

# Islamic Studies in Sumatera: Prospects and Challenges

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**Abstract:** *Discussing about Islamic studies in the territorial context has long been mentioned by observers in contemporary Islamic studies after the collapse of orientalist's paradigm, however, in the territorial context of Indonesia, a regional Islamic studies has not been mentioned at all. Whereas, materially, both in the context of humanity nor religion, it is very urgent for being researched and developed in Indonesia, both from science, research, or institutional side. This article tries to start the efforts above by targeting the Islamic studies of Sumatera. The growth history and also interaction's dynamics of religion and socials, the struggle between religion and power as reflected in the results of studies about classical Islam of Sumatera, both in the colonialism and post-colonialism era indicated a shift in issues knots. In the context of Islamic studies, that fact is a prospective land and also a challenge for further investigation. Because in each shift, the existence of religion and religious are always in disadvantaged position. Therefore, it is needed to revitalize Islamic studies on Sumatra that was driven by the higher religious education in order to maintain the existence and contribution for meeting the various dynamics and relations issues, also the conflicts of interest among religion, humanity, capitalism, environmental and power which have been more complex lately, particularly in Sumatera.*

**Keywords:** Islam, Islamic Studies, Sumatera

## Introduction

Although Reviewing the studies on Islam or often referred by Islamic Studies is a multi-perspective study. Clearly, the discussion of Islamic studies is not necessarily positioned as Islamic affairs only. It could be the study of history, philosophy and criticism of Islamic studies and also about the epistemology. Whatever its name, the discussion of Islamic studies is very important in the establishment and even reinforcement context of Islamic studies existence as a discourse or study area, and as a contemporary disciplines. Reflecting to that urgency, the Islamic studies

scientifically still requires the strengthening of its epistemological, methodological and axiology. So, its presence truly has a strong base of knowledge, the methodological framework of thinking and logic, clear and has core values that can be a vision or purpose of Islamic studies development. Thus, the discussion of Islamic studies differs to the study of Islam itself, the study of Islam is the investigation about it, while the study of Islamic studies is talking about scientific field.

When presenting about Islamic Studies in Germany on a public lecture forum during his visits to the Islamic Research Institute in Islamabad Pakistan in December 1996, Annemarie Schimmel explained about the emergence history, journey, and development of Islamic studies in Germany, which he began in the 12th century or precisely in 1143 AD when the Koran was first translated into Latin in Spain and triggered the interests from several German intellectuals (Christian) to read. Islamic Studies then grows under the influence of Martin Luther's ideas (d. 1546 AD) and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in the 19th century AD onwards. The thing discussed by Schimmel about Islamic studies in Germany was about the history of Islamic studies. It means, one thing that need to be underlined here is the history. However, despite of the historical study presented by Schimmel is still need to be investigated further, it was so clear that Islam had an exact background and long journey in Germany.<sup>1</sup>

The same thing was done by Ibrahim Abu Bakar. According to him, the formation period of Islamic studies in Malaysia began in 1950s and until now there are patterns of Islamic studies which distinctly divided into three phases, the religious, linguistic, then pragmatic and liberal. Once again, what was written by Ibrahim Abu Bakar shows that Islamic studies is different with Islam clearly. He classifies Islamic studies in the following phases of the development and characteristics.<sup>2</sup> Unlike two papers above, Charles Kurzman aims the development of Islamic studies

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<sup>1</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, "Islamic Studies in Germany: A Historical Overview", *Islamic Studies*, vol. 49, No. 3, (2010), Pg. 401-402.

<sup>2</sup> Ibrahim Abu Bakar, "A History of Islamic Studies in Malaysia", *Oriente Moderno, Nuovaserie*, Anno 19, (80), Nr. 2, (2000), Pg. 371-393.

in the US by the data in context of 1960s until the early 2010. Though, there is an increased interest of Islamic studies in America.<sup>3</sup>

By reading some papers on top, along with the other sources, we can draw a red line, that investigating the dynamics of Islamic studies in the region or particular area can present a variety of interesting phenomenon both in the internal, general, as well as the investigation of community and its relation with the religious. Those phenomena, without exception in the Indonesian regions which are rich of Islamic discourses as on Sumatera and Java. At the same time, one thing which should also be stressed that the study of Islam is not synonymous to Islam. It might be that Islam has long been grown in certain communities but there has been no scientific studies about its development. This view seems to be different from what is understood by Zuhri in the Introduction to the Study of Islam, he believes that study of Islam could not be separated from the process of Islamization, since Islamization or religious proselytizing of Islam might not be a reality without the preliminary studies, methodological studies, or evaluation studies about Islamic proselytizing which is appropriate to the context of certain society.<sup>4</sup>

A study of particular community usually can be found in regional or area studies, a multi-perspective disciplines which developed after the Second World War. One characteristic of regional studies is the approach used is usually interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary. Therefore, ideally, a regional Islamic studies presents in a multi-perspective, however, it of course requires a lot of times, energy, and mind. Even though, ideally, it does not mean there is no solution implemented. An understanding of the multi-perspective can be interpreted as an investigation of Islam by using a certain perspective, while using the other perspective will produce a different conclusion. As a result, what they study about Islam in a particular region exists by a multi-perspective study.<sup>5</sup> Thus, multi-perspective does not exist to assess an Islamic phenomenon as a material object of Islamic studies, multi-perspective comes from the compilation of

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Kurzman, "Islamic Studies in U.S. Universities", *Review of Middle East Studies*, vol. 46, No. 1, (2012), Pg. 24-30.

<sup>4</sup> H. Zuhri, *Pengantar Studi Islam*, (Yogyakarta: FA Press, 2016), Pg. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Benjamin I. Schwartz, "Presidential Address, Area Studies As A Critical Discipline", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 1, (1980), Pg. 15-16.

Islamic studies which emerged and developed in a particular context and time.

By reading some articles about Islamic studies in a particular territorial context, generally means talking about institutions that are focused his studies on Islam. It means, the study of Islam is institutionalized Islamic studies. Islamic studies in Sumatera must be different to Islamic studies in America and Europe. Islam which is studied in Sumatra, as well as in another areas in Indonesia, is the traditional studies of Islam as a faith committed by his believers. Such investigations can be classified as traditional Islamic studies using an established traditional perspective. This investigation is not a process-oriented discourse, but is more focused on doctrinal. This model of assessment usually carried out by Islamic educational institutions, both for publics as madrassas or schools and especially for boarding school. It does not mean there is no discourse for the studies in boarding school or other traditional institutions. But, discourse is not the prioritized scale or orientation. There is still a discourse presents, but also in the context of doctrinal strengthening.

Still in the context about relation between Islamic studies and regional, generally cantonal indicates a place or space which form the characteristic, limitation or characteristics that differ from one region to another. Therefore, in every investigation about Islamic studies at any particular region, on the title of the article indicates word *in*, as does the article entitled Islamic Studies in Italy<sup>6</sup>, and the Oriental and Islamic Studies in Hungary: A Communication,<sup>7</sup> In this context, Sumatera is not just the place, Sumatera was built as an identity that does not need the word *in* when investigating about Sumatera Islamic studies. Sumatra becomes a unit that could not be separated from the process of Islamic studies growth in the area. If the word Sumatera is not mentioned, so almost all the theses contained in the study of Islam will fall apart by itself. In other words, the space or area context and limitation of Sumatra have no significance because the word Sumatera as a place does not differs from Aceh, Palembang, or Java. The term “in Sumatera” will only

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<sup>6</sup>Allesandro Bausani, “Islamic Studies in Italy in the XIX –XX cc”, *East and West*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (1957), Pg. 147-156.

<sup>7</sup> Laszlo Hars, “Oriental and Islamic Studies in Hungary: Communication”, *Islamic Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 1, (1976), Pg. 53-58.

give obstacles for identifying and presenting them in a more specific and characterized context that distinguish from the other region or space. Examining about Sumatera Islamic studies means stringing, framing, and tracing its roots which grow Islamic studies and characteristics that became the special of Islamic studies Sumatra. In the end, Sumatera Islamic studies should ideally be a part of Islamic studies in the Indonesian archipelago.

### **Establishing Identity of Islamic Studies in Sumatra**

Sumatera is the sixth largest cluster of islands on earth. This means Sumatera is the sixth largest island in the world. As an island with a variety of flora, fauna and humans, in historical context, Sumatera is not clearly identifiable until the classical era. Sumatera's name will give a different understanding and pronunciation among each writers. Some people call it the country of *Ophir*, where there is a legendary mountain called Ophir, while the Arabic rovers in 1173 called it Ramni,<sup>8</sup> on the other hand Marco Paulo called it Java Minor, these mentioning written in a paper published in 1269.<sup>9</sup>

The origin of the word Sumatra began to be heard along with the entry of Hindu-Buddhist kingdom in the 9th century. There is an opinion claimed that the word itself derived from Sanskrit, *samudra*, which means ocean, SamudraPasai kingdom is the empire in the middle far away of island, if viewed from the Middle East or China as the center of world civilization at that time. While other sources mentioned that Sumatra word derived from Sanskrit, *swarnadwipa*, which means the Island of Gold and *swarnabhumi* which means Golden Land. However, the first person used Sumatra term is one of Sriwijaya's kings in the early 10th century by saying *sumaterabhumi*. Thus, at least since the 10th century the term Sumatra are well known although the pronunciation is different, this is because the authors or rovers differ from one another both in language and origin. Odorico da Pordenone in his explanation at the early 14<sup>th</sup> century called it by *sumoltra*, while Ibn Batutah in his journey records in *rihlahila al-masyriq* at 1345 called it by *samathrah*, and the

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<sup>8</sup> Of course, this Arabian rover is not IbnuBatutah, because he was born in 1304 AD and was dead at 1377 AD.

<sup>9</sup> William Marsden, *TheHistory of Sumatera*, (London: Thomas Payne and Son, 1934), Pg. 2-7

Dutch and British, like Jan Huygen van Linschoten and Sir Francis Drake at the 16th century has always been consistent in writing using the word Sumatra. From the above explanations, in the context of classical Islamic thought or before 1250 AD.

In the context of Islamic studies, just few of academics concern about term or concept of Sumatera. They prefer space concepts of Aceh, Palembang, Padang or Minangkabau, because in those places Islamic studies spread well. The same is also reflected in figures that use regional names such as *al-Sinkili*, *al-Palimbangi*, *al-Minangkabau*. Based on what author knows, there is only one figure who uses the term *al-Sumaterani*, he is the Shams al-Din al-Sumaterani, a charismatic Sufi figure from Aceh. There are several reasons why the term *al-Sumaterani* rarely used among Indonesian archipelago scholars. First, they feel more confident using the term *al-Jawi*. Scholars from Indies or Indonesia who settled in Mecca get more comfort using it. It means, for the international context, a brand used by Indonesian archipelago scholars is *al-Jawi*, although they do not come from Java. One of the figures using the word *al-Jawi*, as stated in his manuscript *mawlidsharaf al-anam*, is Ibrahim bin al-KhulusiWudd al-Jawi al-Sumbawi.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, Ibrahim al-Kurani generalized that scholars who study in Mecca called by *al-Jawiyyin*, they came from Java, as researched by AzyumardiAzra.<sup>11</sup> Second, Sumatra is well known by the island, not by society or culture, whereas the scientists who use family name for a certain place, refers to the society and culture of science, not to the space or area that makes them worthy to bear it. Among the family name identical with its culture, such as *al-Makassari*, *al-Marakushi*, *al-Baghdadi*, *al-Hilli*, *al-Naisaburi*, *al-Isfahani*, and much more.

After the collapse of ethno-religionism and ethno-nationalism system, then towards the system of nation-state or the nation today, efforts to highlight the regional in establishing identity seems need to be rethought. In the context of Indonesian-ness now, territorial boundaries based on tribal or ethnic identities that make up certain identity will be positioned as a discussion. Therefore, in the context of Islamic studies now, modern

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<sup>10</sup>Annabel The Gallop, "A Jawi Sourcebook for the Study of Malay Paleography and Orthography" dalam *Indonesia and The Malay World*, vol. 43, No. 125, (2015), Pg. 26.

<sup>11</sup>AzyumardiAzra, *Jaringan UlamaTimur Tengah dan Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII-XVIII : Akar Pembaruan Islam Indonesia*, (Jakarta: KencanaPrenada, 2015), Pg. 141-142.

or post-modern, ethno-nationalism terms as developed in the 15th century AD until the middle of 20th century AD needs to be re-examined. At the same time, Islamic studies and investigations developed no longer strict to the boundaries of ethnicity or a particular locality, moreover if we talk about problems assumptions of religion and modernity lately indicate that the problem of religion now is no longer about textuality issues but on empirical question that goes beyond traditional spaces; capitalism.<sup>12</sup>

By making the problem of capitalism as lighters idea, Sumatera Islamic studies can be a common thread and also the idea of prospective which become an own nuance and characteristic in contemporary Islamic studies. Capitalism became the lighter because the Islamic elite and middle-class Islam now are always on line with wealth owning issues in the context of both individually or collectively. Still in the same context, power and flow motion of Islamic studies have finally broke the traditional boundaries and turned into an imaginary boundaries formed by power relations and the owners of capital. We can simplify that the urgency of Sumatera Islamic studies is back to the nature of Islamic studies in the context of how religion contact and even form the characteristics which deliberately created by elites to exploit Sumatera for increasing the purses of the capital owners.

Besides as a motivating factor and identity forming of Sumatera Islamic studies, capitalism is also a wrecking machine that targeted Sumatera's resources. Environmental damage caused by excessive exploitation of nature should be a part of points that led to the birth of the

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<sup>12</sup>Esposito written that, "the study of these new Islamically oriented and committed leaders and the organizations to which most belong will require careful studies that combine analysis of textual sources and empirical data. The collection of manifestos and publications must be complemented by in-depth interviews and field research. Islamicists have often been too content with written texts while social scientists have emphasized field studies and statistics. Yet all too often studies of Islamic activists and organizations have found both groups of scholars too reliant on newspaper reports, selected texts, and second-hand information or conjecture. As academics we emphasize the importance of empirical research, but sometimes it is astonishing to see how often studies of Islamic leaders and organizations are based solely on religious tracts and newspaper accounts and not informed by first-hand experience and interviews. This approach is particularly problematic in an area where textual sources are limited, where key individuals are often too busy to write or too monitored to be frank in public contexts. John L. Esposito, "Presidential Address 1989: Islamic Studies Challenges and Prospects", *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin*, Vol. 24, No. 1, (1990), Pg. 10.

Sumatra Islamic studies' identity or in other words Islam and environment can be used as Brand for Sumatera Islamic Studies. The tradition of managing and exploiting Sumatran nature has been taken place since the colonial era until now. The process of human transmigration in Sumatra is also encouraged by the labor needs for the exploitation process.

The same as many things related to all life aspects which are correlated with religious on one side and capitalism on the other. Institutions of Islamic studies in the primary level and at the college level has made the elements profane as mainstream social ideology today. Those practices finally positioned religion as cover or reason for various purposes only. Consequences of capitalist ideology spread into all aspects of life implicate the birth of new social problems which lead religion to participate handling these problems. Among the social problems that should be a concern of religion is environmental degradation, poverty, social welfare, religious marginalization, and conflict between social and religious and many more. Those issues should be part of the actual Islamic discourse or contemporary Islamic studies which should be developed and becomes socio-religious movements today.

### **Prospect of Islamic Studies in Sumatra**

By the collective strength and compatibility to the problems in the field or community, Sumatera Islamic studies, in the context and meaning of contemporary Islamic studies, has a very promising prospect for the efforts and contribution to the development of Islam and Islamic contributions to society. One dimensional power of Sumatera Islamic studies, which becomes its own prospects then, is a strong tradition of thought and religious discourse that directly interacted to social problems around. Religious responses written by classical Muslim intellectuals such as Nuruddin al-Raniri as *Syaikh al-Islam Kesultanan* toward Hamzah Fansuri and Shamsuddin al-Sumaterani's thoughts show the evidence, although it is still frequently polemic and apologetic.<sup>13</sup> The above responses are not merely responded with discourse only, but also became a part of the principles, patterns and rules of interaction in religion and society. It means, there is an effort and

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<sup>13</sup>Azyumardi Azra, *Jarinnan Ulama*, Pg. 225-229.



even the movement about how the religious ideas can be capable to respond social problems.<sup>14</sup> Response and religious movements in Sumatera are not only in the context of response toward (1) understand the social reality as well as in texts written by al-Raniri and others, and (2) the objectification of religion on culture as reflected in *adat basandi syara', syara' basandi kitabullah*,<sup>15</sup> but also the response (3) internalization of religion, as occurs in the form of religious secularization. The latter one should be a concern and also becomes the Islamic studies identity in this contemporary era.

Apart from discourse patterns above, the other prospects of Sumatera Islamic studies is the abundance of approaches, especially approaches to the humanities and social sciences in understanding the Sumatran Islamic realities and problems. To comprehend about socio-religious problems which has been worse nowadays, Islamic studies are still struggling with traditionalistic approaches based on the text. Traditionalistic approach remains necessary and should be used as the entrance for investigating and understanding about Islam<sup>16</sup>. However, when Islam as a social reality gets in touch with the problems and social dynamics, the analysis used should be appropriate to the material object inevitably. That framework of thought has been initiated, and even theorized by IbnKhaldun through his *Muqaddimah*, but unfortunately, that brilliant idea has not been widely applied in the analyzes which are carried out by Muslim intellectuals today.

The process and urgency of approach based on the humanities and social sciences been more urgent to be developed because a religion in the *Shari'ah minded* has not been able to solve problems which shackle

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<sup>14</sup> This effort in European context produces the secularization, BassamTibi written that; "Social scientists and historians concerned with social change, including those studying Islam, are generally agreed those secularization is an inevitable consequence of the high degree of differentiation attained by modern industrial society". BassamTibi, "Islam and Secularization: Religion and Functional Differentiation of the Social System", *Archives for Philosophy of Law and Social Philosophy*, Vol. 66, No. 2, (1980), Pg. 211.

<sup>15</sup> As explained by Ramayulis, Traktat Marapalam "Adat Basandi Syara', Syara' Basandi Kitabullah' (Diktum kramat Konsensus Pemuka Adat dengan Pemuka Agama dalam Memadukan Adat dan Islam di Minangkabau Sumatera Barat)", *Theologia*, vol. 5 No. 1, (2011). Different contexts written by Yasrul Huda, "Islamic Law versus Adat: Debate about Inheritance Law and the Rise of Capitalism in Minangkabau", *Studia Islamica*, Vol. 15, No. 2, (2008). Taufik Abdullah, "Adat and Islam: An Examination of Conflict in Minangkabau", *Indonesia*, Vol 2, (1966), Pg. 1-24.

<sup>16</sup> H. Zuhri, *Pengantar Studi Islam*, (Yogyakarta: FA Press, 2016), Pg. 130.

the religion in the midst of dynamics struggle and social change processes which run so quickly. At the same time, these approaches can make Islamic Studies might be parallel to the Humanities and Social Sciences, even the observers of Islamic studies would be more prominent or has more capabilities than the social scientists in Sumatra. This caused by the double perspectives (Traditional and Humanities-Social Approaches) which are integrated in the understanding of religious phenomenon.<sup>17</sup>

Besides of this approaching issue, Sumatera Islamic studies has not been arranged well. Therefore, it could be presented in Hand Book of Islam Sumatera. Besides that, there should also be Encyclopedia of Islam Sumatera, Bibliography of Islam Sumatera, and Dictionary of Islam Sumatera. All the projects above are parts of the future Sumatera Islamic studies prospects and also the duty for Islamic investigators in higher institutions of Islam which wide-spread from Aceh to Lampung.<sup>18</sup> Exactly, there has been no clear mapping about Islam in Sumatera until now. Mapping functioned as a guide book and then becomes a potential, prospects, and even the new future discussions. Mapping is not just talking about today context but also in a historical context. Islamic historical of Sumatera should be comprehensively mapped, because it is still scattered in various articles of international journals. Therefore, Islam Sumatera Mapping can be a data bank about Islam both in terms of social, thought, legal, demographic, distinctiveness, and others. Islam Mapping is a project which has not been discussed in Sumatra and even in other places. By the power of data and documents, people will be able to see the relation between Islamic studies and its history, also the sustainability of Islamic studies in the future. As believed by AzimNanji that;<sup>19</sup>

The Field of Islamic Studies will continue to be more diverse and Encompassing in its scope, than in the past. There are many possibilities

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<sup>17</sup> Amin Abdullah always discusses Islamic studies by using inter-discipline approach or which he often called by integrative- interkonektif approach. As in Amin Abdullah, "Religion, Science and Culture: An Integrated -Interconnected Paradigm of Science", *al-Jami'ah Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol. 52, No. 1 (2014), Pg. 175-205.

<sup>18</sup> As a simple and classic example, bibliography efforts done by John M Echols in his survey in Cornell University, John M. Echols, "Notes and Materials for the Study of Atjeh in the Cornel University Library", *Indonesia*, Vol. 1 (1966), Pg. 124-140.

<sup>19</sup>AzimNanji, "Introduction", dalam Azim Nanji (ed.) Mapping Islamic Studies: Genealogies, Continuity and Change, (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1997), Pg. Xix.

open for adding to its subject matter and methods, Including the role of Islam as a cultural force of great diversity, the increasing public participation in society by women (Whom contributions and role still await detailed study within Islamic Studies), the history of rural, agricultural and mountainous peoples of the Muslim world and new interactions Among scholarship can contribute to knowledge, linking a fifth of humanity that is Muslim experts, to others Among Whom Muslims live and with Whom they share Increasingly the task of building mutual understanding.

Beside the specific characters of religious and social dialoging in Sumatera Islamic Studies process, it is also very prospective because of cultural inheritance from Sumatera's Islamic intellectuals. Their literacy tradition have the own characteristics differ from Javanese's. In Java community, writing will be done by Fibers or *Babad* concept with Java script or Arabic pegon letters, while it will be Arabic in Sumatera, such as *Bustan al-salathin* written by Nuruddin al-Raniri and texts using Malay with Arabic script (pegon), such as *Hikayat Raja-raja Pasai* which is still full of mysteries and *Hikayat Abdullah* written by Abdullah bin Abdul KadirMunsi (d. 1854). This tradition of writing is still understood generally as a text or partial manuscript, where the work seems coming from individual creativity only, but the tradition of literacy always be collective and must grow and evolve along with society. The texts which have been widely studied by western reviewers such as Drewes can be republished not just for historical needs, but the more crucial one for now is ethical discussions which have been worse lately. Thus, Sumatran scholars' books need to be re-printed and discussed together in public, there is a revitalization process of scholars' ideas for the importance of scientific accustoming which grows and develops in society.<sup>20</sup> That process needs to be handled by observers who focus on this field and institutions of Islamic studies. By socializing the works of Sumatran classical scholars, as in Table I, it could be possible in the following years the new books written to criticize, respond to or even do *pen-syarakh-an* to the texts above. With the above work, there is a continuity process of

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<sup>20</sup> This relation reflected in a discussion between scholars and society. In the context of Aceh, for example, this it is too complex but could give the contribution for Sumatera Islamic studies existence. See Alfian; "The Ulama in the Acehese Society: A Preliminary Observation". *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science*, vol. 3, No. 1, (1975), Pg. 27-41.

Sumatera Islamic studies tradition which actually has long been growing, but dimmed lately. Finally, there is a typical continuity process which can be an icon for Islamic higher institutions in Sumatera.

<b>Table I</b>		
Classical Scholars' Works in the 16 <sup>th</sup> until 18 <sup>th</sup> Century		
<b>No</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Author</b>
1	كفاية الغلام	Ismail al-Minangkabauwi
2	نصيحة المسلمين و تذكارات المؤمنين في فضائل الجهاد و كرامة المجاهدين	Abd al-Shamad al-Palimbangi
3	تهفة الراغبين في حقيقة إمام المؤمنين	Abd al-Shamad al-Palimbangi
4	بستان السلاطين	Nur al-Din al-Raniri
5	جواهر العلوم في كشف المعالم	Nur al-Din al-Raniri
6	مواظب البديعة	Abd al-Rauf al-Sinkili
7	مرأة الطلاب	Abd al-Rauf al-Sinkili
8	شطارية	Abd al-Rauf al-Sinkili
9	عمدة المحتاج الى سلوك مسلك المفردين	Abd al-Rauf al-Sinkili
10	كتاب الفرائض	Abd al-Rauf al-Sinkili
11	تحفة النافس	Ali Haji bin Raja Haji Ahmad

The above lists are just small parts of the thousands manuscripts in Indonesian archipelago, especially Sumatera which is still untouched until now. The manuscripts are spread in various libraries in Indonesia, Malaysia, Europe and also America. The works above are generally still in manuscript form, so it could not be read or discussed by people in general. All of these are the prospects and challenges for the existence establishment of Sumatera Islamic studies. In addition, the texts written in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, the same as 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, have not explored fully. Until now there has not been a lot of reviewers who

review the figures such as Abdul Hamid Hakim (d. 1959) an *ushulfiqh* writer, syakh Abdul Majid (d. 1984), who copying the works of Syam al-Din al-Sumatrani and Abd al-Rauf al-Sinkili. Likewise, Yasin al-Padangi with the number of works. Although those texts are not directly in contact with the real condition of Sumatera, but its existence must be included into the Sumatran context to strengthen the brand of Sumatera Islamic studies.

### **Challenges in Sumatera Islamic Studies**

Through the varied researches done by higher education and research centers in Sumatera, it must be recognized that Sumatera Islamic studies has been existed since the rising era of Islamic empire and then be more victorious in the old colonial era by various fields of studies, perspectives and targets. Sumatera Islamic studies has even grown since colonialism era. There are some Western figures who focus on Sumatera Islamic studies, they are Snouck Hurgronje (1857-1936), especially in Aceh classical studies, and Indonesian scholars in Makkah.<sup>21</sup> Besides Hougronje, other Western scientists who studied Sumatran Islam is James Seagel, Drewes, and many more. They studied about Sumatran Islam, particularly Aceh, manuscripts, and living traditions in Sumatran Muslim communities which are often done by a less objective approach.

This assumption still need to be proven for sure, because we could not claim yet whether it is true or not. However, the important thing to be underlined is Islamic studies throughout its history could not be separated from its forming interests and powers. Because they are often be a fundamental denying issue among some people to reject the views of Islam constructed by Western scientists. Scientists who often called by Orientalist or orientalism, to refer to the developed principles of idea, frequently using approaches based on the colonialist orientation, it is the orientation which believes in subordination of the East which were colonized under Western superiority, namely Europe. The response for this paradigm was the existing cause of post-colonialist approach. Although at first, this theory focused on the study of literature and arts,

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<sup>21</sup> G.W.J. Drewes, "SnouckHurgronje and The Study of Islam", *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, Deel 113, 1ste Afl. (1957), Pg. 1-15

but on Islamic studies conducted by Western intellectuals also cannot avoid biases of specific knowledge and power.<sup>22</sup>

Sumatera Islamic studies today is still filled with the ideas awakened by the base colonialist paradigm of thinking. This paradigm is so entrenched and seemed to be a single truth gotten by those who have the formed hegemony knowledge. This fact then becomes an obstacle in Sumatera Islamic studies. Until now the representation of Aceh classical studies is ScnoukHourgronje, studies texts by al-Raniri and friends are G.W.J. Drewes and other orientalist such as John R. Bowen, Islam reviewers from Islamic universities should come forward to criticize and develop further the tradition of Islamic studies that emphasizes religious dimensions. The tradition of this study certainly did not intend to delete the previous paradigms but rather to complement previous assessment paradigm.

The history of Sumatran Islam phenomenon always present in the dynamics and modernity clash on the one hand and traditionality on the other hand,<sup>23</sup> the clash between textualism with traditionalism, the clash between despair and collective power, War Padri in Pagaruyung, collision scholars and *ulubalang* in Aceh, it has not been excavated scientifically, mainly by intellectuals insider who are psychologically linked with the history of the dynamics above. Phenomenon above can actually be a common thread and problem-solving vision for contemporary religious issues in Sumatera today. In this context too, will appear how the dynamics of Sumatran Islam in the era of colonialism on the one hand and post-colonialism on the other side. In the era of colonialism, there is a triangle elite powers that became the axis of discourse motion and the religious burst; master of colonial, master of customs, religious figures or scholars., while in the post-colonial era, the elite powers turned into the power of bureaucrats politics, financiers, and the religious elite. All the things collaborated into the competition and struggle to maintain and even strengthen their influence. In the process of this seizure, religion becomes a victim, as well as the environment and the people. Islamic Studies of post-colonialism should be brought seriously to strengthen and

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<sup>22</sup> The long explanation about this could be found in Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Penguin Book, 1979).

<sup>23</sup> DalearNoer, *The Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia 1900-1942*. (Singapore; Oxford University Press, 1973).

establish synergy among religions, people and nature or environment. This could be done if the reviewer or Islamic intellectuals and Muslims are not tempted by the dominance and material. Conversely, if they are exposed, they will become parts of the political possessor corporation and capitalism which hate religion, people and the environment.

Based on the above challenges, Sumatera Islamic studies does not only need a framework of adequate then also comprehensive methodologies and approaches, but also requires figures for carrying and presenting Islam as the power of freeing and enlightening. In fact, it can be said that the figures are missed surely. In other words, Islamic studies will have a positive synergy with contemporary Sumatran Islamic religious movements who know well who is friend or enemy, and who is subject or object. By that vision, Islamic studies does not stop at the level of discourse but continue to the growth of public awareness about the problems substance faced today.

If the problematical substance of Islam is not explored, Islam will be further from societies, Islam is getting away from the centers of civilization in Sumatra. One of the facts which proved the existence of a marginalization process in Islamic studies is the decreasing role of *surau* concept in Minangkabau and Boarding School in Aceh. *Surau* is not just a place to teach Islam, but also the place to discuss about Islam and produce Islamic ideas in the form of a written text which then served as guidelines to be taught in public.<sup>24</sup> Those two are just few examples of degradation in role and centers of Islamic studies in Sumatera. Such conditions are challenges for Islamic studies observers, why the role of *surau* and *gayoh* becomes faded, is there any replacement in society.

## Conclusion

Sumatran Islam overflows in the material side but so poor in discourse and development. Those two could only be done by using the adequate and comprehensive review process (studies). This study is important because Sumatran Islam has its own complex and relational problems which are related to the other elements outside Islam. Re-

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<sup>24</sup>Pramono, "Tradisi Intelektual Keislaman Minangkabau: Kajian atas Imam Maulana Abdul Manaf Amin al-Khatib dan Karya-karyanya", this paper presented in Filologi Seminar in Ciloto, Jawa Barat, Januari 24<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> 2005.

discuss the history of Islamic studies conducted by the Western Orientalist and successors such as SnouckHourgronje is the first step that must be established to deconstruct the history of Sumatran Islam. The next step is re-read and develop the relationship between Islam with social phenomenon in various forms and dynamics which run all the time and appeared in social conflicts, especially in the colonialism era. The dynamics patterns and conflicts described above still exist after post-colonialism and current post-reformation but with different shapes and symbols. Reading and studying the above phenomenon should use the adequate methods and approaches. Those need to be developed and discussed further then tested, because the abundant materials on Islamic studies without being accompanied by strength in the methods and approach will only give a misinterpretation and superficiality in understanding Islam. Last, Sumatera Islamic studies should be supported by a system of investigation and references as well as adequate research. All three must become a tradition in the centers of modern Islamic studies in Sumatra as in STAIN, IAIN and UIN.

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