



# Implications of Islam and Pluralism in Post-Suharto Indonesia



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## [ *Abstract* ]

This paper attempts to explore the multifaceted Islamic culture and ideology was shaped in different historical periods in Indonesia, particularly focusing on the revival of Islamic extremism and liberalism as well as the surging conflict among Islamic communities in the post-Suharto era. The paper asserts that in the post-Suharto era, progressive Muslim/Islamic liberalist is upholding pluralism, and *pancasila* is emerging as a positive force for Indonesia's peaceful transition to democracy, solidly defending national unity.

**Keywords:** Indonesia, Islam, Pluralism, *pancasila*, democratization

## I. Introduction

In the Southeast Asian region, Islam figures as an important religion. However, Islam has been controversial in the area, particularly after 9/11 attacks, as a growing radical Islamism is perceived to threaten regional stability and security. On the other hand, Islamic thought and social forces advocating democracy, liberalism, secularism, and tolerance is also mounting, playing an important

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role in dispelling Islamophobia and shaping the new image of Islam in the region. This is precisely what is happening in Islam in Indonesia. As a home to more than 180 million Muslims, Indonesia is the largest Muslim-majority country in the world. However, the identity of the Indonesian state has never been defined in terms of Islam in this multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. In fact, since the establishment of the Republic of Indonesia in 1945, *pancasila* has been enshrined in the Constitution and upheld as state identity by government and society—which enshrines Indonesia not as a theocratic but a secular state. However, with the downfall of the Suharto authoritarian regime, the post-Suharto era is witnessing the change of democracy and Islam. However, with the deepening democratization in Indonesia, Islamic radicalism, marginalized in the Sukarno and Suharto era, is resurfacing and voicing the Islamization of Indonesia and opposing secularism and pluralism. Meanwhile, Islamic liberalism, which advocates democracy, tolerance, and pluralism, is also surging as an important force in Muslim civil society, unavoidably leading to serious conflict among Muslim community. The case of fatwas issued by Islamic hard line groups in 2005 to ban religious minority (*Ahmadiyah* sect) and pluralism, followed by demonstrations opposing ban on religious freedom and defending cultural pluralism and *pancasila* in 2008, obviously indicated the dispute and conflict between Islamic radicalism and Islamic liberalism. The paper surmises that the current context of multi-ethnic and multi-religious Indonesia—where Islamic cultural diversity also thrives—is incompatible with Islamic radicalism. The Islamic hardliners’ ban on *Ahmadiyah* and violence against Islamic liberal practices reveal not only prejudice and discrimination against religious minority, but also presented rising intolerance and hatred to pluralism, which is not only a serious threat to *pancasila*, the basis of the Republic, but also a challenge to the security of multicultural society of ASEAN.

## II. Indonesia Islam: Cultural Pluralism and *Pancasila*<sup>1)</sup>

Its geographical location made Indonesia a melting pot of multicultural and multi-religious influences. Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, and even Confucianism have taken root in various places.<sup>2)</sup>

Indonesia is a populous country of around 235 million, 85% of which are Muslim. Islamic culture is basically hybrid and has gone through different phases of evolution. The first phase is between the 14<sup>th</sup> century to 1650, when Islam was first introduced in Indonesia by trading merchants from Persia and India, as well as *Sufi* priests from the South Asia Subcontinent. The second phase may be pegged between 1650-1868, when the country was under Dutch repression, and its isolation from the larger Islamic world led to the absorption of Javanese tradition, thoughts and rituals. It was also during this period when Arabic traders and migrants from Hadraumat also consolidated Arabic values and traditions, which gradually became important with the increasing role of Arabic traders and priests in Indonesia Islands. The third phase is between 1868-1900, the period of the opening of the Suez Canal, and the consequent opening of free trade as well as the lifting of Dutch religious containment on Muslim pilgrimages. This greatly promoted pilgrimage to Mecca, and further enforced

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- 1) Pancasila is the philosophical basis of the Indonesia State. It is composed of five inseparable and interrelated principles, including: Belief in one and only God; just and civilized humanity; the unity of Indonesia; democracy guided by the inner wisdom in the unanimity arising out of deliberations amongst representatives; and social justice for the whole of the people of Indonesia. More details of *pancasila* and its original formation from Kahin (1952).
  - 2) Scholars emphasize the reality of multi-ethnic society in Indonesia. Wertheim (1959) listed fourteen major groups: Atjehness, Batak, Minangkabau, Coastal Malay, Sundanese, Javanese, Madurese, Balinese, Dyaks, Makassarese, Buginese, Torajas, Menadonese, and Ambonese. It must be pointed out that foreign immigrants brought different culture and religions to the archipelago. Legge (1965), in his book *Indonesia*, examined the country's diverse heritage, which include, among others Hindu and Islamic cultural influences, apart from European and Dutch influences. In addition, Chinese culture is also an important element in Indonesian diversity. Charles A. Coppel, Claudine Salmon, and Leo Suryadinata have made various commentaries on Indonesian Chinese culture. On the influence of Confucianism in Indonesia, see Coppel (2002).

Arabic religious and cultural clout in the islands. The fourth phase may be situated in the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century, during the rise of Islamic modernism in Egypt which attracted many Indonesian Muslims to study in Al Azhar Islamic college, a paramount Islamic learning institution. This greatly expanded Indonesia cultural link with Egypt, a Islamic *Sunni* center. After independence, Indonesian Muslim communities continued to maintain and consolidate links with centers of Islamic learning, while deepening relations with western countries where numerous Indonesian Muslim intellectuals went to universities since the 1970s. They came back with liberal ideas, which undoubtedly had significant impact to local communities. The evolution of Islam show Islamic culture has been hybridized and diversified in Indonesia. Clifford Geertz, the well-known American anthropologist, observed and conducted field research in a town of Java Island in 1950s. He roughly divided Muslims in Java into two categories—the *Santri*, or the orthodox Muslim, strictly observing Islamic faith and rituals, and the *Abangan*, the nominal Muslim combined their faith with local Javanese customs, mysticism and animism (Geertz 1960: 121-30)<sup>3</sup>). In addition, he further differentiates the Javanese *Santri* by their traditionalist or modernist outlooks. The latter identifies with a syncretistic Javanese Islam while the former commit to more “puritan” Islamic modernism (much closer in expression with Arabian tradition). Outside of Java, there is also strong Islamic identification in places like Aceh in Northern Sumatra and parts of Sulawesi. The evolution of Islam in Indonesia is conducive to hybridity, though Islam remained to be very much entrenched in the culture. The country is rootedness in, and widely associates itself to *Sunni* Islam, as well as the practices of the *Shafi’i fiqh* school, while generations of Indonesians subscribe to albeit less influential sects like the *Shiite*, *Ahmadiyah*, and the *Sufi*.

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3) Here, nomial Muslims refer to those Javanese Muslims whose cultural and religious outlooks vary to great extents. Their faith is a syncretic amalgam of indigenous and animist beliefs, as well as Hindu-Buddist and Islamic elements as practiced in rural areas of Central and East Java. A large proportion of the broader Islamic population is *abangan*.

It must be noted however that the Indonesian Muslim community is neither culturally or ideologically unitary. Besides a number of fringe Muslim-based organizations based on various ideologies and thoughts, there are two established Muslim organizations. The first one is Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), formed in Surabaya in 1926, which represents traditional Muslims and aims to strengthen traditional Islam by unifying Indonesians Muslims against secular national ideologies and Islamic modernism. The NU was very influential, with membership base of 30-35 million. Another organization is the Muhammadiyah, set up in Yogyakarta in 1912, and inspired by Islamic reform movements from Egypt at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century. As an Islamic reformist, Muhammadiyah aimed to correct the perceived backwardness and syncretistic nature of Indonesia Islam. Muhammadiyah has been popular in *Santri* modernist communities, enjoying about 29 million members, and runs a large number of self-supported institutions including modern educational institution, mosques and orphanages.

Since the founding of the Republic of Indonesia, the *Pancasila*—the basis of Indonesian state philosophy formulated by Sukarno—upheld the civil values of the newly formed modern nation-state and recognized the ethnic/religious diversity of the Indonesia archipelago. Belief in the one and only God, its most important principle, was not only formulated to appease those Muslims who wanted to establish an Islamic state; it was introduced to eradicate ethnic/religious conflicts by forming a consolidated nation in the multiethnic society.<sup>4)</sup> Generally, the principle enshrined religious tolerance and recognized all religious practices, which helped shape identity in Indonesian social and political life.

### III. Democratization and Rising Religious Intolerance

Indonesia is widely described as a moderate Islamic nation. In many ways, this has been true. However, occasional conflicts

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4) Since Indonesia attained its independence in 1945, the republic expressed its aspiration to establish a consolidated nation in a motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, unity in diversity.

among ethnic and religious groups surfaced since its independence. Furthermore, the democratization process after the collapse of Suharto regime was accompanied by intensified religious/communal conflicts.<sup>5)</sup>

The Indonesian democratic transition began in May 1998. The 1997 Asian Financial Crisis triggered intense rioting and popular movements which finally led to the fall of the Suharto regime.

The transition paved the way for democratization. Under intense domestic and international pressure, B. J. Habibie, Suharto's successor, reformed the political system by starting calling for legislative and presidential elections in 1999, where the opposition was victorious. Moderate Muslim scholar and leader Abdurrahman Wahid, who won the presidency in 1999, has been revered as the father of multiculturalism and pluralism, for his staunch defense of the country's pluralist traditions and commitment to human rights protection and ethnic/ religious/communal equality.<sup>6)</sup>

Consequently, the issue of the establishment of an Islamic State was revived. In the latter years of the New Order regime, Suharto had manipulated Islamic groups and opened up more spaces for Islamists in the regime. This had led to speculation that there was an agenda for the revival of this movement.

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5) For instance, in the closing months of 1996 and at the beginning of 1997, Java was once again became the stage for violent protests. Movements erupted in Surabaya, Situbondo, Tasikmalaya, the Tanah Abang, Pekalongan, Rembang, Temanggung, Wonosobo, and Banjarnegara (Hüsken and Jonge 2002: 89). After the end of New Order, serious communal conflicts broke out in towns such as Palangkaraya in Central Kalimantan Province, Sampit and Poso in Central Sulawesi Province, Ambon in Maluku Province, Ternate and Tobelo in North Maluku Province, and Pemangkat in West Kalimantan Province (Klinke 2007).

6) Abdurrahman Wahid, well-known as Gus Dur, was the fourth president of Indonesia, and Indonesia's first democratically-elected president and past chairperson of *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU), one of the largest independent Islamic organizations in the world. Gus Dur served as chairperson of NU from 1984-1999. Gus Dur is one of the greatest Muslim intellectuals in Indonesia, bridging between the world of traditional Islam and modernity. Gus Dur is respected by the ethnic Chinese community in Indonesia, especially after he lifted all bans on Chinese tradition and cultural practices issued by Suharto regime. He passed away on December 30, 2009. For further reading, see Barton (2002).

Democratization promoted some Islamic groups to openly suggest a more Islamic dimension to the Indonesia nation (Henders 2007: 177-200). The practice *Shariah*, for instance, earned positive response from the Muslim community. The questionnaire survey on practice of *Shariah* conducted by Indonesia Survey Institute in 2001 showed an increasing trend of bringing back *Shariah* in Indonesia.<sup>7)</sup> Meanwhile, the survey also showed that Islam extremist groups expanded influence nationwide and gradually garnered increasing recognition from Muslim community.<sup>8)</sup>

Religious/ethnic/communal conflicts also intensified, especially during the surge of Islamic radicalism that worsened Muslim-Christian relations. It also brought about attacks on some Muslim minority groups. The case of anti-*Ahmadiyah* represents the revival of Islamic monoculturalism and surging religious intolerance.

*Ahemadiyah* is an Islamic reformist movement founded by *Mizra Ghulam Ahmad* in India at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Ahmadis consider themselves Muslims and claim to practice Islam in its pristine form. However, some of the views of *Ahmadiyah* have been contentious to mainstream Muslims since the movement's inception. As *Ahmadiyah* deny Muhammad's being not the last Prophet, many mainstream Muslims exclude Ahmadis, leading to the group's marginalization, persecution, and systematic oppression. This led many Ahmadis to emigrate and settle elsewhere. *Ahmadiyah* was introduced into Indonesia in the beginning of 1920s, and people were attracted by its vigorous advocacy for religious freedom and reform (Wertheim 1979: 213). Since the 1980's, the number of Ahmadis has been increasing greatly (Asia Briefing 2008).<sup>9)</sup> In the Suharto era, the *Majiles*

7) *Indonesia Matters*, March 17, 2006, <http://www.indonesiamatters.com/> (Accessed March 09, 2010).

8) For example, 59% of the respondents show support Majiles Ulama Indonesia, while 11% supported Majelis Mujahadin Indonesia. 17% meanwhile favored Front Pembela Islam. *Indonesia Matters*, March 17, 2006, <http://www.indonesiamatters.com/> (Accessed March 09, 2010).

9) There is no accurate data on Ahemadis. In fact, there exists a big gap of Ahemadis in official statistics and the estimation of media. See Indonesia: Implication of the Ahmadiyah Decree, *Asia Briefing*, No.78, Crisis Group Report, Jakarta/ Brussels, 7 July 2008.

*Ulama Indonesia* (MUI), a semi-official Islamic institute was formed in 1975 with support from government in order to eradicate the impact of communist ideology and religious liberalism. In 1981, shortly after it founded, MUI issued a *fatwa* to ban *Ahmadiyah* in Indonesia and pronounced *Ahmadiyah* as a heretic sect. Thanks to the revival of Islamic extremism in the post-Suharto era, 11 fatwas against liberal Islam have been announced on July 27, 2005. MUI reissued a fatwa to ban *Ahmadiyah* on July 28, 2005, and re-proclaimed *Ahmadiyah* a heresy, aiming to oppose surging Islam liberalism and reformation as well as the infiltration of Christian culture.

The 2005 fatwas issued by MUI triggered a new wave of persecution against *Ahmadiyah* and liberal Islam. Islamic radical organizations spearheaded attacks on freedom of religion and pluralism in the post-Suharto era, joining the movement against *Ahmadiyah*. *Forum Umat Islam (FUI)*, an Islamic hard-line organization set up in August 2005, upheld the MUI fatwa against pluralism and *Ahmadiyah*. Since its founding, FUI launched a cluster of nationwide actions to defend Islam fundamental values and to resist gradual infiltration of secularism, multiculturalism, capitalism as well as Western hegemony (Asia Briefing 2008).<sup>10)</sup> The FUI has a broad national influence, stirring massive action and recruiting more people to subscribe to full Islamic governance.

Another anti-*Ahmadiyah* movement is the *Front Pembela Islam* (Islamic Defenders Front), set up in August 1998. Its goal is the implementation of Islamic law in Indonesia. One part of FPI focuses on religious outreach to the Muslim community, urging stricter adherence to Islamic tenets, favoring Arabic values and religious fundamentalism. FPI played a very important role in recent anti-*Ahmadiyah* riots and violations of civil rights.

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10) Some of FUI's actions in 2006-2007 include: the "Million Muslim March" in support of the anti-pornography bill (May 2006); calling on the government to ban all deviant sects (Oct. 2007); issue statement rejecting a return to Pancasila (Dec. 2007); issuance of statements to support banning *Ahmadiyah* and rejecting the construction of churches (Feb. 2008); rallying a million faithful to support the dissolution of *Ahmadiyah* in Jakarta (April 2008); and the anti-*Ahmadiyah* action by MUI branches in North Sumatra and West Kalimantan (June 2008).



In addition, other Islamic hard line organizations including Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia,<sup>11)</sup> Forum Umat Ulama Islam,<sup>12)</sup> Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia,<sup>13)</sup> Indonesia Committee for Islamic World Solidarity<sup>14)</sup> and Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia<sup>15)</sup> actively participated in a boycott of freedom of religion and multiculturalism, and joined the persecution of *Ahmadiyah* (Bruinessen 2002).

Anti-*Ahmadiyah* movement not only earned active response from Islamic hard line organizations, but also garnered resonance from government officials. Under the MUI's auspices, some provincial governments in Java, Sumatra and Sulawesi actively observed fatwa and took action to ban *Ahmadiyah* activity in their regions, frequently creating persecution and oppression against *Ahmadiyah* followers.

Worse still, the Department of Religion in Indonesia also endorsed MUI's fatwas. Maftuh Basyuni, the minister of Department of Religion even proclaimed to ban *Ahmadiyah* legally in Indonesia. Some senior congressmen stood for banning the movement, believing it to be a war against heresy and a way to purify Islam. With the promotion of MUL, some influential politicians actively lobbied the central government to outlaw *Ahmadiyah*. Finally, on June 9, 2008, President Susilo issued the

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- 11) Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia is an Islamic organization which aims to bring back the Islamic way of life and convey Islamic mission to the world. Hizb ut-Tahrir first emerged among Palestinians in Jordan in the early 1950s. It started its underground activities in Indonesia in the 1980's, and became popular after Suharto regime.
  - 12) Forum Umat Ulama Islam is an Islamic organization, set up by a group of conservative Ulama in the 1980's. The organization's aim was to apply Sharia in Indonesia.
  - 13) Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia is an Islamic missionary organization founded by Muslim political figure Mohammed Natsir in 1966, aiming to perpetrate Islamic culture and way of life.
  - 14) The Indonesia Committee for Islamic World Solidarity (KISDI), an Islamic organization founded in the early of 1990's, is associated with the Dewan Dakwah missionary organization. KISDI organized demonstrations on issues such as Western pornography and gambling, as well as anti-Semitic and anti-Chinese causes, and intolerance of other religions and non-Muslim group.
  - 15) Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia is an Islamic organization founded by Abu Bakar Ba'asir, the suspected mastermind of Bali explosions in 2002. MMI aimed at implementation of Sharia in Indonesia.

ban on *Ahmadiyah*, which triggered massive controversy and protest among civil organizations.

#### **IV. Liberal Islam: Defending Pluralism and *Pancasila***

Escalating anti-*Ahmadiyah* movement and the violation on religious freedom and religious pluralism triggered civil war in Muslim communities (Morgan 2008). Progressive Liberal Islam activists protested MUI's ban on *Ahmadiyah* and the massive violence against the group. Liberal Muslim intellectuals criticized MUI's fatwa, and considered it a threat to the country's reputation as a tolerant nation that respects diversity, and strongly denounced the ban on *Ahmadiyah* as a violation of freedom of religion and pluralism enshrined in the Constitution of 1945. Azyumardi Azra, a prominent Muslim scholar and rector of the Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University argued that the MUI cannot ban Muslims from thinking, because pluralism, liberalism, and secularism are not only ideologies but also ways of thinking. MUI's fatwas were against freedom of expression and human rights in general (The Jakarta Post, 01/08/2005). Civil liberal organizations actively supporting religious tolerance staged massive protests against the fatwa on *Ahmadiyah*. On June 3, 2008, the National Alliance for Freedom of Religion and Faith, a human rights organization supporting interfaith unity, which included Islamic moderates like former Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid, organized a march to celebrate the anniversary of the *Pancasila* and support the rights of *Ahmadiyah*. Muhamm ad Syafi'i Anwar, executive director of the International Centre for Islam and Pluralism, led the peaceful interfaith demonstration. Muslim hardliners led by Islamic Defend Front violently attacked *Ahmadiyah* supporters in the march. Escalating conflict between Islamic hard line and liberal Islam caused mounting concern for social stability. Under the threat and pressure of Islamic hard line groups, President Susilo had to issue a ban on *Ahmadiyah* to appease surging radicalism.

The demonstration led by liberal Muslim intellectuals revealed the rise of liberal Islam in Indonesia and its commitment to defend pluralism and *Pancasila*. Although the liberal tradition in Islam has surfaced in the era of Islamic reformist liberalism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the term of Liberal Islam was first coined in *A Modern Approach to Islam* by Asaf Ali Asghar Fyzee (1899-1981), a Muslim intellectual from India in the 1950s. In his book, Fyzee strongly advocates a critical reinterpretation and reexamination of *Shariah* and *fiqh* (Islamic Jurisprudence) to make them relevant to contemporary modern life. Liberal Islam emphasized the idea of freedom from *taqlid* (Islamic tradition) and every rational Muslim is endowed with the right to practice *ijtihad* (interpretation of Quran and Hadith). These ideas gradually gained popularity in Indonesia in 1970's, during the emergence of Islamic new-modernists who were mostly further influenced by liberalism in western universities after educated in Indonesian Islamic college. Under the leadership of Mukti Ali, the Minister of Religion Department between 1971-1978, a "Look West" policy and modernization was undertaken and the state Islamic colleges established links with centers of Islamic learning in the West, like in Chicago and McGill Universities (Porter 2002: 56). The Muslim, middle-class intellectuals who went to study abroad came back with liberal ideas, which gave rise to Islamic liberalism and supported moderate Islamic thought, democratic reform, and pluralism. Notable Islamic liberals include Nurcholish Madjid, Azyumardi Azra, Amien Rais, Mohammad Shafi'i Anwar, and Din Syamsuddin, among others. Among the group of the Muslim intellectual elite, it was Nurcholish Madjid (1939-2005) who became best known as a neo-modernist, favoring ideas of a modern secular democracy where there is a separation of church and state. He also opposed Islam as a political movement.

As a progressive Muslim intellectual and a pioneer of the Islamic reformation movement in contemporary Indonesia, Madjid was the president of the Islamic Students' Association (HMI) from 1966-1971, and gained prominence as a national student leader opposing the authoritarian governments of Sukarno and Suharto. From 1978-1984, Madjid undertook Islamic Studies in the University

of Chicago under Pakistan's Fazlur Rahman, an eminent Muslim philosopher and reformist who strongly advocated the contextualization of Islam and making it responsive to modern life and the changing world. After earning his doctorate from Chicago, Madjid became a recognized authority on Islam and Indonesian politics, and began serving the state's Islamic University of Jakarta as a professor since 1998. While heavily influenced by Rahman's Islamic liberalism, Madjid championed *masyarakat madani*—a concept which encompasses pluralism, tolerance, and democracy—which enjoyed a large following among educated Muslims. As a Muslim public intellectual of Indonesia, Madjid believed Islam's future will depend not on politics, but on cultural, intellectual and educational activities. He sums up his position with the catch phrase: "Islam yes, Islamic party no!" With the support of other Muslim intellectuals, Madjid set up in 1984 the *Paramadina* Foundation, which aimed to develop Islam culture, and promote Islamic ethics (Bruinessen 2006; Bakti 2004). As Greg Fealy concluded, the *paramadina* became the main organizational vehicle for his activities. Thereafter, it soon gained a reputation as the leading liberal Islamic NGO in Indonesia. In many ways, the *paramadina* established a new paradigm for Islamic organizations. Most existing Muslim organizations until this time are mass-based and usually aimed at grassroots constituencies. In contrast, the *paramadina* targeted urban middle-class Muslims and members of the elite, including entrepreneurs, senior bureaucrats, military officers, politicians, and intellectuals. It organized seminars, study groups, and workshops in luxury city hotels, had high-quality and expensive publications, and developed well-equipped religious schools and a university catering to well-to-do Muslim children. The main focus of the group's activities was religious thought and action; political and social commentary was also often expressed, but were rarely and directly critical of the regime (Fealy 2007). With the expanding influence, the cultural Islamic movement advocated by the *paramadina* proved to be highly effective. Madjid, not only advocated on cultural Islam, but also theologized and developed an Islamic "inclusive theory", contextualizing Islam in Indonesia by enforcing inclusive tradition and disseminating inclusive plural thought. Madjid's endeavors fostering Islamic pluralism, religious

tolerance and interfaith dialogue earned him reverence as the father of pluralism and tolerance in his homeland, aptly characterized by his known monicker *Cak Nur*.

Under the promotion of progressive Muslim neo-modernists, liberal Islam quickly stepped up organization in Indonesia. The establishment of the Liberal Islam Network (Jaringan Islam Liberal, JIL) characterizes modern Islamic orientation/values in contemporary Indonesia in post-Suharto era. Liberal Islam Network is a network of young Muslim intellectuals, staunchly upholding the idea of separation between Islam and state, preferring to disseminate ideas of tolerance, pluralism, secularization, equality, individual and women's rights, among others, which are very significant to the development of liberal Islamic ideas and the future of moderate Islam in Indonesia (Widiyanto 2013).

Meanwhile, to face the challenge of changing the social and political environment, Muslim organizations deeply rooted in tradition are also changing in the post-Suharto era. For example, the Nahdhatul Ulama (NU), the largest Muslim organization in Indonesia, under the leadership of the former chairman Abdurrahman Gus Dur Wahid, is tending towards a more moderate and accommodating stance to universal values such as democracy, pluralism, and tolerance. As to Islam and democracy, Gus Dur emphasized that democracy is a compulsory element of Islam and upholding it is one of its principles. More importantly, as an advocate of tolerance and pluralism, during his presidency, he lifted Suharto's ban on all forms of Chinese culture, as well as and the other bans on Marxism and Leninism following the purge of communism in the wake of 1965 coup d'état. He also came to the defense of Salman Rushdie for his controversial 1988 novel *The Satanic Verses*. This gestures demonstrate Gus Dur's inclusive, moderate and tolerant interpretation of Islamic ideas, being revered as Southeast Asia's prominent spokesman for pluralism in Muslim politics. Heavily influenced by Wahid and liberal Islamism, NU no longer shares the agenda of formally adopting the *shariah* into Indonesia Constitution.

In a magazine interview, Wahid's successor, Hasyim Muzadi,

currently chairman of NU, argued that the struggle for the *Shariah* is not realistic. For him, the application of *shariah* can be done in civil society in contextual way but not within the structures of the nation- state. For the NU, contextual application of consists of being faithful and and accepting of universal interests. At the level of the nation state, religion may contribute ideals, otherwise, it will cause the disintegration. Only the spirit of *shariah* can be included. This was one way of harmonizing the country, where there is "Unity in Diversity" (Hasyim Muzadi Interview 2006). Meanwhile Muhammadiyah, the second largest Muslim organization in Indonesia, is also on a shift towards tolerance for pluralism under the leadership of its chairman Din Syamsuddin, who also advocates on contextual *shariah* and Islamic teaching in a pluralistic society. He launched the Center for Dialogue and Cooperation among Civilizations, aiming to eradicate prejudice and misconceptions among peoples of different faiths by persistent dialogue and cooperation (Barrie 2007).

## **V. Conclusion**

The democratization process stimulated Islamic activism in the political arena and led to a flurry of Islamic and Muslim-based political parties particularly after years of political marginalization under Suharto's rule. Accompanied by cultural/religious revival and Islamic political activism, Islamic politics became a divisive issue drawing national concern. But the poor performance of Islamic political parties in three democratic elections after the downfall of President Suharto showed that political Islam is still in the margins, reflecting popular attitude towards religion in politics. Majority of Muslim voters do not regard Islam as critical to their electoral decisions, even though it may be important in their personal lives. It seems that Islamic and Muslim- based parties lack credibility in dealing with economic development and welfare programs, discouraging constituents from subscribing to their principles. Despite the evidence of growing radicalism and Islamic influence as seen in anti-*Ahmadiyah* movements, and the

increasing numbers of *Shariah* provincial by laws in recent years, low-level support for Islamic and Muslim parties in the 2009 general election can be viewed as the denial of political Islam in Post-Suharto Indonesia.

In contrast, the voice of liberal Islam upholding principles of the separation of church and state, democracy, tolerance and pluralism, is becoming a major player in the post-Suharto era. The rise of liberal Islam can be viewed as a means to reform Islamic thought, where the revival of cultural or secular Islam bridges the separation of religion and state, through programs geared towards the promotion of Islamic culture, intellectual thought, and education, as in Madjid's *paramadina* movement.

In conclusion, it must be remembered that Islam in Indonesia was a first a cultural encounter with traders, Sufi mystics, and Muslim priests, rather than a political or military expansion of the Caliphate. Although there have been several powerful Sultanates established in ancient Indonesia, there never was an intent to set up a unitary Islamic state in archipelago. Under the Dutch colonial regime, Islam was isolated from outside Islamic world by cultivated by local culture. It was only during the latter period of colonial rule, when the Dutch colonial government—through the advice of Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857-1936), a prominent orientalist and a senior advisor of East Indian Affairs (1890-1906)—repressed political Islam and tolerated cultural Islam (Benda 1972: 83-92). The Islamic policy founded by Hurgronje was not only significant for Indonesia's Islamic evolution and socio-cultural reformation; it also became the basis for Indonesia's Islamic policy after it gained independence. The government to some extent adopted the idea of Dutch Islamic policy separating Islam from the state, and strictly contained Islam within the arena of personal, religious, and cultural life of individuals.

The idea of cultural Islam has been further developed by contemporary Muslim intellectuals by way of liberal or secular Islam, emphasizing the spiritual and cultural nature of Islam. In the context of a multi-cultural society, cultural Islam is in line with Indonesia's pluralistic "Unity in Diversity". In the context of

globalization, cultural Islam—forged on strong Islamic cultural influence, *pancasila*, and pluralist tradition—is an ideal way to counter malaise against Islam, making Indonesia a dynamic regional and global force to reckon with.

Lastly, let us return to pluralism as embraced in Indonesia. Religious pluralism or multiculturalism is rooted deeply in Indonesian culture, revered and embodied in *pancasila*, the nation's political philosophy. Recently, there are mounting calls for the government to award the title of national hero to the Abdurrahman “Gus Dur” Wahid, the father of multiculturalism and pluralism in Indonesia, who died on 30, Dec, 2009. The proposal is supported by all communities, and even Christians. This move only reflects the reverence for Gus Dur, his status revealing the popularity of the concept and principle of pluralism in Indonesia. Obviously, there is a growing consensus that multiculturalism and pluralism necessarily guarantee national unity, stability, and prosperity in Indonesia context, despite being challenged by conservative Islamic groups. Meanwhile, the *pancasila*, as an enshrined state ideology in the Constitution of 1945 will undoubtedly be an unshakable belief and basis for multiculturalism and pluralism, which can be further developed as a norm and identity for the ASEAN Socio- Cultural Community.

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