

Martin van Bruinessen, "Wahhabi influences in Indonesia, real and imagined"

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Wahhabi influences in Indonesia, real and imagined

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The first alleged incursion of Wahhabism into Indonesia occurred in 1804, when three pilgrims returned from Mecca to West Sumatra and initiated a radical and occasionally violent movement of religious and social reform. Dutch observers soon assumed that these pilgrims had been influenced by Wahhabi ideas during the Najdi occupation of Mecca in 1803, and this assumption has been adopted by most later Indonesian authors, although the evidence is extremely thin and there are many indications to the contrary. The large Indonesian community resident in Mecca was a medium through which knowledge about Wahhabism reached Indonesia, but the community itself appears to have remained virtually immune to Wahhabi influences.

Wahhabism became a hotly debated issue after the second Wahhabi conquest of Mecca in 1924. Indirectly it gave rise to the major traditionalist organization, Nahdlatul Ulama, that had as its chief objective the defence of beliefs and practices that were attacked by the Wahhabis: *wasila*, *ziyara*, *tariqa*, *taqlid*, *fiqh*. The middle part of the 20th century was characterized by often fierce debates over traditional practices, in which their opponents were invariably dubbed Wahhabis by the traditionalists. In reality there was little direct influence of [the Saudi version of] Wahhabism on Indonesian reformist thought until the 1970s. There was, however a certain convergence: the puritan *Persatuan Islam* movement appears to have developed its strict Salafi ideas almost in isolation from the contemporary Middle East, but evolved towards positions that were almost indistinguishable from those that were internationally sponsored by the Saudis. The *fatwa* rubric of *Persatuan Islam* journal *Al Muslimun* is indicative of the strict Salafi approach adopted by this organization.

It was political developments that pushed a segment of the Indonesian reformists – notably the Indonesian Islamic Da`wa Council – towards

closer cooperation with the Saudis (through the Rabita) from the late 1960s on. Ideologically they remained closer to the Muslim Brotherhood than to Wahhabism, however. The Saudis sponsored (financially) a range of educational activities, even among moderate traditionalists, with the effect that Hanbali *fiqh* conquered a place beside, or even instead of Shafi`i *fiqh* in several traditional *pesantren* (madrasa).

In the 1980s and 1990s an unending stream of anti-Zionist, anti-Semitic, anti-Christian, anti-Shi`a, anti-Ahmadi and anti-liberal tracts, many of them of Saudi or Kuwaiti provenance, flooded the cheap book market in Indonesia. The Saudi Embassy attempted to intervene in Indonesian religious debates, and graduates from Saudi institutes of learning had an increasing impact on public debate. The final decade of Suharto's rule gave this variety of Islam, innocuous to the regime, a wide berth.

Since the fall of Suharto, a few radical Muslim groups have acquired a disproportionate influence. One of them, the *Laskar Jihad*, is the one most directly influenced by contemporary Wahhabism, its leaders having studied with such luminaries as Bin Baz. This was the first movement in Indonesia that rejected elections on religious grounds and adopted a number of other positions that distinguish it from non-Wahhabi Salafi groups.