

Al-Robithoh Al-Islamiyah Al-Muthi'ah: Its Endeavors for Salafi in 2005-2010

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Abstract--The prominent objective of this study is to answer the question of how Pesantren Al-Robithoh al-Islamiyah al-Muthi'ah transformed its religious orientation, from traditionalist to Salafi, led by its young generation, the alumnae of Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan dan Arab (LIPIA) or Islamic and Arabic College of Indonesia. This research aims to elicit the evolutionary, rather than revolutionary approaches this Islamic boarding school has used for its transformation. This research is about a social history which adopted a historical method with sociological neo-functionalism approach, which is open and integrated. As a result, the religious identity transformation has involved not only the graduate of LIPIA, but also its *santri* (students) and syllabus. Subsequently, the transformation has attracted attention of Amsterdam Branch of Young Muslim Association in Europe (YMAE) who have established the direct connection with the institution. In addition, the transformation has been strengthened with the establishment of *Madrasah Diniyyah* (Primary Islamic School). Lastly, the gradual transformation of religious orientation in this Islamic boarding school paid more attention to directing its *santris*' way of thinking rather than that of the institution's owners and managements.

Keywords—Boarding school, graduates, LIPIA, Salafi, transformation, religious identity,

I. INTRODUCTION

This article discusses the religious orientation transformation of *Pesantren Al-Robithoh Al-Islamiyah Al-Muthi'ah* abbreviated to *Roisah* (hereafter called *Roisah pesantren*) from the traditionalist to Salafi. This means to discuss the process of transformation, challenges encountered by *Roisah pesantren* during the transformation, and its impact on Indonesian Muslims in Europe, especially Amsterdam branch of Young Muslim Association in Europe, abbreviated with YMAE which was founded on 11 April 1971 in a gathering attended by 21 participants in The Hague, Netherland.

Roisah pesantren did not start life as an Islamic boarding school, but rather a house of about 300 square meters. It is situated on the Kauman Street, Surodadi, in the district of Kedung, Jepara, Central Java. Since the end of the 1960s, Kyai Abdullah Nawawi born in Jepara in 1940, has owned the house where he founded this institution [1]. In 1982 the house was transformed into an Islamic school named *Robithoh*

Islamiyah al-Muthi'ah or *Roisah pesantren* [2]. This transformation as found in its statute was complemented with the following vision, missions and objectives. Its vision was reformulated to the center for Islamic studies and struggle for the sake of Islamic *Sharia* of *Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jamā'a*. Meanwhile, its missions are to provide religious education that depend on assured qualifications in order to uphold a Salafi system to prepare and guide Islamic generations who will devote themselves to their religion, society and nation [1]; and to direct *santris* to understand their own identities so that they will become pious, and possess noble behaviors [3]. In order to realize the vision and missions, the objectives of *Roisah pesantren* were formulated. "*Santris* are educated to be qualified in mastering Islamic subjects; to devote themselves to public interests [4]; and to actively propagate Islamic missions. There were two types of *santris* at *Roisah Pesantren: muqim* and *non-muqim santris*. The former group consisted of those *santris* coming from villages outside Surodadi and staying in the dormitory; the latter group was identified as those who came from Surodadi but stayed in their family houses [4].

Related to the term *al-jamā'a*, there were diverse definitions. For instance, NU defined Islam of *Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jamā'a* as divine teaching taught and conducted by the Prophet Muhammad SAW to his companions. This seems that *al-jamā'a* means only the companions. However, NU itself has religious doctrines, which community of NU should acknowledge. In the theology, NU follows the approach of Abu al-Hasan al-Asy'ari and Abu Mansur al-Maturidi; while in jurisprudence, it especially follows Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi'i. In addition, NU also follows the *madhhab* of Abu Hanifa Nu'man ibn Tsabit, Malik ibn Anas and Ahmad ibn Hanbal; and in Islamic mysticism, it follows the method of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and Junayd al-Baghdadi [5]. Meanwhile, Salafi people referred to the companions of the Prophet and their followers [6].

In 2008, *Roisah Pesantren* was transformed into a private foundation under the leadership of *Nurul Furqon* (the elder brother of Kamilin). There were 173 participants registered as its *santris* in 2009. Since the establishment of *Roisah* (1960s), the classical books offered to its *santris* tend to follow the preference of traditionalist *pesantrens* in Indonesia.

II. METHOD

This is a case study which adopted the historical approach focusing on the transformation of an Islamic Boarding school

from its traditionalist to Salafi orientation. The study relied on the primary data obtained from the observation and interview conducted in *Roisah Pesantren* as the locus of the research. Of course, the data obtained from the written documents were used to complement the information which were previously collected. Then, a qualitative analysis using relevant theories or concepts was done to get more accurate information connected to the problems being investigated.

III. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

A. *Roisah's Efforts for Becoming Salafi*

Nawawi preferred his *santris* to follow *madhāhib*, i.e. following Indonesian traditionalist Muslim practices [1] that reflected the religious understanding of Nahdlatul Ulama. He added that *Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jamā'a* is a model of thought based not only on the Quran and the Prophet Traditions, but also upon current social realities that classical Islamic books recommend, thus enabling a moderate way in terms of implementing Islamic teaching [1]. However, the understanding of Nawawi of the term *Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jamā'a* has been challenged by his son, Kamilin. He, with the assistance of his elder brother, Rohman, had designed the syllabus of *Roisah*, by inserting subjects of other schools applied in Muslim community since 2007 [4]. The label *Ahl al-sunna wa'l-jamā'a* was given to Muslims believing in, learning and practicing the *Sunna* (the Tradition) of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. These Muslims were not obliged to be adherent to a school of Islamic jurisprudence (*madhhab*). They did not belong to a group of Muslims practicing *tahlilan*, *yasinan*, *manaqiban* (hagiography), *nariyahan* (a kind of prayer for resolving problems), and *barzanjian* (reciting the history of the Prophet Muhammad), which was commonly known as the Indonesian traditionalist Muslims or the congregation of *Nahdlatul Ulama*. In short, the true Islam is Islam based only upon the Quran and the *Hadith* [2].

He added that the term *Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jamā'a* was similar to that of other works which Salafi people refer to. For instance, Salih ibn Abd al-Aziz stated in *Jāmi' Shurūḥ al-Aqīdat al-Taḥāwīyya* (The Comprehensive Commentaries on the *Taḥāwīyya* Faith) that *Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jamā'a* were those following the Prophet traditions and the paths of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad SAW and their followers"[6]. This was similar to that of Ibn Taymiyya pointed out in one hadith reading "*Alay-kum bi-sunnatī wa sunnat al-khulafā al-rāshidīn al-mahdiyyin min ba'dī, tamassakū bihā, wa 'aḍḍū 'alay-hā bi'l-nawājīdh, waiyyā-kum wa muḥdathāti al-umūr, fa innā kulla bid'atin ḍalāla*" (Take my tradition and the that of the Rightly Guided Caliphs who came after me; stick to these traditions; and beware of the new matters of laws because they tend to false conception [7].

Kamilin, who could complete his study at the department of Islamic Law (*Syari'a*) of the LIPIA in 2008 [2] has been transforming the religious orientation of *Roisah* into a Salafi direction. In transforming the religious orientation of *Roisah*, Kamilin, with the assistance of Rohman, took three gradual steps. The *kyai's* sons uphold the traditional methods of teaching the *santris*, such as "*sorogan*" (a *santri* reads an Arabic

Islamic book in front of his or her teacher) and *weton*, also known as *bandongan* or *halqa* (a teacher or *kyai* reads an Arabic Islamic book and the *santris* listen and remark on important words and sentences). Subsequently, like the transformation from a traditionalist religious orientation to a more puritanical one in the *pesantren* of Maskumambang, Gresik, East Java, which initially focused on its *santris* [8], the *santris* in the *Roisah Pesantren* also seem to be the target of the religious transformation of the *kyai's* sons. The *santris* are only taught the *matan* (the main texts), rather than the *sharḥ* (the interpretive texts) of yellow books. In teaching the main texts, he involves providing Quranic verses and the Prophet Muhammad's Traditions and evaluating the texts to see whether they are in line with both sources of Islam. As a next step, in relation to *aqīda* (faith), Kamilin, backed by Rohman, chose a book containing no commentary by ulama but instead only Quranic verses or Prophet Traditions dealing with this subject [8]. The book he selected was *Aqīda Ṭaḥāwīyya* by Abī Ja'far al-Warrāq al-Miṣrī while usually *Aqīdat al-'Awwām* (The Faith of Common People) by Achmad al-Marzuqī is taught [9]. Thus, Kamilin uses an approach that allows the *Roisah santris* to identify traditionalist teaching which opposes the *aqīda* of Salafī, rather than using the opposite way, which is not hoped by the LIPIA [10].

B. *The Impact of Salafi Roisah on Indonesian Muslims in Amsterdam*

The same concern and religious orientation of *Roisah Pesantren* and YMAE Amsterdam encouraged a direct organizational connection between both organizations. The involvement of Nawawi's son, Salafi Muttaqin was decisive. He had a proven track record as a mediator and was responsible for the distribution of alms and other philanthropy from the YMAE focusing on strengthening Salafi purification [11]. Their similar religious orientation led to build joint activities. Indeed, *Roisah* organized the distribution of the *zakāt al-fiṭr* in Jepara, Central Java, which was consecutively collected during *Ramaḍān* from the branch and other philanthropies to finance *Roisah Pesantren's* infrastructures, such as dormitories, office rooms, sport arena, and other facilities, including learning media, computers, and internet and communication technology.

On the whole, the financial support of Muslims in the Netherlands for needy people in their home country, facilitated by individuals, foundations or associations, has, according to Boender, a Researcher of Leiden University, been aimed at their families and acquaintances or specific projects [12]. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Netherlands, founded in 1991, in Indonesia remittances were mainly used to finance daily living needs, health services, education, to service debt as well as to acquire land and property [13]. The financial supports to *Roisah Pesantren* seemed to fit this pattern. That is to say, the money was used in financing the daily needs of orphans and needy people; purchasing new areas for educational projects; and financing the tuition fee. In 2005-2006, for instance, YMAE Amsterdam transferred the *zakāt al-fiṭr* to *Roisah Pesantren*. However, in 2007, it was

able to remit not only the *zakāt al-fiṭr* (of more or less €650) to *Roisah Pesantren*, but also philanthropic donations amounting to approximately €17,000 [14] which was collected from people joining *tarāwih* prayers, held every night of *Ramaḍān* [15]. YMAE Amsterdam managed the transfer of these philanthropy to *Roisah Pesantren*. This signifies that the donor is no longer individual [15]. The money was spent not only on the renovation of its existing facilities, but also on purchasing new areas of land in order to materialize its programs including building classroom [4]. *Roisah Pesantren* run the management of *Madrasah Diniyah* (Schools for Learning Islamic Subjects). Until the beginning of 2010, the provision of the *Madrasah Diniyah* was yet to be materialized. *Roisah Pesantren* finally could begin building the *Madrasah Diniyah* at the end of 2015. Rohman emphasized that the new areas purchased were to be prepared for the building of a *Madrasah Diniyah* and a *muṣallā* that were organized by another alumnus of LIPIA in Jakarta, his nephew Muhsin. This reflected the religious orientation of the *pesantren* leader's sons, Kamilin and Muttaqin.

IV. CONCLUSION

Roisah Pesantren that was initially established to following traditionalist religious orientation had been gradually being transformed into the Salafi one by the young generation of *Roisah Pesantren* who have been given authority to run it. This gradual transformation of religious orientation in *Roisah* focused on directing its *santris'* way of thinking rather than that of the *Roisah* management. The *Roisah's* transformation of religious orientation played an important role in establishing its joint activities with the YMAE.

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