Chapter 6

Where Is the Islam, and What Kind?

In 2008, it seemed that the Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) conversion process was over. There had been a ministerial decree from the then minister of religious affairs, Maftuh Basyuni, that there were to be no more UIN, but it allowed for the possibility of a wider mandate for Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN), a concept adopted by the Ministries of both Religious Affairs and Education as a way to bridge between being religion-only institutes and full universities (Azra 2011: 44). But as often seems the case in Indonesia, with a new change in minister, came a change in policy and some IAIN are now in the process of applying to become UIN. The debates (whether on or off campus) are far from over. Like many debates about education, these debates about Perguruan Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri (PTAIN) concern differences over the purpose of the institution and not only its future but also the future of society, in general.

For some, employability of graduates must be an essential part of the vision for PTAIN. Komaruddin Hidayat (rector at UIN Jakarta) said his vision for UIN Jakarta is for it to become a center of scholarship and civil society. For many at IAINs, the concern is not only about development but also making sure that the Muslim community, especially those from pesantren, share in future economic growth and not become further marginalized. He was also concerned about how to make it so that graduates care about society and have a strong character as well as strong academic records in keeping with the UIN Jakarta motto of “knowledge, piety, and integrity.” Hidayat acknowledges that not all faculty are of the highest caliber and there are not enough PhDs in each field,
but maintains that as a whole, UIN Jakarta is an excellent university. He argues that to improve the scholarship on campus and to become a world-class research university, they need professors who are the best in their field. He wants UIN Jakarta to create cadres of graduates who can build the future for Indonesian by imbuing them with optimism and enthusiasm (interview, February 2009).

Another important part of PTAIN developing into their full measure is for each campus to gain greater autonomy and to reduce the control Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA) has over curricular design. However, Machasin when he was the director for Islamic higher education, was deeply concerned that not all campuses would be able to administer themselves effectively. There are also efforts for each campus to have greater fiscal control of their own budgets (interview, January 14, 2009).

Visions for the future of PTAIN are not limited to those on campus. Traditional leaders like kyai do not want PTAIN to be ideological neutral. The greatest concern of kyai and even society at large is that students are pious; many in society at large are less concerned about academic accomplishment. Many faculty members and administrators have identified an opportunity—to structure an environment so that the desired piety is delivered without committing to what many consider to be an outdated educational agenda. Yatsir Nasution, the rector of IAIN North Sumatra when I taught on his campus, argued that the traditional focus of PTAIN was on creating graduates who excelled in the Islamic sciences. In the past, what was called the Islamic sciences or Islamic Studies was limited to classical topics like fiqh, syari’ah, tafsir, and Sufism. Recently, they have sought to expand the meaning of Islamic Studies, so all the sciences that can be influenced by the Islamic-based philosophy of science are included. He wished to avoid controversies regarding a dichotomy between Islamic and non-Islamic studies by creating a wide range of academic fields influenced by Islam (interview, November 8, 2008).

Wider Mandate

Regardless of how the debate about IAINs becoming universities concludes, there is pressure to create a wider mandate; that all PTAIN would teach more than religion. Therefore some IAINs are adding programs like psychology, nursing, management, and