

From Traditionality to Modernity: How the *Ma'had Aly* Contributes to Muslim Society in Indonesia

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Abstract

Ma'had Aly is one of the religious-educational institutions based in Islamic boarding schools. This institution is an important actor in the transmission of intellectual and Islamic religious knowledge. In this context, students in Islamic boarding schools study the *kitab kuning* (yellow book) or *kitab turath* (traditional Islamic books) and try to contextualize them with the times. Moreover, the problems of the times are increasingly complex, so *ma'had aly* tries to answer these challenges. This article seeks to examine how *ma'had aly* has become an important actor in the context of the circulation and transmission of Islamic religious knowledge in Indonesia. This research focuses on three *ma'had aly* in Indonesia; namely, *Ma'had Aly Pondok Pesantren Al-Munawwir Krapyak*, *Ma'had Aly Pondok Pesantren Al-Falah Ploso*, and *Ma'had Aly Pondok Pesantren Salafiyah Syafi'iyah Situbondo*. The findings in this study show that *ma'had aly* has contributed greatly to the landscape of the map of intellectual transmission and Islamic religious knowledge in Indonesia. Not only that, *ma'had aly* also has its style in the pattern of teaching and education, especially related to contextualization between text and context in a heterogeneous society with the complexity of the problems faced. In addition, from initially focusing only on traditional knowledge, now *ma'had aly* is transforming towards modernity by combining text and context, where the problems of society are increasingly complex.

Keywords: *ma'had aly, Muslim, modernity, society, traditionality*

Introduction

Ma'had Aly is an Islamic religious education institution initiated by Islamic boarding schools as one of the important breakthroughs in producing Muslim intellectuals and scholars in Indonesia. *Ma'had aly* was first established at Salafiyah Syafi'iyah Sukorejo, Situbondo, Islamic boarding school in 1990 at the initiation of KH. As'ad Syamsul Arifin (Rohman, 2024, February 26). Since then, many *ma'had aly* have sprung up in Indonesia, although until 2014 they still had not received formal status from the government. In 2015, there were thirteen *ma'had aly* in Indonesia that received a Decree of Operational Licence and had formal status as Islamic Religious Universities. For this reason, an association was formed to facilitate cooperative relationships and various views between *ma'had aly* on 3 June 2016 and also formed the Ma'had Aly Association throughout Indonesia, called AMALI.

As an Islamic religious education institution, *ma'had aly* seeks to make important breakthroughs in teaching and transmitting knowledge and sciences in Islam: *fiqh*, *tawhid*, *tasawwuf*, *tafsir* and other sciences. In this context, *ma'had aly* transforms the pattern of education and transmission of Islamic religious knowledge in Indonesia. Through intensive programs in studying and analyzing Islamic knowledge, *ma'had aly* also adheres to patterns of education and teaching by contextualizing text over context.

In several studies related to *ma'had aly* in Indonesia, research on *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) and the concept of freedom of thought in the *pesantren*, Gazali and Malik's (2009) study of *Pesantren Sukorejo Situbondo* is important in seeing the style and paradigm of *ma'had aly* thinking in the *pesantren*. Furthermore, as one of the pioneers of *ma'had aly* in Indonesia, Ma'had Aly Pondok Pesantren Salafiyah Syafi'iyah Sukorejo also has a vision; namely, to become an educational institution for *tafaqquh fi al-adin* (upholding religion) at a high international standard that is superior and competitive in producing *faqih zamanih* (people who are *faqih* in their time) as a generation of Muslim *khaira ummah* (role models) (Ma'had Aly Situbondo, 2024, October 31). In this case, Ma'had Aly Pondok Pesantren Salafiyah Syafi'iyah Sukorejo focuses on the study of *fiqh* and *ushul fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) which combines the *pesantren* and college systems.

Other research on *ma'had aly* focuses on the efforts of Pondok Pesantren Darus Sunnah in responding to the modernization of *pesantren*. The *pesantren* is reluctant to accede to the demands of modernization because it

requires changes to the curriculum or the institution of the *pesantren*. While modernization requires standardization and adjustment of curricula, it is feared that it blurs the identity of traditional *pesantren* with certain dimensions and specific characteristics, such as the reading and teaching of *Kutub al-Sittah* (The Books of Six in Hadith) every morning. This is not found in hadith studies in universities (Wajdi & Aulia, 2019). Meanwhile, the study of the transformation of *pesantren* traditions is also important to see changes in the thinking model of *pesantren* in making intellectual and scientific breakthroughs (Riswadi & Amrullah, 2023).

In this context, *ma'had aly* tries to make various innovations in its learning. Its learning strategies tend to combine textual, contextual and comparative methods. The implication is that this study has an impact on the scientific development of *pesantren* education in general and *pesantren*-based universities in particular and that the *pesantren* tradition of thinking takes place dynamically. Research on *ma'had aly* was also conducted by Badrudin et al. (2021). In their research, they review how infrastructure management and educator competence impact the low quality of graduates in one of the *ma'had aly* in Tasikmalaya. Optimizing the management of infrastructure and lecturer competence is an important key in producing good quality graduates by institutional targets.

In the end, this research seeks to find gaps in previous research, especially related to how changes occur in the methods and ways of thinking of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) with the birth of *ma'had aly*. In this context, *ma'had aly* attempts to break the old foundation of thinking that tends to be traditional. However, *ma'had aly* also tries to make fundamental changes in how text and context can be synchronized with each other. Mastery of the *kitab kuning* texts and synergizing them in the context of problems in society is the target of *ma'had aly* as an Islamic religious education institution that produces qualified Muslim intellectuals and scholars.

Method

The author used literature studies and interviews to obtain the data needed. In this case, the author collected data from various sources of literature, including from the official websites of three *ma'had aly*: Ma'had Aly Pondok Pesantren Almunawwir Krapyak; Ma'had Aly Pondok Pesantren Al-Falah Ploso;

and Ma'had Aly Pondok Pesantren Salafiyah Syafi'iyah Situbondo, which are the focus of this research, as well as journals, books and related references that support the research process. Furthermore, the data that has been obtained is analyzed based on the topic of discussion and the focus of study in this research. The data that has been analyzed, is then narrated in the form of descriptions and reviews related to changes in thinking methods and paradigms that develop in *ma'had aly*; namely, a change from traditional to modern. But this does not necessarily eliminate the traditional side, especially classical texts (*kitab kuning*), but instead uses *kitab kuning* as an important foundation and basis in analyzing and responding to and answering the challenges of the times, regarding political, religious and various other issues that are being faced by society.

Results and Discussion

Pesantren and Islamic Scientific Traditions

Pesantren is the oldest Islamic religious education institution in Indonesia. *Pesantren* have produced many religious figures, Muslim intellectuals and scholars in various fields of Islamic science. This means that *pesantren* have contributed greatly to the map of education and teaching in Indonesia. Based on this, *pesantren* have experienced and responded to various problems at the times that occur. As a place of Islamic education and learning, *pesantren* have produced many Islamic scientific works. Even these sciences have been studied and discussed, and provide wider benefits to the community.

In the course of history, *pesantren* also have had an important role in the process of Indonesian independence. The *santri* and *kiai* have fought for independence from the time of the colonizers until now (Wahyuddin, 2016). In this context, *pesantren* also contribute in a broader scope, to create stability in government and community security. *Pesantren* not only study and analyze Islamic knowledge but also contribute greatly to the wider landscape of the State and society.

Meanwhile, amid changing times that continue to roll, *pesantren* must be able to answer the challenges of the times with the complexity of its problems. *Pesantren* are also expected to be actors in providing alternative answers and solutions to problems that are happening in society and globally. The role of *pesantren* as the main pillar in the development of Islamic civilization

in Indonesia cannot be denied. This is because *pesantren* are educational institutions that play an important role in shaping and preserving Islamic civilization amid various changing times. In this case, several factors made *pesantren* able to become a pillar of the development of Islamic civilization in Indonesia, such as a curriculum based on Islamic values, the role of kiai (teacher) as educators, spiritual leaders and intellectuals, as well as creating strong social ties and solidarity in *pesantren* (Wahyuddin, 2016).

Since the events of 11 September 2001, several Islamic institutions have learned a lot from the incident. There are some *pesantren* in Indonesia that are considered to embrace radicalism and violent militancy (Pohl, 2006). This condition is also associated with the connection between *pesantren* and suspects of some violence that has occurred in Indonesia, such as the bombing in Kuta, Bali. Some media portrayed this negatively. In addition, Al-Mukmin Islamic Boarding School in Ngruki, Solo, became one of the *pesantren* that was considered to be a place to produce jihadists and was associated with the al-Qaeda network. However, many *pesantren* have become references in spreading the values of religious moderation, inclusiveness and peace, among others. This is what is missing from the media coverage. Unfortunately, *pesantren* affiliated with jihadists or terrorists are often used as news material for mainstream media.

Meanwhile, the *pesantren* itself is also an Islamic educational institution that functions in the formation of social ethics. In this case, *pesantren* also maintain Islamic traditions and try to make breakthroughs to overcome various problems in society (Saiin, Armita, & Rizki, 2020). Of course, on this basis, *pesantren* are not a hotbed of terrorists and the spreading of violent teachings. *Pesantren* are the main reference in spreading tolerance, inclusiveness and moderation. In a broader scope, *pesantren* also have religion-based local wisdom. For this reason, *pesantren* try to maintain the values, traditions and culture that have been growing and developing in Indonesia. *Pesantren* have also long contributed to the issue of human security and protecting humans themselves, which is sometimes rarely discussed and examined further (Patriadi, Bakar & Hamat, 2015).

In response to this, *pesantren* have made important contributions to various issues and their dynamics. This means that although some *pesantren* are considered as places to produce terrorists, *pesantren* have also had a major impact on society and the country at large. Thus, claims related to the negative

side of *pesantren* should be countered with positive narratives and attitudes that promote moderate, inclusive and mutually protective values.

Pesantren as the oldest Islamic educational institution in Indonesia has an important contribution in producing knowledge and producing cadres of *ulama* who are qualified in religious knowledge (Yusri, 2019). *Pesantren* also hold various events and activities that attempt to distribute knowledge to the students. In this case, teaching the yellow book or *turots* book is important for students to study religious texts from various sources and scholars and from various branches of science including *fiqh*, Sufism, monotheism and various other sciences.

Pesantren are also centers of civilization, where they study and examine the intellectual treasures of Islam and the characteristics of an Islamic boarding school, namely *kitab kuning*, scientific *sanad* and other traditions (Hasanah, 2015). *Pesantren* are also educational institutions that have been around since before Indonesia's independence (Wati, 2014). This also means Islamic boarding schools have different characteristics from other educational institutions. The tradition of teaching the yellow book and the relationship between teachers and students in Islamic boarding schools is the main support in building scientific traditions.

Not only that, *pesantren* are also an original education system which has shaped the diversity and behavior of Muslim communities in Indonesia over time (Yunus, 2019). As Ma'rifah and Mustaqim explain regarding Islamic boarding schools and the formation of a civilizational habitus, Islamic boarding schools have an education system that transmits knowledge from the *kiai* to the students. This activity also becomes a learning medium that exists over time. Not only that, the character of *pesantren* also preserves and maintains existing traditions. This is a cultural defense and is based on Islamic teachings (Ma'rifah & Mustaqim, 2015). From time to time, *pesantren* have also become symbols of strengthening Islamic scientific traditions (Burhanuddin, 2014). Even though they exist amid modernity, *pesantren* still maintain the traditions they have long implemented and transformed with the situation and context, where technology is increasingly sophisticated and life continues to change rapidly.

Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) as Islamic educational institutions have superior character in terms of scientific tradition and knowledge transmission. *Pesantren* also continue to adapt to the changes and challenges of the times. *Pesantren* must be able to be involved and play an active role in

overcoming the complex problems of the people. And, even more, to produce scholars with broad insight and maintain Islamic scientific traditions amidst the onslaught of globalization (Bustari & Bashori, 2020). From these conditions, it can be seen that *pesantren* have a major role to play and contribution to give to the Islamic scientific tradition. The production and distribution of Islamic knowledge can be done with concrete efforts. Thus, the authenticity of scientific traditions that occur from time to time can be maintained. This is also the strength of the religious authority in Islamic boarding schools in maintaining Islamic scientific traditions from generation to generation and having a scientific network that continues to be connected from teacher to student.

Furthermore, the religious authority possessed by *pesantren* should be an alternative to providing an understanding of Islamic religious knowledge. This situation is also important amidst the many problems and confusion experienced by the Muslim community. So, *pesantren* as places for the production and transmission of Islamic knowledge and scholarship should play a role in providing understanding to minority Muslims amid diverse and different religious communities. Thus, attitudes of tolerance and mutual respect among religious believers are also prioritized in maintaining good relations between human beings. Not only that, but the *kiai* also contribute greatly to developing *pesantren* traditions and strengthening Islamic knowledge (Hasanah, 2021). They, as *ulama* and holders of religious authority in *pesantren*, are also role models for the surrounding community and their students. Islamic boarding school education forms the Islamic tradition in Indonesia. The figure of the *kiai* plays a big role in the development of Islamic scholarship, including the *fiqh* of civilization discourse, which is currently the focus and priority for Muslim communities living among the majority of other religions.

Ma'had Aly as an Actor in the Change of Thinking Paradigm

That *pesantren* have become an Islamic educational institution is not in doubt. *Pesantren* also carry out various strategies and breakthroughs in responding to the challenges and complex problems of the times. In this case, the emergence of *ma'had aly* was part of the efforts of *pesantren* to produce intellectuals, *fuqaha*, and scholars who mastered various Islamic sciences, including *fiqh*, Sufism, tawhid, *nahwu* and various other Islamic scientific studies. This also makes *ma'had aly* an important milestone in the map of Islamic scientific transmission and its contribution to the community. As we

know Islamic boarding schools are often associated with the traditional side, but *ma'had aly*, which is based in Islamic boarding schools, has become an important factor in changing the paradigm of thinking.

The establishment of *ma'had aly* is also inseparable from how *pesantren* make important breakthroughs in the progress and development of Islamic science. For this reason, *ma'had aly* focuses on several main studies that have been provided by the Ministry of Religious Affairs in each *ma'had aly*, such as Al-Qur'an and Al-Qur'an Science, Tafsir and Tafsir Science, *Hadith* and *Hadith* Science, Jurisprudence and *Islamic Jurisprudence*, *Ushul Fiqh*, *Akidah* and Islamic Philosophy, *Tasawuf* and *Tarekat*, *Falak* Science, Islamic History and Civilisation, and Arabic Language and Literature. Meanwhile, Ma'had Aly Pondok Pesantren Salafiyah Syafi'iyah Situbondo focuses more on the study of *fiqh* and *ushul fiqh* and they have studied these from before being appointed and collaborating with the Ministry of Religious Affairs. In addition, various problems in society are often discussed in *fiqh* studies as answers and solutions. In this case, Ma'had Aly's focus on *fiqh* science can also be seen in its curriculum. For example, in Ma'had Aly Pondok Pesantren Salafiyah Syafi'iyah Situbondo, the subjects taught can be categorized into basic material (*al-mawad al-asasiyah*), namely course material related to the basis of learning; subject matter; (*al-mawad al-ushuliyah*), namely subjects that are the main study in takhasus *fiqh* (specialised on Islamic jurisprudence) and *ushul fiqh*; and supporting material (*al-mawad al-musa'idah*), namely course material for other disciplines related to the main material and the main requirements set by the State (Ma'had Aly Situbondo, 2024, February 26).

Meanwhile, Ma'had Aly Pondok Pesantren Almunawwir Krapyak offers a *sharia* major with a four-year study time and students are required to make *talhish* (summary) of the books that have been determined. Furthermore, after the books have been *talhish*, exams (*munaqasyah*) and internal *bahtsul masail* are held on Sundays and Thursdays. In contrast, general *bahtsul masail* (a religious discussion forum) is held every year by involving several participants from various pondoks in Yogyakarta and surrounding areas (Ma'had Aly, 2016, October 31). Ma'had Aly Pondok Pesantren Almunawwir Krapyak has a focus on Al-Qur'an and Al-Qur'an Science, as well as Jurisprudence and Ushul Jurisprudence. In this case, it can be seen from several courses offered, namely *Hifd Al-Quran Karim*, *Qiroah Sab'ah Siroj al-Qori' wa Tidzkar al-Muqri'*, *Tafsir al-Qur'an li al-Baidhowi*, *Ahkamul Qur'an: Ahkam al-Qur'an li al-Imam As-Syafi'i*

and several books that *fiqh* and *ushul fiqh* studies are the focus in Ma'had Aly Pondok Pesantren Almunawwir Krapyak.

Furthermore, Ma'had Aly Pondok Pesantren Al-Falah Ploso focuses more on the study of *fiqh* and *ushul fiqh*, especially the comparative study of *mahzab*, which focuses on the Syafi'i *mahzab*. Ma'had aly has several courses that focus on books that contain *fiqh* studies. As we know Pondok Pesantren Al-Falah Ploso has been focusing on *fiqh* studies. This is what makes this identical *pesantren*, focusing on *fiqh* studies compared to other scientific studies.

From the explanation above, it can be seen that the three *ma'had aly* have an important role in changing the paradigm of thinking, and that *pesantren* also have the capability to respond to contemporary challenges and problems while still referring to the *turots* books as a basis for thinking and scientific reference. This means that mastery of the *kitab kuning* is a key thing for *santri* (student) in *ma'had aly* and their ability to apply the results of reading the *kitab kuning* proves that they have been able to master what they have studied and examined intensively.

So far, the stigma against *pesantren* tends to underestimate them, and they are seen as traditional representations. However, *pesantren* also have a paradigm of thinking that changes in the dynamics of the times. The *kiai* and *santri* work together to jointly answer the challenges of the times with a strong Islamic scientific base. This indicates that *pesantren* are the main pioneers in the context of Islamic scientific studies which are very rich and broad. For this reason, new methodologies and adaptive ways of thinking about the problems of the people are the key to overcoming this.

The religious authority of *kiai* in the *pesantren* also has an important role in managing the *ma'had aly*. In addition, the characteristics of each *ma'had aly* are different. Meanwhile, the leadership of *kiai* in each *pesantren* plays a major role in determining the direction and style of scholarship, as well as the products of the *ma'had aly*. However, *pesantren* have been working for a long time with various challenges. Thus, *pesantren* are also able to exist in the face of various challenges and onslaughts. Each *pesantren* has its own characteristics regarding which fields of Islamic science are pursued and become the focus of their studies, although the majority of *ma'had aly* take *fiqh* and *ushul fiqh* as their priority and focus of study. Based on this, the thoughts and perspectives on an issue are certainly different and diverse. This is influenced by the tendency to think, and the sources of reference adopted, as well as how to interpret and

understand what is referred to from the *kitab kuning* or references that they believe in and embrace.

In a broader context, *pesantren* also become a reference for people to get answers to various religious problems faced. The congregation seeks peace of mind and spaciousness of life through attending recitations and listening to lectures from *kiai*. This means that this connection is important and cannot be denied in the context of teacher-student, and religious authority holders who have a scientific *sanad* (knowledge) that is connected from one teacher to another. It is well known that religious authorities also play an important role in the sphere of religious groups in Indonesia. Religious authority is crucial and non-negotiable. The congregation and the people will believe, listen and act following the guidance and *da'wah* delivered by the *kiai*, preachers, or figures they adhere to, and become their reference for Islamic knowledge.

Furthermore, religious authority in the perspective of Ismail Fajrie Alatas is the connection between the owner of religious authority, the means of connection, and the congregation (*jamaah*) (Alatas, 2021). The interesting thing that continues to be studied and analyzed is how the circulation of diversity authority continues to work and is sustainable. The science, the means used, and the actors involved are also dynamic. As long as Islamic science continues to be studied, examined and discussed in classrooms and recitations, it will also perpetuate the Islamic religious authority system. Based on this, the study of Islamic science, the science of jurisprudence, Sufism, Qur'anic interpretation, and various other branches of Islamic science, becomes a study that will never be completed, following the dynamics of the problems faced by humans in their respective times. Therefore, from every era different scholars and preachers with their respective styles and characteristics also continue to emerge. For this reason, *ma'had aly* is an important locus for producing Islamic knowledge and a place for discussion and for Islamic sciences to continue to be analyzed and studied with the various scientific tools, methodologies and approaches available. In the end, the people benefit from efforts to find answers to various problems from the *kitab kuning* and intensive discussions through *bahtsul masail*, *pengajian*, and other scientific forums. Furthermore, Islamic thought and knowledge are not limited. This means that seekers of knowledge will continue to exist and emerge in every era. This also influences the level of understanding and characteristics of each *kiai*, preacher, religious figure, or scholar who studies a particular field of Islamic science.

Based on this, the characteristics of *ma'had aly* are also determined by the style of thought of the kiai in the Islamic boarding school, where the *ma'had aly* exists and is managed. Progressive and inclusive thinking is a manifestation of the long process of someone seeking knowledge (*santri*) until they later become kiai, and they hold religious authority in each Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) that they manage. This is what makes *ma'had aly* attractive compared to other Islamic religious educational institutions. However, *ma'had aly* also had to make a series of breakthroughs in improving the quality of its graduates through a long, intensive, and in-depth process. Finally, the quality of *ma'had aly* graduates also reflects the Islamic boarding school that gave birth to them in mastering the yellow book, Islamic scientific studies, and the representation of the Islamic boarding school they chose to seek knowledge from. In general, *ma'had aly* is also a long process of struggle and requires difficult efforts to achieve the expected targets. However, the changes that the Islamic boarding school has made are the establishment of *ma'had aly* and the transformation of Islamic knowledge which has become the spirit of the Islamic boarding school itself. *Ma'had aly* has distinctive characteristics, a different and unique character, and has an attraction to studying various Islamic sciences which are very rich and broad.

The role of alumni, kiai, teachers and elements involved in Islamic boarding schools is a crucial factor in the success of *ma'had aly* as a center for Islamic scientific studies whose base is Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). If all elements can synergize with each other, then *ma'had aly* will continue and remain an intellectual reference in the field of Islamic science, which is currently very much needed by people to achieve happiness in life in the world. Finally, the Islamic boarding school continues to experience fundamental changes in producing ideas and alternative knowledge which not only has an impact on the internal boarding school (*pesantren*) but also has an impact on the wider community.

Lastly, the changes that occur are inevitable and always find their way. This means that every time there will be problems and who are the scholars who can answer them? Thus, this is dynamic and based on a certain time, where religious authority has become the key and main reference in obtaining the truth of Islamic knowledge and has a clear scientific background.

Meanwhile, the majority of Islamic boarding schools that are based on *ma'had aly* are affiliated with the Nahdlatul Ulama organization, while several

Islamic boarding schools that are affiliated with Salafis do not have *ma'had aly* and tend to be traditional in thinking. This is inversely proportional to *ma'had aly* or several Islamic boarding schools affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama. They have views and thoughts that are more open and progressive, tolerant and inclusive. This condition has triggered the birth of *mujtahids* in the field of jurisprudence, and qualified scholars who continue producing important ideas, thoughts and works in Islamic scholarship.

In this case, *pesantren* can be said to be actors of social change. This is because *pesantren*, including *ma'had aly*, have an important role in the interaction of people's daily lives. These changes have a new impact in changing paradigms and reflecting social interactions, especially regarding religious patterns and expressions. According to William F Ogburn and Meyer F Nimkoff, the spread of social change includes cultural elements consisting of the material and non-material (Soekanto, 1987). Meanwhile, in the context of this research, the social changes carried out by *santri* (students of Islamic boarding schools) and their habits in studying and analyzing the yellow classical books are important in seeing the culture and interaction between *santri-kiai*, students-teachers, and *santri* relations with *santri*. Broadly speaking, *pesantren* and *ma'had aly* are religious institutions that are able to have a real impact on life, namely by being actors of change in the paradigm of critical thinking on a problem that occurs in everyday life, especially in religious issues faced by Muslim communities.

The Contribution of Ma'had Aly to Muslim Society in Indonesia

Ma'had aly is an important breakthrough in the treasures of Islamic knowledge in *pesantren*. The reason is that *ma'had aly* seeks to produce qualified *pesantren* products. Teaching with a structured and focused system, *ma'had aly* becomes a reference and a place to produce *fugaha*, Muslim intellectuals, and *ulama* who will devote themselves to society. So far, Islamic universities have been used as an alternative in the innovation and transformation of Islamic education through the elaboration of the Islamic education system by modifying teaching and research methods according to the times and science (Abdullah, 2017). For this reason, there has been a major change and transformation in the development of Islamic science with the emergence of *ma'had aly*. This institution is also an important part of the effort to focus the study of *turots* and contextualize it with the challenges of the times.

Meanwhile, religious and Islamic studies became important things to be explored as a challenge and opportunity at the beginning of the twenty-first century. This is also what happens in the Indonesian context, that there is an academic discourse on religion that must be distinguished from internal and interfaith religious discourse. This condition becomes important in examining the context of religion and pluralism in Indonesia, especially from three dimensions, namely civil, theological and academic (Woodward, 2009). For this reason, it is important to explore and examine the issue of how Indonesia as a pluralist country can overcome differences that exist, especially related to religious issues.

In response to the above, *ma'had aly* has become an important factor in the landscape of Indonesian Muslim society. *Ma'had aly* can be an alternative and has qualified Islamic scientific capabilities to answer problems that have been difficult to solve in society. Through structured teaching and focus of study, as well as book studies and intense discussions. *Ma'had aly* seeks to produce Muslim scientists and intellectuals who are responsive and solutive in Islamic religious issues. The students master the books of *turots*, in their respective fields of scientific study. This adjusts each *ma'had aly* which has its focus of study, such as the study of jurisprudence, *ushul* jurisprudence, the Koran, and other Islamic scientific studies.

There are many *ustadz* or *ustadzah*, Islamic preachers and influencers who do not have a qualified Islamic scientific base. This makes the congregation and the Muslim community confused in receiving *tausyiah* and *da'wah*, whose scientific *sanad* is not very clear. The *ma'had aly* students have a different and authentic style of thought and style of *da'wah*. They have been equipped with intense understanding and Islamic religious education from *ustadz* or *ustadzah*, *kiai* and educators involved in teaching at *ma'had aly*. They also master various Islamic scientific studies, including *nahwu*, *shorof*, *tawhid*, *fiqh*, *tafsir* and other branches of Islamic science. For this reason, graduates and alumni of *ma'had aly* do not doubt the ability and capability of Islamic science.

As stated by (Kersten, 2016), in the context of contemporary Indonesian Muslims some individuals or groups claim themselves as new *santri* (neo-*santri*). In this case, it is difficult to distinguish between those who are considered traditionalists. In fact, at the end of the twentieth century, it became increasingly blurred between conservative and modernist views that tended to be progressive. Some new manifestations of Muslim intellectualism have

decisively eliminated this divide. This can be seen in the scholar groups associated with UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta and UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, known as ‘Mazhab Ciputat’ and ‘Mahzab Sopen’. The names are taken according to the location of the campuses (Kersten, 2016). The two campuses have also produced several scholars who are qualified in various fields of Islamic science, such as Azyumardi Azra, M Amin Abdullah, Yudian Wahyudi, Noorhaidi Hasan, Moch Nur Ichwan and several others.

If the campuses of Islamic universities have a certain mazhab, then *ma’had aly* in several Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia should also have their mazhab. In this case, the research in this article focuses on three *ma’had aly* that have their characteristics: Ma’had Aly Pondok Pesantren Salafiyah Syafi’iyah Situbondo; Ma’had Aly Pondok Pesantren Almunawwir Krapyak; and Ma’had Aly Pondok Pesantren Al-Falah Ploso. For this reason, some of these *ma’had aly* become references in the study of Islamic science, especially in *fiqh* and Al-Qur’an. These three *ma’had aly* also study and examine these branches of knowledge which are included in the curriculum, as well as the courses offered. Furthermore, many Indonesian Muslim scholars studied in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) and became alumni, as well as continuing their studies at Islamic universities and foreign universities to study Islamic studies and Islamic scientific studies, such as Nurcholis Madjid (Cak Nur), Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), Ulil Abshar Abdalla, Zuhairi Misrawi and several others.

Based on the above context, it can be seen how *pesantren* have played a major role in producing Muslim intellectual figures. Not only that, the existence of *ma’had aly* is also an alternative and an important breakthrough in that *ma’had aly* focuses on Islamic scientific studies and studying the books of *turots* (*kitab kuning*). This is a difference from Islamic universities such as STAIN, IAIN or UIN which do not focus intensively on mastering the *kitab kuning* as their study material. Meanwhile, *ma’had aly* also makes a real contribution in responding to and addressing various Islamic religious issues in Indonesia with the existence of *bahtsul masail* or efforts to answer religious issues that occur today. This also becomes interesting, when *ma’had aly* colors and participates in the landscape of Islamic discourse and scientific maps in Indonesia. Even more broadly in the Muslim community in Indonesia, alumni and graduates of *ma’had aly* can demonstrate the mastery of Islamic science in answering complex contemporary Islamic religious issues.

In addition, *ma'had aly* also has a base in both cities and villages, meaning that santri who graduate from *ma'had aly* return to their respective regions. They can become a reference and a place to discuss and answer religious problems in their area while studying various *kitab kuning* with several branches of Islamic science. Of course, this is a strong foundation for providing alternatives and real contributions to people who experience confusion in solving their problems. From this context, *ma'had aly* has produced fuqaha, Muslim intellectuals and religious leaders in their respective regions, with a variety of different problem characters.

In this respect, *ma'had aly* has become an important base for making various breakthroughs and contributions in the context of Muslim society in Indonesia. *Ma'had aly* is not only able to teach science and knowledge but also produce knowledge so that the results can be felt by Muslim society in a broader context. In addition, Indonesian Muslim society is complex and has various religious expressions. The products of *pesantren* and *ma'had aly* also color and have a real influence on the lives of Indonesian Muslims. *Ma'had aly* alumni and students are clear evidence that Islamic knowledge is studied and implemented in everyday life, especially related to Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), religious problems in society, and problems faced by society at large. The research in this article focuses on three *ma'had aly* that have their individual characteristics: Ma'had Aly Pondok Pesantren Salafiyah Syafi'iyah Situbondo; Ma'had Aly Pondok Pesantren Almunawwir Krapyak; and Ma'had Aly Pondok Pesantren Al-Falah Ploso. They have played their role in the transmission process of Islamic knowledge and the process of emerging educated Muslim middle-class groups, because they produce intellectuals who contribute to the Islamic progress in society and the country. In this context, *pesantren* and *ma'had aly* represent a traditional community, but they also play the role of modernity, because of their role in Islam society, especially Muslim society in Indonesia. *Pesantren* not only transmit Islamic knowledge, but also produce knowledge and implement it to the society.

Conclusion

Pesantren, as an Islamic educational institution, has contributed to various sectors of life, including the development and transformation of Islamic knowledge. *Pesantren* have also given birth to *ma'had aly* as a place for Muslim intellectuals who have qualified Islamic scientific capabilities. *Ma'had aly*

focuses on the study of *turots* books (*kitab kuning*) and intensely examines and studies them. In this context, *ma'had aly* is also an option and alternative as a solution amid increasingly complex problems and challenges of the times. *Ma'had aly* is also a 'beacon' of intensive Islamic studies by studying, examining and discussing the *turots* books (*kitab kuning*), which are important references in Islamic science. Besides that, *ma'had aly* also produce and are active in the transmission process of Islamic knowledge. *Ma'had aly* has made contributions to society, especially for producing knowledge and implementing it in society.

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Interviews

- Interview with Fatihul Lima Ughliq, the alumnus of Ma'had Aly of Pondok Pesantren Al-Falah, Ploso, 29 February 2024.
- Interview with Agil Muhammad, the ustadz (lecturer) of Ma'had Aly Pondok Pesantren Almunawwir Krapyak, 29 February 2024.
- Interview with Ibnu Hajar, the alumnus of Ma'had Aly Pondok Pesantren Salafiyah Syafi'iyah Situbondo, 29 February 2024.