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**Ngruki Revisited: Modernity and
Its Discontents at the Pondok Pesantren
al-Mukmin of Ngruki, Surakarta**

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ABSTRACT

The Pondok Pesantren al-Mukmin of Desa Ngruki, Surakarta, has become one of the most well known and notorious Pesantrens (religious boarding schools) of Indonesia in recent years. Thanks in part to the continued presence of Ustaz Abu Bakar Ba'ashir, one of the founders of the Pesantren and the man said to be the leader of the underground Jama'ah Islamiyah movement blamed for the Bali bombings of 2002, the al-Mukmin Pesantren has been regarded by scholars and security analysts as a den of radical religious fundamentalism and militancy. This paper takes a second look at the Pesantren and identifies it as one of the many educational and non-educational outfits run by the al-Mukmin Foundation of Ngruki; examines its curriculum and teaching methods as well as its students profile, and attempts to locate the institution in the context of a post-Suharto Indonesia where religious politics and sectarian divisions are more than ever apparent. How does an institution like the al-Mukmin pesantren hope to survive against growing competition from Indonesia's more modern Islamic universities and colleges? And can the reform process within the pesantren be described in terms that are modern and secular? In the long run the success or failure of such institutions may serve as an indicator for the tone and tenor of political Islam in Indonesia, and the ASEAN region as a whole.

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He is the author of *Islam Embedded: The Historical Development of the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party PAS: 1951-2003*. (In two volumes), Malaysian Sociological Research Institute (MSRI), Kuala Lumpur, 2004. His other writings include: *From Majapahit to Putrajaya: Searching For Another Malaysia* (Silverfish Books, Kuala Lumpur, 2005), *Islam Progresif: Peluang, Tantangan dan Masa Depan di Asia Tenggara* (SAMHA, Jogjakarta, 2005), *Di San Zhi Yan Kan Ma Lai Xi Ya* (Sin Chew Jit Poh Press, Petaling Jaya, 2004), *The Other Malaysia: Writings on Malaysia's Subaltern History* (Silverfish Books, Kuala Lumpur, 2003); and *New Voices of Islam*, (International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World, Leiden, Netherlands, 2002). Apart from his academic writings he is also a columnist for several newspapers across Southeast Asia, South Asia, South Africa and Europe. His columns have appeared in *The New Straits Times*, *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, *Malaysiakini.com*, *The Star*, *The Pakistan Daily Times*, *The Financial Times*, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, *Jakarta Post*, *Bangkok Post*, *al-Qalam*, and others. He has also been a radio essayist for the BBC World Service and BBC Radio 4.

Ngruki Revisited: Modernity and Its Discontents at the Pondok Pesantren al-Mukmin of Ngruki, Surakarta

I. Ustaz Abu spooks the crowd, still: Framing the Pondok Pesantren al-Mukmin of Ngruki

“What am I? A monster?”

– Interview with Abu Bakar Baasyir¹, 22 May 2007

I begin with an anecdote that sums up some of the difficulties when writing and researching on the *pondok pesantrens* of Indonesia today, and the Pondok Pesantren al-Mukmin of Ngruki in particular. During the final stages of my fieldwork this year (May to June 2007), I found myself in one of the better photo-processing centres of Jogjakarta where I was based. While printing the photos that I had taken of the Pondok al-Mukmin, burning the images on CDs and having some of them enlarged for an exhibition I was planning to do later in the year, the photo-technician and I were using the Photoshop program to trim the photographs I had taken of Ustaz Abu Bakar Baasyir.

While Baasyir’s images were being cropped on the computer screen, the technician opined thus: “He looks like a very handsome man. Who is he?” I answered by telling him that he was looking at a photo of none other than Abu Bakar Baasyir himself, to which he recoiled in terror. “That is Abu Bakar Baasyir? You got that close to him?” In time, practically all the staff and customers of the shop were crowding around the PC monitor and looking intently at the unmoving image of Ustaz Abu. Expressions of horror, anxiety and confusion were prevalent. Ustaz Abu had spooked the crowd, and continues to do so, still.

Researching the Pondok Pesantren al-Mukmin of Ngruki, Surakarta, is a task rendered all the more complicated by the variable political and cultural factors that impinge on the researcher. For a start, the scholar is left with the unenviable task of having to sift through an enormous amount of material—much of it repetitive and uninformed—about the place and the personalities associated with it. Then there is the moral dilemma faced by the scholar who has to draw a defining line between the subject of his research and his own political beliefs, for fear of prejudicing the outcome of his research. Getting to the truth behind the Pondok Pesantren al-Mukmin requires not only patience and detailed fieldwork—much of it gained

¹ Farish A. Noor, interview with Ustaz Abu Bakar Baasyir, at Pondok Pesantren al-Mukmin, Ngruki, Surakarta, 20–22 May 2007 (see Appendix A).

through first-hand encounters and the experience of visiting and living there—but also having to constantly distinguish between the institution (or in this case, as we shall show below, institutions) and the personalities linked to it, who have been blown up to be larger than life.

Sweeping generalizations of Ngruki abound in the numerous reports that have been published on Ngruki and its alleged links—both real and imagined—with the shadowy Jama'ah Islamiyah underground militant movement. In the years following the attacks on New York in 2001 and the Bali bombings of 2002, much hysteria has been whipped up by the international media about alleged links between *pesantrens* and *madrassahs* to Islamist terrorist networks, and caricatures of religious schools as “dens of terror”, “jihad factories” and/or “militant centres” are everywhere. Labelled with names from “dens of ossified traditionalism” to “jihad factories”, religious seminaries of the Muslim world have become the bugbear of Westernized liberals, Eurocentric secularists and the hawks of Washington alike. Elisia Yeo of *Today*, for instance, referred to them as the “schools of terror” (*Today*, 19 December 2003).

In most of the reports published thus far, the impression given of the Pondok Pesantren al-Mukmin is that it is a singular institution based in the Desa Ngruki, Surakarta, and it is, at best, a typical traditional *pondok* with the most basic of services on offer. The International Crisis Group's (ICG) report entitled *Al-Qaeda in Southeast Asia: The Case of the Ngruki Network in Indonesia*,² claims that the Jama'ah Islamiyah “has as its hub a religious boarding school (*pesantren* or *pondok*) near Solo, Central Java, known as Pondok Ngruki. In another ICG report dated 11 December 2002, a similar claim is made about the Pondok Pesantren al-Mukmin, identifying “Ngruki” as a singular institution under the leadership of Abu Bakar Baasyir³ and Abdullah Sungkar⁴, who, as we will show, are merely two of the original eight founders of the Pondok al-Mukmin.⁵

² See: *The Al-Qaeda Network in Southeast Asia: The Case of the 'Ngruki Network' in Indonesia*, by the International Crisis Group (ICG), 8 August 2002, Brussels-Jakarta. www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?l=1&id=1765.

³ Abu Bakar Baasyir was born in Jombang, East Java, on 17 August 1938, and his family were originally of Arab (Yemeni, Hadramaut) origin. During his childhood, Baasyir received most of his basic religious education from his father and household, and was brought up according to the traditional conservative values of his Arab-Javanese parents. His father sent him to the Pesantren Gontor in Ponorogo, East Java. Upon his graduation from the *pesantren*, he proceeded to further his studies at the Al-Irsyad Islamic University in Surakarta. During his university years he took part in the activities of the Muslim students of Solo and joined the Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam (HMI, Union of Muslim Students) and was later elected as leader of the Al-Irsyad Student Organisation. In 1961 he was elected head of the *Gerakan Pemuda Islam Indonesia* (GPII, Indonesian Muslim Youth Movement) as well as the Lembaga Dawah Mahasiswa Indonesia (LDMI, Indonesian Students' Da'wah Organisation). He finally graduated from Al-Irsyad University in 1963, and began his career as an educationist. In the early 1970s Baasyir met with fellow Islamists like Abdullah Sungkar, Yoyo Roswadi and Abdullah Banjara. Together, they decided to set up their own religious seminary (*pesantren*), called Pesantren al-Mukmin in the urban settlement of Ngruki, in the heart of Surakarta. By then, Baasyir and his colleagues were already

shaped by the conservative values and neo-Salafi outlook that was popular among some of the followers of the HMI and GPII, which were also being propagated by the various Islamic agencies in Indonesia that were currently being supported and funded by Arab-Sunni states such as Saudi Arabia. Baasyir, Abdullah Sungkar and their friends were also influenced by the ideas of the Indonesian Islamist-nationalist intellectual Muhammad Natsir, who was then seen as the figurehead of the Masjumi movement as well as the Darul Islam movement. The latter had been engaged in a rebellion against the central government of Indonesia and was determined to set up an Islamic state in Indonesia (Negara Islam Indonesia, NII) by any means necessary. The banning of Masjumi in 1960 (by Sukarno), the persecution of Islamists like Muhammad Natsir and the virtual eradication of the Darul Islam movement forced many Islamists underground. This attracted more followers to their cause. Baasyir was by then an active supporter of the Darul Islam movement, as was Abdullah Sungkar. Thanks to their involvement and public support of the Darul Islam movement, Baasyir and Abdullah Sungkar were imprisoned in the late 1970s, for anti-state activities. It was in prison that Baasyir and Sungkar grew even more radical in their thinking and ambitions. They condemned and rejected the secular Pancasila ideology of the Indonesian state and rejected values and concepts such as universal suffrage, pluralism and democracy on the grounds that these were modern, Western secular concepts that were un-Islamic. In 1985 Baasyir fled into exile in Malaysia. Between 1985 to 1998 Baasyir was based in the southern state of Johor in Malaysia and he set up his own religious school there. While teaching at his religious school at Sungai Manggis in Johor, Baasyir attracted a number of Indonesian students and ex-Mujahideen (one of whom was Nujaman Riduan Isamuddin, a.k.a. Hambali), who joined him there. Baasyir taught his students that they should reject all forms of secularism, abide only Islamic (*sharia*) law and not the secular laws of the country, and prepare for a jihad for an Islamic state. Baasyir and Abdullah Sungkar were finally able to return to Indonesia following the downfall of President Suharto in 1998. Once in Indonesia, he returned to his *pesantren* in Ngruki, Solo, and resumed his teaching activities there. Analysts suggest that by then Baasyir was also the head of the shadowy Jamaah Islamiyah movement that he was accused of setting up during his exile in Malaysia. Notwithstanding such allegations of clandestine underground activities, Baasyir was prominently involved in the setting up of the Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI). At the founding congress of the MMI in Jogjakarta in August 2000, he was elected as its first *amir* (leader). It should be noted, however, that although Baasyir and some of his followers from the Pesantren al-Mukim joined and helped to develop the MMI, the latter was an entity entirely distinct and separate from the *pesantren* that Baasyir had also helped to form decades earlier.

⁴ Abdullah Sungkar was born in Surakarta, Solo, in 1937, the son of Ahmad ibn Ali Sungkar, a pious religious scholar of Arab (Hadrami) background. Sungkar's family traced their Hadrami origins back to Yemen and the early generation of Hadrami Muslim reformers of Islam in Indonesia. His early religious education was left to his father, who was also a religious teacher in Solo. Later he was sent to the Muhamadiyah Islamic University of Surakarta (UMS), where he graduated in 1957. Due to the poverty of his family, however, he was not able to continue his studies and was forced to begin his career as a religious teacher. During the 1950s and 1960s Abdullah Sungkar also began to involve himself in the Muslim politics of Java and took active membership in the reformist-conservative al-Irshad movement that was dominated by Hadrami Muslims. He also became an active member of the Masjumi party under the leadership of Muhammad Natsir, until it was banned by Sukarno in 1960. Later, in the 1970s, Sungkar's public reputation and visibility grew as a result of his involvement in missionary work. He became known as a hardline preacher of conservative Islam, and toured many parts of Indonesia, finally preaching as far as Australia and Germany. Also, during the mid 1970s, he was a media figure, thanks to his access to the Solo-based Radio Dakwah Islamiyah (RADIS) radio station that beamed his sermons to listeners in the Central Javanese province. In 1969, he, along with his companion Abu Bakar Baasyir, helped to form the Pondok Pesantren al-Mukmin in the township of Ngruki, in the heart of Surakarta. Through both his media and educational activities, Abdullah Sungkar managed to gather a big following around him. He and Abu Bakar Baasyir were also active supporters of the (then banned, though underground) Darul Islam movement that was a remnant of the Negara Islam Indonesia struggle of the 1950s. By the 1970s, however, the Darul Islam movement in Indonesia had grown weak and divided. Among its members, men like Abdullah Sungkar preferred the more direct approach to outright political struggle to establish an Islamic state in Indonesia, and were willing to take the path of militant struggle if necessary. It was during this period of internal division that Sungkar began to use the term "Jama'ah Islamiyah" to denote the faction he came to lead (along with Abu Bakar Baasyir), which was visibly more committed to a systematic political struggle against the New Order regime of Suharto and the secularist generals of the Indonesian army. Their outward demonstrations of anger and resistance to the government, however, meant that by then both Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Baasyir were put under constant surveillance by the state's security forces, leading to their arrest and imprisonment in 1978. Sungkar was then accused of being a member of the underground Komando Jihad movement. Following their release, they both returned to their teaching duties at the Pondok Pesantren al-Mukmin in Ngruki, Solo, but, soon after, warrants of arrest were issued to both of them again. (They were

This paper aims to give a detailed explanation about the Pondok Pesantren al-Mukmin of Ngruki, which, as we will show, happens to be only one of several institutions that operate in the Desa Ngruki. The objective is to explain the expanded and complex network of educational and non-educational institutions that operate under the wing of the Ngruki Foundation and how this entire network of schools, medical centres and other non-educational institutions fit within a highly organized, well-administered umbrella organization that is hierarchical, structured and, in many ways, transparent. As such, it is an exercise in demystification as it seeks to reveal the complexities inherent in an organizational network that is not as simplistic and singular as many reports would have us believe.

Related to this is the stated aim of addressing some of the concerns raised about Ngruki thus far that have merely brought to the surface deeply embedded prejudices and misconceptions about Muslim religious educational institutions in general and the Pondok al-Mukmin in particular.

We hope to show that, far from being an antiquated, traditional and stagnant institution, the Pondok Pesantren al-Mukmin operates according to a logic that can best be described as modern, or at least having aspirations to modernity. In its commitment to create a learning environment that is conducive to producing a generation of educated Muslim scholar-activists, Ngruki cannot be compared to many of the poorer, smaller and less advanced *madrasahs* that dot the frontier between Pakistan and Afghanistan, for instance. By tracing its origins to the founders and leaders of earlier Islamist-modernist movements like Persis and al-Irshad, and later the Darul Islam movement of Indonesia, we hope to show that

already under house arrest at that time.) In 1985, moves were made to arrest both men but they managed to slip out of the country to seek refuge in Malaysia. While living in exile in the southern Malaysian state of Johor, Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Baasyir set up another religious school called the Pondok Pesantren Lukmanul Hakiem. It was at the Johor *pesantren* that Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Baasyir met with and taught both Malaysian and Indonesian students, including men like Amrozi, who would later be accused of the Bali bombing in 2002. Following the downfall of President Suharto in May 1998, both Baasyir and Sungkar were allowed to return to Indonesia. During their stay in Malaysia, their *pesantren* was placed under surveillance by the Malaysian authorities at the request of the Indonesians. Despite the relative freedom to operate while in Malaysia, neither Sungkar nor Baasyir engaged in any form of public political activity there. Back in Indonesia, both men returned to their teaching activities but Abdullah Sungkar passed away shortly, on 23 October 1999, of natural causes. Following the death of Sungkar, the Jama'ah Islamiyah faction he helped to create came under the leadership of Abu Bakar Baasyir, though even by then it was not an official organization or movement with an open recruitment system and visible membership base. See: Muhamad Nursalim, "*Faksi Abdullah Sungkar Dalam Gerakan NII Era Orde Baru*", M.A. thesis for Muhamadiyah University of Surakarta, 2001; Martin van Bruinessen, *Geneologies of Islamic Radicalism in Post-Suharto Indonesia*, Utrecht: ISIM and Utrecht University, , 2002; International Crisis Group (ICG) report, *Indonesian Backgrounder: How the Jama'ah Islamiyah Terrorist Network Operates*, Brussels and Jakarta, 11 December 2002.

⁵ See, International Crisis Group (ICG), *Indonesian Backgrounder: How the Jama'ah Islamiyah Terrorist Network Operates*, Brussels-Jakarta: 11 December 2002., Ref: www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?l=1&id=1397.

Ngruki—despite the image given to it by the media and its detractors—is a culmination of a long process of Islamic political activism and mobilization that grew in tandem with the modern Indonesian Islamist movement dating back from the early twentieth century.

Seen from this perspective, the obvious question arises: Is Ngruki then not an example of “Islamic Modernity” at work? And if so, then does this not affirm the view that modernity is not necessarily benign and that it can also lead us to a form of political activism that is couched in a vocabulary of absolutes? The general assumption that religious movements cannot deal with modernization or are unwilling to engage with the tools of modernity has been proven patently fallacious by now, with the rise of modern forms of Hindu, Christian and Muslim politics worldwide, and which, in many cases, has led to the birth of religiously-inspired modern politics and modern religiously-based parties and political movements. If this thesis is accepted as one of our working premises, then Ngruki may serve to confirm the view that modern Muslim politics, even one that is sectarian and divisive, can and often does use the tools of modernity—in this case modern schools—to further its cause.

To address some of these concerns I shall begin with an overview of the Pondok Pesantren al-Mukmin and its place within the overall structure of the Ngruki Foundation, explaining the origins of the foundation and what its original intentions were. We will then look at the curriculum of the *pondok pesantren* and focus on the teachings of Abu Bakar Baasyir in particular, with the aim of showing how Baasyir’s approach and understanding of Islam both complies with and goes against the grain of Ngruki’s teaching in general. We will then consider the career trajectories of the graduates of the Ngruki alumni network before concluding by asking some questions about the role and place of Ngruki today and in the future. But let us begin by revisiting the now-mythical Desa Ngruki that has been the subject of so much media attention of late.

II. Ngruki Revisited: A Closer Look at the Pondok Pesantren al-Mukmin of Ngruki

“Yes of course you can photograph the *pesantren*. After all, we have CIA spy satellites photographing us all the time!”

– Statement by Ustaz Irsyad Fikri of Pondok Pesantren al-Mukmin during our visit, 20–22 May 2007

The Pondok Pesantren al-Mukmin is located in the middle of Desa Ngruki, in the Kabupaten Sukoharjo, in the centre of Surakarta, Central Java. Visitors to the Ngruki will note that it is a culturally and religiously plural area with as many mosques as there are churches, and in the

vicinity of the *pondok pesantren* are 13 churches (both Catholic and Protestant) that are still in use by the local Christian community. It is also important to note that during the peak of inter-religious conflict that swept across the outer island provinces of Indonesia in the early 2000s, none of the churches in Ngruki were attacked or threatened in any way. This reflects Surakarta's plural society, which has always accommodated religious and cultural differences and, apart from the Christian minority, there has always been a strong presence of Chinese, India and Arab merchants who also play a visible role in the city's batik and gold trade.

Surakarta (Solo) has also been the base for the Central Javanese *abangan* ("nominal" Muslim) culture and was historically one of the bases for the now-defunct Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI), which was banned after 1965. Today, it is one of the most important support centres for the Partai Demokrasi Indonesia-Perjuangan (PDI-P) party of Megawati Sukarnoputri, former President of Indonesia and daughter of the country's founder-leader Sukarno.

Since 2002, the Pesantren Ngruki has been stigmatized by its association with the scholar Ustaz Abu Bakar Baasyir, who also happens to be the *amir* (leader) of the radical Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI) movement, which was formed in Surakarta in 2000. But it should be noted that Baasyir is only one of the original eight founders of the *pesantren* and that he has little, if any, influence over the running of the school itself today.

Plans for the creation of a Muslim educational and welfare-based foundation were laid in 1969 and the Pondok Pesantren al-Mukmin was officially established on 10 March 1972 by a number of scholars, including Ustaz Haji Abdul Kohar Daing Matase, Ustaz Abdullah Kustur, Ustaz Abdullah Baraja, Ustaz Hassan Basri, Ustaz Yoyok Raswadi, Ustaz Abdullah Sungkar and Ustaz Abu Bakar Baasyir. (Of the original eight founders, the only living founder of the *pesantren* today happens to be Abu Bakar Baasyir, which accounts in part for his strong standing in the institution.) The *pondok* was first located at Jalan Gading Kidul in the central part of downtown Surakarta. In 1974, it moved to its present location in the heart of Desa Ngruki. At that time, all there was to be seen was its first mosque, a school building and four wooden dormitories for male students who were resident there. (The dorms have since been demolished to make way for a new, expanded brick and concrete dormitory and canteen, all a large three-story structure.)

From the start, the *pesantren* was run by its own foundation, Yayasan Ngruki, which was set up with contributions from its founders. The foundation was set up with the aim of providing education for Muslim children in the city of Surakarta as well as to take care of the city's orphans. Thus, from the onset, the foundation's concerns have been both educational

and pastoral, emphasizing an overall discipline or regime of “care of the self” in the Foucauldian sense.

The timing of the creation of Pondok al-Mukmin is crucial here. Remember that the 1970s was a period when the relationship between the secular government of Suharto—backed as it was by the Indonesian army, intelligence and security forces—was adamant in its opposition to all forms of political Islam. The tattered remnants of the (banned) Masjumi party and the supporters of the Darul Islam movement were then forced to focus their attention on non-political forms of Islamic activism, and many of them switched to education, social welfare and *dakwah* (missionary) activities instead. It in this heated political environment that the Surakarta-based Radio Dakwah Islamiyah (RADIS) was created, where men like Abdullah Sungkar were given the opportunity to spread their message to a wider public, albeit via the medium of *dakwah* discourse. Abdullah Sungkar was also the Central Java Chairman of the Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia (DDII) at the time that he and Baasyir, along with their fellow Islamists, set up the Pondok al-Mukmin.

In the first year (1972), the Pesantren al-Mukmin had only three students and the first batch of 30 students—ten of them orphans from Surakarta—graduated in 1975. The curriculum at the *pesantren* ran for six years at that time. Yayasan Ngruki today is run by three members who came from the first batch of students who graduated in 1975: Ustaz Dr. Haji Taufik Osman (graduate of Political Sociology from the 11 March University or Universitas 11 Maret, Surakarta); M. Kholil (presently head of a junior high school in Purwokorto); and Ustaz Santoso (head of a *pesantren* in Surakarta, recently deceased).

As part of the overall foundational (*yayasan*) structure of Yayasan Ngruki, the Pesantren al-Mukmin comes under the general direction and supervision of the director and board of directors of the *yayasan* itself. The overall structure of Yayasan Ngruki is vast, as it runs other educational and non-educational service centres under its auspices as well, with the Pesantren al-Mukmin being only one of the many institutions under its care.

Structure of the Yayasan Ngruki

The Yayasan Pendidikan Islam dan Asuhan Yatim Miskin Ngruki (Ngruki Foundation for Islamic Education and the Care of Orphans and the Poor, YPIA) is the foundation that oversees the management of the Pesantren al-Mukmin and other institutions under its care. Most of the educational institutions under the YPIA are not run according to the *pondok* (boarding school) system and its students do not actually live on its premises. The sole exception is the Pondok Pesantren al-Mukmin, which offers boarding (*pondok*) services as

well. Schools run by the YPIA are open to students from all family backgrounds and are non-political in the sense that they accept students from families linked to other groups, such as the Muhammadiyah and Nahdatul Ulama (NU) (see Appendix B).

The YPIA is run by its board of directors, most of whom are selected from the alumni of the various schools and colleges that it runs. The board of directors of the YPIA in turn determine the allocation of funds, management, development and appointment of directors and assistant directors at the various institutions under its management. The board does not, however, intervene or interfere directly in the running of the institutions under its care.

The following institutions are run under the YPIA:

- four *sekolah tadika* (kindergartens) in the area of Surakarta, for children between the ages of four and six;
- one primary school (Sekolah Dasar Ngruki, SDM), in the Desa Ngruki, for children between the ages of six and 12;
- one middle-level school (Sekolah Menengah Umum al-Islam Ngruki, SMU), in the Desa Ngruki, for children between the ages of 15 and 18;
- the Pondok Pesantren al-Mukmin of Ngruki, in Ngruki, which is the only school offering board and lodging to full-time students, dispersed across four colleges, for students aged between four and 19; and
- the Ma'ahad Aly (Islamic Academy) of Ngruki, in Desa Ngruki, that caters to graduates of the *pondok pesantren*, the *sekolah menengah* and non-Ngruki students as well, offering courses equivalent to BA degrees offered by other national universities, to students aged between 18 and 24.

Apart from these educational institutions, the *yayasan* also provides services such as the Rumah Asohan Anak-Anak Yatim Desa Ngruki (Desa Ngruki Orphanage) and non-educational services such as the Balai Perobatan Yayasan Ngruki (a public polyclinic), the Ngruki supermarket and mini-mart (located at the Pondok Pesantren al-Mukmin), public phone services and even a freshwater processing company (also located at the Pondok Pesantren al-Mukim) that sells mineral water to the general public living around the Desa Ngruki.

Administration of the Pondok Pesantren al-Mukmin Ngruki

Of all the educational institutions run by the YPIA, only the Pondok Pesantren al-Mukmin offers board and lodging to its students. Many of its students come from different parts of the

country and do not have accommodation in the city of Surakarta. They are therefore compelled by circumstances to stay at the *pondok*.

The *pondok pesantren* is run by a director (*direktor*), who is appointed by the members of the board of the YPIA. The director of the *pondok* is empowered to administer the *pondok* according to his needs. Since 1969, several changes have been made by successive directors to the overall administrative structure of the *pondok* itself. In general, the structure has remained relatively unchanged with one director heading a committee made up of three assistant directors (sometimes also referred to as vice-directors or *wakil direktor*). At present (2007), the administrative structure of the Pondok Pesantren al-Muktim is as follows: The director is Ustaz Kyai Haji Wahyuddin, who exercises overall control of the *pondok* and its affairs. Under the director is the vice-director, Ustaz Dr. Haji Ibnu Hanifa (who holds an MA in Islamic studies). Under the director and vice-director are three assistant directors: Ustaz Dr. Rashid Wahyudi (Academic Affairs); Ustaz Muzajin (Administrative and Finance); and Ustaz Muhammad Saleh Norahim (Usuluddin). The three posts are called the Assistant Directorships for Academic, *Prasawara* and *Siswa* affairs, respectively.

Within the closed compound of the *pondok pesantren* one finds the following institutions:

- one *sekolah tadika* (kindergarten) for children between the ages of four and six;
- the Madrasah Sanawiyah (primary level), which is open to boys and girls (though located in separate compounds) for children between the ages of 12 and 15;
- the Madrasah Aliyah MAAM (senior level), also for boys and girls (located in separate compounds) between the ages of 15 and 18; and
- the Kulliyatul Muallimin/Muallimat KMI (teachers' college) for male and female students aged between 15 and 19 years, which offers degrees equivalent to the SPG (Sekolah Perguruan Guru Agama, or Religious Teachers Training College) degree offered by SPG-equivalent institutions run by the Departemen Agama (Department of Religious Affairs) of the Indonesian state.

Ngruki also offers intensive courses for *takhosus* students who come from outside the *pesantren*, in special selected cases. These are intensive one-year courses that have to be learned at the *pesantren* itself.

There is also a logistics bureau (*biro logistik*) located within the *pondok pesantren*. It manages the daily running of the school and its activities include food production,

distribution of books and uniforms, health care, emergency relief and communications within the *pondok* and the vicinity of the Desa Ngruki. All of these educational services are carried out within the enclosed confines of the *pondok pesantren* and cater to the students who are full-time residents of the *pondok* only. No external students are allowed to enter and participate in the activities within the *pondok* itself, except the *takhsusus* students who are there to do their intensive one-years courses.

Close to the *pondok pesantren* is the Balai Perobatan Yayasan Ngruki (polyclinic), which has been run by Professor Dr. Muhammad Fanani since it was first set up in the 1970s. The polyclinic was originally set up as part of the logistics bureau of the *pesantren* to cater to the medical and health needs of students but it also serves the general public living in the vicinity of the Desa Ngruki today. At present, apart from its head, Dr. Fanani, the polyclinic also has six medical personnel (doctors) on standby and eight male and female nurses as part of its permanent staff. The fees that they charge patients vary according to their means. In many cases, they are waived altogether for those who simply cannot afford to pay.

In the vicinity of the polyclinic is Ngruki's Rumah Bersalin Aisyah (Aisyah Maternity Clinic), which offers midwifery services to the local community. Both the Balai Perobatan and Rumah Bersalin are open to members of the public and not confined to the community of the *pesantren*—though it could not be ascertained if local Christian residents of the *desa* used either one of the services provided.

The *pesantren* also runs its own publications unit and publishes a number of magazines such as *al-Mukminun* (the official magazine of the Ngruki *pesantren*) and *Lisan*, a supplementary magazine that students of Ngruki are invited to submit their essays, poems and stories for publication. Today (2007), *Lisan* has been incorporated into the *al-Mukminun* magazine and the two are sold together.

Teaching and Learning at the Pondok Pesantren al-Mukmin Ngruki

According to the teachers and administrative staff of the *pondok pesantren*, the objective of the al-Mukmin school is to produce male and female graduates who are complete, pious Muslims and who have developed the following characteristics.

- *Salimul Aqidah*: complete and comprehensive faith and belief
- *Sahihul Ibadah*: understanding and practice of worship according to the tenets of Islam
- *Matinul Khuluq*: upright moral character and dignity

- *Mustaqofu'l Fikri*: broad knowledge in all matters, including science
- *Qowiyul Jismi*: a healthy body
- *Qodiran' Alal Kasbi*: independence and self-reliance
- *Nafi'an Linnafsi wa Lighoirih*: social commitment and to be able to serve his wider community
- *Mujahidan Lidinih*: willingness to sacrifice time and effort in the name of his or her religion)⁶

To these ends, the entire teaching system and daily regimentation of life within the enclosed *pesantren* complex is regulated to produce students who can live up to the ideals of the institution (which will be discussed later).

At present (2007), the *pondok pesantren* of Ngruki has around 1,500 students, both boys and girls. At full capacity, the *pondok pesantren* can and has accommodated around 3,500 students, though the enrolment has dropped considerably following the Bali bombings and the media coverage on Abu Bakar Baasyir.

The total number of teachers employed by the YPIA is 300 full-time and part-time teaching staff, whose salaries are centralized and determined by the board members of the YPIA. The teaching staff are salaried and paid on a monthly basis, on par with wages offered to teaching staff at regular state-run colleges and universities. The basic pay of the staff can be as low as 600,000 Indonesian rupiah (RP) and as high as 1,500,000 RP for full-time teachers. In addition, some members of staff are given housing as well as other benefits such as rice and fuel subsidies by the YPIA. (Ustaz Abu Bakar Baasyir, for instance, lives in a small house behind the administration office of the *pondok*, while Ustaz Norhadi Ahmad, who teaches at the Ma'ahad Aly of Ngruki, lives in a larger, double-story house on the outskirts of Surakarta, a property that is owned by the YPIA.)

The curriculum of the *pondok pesantren* is set by the director of the *pondok* and the members of the YPIA, but since the 1980s has also abided by the standards set by the Departemen Agama (Religious Affairs Department) of the Indonesian government. In terms of teaching standards and practice, the teaching at Ngruki is modelled on other well-known modern *pesantrens* of Indonesia, such as the Pondok Pesantren Darussalam Gontor in Ponorogo, East Java. Some of the textbooks used at Ngruki are similar to those used at the more traditional *pesantrens* of Indonesia, while others are also used in the more modern *pesantrens* such as the Pesantren Moden Darussalam. However, many books are drawn from

⁶ See, *Al-Mukin Pesantren Profile*, Ngruki Sukoharjo Surakarta, Central Java, 2006.

Salafi sources and, as such, Ngruki offers a form of Islamic education that cannot be compared to many of the more traditional *pesantrens* and *madrasahs* of the country.⁷ The courses that are on offer range from traditional religious subjects to subjects that are part of the modern curriculum of the secular high schools and colleges of the Indonesian government as well as the state's Islamic universities. The basic religious subjects that are part of the Ngruki curriculum include the following.

- *Aqidah*: Tenets of the Muslim faith; one year for *takhosus* students, three years for KMI and MAAM students
- *Sharia*: Islamic law; one year for *takhosus* students, three years for KMI and MAAM students
- *Durusulloghoh*: Basic Arabic; one year for *takhosus* students, three years for KMI and MAAM students
- *Nahwu*: Arabic Grammar; one year for *takhosus* students, three years for KMI and MAAM students
- *Shorof*: Morphology of Arabic; one year for *takhosus* students, three years for KMI and MAAM students
- *Tahfidz*: Memorization of the Quran; one year for *takhosus* students, three years for KMI and MAAM students
- *Mutholaah*: Arabic reading; one year for *takhosus* students, three years for KMI and MAAM students
- *Insya'*: Arabic writing; one year for *takhosus* students, three years for KMI and MAAM students
- *Tafsir*: Arabic interpretation; one year for *takhosus* students, three years for KMI and MAAM students
- *Muhadatsah*: Arabic conversation; one year for *takhosus* students, three years for KMI and MAAM students
- *Hadith*: Study of the Prophetic Traditions; one year for *takhosus* students, three years for KMI and MAAM students
- *Knot*: Calligraphy; one year for *takhosus* students, three years for KMI and MAAM students

⁷ We would like to thank Martin van Bruinessen for pointing out this distinction to us. For an analysis of the more traditional texts taught at the other traditional *pesantrens* of Indonesia, see, Martin van Bruinessen, *Kitab kuning: Books in Arabic script used in the pesantren milieu*, in *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 146, Leiden, 1990.

- *Tilawah*: Formal recitation of the Quran; one year for *takhosus* students, three years for KMI and MAAM students
- *Usul'ul Fiqh*: Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence; one year for *takhosus* students, three years for KMI and MAAM students
- *Tarikh-I Islam*: Islamic history; one year for *takhosus* students, three years for KMI and MAAM students

The *pesantren* also offers a number of courses that reflect a more modern approach to present-day realities and which are intended to give the students a basic understanding and knowledge of the tools of social sciences. Among the non-religious subjects that are compulsory at the *pesantren* are the following.

- English and Bahasa Indonesia: one year for *takhosus* students, three years for KMI and MAAM students
- Mathematics: one year for *takhosus* students, three years for KMI and MAAM students
- Rudimentary Physics: one year for *takhosus* students, three years for KMI and MAAM students
- Biology (though Darwinism is not taught): one year for *takhosus* students, three years for KMI and MAAM students
- Social sciences: one year for *takhosus* students, three years for KMI and MAAM students
- National Citizenship (a course made compulsory during the years of Suharto's rule and the promotion of the state's official Pancasila ideology): one year for *takhosus* students, three years for KMI and MAAM students
- Femininity (restricted to female students): one year for *takhosus* students, three years for KMI and MAAM students)

Of all the non-religious subjects taught at the *pesantren*, the teaching of English as a third language (after Bahasa Indonesia and Arabic) is the most sought after. All over the *pesantren*, one finds posters and signboards in Bahasa Indonesia and English, and messages transmitted by the public address system are often in English as well. Teaching the principles of National Citizenship has always been a problem at Ngruki, given the steadfast opposition to the state's Pancasila ideology—implemented during Suharto era—from some of the teachers of the *pesantren*. For courses conducted at the Kulliyatul Muallimin/Muallimat (KMI), standardized textbooks approved by the Departmen Agama Indonesia have been used to ensure that the

graduates are eligible for the SPG degree offered by SPG-equivalent institutions managed by the Indonesian Department of Religious Affairs.

Class sizes at the *pondok pesantren* are relatively fixed to about 40 per class as a maximum (also in keeping with the standard class sizes of state schools and colleges). Students at the *pondok* are housed in dormitories (*asrama*) for boys (*putra*) and girls (*putri*) respectively. The girls' compound, located at the original site of the first *pondok*, is entirely cut off and enclosed within a walled area. In both the boys and girls' compounds there are dormitories, classes, libraries, sports areas, kitchens, mosques and laundry areas. Food for students is cooked on the premises and served three times a day at the different messes that are located on the grounds of the *pondok*.

Girls and boys are obliged to wear the uniforms of the *pondok* during class hours. Girls do not have to cover their faces but are obliged to cover their hair at all times. There is no mingling of boys and girls and handphones are prohibited on the premises of the *pondok* (with the sole exception being teachers and administrative staff who are allowed to carry and use handphones). For communication with the outside world, there are phone services (*wartels*) located in the compound itself. Students are not allowed to leave the compound except with the permission of their teachers, or when they are on holiday leave. Students who leave the compound during the day need to obtain and carry an exit permit with them at all times, and to return the exit permit upon their return to their dormitory. Each day begins at 4.00 a.m., with the ringing of the first bell to wake the students and prepare them for dawn prayers. The bell is sounded on the hour every day, up to 10.00 p.m. Teaching begins at 8.00 a.m. and evening classes end at 7.00 p.m., and is on an hourly basis.

There are hardly any foreign students in the *pondok* today, though the student body is mixed. Many students come from other parts of Java or the outer island provinces. Teaching is conducted in Bahasa Indonesia and both Arabic and English are compulsory subjects for most students.

The cost of staying and studying at the *pondok pesantren* ranges from 250,000 RP per year to 350,000 RP per year, depending on the level of education and choice of courses. This does not cover the cost for uniforms or books, but subsidies may be given to the poorer students. The costs cover board, lodging, food, teaching and medical care.

Record-keeping at the Pondok Pesantren Ngruki has been lax since the 1990s, and has depended mainly on the directors of the institution. During the 1980s records of all students were kept, with information on their family backgrounds and even the political affiliation of their families. However, since the mid 1990s, records have been poorly kept and no

comprehensive record of students' backgrounds exists today. The directors of the Pondok Pesantren al-Mukmin insist that their institution is on par with other state-run educational institutions in Indonesia and that it can match the standard of any secular (non-religious) school. In 2006, of the 93 graduates of the senior Madrasah Aliyah of Pondok Pesantren Ngruki, 72 graduated with the equivalent of a high-school diploma and proceeded to enrol in the universities (including Islamic universities, UINs) of Indonesia.

Given that the curriculum and teaching modules of the *pondok* are and have always been fixed, we need to ask how some of the Ngruki alumni were radicalized during their stay there.

Here, we need to address the overall philosophy of the Pondok Pesantren al-Mukmin and the approach it takes to Islamic education and what it tries to inculcate in its students. One of the mottos of Ngruki is “*Da’wa wal-Jihad*” (Missionary activity and struggle), a common enough theme that is repeated all over the *pesantren* and sometimes seen on public notice boards and banners that dot its landscape.⁸ This maxim is in keeping with Ngruki’s stated objective of creating young Muslim scholars who are pious, dedicated and self-reliant. Another recurring theme of Ngruki’s teaching is the concept of *al-Wala’ wal-Bara’*, the doctrine of solidarity between Muslims of the same persuasion and the avoidance of non-Muslims as well as Muslims of different sects or schools of thought, which points to the exclusive approach of Islam taught at the place.

While the doctrines of *Da’wa wal-Jihad* and *al-Wala’ wal-Bara* are deliberately left vague and undefined, it is clear that these general concepts can and do have different meanings, depending on who is teaching them. This is where the pivotal role of the teachers and their distinct profiles and personalities come into play. Needless to say, the name and personality of Abu Bakar Baasyir stands out in bold relief against the rest of the *pondok’s* teaching staff, thanks to his outspoken views and his own interpretation of the Islamic teaching given at al-Mukmin.

Pondok Pesantren Ngruki and Abu Bakar Baasyir and the Jama’ah Islamiyyah

Ustaz Abu Bakar Baasyir was one of the original eight founders of the Pondok Pesantren al-Mukmin Ngruki and is the only living founder today. He had served as the director of the *pondok pesantren* for four years during the early 1980s but left the post after he was forced to

⁸ It is interesting to note that during my visit to the *pesantren* in May–June 2007, several of the banners with the slogan “*Da’aw wal-Jihad*” had been taken down and replaced with signs and posters in English, reminding the students to study the language. Also taken down were posters depicting the suffering of the people of Palestine, which were adorned with images of Kalashnikovs and jihadis in battle dress.

flee into hiding in Malaysia in 1985. By then the Pondok al-Mukmin had gained enough public notoriety to warrant a discussion among its members and teaching staff about its image. In 1985 Indonesian security forces entered the *pondok* in an attempt to arrest both Baasyir and Sungkar, only to discover that both of them had secretly left the country for Malaysia. The image of Ngruki suffered as a result, and in 1995 prompted an eventual exodus of teachers, who felt that they no longer wanted to be associated with such an institution or the two men in particular.

Since their return to Indonesia in 1999, Abu Bakar Baasyir and Abdullah Sungkar resumed their teaching responsibilities at the *pondok pesantren*, though they have never been given any administrative power or authority ever since. Abdullah Sungkar died shortly after his return in 1999, of natural causes. At present, Baasyir serves as one of the many advisory consultants to the *pondok's* board of directors, but has no power to implement any reform of the system. It is important to note that from the beginning, even when the *pondok* was first founded, Baasyir has not had any power to determine the *pondok's* curriculum or teaching methods. While some of the alleged bombers linked to the bombings of Bali in 2002 were known to be alumni of Ngruki and students of Baasyir himself, he was and remains only one of the many teachers employed by the *pondok*.

The attention given to Baasyir and Sungkar in particular was the result of their long association with movements like Persis and al-Irshad, and their vocal support for groups like the Masjumi and the Darul Islam movement. Coupled to this was their active rejection of the Pancasila ideology, a factor that got both men into trouble in the 1970s and 1980s. Sungkar's alleged involvement with the Kommando Jihad⁹ militant group was also one of the accusations

⁹ The shadowy Komando Jihad militia emerged in Indonesia in 1977 under the leadership of the young Indonesian cleric Imran bin Zein. An underground paramilitary movement, it was based mainly in Jakarta and Bandung, West Java, and its members were mainly young disaffected Muslims from cities. Between 1977 and 1978, they were responsible for some minor attacks in some cities of Java, but their influence and their ability to project their power was limited by their own lack of resources. After the Iranian revolution of 1979, however, the leaders of the Komando Jihad claimed that they would embark on a revolutionary struggle against the Indonesian state. In March 1981, members of the Komando Jihad staged an attack on a police base outside Bandung and managed to steal a number of small arms. Analysts at the time suggested that the attack on the police base might have been an inside job, with rogue elements of the Indonesian army secretly working to ensure that the arms heist was successful. By then it was widely speculated that the Komando Jihad had actually been set up under the watchful eye of the Indonesian army intelligence and General Ali Murtopo, a close associate of President Suharto and the general who had been put in charge of the Indonesian oil company Pertamina, who wanted to use the Komando Jihad to eliminate opponents of the government and residual elements of the banned Communist Party of Indonesia. Later, on 28 March 1981, members of the Komando Jihad staged the hijacking of a Garuda Airlines DC-9 plane, which they directed to Malaysia and finally Bangkok. The hijacking was ultimately foiled by the Kopassandha (later KOPASSUS) unit of elite para-commandos. By then the Indonesian army commanders were distancing themselves from the Komando Jihad, and the group had grown beyond their control. In the 1980s, the Indonesian army and intelligence would provoke radical Islamists to gauge their strength, but this radicalized them even further.

levelled against him during his trial in the late 1970s. Media speculation aside, it should be noted that neither of them has ever denied their support for the Islamic state movement in Indonesia. It was Haji Ismail Pranoto who invited both men to join and support the Negara Islam Indonesia¹⁰ (NII) movement in the late 1970s, yet another factor that continued to haunt both of them while they were teaching at the *pondok* in the 1970s and 1980s, and which continued to stigmatize them in the 1990s. Not surprisingly, the Indonesian state's reaction to both Baasyir and Sungkar was to keep a close eye on them all the time.

It should be noted that from the day it was set up (in 1972) Ngruki has been one of the most monitored and studied religious institutions in Indonesia, due to the presence of Abu Bakar Baasyir and Abdullah Sungkar there. Thus Sidel (2006) concludes that there has been a long history of intelligence surveillance and infiltration of the Ngruki network of Abu Bakar Baasyir.¹¹ One of the most well known instances of the *pondok* being infiltrated by Indonesian intelligence services is the case of Noor Huda Ismail, a former graduate of Ngruki, who was enrolled into the *pesantren* by his father with the intention of gaining access to the institution and to be able to monitor more closely the activities of Abu Bakar Baasyir, Abdullah Sungkar and other teachers there. In his own account of how he was sent by his father to infiltrate the *pesantren*, Ismail (2005) noted:

My days at Ngruki were a misfit from the beginning. My secular father worked as a parole officer who was mainly responsible for handling Islamic militants that opposed former president and dictator Suharto. As a means for him to find out more about the group, he enrolled me in Ngruki. "You make it easy for me to enter and observe the school," my father told me. One of his targets of observation was Ngruki's co-founder, Abu Bakar Baasyir, an alleged terrorist

¹⁰ The Negara Islam Indonesia (NII) movement was founded by Lukman Hakim in 1978 in Cirebon, West Java. It was actually a decentralized and dispersed movement with cells and branches operating in secret on many of the university campuses all over Java and the rest of Indonesia. These cells emerged partly as a result of the Suharto government's crackdown on student political activities in the 1970s and the imposition of Normalisasi Kehidupan Kampus (Normalisation of Campus Life) regulations passed at the end of the 1970s. As a result, the more radical Islamist students went underground and formed clandestine groups of their own. The founders of the NII were inspired by the Darul Islam revolt of 1949 that was led by Islamist radicals like Selkarmadji Maridjan Kartosoewirjo. With the help of Islamist radicals and elements within the Indonesian government and security forces, these radical Islamist groups were allowed to operate underground on campus. They formed secret study groups (*tarbiyyah islamiyyah*) where they studied and disseminated the teachings and ideas of Islamist ideologues like Abul Al'aa Maudoodi, Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb. Following the example set by the Ikhwan'ul Muslimun of Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb, the students formed their own secret committees and cells to penetrate other student movements. In 1978 they came out into the open with the formation of the Usroh group in Bandung. The leaders of the NII then formed their own groups all over the country: Muchliansyah formed the Generasi 554 group in Jakarta while Lukman Hakim set up the NII in Cirebon.

¹¹ Sidel, 2006, p. 208.

leader who I interviewed for my current job as a reporter for *The Washington Post*, just a few days before an Indonesian prosecutor reopened the case against him. In a 65-page indictment, the prosecutor charged him for being the *amir*, or leader, of Jama'ah Islamiyah (JI) and declared him responsible for the Marriott Hotel and Bali bombings.¹²

It was in the context of the close monitoring of the *pesantren*, after all, that Baasyir and the school's co-founder, Abdullah Sungkar, were arrested and imprisoned in the late 1970s, and in the wake of their flight into exile to Malaysia in 1985, "the caretakers of the *pesantren* agreed to allow the security services and its agents an active role in the management of the school".¹³

The teaching of Islam by Ustaz Abu Bakar Baasyir

Despite the constant surveillance and threats of arrest made upon him, Baasyir has remained unapologetic about his stand and approach to Islam, which is also reflected in many ways in his teachings. Much has already been written about the teaching that has been done by Abu Bakar Baasyir at the Pesantren al-Mukmin. Jones (2003), Sirozi (2004), Ismail (2005), Hasan (2006), Sidel (2006), Wildan (2007)¹⁴ et al. have all alluded to the fundamentalist, literalist and conservative approach of Baasyir with regard to the understanding, preaching and teaching of Islam that has been done at the *pondok* in the past. It should, however, be noted that what Baasyir has taught at the *pesantren* differs very little from what is taught elsewhere in the Salafi seminaries and religious colleges of Indonesia and the rest of the Muslim world, and that Baasyir himself has not been able to radically alter his teaching syllabus due to the fact that the curriculum used at Ngruki has always been set by the *pesantren's* board of directors and the Ngruki Foundation itself. Where he departs from the other teachers of the *pesantren* is the emphasis he chooses to give on certain aspects of the teaching.

In brief, Baasyir's teaching can be divided into several general (and conventional) categories, as Sirozi (2004) and Wildan (2007) have enumerated: *Tauhid* (the principle of

¹² See, Noor Huda Ismail, *Ngruki: Is it a Terrorism School?* Jakarta Post, 14 March 2005.

¹³ Sidel, 2006, p. 208.

¹⁴ See, Sydney Jones, *Indonesian Backgrounder: How the Jama'ah Islamiyah Terrorist Network Operates*, International Crisis Group (ICG) report, Jakarta, 11 December 2003; Muhamad Sirozi, *Perspectives on Radical Islamic Education in Contemporary Indonesia: Major Themes and Characteristics of Abu Bakar Baasyir's Teachings*, paper presented for the guest lecture at the Centre for International Studies, Ohio University, 9 January 2004; Noorhaidi Hasan, *Laskar Jihad: Islam, Militancy and the Quest for Identity in Post New-Order Indonesia*, Cornell Southeast Asia Program, Ithica, New York, 2006; John T. Sidel, *Riots, Pogroms, Jihad: Religious Violence in Indonesia*, London: Cornell University Press, 2006; Muhammad Wildan, *Ngruki dan Radikalisme Agama di Indonesia*, *The Ngruki Observer*, 9 June 2007, available at www.ngruki.com/.

monotheism), *sharia* (Islamic law), *Ibadah* (norms of worship), *Daulah Islamiyah* (Islamic rule or governance), *Jihad Dakwah* (Islamic missionary activity), *Wahn* (worldliness), *Mutraf* (luxury, or specifically, the critique of) and the specificity of Islam.¹⁵

While some of the books used in the teaching at Ngruki are similar to those used in many other *pesantrens* of Indonesia, most of the books used by Baasyir are drawn from Salafi sources and include texts such as the *Shofatu Tafasir* by Sheikh Ali as-Shobuni, the *Aqidah Takliku Muhtasor* by Sheikh Abdul Wahab, the *Minhajul Muslim* by Shaikh Abu Bakr Jaabir al-Jazaairi and *Al-Iman* by Sheikh Azzindaani. Included in the *pondok's* list of texts are texts written by Baasyir himself, such as the *Aqidah Islamiyah*, a manual outlining the principles of faith and worship. Other texts that may be used in informal teaching sessions under the tutelage of specific teachers include works such as *Jundullah* by Said Hawa.¹⁶

What lends Baasyir's teachings greater political aspect is the emphasis he places on some ideas and themes that are foregrounded—at times at the expense of other ideas, themes and schools of thought that have also existed in the history of Islam and Muslim scholarship. In the hands of Baasyir, the *pondok's* doctrines of *Da'wa wal-Jihad* and *al-Wala' wal-Bara* are cast in a political light that lends them the ideological aspect they now have. This becomes clearer when a closer reading of Baasyir's teachings and interpretations is carried out, as has been done by Sirozi (2004), Ismail (2005), Wildan (2007) and others.

In the case of the central principle of *Tauhid* for instance, Baasyir places stronger emphasis on a comprehensive understanding of the term and all its connotations, which opens up the way for a maximalist application of the principle that exceeds the confines of theological speculation and moves on to the realm of politics as well.

The fundamental doctrine of *Tauhid* rests at the core of Islamic monotheism and spells out the unity of God as the sole creator of the universe. This understanding of *Tauhid Rububiyah* (God as the primary and only creator) is then linked to the understanding of *Tauhid Asma' wa Sifat Husna* (that God has specific and exclusive characteristics that are unique to God alone), which is in turn linked to the concept of *Tauhid Uluhiyah* (the doctrine that God's laws are the only laws through which one can and should live).¹⁷

From this comprehensive standpoint, Baasyir proceeds to forward elaborations of his own, which entail the following: (i) that God is singular and unique, and as the creator of the

¹⁵ For a comprehensive account of Baasyir's teachings and its themes, see, Muhamad Sirozi, *Perspectives on Radical Islamic Education in Contemporary Indonesia: Major Themes and Characteristics of Abu Bakar Baasyir's Teachings*, paper presented for the guest lecture at the Centre for International Studies, Ohio University, 9 January 2004, pp. 4–17.

¹⁶ Interview with Muhammad Wildan, 25–26 June 2007.

¹⁷ Sirozi, 2004, p. 4.

universe all power rests in the hands of God; (ii) that God's law is the only law by which men and the universe are to be governed; (iii) that man-made laws and man-made political systems contradict the doctrine of a singular God whose laws are paramount; (iv) that to seek answers in a man-made political system is tantamount to usurping the central position of God and questioning divine law; (v) that any form of political association or mobilization that is not in keeping with the foundational doctrine of *Tauhid* (in the comprehensive sense) is equal to relegating God to a secondary status and thus falls into the category of *shirk* (false association of God with another), and is therefore un-Islamic and even anti-Islamic.

From this *Tauhidic* starting point, Baasyir's teachings of the *sharia* and the concept of *Daulah Islamiyah* follow. Baasyir, like many other Muslim activist-scholars with a political agenda, sets out the principles of *sharia* in terms that are compatible with his understanding of *Tauhid*. *Sharia* laws are God-given and are therefore not to be questioned, revised or applied hesitantly. For Baasyir, *sharia* is a comprehensive system of regulation that reflects the ordered nature of a universe that is not contingent or accidental, and where an omnipresent and omniscient God is forever present. As there is no room for radical contingency in the universe (for that would imply fallibility in God), any political system that is created on earth therefore has to be based upon God-given *sharia* laws and should lead to the realization of God's will on earth. This is the primary condition for there to be any form of Muslim power or sovereignty (*Daulah Islamiyah*) that is truly Islamic in nature.

It follows from this that any democratic system of rule that allows for popular representation and the expression of popular contradicts the earlier stipulation that all power is in the hands of God and that man is here merely to exercise God's will on earth. It also follows from this that all man-made ideologies (capitalism, democracy, communism) are likewise man-made and contradict the principle of *Tauhid* as well (see appendix A).

It also follows from this that Islam is the only true religion and that only an Islamic form of governance is compatible with the dictates of religion and God. In this respect, Baasyir does not see the validity of other faiths and belief systems, and from this it also follows that he does not subscribe to the notion of religious pluralism, as that would mean putting other religions on par with Islam, which is seen as the final and only true revelation on earth. In this context, Ngruki's doctrine of *al-Wala' wal-Bara* takes on a decidedly conservative and exclusive tone, prompting the students of Baasyir to exclude themselves from the wider circles of Indonesia's plural multi-religious society. It is also from this exclusive approach to the doctrine that Baasyir's anti-Semitism and anti-Christian beliefs and prejudices stem from.

Baasyir's attitude towards other faith communities and belief systems is therefore couched upon an oppositional dialectics that sees Islam as the only true religion and other system of belief as being counterfeit at best, dangerous at worst. From a socio-political standpoint, he therefore insists that governance on earth be left only in the hands of Muslims, and that the goal of Muslim struggle (jihad) that he advocates is unavoidably directed towards the winning and keeping of political power in the hands of Muslims exclusively (see appendix A).

The pastoral aspect of Baasyir's teaching revolves around his constant critique of worldliness (*wahn*) and luxury (*mutraf*), which he regards as fundamentally dangerous in nature and detrimental to the faith (*iman*) of Muslims and their struggle (*jihad*) for power. Baasyir's critique of worldliness is based on both an economy of spiritual discipline and self-improvement as well as having a theological basis to it, again linked to his understanding of *Tauhid*. Desire for worldly power and riches is described as another form of shirk and apostasy, as it entails the prescription of value to worldly things that are, from a *Tauhidic* perspective, mere ephemera and, consequently, "unreal".

The economy of self-discipline that Baasyir advocates and foregrounds is one that sees worldly power as a means to an end, the end being the realization of God's will on earth and the rightful assumption of man's role of God's vice-regent on earth. Every aspect of human social, economic, political and cultural life has to yield to this *Tauhidic* worldview, failing which the individual slips back to the state of unbelief and denial (*kuffar*). Baasyir's constant attacks on non-Muslims (particularly Jews and Christians) are grounded in the numerous historical examples and the anecdotes that he cites in his classes also reflect his belief that Muslims are constantly in a state of siege and their faith is constantly being tested (and weakened) by the enemies of Islam (both from within and without the community) who wish to detract Muslims from their singular purpose to bring God's rule to man and the world.

In summary, it can be said that Baasyir sets out to provide a form of Islamic scholarship that posits the view of Islam as a comprehensive, totalising, hermetically-sealed discursive economy that has its own cosmology, worldview, value system, guideline (both epistemic and moral), political economy and ideology. The maximalist approach he takes to the field of *sharia* stems from his maximalist interpretation of *Tauhid* and the idea of an omniscient and omnipotent God whose reach is totalising as well. As there is no room for contingency and error in this God-centred universe, there can also be no room for independent human agency that contradicts, questions or jeopardizes this God-centred

worldview. Hence it follows that this is a discursive economy that allows no space or opportunity for auto-critique and radical questioning of its principles (see appendix A).

However, it is important to note that Baasyir is certainly not a pioneer of this view of Islam, and nor is he the first to espouse such an interpretation of the religion. Baasyir's outlook on life is very much shaped by his own early education and active participation in politically-inclined Islamist movements like al-Irshad and Persis, both of which were neo-Salafi movements dedicated to spreading a Salafi outlook and understanding on normative popular Islam in Indonesia.

Furthermore, Baasyir can and should be placed in the broader context of the global politicization of Islam worldwide and can best be compared to his counterparts of the twentieth century, like Maulana Abul Alaa Maudoodi (founder of the Jama'at-e Islami of the Indian subcontinent), Sayyid Qutb (of the late Ikhwan movement of Egypt), Ali Shariati (the foremost ideologue of the Iranian revolution) and the earlier generation of Indonesian Islamist-activists like Muhammad Natsir¹⁸ (founder of the Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia, DDII). In the Southeast Asian region we find echoes of Baasyir's ideas reflected in the writings of Syed Naquib al-Attas¹⁹ (founder of Malaysia's Institute for Islamic Thought

¹⁸ Mohammad Natsir was one of the most prominent and influential modernist Muslim leaders in Indonesia. He was born in Alahan Panjang, Minangkabau, in West Sumatra on 17 July 1908. During his youth he took part in the emerging Muslim modernist movement (Kaum Muda) and was at the forefront of numerous attacks on the traditionalist *ulama* in the East Indies. He served as the leader of the Jong Islamiten Bond (JIB) in Bandung between 1928 and 1932. From 1932 to 1942 he served as the director of the modernist Muslim Pendidikan Islam (Pendis) Institute in Bandung. Between 1940 and 1942 he also sat on the Dewan Kabupaten Bandung. The nationalists were keen to win his support and, between 1946 and 1949, he was invited to serve as the Cabinet Minister for Information under Hatta and Syahrir. Between 1950 and 1951 he served as the Prime Minister of Indonesia. Muhammad Natsir was known as a democrat and a constitutionalist, and was extremely popular and well-regarded by modernist Muslims in the country. When Sukarno attempted to disband the political parties in Indonesia and introduce his own version of "guided democracy", Muhammad Natsir was one of the first to attack the president and declare that guided democracy was nothing more than legalized dictatorship. Natsir then transferred his loyalties to the leaders of the armed forces in Sumatra, and supported the Pemerintah Revolusioner Republik Indonesia (PRRI) revolt that began in the late 1950s. The PRRI revolt in Sumatra was later crushed by armed forces loyal to Sukarno, leading to the elimination of many non-Javanese commanders. Natsir himself was alienated and blacklisted as a result of his involvement in the PRRI movement. On 17 August 1959, Sukarno officially banned the Masjumi party and began to work against the modernist Muslim movements in the country (while being goaded on by the PKI and its leaders like D. N. Aidit). Masjumi's leaders were detained and, between 1960 and 1966, Mohammad Natsir was placed under arrest for seven years. After the fall of Sukarno and the destruction of the PKI in 1965, Natsir was released in 1967. The same year, Natsir formed the Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia (DDII) in Jakarta. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Natsir's status and influence grew both at home and abroad. He served as the representative at the Muktamar Alam Islami (Muslim World Conference) based in Karachi, Pakistan. He also represented the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in Mecca and sat on the committee of the Majlis A'la al-Alamy lil Masjidi in Mecca. He was also one of the founders of the Rabithah al-'Alam al-Islami based in Saudi Arabia. Through his contacts in Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, Natsir and the DDII that he set up became the conduit for Arabian investment and sponsorship of Muslim institutions across Indonesia. He remained active throughout his life and passed away in Jakarta in 1993.

¹⁹ For a further elaboration of the writings and ideas of Syed Naquib al-Attas, see, Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas*, Kuala Lumpur: Institute for

and Civilisation, ISTAC) and even among the writings and activist-oriented Quranic exegesis of Tuan Guru Nik Aziz Nik Mat²⁰ (*Murshid'ul Am* of the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party, PAS). Like Baasyir, both Naquib al-Attas and Nik Aziz Nik Mat of Malaysia have taken a similar stand on the question of secular democratic politics and have argued that modern concepts such as representative democracy are not compatible with Islam and contrary to the principle of *Tauhid*, which is central to the Muslim faith.

As Sirozi (2004) has noted²¹, the ideological and activist-oriented approach of Baasyir also leaves little room for discussion on alternative schools of thought and other approaches to Islam that have developed in Muslim history. True to his Salafi background, Baasyir does not accept the Sufistic approach to Islam and questions of human spirituality, and regards both the Sufi (*Tasawwuf*) and rationalist (*Mutazilite*) approaches to Islam and Islamic education as being flawed and dangerous because of their emphasis on spirituality and rationality, respectively. Like many of his Salafi contemporaries, Baasyir does not think highly of the early period of Islamization of the Malay-Indonesian world where Sufism blended with local traditions to create a slow yet organic process of gradualist Islamization in the region. Like many other Salafis, Baasyir retains a strong suspicion of Sufism on the grounds that it adopts a syncretic and eclectic approach that allows Islam to be “blended”—and thus contaminated—by other intellectual and religious belief systems and traditions, be it Christian mysticism, Platonism, Aristotelianism or the Hindu-Buddhist belief systems of the pre-Islamic era.

The final product of Baasyir’s own brand of Islamic teaching (which, again, needs to be differentiated from the teachings of other teachers at the Pondok Pesantren al-Mukmin) is an understanding of Islam that is couched in terms of an oppositional dialectic that juxtaposes Islam against everything else that is deemed un-Islamic or anti-Islamic, and the negative (though constitutive) other in this case ranges from secularism, Western culture and values, democracy, worldly politics, other religions (both Abrahamic and non-Abrahamic) to all man-made secular ideologies. Baasyir’s understanding of Islam is therefore one that sees it as a complete, holistic, comprehensive and maximalist discursive economy that is

Islamic Thought and Civilisation, ISTAC, 1998. For a critical reading of the ideas of Naquib al-Attas, see, Mona Abaza, *Debates on Islam and Knowledge in Malaysia and Egypt*, London: Curzon Press, 2002.

²⁰ For a critical assessment of the ideas of Nik Aziz Nik Mat with reference to his activist-oriented Quranic exegesis, see, Farish A. Noor, “The localization of Islamist Discourse in the Tafsir of Tuan Guru Nik Aziz Nik Mat, *Murshid'ul Am* of PAS”, in Virginia Hooker & Noraini Othman (Eds.), *Malaysia: Islam, Society and Politics: Essays in Honour of Clive S. Kessler* (pp. 195–235), Singapore: Institute for Southeast Asian Studies, 2003.

²¹ Sirozi, 2004, pp. 2–3.

hermetically sealed and unchangeable. For this reason, he offers no apology for the stand that he takes and does not shy away from being labelled exclusive or a radical: in the sense of standing outside and against the prevailing secular-democratic political economy of present-day Indonesia²² (see appendix A).

Given that Baasyir and the other co-founder of Ngruki, Abdullah Sungkar, were both adamant in their views that have not shifted over the years, we need to ask why some of their students chose the path of Islamic militancy and radicalism while others did not. This leads us to the question of the career trajectories of the students themselves.

III. The Ngruki Alumni: Manifold Trajectories

For obvious reasons, the Pondok Pesantren al-Mukmin has attracted considerable media and political attention, thanks to the activities of some members of the *pesantren's* alumni community. This raises related questions about what was taught to them while they studied at the *pesantren*, who their teachers were and what motivated them to carry out terrorist attacks such as the bombing of Bali in 2002.

Several factors, however, have to be borne in mind when attempting any study of the career trajectories of the graduates of *pesantrens* and *madrasahs* that dot the landscape of the Muslim world today.

First, it has to be noted that in the wake of the attacks on the United States in 2001 and Washington's unilateral declaration of the Global War on Terror that followed shortly after, many Muslim governments have been compelled—due to diplomatic pressure as well as internal variable factors—to control, monitor and, at times, even shut down institutions of Muslim learning in their respective countries. As we have shown elsewhere (Noor, 2004)²³ Muslim students (particularly itinerant students who have travelled from one country to another) have been singled out in some instances and targeted as potential suspects who may or may not have been active recruits of militant networks in countries like Pakistan. By 2005, both the governments of Pakistan and India have refused to grant study visas to Muslim students who wish to enrol in *madrasahs* of the subcontinent, thereby bringing to an end a

²² For Abu Bakar Baasyir's stand on the term "radical", see, Farish A. Noor, "We Should Not be Ashamed of Being Labelled Radical", interview with Abu Bakar Baasyir, Malaysia-today.net, 18 August 2006, retrieved from malaysia-today.net/reports/2006/08/we-should-not-be-ashamed-to-be.htm.

²³ See, Farish A. Noor, "Victims of Superpower Politics? The Uncertain Fate of ASEAN Students in the Madrasahs of Pakistan in the Age of the 'War Against Terror'", paper for the conference on "The Madrasah in Asia, Transnationalism and their Alleged or Real Political Linkages", jointly organized by the International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM, Leiden) and the Zentrum fur Moderner Orient (Centre for Modern Orient Studies, ZMO, Berlin), 23–25 May 2004.

long historical connection between South and Southeast Asia that has always witnessed large-scale movement of itinerant scholars and students across the Indian Ocean.

Second, educational institutions of any kind (both religious and secular) invariably produce graduates whose career paths go in radically different directions. Indonesia is no stranger to this phenomenon. A case in point is the Pondok Pesantren Darussalam Gontor of Ponorogo²⁴, East Java, one of the pioneering modern *pesantrens* of Indonesia that has

²⁴ The Pondok Pesantren Gontor of Ponorogo was founded by the *Trimurti* of religious reformer-modernists, Kyai Ahmad Sahal, Kyai Zainudin Fanani and Kyai Imam Zarkasyi, following the Congress of the Muslim Ummah (Kongres Umat Islam) in Surakarta in 1926, and has become one of the most important *pondok pesantrens* of East Java and all of Indonesia. From the outset, the Pondok Pesantren Gontor was influenced by ideas and developments abroad. Through consultation with scholars and teachers from al-Azhar in Cairo, Aligarh Muslim University in India, Madrasah Shanggait of North Africa and other institutions in India such as the Shantiniketan Institute of Rabindranath Tagore, the framework for the new *pesantren* was laid out by Kyai Ahmad Sahal, Kyai Zainudin Fanani and Kyai Imam Zarkasyi. The educational system of the Pesantren Gontor is structured in a parallel manner to the national educational system. At primary level the classes are organized from Standards 1 to 6 at the Kuliyyatul Muallimin al-Islamiyah (KMI). Following the first stage, students of the *pesantren* are allowed to take the Madrasah Aliyah examinations organized under the auspices of the Religious Department (Departemen Agama) of Indonesia. Many of the graduates of Gontor have also opted to continue their studies in other secular universities and colleges in Indonesia, reading non-religious subjects. In terms of its financing and administration, the *pesantren* is run by the *wakaf* co-operative board that is made up of 15 individuals, from which three (called *trimurti mandataris*) are elected as governors of the *pesantren*. The three *mandataris* are elected for a term of five years, which can be renewed if they are re-elected. The *mandataris* and the members of the *wakaf* board in turn are responsible for the administration and running of the *pesantren*, which gets its income from the co-operative business ventures it runs via its co-operative as well as donations from the public. From the outset, the Pesantren Gontor has been financially independent and has not relied on state funding. In terms of its curriculum, the texts used at the *pesantren* are not very different from those used in traditional *pesantrens*. At the heart of its curriculum are standard religious texts such as the *Ihya Ulumuddin of al-Ghazali*, *Minhajut Thalibin of an-Nawawi*, *Tuhfah of Ibn Hajar*. The *pesantren* has also removed some of the older texts, such as the *Fathul Qarib Syarh Matam Taqrib Ibnu Qasyim al-Ghazali*, that are still used in many other *pesantrens*. The main difference in the teaching that takes place in Gontor is the lack of emphasis on doctrinal loyalty or adherence to a particular school of law (*mahzab*). Though predominantly Shafi, the *pesantren* also teaches the works of other scholars from the Hanafi, Maliki and Hanbali schools as well. Another important departure is the emphasis on logic and the philosophical method, with the *Bidayatul Mujtahid of Ibn Rushd*, a commentary on Aristotle, being part of the curriculum. Such a plural outlook has been part of the programme of the *pesantren* from the beginning, as the founders of the Pesantren Gontor were keen to ensure that the institution remain politically neutral and not directly or openly affiliated with either the modernists of the Muhammadiyah or the traditionalists of the Nahdatul Ulama. By the 1990s the *pesantren* had expanded from its original grounds of a two-story mosque and school to include the 8.5-hectare teaching complex that also houses the Institut Studi Islam Darussalam (ISID). The teaching staff of the *pesantren* number around 200 fully paid and salaried teachers who obtained degrees in Islamic studies from countries like Indonesia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. By the 1990s the student body of the *pesantren* had also expanded to include foreign students from countries like Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Somalia, Australia and other Muslim countries. During its time the Pesantren Gontor was seen as one of the most modern *pesantrens* of East Java and referred to itself as “Pesantren Modern Gontor”. It was the first *pesantren* to introduce school uniforms for its students, which was regarded at that time as anti-traditionalist and upset many of the more conservative *ulama* of traditionalist movements like the Nahdatul Ulama (NU). Pesantren Gontor also introduced the teaching of English alongside Arabic, and applied a critical method to the study of traditional religious texts known as the *kitab kuning*, widely used in traditional *pesantrens*. Former students of Gontor, such as the late Nurcholish Madjid, have claimed that it was at Gontor that they were first allowed to apply critical reasoning to the study of religious scripture and religious subjects. Gontor was also one of the first *pesantrens* that allowed its students (*santri*) to engage in debates with each other, and to question their teachers. Pesantren Gontor has grown and now covers an area of 250 hectares of *wakaf* land, and is run by the La Tansa Co-operative, which also undertakes the management of a number of auxiliary enterprises including rice mills, noodles factories, chemists, books shops, sundry shops and telephone centres. The *pesantren* has a yearly intake of several

produced thousands of graduates whose career paths have been divergent in many ways. The Pondok Pesantren of Gontor is the institution that produced Abu Bakar Baasyir but it also produced the late Nurcholish Madjid²⁵, who ranks—even today—as one of the most progressive and liberal thinkers of Indonesia and the wider Muslim world of the late twentieth century.

Third, not all religious-based educational institutions are inclined to produce religiously conservative students; secular institutions are just as likely to produce graduates who may, for reasons of their own, be inclined towards radical politics. The case of the Malaysian terrorist Azahari Husin²⁶, who was a graduate of Reading University, comes to

hundred students and at full capacity teaches around 3,200 students in total, of which 1,200 of them happen to be girls. The female students of Gontor are taught at the Pondok Santri Khusus Putri of Mantingan, Ngawi, and are housed in separate dormitories: the Darul Ma'rifah of Kediri and Darul Muttaqin of Banyuwangi. Pesantren Gontor was, and remains, a modern *pesantren* that departs from the more traditional modes of teaching of the other traditionalist *pesantrens* of Indonesia. Its alumni include some of the most prominent Indonesian Muslim intellectuals, such as Nurcholish Madjid, Habib Chirzin and Abu Bakar Baasyir. Today, the *pesantren* claims to have an alumni network of more than 18,000 active former students, many of whom have also opened up *pesantrens* of their own based on the model of the Pesantren Gontor. There are about 135 *pesantrens* across Indonesia that were built by the alumni of Gontor, which follow the curriculum and teaching methods of the Ibu Pesantren.

²⁵ Nurcholish Madjid was born and raised in Jombang, East Java, which has been long associated with the tradition of Javanese “folk” Islam and traditionalism. His early education was in Indonesia and he eventually became a student in the local university system. In his youth he studied at the Pondok Pesantren Moden Darussalam of Gontor, East Java. Between 1966 and 1971 he was elected as the leader of the Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam (HMI, Association of Muslim Students of Indonesia) twice. He later completed his doctorate in Islamic Studies at the University of Chicago on the subject of pluralism in the ideas of the Muslim scholar Ibn Taymiyya. In Indonesia, Madjid was known as one of the most vocal leaders of the Muslim student movement and an advocate of democracy and democratization in the country. He argued that Muslim political parties and movements had failed to win the hearts and minds of the Indonesian people because they had not adapted to the needs of pluralistic democratic politics. In 1971 **he accused the Islamic parties of Indonesia of sacralising what was profane in life by calling for an Islamic state** (Hefner, 2000: 116). His attacks on Islamic parties and movements made him a popular figure among Muslim democrats and reformers, particularly among the student body, but earned him the hatred of many conservatives and traditionalists. Hefner (2000) has also noted that Madjid was criticized by Islamists from Malaysia, who claimed that his approach to Islam effectively reduced it to a “personalized ethical system” more akin to the fate that had befallen Christianity in the West (Hefner, 2000: 118). By the mid 1980s Nurcholish Madjid had become a popular and well-respected (though still controversial) figure among the Indonesian Muslim middle class. In an effort to win over the Muslim middle class to the Islamist camp, he established the Paramadina association in 1986. The Yayasan Paramadina (which means “to go to Madina”) project was an attempt to Islamize the Indonesian middle class and win them back to the faith. The association boasted of having eight cabinet ministers on its advisory board, which gave an indication of how influential it (and Madjid) was. In 1990 Nurcholish Madjid was invited to take part in the formation of the Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia (ICMI), which was under the co-chairmanship of B. J. Habibie and Dr. Emil Salim. ICMI was meant to serve as a platform for progressive Islamist intellectuals, and Nurcholish Madjid (along with Amein Rais and others) attempted to turn it into a modernist Muslim democratic force within the country. But ICMI suffered from the mistrust of the army and the Sino-Indonesian business community. Furthermore, democrats like Madjid and Rais were given few opportunities to succeed within the organization. In the end, ICMI served as little more than a rubber stamp for Suharto and B. J. Habibie, who would succeed him.

²⁶ Azahari bin Husin was born in 1957 and studied in Malaysia as a youth. In the 1970s he was sent to Australia to further his education and it was in Australia that he first made contact with Muslim students from other parts of the Muslim world. Following the Iranian revolution of 1979, he became a committed Islamist activist and showed his support for the Iranian revolution and the Islamist movement worldwide. During the Afghan jihad

mind and serves as an important counter-factual example to demonstrate just how misleading such sweeping linear and determinist generalizations about Muslim colleges, *madrasahs* and *pesantrons* can be. As we have shown elsewhere (Noor, 2001), the radicalization of Muslim students of Southeast Asia is not the sole prerogative of Muslim educational institutions in the Muslim world. There is ample evidence to show that many Muslim students of Malaysia and Indonesia have been radicalized as a result of their contact with other Muslim students while studying in the West, notably the United States, Western Europe and Australia.²⁷

The alumni of Pesantren al-Mukmin fare no differently from the graduates of other colleges, universities and *pesantrons* of Indonesia. While some of them were involved in the Bali bombings of 2002 and were known to be active members of the underground movement Jama'ah Islamiyah (such as Fathurrahman al-Ghozi, Utomo Pamungkas, a.k.a Mubarak, and others) many other graduates of al-Mukmin have moved on to a variety of disciplines and careers, ranging from activism to politics, commerce to media, education to culture. Muhammad Wildan, who is also a graduate of Ngruki (class of 1989), has noted:

Pondon Ngruki has many and various graduates ... Some of the graduates of Ngruki later attended other universities, a move that would result in different outcomes. Several of the graduates would also continue their studies in Western countries. Regardless of the universities we attended, we still have something in

against the Soviets, Azahari was one of the few Malaysians who travelled to Afghanistan to fight alongside the Mujahideen. Later he was sent to the United Kingdom where he received his doctorate from the University of Reading in the field of Property Valuation. Upon his return to Malaysia he served as a lecturer at the University of Technology (UTM) in the southern state of Johor. It was during the late 1990s that Azahari was said to have made contact with Muslim radicals from a number of Southeast Asian Islamist radical movements, such as the Jama'ah Islamiyah of Indonesia. Azahari was then working with Noordin Mohamad Top, another Malaysian member of the Jama'ah Islamiyah and was said to be in contact with the JI's operational chief, Riduan Isamuddin. As one of the better-trained members of the JI, Azahari was its key bomb-maker, authoring the JI's bomb-making manual. He was said to have been responsible for the Marriott Hotel bombing in Jakarta in 2003 and the Australian Embassy bombing in Jakarta of September 2004. His prosecutors also accused him of being one of the masterminds of the second bombing of Bali in 2005. By 2005, both Azahari and Noordin Mohd Top were the two most wanted Malaysians in Indonesia. The authorities traced them down to a hideout in Jakarta in 2004 but they managed to escape by leaving several booby-trapped bomb devices in the vicinity of their hiding place. Azahari and his followers were finally tracked down to their hideout in the town of Batu, Malang, in East Java by late 2005. Following a surveillance operation that lasted several weeks, the authorities finally stormed the building where Azahari was hiding in on 9 November and a firefight ensued. In the course of the fighting, Azahari was shot through the chest by a police sniper. Azahari's followers continued the fight until they detonated the explosives in the building, killing all the occupants. Following Azahari's killing, his body was flown back to Malaysia upon the request of the Malaysian government. Back in Malaysia, he was given a hero's burial by his family and supporters.

²⁷ See, Farish A. Noor, "Islamisation by Degrees: Europe in the Formation of New Islamist Consciousness among Malaysian Students and Activists between the 1970s and the 1990s", paper for the International Conference on "Cosmopolitanism, Human Rights, and Sovereignty in Multicultural Europe", organized by the Institute of European Studies, UC-Berkeley and the Centre for Global, International, and Regional Studies UC, Santa Cruz, 4-5 May 2001.

common: We hold on to the Islamic values taught to us by our teachers in our boarding school. Indeed, Ngruki has framed our minds to be good Muslims.²⁸

Wildan (2006) has also noted that one significant factor that has shaped the daily lives and worldview of the students of Ngruki is the inordinate degree of police surveillance and control of the *pondok*, which became one of its defining features and an aspect of daily life in the institution. He points out that many of the students studying there in the 1980s and 1990s faced the prospect of continuous harassment by the state's security forces, who were forever close at hand to check on the activities of the *pondok* and question teachers and students there. Despite the *pondok's* complicated and often tense relationship with the Indonesian state, however, Wildan stresses the conventionality of the teaching carried out in the institution and the fact that radicalism is not part of the mainstream curriculum of the *pondok*:

The phenomenon of Islamic radicalism at the Pondok Ngruki is quite different from the Muslim fundamentalist movement in general. Although some of the graduates of Ngruki have been involved in radical activities in the past six years, Islamic radicalism was never the mainstream in Ngruki. I believe that most of the graduates of Ngruki still cannot explain how some of their colleagues got themselves involved in radical activities then. I would say that there were some people within who used Ngruki to spread their beliefs. But as far as I am concerned and what I had experienced, the graduates of Ngruki have several things in common; i.e. the Islamic teaching taught to us by our teachers. (Fathurrahman) al-Ghozi, (Utomo) Pamungkas and I spent almost the same time at Ngruki, and we graduated in the same year (1989) as well...

We studied more on ideology and law rather than focusing on jurisprudence. The notion of jihad was also discussed on many occasions. For that reason the graduates of Ngruki were known to have a stronger ideological commitment than their counterparts elsewhere. But from that point onwards (after graduation) it was up to the graduates to follow their own paths in their search for identity...

However, I also believe that the political and social circumstances (then) also played a part in making those things possible. The attitude of the teachers and students of Ngruki can be understood as their reaction against the New Order of Suharto (in the 1990s), rather than their original attitude. As far as I am

²⁸ Muhammad Wildan, "Pondok Ngruki vis-a-vis Modernity", paper presented at the Ngruki International Conference organized by IKAPPIM, Surakarta, 20–22 January 2006 (p. 1).

concerned, most of the graduates of Ngruki who later got themselves involved in radical activities were the products of that New Order period.²⁹

Wildan's insights into the inner world of the Pondok al-Mukmin, particularly during the critical years of the New Order regime of the 1980s and late 1990s, suggest that much of the radicalization of some of the Ngruki students took place outside the conventional and established norms of the *pondok's* curriculum and teaching process. Furthermore, he has argued that the radicalization of students is certainly not the outcome of a stated policy aimed at radicalization, but rather an indirect consequence of a number of related factors, ranging from the reaction to state (specifically, police) intervention to the more modernist, activist-oriented teaching that was on offer at the *pondok* itself.

Therefore, in attempting to answer the question of how and why some students of Ngruki became radicalized (and the equally important question of how and why the rest were not), we need to take into account the dimension of pastoral care and direct mentor-pupil contact that takes place between some of the teachers and their students. The Pondok Pesantren al-Mukmin, as we have noted above, is already a complex institution with many educationists working there. Furthermore, it is but one of several educational institutions under the care of the Ngruki Foundation (YPIA). Within this broad framework of teachers, schools and other related auxiliary services, Abu Bakar Baasyir and Abdullah Sungkar were only two of the teachers employed. Abu Bakar Baasyir himself claims that no radical training was conducted by him at any time in the *pondok* (see appendix A) and this suggests a pattern of close-knit cells or circles of students and teachers whose discussions, meetings and possibly even plotting were carried out outside the ambit of the *pondok's* regular activities.

This view is supported by the accounts of other graduates of Ngruki, like Noor Huda Ismail (2005), who have written extensively on the non-formal activities that have also taken place at the *pondok pesantren* under the direction of teachers like Abu Bakar Baasyir. Recalling his days as a student at the *pondok*, Ismail notes:

Inside Ngruki's walls, anti-Semitism was rampant. On Thursday night public speaking classes, the most popular topic was the threats facing Islam. Global Jewish power and Indonesia's Christian-controlled economy fuelled our fears. We, the students, delivered impassioned speeches quoting the verse of the Koran that reads "the infidels and Jews will never stop fighting us until we follow their

²⁹ Wildan, 2006, p. 4.

religion”. I was no different, and my words received warm praise and injected me with pride and genuine satisfaction.³⁰

Ismail’s account of his own stay at Pesantren al-Mukmin supports the claim that while the institution’s formal curriculum is on par with the standards and guidelines set by the Indonesian Department of Religious Affairs, there is no means to determine what kind of activities may have taken place outside of formal teaching modules and curricula that has been set. Abu Bakar Baasyir’s exclusive approach to the doctrine of Muslim solidarity accounts in part for the anti-Semitism and anti-Christian polemics that Ismail notes was rampant at the institution during his studies there. Though here again it has to be noted that such non-formal unstructured activities are not unique to religious educational institutions and do also take place in secular educational institutions such as the state universities of Indonesia.

In the end, however, what eventually determined and still determines the career trajectories of the graduates of the Ngruki alumni have less to do with religious fervour and more to do with the economic necessities of the times that they live in. As we have now shown, an overwhelming majority of the graduates of the *pondok pesantren* and other institutions under the care of the Ngruki Foundation eventually moved on to other educational institutions linked to the Indonesian state. Many of them later opted for careers having more to do with non-religious concerns. In many of these cases, it was discovered by the graduates themselves that the teachings of Ngruki were not entirely adequate and had to be supplemented by other disciplines learned elsewhere. Again, the testimony of Ismail (2005) is relevant:

Ngruki’s teachings proved unrealistic in the real world, especially the emphasis on the strict interpretation of Islam that was at complete odds with the environment where we ended up working. After graduation, I had to obtain a personal identification card from the government, the same government I was taught to disregard. I choose to further my study at two government-run universities, where I had to sing the national anthem and respect the national flag. All of this was necessary to start a successful career.

With the amount of media attention that has been given to it, and the ever-changing economic and political realities of post-Suharto Indonesia shifting all the time, what will be

³⁰ See, Noor Huda Ismail, “Ngruki: Is it a Terrorism School?” *Jakarta Post*, 14 March 2005.

the future of the Pondok Pesantren al-Mukmin of Ngruki and the other schools of the YPIA? This will be addressed in our conclusion.

IV. Moving On: The Future of the Pondok Pesantren al-Mukmin of Ngruki

Thanks to the media coverage given to Ngruki and the notoriety of some of its founders and teachers, it is safe to say that this is one *pesantren* that will never escape the glare of the media in the future. For that and other reasons we have mentioned above, it can be concluded that the future development of the Pondok Pesantren al-Mukmin will be the subject of constant research and analysis, and the media will be close at hand to monitor how the institution develops in the future. Furthermore, Ngruki's difficult and often strained relationship with Indonesian authorities will certainly ensure that it remains one of the most closely monitored and infiltrated institutions of learning in Indonesia, with constant attempts being made to infiltrate its teaching staff and student body.

Cognisant that it is under the spotlight, the administrators and teachers of Ngruki have sought to distance themselves from men like Abu Bakar Baasyir (see appendix B) and have made several attempts to clean up the image of the *pesantren*. The need to do so became apparent particularly after the exodus of Ngruki teachers from the *pondok* in the mid 1990s. The teachers were unhappy with the institution's negative reputation and no longer wanted to be associated with men like Baasyir and Abdullah Sungkar. Shortly after the Bali bombing of 2002, the teachers of Ngruki organized a public seminar to warn people of the dangers of religious militancy and radicalism, and issued numerous statements that decried the bombings in Bali as *haram* and un-Islamic.

Furthermore, as an institution that relies on the support of the local community and whose finances are linked to the contribution of students fees, Ngruki has been keen to improve its image in order to regain the high levels of student recruitment it had prior to 2002 and the arrest of Abu Bakar Baasyir. The *pesantren's* administration was and is aware of the fact that many parents of the students there are concerned about the institution's reputation, and has therefore gone to great lengths to communicate its message to the outside world and to make the institution more accessible to outsiders—to the extent of publishing a guidebook in English (dutifully distributed to all journalists and scholars who visit the place).³¹ During my visits to the institution (May 2006, August 2006, May–June 2007), I found that there was

³¹ See, *Al-Mukin Pesantren Profile*, Ngruki Sukoharjo Surakarta, Central Java, 2006.

no difficulty whatsoever in meeting with members of staff and conducting interviews with teachers and pupils there.

This brings us to our first conclusion about the future of Ngruki and the schools run by the YPIA: It is ironic—though not unique to Indonesia—that the modernization and reform process currently being carried out there is at the behest of the Indonesian authorities and the Indonesian security services in particular. Cynics may describe this as “modernization at the end of a gun” but the bottom line is that since it came to the public’s attention in the 1980s the Pondok al-Mukmin has been pressured to revamp its teaching methods, syllabus and curriculum according to the dictates of the Indonesian government, notably the Departemen Agama.

To a large extent, the moves to update and expand the curriculum of Ngruki in order to make it compatible with the mainstream religious studies curriculum set by the Department of Religious Affairs were rational and to be expected. Ngruki’s aim, after all, is to create young Muslim graduates who can take up jobs and posts in both the government machinery as well as the private sector. The reform of *madrasahs* and other religious educational institutions, as we have argued elsewhere (Noor, 2004), has been as much a result of geopolitical shifts as they have been motivated by socio-economic demands and concerns. In the long run, the continuing success and reputation of Ngruki will depend on its ability to provide a form of Islamic education that is modern and applicable in the context of present-day realities of Indonesia.

Furthermore, it has to be noted that the fate of Ngruki is linked to its ability to compete with other Islamic educational centres that dot the landscape of Indonesia today. Indonesia is and remains a country where education is seen as one of the top priorities of many an Indonesian parent and, since the 1950s, the country has been promoting literacy among its young and providing basic education to millions of Indonesians across the 17,000-island archipelago. Unlike other Muslim countries such as Pakistan or Morocco, where basic schooling is seen as a luxury by many, Indonesians can rest assured that the state is there to provide rudimentary education, at least at the primary level. The challenge faced by institutions like the Pondok al-Mukmin is to provide an Islamic form of education that is modern, relevant and useful for their graduates later in life.

Here is where Ngruki is faced with the daunting prospect of having to compete with the other better established and better funded state-sponsored Islamic universities and colleges, such as the Universitas Islam Sharif Hidayatullah (UINSAH) in Jakarta and Universitas Islam Sunan Kalijaga (UINSUKA) of Jogjakarta. Furthermore, there are also

numerous Muslim universities such as the Universitas Muhamadiyah Surakarta (UMS), where higher levels of education are provided by Muslim movements like the Muhamadiyah. Competing against universities like UINSAH, UINSUKA and UMS is not an easy task, as the state's Islamic universities (UINs) already have a head start in terms of research work, funding, resources and popularity. Both UINSAH and UINSUKA currently lead all the other Islamic centres of learning in Indonesia in the field of modern religious studies; while Muhamadiyah's UMS has managed to gain international recognition by forming working partnerships with science-based technological universities in Europe.³² While the research and teaching that is being conducted in places like UINSUKA and UINSAH have moved on from traditional textual analysis to disciplines like hermeneutics, discourse analysis, sociology, anthropology, deconstruction and critical theory,³³ the *pondok pesantrens* of Indonesia—Pondok al-Mukmin is no exception here—are faced with the threat of extinction, unless they adapt and reform in time.

This brings us to the question of modernity and reform, and whether what we see in Ngruki today is a result of a modernization process at work and an example of Islamic modernity in the making.

Indonesia's encounter with modernity is intimately linked to the development of political Islam in the country and the emergence of Muslim centres of education, in all their

³² At present, the Universitas Muhamadiyah Surakarta (UMS), run by the Muhamadiyah movement, has managed to work out a joint training and research programme in the field of engineering and automotive research with Kingston University of London. See, *UMS: Towards an Internationally Recognised University. Progam Kelas Internasional Engineering Automotive*, brochure by UMS Surakarta, 2006.

³³ The modernization and reform process that has taken place in Indonesia's modern Islamic universities is actually a process that began way back in the 1970s but has only now begun to provide concrete results. At present, disciplines such as hermeneutics and discourse analysis have become commonplace in the state's Islamic universities such as Sunan Kalijaga in Jogjakarta and Sharif Hidayatullah in Jakarta. For a broader view of this complex and long-drawn process, see, Zakiyuddin Baidhawiy M. Thoyibi (Ed.), *Reinvensi Islam Multikultural, Penerbitan Pusat Studi Budaya dan Perubahan Sosial (PSB-PS)*, Surakarta: Universitas Muhamadiyah Surakarta (UMS), 2005; Zuly Qadir, "Muhamadiyah dan Pilihan Gerakan Dalam Masyarakat Multikultural", in Zakiyuddin Baidhawiy M. Thoyibi (Ed.), *Reinvensi Islam Multikultural*, UMS, 2005; Mujamil Qamar, *Pesantren: Dari Transformasi Metodologi Menuju Demokrasi Institusi*. Jakarta: Penerbit Erlangga, Ciracas, , 2002; Muhammad Mastury, "IAIN dan Perkembangan Ilmu", in *Al-Jami'ah*, Majalah Ilmu Pengetahuan Agama Islam, No. 49. 1992; H. A. Soetjipto and Agussalim Sitompul, *Sejarah Pertumbuhan dan Perkembangan Institut Agama Islam Negeri IAIN al-Jami'ah*; Lembaga Pendidikan Masyarakat, IAIN Sunan Kalijaga Jogjakarta, Jogjakarta, 1986; *Kerangka Dasar Keilmuan Dan Perkembangan Kurikulum UIN Sunan Kalijaga*, Jogjakarta: Pokja Akademik UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2004; Zainal Abidin Bagir, Jarot Wahyudi, Afnan Anshori (Eds.), *Integrasi Ilmu dan Agama: Interpretasi dan Aksi*, Bandung and Jogjakarta: Penerbit Mizan, Suka Press and Masyarakat Jogjakarta Untuk Ilmu dan Agama, 2005; Amin Abdullah, "Desain Pembangunan Akademik IAIN Menuju UIN Sunan Kalijaga: Dari Pola Dikotomis-Atomistik ke Arah Integratif Interdisciplinary", in Zainal Abidin Bagir, Jarot Wahyudi & Afnan Anshori (Eds.), *Integrasi Ilmu dan Agama: Interpretasi dan Aksi*, Bandung and Jogjakarta: Penerbit Mizan, , Suka Press and Masyarakat Jogjakarta Untuk Ilmu dan Agama, 2005; Samsul Hady and Rasmianto, *Konvensi STAIN Malang Menjadi UIN Malang: Meraih Yang Besar untuk Mengabdikan kepada Yang Maha Besar*, UIN Malang, 2006; Areif Furchan, *Developing Pancasilaist Muslims: Islamic Religious Education in Public Schools in Indonesia*, Jakarta: Logos Press, 2002.

variant and hybrid forms. The debate over modernity took off in earnest from the late nineteenth century, culminating in the development of the country's first Muslim political movements. The Sarekat Dagang Islam that was launched in Surakarta at the turn of the twentieth century was an attempt on the part of Indonesian Muslims to regain control of their local economy at a time when the all-important batik industry was being monopolized by Dutch, and later Chinese, capital interests. Then came initiatives such as the Muhamadiyah movement, the first modernist-reformist Muslim movement that spearheaded the process of Muslim educational reform. Not long after the Nahdatul Ulama's emergence on the political scene, Javanese conservative-traditionalists entered the fray, as a tacit acceptance of the need to modernize as well.

Modernity in Indonesia was seen as a *fait accompli*, a fact brought home by the realities of Western (Dutch) colonial rule and the order of knowledge and power that the colonial enterprise imposed on Indonesian society. From the 1910s to 1920s, the Indonesian Muslims' struggle was that of economic empowerment. Later, from the 1920s to 1930s, modernity came to be understood in terms of political mobilization. From the 1940s to 1950s, it was seen through the lens of the anti-colonial struggle and fight for independence. Following independence, it was taken for granted that the young Indonesian republic was a modern democracy, though even then this was hardly a democracy that could have bracketed Islam out of the equation.

From the 1960s to the 1980s, the development of Indonesian Islam was in tandem with the development of the modern Indonesian republic. Indonesia's Islamists took part in the struggle to define the nation-state. They lent their weight to the anti-communist struggle (which witnessed the massacre of the Indonesian Communist Party, PKI) and eventually adapted themselves to the realities of a dictatorial-militarist rule under Suharto, where political Islam was curtailed and Islamists themselves opted for a form of non-political activism dubbed "*Islam Kultural*" (Cultural Islam).

It is against this broad tableau of national political contestation between Islamists, nationalists, communists, secular democrats and capitalists that institutions like the Pondok Pesantren al-Mukmin were created. Looking at the Pondok Pesantren al-Mukmin today, the signs and symbols of modernity at work are everywhere, from its regimented curriculum to its hierarchical teaching structure, from its centralized command based at its foundation to the contractual relations that determine the employment of its teachers and enrolment of its students.

This is not to say that the conservative and exclusive Salafi-based teachings of some of its scholars like Abu Bakar Baasyir or Abdullah Sungkar go hand-in-hand with the critical spirit of modernity. As we have shown, the hermetically sealed, totalized and totalising discursive economy offered by the likes of Baasyir does not sit well next to the spirit of rational enlightenment or objective, critical enquiry. But even here, in the modern structure of an institution like Ngruki, we can and do find its discontents in the form of scholars who may (and often do) use the tools of modernity to reject it outright.

One thing is for certain though, and that is the Pondok Pesantren al-Mukmin, despite its manifold contradictions, offers a fairly accurate picture of the highly contested debate on modernity and modernization that is taking place in Indonesia today. The ideas of Abu Bakar Baasyir and scholars like him may go against the grain of modernist thinking today but in their violent oppositional dialectic against all that they deem modern, secular and un-Islamic, they too reside within the discursive economy of modernity that has given birth to Indonesia's Islamist experiment. Abu Bakar Baasyir may spook the crowd still, but he is no stranger to any of us.

Biodata

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Dr. Noor is the author of *Islam Embedded: The Historical Development of the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party PAS: 1951–2003* (in two volumes), published by the Malaysian Sociological Research Institute (MSRI), Kuala Lumpur, in 2004. His other writings include: *Writings on the War on Terror* (Globalmedia Press, India, 2006); *From Majapahit to Putrajaya: Searching For Another Malaysia* (Silverfish Books, Kuala Lumpur, 2005); *Islam Progresif: Peluang, Tentangan dan Masa Depan di Asia Tenggara* (SAMHA, Jogjakarta,

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