

## ANALYSING THE ROLE OF ISLAM WITHIN INDONESIA'S CULTURE AND POLITIC

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to analyse how Islam has been playing role in Indonesia's cultural politic. Political Islam has played a significant role in shaping the modern Indonesian political state. Its influence can be seen in the period of pre-independence, through to the Sukarno government, Suharto's New Order and the reform era. This paper employed a chronological framework of analysis to examine the development of political Islam and its impact on the evolution of civil society and democracy in Indonesia. The result showed that the interplay of Islam, culture and politics in Indonesia was dynamic. Despite the suppressed condition of the role of Islam in early modern Indonesia, its contribution toward the development of Indonesia politic was undeniable.

**Keywords:** Islam, politic, Indonesia

### INTRODUCTION

The study of Islam in South East Asian region is gaining an increased amount of attention among both scholars and students (Eliraz, 2004). As a country comprising almost 87 percent Muslims, the development of Indonesia as a modern political state strongly relates to the development of the religion in the country. The relationship between Islam and cultural politics in Indonesia, however, is extremely complex.

As stated by William & Worden —

From the very outset of independence, Islam and the Indonesian state had a tense political relationship. The *Pancasila's* promotion of monotheism is a religiously neutral and tolerant statement that equates Islam with the other religious systems: Christianity, Buddhism, and Hindu-Balinese beliefs. Nonetheless, Muslim political groups had felt betrayed since signing the 1949 Jakarta Charter, under which they accepted a pluralist republic in return for agreement that the state would be based upon belief in one God with Muslims obligated to follow the *Shari'a* or Islamic law. The failure of the Sukarno government to follow through constitutionally and legally on this commitment set the agenda for future Islamic politics. At the extreme was the *Darul Islam* rebellion in 1948, which sought to establish an Islamic state (Frederick & Worden, 1993).

President Suharto's New Order government undertook a major effort to subsume all of Indonesia's political cultures, with their different and often incompatible criteria for legitimacy, into a national political culture based on the values set out in the *Pancasila*. As the consequence of this policy, some groups were marginalised in the name of national stability and development. The suppression of political Islam is characteristic of this period.

This paper also examines the rise of civil society in the closing phase of the New Order regime and in the reform era. An analysis on civil society is crucial as the movement contributes to the re-emergence of political Islam in Indonesia. It is generally recognized that the existence of

an active civil society in a country is linked to the vitality of political democracy. The aim of civil society is not to transform the state but rather to democratise society; in fact, civil society is a pre-condition for the existence of any democratic state. Freedom of speech and expression, including the freedom to criticize government without the prospect of being captured by the state's military apparatus has become characteristics of Indonesia today. It is during this reform era that many organisations were finally able to express their political interests, including some Islamic groups. Problem statement this paper attempted to answer was how Islam had been playing the role in the development of civil society and democracy in Indonesia.

## METHOD

For the purpose of this research, a cultural studies methodology was used to understand the relation between Islam, culture and politics in Indonesia. The research techniques to be used include contextualism. Contextualism refers to how to locate the phenomenon it is studying within the wider social, political and global context (Saukko, 2003). The analysis was especially emphasized on the development and role of Islam within Indonesia's cultural and political context. Thus, the contextual mode of analysis would deploy forms of 'empirical' research which are constituted through a close reading of texts, historical analysis and direct interviews with Indonesia Islamists.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### *Foundations of Political Islam: the Modern State of Indonesia*

The birth of political Islam in modern Indonesian history is signified by the formation of a number of key Islamic organisations; the *Sarekat Dagang Islam* (the Islamic Merchant League) (1905), *Muhammadiyah* (the Followers of Muhammad) (1912), and later *Nahdlatul Ulama* (the Revival of Religious Scholars) (1926). At first, the main goals of these Islamic organisations were to teach Islamic values to their members and to accommodate the interests of Islamic merchants in facing the dominant role of Chinese merchants. As they developed, these organisations became actively involved in fighting against the Dutch colonization of Indonesia and in doing so gave character to political Islam through their activities to form an independent nation.

*Sarekat Dagang Islam (SDI)* was founded in Surakarta by Haji Samanhudi as an Indonesian Muslim self-help organisation based on the model of the *Jammyat Chair*, an Arab-immigrant organisation formed in 1905 to advance the dual agenda of propagating modernist Islam and protecting Muslim merchants from their Chinese competitors. *SDI's* principal purpose was to fend off increased foreign competition in batik production, and in this regard, Islam was simply a means to differentiate native Indonesians from non-indigenous Chinese merchants (Van Niel, 1980).

The *SDI's* later adoption of a stridently Pan-Islamic agenda, combined with its increasingly hard-line position regarding the incompatibility of Islam not only with secular-nationalism, but with all forms of nationalism, would serve to keep it on the margins of mainstream political legitimacy throughout the waning years of the colonial era. *SDI's* Pan-Islamic aspirations became linked with the Ottoman Caliphate until the latter's collapse in 1924, depriving its agenda of international political leverage. In 1923, *SDI* created the *Partij Sarekat Islam (PSI)*, which after 1926 would be known as the *Partij Sarekat Islam Indonesia (PSII)*. However by the late 1920s the movement for change in Indonesia was becoming increasingly defined by the western-educated native elites who had begun to take up the cause of secular nationalism. In 1938, remnants of the

*SDI* created the *Partai Islam Indonesia* (Islamic Party of Indonesia), the first overt political party organized with an Islamic agenda. Its founding signalled the final demise of the artificial division between religion and politics and ushered in a new era of political Islam (Benda, 1958; Lucius, 2003).

To some Islamic nationalists, it is the establishment of *SDI* that marks the national awakening, rather than *Budi Oetomo*, which was founded in 1908 (Santosa, 2007). *SDI* became a strong political force in its time. It had 181 branches all over Indonesia in 1916, with more than 700 thousands members, whereas *Budi Utomo*, in its golden time, had only 10,000 members. To some political analysts, such as M. Natsir in *Indonesich Nationalist*, the denial of *SDI* as the pioneer of national awakening marks the first denial of the role of Islam in politics (Santosa, 2007). The *Muhammadiyah* (Followers of Muhammad) was founded on November 18, 1912 by Kyai Haji Ahmad Dahlan, a devout Muslim scholar who had studied in Mecca for several years and had subsequently been inspired by the writings of the Egyptian reformist Muhammad 'Abduh . In its early development, *Muhammadiyah* aimed to strengthen the bond among Muslims. *Muhammadiyah's* initial efforts reflected its founder's belief that the struggle to reform Indonesian Islam must follow a systematic and goal-oriented evolutionary program. Consequently, initial goals were limited to the spheres of religious proselytization, social work, and education, with the organisation's overall aim being "to improve and strengthen the work of Allah and man's fate in the afterlife" (Peacock, 1978). In relation to the issue of Islamic education developed by *Muhammadiyah*, Lucius (2003, p.38) notes—

*Muhammadiyah's* most important innovation in the field of Islamic education in Indonesia was to establish schools based on the *madrasah* (Islamic School) model rather than the traditional *pesantren* model. The most significant difference between these two models was that secular subjects, including specifically western subjects, were added to the *madrasah* curriculum to supplement traditional Arabic and religious studies. The rationale behind this adaptation lies in the modernist assumption that for Indonesian Muslims to succeed to their rightful place in society, they must not only seek to be pious, but they must also seek to be educated in modern ways.

By 1939, *Muhammadiyah* had 1,744 schools in operation, about half of which were strictly secular, while the other half operated on the *madrasah* model (Peacock, 1978; Lucius, 2003). In addition, it ran 834 mosques, 31 libraries, and oversaw the activities of nearly eight thousand *muballigh* (missionaries) involved in *dakwah* (propagation of Islam). After independence, it would further expand its educational activities to also include religious- teacher schools, technical schools, and a college. For the time being, however, *Muhammadiyah's* rapid organisational successes not only in the field of education, but in proselytization and social work as well, met with stiff resistance from conservative *santri* who resented the implication that their own understanding of Islam was somehow imperfect and needed to be rectified (Ricklefs, 2008, p. 171).

The rapid development of *Muhammadiyah* unsettled the colonial government and it eventually imposed restrictions on its activities. Nonetheless, Islamic scholars of *Muhammadiyah* consistently promoted their political thoughts through writings in news media. Although not explicitly stated, they emphasized the importance of being an independent nation. The political activities of the *Muhammadiyah* intensified in 1937 with the formation by its chairman, K. H. Mas Mansyur, of the *Majelis Islam A'la Indonesia* or *MIAI* (Great Islamic Council of Indonesia) along with *Nahdlatul Ulama* leaders. *MIAI* coordinated various activities and united Muslims to fight the Dutch policies,

such as by refusing the marriage law and military training requirement (Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 2017).

Another important Islamic organisation is *Nahdlatul Ulama* or *NU* (the Revival of Religious Scholars) which was founded in 1926 as a reaction towards more modernist Islamic organisations (*SDI* and *Muhammadiyah*) that were considered to have decreased the legitimacy of *Ulama*, the Islamic leaders or scholars. The aim of this organisation was to promulgate Islamic teachings according to the Ahlussunnah Waljama'ah doctrines. *NU*'s activities primarily concerned the support of traditional Islamic *pesantren*, social work, and the facilitation of economic development for Muslims.

The increasing radicalization of *SDI*'s Pan-Islamic aspirations, following the ejection of Marxist elements from its ranks in the early 1920s, led *NU* leaders to forge an uneasy working relationship with the *Muhammadiyah*. The growing tension between *SDI* and *Muhammadiyah* in 1929 over the issue of cooperation with the Dutch colonial government drove *NU* and *Muhammadiyah* even closer together. This closeness was represented by the establishment of *MIAI* in 1937, as discussed above. *NU* became involved in nationalist political activities including working together with *Gabungan Politik Indonesia* or *GAPI* (Indonesian Politics Association) to demand the Dutch colonial government form an Indonesian parliament (Aqsha, 2005).

Although *NU* as an Islamic organisation was established later than *SDI* and *Muhammadiyah* it showed remarkable growth. By 1942 it had expanded to 120 branches in both Java and Kalimantan. Its *dakwah* activities continued to gain ground throughout many of the outer islands, although East Java would continue to remain *NU*'s heartland throughout much of its history. Its ability to capitalize on existing *pesantren* networks, as well as the resonance of its conservative message among many rural Javanese, gave it an organisational edge that enabled it to compete with other more well-established movements. By the time the Japanese had arrived, *NU* had achieved peer status with *Muhammadiyah* (Bush, 2009).

Although all these three organisations were first founded as Islamic-based mass educational and social organisations and avoided direct participation in politics, the journey of Indonesia's history shows how these Islamic organisations played a significant role in the process of nation building. *Muhammadiyah* and *Nahdlatul Ulama* now represent a major portion of all Indonesian Muslims and the great majority of all *santri* Muslims, the observant Muslims who pray and fast regularly and observe orthodox practices. The establishment of some political parties in the reform era which have affiliations with these two Islamic organisations is clear evidence of the strong role these two Islamic-based mass organisations now have in the Indonesian political life.

#### *The Jakarta Charter and the Depoliticization of Islam*

The idea of Islamic statehood spread rapidly throughout the archipelago in the 1940s and 1950s, ushering in a strengthened political Islamic movement and an era of *Masyumi*. Nonetheless, the desire of secular-nationalists to establish a secular state triggered conflict between secular-nationalists and Islamic leaders on the issue of determining the foundation for Independent Indonesia.

The debate over the state ideology for an independent Indonesia indicates how the secular nationalist groups had ignored the dominant role of Islam in the political struggle against the colonizers. At the same time, secular-nationalists had taken advantage of the Japanese shift of favour from Islamic organisation and Muslim leaders to secular-nationalists. This shift had given more political power to secular-nationalists over Islamic leaders.

The idea of Islamic leaders to form an Islamic state had been rejected by secular-nationalists on the argument that predominately Christian areas in the eastern archipelago such as Maluku and Papua would not join the Republic. Nonetheless, the ideas of Islamic leaders held widespread support and had to be accommodated by the *BPUPKI* (Committee for the preparation of Indonesia's independence) in order to make a fair agreement. Eventually, on June 1 1945, Sukarno gave a speech subsequently called the *Lahirnya Pancasila* (Birth of *Pancasila*) in which he detailed his personal vision for a state ideology that could accommodate all groups. *Pancasila* is a Sankrit terminology to impose a bit of gravitas and imply deep historical roots. *Pancasila* simply means the "five principles".

Many Islamic leaders were upset at Sukarno's ideology of *Pancasila*, which falls short of either making Islam the state religion or turning Indonesia into an Islamic state. The first *sil* of this "five principles" which spoke vaguely of "belief in God" had provoked consternation among Islamic leaders. As a compromise, they proposed the addition of seven words so that the first *sil* became: "belief in God with the obligation for adherents of Islam to carry out the *Shari'a*." This formulation became known as the Jakarta Charter and from the very beginning met with fierce resistance from many within the secular nationalist movement (Barton, 2004). The debate over the Jakarta Charter was analysed by Robert E. Lucius in his unpublished thesis '*A House Divided: the Decline and Fall of Masyumi (1950-1956)*' (2003).

Conflict between secular-nationalists and Islamic leaders did not stop after the national ideology had been established and the independence of Indonesia declared. On the day following the *Proklamasi Kemerdekaan* (independence declaration) the twenty-one members of the *Panitia Pērsiapan Kēmerdekaan Indonesia* or *PPKI* (Preparatory Committee for Indonesian Independence) met to discuss the draft constitution. Unlike that of the *BPUPKI*, the *PPKI*'s representatives were intended to reflect regional diversity rather than ideological diversity, thus they were of a very different character to those who had debated the draft constitution (van Dyk, 1981). With Sukarno and Hatta as the chairman and vice-chairman and a *PPKI* membership comprised of mostly secular-nationalists, the debate over the Indonesian draft constitution was high. In the eyes of secular-nationalists the constitution draft was too much of a religious colour. Again, Islamic leaders were forced to accept the new draft for the sake of the nascent state's survival. Consequently, as noted by Lucius (2003), most of the Muslim leaders agreed to Sukarno and Hatta's demands that references to the Jakarta Charter be removed from the preamble, that the related clause in the section on religion be excised, and that the stipulation that the president be a Muslim is dropped. These changes were accepted by the *PPKI* and Sukarno and Hatta were elected as President and Vice-President respectively.

Sukarno's marginalization policies toward Muslims resulted in several setbacks to the Islamic political movement. The 1955 general election is empirical proof of the effect of Sukarno's secular policies, in which the majority of Muslims voted for secular parties. Nevertheless, Islamic leaders who felt threatened by Sukarno's guided democracy and proximity to *Partai Komunis Indonesia* or *PKI* (Indonesian Communist Party) later supported anti-communist generals such as Major General Suharto.

Meanwhile *Masyumi*, as the main Islamic political party, had been an inherently unstable organisation. The different views of Islamic values between traditionalists (*Nahdlatul Ulama*) and modernists (*Muhammadiyah*) were of little importance when compared to disputes of a political or economic nature that had been entrenched by fundamentally different cultural perceptions. This conflict culminated in *NU*'s defection from *Masyumi*. As noted by Barton, "in

1952 the rusticated traditionalists, fed up with being considered inferior to their urban modernist coreligionists, split from Masyumi and NU formed their own political party” (Barton, 2004, p.68). Although the role of political Islam had been suppressed there were some ex members of *Masyumi* and *Hisbullah* soldiers who saw the refusal of the Jakarta Charter by the secular nationalists and the acceptance of the revision of the constitution draft by Islamic leaders as a betrayal of the goal to establish an Islamic state. This betrayal, combined with Sukarno’s policies of marginalising Islamic leaders and his closeness to the Indonesian Communist Party helped instigate some radical Islamic figures to take up armed resistance against the newly formed secular government. The *Darul Islam*’s rebellion in 1948 is an example of how the rejection of the Jakarta Charter and the failure to establish an Islamic state had motivated some radical Islamists to employ violent methods in order to achieve their political ends.

It is also important to take into account the transition from Old Order era to New Order era. There was considerable tension between *Tentara Nasional Indonesia* (Indonesian National Army) and *PKI* who both claimed to have their own power and identity. Led by Lieutenant Colonel Untung, *PKI* launched a *coup d’etat* on 30 September 1965 by kidnapping and killing seven military officers. During the months from October 1965 to March 1966, the main political transformation occurred, signalled by the erosion of Sukarno’s authority, hyper-inflation and the dominance of military. The conflict reached its peak when on 11 March 1966 at a meeting in Bogor with three senior generals, Sukarno finally signed a letter of order instructing Suharto ‘to take all measures considered necessary to guarantee security, order and stability of the government. Suharto brought in the military as the main actor in the Indonesian political scene. The military had created bodies throughout all levels of government structure that legalized the use of coercive forces to deal with political and social movements within society. This condition had created obstacles to the development of Islam in Indonesia.

#### *Islam under New Order: The Cooptation and Depoliticization of Islam*

One lesson that Suharto learned from the Old Order was that in order to create a stabilised government system the protection of his government from both internal and external threats was of paramount importance. In order to achieve this stability the military became one of the main actors on the political stage. Suharto understood that to enable the development of the country, political stability was required. Thus, he introduced *Komando Operasi Pemulihan Keamanan dan Ketertiban* or *KOPKAMTIB* (the Operation Command for Security and Order Restoration) which was responsible for creating and maintaining security and an orderly society. *KOPKAMTIB* was established on 10 October 1965 with Suharto as the first commander. In practice, it turned into the front guard of the New Order to protect government interests and maintain Suharto's rule. This institution was allowed to sidestep legal processes and take any necessary actions, including prohibition, searching, execution and arrest without warrant (Prayudi, 2004).

Suharto initiated a number of additional policies in order to achieve stability, including the *Ancaman, Tantangan, Hambatan* and *Gangguan* or *ATHG* (Threat, Challenge, Obstacle and Disturbance) and the policy of *Suku, Agama, Ras dan Antar-golongan* or *SARA*, which aimed to diminish the significance of issues surrounding ethnicity, religion and race. In this context, society was required to show their support and loyalty to the state by accepting the development process and suppressing ethnic differences and concerns. Any activities that were considered as part of *ATHG* or *SARA* would be taken care of by the military which was responsible for the security of

the New Order regime. These policies were effective in suppressing the development of political Islam in Indonesia.

Suharto further limited the role of political Muslims by denying them a seat at the political table. Like his predecessor, Suharto refused to change the *Pancasila* and continued to pursue a secular course. Both the pursuit and avowal of an Islamic state were illegal acts under the New Order regime. Suharto's regime tried to steer a middle course between the far left, the *PKI*, and the far right, the Islamists (Abuza, 2003). Sukarno's strategies of depoliticising Islam were well adopted by Suharto after he came to power in 1966. His military approach to running the government stifled the activity of political Islamic movements and resulted in the imprisonment of a number of Islamic leaders considered by the regime as dangerous.

Suharto allowed two large Islamic organisations, *NU* and *Muhammadiyah*, to remain functional but their activities were limited and political activities were prohibited. Suharto realised the power which these two Islamic organisations had and their significant role played during the independence movement era under the *Mayumi* organisation. Thus, it was impossible for him to close down these organisations without encountering resistance from the followers of these organisations. However, he refused to acknowledge the rehabilitation of *Masyumi* as proposed by M. Natsir, Prawoto and M. Roem.

Suharto continued the suppression of Muslims by limiting the number of Muslim political parties in the general election. Acknowledging political stability as the prerequisite for economic development, Suharto's government issued a policy on party system restructuring. He coerced four Muslim parties (Indonesia Muslim Party [*Parmusi*], Revival of Religious Scholars [*Nahdlatul Ulama*], Indonesia Islamic League Party [*PSII*] and *Perti*) to merge into one party, known as *Partai Persatuan Pembangunan* or *PPP* (Indonesian Development Party) with *NU* as the largest component of the party. *NU* had demonstrated its ability to win nearly one-fifth of both general elections in 1955 and in 1971. Along with another merged secular party, *Partai Demokrasi Indonesia* or *PDI* (Indonesian Democratic Party), Suharto controlled these two parties through funding and screening to sustain loyalty. Meanwhile, *Golkar* was formed as Suharto's political vehicle in the political arena. Muslim parties were only given a limited number of seats in the Consultative Assembly and House of Representatives. The unification of Islamic parties symbolizes the significant decline of political Islam in the New Order era (Prayudi, 2010).

The marginalization process toward political Islam by Suharto's New Order continued, bolstered by new laws requiring the acceptance of the *Pancasila* by all political parties. None of the political parties was allowed to adopt another ideology but *Pancasila*. Consequently the only Islamic political party, the United Development Party was forced to replace Islam as the ideology of their party with the *Pancasila*. Further, the Islamic symbol of this party, *Ka'bah*, which represents the house of God in Mecca was replaced with 'Star' which represents the first principle of *Pancasila*.

The New Order employed tactics of stigmatization and media control which effectively frightened society and religious groups. *Kompas* daily, in its 3 February 1977 edition, wrote a report that the government had exposed an Islamic group, the "*Komando Jihad*" (the *Jihad* Command), who wanted to establish an Islamic state. This group had been associated with some of former members and leaders of *Darul Islam* movement. Some political analysts like Ikrar Nusa Bhakti and Cahyono (2001) argue that *Komando Jihad* was engineered by the New Order's government, through *Badan Koordinasi Intelejen Negara* or *BAKIN* (the State Intelligence Coordinating Agency), to discredit Islam. Another group that the military considered extreme was "*Dewan*

*Revolusi Islam Indonesia*” (the Islamic Revolution Council of Indonesia) which purportedly also wanted to establish the Indonesian Islamic state. Again, some political analysts argue that this group was merely being used as a political tool by the New Order to intimidate political Islamic groups. This argument is persuasive given that this group had adopted non Islamic ways in reaching their goals and were arguably not politically active at all (Bhakti, 2001).

The power of political Islam during the New Order regime, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, had entered into another dark period in the history of modern Indonesia. It had experienced various tragedies, from the discrediting of Islam by anti Islam generals like Ali Moertopo to the mass massacres by the military in Tanjung Priok and Aceh (Bhakti, 2001) (Abuza, 2003). During this era thousands of Muslims had become victims of the New Order regime.

### *Cultural Islam and the Emergence of Political Islam*

The emergence of cultural Islam was bolstered by Suharto’s more conciliatory attitude towards Islam and Muslims in the period following the enactment of laws requiring every organisation to adopt the *Pancasila* as its ideological basis after Muslim’s acceptance of *Pancasila* as the sole ideological basis of any organisation in 1989. Conflict, mutual suspicion and hostility between President Suharto and many Muslim groups had diminished significantly (Azra, 2003). Suharto’s open attitude toward Islam can be attributed in part to domestic and international pressures which insisted Suharto to become more open. It was Paul Wolfowitz, the former American ambassador to Indonesia, who first suggested that Suharto must adopt a political policy of openness.

In addition to international pressure, Suharto’s openness policy was the consequence of internal conflict between Suharto and the army (*Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia* or *ABRI*) (Mackie & McIntyre in Hill, 1994). The conflict rose due to Suharto’s anxiety toward some generals who demanded more dominant roles in the government and further ask him to resign the presidency. The emergence of *Petition 50* by the senior and retired military officers in 1980 was a clear example of this situation. Suharto then built strong relationship with technocrats like Habibie and attempted to gain sympathy from Muslims. Suharto’s deteriorating relationship with the army and the introduction of an openness policy provided the conditions in which cultural Islam in Indonesia could develop.

As the consequence of the implementation of cultural Islam during 1990s, Islam was regarded and practised solely as a religious and cultural activity in Indonesia, rather than an activity to initiate political change. The establishment of mosques, *madrasah* (Islamic schools), and the increase in the number of Indonesian Muslims making the pilgrimage to Mecca were some indicators of the development of cultural Islam taking place. This growth was also facilitated by Suharto's policies intended to maintain support for his government by the Islamic community. Heffner, for instance, notes that to pay back the Islamic community for their support, Suharto passed a law mandating religious educations in schools, with state-certified teachers and texts, which was vigorously enforced (Schwarz & Paris, 1999). The emergence of an Islamic cultural movement emphasising the dimensions of ritual and community become the characteristic of Islam in Indonesia during the New Order regime.

Between 1988 and 1993, Suharto made a number of concessions to the Muslim community including the founding of an Islamic bank, enhancing the authority of Islamic courts, lifting the ban on the veil worn by women in schools, and the founding of an Islamic newspaper, *Republika*, in 1993. Suharto also injected funding into Islamic schools and Islamic TV programming and



formed *Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia* or *ICMI* (the *Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals*) in order to co-opt Muslim intellectuals and promote Islamic ideals (Abuza, 2003). Nonetheless, Suharto's attempts to gain support from the Muslim community seemingly failed. The establishment of *ICMI* in December 1990 precipitated the rise of political Islam that had been suppressed by Suharto for more than twenty-five years. Many *ICMI* members actively criticised Suharto's authoritarian regime and his economic development policy which only benefited a small number of elites within the administration, such as his step brother Bob Hasan and his children. *ICMI* symbolizes the rise of Islamic politics that had been suppressed for more than twenty-five years. The establishment of *ICMI* could not be separated from its chairman, BJ Habibie, the then Indonesian President who revoked media licensing.

Undoubtedly Suharto had miscalculated and underestimated the power of "cultural Islam" as a political and social force. Not unlike Snouck Hurgronje, the most prominent Islamic advisor to the Dutch Netherlands Indies government, who advised the Dutch to allow "Islam as a cultural phenomenon" (Azra, 2006). Suharto too, failed to acknowledge the political implications and growing momentum of cultural Islam. Ultimately, the cultural force of Islam which Suharto had once supported slowly grew to contain the government and its policy decisions; cultural Islam had manifested itself into a powerful political force.

In sum, the development of political Islam under Suharto's New Order arose in the context of government pressure, co-optation, and manipulation by the state in order to sustain the power of Suharto. Nevertheless, there were times when Islam played crucial roles in politics, especially in the latter stages of Suharto's rule. Islamic intellectuals had become the locomotive of reform along with student movements, demanding Suharto to resign from his position. The growth of cultural Islam in Indonesia, which metamorphosed into a powerful political movement, is evidence of its dynamic development as both a movement responding to the policies of the government of the day as well as a driving force for political change.

### *Islam and Politics in Transition*

The political events in many Asian countries during the last twenty years have shown that an understanding of civil society is crucial in tracking the changes in economy and polity. In some countries where Islam is dominant, the idea of civil society relates to the Islam-centric version of civil society, known as *masyarakat madani*. According to Anwar Ibrahim, former Malaysian deputy Prime Minister, *masyarakat madani* (civil society) is a social system which is founded on the moral principle which balances freedom with societal stability (Wolters, 2002).

Within the context of Indonesia, the development of civil society in the *Reformasi* period has encouraged social and political organisations to become pressure groups and upholders of political freedoms. The role of Islamic movements like *Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam* or *HMI* (Islamic Student Union), *Korps Alumni Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam* or *KAHMI* (Corps of Islamic Student Union Alumni), and some Islamic intellectuals such as Amien Rais and Nurcholis Madjid were crucial in the early stage of the reform process. As Abuza (2003, p.65) notes, it was Islamic organisations that provided the bulk of the demonstrations that brought Suharto down. The united student and Islamic movements demanded the same goal: reform and succession of national leadership. The fall of Suharto's New Order also signifies the rise of the civil society movement in Indonesia.

The euphoria of reform, marked by the widening of political and civil rights, resulted in the emergence of new political parties. To some political analysts this situation reflects the rise of civil society. The reform era is also marked by the emergence of both liberal and radical Islamic movements. They have taken various forms to express their political interests. The development of Islamic radicalism, for instance, reaches its peak in the reform era. Political turbulence and lack of police control provided fertile ground for the rapid growth of these movements.

Islamic movements in the reform era were characterised by a dynamic political condition. Some Islamic groups expressed their interests in the form of political parties, while others in the form of social movements. In general, the re-emergence of political Islam can be classified into two groups. Firstly, political Islam represented by Islamic movements such as the Islamic Defenders Front (*Front Pembela Islam* or *FPI*) led by Habib Muhammad Rizieq Syihab, the Communication Forum of the Followers of the Prophet Path (*Forum Komunikasi Ahlus Sunnah Wal-Jamaah* or *FKAWJ*) which is famously known through its paramilitary wing “*Laskar Jihad*”, and others. Essentially, these Islamic groups are Islamic movements with strong political activities and motives. Nevertheless, they themselves refuse to be classified as political parties and they have no relationship with the existing Islamic political parties that flourished in the reform era. Thus, they are principally independent groups that refuse to channel their political aspirations through formal Islamic parties. Some of these Islamic movements are labelled as hard-line Islam. Leaders of organised Islamic political parties tended to keep a distance from these Islamic movements. The development of political Islam represented by formal Islamic political parties constitutes the second type of group. Islamic parties which were suppressed for nearly three decades grew rapidly in the reform era. Nevertheless, there is no political consensus among these groups. This lack of consensus relates to the different historical background of each party and their varying goals.

The rise of many Islamic political parties indicates that Islamic organisations were quick to capitalize on the liberal conditions and newfound freedoms of the press and organisations. As Robert Heffner argues Islam, rather than being a conservative and antidemocratic force, was the single most important force for political change and democracy. Since the late- 1980s, the largest audience for democratic and pluralists ideas in Indonesia has been, not secular-nationalists, but reform minded Muslim democrats. Nowhere in the Muslim world have Muslim intellectuals engaged the ideas of democracy, civil society, pluralism, and the rule of law with a vigour and confidence equal to that of Indonesian Muslims (Heffner as cited in Abuza, 2003, p. 168).

Heffner’s statement highlights the significance of Islam in contributing to a more democratic Indonesia. The emergence of Islamic political parties in the reformation era contradicts the statement from some political analysts who claimed that the adoption of the ideology of *Pancasila* by the United Development Party (PPP) during the New Order regime marked the end of political Islam in Indonesia. On the contrary, the emergence of Islamic political parties in the reform era signifies the re-birth of political Islam.

The re-birth of political Islam has raised a number of salient questions for consideration. An important point of contention is whether the objective of these parties is to advance Islamic ideals or is merely to gain power in the name of Islam. Muslim intellectuals, such as Kuntowijoyo and Bachtiar Aly (in Azra, 2006), believe that the emergence of these Islamic parties in the post-Suharto era is merely an expression of the reform era's new-founded political freedoms and democratic ideals. Others argue that the foundation of these Islamic parties is based solely in the pursuit of greater power rather than the achievement of religious objectives. Muslim elites involved in the establishment of these parties have shown strong tendencies of self-interest, rather than a

desire to achieve religious goals. The foundation of highly political parties by traditional Islamic become counterproductive to advancing Muslim interests in the political arena. The high number of Islamic parties has effectively spread votes in the general elections across a large number of parties, resulting in a small percentage of the overall votes being directed at any one Islamic party. Consequently, non-Islamic parties gained significant votes in the 1999 general elections. On the other hand, *Golongan Karya*, which had become the political vehicle of Suharto in the New Order era, still remained strong to be defeated by the new Islamic political parties. The Indonesia Democratic Party for Struggle, led by Megawati Sukarnoputri, gained 33.73 percent of votes to win the 1999 general election. Of the 17 Islamic political parties, only three parties gained more than 2% votes: the Unity Development Party or PPP (10.7%), Nation Awakening Party or PKB (12.60 %), and National Mandate Party or PAN (7.11%).

The small share of the total vote in the 1999 general election concerned many Muslims involved in the political Islam cause. Certain external factors such as PDIP's complacency and insensitivity to Islamic aspirations, however, provided the stimulus for the fragmented Islamic parties to forge a loose coalition, initially called "*Fraksi Islam*" (the Islamic Coalition) and later known as the "*Poros Tengah*" (Middle Axis). The growing unresolved conflict among supporters of Habibie and Megawati had created an unexpected opportunity for the *Poros Tengah* coalition to propose Abdurrahman Wahid as its presidential candidate in the MPR general session in October 1999 (Azra, 2006, pp.17-18). Megawati as the leader of PDIP, in the eyes of Islamic political parties, has been considered as the representation of secular-nationalists that is not friendly to Muslim groups. Also, there has been an understanding within Islamic teaching where men must become the leader instead of women. This condition can also be seen as the conflict between Indonesian secular-nationalists and Islamists. The election of Abdurrahman Wahid as the fourth president came more as the result of trying to accommodate all parties after Nurcholis Madjid refused *Poros Tengah's* proposition to become the president. Although President Wahid represented the power of the Islamic Coalition, he did not represent many of the aspirations of Islamic political parties. Soon, Wahid's policies disappointed the Islamic Coalition which had previously supported him. For example, he made a number of changes to the composition of his cabinet, which consisted of the representatives from some Islamic parties, without consulting with the Islamic members. Ultimately, his inconsistent attitude and heretical management style, which led to the "Bulogate I" and "Bruneigate" scandals, and his declaration of martial law at the peak of his conflict with the MPR, resulted in his impeachment in the Special Session of MPR on 23 June 2001, to be replaced by Vice President Megawati Soekarnoputri as the fifth president.

The emergence of various Islamic political parties simply represents an expression of the reform era, which is generally understood by the Muslim elite to mean political freedom and democracy. As Azyumardi Azra states—

The explosion of the number of Islamic political parties is merely the expression of an almost uncontrollable political euphoria among the Muslim political elite, who had been suppressed or at least marginalised for most of the Suharto era. The existence of so many Islamic political parties could be counter-productive for the unity and welfare of Indonesian Muslim society at large (Azra, 2006, p. 29).

Thus, the establishment of so many political parties in the reform era tends to be motivated by self or group interests rather than religious motives. This also indicates that for most Indonesian Muslims, they still tend to focus more on religious practices rather than involvement in political

activities. This condition possibly relates to the suppression in the Suharto regime of Muslims and Islamic political activities as well as the successful implementation of cultural Islam during the New Order regime. The tendency among Muslims to become more devout, at least formally, has not been necessarily translated into more of an Islamic political orientation. Simply stated, the formation of Islamic political parties tends to represent the dynamic of Islamism at the level of Islamic elites, not at the level of citizenry.

Significant problems arise when those whose aspirations are not well represented through these political parties and when those who strongly refuse the idea of secular government take a more radical approach to political action. This situation has led to the emergence of radical Islamic groups, which were previously suppressed and marginalised socially and politically.

## CONCLUSION

The interplay of Islam within the context of culture and politic in Indonesia was very dynamic. Its development and cultural practice strongly related to the development of politic in the country. The formation of Islamic organisations such as *Sarekat Dagang Islam* (the Islamic Merchant League), *Muhammadiyah* (the Followers of Muhammad) and *Nahdlatul Ulama* (the Religious of Revival Scholars) marked the development of political Islam in the modern history of Indonesia. These organisations, however, had their own goals and different understandings of Islamic values. Despite the difference, all these organisations were first founded as social organisations and grew into Islamic organisations that played significant role in the pre-independence era. Through the formation of Islamic military groups, these Islamic organisations waged *jihad* toward the Dutch coloniser.

The debate that occurred among Islamic leaders and between secular nationalists over the issue of an Islamic state as well as the issue of whether the Jakarta charter should be state ideology resulted in a great deal of friction within Muslim community. Some leaders fully supported the idea, others wanted the secular government to implement religious practices among Muslims, whereas the rest preferred pluralism and liberal democracy. Concurrently, secular nationalists were effective in strengthening their power base to exclude Muslim political leaders *NU*.

This poor condition of political Islam continued under the New Order regime in which the Muslim community was further marginalised by President Suharto. Suharto implemented various policies to ensure Islam remained outside of the political arena. The introduction of a semi military body (*KOPKAMTIB*) to restore order and peace as well as the *ATHG* and *SARA* organisations which sought to limit the discussion of politically sensitive and divisive issues were effectively used by Suharto to quell political Islam.

Despite the depoliticization of political Islam, the New Order regime was more tolerant toward what was called “cultural Islam”, especially to Muslim organisations that principally accepted the pluralist principles of Pancasila. Suharto’s openness attitude was considered an advantage to the development of Islam. The establishment of the Indonesia Association of Muslim Intellectual (*ICMI*), among other concessions that Suharto had given to Muslim community, had been an instrument for Muslim intellectuals to criticize Suharto’s government and eventually for the cultural Islam movement to garner some political influence over Suharto. Thus, it can be concluded that Suharto had miscalculated the political implications of cultural Islam. The emergence of cultural Islam ultimately contributed to the re-emergence of political Islam in the 1990s. It can also be said that Muslim organisations contributed to the emergence of the idea of

civil society through the analysis as well as writings of Muslim Intellectuals in news media and journals.

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