

Appendix B: The Nature of Reformist and Modernist Islam

These terms, 'reformist' and 'modernist,' refer to Islamic groups or individuals who believe that the Islamic community drew on stagnating ideas (*kejumudan pemikiran*) and was trapped in diverge act mysticism, superstision (*khurafat*), innovation (*bid'ah*), and even worse, that Islamic community had fallen to Western (Christian Europe) domination. To solve these problems, they asked and persuaded Muslims to reanalyse and reinterpret Islamic doctrines in a language and formulation that would be accepted as 'modern thought'. Islam should be understood rationally and should be presented in a form that was appropriate to the contemporary situation, so that Islam would be able to compete with the modern civilisation. Through this way, it was believed, the Islamic community (*umat Islam*) would be able to free themselves from Western colonialism, poverty, ignorance and backwardness, and would return to the real situation of Islam, in which Islam was superior to other powers.

Reformist attempts center on three issues. First is purification of Islamic doctrines and practices (*fiqh*, jurisprudence, law covering all aspects of life including rituals) from superstition (*khurafat*), innovation (*bid'ah*), and un-Islamic influences and traditions, which are commonly accepted by Muslims as proper Islam. The second issue concerns the Islamic political movement, ie. independence movements against the Dutch colonial domination and suppression. The third issue is Islamic educational and social movements which are marked by the adoption of Western (Dutch) organisational and educational systems and ideas, including those of Christian missionaries, without violating Islamic principles. The result of this adoption was the establishment of Islamic schools, social and political organisations, scout movements and missionaries with modern Western (Dutch) methods and techniques. Among these three issues, the first issue, i.e. the *fiqh* issue became the most important issue, often creating tension among Muslim groups. Because of this, modernists and reformists often concentrate only on the *fiqh* issue.

These reformist and modernist ideas were represented by Islamic organisations such as Muhammadiyah, Persatuan Islam (PERSIS, Islamic Unity), Al-Irsyad, Jamiatul Khaer and Sarikat Dagang Islam (SDI, Muslim Trade association) which later became Sarekat Islam (SI, Muslim Association). The roots of these movements can be traced back to the Islamic purification movement of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahab, the Pan-Islamic political struggle of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, the Muhammad Abduh reformist movement and other movements developed in the Middle East, especially in Mecca and Cairo. These reformist and modernist movements, since they challenged Islamic traditionalists, later provoked the

establishment of the *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU, the Rise of Religious Scholars), which was worried that Islamic traditions would disappear (Ali and Effendy 1986).

Sociologically, there are two distinct characteristics of the reformist and modernist movements. First, different from traditionalist groups which centered in rural areas (*pedesaan*) and developed among peasant community, they commonly developed among educated and entrepreneur circles in urban areas (*perkotaan*). This tendency, according to Fachry Ali and Bahtiar Effendy, derives from two different responses of religious figures (*ulama*) toward the Western (Dutch Christian) cultures. The traditionalist circles tended to avoid Western penetration and isolated themselves from contact with Western agents by establishing religious institutions, educational and other social institutions exclusively in rural areas. This isolation strategy, Ali further argues, was even more strengthened and justified by the Prophet Muhammad's words "*man tasyabbaha bi qoumin fahuwa min hum*": Those who imitate (traditions of) a group of people are part of them. On the contrary, modernist circles, usually businessmen and educated people in urban areas, had closer contact with the Western culture and its agents which clearly existed in urban areas.

The second sociological characteristic of the reformist and modernist movement is that the followers and supporters are usually of the younger generations. The radical reformist approaches and rebellious attitudes toward traditions and practices existing in the Islamic community, attracted young people. Borrowing Ben Anderson explanation in his *Java in time of Revolution: Occupation and Resistance 1944–1946*, young people played more of a role than the elite intellectuals in the Indonesian revolution. This important role of young people in Java, Anderson argues, is based on the Javanese cultural view that youth is the period of isolation, transition and independence, which is potentially rebellious (Anderson, 1972:2–7, cf. Hadiz's, 1992:22–3 and Tholkhah, 1994:8–9). Young people, who came from of the traditionalist circles in rural areas, were acquainted with the modernists ideas in urban areas, where they studied or worked. When they returned to their country areas they spread what they learned in cities. As a result of this, there was an inevitably conflict between the young modernist generation and older traditionalist generation (Noer, 1973:6, 216–46).