Modernist Islam in Southeast Asia: A New Examination

Howard M. Federspiel
Ohio State University
Columbus, Ohio

Scholarly activity is in constant flux and this is the case in Islamic Studies, where one of the important contemporary trends centers on research that transcends national boundaries for regional and universalist views of Islam and Muslims. In part, this trend reflects tendencies within Islam itself, where fundamentalism and globalization have broadened conceptions of what the universal Muslim community should be and where Islamic activity might profitably be undertaken. In part, the trend reflects scholars’ own interests where enough studies of single countries or ethno-geographic regions (such as the Arab world) exist to encourage attempts at integration of major trends crossing political and social boundaries. Islamic modernism in Southeast Asia offers a case study of such development. Starting as an important movement in the Ottoman Empire in the latter part of the nineteenth century, Islamic modernism had a wide impact on Islamic societies throughout the world by the 1940s, when its message was superseded or integrated into the philosophies and ideologies of the day. An important arena for modernist activity was Southeast Asia, where the movement had a significant impact on Muslims in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and southern Thailand. The movement in Southeast Asia left a considerable record of its activity and was subsequently covered academically by a fair number of scholarly studies on the individual personalities and associations important in the movement, although none were addressed specifically to an assessment of the overall modernist Muslim movement in the region. This article was written as an attempt to begin such an assessment.

The Scholarly Literature

Islamic modernism has been an important religious movement in Southeast Asia from the beginning of the twentieth century until the present time.
Scholarly coverage of the movement in Southeast Asia began in the late 1920s and was an accepted part of the general description of the region in the 1950s, although the modernist trend was not always made distinct from the general picture of Islam that was being described. One study of Indonesian nationalism during this period by the Armenian-Dutch scholar J. Petrus Blumberger had an analytical description of the modernist movement in Indonesia, which remains important in light of later scholarship. Following Blumberger’s lead, five major studies by H. Benda, G. Kahin, C. Geertz, M. Yunus, and Hamka appeared in the 1950s, placing the modernists in Indonesia in perspective vis-à-vis national development in that country; Yunus and Hamka were actual participants in that history. Geertz’s famous study of cultural contrasts on Java placed modernism accurately within the cultural context and countervailing movements of the time. In the 1960s, five major studies by G. Pijper, Alfarhan, T. Abdullah, D. Noer, and H. Federspiel provided detailed information about the beliefs, political stands and activities of modernist associations themselves as they existed in the first half of the century. Along with later studies by M. Nakamura and J. Peacock, these studies constituted the key studies on the modernist effort in Indonesia for many years. Since that time, there have been numerous studies reexamining those early modernist movements in Indonesia by Indonesian writers, such as A. Jainuri, R. Saidi, A. Minhaji and D. Wildan.

In the other three countries of the Southeast Asian region affected by Islamic modernism, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand, studies are less prevalent, undoubtedly because Islamic modernism had less impact there. In this Malay zone, the study by W. Roff in the 1960s, A. and K. Hussain in the 1970s and by I. Abu Bakar in the 1990s are primary. Khoo Kay Kim, H. Mutalib and F. H. Abdullah draw heavily on Roff as they cast modernism within the context of Malaysian history and national awareness. Scholarship about modernism in Thailand has not been as well covered and there is only the study by R. Scupin, while other studies pass over that phase of history for general descriptions of the Muslim situation in a Buddhist state. With the exception of F. von der Mehden, overarching studies of Islam in Southeast Asia or the general Islamic world have not summarized or defined the nature of Islamic modernism in Southeast Asia with much thoroughness, although J. Voll and The Cambridge History of Islam have some coverage. At the same time, some authors of Southeast Asian history and national development over the past fifty years have included discussion concerning the impact of Islamic modernism on the societies and states of the region, especially Indonesia and Malaysia. Sadly, as stated earlier, we have yet to see a definitive and comprehensive study of Islamic modernism in Southeast Asia.
General Considerations

The twentieth century has been a century of gigantic change for the political, economic and social structures of Southeast Asian societies as they moved from colonized, fragmented and culturally diverse entities in the early part of the century to standard nation-states. Islamic modernism has constituted an agent in that restructuring, but its influence has varied markedly in specific areas within the region itself. Standing alongside the powerful drives for national political independence, the economic development, and creation of ‘modern’ societies, Islamic modernism cannot be regarded as a dominant influence. At best, it has been a secondary, sometimes tangential, and often a competitive agent in relationship to the economic and political mainstream. It made an impact, but only within a context, as we shall see below.

On the other hand, within the narrower confines of the Islamic community in Southeast Asia, modernism has been a major actor for nearly a century in Indonesia and an important actor in the Malay Zone for the first half of the century. It has had to compete with other tendencies, notably a formidable traditionalist identification and an important secularized grouping throughout the region, and a sizeable nominal Islamic following within Indonesia. Still, if it has not shaped the entire Islamic community into its own image or determined its direction, Islamic modernism has nonetheless exerted considerable influence within that community and can claim credit for acting as a catalyst in the development of communal advancement in the last century. In particular, the enormous gains made in making Southeast Asian Muslims aware of their Islamic obligations, the performance in making Islamic lessons part of normal schooling, and the intellectual efforts in making modernization compatible with standard Islamic teachings, belong in considerable part to the awareness of those factors on the part of the modernist movement.

At this point, it may be helpful to lay out the major features of Islamic modernism at its appearance in the latter part of the nineteenth century and somewhat later in the more specific context of Southeast Asia. Briefly put, Islamic modernism rests on the articulated ideas of two key thinkers, Persian political activist Muhammad Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī,35 (d. 1897) and the Egyptian jurist Muḥammad ʿAbduh36 (d. 1905). Al-Afghānī contributed the idea that technological modernization arising in the West belonged to humankind in general and was not simply a manifestation of Western civilization; hence the principles of that modernization could be adapted to Islamic social, economic and political practice without damage to past religious belief or behavior. Muḥammad ʿAbduh held that revitalization necessary for Islam to assume the degree of recognized “greatness” that it had enjoyed at times in its
history depended on the proper application of principles contained in the Qur’ān and the Way of the Prophet. Those sources should be interpreted directly, rather than through scholars of the early and middle periods of Islamic history, so that Muslim thinkers and actors would be unhampered by past interpretations and could apply those principles to the contemporary world. An important explanation by the Syrian Arab Emīr Shakīb Arslān (d. 1946) underscores these two writers, for he articulated the notion that Islam had undergone a long period of stagnancy because of a turn inward, as emphasized by the high concern among believers for mystical practice, rote memorization in learning, and customary viewpoints in religious thinking, thereby avoiding the challenges of the contemporary world; redirection of effort and activism was demanded to overcome that lethargy. In the central Islamic world, the Manār School took these major themes and gave them considerable expression throughout the period to 1950 and, in other regions of the Islamic world, the principles received substantial development through the work of many activists.

In Southeast Asia, the three major themes were preserved and even developed, but underwent considerable adaptation to specific religious and social conditions existing in the region in the first half of the twentieth century. In particular, modernist Muslims in Southeast Asia called for a further Islamization of the region with emphasis on overcoming the compromises that Islam had supposedly made with religious beliefs and practices that preceded Islam. In this sense, it was an intensification movement designed to complete a process of conversion that had been in the works for hundreds of years, but had been forestalled because of European colonialism and loss of Muslim dedication. The anti-colonialist tenet was of considerable importance, since British and Dutch domination had deliberately isolated or otherwise made ineffective the elements in societies in Southeast Asia that would have emphasized Islam and its role in operating the societies and states in the region. Islamic modernists, like many other factions of Muslims and non-Muslims, were hostile towards the continuation of colonialism and worked for its removal in Southeast Asia, sometimes openly and always clandestinely. In this effort, they played a role subsidiary to other nationalist forces which dominated politics in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. Finally, modernists in Southeast Asia held that new Islamic institutions suitable to the times had to be constructed that would allow standard Islamic teachings to be stressed and, subsequently, these appeared in the educational, political and social welfare fields, but in different form and shape in different parts of the region.

Islamic modernism was important in the Western part of Southeast Asia and, consequently, affected the Indonesian archipelago with its major impact.
on Sumatra and Java, while the Eastern islands were less strongly affected. Throughout the Indonesian area, modernism retained its identity and vigor throughout the century. On the Malay Peninsula, it had strength on the island of Singapore, both the east and west coasts of present day Malaysia, and into the Malay provinces of southern Thailand, but by 1940 had lost its independent vigor and had mostly faded into the general Islamic community in those three areas. Modernism had a limited impact on the northern Borneo territories, including Brunei, and almost no impact on the southern territories of the Philippines until the 1950s. The ease of communication with the outside world and the subsequent worldviews of the elite in various areas of Southeast Asia seem to have been the determining factors. Singapore, Jakarta and Padang were open to the outside world and had elite favorable to outside influences, including Islamic modernism, while Brunei, Sulu and Makassar were off the main communication systems and had elite that preserved more traditional outlooks and values.

The Entry and Development of Islamic Modernism in Southeast Asia

Islam initially arrived in Southeast Asia sometime between the seventh and tenth Christian centuries, via the trade routes. Afterwards, a long-term relationship was established between Southeast Asia and the central Islamic world through trade, the migration of Southern Arabian peoples, the pilgrimage, and student activity. It was through these relationships that Islamic modernism also found its way to Southeast Asia from the Middle East, with the education of students from Southeast Asia in the Middle East having perhaps the most influential effect by the end of the nineteenth century. That is, many of the leading figures of the early modernist movement in the region were students in Arabia, so we understand how important that particular vehicle was. On the other hand, we know equally well that modernism also passed via the pilgrimage and with immigrants coming to Southeast Asia from the central Islamic lands, especially from Southern Arabia. But we must understand that modernism was not the only influence coming via that “connector,” but was only one of many influences passing along it. Islamic modernism’s doctrinal opponents, Shafi’i traditionalism and mysticism, for example, used the same vehicles (pilgrimage, immigrants and students) during the same period of time to defend and strengthen their own institutions and proponents. This cultural transfer must be seen in perspective.

The initial wave of modernist influence occurred at the very end of the nineteenth century when a group of young scholars who had studied the Islamic sciences at Mecca under the Mirangkabau shaykh Ahmad Khāṭīb
(d. 1916) returned to Singapore and Sumatra and began to teach the new doctrine. They concentrated on the publication of periodicals to disseminate their ideas and on the establishment of new schools as a means of propagating the new approach to Islam. They regarded the purification of Islam as important and spent much time on making belief and practice of religion reflect the standards they constructed as suitable. Mohammad Tahir b. Jalaluddin Al-Azhari (d. 1957) in Singapore and Haji Rasul (d. 1945) in Sumatra were major figures in this first wave.

Although operating somewhat separately, because Singapore was in the British zone and Sumatra was in the Dutch, the two groups of converts emphasized similar themes and activities and maintained contact with one another. West Sumatra, known as Minangkabau, was a major center of activity. There, young scholars returned from Mecca to take up work in existing religious schools where they themselves had studied and in new schools which they founded. In traditional fashion, they worked at their own separate institutions and had a communications system that allowed them to exchange good students and to pass information and ideas among themselves. The journal \textit{al-Munir}, published at Padang (1911–1915), was an important means of passing information, including jurisprudential issuances (\textit{fatwas}) that spoke specifically to matters of Islamic reform in local society. The major work of this group of scholars, however, was in the educational field, where a modified school curriculum for a new type of school known as the Madrasah Thawalib existed, which combined general education and Islamic sciences. T. Abdullah asserts that this school system arose because of the inability of the Dutch to establish enough schools of their own design in the Sumatran region where there was a large demand, so Muslim modernists felt forced to enter the educational field and fill the void.

A similar trend took place in Singapore and on the Western coast of Malaya. The magazine established there in 1906 was named \textit{Al-Imām} and had a wide impact on Muslim society of the region; it enjoyed a readership in Indonesia, as well. The schools that were founded were modeled on the Egyptian \textit{madrasah} and, in fact, many used Egyptian teachers initially, although as the schools themselves produced graduates, new \textit{madrasah} were founded using local talent. The modernist effort in this Malay area took a strong stance against the ingrained customs of the region, which regulated traditional Islamic practice in ways found unacceptable by modernists. They also challenged the authority of traditional Muslim leaders, which naturally produced conflict with the Malay ruling elite and with British authority. But here, unlike on Sumatra, leadership of the modernist faction was largely among Arabs and Sumatran immigrants and the new movement did not become important enough among the general Malay population to become a
determining force in religious matters or in the new Malay nationalism that was developing. Consequently, the two major figures from the movement that did make national contributions, Sayid Shaykh al-Hādī (b. 1862) and Za'ba, (d. 1970), worked in arts and letters rather than in politics or religious affairs. Significantly, the Malay competition with the immigrant Chinese, Arab and Indian communities for political control became the dominant factor in Malay nationalism and swept all others aside, including religious agendas. Islamic identification became part of "Malayness," but the nature of that Islamic identification — whether modernist, traditionalist or mystic — was otherwise unimportant.

On Java, modernism arrived slightly later than on Sumatra or Malaya. There, it centered on Agus Salim (d. 1954), Ahmad Surkati (d. 1943) and Ahmad Dachlan (d. 1923) beginning in about 1910. The message of these modernists was applied in a somewhat broader manner than in the previous efforts in Southeast Asia, as they became involved with political action, social action, and education. The essence of this second stage of modernism was on building new Islamic institutions. As on Sumatra, two of these leaders made an impact on the major population groups of the region and also cemented their hold by becoming important in the political activism of the nationalist groups of the era; they helped define nationalist issues of the day.

The founding of the Muḥammadiyah organization was probably the most significant event in this wave of activity, both in attainment of membership, scope of activity, and longevity. Begun in 1912 by Ahmad Dachlan, the early movement concentrated on teaching Islamic fundamentals to Javanese children who attended Dutch-sponsored schools, with the blessing of Dutch authorities themselves. Over time, the movement built its own large school system, which afforded instruction in both general subject matter and standard Islamic teachings. That system ultimately expanded to encompass the entire spectrum of educational activity from kindergarten through post-secondary normal schools, and after the end of the era, went on to establish universities. The movement sponsored a printing press for the production and distribution of a vernacular Islamic literature aimed at the Javanese Muslim audience in both Javanese and in the newly emerging national language, Bahasa Indonesia. There were also scout movements, hospitals, clinics, orphanages, poor houses, and other social endeavors that engaged both male and female members of the organization. Ultimately, Muḥammadiyah leaders joined forces with Haji Rasūl on Sumatra and brought much of the Madrasah Thawalib system into the Muḥammadiyah organization as well, thereby giving cross-cultural strength and coherence to the modernist movement in the larger Indonesian area.
The organization, which numbered some 24,000 in 1930, later served as the backbone of one strand of Muslim political activity in the Republic of Indonesia after 1945.52

In the political realm, the most important work was done by Hadji Agus Salim, who was Dutch educated and had served a lengthy period of service as a member of the Dutch consulate in Jiddah. There, he assisted in Dutch regulation of the pilgrims from the Indonesian archipelago. Returning to the Indies, he took part in the development of the leading political movement of the day called the Sarekat Islam. He was instrumental in that movement in shaping the viewpoint of the modernist Muslim wing of the party that promoted the conception of Islam as a precursor to modern socialism and hence an answer to the Marxist position, which was trying to use the Sarekat Islam as a united front organization at the time. In this era between 1912 and 1941, Islamic modernism was intricately involved with the movement working for political independence and the construction of a national state, and Muslims were important members of that movement thereafter. Agus Salim was also the inspiration behind the effort to bring modernists and traditionalists together into a common front through a series of conferences between 1921 and 1926, which failed to bring integration or even unity between these two orthodox groups of believers, but did much for the two sides in identifying their respective positions. Perhaps most importantly, he sponsored an intellectual organization of Muslims attending Dutch high schools and through it trained a generation of Islamic leaders who manned many of the Islamic and Indonesian institutions in the first generation of independence after 1945.53

The final figure in the second wave was Ahmad Soorkati, a Sudanese Arab who worked in the schools of the Arab community, composed mostly of Hadramauti immigrants, which were the elite of the Muslim community in Indonesia, with religious schools more advanced than other Muslims in the region at the time. He retained a reputation for devotion to the principles of modernism and was close to Ahmad Dachlân in doctrinal outlook and regarding educational endeavor as the centerpiece of the modernist effort for the day.54 Because the Arab community was regarded as outside the nationalist framework, he did not have the opportunity, as did Dachlân and Salim, to shape events in the broader Indonesian society. Nonetheless, he had considerable reputation as a scholar.

Finally, the last major arrival of modernism occurred in the 1920s with the work of Ahmad Hassan (d. 1958), who concentrated on the ideological formulation of modernism and gave expression to the themes and arguments raised by the modernists over the previous 25 years. Significantly, this movement was not so much inspired from abroad as it was an intensification
of efforts started in the work of Dachlân and Salim. Using a printing press and
public debate as instruments, Hassan and his friends in an organization called
the Persatuan Islam (Islamic Union) challenged all those it found not in accord
with their view of what Islam demanded of humans. Accordingly, Christians,
the Ahmadiyah, traditionalist Muslims, secular nationalists and even some
modernist Muslims were charged with error and condemnation for their
positions and actions. Through this effort, Persatuan Islam gave full voice to
standard Muslim positions on many issues, but because its activists were
outspoken and unrelenting in their ideological attacks on others, they were
often branded as troublemakers. The explanations of standard Muslim Sunni
beliefs in the new Indonesian language, however, attracted much attention and
remained popular even until the present time.55

Throughout the discussion above concerning these several waves of
penetration into Southeast Asia, personalities have been identified as the
representatives of the modernist effort. In the Malay Zone, the personalities
were highly important and made contributions in their own right without
much identification with organizations. In the Indonesian area, religious
associations were used as the way to implement modernist proselytization, and
single individuals were mostly important as leading members. Hence, while
these personalities were important for their own contributions, they were also
the leaders and spokesmen of sizeable movements of people who were
converted to the modernist belief system. Consequently, many members
participated in the movements; parties, blocs and other organizations begun
by the individuals named here and became important as leaders or
representatives of the movement. Starting with only a few in number at the
beginning of the century, these organizations had tens of thousands of
members by the end of the 1940.56

The Challenge to Modernism in Southeast Asia

Modernism gained adherents fairly rapidly in Southeast Asia, but was also
severely challenged from several quarters, both within Islam and in the wider
Southeast Asian environment. Within Islam, it had to contend in sharp debate
with the entrenched religious elite that already existed, known as
“traditionalists.” This existing system had control of official positions
established by the native states in the form of “muftis,” “penghulus,” “imams”
and various other titles of respect and authority. The debate, however, took
place largely on doctrinal issues with the traditionalists charging modernists
with “fanaticism” and modernists charging traditionalists with “obstinacy” for
not putting aside their dedication to the scholars of the Shaf‘î law school for
new legal formulations based on the Qur’an and Way of the Prophet.
Traditionalists were also the purveyors of mysticism at times, so they felt under
pressure from the attacks of the modernists on that popular institution. This animosity was to last for a long period of time. In Singapore, Malaysia and southern Thailand, the rivalry abated with the Japanese occupation in the early 1940s, but in the Indonesian area, it lasted well into the 1980s, until the two sides finally came to a tacit understanding. At the beginning, polemic was often harsh, with proponents of the two sides calling those of the other side rude names and castigating them as being untrue to their religion. Burial in cemeteries was denied in some cases.57

The clash with dominant political powers was strong as well. Dutch, English and Thai administrators in their respective regions regarded all activist Muslims they did not directly control as a threat to their rule; modernists constituted a part of that challenge, but for varying periods of time, depending on the location. In Thailand, modernist identification was never regarded as separate from the general Malay-Muslim community’s response to the imposition of Thai national values on the population, starting in the early part of the twentieth century. In the British area of Singapore and Peninsular Malaya, modernists were seen as a threat when they first appeared, but less so as time passed, as some were co-opted into the established governmental system. Others used the press for expression of their viewpoints and found it expedient to keep rhetoric at a level acceptable to British censors. Eventually, the few modernist groups that survived were taken into the United Malay National Organization in the 1950s and became part of the nationalist effort without much differentiation from other member organizations.58 In Indonesia, modernists were identified with the drive for independence with stress on the capacity of Indonesians to rule themselves, which was the stance of most nationalistic groups at the time. Islamic modernists in Indonesia, and perhaps in Malaya as well, were often regarded as “anti-modern,” for they strongly objected to Western values of the time — secularism, women's emancipation, general social equality — that were at odds with established patterns of the region and with interpretation of the prevailing religious teachings at the time.59

Further, there were struggles with local cultures and pre-Islamic values that had established the customs and ways of life of the region, which local inhabitants were reluctant to jettison or change appreciably for greater identification with Islam. Here, a dilemma presented itself in which Islam and culture were both regarded as important and as being in union with one another. To emphasize one at the expense of the other was seen as upsetting a delicate social balance and inviting cultural disaster. Traditionalist Muslims had worked slowly and carefully at changing that balance in favor of Islam, but the modernists were committed to immediate change, with emphasis on the development of Islam even at the expense of local custom. Such open
advocacy produced considerable friction in society, in families and among individuals themselves. This was true in all areas of the region under discussion.60

Finally, there were also serious disputes with non-Muslims that called into question the overall tolerance of Islamic modernists regarding other peoples, although certainly the disputes were not one-sided. Christians were seen as wrong-headed for their view of Christ and castigated for their attacks on the “sexuality” of the Prophet Muhammad and on Islam as being out of step with modernity. The Ahmadiyah was charged with misinterpreting scripture regarding the nature of the Prophet ‘Isa and the finality of Muhammad’s message. The Chinese were branded as “heathen polytheists” who manipulated their predominant role in the economy as a tool of exploitation, and the Arabs were charged with racial insensitivity for their insistence on elite status within the Muslim community because of their association of the Prophet with their race. Secular nationalists, as well, who belonged mostly to nominal Muslims populations, were harshly and unrelentingly attacked for promoting the cause of Indonesian nationalism without an accompanying Islamic identity, claiming such an approach elevated nationalism to a level equal with God and hence was polytheism.61 Modernists alienated most other groups — and sometimes one another — and were not great proponents of unity, except on their own terms.

The Contributions of Islam to Southeast Asian Society

Modernists appeared at a particular time when Malay/Indonesian was being developed as a modern language and contributed substantially to it through the production of literature, both magazines and general studies of religion and its application to society. Certainly, Islamic literature existed earlier and, under normal conditions, a new Muslim literature in the vernacular probably would have arrived later in any case, but modernists undertook the task and enhanced earlier Muslim literature based largely on Arabic texts and translated Arabic materials. The earlier literature had been elitist because its reliance on strong Arabic language skills meant that only a limited number of people in the populace had access to it. The modernists went to the vernacular, to the simplified text, and to elementary lessons; it opened Islamic teachings to the wider Muslim population. In itself, this was a useful and valuable contribution.62

The modernists helped develop a school system that bridged the difference between general Western subjects and Islamic sciences. Colonial schools — and later their successor institutions in independent Malaysia and Indonesia — were too few and too narrow in their subject matter, while earlier
Muslim schools were too limited in their emphasis on Islamic subject matter. The blend came with the modernists, and they supplied it in the creation of madrasah that gave opportunity for education at a time when the demand exceeded the ability of authorities to offer such training universally throughout society. In truth, the traditionalists participated in this effort as well, but the initial effort seems to have been modernist in origin and their activity was always considerable.63

Modernists also promoted intellectual thinking in both Indonesian and Malaysian societies that dealt with public and societal issues in a broad sense. In particular, that intellectualism explored religious obligations for a society that was only beginning to understand its own adherence to the Islamic religion. In this respect, it acted as a counterweight to Western thinking, which had a tremendous impact at the time and, while it was hardly successful in turning back Westernization, it formulated objections and alternate courses of action which assured that such Westernization was not accepted without question, but underwent adaptation to make it compatible with existing values and cultures. Again, in fairness, it must be understood that there were many other voices in society with much the same view, so Muslim intellectualism was a part of a larger indigenous voice calling for care in such cultural borrowing. But the Muslim intellectual ability is certainly seen well in the important debate between Agus Salim and his colleagues with a socialist-communist movement early in the century that featured Islam as an alternate system, with its own “socialism” in a superior system of values. This early intellectualism in Indonesia is seen by many observers as a precursor to the much heralded Indonesian Muslim intellectual movement of the late twentieth century.64

Certainly, later intellectuals — Nurcholish Madjid (b. 1939), Dawan Rahardjo (b. 1942) and Amin Ra’is (b. 1944), et al. — drew on wider religious trends including “comparative religion” methodology from the West, but their initial impulse and undergirding Qur’anic reference point are Islamic modernist.

Finally, as alluded to above, Islamic modernists participated fully in the nationalist movements and proto-nationalist movements of the day in Indonesia, Malaya, Singapore, and southern Thailand, sometimes as distinct groupings, as in Indonesia, and sometimes as part of larger communities, as in the Malay Zone. Strikingly, Muslims usually took the “high ground,” emphasizing such values and populist concepts as elections and “democracy,” but they were often out of sync with contemporary realities of nationalism, power politics and political tradeoffs, which other factions used far more effectively. In the long run, modernists, like their traditionalist colleagues, were not highly successful in politics, but still contributed importantly in that realm as well.65
Endnotes


2. Haddad and Esposito.


22. Malay peoples with historical and contemporary communication are found across these three countries which they share with the Chinese in Singapore and Western Malaysia and with the Thai in southern Thailand.
30. Disinterest in the impact of modernism can be seen in a major anthology of articles on southern Thailand published by A. Forbes, which hardly mentions the subject in some 20 scholarly articles. The same is true of Pitsuwarn, the modern reference to Muslim events in that country. See Andrew D. W. Forbes (ed.), The Muslims of Thailand (Gaya: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, 1988), 2v., and; Surin Pitsuwarn, Islam and Malay Nationalism: A Case Study of the Malay Muslims of Southern Thailand (Bangkok: Thomsat University Press, 1985).
42. See, for example, H. Endang Saifuddin Anshari, Wawasan Islam: Pokok-Pokok Fikiran tentang Islam dan Ummatnya (Principles of Islamic Thought regarding Islam and its Community of Believers) (Jakarta: Rajawali, 1969), 241–249.
43. The northern Borneo territories consist of the contemporary Malaysian states Sarawak and Sabah and the independent nation of Brunei. In the early part of the century they existed as three separate entities, but related entities under British colonial administration.
49. Abu Bakar, *Islamic Modernism*.


