

# ASPECTS OF ISLAM IN POST-COLONIAL INDONESIA

FIVE ESSAYS

BY

C. A. O. VAN NIEUWENHUIJZE



W. VAN HOEVE LTD. - THE HAGUE AND BANDUNG

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## FOREWORD

**T**o write on Indonesia was, until World War II, the almost exclusive privilege of Dutch authors. Most of them did not think of writing in any language but their own. Since the political tide has turned and in turning has for several years brought Indonesia into the centre of international interest, Indonesian studies have been undertaken by scholars of many nations. A few extremely well equipped centres for research have been established in countries not traditionally interested in things Indonesian. The research carried out there seems to have a dominantly economic and political character. Many studies, however, not pursued in such centres, are reported to be handicapped by a shortage of accessible material.

In the Netherlands one can from time to time hear how somebody complains of what are to his mind shortcomings in research done elsewhere, and under such conditions a common complaint is that no use has been made of the results of pre-war research. One could certainly wish that this complaint were heard, and heeded, by many who seem by now to be unaware of it. For one thing, they might in quite a few cases find that considerably more material is available than they had expected at first. Yet the existence of pre-war research reports should not lead to too great an optimism. In fact the results of pre-war research, carried out in practically all cases by Dutch scholars or under Dutch supervision, seem to offer at least two kinds of difficulties to

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modern international research. Firstly the language. Besides Dutchmen and Indonesians, only a few of the scholars interested in Indonesia are able to read Dutch. Now this is a difficulty that can be overcome, and the cost of doing so, either in energy or in money, is known. The second difficulty is more grave in character. The topics, aims and methods of pre-war research are different from the topics, aims and methods of present-day research. Nowadays, general interest is focussed upon the over-all conditions of Indonesia – the economic, sociological, political etc. – together with their backgrounds and probable developments. Literary, philological, historical and similar approaches tend to be kept a bit in the background, and may even be made subordinate to the dominant approaches. Under pre-war conditions the order of importance, from the scholarly point of view at least, was rather the reverse.

Under the colonial system, research in matters economic, political and such like was automatically relegated to official circles. The results could at that time be found in official reports, several of which might be classified confidential or even secret, the category top-secret being an invention of later date. It was often the academically trained civil servant rather than the university staff member, who carried out research on matters that nowadays tend to keep scholars busy, in the United States as well as, probably, countries like Russia, China and Japan. It goes without saying that not all reports produced were faultless from an academic point of view. Moreover much of their contents has either ceased to be of interest or become outdated. Even so, from the enormous quantities of material produced, a wealth remains in which, implicitly or explicitly, much valuable information can be found. In addition, the quantity and quality of more scholarly treatises, by nature less liable to the effects of time, is considerable. For a proper use of all this material in modern international research, normally a double translation process will be required – into another language and into the modes of approach applied by modern research workers.

The requirements just mentioned hold good most of all for publications concerning Islam in Indonesia. It is generally known and gradually becoming more recognized that Islam is one of the main determinants of the Indonesian spiritual climate. It is also more and more recognized that this spiritual climate tends to exert a decisive influence on economic and political conditions and possibilities – an influence that would itself be a fit object for a thorough piece of research.

As the specialists in the field are well aware, there exists an impressive quantity of important publications, in Dutch, on Indonesian Islam. A name like Snouck Hurgronje is as famous now, internationally, as it was two or three decades ago. Notwithstanding this, there is an intermittent output of works, mainly or partly dealing with Islam in Indonesia, whose authors have apparently been unable to profit from material which would be easily accessible to the average interested Dutchman. This is an awkward situation calling for improvement. Ways and means are being discussed in several places, including the Netherlands.

The author of the essays that are to follow here has tried to make a modest contribution to this attempt at international co-operation, partly by re-writing things already published in his own mother tongue, partly by including some papers not published before. The idea has been to concentrate on Islam under modern Indonesian conditions, particularly from the point of view of what one might call, for practical purposes, the spiritual sub-structure. Wherever feasible, reference has been made to older publications, in an attempt to indicate some paths leading through the labyrinth of Dutch publications on the subject, without, however, pretending to give references that might in any way be called complete. The idea was that this may help to demonstrate the usefulness and the scope of the material available, even if its purposes were different from ours.

A special acknowledgement is due to the editors of *Pacific Affairs* for their kind permission to reprint the paper, originally published by them, on the Dār ul-Islām movement in Western Java. The author would have preferred to redraft this paper

completely, and to bring it up to date. There is no doubt, as far as the general characteristics are concerned, that one could even to-day describe the Javanese Dār ul-Islām movement in much the same terms as are used by Gardet in his brief sketch of the Egyptian Ikhwān al-Muslimīn: "De fait, les Frères Musulmans ne sont pas des doctrinaires. Leur doctrine est un Islām dépouillé, qui entend revenir aux sources coraniques selon la tradition la plus pure des 'anciens' (*salaf*), et en sachant intégrer tout le procès technique de l'âge moderne. (...) Le shaykh Bannā' (...) avait maintes fois exposé son programme, mais programme d'action beaucoup plus qu'oeuvre de philosophe."<sup>1</sup> These characteristics differ hardly, if at all, from what was written in 1950. Yet there might be reasons, of a preponderantly historiographical character, for a recast of the paper. There has been a period, in the recent past, during which the newspapers printed items on so-called Dār ul-Islām activities almost daily. Apart from a considerable geographical spread of the movement along the mountainous chain surrounding the so-called principalities of Central Java, new centres seemed to have been formed. Aceh, the northernmost part of Sumatra, a traditional centre of militant orthodox Islam, was mentioned in this connection, as well as southern Celebes, an area known for its religious fervour, though of a slightly mystical, somewhat sectarian type. The question arises here how far the new centres were founded on the initiative of the West Java headquarters. Theoretically, there are several possibilities. What seem new centres of the same movement may be local movements having adopted the same widely cherished name as the West Java movement. After having started in this way, they may have become affiliated or associated in numerous possible ways, to the West Java headquarters. They may, as suggested, have been launched by the West Java headquarters with the aid of local people.

<sup>1</sup> L. Gardet, *La cité musulmane, Vie sociale et politique*, Paris, 1954, p. 265. For 'dépouillé' the present writer would rather substitute another term, more Islamo-centric in approach, such as 'concentré'.

In a similar way one might ask how far other areas have been affected, overtly or secretly, by the same tendencies, though not to such a dramatically high degree. A further question might deal with the relations between this Indonesian movement and similar or parallel movements in other Muslim countries. In a meeting, as early as 1950, with the central committee of the then forbidden Muslim Brethren movement in Egypt, the author was struck by a vivid interest in the West Java Dār ul-Islām movement – interest supported by a good deal of rather detailed information, it seemed. In fact, would it not be surprising if no relations existed between movements, each so well settled – even though not legally – in its own society?

Another question, often asked and never answered, deals with the relations between the Indonesian government and the Dār ul-Islām movement in Indonesia. It goes without saying that there can be no parallelism between these relations and those between, say, the successive Egyptian governments and the Ikhwān al-Muslimīn. From time to time, leading Indonesian politicians have made no secret of it that the Dār ul-Islām problem is an embarrassing one. The reasons are obvious.

As stated in the paper as reprinted here, the concept of Dār ul-Islām meets with a positive response from the average Muslim, and its elaboration in any specific sort of movement will for this reason never meet with a blunt refusal on the part of public opinion. A government, whether from the point of view of democratic ideals or from that of its own stability, has to take this kind of thing into account before acting. Moreover, the Indonesian government in its initial period at Jogjakarta had no reason to be unfriendly with a movement that excelled in making itself a nuisance to the Dutch. The difficulties were bound to come later, when both claims clashed in an unequal competition to gain control over the country, in such a way that, for complicated reasons, neither of the parties interested could win the fight by knocking its opponent out.

It is exactly for these reasons, it seems, that data for further research are lacking. On the one hand there is no potential

source of data that is not biased and that for this reason would not, once it started supplying information, turn to propaganda. In addition, most of the real struggle goes on underground. People who are well-informed, therefore, are scarce, usually out of reach, and if one were to reach them, one would most probably find them far from talkative.

The author having had the opportunity of gaining access to good material for the period he was at that moment able to cover, and having tried to offer an interpretation of the movement that would be more lasting than a superficial day-to-day evaluation, feels that under the given conditions he should leave the original paper unaltered rather than attempt to bring it up to date on the basis of insufficient and unreliable data. That he has not decided to leave the paper out altogether should be interpreted as an indication of his evaluation of the spiritual importance and impact of the ideas for which this movement, in its specific and rather incidental manner, stands.

Something has been said above about language problems. An additional remark on the linguistic appearance of this book should be made here. Contrary to what at a first glance may seem to be the case, this book is not in English. It has been written in a *lingua franca* of the Western world of the middle of the 20th century, which by some is mistakenly called English, and which in fact owes a good deal to English, particularly as far as its vocabulary and syntax are concerned. For the rest, however, it betrays a considerable amount of influence of many different patterns of thought and patterns of expression. To British and American readers this may well imply a certain amount of frustration in reading this text. Realizing this, the present writer feels a certain embarrassment in submitting the results of his labour in the disguise of this peculiar vehicular language. His hesitation has only been overcome by his awareness that thus far this category of readers have been prepared, in cases comparable to this, to show the clemency that seems to be the corollary of their success in avoiding to learn foreign languages by spreading their own.

*The Hague, Fall 1957*



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## BACKGROUND TO ISLAM IN INDONESIA

### THE SELF-ENCLOSED TRADITIONALISM OF THE 'CLOSED' COMMUNITY

En général, aucune civilisation n'est détruite du dehors sans s'être tout d'abord ruinée elle-même, aucun empire n'est conquis de l'extérieur, qu'il ne se soit préalablement suicidé. Et une société, une civilisation ne se détruisent de leurs propres mains que quand elles ont cessé de comprendre leurs raisons d'être, quand l'idée dominante autour de laquelle elles s'étaient naguère organisées leur est redevenue comme étrangère.

RENÉ GROUSSET<sup>1</sup>

The usual name for the type of religious-cultural-social life which, in Indonesia as in other parts of the Muslim world, forms the substratum beneath Islam, is 'primitive community' <sup>2</sup>. Taken in the meaning strictly derived from its etymological value, this term is of no use for the present purpose. 'Primitive com-

<sup>1</sup> René Grousset, *Bilan de l'histoire*, Paris, 1946, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Of the many names used, *archaic* has recently been defended as a most useful word when applied to situations of acculturation processes whereby small communities are brought up to international standards of Western origin. For acculturation processes like the one produced by Islam in Indonesia (see end of this chapter) the word would seem to be less adequate. Comp. Prof. Dr. G. J. Held, "An archaic eastern society (New Guinea) in a modern eastern world", *Indonesië*, Vol. VII, No 6, The Hague, Oct. 1954.

munity' must be taken here as a type of social identity which, from the point of view of practical demonstration of theoretical concepts, comes nearest to 'closed community'. In this connection the theoretical concept 'closed community' should be taken as indicating a group of human beings existing as a self-integrated, isolated-and-independent, self-sufficient unit which is closed with regard to the rest of the human race, that is, in as far as its members can be aware of the existence of it.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe a number of selected characteristics of this sort of life. Thus in a way the theoretical concept just mentioned will be defined indirectly by summing up, in a descriptive manner, several of its characteristics. Naturally such characteristics, in their turn, are abstractions of phenomena found in different situations under many forms and disguises. They will be selected with a view to their usefulness in understanding Islam in Indonesia and the way they influenced, and were in turn influenced by, the bottom layer which they flooded when spreading into Indonesian daily practice. Incidental facts and developments cannot be considered here in detail if this chapter is not to become a handbook; they will appear here as examples or illustrations only.

At one point this procedure stands in need of being defended. It is to be admitted without reserve that what in common generalization is usually referred to as 'primitive' is, in fact, not one phenomenon but a multifarious host wherein dissimilarities are often more conspicuous than similarities. Striking differences exist between one 'primitive community' and another; on the other hand what may be brought under the denominator 'primitive' can be found all the world over, in any and every community and society. All this can be granted. The point here to be made is that neither differences nor variations, neither geographical distribution nor apparent omnipresence of certain phenomena are relevant to the present purpose. What matters are the basic similarities or parallelisms, as indications of one common type. To use a metaphor one might say that what is relevant here is not the melody of the music but the key in which it is

written, not the variations of melody but the potentialities of the key.

The closed community occupies a place in the universe in its own right. In a most natural and self-evident manner it is, from its own point of view, the centre of the universe. Now this is the only point of view that matters. It is unique. Human life in the full sense of the word is lived 'here'. (One is tempted to add, and 'here' only; this would, however, imply a distinction that does not make sense, as the given view would so have it that there is nothing equivalent or comparable outside from which to distinguish the closed community).

The life span of the closed community extends from primeval times to eternity. More adequately one should even omit the addition 'to eternity'. It exists in an eternal present, as the actualization of the myth which for this purpose is intentionally enlivened and experienced time and again. This present is the permanently variable replica of the 'original' archetype. The connecting link between daily practice and mythical archetype is the rite. In other words, the rite is the means to *make* the community what it *is*, a means therefore to ensure that for which the German language has the word *Heil*: security, wholesomeness, in the natural and in the supernatural sense.

One might distinguish this sort of temporal perspective, first of all, from the concept of the straight line that seems to be the most useful symbol for a (hardly temporal) finality as introduced by the religious philosophies springing from Christianity or, to a lesser extent, Islam. One should moreover be careful not to identify it completely with the particular shape into which it has evolved in some cases (an identification which at times has produced rather useless generalizations), namely with the cycle (of the type of harvest year and such-like). The least inadequate means of explaining it by comparison may be to compare it, in a seemingly commonplace manner, with Euclid's straight line, the ends of which are supposed to meet somewhere in the infinite. Using this comparison, one should add that the line itself is less important than the points that go into its composition.

The 'points' are the various *aporias*, critical stages man has to pass through during his earthly existence: points where the continuity and harmony of life cannot just be taken for granted. Western man, having lost the taste if not for their importance at least for their flavour, calls them milestones: birth, death, marriage, initiations at adolescence, and similar events which decisively influence personal and communal existence. Any time such a milestone has been reached the community, assuming its full importance as a complete and active unit, works (together) for common harmony and security. By the consummation of the myth, in the ritual becoming to the occasion, it ensures a safe passage through life in accordance with life's archetype. This archetype has 'universal' validity (from the point of view of the closed community): by practicing the rite in which it finds its expression the community realizes 'universal' harmony and security. In doing so it 'is' the universe and thus, in our very inadequate terminology, stands in direct relationship with the powers of the universe. This applies particularly to such powers as are normally beyond man's, so to speak mechanical, control or influence – the dead, ancestors, spirits, or whatever name they have. It is often and rightly said that on such occasions the community achieves that any distinctions or contrasts, which would be otherwise insuperable, are overcome.

This is the place to point to the form such contrasts and distinctions usually take, a form in which the potential linking-up of opposing entities is implied. Most common are contrasts in pairs of terms which serve, for all sorts of purposes, as symbolical and categorical distinctions (left–right, man–woman, North–South, life–death, etc); one pair may at times symbolically and actually replace the other. These distinctions are sometimes referred to as (cosmic or universal) dualism, a term to be handled with care in so far as the distinctions are not meant to indicate absolute and insuperable contrast or conflict. It is exactly on account of this latter characteristic that they are able to serve a most important aim, acting as the basis for often very complicated systems of classification. By means of such systems the

human mind, under conditions of closed community life, is able to turn the universe into some sort of proto-cosmos, even though not under human control to any appreciable extent.

These remarks already exceed the limits of a discussion on the temporal boundaries of the closed community. A few considerations must be added now as to what might be called its geographical or spatial limits. A closed community, as (its own) theory would have it, is surrounded by no man's land. If human beings were to exist outside the community's boundaries – which from its own point of view, again in accordance with theory, would be a nonsensical supposition – they could not lead a properly human life: they could not share in the benefits provided by 'the' community and by communal life – these being prerequisites for any life that comes up to the proper standards. Consequently such people, if they were found to exist nevertheless, would have to be accounted for in the classification system by placing them in a category in obvious antithesis vis-à-vis the community.

In short, geographical isolation is an intrinsic element of the closed community as theory depicts it. Its universal function and the position it holds, need this isolation as a prerequisite. The closed community needs the established fact – which is more than a fictitious axiom or a hypothesis – that as 'the' human community it stands alone in the universe. To be alone, then, is to be unique.

This explains why, in practice, territorial frontiers, serving as substitutes for absolute isolation even with nomadic tribesmen, are factors of paramount importance.

Now some remarks on the internal structure and its functioning are in place. In the closed community authority, fundamentally speaking, is a function of the position the community has in the universe<sup>1</sup>. It is naturally vested in the elders. In order to belong

<sup>1</sup> It is fashionable to speak of village democracy, and serious discussions are held on 'primitive forms of democracy'. It would seem that one of the initiators has been a Dutchman, Dr. B. J. Haga, who wrote on *Indonesische*

to the elders it is not enough to be one of the oldest. It takes a combination of age and of natural leadership, based on personal abilities and efficiency. The actual authority which is vested in a person is, first and foremost, borrowed or reflected. Basically it is the authority that appertains to the community's way of life, finding its root in the myth. In our terminology, it is an authority with transcendental origins and ties. Practically therefore, the legitimacy of authority as wielded by its actual bearers is founded upon the fact that it maintains tradition. The person in whom authority is vested is to maintain the principles and rules laid down by the founders or ancestors as the pattern of community life. He is to see to it that the community fulfills its universal function properly. To the members of the community he represents the right way. One could add speculatively that in view of the originating powers from which his own authority is reflected, he stands for the personification of the community as a whole. On the one hand this goes a long way to explain the informal elasticity that is characteristic of the closed community type of traditionalism and by means of which actual authority may adapt community life to the normal processes of change and development. On the other hand it demonstrates how authority, without being inherently linked up with the personality of its bearer as an individual, holds a most fundamental importance for the community, acting as little less than its natural centre of gravitation. It is a kind of super-personal authority that simultaneously supports the whole of community life and is supported by it.

*en Indische democratie*, 1924. See also *Civilisations*, Vol. IV, 1954, No 1. With all due respect, this is pouring old wine into new bottles, – to use the reverse of a biblical saying. There is in fact only one situation in which to affix the label 'democracy' to these age-old institutions makes sense, in a way. This is when some sort of revivalist movement of the type to be discussed in this chapter uses it in order to match two essentially different structures, in a vain attempt to prevent one from annihilating the other. To be sure, this is blatant propaganda, but it does open up new vistas for analysis and for future development. At any rate this use of the term does not fit scientific investigation.

These characteristics are clearer in practice in proportion as the community observed is smaller; family units living in small villages usually offer clear demonstrations. Larger formations often show the same elements, although sometimes the personality of the bearers of authority disappears more or less in councils where authority may, for instance, be voiced by a *primus inter pares*.

Deviations from this main line do occur, but one should not allow oneself to be led astray by what only seem to be deviations without actually having this function. Occasionally one meets the situation of one unit holding predominant leadership in the composite group to which it belongs for no better reason than what looks like mere political power in our sense. Further analysis in such cases usually results in the conclusion that the means by which such a unit placed itself into a position of prominence have not been politics only. Prominence is connected with authority in the sense just described; it has what we call magico-religious roots. Those units which in a composite social structure suffer a relative set-back by another component unit's coming into the foreground, have no remedy which will cure the inequality of status from which they suffer. Direct resistance in terms of mere political or technical power would be a most inadequate means of reaching their goal. As long as they have no proof of supernatural claims at least similar or equal to those of the unit in ascendancy, they cannot but remain contented with the liberties and sovereignty left to them within their own sphere. For the rest all they can do is wait and look for a chance to develop their own claims to superiority.

This resumé of closed community 'politics' can be most amply illustrated almost everywhere in Indonesian practice amongst primitive tribes, just as easily as in more 'advanced' areas, even in the sphere of Islam<sup>1</sup>. By way of illustration one may refer to the 'messiah' movements at Biak and other places in New Guinea. Numerous 'kings' appear on the scene, each of them able to exercise influence within his own group and to spread

<sup>1</sup> A distant echo in Muslim surroundings (of a Javanistic type) is described in the thesis of G.W.J. Drewes, *Drie Javaansche Goeroe's*, Leiden, 1935.



this influence over other groups if and as long as the other groups concerned fail to produce a 'king' of their own with the same or similar claims. In the case of successful heroes holding a number of groups in their sway, they can consequently act most effectively as a sort of central authority commanding a relatively large force. The striking power of such an organization was experienced, for instance, by the Sawaians, people originating from Halmaheira, who were expelled from the Papuan islands. The Tidorese, in their turn, had the reverse experience. There was, when they penetrated, no hero able to command a united force, and all they met was scattered resistance of powerless small family units.

Similar events happened to the Toraja tribes when they were called upon to oppose encroachment on the part of Muslim realms from Southern Celebes.

In a closed community the individual person is, first and foremost, a member of the community. By being a community member, following in the footprints of one's forebears, one shares in the universal well-being achieved by the community as a whole – there is no other way. The consequences for non-community members are evident – no life in the proper way, no security in any sense. These consequences may be academic in as far as one cannot, from the closed community point of view, imagine independent yet complete human life beyond the community's borders. They are most real however for community members who for some reason may refuse or fail to do what is expected of them. To act in such a manner would imply voluntary withdrawal from communal life, that is to give up human existence; on top of this it would have repercussions on the community as a whole: it disturbs the universal harmony achieved by the community. A distant echo of the dramatic character of such a situation can be perceived in Greek tragedy.

For those concerned, membership is something absolutely natural: one is born into the community. Just as natural and obvious is the system whereby, step by step, the younger gener-