Andree Feillard, *Islam et Armee dans L'Indonesie Contemporaine*. Paris: Editions l'Harmattan in association with Association Archipel, Cahier d'Archipel 28, 1995. 379 pp.

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It has been almost twenty years since Benedict R. O'G. Anderson bemoaned the lack of serious Western scholarship on Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and the tendency among Indonesian political observers to view the organization as "thoroughly corrupt and thoroughly opportunist."[1] Happily, since that time, it has become more difficult for observers to dismiss NU in such sweeping terms. For more than ten years now, NU has been involved in one political or economic initiative after another. Rather than avoiding risk for the easy opportunity, many of these efforts have been marked by controversy and bold experimentation.

No doubt in part in response to its new profile, over the past five years NU has been the focus of at least four major research projects, including three doctoral dissertations. Andree Feillard's is the first of these to become available to a Western audience in a European-language book. A former journalist who lived in Indonesia for seventeen years while reporting for Agence France Presse and *Asiaweek*, Feillard returned to France in the late 1980s to pursue a PhD in history, specializing in the history and politics of Nahdlatul Ulama. The present book is a substantial revision of her dissertation.

The book is divided into four chronological sections. The first part traces NU's development from its founding in 1926 up through 1965. Though this is the least unfamiliar of the four periods treated, the reader will still encounter surprises in Feillard's account. For example, developing a point also made by the Dutch anthropologist Martin van Bruinessen, [2] Feillard points out that NU was founded not merely in reaction to the progress of modernist Islam, but, initially at least, to provide a representative organization that could travel to Arabia to appeal to that country's new Wahhabi rulers. In the 1920s the Wahhabis had just completed their conquest of Mecca and were threatening to dismantle saint shrines long frequented by traditionalist Muslims. In an effort to make a strong impression on the Saudis, this delegation was later transformed into a full-time organization for traditionalist *ulama*.

Equally interesting are Feillard's insights into the relationship of NU to Soekarno in the late colonial era. At the time of NU's founding, independence was not listed among its goals. In 1938, NU gave the impression that it was unsympathetic to the nationalist cause when it declared the Dutch Indies a *dar al-Islam*, "an Islamic land," an announcement which seemed to legitimate colonial rule. Despite these acts, Feillard shows that the organization was from its beginning infused with nationalist ideas. Moreover, in a closed door meeting in 1940, eleven high-ranking *ulama* met to decide

[1] Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, "Religion and Politics in Indonesia Since Independence," in *Religion and Social Ethos in Indonesia,"* eds. Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, Mitsuo Nakamura, and Mohammad Slamet (Clayton: Monash University Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, 1977), p. 23.

[2] Martin van Bruinessen, *NU: Tradisi, Relasi-Relasi Kuasa, dan Pencarian Wacana Baru* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 1994), pp. 26-34.

whom they would select for president of a future independent Indonesia. Of the two names presented, Mohammad Hatta and Soekarno, the vote was ten to one in favor of Soekarno. What makes this incident all the more remarkable is that it took place just one month after Soekarno's publication of articles in which he praised the Turkish secularist leader, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, for having separated religion from state. (p. 31) Worse yet from a traditionalist perspective, Soekarno placed much of the blame for the Muslim world's backwardness on traditionalist Islamic scholars and their reliance on received religious interpretations (*taqlid*). Here, as in many later instances, the NU leadership responded to Soekarno's criticisms with humor and tolerance. Feillard attributes the leadership's affection for Soekarno to the fact that he was an East Javanese, like most of them, and to their strong identification with the nationalist cause he embodied.

The second section of the book treats the period from 1965–1973. These years began with NU's well-known collaboration with the army against the Communist Party (PKI) in the aftermath of the failed coup by the Thirtieth of September Movement. Less familiar to most readers will be Feillard's account of the way in which NU's Jakarta leadership, while supporting the campaign against the PKI (Indonesian Communist Party), was deeply divided over which attitude to adopt toward President Soekarno. Allied with army radicals and the anticommunist action groups, a faction associated with the young militant, Z. E. Subchan, sought to bring down the president as a first step toward the creation of what they felt would be a more democratic order. However, NU's mainstream leadership opposed any effort to remove the president and continued to give him their support even after the March 11, 1966 ("Supersemar") transfer of powers from President Soekarno to General Soeharto. Ironically, though the army originally supported Subchan against NU's Soekarnoist leadership, by 1969–1970 they found the young activist too outspoken. His opposition to army set-asides in parliament, denunciations of sweetheart deals with Chinese business, and his repeated warnings that the New Order regime was becoming authoritarian had become irritants and prompted the army to arrange his fall from power.

It was in the period from the late 1970s to the mid-1980s that NU experienced its deepest crisis, and it is in the section of her book treating this period that Feillard takes her greatest steps toward a new understanding of Islam and politics in Indonesia. Contrary to many characterizations of the organization during this period, Feillard shows that NU's drift into opposition during the 1970s served to drive away a significant portion of the organization's membership. Muslimat, NU's women's organization (and the most conscientious of NU's affiliates at keeping records) saw its ranks decline from 3.5 to 1.2 million members. (p. 215) Thirteen of the organization's regional youth bureaus (Ansor) became inactive. Mosques and *pesantren* once proud of their ties to the mother-organization let their affiliation lapse. Not only was NU being pushed to the margins in national politics, its institutional structure was verging on collapse.

It was this institutional crisis that provided an opportunity for two reformists in the organization, Abdurrahman Wahid and Kyai Achmad Siddiq, to urge in 1983 that the organization renounce party politics and "return to the spirit of 1926." Feillard shows with wonderful detail that the NU leadership was able to agree on the wisdom of this move even as they disagreed as to the reasons for doing so. Some in the political

wing of the organization were disgusted with John Naro's handling of the Muslim PPP, and simply wanted out so as to wreck his plans. Others, including Kyai Siddiq, felt that a less political course would allow NU to become a more credible "moral force" capable of influencing national politics in an appropriately religious way. (p. 195) By contrast, Wahid saw the withdrawal from party politics not as a means of becoming a moral force but as an opportunity to exercise influence, including political influence, everywhere—in the army, in all three political parties, and in non-governmental organizations. Not a retreat, the withdrawal from party politics was for Wahid a displacement into a more effective, if visibly apolitical, militancy.

At first, Feillard shows, the strategy worked. As NU's relationship with the government warmed, contracts to NU businessmen (which had also declined during the 1970s) picked up once more. NU preachers were in demand at government and private functions. And the government committed enormous resources to religious predication (*dakwah*), mosque construction, and Islamic schools. To the surprise of many in the organization, however, NU was not rewarded with a cabinet post, though Wahid was appointed to the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR). As Wahid rose to prominence from the ranks of the coalition that had originally supported NU's realignment, however, the scope of his socioeconomic ambitions and the strength of his commitment to NU's independence became more apparent. By 1989, there were clear signs that some in government were unhappy with Wahid's ways. When, in 1991, he joined forces with prodemocracy activists to form the Indonesian Democratic Forum, he fell into further disfavor. In 1992 and again in 1994 there were furious, government-backed campaigns to remove him from the presidency of NU's executive board, the Tanfidziyah.

The book ends with this cloud hanging over NU and Abdurrahman Wahid. Observing the rise of the Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals (ICMI), Feillard argues that ICMI is essentially a vehicle for a new accommodation between modernist Islam and an authoritarian regime. Thus her view of ICMI is consistent with those who argue that tensions between ICMI and Abdurrahman Wahid are all part of a broader re-*aliranization* of Indonesian politics. There is no question that there are fundamental realignments occurring in Indonesian politics right now, and modernist Muslims want finally to be back in the game. While her basic point is well taken, I nonetheless found myself wishing that Feillard had shown the same subtlety of argument when talking about "modernist" Muslims that she does when talking about NU. ICMI is a broad and, in one sense, rather superficial edifice, one which at times only obscures the actual alignments within the modernist community. Some of those alignments have brought certain modernists—including some in ICMI—into tacit alliance with prodemocracy forces.

This point aside, Feillard's book is a remarkable achievement—the most comprehensive account to date of Muslim-state interactions in New Order Indonesia. For those who read Indonesia's religious politics as always just more of the same—*abangan* elites marginalizing their *santri* rivals—Feillard's account provides a powerful counterargument, demonstrating the responsiveness of all actors in this social drama to new and at times unanticipated events. More fundamentally, Feillard puts to rest a number of stereotypes of traditionalist Islam. She shows us the traditionalists' deep commitment to nationalist values, their openness to social and educational reform,

and, at least in Java, the depth of their dialogue with Javanese culture. Feillard has written an important book, one that can and should serve as the basis for a collective reexamination of our ideas on Islam, on Java, and on Indonesia's cultural politics.