

Islamic Fundamentalism in Late-Colonial Indonesia: The Persatuan Islam Revisited¹

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ملخص

تعرف وحدة الإسلام (برستوان إسلام) كجمعية لها أثر واضح في تاريخ الكتابة الإسلامية بإندونيسيا في أوائل القرن العشرين. رغم تركها المجال السياسي. إن آراءها الحديثة والأساسية وكذلك العقيدة الأصلية التي تمسكت بها صارت هذ الجمعية نوع الإسلام بجنوب شرقي آسيا. إن الجمعية التي قام بتأسيسها جماعة من المسلمين في باندونج جاوى الغربية سنة ١٩٢٣ م لها طريقتا في التعليم. عندما قام العلماء التقليديون بالطريقة المباشرة حيث يتركز التعليم في المدرس والطالب استعملت هذ الجمعية فصولا للتعليم. المواد التي علمت في مدرستها هي ٧٥ من مائة للعلوم الإسلامية و ٢٥ للعلوم العامة في المدرسة الابتدائية ثم انتقلت الموازنة إلى ٥٠:٥٠ في المدارس فوقها.

لهذه الجمعية مبدأ هو تنمية الإسلام مؤسسة على القرآن الكريم والسنة النبوية. رأى رجال هذه الجمعية بأنهم العلماء الذين جاهدوا في تزكية الإسلام من كل بدعة وتكييف المبادئ الإسلامية بالأحوال المعاصرة. ولأجل نشر مبادئها استعملت الجمعية مجلات بالإضافة إلى التسهيلات الأخرى. هناك أربع مجلات صدرت بين سنة ١٩٢٩ إلى سنة ١٩٤١ وهي Pembela Islam (دافع الإسلام) واللسان والفتوى والنقوى. والحركة التي قامت بها وحدة الإسلام يمكن معادلتها بأعمال المجددين أمثال جمال الدين الأفغانى ومحمد عبده والسيد رشيد رضا.

Abstrak

Persatuan Islam, secara umum dikenal sebagai organisasi yang cukup berpengaruh dalam tulisan keislaman di Indonesia pada awal abad kedua puluh. Meskipun tidak banyak menaruh perhatian dalam bidang politik, namun ide-idenya yang modern dan fundamentalis serta ideologinya yang murni mampu dianggap sebagai warisan yang penting dalam membentuk identitas Islam di Asia Tenggara. Organisasi yang didirikan oleh sekelompok cendekiawan muslim di Bandung pada tahun 1923 ini mempunyai sistem pengajaran yang berbeda dari sistem yang banyak berlaku pada saat itu. Jika para ulama tradisional (kyai) menerapkan sistem pengajaran dengan pendekatan guru-murid, maka Persis menggunakan sistem klasikal. Berkaitan dengan materi yang diajarkan, 75% adalah pelajaran agama dan 25% untuk pelajaran umum, khususnya dikelas-kelas dasar, adapun untuk kelas-kelas di atasnya perbandingannya adalah 50 : 50.

Sebagai organisasi Islam Persis mempunyai prinsip "memajukan Islam dengan berdasar pada al-Qur'an dan al-Hadis." Para tokohnya menganggap diri mereka sebagai ulama baru yang berusaha membersihkan agama dari segala bid'ah, serta mengadaptasikan prinsip-prinsip agama pada kondisi kontemporer. Untuk menyebarkan ajaran-ajarannya digunakan majalah disamping sarana-sarana yang lain. Ada empat majalah yang diterbitkan antara tahun 1929 - 1941 yaitu ; *Pembela Islam*, *al-Lisan*, *at-Fatwa* dan *at-Taqwa*. Gerakan yang telah dilakukan Persis ini dapat disejajarkan dengan apa yang telah dilakukan oleh para pembaharu yang lain semisal al-Afghani, Abduh dan Rasyid Rida.

The Persatuan Islam (Islamic Union; Persis) is generally recognized as an influential organization in Indonesian Islamic writing on the twentieth century for its attempts to apply Islamic teachings to the Indonesian religious environment.² While considered generally out of touch with political reality, its modernist, fundamentalist and ideological message has been regarded as an important legacy in the building of an Islamic identity in Southeast Asia. While the movement has moved to a very minor role in contemporary Indonesian Muslim activity, in its heyday in the 1930's and 1950's, it was an influential actor in both the Islamic community of Indonesia and on the political stage of those eras. The academic study of

this movement was undertaken first by a Dutch administrator-scholar in the 1930's in official reports and in a published study in the 1960's,³ and later through a dissertation and two ancillary studies by an American scholar in the 1960's and 1970's.⁴ Since the appearance of those studies several Indonesian scholars have written studies of the movement and one Indonesian scholar has contributed a new dissertation on the the legal teachings of one of its prominent activists.⁵ In view of these new studies and an extensive review of the original source materials of the movement, this essay reexamines the earlier evaluations and compares them with other Islamic thinkers movements of the twentieth century to gain fuller perspective of the Persatuan Islam and its place in Indonesian history. The focal point of this assessment is on the movement in the the last two decades of Dutch rule in the Indies from approximately 1923 to 1942, which is the initial period of Persatuan Islam activity. What emerges from this reassessment is a fuller understanding of the role of the movement and its place in the Islamic activities of its day.

1. Beginnings

The Persatuan Islam was founded formally on September 12, 1923 in Bandung by a group of Muslims interested in religious study and activity.⁶ The Muslims involved in these discussions all belonged to the merchant class, and came from three family groups that two generations earlier had immigrated, for reasons of trade, from the Palembang region on Sumatra to the West Java area where they had come to regard themselves as Sundanese, the dominant ethnic group in the West Java region. The two leading figures in these discussions were Hadji Zamzam and Hadji Muhammad Junus. Initial membership in the Persatuan Islam was less than twenty persons and in the early years of operation activity centered about Friday community prayer when the members came together and on courses of religious instruction given by several Persis members.⁷

The discussions that led to the founding of the Persatuan Islam focused not so much on actual religious teachings as on the reformist ideas that were then enjoying considerable popularity on Sumatra, with some following on Java, and on the conflict of these new ideas with the established religious system. The study group discussed the contents of *al-Manâr* (The Beacon),⁸ the modernist Muslim publication printed in Cairo, and *al-Munir* (The Light),⁹ a periodical of similar bent published in

Padang by Indonesian religious scholars who had studied in Mecca. We see here the slow spread of modernist Muslim thought throughout Southeast Asia, for it was already established by 1910 in Minangkabau on Sumatra and in Singapore, and yet in Java in the mid-1920's it is seen as a fresh and novel approach to the understanding of Islam. The group also followed issues of the time: the debate concerning the superior status of Arabs among non-Arab Muslims, strategies for gaining concessions from the Dutch colonial authorities then in control of the region, and communist infiltration into the Sarekat Islam, the leading political movement of the day.¹⁰

For the first several years the association did not espouse modernist principles as an organization, but in keeping with a membership with varied views promoted the study of Islam in general terms.¹¹ By 1926 differences emerged and a split occurred. The secessionist group, composed of the traditionalists, founded a rival organization known as the *Permufakatan Islam* (Islamic Association), while the rump group retained the name *Persatuan Islam* and declared it self to be a modernist Islamic movement.¹² The catalyst to this division seems to have been the arrival of Ahmad Hassan and his attendance at meetings. He was of Tamil ancestry, born in Singapore who had come to Java for establishing a business in cloth manufacture and trading, but had considerable training in Islamic sciences. His thinking about Islamic matters was fairly developed as a result of working on *Utusan Melayu*, a Malay-language newspaper in Singapore. He apparently argued the modernist position with great conviction at a time when many members were ready to commit to that viewpoint and others were equally ready to leave.

The composition of *Persis* membership shows a peculiar development in Indonesian Islam, i.e., the association of Muslim traders with religious studies and the role of immigrant Muslim communities in sponsoring religious institutions in their adopted cities. In this case the organization was founded by Sumatrans; and as it developed, it found its greatest support among the Sundanese; both groups were closely connected with Islam as a point of identification. There were Javanese members as well, but the initial membership drew first from non-Javanese Muslims, unlike the two leading Muslim associations of the day, the *Moehammadijah* and the *Sarekat Islam*, which organized heavily among Javanese Muslims.¹³ In addition to members already identified one can include *Moehammad*

Natsir from Sumatra, Abdurrahman, O. Qomaruddin and Sabirin, who were Sundanese, and A. Banaama and Al-Kahiri from the Arab community. Consequently the membership represented people of diverse origins, where ideology and outlook appear to have been more important rather than racial solidarity.

2. The Early Organization.

The statutes of the Persatuan Islam adopted after the split called for "furthering Islam on the basis of Qur'ân and Way of the Prophet" and for "the propagation and instruction of Islam."¹⁴ Over time, certainly by 1930, Persis leaders came to regard themselves as a new brand of religious scholars (*ulama*) whose efforts were designed to cleanse religion of unauthorized innovation (*bid'ah*) and adapt religious principles to contemporary conditions; they took this role very seriously. There was in Persis little emphasis on expanding its membership, and until the Japanese invasion in 1942, it remained a small, loose-knit organization. The Indonesian scholar Deliar Noer stated that the membership of the Persatuan Islam never rose above 300 at Bandung, but that it was popular there and by 1942 controlled six mosques in the city, each serving over 500 Muslims. A number of branches were established by sympathizers in various cities and towns, mostly in West and Central Java, and according to Noer, the membership of the larger organization was less than a thousand person.¹⁵ The local popularity appears to have centered on the religious education offered at its mosques, on its clear position regarding controversial issues, and on the social contact and entertainment offered by the many meetings, lectures and debates organized by the movement's activists. Consequently, the reputation of the Persatuan Islam lay less with its organizational accomplishments in education, buildings or organization, than it did with the building of an esprit d'corps, a distinctive character, an outlook and an ideology that saw Islam as the very center of life with all matters directly dependent on that conviction.

3. Islam as Ideology

The key assumptions of the Persatuan Islam that undergirded its ideology during the last eighteen years of the Dutch period can be summarized with the following points:

1. That Muslims had not been careful about the purity of their religious doctrines and practices in the course of history and had allowed questionable and objectionable innovation to contaminate the true lessons of Islam. Muslims were charged with reexamining Islamic teachings to ascertain just which lessons were correct and where there were accretions or unsubstantiated change that needed to be expunged. Further, that in establishing Islam in Southeast Asia Muslim activists had not insisted on standard practices and teachings of Islam and had allowed "superstitions," folk-beliefs and religious concepts and behavior from earlier religions of the area to survive and flourish as part of the converted population's general mode of religious activity, making Islam syncretic rather than purist in tone.
2. That all Islamic teachings were to be based on the scriptures of Islam, defined by the Persatuan Islam as the Qur'an and the "firm" Traditions of the Prophet Muhammad. This was coupled with the viewpoint that Islamic teachings could be generally understood by any nearly any Muslim, and needed no knowledge from the standard Muslim theological and jurisprudential literature, the so called "yellow books," taught by traditionalists scholars in their schools. In essence this was as close to a populist view of Islam as was likely to be attained. This approach and use of sources was to allow Persis scholars to challenge many older teachings that the movement regarded as out of synch with "true" Islam. The stance also put it at odds with the older, mostly rural Muslim teachers (*kiyai*), who held that the teachings of the classical scholars was important in the understanding of Islamic doctrine and practice. There were other groups at the time who had already accepted the scriptures as the only legitimate sources, but they had not yet approached the subject with the ideological fervor that members of the Persatuan Islam expressed.
3. Within Islam all believers were equal in status before God, so there could be no race, people, family or individual who could claim superiority. The only legitimate competition among Muslims was to be in achievement of piety. Consequently, claims of Arabic superiority over other races, claims of descent from the prophet giving special status, or the use of titles indicating academic attainment or previous performance of the pilgrimage were not valid in the functioning of the Islamic community. Ancillary to this principle was the corollary that all

- languages were appropriate for carrying the Islamic message. While the original message of Islam was in Arabic, it was justifiable and even incumbent for activists to translate, explain, interpret and otherwise outline the religious message in the vernacular. To this end Indonesian and regional languages were all regarded as legitimate vehicles for this activity. This principle fit with the spirit of egalitarianism that was common in the populations of the economically important cities of Java.
4. That the principles of Islam formed a guide or template for good thought and behavior that all believers should apply in their personal behavior, family life, communal living and in all phases of life. These principles were described as "Islamic law" and were seen as important for all Muslims to adopt and should be placed in force in the general society at any time that the Muslims were successful in gaining political control. It was necessary for all Muslims to discover the essence of this law in the scriptures of Islam and to apply them fully in life. Consequently it was incumbent on the association to offer information sessions, short courses, programs of study and regular school for the increase of knowledge among the members of the Muslim community. This was regarded as a non-ending activity involving all members of the activist elite within the organization.
 5. That Islam constituted the highest allegiance for Indonesian Muslims, outranking any feeling of nationalism for the country and peoples of Indonesia. The Persatuan Islam did recognize that Indonesia as a concept had some meaning, but that it only had validity when harnessed to the Islamic identity of the people. Consequently, Persis held that Indonesian people needed only to identify with Islam, follow its lessons and work for the end of Dutch control over Muslims and all good things would follow. Religiosity and Islamic values would replace the colonial system easily and fully, while a new Muslim state in Indonesia would rise to provide earthly and spiritual guidance for its citizens. Persis activists opposed the entire colonial system that operated across the globe and maintained that it was the duty of Muslims everywhere to work for ending that domination, not simply in their own "nation." This pan-Islamist activity was to create of a union of Islamic governments across the Islamic world--Indonesia, South Asia, North Africa and Central Asia--as the colonial powers were replaced.

6. That groups who questioned the validity of Islamic teachings were to be dealt with as wrongheaded, in error, and as enemies until they changed their attitudes and beliefs. Persis activists included in this group those who believed that there were other ways of arriving at Islamic doctrines than from free examination of scriptures, those who questioned the position of the Prophet in Islam, those who believed nationalism was a superior doctrine to that of Islam in politics, and those who attempted to achieve special status through religious interpretation. All these groups were subject to Persis polemic and apology with little effort to overcome differences or find a middle ground. Persis was not interested in compromise, but in application of the principles it saw as correct.

4. Activities

a. Ideological Magazines

There were four magazines published by the Persatuan Islam between 1929 and 1941. *Pembela Islam* (Defense of Islam) and its successor *Al-Lisan* (The Tongue) were published in Malay written with Roman letters, appearing monthly, with a readership of approximately 2,000. *Al-Fatwaa* (Legal Opinion) was a companion magazine in Malay written in Arabic script (*jawi*).¹⁶ *At-Taqwa* (Devotion), a Sundanese language publication, was the fourth publication, with a circulations of 1000.

There were there were three parts to Persis publications: general articles, short ideological statements, and the question-answer section. An example of a general article appeared in 1932 under the title "Hijrah" in which the editor reviewed the approach of Gandhi to British colonialism and the relevance of that approach to the Muslims of Indonesia; the editor was open to Gandhi's aims, but questioned the use of the particular tactic in Indonesia at that moment.. The second section of the periodicals were short, often pithy expressions of ideological position, usually signed by a set of initials or a pseudonym. The most famous set of statements consisted of those signed with the initials M.S., which expressed strong, anti-Dutch, anti-nationalist, anti-sayyid, and anti-traditionalist attitudes.¹⁷ For example, M.S. was signed to an article in 1931 regarding the subject of nationalist attitudes toward religion, in which the editorial position of superiority of Islamic identification vis-a-vis nationalist goals was asserted. The statement read: "[Previously] the nationalists did not ever mention Islam, its movements or even its shortcomings . . . but now there is frequent use of .

... Islamic matters. . . [apparently for ulterior motives of attracting Muslims]. We hope Islam will no longer be used as an instrument for gaining freedom, but rather that freedom will be attained for Islam."¹⁸ The third part of the contents of these magazines was the question-answer (*sual-djawab*) section in which one member of the editorial staff, usually Ahmad Hassan, answered the questions of readers on matters of religious importance, ranging from ritual worship to social and political behavior. This section was designed to be a guide to proper religious belief and behavior, not based on the feelings of the moment or trends of the time, but in line with the scriptures of Islam itself. Here the contributors did not function simply as writers, but as learned scholars seeking to apply the lessons of Islam to contemporary problems. It was really the old practice of issuing a religious opinions (*fatwa*), since religious sources were used as the basis for the decision. Readers' letters to *Pembela Islam* indicate that the question-answer section was well read, and apparently in response to a demand for such decisions, a collection of those opinions appearing in Persis publications was published in several volumes throughout the 1930's under the collective title of *Sual-Djawab*.¹⁹ Even in 1998 this collection was still a good seller.

b. Debates: written, private and public

If the magazines were the doctrinal center of the association, the debate was, for a time in the early 1930's, its chief activity. Here the activists challenged other individuals or groups harboring a view, approach or policy deemed inimical to that of the Persatuan Islam. Persis members regarded this as "defending Islam" from "threats against it or calling its reputation into question." Here we see all of the key points of the association's ideology outlined earlier come into play and attempts by Persis activists to identify the culprits who perpetuated views and actions preventing strong Muslim values from emerging. The debating took several different forms: some were written exchanges, often appearing in the respective publications of the competing sides, while a small number were formal public debates with rules of contest and presiding officials.

The debate involving written exchanges, was held with the Indonesian nationalists who were led by Soetomo and Soekarno, but included a large number of other activists. They were challenged for refusing to recognize the political role of Islam and for rejecting religious

law as capable of providing the principles for Indonesian society or for a future Indonesian nation. That debate was long running and took place in the pages of *Pembela Islam* and *Al-Lisan* on the side of Persis and through such newspapers as *Sulub Indonesia Muda* and *Fikiran Rakyat* on the side of the nationalists. In these articles, the secularists were attacked for insisting on law other than the Muslim sacred law (*shari'ah*) and for limiting the independence movement to Indonesia and not seeking the independence of all Muslim peoples under colonial rule. Fachroeddin al-Kahiri's article appearing in *Pembela Islam* in 1933 summed up the Persis position very well. "So long as the Muslims of Indonesia consider Indonesian freedom as more important than the freedom of all Muslims, consider politics as more important than worship, . . . exchange obedience to the *kijai* for obedience to the leader, . . . consider emotions more important than examination of substance, . . . and consider the enemies endangering Indonesian freedom more important than the enemies who endanger Islam, . . . so long will Indonesian freedom remain only a phrase on the lips."²⁰

The formal public debate presents us with the most graphic examples of Persis commitment to its doctrinal positions concerning Islam. Here there were four separate groups that were the targets of Persis action: traditionalist Muslims, the Ahmadiyah Qadiyan, hostile Christian groups, and groups espousing atheism. Traditionalist Muslim groups were attacked for adhering to classical jurisprudence in the face of modernist Muslim views that it was a flawed system, and for maintaining traditionalist views on some matters of ritual, such as the burial ceremony, which modernists regarded as pandering to pre-Islamic beliefs and practices. There were three debates with Nahdlatul Ulama activists, one debate with members of the Ittihadul Islamiyah, and at least two debates with the Majelis Ahli Sunnah.²¹ The Ahmadiyah Qadiyan was challenged for its stand in maintaining that a prophet existed after Muhammad, in sharp contradiction to Sunni belief that Muhammad was the last or "seal" of the prophets. There were two debates with the Ahmadiyah Qadiyan at Bandung and Jakarta, both in 1933.²² Christianity was strongly attacked because of the provocative statements made by Christian writers—Indonesian and foreign—in assailing the character of Muhammad and questioning the validity of the Qur'an. There were at least three with the Seventh Day Adventists on Christian claims of divinity for Jesus. The Indonesian Muslim chronicler

Tamar Djaja lists a debate between Ahmad Hassan and the Christian scholars Diernhuis, Eisink and Schoemaker, and makes reference to debates with "atheists" in Jakarta and Malang.²³

Good-sized audiences attended these debates, probably because they were well publicized by the Persatuan Islam, and because the debates centered on controversial issues then drawing considerable public attention. For example, at one of its most successful debates, with representatives of the Ahmadiyah Qadiyan at Batavia in April 1933, some 2000 people attended, including a Dutch official from the Office of Internal Affairs, several reporters from leading newspapers and magazines, and representatives of a number of interested Islamic organizations from the West Java region.²⁴ While this was probably the largest of the debates, others drew hundreds of people. These debates, while of no real value in resolving the issues or reconciling the differences between the debating factions, mostly gave Persis activists an arena in which to propound their viewpoints, and the Persatuan Islam—and Ahmad Hassan in particular—gained a reputation for formulating lucid and cogent arguments in defense of modernist Muslim principles. Of course, the views of the Persatuan Islam probably received greater attention in the challenges than in the debates themselves, for the issues could be put succinctly in challenges, flyers and advertisements which drew much attention, while the debates themselves were unpredictable, sometimes missed the intentions of the organizers or left issues hanging. After all the importance was in the issue, not the debate itself. It was simply a means to an end.

c. Preaching and Dissemination of Information.

In 1935 and 1936 Persis activists turned to the use of information sessions (*tabligh*) as a means of bringing its message to the attention of the Muslim community of West Java. In October and November 1935 it held two "grand information sessions" (*tabligh akbar*) at its own facilities in Bandung where 700 and 500 people attended respectively. This was followed in 1936 with similar sessions in the cities of West Java and Kutaradja in Aceh. Attendance was often in the hundreds of people, with the highest attendance at meetings in the Jakarta drawing audiences of 700 and 500 respectively. Usually, however, attendance was less, often between 50 and 100. Alongside the "grand information sessions" the women's unit, *Persistri*, regularly offered "ordinary" information sessions every Monday for

women and younger females with about 50 people attending these sessions, often including women from other Islamic organizations than Persistri. Speakers were both men and women. Discussion topics were similar to those employed in the "grand" sessions but modified for the female audience. As part of the Persis effort in 1935-36 Persistri also gave several "grand information sessions" of their own for women's groups, once in Batavia and twice in Bandung. Attendance at the Batavia meeting was 250 people. At the meeting in Batavia and the first meeting in Bandung the speakers were all women, but at the third meeting male speakers from among the leading activists of Persis were featured. General thinking in the association—among both Persis and Persistri leaders—was that women lay advocates were necessary to make sure that the message of modernist Islam would be spread throughout the female section of society, so there were ample recruiting efforts there as well as the more substantial effort among males.²⁵

In his brief history of the movement Dadan Wildan shows the division of labor; for example at a meeting in Bandung in 1935 the major speaker covered donations to the poor (*zakai*), followed by an address about fasting (*sawm*), followed by a discussion of traditionalist research methodology, with the closing speaker dealing with fasting (*puasa*).²⁶ At other sessions the ascent of the prophet Muhammad to heaven (*mi'raj*), the doctrine of unity (*tauhid*), matters of general worship (*ibadah*), early Muslim history (*tarikh*) and concepts of Islamic jurisprudence (*bukum-bukum*) were included. It was axiomatic that Persis speakers spoke from the viewpoint of their belief system, so that the stress on the use of Qur'an and firm Tradition as the only legitimate sources of Islamic teachings came across strongly in the presentations and also references were made to nationalism, Christianity and other matters that reflected the ideological views of the activists.²⁷

These "grand information sessions" were intended as the lead-in to further work by a much larger group of activists who were to be recruited and energized by these sessions. Both men and women were to be recruited to become lay advocates (*mubalighin*) to carry the work further by speaking to small groups in society. To assist these lay advocates a handbook (*Cursus Agama*) was prepared in 1935 for that use. The handbook began with a section on the principles of religion, followed with a section on the principles of Islamic law, followed by two sections on

leadership according to Islam, followed by another section on the principles of belief, followed by another section on law used by Muslims to regulate their behavior, and concluded with a short selection from a legal compendium on the essence of marriage. This handbook may indicate some concerns about the errors made by the lay activists, but it probably indicates as well that activity in this effort was proceeding and guidelines were there to give it proper direction.²⁸

d. Contributions to a modernist Muslim literature for Indonesia

To this point in our discussion of the Persatuan Islam there has been continual mention of publication, either as a direct medium for propagating the Persis viewpoint, as in the ideological magazines of *Pembela Islam*, *Al-Lisan*, *Al-Fatwaa* and *Al-Taqwaa*, or as an indirect medium in publishing the results of debates with adversaries and in the issuance of a guide in the grand information sessions. These efforts were considered sufficiently expressive that they could be recycled into several ancillary magazines and anthologies, bringing some economic benefit and clear reputation to the organization and its activists. In addition to periodical publications, the Persatuan Islam published pamphlets and short monographs by its own members and other Muslim groups and individuals. The motivation for such publications may have been slightly different than that of the ideological magazines in that these pamphlets and small books seem intended to provide basic information about Islam that could be used in information sessions and teaching situations.

The Persatuan Islam was operated for people who found it preferable to use the Indonesian language, for reasons of trade and to identify themselves with the groups that were seeking independence from Dutch rule. But the association was located in an Sundanese language zone and there were many people there who used that language much more than Indonesian. Consequently Persis publications emphasized Malay/Indonesian, but also published in Sundanese. Usually Indonesian in Roman script was used, but in both Indonesian and Sundanese works Arab scripts were sometimes employed, reflecting the usage at the time when both forms were used by wide numbers of people.

The first grouping of books dealt with proper belief, where the nature of God, fasting, and regular worship were discussed. A second grouping of books dealt with Persis conceptions of Islamic law where

proper observance of worship, the poor tax, the pilgrimage, conduct of business, burial practice and general behavior were issued. A third grouping of books dealt with the Qur'an and consisted of several anthologies of selections including a major translation and commentary that was to become a standard Indonesian commentary some thirty years later. A fourth grouping of books provided history of the early Muslim era and included an important polemic prepared by Moehammad Natsir and X. Shoemaker, a Dutch missionary who converted to Islam, titled *Cultuur Islam* (Islamic Culture) in 1936, which laid out the high points of Muslim civilization. A fifth grouping of books dealt with political matters, with the center piece being *Islam dan Nasionalisme* (Islam and Nationalism) by Ahmad Hassan published in 1940, which was a summation of the Persis position regarding a long-running dispute with the Nationalists. It was noteworthy for its use of the terms "sinner," "hypocrite," and "backslider" to label opponents for their refusal to recognize the Islamic viewpoint in their vision of an independent Indonesia.

Persatuan Islam efforts to write about religion came during a period when there was a great wave of literary activity among Indonesians.²⁹ Several literary groups appeared during this period, and a rash of newspapers, periodicals and books were published by the various political, social and religious clubs, organizations and movements. The Persatuan Islam's efforts were a part of this greater activity, and while it produced no outstanding literary works, several of its works have been very long lived and reprinted numerous times. Importantly, Persis developed a simplicity of style in its textbooks that facilitated the study of religion in schools and by persons interested in religion. Also, the writing of Indonesian religious textbooks had some impact on the development of Bahasa Indonesia, by defining and using religious terms in Indonesian language works.

e. The Role of Formal Education

From the very beginning, instruction in Islam and its sciences was offered at the meeting place of the Persatuan Islam in Bandung, but the courses and classes were operated by individuals or groups of individuals rather than by the organization itself.³⁰ Hadji Zamzam, first alone and then after 1924 in conjunction with Ahmad Hassan, gave lectures and talks to adult classes concerning Islamic belief (*aqidab*) and proper observance of religious ritual (*ibadab*). In 1927, and possibly before, classes were also

operated for Muslim students studying at Dutch schools; a law of 1915 allowed optional religious instruction to be given as part of the public educational system.³¹ An advertisement in 1932 stated that *Pendidikan Islam* was to consist of three related courses of study. Pupils at the age of 5 could enter the *kindergarten (Fr. belklasse)*, which was considered to be a preparatory year for regular elementary school. The HIS (*Hollandsch Inlandsche School*), which pupils entered at six years of age had two classes. It constituted part of the Dutch-recognized elementary education system, which was partially supported by the government with the parents paying fees as well. The third course of study was the MULO (*Meer Uitgebreid lager Onderwijs--More Extended Lower Instruction*), which also consisted of two classes and was the junior high or middle school level of the Dutch education system. Like the HIS the state paid a subsidy and parents also paid fees. An advertisement stated that students in all three levels of instruction "modern subjects" would be taught as well as Islamic sciences. By 1938 this institution had replicated itself at four other sites in West Java, which drew students not only from the region but from other sections of Java and from Aceh.

In March 1936 Persis devised a new academic institution it called a "pesantren." The move was undoubtedly part of a drive to intensify the teaching of Islam throughout West Java manifested in the "grand information sessions" discussed earlier. A brochure, issued by the school at a later date, stated that "the purpose of the founding of the 'pesantren' was to produce propagandists (*muballighien*) capable of spreading, teaching and defending and maintaining Islam, wherever they were." The subject matter taught after the reorganization probably changed only slightly from what it had been prior to the reorganization, but Persis leaders were assured that the modernist Islamic viewpoint would be presented in all courses of instruction. Some general subjects and basic science courses were added at this time, but stress remained overwhelmingly on religious subjects.³² During the same reorganization, an afternoon class was established for elementary school children, both boys and girls, who attended secular schools in the morning.³³ The initial enrollment was about 100 pupils.

The final development in education occurred in 1940 when Ahmad Hassan decided to relocate the *Pesantren Persatuan Islam* to East Java, to the small city of Bangil, attracting 25 students from Bandung to go with

him. The move was apparently prompted by family considerations on the part of Ahmad Hassan who had relatives living in the Surabaya area. This move had some far-reaching effects on the Persatuan Islam, but those effects were not immediately apparent in 1940 and 1941 when the move first occurred and really only became important after Indonesian independence in the 1950's. The other educational institutions, such as the afternoon instructions in religion and the Dutch-sponsored classes remained in Bandung.

This education offered by Persis was certainly different than that offered by the traditionalist schools, which relied heavily on traditional teaching methods, on traditional textbooks, on the "hidden knowledge" of the leading teachers, on the relative importance of mysticism alongside classical studies and on the master-student (*kijai-santri*) relationship that undergirded relationships between teacher and student. Persis students followed the trends of Dutch sponsored education, with the use of regular classrooms, with general teaching plans, and used curriculum materials developed by the association itself with emphasis on modernist Muslim principles. The ratio of Islamic subjects to general subjects was 75:25 in the lower classes, changing over to 50:50 for the higher grades. Among the Islamic subject matter Arabic language was taught and readings from the Qur'an and books of Traditions were included, but geography, arithmetic, modern history and Indonesian language were taught as well. Significantly, as late as 1954 four books written by Ahmad Hassan were still being used as textbooks, indicating that they had been used earlier, probably from the founding of *pesantren* in 1936.³⁴

5. Conclusions and Comparisons

The Persatuan Islam demonstrated a total commitment to Islam during this era and became one model on how this might be done in the Indonesian context. All their efforts were given to creating that image and that reality. In this they emulated what religious scholars (*kiyai-kiyai*) had done for some time in forming small communities in the countryside to live godly lives and teach Islam to others. The members of those communities lived meaningful, but often comparatively isolated lives. But the Persatuan Islam was an urban group and its activists did not seek isolation, but intensive interaction with others. Through publications, teaching and propaganda efforts, and public debates they sought to make others aware

of the importance of accepting this "totally Muslim" lifestyle that they adopted and tried to perpetuate. In the place they chose to do it and in the methods they used to achieve their goals the activists were different than others who had gone before them, even though they were not essentially different from other groups elsewhere in the Islamic world who had much the same mission.

One important distinction for the Persatuan Islam was its adherence to the modernist Muslim position and the paramount position the activists gave this *weltanschauung* in the propagation work that the association undertook. Persis activists regarded Islam as in danger from the poor position its followers were in, both in terms of achievement and in terms of reputation. Repair of this condition was viewed as possible through the promotion and adoption of the modern program of using Qur'an and firm Tradition as the sources for Muslim doctrine and thought, while eschewing reliance on the books of traditionalist scholars. Others believed this as well, but Persis scholars were the first in Indonesia to work through the details of this doctrine and devise formulations that applied to practical life in the Indonesian setting. The effort was considerable and the results called into question many Indonesian folk practices, condemned certain practices in worship as extraneous and wrong, called for greater Islamic accountability in politics and demanded that all Muslims conform to high standards of morality and effort. Moreover, they created a literature outlining the new message and made it readable in the local language of the areas in which they worked, without demeaning Arabic as a religious language. In this way the model that was produced was not reflective of the "old" Islam of Indonesia but a fresh, committed version of what a modern Muslim should be.

This effort was bold and telling, with many Muslims recognizing the importance of what Persis activists were trying to achieve. At the same time the effort had its problems. Total effort often produced narrow-mindedness and intolerance. Persis activists felt they had a lock on the truth and that after they had decided an issue, whether through normal reasoning or through legal opinion, that the matter was closed and that the only matter left was to tell other people what to believe. They seldom revisited their logic in light of the views of others or the problems of others. They were one-dimensional and when confronted with opposition they merely repeated the belief or undertook to attack the other side for imperfect

belief, imperfect argumentation or failing to live up to good Islamic expectations. Interaction with others was never for the purpose of coming to a common understanding, but to expose the imperfections or wrongly-held views of others. These tactics alienated a lot of other groups—traditionalist Muslims, Christians, nationalists, practitioners of folk Islam and others who were attacked. Not even fellow modernists were spared their critique.

In the second instance the Persis effort was too demanding and exclusive to be effective. At a time when unity of purpose was called for in the all-important drive for political independence, Persis efforts at creating the new, enlightened Muslim were undertaken in such a way as to deepen alienation among groups rather than bringing groups together. Persis eschewed violence, but it used confrontation to promote its image and in this it succeeded. One might question the cost of the effort, however, since it perpetuated differences at a time when peace and cooperation was needed much more. A third criticism relates to the other two, i.e. that the Persatuan Islam did not, despite its very meaningful efforts, produce leadership for the Islamic community of Indonesia. With the exception of Moehammad Natsir who was an important political leader in a later era, none of its activists emerged in the late colonial era or in the succeeding Japanese period as a leader of the independence movement or of the Islamic community itself, not even at the secondary level. A telling sign for leadership would have been found in efforts at bringing groups together for common purposes, whether they were efforts for holding religious rites and observances or for political purposes. Persis activists never moved beyond local efforts in this field of endeavor, and it was left to other Muslim groups to promote those efforts. This was a telling failure.

Comparison with three sets of other Muslim intellectual-activists is considered here in order to gain perspective concerning the place of the Persatuan Islam in development of Islam in the twentieth century. The group of Jamaluddin al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida preceded the Persatuan Islam except for Rashid Rida who was a contemporary in the early part of Persis history. The group of Hassan al-Banna and `Ala Mawdudi, were roughly the contemporaries of the Persatuan Islam and their development of fundamentalist principles seems to have some similarities with the Persatuan Islam. The Indonesian Muslim neo-Modernists Nurcholish Madjid and Dawam Rahardjo appear much

later, beginning their work only in the 1970's, but they constitute a current standard that reveals contemporary outlooks.

Regarding the first group of al-Afghani, Abduh and Rida, we see some immediate similarities in the charge that past practices of religious scholars (*ulama*) had allowed many cases of unjustified innovation (*bid'ab*) to become part of religious worship and the call for a return to Qur'an and Traditions as a way of revitalizing Islam. These were the hallmarks of the these three scholars and it was they, more than anyone else, who first raised the issue of reform in a meaningful way and who made it a cogent movement within Islam. In a sense the activists of the Persatuan Islam were second-generation followers who applied that message to a somewhat different time and certainly in a different place. The call to the sources of Islam was very much the same, but, of course, "innovation" had a slightly different meaning; for the most part the Persatuan Islam activists found much more innovation that needed addressing because of the peculiarities of Indonesian Islam itself. But, despite similarities, care must be taken not to believe that the Persatuan Islam was simply a reflection of the three Middle Eastern scholars. The Dutch administrator-scholar G. F. Pijper is convinced that Ahmad Hassan was not a copyist, but worked out his own theories, and Indonesian Muslim scholar A. Minhaji concurs with that assessment.³⁵

Regarding the fundamentalist scholars, Mawdudi and Hassan al-Banna, we again find some parallels, which may not be too surprising since those two were generational counterparts of Persis located in other Muslim regions undergoing development similar to those occurring in Indonesia. There was the basic stance that Islam is a religion of rules and that the rules must be applied by political power if Muslims control the means of doing that. All three were involved against colonial rule in some form and all three had to deal with other Muslims who were not convinced that they wanted to carry the ideas of religious law to the extremes that of all three these actors wanted. None of the three were in good odor with the political authorities, but Mawdudi and the Persatuan Islam were able to remain within the political system itself while Hassan al-Banna's followers were unable to do so in Egypt for unique reasons. Unlike the other two personalities who headed organizations dedicated directly to achieving political power, the Persatuan Islam leadership never chose direct political action, but worked through other organizations devoted to that end.³⁶

Concerning the neo-modernist Indonesian Muslim thinkers Nurcholish Madjid and Dawam Rahardjo, there are only a few parallels, but much difference. Both Madjid and Rahardjo draw freely on Western social science approaches and methodologies to examine material and their presentations are also heavily influenced by the Western format. This contrasts with the "question-answer" approach of Persis in its earliest works, and with a presentation that was frequently jurisprudential in nature in the later writings. Persis activists spent their time on Islamic learning and Islamic thinking, constantly turning over the Islamic message for its relevance to situations; their writings and pronouncements reflect that emphasis. In comparison Madjid and Rahardjo do much more exploring among non-scriptural sources to locate material and meaning in order to formulate answers to questions that speak as much to contemporary twentieth century civilization as to the tradition of Islam. The emphasis of the two sets of scholars is much different, since the Persis scholars had a strong ideological bent and regarded the distribution of a message to be its *raison d'être*, while Madjid and Rahardjo are not propagandists, but devote their effort and especially the application of Islamic principles to the problems of contemporary society, without expecting an ideological outcome.³⁷

In all three sets of comparison there are strong ties of Islamic understanding that bring the Persatuan Islam into proximity with all of the other groups. Point in time creates some obvious differences as does location, but the primary difference seems to rest on sense of mission. In this regard the relationship with Mawdudi and al-Banna is closest, particularly because of the importance Islamic law to contemporary Islam and the attention given to making it applicable in the modern nation-state. The other two comparisons may not oppose this mission, it is merely that they did not have that as their chief purpose.

Endnotes

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- ¹Nasution, *Ensiklopedi*, p. 764-765; *Ensikopede Islam*, pp. 95-96, and; *Leksikon Islam*, pp. 584-585.
- ²*Indische Verslag*, 1930, pp. 310-313; Pijper, *Studiën*, 120-134.
- ³Federspiel, *Persatuan Islam*; Federspiel, "Islam and Nationalism,"; Federspiel, "Social and Political Language."
- ⁴Wildan, *Sejarah*; Anshary and Mughni, *A Hassan*; Mughni, *Warisan*; Minhaji, *Ahmad Hassan*.
- ⁵Netherlands, *Indische Verslag*, 1930, pp. 310-311.
- ⁶Noer, "Modernist Muslim Movement," p. 134.
- ⁷Adams, *Islam in Egypt*, pp. 180-187.
- ⁸Hamka, *Ajahku*, pp. 73, 86.
- ⁹Ali, "The Muhammadiyah Movement," p. 49.
- ¹⁰Netherlands, *Indische Verslag*, p. 311.
- ¹¹Netherlands, *Indische Verslag*, p. 311..
- ¹²Jay, *Religion*.
- ¹³Jay, *Religion*.
- ¹⁴Noer, *Modernist Muslim Movement*," p. 134.
- ¹⁵*Al-Lisan*, No. 1 (December 1935), p. 1.
- ¹⁶Collected in *Kitab Pepetah*.
- ¹⁷*Pembela Islam*, No. 56 (December 1932), p. 6.
- ¹⁸*Sual-Djawab*, 15 v..
- ¹⁹*Pembela Islam*, No. 59 (March 1933), p. 25.
- ²⁰Wildan, *Sejarah*, 46-7; Ockeloen, *Catalogus*, 115.
- ²¹Pijper, *Studiën*, 130-131; Ockeloen, *Catalogus*, 115.
- ²²Wildan, *Sejarah*, 50-51; Noer, "Modernist Muslim Movement," pp. 143-144; Djaja, *Indjatul Islam*, p. 12.
- ²³Wildan, *Sejarah*, 46-47
- ²⁴Wildan, *Sejarah*, 54-55.
- ²⁵*A l-Lisan*, 1, 27 December 1935, p. 26 as cited in Wildan, *Sejarah*, p. 53
- ²⁶Wildan, *Sejarah*, p. 53-54.
- ²⁷Wildan, *Sejarah*, 55-56.
- ²⁸See McVey, *Indonesia*, pp. 410-437.
- ²⁹*Risalah*, I, No. 1 (June 1962), p. 10.
- ³⁰Noer, "Modernist Muslim Movement," p. 140; Vandenbosch, *Dutch East Indies*, p. 47
- ³¹Persatuan Islam, *Pesantren*, pp. 2-3.
- ³²*Dunia Madrasah*, No. 5 (January 5, 1955), p. 17.
- ³³Yunus, *Sejarah*, 260-261.
- ³⁴Keddie, *Sayyid*, pp. 214-228; Adams, *Islam*, pp. 70-78; 187-195.
- ³⁵Nasr, *Maududi*, pp. 41-46, 72-74; Abu-Rabi, *Intellectual*, pp. 69-91.
- ³⁶Barton, "Indonesia's," pp. 45-55, 63-68; Ali and Effendy, *Merambah*, pp. 199-215.

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