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Journal for the Study of Islamic History and Culture



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Engaging Contemporary Challenges**

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in the Contemporary World: Emphasizing the views of
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Alanuari

**Fakultas Islam Nusantara
Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Indonesia**

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Mahmoodreza Esfandiar

Islam Nusantara and the Challenges of Political Islam in the Contemporary World:

**Emphasizing the views of
Abdurrahman Wahid**

Islamic Azad University, Iran

mresfandiar@gmail.com

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the most important challenges of Islam Nusantara with political Islam in the contemporary world. To this end, the most important Islamic thought currents in Indonesia, namely traditional Islam, religious reformism and liberal Islam, are discussed first. The religious reform movement in Indonesia has always been influenced by major Islamic centers in the Middle East such as Mecca, Medina and Cairo. The current of traditional Islam is in fact the heritage of Islamic culture of this region. Islamliberal is also influenced by modern Muslim thinkers such as Fazlur Rahman. This article seeks to answer these questions of how the religious reform movement in the Malay world, especially in the pre-modern Indonesian archipelago, took shape and how the traditional movement reacted to it. Also, what are the most important features of Islamic thought and the current of religious reform and intellectualism in Indonesia? Finally, a picture of the situation of these three currents in Indonesia is drawn and the important role of Islam Nusantara in resolving the crises of the contemporary period is explained with emphasis on the thoughts of Abdurrahman Wahid. .

Keywords: Islam Nusantara, Traditional Islam, Religious Reform, Liberal Islam, Abdurrahman Wahid, Indonesia.

Abstrak

Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk menyelidiki tantangan terpenting Islam Nusantara dengan Islam politik di dunia kontemporer. Untuk tujuan ini, arus pemikiran Islam terpenting di Indonesia, yaitu Islam tradisional, reformasi agama, dan Islam liberal, dibahas terlebih dahulu. Gerakan reformasi agama di Indonesia selalu dipengaruhi oleh pusat-pusat Islam besar di Timur Tengah seperti Mekah, Madinah dan Kairo. Aliran Islam tradisional sebenarnya merupakan warisan budaya Islam di wilayah ini. Islam liberal juga dipengaruhi oleh pemikir muslim modern seperti Fazlur Rahman. Artikel ini berusaha menjawab pertanyaan-pertanyaan tentang bagaimana terbentuknya gerakan reformasi agama di kawasan Melayu, khususnya di kepulauan Indonesia pra-modern, dan bagaimana gerakan tradisional bereaksi terhadapnya. Juga, apa ciri terpenting pemikiran Islam dan arus reformasi agama dan intelektualisme di Indonesia? Terakhir, digambarkan situasi ketiga arus tersebut di Indonesia dan peran penting Islam Nusantara dalam menyelesaikan krisis periode kontemporer terutama dengan penekanan pada pemikiran-pemikiran Abdurrahman Wahid.

Kata kunci: Islam Nusantara, Islam Tradisional, Reformasi Keagamaan, Islam Liberal, Abdurrahman Wahid, Indonesia.

ملخص

الغرض من هذه الدراسة هو التحقيق في أهم تحديات "إسلام نوسانتارا" مع "الإسلام السياسي" في العالم المعاصر. ولهذه الغاية، تمت مناقشة أهم التيارات الفكرية الإسلامية في إندونيسيا، وهي "الإسلام التقليدي" و "الإصلاح الديني" و "الإسلام الليبرالي"، أولاً. لطالما تأثرت حركة الإصلاح الديني في إندونيسيا بالمراكز الإسلامية الرئيسية في الشرق الأوسط مثل مكة المكرمة والمدينة المنورة والقاهرة. المدارس الإسلامية التقليدية هي في الواقع تراث ثقافي للإسلام في هذه المنطقة. يتأثر الإسلام الليبرالي أيضاً بالمفكرين المسلمين المعاصرين مثل الأستاذ فضل الرحمن. يحاول هذا المقال الإجابة على أسئلة حول كيفية تشكيل حركة الإصلاح الديني في منطقة الملايو، لا سيما في الأرخبيل الإندونيسي ما قبل عصر الحداثة، وكيف تفاعلت الحركة التقليدية معها. وما هي أهم ملامح الفكر الإسلامي وتيارات الإصلاح الديني والفكري في إندونيسيا، وأخيراً يصف وضع التيارات الثلاثة في إندونيسيا والدور المهم لإسلام نوسانتارا في حل أزمة الفترة المعاصرة، خاصة مع التركيز على أفكار المفكر الإندونيسي الراحل عبد الرحمن وحيد.

الكلمات الإرشادية: إسلام نوسانتارا، الإسلام التقليدي، الإصلاح الديني، الإسلام الليبرالي، ش. عبد الرحمن وحيد، إندونيسيا.

Introduction

In order to get better understanding about Islam Nusantara, we need to look at the history of the spread of Islam in the Malay world. The Islam that spread in these areas was a mystical Islam in which Sufi tariqats, especially from the Arab lands and the Indian subcontinent, played an important role. The most important of these sufi orders were Qadiriyyah, Naqshbandiyyah, Rifa'iyyah and Shattariyyah.

Basically, in the Malay world, there is no clear distinction between Sufism and other Islamic sciences such as such as fiqh, kalam, tafsir, etc., because the Sheikhs of the tariqats and the Sufis have been experts in most Islamic sciences and have been considered the great scholars (alim) of the region. Hamzah Fansouri, Shamsuddin Sumatraei, Nouruddine Raniri, Abdul Rauf Singkili, Yousef Maqassari and Abdul Samad Palimbani, etc, have been among the great Sufis and scholars of this region. The Sufis who, more than any other Sufi, spread Islam in Java with tolerance and adaptation to indigenous culture, were wali Songo or nine Javanese saints. For the Muslims of this region, they are considered saints and walis, and their maqams is highly respected and sacred by the people.

The Malay world was heavily influenced by Hindu and Buddhist cultures and religions before the advent of Islam, and was ruled by powerful Hindu and Buddhist dynasties such as the Majapahit, Srivijayah, and Sailendra.¹The fusion of indigenous religions and customs with Hindu and Buddhist cultures and religions had led to the emergence of a particular culture in these areas..Muslim missionaries sought to highlight more common cultural concepts and values with more flexibility, and to use the facilities and capacities of indigenous culture in the service of Islam.²On this basis, we can speak of Malay Islamic culture and civilization, which is the product of this cultural fusion. This process, which according to Gus Dur is called “pribumisasi”, caused a special example of Islam to appear in this region.In fact, Islam Nusantara is the product of this process.³

Among Indonesian Muslims, three major religious movement can be observed:

1. Reformism and religious modernity are important trends in Islamic thought in this region. Religious reformism and modernization are movements that seek to rid Islam of superstitions under the influence of the reformists and predominantly Egyptian Salafis such as Abduh and Rashid Rida, and seeks to use new Western achievements in education and technology to rebuild and strengthen Islamic societies and to revive the former ruler of Islam.
2. Religious intellectualism and liberal Islam which tries to give a interpretation of Islam that does not conflict with the values of the modern world by separating religion from politics and emphasizing the negation of political Islam.

1 See.Hall,D.G.E., *A History of Sout-East Asia*, British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data, London, Macmillan Education 1987, vol.1, p.12-13, 47-181.; Rahardjo,J.,*Indonesia, Land and People*, Tokyo, Gunung Agung,2011, p.143,145,146.

2 See.Sunyoto, Agus, *Atlas Wali Songo*, Indonesia, Pustaka Iman dan Lesbumi Pbnu,2016,p.244, 255-256, 260;Ghulam-SarwarYousof, “Islamic Elements in Traditional Indonesian And Malay Theatre” in *Kajian Malaysia*, Vol. 28, No.1,p.86-91; Ricklefs, M.C.,*A History of Modern Indonesia since 1200*, USA.2008, p.58-59.

3 Wahid ,Abdurrahman, “Islam, Culture and Indigenization”, in: *GUS DUR on Religion, Democracy and Peace: Selected Essays*, by. Abdurrahman Wahid, Yogyakarta: 2018,p. 40-59.

3. Traditional Islam, which we know as Nusantara Islam, considers itself the inheritor of the long-standing Islamic culture of this region and in fact it should be called Indonesian Islam, that is, Islam that is mixed with indigenous culture and has a mystical and Sufi color and smell.

This article seeks to examine these three major religious currents in Indonesia from the late nineteenth century to the contemporary period and the challenges of Islam Nusantara with political Islam in the new era by looking at the thoughts of Abdurrahman Wahid. It is important to examine these three currents because, first, they still play an active role in contemporary Indonesian society, and second, because Indonesia's religious identity owes much to these three currents. In fact, being familiar with their evolution will help us better understand the interaction of religion and society in Indonesia in the years to come. This study will show us what is the capacity of Islamic movements in Indonesia and how it can be saved from the possible harms of some Islamic tendencies and also how Islam Nusantara can be a good model for other Islamic countries for religiosity in the modern world by relying on traditional values.

Religious Reformism

From the late nineteenth century, religious relations between the Indonesian archipelago and the Malay Peninsula and Islamic lands such as Mecca, Medina, Egypt and Baghdad took on a new form and from the early twentieth century, under the influence of religious reformers such as Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn al-Asadābādī (d. 1875), Muhammad 'Abduh (d. 1905) and Rashīd Ridhā (d. 1935), a new Islamic reform spread among Malay Muslims.

In fact, the legacy of Muhammad 'Abduh, from the first decades of the twentieth century, has been instrumental in nurturing the discourse of Islamic modernity and reform in Indonesia. In line with global developments, Indonesian Muslim independence struggles took on new forms. Influenced by ideological developments in the Middle East and some other factors, they formed Islamic groups and organizations in the educational, social and political dimensions. Indonesian reformists emphasized the removal of Islam from heresies and the use of *ijtihad* to adapt the teachings of Islam to the conditions of the day, as well as to benefit from new Western knowledge.⁴

It is in this context that the importance, position and influence of a reformist publication such as *Al-Manār* on the formation of the Islamic reform movement among Malay Muslims become apparent. This magazine not only directly influenced the spread of Islamic reform through its articles, but is also important in that it became a model for the publication of similar magazines in the region. Among these publications, we can mention *Al-Imam* and *Al-Munir*.⁵

4 Ricklefs, Merle Calvin. *A History of Modern Indonesia since c. 1200* (USA: Stanford University Press. 2008), p.202-2-3; Cf. Noer, Deliar. *the Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia: 1900-1942* (Singapore: Oxford University Press.1978), p. 59, 73-100; Eliraz. "Distinctive Contemporary Voice: Liberal Islam Thought in Indonesia". *Studia Islamika*, Vol.15. No 3, 2008, p.402.

5 Azra, Azyumardi. "Intellectuals in The Modern Islamic World The Transmission of Al-Manar's Reformism to The Malay-Indonesian World The Case of Al-Imam and by Stephane A. Dudoignon, Komatsu Hisao and Kosugi Yasushi, (Rutledge, London and New York: 2006), p.143; Hamid, Ismail. "Kitab Jawi: Intellectualizing Literary Tradition". *Islamic Civilization in the Malay World*, Ed. by Mohd. Taib Osman (Kuala Lumpur and Istanbul: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka and The Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture. 1997), p.241-242; Mutalib, Hussin. "Islamic Malay Polity in Southeast Asia". *Islamic Civilization in the Malay World*, Ed. by Mohd. Taib Osman,

Al-Imam was the first magazine of Islamic modernity and reform in the Malay Peninsula, which was published as a monthly in 1324 AH / 1906 and was widely circulated in the Indonesian archipelago. This magazine was published in Penang by Sayyid Sheikh al-Hadi - promoter of Islamic modernity, pioneer in modern Malay literature, teacher and journalist in the Malay Archipelago (d. 1934) - in collaboration with Sayyid Sheikh bin Muhammad Tahir Jalal al-Din (Minangkaba'i reformist), Sheikh Muhammad bin Salim Kalali (Hadrami reformist from Aceh) - who both studied at Al-Azhar and Mecca universities and were influenced by the reformist movement of Muhammad 'Abduh- and Haji Abbas Muhammad Taha (from Singapore).⁶

Sayyid Sheikh al-Hadi's activities coincided with the influence of the British colonial government, the political awakening among the Malays, and the transition from pre-colonial to post-independence.⁷

Together with other young religious leaders or "Kaum Muda" and reformers such as Sheikh Tahir Jalaluddin, he sought a plan of social reform based on Islamic principles and thought and sought to harmonize the basic teachings of Islam with modern scientific thought. In fact, on the one hand, they sought to remove irrational beliefs from Islamic teachings, and on the other hand, they sought to develop new scientific teachings.⁸

Al-Munir was published by Haji Abdullah Ahmad in Padang, Sumatra. He collaborated with Sheikh Tahir Jalaluddin in spreading the ideas of Islamic modernity in the Indonesian archipelago.⁹

With the rise of the reformist currents, their criticism of traditional Islam increased. The reformists' criticism of the traditionalists was that the heresies and superstitions that have permeated Islam over the centuries have misled Muslims and weakened them. As a result, Islam lost the intellectual and scientific flourishing of the early centuries and made European colonial powers easily dominate Muslim countries in the nineteenth century. The reformers considered the revival of Islam and its adaptation to the world today to depend on purifying faith and belief from impurities and returning to the basic teachings of the Qur'an and following the Prophet of Islam (PBUH). According to them, Muslims also need to learn about Western advances in education and political science, and they should learn from Westerners what is not forbidden in Islam and which helps the development of Islamic societies. The founder of Islamic modernity and reform in Indonesia is the Muhammadiyah Organization that is now proud of its population of 50 million.¹⁰

(Kuala Lumpur and Istanbul: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka and The Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture. 1997), p.28.

6 Cf., Roff, William R. *Studies on Islam and society in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: NUS Press. 2009), p.159, 167; Hashim, Rosnani. *Reclaiming the Conversation Islamic Intellectual Tradition in the Malay* (Selangor, Malaysia: The Other Press. 2010), p.95.

7 Cf. Tan, Linda. "Syed Shaykh: His Life and Times". *The Real Cry of Syed Shaykh al-Hady*, E.D . Gordon, Alijah (Kuala Lumpur: MSRI. 1999), p.121, 137, 158; Syed Husin Ali. *The Malays: their problems and future* (Kuala Lumpur: The Other Press. 2008), p.17-18.

8 Milner, Anthony. *The Malays* (United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell. 2008), p.138; Haji Salleh, Muhammad. *An Introduction to Modern Malaysian Literature* (Kuala Lumpur: Institut Terjemahan Negara Malaysia. 2009), p.6.

9 Hamid, Ismail. "Kitab Jawi: Intellectualizing Literary Tradition". *Islamic Civilization in the Malay World*. Ed. by Mohd. Taib Osman, (Kuala Lumpur and Istanbul: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka and The Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture. 1997), p.242.

10 Fealy, Greg. Hooker, Virginia. White, Sally. "Indonesia". *Voices of Islam in Southeast Asia*. Compiled and

Muhammadiyah, while accepting some forms of Western culture, calls for the revival of Islam. In other words, it favors modern Islam; Therefore, he has directly paid attention to scout affairs and population control. In this way, it has taken advantage of both traditional and rational tendencies.¹¹

Following moderate political Islam, Muhammadiyah Seeks *ijtihad* and pluralistic values instead of *jihād*, and has engaged in a cultural struggle against terrorism with the design of Islam as a “the mercy to all worlds”. The establishment of the World Peace Assembly and the signing of a memorandum of understanding on educational cooperation with Australia in cultural exchanges, strengthening democracy, good governance, developing tolerance in society and promoting the well-being of the people are examples of Muhammadiyah’s actions.¹²

Religious intellectualism and liberal Islam

Religious intellectual currents in Indonesia come in many forms, and almost all of them emphasize the separation of religion and state, the strengthening of cultural Islam versus political Islam, and religious pluralism. One of the most influential figures in the creation of Islamic intellectualism was Ahmad Sukarno (d. 1970), one of the Muslim leaders of Indonesia’s anti-colonial struggle and the first president of the country from 1923 to 1964. While emphasizing nationalism, he believed in its alliance with Islam and Marxism, and emphasized the compatibility of nationalism, Islam, and Marxism as ideology.¹³

However, especially after Indonesia’s independence, Sukarno emphasized the personal nature of religion, believed in the separation of religion from politics, and did not agree with the involvement of religion in areas beyond religion. Of course, he did not hide his Islamic tendencies and considered himself a democratic Muslim. In his view, in a country like Indonesia, there are only two states between politics and religion: the unity of religion and politics without democracy, or the unity of democracy and politics without religion. He preferred the latter because, in his view, Islamic rules would not be ignored and parliament could incorporate them into state law.¹⁴

Muhammad Natsir (d. 1993), an Indonesian Islamist and leader of the Islamic Unity Party, opposed Sukarno’s Western and nationalist ideas, emphasizing that Islam encompasses all aspects of human life. In fact, the leaders of Islamic reform and modernity opposed nationalism and considered it a human achievement; While Islam, in their view, is based on divine revelation and Islamic beliefs and rules must always rule the individual and social life of human beings as an unchangeable truth.¹⁵

Edited by Greg Fealy and Virginia Hooker (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.2006), p.40.

11 Cf. Syamsuddin, M.Sirajuddin. *Religion & Politics in Islam* (Los Angeles: University of California. 1991), p.218-274.

12 Indra Putri, Rima Sari. *Anti Terroism Cooperation between the National Agency for Contraterrorism and Civil Society: Study Case of Muhammadiyah Disengagement*. Defense Management Vol.2: 12(2012), p.3-7.

13 Legge, J. D. *Sukarno: A Political Biography* (London: Allen Lane. 1972), p.68-69, 81-83.

14 Cf. Soekarno, Adams, CindyHeller. *Sukarno: An Autobiography* (Hong Kong : Gunung Agung. 1966), p.198-199; Noer, Deliar. *the Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia: 1900-1942* (Singapore: Oxford University Press.1978), p.286-287.

15 Ricklefs, Merle Calvin. *A History of Modern Indonesia since c. 1200* (USA: Stanford University Press. 2008), p.298-299; Noer, Deliar. *the Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia: 1900-1942* (Singapore: Oxford University Press.1978), p.320-322, 393-394.

By compiling Pancasila, Sukarno introduced to the masses a mixture of Western democracy, Islamic modernity, Marxism, and rural-indigenous democracy. Thus, the acceptance of Pancasila in Indonesia means the separation of religion from politics or secularism.¹⁶

By embracing Pancasila's ideology in Suharto's time, modernist and secular religious intellectuals helped spread the separation of religion from politics and replacing cultural Islam with political Islam. Mohammad Suharto (d. 2008, the second president of Indonesia) in 1990, established a government-controlled organization called the Association of Muslim Intellectuals (ICMI) to research and spread modernist ideas about Islam and its relationship to the government in Indonesia to preserve and strengthen of secular nature of government, should weaken the Islamist currents, which were a potential threat to his power. With the growth of extremist Islamic currents after the Suharto era, the importance and necessity of the connection of liberal Islamic currents with each other to line up against Islamic extremism was felt more and more.¹⁷

The current of liberal Islam in Indonesia began in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Fazlur Rahman, Pakistani-American modernist thinker, has been instrumental in creating the aforementioned current. This movement was founded in Indonesia by prominent personalities such as Harun Nasution (d. 1998), Munawir Syadzali (d. 2004), Nurcholish Madjid (d. 2005), Abdurrahman Wahid (d. 2009), Ahmad Alhabib (d. 1973) and Djohan Effendi (Born in 1939).¹⁸

This period coincided with the clash of two currents of thought in Indonesia, one that defended the secular government and the other that aspired to establish an Islamic government. The Liberal Islam movement, meanwhile, introduced a new approach according to which only a new interpretation of Islamic theology could properly re-read the relationship between Islam and politics. They emphasized contextual *ijtihad* as an independent theological method of reasoning. Contextual *ijtihad* means paying attention to the context and conditions in understanding and interpreting religion. They thus hoped to adapt Islam to the conditions and requirements of the archipelago in the contemporary period and to harmonize Indonesian Muslims with modernization, which was closely linked to the New Order's Suharto regime. While accepting the claim that Islam is permanent and stable, they considered the understanding and interpretation of Muslims from the Qur'an and Sunnah to be variable and appropriate to the conditions and requirements of the time. According to them, the claim of forming an Islamic government lacks clear and definite reasons in the Qur'an and Sunnah. Thus, according to this current, Islam is a set of interpretable and non-ideological teachings, and accordingly, Muslims' understanding of religion should not be limited to a specific place and time, in other words, they opposed the ideological interpretation of Islam. In this view, only God is the absolute truth and no one can claim to receive and know the absolute reality of Islam, and for this reason no one has

16 Eliraz. "Distinctive Contemporary Voice: Liberal Islam Thought in Indonesia". *Studia Islamika*. Vol.15. No 3, 2008, p.391; Lapidus, Ira M. *A History of Islamic Societies*, (New York: Cambridge University Press. 1999, p.1062.

17 Gross, Max L. *A Muslim Archipelago: Islam and Politics in Southeast Asia* (Washington DC: Center for Strategic Intelligence Research, National Defense Intelligence College. 2007), p.93; Eliraz. "Distinctive Contemporary Voice: Liberal Islam Thought in Indonesia". *Studia Islamika*. Vol.15. No 3, 2008, p. 384, 391.

18 Eliraz. "Distinctive Contemporary Voice: Liberal Islam Thought in Indonesia". *Studia Islamika*. Vol.15. No 3, 2008, p.383.

the right to consider his interpretation of Islam to be more true than the interpretation of others. Therefore, Muslims must adhere to religious tolerance, both in the face of Muslims and non-Muslims.¹⁹

Liberal Islam in Indonesia has found a very important position among the young Muslim intellectuals in Indonesia and has influenced the Indonesian intellectual life as well as the general atmosphere of the society. Since the 1980s, the growing interest in Islam has led intellectuals and many urban middle-class Muslims to pursue the ideals of liberal Islam and a more progressive understanding of Islam.²⁰

Traditional Islam (Nusantara Islam)

The rise of Islamic reformist movements, which emphasized religious reform and the use of modern educational methods and political activities, provoked a reaction from Indonesian traditionalist scholars. They tried to confront institutions such as Muhammadiyah by founding organizations such as the Minangkabau Ulama Union in 1921, and then the Nahdlatul Ulama in 1926.²¹

Most scholars, throughout Indonesia, ran religious schools and educational institutions known as the Pesantren. In 1920, Wahhab Chasbullah, with the help of his friends, established a forum for scientific discussions called the Taswirul Afkar. This circle founded the Madrasah Nahdatul Watan. Hashem al-Ash'ari, together with Abd al-Wahhab, founded Nahdatul Ulama. Today, the organization claims to have 35 to 40 million members and considers itself the largest Islamic social organization. This Muslim organization follows the Sunni Islam and has strong rural bases in central Java, Kalimantan, Sumatra and Nusa Tenggara. This organization officially recognizes four schools of Islamic jurisprudence (Shafi'i, Hanbali, Hanafi and Maliki). Nahdlatul Ulama, which was established to protect traditional Islam, in addition to Islamic law, endorsed the customs of the Sufis and considered the theme to be the most spiritual group of Muslims. The emergence of this movement brought about a profound and important transformation in the structure of Islamic and traditional Javanese society.²²

Abdurrahman Wahid, Messenger of Peace, Tolerance and Humanitarianism from Nusantara Islam

Abdurrahman Wahid, a political and religious leader and the fourth president of Indonesia (1998-1999), grew up in a Kyai family and personalities who were the founders of the Nahdlatul Ulama. Abdurrahman, who was of religious origin and traditional Islam, also

19 Effendy, Bahtiar. *Islam and the State in Indonesia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. 2003), p.62-79; Azra, Azumardi. "From IAIN to UIN: Islamic Studies in Indonesia". *Islamic Studies and Islamic Education in Contemporary Southeast Asia*. editors: Kamaruzzaman Bustamam-Ahmad, Patrick Jory (Malaysia: Yayasan Ilmuwan. 2011), p. 51.

20 Eliraz, "Distinctive Contemporary Voice: Liberal Islam Thought in Indonesia". *Studia Islamika*, Vol.15. No 3, 2008, p.391, 403.

21 Lapidus, Ira M. *A History of Islamic Societies* (New York: Cambridge University Press. 1999), P.765.

22 Tamara, Nasir. "The Ummah: Rising to the Challenges With Special Reference to Indonesia". *Islamic Civilization in the Malay World*. Ed. by Mohd. Taib Osman (Kuala Lumpur and Istanbul: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka and The Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture. 1997), p.372-373; Fealy, Greg. Hooker, Virginia. White, Sally. "Indonesia". *Voices of Islam in Southeast Asia*. Compiled and Edited by Greg Fealy and Virginia Hooker (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. 2006), p.40.

became acquainted with Western culture. He seriously studied the famous English, French, Russian novels and classics of Western literature, as well as the writings of prominent European social science theorists. Abdurrahman studied these works in Indonesian, English, and sometimes in French, Dutch, and German. He also studied the works of ancient Greek philosophers and Islamic philosophers. Abdurrahman studied the works of Marx, Lenin, and Mao, and although there were elements in Marxist thought that attracted him, he was concerned about the anti-religious nature of these ideas. Abd al-Rahman, on the other hand, was attached to Western liberal views and nevertheless hoped to find an Islamic solution to social problems such as injustice and poverty; Therefore, he studied the works of Islamists such as Sayyid Qutb (d. 1964), Hassan Bana (d. 1949) and studied the nature of Islamic organizations in the Arab world such as the Muslim Brotherhood (Jamā'at al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn). It was not long before Abdurrahman turned away from the thoughts of the Islamists and opposed Islamic fundamentalism, calling them contrary to the true spirit of Islam.²³

In November 1963, Abdurrahman received a scholarship from the Ministry of Religious Affairs to study at Al-Azhar University in Egypt. He had already studied many of the courses offered in Al-Azhar in Java and did not like the usual teaching methods of this university, so he went to Iraq after receiving a scholarship from Baghdad University. At this university, his focus was on studying the history of Islam in Indonesia. Studying at Baghdad University was a good opportunity for him to organize his studies on Islam by studying the works of Orientalists and Western Islamologists, and to take advantage of the university's rich library. Abd al-Rahman also valued his presence in Iraq spiritually and visited the graves of Sufi great figures such as Abdul Qadir Gilani and Junaid Baghdadi. Abd al-Rahman went to the Netherlands after completing his studies at the University of Baghdad (1969-1971). After a year in the Netherlands, Germany and France, he returned to Indonesia in 1971.²⁴

Abdurrahman wahid, after becoming the head of Nahdlatul Ulama, undertook reforms in this organization, which led to his popularity in this organization. He sought to dissuade the organization from being passive in the face of Indonesian social and political developments during Suharto's rule. He emphasized Pancasila and believed that the Indonesian people and government should consider Pancasila as a national pact and a factor in the unity of Indonesian society with its ethnic, cultural and religious diversity. He focused his efforts on serving the interests of all Indonesians, especially the disadvantaged, as well as ethnic and religious minorities. Abdurrahman Wahid's criticism of Suharto's government for violating the rights of the people and depriving him of social and political freedoms angered the authorities and led them to remove him from the chairmanship of Nahdlatul Ulama, which he had held since 1983, but to no avail. In addition to Suharto, a number of religious scholars whom Abdurrahman criticized them for being backward and

23 Barton, Greg. *Abdurrahman Wahid: Muslim democrat, Indonesian president* (Singapore: UNSW Press. 2002), p.59-60, 92; Septiana, Egi. *Catatan Gusdur*. ISBA: 42443. Ebook.No.05.10.05 (Bandung:PersEbook369), p.6-7; Al-Zastrouw, Ng. *Gus Dur, Siapa sih Sampeyan? Tafsir Teoritik atas Tindakan dan Pemyataan Gus Dur* (Jakarta: Erlangga.1999), p.16-18.

24 Septiana, Egi. *Catatan Gusdur*. ISBA: 42443. Ebook.No.05.10.05 (Bandung:PersEbook369), p.7-10; Al-Zastrouw, Ng. *Gus Dur, Siapa sih Sampeyan? Tafsir Teoritik atas Tindakan dan Pemyataan Gus Dur* (Jakarta: Erlangga,1999), p.22, 25; Cf. Barton, Greg. *Abdurrahman Wahid: Muslim democrat, Indonesian president* (Singapore: UNSW Press. 2002), p.61-101;

opposed to political and social freedom of Islam joined the ranks of his enemies.²⁵

Abdurrahman's liberal and modernist ideas and his efforts to promote and strengthen religious tolerance and freedom of thought and fundamentalist discourse, especially during his second term as leader of Nahdlatul Ulama, angered a number of his supporters as well as Islamists.²⁶

Abdurrahman Wahid continued to enjoy public acclaim due to his spiritual status after being ousted from the presidency. He continued his cultural activities to promote tolerant Islam, consistent with democratic and human values, and to facilitate dialogue between Muslims and other religions and cultures through various means, such as regular radio lectures and the writing of books and articles. Among his activities to advance the aforementioned goals was the establishment of the wahid Institute in 2003, which continues to operate.²⁷

Abdurrahman Wahid's intellectual legacy is important to Indonesian society in many ways. His effort was to provide a compassionate interpretation of Islam that is consistent with the values of the new world, such as human rights, democracy, and secularism. In fact, Abdurrahman Wahid, with his extensive knowledge of religious traditions and sufficient mastery of the social sciences, was one of the few people who could understand the relationship between religion and modernity. While deeply attached to the traditional culture of Indonesian Islam, he was also critical of it. Abdurrahman Wahid was a liberal democrat in thought and action, and is known for his defense of ethnic and religious minorities as well as his efforts to strengthen the foundations of social and cultural pluralism in modern Indonesian society. Undoubtedly, his inclination towards the idea of religious tolerance, peace-seeking, and compassion for all was rooted in his mystical upbringing and attachment to Sufism. Abd al-Rahman considered the fundamental values of religions to be very close and believed that despite differences, the way was opened for their understanding and coexistence. Abdurrahman Wahid's ability to communicate with Western political figures and thinkers and his deep knowledge of the world situation set him apart from other Indonesian figures of his time.²⁸

Emphasizing the spiritual and moral role of Islam in the structure of society, Abdurrahman Wahid believed that the most important function of religion is in the

25 Cf. Rifai, Muhammad. *Gus Dur: Biografi Singkat 1940–2009*. Editor: Atania Rahma (Jogjakarta: Garasi. 2014), p.43; Rumadi. *Islamic Post-Traditionalism in Indonesia* (Singapore: ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute. 2015), p.4-5.

26 Cf. Barton, Greg. *Abdurrahman Wahid: Muslim democrat, Indonesian president* (Singapore: UNSW Press. 2002), p.174, 184-188, 198-199; Riddell, Peter G. *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World: Transmission and Responses*. (USA: University of Hawaii Press. 2001), p.251; Aspinall, Edward. "Semi-Opponents in Power: The Abdurrahman Wahid and Megawati Soekarnoputri Presidencies". *Soeharto's new order and its legacy: essays in honour of Harold Crouch*. edited by Edward Aspinall and Greg Fealy (Australia: ANUE Press. 2010), p.122.

27 Rifai, Muhammad. *Gus Dur: Biografi Singkat 1940–2009*. Editor: Atania Rahma (Jogjakarta: Garasi. 2014), p.84-85; Cf. The Wahid Institute (2020). Retrieved 17/6/2020. from: <http://wahidinstitute.org/wi-eng/about-us/about-the-wahid-institute.html>.

28 Cf. Barton, Greg. "Memahami Abdurrahman Wahid". *Prisma Pemikiran Gus Dur* (Yogyakarta: LKiS. 1999), p.21, 25; Salim, Hairus HS. "Gus Dur dan Kenangan Cendekiawan Zaman Parisma". *Prisma Pemikiran Gus Dur*, (Yogyakarta: LKiS. 1999), p.11; Muryadi, Yohanes. "GUS DUR Sang Pluralis". *GUS DUR di Mata Wong Cirebon: Refleksi Tokoh-Tokoh Cirebon atas Berbagai Pemikiran dan Gerakan KH. Abdurrahman Wahid* (Indonesia: Pilar Media. 2010), p.346-347; Hakiem, M. Luqman. "Memahami Sufisme Politik Gus Dur". *Catatan Gusdur*. ISBA: 42443. Ebook.No.05.10.05 (Bandung: PersEbook369), p.19-20.

individual sphere and that the government, like most countries in the world, should be governed on the basis of modern and democratic methods. In fact, he believed in an intermediate path between absolute secularism and Islamic fundamentalism.²⁹

According to Abd al-Rahman al-Wahid, different interpretations of Islam must be respected, and no group has the right to impose its interpretation of Islam on others or to claim that God has the right to rule over human beings. He openly opposes the religious state and calls it an illusion.³⁰ He emphasized Indonesian Islam and its distinction from Arab Islam, citing the *pribumisasi* of Islam (the process of localization of Islam in Indonesia) resulting from the fusion of Islam with indigenous culture.³¹

Abdurrahman Wahid's most important interest during his lifetime was reading and writing. He has written several books, the most important of which are his articles. *The Wisdom of Tolerance: A Philosophy of Generosity and Peace* is one of the most important works of Abdurrahman Wahid, which he wrote in English in collaboration with Daisaku Ikeda (author, famous Buddhist thinker and world peace activist). *The Wisdom of Tolerance* is, in fact, the interstate dialogue of these two thinkers about the cultural commonalities of Islam and Buddhism centered on peace. This work was published by I.B. Tauris published in London-New York in 2015; *Islamku, Islam Anda, Islam Kita: Agama Masyarakat Negara Demokrasi* (*My Islam, Our Islam, Your Islam: The Religion of Society with a Democratic Government*) is one of the most important works of Abdurrahman Wahid in Indonesian. This work contains a collection of articles by the author on the defense of religious minorities in Indonesian society, free from any racial or religious prejudice. This book was published in 2020 by the Wahid Institute in Indonesia.

Conclusion

Traditional Islam in Indonesia has a more mystical color and smell and is the result of Sufic Islam mixing with the indigenous values of the people of this region. The current of traditional Islam in the new era has faced wide-ranging challenges. On the one hand, religious reform movements in the Middle East, such as the Salafi and Wahhabi currents, and on the other, secular religious intellectual movements have opposed traditional Islam. Islamic fundamentalism, which feeds on the ideas of radical Islamists, is also the most important challenge of traditional Islam. In contrast, traditional Islam has tried to maintain some of its reforms while preserving its historical identity, and on the other hand, by establishing socio-cultural associations and organizations, it continues to protect its privileged position and role in the large Muslim community of Indonesia.

The most important representative of traditional Islam in Indonesia is NU. It seems that this current, by harmonizing itself with the progress and values of the modern period, as

29 Cf. Abdurrahman Wahid. "Indonesia's Mild Secularism". *SAIS Review*. Vol. 21. N.2 (Summer-Fall: 2001), p.27-28.

30 Cf. Abdurrahman Wahid. *Islamku Islam Anda Islam Kita: Agama Masyarakat Negara Demokrasi* (Indonesia: The Wahid Institute. 2006), p.66-69; Abdurrahman Wahid. "Is There a Concept of an Islamic State?". *GUS DUR on Religion, Democracy and Peace: Selected Essays* (Yogyakarta: Gading Publishing. 2018), p.15-18; Abdurrahman Wahid. "Editor's Introduction: The Enemy Within". *The Illusion of an Islamic State: How an Alliance of Moderates Waged a Successful Campaign Against Radicalization and Terrorism in the World's Largest Muslim-Majority Country* (Jakarta • Winston-Salem • Cairo • Leiden: LibForAll Foundation. 2011), p.i.

31 Cf. Abdurrahman Wahid. "Islam, Culture and Indigenization". *GUS DUR on Religion, Democracy and Peace: Selected Essays* (Yogyakarta: Gading Publishing. 2018), p.40-59.

well as refining some superstitions and irrational beliefs, can continue its strong presence in Indonesian society. The reformist and modernist Islamic movement, which is represented by the Muhammadiyah Association, while opposing traditional Islam and emphasizing the reform of religious thought, also has a glimpse of development and progress and cautiously uses Western models as long as it does not harm its Islamic goals.

The most important challenge of the Islamic reformist and modernist movement is not to fall into the trap of Islamic extremism and not to shy away from moderation. It seems that if this current, as we have mentioned, can take a step towards rationality and moderation, it can still be a strong current among Indonesian Muslims.

The current of liberal Islam that one of the most important representatives of which is Noor Khalis Majid, has been growing among the educated and the middle class. This movement has been able to harmonize with the values of the modern period and, with the support of young thinkers such as Uli al-Absar-Abdalla (born in 1967), has been able to advance and pave the way for a bright future. I think close cooperation between the liberal Islam movement and Kaum Muda ("young group") is necessary to advance the goals of Islam Nusantara.

In addition, we should mention the weaker current, which is the extremist and Salafi-Takfiri movements. This, of course, has not been widely welcomed because in the nature of Indonesian Islam, the spirit of moderation and tolerance prevail, and the intellectual tradition of pluralism has been the hallmark of religious thought in Indonesia for centuries. Even in pre-modern times, scholars and jurists did not seek to impose their views on Malay Muslims. Needless to say, the latter could take power if the three main currents are weakened and pose serious challenges to Indonesian society, which, despite all the ups and downs, has not deviated from moderate Islamic thought.

The conclusion of my words is that Islam Nusantara can send a message of peace and tolerance to the Islamic world; Because Islam Nusantara is a great example of tolerance and cultural Islam with great digestion and can be a model for other Muslim communities. Mysticism and Sufism as one of the most important components of Islam Nusantara along with the rich cultural background of this region and the gentle and kind spirit of the Malay people, has made Islam Nusantara a valuable example of Islam compatible with human values in modern period.

At this time that the Middle East, as the heart of the Islamic world, is in turmoil and on the verge of new conflicts, and on the one hand, world powers are fighting with each other over their interests in this region, and on the other hand, this region has become a Arena of ideological rivalries based on political Islam, considering the experience of Islam Nusantara can be very useful for the Middle East.

These days, when each of the Islamic states competes with each other on the basis of their political-religious ideology (Arab Wahhabism, Ottoman political Sufism, and Iranian Shiism), it seems that the return to cultural Islam and attention to the Islamic traditions of Muslim nations and Recognizing cultural diversity and avoiding imposing an ideological pattern on others is a lifeline to overcome these conflicts.

I think re-reading the thoughts of characters like Gus Dur can be very helpful in solving

the above problems. With praiseworthy insight, he emphasized the importance of concepts such as *pribumisasi*, and while believing in pluralistic cultural Islam, he offered a middle way by relying on the valuable achievements of Islam Nusantara, without being caught up in absolute secularism or Islamic radicalism. I think Gus Dur can still be a good and inspiring role model for Nusantara Islam.

I would like to end my talk with the words of Gus Dur, who wrote in the introduction to the book *The Illusion of an Islamic State*:

“People who are convinced that they know more than anyone else about Islam, and yet are full of hatred towards any of God’s creatures who do not travel the same path as they; and those who claim to be in possession of the absolute truth, and for that reason entitled to act as God’s vice-regents on earth (caliphs) and to dictate how everyone else must live—clearly, their words and behavior will not lead us into the presence of God. Their dream of an Islamic state is merely an illusion, for the true Islamic state is not to be found in the structure of any government, but rather, in hearts which are open to God and all His creatures.”

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Author Guideline

Islam Nusantara Journal for the Study of Islamic History and Culture facilitates publication of article and book review on study of Islam, Muslim culture, social and politics in Southeast Asia (Nusantara) and beyond. It is published twice a year and written in Indonesia, English and Arabic. It aims to present academic insight of social and cultural complexity of Muslim world in Southeast Asia under the frame of dialectic between Islam and local culture or cultural realities.

The journal invites scholars and experts working in various disciplines in the Islamic studies, humanities and social sciences. Articles should be original, research-based, unpublished and not under review for possible publication in other journals. All submitted papers are subject to review of the editors, editorial board, and blind reviewers.

Papers submitted for publication must conform to the following guidelines:

1. Papers must be typed in one-half spaced on A4-paper size;
2. Papers' length is about 8,000-10,000 words;
3. All submission must include a 200-300 word abstract;
4. Full name(s) of the author(s) must be stated, along with his/her/their institution and complete e-mail address;
5. All submission should be in Microsoft Word, RTF, or WordPerfect document file format;
6. Arabic words should be transliterated according to the style of 'Islam Nusantara Studies';
7. Bibliographical reference must be noted in footnote and bibliography according to 'Islam Nusantara Studies' style.ain.

Examples of footnote style:

¹Ryan Sugiarto, *Psikologi Raos: Saintifikasi Kawruh Jiwa Ki Ageng Suryomentaram*, (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Ifada, 2015), p. 139.

²Nur Syam, *Tarekat Petani: Fenomena Tarekat Syattariyah Lokal*, (Yogyakarta: LkiS, 2013), p. 164.

³Syam, *Tarekat Petani*, p. 173.

⁴Ubaidillah Achmad dan Yuliyatun Tajuddin, *Suluk Kiai Cebolek Dalam Konflik Keberagamaan dan Kearifan Lokal*, (Jakarta: Prenada, 2014), p. 140.

⁵Nur Syam, *Tarekat Petani*, p. 99.

⁶M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah*, vol. 14 (Bandung: Lentera Hati, 2013), p. 167.

⁷Deny Hamdani, "Cultural System of Cirebonese People: Tradition of Maulidan in the Kanoman Kraton," *Indonesian Journal of Social Sciences* 4, no. 1 (January-June 2012): p.12.

⁸Hamdani, "Cultural System of Cirebonese People," p. 14.

⁹Deny Hamdani, "Raison d'être of Islam Nusantara," *The Jakarta Post*, 06 Agustus 2015, p. 5.

¹⁰Azyumardi Azra, "Islam di "Negeri Bawah Angin" dalam Masa Perdagangan," *Studia Islamika* 3, no. 2 (1996): h. 191-221, review buku Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

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Please include, at the beginning of the review:

1. Author, Title, Place, Publisher, Date, number of pages, ISBN E.g., Turabian, Kate L. A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations. Sixth edition. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996. 308 + ix pp. ISBN: 0-226-81627-3.
2. The review should begin with a brief overall description of the book.
3. Matters that may be considered in the body of the review include:
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 - Comments on the author's style and presentation.
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