

## ACADEMIC STUDY'S TRANSFORMATION OF INDONESIAN MUSLIM ON HIS RELIGION: THE CASE OF MUN'IM SIRRY

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**Abstract.** This article examines the transformation of the academic study of Rekonstruksi Islam Historis by Mun'im from the book into three zoom forums, namely Cris Foundation, Esetorika and YIPC Indonesia. Mun'im's studies in the book and the three zoom forums are the primary sources for this article. Furthermore, Mun'im's decision to represent Indonesian academic Muslims in this article is primarily Mun'im's academic answer to the doubts of non-Muslim scholars regarding Muslim studies. Meanwhile, the analysis of the transformation of Mun'im's study is not only based on from book to zoom, but also between zooms. From this, this article concludes that the transformation of the study brought an increase in the focus of the study, from what was originally only on Islam as a religion of late antiquity to become stronger in Mun'im's efforts to harmonize relations between religions in the contemporary era in Indonesia. The findings on Mun'im's study provide two perspectives on Islamic studies. First, as a study, Islam becomes an open and dynamic object to be studied critically. Second, even though Islamic studies are academic in nature, the success in conveying their ideas depends on how the reviewer manages to adapt (situational attitude) to the intended audience.

**Keywords:** *Mun'im Sirry, Academic Muslim, Rekonstruksi Islam Historis, transformation.*

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### 1. Introduction

In Islamic studies, the spreading of Mun'im Sirry's thoughts in Indonesia is getting faster, especially when there are many discussions in the media room such as the Zoom Cloud Meeting (Zoom) application (Archibald *et al.*, 2019)<sup>†</sup>. It was proven when his book *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis* (Sirry, 2021) was published, various institutions quickly invited Mun'im to discuss (dissect) the book. Until this article was written, there were at least three institutions with different concentrations discussing the book which can be found on their respective YouTube forums (channels), namely Cris Foundation (12 August 2021), Esoterika (13 August 2021) and YIPC Indonesia (18 August 2021). In the three forums, Mun'im discussed the general description of his book, especially regarding the meaning of historical Islam and how to reconstruct it, but with different narratives

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<sup>†</sup> In this era of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Zoom Cloud Meeting application or Zoom has become a medium that is widely used for scholars to discuss such as conferences, seminars, teaching and learning, book reviews and others, because they can meet face-to-face like meeting face-to-face. Regarding the magnitude of the benefits of this application, Archibald et al. among others said that the Zoom application has more benefits than other meeting applications.

from one forum to another. At Cris Foundation forum, Mun'im focused on the context of the Qur'an emergence (Sirry, 2021)<sup>‡</sup>. In Esoteric forum, Mun'im focuses on Historical Islam as late antiquity (Sirry, 2021)<sup>§</sup>. Meanwhile, YIPC Indonesia forum focused on the relationship between Islam (the Qur'an) and Christianity (the Bible) (Sirry, 2021)<sup>\*\*</sup>. The difference in narrative from written (book) to oral (zoom) and between zoom forums is what the author calls the transformation of the study in this article.

Actually, the phenomenon of conveying thoughts from written to oral or vice versa is something commonly encountered. Gorke (2014) in his study of oral interpretation said that when explaining a kitab of interpretation orally, someone often adds more than what is written. This happens because the interaction (communication) of the speaker and the audience is different in written and spoken. In written interactions, the speaker (i.e. the writer) and the audience (i.e. the reader) are in a context-free environment, so the interaction is imaginative: the writer imagines the reader and vice versa (Ong, 2002). Meanwhile, in oral interaction, the pronouncer (i.e. speaker) and the audience (i.e. listener) are in a bounded context, so the interaction is clear and direct (Ong, 2014). In the case of the Historical Islamic Reconstruction study, Mun'im was originally in a context-free written interaction. Therefore, Mun'im can only imagine his book readers as 'general and academic readers'<sup>††</sup>. However, when the idea was presented at Zoom forum, Mun'im was in an oral interaction bound to a certain context, namely at Cris Foundation, Esoterika and YIPC Indonesia. Therefore, Mun'im clearly knew the listeners of the material, namely those from the three institutions. With this reading model, examining the transformation is done to understand the dialectic of delivering Mun'im's thoughts to the audience.

Apart from the reading model mentioned above, there are two other reasons for choosing Mun'im in this article. First, on the one hand, Mun'im's study attempts to refute the claim that no Islamic scholar can undertake a serious academic study of his Religion and the Scriptures (Daneshgar, 2020), as Mun'im himself revealed that he not only can, but also must be critical in studying Islam and Qur'an<sup>‡‡</sup>. Second, Mun'im became a controversial scholar, especially for Indonesian Muslims. Yusuf Rahman, for example, praised Mun'im by saying that even as a scholar of faith, he dared to be critical and objective in studying what he believed (Rahman, 2015). However, Baso (2021), for example, categorize him an example of a scholar who has regressed in Islamic studies. This situation became a separate issue in studying how Mun'im spread his thoughts in Indonesia. Third, there are only four studies on Mun'im, which can be mapped based on Mun'im's work. Hasan (2017) examines *Polemik Kitab Suci* (Sirry, 2014) as a search for a reformist interpretation of the Qur'an. Azhar (2016), Hidayat and Rizki (2019) examines *Kontroversi Islam Awal* (Sirry, 2015) whose other version is *Kemunculan Islam dalam Kesarjanaan Revisionis* (Sirry, 2017) especially looking at Mun'im's contribution in Islamic studies and Firdausiyah (2020) examines *What's Modern About Modern Tafsir?* (Sirry, 2016) in uncovering the criteria of modern interpretation. These various studies not only have not touched Mun'im's latest book, but also on written-to-oral presentation.

<sup>‡</sup> In his introduction to the discussion, Mun'im said that he would focus on the areas of the Qur'an, Hadith and Tafsir to be relevant to Cris Foundation's zoom audience.

<sup>§</sup> At the beginning of his talk, Mun'im said that he would focus on discussing historical Islam.

<sup>\*\*</sup> Like the previous two forums, Mun'im said that he would focus on the issue of the relationship between religions because the audience is those who are active in this issue.

<sup>††</sup> Mun'im Sirry, *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis: Pergumulan Kesarjanaan Mutakhir*, p. 1.

<sup>‡‡</sup> Mun'im Sirry, *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis: Pergumulan Kesarjanaan Mutakhir*, p. 6.

This article uses the discussion on the three zoom forums above as a basis for the scope of *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis*, for two reasons. First, to summarize the scope of the discussion because all the discussions contained in the book are discussed in zoom, but not vice versa. The discussion in question is the context of the emergence of the Qur'an, historical Islam as late antiquity and the relationship between Islam (Al-Qur'an) and Christianity (Bible). Second, the transformation phenomenon does not only occur in the study from book to zoom, but also occurs among zooms, so the analysis of the transformation of Mun'im's study includes these two conditions. From here, the question to be answered in this article is how is Mun'im's academic study on *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis* and its transformation from book to zoom? Through this question, this article will show two things. First, Mun'im's study can serve as a model for Muslim scholars who can take an academic attitude towards what they believe and the majority of Muslim scholars have so far. Second, the transformation of delivery form plays an important role in the success of the position and the spread of Islamic study ideas, in this case Mun'im's thinking in the digital era of Indonesia.

## 2. Mun'im Sirry and *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis*

Mun'im Sirry is a contemporary Islamic scholar born in Madura on March 9, 1971 who experienced two phases of his intellectual journey, which is in line with Hidayat (2021), namely traditionalist to revisionist. In the first phase, it can be seen when he studied at Al-Amien Pesantren for six years, then continued to undergraduate (S1, graduated in 1996) and postgraduate (S2, graduated in 2005) in Pakistan, to be precise at the Faculty of Sharia and Law International Islamic University, Islamabad. After that, Mun'im continued his education to the West, at the University of Chicago Divinity School (2012), which gave birth to revisionist thinking<sup>§§</sup>. The educational journey shows the maturity of Mun'im's thinking on the traditionalist and revisionist sides in their respective phases (El Shamsy, 2020)<sup>\*\*\*</sup>. From here, what is believed in the tradition of traditionalist thought is reviewed in the tradition of revisionist thought, resulting in a critical review of what traditionalist Muslims have believed, such as *Scriptural Polemic, Controversies over Islamic Origins, Kemunculan Islam Kesarajanaan Revisionis* and *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis*, as well as other works that can be seen from his *google scholar*.

As an educational journey, Mun'im is a scholar who chooses not to stop at one conclusion in his study. He becomes a scholar who continues to wander where data directs his thoughts, so his studies do not stagnate and stop, but continue and develop. This is known from his oft-repeated expression, and I quote here a version of the book *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis*:

“As someone who is still learning, my thoughts and conclusions are still in flux, and may continue to be so. Not that old thinking is wrong. I'm used to letting reading and observation drive my conclusions, not the other way around. In some cases, my conclusions have changed because of new data I have discovered or new insights I have gained from reading and following intellectual conversations”<sup>†††</sup>.

Mun'im's statement above shows an open attitude for him to studies that happen in various parts of the world. So far, the development of Mun'im's thoughts, especially

<sup>§§</sup> Mun'im Sirry, *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis: Pergumulan Kesarajanaan Mutakhir*, p. 6.

<sup>\*\*\*</sup> In this case, the influence of the publisher in determining the results and dissemination of knowledge to the public can be seen in the explanation.

<sup>†††</sup> Mun'im Sirry, *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis: Pergumulan Kesarajanaan Mutakhir*, p. 6.

related to Qur'anic Studies, Hermeneutics, Political Theology, Christian-Muslim Relations has brought him to several important roles in the world of scholarship such as lecturer at the University of Notre Dame, United States, Co-editor of *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations Journal*, editor of *New Trends in Qur'anic Studies* (2019) and *Finding Beauty in the Other* (2018), author of international class books and Scopus indexed journals, one of the Indonesian Muslim scholars after Harun Nasution, A. Mukti Ali, Nurcholish Madjid, Abdurrahman Wahid and others, as well as other important roles. These various roles made it easier for his thoughts to be ogled by other Muslim scholars, including his book entitled *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis*. As mentioned above, this book is a continuation of the book *Kemunculan Islam dalam Kesarjanaan Revisionis* published by Suka Press or *Kontroversi Islam Awal* published by Mizan. Furthermore, Mun'im raised the level of discussion on these historical sources. However, Mun'im directs the two books as an important step in understanding the dynamics of Islamic studies among contemporary Western scholars, about the struggle between traditionalist and revisionist scholars, and the emergence of Islam in these two poles of scholarship<sup>†††</sup>.

This book covers ten main chapters: (1) *Melacak "Islam Historis": Idenifikasi Masalah*, (2) *Al-Qur'an sebagai Sumber Sejarah: Pendekatan dan Tantangan*, (3) *Ortografi Al-Qur'an dan Studi Manuskrip: dari Scriptio Defectiva menjadi Scriptio Plena*, (4) *Konteks Historis Al-Qur'an dan Narasi Alkitab: Menelaah Bukti Internal*, (5) *Menyingkap Konteks Al-Qur'an melalui Tafsir: Beberapa Problem*, (6) *Biografi Nabi dan Kemunculan Islam: Masalah Historisitas*, (7) *Menemukan Kembali Sumber Awal: Perdebatan Metodologis*, (8) *Mencari "Muhammad Historis": Proyek yang Belum Selesai*, (9) *Narasi Penaklukan Islam: Sejarah dan Bias Kekuasaan* and (10) *Identitas Agama Penakluk: Reifikasi Islam sebagai Agama Historis*. The ten chapters always begin with key questions that can describe the focus of the study. For Mun'im, asking the right questions is the most crucial thing in a study. Furthermore, from the ten chapters above, Mun'im only conveyed some of them that were narrated orally in three different zoom forums, namely Cris Foundation Channel, Esoterika and YIPC Indonesia recorded and immortalized in their respective YouTube channels.

The Cris Foundation Channel Forum or Center for Research and Islamic Studies Foundation was established by a student community from UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya in November 2012, which aims to develop and empower academic activities, including book review<sup>§§§</sup>. Esoterik is a discussion forum for scholars, especially lecturers based in Jakarta. This forum discusses various issues related to religion, gender, race, ethnicity, state and political orientation in order to hone thought and spirituality<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup>. YIPC Indonesia is a Muslim and Christian student community that strives to produce narratives of peace and harmony between religions (Islam and Christianity) based on the scriptures, especially the Qur'an and the Bible (Booklet YIPC; Wahab, 2020). Because the agenda of the three forums is Book Review, Mun'im only discusses the general picture with a focus on three discussions, mainly revolving around the meaning of historical Islam and how to reconstruct it. The three discussions are the context of the Qur'an's emergence, Islam as a late antiquity and the relationship between Islam (Qur'an) and Christianity (Bible) which are presented in different time durations: Cris Foundation for 02:14:31,

††† Mun'im Sirry, *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis: Pergumulan Kesarjanaan Mutakhir*, p. 1.

§§§ Cris Foundation, "Deskripsi", dalam

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC5eSyILcbIbKDiW32SZxYGw/about> accessed on 23.09.2021.

\*\*\*\* Esoterika-Forum Spiritualitas, "Tentang", in

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/Islamilmiahindonesia/about>, accessed on 23.09.2021.

Esoterik during 02: 12: 59 and YIPC Indonesia for 01: 47: 02 and this three forums will be analyzed in the following discussion.

### 3. Transformation of *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis* Studies

As stated in the introduction that in reviewing the transformation of Mun'im's study, this article uses the Zoom forum as a starting point. In the Cris Foundation zoom forum, Mun'im criticized the majority Muslims belief that the Qur'an appeared in a polytheistic and Paganistic society, he said that the Qur'an appeared in a pluralistic religious climate. It can be seen from the stories in the Qur'an that have been published in previous kitabs, especially the Bible. Therefore, even though the description of the story tends to be concise and fragmentary, the audience of the Qur'an still understands it. This is important, in the context of making the Qur'an as the primary source to trace the context of the birth of early Islam. The problem is that the Qur'an contains very few descriptions of the context of his birth. By focusing on the prophetic story, Mun'im said that the Qur'an way narrates the Prophets is interesting, it never discredits the holiness or personality of the Prophets, which is usually done in the Bible, because it adapts to the context of the audience, namely that the Prophet is a human choice as Muhammad called *al-Mushtofa*. Thus, according to Mun'im, although the Qur'an informs very little about the context of its contemporaries and more (2/3) discusses the earlier stories, it still provides a unique context, especially because the Qur'an modifies previous traditions to be relevant to the context. Apart from the Qur'an, other sources such as kitabs of interpretation cannot be used to trace the context of the birth of the Qur'an.

In the zoom forum of Esetorika, Mun'im did not discuss his book very much, he only focused on explaining Islam as a religion of late antiquity with two objectives. First, as a criticism of Muslim scholars who believe that (1) the emergence of Islam was cut off from previous religions and (2) the label of jahiliyah for pre-Islamic society. Mun'im raises a different argument, namely studying Islam through the Qur'an. He then explicitly states that there is no evidence from the Qur'an that mentions the emergence of Islam as disconnected from previous traditions. Second, Islam is a late antiquity that inherits the traditions of other religions. One of the characteristics of late antiquity is the connection with before and after, thus Early Islam, namely the 3-8th century, is connected to the previous period (called Antique-Classic) and the period after (called Medieval-Age). Therefore, for example, the relationship between religion and politics has existed since the beginning of the emergence of Islam. Furthermore, to trace historical Islam, Mun'im cited the Qur'an as the only reliable source. Mun'im criticized the description of labeling musyrikun to the audience of the Qur'an because it is not seen in the Qur'an. The audience of the Qur'an is actually multi-religious, as can be seen from the many narratives of the Qur'an that are same as the Bible. For example, the stories in the Qur'an are told in brief and fragmentary forms, which are understood only by those who are familiar with the biblical tradition. In summary, Mun'im mentions archaeological finds such as slate, buildings, coins and others can be used to trace historical Islam.

In the YIPC Indonesia forum (Sirry, 2021), Mun'im specifically focused on chapter four on the Qur'an and the Bible, which he considered as a controversial issue since the beginning of the meeting between Islam and Christianity (the two largest religions in the world), especially regarding the belief that the Bible has been distorted (*tahrif*) from among Muslims. At the same time, Christians also believe that nothing can reflect Divine Revelation other than the Bible, so the Qur'an is rejected. In the other words, the debate



between Islam and Christianity stems from the authenticity of the two Scriptures. Usually, this problem is solved by agreeing that the Qur'an and Christianity are from God. However, new problems arise when they realize that there are differences in content between the two scriptures. For example, the sequence of narrations such as the story of the Prophet Yunus, the story of Sarah (the wife of Prophet Ibrahim), the dialogue of Prophet Jesus and his disciples, which are different between the Qur'an and the Bible, so the Qur'an is considered imperfect in recording the stories perfectly. According to Mun'im, this problem can be solved if the audience understands the Qur'an, namely that the Qur'an assumes that the audience understands the contents of the Bible. For Mun'im, this argument is important in overcoming the problem correctly. Furthermore, the Qur'an defends Christianity, especially against Jews, for example, calling Jesus (Isa) the Messiah, Jesus as Kalamullah, Maryam being called the holy woman chosen by Allah. However, the Qur'an still emphasizes aspects of the reformation of the Bible as a natural theological argument in the emergence of new religions, even though it maintains an important part of the Christian tradition.

Up to this point, Mun'im's explanation of *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis* was discussed in various ways, which differed from one forum to another by revolving around historical Islam and how to reconstruct it. The focus of the delivery carried out by Mun'im adjusted the audience in each of these forums. As a forum that focuses on the Qur'an, Hadith and Tafsir, Mun'im directs his studies to these three fields, which in his book refers to the chapters "Al-Qur'an sebagai Sumber Sejarah", "Konteks Historis Al-Qur'an dan Narasi Alkitab" and chapter five "Menyingkap Konteks Al-Qur'an melalui Tafsir", all of them are used to explain historical Islam in chapter one "Melacak "Islam Historis". Interestingly, Mun'im chooses the term context of the emergence of the Qur'an which is an understanding of historical Islam. It was impressed that Mun'im tried to bring the discussion of historical Islam to students at the Cris Foundation forum with the concept of the context of the Qur'an emergence. This is different from the Esetorika forum, where Mun'im instead focused on discussing the historical Islamic term. With an audience of lecturers, Mun'im explains specifically about the core of the book's discussion, namely reconstructing historical Islam by making Islam a late antiquity religion – inheriting previous religious traditions. At the YIPC Indonesia forum, the discussion of historical Islam was found substantially in the study of the relationship between Islam and Christianity, especially when Mun'im mentioned that Islam maintains the Christian religious tradition while carrying out reforms on the theological side.

In the Cris Foundation and Esetorika forums, Mun'im discussed the polytheistic and paganistic concepts that he used as a critique of Muslim beliefs about the emergence of early Islam. Mun'im argued that Islam (Al-Qur'an) was not present in these two religious climates, but inherited the previous religious traditions, especially Christianity (the Bible). This argument is not mentioned in the YIPC Indonesia forum even though this discussion is related to the relationship between Islam and Christianity. In his book, the critic not only uses the arguments mentioned in the Cris Foundation and Esetorika forums, but also mentions Abraham Geiger's findings in his book, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* and Richard Bell in his book, *The Origin of Islam in Its Christian Environment*, even though the findings of the two books, according to Mun'im, may not be agreed, but the fact that the three religions have many similarities in common is unavoidable<sup>††††</sup>. The arguments about the findings of the two scholars seem irrelevant

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<sup>††††</sup> Mun'im Sirry, *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis: Pergumulan Kesarjanaan Mutakhir*, p. 8.

in those zoom forums. Furthermore, in transformative way, Mun'im used the Qur'an as a primary source in criticizing the beliefs of Muslim scholars above as well as tracing historical Islam as late antiquity.

As a primary source, according to Mun'im, the Qur'an records many stories that have also been recorded by previous scriptures. Transformatively, Mun'im directed the exposure of stories in the Qur'an according to the interests of the audience's focus in each of these forums. At the Cris Foundation forum, Mun'im directed stories about Prophet Ibrahim, Prophet Noah and the "elephant" war to use the Qur'an as a historical source. At the Esetorika forum, the story about Sarah (Ibrahim's wife), was directed to strengthen the argument of Islam as late antiquity. Meanwhile at the YIPC Indonesia forum, the stories of Sarah, Yunus and Isa's disciples were directed to compare the order of narration in the Qur'an and the Bible. In his book, although there is no chapter that specifically discusses the stories in the Qur'an, chapter four "Konteks historis Al-Qur'an dan Narasi Alkitab"<sup>††††</sup> contains many stories that show arguments for the relationship of Islam (the Qur'an) and Christianity (the Bible). By discussing in the three forums, the relationship between stories in the Qur'an and the Bible becomes an argument for reconstructing historical Islam, with the conclusion that the audience of the Qur'an understands the contents of the Bible. The problem is that Mun'im criticizes the authenticity of Muslim sources other than the Qur'an: *hadith, sirah and tafsir*, but he accepts the Bible as it is.

In his book, Mun'im considers that because Muslim sources except the Qur'an are still debated in traditionalist and revisionist scholarship<sup>§§§§</sup>, he raises another scholarly categorization, namely neo-traditionalism, which holds that the absence of contemporaneous sources does not mean that there are no contemporary sources. Muslims have no historical value, among them is Harald Motzki and his method, namely "*isnad-cum-matn*"<sup>\*\*\*\*\*</sup>. However, this argument is not mentioned at all in the three zoom forums, even though the argumentation of the neo-traditionalist findings is significant in the first chapter, "Melacak "Islam historis", of his book. In the Esetorika forum, and in chapter one on his book<sup>†††††</sup>, Mun'im considers that archaeological finding such as slate, coins (numismatic), may be used to trace historical Islam. In the Cris Foundation forum, Mun'im criticized the tradition of interpretation by saying that the interpretation cannot be used to trace historical Islam, this is also expressed in a statement closing of chapter five "Menyingkap Konteks Al-Qur'an melalui Tafsir"<sup>†††††</sup> in his book. Unfortunately, Mun'im's critical attitude towards Muslim sources does not appear when dealing with the Bible, which is prone to debates about *tahrif* (distortion). With theological reasons, Mun'im said that the Bible came from the same God, as revealed at the YIPC Indonesia forum. In fact, Mun'im was critical of the Qur'an<sup>§§§§§</sup>, even though he also believed that it came from God who sent the Bible.

†††† See Mun'im Sirry, *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis: Pergumulan Kesarjanaan Mutakhir*, p. 103-130.

§§§§ In his tracking, reinforced by the views of modern scholars, Mun'im made the Qur'an the only source to trace historical Islam, which he called late antiquity. Meanwhile, another Muslim source: *hadis* dan *sirah*, is still a matter of debate among traditionalist and revisionist scholars, both of whom Mun'im criticized for not helping in explaining historical Islam. Mun'im Sirry, *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis: Pergumulan Kesarjanaan Mutakhir*, p. 25.

\*\*\*\*\* Mun'im Sirry, *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis: Pergumulan Kesarjanaan Mutakhir*, p. 35.

††††† See Mun'im Sirry, *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis: Pergumulan Kesarjanaan Mutakhir*, p. 18-19.

††††† There, Mun'im said that interpretation is problematic when it is used as a means of tracing the historical context of the birth of the Qur'an. See Mun'im Sirry, *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis: Pergumulan Kesarjanaan Mutakhir*, p. 167.

§§§§§ This critical attitude can be found especially in chapters two and three in Mun'im Sirry, *Rekonstruksi*

The problem with the method of taking sources in tracing historical Islam other than the Qur'an above gives an understanding that Mun'im still tends to be critical of Muslim sources compared to non-Muslims. But at the same time, Mun'im still opens the possibility for Muslim sources to be used as sources to trace historical Islam, as there are methods from neo-traditionalists, even though they are not used in the study of historical Islamic reconstruction. By accepting the Bible and archaeological findings, the study of tracking historical Islam also shows it as a study of the relationship between religions, especially Christianity, as differently seen in the explanations of his studies in the three zoom forums. The relationship between religions, specifically the relationship between the Holy Scriptures, is directed at tracing the context of the birth of the Cris Foundation version of the Qur'an or historical Islam as late antiquity in the Esetorika forum. While at the YIPC Indonesia forum, even though he did not ignore the tracking of historical Islam or the context of the birth of the Qur'an, Mun'im was more directing the study of inter-religious relations in responding to contemporary issues experienced by religious people in Indonesia.

Up to this point, the various explanations above provide an understanding that *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis* from a book to a zoom changes the form and substance of Mun'im's study, which tends to lead the development of contextual studies due to the involvement of the audience. In the form of study, if in his book he often reveals scholarly debates in tracing historical Islam, which results in the opening of a critical study space for emerging theories, then in the zoom forum, by using the internal evidence of the Qur'an as a source for tracing Islam history, especially from the narrative of the stories, generate situational understanding between the speaker and his audience about historical Islam. In the core of the study, if in his book he focuses on the relationship between religions in the past as an effort to reconstruct historical Islam, Mun'im also discusses the relationship between religions (Islam and Christianity) as a contemporary issue in the Zoom forum. From here, Mun'im's study of *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis* can be developed in terms of its implications for Islamic studies by Indonesian Muslim scholars, including as a study of the relationship among Islam and other religions.

#### **4. Implications of Transformation of Mun'im's Study on Islamic Studies**

In the previous explanation, there were two main focuses of Mun'im on *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis*, namely (1) the reading model in reconstructing historical Islam and (2) the relationship between Islam and previous religions, especially Christianity. These two sections simultaneously become crucial issues for Muslim scholarship in Indonesia, especially shifting apologetic Islamic studies to academics on Islam, including its historicity<sup>\*\*\*\*\*</sup>, Therefore, the two sections will be elaborated to find out the extent to which Mun'im's study model from books to zoom has implications in forming a unique model of Islamic studies in Indonesia. Thus, this article finds its significance in responding to Mun'im's anxiety about the study of Muslim scholars.

As seen in his biography, Mun'im is a Muslim scholar who has developed in his intellectual journey, which shows an open attitude towards the tradition of critical study of what is common belief for Muslims. The intellectual development by Muslim scholars

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\*\*\*\*\* In his book, Mun'im says that these various debates among modern (Western) scholars "no longer" occur among Muslim scholars, all of them are apologetic towards their Holy Scriptures. Mun'im Sirry, *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis: Pergumulan Kesarjanaan Mutakhir*, p. 46.



has actually been a lot, for example Ahmad Syafi'i Ma'arif who was originally a traditionalist then became a modernist. Furthermore, if this open attitude becomes an entry point for realizing an academic study of Islam, it can be taken by all Muslim scholars (Zaid, 1993; Syahrur, 1990) including in Indonesia. However, being an academic Muslim is not an easy challenge because his findings tend to be critical of what Muslim traditions believe and inherit<sup>†††††</sup>. It is still difficult to distinguish between criticism of thoughts and criticism of Islam. At the same time, those who become academic Muslims usually appear after pursuing education in the western world (Makin, 2015), which is thick with traces of orientalism, but it is because a “non-Muslim country”. This situation is exacerbated by the strong resistance of the traditionalist Muslim tradition to modernist scholarly studies. With these challenges, openness becomes an important (even major) part for Muslim scholars in producing academic studies, as Mun'im did.

Mun'im's open attitude in his studies forms an academic tradition that is not stagnant, but it is dynamic and developing. The book *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis*, as acknowledged, is a follow-up study as well as a solution to the previous study in the book *Kemunculan Islam dalam Kesarjanaan Revisionis*, which originally focused on deconstruction into reconstruction<sup>††††††</sup>. In fact, Mun'im's study of *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis* has not yet reached a final conclusion. In this study, Mun'im still opens up reading models or other sources that can produce new conclusions about historical Islam, for example about archaeological findings, neo-traditionalist methods, and others. In other words, Islamic studies have always been one of the objects of study that are always open to anyone, including Muslim scholars. It is the dynamic character of Mun'im's study that seems to make Qadafi (2018)<sup>§§§§§§</sup> call on Muslim scholars to respond to one another to academic studies, as his study “*Muhammad is Not the Father of Any of Your Men*” by Powers (2011). By making Islamic studies an open study, so the tradition of criticizing thoughts needs to be appreciated, as, for example, Rahman (2019) revealed Mun'im's criticism of A'zami's criticism of Armas' study and Lien Iffah's criticism of Majid Daneshgar's study (Fina, 2021). In addition to dynamic study results, the delivery of studies also needs to be dynamic, as Mun'im did from books to zoom.

In his presentation, Mun'im transformed the delivery form of *Rekonstruksi Islam Historis*, both from books to zoom and between zooms themselves. The transformation effort aims to adjust the delivery of his ideas to his audience, which is an imaginative in a book (written) to a contextual (situational) in zoom (oral) form. The idea of reconstructing historical Islam in the book, which was built with various historical-critical arguments, has been transformed into relevant narratives in three different zoom forums. This transformation of delivery is reminiscent of Mun'im's conclusion on the differences in narrative stories in the Qur'an and the Bible, namely adjusting the audience while carrying out theological reforms that are typical of Islam as a new religion. Furthermore, transforming the form of delivery while maintaining the main idea is actually something that is commonly encountered, which the author calls an attempt to contextualize thought.

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††††† Abdul Aziz's case in his dissertation, “Konsep Milk Al-Yamin Muhammad Syahrur sebagai Keabsahan Hubungan Seksual non-Marital”, where the conclusion is different from the thoughts inherited by Muslim tradition caused Abdul Aziz to receive criticism, both from scholars and not.

†††††† This expression was conveyed directly by Mun'im in Mun'im Sirry, “Diskusi Buku Esoterika Seri 16”.

§§§§§§ Zayn Qadafi considers that according to Zayn Qadafi that Mun'im has opened a new way for Islamic scholars to examine what are the beliefs of Muslims in Indonesia, especially regarding the thoughts of the revisionist group.

## 5. Conclusion

From the various discussions presented in the previous discussion, it can be concluded that there has been a transformation in the delivery of Rekonstruksi Islam Historis studies, both from books (written) to zoom (oral), as well as between zooms: Cris Foundation, Esetorika and YIPC Indonesia, which originally argued in The scope of traditionalist and revisionist scholarship is the internal argument of the Qur'an, especially the story. This transformation of the form of delivery has brought an increase in the focus of the study, from what was originally only on Islam as a religion of late antiquity to become stronger in Mun'im's efforts to harmonize relations between religions in the contemporary era in Indonesia. The findings on Mun'im's study provide two perspectives on Islamic studies. First, as a study, Islam becomes an open and dynamic object to be studied critically, so that Muslim scholars can find Islamic identity academically without the need to involve theological debates (apologetic). Therefore, the findings in Islamic studies will not be final (finished), but it will continue to develop, as happened in Mun'im's study in tracing historical Islam. Second, even though Islamic studies are academic in nature, the success in conveying their ideas depends on how the reviewer manages to adapt (situational attitude) to the intended audience, as Mun'im did in both books and zoom forums. Thus, the idea of Rekonstruksi Islam Historis is not only of academic standard, but also Mun'im transforms the form of delivery of his studies so that he is able to be relevant to his audience while maintaining the main ideas of his study. *Wallahu A'lam.*

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