

Traditionalist and Modernist Islamic Thought at IAIN North Sumatra, 1973-2014

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ABSTRACT

This historical research explores the intellectual contestation between traditionalist and modernist Islamic thought at the State Islamic Institute (IAIN) of North Sumatra from 1973 to 2014. Using historical methods heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography this study collects data through literature review, interviews, and archival research. The study reveals that traditionalist thought, rooted in Ash'ari theology and Shāfi'ī jurisprudence, dominated in the early decades, while the modernist wave emerged through lecturers educated in Jakarta and abroad who introduced rationalist, contextual, and pluralist Islamic approaches. The coexistence of both currents shaped the academic and theological discourse at IAIN North Sumatra. This research contributes to understanding the intellectual development of Islamic higher education in Indonesia.

INTRODUCTION

Since its inauguration in 1973, IAIN North Sumatra has been present as a response to the need for state Islamic higher education in the North Sumatra region which previously only had private institutions (Abdillah, 2005). This institution not only expands access to formal Islamic education, but also becomes a dialectical arena between the two major currents in the Indonesian Islamic intellectual tradition, namely traditionalism and modernism (Burhani, 2012). These two currents have historical roots that have traditionalism based on Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), and modernism which represents the spirit of Muhammadiyah renewal (Effendy, 2005).

A striking intellectual phenomenon began to appear since the mid-1990s, when a young progressive Muslim community emerged that was mostly from a traditional background, but underwent a paradigm shift after receiving higher education at IAIN (Luth, 2002). They introduced rational, historical, and empirical approaches to Islamic studies, and encouraged open dialogue on the legacy of classical texts. This transformation was also driven by the inclusion of the idea of Islamic reform which had previously been introduced by figures such as Harun Nasution through the paradigm of Islamic rationalism (Madjid, 1992). However, the dynamics of Islamic thought at IAIN North Sumatra do not take place in a linear manner. Since the early 2000s, there has been a significant change when academics who continue their S2 and S3 studies at public universities have brought a new spirit to the campus (Munhanif, 2010). On the one hand, they offer intellectual enlightenment and a vision of religious pluralism; but on the other hand, there was resistance from conservative groups who considered this approach as Islamic liberalization (Rahardjo, 1995). This tension is complicated by the strong currents of Western thought (Orientalists) that enter through reference books and theories of contemporary Islamic studies, as well as by religious fatwas that reject secularism, pluralism, and liberalism (Saleh, 2001).

A number of previous studies have touched on aspects of Islamic thought in the Islamic higher education environment in Indonesia. For example, the study of Masykuri Abdillah (Wahid, 2001). explained that the transformation of thinking among Islamic campuses is part of the inevitable modernization process. Ahmad Najib Burhani and Munhanif's research also notes how institutions such as IAIN have become a space of struggle between normative Islamic thought and contextual critical approaches. However, studies that specifically and longitudinally analyze the dynamics of traditionalist and modernist thought in IAIN North Sumatra are still very minimal (Zarkasyi, 2008).

Most previous research (e.g., Abdillah, 2005; Burhani, 2012; Munhanif, 2010) has discussed the modernization of Islamic thought within Islamic universities or the struggle between normative and contextual currents in Islamic studies. However, these studies have been general in nature and focused primarily on dynamics at the national level or at large institutions in Java. To date, longitudinal studies specifically exploring the dynamics of traditionalist and modernist thought at IAIN North Sumatra from its founding (1973) to its transformation into UIN (2014) remain limited (Zarkasyi, 2008, only touches on

certain aspects). Yet, this period encompassed crucial phases—namely the emergence of a progressive intellectual community in the 1990s and the shift in academic orientation resulting from the cadre formation of lecturers at public universities since the 2000s, which significantly influenced the direction of Islamic discourse in North Sumatra.

Thus, this research is present to fill the gap in the literature, namely by examining historically and analytically how the interaction, dialectic, and tension between traditionalist and modernist currents developed at IAIN North Sumatra during 1973–2014, as well as its impact on the curriculum, teaching methods, and construction of students' thinking. The time period 1973–2014 was chosen as the temporal boundary of this study because it includes two important phases: the establishment of IAIN North Sumatra and its transformation into a State Islamic University (UIN). In this range, there is a consolidation and contestation of Islamic thought which has an impact on the orientation of the curriculum, teaching methods, and students' perspective on contemporary Islam. By examining these dynamics, this research contributes in three ways. First, from the academic side, he enriched the literature on the history of the development of Islamic thought in Islamic universities in Indonesia, especially in North Sumatra. Second, theoretically, this research can expand the scope of the study of the relationship between traditionalist and modernist Islam in higher education. Third, in terms of practicality, the results of this research can be an institutional reflection for the development of the vision and direction of Islamic education policies in the future. Therefore, this study is important in understanding how local-state-global Islamic discourse is interlinked in the academic space and forms a complex configuration of Islamic thought in IAIN North Sumatra.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Islamic Traditionalism

According to Achmad Jainuri (2004), traditionalists are a group that is synonymous with local Islamic expressions and traditional cultural elites who tend to maintain old forms of Islam. They are not particularly interested in changes in Islamic practices and thought. (Achmad Jainuri, 2004). In this context, Islam is understood primarily as a sharia related to worship, and fiqh is considered the main face of Islamic teachings.

Harun Nasution (1986) explained that the main characteristics of traditional theology include the recognition of the weakness of reason in reaching the essence of reality, belief in the uncertainty of human will, and the view that all world phenomena are subject to God's absolute will (Harun Nasution, 1986). This view creates a tendency towards taklid, which is a blind acceptance of the authority of the scholars and the classical books without critical effort or ijtihad. In social reality, this has an impact on the dominance of kyai authority and makes fatwa final and unquestionable.

Modernism and Islamic Rationalism

On the contrary, modernists are of the view that Islam should continue to be developed contextually through a rational and open approach. Harun Nasution developed the idea **of Rational Islam**, which is an approach in which reason is used to understand the text of revelation, not to reject it, but to explore substantive meaning in the context of the times (Harun Nasution, 1986). According to him, modernism is the spirit of change in old customs, social structures, and institutions to be in accordance with the values of scientific and technological progress.

Nurcholish Madjid developed rational thought and Islamic renewal by emphasizing the need to distinguish between **Islamic doctrines that are trans-historical and universal** and that of **Islamic understanding that are local and temporal** (Nurcholish Madjid, 1992). He rejected static and scriptural Islam, and instead prioritized *ijtihad* in interpreting Islamic texts to answer contemporary problems. According to him, Islam is a teaching that is open to modernity, and any form of rational and contextual change is acceptable as long as it remains based on the core values of religion. Madjid also emphasized that human experience in understanding religion is relative and bound by time and space. Therefore, religious thought must be inclusive and tolerant of diversity of opinions, unlike traditionalist approaches that are often exclusive and claim the Singular truth (Nurcholish Madjid, 1992).

The Relevance of Theory to the Context of IAIN North Sumatra

The above framework of thought is important in analyzing the development of Islamic thought in IAIN North Sumatra from 1973 to 2014. The struggle between traditionalist and modernist thought in the campus environment reflects the interaction between the heritage of the pesantren and the ideals of Islamic reform. Harun Nasution and Nurcholish Madjid are the main theoretical representations in explaining how Islamic rationalism and modernism enter academic spaces, including through curriculum, scientific papers, and the mindset of lecturers and students. Concepts such as theological rationalization, text reinterpretation, and inclusiveness of thought are important instruments to understand why some people in IAIN are able to encourage pluralism discourse, while others maintain classical orthodoxy. Therefore, the above theories are used to read the intellectual dynamics in the space of Islamic higher education as a dialectical arena between the past, present, and future of Islamic thought.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses the historical research method, which is a scientific approach that aims to reconstruct past events in a systematic, objective, and critical manner based on available historical traces. According to Daliman (2012), the historical method is a set of principles and rules used to effectively collect historical sources, evaluate them critically, interpret data, and present them in a coherent and meaningful form of writing (Daliman, 2012). In the historical method, there are four main stages that will be applied in this research, namely:

heuristic (collection of sources), criticism of sources, interpretation (interpretation), and historiography (writing history).

Heuristic (Source Collection)

The first stage in historical research is heuristic, which is the activity of collecting and identifying sources relevant to the research theme. In this study, the author uses library research techniques as the main approach to obtain relevant historical data on the struggle of Islamic thought in IAIN North Sumatra from 1973 to 2014. The sources used consist of:

The primary source is in the form of in-depth interviews with figures who are directly involved in the dynamics of thought at IAIN North Sumatra, such as senior academics, alumni, and institutional managers in the period studied. Secondary sources are in the form of academic books, journal articles, official documents of institutions, biographies of figures, annual reports, and relevant historical archives.

Source Criticism

After data collection, the next stage is **source criticism**, which aims to test the authenticity (external criticism) and credibility (internal criticism) of the sources that have been collected. **External criticism** is used to ensure the authenticity of documents or data sources, such as the validity of archives or the credibility of sources. **Internal criticism** aims to assess the content of the sources contextually, including the consistency of information, possible ideological bias, and the suitability between the content of the source and the focus of research on the dialectics of traditional and modern thought on the country's Islamic campus.

Interpretation (Data Interpretation)

The third stage is **interpretation**, which is the process of analyzing and interpreting the data that has been collected and criticized. In this process, the researcher compiles historical facts chronologically and contextually to reveal the patterns of thought, the influence of religious ideology, and the socio-intellectual dynamics that occurred in IAIN North Sumatra. Interpretation is carried out with a qualitative-hermeneutic approach, which combines the text (historical documentation and narrative) and its social context. This interpretation will show how the dialectic of traditionalist and modernist thought develops in academic interactions, curriculum, and the role of intellectual actors in the campus environment.

Data Collection Techniques

To obtain valid and in-depth data, this study uses the following techniques:

1. **Historical Archive and Document Studies**

Searches of official campus documents, institutional archives, lecturers' scientific works, academic activity reports, and personal documents of

campus figures were carried out to obtain authentic traces of the development of thought.

2. **In-Depth Interview**

Interviews were conducted with senior academics, alumni, and figures who have direct involvement or intense observation in the development of IAIN North Sumatra. These interviews use a semi-structured approach to dig deep and reflective information.

3. **Literature Review**

Literature reviews of books, scientific journals, research reports, and works by Indonesian Islamic thinkers such as Harun Nasution, Nurcholish Madjid, and local scholars in North Sumatra are used as theoretical and contextual foundations.

4. **Field Observation**

Direct visits to campus environments, libraries, and strategic locations related to intellectual activities will be carried out to document the dynamics of the academic space and relevant cultural symbols.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

History and Development of IAIN North Sumatra 1973-2014

The history of the establishment of IAIN North Sumatra is inseparable from the urgent need of the people of North Sumatra for the existence of a state Islamic university in the 1970s. At that time, the growth of Islamic educational institutions such as madrasas, Islamic boarding schools, and high school level schools was very rapid, but there were no state Islamic higher education institutions in the province. The idea of establishing IAIN received wide support from various elements, including community leaders, scholars, local governments, and Islamic education activists. The initial initiative was marked by the establishment of the Faculty of Tarbiyah by H. Ibrahim Abdul Halim and the establishment of the IAIN establishment committee led by Lt. Col. Inf. Raja Syahnan in 1960 (UIN North Sumatra, 2015).

At the same time, the Nahdlatul Ulama Higher Education Foundation (PERTINU) contributes to advancing Islamic higher education in North Sumatra. This foundation opened the Faculty of Sharia (1962), the Faculty of Tarbiyah (1963), and the Faculty of Ushuluddin (1965). The emergence of these three faculties encouraged the establishment of the North Sumatra Nahdlatul Ulama University (UNUSU). Since the late 1960s, there has been an effort to merge Islamic faculties in Medan and Padangsidempuan to meet the requirements for the establishment of an independent IAIN, which requires a minimum of three faculties. Support for this initiative came from Islamic organizations, youth, students, as well as the Regional Government and the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia who helped prepare campus infrastructure.



Source: www.uinsu.ac.id

Figure. 1 Lecturers with Suharto (President of the Republic of Indonesia)

An important momentum occurred on November 19, 1973, when IAIN North Sumatra was officially established as the 14th IAIN in Indonesia. The inauguration was carried out by the Minister of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia, Prof. Dr. H. Mukti Ali, who at the same time determined the merger of the Faculty of Tarbiyah and Sharia (formerly the branch of IAIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh) and the Faculty of Ushuluddin and Tarbiyah in Padangsidimpuan (branch of IAIN Imam Bonjol Padang) into the structure of IAIN North Sumatra. The Minister of Religious Affairs also appointed Haji Ismail Sulaiman as the Rector's care taker, accompanied by H. Ibrahim Abdul Halim and Drs. Hasbi AR as the vice rector. In early 1974, the Board of Curators was also formed with Governor Marah Halim Harahap as its chairman.



Source: Samsul Bahri, page 123

Figure. 2 Haji Ismail Sulaiman The first Rector of IAIN North Sumatra

Since 1975, the Islamic thought curriculum at IAIN North Sumatra has strengthened the campus's identity as a center for the development of Islamic scholarship. Students are introduced to various schools of theology, philosophy, and Sufism, accustoming them to cross-sectarian differences. The return of doctoral scholars such as Ridwan Lubis and M. Yasir Nasution in the late 1980s

contributed to the progressive, rational, and pluralistic intellectual atmosphere, in line with Harun Nasution's vision of scientific renewal.

Institutionally, IAIN North Sumatra developed with the establishment of a Postgraduate Program in 1994 through Decree of the Minister of Religious Affairs No. 24/1994. This program initially offered a Masters in Islamic Studies program, then expanded to include Islamic thought, education, Islamic law, Islamic economics, and even the study of hadith. Supporting facilities were also improved, including the library, which expanded from 1973 to a permanent 3,000 m² building in 2003, with a branch on the postgraduate campus. This development reflects IAIN North Sumatra's readiness to transform into a State Islamic University.

Traditionalist Islamic Thought Figures

Traditional Islamic thought emerges as a response to modernity's limitations, emphasizing that humans are not merely rational beings but spiritual entities rooted in divine consciousness. Seyyed Hossein Nasr views tradition as eternal truth, unchanging across time. Within this framework, traditional Islam highlights spirituality, diversity of sects, and loyalty to classical scholars.

In practice, Sufism accommodates local culture through reverence for sacred sites, offerings, and amulets. Although often criticized as deviating from strict monotheism, such practices enabled Islam's wide acceptance in Indonesia. In fiqh, most Indonesian Muslims adhere to the Shafi'i madhhab, though reformists challenge taqlid and advocate a direct return to the Qur'an and Sunnah.

Criticism of traditionalism includes reliance on memorization, teacher authority, and limited space for critical reasoning, particularly in pesantren education. Theological focus also leans toward metaphysics, often neglecting Islam's emancipatory mission against social injustice. Doctrinally, traditional Islam in Indonesia stands on three pillars: Shafi'i fiqh, Ash'ariyah-Maturidiyah theology, and al-Junaid's Sufism.

At IAIN North Sumatra, traditionalist discourse thrived in Ushuluddin and Sharia faculties, led by figures like Arsyad Siregar, Ramli Abdul Wahid, and Hamdan Abbas. Abbas, educated in Makkah and active in UISU, UNIVA, and IAIN, became a central figure in preserving classical fiqh through teaching and prolific writing. His contributions within academia and MUI North Sumatra demonstrate traditionalism's enduring role in shaping Indonesia's Islamic intellectual landscape.



Source: The author's personal collection

Figure. 3 Hamdan Abbas

Hamdan Abbas is known as a traditionalist scholar who firmly holds the principles of his clericism. It is not easily swayed by pressure or the interests of the rulers. One example of his consistent attitude was when he still banned the consumption of snails even though the government at that time was trying to legalize them to be developed as food. In fact, he did not hesitate to refuse an official invitation from officials if the event was considered not in line with Islamic teachings.

In the field of jurisprudence, Hamdan Abbas is very firm in adhering to the Shafi'i madhhab. As an alumnus of Makkah, he teaches fiqh to students using the classic books (turas) of Syafi'iyah. He even wrote diktats based on the book of the Shafi'i madhhab which became a handle in the learning process on campus, especially at IAIN North Sumatra and the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) North Sumatra, where he once served as Chairman.

Hamdan Abbas is known to be very rigid towards the discussion of ideas that differ from the Shafi'i school. Students and colleagues admit that critical discussions with him are very limited, as he only refers to the diktat and the books of the Shafi'i madhhab. Nevertheless, his influence remained great in shaping the thinking of the next generation such as Lahmuddin Nasution and Darul Aman who absorbed many of his views.

His teaching style strongly reflects traditional values, both in method and appearance. He teaches by means of lectures and reading Arabic texts, and still maintains the characteristics of traditional scholars such as wearing peci, suits, and sarongs when teaching. Hamdan Abbas even told students that graduation without honesty is haram, which shows his firmness in the aspect of educational ethics. He also taught courses such as *ushul bid'ah* which strengthened his position as the guardian of orthodoxy in Islamic thought.

In the 1970s, the IAIN North Sumatra campus was still dominated by traditional Islamic beliefs. It was only in the 1980s that the idea of modern thought influenced by Harun Nasution entered. Even so, the differences between the traditional and modern camps do not create open conflicts. Lecturers in IAIN respect each other's differences, even though they still hold to their own views.

Meanwhile, the dynamics of thought between traditionalists and modernists show different approaches. Traditionalists are more open to accepting new ideas on a theoretical level, but still return to tradition-based religious practices. Meanwhile, modernists tend to be of the view that Islamic law can change according to the context through the process of *ijtihad*. In its development, traditionalists have also begun to show openness to *ijtihad* even though in practice they still uphold the religious heritage that they have held so far. Arsyad Siregar is a scholar born in Mount Manaon, one of the villages in the Tapanuli Residency. There are two versions related to the year of his birth, namely 1920 and 1925. Official documents from the Indian government in 1939 record 1920 as the year of Arsyad Siregar's birth, while the 1925 version is sourced from family information and personnel documents. His son, Dr. Muhammad Habibi Siregar, MA, supported the 1920 version based on the fact that Prof. Dr. A. Mukti Ali, the Minister of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (1971–1978) who was born in 1923, was his junior while studying in India.



Source: Samsul Bahri, 2024

Figure. 4 Arsyad Siregar

Arsyad Siregar was born in Padang Lawas, an area known for producing Islamic scholars. He received his early education from his father before studying in Kedah, Malaysia, and then in India at Darul Ulum Djamiyah Qosimijah, where he earned a degree in hadith. After the 1947 India-Pakistan conflict, he led a madrasah in Pakistan for five years. Returning to Indonesia in 1954, he declined President Soekarno's offer of an ambassadorship to serve his hometown. Together with his wife, he founded a theological school that became the forerunner of the Islamic education center in South Tapanuli. He later founded Pertinu (Pertinu) (1963) and the Faculty of Ushuluddin (1968), which became the embryo of IAIN North Sumatra (1973). As the first dean, he produced many important figures and was known as a reformist traditionalist scholar.

Lahmuddin Nasution was known as an expert in Shafi'i fiqh and Ash'ariyah kalam. Educated in the classical tradition of Islamic texts, he was active in Al Washliyah and served as dean of the Sharia Faculty at IAIN North Sumatra. Consistent with the Shafi'i school of thought, he remained moderate and respected diversity. As Chairman of the Fatwa Commission of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) North Sumatra, he wrote and provided answers to

contemporary legal issues, including issues of Islamic economics. His thinking rejected capitalism and promoted a sharia financial system.

Ramli Abdul Wahid was a hadith expert and a staunch critic of liberalism, secularism, and pluralism at IAIN North Sumatra. Although rooted in Islamic teachings, he remained open to any context as long as it complied with sharia. He frequently debated with prominent figures, upholding the Ash'ariyah tradition. As an educator, he strongly rejected ideas deemed deviant and actively developed a cadre of ulama (Islamic scholars). For him, Islamic education must be based on the Quran and hadith, and incorporate the role of the family as a foundation for character. The environment where Arsyad Siregar was born in the North Padang Lawas area is known as a scholar-producing area. One of them is Sheikh M. Saleh Mukhtar Harahap who also studied in Makkah and Malaysia. The socio-political conditions at the time of Arsyad Siregar's birth were also marked by Dutch colonial domination and the increasing migration of the Mandailing people to the Malay Sultanate areas in East Sumatra, such as Deli and Langkat. Their acceptance is due to the ability of social and cultural acculturation as well as the depth of religion.

Figures of Modernist Islamic Thought

Modern Islamic thought in Indonesia is rooted in Middle Eastern reform movements such as Wahhabiyah and the rationalist ideas of Jamaluddin al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh. This modernism brought the spirit of *ijtihad*, rationalization, and socio-political reform, and then entered Indonesia through education and interaction with Western modernity. Harun Nasution became a key figure, emphasizing rational theology and introducing Western academic approaches into the IAIN curriculum since 1973.

Azyumardi Azra distinguished modernity as values aligned with Islam (work ethic, reason) from modernity as the historical experience of the West. Other figures, such as Abduh, rejected fatalism, while Iqbal saw religion as a force for developing human potential. In Indonesia, Nurcholish Madjid emphasized that modernization was part of a divine command, while Adian Husaini criticized the tendency to imitate the West without critical evaluation.

At IAIN North Sumatra, modernist ideas were strengthened by figures such as M. Ridwan Lubis, Syahrin Harahap, Amiur Nuruddin, and Yasir Nasution. Ridwan Lubis in particular rejects a purely textual approach, offers a contextual reading, and emphasizes *maqasid al-syariah* in Islamic law. He promotes an inclusive, rational and humanistic theology that rejects fatalism, and encourages religious moderation as a middle way to maintain tolerance, pluralism and justice in a multicultural society.



Source: cariustaz.id

Figure. 5 M. Ridwan Lubis

M. Yasir Nasution is an important figure in the development of modern Islamic thought at IAIN North Sumatra. Although he came from a traditional educational background of Islamic boarding schools, namely the Musthafawiyah Islamic Boarding School, where he studied classical books such as *Al-Bajuri*, *Tafsir Jalalain*, *I'anatu al-Thalibin*, and *Al-Fiyyah*, his journey in advanced studies led him to intellectual transformation. His S-2 and S-3 studies at IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta brought him into direct contact with the rational thinking of Harun Nasution, who became the main motor of the renewal of Islamic thought in Indonesia. Although known as a NU figure, Yasir shows a moderate orientation of thinking and is open to renewal.

Upon his return from Jakarta in the 1980s, Yasir and M. Ridwan Lubis became pioneers of modernist Islamic thought at IAIN North Sumatra. Yasir from the Faculty of Sharia and Ridwan from the Faculty of Ushuluddin both initiated the birth of a new paradigm that shifted the dominance of traditional approaches towards a more critical, contextual, and dynamic reading of Islamic texts. Together with other waves of academics who studied at various universities at home and abroad, they brought a fresh current that dismantled the dominance of the Shafi'i school and Ash'ariyah theology in the Islamic academic environment. Yasir Nasution's great contribution is reflected in his work *The Philosophy of Islamic Law*, which is a response to the need to read Islamic law not only normatively but also philosophically and contextually. He emphasized that Islamic law should not be understood literally, but should be studied with a philosophical approach in order to explore the underlying rational, ethical, and spiritual values. For him, the *maqashid al-shari'ah* approach is important as the main direction of Islamic law to be in harmony with the principles of justice and public benefit. Therefore, *ijtihad* and *ushul fiqh* must be developed with a legal hermeneutic approach that allows flexibility and adaptability to the context of the times.



Source: Azhari Akmal Tarigan and Mustafa Kamal Rokan

Figure. 6 M. Yasir Nasution

In the context of Islamic anthropology, Yasir Nasution highlighted Al-Ghazali's concept of humans as dualistic beings, both physical and spiritual, endowed with intellectual and spiritual potential to achieve perfection before God. He argued that this classical thinking needs to be reconstructed to be relevant in addressing the moral crisis, materialism, and dehumanization. He offered a transcendental humanist Islam as the basis for education, law, and socio-political ethics, emphasizing the formation of intelligent, moral, and spiritual Muslims. Meanwhile, Amiur Nuruddin emphasized the importance of *ijtihad* (intelligible text) in addressing issues of human rights, democracy, technology, the global economy, and bioethics. He based his reforms on the *maqasid al-sharia* (the principle of Islamic law), ensuring that Islamic law can address modern challenges fairly and contextually. In the field of economics, he rejected "Islamic economics" as merely a label, emphasizing that Islamic economics must emphasize justice, solidarity, and collective work.

His seminal work, *Bajanjang Naiak Batanggo Turun* (The Rise and Fall of the Mountains), emphasized the role of small but meaningful contributions in Islamic economic development. Nur Ahmad Fadhil Lubis developed Islamic philosophy with an integrative approach, connecting reason and revelation. He rejected the science-religion dichotomy and rigid scripturalism, emphasizing the need for contemporary *ijtihad* with a historical and sociological approach. Fadhil is known as a proponent of pluralism, tolerance, and inclusive Islam. As Rector of IAIN North Sumatra, he encouraged institutional transformation, digitalization, curriculum internationalization, and rejected the formalism of *sharia*. Syahrin Harahap emphasized that all knowledge originates from God, so reason must be balanced with faith and spirituality. He introduced the concept of modern piety, the application of Islamic values to modern life through reason, science, and spiritual ethics. In his book, *Theology of Harmony*, he asserted that interfaith harmony is part of monotheism, not merely a social necessity. His cosmopolitan thinking emphasizes Islam as a dynamic religion capable of integrating democracy, human rights, pluralism, and technology. These figures shaped the current of Islamic modernism at IAIN North Sumatra, balancing

classical heritage with the demands of modernity, thus giving rise to a rational, inclusive, and progressive Islamic discourse.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Since its founding in 1973, IAIN North Sumatra Medan has emerged as a response to the community's need for a state Islamic university, while also serving as a space for a dialectic between traditionalism and modernism. Traditionalists at IAIN North Sumatra tended to be grounded in Ash'arite theology and Shafi'i jurisprudence, with a tendency toward imitation (taqlid), and viewed religion more as a realm of worship and practical jurisprudence. Meanwhile, modernists began to emerge in the 1980s with the return of academics with Master's and Doctoral degrees from Jakarta and Western universities. They brought new ideas based on rationality, contemporary ijtihad (ijtihad), and an emphasis on ethical values and pluralism. Despite these differing paradigms, the contest of ideas at IAIN North Sumatra did not take place in a confrontational manner, but rather in a relatively conducive academic environment. This was supported by the increasing number of doctoral lecturers, both from within and outside the country, who broadened students' horizons. Differing views were viewed as intellectual wealth, allowing traditionalists and modernists to coexist in appreciating the diversity of Islamic interpretations. This dynamic became even more evident when several modernist figures occupied strategic positions such as rectors or deans, enabling them to drive institutional transformation, scientific integration, digitalization, and the internationalization of Islamic education. Meanwhile, religious organizations such as the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) also became channels for the actualization of thought.

FURTHER STUDY

Future research on *Traditionalist and Modernist Islamic Thought at IAIN North Sumatra (1973–2014)* should explore the intellectual genealogy and key phases of thought transformation, analyze curriculum and publications to trace the negotiation between tradition and modernity, and investigate the roles of lecturers, alumni, and student movements in shaping these discourses.

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