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Islamic Post-Traditionalism in Indonesia

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Islamic Post-Traditionalism in Indonesia

RUMADI

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CONTENTS

<i>Foreword</i>	vii
<i>Preface</i>	xi
1. Introduction	1
2. NU Intellectualism: Foundations	15
3. NU and the Islamic Post-Traditionalist Discourse	95
4. Islamic Post-Traditionalism and the Future of NU Intellectualism	169
5. Conclusion	283
<i>Bibliography</i>	291
<i>Index</i>	301
<i>About the Author</i>	309

FOREWORD

POST-TRADITIONALISM IN NU?

By Abdurrahman Wahid

In this book, the predicate “post-traditionalist” is applied to anyone who desires change within Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). This of course is inherently problematic and must be resolved immediately. However, there is one aspect in the history of NU’s foundation that Dr Rumadi does not cover, namely the dialogue between Islam and nationalism, which has been around since before NU was established.

In all his enthusiasm, Rumadi has the tendency to take anything that appears as a “deviation” from old traditionalism, and consider it part of the student revival that is needed today. This attitude, of viewing post-traditionalism as the essence of NU “revival”, is frankly quite dangerous because it can be easily misused.

In fact, there is also a “revival” of older parties to strengthen this old traditionalism, including within NU, in reaction to the attitude that rejects tradition. This does not complement or serve post-traditionalism, but rather opposes it. The most obvious example of this is the emergence of figures such as KH Ma’ruf Amin and KH Sahal Mahfudz. They do not lead NU to “oppose” traditionalism; instead, they uphold traditionalism but in “deviation” to other parties who hold to the old traditionalism. How do we explain the attitude of the Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI), which is so quick to deem others deviant? Is it not so that this leads to the religious formalism that NU has fought against from the very beginning? Rumadi does not explain this issue. This could well encourage others to consider all NU members as post-traditional.

Thus, it is clear that within NU there is also a denial of the creative dialogue between Islam on the one hand and nationalism on the other. So where then do we place people like Bung Karno, let alone our friends in dialogue such as KH M. Hasjim As' yari and NU *kyai* in general who are not usually considered? And what of the Mecca chapter of Syarikat Islam that was established in 1913 and went on to inspire a number of efforts to enforce religious traditionalism, but also freed religion from stagnation? What do we label it? And how should we consider the actions of H.O.S. Tjokroaminoto and his son-in-law Soekarno, along with KH M. Hasjim As' yari from Tebu Ireng *pesantren* in Jombang, his cousin KH A. Wahab Chasbullah, his nephew Ahmad Joyosugito (founder of the Ahmadiyah movement in Indonesia), his son KH A. Wahid Hasjim and his cousin KH A. Kahar Mudzakir (who later became a member of Muhammadiyah's national leadership)?

We must be careful here in judging those who, at the end of the day, have become the "NU Ulama". Indeed, it is not easy to follow the developments of an organization like NU over the decades. The creative dialogue between NU and the spirit of nationalism is by no means easy to explain. Before NU had been established, the Majelis Taswirul Akfar (Council for the Awakening of Thought) was formed, and before it the Nahdatu Al-Tudjar (Awakening of the Merchants) and the Nahdlatu al-Wathon (Revival of the Motherland). This was followed by the NU Congress in 1935 in Banjarmasin. All of this deeply influenced NU, and we do not now know whether it should be labelled as post-traditionalism or not.

In the Congress in Banjarmasin, NU decided it was not a religious obligation to establish an "Islamic State". That in itself was startling, and still we do not know what label to give this. In Banjarmasin five figures rejected the decision, holding tight to their convictions that an Islamic State had to be established. They later changed their tune in 1950, accepting the Republic of Indonesia that they had initially rejected. In fact, they became the "Pancasila Heroes" and essentially regarded the President of the Republic of Indonesia as the legal ruler of state (*waliyul amri al-dlaruri*) with effective authority for a set period of time (*bi al syaukah*). For how long? Forever, until doomsday. The phrase "for a set period of time" was used because the requirements for the President of the Republic of Indonesia were not the same as the requirements for the ruler of state. These results from the National Conference in Medan in 1957 are rarely used in considerations of NU's stance and attitudes.

It is clear from the discussion above that examining the term post-traditionalism requires a willingness to use all the materials available. However, this book is of great value as it reveals the enormous process currently taking place within NU. Whatever it may be called, it is of immense interest to studies of the changes occurring within the Muslim community in Indonesia. No matter the labels used, this book details with interest how the traditional ulama are reacting to challenges from within and from outside of their community. This is the most important thing to be obtained from this book.

The process through which NU was born was a result of historical developments, and not the cause of the changes that subsequently took place. This is the great value of the book you hold in your hands.

Jakarta, 7 February 2008

PREFACE

No words suffice but praise to God the Almighty for it was with His help that I was able to complete this dissertation through much hard work. Although the completion of this dissertation took much sweat, time, and money, I am aware that there are many gaps that were unable to be explored. This was a consequence of limitations I faced in being able to examine everything related to the research topic. However, this is not an excuse for any academic errors in this research. I take full responsibility for all the shortcomings in this book.

This work does not represent the end of my academic career, but rather the beginning of a long and more challenging academic journey. Consequently, I accept criticism from readers in order to become a more responsible intellectual.

Although I worked hard to finish this research, I feel indebted, both directly and indirectly, to many; those who helped, who gave motivation, who were discussion partners, who continually asked if my dissertation was finished, and to those who helped collect data in the field.

First of all, to my parents. They both worked hard, expending much energy and time to guide me while I obtained my degrees, from undergraduate through to doctoral. In all their simplicity and with all their restrictions, they have always been a light in my life that has never flickered nor died. To my father, who is now in the presence of God (7/1/2005), I hope you are peaceful by His side. Your sacrifice was not in vain.

To my beloved wife, Emmamatul Qudsiyah who wished that I would finish this dissertation quickly in amongst the busyness of making a living. My two children, Affan F. Azka and Najma Fuaida, who have forgone their right to my love and attention, you always give me inspiration.

To my supervisors, Prof. Dr Azyumardi Azra and Dr Bahtiar Effendy, who encouraged me to finish this dissertation, and who were both teachers

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To the management and academic staff at the Bengkulu State Islamic College (STAIN Bengkulu) who permitted me to study while I was still teaching there. Your assistance and flexibility helped me greatly in my studies. Similarly to the staff of the Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University in Jakarta (UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta), especially in the Faculty of Islamic Syariah and Law, who willingly allowed me to forgo my duties as I finished my dissertation.

To my friends who became discussion partners and critiqued my dissertation. Yenni Wahid, Ahmad Suaedy, Abd. Moqsith Ghazali (The Wahid Institute), Ulil Abshar-Abdalla, Khamami Zada, the late Maskur Maskub, M. Imdadun Rahmat, and Fawaid amongst others (Lakpesdam NU's *Taswirul Afkar Journal*), Farid Wajdi (Yogyakarta/Leiden), Jadul Maula (LKIS), and others at P3M, Desantara, JIMM, ISIS, eLSAD (no longer active), Averoes (Malang), LAPAR (Makassar), and the Liberal Islam Network (JIL). I cannot forget Mr Masykuri Abdillah and others at Jakarta UIN's Center for Development of Human Resources (PPSDM) who were happy to give me room to do as I needed and obtain self-actualization. These friends have all helped me greatly in completing this dissertation, although perhaps they are not aware of this.

Hopefully the kind favours of all are rewarded accordingly. I hope that this work is beneficial to all.

Kampung Semanggi, 16 July 2005

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