

## Islam, Nationalism and Democracy: A Political Biography of Mohammad Natsir

THIS book lucidly explores the journey of the political career of Mohammad Natsir, who was once a prominent political figure as well as a leading Muslim thinker in Indonesia. Kahin attempts to provide her reader with an understanding of Natsir's views on nationalism and democracy. Her goal is also to analyse the influence of modernist Islam on Natsir as a politician and his response to major political and social upheavals that took place during his career. The work is presented in chronological order.

It begins with the introduction of Natsir's background, including his childhood, education and homeland. The subsequent chapters discuss phases of his involvement in Indonesian politics. Kahin concludes with an epilogue discussing Natsir's 'legacy' and recognition he received from the Indonesian government after his death. Sources consulted in writing this book are extensive; they include many of Natsir's writings and interviews the author conducted with Natsir and his family members. The author introduces and describes Natsir to her readers as a very down to earth person, pious and a man who lived a humble life. She also shows that Natsir's personality contributed greatly to his popularity as a politician and Muslim leader. Kahin also cites Deliar Noer, who suggests that Natsir's personality also jeopardized his political career. As mentioned in the title, this work focuses on Natsir's interpretation of Islam, democracy and nationalism while juggling political changes and developments that took place within Indonesian politics.

Kahin demonstrates that Natsir as a politician lived an impressive and challenging life. He had enjoyed a splendid career in the early period

---

### Judul Buku

Islam, Nationalism and Democracy: A Political Biography of Mohammad Natsir

### Penulis

Audrey R. Kahin

### Penerbit

Singapore: NUS Press, 2012

### Jumlah Halaman

264

### ISBN

978-9971-69-571-2

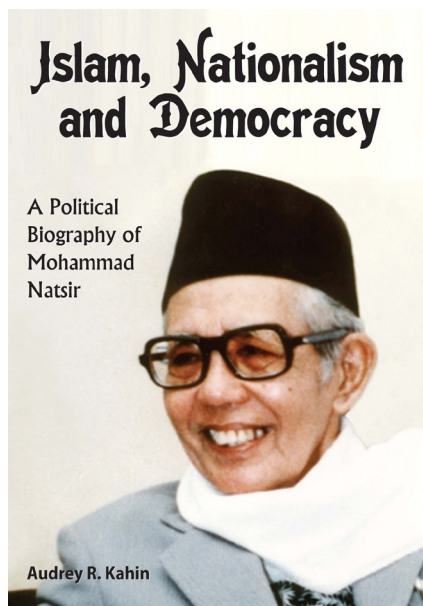
### Peresensi

Nazirah Lee

---

with Sukarno's 'guided democracy'. After his resignation, Natsir stayed active in politics, voicing his criticisms of the government's internal and international policies. In consequence, he was marginalized by mainstream politics. Natsir then turned into a 'national enemy' in 1958 when he joined the rebellion in Sumatra because of his dissatisfaction with Soekarno. He surrendered in 1961 and was imprisoned until Soekarno fell from power in 1965. During those four years, Natsir endured 'house arrest', 'detention', 'quarantine' and incarceration in the Jakarta Military Prison. Natsir returned to politics after his imprisonment but found his political influence had dwindled. The younger generations in Islamic parties had different views on Islam and its position in politics. To demonstrate this development, Kahin cites Nurcholish Madjid, who insists that Islam is a 'personal religion' and secularization is needed to achieve modernization. Natsir was once again facing an unfavourable situation and how to channel and realize his ideas on Islam in Indonesian politics.

Kahin demonstrates that the leadership change from Soekarno to Suharto in 1965 brought about little change to the position of Islam in Indonesia. Even though, at the beginning of his administration, Suharto tried to win both secular and Islamic parties' leaders by showing his leniency towards them, this position did not last. Suharto was alarmed by the warm welcome the public gave to Islamic organizations and he began to put restrictions on Islamic activities. This affected Natsir directly. Kahin demonstrates that he began to focus more on propagation work from 1967. He established Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia with the aim of



of his involvement in politics when he was appointed as the Minister of Information and then the Prime Minister of Indonesia. The apex of his career lasted only a short period of time since he resigned his position as Prime Minister six months after his appointment due to his dissatisfaction

educating Muslims about Islam. He also actively built a close relationship with Muslim leaders in the Arab countries, Pakistan and Malaysia. By the 1980s the Suharto administration began to take steps to restrict his movements, even in personal matters. He was denied permission to perform the haj and to get medical treatment outside Indonesia. Despite such oppression, Natsir never gave up his idea that Islam should be recognized in Indonesian politics. He passed away on 6 February 1993, leaving the legacy of his thought not only in Indonesia but also in Arab countries. Kahin concludes that Natsir's legacy might have influenced the Arab spring that occurred in 2011.

Studies conducted on Natsir have always associated him with the image of a devout Muslim. In this book, Kahin illustrates that Natsir's view of democracy and nationalism was defined by his interpretation of Islamic principles. His hesitation to share Soekarno's view on nationalism and democracy was the first obstacle in his political career. This book compares Natsir and Soekarno in many respects regarding their views on nationalism and democracy. Soekarno, according to the author, embraced nationalism while Natsir criticized extreme nationalism, even though he had a recognized love for his country. The reason for his attitude on this issue could have derived from the modernist Muslim discussion during that period that patriotism or hub awlatn is in line with Islamic teaching.

The differences between Natsir and Soekarno went deeper on the issue of Pancasila (the five principles of Indonesia's State ideology—nationalism, internationalism, humanitarianism, democracy, social justice and belief in God). Prior to 1957, Natsir was convinced that Pancasila was in line with Islamic teaching because it put the stress on the belief in the one and only God. However, Soekarno's efforts to introduce a more authoritarian order in Indonesia and the growing strength

of the Communist Party led Natsir to change his view. Kahin cites Natsir's writing, which stated that Pancasila was amorphous, secular and unsuited to a Muslim nation. The root of this conflict between Soekarno and Natsir might have come from their different interpretations of the need for religion. Soekarno once mentioned that God was irrelevant to the later stage of human development. Natsir, however, firmly believed that religion is essential and considered Islam to be a philosophy of life and a system of living. The author also implies that Natsir and Soekarno had different views on the need to preserve Islam as the main source for determining the type of modernization and progress that would suit Indonesia. Natsir strongly believed that Pancasila was a threat to the appreciation of Islam (or religion) amongst the Indonesians. In the 1980s Natsir enthusiastically opposed Suharto's attempts to introduce Pancasila into the school curriculum because he saw it as an action to undermine monotheistic religions. The discussion in this book suggests that Natsir was a sincere patriot but he believed that nationalism could not surpass the superiority of Islam.

The author's analysis contends that Natsir was a fervent believer in democracy. Apart from the Western education of his early childhood, Natsir's acceptance of democracy was influenced by his notion that it could fulfil part of the Islamic state due to its similarity to the concept of syura. Kahin also demonstrates that Natsir tried his best to realize a truly democratic state in Indonesia within which Islam played a major role. He faced major obstacles, however, because the resistance came not only from a secular nationalist group but also from traditionalist Muslims within his own party. Soekarno and (later) Suharto clearly refused to share Natsir's view on democracy. Democracy and the Islamic state were incompatible, in Soekarno's view, and he labelled those who wanted

to establish an Islamic state as 'Muslim extremists'. Natsir, however, strongly rejected Soekarno's 'guided democracy' because he considered the concept of democracy that Soekarno presented as a corruption of the principles of true democracy. According to the discussion, Natsir's efforts to realize his version of democracy in Indonesia failed because the Islamic characteristics that he highlighted differed from the democracy that was implied by Soekarno and Suharto administration. In sum, the author shows that Islam, in the form promoted by Natsir, was incompatible with the vision held by the secular nationalists who were in power.

Even though Natsir was only active at the international level after 1967, he was by no means isolated from the development that took place in the Muslim world. Furthermore, he was recognized as a modernist Muslim who was influenced greatly by the modernist movement in Egypt in the early twentieth century. The author states that, as a 'Kaum Muda', Natsir was influenced by Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida. Even so, his approach on issues regarding the principles of democracy or nationalism was based on the Indonesian context. The author states that Natsir admitted that he was attracted to ideas and opinions shared by prominent Islamic scholars, such as Muhammad Abduh, Rashid Rida, Hasan Al-Bana, A. Ala al-Maududi and Syed Qutb. Kahin, for example, puts forward that Natsir and Qutb rejected nationalism, even though Natsir hesitated to accept Qutb's idea to reject egalitarianism. Meanwhile, on the issue of the establishment of an Islamic state, Natsir went along with Maududi's opinion that the establishment of Islamic republics is a task that has to be undertaken slowly.

(Sumber: *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume 88, Part 2, No. 309, December 2015 pp. 172-175)

