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Islamic particularity and academic freedom: Public institutions and doctrinal difference in contemporary Indonesia

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The Indonesian Muslim community includes segments dedicated to contrasting pious projects and doctrinal positions, yet the nation's Ministry of Religion (MORA) manages aspects of Islamic life while purporting to more or less transcend such contrasts. This tension recently emerged in Indonesian public life when a state Islamic university defended the autonomy of its research practices against a challenge by scholars from outside the university who claimed that the doctoral project of Jalaluddin Rakhmat (1949–2021) offended doctrinal positions of the Sunni majority and gave priority to Shiite historiography and doctrine. This dispute shows how questions concerning academic method become disputes about public interest, and further, its resolution attests to the emergence of free inquiry as an Islamic value in the environment of MORA's universities. Academics cited the example of earlier generations of scholars as supporting precedent for an Islamic principle of free inquiry.

This article examines a recent dispute about academic freedom in order to better understand the Islamic public sphere in Indonesia, and in particular, the positioning of the Indonesian state's Islamic bureaucracy in relation to doctrinal differences. Our case study is a dispute that unfolded around the awarding of the academic title of PhD by a state Islamic university (UIN) to Jalaluddin Rakhmat (1949–2021), an Indonesian intellectual frequently criticised by segments of Indonesia's Sunni intelligentsia. During Rakhmat's doctoral candidacy, some intellectuals became concerned that his research impugned Sunni doctrine. Opponents of the research argued that the Alauddin State Islamic University, where Rakhmat was writing his dissertation, ought to discontinue his project out of respect for Sunni doctrine and academic convention.

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After all, the Alauddin University was a public resource owned and managed by Indonesia's Ministry of Religion (hereafter MORA). Against that, the university argued that its researcher's independence was authorised by the academic value of free inquiry. So, the dispute became one about how public Islamic institutions ought to position themselves in relation to Islamic diversity in Indonesia. Was the research institute to be autonomous in the management of its research? Or, given that Sunni Islam is the dominant doctrinal current in Indonesia, should the university and its researchers defer to Sunni precedence?

Our article adds to the literature on Islam and the state in Indonesia by describing and analysing how one of the state's Islamic research institutes confronted and resolved a dispute about the place of Islamic particularity in public life. Approximately 88 per cent of Indonesia's population of around 270 million self-identify as Muslims, and although the state is structured as a Republic in which sovereignty is held by a popularly-elected parliament, the national ideology explicitly makes monotheism an attribute of Indonesian statehood. The state apparatus and bureaucracy include institutions dedicated to Islamic norms and aspirations. One commentator has described the resultant political environment as one in which 'godly nationalism' enables and constrains the inculcation of 'communal tolerance as positive ethical virtues'.[1] In attempting to shape Islam in support of policy goals through formal institutions and processes (legal, educational, regulatory), Indonesian governments will implement concepts and projects of piety that might sit uneasily beside the concepts and projects fostered within actual communities. As a growing body of literature indicates, Islam grounded in national policy is not always a good match for the pious aspirations of actual communities.[2]

We focus on a mismatch of this kind below, in which a particularistic disposition towards study and doctrine underpinned a major challenge to the autonomy of one of the state's Islamic institutions (the Alauddin State Islamic University/UIN). The resulting ordeal gained intensity because it involved the Sunni/Shiite divide. Indonesia is home to a massive Sunni majority, and at the time of the dispute in question here (2010–15), a moral panic was being fanned by Sunni advocates concerned about what they perceived as threats from Shiite Islam towards the Sunni consensus.[3] This placed stress on Indonesian institutions. The Alauddin UIN was accused of betraying Sunni doctrine. The challenge to the university's autonomy created an important question: in the state's mediation of Islam, should its institutions privilege the doctrinal hegemony of Sunni Islam? Although the Indonesian state's treatment of Islamic currents has not always been even, influential architects of Indonesian religious policy have frequently taken the position that there should be no privileging,

1 Jeremy Menchik, *Islam and democracy in Indonesia: Tolerance without liberalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

2 Highlights of the literature on this contrast include: Talal Asad, *Genealogies of religion: Discipline and reasons of power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); and Charles Hirschkind, *The ethical soundscape: Cassette sermons and Islamic counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

3 R. Michael Feener and Chiara Formichi, eds, *Shi'ism in Southeast Asia: Alid piety and sectarian constructions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Dicky Sofjan, 'Minoritization and criminalization of Shia Islam in Indonesia', *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 39, 2 (2016): 29–44.

at least not in the field of education.[4] They have generally insisted that the Islamic education provided by the state ought to provide knowledge and analysis of the diversity of Islamic currents, but should never require students to prefer or choose one of them. In other words, state institutions should function independently of Islamic particularity. Against this background, the resolution of the dispute around Jalaluddin Rakhmat's doctoral dissertation deserves attention. It was resolved by the Islamic university's insistence upon free inquiry as a public and Islamic value. This insistence, we observe below, was strengthened by the university's reflections upon previous academics of the MORA system who had established free inquiry as a core value for academic work in the MORA universities.

Our conclusions also add to the existing literature on public Islam in Indonesia by giving close attention to the religious basis of this dispute. This basis might appear, to observers unfamiliar with the religious reasoning involved, to be 'merely symbolic' as opposed to a substantive ground for public dispute. To observers accustomed to viewing public disputes through the lens of individual or group rights, the dispute under the microscope here might not seem to be a substantive dispute. It might seem essentially different to rights-based disputes like the Ahmadiyah example of 2008, in which a divergent Islamic group was constrained by government decree from disseminating its teachings.[5] That dispute is easily understood as a dispute about the freedom of a group to do something guaranteed by the Indonesian Constitution, namely to practice its religion freely. The dispute described here, however, was at root a conflict over *scholarly method*. Although it became a dispute about the right of institutions to conduct free inquiry, it was initially brought on by a claim that the public good would be harmed by particular scholarly approaches employed in Rakhmat's project. His critics complained that his scholarly method implied an improper role for human agency in Islamic doctrine, and that, they argued, was corrosive of public morals.[6]

In what follows, we show how a dispute about academic method became a public contest that drew institutions into its scope. We follow a recent line of research by scholars interested in religion and public semiotics which has reminded us that for religious actors, 'symbolic transgressions' are regarded as damaging to the public good.[7] A recent article by Webb Keane highlights the value of this approach.[8] He describes a dispute that commenced in the early 1990s when an Indonesian literary

4 Illustrative examples are Mukti Ali, *Agama dan pembangunan di Indonesia: Bahagian 4* [Religion and development in Indonesia: Part 4] (Djakarta: Departemen Agama Republik Indonesia, 1973); Azyumardi Azra, *Pendidikan Islam: Tradisi dan modernisasi di tengah* TANTANGAN MILENIUM III [Islamic education: Tradition and modernisation in the context of the challenge of the third millenium] (Jakarta: Kencana/Prenada, 2012).

5 Elaine Pearson and Human Rights Watch, *In religion's name: Abuses against religious minorities in Indonesia* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2013).

6 On the problematisation of human agency in Qur'anic interpretation, see Webb Keane, 'Divine text, national language, and their publics: Arguing an Indonesian Qur'an', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 60, 4 (2019): 769–71.

7 Michael Lambek, *Knowledge and practice in Mayotte: Local discourses of Islam, sorcery, and spirit possession* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993); Hirschkind, *The ethical soundscape*; Julian Millie, 'An anthropological approach to the Islamic turn in Indonesia's regional politics', *TRaNS: Trans –Regional and –National Studies of Southeast Asia* 6, 2 (2018): 207–26; Keane, 'Divine text'.

8 Keane, *Divine text*.

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scholar translated the Arabic Qur'an into Indonesian verse. For literary modernists, this act of literary creativity was unproblematic, but a number of segments within the Islamic community protested; this individual creativity had ignored deeply-cherished norms for mediating the Qur'an that protected its divine (not human) origin. This dispute was a public one because—for some Muslims—this was not just a question of textual forms, but an act which threatened the social order. Such disputes, we argue, ought to be given more attention in studies of Islam and public life in Indonesia. The state has committed to intervening in Islam, and at the same time, Islamic groups have been more assertive in their public advocacy since the end of the authoritarian era in 1998. Disputes over Islamic particularity are not likely to disappear from public life in the near future.

Keeping this in mind, in what follows we pay close attention to the way the protagonists in this dispute saw public well-being as depending upon symbolic arrangements—in this case the Sunni doctrinal hegemony. The Western tradition imagines an ideal public sphere as a permissive and neutral semiotic domain in which followers of religions, enjoying freedom to practice religion in private, are obliged to tolerate their sacred signs being publically appropriated into semiotic forms outside their expectation or preference. And after all, it might be asked, what is the substantive as opposed to symbolic effect of these appropriations? What really is the substantive consequence for Indonesians if some intellectuals promote Shiite principles of academic reasoning? The global reality is, however, that passionate opposition from religious groups of all kinds erupts around 'semiotic transgressions' (this term is Keane's) identified in appropriations or misuses of symbols, texts, objects and words (think Danish cartoons, the sculptures of Andres Serrano, Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, et cetera). By giving serious attention to public dispositions expressed around signs and their meanings, we hope to arrive at a better understanding of public Islam in Indonesia.

When we refer to 'academic freedom' in what follows, we are referencing a principle that is a supporting pillar of the modern research university, an environment in which the creation of new knowledge is prioritised. In the late nineteenth century, Western universities began to place greater value on the creation of *new* knowledge through rational/scientific research methods, a process which weakened the authority of Christian institutions and doctrine in academic and scientific work. After all, religious influence in scientific work relied upon the affirmation of canons of received knowledge.[9] As the modern research-based university developed, academic inquiry became the domain of specialised scholarly communities with autonomous control over evaluation of their method and work. Method and practice were to be judged within the discipline, not by administrators, clerical bodies, funders or political actors.

The modern teaching and research university has become an institutional model for nations across the globe, including Indonesia, and the norm of academic freedom has been subsequently globalised. In 2012, the Indonesian government passed educational reform legislation which included Article 8:

9 Craig Calhoun, 'Public knowledge and the structural transformation of the university', *Social Research* 76, 2 (2009): 561–98; Julie A. Reuben, *The making of the modern university: Intellectual transformation and the marginalization of morality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

> Academic freedom, freedom of academic expression and scientific autonomy are to apply in the management of education and the development of scientific knowledge and technology … [their] implementation is the personal responsibility of the scholarly community, and must be protected and facilitated by the leadership of Higher Educational Institutions.[10]

This law applies to both branches of Indonesia's state-managed university system, the universities under the Ministry of Research and Technology, commonly referred to as 'general' or 'public' universities (Ind: *umum*), as well as those under MORA.[11] It is the latter branch that is of interest here, for it was in a MORA university, the Alauddin UIN, that the dispute focused upon here played out.

The Ministry began to fund and manage Islamic education soon after independence in 1945, but it was only in the 1960s that the government began to invest serious resources in Islamic universities, in response to public demand from Muslims concerned about educational equality. The result is a highly innovative university system.[12] As noted above, affirmation of past knowledge has generally been a core principle of religious academic work, yet Indonesia's MORA is trying to create religion-focused research institutions modelled on the modern research and teaching university that will not lag in prestige and quality beside the secular-oriented institutions under the Ministry of Research and Technology. This is remarkable when it is considered that in Europe the model of the research and teaching university emerged alongside the marginalisation of religion from the domain of science and formal education. In other words, the Ministry is constructing institutions for religious study by following a model that evolved through a historical process that was secularising in nature. This endeavour is a novel one.

As we show below, influential Muslim academics in Indonesia have supported academic freedom as a necessary value for contemporary Islamic society, but it would be naïve to suppose that academic freedom could be unproblematically incorporated into the modern sphere of Islamic education. In Craig Calhoun's words, 'academic freedom is not just a matter of free speech and individual rights. It is a matter of institutions and public purposes.'[13] The dispute described here concerned an institution's capacity to exercise autonomous authority over intellectual work. In the research and teaching universities focused upon secular curricula, disciplines maintain monopolies on method and research practice. These monopolies are generally not contested from within other spheres. For example, even though non-academics might not like what sociologists do, they have no authority over the ways in which sociologists evaluate intellectual work within the discipline.

10 Republic of Indonesia, Law on Higher Education [*Undang-undang Tentang Pendidikan Tinggi*], no. 12/2012, Article 8.

11 The Ministry owns and manages 58 institutions of tertiary study (UIN, IAIN and STAIN). It provides oversight and funding for a further 649 that are owned by private operators; 53 of the 58 state-owned institutions have graduate schools, as do 89 of the 649 private institutions. These details are available at MORA's website: www.kemenag.go.id.

12 Abdullah Saeed, 'Towards religious tolerance through reform in Islamic education: The case of the State Institute of Islamic Studies of Indonesia', *Indonesia and the Malay World* 27, 79 (1999): 177–91; Carool Kersten, 'Indonesia's new Muslim intellectuals', *Religion Compass* 3, 6 (2009): 971–85.

13 Calhoun, 'Public knowledge', p. 561.

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Yet scholars of religion within the MORA institutions cannot have a monopoly on the method and practice of research in Islam, for other institutions and actors outside the university sector also claim rightful authority over these things, and as we show below, feel authorised to challenge the practices and protocols applied to them. In other words, the argument that the public derives a benefit when specialised scholars employed in state institutions enjoy free inquiry is legitimately challenged by qualified scholars from outside that setting. In this article, we examine such a challenge, showing how academics of the religion faculties in the MORA institutions compete with rival authorities from outside their specialisations. Our case study enables us to engage with two questions: Does Indonesia's Islamic bureaucracy have a responsibility to prioritise the doctrinal preferences associated with the country's Sunni majority? Can the scholars in the state Islamic universities claim autonomy in the evaluation of research conducted in their academic environments against scholars from outside that environment?

The first part of this article provides necessary background by observing how methodological innovation in the Islamic sciences has been debated in Indonesia. We use prominent Indonesian scholars as references for this discussion. The second part moves from the abstract level to an actually-occurring dispute. As noted, the dispute originated in a MORA university, and concerned the awarding of a doctoral degree to the public intellectual Jalaluddin Rakhmat. His candidature brought on a battle over the authority of MORA scholars over scholarly treatments of Islam, and tested the commitment of the university to the specialised differentiation implemented in the modern research university. We close by describing the resolution of the dispute. The key points of the resolution were, in our view, the University's reliance on the academic principle of free inquiry, and its awareness of the example set by previous scholars within that academic setting.

Freedom of inquiry in Islamic academia

Disputes over academic freedom in the study of Islam are not new in Indonesian Muslim intellectual life. In this background section, we provide a brief sketch of the ideological fragmentation of Islamic scholarship around this value. We canvass two opposing Islamic viewpoints on academic freedom and its public value. The two perspectives respectively align with the lines of opposition emerging in the Rakhmat PhD ordeal. Nurcholish Madjid (1939–2005) and Adian Husaini (b. 1965) are authoritative speakers for publics that make contrasting claims about the responsibility of state institutions concerning academic method in the Islamic sciences. The former affirms the contribution of human agency to the creation of new Islamic knowledge, while for the latter, that contribution has destructive potential.

Nurcholish Madjid was a public intellectual and educator whose understanding of free inquiry was undoubtedly linked to his own rich educational experiences. His basic education was undertaken at one of Java's traditional Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*).[14] In 1961 he commenced his undergraduate training at the

14 The standard biography of Madjid is Ahmad Gaus, *Api Islam: Nurcholish Madjid: Jalan hidup seorang visioner* [The fire of Islam: Nurcholish Madjid—the life of a visionary] (Jakarta: Kompas, 2010). See also Carool Kersten, *Cosmopolitans and heretics: New Muslim intellectuals and the study of Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); Greg Barton, 'Indonesia's Nurcholish Madjid and

newly-opened Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic Institute, the first of the MORA institutes to open to undergraduates. In 1984 he was awarded the title of PhD from the University of Chicago. On his return to Indonesia, he was active in the establishment of Indonesia's first progressive, private Islamic university, the Paramadina University. These experiences gave Madjid a sharp awareness of the differences between the various educational systems existing in and outside of Indonesia, and the diverse benefits they offered for a modernising Indonesia.[15]

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Madjid published a series of papers that established him as a maverick thinker, including 'The need to renew Islamic thinking and the problem of the integration of the ummat'.[16] This text, which has become a classic of Indonesian Muslim thinking, was first delivered as a speech in 1970, but has since then been frequently republished. In this paper he suggested that Indonesia's Muslims ought to free themselves from a conservative political programme that had locked public Islam into ongoing opposition with Indonesia's modernising and secularising elements. He observed that Indonesian Muslims had achieved a high degree of political unity, but that the price of this unity was that Indonesian Muslims were generally behind the vanguard of social, political and economic progress. What they most lacked, in Madjid's view, was an appreciation for freedom of thought, for this lack prevented them from participating in progressive intellectual activity and the free circulation of ideas. Free inquiry was, Madjid claimed, *the* most important value for resolving the problem of the stagnation of Islamic society.

This claim affirms a privileged place for human action in the creation of new Islamic knowledge. The privileging of human agency underpins Madjid's observations that human cultures had been integral to the creation of Islamic civilisation and culture:

> Muslims emerged from the Arab peninsula with nothing other than a resolute faith emanating from the Qur'an and the prophetic example. In the regions they conquered, they discovered the legacies of human cultures from the West (Greece and Rome) and the East (Persia). They then developed these legacies on top of the principles they had brought from the deserts of the Arab peninsula, and made them their own property. These are the achievements that gave birth to what we now know and are so proud of as the culture and civilisation of Islam.[17]

In other words, the intellectual and cultural legacies of human societies were integral to the creation of Islamic knowledge and civilisation. Islamic civilisations were the products of encounters and exchanges between groups. Freedom of thought enabled the renewals they produced, to the point where Islamic civilisation could not have been created without it. In Madjid's view, new modes of thought and inquiry were

Abdurrahman Wahid as intellectual *ulama:* The meeting of Islamic traditionalism and modernism in neo-modernist thought', *Studia Islamika* 4, 1 (1987) 29–81.

15 Nurcholish Madjid, *Bilik-bilik pesantren: Sebuah potret perjalanan* [*The pesantren*'s lodgings: A portrait of a journey] (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1997).

16 Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam, kemodernan dan keIndonesiaan* [Islam, modernity and Indonesianness], new ed. (Bandung: Mizan, 2008 [1987]), pp. 225–39.

17 Ibid., p. 235.

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to be developed and applied in replacement of older ones. With this view, Madjid is affirming an epistemological foundation of the modern, research-based university, where the replacement of a method or paradigm is regarded as a sign of the credibility of the discipline concerned. The sacralised affirmation of existing knowledge is contrary to the institutional principles of this environment.

The Islamic universities were to be the sites for Islamic scholarship to develop the attributes of the research-based university. Later in his career, he expressed the view that these institutions had not travelled far enough along that route. After his experience in Chicago, he looked back rather critically on the MORA institutes, and critiqued them for their dogmatic curriculum, lack of openness, and resistance to academic methods applied in the non-religious education sector.[18] Nevertheless, as we show below, Madjid's example is regarded as a precedent in Indonesia's Islamic universities. At a critical moment of the dispute around Rakhmat's PhD, Madjid's position on free inquiry was cited as an exemplary model for the conduct of Islamic intellectual work.

If Nurcholish Madjid has been the most influential advocate of academic freedom in Islamic intellectual work, Adian Husaini is among the most eloquent of spokespeople for an opposing view. For this Jakarta-based activist and public intellectual, who was awarded a PhD from Malaysia's International Islamic University (ISTAC-IIUM), the replacement of existing paradigms with new human intellectual constructs is precisely what should *not* happen in Muslim intellectual work. Academic freedom is not a positive value in Islamic scholarship, but a sign of something going wrong. His writings about the science of Qur'anic interpretation proscribe precisely the thing that Madjid insisted was most important for progress in the development of Islamic society: free inquiry.

At the core of Husaini's public advocacy are his objections to what he sees as the improper exercise of human agency in interpreting the sacred texts.[19] Tried and true methods for interpretation had been established by the companions of the Prophet and the two generations after them, as well as the early generations of learned Muslims (*'ulama*). These authentic bearers of the Prophet's legacy had enshrined a core principle in their methods of interpretation: the text and meanings of the Qur'an are from God (*'lafzan wa ma'nan minallah'*), and are not the products of human culture. Because the Qur'an's meanings are Allah's revelation, the exercise of human agency in their interpretation ought not go beyond the literal meanings of the Arabic text.

On that basis, Husaini has critiqued academic interventions that constitute or imply human agency in the construction or interpretation of the Qur'an. Two examples of such interventions appear frequently in his writings. One is the revisionist claim by scholars that the Caliph Uthman was motivated by political considerations

18 Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam, kerakyatan, dan keIndonesiaan: Pikiran-pikiran Nurcholish 'Muda'* [Islam, the people and Indonesianness: The thoughts of the 'young' Nurcholish] (Bandung: Mizan, 1993), pp. 251–2.

19 Adian Husaini, *Islam liberal, pluralisme agama dan diabolisme intelektual* [Liberal Islam, religious pluralism and intellectual satanism] (Surabaya: Risalah Gusti, 2005); Adian Husaini and Abdurrahman al-Baghdadi, *Hermeneutika dan Tafsir al-Qur'an* [Hermeneutics and Qur'anic interpretation] (Depok: Gema Insani, 2007).

when he organised the standardised form of the Qur'an known as the 'Uthmanic codex'. This claim, in Husaini's view, compromises the authentic nature of the Qur'an as Allah's sole revelation. These scholars 'destroy the Muslim conviction that the Qur'an is the speech of Allah, and that it is the only sacred book that is truly sacred and free from error'.[20]

A second example concerns the appropriation of hermeneutic method into Qur'anic interpretation. In the late 1990s, Indonesian Muslim scholars had enthusiastically taken up the example of the Egyptian scholar Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid (1943–2010), who had advocated for a hermeneutic approach to the Qur'an's meanings. In Zaid's view, scientific interpretation of the Qur'an required a contextualisation in which the Qur'an was understood as an Arabic text created at a distinct place and time.[21] Husaini argues this view is a grave misunderstanding about the nature of Muhammad's role in revelation, for the Prophet was the recipient and bearer of revelation, but was not its author. The text and meanings are of divine origin, and are not to be interpreted as products of Arab culture.[22] This was the manifest error of hermeneutic approaches to the Qur'an's meanings. Of course, both these approaches, the historical-revisionist method applied in criticism of the Uthmani text and the hermeneutic method, are commonly applied in modern literary study, and also in liberal traditions of biblical scholarship. In Husaini's view these approaches may not be applied to the Qur'an, for it is the vehicle for the unmediated expression of Allah's words.

Husaini might appear to be preoccupied with academic matters located at a fair distance from the concerns of non-specialists and from the material realities of everyday life. For Husaini, however, there is no such distance. He sees that proper respect for scholarly method is an aspect of the moral work that educated Muslims were obliged to maintain in their everyday conduct.[23] The establishment of autonomous institutions where such respect is absent creates a risk to public welfare. The key point, as Husaini sees it, is that if scholarly method and practice fail to preserve the literal meanings of the Qur'an, the weakening of those meanings effects a liberalisation that harms the common good. Human agency in interpretation opens the door to all kinds of deviances from moral order that may already be observed in Indonesia: neglect of worship practice, violation of dietary and other prohibitions, interreligious marriage, same-sex marriage, failure to cover the *aurat*, freedom of religion, and so on.[24] On these grounds, scholars are in fact custodians of public welfare, and the

20 Husaini, *Islam liberal*, p. 77.

21 Abu Zaid described his innovations and the resistance to them from the Egyptian academy in Nasr Abu Zaid with Esther R. Nelson, *Voice of an exile: Reflections on Islam* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), pp. 57–8.

22 Husaini and al-Baghdadi, *Hermeneutika dan Tafsir*. Husaini's critique in fact replicates precisely a key pillar of the 1996 apostasy conviction of the Cairo Appeals Court against Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid. One of the offences for which he was convicted was 'Calling the Qur'an a cultural product, thereby denying its pre-existence in the preserved tablet'; see Zaid and Nelson, *Voice of an exile*, p. 10.

23 The contrast between Madjid and Husaini with respect to the creation of new Islamic knowledge and its moral meanings replicates Asad's distinction between religion shaped by national policy, in which principles of national modernity are institutionalised and personal piety is privatised, and the notion of religion as a shared, divinely mandated way of life which requires believers to remind and encourage each other towards proper attention to pious practices. See Talal Asad, *Genealogies of religion*.

24 Husaini and Al-Baghdadi, *Hermeneutika dan tafsir*; Husaini, *Islam liberal*, pp. 17–27.

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closure of meanings in intellectual work is a virtue of Islamic scholarship upon which the public good depends. The constraints the *'ulama* placed on inquiry throughout history have helped to sustain Islam's moral framework. In Islam, he argues, affirmation of past knowledge has a public benefit, while the human creation of new meanings is dangerous.

So, should free inquiry be including amongst the defining values of the MORA institutions? The Ministry of Religious Affairs answers 'yes' to this question, being committed to building research institutions in the global model of the 'modern university'. Husaini answers in the negative: the common good demands that academic practice be constrained by the scholarly method established in the Islamic canon. This contrast provides a frame for our problem: the more or less secular trajectory of the Republic's bureaucratic structure facilitates a differentiated, specialist sphere of academic inquiry in which academic freedom is cultivated. Indonesia's policy settings include Islamic study in this trajectory. But the claims to Islamic authority emanating from that specialised sphere are seen as harmful by legitimate claimants to Islamic authority from outside that sphere. Here we see how religion contrasts with other academic specialisations when it is established as a specialised sphere of expertise: Islamic publics are generally happy to cede authority over scholarly method and practice to academic departments in sociology, engineering, dentistry and so on, but some publics express resistance to claims for autonomy over Islamic scholarship.

Background to the ordeal

In 1982, the first postgraduate faculty was opened in a MORA university, at the Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic Institute (IAIN) in Ciputat, near Jakarta. This opening was a significant step in the implementation of MORA's novel venture into Islamic education. The Ministry did not intend merely to provide a new environment for traditional scholarly method. It wished to expand and renew the study of Islam through the appropriation of methods from religious studies, political science, history, gender studies and sociology.[25] It wished to bring scientific legitimacy to the study of Islam, making it the equal of the secular sciences. Furthermore, the policy heavyweights behind the programme wished to encourage rational scientific method in the study of Islam, hoping that this would enable the study of Islam to transcend the sectarianism that divided Indonesia's Muslim community. A postgraduate school was an important step in achieving these goals.

The ordeal we are describing here unfolded within the Postgraduate Faculty of the Alauddin UIN, in Makassar, in Indonesia's South Sulawesi province. Through the period of the ordeal, the chair of the Postgraduate Programme was Professor Ahmad M. Sewang (b. 1952), who had earned his PhD degree at the Jakarta IAIN in 1999 in Islamic History and Civilisation. Sewang brought great enthusiasm for non-traditional methods in Islamic study to his role in Makassar. As part of the postgraduate programme, he invited prominent intellectuals to speak to students. In 2009 and 2010,

25 Key sources on the intellectual programme implemented by MORA universities include: Deliar Noer, *Administrasi Islam di Indonesia* [The administration of Islam in Indonesia] (Jakarta: Rajawali, 1983); Harun Nasution, *Islam rasional: Gagasan dan pemikiran* [Rational Islam: Concepts and thinking] (Bandung: Mizan 1995); Fuad Jabali and Jamhari, eds, *IAIN dan modernisasi Islam di Indonesia* [IAIN and the modernisation of Islam in Indonesia] (Ciputat: Logos Wacana Ilmu, 2002).

the Makassar UIN invited one of Indonesia's most prominent intellectuals, Jalaluddin Rakhmat, to give presentations. His two public lectures were on the communicative aspects of preaching and the meeting points between Sunnite and Shiite Islam.

By that time, Rakhmat had become one of Indonesia's most controversial public intellectuals. He had attracted attention for publically advocating Shiite intellectual concepts since around the end of 1982 and early 1983. At that time, the Iranian Revolution was creating waves amongst Sunni Muslims globally.[26] Indonesians such as Rakhmat were inspired by the Iranian movement, while others were concerned about threats from political Shiism. Shiites have traditionally been a tiny minority in Indonesia, but conservative elements of the Sunni establishment were concerned by Rakhmat's public embrace of Islamic concepts associated with Shiism. Yet Rakhmat appeared to welcome opposition from Sunni critics. Throughout his career he had viewed creedal polemics as beneficial for Indonesia's public discourse, and appeared to relish ongoing conflict with Sunni opponents. Sunni advocates became more vocal in their opposition to Rakhmat when, in the wake of Indonesia's 1998 political liberalisation, he played a leading role in the establishment of civil society organisations (CSOs) that were understood by his opponents as vehicles for Shiite proselytisation.

Rakhmat's career as a public intellectual, activist and politician had prevented him from undertaking doctoral study. He had commenced working as a lecturer in Communications at a university in Bandung in 1976, and at that time held aspirations for higher study. Other demands upon his time frustrated these goals,[27] which seemed even more unattainable after he was elected to the country's Legislative Assembly in 2014. The experience of giving lectures at the Makassar UIN led him to consider enrolling in the doctoral programme there.

After receiving inquiries from Rakhmat about the possibility of doctoral study, Sewang initially thought that the inquiries were not serious; how could a national figure of the stature of Rakhmat want to become a student at his university? In subsequent conversations, however, Rakhmat assured him of the seriousness of his intentions. Formal requirements were not an obstacle to enrolment: Rakhmat held the necessary qualifications to be accepted into the programme. Sewang himself became the main supervisor. Two co-supervisors were appointed, both of them career academics trained within the MORA system who were supportive of Rakhmat's unconventional research project, entitled 'The origins of the traditions of the companions: A historiographical study of shariah history'.

To understand the dispute that erupted around Rakhmat's candidacy and research, an overview of the thesis and its methodology is required.[28] The empirical

26 Sources on Shiism in Indonesia with emphasis on the recent period include Zulkifli, *The struggle of the Shi`is in Indonesia* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2013); Dedy Djamaluddin Malik and Idi Subandy Ibrahim, *Zaman baru Islam Indonesia: Pemikiran dan aksi politik Abdurrahman Wahid, M. Amien Rais, Nurcholish Madjid dan Jalaluddin Rakhmat* [A new era of Indonesian Islam: The thinking and political practice of Abdurrahman Wahid, Amien Rais, Nurcholish Madjid and Jalaluddin Rakhmat] (Bandung: Penerbit Zaman Wacana Baru, 1998); and Feener and Formichi, *Shi'ism in Southeast Asia*.

27 Jalaluddin Rakhmat, 'Asal-usul sunnah sahabat: Studi historiografis atas tarikh tasyri'' [The origins of the traditions of the companions: A historiographical study of the history of the implementation of the shariah] (PhD diss., UIN Alauddin Makassar, 2015), pp. iv–vi.

28 There are two versions of the dissertation text. The unpublished dissertation is Jalaluddin Rakhmat, 'Asal-usul sunnah sahabat'. The subsequently produced trade publication is Jalaluddin Rakhmat, *Misteri*

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focus of his doctoral research was the body of positive Islamic norms known as 'the example of the companions' (Indonesian from Arabic: *sunnah sahabat*). These are reports of acts and utterances legitimised by a chain of reporters, similar in form to the Hadith that report the example of the Prophet Muhammad, but differing from them because the acts and utterances reported are those of the Prophet's companions, not the Prophet. Rakhmat's main argument was that this body of Islamic authority had been manipulated in support of political hegemony at key points in Islamic history to the detriment of the descendants of ʿAli. Considering that the Shiite community defines itself by its genealogical link to ʿAli, this argument could be read as a claim that Shiite Islam had been unfairly marginalised by Sunni doctrine. Rakhmat claimed to have proved this by appropriating methods from critical historians and Orientalist Hadith scholars. Most notably, his dissertation included a lengthy review of the historical-critical method of hermeneutics, referring back to its origins in eighteenth-century German scholarship. He enthusiastically adopted the critical method for Hadith study proposed by the Hungarian Orientalist Ignas Goldziher (1850–1921).[29] Using these methods, Rakhmat arrived at a revisionist account of the formation of the shariah.

Aside from his preference for Western scholars over the Sunni canon, two other aspects made this research highly controversial. The first was Rakhmat's case study. He focused closely on a dispute emerging in early Islamic history: Did the Prophet Muhammad leave a testament nominating ʿAli (Muhammad's son-in-law) as his successor? Based on a critical overview of the *sunnah sahabat*, Rakhmat argued that he did leave such a testament. The Hadith that proved he did so, Rakhmat argued, had been removed from public circulation by scholars of the Sunni Umayyad dynasty (established in Damascus in 661 CE) in support of the caliph Mu'awaiyah, who was at war with the Prophet's descendants, that is to say, with the party (*shi'a*) of ʿAli. In effect, Rakhmat was arguing that politicised Hadith scholarship had suppressed the claims of the Prophet's family to leadership of the community. This argument supported the Shiite account of caliphal succession, and directly impugned the moral character of major Sunni figures such as the first three caliphs, Abu Bakar al-Siddiq, Umar bin al-Khattab, and Usman bin `Affan, and the fifth caliph, Mu'awiyah.

Second, he made a scathing evaluation of a foundational method in traditional Hadith scholarship, namely 'discrediting and correcting' (Arabic: *al-jarḥ wa al-taʿdīl*).[30] Hadith scholars use this method to evaluate the soundness of a report of a tradition by paying attention to the character and reputation of the individuals who reported it. Rakhmat claims this method was in fact a politicised tool for discrediting opponents of the Sunni Umayyad dynasty. The Prophet's companions were never subjected to such evaluation, yet adverse judgements were consistently applied to the transmitters of pro-ʿAli Hadith. In Rakhmat's view, Hadith favouring ʿAli were marginalised for the sake of the Sunni hegemony. A better method, he recommended,

*wasiat nabi: Asal usul sunnah sahabat; Studi historiografis tarikh tasyri*ʿ [The mystery of the Prophet's testament: The origins of the traditions of the companions; A historiographical study of the history of the implementation of the shariah] (Bandung: Penerbit Misykat, 2015).

29 Jalaluddin Rakhmat, 'Asal-Usul sunnah sahabat', pp. 26–39.

30 Ibid., pp. 33–57; *Misteri Wasiat nabi*, pp. 30–39.

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would draw critically on a wide range of methods. In other words, Rakhmat was a researcher intent on importing methods into the study of Islam from fields outside the religion, and the conclusions he obtained by doing so would impugn the integrity of Sunni hegemony.

To an observer not aware of the symbolic conflicts latent in Indonesia's public Islamic sphere, these issues might appear to concern scholarly nuances lacking in immediate significance. But Muslim scholars in South Sulawesi saw Rakhmat's methodology as having implications for the broader public interest, and initiated a stressful ordeal that preceded and accompanied the finalisation of the thesis. Muslim intellectuals attempted to convince the wider community that the university was acting against the public interest by hosting the research. The dispute became a test case about whether the autonomy of Islamic scholarship in State Islamic universities should give way to Islamic particularity.

The ordeal

Rakhmat's candidacy and research rapidly came to the concerned attention of Muslim intellectuals in Makassar outside the UIN, bringing reactions from his anti-Shiite opponents. The most active player in opposing Rakhmat's candidature was Muhammad Said Abd. Shamad, the chair of the Makassar branch of a CSO, the Institute for the Research and Study of Islam (LPPI). This is an activist group that includes amongst its goals the prevention of the development of Shiism in Eastern Indonesia. The group is small, but is affiliated nationally with organisations with similar goals that it collaborates with in larger coalitions.[31] The Makassar LPPI had already been aware of Rakhmat's controversial ideas from the speeches he had earlier delivered in the Makassar UIN Postgraduate Programme.

Between April 2011 and January 2015, Abd. Shamad and his organisation campaigned against Rakhmat's candidacy and project.[32] They made appeals and complaints to the UIN and its rector Abdul Qadir Gassing, the local media, the Makassar city police, the Council of Islamic Scholars (MUI), Islamic CSOs, parliamentary committees and MORA. The ordeal was played out in public forums and debates (organised by the UIN), in the pages of various media, most notably the Makassar-based newspapers *Tribun* and *Fajar*, and on social media. Staff of the university were summoned to meetings before MUI as well as the provincial House of Representatives. The dispute continued even to Rakhmat's oral defence of his dissertation, at which a stand-off between Rakhmat and a panelist nearly prevented the dissertation from being approved.

The main demand of Abd. Shamad and the scholars who supported him was that the rector refrain from granting Rakhmat a doctoral title, and that he allow members of the South Sulawesi branch of MUI to proofread his doctoral thesis prior to his

31 Ahmad Najib Burhani, 'Fundamentalism and religious dissent: The LPPI's mission to eradicate the Ahmadiyya in Indonesia', *Indonesia and the Malay World* 44, 129 (2016): 145–64.

32 Our knowledge of Abd. Shamad's critique is based on Usep Abdul Matin's discussions with him and other participants in the matter, on publications appearing in the media, and on a number of video recordings of the debates and discussions on the issue that were held at MORA institutions in Makassar and other cities. DVDs of these recordings have circulated informally. Some were posted on Youtube, such as the recording of Rakhmat's doctoral examination, which we cite below in footnote 38.

promotion examination. This demand challenged the authority of the University to evaluate its own research. Work of such grave significance should not be evaluated by the university alone, they claimed. Two reasons were given in support of these demands. The first objection was that Rakhmat was publicly advocating for a central tenet of Shiite doctrine, namely that the fourth Caliph, 'Ali, was the rightful replacement of the Prophet Muhammad as leader of the Muslim community. Given that respected Islamic bodies in Indonesia including MUI had publicly expressed disapproval of the Shiite current, it was improper for the Makassar UIN to assist Rakhmat to spread this conviction in Indonesia.[33] Second, in a claim that mirrored that of Husaini's discussed above, Abd. Shamad argued that through his interdisciplinary approach, Rakhmat had mocked the Prophet's companions. The critical-historical methodology attacked the foundations of Sunni doctrine and history.

Being a public institution, the Makassar UIN could not remain silent in the face of this protest. The university's subsequent reaction was notable for two reasons. First, the postgraduate school decided that academic freedom was the proper basis for a response, and accordingly, Sewang mobilised this concept in the public exchange that followed. In a number of public presentations, as well as in letters defending the programme published in *Fajar*, Sewang and colleagues defended their institution with a classic exposition of academic freedom as a value foundational to the specialised domain of research. He pointed out that if Rakhmat were to obtain his doctoral degree, it would be through his own efforts and not by the will of the rector. Even the president of the Republic, Sewang stated, could not influence Rakhmat's candidature. The question of whether his work warranted the conferral of the degree would be decided through the proper exercise of academic procedures by the Makassar UIN. The Makassar UIN's plea for freedom of inquiry also expressed a liberal disposition towards Islamic orthodoxy: Rakhmat's co-supervisor, M. Qasim Mathar, wrote in *Fajar* that the university was authorised to allow and encourage its doctoral students to arrive at findings that might be in contrast with the commonly-accepted patterns of Islamic thought, and this was entirely in line with Islamic tradition, for there was no religious institution that had absolute authority to determine the faith or Islam of a person.[34]

The second aspect to be noted here is the public and inclusive nature of the UIN's response. Sewang did not distance the university from Rakhmat's critics, but engaged with them in lengthy dialogue, sometimes in face-to-face meetings. He did not treat the dispute as an internal matter, but took his advocacy of academic freedom to the wider public. In August 2011, for example, he invited professors of the South Sulawesi province as well as Abd. Shamad to attend a discussion forum of the Indonesian Professors Association (API) at the Alauddin UIN. In this forum, Sewang presented slides about academic freedom in Islamic history, mentioning prominent Muslim scholars who had respected Shiism as a part of Islam, including the senior

33 'Proses doktoral Kang Jalal diprotes', *Fajar*, 27 Apr. 2011, p. 9. The disapproval referred to here is the 1984 fatwa of the Indonesian Scholars' Council urging Sunni Muslims in Indonesia to be more wary (*meningkatkan kewaspadaan*) about teachings based on Shiism. See Majelis Ulama Indonesia, *Himpunan Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia sejak 1975* [Collected fatwa of the Indonesian Muslim Scholars' Council since 1975] (Jakarta: Sekretariat Majelis Ulama Indonesia, 2011), pp. 46–7.
34 M. Qasim Mathar, 'Kang Jalal mahasiswa program by research', *Fajar*, 28 Apr. 2011.

Indonesian scholar Muhammad Quraish Shihab, who from March to May of 1998 had briefly held the position of minister of religious affairs.[35] Differences of opinion were inevitable in Indonesia's universities, Sewang argued, and a policy of avoiding differences of opinion contradicted the principle of academic freedom upheld by every university. If differences of opinion were to be avoided, Indonesia's universities would create imitative students, not creative ones (*mahasiswa pengekor, bukan mahasiswa kreatif*).

The resolution

A peak moment of the ordeal was Rakhmat's oral defence of his dissertation, which took place at the Alauddin UIN on 14 January 2015.[36] The expert panel assembled for the defence included UIN academics, but these academics were not assembled to avoid conflict about the dissertation. They were experts in the Islamic disciplines invoked in Rakhmat's research. Some of them held roles in Islamic organisations outside of the university. Two members of the panel were strongly critical of Rakhmat's dissertation. In fact, the thesis was nearly refused, and questions of method were critical to this disagreement.

As noted above, Rakhmat had attributed political motives to previous scholars' use of the methods of *al-jarḥ* (identifying defects) and *al-taʿdīl* (the correcting following upon *al-jarḥ*). Hadith scholars rely on this method for evaluating the veracity of Hadith narratives by examining the character and credibility of the narrators. In his dissertation, Rakhmat had concluded that the methods of *al-jarḥ* and *al-taʿdīl* were not effective standards for evaluating Hadith. Members of the panel had been trained in this method. For them, Rakhmat's conclusion was improper and divisive, and appeared as advocacy on behalf of Shiite doctrine. A panel member argued that if Rakhmat's conclusion were accepted, it could discredit all of the Hadith that depended on the *al-jarḥ wa al-taʿdīl* method. Yet Rakhmat would not budge from his position: if he were to delete that conclusion, this would ruin the scientific value of his research, and would undermine his historiographical approach to the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad's companions.

After the public part of the examination was concluded, the panel retired to consider its decision privately. One member of the panel was inclined to not approve the thesis, and Rakhmat himself would not make the changes they sought. Mediation from Sewang was required to resolve this problem. The disputants agreed on a formulation of words that was mutually agreeable. Consequently, Rakhmat revised his conclusion to become: 'The sciences of *al-Jarḥ* and *al-Taʿdīl* have flaws which should ideally be strengthened and tested with insights from other disciplines. The weaknesses include …'.[37] This compromise was accepted by the two parties and Rakhmat's dissertation was passed.

35 We are grateful to Professor Sewang for sharing with us his unpublished slides presented at the meeting held on 11 Aug. 2011 in Makassar UIN's Training Centre.

36 The defence was recorded in video, and uploaded onto Youtube in a sequence of four excerpts entitled *Ujian promosi Dr Jalaluddin Rakhmat di UIN Alauddin Makassar* [Doctoral examination of Dr Jalaluddin Rakhmat at UIN Alauddin, Makassar].

37 Jalaluddin Rakhmat, *Misteri wasiat*, p. 30.

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In retrospect, although Abd. Shamad's protest had been supported by some organisations and individuals in South Sulawesi, Sewang's claim for academic freedom received stronger support than Abd. Shamad had been able to raise. Important institutions approached by Abd. Shamad refused to support his action. For example, he had lodged a complaint with the Makassar police alleging defamation of religion (*penodaan agama*), a criminal offence under Indonesian law. The complaint stated that Rakhmat had defamed the Prophet's companions. After consulting various parties, the police decided not to proceed with the complaint. Organisations such as Nahdlatul Ulama and MUI had also declined to join the protest against Rakhmat's research, although individuals affiliated with these organisations did. Sewang himself had been contacted by a number of institutions that had first been approached by Abd. Shamad. In Sewang's recollection, CSOs and state agencies had been receptive to his argument that Rakhmat should be entitled to undertake his research in an environment of free inquiry without interference from outside the institution.

Our final observation about the ordeal was the way free inquiry was promoted as an Islamic value with beneficial potential for Indonesian society. As one would expect, Sewang argued in his presentations that there were plentiful examples in Islamic history showing that free inquiry was in fact an Islamic principle. This was not surprising, for Madjid had done the same a number of decades before. What was more surprising was the importance given to academic predecessors within the MORA university system. These were adduced as authentic legitimisation for a principle of free inquiry in Islam. In his interviews with the supervisory team, Usep Abdul Matin heard many references to scholarly predecessors such as Madjid who had insisted that free inquiry ought to prevail in the MORA research institutions.

The same insistence is expressed powerfully by Rakhmat's promotor, Ahmad Sewang, in his final address at the conclusion of the oral examination (this can be viewed among the video recordings of the examination posted on Youtube).[38] The ordeal had been a stressful process for him, and the oral examination itself was full of tension. Sewang and his colleagues had endured five years' of what he described as 'intimidation and terror' directed at his institution. For around two hours Rakhmat had defended his historiographical approach against his examiners, including some who were deeply concerned at the ethical implications of Rakhmat's treatment of the Prophet's companions. After the passing of the thesis, which was also a sort of resolution of the dispute that accompanied it, an emotional Sewang expressed his appreciation to his academic forebears in the Ministry's system, including Madjid and others. Referring to the founding professor of the Jakarta State Islamic University, Harun Nasution (1919–98), who had been the supervisor of his own doctoral research, he told the audience that if it were not for Nasution's example, 'I would still be brawling with my colleagues about doctrinal divisions [*madhhab*]'. In Sewang's view, Rakhmat's research belonged to the same lineage of thinking, and had distinguished the university, he claimed, because Rakhmat was prepared to consider doctrinal differences as *historical constructions*, not as reflections of the Divine intention. For Sewang, freedom of inquiry had special meanings because of the lineage

38 The relevant part is in the fourth of the videos: *Ujian Promosi Doktor Jalaluddin Rakhmat UIN Alauddin Makassar #4*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2gNNZUA5pcc (last accessed 9 Aug. 2022).

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of academics who had promoted it within the institution in which he was professor. Through this reflexivity, the principle of free inquiry appears as a moral disposition inculcated within the institutional environment.

The speech is important because it indicates that this dispute was not played out between, on the one hand Muslims concerned at the immoral conduct of the state and, on the other bureaucrats responsible for maintaining an impersonal policy order. The literature on bureaucracy and Islam in Indonesia and elsewhere might give the impression that the religious graduates of the bureaucracy are agents in systematising the religious domain in forms appropriate for national governance.[39] It might appear that they do service to a 'policy domain' that requires reproduction of a universally applicable citizenship framework that lacks the shared, affective commitment to pious conduct that has conventionally structured pious practice within communities.[40] In other words, they might be understood to work for the 'policy' part of religion. Sewang's speech, and indeed his determined defence of Rakhmat over a long period, suggest something different. He appears as an Islamic intellectual for whom the examples provided by previous teachers provide guidance about proper conduct. Sewang was morally charged by their example to defend his pupil and his institution on a matter of Islamic principle. It is striking that this precedent should emerge in the domain of the Islamic bureaucracy. It points to an emergent pattern of Islamic authority in Indonesian society that could conceivably be important in future disputes of this kind.

Conclusion

The two questions we have engaged with here both bear upon the position to be taken by the state's Islamic institutions towards Islamic particularity. If the Indonesian populace is Sunni by a vast majority, is the national bureaucracy obliged to favour Sunni doctrine and historical memory? Furthermore, are the researchers within the State's Islamic research universities entitled to evaluate their practices and outputs with freedom and autonomy from Islamic intellectuals and institutions outside that sphere? When it approved Rakhmat's dissertation and resisted public pressure from dissenting scholars, the Makassar UIN affirmed that the academic freedom enjoyed by UIN researchers was not to be constrained by Sunni doctrinal supremacy. And it affirmed its autonomy in relation to the evaluation of its scholars' research activity. The dispute enabled us to glimpse an emergent tradition of Islamic freedom of inquiry, for key protagonists were motivated by precedents established by earlier scholars active within the MORA institutes.

Will free inquiry be accepted more broadly as a principle that ought to apply to Islamic research? On the one hand, our description above reveals that free inquiry has become an authentic Islamic value in the reflexivity of the UIN staff involved in this dispute. Nevertheless, we have also drawn attention in the above to the opposite possibility. Academic styles and methods have moral implications, and do not have value simply because they enable researchers to create new knowledge. In the eyes of some,

39 A useful account of this literature is provided in Dominik M. Müller and Kerstin Steiner, 'The bureaucratisation of Islam in Southeast Asia: Transdisciplinary perspectives', *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 37, 1 (2018): 3–26.

40 Asad, *Genealogies of religion*.

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precedent has established Islamic scientific method as a guarantor of propriety and goodness, and as such, freedom to innovate opens the door to wrongdoing and corruption. Furthermore, the appreciation of free inquiry as a positive value makes sense in an environment where a premium is placed on the creation of new knowledge, and on the replacement of existing paradigms with new ones. Our case study shows that some academic environments, rivals to the UIN in the spectrum of Islamic authority in Indonesia, value an academic ethic that is the opposite of this. In this view, old knowledge must not cede to new.

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