh actions against them by arresting Kiyai Hasan Maolani in 1843 before being compelled to Manado two years later and died there in 1874²⁷. According to many local sources, most of the currently existing pesantrens are belonged to the descendants of Kiyai Hasan Maolani or at least claimed to have genealogical links with him.

As being underscored elsewhere, pesantren had been playing pivotal roles within society for centuries. As such, the local government that was aware of the influential stance of the pesantrens frequently involved them in a variety of projects

²⁷ G.W.J. Drewes, *Drie Javaanse Goeroe's: Hun Leven, Ondericht en Messiasprediking*, (Leiden: Ph.D Dissertation, 1925), p. 10-18

designed for empowering societies. One of the most popular programs was the *Santri Raksa Desa* (Village Empowering Santri Program or SARA KSA), firstly launched by Governor of West Java Province, Nuryana, in 1996. The goal of the SARA KSA was to disseminate the importance of creating healthy life among villagers and to help them to have a well-constructed health infrastructure in their own neighboring compounds. In this project, santris from different pesantrens in Kuningan were sent to villages where they directly communicated and worked together with villagers to implement the projects.

The success of the SARA KSA had given more confidence for the government to even strengthen such a kind of joint cooperation with the active participation of pesantrens at the front line. Hence, under the tutelage of the provincial government, the local government of Kuningan sponsored the setting up of a new and unified umbrella organisation for pesantren leaders named the *Forum Komunikasi Pondok Pesantren* (Islamic Boarding Communication Forum or FKPP) just a few months after the SARA KSA program ended. Kiyai Dodo Murtadlo, one of the most charismatic pesantren leaders in Kuningan, became the first general chairman. For the pesantrens, FKPP was expected to represent their interests in particular and all Islamic education institutions in general before the government²⁸.

In spite of getting supports from both provincial and local governments, FKPP, since its foundation, was not so much active in organising any activities except being considered as a formal representative of all pesantrens in Kuningan before the government mostly manifested in ceremonial activities. Some FKPP leaders blamed the intrinsic nature of the organisation to be the main cause of its stagnancy. First, the idea of its foundation that came from the government often put FKPP at odd before the

²⁸ Personal interview with KH. Dodo Murtadlo, June 2011.

local pesantrens that were in fact autonomous in nature²⁹. Second, as a part of the government package, FKPP whose board members were belonged to the government officials and not having pesantren background was often seen with suspicion particularly following the collapse of the New Order government only two years after its foundation.

However, after more than a decade without any significant activities, FKPP in 2008 started taking some initiatives such as organising the entrepreneurship training for santris and working together with the local national education office (*Dinas Pendidikan Nasional*) to provide B and C package programs designed to give certificates of graduation of junior and high schools for all santris at the pesantren salafiyah. Furthermore, the rise of such a number of young kiyais in the early 2008 as Kiyai Aman Syamsul Falah, Kiyai Abdul Aziz, and others put the board of FKPP at stake. Those young pesantren leaders demanded the FKPP board to hold its first general assembly in which all pesantren members of FKPP could compose a new board of FKPP expected to take more progressive actions for the sake of the pesantren. With the support of a local rich man financially and some senior leaders of the pesantrens politically, the first general assembly that was initially planned to be convened in the last months of 2008 was finally held in January 2009. Most participants in the end agreed to chose Kiyai Abdul Aziz as a new general chairman replacing Kiyai Dodo Murtadlo. To further reform the

²⁹KH. Abdurrahman Wahid (or Gus Dur) as quoted by Zainal Abidin views pesantren as a sub-culture due to the fact that pesantren in the framework of Indonesian culture have their own characteristics relatively autonomous from the general Indonesian culture. At least there three elements that support this argument. First, the relatively independent stance of the kiyai before the ruling power. Second, they have worked untiringly to preserve mostly referred classical texts for centuries. The last is that pesantren construct thier unique values and virtues to educate thier pupils. Zainal Abidin (2005), "Liberalisasi Pendidikan Pesantren: Mencermati Tumbuhnya Fenomena Transformasi Pemikiran Liberal dari Pesantren," *Lektur* vol. XI no. 01 (Januari – Juni), p. 31.

FKPP, the new chairman composed a new board dominated by young pesantren leaders including Aman Syamsul Falah, Aang Asya'ri, Ajib Ma'ali and others and put senior leaders at the advisory board. Considering this new composition of the FKPP board, Kiyai Abdul Aziz ever stated "with this composition, we want the FKPP to be more progressive"³⁰.

Added to the leadership issues, the FKPP Assembly meeting also elaborated other crucial issues including the ideas to improve the quality of education in pesantren through the foundation of Ma'had Aly in Kuningan. All representatives without any exception shared their support for the notion and fully agreed upon listing it as one of the main recommendations produced by the assembly and to be implemented by the new FKPP board. As such, just a few months after the assembly the new general chairman of FKPP appointed five most respected persons including Kiyai Abdullah Dunun, Kiyai Achidien Noer, Kiyai Asep Saepudin, Kiyai Tata Taufik and Kiyai Dodo Murtadlo as the members of the preparatory team whose main tasks were to take any important and possible footsteps to establish the Ma'had Aly.

Similar to that of other Ma'had Alys, such topics as the falling number of celebrated kiyais and the degenerating quality of pesantren alumni were among the most frequently stated argument for the establishment of Ma'had Aly in Kuningan. Further, many of younger pesantren leaders felt that they were under-qualified in terms of expertise in religious subjects and non-religious subjects to cope with new rising challenges. At the same time, there was also a growing gap of expertise between those young ulama who graduated from Islamic universities and those who only studied at the pesantren clearly viewed in religious discourses within the local board of MUI of Kuningan.

An important key to supporting the notion is the familiarity of FKPP leaders with the ideas of Ma'had Aly. Fortunately, some of

³⁰Personal Interview with KH Abdul Aziz, May 2011.

them like Kiyai Dodo Murtadlo and Kiyai Asep Saepudin were graduates of Pesantren Miftahul Huda of Tasikmalaya, that had since twenty five years ago been referred as one of the ideal prototypes of Ma'had Aly by Kiyai Hasan Basri in his presentation in the Central MUI Workshop in 1985. In addition to those figures, Kiyai Achidien Noer, more than any other FKPP leaders, since 1995 had been actively involved the meetings organised by MORA to compose the book on Ma'had Aly already mentioned above³¹.

Unlike other Ma'had Alys that are mostly attached and or belonged to a certain pesantren like those of Pesantren Situbondo, Pesantren Krapyak and others, the Ma'had Aly Kuningan is structurally belonged to FKPP, which is not partly or fully affiliated with any certain pesantren. Hence no single pesantren in the region could have any chance to claim it and the members of the central board of Ma'had Aly also come from different pesantrens and even different academic backgrounds. For instance, the director is in the hand of Kiyai Dodo Murtadlo, the leader of the Pesantren Riyadul Huda and a bachelor graduate of the Riyadh University. Its vice director is Kiyai Achidien Noer, a former leader of the salafy-oriented Pesantren Husnul Khotimah and a graduate of the Master program at the Madinah University. Meanwhile, the secretary goes to Kiyai Aang As'ary, the leader of pesantren Tanjung Sari and a graduate of Al-Azhar University Cairo.

In its framework of education, the board of Ma'had Aly Kuningan decided to adopt university styled structure of curriculum with the use of SKS (semester based credits) with 155 credits and lasted within four years or eight semesters of study with writing thesis as the final task. Initially, the central board preferred to almost fully adopt the curricula applied in the Ma'had Aly of Pesantren Situbondo including its study program on Islamic Jurisprudence. They believed that the most intriguing

³¹ Personal Interview with KH Achidien Noer, January 2011.

problem faced by the *ummat* was the declining number of ulama in the field of *fiqh Ush al- Fiqh*. However, the absence of formal certificates for Ma'had Aly graduates, who are not formally attached to any Islamic higher education institutions, drove the board of Ma'had Aly Kuningan to change the course. In anticipation for the joint cooperation with one of the state recognized either state or private colleges for Islamic studies surrounding Kuningan, they decided to alter its study program into the *Ahwal al-Shakh al-Siyyah* (Islamic Personal Law or AAS) that is similar to that of the IAI(N) or STAI(N) along with the same curriculum.

Through this approach, while waiting for the hope to get legal recognition from the government, graduates or students of Ma'had Aly Kuningan could easily join one of the State recognised Institutes for Islamic Studies without having any significant problem in the process of academic credit conversion. In preparing for that, in addition to building a close contact with IAIN Syekh Nurjati Cirebon, which is the only State-owned Institute for Islamic Studies in the eastern part of West Java province, the board of Ma'had Aly sought contacts with STAI Suryalaya that run the AAS Study Program. In the Workshop on Curricula, in which I attended and was held on July 2011, the board of Ma'had Aly invited the chairman of STAI Suryalaya, Prof. Rahmat Syafei, as the sole speaker. Both sides agreed to improve much beneficial cooperations in the future including the academic transference from Ma'had Aly Kuningan to STAI Suryalaya in case the government fails to issue a legal recognition for Ma'had Aly.

For the time being, Ma'had Aly Kuningan could still countinue its own academic plan. The use of classical texts as its main references in religious subjects is still among the most visible priorities. Texts on Islamic Law like *Fath al-Mu'in* and *Fath al-Wahhab* become the standarised references for students to master. However, tn terms of uniform, unlike that of Pesantren

Situbondo, Ma'had Aly Kuningan is reluctant to oblige all students to still wear sarong as well as to stay at the dorm since the permanent dorm is not yet available and most of the students are in fact married³². Furthermore, since most of the students also have their own jobs for living, the learning schedule takes only three days a week, namely from Friday to Sunday and all are in the mid day.

Improving the quality of the young kiyai is in fact an uneasy task as so many obstacles soon come into view as the difficulty to recruit qualified inputs, the limited financial sources and the lack of human resources for lecturers. In the beginning, the board of Ma'had Aly announced to only sign up those who could rightly read the minimal standard classical text, *Fath al-Qorib*, a text usually made as the first stage before studying *Fath al-Mu'in*. Surprisingly, only less than 10 people who submitted their application to the program initially targeting to reach at least 40 students. With this poor outcome, the board changed the turn by admitting all applicants who were eager to apply without any standardised quality requirements. 46 students were then accepted as the first students of Ma'had Aly Kuningan. As being anticipated, this policy of the student recruitment brought about severe consequences as many of them were far underqualified and some are not even familiar with Arabic classical texts. Consequently, the board, instead of directly starting its academic year, launched what so called the language preliminary program designed to prepare students to reach the required standard of Arabic language skills and this program runs for six months.

³² For the time being, teaching and learning activities of the Ma'had Aly takes place at the Pesantren Riyadul Huda that is belonged to Kiyai Dodo Murtadlo. There are about 70 permanent students already living in the pesantren. The absence of extra rooms for non-permanent students of the pesantren makes impossible for students of the Ma'had Aly Kuningan to stay there.

In the case of financial affairs, the board initially asked students to fully pay tuition reaching five hundreds thousands Indonesian Rupiah per a student every semester or six months. However, the outputs were far from satisfaction. The fact that most of the students were from lower income families makes them impossible to comply with this tuition obligation. Only less than 20% who afforded this compulsory payment. Most of them paid between 25 up to 75% of the total amount of tuition fees and the rest failed to pay except for registration fees. Again and again, the board were forced to find out an alternative solution. They then sought some supports both from the local government and other funding institutions. The efforts were successful when the local government provided and gave a promise to give annual subsidies aimed at supporting the daily operation expenses for Ma'had Aly. Meanwhile, the local Zakat (giving alms) office, where some of the leading members of the Ma'had Aly board occupy important positions in its management structure, gave annual subsidies for student scholarship³³. Thus, the board of Ma'had Aly is now able to run its activities without significant financial hindrances.

Meanwhile, for qualified lecturers, the board, as being mentioned above, sought a close cooperation with IAIN Cirebon and STAI Suryalaya following the adoption of the AAS as the final study program of Ma'had Aly. Nevertheless, as the main goal of the foundation of Ma'had Aly is to strengthen the position of pesantren along with its kiyais in the fields of public academic life, the board of Ma'had Aly soon faced the question on how to place the kiyais without having any formal academic background and titles and non-pesantren lecturers. The alteration of the study program from the *Fiqh Ush al-Fiqh* into the AAS similar to that of the IAI or STAI means that lecturers should also comply with the state standarised academic rules in which all lecturers

³³Personal communication with Ja'far Shodiq, the head of the Administrative Affairs of the Ma'had Aly Kuningan, April 2011.

must hold formal certificates from Master program of one of the universities or colleges. Putting aside senior kiyais who do not any academic qualification means the loss of real support of the influential figures in the pesantren circles in the future. As the first academic year just started in September 2011 and many of the subjects are still in the introductory phase without very much involving senior kiyais, there will be not easy to predict how this Ma'had Aly will run in the years to come without the real guidance of pesantren supreme leaders.

CONCLUSION

After observing some important aspects of the topic, some conclusions could be drawn up. First, pesantrens with their long and significant roles in Indonesia history face steadily growing challenges in negotiating with ongoing changes as the results of modernisation, if not secularisation, of national education system and of the growing demands of Muslim parents to have better as well as future promising education for their children. Many pesantrens, mostly small salafiyah typed ones, failing to encounter this continuing developments suffer and in many cases even bring about their total shutting down. Second, the foundation of the Ma'had Aly by several pesantrens is one of the ways taken by the pesantrens to response to the current developments within Muslim communities, to define or even maintain their central roles as well as to preserve their tradition in producing celebrated kiyais in such a modernised and globalised Indonesia.

Finally, however, in the case of Ma'had Aly Kuningan or might be of other Ma'had Alys, issues such as the underqualified inputs for students enrolled, the limited sources of money to run the organisation and the lack of standarised lecturers put Ma'had Aly Kuningan in a difficult and uncertain situation. At the same time, the failures to assure the government to formally recognise graduates of Ma'had Aly make the matter even worst. Despite

those puzzles to be solved, pesantren that since the inception has been well-autonomous and self-contained will continue to thrive amidst the ongoing challenges.

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