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Islam, Nationalism and Democracy: A Political Biography of Mohammad Natsir. By Audrey Kahin. Singapore: NUS Press, 2012. xiv+235 pp.

Mohammad Natsir (1908–93) was one of the crucial figures of Indonesian history in the twentieth century. He was a Minangkabau from West Sumatra who emerged as a leading Islamic polemicist in the 1930s. He was educated in the colonial European-style educational system, culminating in secondary school in Bandung. There he became connected with the rather hard-line Modernist style of the Persatuan Islam, under the leadership of A. Hassan, a Singapore-born Tamil with a Javanese mother. Natsir denounced the new concept of Indonesian nationalism — championed by Sukarno, among others — insisting instead that only Islam could be the basis of the hoped-for independent Indonesian nation.

During the Japanese occupation, as Audrey Kahin recounts in this biography of Natsir, he “enjoyed considerable freedom of action in running educational affairs” (p. 39) in Bandung. In the heady days of the early revolution after the Japanese surrender in 1945, he and other Modernist politicians took over the leadership of the Masyumi Party — the main vehicle for Islamic political aspirations — from more politically neutral leaders who had been favoured by the Japanese. He was now a major political actor.

Natsir’s political ascendancy peaked in 1950–51 when he became prime minister in the first Cabinet of the post-revolutionary Republic of Indonesia. Now Natsir — once the critic of nationalist thought — was effectively its embodiment. This left him in a delicate position in facing the Darul Islam rebellion, for — as Kahin observes — “it involved his friends, his religion and his Masyumi political party” (p. 74). After six months in power — if anyone could be said to have held power in the rather chaotic early years of the Republic — Natsir resigned. He had, says Kahin, “been unable to achieve practically any of his major goals” (p. 84). No arrangements had been made for general elections, a rebellion in Ambon was brought

to an end but the Islamically inspired Darul Islam rebellion had not been quelled or reconciled with, the government was split within itself and Natsir's working relationship with President Sukarno was at an end.

Natsir was a man of real intellectual power but also of rather narrow, stiff political and religious convictions, which led him to become a voluble critic of the growing chaos, corruption, radicalism and increasingly Sukarno-dominated politics of Indonesia. He had, says Kahin, "a general tendency toward rigidity and unwillingness to soften a fundamental stance, an apparent willingness to break rather than bend in any negotiations" (p. 88). Eventually his views led Natsir and his Masyumi Party literally into the wilderness, with the declaration of the Sumatra-based rebellion known as PRRI (Pemerintah Revolusioner Republik Indonesia, Revolutionary Government of the Indonesian Republic) in 1958. The rebels were quickly crushed by combined Indonesian military operations and reduced to a life on the run in the forest. Kahin's account of Natsir's life is at its best on this troubled time in the life of her subject. In 1961 Natsir and other leaders of the rebellion surrendered and were imprisoned.

After Sukarno's chaotic regime collapsed in the confused coup and subsequent slaughters of 1965–66, to be followed by Soeharto's "New Order", Natsir was released from prison in 1966. But in fact the new military-dominated regime hardly trusted him any more than the preceding regime. He was not allowed to return to political roles, but was (perhaps rather remarkably) allowed to create the Dewan Da'wah Islamiyah Indonesia (Indonesian Islamic Mission Council, DDII) in 1967. Natsir is frequently credited with the observation, "Before, we conducted *dakwah* through politics; now, we pursue politics through *dakwah*" (p. 168).

Natsir built close links with Saudi Arabian leaders and was a founding member and vice-president of the Saudi-sponsored Rabitat al-'Alam al-Islami (Muslim World League, est. 1962). His DDII became the Rabitat's main channel for promoting Wahhabi thought in Indonesia. It built particularly influential links to university

students (more so in state universities than in Islamic ones), where it promoted Muslim Brotherhood-style religious study circles. In later years, DDII links were common in the careers of many of the most puritanical and extremist of Indonesia's Islamists.

Natsir has long deserved a serious biography, so Audrey Kahin's book is welcome and valuable. Like all books, it has some shortcomings. It tends to accept Natsir's own memories as reliable evidence, lacks any Dutch sources and rests mainly on published material and interviews. The last include extensive interviews by the author with Natsir himself in 1967, 1971 and 1976 and records of her late husband George McT. Kahin's discussions with him in the 1940s and 1950s. The book is, as noted above, at its best on Natsir's time in the jungle.

There is, however, one major shortcoming acknowledged by Audrey Kahin. Her subject was a man deeply inspired by his understanding of Islam. Kahin writes, "I became conscious of the depth of Natsir's understanding of the history and philosophy of Islam, which was the center of his life, and a realization that I could not deal adequately with that aspect of his thinking. This, then, is a biography ... [whose] primary focus is not Natsir's philosophical and religious development" (p. xii). Thus, a vital source of his motivations, values and aspirations still awaits scholarly analysis.

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Global Indonesia. By Jean Gelman Taylor. London: Routledge, 2013. 222 pp.

Jean Taylor has already given us an impressive history of Indonesia. Her *Indonesia: Peoples and Histories* (Yale University Press, 2003) broke new ground in its thematic chapters, historiographic