CHAPTER 10

Large-scale Modernist and Traditionalist movements on the defensive

While there are many individuals and agencies involved in the deepening influence of Islam in Javanese society, the largest players are unquestionably Muhammadiyah and NU. The precise numbers of their followers c. 2011 are not known, but it is conventional to say that NU has some 40 million followers and Muhammadiyah something of the order of 30 million. Muhammadiyah tends to dominate Islamic activities in cities and larger towns, while NU is dominant in the countryside. With their educational institutions (discussed in Chapter 8), mosques, multiple subsidiary organisations and health and welfare services, they play a prominent role in society.

It is common for both NU and Muhammadiyah leaders, as well as other observers, to describe these organisations as ‘moderate’, to distinguish them from Islamist and violent groups, but the term is of limited analytical use. Masdar Hilmy’s caveat in this regard is salutary:

We cannot define a clear fault line dividing peaceful Islamism from radical and violent Islamism. … In reality, Islamism is on a borderless continuum where the boundary between it and so-called ‘moderate Islam’ is blurred. In other words, Islamist ideas are contiguous with ‘moderate’ ones on particular grounds and can gain broad resonance within some mainstream Islamic organisations such as Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). Despite their wide reputation as being ‘moderate’ organisations, some segments of these organisations are surprisingly sympathetic to key points of the Islamists’ agenda. That
is why their rhetoric can at times be remarkably similar to that of Islamist groups.¹

It is important to note that, in facing more radical groups like those covered in Chapter 12 below, NU and Muhammadiyah have found themselves in an essentially defensive position. This is, however, a new experience for neither of them. Muhammadiyah’s founding a century ago was to a large degree defensive, seeking to defend the ummah against the threat of Christian missions. But it also sought to reform Islam, and within Muslim circles it held the initiative as it sought to change the way that Islam was understood and practiced. Traditionalism has in a sense always been defensive. NU was set up in 1926 to defend Sunni orthodoxy and Sufism from the Modernist assault, which Traditionalists saw as puritanical and which they labeled ‘Wahhabi’. They both sought to defend themselves against the threat of Communism in the 1950s and 1960s and against the totalitarian aspirations of Soeharto’s New Order in subsequent decades. As the 21st century opened, both NU and Muhammadiyah found themselves defending their ideas against new, more radical and even extreme ideas and agendas in the Muslim community.

Facing a common threat tended to bring NU and Muhammadiyah closer together. In 2002, the heads of the two organisations, Hasyim Muzadi and Syafii Maarif respectively, along with other leaders, held a closed-door meeting in Jakarta. At the subsequent news conference, they expressed concern about the rise of more radical voices, and said that in the past conflicts between them had distracted attention from concern for minority faiths. Now they were determined to work more closely together to resist radicalism and to promote inter-religious harmony.² Such closer cooperation was indeed visible as the years passed.³

¹ Hilmy, *Islamism and democracy*, p. 101. Here Hilmy also cites a similar view put by Greg Fealy.
³ For example, the Muhammadiyah leader Ky. H. Kusnin Basri of Kudus said that there had been many village-level conflicts between Muhammadiyah and NU in the past, but now the relationship was a cooperative one; discussion of 27 March 2004, Kudus. The senior NU leader there, Ky. H. Chusnan, claimed that Muhammadiyah no longer opposed local culture and that they engaged in joint *dakwah*; discussion of 27 March 2004, Kudus. In 2004, the Muhammadiyah University in Malang
NU remains a Traditionalist network led by kyais, with its legal thinking rooted in the four orthodox schools of Sunni Islam and its style much influenced by Sufism and the long history of Islam in Javanese cultural contexts. Consequently, as we have noted several times in this book, its ideas could overlap with abangan traditions, such that NU has sometimes functioned as a sort of bridge across the santri-abangan divide. NU’s kyais are still believed to have supernatural capacities, such as communicating with the dead. Such communication is an important idea in Sufism, which is of central importance within Traditionalism, but it is an idea that divides NU thinking profoundly from that of Muhammadiyah, whose Modernist rationalism cannot make sense of such a belief. Kyais are also expected to know secret sciences such as invulnerability. Such supernaturally powerful figures and hidden forces are accepted among Traditionalists and make sense to many of abangan culture.

Four criteria to be regarded as a kyai (for there are no formal procedures to do this) were set out by the head of NU in East Java, Ky. H. Ali Maschan Moesa:

• ability to read the kitab kuning (the ‘yellow books’ that constitute the classic works of Traditionalist Islam),
• popularity as a pengajian leader,
• ability to lead ritual prayer, and
• ability to nyuwuk (a magical blowing of the breath to cure the sick).

A fifth criterion that commonly applies, not mentioned by Ali Maschan Moesa, is descent from or authorisation by a preceding kyai.

Published a volume of essays from both sides, most of them originally published in newspapers over 1999–2003, emphasising the importance of Muhammadiyah-NU cooperation, with introductions by Muhammadiyah’s Syaffi Maarif and NU’s Salahuddin Wahid (Abdurrahman’s brother): Ma’mun Murod Al-Barbasy et al. (eds), Muhammadiyah-NU: Mendayung ukhuwah di tengah perbedaan (intro. A. Syaffi’i Ma’arif and Salahuddin Wahid; Malang: UMM Press, 2004).

4 Ky. H. Imam Ghazali Said observed that the threat of the Revivalist ‘New Salafis’ faced both by Traditionalists and followers of kebatinan were bringing the latter two together. Discussion with Ky. H. Imam Ghazali Said, pesantren An-Nur, Wonocolo, Surabaya, 23 Oct. 2008.

Kyais often enjoy high esteem from their communities although, as Pieternella van Doorn-Harder reminds us, ‘In real life, it must be admitted, there are many not-so-holy kyai.’ The truth of that observation notwithstanding, when a kyai or group of kyais hold a major public event, hundreds of people from surrounding areas are likely to attend. Such was the case with the group ‘struggle’ of Sufi spiritual exercises (mujahadah) led by 15 kyais in Yogyakarta in early 2009. Or again, when several kyais in Kediri led communal ‘great dhikr’ in commemoration of ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani (d. 1166), the founder of the Qadiriyya Sufi order, and of the approach of Ramadan, some 7,000 people packed the grounds of the government office where it was held.

NU continues to be organisational home to charismatic kyais, among whom Gus Mus (Ky. H. Mustofa Bisri, b. 1944) of Rembang is a prominent example. His father and grandfather were respected Traditionalist leaders as well. Gus Mus studied in pesantrens in Java and at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, where he was a friend of Abdurrahman Wahid and, like him, displayed little interest in his studies. He returned to Indonesia in the 1970s. He is known for his idiosyncrasies, independence, creativity and lack of pomposity. He is also a noted poet and artist. During the national controversy over the raunchy ‘drilling’ style of Inul Daratista, which the East Java MUI declared to be pornographic, Gus Mus painted a picture of Inul dancing in the midst of a gathering of kyais including himself, which he provocatively entitled ‘dhikr with Inul’. He displays a lack of interest in administrative or political roles — having several times declined requests to become head of NU — and although he served as a PPP member of the provincial and national parliaments for a time in the Soeharto era he found this unrewarding and stepped down. He has in fact expressed some reservations about democracy

6 Van Doorn-Harder, Women shaping Islam, p. 170.
7 KR, 8 Jan. 2009; this was an observation of the date of 10 Sura (Muharram), when the commended (but not obligatory) fast of Ashura is carried out by pious Sunnis.
10 He is, however, on the advisory board of the Libforall foundation, founded in 2003 by Abdurrahman Wahid with the American C. Holland Taylor. Its principle aim is to ‘support moderate and progressive Muslims’ in working for ‘peaceful, tolerant and free societies’. See the foundation’s website at http://www.libforall.org/.
handing all power to the people. He is opposed to state imposition of *shari’a*. He is bluntly critical of MUI and its denunciations of deviant sects, and of vigilante violence. He observed,

> If I can make an analogy, if we have a food stall and then there is another food stall that is like ours and clearly some or many of our customers switch to that stall, what do we have to do? According to me, we have to look at ourselves, then upgrade our management, service and the quality of the food. … Or at most inform our customers that the other stall is not a branch of ours. It is not for us to call the police to shut that stall, let alone burn it.¹¹

Another charismatic *kyai* was Gus Maksum (Ky. H. Maksum Djauhari) of Kediri, who died in 2003 at the age of 57. He was famed for his supernatural capacities and was a striking figure with his long hair, wispy beard and simple dress. He was a master of indigenous martial arts (*pencak silat*) and was leader of NU’s martial arts organisation Pagar Nusa. Gus Maksum

---

also was believed to be a master of the secret sciences of invulnerability (ilmu kanuragan), particularly invulnerability to sharp weapons (ilmu kebal bacok). ‘That was very useful when the ninja issue erupted in 1998,’ he said (we will discuss these ninjas shortly). Tens of his students lived in his house with him and were treated as if they were his own children. He also cared for children who were the victims of communal violence in Sampit, Central Kalimantan, and was a defender of the environment. By the application of coconut water and (supernaturally powerful) rituals, he cured drug addicts. When he died, it was estimated that more than 10,000 people attended his burial.12

In the orthodoxy-enforcing atmosphere created by MUI and others, NU ideas about the occult were at some risk of denunciation. When MUI denounced Ahmadiyya, it also issued a fatwa against people believing in prophesies (peramalan or Arabic kahana) and supernatural healing (perdukunan or Arabic irafa).13 The venerable Ky. H. Idris Marzuki of Lirboyo pesantren supported the judgment against the Ahmadis but, he said, ‘With regard to perdukunan, hang on a minute. If it isn’t in conflict with Islamic shari‘a it’s not a problem. The same is true regarding prophesying, for prophesying is after all a custom, just so long as you don’t believe in it completely.’14 Such beliefs carried on among NU followers despite the criticism of non-Traditionalists and MUI. One example is the practice of sumpah pocong (shrouded oath), where one swears to one’s innocence while wrapped in a shroud and lying in a coffin in a mosque, a practice that may be demanded by villagers whether or not police have resolved on the innocence of someone. This is done in the belief that, if the person has lied, God will subject him or her to torments in the grave.15

The presumed-to-be supernaturally potent and gnomic style of some kyais is nicely illustrated by Ky. H. Salman Dahlawi, the head of the Naqshabandiyya tarekat (Khalidiyah branch) headquartered at his small pesantren Al-Manshur at Popongan, near Klaten in Central Java. When,
with others, I visited him in 2006, his room was full of a stream of visitors, mostly male but some women, seeking his blessing, advice, supernatural intervention, and so on. Ky. Salman was venerable and elderly — he said that he was 74 — and conveyed an aura of great sanctity. Everyone calling upon him kissed his hand and whispered in his presence. His responses were almost inaudible. One visitor opened two bottles of water for Ky. Salman to breathe prayers into. On departure, most pressed money into his hand while holding and kissing it. Our discussion — such as it was — consisted of very few words (partly in Indonesian, partly in Javanese). Why, I asked, is Sufism growing in our time, when some people claim that mysticism is inconsistent with modernity? Ky. Salman’s answer was ‘watak’ (character) — possibly meaning the ‘character’ of Sufism, or of modern people, or of our times or of something else. Afterwards one of his followers said that he did not know what the kyai meant, either. The visit left an impression of the influence, sanctity and supernatural prowess ascribed to a figure such as Ky. Salman, but
it was also a useful reminder that the most holy are not necessarily the most informative. The same is true of the venerable Ky. H. Muslim Imampura (Mbah Lim), recognised by some as a *waliullah* — a saint who stands close to God. He is elderly — probably in his 80s — toothless, idiosyncratic, with very slurred speech, conveying a welcoming air of conviviality and sanctity.

---

all at once. In other words, a very Javanese sort of kyai. He suffered some illness in the distant past and since then has been unable to speak clearly. So someone close to him acts as a ‘translator’ when he meets people. But, it is claimed, when he recites the Qur’an he can do so clearly.

*Kyais* are frequently called upon to deal with what people think are supernatural threats. They may be asked to cure suspected cases of individual spirit possession or to exorcise school girls caught up in mass hysteria — although in at least one case to no effect. The greatest call upon their supernatural powers occurred when, in 1998–9, so-called *ninjas* were spotted, particularly in the Banyuwangi area. These were reputedly black-clad villains who could leap over buildings and perform other feats, which multiple witnesses were prepared to attest to. Practitioners of black magic (*dukun santet*) were also believed to be at work. Multiple — some claimed over a hundred — Traditionalist kyais lost their lives. People mobilised to defend themselves and perhaps up to 200 suspected *ninjas* and *dukun santen* were murdered by villagers. Many of those killed turned out to be innocent people who were mentally ill. Such outbreaks occurred in West Java, too, and reportedly claimed up to 300 lives.

In response to the wave of ninja and dukun santet deaths, the prominent NU leader Said Agil Siradj told *Jawa Pos* that black magic was always present everywhere, and Banyuwangi was particularly famous for sorcery, but it was forbidden by Islam. Black magicians usually inherited their power from their ancestors, he said, and had to use it if they were to avoid disaster, so they always had to seek human victims. To protect themselves, Muslims should read the Qur’an frequently, particularly the ‘throne verse’ (*Ayat al-“}

---

18 *TempoI*, 11 Feb. 2009, reporting a case in Jember, where two kyais and three ‘paranormals’ had been summoned.
19 The most comprehensive study of these episodes is to be found in Herriman, ‘Din of whispers’. See also Nicholas Herriman, ‘The great rumor mill: Gossip, mass media, and the ninja fear’, *Journal of Asian Studies* vol. 69, no. 3 (Aug. 2010), pp. 723–48; Arif Zamhari, *Ritual of Islamic spirituality*, pp. 168–70. Detailed reports of various cases and of the various — often dubious — kinds of information available at or just after the time may also be found in Abdur Manan, Imam Sumaatmadja and Veven Sp Wardhana, *Geger santet Banyuwangi* ([Jakarta:] Institut Studi Arus Informasi, 2001). There were also episodes in Malang, Probolinggo, Lumajang and Lamongan; *SP* online, 20 Oct. 1998; *KmpsO*, 21 Oct. 1998.
Kursi, Qur’an 2:255, which speaks of the throne of God extending over the heavens and the earth, of God’s omnipotence and omniscience). Any member of the family struck by black magic should be taken to a kyai to be cured, for many kyais could do this, Said Agil said.21

Again, Keith Thomas’s work on 16th- and 17th-century England should remind us that ideas such as these are neither uniquely Islamic nor particularly Javanese. Traditionalist Islam in Java was in a position rather like Thomas’s description of the medieval Catholic Church: ‘In the Mass, the healing power of saints and relics, and the exorcism of the possessed, the Catholic Church had a magical repertoire …. It was precisely because the Church had its own magic that it frowned on that of others.’ He ends his book by observing appositely, ‘If magic is to be defined as the employment of ineffective techniques to allay anxiety when effective ones are not available, then we must recognize that no society will ever be free from it.’22

Kyais who convey sanctity and have supernatural reputations are highly regarded in a society so steeped in ideas of the occult, but kyais are not just other-worldly figures, as we have seen. In Kediri, where they are so prominent, they have been involved in encouraging and facilitating communications between the giant Gudang Garam tobacco factory and its employees when there are industrial disputes. In 2002, for example, the NU leaders issued advice (taushiah) supporting the action of the union in defending the rights of workers, urging the management to be more receptive and prudent, asking both sides to restrain themselves and security authorities not to be repressive, and advising all to be wary of provocations.23

Since the time of the Japanese occupation, kyais have been political actors. In contemporary Indonesia, NU has adopted a position that rejects ideas of an Islamic state, the introduction of shari’a law or HTI-style demands for a caliphate, and instead regards the Indonesian national state, governed by the amended 1945 constitution, to be final. We have seen NU as an effective employer of violence, particularly during the Revolution and the


22 Thomas, Religion and the decline of magic, pp. 326, 800.

mid-1960s, but in contemporary Indonesia it rejects the use of violence.\textsuperscript{24} Its Banser paramilitaries turn out to guard churches when it looks like trouble is looming\textsuperscript{25} and, it need hardly be said, protected \textit{kyais} and \textit{pesantrens} from attacks when it was thought that \textit{ninjas} or black magicians were about.

As we pointed out in Chapter 3 regarding the Japanese occupation of Java, there has long been an important difference between Modernist and Traditionalist leadership with regard to political involvement. The mainly urban Modernists have never had any problems with being engaged in political activity, if that could promote their cause. Traditionalist leadership, however, consists of \textit{kyais} whose social and religious standing and influence rest upon from their evidently other-worldly gifts and aims. The more they become involved in the inevitably rather grubby, compromise-filled world of politics, the more others doubt just how other-worldly and pious, how close to God, they really are. Entering the world of politics makes \textit{kyais} seem ordinary — the one thing that no \textit{kyai} should be. And the more ordinary they seem, the less people think their advice to be free of self- or party interest. Thus, from the Japanese occupation to the present, Traditionalist \textit{kyais} have had to face a dilemmatic relationship between their socio-religious standing and their political activism.

It is clear that the involvement of Traditionalist religious leaders in politics since the fall of Soeharto has diminished their standing in the eyes of the community. The PKB party had its roots in NU and was led by one of the most charismatic and idiosyncratic of all \textit{kyais}, Abdurrahman Wahid. We noted in Chapter 7 that his brief time as President of Indonesia (1999–2001) was far from a success. His erratic yet domineering leadership style alienated many \textit{kyais} (among many others), so that PKB itself split into factions and then in 2007 spawned a competing \textit{kyai}-led party, PKNU, which, however, won only 1.5 per cent of the national vote in 2009 and therefore failed to gain a single seat in the national parliament. Even while some \textit{kyais} were getting involved in party politics, other NU leaders protested that this was

\textsuperscript{24} NU leaders have made multiple statements to this effect. For example, see Hasyim Muzadi quoted in \textit{JktP} online, 29 Dec. 2002; Said Agil Siradj quoted in \textit{JktP} online, 17 July 2010. Of course, no organisation is perfect or in complete control of its constituents, especially when they number some 40 million. When hundreds of members of NU’s martial arts body Pagar Nusa were on their way to a gathering in East Java, they beat up people along the road and put three victims into hospital; \textit{AntaraNews.com}, 15 Jan. 2010.

\textsuperscript{25} For example, on Christmas eve 2005, Banser mobilised 13,000 members to guard churches in East Java and 3,500 in Central Java; \textit{TempoI}, 24 Dec. 2005.
Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java

inconsistent with their fundamentally moral and religious calling, that it caused damaging splits among them and diminished their standing. 26 Their compromises did sometimes lack obvious holiness. This was notably so in Kediri, where PKB accepted the support of one Heri Baung, the boss of illegal gambling, alcohol and prostitution and leader of several thousand assistants of doubtful piety. He said that he had given up his worst activities and went on the hajj in 2003, but not everyone was convinced of this change of character.27

One NU leader near Yogyakarta said that NU followers had adopted the adage, ‘for studying the Qur’an follow the kyai, for politics follow yourselves’.28 Four hundred people surveyed in Jekulo (Kudus) were

Table 24 Reasons given for supporting political parties in Jekulo, 2004 parliamentary election29

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason given</th>
<th>% of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Felt close to the candidate</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party connection with a mass organisation</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Followed kyai or social leader</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attracted to party vision and mission</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because of leading figure of party</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious emotion</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reply</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


27 There are multiple reports on this, e.g., MmK, 29 March 2004; RK, 1 Apr. 2004. Heri Baung’s full name is Ahmad Heri Subagyo. The alliance with him was a flop, for most of his followers still voted for PDIP, which led to physical conflict; MmK, 13 Apr. 2004, 21 Apr. 2004.

28 Yen ngaji nderek kyai, yen politik pribadi-pribadi; said by Drs H. Suharto Djuwaini, chair of the Bantul NU and a senior figure in the Department of Religious Affairs, Yogyakarta, 15 Apr. 2008 (interviewed by Arif Maftuhin).

29 Achmad Täyuddin, ‘Masyarakat toleran’, p. 73. Ibid., p. 111, tells us that of those who voted for PKB, 23 per cent said they did so because they were following their
Modernist and Traditionalist Movements on the Defensive

asked on what grounds they had made their political choices in the 2004 parliamentary election. They responded as seen in Table 24, confirming how little influence was wielded by either kyais or the national figures leading political parties, and how free voters felt to choose whatever local candidate they most trusted.

It is a token of the declining influence of kyais that election candidates endorsed by them often failed to win elections. In August 2004, 25 leading kyais of East Java — led by Iris Marzuqi of Lirboyo — issued a call which, they said, rested on ‘spiritual advice from the great ulamas of the Hijaz’, that people should vote for the combination of Megawati and Hasyim Muzadi for President and Vice-President of Indonesia in the second round of the presidential election of that year.30 This was followed by more such advice from the leading kyais of Lirboyo and Ploso in September.31 When the election was held in September, a majority at polling booths located at pesantrens voted for Megawati and Hasyim Muzadi,32 but that was the end of the kyais’ influence. Overall, 59.7 per cent of voters in East Java chose instead the combination of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Yusuf Kalla.33

Another dramatic example was the 2008 election for mayor and deputy mayor of Kediri — a town that is commonly thought of as dominated by Traditionalist kyais. They split among themselves in supporting various pairs of candidates, all of whom did poorly. The newly elected mayor and deputy were ‘cleanskins’ — people without previous party political identities — and, even more remarkably, Dr Samsul Ashar (who won as mayor) had a Muhammadiyah background and his deputy, Abdullah Abu Bakar, had Arab ancestry. The new team immediately showed itself to share the general view repeatedly illustrated in this book that as heads of local government their responsibilities extended to religious life, for Dr Samsul expressed the


32 This was true at Lirboyo, Ploso, the LDII pesantren and other such venues; RK, 21 Sept. 2004.
33 Calculated from Tabulasi Nasional Pemilu — Pemilihan Presiden Putaran II at http://tnp.kpu.go.id. The percentages voting for SBY and Kalla were 51.7 in Central Java and 59.7 in Yogyakarta.
Illustration 29 Published advice by senior kyais of Kediri for NU followers to vote for Megawati Sukarnoputri and Hasyim Muzadi in 2004
hope that the people of Kediri would draw closer to God and become more
diligent in observing their daily prayers together in mosques.\textsuperscript{34}

In 2009, \textit{Radar Kediri} editorialised that the public believed ‘that
many \textit{kyais} more and more forget about the people. They are distracted by
worldly wealth and a warehouse-full of ambition for power or office.’\textsuperscript{35} The
prominent NU leader Ky. H. Ali Maschan Moesa said that the status of
being a \textit{kyai} had become such that there was even a growing tendency for
the sons of \textit{kyais} no longer to wish to follow in their fathers’ footsteps.\textsuperscript{36} A
group calling themselves ‘The Younger Generation of NU’ (Generasi Muda
NU) gathered on the town square of Kediri in 2004, performed both an
exorcism (\textit{ruwatan}) and \textit{tablilan}, and called upon all NU leaders to withdraw
from party politics.\textsuperscript{37} In 2007, a \textit{Jawa Pos} survey of 486 students at 13 major
pesantrens in East Java revealed that 47 per cent said that they would not
follow the political choice of their \textit{kyais} in the upcoming provincial election.\textsuperscript{38}
The national-level leadership elected at NU’s national congress in 2010 for
the next five years was led by Said Agil Siradj, who pledged to keep NU out
of politics.\textsuperscript{39}

Involvement in party politics was not the only issue that made some
younger people of Traditionalist background dissatisfied with their elders, for
even \textit{kyais’} interpretations of Islam were coming under challenge. We noted
in Chapter 6 above how, in the 1980s and early 1990s, younger NU activists
set up organisations such as P3M (Association for \textit{Pesantren} and Community
Development, established in 1983), Lakpesdam (Committee for the Study
and Development of Human Resources, 1985) and LKiS (Centre for the
Study of Islam and Social Transformations, 1992). These promoted more
exploratory, Liberal versions of Islam and supported the socially engaged
activism that followed from them. Thus, Islamic Traditionalist epistemology
was giving birth to Liberal Islamic agendas, particularly (but not only) among
younger thinkers. Of the multiple groups encouraging more Liberal thought,
one of the most prominent was JIL (Jaringan Islam Liberal, Liberal Islamic

\textsuperscript{34} The occasion was an observation simultaneously of the supposed 1,130th anni-
versary of the city’s foundation and of the Prophet’s night journey to heaven (\textit{isra’}
and \textit{mir’aj}), where Emha Ainun Najib and his group Kiai Kanjeng performed; \textit{RK},
26 July 2009.
\textsuperscript{35} \textit{RK}, 22 May 2009.
\textsuperscript{36} Discussion with Ky. H. Ali Maschan Musa, Surabaya, 22 June 2007.
\textsuperscript{37} \textit{RK}, 20 June 2004.
\textsuperscript{39} \textit{TempoI}, 27 March 2010, 1 Apr. 2010.
Illustration 30 Cover of the JIL volume
*The face of Liberal Islam in Indonesia, 2002*
Modernist and Traditionalist Movements on the Defensive

Network), established formally in 2001 but with roots in earlier discussions and networks. *Jawa Pos* became the principle platform for columns written by JIL thinkers and activists, led particularly by Ulil Abshar Abdalla (b. Pati 1967 and son-in-law to Ky. H. Mustofa Bisri [Gus Mus]).

The revolutionary character of JIL can be gauged from the following passage, written by Luthfi Assyaukanie (b. Jakarta, 1967), one of its leaders, in a book that republished many of the columns originally in *Jawa Pos*. This passage challenges some of the most cherished views among Sunnis regarding the *Qur’an*:

Islam is not a religion that existed with all its concepts in complete form at the moment it happened. The religion evolved. … The *Qur’an* is not a book that already existed that was handed down by Gabriel to Muhammad and then it was just left to the Prophet’s companions to carry it out. The *Qur’an* was ‘created’ by the place, by the time and by the interaction between the Prophet and Arab society. This explains why there are many verses which begin with the phrase ‘they asked me’. Such verses indicate how much the *Qur’an* is not a command that descended from the skies without consideration of the social context and circumstances.  

This was a direct challenge to the view of the medieval Ash‘ari theologians that the *Qur’an* was eternal, which has remained Sunni orthodoxy down to the present, in opposition to the Mu‘tazili rationalists’ doctrine of the createdness of the *Qur’an*.  

Ulil Abhar Abdalla also challenged deeply cherished beliefs about the *Qur’anic* verse (33:40) that proclaims Muhammad to be the ‘seal of the prophets’, conventionally taken to mean that he was the final prophet sent by God. Ulil wrote,

I wish to make a new interpretation of the Qur’anic statement, ‘Muhammad is not the father of any one of you men; he is God’s Messenger

---

40 Luthfi Assyaukanie (ed.), *Wajah liberal Islam di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Jaringan Islam Liberal, Teater Utan Kayu, 2002), p. xix. The book had a provocative cover design, featuring multiple clocks marking the passing of time and a spotlighted time-bomb. By this time, Assyaukanie held undergraduate degrees from the University of Jordan in philosophy and Islamic law and a master’s degree in philosophy from the International Islamic University Malaysia. His earlier education was in the pesantren Attaqwa in Bekasi and he later completed a PhD at the University of Melbourne.

and the seal of the prophets’. In traditional interpretation, this verse is seen as an argument that Muhammad was the final Prophet. The idea of Muhammad as the final Prophet can make it seem as if the Islamic revelation is not progressive, as if the history of Islam is not progressive, because everything goes back to the Prophet. After all, there is no prophet after Muhammad. That is just one possible interpretation.

This verse, in the standard recitation of the Quran, can be read in two possible ways. ... Khatim means the closing of the prophets, but it can also be read as khatam meaning a ring [bearing a seal]. I prefer the second reading. Thereby, the Prophet is like a finger among other fingers, but this one ‘finger’ is so extraordinary because it wears an esteemed ring. Do I thereby believe that the history of prophethood did not end after the death of the Prophet [Muhammad]? I say, yes! That is why I once said that all individual Muslims are ‘little Muhammads’ who bear the burden of prophetic history just like Muhammad in the past.

Such revolutionary, iconoclastic rethinking enthused many younger Muslims and won attention and respect from both Indonesian and foreign scholars of Indonesian affairs; it also attracted support from some kyais, but produced storms of outrage from more conservative religious circles. In November 2002 a group of 80 religious scholars gathered in Bandung (West Java), including Traditionalist ulamas and kyais from various pesantrens across Java, as well as people from Persatuan Islam, Muhammadiyah, Partai Keadilan (which would shortly become PKS) and others. The meeting considered three main issues before them — the recent arrest of Abu Bakar Ba’asyir in the wake of the Bali bombings, a new anti-terrorism bill and an article by Ulil in Kompas of 18 November (perhaps implying that these three were of comparable significance). These ulamas issued a fatwa declaring that those who insulted Islam should be put to death and called upon the police to heed their decision, but they claimed that this was not just aimed at Ulil. The police should also break up ‘all networks and activities ... that insult Islam, God and God’s Messenger’, for there were strong indications that an anti-Islamic conspiracy was afoot. JIL was obviously what they had in mind. Seeking to calm the atmosphere, Masdar F. Mas’udi issued a statement on behalf of NU’s advisory board (Syuriyah) making four points:

---

42 As translated in Qur’an: A new translation by Abdel Haleem, p. 269.
43 In Assyaukanie, Wajab liberal Islam, 77. Ulil Abshar Abdalla was educated in pesantrens on Java’s north coast and then completed a first degree at LIPIA in Jakarta. He later did an MA at Boston University.
Modernist and Traditionalist Movements on the Defensive

(1) that Ulil’s views were not motivated by a wish to insult Islam, God or the Prophet, (2) that physical threats against a person merely because of his opinions must be rejected, (3) that in order to avoid misunderstandings Ulil should elaborate his ideas and (4) that ‘because there are no human ideas that are absolutely true’ the right of others to object to Ulil’s thoughts must be respected, no matter how strongly they might wish to put those objections, so long as this was done without threats and in a polite way.\textsuperscript{45} There was, however, little politesse noticeable among Ulil’s enemies.

No one tried to murder Ulil at that stage, although he was one of the targets of several mail bombs in Jakarta in early 2011 (but was unhurt).\textsuperscript{46}

In August 2005, a gathering of NU kyais from across Java and Madura at Lirboyo pesantren in Kediri issued advice (\textit{taushiyah}) that JIL should be banned.\textsuperscript{47} This followed upon MUI fatwas of July 2005 declaring liberalism, pluralism and secularism \textit{haram}, decreeing that Muslims should not marry non-Muslims,\textsuperscript{48} rejecting joint prayers with non-Muslims and (as we have seen above) renewing an older fatwa declaring Ahmadiyya a deviant sect. In these fatwas, liberalism was defined as interpretations of the \textit{Qur’an} and \textit{Hadiths} ‘using free reasoning, and only accepting religious doctrines which are consistent just with reasoning’.\textsuperscript{49} JIL was unmistakably the principal target.

Traditionalist leaders’ responses to these younger Islamic Liberals were mixed, but for the more conservative and hostile among them, this challenge came just as they themselves were moving towards more doctrinaire versions of their faith. Increasing conservatism and even Wahhabi influence among kyais was noted in some quarters, the latter attributed to the experiences kyais had while studying and undertaking the pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia.\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{45} The text of the statement of 27 December 2002 may be found in Riyadi, \textit{De-konstruksi tradisi}, pp. 181–3.
\textsuperscript{46} The main perpetrator of this bombing campaign was convicted under Indonesia’s terrorism law and sentenced to 18 years in prison in March 2012. Several accomplices received shorter sentences. \textit{JktP} online 6 March 2012.
\textsuperscript{48} We may note that this ruling was in spite of specific \textit{Qur’anic} approval for a Muslim man to marry a pious Jewish or Christian woman, as indeed had the Prophet Muhammad himself.
\textsuperscript{49} The fatwa texts may be found at http://www.mui.or.id/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=65&Itemid=73.
\textsuperscript{50} This view was expressed in discussion by Ky. H. Imam Ghazali Said, Surabaya, 23 Oct. 2008; and by A. Rubaidi and Mashuri, leaders of the Inter-Religious Forum (Forum Lintas Agama) in Surabaya, 23 Oct. 2008, with reference particularly to the kyais of East Java.
The 1999 national conference of NU passed several decisions that seemed narrow in their religious understandings and a rejection of the Liberal positions associated with Abdurrahman Wahid. These included forbidding inter-religious prayer (not an unusual practice in Indonesia) and declaring it unlawful for a non-Muslim to be a political leader. Reversing the 1984 decision to accept *Pancasila* as its foundation, the conference declared that NU was returning to Islam as its sole foundation.\(^51\) This trend continued in later meetings, such as the national conference of 2010, which decreed (despite the minimum age requirements for marriage in the national law) that in *shari’ah* law there was no minimum age for marriage. It was also decreed that Muslims should not be buried together with non-Muslims\(^52\) — a greater separation in death, we may note, than Indonesians commonly experience in life. In the election for NU leadership for the coming five years — in the end won by Said Agil Siradj as general secretary and Sahal Mahfudh as head (rois aam) of NU’s advisory board (Syuriyah) — the conference rules banned anyone with Liberal views from standing. Nevertheless Ulil Abshar Abdalla quixotically did so and gained a few votes in the first round.\(^53\)

We noted at the start of this chapter that NU was a defensive organisation for Traditionalism from the start, and by the early 21st century it was perhaps more so than ever. It need hardly be said that a significant decline in the standing and influence of Traditionalist *kyais* as we have noted here facilitated challenges to their understandings of Islam. These came from Liberal interpretations of Islam, but not only from that direction. Among others, the Modernist challenge remained significant, not least because of the extraordinary organisational reach and resources of Muhammadiyah.

As we turn to Muhammadiyah in post-Soeharto Indonesia, let us note that the contest for authority that we have been discussing — like almost everything else discussed in these post-1998 chapters — represents a debate within an Islamic frame of reference. These are hotly contested arguments about what Islam is. All sides, however, accept the dominance that Islam — which, for Liberals, means essentially dominance in their private lives but which, for others, is a much broader view seeking conformity both in what people think and in what they do. Within Javanese society, there had long since ceased to be any significant voice disputing the dominance of Islam. Not even the Christian minority


\(^{52}\) *JktP* online, 27 March 2010.

\(^{53}\) *JktP* online, 28 March 2010.
Modernist and Traditionalist Movements on the Defensive

could credibly deny that, however much it might hope to win some Muslims to Christian beliefs.

Muhammadiyah remains the foremost Islamic Modernist organisation throughout Indonesia, but the tensions inherent in Modernism have created problems for it. Islamic Modernism rested from its beginnings on two potentially divergent aspirations. The first was to return to the Qur’an and Hadith as the foundation for knowing what Islam is. To this end, Modernism employed human reason and was committed to modern educational innovations to enhance the capacity of reason. Hence Muhammadiyah’s massive presence in the realm of modern education. The second aspiration was for a more general Islamic renewal or modernisation (tajdid — a ubiquitous term in Muhammadiyah discourse), better preparing Muslims for their encounter with modernity. The first aspiration can give rise to puritan literalism in the name of rejecting medieval innovations, while the second can lead to potentially contradictory openness to innovative ideas of the modern age.

We noted in Chapter 6 that from 1995 onwards, a quite flexible and progressive leadership group dominated Muhammadiyah at national level. These were people such as Amien Rais, Syafii Maarif, Amin Abdullah, Moeslim Abdurrahman and Abdul Munir Mulkhan. When Amien Rais entered party politics as the leader of PAN in 1999, Syafii Maarif succeeded him as chairman of Muhammadiyah, and was reelected to that position for a new five-year term in 2000. Under such leadership, for about a decade Muhammadiyah emphasised what was called dakwah kultural (cultural proselytism), which was largely an attempt to bring the Modernist understanding of Islam to abangan villagers, a social realm where deeper Islamisation had been mainly a Traditionalist enterprise.

A major landmark of Muhammadiyah’s ‘cultural dakwah’ was Munir Mulkhan’s Gadjah Mada University doctoral thesis on ‘pure Islam in peasant society’, published in 2000.54 Munir Mulkhan posited that there were four kinds of Muhammadiyah people, one of whom he described as being squarely in the tradition of the founder Ky. H. Ahmad Dahlan in being tolerant towards abangan spiritual ideas and practices. For Munir Mulkhan, the issue was how Muhammadiyah should adapt its reforming and purifying aspirations to the reality of Javanese peasant society. In his view, ‘the spread of Muhammadiyah to rural villages is not evidence of Islamisation, but of the indigenisation of pure Islam in a special way, consistent with peasant

Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java

tradition, which signifies the emergence of “peasant theology”. What is needed, he said, was a “new road” of Islam in developing social integration in a society that is increasingly open, democratic and plural. He argued for the need to rethink what shari’a is and to return to the ideas of Ahmad Dahlan in adopting a more flexible approach to peasant society.

Prominent figures such as Nurcholish Madjid and the Muhammadiyah thinker Dawam Rahardjo declared that Muhammadiyah thought had stagnated and compared poorly with the innovation seen from Traditionalists. Nurcholish saw mysticism as an important part of Islam and so did some of those within Muhammadiyah who found its ideas rather narrow-minded. Thus at around this time it was possible to note within Muhammadiyah an increasing openness to Sufism of the type promoted by Hamka six decades before, that is, ‘Modern Mysticism’, mysticism without a tarekat or obedience to a spiritual master (a shaykh or murshid). This greater sympathy towards mysticism also facilitated greater sympathy towards Traditionalist and abangan ideas.

As had been the case in NU, many younger Muhammadiyah activists responded positively to this sort of rethinking, but a good many — particularly from older generations — did not. A group of younger Muhammadiyah researchers studied the local reality in the relationship between Muhammadiyah and indigenous cultural practices in Lamongan on Java’s north coast, Muhammadiyah’s strongest centre in East Java and where it is generally regarded as quite puritanical. For the previous 50 years, Muhammadiyah had been growing in this predominantly Traditionalist area where many local practices of a far-from-pious sort continued. Lamongan’s Muhammadiyah leaders were generally opposed to characteristically Javanese arts: to wayang, martial arts, village crop-cycle rituals, local dance performances and — it need hardly be said — slametans. Local traditions that NU followers regard as piously Islamic, such as songs in praise of the Prophet (slawatan), were also condemned by the Lamongan Muhammadiyah people. On gender issues, they were also at the more puritan end of discussion, some even insisting that the parts that a woman should not reveal in public — the aurat — include her voice. For their part, NU people regarded

55 Ibid., pp. 4–5.
57 JktP online, 2 Dec. 2001.
58 Discussion with Prof. Abdul Munir Mulkhan, Kota Gede, 10 March 2005. There were many other indications of this greater openness to ‘Modern Mysticism’.
59 Discussion with Prof. Syafiq Mughni, Sidoarjo, 23 June 2007.
Muhammadiyah as being culturally ‘dry’ and socially rather exclusive and disruptive. In his study of another north-coastal area, Mudjahirin Thohir commented that ‘when NU and Muhammadiyah … figures gather in one room, it is as if they are tolerant, but when they return to their respective followings, on the contrary they reinforce the importance of a fanatical attitude’. Their activities, in other words, were sometimes pursued in a highly competitive style, but we should note that both of these north-coast studies were done before the post-2001 increase in Muhammadiyah-NU cooperation could have significant grass-roots impact.

Some younger Muhammadiyah figures emulated JIL in forming their own group, called Jaringan Intelektual Muda Muhammadiyah (JIMM, Muhammadiyah Young Intellectuals’ Network), in 2003. They regarded themselves as protégés of Abdul Munir Mulkhan, Amin Abdullah, Moeslim Abdurrahman and other leading reformers within Muhammadiyah, but were criticised by other Muhammadiyah figures. They held workshops to debate how to rethink their faith and reinvigorate Muhammadiyah as a reforming (tajdid) organisation, returning to the vision of Ahmad Dahlan. They also sought more effective social activism in place of religious formalism and criticised others — depicted mainly as graduates of the Persatuan Islam pesantren at Bangil and Middle Eastern institutions — who were implacably opposed to local culture. JIMM has never become as prominent or influential as JIL, but it precipitated conflict within Muhammadiyah. When JIMM sought to hold a workshop in Kartasura in January 2005, it was physically threatened by a group calling themselves the Muhammadiyah Youth Generation Preparedness Command (Komando Kesiapsiagaan

---

61 Mudjahirin Thohir, Orang Islam Jawa pesisiran, p. 284.
Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java

Angkatan Muda Muhammadiyah), ostensibly on the grounds that the meeting was being held in a Christian foundation-owned building (which JIMM had merely rented for the occasion). The meeting was forced to relocate to a pesantren. Syafii Maarif was sympathetic to these younger activists — ‘young Muhammadiyah thinkers whom I always pushed and to whom I lent a protective umbrella’ — but he also warned them that ‘what had to be defended is the organisation as an institution’. That organisation was becoming subject to serious strains along the lines of innovators vs puritans. While supporters regarded these young intellectuals as the continuation and developers of Muhammadiyah’s vision, their opponents denounced them as destroyers of Muhammadiyah.

The more Liberally inclined Muhammadiyah leadership was challenged not only by grass-roots realities where more puritan views were strong, but also by a returning cohort of younger Modernists who had been educated in the Middle East. From c. 2000 these began to consider how they might take over Muhammadiyah and save it from what was beginning to be called the ‘Liberal virus’. This anti-Liberal group had many prominent Muhammadiyah members in its ranks. Prof. Din Syamsuddin, life-long Muhammadiyah activist and head of MUI, was offering himself as their candidate for Muhammadiyah leadership. In early 2005 Din was a leading figure at a Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta seminar on the theme ‘Muhammadiyah thought: Response to Islamic liberalisation’, and subsequently wrote the introduction to the published papers. He wrote of Muhammadiyah taking a central position between extremes, but the volume was a straightforward rejection of JIL, JIMM and Liberalism in general. The younger generation who were attracted by Liberalism, wrote Din, included

63 TempoI, 1 Jan. 2005.
64 Syafii Maarif, Titik–titik kisar di perjalanananku, pp. 349–50.
65 Discussion with Prof. Syafiq Mughni, Sidoarjo, 23 June 2007. He continued to give JIMM facilities at Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidoarjo for their monthly meetings. In his important study of Bangsri on the north coast, Mudjahirin Thohir reports a strong local impression that ‘Muhammadiyah is firm in its organisation but brittle in its understanding of faith and shari’ia’ whereas NU is ‘strong in building the foundations of its religious understanding but weak in institution building’; Mudjahirin Thohir, Orang Islam Jawa pesisiran, p. 282.
66 Din Syamsuddin’s educational background is rather unusual for people on the more puritan side of Muhammadiyah: Gontor, followed by a first degree from IAIN Jakarta and then MA and PhD degrees in political science from UCLA (1982, 1996). His opponents depict him as an opportunist prepared to adopt any ideological position that suits his interest, which he would no doubt deny.
some who had ideas so extreme that they wanted to change Muhammadiyah into a social activist organisation that was neutral in religious questions. Indeed, they thought that ‘Christianisation should no longer be an issue for Muhammadiyah’, Din claimed. Syamsul Hidayat of the Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta wrote of these young Liberals — especially ‘newcomers’ in Muhammadiyah, he said — having an inferiority complex in the face of Western civilisation, so that non-Islamic ideas like liberalism, secularism and pluralism could easily infiltrate their thinking. Liberals used Islamic concepts and terminology ‘to spread viruses of thought that endangered Islamic faith and conviction’. ‘Finally, the structure of Islamic thought will collapse’, he wrote. Adian Husaini contributed to this volume, but also brought out his own collection of columns entitled ‘To dam the Liberal current in Indonesia’.

In 2005 a new Muhammadiyah leadership was elected, headed by Din Syamsuddin. Noted progressives were dropped from the central leadership, Liberalism became clearly taboo at the top and ‘cultural dakwah’ disappeared from the agenda, leaving an embittered faction of intellectuals without influence within the organisation. One of the leadership figures regarded as conservative, Dr Yunahar Ilyas, simply said that ‘cultural dakwah’ hadn’t much worked. All the Javanese superstitions would still be strong in a century, he believed. The more sympathetically inclined Prof. Syafiq Mughni also commented on ‘cultural dakwah’ being, by 2007, ‘not so functional’.

68 Adian Husaini, *Membendung arus liberalism de Indonesia*.
69 I have heard (somewhat differing) accounts of the 2005 meeting from Prof. Abdul Munir Mulkhan (Kota Gede, 22 Oct. 2005 and 13 June 2007), Prof. H.M. Amin Abdullah (Yogyakarta, 22 Oct. 2005), Dr M. Hidayat Nur Wahid (Jakarta, 7 June 2007), Prof. Yunahar Ilyas (Yogyakarta, 11 June 2007), Prof. Syafiq Mughni (Sidoarjo, 23 June 2007), Prof. Ahmad Syafii Maarif (Yogyakarta, 14 Sept. 2008) and others.
70 Discussion with Dr Yunahar Ilyas, Yogyakarta, 11 June 2007. He was born in Bukittingi (Sumatra) in 1956, gained his first degree in the faculty of theology at Imam Muhammad bin Saud University in Riyadh, followed by postgraduate degrees in philosophy and gender studies at IAIN Yogyakarta.
activists and more progressive thinkers were dismayed at the outcome, so much so that it sometimes seemed that Muhammadiyah could fracture along the lines of innovators vs puritans.

Despite such internal strains, a commitment to keeping the organisation together prevailed, Din Syamsuddin moderated his own positions over time, and when he was reelected as head of the organisation in 2010, along with him was elected a more balanced central leadership board. This was partly because the organisation had been brought to the brink of destructive polarisation by the conflict precipitated by Liberalism, so that all sides withdrew from open confrontation, but perhaps more because Muhammadiyah and NU both found themselves threatened by distinctly non-Liberal threats to themselves at grass-roots level. They had to accept that they were not the only ones interested in pursuing an active Islamisation agenda.

In Chapter 12 we will look in greater detail at the origins and aspirations of smaller Islamist and Dakwahist movements at work among the Javanese, notably those who are Revivalists in epistemology. Pending that discussion, here we will see how their wish to spread their interpretations of Islam led them to challenge the much larger-scale movements of NU and Muhammadiyah by infiltrating them, requiring the latter to take defensive measures. By the opening years of the 21st century, suspicions were growing that organisations such as Partai Keadilan (shortly to become PKS) with its barely concealed aspirations for a greater role of Islam in the state, HTI with its aspirations for a global caliphate and Abu Bakar Ba’asyir’s MMI with its aspirations for the full implementation of sharia law, were successfully undermining the organisational and ideological integrity of Muhammadiyah and NU.

At the 2005 Muhammadiyah meeting that elected the more conservative national leadership, it appeared that Muhammadiyah people who were also in HTI, MMI, MTA and even LDII were influencing the direction of discussion. It was also becoming clear to some Muhammadiyah leaders that they were losing control of some of the organisation’s assets. Muhammadiyah mosques, prayer-houses, schools, universities and health institutions, they believed, were falling into the hands of activists particularly associated with PKS, and Muhammadiyah cadres were drifting towards PKS’s more uncompromising versions of Islam. Evidently what was taken over in some cases were mosques or prayer-houses that had fallen into disuse or disrepair, or were damaged in Yogyakarta’s terrible earthquake of 2006, where PKS activists volunteered to fix them up and then — unsurprisingly — conducted pengajian and gave sermons promoting their views. Such circumstances did not, however, explain the spread of PKS influence in Muhammadiyah health
institutions or universities (as well as in state universities, where PKS’s main strength was to be found).72

In 2006 the Muhammadiyah leader Haidar Nashir published an analysis of the ‘tarbiyah movement’ — the campus cadre-formation circles modeled on those of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood — which gave rise to PKS. This was a closely argued case for Muhammadiyah to guard itself against infiltration by PKS’s ‘puritan and militant Islamic ideology’.73 The organisation’s publication *Suara Muhammadiyah* also expressed this view repeatedly.74 PKS publicly and privately denied that there was any plot afoot to infiltrate or take over Muhammadiyah assets. Nevertheless, Muhammadiyah felt threatened.

The external threat posed by ‘other ideologies’ — as it was often put in Muhammadiyah discourse, represented above all by PKS — reunited the contending wings of Muhammadiyah in defence of the organisation. In December 2006 its central leadership, led by Din Syamsuddin, issued a ‘letter of decision’ that constituted an instruction, in principle binding on all organs and levels of Muhammadiyah, to strengthen their discipline and reassert Muhammadiyah ideology. It declared that Muhammadiyah must protect itself from interests of other sides which, either directly or indirectly, openly or surreptitiously, can damage and destroy the Muhammadiyah organisation. … All members of Muhammadiyah must be conscious of, understand and regard critically that all political parties in this nation, including parties that claim themselves to be, or develop wings/activities, for *dakwah* such as Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS) are really political parties. Every political party is oriented towards winning power.


Hence, it was declared, PKS or similar organisations were not to have access to Muhammadiyah facilities anywhere for any activities, including ‘activities that call themselves or use symbols of religion or dakwah such as pengajian and guidance of the ummah’. It was hard to deny — although some did — that PKS was the principal (indeed the only specifically named) target of this instruction.

Stopping PKS infiltration, however, was unlikely to be achieved merely by issuing an instruction. One PKS activist reported that the trend for Muhammadiyah cadres to go over to PKS was significant and would be still greater if PKS had not instructed them to remain within Muhammadiyah, thereby avoiding the collapse of the latter — and also, we may note, thereby maintaining clandestine PKS influence within it. The Yogyakarta PKS activist Ilyas Sunnah spoke of people who just happened to be PKS cadres taking on roles in local mosques, but denied that there was any takeover plot. He said that PKS supplied people to give mosque sermons, but it was impressed upon the local mosque organisers that these speakers should not be identified as being from PKS. The Muhammadiyah instruction of December 2006 was, he said, a warning to PKS to be careful. And, we may say, his comments indicated that PKS’s influence might not always be visible on the surface.

While Muhammadiyah was acting to defend its widespread educational and social service activities from PKS, NU found it necessary to defend itself from infiltration by HTI. This was a somewhat surprising direction for a threat to come from. Whereas both Muhammadiyah and PKS had roots in

---

75 Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, Surat keputusan Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah nomor: 149/KEP/1.0/B/2006 tentang: Kebijakan Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah mengenai konsolidasi organisasi dan amal usaha Muhammadiyah (Yogyakarta 10 Zulqadah 1427 H / 01 Desember 2006 M).
76 In discussion of 11 June 2007 in Yogyakarta, Yunahar Ilyas said that PKS was just mentioned as an example in the Surat keputusan and that Muhammadiyah was neither pro- nor anti-PKS.
77 PKS denied the infiltration (and other) accusations against it in Risalah untuk mengokohkan Ukhuwah dan Islah, signed by PKS President Ir. H. Tifatul Sembiring and Ketua Dewan Syariah KH Dr Surahman Hidayat, dated Jakarta 15 Ramadan 1428 / 27 Sept. 2007, published in KR, 9 Oct. 2007 (and elsewhere). The Yogyakarta PKS leader Kholil Mahmud said that PKS strives to reduce conflicts, that what appeared to be conflict was only at the level of the elite, and there was no issue at grass-roots level, but he then mentioned several such conflicts; discussion Yogyakarta, 22 March 2008.
78 Arif Maftuhin interview of Sallabi, Yogyakarta, 20 June 2008.
Islamic Modernism (although PKS is not purely Modernist in epistemology) and were largely urban-based, NU and HTI seemed to be from different planets. We will discuss HTI’s origins and ideas more in Chapter 12. For the moment, we may note that its ideology is Middle Eastern in origin, rejects democracy and aspires to a universal caliphate, while NU is deeply rooted in Javanese society and committed to the Indonesian national state. From the point of view of aspiring infiltrators, however, NU has the immense attraction of being very large and loosely organised. The extremist organisations MMI and FPI were also believed to be infiltrating NU circles, taking over mosques and prayer houses and spreading their ideas through NU pengajian sessions.80 In fact, it seems that in many cases what was taken over were mosques and prayer-houses that had fallen into disuse or disrepair, as was also the case with Muhammadiyah facilities that fell under PKS influence.81 However it happened, the spread of HTI (and other) influences among NU’s grassroots following was a challenge for Traditionalists. NU leaders even received reports that at grassroots level there were people who regarded themselves as NU but thought that a caliphate was desirable. So leaders went to local-level branches to explain the differences between NU and HTI thinking. Meetings of around a thousand NU local figures each were held across East Java and Madura in 2007, where these ideological differences were made clear.82 Further attention to maintaining NU’s ideology at grassroots level followed. At least one NU leader told HTI that if they did not stop attempting to infiltrate, NU would respond with its ‘organs’83 (i.e., Anshor would be sent into action). ‘This movement has attacked us far too often; once in a while we need to counter-attack’, another said.84

Such threats to the coherence and integrity of their own organisations undoubtedly strengthened the Muhammadiyah and NU opposition to militant, extremist, violent or terrorist versions of Islam. This required some-

80 Tempo, 1 Apr. 2007. Also discussions with Ky. H. Dr Ali Maschan Musa (then head of NU in East Java), Surabaya, 22 June 2007; and with A. Rubaidi and Mashuri, Surabaya, 23 Oct. 2008.
81 Masdar Hilmy email, 16 Jan. 2008; Arif Mafruhin interview of Drs H. Suharto Djuwaini, Yogyakarta, 15 Apr. 2008. The HTI leader H. Dr Muhammad Usman insisted that HTI only became involved in NU mosques where local people asked them to do so (discussion Surabaya, 24 Nov. 2007).
82 Discussion with Ky. H. Dr Ali Maschan Musa, Surabaya, 22 June 2007.
84 Ky. H. Dr Ali Maschan Musa, quoted in JktP online, 5 Nov. 2007.
thing of a shift in position for Din Syamsuddin as head of Muhammadiyah. At the time of Israel’s war against Hezbollah in Lebanon in July–August 2006, like many religious leaders in Indonesia, Din was bitterly opposed to Israel’s military action. Instead of Indonesians going to fight in person, he said, they should donate money for Hezbollah and Hamas to buy arms to fight Israel. He claimed that Muhammadiyah had already given millions of Rupiah to the Palestinian embassy in Jakarta for this purpose. ‘If needed, I will personally hand over the weapons to them’, he added. Only a few months earlier he had said that ‘No religion, including Islam, tolerates any use of violence’ and it was in fact this latter view that became more characteristic of these large-scale movements. They frequently reiterated their joint opposition also to the implementation of shari’a law or a universal caliphate. Such ideas not only threatened the Indonesian state and the harmony of its multi-religious and multi-ethnic society, but also — they had now learned — threatened themselves. Defending the Indonesian status quo thus meant also defending Muhammadiyah and NU.

85 JktP online, 14 Aug. 2006.
86 JktP online, 22 June 2006.