

# Islamic literature in modern Indonesia: political disputes among Muslim writers, 1930s-1960s

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## **Abstract**

This article examines the evolution of Islamic elements in twentieth-century Indonesian literature. The study employs historical analysis and methods to assess the continuity and change in the expression of Islamic themes in literary works. By examining the verses in literary works and the criticism that surrounds them, the article shows that Islamic literature has transformed significantly over the last decade. The article argues that literary criticism among Muslim writers goes beyond literary critique to encompass an assessment of political ideology. Literary works are viewed as a means to address issues such as communist ideology, as well as a medium of *da'wah* by Muslim writers or poets. As such, the study finds that both Islamic melodramatic and Islamic romance literature has ideological impulses. Overall, the article highlights the importance of examining the intersection of literature and politics, particularly in the context of Islamic literature in Indonesia. By tracing the evolution of Islamic elements in literary works, the study provides valuable insights into the cultural and political history of Indonesia.

Artikel ini mengkaji evolusi unsur-unsur Islam dalam sastra Indonesia abad ke-20. Kajian ini menggunakan analisis sejarah dan metode untuk mengkaji kesinambungan dan perubahan ekspresi tema-tema Islami dalam karya sastra. Dengan mencermati ayat-ayat dalam karya sastra dan kritik yang melingkupinya, artikel tersebut menunjukkan bahwa sastra Islam telah mengalami transformasi signifikan dari dekade ke dekade. Artikel tersebut berpendapat bahwa kritik sastra di kalangan penulis Muslim melampaui kritik sastra untuk mencakup penilaian ideologi politik. Karya sastra dipandang sebagai sarana untuk mengatasi isu-isu seperti ideologi komunis, serta media dakwah oleh penulis atau penyair Muslim. Dengan demikian, studi ini menemukan bahwa sastra melodramatis Islam dan romantisme Islami memiliki dorongan ideologis. Secara keseluruhan, artikel ini menyoroti pentingnya mengkaji persinggungan antara sastra dan politik, khususnya dalam konteks sastra Islam di Indonesia. Dengan menelusuri evolusi unsur-unsur Islam dalam karya sastra, kajian ini memberikan wawasan berharga tentang sejarah budaya dan politik Indonesia.

**Keywords:** *Political disputes; Islamic literature; da'wa; communist; Ideology*

## **Introduction**

This article discusses how Islamic political figures convey their ideology and vision using literary works, highlighting the intimate relationship between Islam, literature, and politics. Islam has become a significant element in the development of literature in Indonesia and serves as a means of criticizing political enemies of Muslim political elites. In Pakistan, Urdu political poetry was used during the Khilafat movement as a familiar and acceptable way of conveying political messages.<sup>1</sup> Poets can also be seen as political activists whose poetic expressions leave a lasting impact on readers.<sup>2</sup> Jackson's studies reveal that the revival of Islam in the Pan-Islamism period also took advantage of literary works, especially poems, in

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<sup>1</sup>Gail Minault, "Urdu Political Poetry during the Khilafat Movement," *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (1974), 459–71.

<sup>2</sup>Nukhbah Taj Langah, *Poetry as Resistance: Islam and Ethnicity in Postcolonial Pakistan*, 1st edition, New Delhi: Routledge India, 2011.

campaigning for Islamic political agendas.<sup>3</sup> By altering political language in the form of poetry, one may frame their propaganda more preferable to the wider audience, that mostly consist of laymen, so the target audience will not be noticed as a part of ideological construction.<sup>4</sup> However, this does not mean that other works of art, such as music, cannot be an instrument that mediates Islamic propaganda messages in the public space. Quite the opposite, music is as effective as poetry.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, it seems that the close relationship between Islam and literary works can be traced from the development of early Islamic historiography in the Middle East,<sup>6</sup> and similar patterns are also easily found in Southeast Asia.<sup>7</sup>

As far as the development of Indonesian's literary works is concerned, the earliest poetry was written in Malay language by the young Sumatranese individuals.<sup>8</sup> They published their poetry in *Jong Sumatra*.<sup>9</sup> Teeuw argues that for many centuries Malay had been the medium of contact for the entire archipelago. The oldest inscriptions preserved in an Indonesian language were written in a language which had rightly been called Malay. He further suggests that these inscriptions date back to the pre-Islamic era on the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. and have been found in the neighbourhood of Palembang in the hills of the Minangkabau (central

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<sup>3</sup>Roy Jackson, *Mawlana Mawdudi and Political Islam: Authority and the Islamic State*, London: Routledge, 2010.

<sup>4</sup>Benedict Richard O'Gorman Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London, New York: Verso, 1991.

<sup>5</sup>Anne K. Rasmussen, "Performing Religious Politics: Islamic Musical Arts in Indonesia," in *Music and Conflict*, ed. John Morgan O'Connell and Salwa El-Shawan Castelo-Branco, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010, 155–74.

<sup>6</sup>Barbara Flemming, "The Poem in the Chronicle: The Use of Poetry in Early Ottoman Historiography," in *Essays on Turkish Literature and History*, Leiden: Brill, 2017, 344–51.

<sup>7</sup>R. Michael Feener and Terenjit Sevea, *Islamic Connections: Muslim Societies in South and Southeast Asia*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009.

<sup>8</sup>Keith Foulcher, "Perceptions of Modernity and the Sense of the Past: Indonesian Poetry in the 1920s," *Indonesia*, no. 23 (1977), 39–58.

<sup>9</sup>Andries Teeuw, *Modern Indonesian Literature*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967, 4.

Sumatra), and Bangka, the island east of Sumatra and South of Malaya.”<sup>10</sup> Srivijaya empire developed Malay as medium for teaching of Sanskrit language and Buddhist philosophy,<sup>11</sup> and then spread throughout the archipelago through commercial and religious activities.<sup>12</sup>

During the Islamic era, we can find many Islamic intellectual works on sufism, Islamic jurisprudence, monotheism, Quranic exegesis and others written in Malay with Arabic script (Melayu Pegon or Arab Pegon). These works also included Romances, Chronicles, and various types of Malay poetries such as: Pantun, Syair, and Gurindam.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, literary and even political works were also expressed in this language using either Arabic or Latin script. It is not an exaggeration to say that Malay functioned as a language of science, culture, politics, trade, and religion in pre-20<sup>th</sup> century Indonesia

As far as Indonesian nationalist awakening is concerned, one may argue that the press and a number of organizations obtained a strategic position in which authors and activists employed Malay as the medium of communication for the nationalist movement, and propagated the notion of one common national language for all Indonesian. Adams notes that in 1918 there were 40 newspapers used Malay, and this number had grown to nearly 200 by the end of 1925.<sup>14</sup> It should be noted that Malay was the language which the nationalist movement in all its manifestations utilized. On June 25, 1918, Malay was also obtained an official recognition from the Dutch government as soon as the Indonesian organizations in the people’s council addressed a request to use

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<sup>10</sup> Andries Teeuw, *Modern Indonesian Literature...*, 4.

<sup>11</sup>George Coedès, *Sriwijaya: History, Religion & Language of an Early Malay Polity*, Kuala Lumpur: MBRAS, 1992.

<sup>12</sup>Richard Olof Winstedt, *A History of Classical Malay Literature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969.

<sup>13</sup>Anthony H. Johns, *Cultural Options and the Role of Tradition: A Collection of Essays on Modern Indonesian and Malaysian Literature*, Canberra: Faculty of Asian Studies in Association with the Australian National University Press, 1979, 31.

<sup>14</sup>Ahmat B. Adam, *The Vernacular Press and the Emergence of Modern Indonesian Consciousness*, Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1995.

Malay as the medium for deliberation in conjunctions with Dutch.<sup>15</sup> This means that Malay had also been accepted as an important language used in the political council's activities and thus sharpened the spirit of Indonesian nationalism. Language is the expression of nationality, as Yamin<sup>16</sup> pointed out in his poem<sup>17</sup> titled *Bahasa, Bangsa* (Language and Nation):

*As a young child, I slept in my mother's arms. She promised lullabies and songs to charm, rocking me gently day and night. In a cradle hanging by her side, out of sight. Born in a nation with its own language and tongue. Surrounded by family, I grew up young noble and wise, I walked on this land with joys and sorrows, by my side hand in hand. My feelings unified into one In a language so beautiful, like a rising sun.*

He warned Indonesian youth by saying “Tiada bahasa, bangsapun hilang” (eng. “without language, the nation is lost”) and also persuade them to strengthen their patriotism by protecting the nation. He showed through his works how closely political, cultural, and language ideals were connected. He said “My soul for my nation, since the beginning until the end, or until I move to another land, leaving this transient world behind, let all my trivial desires vanish, as a sacrifice to the Almighty, and for the welfare of humanity. Let us work together and be free.”<sup>18</sup>

It is not an exaggeration to suggest that literary works were also used as medium of political expression. Semaoen, an eminent leading communist figure, wrote a novel entitled *Hikajat Kadiroen*.<sup>19</sup> This novel tells a story about

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<sup>15</sup>Andries Teeuw, *Modern Indonesian Literature...*, 8.

<sup>16</sup>Yamin was a productive writer in pre-war Indonesia period even a pioneer of modern Indonesian literature. Yamin was also a leading figure whose ideal of Bahasa Persatuan Indonesia obviously came true in October 28, 1928. He was elected as the top leader of Jong Sumatran Bond. Later as a member of BPUPKI he participated in formulating Pancasila and Indonesian constitution. See for instance, Z. Usman, *Kesusasteraan Baru Indonesia*, Djakarta: Gunung Agung, 1959, 149-160.

<sup>17</sup>Ajip Rosidi, *Ichtsar Sedjarah Sastra Indonesia*, Bandung: Penerbit Binatjipta, 1969, 30.

<sup>18</sup>Muhammad Yamin, *Tanah Air*, 1922 <https://www.sepenuhnya.com/2020/09/puisi-tanah-air.html>.

<sup>19</sup>Some discussions on Semaun's political activities written, for example, by Ruth T.

Kadiroen, who earned rapid promotion in the Indonesian branch of the colonial civil service. However, he soon became frustrated because, despite all his efforts and ideals, the poverty and misery of the people increased. He then came into contact with PKI (Communist Party of Indonesia) leaders and was attracted by their theories, idealism, and efficiency. For some time, he was a moral as well as a financial supporter of the PKI in secret, but then was forced by his superiors to choose between his career or the party. He resigned from his job, convinced that he could effectively fight for his ideals only through political activity. It could be argued that Semaoen tried to present his deep concerns on Indonesian people's suffering from the inequality, unjust treatment, and suppression from the colonial Dutch government in both economic and political life. He saw that these problems could only be effectively overcome through political struggle by exploiting a clear and systematic ideology namely communism. Semaoen was very confident that communism and PKI were the most appropriate way for Indonesia. His political involvement in the SI and then PKI obviously proves Semaoen's concrete formulation of Indonesian struggle for dignity. His literary works, such as *Hikajat Kadiroen*, undoubtedly served as medium for his political and ideological propaganda.

Teeuw briefly argues that Semaoen's novel is a poor literary work. In some places of this *Hikajat* it is merely a communist treatise and in other places a kind of report. However, Teeuw says<sup>20</sup>:

This book is an interesting document, showing the early propaganda approach of the PKI in Indonesia, and the persuasive arguments with which it tried to convince both the government and the people that communism was not revolutionary at all. No less curious is the mixture of political idealism, romanticism and religious sentiment which can

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McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2006, 125-1554; Takashi Shiraishi, *An Age in Motion: Popular Radicalism in Java, 1912-1926*, Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 1990, 98-103; Semaun, "An Early Account of the Independence Movement," trans. Ruth T. McVey, *Indonesia*, Vol. I (1966), 46-75.

<sup>20</sup>Andries Teeuw, *Modern Indonesian Literature...*, 16.

be seen in the leading communist characters in the book.

Rustam Effendi, a political ally of Semaoen, published his poetry collection entitled *Pertjikan Permenungan* (sprinkled meditation), written in 1925. This collection could also be considered as political poetry, portraying the strength of the people and nation in overcoming the oppression of Dutch colonialism. Effendi did not propose any clear ideology to be implemented, unlike Semaoen. However, his criticism and hostility towards the tyrannical government were incendiary and undoubtedly posed a threat to the colonial government. As a result, his book was banned. This collection of poetry was also adopted into a drama in *Bebasari*. Effendi briefly explained on his book:

*Pertjikan Permenungan* (The Splash of Reflection) and *Bebasari* (My Play) were written when Dutch colonial oppression had grown much worse, in reaction against the flaring up of Indonesian spirit of independence. Dutch tyranny was especially savage outside the Javanese 'centre' of things. Fear of the voice freedom forced the despots to hit out hard, muzzling the press in the interest of truth. New crimes were created, the jails were full, many were exiled.<sup>21</sup>

It is also worthwhile to quote some part of Effendi's poetry:

*Every tree in the grove, from the shoots to the roots, every rock in the river, every wave foam on the beach, every lovely sunshine, every noise in the middle of the canyon, that is the people who defend me, because that is my homeland. Strived by the forefather and foremother, blood and flesh with my soul. Dearest brother, from save to save, still my heart awaits you, you will bring freedom, because of love to the motherland, painstakingly coming to here, sir. Crossing the blood through thorns. O, my dearest brother, my lord. No victory can be requested, every job asked for a sacrifice.*<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Burton Raffel, *The Development of Modern Indonesian Poetry*, California: SUNY Press, 1967, 204.

<sup>22</sup>H. B Jassin, *Kesusasteraan Indonesia Modern dalam Kritik dan Essay*, Djakarta: Gunung agung, 1955, 64.

Yamin, Semaoen, Rustam Effendi, and other young activists, such as Hatta, Mas Marco Kartodikromo, Sanusi Pane, Marah Rusli, are regarded as individuals whose contributions were crucial for the development of modern Indonesian literature and the realization of the idea of Bahasa Indonesia as Bahasa Persatuan (language of Indonesian unity). Interestingly, most of them were Sumatranese, and their political ideologies were nationalist, socialist, and communist. Regardless of their cultural and political differences and strongly supported by the people they awakened and strengthened Indonesian nationalism. National unity was prioritized over differences in culture, ideology, and politics.

Having been inspired by the idea of language of unity, Jong Java acknowledged Malay as the medium of communication in its meetings.<sup>23</sup> When it celebrated its twelve and a half years of existence in 1927, Jong Java also spoke of the Indonesian language. Historical account notes that by 1928 the ideal of unity had fully matured. At the Indonesian youth congress in Jakarta a resolution was unanimously accepted, proclaiming the three formulations of Indonesian unity, ie. country, nation, and language. At the same time, *Indonesia Tumpah Darahku*<sup>24</sup> was written by Yamin in the occasion of the youth congress. Yamin said:

*When we unite, we are strong, Like a bundle of bamboo sticks, unbreakable for long. Therefore, my fellow countrymen, Let us not be divided, but stand as one. Let us join hands and be steadfast, In loyalty and unity, our strength will last.*<sup>25</sup>

October 28<sup>th</sup>, 1928 was the culmination of the young people's desire to establish Indonesian unity. Specifically, this event was also recognized as the formal acceptance of Indonesian language, *Bahasa Persatuan* after various

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<sup>23</sup>Hilmar Farid, "The Malay Question in Indonesia," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, Vol. 18, no. 3 (2017), 317-24.

<sup>24</sup>This Yamin's second collection of poetry was printed in 1929.

<sup>25</sup>Fachruddin Ambo Enre, *Perkembangan Puisi Indonesia Dalam Masa Dua puluhan*, Djakarta: Gunung Agung, 1963, 34.



literary works were published. Malay was finally transformed into Bahasa Indonesia as the medium for expressing political ideals widely utilized among activists.<sup>26</sup> However, historical accounts do not clearly prove any contributions of the Muslim activist and writers from Islamic ideological movements or organizations' background like Muhammadiyah and Sarekat Islam (SI, Islamic Union) for instance. Unlike nationalist and communist wing, they did not pay much attention to publishing their political ideas through literary works. They wrote and publish social and Islamic issues as part of Dakwah, enriching and enlightening the Muslim peoples and propagating Islamic tenets in daily life. At some level, Muslim activists and writers from Muhammadiyah also propagated the idea of Tadjid, which is dedicated to purifying the faith, renewing the way to understand the Quran and Hadits, and modernizing the wordly life. They were focused on Dakwah (Da'wa, teachings of Islam) for the sake of implementing pure Islamic tenets, modernizing education, and promoting humanitarian programs. This probably led Aveling to point out that in most modern Indonesian poetry, Islam was not prominent. He argues that "strict belief in Islam and the secular beliefs of modernity are almost incompatible."<sup>27</sup>

Muslim activists and writers from Islamic ideological background did not participate in publishing their literary works until the end of 1920s. It is Buya Hamka who initially wrote about *sastra Islam* (Islamic literature) or *sastra berunsur Islam* (literature incorporating elements of Islam) starting from that particular period. As a preacher, Hamka exploited his literary works to highlight and underline the importance of implementing Islamic norms and strengthening Islamic ideology. The present and development

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<sup>26</sup>Scott Paauw, "One Land, One Nation, One Language: An Analysis of Indonesia's National Language Policy," in University of Rochester Working Papers in the Language Sciences, ed. H. Lehnert-LeHouillier and A.B. Fine, Vol. 5 (2009), 2-16.

<sup>27</sup>Harry Aveling, *A Thematic History of Indonesian Poetry, 1920 to 1974*, DeKalb: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Northern Illinois University, 1974, 7.

of Islamic literature then accordingly paved the way for debates and controversies among the people from different religious and ideological backgrounds.

In this article, the author uses a number of literary works written by some Indonesian figures to gain a deep understanding of their thoughts and political expressions and tendencies. Therefore, the author utilizes Expressive Theory of literature as introduced by MH. Abrams in his work *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and Critical Tradition*. Expressive theory is a literary approach that attempts to connect literary works with the author's expression of emotions and thoughts. Through this theory, the ideological and political expression of the authors of two respective ideological groups in the Old and New Order Era, namely Islam and communism, will be portrayed. However, the study will particularly much focus on the literary works of Muslim groups such as Hamka, AA Navis, and Kipandjikusmin. This article differs from other articles or research on literature. It specifically focuses on the ideological and political aspects of literary works. I tend to underline that literary works are cultural and ideological expression of the authors and can provoke debates and conflicts among poets.

### **Islamic literary works: from Hamka to Kipandjikusmin**

Islam, as believed by the ummah, has historically been expressed as an important part or element of Indonesian culture and identity. Islam has also significantly influenced the complexity of the Indonesian culture and even politics. It is understandable to mention that the borderline between Islam, culture and politics is very thin. In line with the cultural and political influences in the society, Emerson<sup>28</sup> briefly explains his

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<sup>28</sup>Donald K. Emerson, *Indonesia's Elite: Political Culture and Cultural Politics*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976, 24.

theory on Cultural Politics, which refers to “what happens when cultural differences are politicized and political differences are cast in cultural term.” Therefore, many Indonesian or local culture, tradition and literature works, in particular, have been deeply influenced by Islam. One may argue that Islam as an identity or element of a particular culture could not be denied. A specific discussion on Islamic literature or literature incorporating element of Islam is obviously fundamental.

It is widely acknowledged that the majority of Indonesian writers and readers culturally profess to be Muslim and are conscious of their religious roots. Religious fiction, prose, poetry, and drama that serve the purpose of *Da'wah* do exist, which is why some authors have received the label ‘religious writers.’ Their literary works are deeply influenced by Islamic doctrines and morality. Examples of such literature include Mohammad Diponegoro’s *Siklus* (Eng. cycle)<sup>29</sup> and Tohari’s *Kubah* (Eng. *Dome*).<sup>30</sup> Both of these works clearly depict stories related to Islamic doctrines of moral values. Some stories mentioned in both Diponegoro and Tohari’s works promote sufism (Islamic mysticism) stories.”<sup>31</sup> Hamka<sup>32</sup> was not only a writer but also a preacher as Saleh Iskandar Poeradisastra observed. However, it suffices to say that Indonesian literature is generally Islamic literature because it focuses on

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<sup>29</sup>Mohammad Diponegoro, *Siklus*, Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya, 1975.

<sup>30</sup>Ahmad Tohari, *Kubah*, Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya, 1980.

<sup>31</sup>Mohammad Rokib, “Reading Popular Islamic Literature: Continuity and Change in Indonesian Literature,” *Heritage of Nusantara: International Journal of Religious Literature and Heritage*, Vol. 4, no. 2 (2016), 188.

<sup>32</sup>Hamka was born on February 17<sup>th</sup>, 1908 in Sungai Batang, Minangkabau from a family of scholars and reformers. As a renowned Southeast Asian Muslim scholar and Ulama, he wrote hundred books and articles on Islamic philosophy, theology, history, jurisprudence, ethic, literature and culture. His remarkable work is *Tafsir al-Azhar*, that brought him as an influential ulama in Southeast Asia. See for instance Sarah Larasati Mantovani and M. Abdul Fattah Santoso, “Pemikiran Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah (Hamka) tentang Partisipasi Politik Perempuan di Indonesia 1949-1963”, *Profetika*, Vol. 16, no. 1 (2015): 83-92; J.R. Rush, *Hamka’s Great Story: A Master Writer’s Vision of Islam for Modern Indonesia*, the University of Wisconsin Press, 2016.

glorifying, upholding, and propagating an Islamic worldview and concept of humanity directly and explicitly.<sup>33</sup> Many writers argue that religious content of the writer's belief does not guarantee the production of Islamic literature. As Abdurrahman Wahid pointed out, the relationship between Islam and literature is complex and extends beyond the mere delivery of Khutbah and moral advices. Wahid's discussion addresses critical questions, such as whether "sastra baik-baik" (devout literature) is the only Islamic literature, or whether "sastra urakan" (sloppy literature) and also secular literature can be considered Islamic literature. Furthermore, what constitutes Islamic literature is the essential question.<sup>34</sup>

Kratz's analysis reveals that Islam played a significant role conceptualizing modern Indonesian literature for the first time in the late 1930s.<sup>35</sup> At that time, the so-called *roman pitjisan* (dime novel)<sup>36</sup> began to flourish in Medan, many young and progressive Sumatranese Muslims and Ulama actively participating in publishing their novels primarily in the Islamic journal *Pedoman Masyarakat*. Kratz reports that the authors of Roman Pitjisan considered their work a response to the literature of *Kantoor voor de Volkslectuur* (currently *Balai Pustaka*) and the libertarian westernized journal *Poedjangga Baroe*,<sup>37</sup> which was first published in 1933 under Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana, the leading figure

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<sup>33</sup>Ernst Ulrich Kratz, "Islamic Attitudes Toward Modern Indonesian Literature," in Cornelius D. Grijn and S.O. Robson (eds.), *Cultural Context and Textual Interpretation*, Dordrecht: Foris Publications, 1986, 60.

<sup>34</sup>Suara Muhammadiyah, *Ensiklopedia Buya Hamka: Percikan Pemikiran, Penafsiran, Pemahaman Dan Imajinasi Autentik Buya Hamka*, Jogjakarta: Suara Muhammadiyah, 2019.

<sup>35</sup>Kratz, "Islamic Attitudes Toward Modern Indonesian Literature" ..., 64.

<sup>36</sup>The characteristic of Roman Pitjisan is melodramatic, romantic and Islamic in outspoken manner. Roolvink mentions some other characteristics of Roman Pitjisan: pleasureable, attractive but simple, and imaginative. Love story, young peoples' desire to independently choose their mate and superiority of Adat are also presented attractively by the authors. R. Roolvink, "Roman Pitjisan Bahasa Indonesia," in A. Teeuw, *Pokok dan Tokoh Dalam Kesusasteraan Indonesia Baru*, trans. Anku Raihul Amar Gelar Datuk Besar, Djakarta: Jajasan Pembangunan, 1990, 239-51.

<sup>37</sup>Poedjangga Baroe was first published in 1933 under Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana, the leading figure of westernized Indonesian poet.

of westernized Indonesian poet. Hamka was among the authors who actively wrote Roman Pitjisan. He authored several novels, including *Si Sabariah*, then, *Laila Madjnun* in 1932, *Di Bawah Lindungan Ka'bah* (1938), *Tenggelamnja Kapal Van der Vijk* (1938), *Tuan Direktur* (1939), *Merantau Ke Deli* (1939), *Di Lembah Kehidupan* (1938), and *Entjik Utik*. Some of these novels received criticism, leading people to give Hamka a nickname, *Kiai Ai Lap Yu* or *Kiai Tjabul*, which means an obscene religious teacher.<sup>38</sup>

His novel, *Si Sabariah*, was unfortunately controversial and rejected by the conservative Muslims because of its romanticism, which could potentially have a negative impact on the youth.<sup>39</sup> Hamka then met with three Muslim leaders—Abdul Karim Amrullah, Abdullah Ahmad and Jamil Jambek—and read his novel to them, expecting their comments. Surprisingly, these three prominent modernist Ulama were not angry and reportedly could not sleep after listening to being impressed by Hamka's romantic novel.<sup>40</sup> It could be suggested that the modernist Muslim group, as represented by Abdul Karim Amrullah, Abdullah Ahmad, and Jamil Jambek, did not view Hamka's romantic and melodramatic novel a theological or moral deviation. Consequently, they had no reason to declare it *Haram* (forbidden). On another occasion, Hamka also argued that:

*Roman termasoek kesenian, kesenian ertinja keindahan. Allah soeka akan keindahan, asal sadja keindahan itoe tidak melanggar akan perintah agama. Sebab itoe semata2 roman tidaklah terlarang oleh agama. Tapi kalaoe sekiranya roman itoe akan mengandjoerkan perboetan tidak senonoh, perboeatan tjabul, meroesakkan boedi pekerti, maka haramlah hoekoemnja*<sup>41</sup>

<sup>38</sup>Kratz, "Islamic Attitudes Toward Modern Indonesian Literature" ..., 64.

<sup>39</sup>Nunu Burhanuddin, "Konstruksi Nasionalisme Religius: Relasi Cinta dan Harga Diri dalam Karya Sastra Hamka," *Epistémé: Jurnal Pengembangan Ilmu Keislaman*, Vol. 10, no. 2 (2015), 353–84.

<sup>40</sup>On a complete information about Hamka's meeting with these leaders or ulamas, see Hamka, *Kenang-kenangan Hidup*, Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1974, 2:74-76.

<sup>41</sup>Hamka, "Kata Penutup," *Pedoman Masyarakat*, 6 (1940), quoted from Kratz, "Islamic Attitudes Toward Modern Indonesian Literature" ..., 76.

*Roman seeks art, art means beauty. Allah loves beauty, as long as that beauty does not violate religious commandments. Therefore, the pursuit of beauty alone is not prohibited by religion. But if that Roman will display indecent behavior, indecent acts, and damage morals, then his actions become forbidden.*

Accordingly, rejecting the account of conservative Ulama, the modernists argued that romantic and melodramatic literatures are not prohibited in the Islamic doctrine. It is imperative to note that the rejection of roman and literary works in general by conservative Muslims was obvious. This could be seen, at least, in the development of modern Indonesian literature after 1930s. This group of conservative Muslims rejected romanticism and religious satire of literature, considering it un-Islamic due to its negative effect on the morality of the young people. Romanticism was also seen as *cabul* (Eng. perverted), which could weaken and threaten the values of Islamic morality. Hamka's nicknames, Kiai Ai Lap Yu and Kiai Tjabul, were strong evidence of how more conservative Muslim groups viewed Hamka as being perverted.

Religious satire in literary works, which often involves personifying God and presenting angels and prophets in modern-day settings, has sparked controversial debates among writers and Muslim society. Those who sought to establish intellectual freedom and express their imaginative works were disturbed by the negative treatment they received from conservative ulama and political authorities. Theologically and politically, these literary works were considered deviations. For example, in 1948 Bahrun Rankuti's controversial radio-broadcasted play titled *Sinar Memantjar Dari Djabal Nur* (A Ray Emanates from Jabal Nur) provoked protests, as people were upset and shocked to see the Prophet Muhammad portrayed as giving a speech in front of a microphone.<sup>42</sup> In 1950, there was also a huge protest condemning A.A. Navis' novel titled *Robohnja Surau Kami* (The Dilapidation

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<sup>42</sup>H. B. Jassin, *Heboh Sastra 1968: Suatu Pertanggungjawaban*, Jakarta: Gunung Agung, 1970, 7.

of *Our Prayer Hut*). Navis utilized his imagination to illustrate a dialogue between personified God and Hadji Saleh in the hereafter:<sup>43</sup>

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GOD	You?
Hadji Saleh	My name was Saleh. For having gone to Mekah (performing Hajj) my name has been changed into Hadji Saleh.
GOD	I don't ask your name. I don't need your name. This name was only useful for you in the world. What did you do in the world?
Hadji Saleh	I performed Ibadah, my God

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Navis then tells in his novel that Hadji Saleh is not admitted to heaven but relegated to the hell, yet he is convinced that he has every right to go to paradise since he is sure that he has obeyed every religious tenet. Having been shocked by the unbelievable decision of God, Hadji Saleh leads a demonstration protesting God. Navis illustrates a part of the dialogue between the people and God during the demonstration:

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GOD	You people, what do you want?
Hadji Saleh	On behalf of the people who really love You, we demand You to reconsider Your decision and send us to heaven as you had promised in Your holy book.
GOD	Where did you live in the world?
Hajid Saleh	We, your believers, lived in Indonesia, our God.
GOD	O, the prosperous country, is not it?
Hadji Saleh	Yes, that is true, our God.

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<sup>43</sup>Ali Akbar Navis, *Robohnja Surau Kami*, Bukittinggi: Nusantara, 1966, 13.

Additionally, Kipandjikusmin, who just started to involve in the Indonesian literature, was also regarded as contradicting the Islamic morality and disturbing the religiosity of the people. He was then arrested and tried in court. Unfortunately, Kipandji was powerless when the prosecutor charged him with insult to God, Angels, Prophet, Pancasila and UUD 1945 as well.<sup>44</sup> Through his novel *Langit Makin Mendung* (The Darkening Sky)<sup>45</sup> Kipandji illustrates his sadness for having seen what happens in the *Planet Senin*, center of prostitution in Jakarta. He moans: “O God, Rabbi, help us”<sup>46</sup> and invites Angel and Prophet to witness what people and prostitutes really do in the *Planet Senin*. The Prophet comments “actually this spectacle is rather fun, yet dirty. But I suggest to install television in heaven.”<sup>47</sup>

Generally, the *Langit Makin Mendung* actually tells the story of the Prophet Muhammad descending to earth with Jibril (Gabriel) to scrutinize why the number of Muslims entering heaven decreases. Kipandji tried to underline that this is because of the fact that Indonesian Muslims have begun fornicating, drinking alcohol, waging war on Muslims, and otherwise going against the tenets of Islam because of NASAKOM, an ideological combination of nationalism, religion, and communism. Unable to do anything to stop the rampant sinning, the Prophet Muhammad and Gabriel then watch the political manoeuvring, crime, and famine in Jakarta in the form of eagle. It is arguably considered that Kipandji’s short story is actually a heavy criticism attacking the failure and bankruptcy of Soekarno’s ideological politics of NASAKOM.

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<sup>44</sup>Kratz, “Islamic Attitudes Toward Modern Indonesian Literature” ..., 61.

<sup>45</sup>An English version of *Langit Makin Mendung* was done by M.D. W. Morgan, *The Darkening Sky Indonesian Short History*, Southeast Asia Paper No. 5, Center for Southeast Asian Studies School of Hawaiian, Asian, and Pacific Studies, University of Hawaii at Manoa, 1982. See also N.Tahiq, “Freedom of Speech and Literary Expression: A Case Study of *Langit Makin Mendung* By Kipandjikusmin,” Master Thesis, the Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, Montreal, Canada (1995).

<sup>46</sup>Jassin, *Heboh Sastra 1968...*, 32.

<sup>47</sup>Jassin, *Heboh Sastra 1968...*,32.



The tremendous backlash against Kipandji and the publisher revealed that literary world was still under the strong control of religious conservatism and political authority, as represented by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Office of the Council for Prosecution. Okky Madasari stated that “we are witnessing the suppression of creativity that should otherwise flourish and lead this nation towards reason and progress.”<sup>48</sup> Goenawan Mohamad also commented on Kipandji’s work, stating that “it is a bad short story, but its literary qualities were not what condemned it.”<sup>49</sup> This short fiction, which was 4,400 words long, became significant because it was deemed insulting to religion, and a prominent Indonesian literary critic, H.B. Jassin, was charged. Many people who believed that intellectual creativity should be appreciated deplored this negative attitude towards Kipandji’s work.<sup>50</sup> For them, religiosity should be enriched not only by formal Islamic knowledge, as formulated by Ulama’ and practiced in daily life, but also by a good appreciation of art. This religiosity encouraged Hamka to suggest that it is important for Ulama to write novels and other literary works according to their abilities, in order to infuse sentiments into literature.<sup>51</sup>

### **Literature and political dispute: Islam vis-à-vis Communism-Government**

It should be noted that Muslim poets in the 1940s and 1950s widely discussed various topics related to Islam and literature. These included the roles of Ulama in developing literature, the ideological and educational

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<sup>48</sup>Okky Madasari, “Trials of Fiction: We Lose the Battle Again,” *The Jakarta Post*, December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

<sup>49</sup>Goenawan Mohamad, “Kipandjikusmin,” *Tempo*, July 30, 2019.

<sup>50</sup>On the literary criticism addressed to the ideology of NASAKOM and the Guided Democracy, see, Kipandji, *Langit*. According to Jassin the Planet *Senen* was a symbol of bankruptcy of Soekarno’s ideology and politics.

<sup>51</sup>Hamka, “Kata Penutup”..., 69.

function of literature, and the intended audience for literature. Accordingly, the year of 1956 could be considered as an important era of the development of Islamic concept of art and literature. The political instability resulting from tensions between Soekarno, who advocated for the implementation of *Demokrasi Terpimpin* (*Guided Democracy*) and NASAKOM<sup>52</sup>, particularly with Islamic forces, encouraged Muslim poets to formulate their ideology of Islamic literature and art. From a broader perspective, Islamic literature is ideologically seen as a corrective to the nation's failures and fallacies caused by the authoritarian government. The Islamic ideology of literary works also involves protecting society as a whole from any worldly ideologies that contradict Islam and the five national principles of Pancasila. This attempt was worthwhile since it led to a clearer concept of Islamic literature and art.

That is why they saw and regarded communism as their political and cultural enemy and thus initiated the organization of an Islamic cultural and literary movement. In 1956, for instance, LEKSIS (*Lembaga Kesusasteraan Islam*, institute of Islamic literature) was founded. In the same year, Muslim poets also established HSBI (*Himpunan Seni Budaya Islam*, association of Islamic art and culture) with the aim of making the Islamic society realize the value and function of art and culture in relation to religion.<sup>53</sup> They also sought to respond to the cultural movement organized by LEKRA, a Marxist cultural association founded in 1950.<sup>54</sup> These associations immediately set up MASBI (*Madjelis Seniman Budajawan Islam*, council of Muslim artists and cultural practitioners), consisting

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<sup>52</sup>S. M. Amin, *Indonesia Dibawah Rezim Demokrasi Terpimpin*, Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1967.

<sup>53</sup>Kratz, "Islamic Attitudes"..., 81.

<sup>54</sup>Some of LEKRA's activities, such as campaigning against Hamka and charging that Hamka's novel *Di Bawah Lindungan Ka'bah* and *Tenggelamnja Kapal Van der Vijck*, were plagiarized and led to conflicts between Islamic and Marxist ideological groups. The quarrel of these groups clearly illustrates the situation in the era of political instability under the Old Order government.

of Ulama, scholars, intellectuals and Muslim leaders. Their task was to convene a *Musjawarah Seniman and Kebudayaan Islam* (Colloquium of Muslim Artists and Cultural Practitioners) in 1962 and formulate what Indonesian identity should be, as well as the way to achieve an Islamic culture and literature.<sup>55</sup>

Pelajar Islam Indonesia (*PII*, Indonesian Muslim Students), an Islamic student organization, attempted to create Islamic doctrine-based literature that emphasized the importance of perfecting oneself as a true Muslim to realize Islamic art. In 1963, they published their own Manifesto of Islamic culture and art, which emphasized that Islamic art should be for humanity rather than for art's sake, and that it should serve as a medium of da'wa. However, Goenawan Muhammad cautioned that art should not be used to proselytize to any religion but rather should help solve problems.<sup>56</sup>

Looking at the years of 1940s and 1950s, we can observe that although conservative Muslims rejected romanticism and religious satire of literature, it did not really inhibit Muslim poets from seeking the ideology of Islamic literature. They continuously discussed many issues concerning Islam and literature across a wide spectrum. Even an attempt to formulate an ideology and movement of Islamic art and culture was also evident since Muslim poets were challenged by the cultural propagation and movement of Marxist groups.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, we may argue that, like Marxist group, Muslim poets could considerably be recognized as transmitters of Islamic ideology and politics. Hamka's following poetry, which was written immediately

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<sup>55</sup>Kratz, "Islamic Attitudes"..., 74.

<sup>56</sup>Kratz, "Islamic Attitudes"..., 73.

<sup>57</sup>Choirotun Chisaan, "In Search of an Indonesian Islamic Cultural Identity, 1956-1965," in Jennifer Lindsay and Maya H.T. Liem (eds.), *Heirs to World Culture: Being Indonesian 1950-1965*, Verhandelingen van Het Koninklijk Instituut Voor Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde 274, Leiden: KITLV Press, 2012; Martina Heinschke, "Between Gelanggang and Lekra: Pramoedya's Developing Literary Concepts," *Indonesia*, no. 61 (1996), 145-69.

after M. Natsir,<sup>58</sup> the chairman of the Islamic party Masjumi, addressing his speech on the basic principles of national life in the Constituent Assembly in 1957, is evidence of Hamka's ideological interests: "where else is Natsir, where are we again, this is a million friends alike, live and die together, to claim divine blessings, and include me in your list."<sup>59</sup> When Hamka also addressed his speech at the Constituent Assembly in 1959, criticizing Sukarno by saying "the Guided Democracy is totalitarian,"<sup>60</sup> Natsir wrote a poem for him: "Mount it! Mount the banner of the word of Tawheed, Even the infidels detest it. Millions of like-minded friends get ready to enter into your list."<sup>61</sup>

Interestingly, even after the fall of PKI and LEKRA, da'wa remains as a key theme of discussion among Muslim poets.<sup>62</sup> Da'wa, as an Islamic tenet to be implemented by every Muslim, is an endless theme of the discussion, as well as an expression of religious and ideological consciousness of the Muslim poets. In the words of Taufiq Ismail, a representative of the Angkatan 66, "my literature is Dhikr (remembrance of God) literature" that will always remind people of The Creator.

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<sup>58</sup>Born in Alahan Panjang, West Sumatra on July 17<sup>th</sup> 1908 Natsir went to elementary school in Maninjau for two years, moved to HIS Adabiyah in Padang, and Madrasah Diniyah. He continued to MULO, and AMS in Bandung and became a student of A. Hassan, a Muslim reformist from the *Persatuan Islam* (PERSIS). Natsir was actively involved in some social and political organizations, such as *Pandu Nationale Islamietische Pavindery*, JIB, PII, MIAI, and Masyumi. He chaired the Prime Minister of Indonesia (1950-1951) during his leadership time of Masjumi (1949-1958). His *Mosi Integral* addressed during the parliamentary session of the *Republik Indonesia Serikat* (RIS) on April 3<sup>rd</sup> 1950 was paramount event. The RIS was formally abolished and backed to the NKRI. See for instance A.R. Kahin, *Islam, Nationalism and Democracy: a Political Biography of Mohammad Natsir*, Pasir Panjang: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2014.

<sup>59</sup>Leon Agusta, "Di Akhir Pementasan Yang Rampung," in Nasir Tamara, et.al (eds.), *Hamka Di Mata Hati Umat*, Jakarta: Pustaka Sinar Harapan, 1996.

<sup>60</sup>Herbert Feith, *The Decline of Constitutional Democracy in Indonesia*, 1st Equinox Ed Edition, Jakarta: Equinox Publishing, 2006.1st Equinox Ed Edition (Jakarta: Equinox Publishing, 2006

<sup>61</sup>Herbert Feith, *The Decline of Constitutional Democracy...*

<sup>62</sup>Evan Darwin Winet, "Between Umat and Rakyat: Islam and Nationalism in Indonesian Modern Theatre," *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 61, no. 1 (2009), 43-64.

## Conclusion

Literary works are cultural and ideological expressions and can provoke debates and conflicts among poets. Islam has enriched Indonesian cultures and literatures, with many Islamic-based works written by Muslim scholars and poets. Islamic elements are evident in Indonesian literature, including the use of religious satires. During the 1950s and 1960s, Islam was also used as an ideological basis for literature, particularly in response to political tensions. Historical analysis is a useful approach for understanding social, political, and religious debates and conflicts in Indonesian society, including their influence on literary works.

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