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# AN INDONESIAN COMMUNITY IN CAIRO: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN A COSMOPOLITAN ISLAMIC MILIEU<sup>1</sup>

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The ideological source of the form of Islamic reformism expressed in Indonesia today by such movements as Muhammadiyah is largely traceable to Cairo in the late nineteenth century. For most of the twentieth century, Egypt's capital remained a bastion for like-minded Indonesians seeking to further their studies in the Middle East. However, I wish to show in this essay that, with the expansion of the resident community of Indonesians in Egypt, the Cairene body has now come to represent far more than the revivalist scripturalism<sup>2</sup> laid out by Muhammad `Abduh (1849-1905)

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<sup>2</sup> Often labeled as Islamic modernism, Muhammad `Abduh advocated the adoption of western technologies and systematic educational methods not in direct conflict with Islamic values. Furthermore, he outlined an approach to "return" to a pure understanding of Islam by interpreting the Qur'an and the Sunna through the use of independent and rational investigation (*ijtihad*) above the allegedly blind reliance (*taqlid*) upon the opinions of the medieval jurists.

and Rashid Rida (1865-1935), and to encompass the diversity of approach and opinion that is expressed in contemporary Indonesian Islam. Furthermore, whereas its constituent elements are not necessarily represented in the same proportions, at another level, one may find in Cairo proponents of thought that are to be sourced, not only to that city, Mecca, or Southeast Asia, but to the total world of ideas circulating in global Islamic discourse—including contributions from intellectuals in, or connected to, Europe and America.

What follows was primarily inspired by often serendipitous encounters during visits to Cairo in May 2002 and July-August 2003.<sup>3</sup> At one level, it reflects my personal reaction to that city and some of its residents, for which I beg the reader's patience. On another level, I wish to entwine this experience with those of Indonesians today, past descriptions of their community and its divisions, and the close linkage of many of its members with the ongoing national project of Indonesia. To this end, I shall invoke comparisons with Snouck Hurgronje's earlier description of the larger parent community of Southeast Asians in present-day Saudi Arabia, because Mecca, in the late nineteenth century, was likewise subject to the simultaneous pulls of ethnic particularisms and transcendent unity voiced in Islam.<sup>4</sup> I will also refer to Mona Abaza's work on the Cairene community in order to show how the structure of the community today relates to the continuities and ruptures of the nationalist twentieth century.<sup>5</sup> However, I will question some aspects of her work and call for a reading of the nature of this community, drawn less from the speculative hopes voiced by their Egyptian masters and more from those announced by the students themselves in terms of their (potential) contribution to Indonesia's future.

### The Cairene Community, 1860s to 1980s

"A teacher who studies religion goes to Cairo."<sup>6</sup>

Despite the long-standing renown of Cairo's al-Azhar mosque, inaugurated in 972 by the Fatimid Sultan, al-Gawhar, an apparent similarity between the curriculum there and in Java's *pesantrens* (schools of Koranic studies) in the nineteenth century,<sup>7</sup> and even the notable presence in Southeast Asia of scholars bearing the sobriquet "Azhari"

<sup>3</sup>I also hope that, in presenting them here, this essay will connect with two earlier pieces on the Indonesia-Cairo linkage, namely Lance Castles, "Notes on the Islamic School at Gontor," *Indonesia* 1 (1966): 30-45; and William Roff, "Indonesian and Malay Students in Cairo in the 1920s," *Indonesia* 9 (1970): 73-88.

<sup>4</sup>C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Mekka*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1888-89); see abridged translation of Hurgronje, *Mekka*, vol. 2, *Mekka in the Latter Part of the 19th Century: Daily Life, Customs and Learning of the Moslems of the East-Indian Archipelago* (Leiden: Brill, 1931).

<sup>5</sup>Mona Abaza, *Indonesian Students in Cairo: Islamic Education, Perceptions and Exchanges* (Paris: Cahier d'Archipel, 1994); and "Indonesian Azharites Fifteen Years Later," *Sojourn* 18,1 (2003): 139-53.

<sup>6</sup>Malay popular expression reported to Dr. Homan, Batavia, c. 1865, as cited by P. J. Veth, "Javaansche Studenten in Egypte," *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsche Indië* 2,2 (1868): 438.

<sup>7</sup>Martin van Bruinessen has suggested the possibility of a linkage. See Martin van Bruinessen, "Pesantren and Kitab Kuning: Continuity and Change in a Tradition of Religious Learning," in *Texts from the Islands: Oral and Written Traditions of Indonesia and the Malay World*, ed. Wolfgang Marschall (Berne: The University of Berne Institute of Ethnology, 1994), pp. 121-146; see especially p. 137.

(Azharite),<sup>8</sup> there is, at present, little hard evidence of a Southeast Asian student community in Egypt before the 1860s. By this time, a part of the mosque was endowed as a lodge (*riwaaq* or *ruwaaq*) for Southeast Asians, who were termed collectively in Arabic as “the Jawa”; thus their corner of al-Azhar was known as the *riwaaq al-jawa*. It is worth noting, too, that the singular adjectival form of *jawa* is *jawi*, which has lent its name to Malay, when written in Arabic script, and even to the once-famous export “Jawi incense” (*luban jawi*, benjoin or benzoin) noted by Ibn Battuta in Sumatra c. 1345.<sup>9</sup>

The existence of the *riwaaq al-jawa* was recorded by Alfred von Kremer in 1863, who noted that it was patronized by a mixture of Southeast Asians, Indians, and Arabs.<sup>10</sup> This inter-regional connection hints at an involvement by members of the Hadrami diaspora in the establishment of the *riwaaq*, though an examination of the original deed of *waqf* (pious endowment) that established it will be needed to prove this. In any case, by the 1870s, the *riwaaq al-jawa* was a small, but established, part of the Azharite landscape. It was noted by the then Minister of Education, `Ali Mubarak, as having its own library and a *shaykh* elected by the student body, which was estimated by Ignác Goldziher as being only six students in 1871—all of whom had left by 1875.<sup>11</sup> It was also, it should be said, very much a Malay-dominated institution and an extension of the much older Jawi community in Mecca.

The absence of a community, as such, did not preclude the arrival of some famous Jawi visitors, though again information is scanty. The Bantenese scholar, Muhammad bin `Umar al-Jawi al-Bantini (1813-97), is said to have visited in the 1870s, while the father of Jawi publishing in the Middle East, Wan Ahmad bin Muhammad Zayn al-Fatani (1856-1906), apparently arrived around 1880, and seems to have worked for a time checking Malay books in either the famous bookshop established by Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi or, perhaps, even the Ottoman Printing Office (al-Matba`a al-Amiriyya).<sup>12</sup> The latter is perhaps more likely and seems to have led to the connections

<sup>8</sup> One of the best known of these was Kemas Haji Muhammad, b. Abd Allah Azhari al-Falimbani, who studied in Mecca c. 1843 and established the first Islamic printing press in Southeast Asia. See Jeroen Peeters, “Palembang Revisited: Further Notes on the Printing Establishment of Kemas Haji Muhammad Azhari, 1848,” in *IIAS Yearbook 1995*, ed. Paul van der Velde (Leiden: International for Asian Studies, 1996), pp. 181-90.

<sup>9</sup> For a brief summary of Ibn Battuta’s stopover, see Hamilton Alexander Rosskeen Gibb, *Ibn Battuta: Travels in Asia and Africa, 1325-1354* (London: Routledge, 1929), p. 273. Incidentally, the very term *benzoin* is a corruption of *luban jawi*, via the sixteenth-century French word *benjoin*.

<sup>10</sup> Alfred von Kremer, *Aegypten* (Leipzig, 1863), 2:279.

<sup>11</sup> See `Ali Pasha Mubarak, *al-Khitat al-tawfiqiyya al-jadida li misr al-qahira wa biladiha al-qadima wa al-shahira*, 8 vols. (Cairo: Bulag, 1888), 4:22. Reference to Goldziher is made in Abaza, *Indonesian Students*, p. 39. Unfortunately, it is not in her bibliography.

<sup>12</sup> On Nawawi’s visits, see Chaidar, *Sejarah Pujangga Islam: Syech Nawawi al-Banteni Indonesia* (Jakarta: C. V. Sarana Utama, 1978), pp. 85-88. For al-Fatani, see Wan Mohd. Shaghir Abdullah, “Bahasa Melayu Bahasa Ilmu: Mininjau Pemikiran Syeikh Ahmad bin Muhammad Zain al-Fatani,” *Jurnal Dewan Bahasa* 34 (1990): 201-6. From its inauguration until the mid-twentieth century, the bookshop of al-Halabi was the primary printer for Jawi works. It was best known for the accuracy of its editors, and on a visit there in 1922, the missionary Hendrik Kraemer noted that “a Malay or Javanese” came from al-Azhar each day as a translator or to check the proofs of forthcoming manuscripts. H. Kraemer, *Rapport van Dr. H. Kraemer, Aangaande Zijn Verblijf te Cairo van 15 November 1921-13 Maart 1922 aan het Hoofdbestuur van het Nederl. Bijbelgenootschap* (Amsterdam: Nederlandsch Bijbelgenootschap, 1923), p. 3.

that helped him to become promoted to the director of the Meccan office of that press when it was opened in 1884.

The reason for the small size of the community in Cairo, as compared to Mecca, was directly related to the difference in experience on offer. In the case of the latter city, in the 1880s, we are given an often vibrant image by Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje's two-volume work and accompanying photo album. In essence, Mecca was the hub of the Jawi intellectual and spiritual universe. Most would have been drawn there by the Hajj and the blessings (*barakat*) to be gained at the hallowed tombs of the pious forebears (*al-salaf al-salih*). Furthermore, a prominent minority—known as the *muqimun* (residents)—stayed from months to years participating in the religious life of the city.<sup>13</sup> By and large, they gravitated to the teaching circles (*halqat*) of the *'ulama'* (Muslim scholars), who represented their shared Shafi'ite juridical tradition (*madhhab*), with its key texts. By successfully comprehending and performing such texts, the student would gain a license, known as an *ijaza*, which connected them to a lineage of learning that terminated with the text's authors. And, for pilgrim and scholar alike, Mecca offered the chance for the even more intimate connection with the Prophet, gained after induction into the mysteries, exercises, and litanies of the Sufi orders, and by way of the *silsila*, the genealogy of mystical masters stretching back to the putative founder of the order.

But while al-Azhar was also a seat of learning, whose colonnades mediated the Shafi'ite tradition, and Cairo's environs were peppered with hallowed mosques and saintly tombs, including that of Imam Shafi'i himself (d. 820), it was not a destination for Jawi pilgrimage, beyond the scholarly imperative to search for knowledge, "even unto China."<sup>14</sup> It was also a radically different city, in many respects, having been exposed to a series of French-inspired modernizations under the Khedival dynasty, established by Muhammad 'Ali (r. 1805-48), with large-scale building programs in the industrial suburb of Bulaq (from the French *Beau Lac*), a railway to Alexandria, and spacious boulevards modeled on the ultra-modern city of Paris. From the 1870s, there would be attempts to change the style of education at the mosque of al-Azhar, such as new examinations and diplomas (1872) or Muhammad 'Abduh's efforts in 1896 to reform the library and curriculum. Such changes were often resented and resisted by teachers and students alike.

For many scholars, though, the most important innovation of the nineteenth century was the printing press.<sup>15</sup> Mecca-based Jawi scholars, such as al-Fatani and al-

<sup>13</sup>The division between *hajji* (pilgrim) and *muqim* (resident) is also a nice mirror of that contemporaneous divide in the Indies between the Dutch in the Indies at the time, who were described either as *blijvers* (stayers) or *trekkers* (sojourners) who were only in Southeast Asia to make a quick fortune.

<sup>14</sup>Although Imam Shafi'i lived for a time and died in Cairo, the city itself remains largely Maliki in affiliation. Under the official dominion of the Ottomans from 1517 to 1914, the state *madhhab* was that of Istanbul, the Hanafi, much as that school enjoyed pride of position in Mecca until the Arab revolt of 1916. Meanwhile, the rural population of Egypt was and is largely Shafi'i in inclination. According to Aunul Abied, there is still a saying that runs: "Hanafi is the school of the rulers, Maliki that of the Cairenes, and the Shafi'i did not exist save in the countryside" (*al-hanafiyya madhhab al-hukkam wa al-malikiyya madhhab al-masriyyin wa al-shafi'iyya lam yabqa illa fi al-aryaf*). Aunul Abied, personal communication, September 26, 2003.

<sup>15</sup>See, for example, Timothy Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Brinkley Messick, *The Calligraphic State: Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society* (Berkeley:

Bantini, were certainly aware of this. And while al-Bantini seems to have been the first Jawi scholar to send his work to Cairo for printing, in 1859,<sup>16</sup> as mentioned above, al-Fatani's career was intimately connected with the printing press, although it might be noted that the works he put to the press in Mecca were the print cousins of an existing manuscript corpus. There was still no better global choice than Cairo, when the lexicographer and mystic, Abu Bakr bin Abd al-Quddus al-Tubani, sought a publisher for his trilingual Arabic-Malay-Javanese dictionary in 1885,<sup>17</sup> or when Ahmad Khatib bin `Abd al-Latif al-Minankabawi (1860-1915) desired the same for his polemics against matrilineal custom in West Sumatra in the 1890s.<sup>18</sup>

Cairo also offered the student a variety of educational institutions that gave graduates of al-Azhar the chance to upgrade their skills to suit the modernizing world.<sup>19</sup> Certainly, residence in the *riwaq* itself did not preclude participation in that world. However, perhaps because of the crisis years of the late 1870s, followed by the commencement of the British occupation in 1882, it was not until the end of the 1890s that key linkages were made with Cairo that would largely define relations with that city for much of the twentieth century.<sup>20</sup> These took the form of connections between Indies-born Hadramis, the royal house of Riau-Lingga, and the reformist movement in Cairo, led by the print-activist and later state Mufti, Muhammad `Abduh. The history of this movement, subsequently perpetuated by his deputy, Rashid Rida, with its emphasis on modernity and a "return" to the sources of Islam, is well-known and has been the subject of a number of studies.<sup>21</sup> In Southeast Asia, it inspired the so-called Kaum Muda movements of the Malay world and served as a model for the Muhammadiyah organization on Java, founded in 1912. It was also a movement that placed Islam in emergent national frameworks. So, with increasing numbers of newcomers to the *riwaq al-jawa*, in the 1910s, its members began rethinking the nature of their home communities. In 1912, for example, a number of the students of the *riwaq* established an association (the Djamiah Setia Peladjar) and their own newspaper, *al-*

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University of California Press, 1993); and J. Skovgaard-Petersen, *Defining Islam for the Egyptian State: Muftis and Fatwas of the Dar al-Ifta* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), p. 50.

<sup>16</sup> This was the first Bulaq edition of his *Fath al-mujib*, a commentary on the *Manaqib al-hadith* of al-Shirbini (d. 1569). See Carl Brockelmann, "al-Nawawi," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1993): 7:1040-41.

<sup>17</sup> For notes on al-Tubani's contribution to lexicography and that of his Cairo-based successors, Idris al-Marbawi and Mahmud Yunus, see Michael Laffan, "New Charts for the Arabic Ocean: Dictionaries as Indicators of Changing Times," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 159,2/3 (2003): 351-87.

<sup>18</sup> On the long-term ramifications of al-Minankabawi's anti-*adat* stance, see B. J. Schrieke, *Indonesian Sociological Studies*, vol. 1 (The Hague: Van Hoeve, 1955), pp. 119-35. Ahmad Khatib's three polemics against the Naqshbandiyya were first bound together in Cairo in 1908 and subsequently reprinted in Padang.

<sup>19</sup> See Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt*.

<sup>20</sup> See Michael Laffan, *Islamic Nationhood and Colonial Indonesia* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), pp. 114-41.

<sup>21</sup> Of these, Hourani's classic remains a key source. See Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939*, 2nd ed. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

*Ittihad*. However this Malay-dominated venture was short lived because of the interruption of the First World War.<sup>22</sup>

Although copies of *al-Ittihad* are yet to come to light, its content and ideas may be gathered from parallel reports in allied papers, such as *al-Munir* in Padang, under the direction of Abdullah Ahmad (1878-1933), or *Neracha* in Singapore, under Hajji `Abbas bin Muhammad Taha (b. 1885).<sup>23</sup> As in the Singaporean reformist journal, *al-Imam*, before it, which was also edited for a time by Hajji `Abbas, *al-Ittihad* seems to have presented Cairo as the global center for an Islamic education that would provide the homeland (whichever one it was) with a body of youth equipped to face the challenges of modernity. This view of Cairo was echoed again, after the First World War, when a rapidly growing Jawi community, still focused on the *riwaq*, but now housed in a variety of lodgings around the city and attending a range of institutions, founded a second paper, *Seruan Azhar*, in 1925, to make their presence and ideology felt at home.<sup>24</sup> As one editor, Mahmud Yunus (1899-1982), wrote:

Like the dawn, this journal arises in the East in order to give light to the homeland, to convey an understanding of the world to come and some lessons that will bring great development [*kemajuan*] to the homeland. It calls for the [enacting] of the demands of religious science and of the world that are of great benefit. It calls so that we will become awake and become aware as foreign peoples have long trodden the path of development and labor. It is fitting then that we do likewise and learn.<sup>25</sup>

The content of *Seruan Azhar*, which was most likely produced on the press of al-Babi al-Halabi, reflects, to a large degree, the continuation of the discourse of reform, modernity, and education. Indeed, great emphasis was placed on how thoroughly modern and organized al-Azhar had become, with its examinations and classes ordered by student age, rather than by mastery of a text at the feet of a master.<sup>26</sup> And, much like Timothy Mitchell has noted for nineteenth-century Egypt, a key term was *nizam* (order). *Seruan Azhar* also foregrounded the idea of a Southeast Asian sense of community. But, while it stressed the commonalities between Siamese, Malays, and Javanese—who belonged to what its title page declared to be the “united world of our beloved people” and whose representatives were all to be found in Cairo—the national

<sup>22</sup> Abdullah also notes that, after the murder in 1916 of two Jawi students by their classmate, the parent society was dealt a death blow of its own. See Taufik Abdullah, *Schools and Politics: The Kaum Muda Movement in West Sumatra* (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 1971), p. 140.

<sup>23</sup> See Laffan, *Islamic Nationhood*, pp. 139-41; Mohammad Redzuan Othman, “The Middle Eastern Influence on the Development of Religious and Political Thought in Malay Society, 1880-1940” (PhD dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1994), pp. 233-34. On *Neracha*, see William R. Roff, *Bibliography of Malay and Arabic Periodicals Published in the Straits Settlements and Peninsular Malay States 1876-1941* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 33. Further work on *Neracha* is currently being done by Zakir Hussain at Oxford University.

<sup>24</sup> This community and its paper was first studied by Bill Roff, and I have tried to extend his observations in my own recent study. See Roff, “Indonesian and Malay Students”; see also Laffan, *Islamic Nationhood*, pp. 114-41. According to one of those students, Othman Abdallah, there were some 150 Southeast Asians in Cairo in 1925. See Othman Abdallah, “Seruan Azhar,” *Seruan Azhar* 1,1 (1925): 11-13.

<sup>25</sup> Mahmud al-Yunusi, [no title], *Seruan Azhar* 1,1 (1925): 3-5.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, the article of Othman Abdallah in the same issue on the great advances in organization at al-Azhar. Abdallah, “Seruan Azhar,” pp. 11-13.

fissures of the future were evident in the way the paper identified members of that community as being Siamese, Malay, or indeed Indonesian. Certainly, the suggestion that new lodgings be found specifically to suit the Siamese students, as opposed to those taken up by their fellow Jawis (and some Hadramis), seems to indicate that Jawi commonality had its practical limits.<sup>27</sup>

But, at the same time too, the relatively small sizes of these component communities perhaps served to minimize internal divisions. Whereas the Indonesians in Cairo had once been primarily from Sumatra or Kalimantan, the influx of graduates from Muhammadiyah schools in Java, with their common struggle against traditionalist *'ulama'* and (increasingly) the Dutch, probably served to distance them from their confreres who were from what would become Malaysia. In a sense, one could say that twelve Southeast Asians in 1912 made a single Jawi community, but 150 in 1925 created a plurality of communities, divided along emerging national lines.

Here, too, comparison might be made with the history of the Meccan community, where, from the sixteenth century, any pious traveler coming from the isles east of India gained the appellation "Jawi." Certainly, the small size of the community would have fostered such commonality, which was reinforced by their shared Shafi'ite tradition. By the late eighteenth century, though, it was a very different matter, and most ethnic groups had since founded their own lodgings, often with pious endowments from Southeast Asian rulers.<sup>28</sup> In her research on Malay texts copied in Mecca in the early nineteenth century, Annabel Gallop has observed references to ethnic cantonments for groupings like the Acehnese and the maintenance of distinct regional styles of illumination by Jawi expatriates.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, over the course of the nineteenth century, there appears to have been a rise in the number of Javanese pilgrims and scholars. When Snouck Hurgronje made his visit to that city in 1885, he perceived a community largely dominated by luminaries from West Java, in particular, and a shift away from the Malay-dominated corpus of Jawi *fiqh* (jurisprudence) towards an emphasis on Arabic scholarship, led by the Bantenese Nawawi, with Jawi access to the mystical orders being somewhat monopolized by his compatriots like *'Abd al-Karim Banten*. Furthermore, Snouck's opinion of the Malays, formed largely because of his close association with the Bantenese, was rather slighting. When the Minangkabau, Ahmad Khatib, assumed some importance in Mecca in the following

<sup>27</sup> The lodgings used by the community included two guest-houses established by prominent Indies Arabs, Muhammad bin Hashim and Hasan bin *'Abd Allah al-'Attas*. Probably, like the original *riwaaq al-jawa*, the lodgings furnished by al-*'Attas* were for a mixture of (Peninsular) Malays and Hadramis. See *Seruan Azhar* 1,9 (1926); and Othman, *Middle Eastern Influence*, pp. 231-32.

<sup>28</sup> For example, when Muhammad Arshad al-Banjari stayed in Mecca in the eighteenth century, he resided in a *waqf* house established there by his patron, Sultan Tahlil Allah (r. 1700-45). This house remains a center for the Banjarese in Mecca today. See Azyumardi Azra, "The Transmission of Islamic Reformism to Indonesia: Networks of Middle Eastern and Malay-Indonesian *'ulama* in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries" (PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 1992), p. 503.

<sup>29</sup> I discussed this material with Annabel Gallop at the British Library in October 2002. Dr. Gallop suggested to me that investigation of the colophons of various Meccan manuscripts now held in Malaysia, and made accessible due to the recent publication of its catalogues, would provide a window on such micro-communities.

decade, Snouck noted that he was “by Malay standards quite knowledgeable.”<sup>30</sup> Whether such a comparison is valid or not, Snouck’s writings, for all their implicit emphasis on Jawi unity, indicated ongoing divisions along ethnic lines.

On the other hand, in 1925, the students in Cairo were still, on the whole, closely allied to the Malay Kaum Muda and like-minded Javanese from Muhammadiyah, which also would have minimized ethnic differences still manifested in Mecca, with its much larger communities tied to the traditionalist networks of *‘ulama’*. It is noteworthy that the editors of *Seruan Azhar* warmly welcomed the ascent of the house of Sa`ud in the Hijaz, which marked a watershed in the long-standing Sufi-oriented relationship spanning the Indian Ocean.<sup>31</sup> Salafi modernism had seemingly won the day among the Indonesians in Cairo, and its graduates expected to win the long-term struggle for the mantle of orthodoxy in Indonesia. However, their practical alliance with the Wahhabiyya movement—which also used the term *salafi* for self-reference—only deepened suspicions about the ulterior motives of the Kaum Muda among Southeast Asians in the Middle East and at home. In 1926, a grouping of Javanese traditionalists united to form their own organization, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), as a bulwark against such a putative threat.

In any case, it should be recalled that the outpost in Cairo was exactly that. It was an outpost that now largely reflected on, rather than directed, events in Southeast Asia, and, whereas student numbers continued slowly to increase, there were far more Indonesians exposed to the reformist version of Salafi discourse in Indonesia itself, whether in the schools of Muhammadiyah and the Persatuan Islam (Persis, founded 1923), or in the parallel institutions of the Hadrami movement, al-Irsyad.<sup>32</sup>

The global conflict of 1939-45 once more halted the expansion of the Indonesian community in Egypt, but with their return in the following decades and their euphoria over a now independent homeland, they would have reveled in the experience of Cairo as a modern and vibrant city. They would have been buoyed, too, by the success of previous Azhar graduates, like the first Minister of Religion, Muhammad Rashidi (b. 1915) and other former colleagues who were carving out careers of their own in Islamic education at the nascent State Institutes for Islamic Studies (IAIN)—such as Harun Nasution (1919-98) or Mahmud Yunus.<sup>33</sup> Such an image is presented in the first snapshot of the Indonesian community supplied by Mona Abaza, who conducted

<sup>30</sup> See C. Snouck Hurgronje to Director of Education, Batavia, September 29, 1894, *Ambtelijke Adviezen van C. Snouck Hurgronje 1889-1936*, ed. E. Gobée and C. Adriaanse (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1957-65), 3:1846. For previous suggestions about Snouck’s prismatic view, see Michael Laffan, “Raden Aboe Bakar: An Introductory Note Concerning Snouck Hurgronje’s Informant in Jeddah (1884-1913),” *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 155,4 (1999): 517-42.

<sup>31</sup> Of course, that relationship had experienced previous interruptions, most notably the first Wahhabi interregnum of 1803-18, which itself was ruthlessly put down by Egyptian forces.

<sup>32</sup> For an insight into the schooling system of al-Irsyad, with its mixed emphases on modern education, patriotism, and discipline, see Natalie Mobini-Kesheh, *The Hadrami Awakening: Community and Identity in the Netherlands East Indies, 1900-1942* (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 1999).

<sup>33</sup> The dominance of reformist or traditionalists in the IAIN system has at times been the subject of some contention, or at least humor. In the 1960s and 70s, when NU was dominant in the Ministry of Religion, they were at times referred to as the IAINU. See Karel Steenbrink, “Recapturing the Past: Historical Studies by IAIN-staff,” in *Toward a New Paradigm: Recent Developments in Indonesian Islamic Thought*, ed. Mark R. Woodward (Tempe: Arizona State University, 1996), pp. 155-92, especially p. 182.

fieldwork in Cairo in the 1980s and was on hand to observe a shift in the community that contrasted with the recollections of Azharites she interviewed in Indonesia.<sup>34</sup>

In essence, there was a great contrast observable between the Cairo of the 1950s and 1960s and that of the 1970s and 1980s, in terms of the general spirit of intellectual openness to European (and particularly French) thought and relaxed dress-styles. With a slow expansion in numbers,<sup>35</sup> and the concurrent rise in globalizing fundamentalisms championed by Iran and Saudi Arabia respectively, there had been a shift towards a more rigorously textual approach to study and life in Cairo. Veiling became more common, male students adopted the long white gown (*galabayya*), and an ideological split emerged between those attracted to 'Abduh's modernism and partisans of the neo-Hanbalism of the Wahhabiyya. Certainly, this apparent narrowing of scholarly vision was well-known in Indonesia. The current assistant rector of the Muhammadiyah-run Universitas Hamka, Fatah Wibisono, told me that he actually declined the offer of a scholarship to Cairo in the 1980s for such reasons.<sup>36</sup>

However, while the Salafizing trend was clearly in evidence, both among Indonesians and at al-Azhar, study in Cairo was not necessarily as limited as some alleged.<sup>37</sup> Certainly, Dr. Wibisono now feels that he was misinformed at the time. As Abaza's book makes clear, Cairo was still perceived as offering a far more open educational environment than Mecca, and some Indonesians continued to seek out instruction beyond al-Azhar or the mosques of Madinat Nasr.<sup>38</sup> For example, Rifyal Ka'bah, now a noted specialist on Islamic law, gained a masters degree from Zamalek's Institute of Islamic Studies (*Ma'had al-Dirasat al-Islamiyya*) in 1984.<sup>39</sup> Others made use of the local library of the Virginia-based International Institute for Islamic Thought (IIIT), also based in Zamalek, or gravitated to prominent local intellectuals, such as the

<sup>34</sup> See Abaza, *Indonesian Students*, pp. 73-90. Abaza's interviewees and brief life histories included a Javanese founder of *Seruan Azhar* and also minister of education, Raden Fath al-Rahman Kafrawi, as well as his Minangkabau colleague and future director of a school for Indonesians in Mecca, Janan Tayyib. Others discussed are Harun Nasution, Muhammad Rashidi, Kahar Muzakkir (1908-73), Fuad Fakhruddin (b. 1918), Yusuf Saad (b. 1919) and, perhaps most famously, Abdurrahman Wahid (b. 1940). Of course, these were by no means all the famous Azharite graduates to achieve fame in Indonesia, and other notable figures include Muhammad Basyuni Imran of Sambas (d. 1981) and the Banjarese Abdul Rasyid (1885-1935).

<sup>35</sup> The records of the Indonesian student community in Cairo date from the 1950s and indicate a relatively small enrollment then of fifty-five nationals. Saiful Bahri, personal communication, July 29, 2003. Statistics for Indonesians cited by Abaza show a rise from some eighty students in 1953, to 415 in 1982-83, 730 in 1987, and approximately one thousand in 1993. Abaza, *Indonesian Students*, p. 99.

<sup>36</sup> Fatah Wibisono, personal communication, Jakarta, February 21, 2003.

<sup>37</sup> Abaza notes that a son of one of the founders of the modernist Gontor school in East Java, Amal Fathullah Zarkashy, defended a masters thesis in Cairo in 1986 with the title "The Salafi Trend in Contemporary Islamic Thought in Indonesia." See Abaza, *Indonesian Students*, p. 119, n. 19. Such a trend in Egypt has also been observed in the case of its national body for the issuance of *fatwas*. See Skovgaard-Petersen, *Defining Islam*.

<sup>38</sup> Abaza, *Indonesian Students*.

<sup>39</sup> After studies at al-Azhar, many Indonesians continue their studies at this graduate institute. Aunul Abied, personal communication, September 26, 2003. Ka'bah followed his studies in Cairo with a dissertation at the Universitas Indonesia in Jakarta, defending a comparative study of the *fatwas* of Muhammadiyah and NU. It has since been published; see Rifyal Ka'bah, *Hukum Islam di Indonesia: Perspektif Muhammadiyah dan NU* (Jakarta: Universitas Yarsi Jakarta, 1999).

Nasserite (and Francophile) professor of philosophy at Cairo University, Hasan Hanafi (see below). Furthermore, Cairo's book (and cassette) culture was well and truly alive in the network of alleys around al-Azhar, though students tended to frequent that of al-Halabi more out of curiosity than anything else, with its stock of relatively unattractive Jawi books seemingly of interest to only a few Malaysian students.

At the time of Abaza's initial field research, the students were living in three zones. A few first-year students, yet to secure bursaries (mostly Sumatrans), were residing free in the old *riwaq*—then referred to as as the *riwaq al-indunisiyyin* (the *riwaq* of the Indonesians). Others were in the, then inaccessible, university quarters of Madinat al-Bu`uth in `Abbassiya, while the vast majority were taking up affordable apartments in the spreading web of concrete apartment blocks to the east, in the then "unfinished modern city" of Madinat Nasr. The very presence of so many Southeast Asians had led them to term the area Kampung Melayu ("Malayville," if you like), and they were busily engaged in maintaining their own distinct culture in this new outpost of Islamic modernity.

Perhaps the most distinctive of such markers noted by Abaza was food, and, despite some Azharites developing an affection for local favorites, like the slimy green vegetable *mulukhiyya*, students would typically band together to procure key ingredients for their own cuisine. This certainly resonates with my own first experience of Egypt in December 1991. After finding a taxi with the help of a Malaysian student and then sharing it with a veiled Indonesian, I helped shift an enormous box of rice and cooking oil, brought all the way from Java, into her lodgings, in what I then thought was the utter desolation of Madinat Nasr.

### Cairo Today

There is much about Cairo today that an Indonesian student of 1900, 1950, or 1980 would recognize, but there is much too that has changed. Certainly, the city has continued to expand, absorbing outlying towns and embracing the concrete flyover. Still, the Fatimid core, with its "medieval" street plan, remains, thanks to regular (and often controversial) restorations.<sup>40</sup> The most recent of these is now underway, and the makeshift wooden scaffolding put in place after the 1991 earthquake has finally been replaced by the more deliberate contrivances of the Ministry of Culture that is gentrifying many of Cairo's monuments with a combination of concrete and the removal of the "unsightly," local inhabitants included. Such modifications have already had an indirect effect on the Indonesian community, with the clearing out of the last remnants of their *riwaq* in the restoration of al-Azhar in 1997. The Asian financial crisis has since pushed them even further to the fringes of the city and even beyond the now quite attractive areas of Madinat Nasr's eighth district.

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<sup>40</sup> I am aware, though, that even this is somewhat artificial, thanks to the efforts of the colonial Anglo-French committee for the preservation of Cairo, which was just as cavalier about removing homes and the uninteresting to restore vistas on an idealized Fatimid or Ayyubid past. Ongoing research on the committee and its work was presented in 1997 at the Nederlands-Vlaams Instituut te Cairo by Yaroslav Dobrowolski and Alaa al-Habashi of the American Research Center in Egypt (ARCE).

Some tourists were trickling back in early 2002, though life remained tough for the touts around Khan al-Khalili, the warren of markets on the opposite side of the road from al-Azhar. The same holds true in the bustle of modern Cairo's major transport hub of Maydan al-Tahrir, where I was first struck by how the Indonesians have been pushed to the periphery of the city. It was here, in a restaurant serving Egyptian staples largely to young Egyptians, where I found that my Indonesian friend was more the focus of unabashed curiosity than I was. "You speak Arabic?" "Where are you from?" came the questions to my uncomfortable friend, who was in fact a veteran of seven years in Cairo, though still an unwilling eater of *ful*, the national favorite.<sup>41</sup> It was a far different matter as he conveyed me around the bookshops of al-Azhar or the streets of al-Hayy al-`Ashir, the "tenth district," of Madinat Nasr. Here, Southeast Asians, Africans, and, indeed, most international students, went either unnoticed or were effusively greeted by friends and neighbors.

I should also point out that this openness to interaction extends in both directions in the areas frequented by Indonesians. I observed a genuine mutual regard among locals and students at al-Azhar and in the bookshops. Moreover, the sort of participation in national life that seems lacking among Indonesians in Australia and the Netherlands is very natural in "Islamic" Cairo, with most students having a declared affiliation for one of the leading football teams. They have organized football competitions among themselves, and the students from Sulawesi—the province providing the greatest numbers of Azharites—recently triumphed in July 2003 at the Indonesian Games held in the suburb of Darasa, just behind the Madinat al-Bu`uth.

But, Cairo is about far more than *fiqh* and football, and its bewildering range of experiences was once described on the homepage of an Indonesian student organization under the heading of "Egypt, al-Watan al-Mutanaqid, the Nation of Paradox."

Don't just imagine that Egypt is only about nice things! That's far too simplistic. Egypt is certainly not as beautiful as might be imagined, although it is not as bad as might be feared. Egypt is a *mutanaqid* land, a country of paradox, in the sense that it has everything there is in the world, both positive and negative. Anybody with preconceptions about Egypt, whether positive or negative, will certainly be let down. Egypt is a country full of buildings indicative of a high culture, yet sadly cleanliness is neglected. Elite areas and new cities may be found everywhere, but so too are slums adorned with rubbish.... Egypt is the country of al-Azhar, with its innumerable experts and memorizers of the Qur'an, yet the frequency of moral crises, stemming from acts of rape, free sex, and experimentation with women may be clearly seen; even if they are obscured by the veil. The percentage of those who have obtained a doctoral degree per 100 thousand people is among the highest in the world, and yet some 60 percent of the population is illiterate. Beautiful and sensuous women may be seen on the streets, some of whom have gowns that are so revealing that they no longer resemble clothes. Yet there are many who cover themselves up from head to toe. And in Egypt too, the most conservative Islamic thought finds a place, as does

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<sup>41</sup>The student concerned here was Muhammad Aunul Abied Shah, mentioned above. *Ful* is a dish of broad beans cooked with oil and often spiced with pepper or chili.

the most secular, which has a considerable following. This is an illustration of the paradoxical nature of the land of Pharaoh, conquered by the general Amr ibn al-`As in the time of the Caliph `Umar ibn al-Khattab. Actually there are still many examples which could be brought forward, but space prevents us. Thus we have this dual advice: take that which is of benefit, and leave aside that which smacks of danger.<sup>42</sup>

According to information recently obtained by Abaza, in interviews with the present Indonesian cultural attaché to Cairo, Noer Samad Kamba', the student community in the year 2000 numbered 2,700 members, of whom some five hundred were female.<sup>43</sup> As a veteran, and despite it having been examination time at al-Azhar, Aunul Abied was able to conjure a series of meetings with some of these students, most especially through the organization of which he was a leading member, Fosgama (see below). By and large, they fell into one of two clear groups, single or married. For the former predominantly male majority, life was clearly tougher. A single student would share the rent of a basic flat in one of the many concrete tower-blocks in Madinat Nasr. Communal areas were usually quite chaotic, beyond which student rooms were neat refuges, equipped with the core study texts, posters, and a computer.<sup>44</sup> The life of a married student like Abied was perhaps cozier, but, in many cases, married couples were partnerships between students, often with small children.<sup>45</sup> There was, thus, the usual juggling of responsibilities—some even met me with their children in tow—and all four of the husbands I met were encouraging their wives to complete their courses in Egypt. Indeed, some were still in Egypt for that reason.<sup>46</sup>

Given that there are now so many Indonesians in Cairo, these students naturally represent a constellation of ethnicities and affiliations. To that degree, there are meaningful comparisons that can be made between the accounts of Snouck and Abaza. In the case of the former, it seems that, as the Meccan community expanded and

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<sup>42</sup> Latansa Online, "Egypt, al-Watan al-Mutanaqid, the Nation of Paradox [more accurately, the Paradoxical Land]," <http://server3003.freeyellow.com/latansa2000/page21.html> (accessed March 22, 2002; site now deactivated). The final admonition is a reworking of a *hadith* attributed to the Prophet that is also popular in organizations like NU.

<sup>43</sup> Abaza, "Indonesian Students in Cairo Fifteen Years Later." The official figure as of 2002 was 2,163. I also met with Pak Noer, who comes from South Sulawesi, on May 7, 2002. During that interview, discussions ranged from the importance of al-Azhar for Indonesia to the international preeminence of its *fatwas* and the role of Sufism in Indonesian history. In this regard, Pak Noer wanted to stress the continuing need for the reform of "medieval" practices in Indonesian Islam and the ongoing place of al-Azhar as a center for the teaching of moderate Islam in the global context.

<sup>44</sup> This was consistent with the group accommodations of African students in Madinat Nasr that I visited in 1997.

<sup>45</sup> I also visited the homes of two other married couples. At the first, where the husband was a graduate of al-Azhar and an employee at the embassy, the wife was then studying for her masters degree. This was the case too for a Cairo University-trained medical doctor I visited in the green suburb of Doqqi, who was contemplating a return to Indonesia with his wife and three daughters after a stay of some twenty years. Mustafid Dahlan, interview, May 10, 2002, in Doqqi.

<sup>46</sup> Although far from a comprehensive survey, my observations of married students tend (at least, in principle) to go against Abaza's earlier impression that the high rate of marriage among students tended to leave the women as Cairene housewives, unlikely to ever complete their studies. Abaza, *Indonesian Students*, p. 115, n. 13.

diversified, very specific particularisms were manifested that separated Malays, Javanese, or Bugis on certain levels.<sup>47</sup> And while Abaza, like Snouck, made little direct comment on intra-Indonesian particularisms, she was well aware of the diversity of Indonesia's students, listing a number of student clubs formed since the 1950s, and, in 1993, noted the existence of some twelve newsletters "expressing either regional or *pasantren* affiliation."<sup>48</sup> Of these *pasantrens*, it is perhaps that of Gontor that is best known, and its graduates jokingly repeat an amusing saying attributed to one of its founders, Ahmad Sahal, that "If my student seeks worship, let him go to Mecca, if he seeks knowledge, let him go to Cairo, and if he seeks education, let him come to Gontor."<sup>49</sup>

Regional associations have been founded for students from West Sumatra (1957), Kalimantan (1958), Jakarta (1969), Aceh (1974), South Sumatra and Banten (both in 1976), Sulawesi (1977), Jambi (1986), Riau and West Nusa Tenggara (both in 1987), Madura (1994), Medan (1996), Bengkulu (1997), and East Java (1998).<sup>50</sup> Sources outside the embassy give a slightly different view about numbers of students and organizations. The following comment was on the same website referred to above, where the authors mentioned that as summer (of 2001) was approaching, the students were gearing up to organize discussions.

It can be imagined that with some 2,300 students, there is one main student organization (The Persatuan Pelajar dan Mahasiswa Indonesia, or PPMI-Mesir), such local affiliates as ICMI Cairo [The Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals], Keluarga Mahasiswa Nahdlatul Ulama Mesir (KMNU), Ikatan Keluarga Muhammadiyah (IKM), Perwakilan Pelajar Islam Indonesia (PII), some seventeen regional or affinitive organizations, and twenty for graduates of certain schools. There are five scholarly journals published, five mini-tabloids, and even more fortnightly bulletins.<sup>51</sup>

While this student website indicates that there is, perhaps, even more going on, and the disparity of four hundred missing students might be explained by the ongoing economic crisis, knowledge of founding dates (of student regional associations) is especially useful because, generally speaking, this reflects both the trajectories of Islamic education within some of those regions and a long-term shift towards a community in Cairo that is more truly representative of their diverse homelands. For example, keeping in mind the linkages between the reformist discourse of Rashid Rida and parts of the Malay world, it is no surprise to see that groups from Sumatra, Kalimantan, and Sulawesi were first to obtain critical mass. This does not imply an

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<sup>47</sup> While this argument was not explicitly put forward by Snouck Hurgronje, I have advanced such an argument in my analysis of his experiences and work. See Laffan, *Islamic Nationhood*, pp. 54-76.

<sup>48</sup> Abaza, *Indonesian Students*, p. 110.

<sup>49</sup> Latansa Online, "Egypt, al-Watan al-Mutanaqid, the Nation of Paradox." For observations on the origins of this *pasantren* and its linkage with Cairo in the mid-1960s, see Castles, "Notes on the Islamic School at Gontor."

<sup>50</sup> This information comes from a draft version of Abaza's now published notes of 2002 (Abaza, "Indonesian Students in Cairo Fifteen Years Later"), although the dates supplied therein at times conflict with the ones supplied in her earlier book.

<sup>51</sup> Latansa Online, "Egypt, al-Watan al-Mutanaqid, the Nation of Paradox." Incidentally, the title of the website alludes to the first two words of the motto of Gontor, namely "don't forget" (Arabic: *la tansa*).

absence of the Javanese throughout the century, and as I have noted, Muhammadiyah had representatives in Cairo by the 1920s. Otherwise firm linkages have been maintained with the State Institutes for Islamic Studies and, indeed, the famous Darussalam *pesantren* at Gontor, which was given its modern tint by three brothers, Imam Zarkasji, Ahmad Sahal, and Zainuddin Fanani, in 1926. Such a reformist heritage is apparent too in that some of the associations are as much an expression of doctrinal divisions as ethnicity, like the Forum Silaturrahmi Persatuan Islam, founded in 1996.

Still, Cairo was never exclusively about connecting with the message of Muhammad `Abduh, nor do the like-minded reformists oriented to such organizations as Muhammadiyah or Persatuan Islam have it all their way. There has always been some traditionalist presence in Cairo, particularly within al-Azhar itself, as may be attested by arguments there in the 1920s among Malay partisans of the Kaum Muda and Kaum Tua groupings, as the former began to dominate the community at large.<sup>52</sup> Even Abdurrahman Wahid spent some (officially unproductive) years in Egypt in the 1960s. Now, too, there is a significant NU population, estimated on the order of five hundred members, which formed its own local affiliate in 1982, and whose students established a newsletter of their own, *Tanwîrul Afkâr*, in 1997. Indeed, the Forum Studi Keluarga Madura (Fosgama, Madura Family Study Forum), while largely made up of Gontor graduates, is an NU-dominated entity, rather like their home island.

In the eyes of Muhammadiyah cadres back in Indonesia, like Fatah Wibisono, the influence of local institutions like Gontor, where students are not obliged to maintain an explicit affiliation to any particular mass organization for Muslims, leads to what he calls the “de-NU-ization” of the pupils from traditionalist backgrounds and fosters increasing openness.<sup>53</sup> In Cairo, this would seem to be true, though the influence of Indonesian intellectuals with a neo-traditionalist background, such as Abdurrahman Wahid and Nurcholish Madjid, and the intellectual discourse abroad is no less important in this transformation. I shall turn to this question of methodological difference again below.

Perhaps the most obvious differentiation enunciated by the Indonesians I met was with their fellow Southeast Asian students from Malaysia. And while there are those who share flats or, indeed, classes at al-Azhar with Malaysians, those I spoke to were quick to point out that, as Indonesians, they were different from their Southeast Asian neighbors, whom they characterized as being less open to variety and lacking the sort of grounding in Arabic available in the *pesantrens*. There was also a sense of financial difference, with the Malaysians allegedly being well-looked after by a government that had survived the Asian financial crisis, as opposed to those Indonesians supported from home by a dwindling currency.

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<sup>52</sup> Such arguments were monitored by the Malay journal *al-Ikhtwan*. See Othman, *Middle Eastern Influence*, pp. 226-27, n. 6. Whereas Othman rightly points out the existence of debates between reformists and traditionalists, his thesis, as a whole, offers a very reformist view of the past, which first places reformism within the bounds of al-Azhar rather than in the surrounding milieu, where Rashid Rida, in particular, was active.

<sup>53</sup> Fatah Wibisono, personal communication, February 21, 2003, Jakarta. It is, perhaps, ironic that the opposite could be said for once modernist-dominated institutions like Yogyakarta's IAIN Sunan Kalajaga, where graduates from a *pesantren* background have received a tertiary education and now form the bulk of its teaching staff.

Such differentiation is a far cry indeed from the depiction of “the beloved homeland of our united people” that adorned the cover of *Seruan Azhar* in 1925-26. Still, this is not apparent to the outsider calling at the (probably illegal) restaurants that have sprung up in various parts of Madinat Nasr. The sweet mix of coconut cream, chili, and chicken seems to melt away ethnic differences, and, at one such converted ground-floor flat, I met with students from Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand.<sup>54</sup> Spices are the key to the magic, and it was with some surprise that I learned that the pungent street of spice-vendors, which abuts Khan al-Khalili, is held of little value compared to what is available in Mecca. Rather, the firm links between the Cairene and Meccan communities are a primary channel for the onward diffusion of Southeast Asia’s most famous products, though Ibn Battuta’s *luban jawi* is probably not one of them.

Food also seems to melt away regional differences, and, at a gathering of primarily Madurese students I attended, we were treated to specialties from Padang, Yogyakarta, and Palembang. On the occasion concerned, the topic for discussion began with the role of Islam in Indonesian nationalism, and, over the course of the following two hours, debate shifted forward to the role of Islam in Indonesia today—most especially to its role in keeping Indonesia together.<sup>55</sup> In the series of comments made, whether by some of the forty males in the main room, or from the smaller female contingent off to the side, segregated but not alienated, all were keen to link Islam to the project of Indonesia. As they saw their own history, Islam had been crucial in welding national unity against the Dutch, then against communism, and (at that time) the threat of disintegration itself.

Indonesian students in Cairo feel their Indonesian identity strongly, even if they have not been vetted by the consulate or sent with the national flag sewn onto their baggage. And while there were Acehnese who kept their distance,<sup>56</sup> the lodge of the student association (PPMI), now relocated from its old base in Bab al-Luq to Madinat Nasr, in a building furnished by ICMI, serves as the nerve center for the student community. Here, new arrivals may be housed temporarily or bid farewell at what is popularly called the Wisma Nusantara (Archipelago House), a Sanskritic-Javanese name in contrast with the more Arabized nomenclature of the Bait Malaysia (Malaysia House).<sup>57</sup> Overseen by the students, there is also a restaurant downstairs, with the requisite warmers stocked with rice and aromatic curries, and a Thai-style soup, *tom yam*, has also become a favorite. It is also a venue that regularly hosts lectures, with

<sup>54</sup> This also reminded me of my experiences in 1997, when I was invited to a football match between students from various West African countries and a meal at the home of a friend from Mali.

<sup>55</sup> This, I was led to believe, was for a casual chat about my research with a few students. Needless to say, I was a little taken aback to enter a flat full of some sixty students, complete with microphones, cameras, and a welcoming banner. Madinat Nasr, May 9, 2002.

<sup>56</sup> According to Aunul Abied, he had spoken with some Acehnese in Cairo and asked why they felt that they had nothing to do with Indonesia. Apparently, most reported the direct suffering of friends and family at the hands of the military, and, for this reason, Aunul Abied felt that their objections to the idea of being Indonesian were entirely reasonable. Aunul Abied, personal communication, May 2002. With the recent recommencement of hostilities in Aceh, the ethnic divisions have doubtless been further emphasized.

<sup>57</sup> The Wisma Nusantara is not to be confused with the Indonesian embassy in Cairo, the Wisma Indonesia. According to Abaza, the Bait Malaysia also maintains a library of student theses. See Abaza, *Indonesian Students*, p. 109.

speakers invited from a range of institutions, whether visitors from Indonesia, or locals from the American University, the IIIT, or Cairo University. Furthermore, with an internet café, an upstairs library that holds an expanding number of these defended in Cairo, and its offices equipped with computers that house the association webpages, the Madinat Nasr complex is a far cry from the once battered and cramped quarters within the *ritwaq al-indunisiyyin*.

For all their very parochialism, the Indonesian students remain intimately bound to world events, and the notice board downstairs held both advertisements for upcoming lectures and elections, in addition to reminders about the Palestinian cause. On a visit there on May 14, 2002, I was shown photo albums of local benefit concerts, weddings, and a small demonstration held in the courtyard, where Indonesians pledged themselves to go and fight in the *intifada*. The images of the latter looked decidedly laid-back to my eyes, and when I asked if any Indonesians had actually gone to fight in Palestine, I was laughingly told that nobody had been “allowed” to by the government. Incidentally, the Muslim Brotherhood’s Ma’mun al-Hudaybi gave a very similar response to questions from a Dutch journalist about the training of volunteers for Palestine.<sup>58</sup> And when I asked one Indonesian student whether he or his friends had contact with al-Hudaybi, his response was that while the latter was a good man with fine ideas, contact with him would only invite unwanted attention from the Egyptian security service.

### **Gravitation to Key Individuals: The Continuing Search for Diversity and Position**

When many of the first Jawi students arrived in Cairo in the 1890s, they came in search of an individual teacher as much as for an experience of Islamic modernity or because of the fame of al-Azhar itself. The same was true in the 1910s, when many came to be with Rashid Rida. For others, since the 1980s, the Sorbonne-trained Hasan Hanafi has been their lodestone. A pioneering resident of Madinat Nasr, this prominent advocate of “Leftist Islam” (*al-yasar al-islami*) now lives under guard for fear of assassination. The threat comes from Islamist radicals who accuse him of being an apostate and who forced his friend and colleague, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, abroad for his work on contextualizing understanding of the Qur’an.<sup>59</sup>

Having been conducted into his voluminous and unkempt study, Aunul Abied and I were able to experience Hanafi in full didactic mode.<sup>60</sup> After trying to tease out my approach to my own studies, Hanafi pressed on, discussing the need for a broadly theoretical mode of dealing with Islam in Southeast Asia. He was certainly not lacking in theories and asserted that Indonesia remained too much “a receptive culture” and that the further east one ventures in the archipelago—to which he has frequently been

<sup>58</sup> On this occasion, I was the uncomfortable interpreter. Interview between Betsy Udink and Muhammad Ma’mun al-Hudaybi, May 11, 2002, Roda Island.

<sup>59</sup> Abu Zayd was condemned for apostasy by the Egyptian courts in 1995 and thus ordered to divorce his wife. Rather than do so, and in the face of violent threats from Islamists, both have made their homes in Europe, with Abu Zayd holding teaching posts in the Netherlands and Germany, where he attracts many students from Indonesia.

<sup>60</sup> Hasan Hanafi, interview, May 7, 2002.

invited—Islam is more consciously asserted as identity. He also feels that there is much fertile ground for his “Leftist Islam,” even if the precise terminology could be altered, given the unhappy memories of the putsch of 1965. According to Hanafi, on his several tours of Java and Sumatra, where he spoke to mixed audiences of Muhammadiyah and NU affiliates, he has “told Indonesians enough times to start thinking for themselves.” To this end, he claims Abdurrahman Wahid as one of his protégés and is proud that Wahid had initiated the new spirit of openness in Indonesia, which would continue under the “left-leaning” Megawati.

According to Abied, Hanafi is also quite impressed with Amien Rais, the former Muhammadiyah chairman and current speaker of the Lower House (DPR, Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat, People’s Representative Assembly), whom he believes is putting his (Hanafi’s) ideas into action. Somewhat surprisingly, he is said to be dismissive of (potential president) Nurcholish Madjid. Clearly, Hanafi feels that he may lay a claim to the new Indonesia, even if his idea of that Indonesia seems equally (mis)informed by his own students. Although it is often suggested by NU that Wahid initiated the new openness, the real credit should probably go to his unpopular predecessor, B. J. Habibie. Any idea that Megawati is a leftist is, no doubt, due to a misguided view that she truly represents the legacy of her late father, the admirably Nasserite Sukarno. Hanafi’s suggestion that Indonesia is too receptive may be taken as valid only if one accepts that Indonesians must write in Arabic to gain the status of producers. Certainly, they are beginning to do so, but, even so, the prime problem with the view from Cairo is that no “Islamic” scholar seems to feel that it is worthwhile reading Indonesian.

I have noted above that Hanafi refers to his having successes across Indonesia’s porous sectarian boundaries, yet it seems that he has some trouble appreciating the distinctive openness of Indonesian culture. Indeed, he has even criticized his students for visiting Yahya Isma`il, his opponent and an arch-enemy of Abu Zayd, while Yahya Isma`il is said to find it strange that his students still seek out Abu Zayd’s writings. A similar openness was a feature, almost a century ago, of the Singaporean journal, *al-Imam*, which happily derived its ideas from two rival ideologues, namely the reformist, Muhammad `Abduh, and the nationalist, Mustafa Kamil (1874-1908). Today too, it seems that while charismatic teachers can attract the attention of students, they cannot prevent them from seeking ideas elsewhere. It remains an easy step to venture beyond Madinat Nasr or Cairo University and back to the arcades of al-Azhar. And while the ancient mosque of al-Gawhar received its millennial facelift, the same cannot be said for its adjacent campus. Within its gates, the buildings look decidedly dilapidated, the classes are full, and *nizam* is not the first term that comes to mind.<sup>61</sup> Still, the University boasts a prestigious line-up of lecturers, some of whom have a cult following among the Indonesian and Malaysian students.

One of these is Dr. `Ali Gum`a Muhammad `Abd al-Wahhab (b. 1952), whom I met on May 18, 2002 at al-Azhar in the restored *riwaq* of the Syrians, which was as close as I ever came to the old *riwaq al-jawa*. Doctrinally speaking, `Ali Gum`a at first seems about as opposed to Hasan Hanafi in education and orientation as one could imagine. After graduating from `Ayn Shams University with a degree in business studies in

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<sup>61</sup> Visit made May 20, 2002.

1973, he moved to al-Azhar to commence schooling in religious studies and Shari`a (Islamic law), graduating with a masters degree in jurisprudence (*usul al-fiqh*) in 1985. This was followed by a doctorate with first-class honors in 1988. At the time of my visit, he was a newly appointed lecturer in the Faculty of Islamic Studies, al-Azhar, the director of the Zamalek branch of the IIIT, a member of the guiding *fatwa*-committee of the Dar al-Ifta', as well as being on the *fatwa*-giving council for North America (Majlis al-Ifta' li-Shamal Amrika), not to mention being a counselor to the Ministry of Pious Endowments.<sup>62</sup>

He is, furthermore, a prominent member of the Shadhiliyya Sufi order, and, in late 2003, he was appointed to the post once held by Muhammad `Abduh as Mufti of the Republic. In an interview with *al-Ahram* on the occasion of his appointment, `Ali Gum`a outlined his own views on the traditional harmonization of Sufism and *fiqh*, the role of the state in instituting Shari`a, and the application of *hudud* (corporal and capital) punishments. He also spoke of the relative lack of education shown by Islamist preachers and (un-named) contextualists (Hanafi?) and apostates (Abu Zayd?). In all cases, though, Gum`a demonstrated his own neo-traditionalist brand of contextualization by pointing out that, as Islam was always a faith in keeping with the needs of the people of the day, calls for "the renewal of religious discourse" (*tajdid al-khitab al-dini*) as voiced by people like Hanafi—and especially after September 11—were misplaced.

Meanwhile, as part of his project aimed at "reviving" traditional *fiqh* to show how it remains applicable to modern needs, he is an editor of the *Encyclopedia of Islamic Concepts (Mawsu`at al-mafahim al-islamiyya)*. He also conducts informal weekly classes on the ground floor of the *riwaaq* of the Syrians, and is available for consultation thereafter.<sup>63</sup> When teaching in the *riwaaq*, Gum`a reverts to the traditional method of instruction, long banished from al-Azhar University's formalized classrooms, sitting on a low chair before a semicircle of students who are seated cross-legged on the floor with their texts. These students are from a variety of countries, but Southeast Asians make up a sizeable proportion—perhaps 30 percent on the day I visited. Behind the male students was a smaller body of females, with an even greater Southeast Asian concentration. The class itself commenced with recitation of various *hadith* (reports about Muhammad's life and utterances), with Dr. Gum`a interrupting with corrections or to invite a new student to commence reading. Afterwards, he held an open session, where questions could be asked on any matter of *fiqh*. These ranged, on the day I visited, from questions concerning the correct method for eating watermelon to the application of ointment, questions of tax and agriculture, and even the delicate matter of divorce and marriage raised by an electrician in some doubt as to the marital status of his "friend." Throughout, the discussions were good-natured and often humorous, especially when Dr. Gum`a implied that the electrician and his "friend" might be one

<sup>62</sup> Biographical information about `Ali Gum`a is derived from a feature in *al-Ahram*. See "al-Duktur `Ali Gum`a min minbar al-sultan hasan ila kursi al-mufti; al-Hudud fi al-islam li-al-takhwif wa laysat li-al-tatbiq," *al-Ahram al-`arabi*, October 11, 2003.

<sup>63</sup> `Ali Gum`a also has a regular *halaqa* pitched primarily at non-scholars at the mosque of Sultan Hasan, where he also regularly gives the Friday sermon. According to Aunul Abied, there is a group of Indonesian women who are always present at his lectures, and seemingly know in advance where apparently spontaneous happenings will occur. Aunul Abied, personal communication, May 20, 2002.

and the same person. And neither was the teacher averse to correction by a student, though it should be said that his mastery of the subject was never in dispute.

Upon the conclusion of this session, Dr. Gum`a retired to his office to receive individual questions and petitions.<sup>64</sup> The purpose of my own visit was to learn more about the history of al-Azhar, which was presented to me in straightforward fashion, from its establishment by al-Gawhar, to the modernizations of the 1850s under al-Bajuri, and then the interventions of `Abduh and Nasser. He also detailed the changes in the structure of the degree and examination procedures that were better suited to modern learning. He claimed that before `Abduh there was “no *nizam*.”<sup>65</sup> Instead, ignorance allegedly reigned, so much so that one of `Abduh’s devotees, Amir Shakib Arslan (1869-1946), encountered Azharites who had never heard of his homeland, Lebanon.

Doubtless, an Azharite ignorant of Lebanon would have had even less idea of where Southeast Asia lay. Still, when asked about the history of Southeast Asians in Cairo, Gum`a seemed but dimly aware of a long-term presence, although he was certainly positive about the good work being done by Azharites in Southeast Asia, where he too has been invited on several occasions. At this point, I asked him if he felt that the ideas of his fellow Egyptian and invitee, Hasan Hanafi, were having much of an impact, but this was a question that did not seem overly to interest him.

I then asked if he perceived any real differences between his Indonesian and Malaysian students. At first, he felt that this was a strange question, and disavowed that there was any difference between Muslim students from any country. However, on reflection, he felt able to venture that the Malaysians seemed far more orderly and disciplined and were able to handle the source texts well. He then speculated that this was because, in colonial times, the Malaysians were given a proper education by the British, as opposed to the Indonesians who were under the Dutch. It also seemed to him that the general attitude of Malaysians toward Islamic education reflected an appropriate vision of it as a means of strengthening Muslims (*taqwiyat al-muslimin*), creating in turn the correct environment to produce real `ulama’, and not merely officials (*muwazzafin*).

The view that Indonesians were deprived of proper education by the Dutch ignores the fact that the *pesantren* tradition was alive and well, regardless of the presence of the colonial (or postcolonial) rulers, and that the movement for reform, with its emphasis on modern schooling and print literacy, was coeval in what is now Indonesia and Malaysia. Still, this is all about perceptions, and Abied, who had largely kept silent in the presence of these two very different masters, later conceded that the Malaysians

<sup>64</sup> Outside, I met an American-educated Egyptian, who was trying to enter al-Azhar to resolve his own status after the events of September 11, 2001. Other plaintiffs included an effusive assistant at a local bookshop, whom I had met the previous day, and people seeking financial aid for various personal reasons.

<sup>65</sup> At the beginning of the twentieth century, the highest degree offered, the doctoral *alimiyya*, was designed to take twelve years study. When it was first officially tested in 1912, only twenty-six students passed out of 362 who sat the examinations. By 1923, however, the number of graduates rose significantly. See Rifaat Abdul-Reda Dika, “Islamic Traditions in Modern Politics: The Case of al-Azhar in Egypt: A Historical Study of Culture and Social Change” (PhD dissertation, Wayne State University, 1990), pp. 113 and 124.

were indeed more organized, but he again stressed that he felt that they were generally at a lower educational level when they arrived in Cairo, and that they were much less inclined to seek out instruction beyond al-Azhar.<sup>66</sup> He also posed a question about the aim of studying in Cairo. While the attainment of a degree (*shahada*) is certainly important, and Indonesians attain these degrees more often by these days, in some of Indonesia's communities this is held of little account. As he pointed out, his own family in Madura, which ran a *pesantren*, had been unimpressed by his decision to attend Gontor and then to go to Cairo rather than Mecca. Furthermore, he noted that his relatives would be interested only in whether he had gained any *ijazas* from key *'ulama'*. This also seemed connected to his concerns about what would be expected of him on his return to the village. Abied clearly has ambitions of becoming an intellectual who participates in Indonesian national life, but his obligations are to return to his own, more localized, community as a spiritual guide.

### Indonesian Self-Awareness and Participation in Global Discourse

The question of the future role of the Azharite in Indonesia is certainly important, and Azharite graduates will, I believe, play an even greater role in Indonesia in the future. What is also increasingly occurring, though, is a greater participation by Indonesians in the Islamic world beyond their own shores. Far beyond the self-confident declarations of Hasan Hanafi, not only is there great intellectual debate in Indonesia, but some Indonesians are following Nawawi Banten and writing in Arabic. One example is the late Ahmad Nahrawi Abd al-Salam, whose text on al-Shafi'i is regarded favorably.<sup>67</sup> Increasingly, theses by Indonesians and Malaysians find their way from the libraries of their student organizations to the bookshelves of Maydan al-Azhar, such as those of Surahman Hidayat or Nur al-Din Marbo al-Banjari.<sup>68</sup> The latter was a student of 'Ali Gum'a and now has his own *madrasa* (Islamic school) in Malaysia. Indeed, when in Cairo, Nur al-Din Marbo's studies were sponsored by one of the newer bookshops (Dar al-Salam), with its extensive stock of Lebanese reprints of the old texts edited for al-Halabi. Meanwhile, the shop of al-Halabi itself is a dust-filled space presided over by two old men who guard what remains of its fragile stock of Arabic and Jawi books.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>66</sup> According to Abied's wife, Iffah, when invited by the Malaysian female students to a "discussion forum," she was disappointed to find that this consisted of a lengthy exhortation by a leading male student, followed by even longer prayers. Iffah Ismail, personal communication, May 20, 2002.

<sup>67</sup> Ahmad Nahrawi 'Abd al-Salam, *al-Imam al-shafi'i fi madhhabihī al-qadim wa al-jadid* (Cairo: [publisher not known], 1988).

<sup>68</sup> Surahman's book on religious pluralism in an Islamic state, introduced by Muhammad Abd al-Rahman Mandur, is apparently well regarded. See Surahman Hidayat, *al-Ta'ayush al-silmi bayn al-muslimin wa ghayrihim dakhil dawla wahida* (Cairo: Dar al-Salam, 2001).

<sup>69</sup> I visited al-Halabi's dilapidated shop front on May 20, 2002. At the time, I was accompanied by another student, Saiful Bahri, who stated that all the works were at a very elementary level and seldom bought by Indonesians. Whereas, Abaza noted that al-Halabi still held some eighty Jawi works in the 1980s, which was seemingly confirmed by the catalogue page that was literally ripped out for my uneasy benefit, I doubt that more than twenty are in stock. Abaza, *Indonesian Students*, p. 130. As of October 2003, the shop remained an unsteady operation.

The shift from Jawi exegesis to Arabic production in Cairo has fostered an increasing awareness of Indonesia as an Islamic entity in Arabic-speaking countries and intersects with a rise in articles and books about Southeast Asia.<sup>70</sup> What is important, though, is that among these are works by Indonesians. The publication of Arabic articles in the Indonesian academic periodicals *Studia Islamika* and *al-Jam`iah* (written primarily by students at the various IAINs) is also intended to play a role in explaining the Indonesian cultural approach to Islam to a wider Arabic-literate audience.<sup>71</sup>

It is clear from many of these works that Indonesians are intensely interested in their place in the wider Muslim world, both in time and space. To this end, the writings of the current rector of the IAIN of Jakarta, Azyumardi Azra, play a leading role; and it is no coincidence that the push to convert this institute into a university (since 2002 the Universitas Islam Negeri) was driven by a conscious desire to emulate and build links with al-Azhar.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, Indonesians are extremely interested in what is said about them abroad. In Cairo, I found that several of the students knew of Abaza's work or had even read it.<sup>73</sup> Some even suggested that it needed rewriting, but when asked what troubled them about it, they were not so clear. The problem, I believe, lies in her previous presentation of Indonesians as lost and helpless souls, the rather disordered nature of her account—a feature shared in a way by Snouck's own ramble through Mecca—and her lack of detailed attention to the written ideas of those students in languages other than Arabic. Furthermore, Abaza drew little distinction between internal Indonesian reasons underpinning their connection with Cairo, beyond the oft-repeated imperative of "travel in search of knowledge" (*rihla fi talab al-`ilm*), and, although she pointed out what students read and whom they met, there was an assumption (perhaps shared by Hasan Hanafi and `Ali Gum`a) that the ideas to which they were exposed were later copied or emulated uncritically.

To some extent this is true. In her book, Abaza noted a worrisome trend to read literature of an Islamist or conspiratorial tone.<sup>74</sup> Such literature ranges from the widespread works of the famous Muslim Brother Sayyid Qutb (executed by Nasser in 1966) to the conspiracy theories about a Judeo-Crusader plot to destroy the Muslim world. Of particular fame recently, there have been two books by the journalist Muhammad `Isa Dawud, who claims to have had communications with a Muslim Jinni who revealed to him the plots made by the Antichrist (Dajjal). Dawud claims that the Dajjal himself is currently in residence in the Bermuda triangle, from where he directs

<sup>70</sup> At present, I have collected several works in the area in the hope of examining them in greater detail later.

<sup>71</sup> Abaza also notes the publication of an all-Arabic journal called *al-Zahra: Majalah Studi Islam Berbahasa Arab*. See Abaza, "Indonesian Azharites," p. 148. At a more popular level, the Egyptian-born Professor Nabilah Lubis is the editor and driving force behind a glossy Arabic magazine on Indonesia, *Alu Indunisiya*, published in Jakarta for some three years by the "National Information Institute."

<sup>72</sup> See the comments of the minister of religion, Said Agil al-Munawwar, in relation to this desire in *Proses Perubahan IAIN Menjadi UIN*, ed. Kusmana and Yudhi Munadi (Jakarta: UIN Jakarta Press, 2002), pp. 89-91.

<sup>73</sup> Aunul Abied, personal communication, May 4, 2002; Cecep Taufikurohman, personal communication, May 18, 2002.

<sup>74</sup> Abaza, *Indonesian Students*, p. 131.

US policy.<sup>75</sup> According to Abied, who noted his own suspicious about him, Dawud has been invited to a public discussion held by the Gontor Alumni in Cairo. Popular translations and refutations of these works may be readily obtained in the street-stalls of Java.<sup>76</sup> But, they can also be found in the quality bookshops, like the (Christian-owned) Gramedia chain, in some cases sitting next to an eclectic assortment of manuals about black magic, mysticism, and a welter of translations of the works of Western writers like Massignon, Karen Armstrong, and Annemarie Schimmel.<sup>77</sup>

The multilayered fusion of such an Indonesian discourse is all too apparent in a recent book published by the Madurese students in Cairo, entitled *The Contextualization of Islam in Culture*.<sup>78</sup> This was the result of the summer session of talks mentioned on the website. Its footnotes, bibliographies, and arguments all show the influence of the ideas of writers from a wide variety of spectrums. Cited are Hasan Hanafi, Hamdi Zaquq, Yusuf Qardawi, Fazlur Rahman, Martin van Bruinessen, M. Dawam Raharjo, Din Syamsuddin, Abdurrahman Wahid, and Nurcholish Madjid. And, of course, these sit beside citations of the Qur'an or classics like the *Ihya' `ulum al-din* of al-Ghazali (d. 1111) or the *Minhaj al-`Abidin* of Imam Nawawi (1233-77). Furthermore, the key concerns of its young authors, who, at the time of publication, ranged in age from twenty to thirty, are equally diverse. There are chapters on "Islam and globalization," "Islam and the West" (in which Huntingdon and September 11 naturally figure), "Islam: the rational and spiritual faith," "Positing a new jurisprudence," "Towards the contextualization of Qur'anic exegesis" (in which `Abduh and Abu Zayd are constantly invoked), and, lastly, "Islam in the perspective of various figures" (that is, Morad Hoffman, Hasan Hanafi, Yusuf Qardawi, and Muhammad `Imara).

In one piece, Romli Syarqawi critiques the Islam-West divide and stereotyping of both Islam and the West, whether in notions of the "crusade" launched by George Bush or the "jihad" appropriated by Usama bin Ladin. He also writes against the stereotyping of the nations of the West as participants in a Zionist-Crusader conspiracy that purportedly seeks to bring down Islam, acting as a virus running wild through the Islamic "memory." However, a dozen pages later, Rahman Hadiyanto repeats a well-worn theme about the plot of the Orientalists to convert Muslims to Christianity and annex the lands of Islam. At the same time, he presents the past history of Islamic civilization in terms of religious tolerance at the `Abbasid, Andalusian, and Ottoman courts, as opposed to the long history of massacre and intolerance in the West. A third student, Ahmad Afandi Ahmad, employs Egyptian readings of American

<sup>75</sup> See Muhammad `Isa Dawud, *Hikmah sahabi ma`a al-jinni al-muslim mustafa kancur* (Cairo: Dar al-Bashir, n.d.) and *al-Khuyuth al-khafiyya bayna al-masikh al-dajjal wa asrar muthalatha barmuda wa al-atbaq al-ta'ira* (Cairo: Dar al-Bashir, c. 1995).

<sup>76</sup> When the Indonesian translation was released in 1996, it attracted criticism from several quarters, including from the Salafist writers affiliated with the Forum Komunikasi Ahlus Sunna Wal Jamaah. See, for example, the review of Suyuthi Abdullah, "Dajjal dari Segitiga Bermuda: Ilmiah Yang Tidak Ilmiah," *Salafy* 24 (AH 1418/1998 CE): 58-60. When I asked one bookseller at Solo station in March 2003 about sales of these books, she reported that they were becoming popular again with the (then impending) attack on Iraq.

<sup>77</sup> Gramedia, Pondok Indah Mall, February 18, 2003.

<sup>78</sup> Mas Guntur Romli and Shofia Tidjani, eds., *Kontekstualisasi Islam dalam Peradaban*, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Bindhara Press, 2002).

anthropology, Sufism, and even the work of the Muhammadiyah leader, Amin Abdullah, to argue for a Sufi-based social morality.<sup>79</sup>

As indicated above, some student articles are worryingly simplistic, while others are refreshingly diverse and critical; but all see Islam's role on the world stage interpreted through a *pesantren* experience. As one student wrote in the prologue: "The *pesantren* is our identity, a part of our lives, and our future."<sup>80</sup> And, as can be seen from the first chapter title of *Kontekstualisasi Islam*, globalization is certainly a pervasive feature of modern discourse. Yet, the articles show that, as a concept, it is not simply understood as a gloss for the much-loathed process of "Americanization." If anything, globalization is conceived by these young writers as ushering in an even more confusing range of possibilities.

Moreover, these advocates of contextualists like Hanafi and Nurcholish Madjid are eager to show how an eternal message can adapt to contemporary times and go beyond the simple proscriptions of Wahhabi-style scripturalists they face at home and abroad. As Anis Masduki writes in the student paper, *Tanwîrul Afkâr* (Illumination of Thoughts), there is an ongoing need to "bring Islam down to the level of the community" (*membumikan Islam dalam masyarakat*):

To this end we need to draw upon the postulates of religion that are relevant and form the needs of the community. This is not the time for the Islamic community [*ummat Islam*] to campaign from reactionary positions advocating the *sunna* [attested practice of the Prophet] of the beard, the illicit nature of music, and the *sunna* of polygamy. Rather, what the Islamic community must do is campaign, for example, for the necessity of tolerance and dialogue, and the illicitness of colonialism, war and the like. Let it not be that the energy of the Islamic community is exhausted in resolving unimportant matters and absolute minutia. Instead, let there be a generation of *'ulama'* [concerned] with the major contemporary issues by prioritizing the essence [of religion] and values, not just *'ulama'* preoccupied with beards, polygamy, menstruation, and parturition.<sup>81</sup>

While Islam is to be "brought down" to the people, the esoteric aspects of mysticism are also to be infused into the mix. I have already suggested that, as a part of the widening of the Cairene community to reflect their home world, the diversity of that world is manifested and remade abroad. And it seems, now, that more students are becoming affiliated with mystical orders in Cairo. One Indonesian, with an interest in such, is a graduate of the medical faculty of Cairo University and a teacher at the Indonesian school in Cairo. Another Madurese, Dr. Mustafid, is from a Shattari family, and, after reading privately about a number of orders, he has since joined the Shadhiliyya, for which he seems to serve as a recruiter. According to Dr. Mustafid, the

<sup>79</sup> Compare the articles of these authors. Romli Syarqawi, "Merentang-kembali Dialog: Agenda Baru 'Islam-Barat' Pasca Teror," in Romli et al., *Kontekstualisasi Islam*, pp. 51-60; Rahman Hadiyanto, "Islam dan Tantangan Dunia Baru," in Romli et al., *Kontekstualisasi Islam*, pp. 69-75; and Ahmad Afandi Ahmad, "Agama: Dari Spiritualitas Individu Menuju Moralitas Sosial," in Romli et al., *Kontekstualisasi Islam*, pp. 85-90.

<sup>80</sup> Musthafa Abd. Rahman, "Prolog: Isu Kontekstualitas Peradaban Islam," in Romli et al., *Kontekstualisasi Islam*, p. xiv.

<sup>81</sup> Anis Masduki, "Mengapa Harus Simbol?," *Tanwîrul Afkâr*, 10-25 July 2003, p. 3.

orders had once been far too elitist in Indonesia, inducting only members of the aristocracy and engaging in pointless rivalries. Now they seek a different *educated* elite and harmonious coexistence and realize that they have an important role to play in Indonesia's development. And, like Abied, Dr. Mustafid also criticized the Indonesian obsession with gaining *ijazas*.<sup>82</sup>

Still, as far as Cairo goes, the pull of mystical orders is far weaker than in Indonesia itself, or even in Mecca, where the authorities turn a blind eye to the discreet behavior of a foreign people. During her first period of fieldwork, Abaza claimed to have met only two Indonesian members of the Naqshbandiyya. At one level, one might still maintain that the overall discourse encountered by Indonesians in Cairo does not look kindly on the mystical *shaykhs*. Then again, one might wonder what the long-term impact will be of the rise of a noted admirer of `Abduh and Shadhili Sufi to the post of Mufti of the Republic, attracting the attention of a prominent section of the Indonesian student body.

By the same token, though, at the canteen of the Wisma Nusantara, I met with two students who were very frank about the need for their countrymen to dispense with a great number of what they felt to be dubious practices in order to advance properly and reform.<sup>83</sup> One of these students, Saiful Bahri, was also quite open about the difference between Egypt and Indonesia, though not in the way one might expect. For him, it was the relative clarity of people's positions that he admired. Quite unlike Indonesia, which to his mind had far too many complicated factions and parties, in Egypt people said exactly what they meant, whether on the bus or in a book. Egypt may be a land of contradiction, but you can choose or reject an option and stick with your choice.

## Conclusion

More recent discussions with students at a *pesantren* near Yogyakarta indicated to me that the general discourse had shifted away from fears of national disintegration to the need to tackle radicalism and corruption. To that end, they felt that their particular brand of almost nationalist traditionalism—that of NU—offered the best hope for the future. Of course, this view will be contested by people from organizations like Muhammadiyah, which helped pave the way to Cairo from beyond Java's *pesantrens* and Mecca's sacred precinct, or more recently, the Tarbiyah movement, which has

<sup>82</sup> Dr. Mustafid Dahlan, interview, May 10, 2002, Doqqi. As of late 2003, Dr. Mustafid and his family had returned to Indonesia. Incidentally, the reference to a new intellectual elite reminds one of the arguments put forward in *Bintang Hindia* in the early years of the twentieth century, when Abdul Rivai called for the creation of the new *bangsawan pikiran*. See Ahmat Adam, *The Vernacular Press and the Emergence of Modern Indonesian Consciousness (1855-1913)* (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 1995), pp. 101-6.

<sup>83</sup> These were two postgraduate students, M. Khalid Muslih and Saiful Bahri. In 2002, Muslih had, like Abied, been in Cairo for seven years. He is also a graduate of Gontor and hopes to return there as a teacher at the completion of his studies. Meanwhile, the softly spoken Saiful is from Solo. Originally, he had hoped to study medicine, but found that his schooling—public by day, Qur'anic by night—had shown him his true abilities. At the time of our first meeting, he had graduated from al-Azhar with honors. He is currently writing a doctoral thesis on the history of modern exegetes, although this project was somewhat hindered by his duties as elected leader of the Indonesian students in Cairo until August 2003.

played a crucial role in the globalization of a certain kind of Indonesian Islamic discourse.

Still, Mecca remains central to the Traditionalist imagination, and we should not stray too far from the simple appeal of the deeply personal methodology of the *halqa* or overstate the influence of the new generation of contextualists. For many Indonesians, Cairo remains an alternative center that is a well of new and sometimes contentious trends. As Abied wrote to me in an e-mail calling for further nuance in this paper:

The “traditionality” of people with an NU *pesantren* background entails that they prefer to send their children to the traditional *halqas* of Mecca’s Holy Mosque and environs, and to the region of the traditionalist Hadramis in Yemen. In terms of the method of instruction they still use the *sorongang* system [a private lesson where a *santri* studies with a Shaykh or Kyai], or that of the *halqa*, not the classical system which is relatively modern, as at al-Azhar. In terms of the dictation of the lesson, the classical books written by past *‘ulama’* are used, unlike al-Azhar which has changed to use the books of contemporary *‘ulama’*, who nonetheless make reference to the classical texts.... In terms of religiosity, al-Azhar, with its Egyptian life, has been brushed by the trend of modernization. It is unlike the tradition that persists in Yemen and—more or less—in Syria. There the people still carry out the practice of pilgrimage to the tombs of holy people, the *tahlil* [coming together to recite Qur’anic verses] and other traditional religious rites. Recently, minor voices have been raised against the NU *santris* [students] studying at al-Azhar because they are regarded as having metamorphosed into secularists, “leftists,” and “liberals,” who no longer visit graves to obtain divine blessings, and are unable to perform *tahlil* etc. This is making the traditionalist *kyais* [religious teachers] of NU ever more resistant, and causing them to object to sending their students to Cairo. [The question of] the Shafi’i *madhhab* [juridical school] is pertinent here. This is because al-Azhar employs the comparative study of juridical schools, not just one, while still defending the existence of all [four]. Meanwhile the traditionalist *‘ulama’* of NU still consider it necessary to be committed to only one. And for the bulk of those Muslims who are still *fiqh* oriented, like the traditionalist *‘ulama’* of NU, such a reality is an important factor for consideration. It has not yet been looked into whether, as you indicated, there is a feeling of contentment that comes from being in proximity to the Sacred Mosque [in Mecca] or the Prophet’s Mosque [in Medina]. [Still, the *fiqh* approach] ensures that Mecca remains the primary destination for the *‘ulama’*, despite being occupied by the Wahhabi fundamentalists.<sup>84</sup>

Regardless of the form of religiosity patronized by the Wahhabiyya in Mecca, or al-Azhar, for that matter, the Cairene NU community will continue to expand, leading its members to become more internally diversified in the process as they seek the benefits and patronage of a variety of teachers, whether Nasserite contextualists or neo-Sufi jurists. Nevertheless, Indonesia’s distinct traditionalism will remain a powerful source of unity among them and will mark them off from some of their fellow expatriates on certain questions of religious practice. Furthermore, their parent movement in Java now seems ready to expand beyond Mecca yet again and to connect with other

<sup>84</sup> Aunul Abied, personal communication, September 26, 2003.

potentially compatible centers. One sure sign of this was the gathering, in August 2003, of the members of the national executive in a meeting with prominent local intellectuals and the representatives of NU communities in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the UK, and Sudan. I have described this meeting and its attendant events elsewhere,<sup>85</sup> although I did not mention then the particularly interesting connections being made with Sufi organizations in Khartoum. It seems, then, that one segment of the Indonesian community is preparing to branch out once more and in a place that they feel welcomes its traditionalist style of Islamic learning.

As is clear too, the Sufi-inspired Nahdlatul Ulama is by no means excluded from Cairo as an international capital of Islam. After all, the Sufis of Mecca have survived too and are a key part of the Indonesian community there. Such unity and diversity seems very apt for a nation with the undeniably Sanskritic motto of “many but one” (*Bhinneka tunggal ika*). Nevertheless, diversified unity has its discursive limits, and while some Acehnese in Cairo feel alienated from an Indonesian identity, feelings which must surely have intensified since the latest offensives of the TNI (Tentara Nasional Indonesia, Indonesian National Army), the Bali bombers have in their own way demonstrated the limits of a communal discourse framed in terms of a nation-state in which they have no faith.

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<sup>85</sup> See Michael Laffan, “When Kiais Came to Cairo,” *Archipel* 66 (2003): 5-12.