Chapter 4

Splitting the *Kiblat*: Consequences of Alternate Strategies for Educating Faculty Members

Inayah Rohmaniyah, a faculty member at Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Yogya who teaches a course on Orientalism reported that students begin the course thinking that Westerners who study Islam have a limited number of motivations. Either they want to convert or they want to destroy Islam. At first the students are very resistant and emotional. So much so that when confronted with fact that Edward Said was a Christian, they hoist him on his own petard. They understand Said’s thesis to be that Westerners study Islam to colonize Muslims and therefore Said, as a Westerner (his being born a US citizen and his US education taking precedent over his Palestinian birth and his boyhood in Cairo) must write about Islam in order to colonize Muslims. The course then focuses on the wide variety of methods, goals, and even individual scholars. Typically after two or three months, the students have come to see the complexity in Western Islamic Studies. Rohmaniyah finishes her course with a reflection paper that traces the students’ intellectual journey in the class.

On Perguruan Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri (PTAIN) campuses, the long relationship with Western scholars has created a backlash. There is a deep concern about “Orientalism”—seemingly defined as a sense that the West is out to destroy Islam—and that Western scholarship about Islam was and/or is part of it. This distrust can be seen in the concerns about PTAIN faculty members studying in the West. There are two main traditions on PTAIN campuses: one
comes out of Middle Eastern universities and the other comes out of Western universities (Azra 2011: 47). Starting in the 1980s, the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA) promoted graduate work in Religious Studies and Islamic Studies in the “West” rather than the Middle East. The idea was to send equal numbers to the Middle East and the West. The factors determining who went where included language ability. Those who were more proficient in English went to the West and those who were more proficient in Arabic went to the Middle East. Some argue that this is correlated with educational background; those with pesantren backgrounds (and hence better Arabic) were more likely to head to the Middle East (Fadhil Lubis, interview, December 15, 2008). Of course, Pondok Moderen Gontor, with its focus on teaching both English and Arabic yielded students who went against this trend, including Nurcholish Madjid. Further, one friend and colleague of mine started his education memorizing the Quran at an uncle’s pesantren and finished with a PhD in History from UCLA. The general trend has a number of implications. First of all, if there is an association with liberalism or at least a conciliatory attitude toward the West and studying in the West, it may precede going there. There had to be some desire to study English and perhaps even a greater desire to learn English, than to gain proficiency in Arabic. Secondly, once someone has started down a track of studying in the West or in the Middle East, enough investment has been made in language and disciplinary perspective, that it is impractical to switch. This may contribute to the polarization of these two broad categories of alumni. However, it is common for high-ranking PTAIN administrators who did not study in the West to have had short study tours hosted by the United States. This indicates a clear effort on the part of Western governments to reach out to the current leadership and to bridge this perceived gap.

Further, surveys have shown that the close intellectual connection between PTAIN faculty members and other Indonesian Muslim intellectuals and the West is in part due to the fact that they felt marginalized by the Middle Eastern Islamic hegemony—a sense that Indonesian Islam is less real than Middle Eastern versions (Kraince 2000: 184). If there is a general trend that graduates from Western institutions are more liberal, and this is by no means certain, this might have to do more with self-selection rather than anything that occurs during their education. Those who are