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Indonesian Islamic Reform

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INDONESIAN ISLAMIC REFORM

PERSATUAN ISLAM: ISLAMIC REFORM IN TWENTIETH CENTURY INDONESIA.

By Howard M. Federspiel. Monograph Series, Modern Indonesia Project, Southeast Asia Program. Ithaca: Cornell University, 1970. vii, 247 pp., planographed. Glossary, bibliographies.

Persatuan Islam is a fundamentalist Muslim group founded in Bandung in 1923. Ahmad Hassan, born in Singapore of a Tamil father and a Javanese mother, early became its intellectual chief and most prolific writer. He aligned the movement with the modernist reforms of the Egyptian Muhammad Abduh. This set him against the Indonesian traditionalists, who defended the classical theology of Islam as the unchanging truth.

Federspiel's well documented study is based largely on Indonesian materials, especially the publications of Persatuan Islam itself. Its value lies not only in the information it gives on the main topic but in the picture it draws of developments in Indonesian Islam over the past fifty years. Persatuan Islam has clear-cut views about these developments, about traditional Muslim religious thought and practice, and about Occidental culture. It is for this that the author considers it important, and not for the number of its adherents nor for its influence on Indonesian society.

Almost everything about Persatuan Islam, in fact, condemned it to remain a splinter group—it was down to ten thousand in 1963. Its incisiveness in argument that commends it to outsiders damned it in a society that prefers shades of gray to black and white. Indonesia is a land proud of its burgeoning nationalism and its rich cultural heritage that predates Islam. But Persatuan Islam rejected national boundaries, a national flag, and the very concept of a nation state in favor of a world-wide community governed by Islamic law. It also frowned on practices typically Indonesian like ritual banquets, the shadow theater, and men's wearing gold and silver ornaments. In a tolerant, kindly society, Persatuan Islam held on to many of the harsh punishments of the Muslim code, like flogging and the severing of thieves' hands, as well as to polygyny and a subservient position for women. It antagonized Christians by bringing up the old Muslim charge that they had falsified their Scriptures to hide prophecies about Muhammad. Its distrust of the West kept it from analyzing genuine Occidental values to find the source of their vitality. Finally, it labeled all Communists as apostates from Islam and mounted attacks even on fellow Muslims who accused it of dividing the Islamic community.

In urging all these views Persatuan has been rigidly uncompromising. Its vocal adherents bore with other opinions only on the premise that all would ultimately agree with their own interpretations of Islam.

The Persatuan group served Islam well in providing excellent religious texts in Bahasa Indonesia and adequate religious education in the years before World War II. But its solutions to ethical problems raised by advances in technology never went beyond the superficial and incidental. In an era when social questions cried out for answers, its followers specialized in juridical speculation on matters of worship and ritual washings. At the same time they clung to the kind of outmoded concordism that twists words to find all of contemporary science in the Qur'ān, including cross pollination, viruses, bacteria, and modern genetics and astronomy.

Today the group no longer seems to be in control of its own destinies. Instead of the elite corps of leaders that it was in the 1930's, it is now on the way to becoming a politically docile ghetto organization. Ultra-conservatives of any cast will get a better view of the weakness of their position by reading this objective and revealing study.

If the work is published later in more permanent form a few slight modifications might be in order. The author states in Chapter I that traders from Gujerat on the west coast of India brought Islam into the Malay area. Cambay in Gujerat was one of the sites from which Islam came to Indonesia, but more important sources would seem to be the Malabar coast and the southern Tamil regions. Confirmation of this might be the fact that the Malay area, like south India, belongs to the Shafi'ite school of jurisprudence, while Gujerat follows the Hanafite rite. It might be well to make it clear too that "lay" is being used in the sense of "non-specialist" when it is juxtaposed to 'ulama on page 181. Otherwise readers unfamiliar with the subject may conclude that Islam has a clergy in the Christian sense. Finally, all works mentioned in the footnotes should be listed alphabetically under their authors and completely identified in the bibliography. Examples are von Grunebaum's *Unity and Variety in Muslim Civilization* (cited on pp. 41, 60, and 246), Margoliouth's *The Early Development of Mohammedanism* (cited and misspelled on p. 54), and Schacht's *The Origins of Muhammedan Jurisprudence* (cited on p. 54), all of which are missing from their places in the list of background and comparative materials on pp. 235-247.

THOMAS J. O'SHAUGHNESSY

A BRITISHER IN SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES

ALEXANDER DALRYMPLE (1737-1808) AND THE EXPANSION OF BRITISH TRADE. By Howard T. Fry. Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 1970. xxvii, 330 pp.