Islam in Indonesia: Modernism, Radicalism, and the Middle East Dimension

Giora Eliraz
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Southeast Asian Islam is receiving an increased amount of attention among both scholars and students. The direction has been toward understanding Muslim diversity and change, despite the still-existing perceptions among

the public of a monolithic and static Islam. Fundamentalism still gains more attention, partly due to its current influence and confusion. In this book, Giora Eliraz comparatively examines how the Middle Eastern Islamic modernist movements influenced Islamic movements in the Malay-Indonesian world throughout the twentieth century and contributed to the rise of contemporary Islamic radicalism in Indonesia.

Eliraz studies the transmission of modernist and/or radical ideas from the Middle East to Indonesia, the multiple organizations and strategies within Islamic movements, as well as the impacts of local and national values on the distinct faces of Indonesian Islam. Despite the current emergence of Islamic radicalism, the majority of the people continue to reject politicized Islam. According to the author, the tradition of intellectual and organizational pluralism has become the predominant characteristic of Indonesian Islam.

The book is divided into three chapters. Chapter 1 examines how the reformist ideas of Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905), his colleague Jamaluddin al-Afghani (1839-97), and Muhammad Rashid Rida (1865-1935) were transmitted to Southeast Asia (including Indonesia and the Malay Peninsula) through publications and networks, and how they were interpreted and applied within the new environment. Thus, Islamic reformist ideas, particularly from Egypt, influenced the rise of as well as the conflicts between the modernists, represented by the Muhammadiyah (established in 1912), and the traditionalists, represented by the Nahdatul Ulama (NU, established in 1926). In these two movements, Middle Eastern reformism underwent a process of localization that involved local preachers, activists, and scholars.

Eliraz argues that although reformism has focused more on rational-legal interpretation *(ijtihad)* and religious purification, it has actually had far-reaching social and political repercussions. During the Dutch colonial era, Islamic modernism not only transcended ethnic boundaries but also served as the rallying point of anti-colonialism (or Islamic nationalism).

The Islamic modernists' involvement in the political sphere greatly challenged the Dutch colonial regime, which attempted to restrict political Islam while allowing cultural Islam. Unlike the Malay states, in which Islam and politics were less connected because the British did not attempt to restrict the Muslims' pilgrimage and were not suspicious of the small number of Islamic modernists, Indonesia provides a different case, for Islamic modernism and politics were closely linked there. Compared to Islamic modernism in Egypt, which did not develop into a unified movement, Islamic modernism in the Malay-Indonesian world served as a solid

modernizing agent in the educational, social, cultural, and political spheres. The author contends that Islamic modernism in the Middle East, and later on in Indonesia, provides some historical references and ideological underpinnings of contemporary radicalism, which is characterized by the close relationship between religion and political activism.

Chapter 2 looks more closely at the global and local contexts of contemporary radical Islamic fundamentalists in Indonesia. For Eliraz, these include the Jama`ah Islamiyah and the Ngruki Network; the Forum Komunikasi Ahlu Sunnah wal-Jama`ah (FKAWJ, the Communication Forum of the Followers of the Sunnah), which established the Laskar Jihad movement; the Komite Indonesia untuk Solidaritas Dunia Islam (KISDI, the Indonesian Committee for Islamic World Solidarity); the Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia (DDII, the Indonesian Islamic Preaching Council); and the Front Pembela Islam (FPI, the Islamic Defenders' Front). The author states that they all share the feature of Middle Eastern radicals in their effort to establish an Islamic state based on the Shari`ah, usually simplified as "Islamic law." But it should be emphasized, however, that Islamic radicals have different goals and agendas. In addition, they have understood jihad as multifaceted (viz., spiritual and physical, social and political) and do not always have political agendas, although they aspire to forge what they perceive as an Islamic society within the nation-state system.

Chapter 3 focuses on the local context for the rise of Islamic radicals. The persistence of local histories and cultures leads the author to suggest that radical Islamic fundamentalism remains marginal in contemporary Indonesia. It is the Muhammadiyah and NU, both of which have accepted the official state ideology of Pancasila ("Five Pillars": divinity [defined as belief in one supreme God], humanism, unity, democracy, and social justice) as the middle way between an Islamic state and a purely secular state, that continue to play a moderating role in the political sphere. In other words, the Islamization process in Indonesia is not contradictory with the process of Indonesianization. This has also meant the victory of "cultural Islam" and the failure of "political Islam" in the country. The more recent emergence of Islamic "neo-modernism" and "liberalism" has also been linked to the global and local Islamic modernist discourse.

The majority's rejection of political Islam does not mean that the people are not involved in politics at all. Perhaps the political Islam that Eliraz has in mind is the political Islam of those who have a specific goal: establishing an Islamic state. Unfortunately, the author has provided little explanation about such categories as modernism and radical fundamentalism. An arti-

cle by William E. Shepard, "Islam and Ideology: Towards a Typology" published in the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (vol. 19, 1987, pp. 307-35), may shed some light on these categories of Islamic movements. More space is also needed to investigate how and why Abduh's heritage has moved away from its reformist spirit and toward the more fundamentalist orientations found in those minority groups. It would be equally interesting to learn more about how Islamic modernism has paved the way for Islamic moderation and liberalism. The traditionalist NU's unique – but complex – role, as a moderating agent in the political sphere would be another fascinating research topic.

Although the book sometimes gives more generalizations than details about groups and individuals, it is a very good and insightful survey of major books and articles on Islamic movements in Indonesia. It deserves to be read by everyone interested in the history of Muslim politics and culture in Indonesia.

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