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**NO. 311**

**INDONESIAN MUSLIMS IN A  
GLOBALISING WORLD**  
WESTERNISATION, ARABISATION, AND INDIGENISING RESPONSES

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**S. RAJARATNAM SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES  
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The S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) was officially inaugurated on 1 January 2007. Prior to this, it was known as the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (IDSS), which was established 10 years earlier, on 30 July 1996, by Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam, then Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence. Dr Tony Tan later became the elected seventh President of the Republic of Singapore. Like its predecessor, RSIS was established as an autonomous entity within Nanyang Technological University (NTU). RSIS' mission is to be a leading research and graduate teaching institution in strategic and international affairs in the Asia Pacific. To accomplish this mission, it will:

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## Abstract

In the two decades since the fall of the Suharto regime, one of the most conspicuous developments has been the rapidly increasing influence of religious interpretations and practices emanating from the Middle East and more specifically the Gulf states, leading observers to speak of the “Arabisation” of Indonesian Islam. In the preceding decades, the state had strongly endorsed liberal and development-oriented Muslim discourses widely perceived as “Westernised” and associated with secularism and Western education. Indonesia’s unique Muslim traditions have in fact been shaped by many centuries of global flows of people and ideas, connecting the region not just with the Arab heartlands of Islam and Europe but South Asia and China. What is relatively new, however, is the presence of transnational Islamist and fundamentalist movements, which weakened the established nation-wide Muslim organisations (Muhammadiyah, NU) that had been providing religious guidance for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The perceived threat of transnational radical Islam has led to renewed reflection on, and efforts to rejuvenate, indigenous Muslim traditions.

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His involvement with Indonesia began with fieldwork in a poor urban *kampung* in Bandung (1983-84) and included stints as an advisor on research methods at LIPI (1986-90) and as a senior lecturer at the IAIN Sunan Kalijaga in Yogyakarta (1991-94). After his return to the Netherlands, van Bruinessen took part in founding the International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM) in 1998 and was one of its professors during 1999 through 2008. Since his formal retirement in 2011, he held visiting professorships in Indonesia as well as Turkey.

## Introduction

Indonesia has experienced, especially since the fall of Suharto's "New Order" regime in 1998 but beginning earlier, an increasing prominence of Islamic activism in the public sphere. This culminated recently in a series of massive but peaceful demonstrations in Jakarta that were billed as "Actions in Defence of Islam" (*Aksi Bela Islam*). The largest of these demonstrations, held on 2 December 2016, brought perhaps a million people out on to the streets; many of them dressed in white, the colour associated with Islam, and in a style vaguely associated with the Arab Gulf countries. This series of demonstrations probably represents the most successful mass mobilisation in recent Indonesian history. The organisers and public leaders of the demonstrations belonged to various radical, fundamentalist, and conservative groups, but a majority of the participants belonged to the mainstream of Indonesian Islam and were not radicals by any means. Many came from other parts of the country in disciplined groups; their journeys were organised by the local branches of mainstream Muslim organisations or religious teachers.

There was an obvious political context to these demonstrations, namely the approaching municipal elections and the candidacy of Jakarta's governor, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (popularly known as "Ahok") for re-election. Basuki is an ethnic Chinese and a Christian, and his opponents appealed to deep-rooted Muslim suspicions about Christians and especially the Chinese. They argued that the Qur'an urges Muslims not to make Christians or Jews their leaders. Five years earlier, such efforts to delegitimise Basuki had been unsuccessful, but this time his opponents found the ideal mobilising issue: they construed an infelicitous remark by Basuki in a campaign speech as a deliberate insult to the Qur'an. Part of the costs of bringing hundreds of thousands from all over Java to the capital was probably borne by the campaigns of other candidates for the governorship of Jakarta, who included the son of former president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, and a Muslim politician supported by Prabowo Subianto, a presidential hopeful. The mobilisation, however, was entirely the work of networks of Muslim religious preachers and activists. With a narrative of Islam under threat, radicals and conservatives succeeded in connecting with a much broader section of the Muslim community than their natural constituency alone. The demonstrations were primarily directed against Basuki and demanded his punishment for alleged blasphemy; for many participants, the demonstrations were also a show of force and a display of pride in Muslim solidarity.<sup>1</sup>

The organisers appealed to an old anxiety, once widespread among Muslims, about the threat of Christianisation: the perception that there existed a foreign master plan for weakening and destroying Islam in Indonesia and leaving the country dominated by (pro-Western) Christians.<sup>2</sup> The fears go back to the colonial past, when missionary schools were providing the best education, which resulted in a

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<sup>1</sup> Two collections of articles on the "Actions to Defend Islam" have appeared so far: the essays in Rais & Bagir (2016) focus on increasing conservatism and intolerance, and changes in Muslim discourse in general, and those in Sangadji dkk (2017) analyse the economic interests hidden behind the "Islamic populism" of the demonstrations.

<sup>2</sup> Muslims' suspicions of Christian intentions found their parallel in Christian fears of Muslim intolerance. For an excellent study of these pervasive mutual fears during the Suharto period, see Mujiburrahman (2006).

situation that, for a long time after independence, Christians, who numbered less than 8 per cent of the population, were highly over-represented among the bureaucratic, military, and business elites. During the first decades of the New Order period (roughly 1966–1990), the regime was distrustful of Muslim politicians and continued to favour Christians and nominal Muslims. The most visible segments of the business elite, moreover, were the Chinese; this was a result of the Dutch colonial policies that allowed the Chinese to engage in few other roles besides those of middlemen and traders. There is a widespread perception that the entire economy is controlled by the Chinese minority. The real-estate development and rising prices in the central districts of Jakarta have pushed the original, mostly Muslim population to the margins, resulting in an increased proportion of Chinese and Christians there. Added to these older concerns was the perception that the government of President Joko Widodo granted large infrastructural investments to Chinese companies, which brought (as was incorrectly claimed) large numbers of Chinese workers into the country.

The Muslim mobilisation of the “Actions in Defence of Islam” also aroused concern among non-Muslims as well as segments of the Muslim population about the increasing influence of radical activists and conservative preachers, and the increasing intolerance. Many attribute the changing tone of public Muslim discourse to influences from the Middle East, or more precisely the Arab Gulf countries, and speak of the Arabisation of Indonesian Islam as a threat to inter-religious and inter-ethnic harmony. At first sight, the Arabisation thesis has a high degree of plausibility because many of the most visible actors belonged to Indonesia’s Arab community or had strong Arab connections. Moreover, many of those who took part in the demonstration deliberately dressed in styles that they associated with the Arab Middle East, apparently believing that such sartorial styles were more “Islamic” than traditional Indonesian or Western clothes. The hard core of the demonstration consisted of the Islamic Defenders Front (Front Pembela Islam, FPI), a vigilante group led by the Indonesian Arab Rizieq Syihab that had carried out numerous raids against bars and nightclubs as well as actions against deviant Muslim sects such as the Ahmadiyah, and newly erected churches.<sup>3</sup> Among the other coordinators, graduates of Medina Islamic University in Saudi Arabia played a prominent role.

## Arabisation

Concerns with Arabisation of Indonesian Islam were first raised soon after the fall of the Suharto regime, when various transnational Islamic movements, which had been present underground during the previous decade, came out into the open. Middle-East-based movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood (which became a legal party, PKS), Hizbut Tahrir, and various Salafi groups appeared to be successfully recruiting young people, drawing them away from established, moderate organisations such as Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU).<sup>4</sup> Members of Indonesia’s Arab community were prominent among the leaders of the radical and sometimes violent organisations that emerged, such

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<sup>3</sup> On this organisation and the anti-Arab feelings that its actions generated among sections of the Indonesian public, see Bamualim (2011) and Wilson (2014). An internet search of images for “Front Pembela Islam” will reveal their picturesque sartorial style.

<sup>4</sup> See Bruinessen (2002).

as Laskar Jihad (which fought a holy war against Christians in the Moluccas in the early 2000s) and Jemaah Islamiyah (which was involved in a series of terrorist attacks, also in the early 2000s). Numerous graduates from universities in Arab countries, most of them recipients of Arab government grants, returned to Indonesia and set themselves up as religious teachers and preachers, dedicating themselves to “correcting” Indonesian Muslim practices and beliefs. New mosques and schools were built, with financial and ideological support from foundations in Arab Gulf countries.

There has been a major shift in everyday Muslim practices, and much of that shift can be interpreted as an adaptation to real or imagined Arab Muslim practices. Under the influence of purist preachers, many young people have begun to reject their parents’ religious views, which they believe to be misguided. Middle-class lifestyles increasingly involved religious identity markers, with changes in consumption, habitus, and dress that signalled Islam and orientation towards the Arab world. For those who could afford it, the *umrah*, visits to Mecca outside the major *hajj* (pilgrimage) season, became a form of conspicuous consumption. Many adopted a sartorial style that signified an increased Islamic awareness. While hardly any Indonesian Muslim women were veiled in 1980, hardly any Muslim women today do not at least cover her head, and the trend has been progressing towards heavier and heavier veiling.<sup>5</sup> Everyday conversations have also been affected by and are increasingly punctuated with “Islamic” expressions, many of them in Arabic. Instead of Indonesian *selamat pagi* (“good morning”), many people are now using Arabic (and presumably more Islamic) *as-salam alaykum*; instead of Indonesian *saudara*, meaning “brother” or simply “you”, the Arabic *akhi* is gaining field; people may call their mother *ummi* rather than *ibu*, and hundreds of other Arabic expressions are gradually taking the place of the corresponding Indonesian ones.<sup>6</sup>

## Westernisation

Those who support this tendency to purge Indonesian culture of elements that are considered incompatible with what they believe to be “pure” Islam claim that they are defending not Arab culture but “authentic” Islam. They reject traditional Muslim beliefs and practices as they perceive these beliefs and practices as being tainted by pre-Islamic superstitions or foreign, mostly Western, efforts to change the essence of Islam. Islamic reform movements have, since the beginning of the 20th century, made efforts to purge Islam of elements believed to be remnants of Indonesia’s pre-Islamic past. More recently, the purifying impulse has been directed especially against perceived or real Western influences.

Indonesia’s founding fathers, the leaders of the Independence movement, were mostly educated in Dutch schools and influenced by Western thought. The succeeding generations of the elite were at least in part educated in North America, Western Europe, or Australia. This is also true for many of the

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<sup>5</sup>For a sophisticated study of the rapid increase in female covering in post-Suharto Indonesia, see Smith-Hefner (2007).

<sup>6</sup>For anyone interested in this Arabising trend in daily conversation, it is sufficient to take a brief look at Indonesians’ Facebook postings, which illustrate the tendency very well.

leading Muslim intellectuals who actively intervened in the public sphere during the New Order period. In the post-Suharto years, numerous Muslim non-government organisations (NGOs), discussion forums, and publishing ventures were supported by Western sponsors, in the framework of efforts to strengthen civil society and enable a vibrant public sphere, in support of democratisation.

Discordant and opposing voices had been suppressed or marginalised under the New Order, but from the 1990s onwards, various radical and fundamentalist groups emerged. After Suharto's fall, they became the dominant voices in the public, setting the terms of debate. International issues — the Palestine question, Afghanistan, Muslim struggles in the Philippines and Thailand, and somewhat later America's "War on Terror"— became major topics of debate, along with the issue of implementation of Islamic law, and, especially, polemics against Muslims who were perceived as stooges of Western interests. This concerned secular and non-practising Muslims, as well as Muslim thinkers, especially those who had sought to develop a Muslim discourse compatible with modernity, liberal democracy, gender equality, harmonious inter-religious relations, and rationalism.

Secularism, liberalism, and pluralism, in the view of the radicals, are not innocent intellectual exercises but strategies that are deliberately imposed on the Muslim's world by the West, as part of a new Crusade to weaken and defeat Islam. They perceive them to be part of a Western project aimed at undermining Islam, often referred as the Arabic expression *ghazwul fikri* (*al-ghazw al-fikri*), "cultural invasion". In this view, Western popular culture — films and popular music, consumption of alcohol and various drugs, and freer attitudes towards sexuality —was deliberately exported to undermine Muslim societies' moral values and open them up to further exploitation. The largely secular, cultural, and intellectual elites of the recent past, liberal Muslim thinkers and advocates of interreligious dialogue, and proponents of the rights of religious minorities are all accused of being part of the same *ghazwul fikri*, and they have been made the targets of ideological attacks that have marginalised their influence in society.

The discourse of *ghazwul fikri*, originating from the Middle East and originally associated with the Muslim Brotherhood, gained influence in major Muslim institutions and organisations.<sup>7</sup> In their 2004 congresses, both Muhammadiyah and NU removed their most prominent "liberal" members from their central committees, and in the following year, Indonesia's semi-official Council of Muslim Scholars (MUI) issued a *fatwa* (authoritative opinion) that declared secularism, liberalism, and pluralism incompatible with Islam. Religious thought that could be described as tainted by Western influences was henceforth viewed with suspicion, and progressive and liberal Muslim thinkers were put in a defensive position.<sup>8</sup> Notably, it was no longer advisable to advocate harmonious inter-religious relations and the rights of religious minorities on the basis of liberal and secular reasoning. Muslims who were uncomfortable with the increasing influence of intolerant and polarising discourses had to look elsewhere for an alternative. This was what led to a re-appreciation of the indigenous tradition of

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<sup>7</sup> The origins of the concept and its use in polemical discourses in the Middle East and Indonesia are discussed in greater detail in Bruinessen (2014).

<sup>8</sup> See the introduction and the contributions by Burhani and Ichwan in Bruinessen (2013).

Muslim learning and piety i.e. Indonesian “traditional” Islam as it had flourished before the days of rapid and pervasive globalisation.

## Indigenisation: Islam Nusantara

NU and Muhammadiyah were, to some extent, carried away by the general trend against secular, pluralist, and liberal discourse, but they also felt threatened by the increasing influence of transnational Islam and its Arabising impulse. Especially in the traditionalist NU, there were many who felt that their traditions, rooted in local culture, warranted a more concerted defence. In the 1980s and 1990s, the NU’s charismatic leader Abdurrahman Wahid (popularly known as Gus Dur) had, in opposing political Islam, proposed a “cultural approach” and insisted that “indigenous Islam”, i.e., Islam expressed in Indonesian cultural forms, was just as legitimate as “Arab Islam”. The idea, like many of Gus Dur’s other interventions in public debate, has remained controversial within NU because some believed that it legitimised syncretistic practices. At its 2015 congress, however, the NU formally adopted this concept, under the new name of “Islam Nusantara”, along with loyalty to the unitary Indonesian nation-state, among its principles. Rejecting the transnational Arabising trends, the NU reiterated that it based its identity on locally grown traditions of Islamic learning and practice.<sup>9</sup>

The name Nusantara had first been proposed by the early 20th century nationalist Ki Hadjar Dewantoro as an alternative for Indonesia, which was of Greek origin and reflected the mistaken Western view of the Archipelago as “India”. The name Nusantara, which immediately conjures up a string of islands to Malay speakers, in fact, occurs in old Javanese texts, though with a slightly different meaning. To modern nationalists, it came to denote all of present Indonesia, possibly also including Malaysia. Significantly different from the name Indonesia, the name Nusantara has overtones of indigenous authenticity.<sup>10</sup>

The proponents of Islam Nusantara do not, of course, imply that this is a variety of Islam that arose in Indonesia in the absence of foreign influences. Rather, it recognises that Islam first took its organised and systematised form among Arab speakers but that wherever it spread, it adopted local colours because it had to interact with different cultural concepts. The core beliefs and rituals show little variation, but they are embedded in broader cultural practices that may vary widely from one place to the other. There is no *a priori* reason to consider the Arab culture as a superior vehicle for Islamic values. Other cultures, the argument goes, are equally legitimate carriers of Islam. Islam Nusantara is

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<sup>9</sup> Prior to the NU congress, both the NU chairman, Kyai Said Aqil Siroj, and the prolific NU intellectual Ahmad Baso, published books emphasising different aspects of the concept (Siroj 2015; Baso 2015a, 2015b). Siroj stressed that it meant that the cultures of Nusantara were inspired by Islam (and therefore not in need of being purified and “Islamicised”); Baso defined Islam Nusantara as the tradition of Southeast Asian Islamic learning.

<sup>10</sup> The Dutch historian Bernard Vlekke significantly adopted the term Nusantara (crediting Ki Hadjar) for his pioneering attempt to write an Indonesia-centred history of Indonesia, countering the standard colonial historiography (Vlekke 1943).

the result of centuries of interaction between Islamic propagation (*tabligh, dakwah*) and local cultures. It is, moreover, recognised that Islamic propagation also came in a variety of cultural guises.

One favourite legendary account of the Islamisation of Java concerns the saint Sunan Kalijaga, who employed the cultural forms of *wayang* and *gamelan* to spread the Islamic message. He is the most Javanese of the Nine Saints who are credited with the first propagation of Islam. Unlike the other saints, he did not come to Java from outside but never left the island and acquired his deep understanding of Islam through solitary meditation in a Javanese forest, whereas the other saints are typically believed to have brought Islam either directly from Mecca or by way of various locations along the coasts of the Indian Ocean and South China Sea.<sup>11</sup>

Indonesian Muslims are acutely aware of the various foreign cultures that left their traces in Indonesian Muslim traditions. The early Muslim literatures of Nusantara contain narratives that appear derived from Persian originals (possibly from North India, where Persian was the learned language of Islam), and some appear to be Shi'i in inspiration.<sup>12</sup> Some monumental early Muslim gravestones appear to have been hailed from Gujarat in India; other grave monuments show Chinese influences. Legends associate the saints Sunan Ampel and Sunan Bonang with Champa before they arrived in Java, and, as will be shown below, a dubious source that attributes Chinese origins to the Nine Saints has gained acceptance among some within NU as well as among Indonesian Chinese who recently converted to Islam. These diverse cultural influences have, however, become integrated in a distinctly Southeast Asian synthesis.

## Local and global in Islam Nusantara

What is said of Islam Nusantara can also be said of Indonesian cultures in general. They are highly distinctive, but that is not because of isolation from foreign influences. In fact, these cultures came about through centuries and millennia of active interaction with powerful cultural flows that reached the Archipelago from across the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea.<sup>13</sup> Cultural borrowing was a creative process, in which the “foreign” elements were incorporated into a distinctively local synthesis. Nusantara was never a passive recipient of all those foreign influences. The borrowing was selective; only new elements that made sense in the context of the existing Indonesian cultures were adopted, and many of these borrowed elements were given a distinctive twist.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, the dominant global flows impacting Indonesia, each supported by communities of settlers, hailed from three powerful centres: the West, the heartlands of Islam, and

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<sup>11</sup> Clifford Geertz (1968) recounts the legend of Sunan Kalijaga's conversion and preaching as an emblematic case of the “classical style” of Javanese Islam before scripturalism took over. For a contemporary Javanese account see Chodjim (2013). Sunyoto (2012) is a useful compilation of legends and historical evidence about the Nine Saints (*wali songo*).

<sup>12</sup> For a judicious overview of Persian and Shi'i influences, see the Introduction in Formichi and Feener (2015).

<sup>13</sup> This was brought out, for a much earlier period, in the important studies on Southeast Asian early states by Coedès (1948).

China. As a nation, Indonesia was given shape by Dutch colonialism and Islam-inspired resistance to foreign domination. Colonial rule, gradually expanding during this period, integrated the various regions of insular Southeast Asia under a single administration and introduced new ideas and practices in law, education, and associational life. Islam had come to Indonesia from various parts of Asia and in many different forms, but in the 19th century, the most important cultural brokers were Arab traders from Hadramaut (now a part of Yemen) and *hajjis*, i.e., local men who had made the pilgrimage to Mecca.

Nusantara is home to more than a dozen major ethnic groups and hundreds of smaller ones. Two competing entities provided a structure that transcended ethnic boundaries and integrated all these various groups into a larger whole: the colonial administration, and the networks of Muslim learning and trade. It has often been observed that the Indonesian nation-state was the product of Dutch colonialism; its boundaries coincide exactly with those of the Netherlands Indies and not with those of the large pre-colonial states of Srivijaya and Majapahit. The borders that separate the Malaysian and Indonesian parts of Borneo or independent East Timor from the Indonesian western part of the island do not make sense in terms of geography and ethnicity but are generally accepted as legitimate by Indonesians because the former colonial administrations integrated these parts into different polities with different state institutions and different regimes of education.

Inter-island trade and the cultural flows accompanying it constituted another powerful integrating factor. The spread of Islam is closely associated with long-distance trade as well as inter-island trade. Trading networks and networks of religious learning that brought students from one part of Nusantara to another in search of knowledge created a sense of common destiny across large parts of the archipelago. This obviously did not stop at the boundaries drawn by the colonial powers but included the Malayan Peninsula and the southern Philippines. The expansion of Islam and the expansion of colonial administration throughout Nusantara proceeded more or less simultaneously.<sup>14</sup> For both, moreover, the Malay language, with its numerous Arabic loan-words, was the preferred medium of communication. The Malay language, and other cultural expressions associated with it (poetry, song, and music), came to constitute the core of Indonesia's national identity.<sup>15</sup>

Muslims have always looked towards Mecca and Medina as the prestigious heartland, and many travelled there not only to fulfil a religious obligation but also to gain spiritual power and prestige.

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<sup>14</sup> The Dutch scholar W.F. Wertheim, who was fiercely critical of the colonial venture, presents the interesting argument that the spread of Islam was largely a response to colonialism. In his view, many adopted Islam as a way of rejecting the authority of the East India Company and later the Dutch civil administration (Wertheim 1956). Islam was in fact well-established in many parts of Nusantara before the arrival of the first Dutch trading ships in 1600. However, in the 19th and 20th centuries the strengthening of Islamic sentiment, anticolonial resistance and the birth of nationalism were closely connected.

<sup>15</sup> The most prominent Muslim intellectual of Indonesia's New Order period, Nurcholish Madjid, who was a strong defender of the legitimacy of Indonesian cultural expressions of Islam and the accommodation of Indonesian nationalism and Islam, argued in one of his last works that the truly national art forms of Indonesia were not gamelan and wayang, which belonged to the court cultures of Java and Bali only but the popular styles of Malay song and music, with their Indian Ocean rhythms, that are loved by people throughout the archipelago: a vernacular Muslim culture that united Nusantara from below rather than the "high" art forms that were imposed from above (Madjid 2004).

These pilgrims and seekers of knowledge were the true Islamisers of Indonesia. Upon their return, they often attempted to reform local religious practices and bring the practices closer to what they had witnessed in Arabia. The history of Islam in Indonesia is one of wave upon wave of reform, brought about by these returning pilgrims, after which the reformed practices and beliefs were accommodated in new local adaptations or gave rise to anti-reformist protests.

The regular communications with Arabia were not the only “foreign” factor impinging on Indonesian Islam, however. The leading nationalists of the early 20th century had received their education in Dutch schools and had no access to Arabic texts. Those among them who were committed to Islam and considered Islam to be part of Indonesia’s national identity depended on Dutch scholarship on Islam and a Dutch translation of the Qur’an. The first association of such Muslim intellectuals, Jong Islamieten Bond (JIB, Young Muslims’ League, established in 1925), published its journal, *Het Licht* (The Light), in Dutch rather than Malay. The discussions in the association also indicated a quite Westernised approach to Islamic issues.<sup>16</sup> Around the same time, the Ahmadiyah also began to gain influence in the same Dutch-educated circles because of its English-language publications and the English-speaking missionaries it had sent from British India to Indonesia.<sup>17</sup>

Another significant European contribution to the distinctive character of Indonesian Islam concerned its associational life. The major Muslim associations, such as Muhammadiyah and NU, were established in compliance with Dutch Indies legislation and they followed the model of Dutch Christian religious associations in terms of the type of activities they were engaged in. The legislation imposed periodical congresses and a formal leadership structure, with a board answerable to the congress. Key activities included education (in various types of schools), health care (hospitals), religious outreach (*tabligh*, predication), sports, and cultural activities. These associations are unique for Indonesia and have no equals elsewhere in the Muslim world.

In a much earlier period, there had also been a distinctive Chinese component in Indonesian Islam, still recognisable in the architecture of certain mosques and saints’ shrines.<sup>18</sup> The role of Chinese Muslims in the conversion of Java’s north coast to Islam remains a highly controversial subject, but in the past decade, recent Chinese converts have made an effort to highlight and revive the relations

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<sup>16</sup> This is brought out clearly in the essay on these Dutch-educated Muslim intellectuals by Ridwan Saidi (1989).

<sup>17</sup> The Ahmadiyah was a Muslim religious movement founded in late 19<sup>th</sup> century British India by the charismatic Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, which soon split into two rival sections, of which the larger, with headquarters in Qadian, considered the founder as a prophet and the smaller, based in Lahore, defined him as a reformer and renewer of Islam (*mujaddid*). Both sent envoys to the Netherlands Indies, leading to a lasting presence of the Ahmadiyah in Indonesia. It was the Lahore missionaries who made a significant impact on Muslim reformism in Indonesia. The Qadiani claim of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad’s prophethood has been the ostensible reason for world-wide anti-Ahmadi campaigns and violent attacks against Ahmadi communities, including in Indonesia. See Beck (2005), Burhani (2014).

<sup>18</sup> Notable examples are: the mosques of Palembang in South Sumatra and Sumenep in Madura, and certain buildings in the grave complexes of the Javanese saints Sunan Gunungjati in Cirebon and Sunan Giri in Gresik. For an illuminating overview of Chinese elements in Indonesian local varieties of Islam, see: Lombard and Salmon (1985); see also the observations on the pervasive Chinese influence on Javanese culture in general in Lombard (1990).

between China's Muslim communities and those of Indonesia.<sup>19</sup> Recent scholarship, one may add, also takes the Chinese connection more seriously than was the case in the past. The prestigious *New Cambridge History of Islam* argues that it was likely that the arrival of a large number of Muslims expelled from Quanzhou in the 1360s brought about the first wave of conversion of large numbers of indigenous people in Borneo, Sumatra, and Java. There had been Muslim traders living in coastal settlements before, but only after 1360 do we see a significant conversion.<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, there are clear traces of Muslim influences originating from various coastal regions of India in the early phases of Islamisation.<sup>21</sup> In the late 19th and 20th centuries, reform movements in India also made an impact in Indonesia. A modern *madrasah* established by Indians in Mecca, the Sawlatiyya, had significant numbers of Southeast Asian students and influenced educational reform in Indonesia. In the 1930s, the Ahmadiyah mission reached Indonesia, and in the 1970s came the *Tablighi Jamaat*.<sup>22</sup> Modest numbers of Indonesians and larger groups of Malaysians study in Indian *madrasahs* such as Deoband and Lucknow's NU. More recently, Turkish Islamic movements have started proselytising in Indonesia, with a modest measure of success, as some people welcomed Sufi-flavoured Turkish Islam as more compatible than the puritan Arab styles of Islam.

In the following sections, I shall discuss how Western academic and political styles and political contestations in the Middle East have impacted on Muslim discourses in Indonesia. I conclude with the description of one particular attempt to reinvent and revitalise local tradition to withstand the onslaught of purist transnational Islam.

## **Studying Islam in the West: The New Order and its favoured Muslim discourses**

Indonesians who wanted to increase their knowledge and understanding of Islam had traditionally spent periods under the guidance of prominent scholars in Mecca or at the Azhar in Cairo. Leading religious authorities of Indonesia's main Muslim associations, the traditionalist NU and the reformist Muhammadiyah, owed their legitimacy at least in part to their studies in the Middle East. The major centres of Islamic learning in South Asia, which exercised some influence in Malaysia, never attracted many Indonesian students. In the final three decades of the 20th century, however, Western universities emerged as alternative sites to learn about Islam.

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<sup>19</sup> Two respected Dutch scholars lent their prestige to a fascinating but unreliable Malay text claiming that most of the saints of Java's north coast were of Chinese origin: De Graaf and Pigeaud (1984). On the recent efforts to re-establish a connection with China's Muslim minority, see Chiou (2007).

<sup>20</sup> Wade (2010).

<sup>21</sup> See Reid (2010) on the intensive interaction with Muslim trading communities along the Indian coast, from Gujarat and Calicut to Coromandel and Bengal. The most prolific Muslim author writing in Malay, Nuruddin Al-Raniri, who was the leading religious authority in Aceh in the early seventeenth century, was born in Gujarat and later returned there.

<sup>22</sup> Noor (2012).

The first Indonesians to pursue Islamic studies in Western academia, as early as the late 1950s and 1960s, were a handful of young men affiliated with the reformist Muslim party Masyumi (which in those years was the main pro-Western party). They received scholarships to study at the Institute of Islamic Studies at Canada's McGill University, which W. Cantwell Smith had recently established as a centre for interreligious encounter. A. Mukti Ali and Harun Nasution, who were to exert a major influence on later generations of Muslim students, were the best known among this first cohort.<sup>23</sup> Under Smith's influence, Mukti Ali developed a strong interest in comparative religion. He later became the New Order's first Minister of Religious Affairs (1973–1978), a pioneer of interreligious dialogue, and later served as the rector of Yogyakarta's State Institute of Islamic Studies (IAIN) for a long period of time. Nasution wrote his PhD thesis on the Egyptian modernist theologian Muhammad Abduh and became Indonesia's most prominent defender of Mu'tazila rationalism and a long-time rector of Jakarta's IAIN. Both men had an enormous influence on younger generations of students and Muslim intellectuals trained at their IAINs.<sup>24</sup>

The first IAINs date back to the 1950s. The NU politician Saifuddin Zuhri, who was Sukarno's last Minister of Religious Affairs, is usually credited with the furthering of these institutes as a channel of educational mobility for students of *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) background, who had no access to other higher education. Under the Suharto regime their number rapidly expanded until every province had one. The government relied on these institutes to create a class of enlightened religious officials, willing to function in a *de facto* secular environment and to accept the principle of more or less equal relations between the five officially recognised religions. From the mid-1980s onwards, perceiving the radicalising tendency among recent graduates from Middle Eastern countries, the Ministry of Religious Affairs intensified academic cooperation with Western countries and sent increasing numbers of IAIN graduates to Canada, the Netherlands, Australia, and Germany for postgraduate studies. Foreign scholars were invited to teach at IAINs.<sup>25</sup> All in all, this was probably one of the few programmes of "religious engineering" anywhere in the world that were really successful. IAIN graduates in the religious bureaucracy, in the religious courts, and in education have proven to be a force of moderation and reason in the conflict-ridden years following the fall of the Suharto regime. IAIN, especially the IAIN of Jakarta (located in Ciputat), gained a reputation as a fortress of Muslim intellectualism and critical theological thought.<sup>26</sup>

One of the earliest, and the most famous and influential among the IAIN graduates who pursued postgraduate studies in the West was Nurcholish Madjid. He had been the chairman of the "Modernist" Muslim student association HMI (Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam, Islamic Students' Association) for two

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<sup>23</sup> Others of the same generation included Anton Timur Jaylani and Kafrawi Ridwan (who were both to serve as high officials in the Ministry of Religious Affairs). McGill continued to train Indonesian Muslim scholars in the following decades. See Jabali and Jamhari (2003); Steenbrink (2003).

<sup>24</sup> Muzani (1994); Munhanif (1996).

<sup>25</sup> For an evaluation of one of the long-term co-operation programmes, concerning Canada's McGill and the IAIN at Ciputat, Jakarta, see: Jabali and Jamhari (2003).

<sup>26</sup> Some people even spoke half-jokingly of the *madzhab* (school of thought) of Ciputat as a distinct intellectual tradition in Indonesian Islam. See the analysis of the thought of some leading Ciputat-based Muslim intellectuals, including NurcholishMadjid, in Effendy (1999).

periods in the early New Order period, was singled out as a potential leader by both the Indonesian authorities and the American Embassy, made several visits to the United States, and finally completed his studies with a dissertation at the University of Chicago under the supervision of the great Pakistani scholar Fazlur Rahman.<sup>27</sup> In the 1980s, when HMI alumni of Nurcholish and later generations began filling the middle and higher echelons of the bureaucracy, the universities, the media, and the business world, Nurcholish's discourse of renewal of Islamic thought became highly influential (although, even in HMI circles, he had many opponents). Core elements of this discourse include moderation, interreligious understanding, bourgeois-liberal values, contextual interpretation of the Islamic sources, and respect for local tradition. In the 1990s, corresponding with the changing global conditions, democratic values and human rights as well as a tendency towards Perennialist and Sufi thought became increasingly salient. Nurcholish himself, though remaining personally modest, became Indonesia's Islamic superstar, being loved by the rich and powerful, but also accepting invitations to appear in much less glamorous surroundings.<sup>28</sup>

Nurcholish's popularity and influence were much resented by Muslims who were convinced that Islam and secularism do not go together and who thought that he betrayed the ideals of the struggle to make Indonesia a more Islamic society and state. In the view of Muslim radicals, who had been suppressed during the first decades of Suharto's New Order but came gradually out into the open in the 1990s, he was the iconic figure of the *ghazwul fikri*, the cultural invasion by the West. Criticism of Nurcholish broadened to include ever more "liberal" Muslim thinkers and ultimately the claim that the IAINs, with their Western connections, had been turned into channels for the subversion of "true" Islam.<sup>29</sup>

## Middle East conflicts and their impact in Indonesia

Indonesia never recognised the state of Israel. This was initially, I gather, a gesture of Third World solidarity in support of Arab nationalism. In the 1950s, Sukarno and Nasser, along with India's Nehru, came to lead a bloc of non-aligned nations in a coalition against the imperialism of the former colonial powers. However, as the definition of the conflict gradually changed — the ethnic conflict between Jews and Arabs became a national one, pitting Palestinians against Israelis, and ultimately one between Muslim and Judeo-Christian civilisation— Palestinian Arabs increasingly came to be seen as fellow Muslims, and anti-colonial solidarity was reframed as religious solidarity.

In the aftermath of the Israeli-Arab war of 1967, Mohamad Natsir, the former chairman of the Masyumi party, visited Palestinian refugee camps, and upon his return to Indonesia told his countrymen how ashamed he had felt at seeing relief arriving from India and many other countries but not from Indonesia. After the next Arab-Israeli war in 1973, associates of Natsir established a Muslim solidarity

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<sup>27</sup> Another Indonesian who studied with Fazlur Rahman was the historian Ahmad Syafi'i Ma'arif, who was Muhammadiyah's chairman in 2000–2005 and is one of the country's leading moral authorities.

<sup>28</sup> Kull (2005); Bruinessen (2006).

<sup>29</sup> An influential publication in the ideological attack against the IAINs and liberal and progressive Muslim views in general was Jaiz (2005). The title of this book claims that the IAINs enable apostasy from Islam.

committee and called upon Indonesian Muslims to donate blood for Palestine. This resulted in the embarrassing amount of 45 litres of blood being sent to Lebanon as Indonesia's expression of Muslim solidarity.<sup>30</sup>

Natsir remained the public personality most concerned with Middle Eastern politics. The organisation for Islamic outreach that he established, together with other former Masyumi politicians, the Indonesian Council for Islamic Predication (DDII), received some support from Saudi Arabia but did not involve much in the Arab world beyond translating some works by Islamist thinkers. It was only by the late 1980s that the issue of Palestine and the struggle against Zionism could mobilise significant numbers of Indonesians. The first *Intifadah* (Palestinian uprising, 1987–1993) marked a turning point, no doubt in part due to the availability and impact of televised images. A number of political activists affiliated with the DDII established an organisation named KISDI (Committee for Solidarity with the World of Islam), which specialised in political rallies and demonstrations, in protest against Israeli policies and in support of Palestinian rights. In the 1990s, KISDI took up other international "Islamic" issues, such as the conflicts in Kashmir and Bosnia, and demonstrated aggressively against "biased" reporting in the Indonesian press (especially the Christian-owned media).<sup>31</sup>

The Russian occupation of Afghanistan (1979–1989), and the American- and Saudi-sponsored *jihad* against the occupiers have been drawing the attention of limited circles of highly motivated radical Muslims in Indonesia since the early 1980s. Whereas there had never been, in spite of all anti-Zionist rhetoric, a call for Indonesian Muslims to join a *jihad* against the occupation of Palestine, the Afghan war attracted small groups of Indonesia's would-be *mujahidin*, who travelled to Pakistan to receive training and do *jihad*. Some were recruited for the *jihad* while they were studying or working in Saudi Arabia, whereas others belonged to radical underground groups that were preparing for a violent Islamic revolution in Indonesia. Once they returned to Indonesia, the veterans spread information about the conflict by word of mouth and through semi-legal print publications.<sup>32</sup>

Another significant event in the Middle East, the Iranian revolution of 1978–1979, initially made a much greater impression on Indonesian students, although it took some time for its intellectual impact to be felt.<sup>33</sup> The works of two thinkers who had inspired the Iranian revolutionaries, Ali Shariati and Mortaza Motahhari, found an avid readership when they began appearing in translation. A small group of young intellectuals, Jalaluddin Rakhmat, Haidar Bagir, Agus Abu Bakar, and the Islamic scholar Husein al-Habsyi, led a movement of self-conversion to Shi'ism that attracted tens of thousands of recruits.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Latief (2009).

<sup>31</sup> Hefner (2000), pp. 109–10; Bruinessen 2002.

<sup>32</sup> Indonesia's jihadist groups have received disproportionate attention and much of the available literature is not very insightful. A useful overview, that brings out clearly how the Afghan jihad transformed Indonesian Islamic activism, is Solahudin (2011). See also Temby (2010).

<sup>33</sup> Nasir Tamara, a young Indonesian journalist who flew from Paris to Tehran on Khomeini's plane, wrote a book on the revolution that was widely read: Tamara (1980).

<sup>34</sup> The major study on the emerging Shi'a movement in Indonesia is Zulkifli (2009). It is usefully complemented by Umar Faruk Assegaf's contribution in Formichi and Feener (2015).

In the long run, the impact of the Iranian revolution was overshadowed by the Saudi reaction to it. Feeling threatened by the Iranian revolutionaries' questioning of its legitimacy, the Saudi regime opened a counter-offensive to gain a hold on the hearts and minds of Muslims all over the world. In Indonesia, the DDII became the Saudis' most trusted collaborator, publishing numerous tracts and books purporting to prove that the Shi'a constituted a dangerous deviation from proper Islam. The Saudi and DDII ideological offensive targeted not just Shi'ism but various other sects and groups they considered as deviant, including the Ahmadiyah as well as the group around Nurcholish Madjid and other liberal Muslims.<sup>35</sup> By offering scholarships for studying Islam in Saudi Arabia (many of which were distributed through the DDII), the kingdom aimed to have a long-term influence on Islamic discourse in Indonesia.

True to the origins of its founders in Islamist politics, the DDII long favoured the ideas associated with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and translated many of their books. Many of the Brothers then lived and worked in exile in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, and these countries assisted in the expansion of their ideas. From the mid-1980s onwards, however, Saudi Arabia has made great efforts to achieve discursive hegemony for its own brand of Islamic discourse, Salafism (usually dubbed Wahhabism by its opponents). As early as 1981, Saudi Arabia established an Institute of Arabic Studies, later revamped as the Institute of Islamic and Arabic Studies (LIPIA), in Jakarta. This was allegedly the first foreign-owned educational institution officially recognised by the Indonesian government. LIPIA became a major vehicle for the spread of the Salafi *da'wa* (predication) in Indonesia, although in the first decades of its existence, it also helped many students, who later turned out to be "liberals" or progressives, to gain fluency in Arabic and acquaintance with modern, non-Salafi Arabic writing.<sup>36</sup>

The revolution in electronic communication — satellite television, Internet, the cellular telephone, and short message service (sms) — made for a qualitative change in relations between Indonesia and the Middle East. Students in Egypt and the Gulf could communicate on a daily basis with friends and relatives at home. Events and discussions taking place in Cairo were relayed to Indonesia by students at al-Azhar. The content of sermons in Riyadh, Medina, or Qatar could be known almost simultaneously in Indonesia. Students in Yemen or Saudi Arabia could act as intermediaries between Salafi authorities in those countries and their followers in Indonesia. By the early 2000s, it had become possible for Indonesian Salafis to request *fatwas* (authoritative opinions) from sheikhs in Arabia by telephoning friends studying there, who would then ask the question in person and phone back the answer.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> The Saudi sponsored assault on "liberal" Islam, which began in the 1980s and gained impetus in the following decades, is discussed in Bruinessen (2011).

<sup>36</sup> On LIPIA and the development of the Salafi *da'wa* in Indonesia in general, see Hasan 2006, Chapter 2. Among LIPIA's graduates one famously finds not only prominent Salafi activists but also liberals and NU intellectuals such as Ulil Abshar-Abdalla, Ahmad Baso, and Mujiburrahman.

<sup>37</sup> This included some crucial *fatwas* legitimising actions to be carried out by Laskar Jihad. See the discussion in Hasan 2006, Chapter 4.

## Reformasi and after: The consolidation of new transnational Islamic movements

The last decade of the New Order had allowed Islamists voices a certain freedom of expression, although the moderate voices of Nurcholish and his circle continued to be endorsed by the state and received most press coverage. After Suharto's resignation and the gradual unravelling of the New Order, radical Islamist groups came out from (semi-) clandestinity, and their media, now published legally, enjoyed enormous circulation figures for a few years. In sheer volume and impact, Islamist discourse now dwarfed the liberal, pluralist discourse that had been almost hegemonic during the New Order. Many members of the new Muslim middle class that had emerged in the last decades of Suharto's rule found the Arab-centred discourses of the transnational Islamist movements more "authentic" than the liberals' discourse of Islamic hermeneutics, tolerance, and human rights. Within a few years, the latter was marginalised and the very idea of liberal Islam stigmatised.<sup>38</sup>

The most significant new movements that moved into the limelight were the following: an Indonesian version of the Muslim Brotherhood, which transformed itself into a political party, the Partai Keadilan (PK) and later the Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS); an Indonesian wing of the Hizbut-Tahrir; and a more diffuse Salafi movement (of which one wing became notorious as Laskar Jihad). All three are the Indonesian branches of well-established transnational movements and owe allegiance to a leadership abroad (PKS less so than the other two). In this sense, they are significantly different from all earlier Indonesian Muslim organisations. It is precisely this transnational connection that provides them with a degree of legitimacy in the eyes of many ordinary Muslims. The PKS not only maintains connections with the Middle East but has also been careful to cultivate relations with Indonesian students abroad, in the West as well as the Arab world.

The former two movements sprang from student groups at several of the better Indonesian secular universities; a high proportion of their members and cadres are graduates from institutes of higher education in non-religious subjects. Relatively few of the cadre members of the PKS, but a larger proportion in the central leadership, have been educated in Saudi Arabia or elsewhere in the Arab world. Prior to the 2009 elections, an apparent split between "pragmatists" and "idealists" emerged in the party; this coincided, to some extent, with the division between professionals educated in non-religious subjects and *ustadz* (religious teachers and preachers) with an Arabic education in Islam. The Salafi movement, on the other hand, is almost exclusively Arab educated and its major wing depends on significant funding from a foundation based in Kuwait. All wings of the Salafi movements appear to be connected with specific Salafi *ulama* in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, or Yemen.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> This also happened in spite of significant injections of Western funds into the NGO world, subsidies for book printing and active support of anti-fundamentalist groups such as Jaringan Islam Liberal, the Liberal Islam Network. Reports on Western funding in fact contributed to the stigmatisation of liberal Islam. See the discussion in Bruinessen (2011).

<sup>39</sup> Hasan (2006); Wahid (2014).

Some of the other new movements are purely Indonesian but do take a great interest in Muslim struggles elsewhere in the world. The Council of Indonesian Holy Warriors (Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia, MMI) was established in 2000 as a legal front for various groups that strive for an Islamic state (including sections of Darul Islam as well as Jemaah Islamiyah). It has adopted some of the international *jihadi* Salafi discourse, but in practice, it remains focused on the struggle for an Islamic state in Indonesia and an ideological war against all groups and movements that stand in the way of this ideal.

Mainstream Muslim discourse has been much influenced by the discourse of these radical movements, although the violent activism of the most radical fringes was firmly rejected. Middle East graduates, who returned from study in Egypt or the Arabian Peninsula, played an important role in mainstreaming these discourses and purging Indonesian Islam of local practices including harmonious relations with non-Muslims. Numerous graduates leaning towards militant Islamism or Salafism have returned from the Middle East since the 1990s. They attempted to enter existing institutions—schools and universities, the religious bureaucracy, religious organisations— or set themselves up as independent teachers and preachers (*ustadz*) catering to the pious middle class.<sup>40</sup> Middle East graduates hold prominent positions in the Indonesian MUI and are the most vocal opponents of the “diseases” of liberalism, secularism, and pluralism. Along with activists of the said transnational movements, networks of Middle East graduates played a role in organising the recent mass demonstrations in Jakarta.

## **Local responses to globalising Islam: Cultural resistance in Cirebon**

In this final section, I shall take a look at how globalisation, especially in its “Arabising” form, has impacted local practices in a somewhat peripheral region in Indonesia, and the various forms of cultural resistance that this has brought about. Cirebon is a rice-producing region on Java’s north coast that has been bypassed by many developments in the core areas of Java. The once flourishing harbour of the capital city is a sleepy affair, as trade has been diverted away from the region. There is no modern industry worth mentioning; the most significant and productive sector is the rattan industry, which processes raw rattan from Kalimantan into furniture for export. Recently enacted trade liberalisation policies, affecting the export of unprocessed rattan, have dealt this industry a serious blow.

Cirebon is known for its distinctive and rich traditions in music, dance, batik, and other art forms, as well as its colourful local adaptations of Islamic practices and the wide range of syncretistic mystical movements that emerged here. This heritage is commonly ascribed to the sultanate of Cirebon, which

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<sup>40</sup> The rapid expansion of the army of young *ustadz*, who approach their audiences not only in sermons in mosques but through a range of traditional and electronic media, including personalised text messages, is challenging the authority of established scholars. For interesting observations, see Abaza 2004, Fealy and White (2008), and Slama (2017). Many of these *ustadz* are not, in fact, Middle Eastern graduates but they created a new market in which the latter also found their place.

merged Chinese, Indian and Arab influences with Javanese and Sundanese traditions into a new synthesis. The sultanate, divided into four rival courts, was never patronised by Indonesia's republican government (as some of the other sultanates were) and is in decline, but it is still seen as the source of spiritual power that holds this vernacular civilisation together.<sup>41</sup> Orthodox Islam (as opposed to syncretistic Javanism) has long been dominated here by four large *pesantrens*, located around (and at some distance from) the city of Cirebon, which remain very influential in the cultural and political life of the region. The city has several modern universities, but none of these can compete with those of the big cities.

This is not a region where one would expect the above-mentioned transnational Islamic movements to find a natural following. To my surprise, however, I found that all the new Islamist movements are well represented in Cirebon and have a considerable measure of local support.<sup>42</sup> Their typical mode of expansion was through university students originating from Cirebon who studied in places like Bogor, Jakarta, or Bandung and were inducted into these movements there. Returning home on the weekends, they set up religious study groups at the secondary schools from which they had graduated. Locally recruited activists then attempted to establish groups of sympathisers in neighbourhoods. PKS activists established a number of schools that provide cheap and good education, besides solid discipline; a Salafi group established a large, well-funded *madrrasah* that successfully targets the local Muslim middle class.

As elsewhere, in Cirebon these new movements have had some success in converting *abangan*, nominal Muslims adhering to syncretistic beliefs and practices, to their worldview. In fact, they may even have been more successful in recruiting former *abangan* to their ranks than youth with a prior religious education in Muhammadiyah or NU circles (but the latter are definitely represented as well). This is perhaps not as surprising as it seems at first sight. *Abangan* beliefs and rituals are focused on local shrines and local spirits, whose powers are geographically circumscribed. As has been observed elsewhere, once people break out of their geographical isolation by trade and travel, and start interacting more intensively with more distant communities, the old local spirits are of little help to them against the strong appeal of supernatural support of a more universal scope.<sup>43</sup> When *Abangan* decide to send their children to a *pesantren* or a Muhammadiyah school — a process that characterised the New Order period — this represents not only a gradual conversion to a more orthodox form of Islam but also mental migration from the village or urban neighbourhood community into the Indonesian nation-state. In Cirebon, such conversions have been taking place but never on a massive scale. The relations between the large *pesantrens* and the surrounding *abangan* environment have long been characterised by mutual distrust and hostility. The arrival of transnational Islamic movements in the

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<sup>41</sup> Two dissertations provide excellent overviews of the history of the Cirebon courts and of Islamic beliefs and practices in Cirebon, respectively: Siddique (1977); Muhaimin (1996).

<sup>42</sup> The following paragraphs are based on my observations during a two-month period of field research in early 2009 and a number of shorter visits in the preceding and following years, as well as conversations and email exchanges with friends from Cirebon.

<sup>43</sup> This reasoning is the core of an interesting theory explaining the spread of Islam and Christianity in Africa, at the expense of local religions: Horton (1971). Robert Hefner adapted Horton's idea to an explanation of the ongoing Islamisation of East Java: Hefner (1987).

region made it possible for *abangan* to skip the stage of the established national organisations and become part of a global community. It is one of the few available options for cosmopolitanism and a deliberate jump into modernity, however anti-modernist the movement as such may be.

One imported global issue that gave rise to local-level conflict was anti-Ahmadiyah agitation. This was not entirely new: the Muslim World League has been spreading anti-Ahmadiyah materials and agitating for a worldwide ban of the Ahmadiyah almost since it was established. As early as 1980, the Indonesian MUI issued a *fatwa* declaring the Ahmadiyah a deviant sect beyond the pale of Islam, but at that time, this had a negligible impact on the Ahmadi's religious freedom. The political context changed dramatically in 2005 when the MUI issued another *fatwa* against the Ahmadiyah. In various parts of the country, violent mobs, incited by self-appointed guardians of orthodoxy, attacked Ahmadi institutions and residences, while the police, reluctant to appear insufficiently sympathetic to radical Islam, did not dare to intervene.<sup>44</sup>

Not far from Cirebon lies a village, Manis Lor, that is almost entirely Ahmadi. This is a region that is home to various other heterodox sects or minor religions, besides orthodox Muslim and *abangan* villages. The relations between the different communities were, for most of the time, characterised by mutual tolerance, and the Ahmadiyah of Manis Lor had never had any problems with their neighbours.<sup>45</sup> But this changed in the new millennium. The first major attack on the village occurred in 2004, when a coalition of local Islamist groups, reinforced by activists from Jakarta, stormed the village and attempted to destroy the main Ahmadiyah mosque. Since then, more raids have followed and the local authorities, feeling the pressure, closed down the Ahmadiyah mosques and forbade the Ahmadi's to congregate in private homes for worship. The central government has done little or nothing to protect the religious freedom of these citizens and instead, made gestures to accommodate radical Muslim demands. A joint ministerial decree in 2008 practically proscribed all Ahmadiyah activities throughout the country.<sup>46</sup>

There was, however, also some mobilisation of local support for the beleaguered Ahmadiyah. An NGO in Cirebon affiliated with the NU, Fahmina, sent activists to the village to form a protective ring around the mosque and give moral support to the villagers. They advocated the Ahmadiyah's right to their different beliefs, and managed to have the local press publish a strong statement by a leading NU scholar, who endorsed their pluralist views. In these actions, Fahmina activists operated cautiously in order to not alienate the major *pesantrens*, as NGO activists elsewhere had done. They made clear that their support for the basic rights of the Ahmadiyah did not mean acceptance, or even just

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<sup>44</sup> The main organisation behind the anti-Ahmadiyah agitation is a small, apparently Middle East-funded group calling itself LPPPI (Lembaga Pengkajian dan Penelitian Islam, "Institute of Islamic Studies and Research"). In 2002, LPPPI organised a seminar in Jakarta's Istiqlal Mosque to denounce the Ahmadiyah; in 2005 it organised a major mob attack on the Qadiani Ahmadiyah's main community centre in Parung near Bogor, and it has remained at the forefront of agitation since. See Burhani (2016).

<sup>45</sup> For a description of this village from more peaceful days, see Effendi (1990).

<sup>46</sup> This joint decree was signed by the Minister of Religious Affairs, the Attorney General and the Minister of the Interior on 9 June 2008. The decree stopped short of actually banning the Ahmadiyah, as had been demanded by the Council of Ulama and various radical groups.

tolerance, of Ahmadi doctrines but rather the defence of an earlier *status quo* in which different faith communities left each other in peace.

Fahmina is a relatively small NGO but it derives strength from its good connections with the major *pesantrens* of the region. Fahmina itself is dwarfed by the numbers that the radical Islamist groups in Cirebon can mobilise, but as long as it maintains its connections with the *pesantrens*, it will remain able to call upon the support of the much larger masses that are loyal to the *kiais* and the NU. In opposing the “Arabising” influences brought into the region by the Islamists, Fahmina activists and a loose network of locally rooted allies have made an effort to revive local cultural traditions as a resource. Some younger *kiais* also take an active role in this effort, such as Kiai Maman Imanulhaq of the *pesantren* Al-Mizan in Jatiwangi, where traditional arts have become part of the curriculum.

Several senior *kiais* appear independently to have come to the conclusion that “traditional” Islam needed to be salvaged from the homogenising and purist influence of the new transnational movements. Their concern was primarily with the *pesantren* subculture, which also reflected Arab and Indian Ocean influences in its expressions of devotion to the Prophet and the high prestige accorded to his descendants, as well as in the use of religious song and recitation, and percussion instruments in popular performances. Some deliberate invention of tradition was going on during my fieldwork period: an obscure old grave under a tree was being developed into a new pilgrimage site, where colourful new rituals (based on popular *mawlid*s, celebrations of the birth of the Prophet) were periodically performed. One of the *ulama* involved told me that his ideal was to develop the site of this sacred grave into a centre of local culture. Interestingly, the performance arts I witnessed here, though created by local artists, were of Egyptian-style popular music and of songs in praise of the Prophet accompanied by Arab percussion: the sort of cultural practices that Salafis as well as Muslim Brothers strongly object to but are patronised by the region’s Javanised *sayyids* (descendants of the prophet Muhammad) as well as most of the traditional *pesantrens*.

## Conclusion

The talk of Arabisation versus Westernisation implicitly assumes an essentialised, homogenised Arab world, or an equally monolithic West, impinging upon a vulnerable and malleable Indonesian Islamic community. It is undoubtedly true that the numbers of Indonesians travelling abroad have dramatically increased during the past few decades, and that the flows of goods and ideas from the Middle East as well as the West (and other regions) to Indonesia have accelerated and become more massive. However, these cultural flows have been highly complex and richly varied, and so has their impact. Muslims across the spectrum, from secular-minded liberals and progressives to Islamists and Salafis, have, in various ways, incorporated some influences of Western origin (or mediated by actors in the West) as well as influences traceable to the Middle East, alongside yet other influences. The adoption of foreign ideas and practices has always been selective, and made in accordance with perceived local needs.

The responses to the “Westernising” and “Arabising” varieties of globalisation have often taken the form of appeals to Islamic or Indonesian authenticity and the invention of traditions. It strikes me as significant that the efforts to strengthen local culture to resist the influx of “Arabian” puritan Islam in Cirebon involved cultural traditions reflecting an earlier synthesis of Arab and Javanese cultures.

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