MUSLIM POLITICS AND DEMOCRACY IN INDONESIA

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Abstrak

Tulusan ini hendak mengkritik kondisi politik umat Islam Indonesia dewasa ini. Hal ini didasarkan pada adanya sekian banyak konsep politik dalam Islam sebagaimana juga ada dalam agama-agama besar lainnya. Dengan merujuk pada adanya keyakinan dalam agama Islam (tauhid), dimungkinkan untuk menjawab berbagai tuduhan yang dialamatkan pada umat Islam dewasa ini. Pembahasan diawali dengan membahas konsep diktator dan kemudian diakhiri dengan konsep demokrasi. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa ada banyak konsep dalam Islam tentang politik kenegaraan sehingga sistem politik demokrasi hanyalah merupakan salah satunya saja. Dengan demikian, isu yang selama ini dibangun secara universal seperti adanya benturan peradaban sebagaimana diusung Huntington ternyata tidak terbukti, melainkan hanyalah pertarungan interen peradaban saja. Petunjuk utamanya adalah adanya sistem demokrasi di dalam ajaran Islam itu sendiri.

الخلاصة

تسعى هذه المقالة إلى تقديم دراسة نقدية تجاه عديد من وجهات النظر والخطابات التي تسيطر عليها مسلمات إسلامية في العمل السياسي. كما تحاول المقالة الإحاطة بالتنوع المنتشر في ظاهرة الإسلام السياسي وخاصة في إندونيسيا. تدفع الدراسة بأن الإسلام، كما هي الحال في الأديان الكبيرة الأخرى، يشكل منظومة عقائدية معقدة يمكن من خلالها توفير الدعم لمدى واسع من النظم السياسية؛ بدءًا من الديكتاتورية وانتهاء بالديمقراطية. ومن ثم تخلص الدراسة إلى المحاولات الدؤوبة للبحث عن شكل وحيد متجانس من الإسلام السياسي ستظل محاطة بالعديد من وجهات النظر المتعارضة عن الديمقراطية وغيرها. كما تخلص الدراسة إلى أن مثل هذا الاتجاه قد يولد، أخيرًا، ما يمكن وصفه بصدام داخل الحضارة الواحدة وليس صدامًا بين الحضارات كما هو معروف.

Keyword: Muslim politics, cultural Islam, democracy, pluralism, and tolerance

A. Introduction

A variety of studies on the relation between Islam and democracy and have tended to prove the negative and pessimistic conclusions of the compatibility between Islam and democracy

and the prospect of democratization in the Muslim world. Samuel Huntington, for example, suggests that "Islamic concepts of politics differ from and contradict the premises of democratic politics"[1] while Gelner concludes that Islam "exemplifies a social order which seems to lack much capacity to provide political countervailing institutions or associations, which atomized without much individualism, and operates effectively without intellectual pluralism"[2]. In a similar vein, Bryan Turner summarises that "Islamic society lacked independent cities, an autonomous bourgeois, rational bureaucracy, legal reliability, personal property and the cluster of rights which embody bourgeois culture"[3] while Leonard Binder points to what he calls "cluster of absences": the absence of the concept of citizenship and of legal-political culture of compromise and flexibility as a critical deficiency in the Muslim world.[4] "Muslim exceptionalism" to the post-Cold War global trend toward democratization is thus in varying degrees implicitly or explicitly assumed in these analyses.[5]

This kind of analyses, however, has been increasingly challenged and perceived to be equally driven by essentialist, unitary and parochial premises. In line with this growing criticism, this essay will critically review views and narratives dominated by these essentialist and monolithic premises on the relationship between Islam and democracy. The essay then seeks to present a more nuanced understanding on the relationship between the two. More specifically discussing Muslim politics in Indonesia, it will further argue that Islam, like any major religion, is complex enough to lend itself to support all forms of political systems, from the most authoritarian to the most democratic.[6] As a result, far from being a coherent, monolithic form, Muslim politics in Indonesia, like elsewhere in the Muslim world, has been, and will continue to be, characterized by competing visions on democracy. The key debates, as a growing literature shows, bear on intra-civilizational clashes, not those of an inter-civilizational variety.[7]

B. Beyond Essentialist and Unitary Debate

As suggested earlier, most accounts on the perceived 'Muslim exceptionalism' and Islam's inherent incompatibility with democracy are predicted on essentialist, unitary and parochial premises. Edward Said, one of the most prominent critics of Orientalism, cynically illustrates this kind of analysis on Muslim politics as expending "thousands of words without a single reference to people, periods, and events".[8] In a similar vein, others criticize the same kind of analysis for its reductive reference to Islam as a surrogate idea or usage for unitary faith, history, or socio-economic condition[9] while Mahmood Mamdani describes the theory as the contemporary version of what he calls "culture talk", a kind of talk which assumes that it is culture (modernity), and not politics, that serves as "a dividing line between those in favour of a peaceful, civic existence and those inclined to terror".[10]

The main problem of this kind of construction is thus its tendency to define Islam as a coherent sociological and political entity and hence overlook the complex nature of religious movements and ignore the intimate relationship between religious discourses and different and changing socio-political contexts. As Asad, Zubaida and Al-Azmeh succinctly argue, there are many Muslim societies whose historical variation cannot be unified in terms of common cultural items. Cultural themes referring to religious and historical traditions are assigned different socio-political contexts. From this perspective, the contemporary Islamist movement, like other political developments, is not an expression of continuity and of persistent themes of Islamic history. Rather, they are constituted as political forces shaped by the socio-economic and political contexts in which they operate.[11] In a more elaborate account, Talal Asad has persuasively argued against the prevailing discourses about "the essentially inegalitarian character of Islam":

> *Islamic religious, legal, political ideologies do not have an essential significance which moulds the minds of believers in a predictable way. They are part of changing institutions, and discourses which can be, and often are, contested and reconstituted. To understand the authoritative limits of such contestations one must focus on religious discourses within specific historical situations, and not on a supposedly original Islamic ideology[12]*

Muslim discourses and the actors who articulate them are thus historically situated. Meanings and action are determined in relation to material condition such as

institutional relations and the actors' position of power. As a consequence, the scripture should not be used to attribute homogeneity to Muslim societies since its interpretations and their insertion into particular contexts with varied meaning/power effects presents a multitude of discourses that must be accounted for reference to the power position at stake.[13]

C. The Plurality of Muslim Politics

These essentialist and unitary accounts on Islam and democracy thus fails to effectively address the diversity of Muslim political discourse and movements. While some Muslims assert the incompatibility of Islam and democracy, in recent years a number of activists in human rights and democracy movements throughout the Muslim world are well aware that various principles of democracy are inherent to the corpus of Islamic ideals and thought.[14] More importantly, as well documented by Esposito, the call for greater liberalization, democratization and the creation of institutions of civil society has become a common and widespread historical transformation in the Muslim world.[15] The claims of the clash of civilizations, with its essentialist tendency, however, reduce this complex social and historical dynamics into essentialized and artificially coherent categories and thus only serves to obfuscate the real dynamics of the struggle between interpretative communities over who gets to speak for Islam and how.[16]

As Hefner argues, the twentieth century has brought changes to the world at a rapid and unprecedented rate. These changes have swept the Muslim world, leading to various responses.[17] More importantly, as well documented by Picastori and Eickelman, this transformation has led to the fragmentation of knowledge and authority among Muslim societies. A key feature of this process has been "the competition and contest over both the interpretation of symbols and control of the institutions, formal and informal, that produce and sustain them".[18] Remarkably, however, the struggle for reform and democracy has been a major component of contemporary Islamic resurgence. While some Muslims called for a totalizing transformation of the social order according to an unchanging plan, modelled on an ideal of pristine unity identified

with the first generation of Muslim believers, there is a remarkable effort underway in many countries to give Muslim politics a civic, pluralist, and even democratic face.[19] Central to this effort is the resistance to etatist and essentializing interpretation of politics and calling for a pluralistic organization of state and society. Recent developments in Indonesia in particular offer even more striking indication of Muslim interests in democracy and civic pluralism. In this country, as will be elaborated in the following section, a central theme of what Hefner calls "civic pluralist" or "civil" Islam, one which consistently claims that the modern ideals of equality, freedom, and democracy are not uniquely Western values, but modern necessities compatible with, and even required by, Muslim ideals, has emerged or likely to emerge as a dominant force.[20]

D. Islam and State in Indonesia

As any other nation with a multiethnic population and Islam as a predominant religion, Indonesia since the very beginning of her birth has to face the crucial question over the place and position of Islam in its national framework.[21] The central issue from the early period of Indonesian history, therefore, is whether or not Islam should be formally linked or incorporated into the state.[22] There is no a single answer for the question and Indonesia has seen, as a result, an institutionalized divide between nationalist group who deny the formal link between Islam and the state and Muslim group who demand a more formal Islamic form of government.[23]

It is interesting to note, however, that in this battle of ideologies, secular-nationalist-oriented Indonesian nationhood has always appeared to become a dominant political discourse and practice in the country. It can be seen in the fact that Islam has been politically and constitutionally kept separate from the state and, therefore, it almost has no established political role at state level.[24] Despite the fact that Muslims constitute 88% of Indonesia's total population, from the early period of independence, Islam has played a much less prominent role in the country's political life.[25] Having played an important role in anti-colonial resistance since the very beginning of the nationalist

movements, Islam was excluded from the framework of Indonesian nationhood and a more secular state ideology, *Pancasila*, was chosen by postcolonial Indonesian leaders as the foundation of the newly born nation.[26] In the subsequent modern Indonesian history, political Islam has never dominated and political organizations committed to explicitly Islamic goals have never been able to attract sufficient popular support.[27]

In the early stage of independence, Muslim leaders fought for the inclusion in the preamble to the national constitution of what is known as the Jakarta Charter, a document which espouses the obligation of Muslims to observe religious laws (*shari'a*) but the proposal was not accepted because of the strong opposition of the secular nationalists, many of whom are Muslim themselves, and the lack of popular majority for the enforcement of the *shari'a*. The failure of political Islam was enforced in the 1955 elections, the first free to be held in the country, when the Islamic parties together won no more than 44% of the total vote and the party most vocal in its defense of the Jakarta Charter, Masyumi, received only 20.9% of the vote.[28]

At the very beginning of the New Order, it seemed that Islam would have a greater role in Indonesian politics when Soeherto, with his political base in the army, formed a de facto temporary alliance with a broad range of Islamic and other groups for the purpose of destroying the Indonesian Communist Party. It soon became clear, however, that the New Order was an authoritarian military regime, and that Soeharto had no intention of sharing power with mass-based political organizations of any kind, including nationalist and non-religious groups. During the first two decades of the New Order, while religious observance was strongly encouraged, political Islam became a principal target of the state's exclusionary politics as well as the focus of ideological and political distrust.[29] At least until the late of 1980s, political Islam was effectively marginalized through an extensive public indoctrination to stigmatise Islam as a political ideology dangerous to the unity and prosperity of the state. Moreover, political Islam was ultimately undermined institutionally and ideologically with all Muslim political parties were forcedly to merge into a single party strictly controlled by the government and had

to accept the official state ideology, *Pancasila*, as the only safe and legitimate ideology.[30]

Given the dual character of Islamic policy of Soeharto: the promotion of personal piety on the one hand and opposition to the politicization of religion on the other, the extensive de-politicization of Islam has been coupled with the remarkable Islamization of Indoensian society and culture.[31] Over the past three decades Indonesia has experienced an Islamic revival of historically unprecedented proportion.[32] It should be noted, however, that the nature and consequences of Islamic resurgence in the country are more complex than a simple shift from secular nationalism to "conservative" Islam.[33] Unlike some of its Middle East counterparts, a key feature of this revival has been the emergence of what Hefner identifies as "civil pluralist" Islamic discourse, one which consistently claims that the modern ideals of equality, freedom, and democracy are not uniquely Western values, but modern necessities compatible with, and even required by, Muslim ideals.[34]

Developing a more open, tolerant, and pluralistic approach to the relationship between state and Islamic society, this new Islamic discourse deny the necessity of a formally established Islamic state, emphasize that it is the spirit and not the letter of Islamic law (*shari'a*) to which Muslims must attend, stress the need for programs to elevate the status of women, and insist that Muslim world's most urgent task is to develop moral tools to responds to the challenge of modern pluralism.[35] Without any centralized coordination, a great movement for a civil Islam was spontaneously developing in both "traditionalist" and "modernist" circles. The modernist side is led by the religious thinker Nurcholish Madjid and the traditionalist side by the activist Abdurrahman Wahid.[36] The movement's intention was the establishment not of "a monopoly-creating and diversity-denying "Islamic" state, but of a Muslim civil society dedicated to the Islamic values of justice, freedom, and civility in difference.[37]

From a comparative Islamic perspective, the degree to which this Muslims group engage with these ideas is remarkable. As Hefner notes, reform-minded Muslim democrats, and not secular nationalists, have been the largest audience and supporters

for democratic and pluralist ideas in Indonesia since the 1980s and "nowhere in the Muslim world have Muslim intellectuals engaged ideas of democracy, human rights, pluralism, civil society and the rule of law with a vigour and confidence equal to that of Indonesian Muslims".[38] It is with this remarkable engagement with democratic and pluralism ideas that this Muslim group has played a prominent role in accepting and supporting Pancasila as the final foundation of Indonesian nationhood and its political implications, especially   with regard to the non-sectarian and harmonious relations between the various faiths, in the interests of national unity.[39]

E. After Soeharto: Civil Islam in peril?

The emergence of civil-democratic Islamic discourse, however, has been in the recent years challenged by a steady rise in Muslim consciousness and ritual formalism, especially among the urban middle classes and student population. University campuses have become fertile ground for an Islamic awakening, with students being recruited into a diverse range of disciplined organizational cells. Some of these cells have taken their inspiration from fundamentalist thought and organizational models of radical Islamic movements in the Middle East.[40]

The resurgence of political Islam, however, can be seen more profoundly after the fall of Soeharto. One observer even suggests that the rise of political Islam is one of the most visible political developments in post-Soeharto Indonesia.[41] There are several tendencies that indicate the resurgence of political Islam. First, the establishment of a great number of "Islamic parties" which mostly adopt Islam as their basis replacing Pancasila that used to be the sole basis of any political and social organization; second, the increasing demands from certain groups among Muslims for the official adoption and implementation of *shari'a* and third, the proliferation of Muslim groups considered by many as radicals, such as Laskar Jihad (Jihad Troops), Front Pembela Islam (Islamic Defence Front), Hizbu Tahrir (Party of Liberation), and Angkatan Mujahidin Indonesia (the Jihad Fighter Group of Indonesia).[42]

Although relatively small compared to their mainstream rivals, these radical Muslim groups did seize the initiative form moderate and pro-democracy Muslims in the months following Soeharto's overthrown. According to Hefner, this has had as much to do with the legacies of Indonesian state and society as it has to do with any specific quality of Muslim politics. Certainly, some features of contemporary Indonesian politics, such as the ideals of the *jihadis* movement, can only be fully explained with reference to the pluralism and contests of Muslim politics. But the specific effect of these variables was determined by two more general features of civil society relations: the relative weakness and segmentary divisions of civil society, and the habits of some in the political elite (both at the national and provincial level) of neutralizing their opposition by inflaming sectarian passions and mobilizing supporters along ethno-religious lines.[43] Rather than building on resources in the Muslim community for moderation and participation, political bosses in the state and local society engaged in sectarian trawling that provided Islamist paramilitaries with an influence greatly out of proportion with their numbers in society. This is exacerbated by the fact that civil-democratic Muslim groups were not organized in such a way as to allow it to act as a centrally coordinated political machine.[44]

The resurgence of fundamentalist stream of political Islam led some to question the moderate nature of Indonesian Islam. Some even suggest that the future of democracy was in danger. The results of 1999 and 2004 elections, however, indicated that the country since the 1990s has experienced "a great convergence toward a democratic and pluralist centre".[45] Whereas, in the 1950s, the majority of Muslims advocated the formation of an Islamic state, in the 1999 and 2004 elections the overwhelming majority voted for pluralist parties.[46] Of seven parties which won significant percentages of the vote in the 1999 election, only three are based on Islam: Hamzah Haz's PPP, with 11 percent; the Crescent Moon and Star Party (PBB), with 2 percent; and the Justice Party (PK), with just 1 percent. The remaining four, which together took a resounding 76 percent of the vote, are all committed to the secular state and oppose the implementation of the *shari'a.* They include Megawati's PDI-P, with 34

percent; the Joint Secretariat of Functional Groups (Golkar), with 22 percent; Abdurrahman Wahid's National Awakening Party (PKB), with 13 percent; and Amien Rais' National Mandate Party (PAN), with 7 percent.[47] The overall results of 2004 elections again affirmed the general pattern of the dominance of secular, pluralist parties and the lack of electoral support of exclusive Islamic parties.[48]

While the nature of development in the transition period remains to be seen, it seems, however, that the level and magnitude of support for ideological and symbolical Islam are relatively low and small.[49] Islamic radical groups in particular are not supported by the mainstream of Indonesian Muslims. Even though these groups are free to preach their ideas and practice, they failed to attract a significant following.[50] The majority of Muslims, as signified by limited number of seats enjoyed by Islamic forces in the parliament and the rejection of the Jakarta Charter, thus remain moderate and aspire to a more viable and proper relationship between Islam and state. In the light of Indonesia's political history, it is fair to say that in two democratic situations, a legalist and formalist political Islam was unequivocally defeated. Its fate and destiny was even bleaker in an authoritarian political setting.[51]

Mujani and Liddle offer three explanations for the declining support of the pro-*shari'a* forces in Indonesia. First, the pro-*shari'a* forces were never as strong as they appeared to be, principally on account of the traditional political quietism of Indonesian Muslims. In the 1950s, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) joined in the call for *syari'a* mainly to avoid being outflanked by the larger and more assertive Masyumi. Moreover, very few Masyumi leaders were in fact religious ideologues. Most were Western-educated, wanted to create a modern state and society, and were willing to join coalitions with secular parties. Their calls for an Islamic state were a device meant to attract unsophisticated village Muslims whom they assumed would vote automatically for a Muslim party.[52]

Second, Soekarno's and Soeharto's repression of political Islam between 1955 and 1999-and the response of Muslim politicians and intellectuals to that repression produced a sea change in Muslim political culture. While a few turned to violence,

which easily crushed by the government, the largest group, consisted of young Muslims leaving the schools and universities from the 1970s onward, wanted to make peace with the secular state.[53] Describing this transformation, Azyumardy Azra asserts that most of the Muslim population in Indonesia are leaning toward what he calls "substantive Islam" rather than towards "formalistic Islam". Though there is a continued tendency among Muslims to become more devout (santri), at least formally, this seems to have more to do with ritualistic or cultural Islam at best rather than with political Islam or Islamic parties. The tendency among Muslims to undergo some kind of "santrinization" has therefore not necessarily been translated into a more Islamic political orientation[54]

Third, the two largest mass organizations, Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama, have been and remain pillars of Islamic moderation and civic-pluralism. Both organizations took principled and courageous stands against proposals that would have obliged the state to implement Islamic law.[55] More importantly, through their dense and pervasive network of civil society organizations, which together have the sympathies of as much as three-quarters of all Indonesian Muslims, they have been enormously successful in entrenching political moderation in the world's most populous Islamic society. In the post-Soeharto era, civil-democratic Muslim group and their descendants seems to enhance further their strength and influences by holding many key positions in government and civil society. They control Golkar, PKB, and PAN, and are responsible for these parties opposition to state enforcement of the *shari'a*.[56]

F. Concluding Remarks

From the discussion on historical and contemporary development of Muslim politics in Indonesia, one important point can be made: that there is no unitary Muslim politics and thus there is no monolithic relationship between it and democracy. Like in any other Muslim country, Indonesia in the 1970s and 1980s saw a pluralization of religious authority, characterized by the emergence of new social movements and new leaders. What is important to note, however, is that in Indonesia, civil-democratic Muslims emerged as the dominant force in these new movements. The ranks of

democratic Muslims have been determined to demonstrate that Islamic values are consistent with democracy, pluralism, and tolerance.

Despite recent revival of a more ideological, symbolical and political vision of Muslim politics, especially in the aftermath of Soeharto's fall, it appears that in a greater degree of democratization following the eventual departure of Soeharto from Indonesian politics, the civil-democratic Islam is in a position to become a major political and intellectual force. Declining popular support for ideological and radical Islamic movements striving for an exclusive Islamic basis of nationhood over years can be seen as reflection of their strength and important position in the country and thus provides a great hope for a viable, mutual co-existence of Islam and democracy in the country.

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[38] Robert W. Hefner, 'Islam in an Era of Nation-States', p. 50.

[39] Emanuel Sivan (2003), *Op. Cit*, 45, 1. pp. 25-44.

[40] See Adam Schwartz (1999), *A Nation in Waiting: Indonesia's Search for Stability*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin; Martin van Bruinessen, 'Islamic State or State Islam? Fifty Years of State-Islam Relations in Indonesia' in Ingrid Wessel (ed.), *Indonesia am Ende des 20* (Jahrhunderts. Abera Verlag:Hamburg); Azyumardy Azra, 'Globalization of Indonesian Muslim Discourse: Contemporary Religio-Intellectual Connection Between Indonesia and the Middle East' in Johan Meuleman (ed.) (2002), *Islam in the Era of Globalization,* RoutledgeCurzon: London.

[41] See Azyumardy Azra, 'Political Islam in Post-Soeharto Indonesia' in Virginia Hooker and Amin Saikal (eds) (2004), *Islamic Perspectives on the New Millennium,* Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. p. 133.

[42] *Ibid.*, p. 134. See also Bachtiar Effendy (2002), *Islam and State in Indonesia,* Insititue of Asian Studies: Singapore.

[43] Robert W. Hefner (ed) (2005), *Remaking Muslim Politics,* Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 275.

[44] *Ibid.*, p. 295.

[45] Robert W. Hefner, Islam in an Era of Nation-States', p. 27.

[46] Ibid., p. 28. See also Saiful Mujani and R. William Liddle (2004),*Op. Cit,* 15, 1. pp. 109-123.

[47] Saiful Mujani and R. William Liddle (2004), *Ibid.* 15, 1. p. 117.

[48] It is true that one of Islamic parties, Justice and Welfare Party (formerly Justice Party) gained a significant rise of vote while Amien Rais-led pluralist National Mandate Party suffered from a

considerable lost. This does not mean, however, that the support of pro-*syari'a* forces is on the rise. In fact, the growing popularity of Justice and Welfare Party, with supposedly additional support from PAN constituencies, affirms instead the strong tradition of political moderation among Indonesian Muslims in the sense that it was only with moderating their political performance by, among other things, promoting less ideological issues and agendas such as political professionalism and anti-corruption issue that this party gained a considerable rise of support.

[49] Bachtiar Effendy (2002), *Islam and State in Indonesia,* Singapore: Insititue of Asian Studies.

[50] Azyumardy Azra, (2002), *Op.Cit.*

[51] Bachtiar Effendy (2002), *Op. Cit,* p. 223.

[52] See Saiful Mujani and R. William Liddle (2004), *Op. Cit.* 15, 1. pp. 109-123.

[53] *Ibid.* p. 117.

[54] Azyumardy Azra (2004), *Op. Cit.* p. 143

[55] Robert W. H. (ed) (2005), *Remaking Muslim Politics,* Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 275.

[56] Saiful Mujani and R. William Liddle (2004), *Op. Cit.* 15, 1. pp. 109-123.

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