



**Nation-building in the Era of Populism
and the Muslim Intelligentsia:**

THE INDONESIAN EXPERIENCE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction..... 4

Formulation of nation-building in Indonesia.... 5

Nation-building in a country with a Muslim-majority population.... 7

Populism as a challenge to nation-building.... 10

A second look at religion and state in the polity of Indonesia.... 12

The role of Muslim intellectuals in Indonesian nation-building.... 14

References 18



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INTRODUCTION

As the Presidency of Joko Widodo (or Jokowi as he is known familiarly) began, the incoming government espoused the idea of a “*revolusi mental*,” a mental revolution. Indeed, this psychological shift was a key campaign theme advocated by Joko Widodo prior to the presidential election of 2014. Once in office, the new President issued a regulation on this very topic, known as “Instruksi Presiden” (Presidential Instruction) number 12, in 2016. It was anticipated that this move would draw criticism for being “jargonistic,” which turned out to be the case, as the Instruction generated considerable controversy. For several weeks, the new edict remained a hot topic in the country’s newspapers. Some of the attacks in the media revived an issue that had lain dormant for a while: what it could or should mean to be Indonesian in the post-authoritarian era.

Some critics recalled that Jokowi’s move paralleled what the country’s first president, Sukarno, did during the formative years of Indonesia that lasted from 1945 up to the epoch of “guided democracy.” Sukarno once employed the phrase “character building, nation-building” as an ideological framework for public policy intended to mobilize the newly-independent (post-colonial) polity. Criticism of Sukarno’s initiative has now become associated with the current phenomenon of populism. References to the term “nation-building” were quite frequent in Sukarno’s speeches beginning in the mid-1950s and continuing into the mid-1960s, including his state speech of August 17, 1957 and another delivered at the Asian Games of 1962. Historians later would provide inconsistent accounts of what Sukarno actually did within this conceptual framework. Some observers acknowledged the importance of integrating the diverse citizenry of the new nation while others strongly condemned the populist and authoritarian tone of Sukarno’s speeches. Especially when we remember that the Cold War formed the backdrop

to Sukarno’s presidency, evaluating his ideas becomes a more complex and challenging task.

In what follows, I intend to link the current *revolusi mental* with the memory of Sukarno-style nation-building as a way to illuminate the problems of a country like Indonesia. To begin with, the term nation-building is enshrined in the formal content of Inpres 12/2016 issued during the Presidency of Jokowi. The problem of integration in Indonesia is acute, since the country, a sprawling archipelago, contains as many as 500 ethnic groups¹ as well as a variety of distinct religious communities, all swept up in a wave of drastic change. Nor should we overlook the fact that Indonesia has millions of increasingly affluent consumers assailed daily by barrages of often-conflicting information. All of these factors influence the functioning of Indonesia’s government. Leading figures in and out of the government therefore are trying to channel this new-found prosperity into a positive process of nation-building.

The question then becomes: how to revisit the meaning of nation-building while taking into account the diversity of contemporary society. If we wished to frame the problem more generally, we might also inquire whether populism is likely to push Indonesia into an era of uncertainty and whether at this point nation-building has lost its meaning.²

With these issues in mind, the present essay is intended to determine how Indonesian Muslim intellectuals shape the discourse of nation-building, and how their role displays both continuity and change.

¹ The United Nations even has developed a special kind of analysis tailored to “small island” and/or “archipelagic nations” in its report on sustainable development. This could be considered an indication of increasing recognition that the ecosystems of such nations need an additional and quite different analysis than most other types.

² Papers and serious journals keep reminding both government officials and the intelligentsia establishment, often in gloomy words, that they should examine more seriously the type of populism that thrives in today’s Indonesia.

FORMULATION OF NATION-BUILDING IN INDONESIA

As we are all well aware, the post-World War II period brought with it some very fundamental changes. The broad interests of humanity found expression in a variety of new moral and political movements including anti-slavery, anti-colonialism, and anti-imperialism. Furthermore, the postwar era introduced reforms in multilateralism and envisioned a different set of obligations, with distinctive roles attached to them, that governments were now expected to fulfill. It was in this context that Indonesia achieved international recognition as an independent nation. What we might learn from the post-war period is that legitimate government is obliged to respect human dignity. That principle manifested itself in certain core institutions of the modern nation-state and international bodies, especially their charters and constitutions. Denmark approved its constitution in 1953, (West) Germany approved the Basic Law in 1949, and the transition from the Fourth to Fifth Republics in France took place in the 1950s. In addition, the UN Charter was adopted in 1945, the same year in which the process of independence for Indonesia was launched. And the birth of Indonesia as a nation also coincided with the formulation and acceptance of the Indonesian constitution, often abbreviated as UUD 1945. The set of principles known as Pancasila was enshrined in the preamble of UUD 1945, and it therefore serves as the underlying premise of the entire constitution.³

Pancasila was proclaimed by Sukarno on June 1, 1945. Because it is incorporated into the constitution,

it has been the foundation of Indonesia's polity. Pancasila consists of five principles: *Ketuhanan yang Maha Esa* (belief in the One and Only God); *Kemanusiaan yang Adil dan Beradab* (just and civilized humanity); *Persatuan Indonesia* (the unity/union of Indonesia); *Kerakyatan yang Dipimpin oleh Hikmat Kebijaksanaan, dalam Permusyawaratan Perwakilan* (democracy guided by the inner wisdom of the deliberation of the representatives); and *Keadilan Sosial bagi Seluruh Rakyat Indonesia* (social justice for all Indonesians).

Sukarno offered an alternative version of those values in a speech given on June 1, 1945, although he continued to refer to just five *sila* (principles) or Pancasila in the Indonesian language. He called Pancasila the founding self or “dasar falsafah” (*philosophische grondslag*), or “*pandangan dunia*” (*weltanschauung*) of the nation and state of Indonesia. The principles, thus redefined, are as follows: 1. *Ketuhanan yang berkebudayaan* (theism with civilization); 2. *Internasionalisme (kemanusiaan universal) yang adil dan beradab* (internationalism; universal humanism with just and civil virtues); 3. *Persatuan dari keragaman Indonesia* (unity from the diversity of Indonesia); 4. *Demokrasi permusyawaratan* (democracy of deliberation); 5. *Keadilan sosial* (social justice).

In Sukarno's view, those five *sila* could be further reduced to three: 1. *kebangsaan dan internasionalisme (sosio-nasionalisme, or nationhood and internationalism/socio-nationalism)*; 2. *demokrasi-politik dan demokrasi/keadilan-ekonomi (sosio-demokrasi, or democracy of politics and democracy/justice of the economy/socio-democracy)*; and 3. *ketuhanan yang berkebudayaan* (theism with culture). Further,

³ Today's literature provides an extensive list of readings on what constitutes a charter, and how a charter would serve as the legal basis for a nation-state's judiciary system.



To express this point in a slightly different way, the foundation of all the principles of Pancasila is ***gotong royong***.

he said, “If I am to reach the very heart of those principles: five to three, three to one, then I will arrive at one original Indonesian word: *gotong royong*.⁴ The state of Indonesia should be founded as a state of *gotong royong*.”

To express this point in a slightly different way, the foundation of all the principles of Pancasila is *gotong royong*. This notion has numerous applications across many fields. First, it implies that theism must be of *gotong royong* in its core (i.e., it should be a theism that is broadly cultural and tolerant, not one that is aggressive and pits each person against every other). The principle of internationalism should be of *gotong royong* (humanistic and just); it should not be an internationalism that is colonialistic and exploitative. The principle of nationhood should be of *gotong royong* (capable of developing unity out of diversity, *bhinneka tunggal ika*,⁵ rather than

eliminating differences and diversity, or refusing unity). The principle of democracy should be of *gotong royong* (deliberative); democracy should not be confused with majoritarianism (majorocracy), nor should it allow rule by a narrow elite of powerful, resource-rich groups (minorocracy). In economics, the principle should be of *gotong royong* (that is, the economy should encourage wider participation and emancipation, yet the market should be modified by the spirit of family). In other words, a Pancasila-based economy would not involve a vision of welfare drawn from individualistic capitalism. Yet neither would it allow the state to sharply restrict individual economic liberty or oppress individuals in the way that old-fashioned étatism permitted.

With the spirit of all five principles, Pancasila is a vision and a durable worldview for the nation-state of Indonesia. The principles enable us to anticipate and reconcile competing elements: the one-dimensional statecraft of secularism is avoided, as is religious radicalism. Pancasila also arbitrates between homogeneous nationalism and atavistic tribalism, between inward-looking chauvinist nationalism and triumphalistic globalism, between autocratic governance and individualistic democracy, between an étatist economy and predatory capitalism.

⁴ Loosely translated or paraphrased, “jointly-shouldering, sharing, tying up the loose ends.” This word arose from certain practices of rural populations: providing (public) services, arranging work according to a roster/schedule, eating from one or two big plates in times of prayer or festivals, moving homes, and creating terraces and providing irrigation.

⁵ This saying is the only verbal symbol (the other symbols are based on numbers, animals, or things) in the national insignia/coat of arms: Garuda Pancasila. It comes from the book of Sutasoma, written by Mpu Tantular during the height of Majapahit (the reign of Rajasanagara). A more complete version of the saying is, *bhinneka tunggal ika, tan hana dharma mangrwa*, or diversity but consistent with oneness; truth is not equivocal or scattered (truth is always one and integral). The phrase is from Old Javanese (the early Javanese language which was mixed with Sanskrit). For a more thorough observation, see Poerbatjaraka 1952, *Kepustakaan Java* (Writings of Java); P.J. Zoetmolder, 1974, *Kalangwan: A Survey of Old Javanese Literature*; and J. Gonda 1952, *Sanskrit in Indonesia*.

NATION-BUILDING IN A COUNTRY WITH A MUSLIM-MAJORITY POPULATION

For most Indonesia specialists, the relationship between Islam and the Indonesian polity has been a matter of intense interest. The theoretical framework applied in this essay to Indonesia and its intellectual elite is based on *Intelligentsia Muslim dan Kuasa* (in turn derived from my 2004 dissertation, entitled *Indonesian Muslim Intelligentsia and Power*, which was published 2008). In this context I would like to focus more on aspects of nation-building in which Muslim intellectuals played a key role and envisioned a modern ethical polity.

Prior to independence in 1945, the nascent Indonesian leadership and the most effective political organizations of that era gained energy and inspiration from the civilization of Islam. Agus Salim⁶ and Haji Oemar Said Tjokroaminoto⁷, two leading Muslim intellectuals in the 1920s, not only commanded strong retinues of followers but also learned how to establish a democratic nation. Both Sukarno himself, whose views were more deeply

rooted in the “domestic” political movement, and Moehammad Hatta⁸ who came out of the pan-anti-colonialism movement in Europe, derived their political theories and movements from Islamic values. Considering all that those men did and the enormous impact they had on modern Indonesia, there is no doubt that Islamic thinking contributed greatly to the ideals of the nation. The generation of Muslim intellectuals who worked towards Indonesia’s independence (the “founders”) contributed to the idea of emancipation as the key message of independent Indonesia (*Indonesia Merdeka*), that all human beings are equal before God; that serfdom and the exploitation (by way of colonialization and imperialism) of human by human are totally unjustified.⁹ This belief system is often characterized as religiously-based emancipation¹⁰. The nation-building of Indonesia

⁶ A Muslim intellectual and early educator who joined Sarekat Islam in 1915. He was a member of BPUPK (preparatory committee for the independence of Indonesia), and later part of a diplomatic negotiating team at the United Nations working out the terms of independence for Indonesia (Lake Success, New York, 1947). Eventually, he became a minister in the newly independent Indonesia.

⁷ Leader of Sarekat Islam “Union of Islam”, founded in 1905 as Sarekat Dagang Islam, renamed Sarekat Islam in 1912. The organization was a union from which many Indonesian leaders—including Sukarno himself—and national movements arose.

⁸ Founder of the nationalist movement, Perhimpunan Indonesia (Association of Indonesia), established in 1922; later first vice-president of Indonesia and prime minister during the formative years of the newly independent country

⁹ This point is quite similar to the Islamic understanding that human beings are tasked by the Almighty with tending to life on earth, to make earth worth living for all (for example, in Surah al-Baqarah verse 30)

¹⁰ This emancipation is based on the understanding that humanity is contingent, the creature; and that God is absolute, the creator. Emancipation thus conceived is to be found in most religions, including even the smallest streams of beliefs. This type of emancipation is powerful, since it offers an understanding of the genesis of life, and the ultimate destiny of the life of humanity. This gives strong justification (Yudi Latif, 2011)

has been powerfully shaped by this understanding. It gives inclusive space for all individuals and groups with various ethnic, religious, and linguistic backgrounds, while providing an early understanding of otherness within one family or nation.

The diversity within Islam, which includes everything from its jurisprudence and traditions to its socio-political environment, has been the ultimate factor in moderating conflicts. In Indonesia, this has been especially true given the country's extraordinary geographical and cultural diversity. Its islands reach from Aceh in the west all the way to Papua in the east. Each region of the country has its own heritage, written works, and emphases on particular values. In the early 1970s, a great deal of energy was devoted to developing a synthesis of Islam and modern Indonesian life, an effort in which Nurcholish Madjid was one of leading figures. What was happening in the 1970s actually was a reflection of efforts made to address the mess of the 1950s and 1960s¹¹. In this effort, renewal was not primarily associated with "post-colonialism" (as was the case during the first 15 years of the nation's history), but rather with "post-ideology." Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur, later to become Indonesia's president in the post-authoritarian era), Nurcholish Madjid and to certain extent Soedjatmoko warned the new regime and the larger society about

the growing over-emphasis on "technocratism" and "depoliticization," which they attributed to the post-ideological polity. Both men, it turned out, bequeathed an enduring legacy to the very ideas of "modernity" and "development." What remains significant, for the purposes of this essay, is their shared conviction that religion never ceased to play a role in the nation's life, and that development is a process of joint learning. In this respect, it is worth considering the value of Islam and the important role it has played in the development of Indonesian democracy. In the context of the development of democratic institutions in the post-reform (or post-1998) era, we should recall that democracy is partly about preventing tyranny and totalitarianism. One notable support for that observation is provided by Mohammad Natsir, a leading Indonesian national and international figure of the 1940s through the 1960s, who argued that Islam is "*democratic*, in the sense of being *anti-istibad* (anti-mob or anti-anarchy), *anti-absolutist*, *anti-authoritarian* and *anti-totalitarian*."

More specifically, I would like to cite the late Nurcholish Madjid, a prominent Muslim scholar. He maintained that the only eternal entity is God; everything else is ephemeral and contingent. Knowledge of their own contingency should enable human beings humbly to approach the "Truth"

¹¹ The 1950s and 1960s witnessed a sharp swing in the Indonesian polity. During 1950's governments in the country's parliamentary democracy rose and fell quite rapidly (they averaged between 8 months and about 3 years). The sharp contrast between ideologies of party politics compromised the effectiveness of any sitting government. This period also saw religiously motivated armed struggles, and, separately, armed struggles waged due to the neglect of economic development outside Java by the central government. At the same time, this period also included the Asia-Africa Conference, the first free election in the nation with universal suffrage, and discussions about the proposed constitution (Konstituante). Many important Indonesian thinkers rose to prominence during this period. Muslim thinkers were important in shaping the debate on how to integrate the core value of "emancipation" in Islam as a crucial integrative factor for the nation.

The 1960's began the era of "guided democracy" during which the institutions of democracy were over-shadowed and "reorganized" by Sukarno and his dominating personality. This was also an epoch of inflation-prone economic life. At the same time, this era saw the comeback of Indonesia's original constitution, UUD 1945, which again was invoked as the chief means to frame the polity of Indonesia. During those years, too, we had to live through the tragic

events of 1965 (violence and killing in 1965), and then the coming of a New Order. In this particular time, Muslim thinkers and creators of solidarity still tried hard to frame the discussion so as to highlight the unity of Indonesia based on emancipation, even in a decade of huge existential problems. They obviously tried hard to prevent a further breakdown in the political cohesion of Indonesia, seeing the novelty of the proclamation of Indonesia in 1945. In effect, the incoming New Order regime (in 1966) sought legitimacy from Muslim thinkers and solidarity makers when they claimed new way of governance.

The extremes during this period constituted the intellectual background for a new generation of Muslim thinkers, the likes of Nurcholish Madjid, Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), and Munawir Sjadzali. This new generation took the extremes during '50s and '60s seriously while espousing a polity based on the "emancipation" value of Islam which they saw as integral to the proclamation of Indonesia as a nation-state. Undoubtedly, they framed a new generation of discourse that combines Islamic thinking with the socio-history of Indonesian thinking without relying on one or more particular ideologies of party politics.

For further general historical reference, see, for example, Ricklefs, 2001



The nation-building of Indonesia has been powerfully shaped by this **understanding.**

and understand that well-being is best attained through uprightness (*hanif*), submission, humility, mutual recognition (*ta'aruf*), and deliberation in an open, just, civil and social environment. Coming from this Islamic perspective, he reiterated that the humanistic Islamic message asks Muslims to empower themselves to make Islam a living grace for all (*rahmatan lil-alam*).

Madjid viewed nation-building in the context of the "nation-state"; that is, he regarded it as a state for all the communities within the nation, one which is founded on consensual social terms and produces an open "contractual and transactional" relationship between the parties to the agreement. He further describes the foundation of the "nation-state" as being designed to attain the general welfare (in the Salafic conception, this would be expressed as *al-maslahat al-ammah* or *al-maslahat al-mursalah*, the foundation of the concept of the general welfare),

and to disseminate a concept of goodness of and for all without discrimination and exceptions. The problems and difficulties faced by Muslims are not something that they alone must try to solve. In the search for common ground, the universal message of Islam calls for a process of dialogue about local situations and dynamics, and instructs Muslims to face persisting and emerging challenges. Muslims are asked to empower themselves to live without barriers between being Islamic and being a citizen of Indonesia. More fundamentally, Indonesian Muslims are optimistic in welcoming all future challenges in the spirit of both Islam and Pancasila. Islam is, in fact, a significant participatory element, a pillar and source of Indonesian values. Having said that, it is natural to expect Islam to keep playing an important role in the development of Indonesian values in the Pancasila.

POPULISM AS A CHALLENGE TO NATION-BUILDING

At times, populism has posed a challenge to the legitimacy currently enjoyed by the Indonesian polity, in part because it has emerged as a “post-truth” movement. It is not hard to imagine that some forms of populism could lead to the phenomenon often labeled “state failure.” Here, the polity can no longer sustain its own legitimacy or perform the usual functions of governing, much less wield power wisely and bring about progress. There is of course much debate about how populism should be assessed or framed. That debate has special relevance for multicultural Indonesians and their nation-building project,

since it raises questions about whether the populist wave, whether motivated by religion or ethnicity, might undermine the country’s longstanding multicultural life. Could the great experiment that is Indonesia perhaps outlive the post-colonial legitimacy it acquired earlier in its history? Can the Indonesian nation still be considered legitimate in a world shaped by populism?

Indonesia is a hybrid nation whose many constituent cultures have endured and cross-fertilized each other over many decades and even centuries. It can be analogized to an ecosystem in which different ethnic and racial groupings cohere, follow shared ideals, and maintain unity. Indonesia



Indonesia is a hybrid nation whose many constituent cultures have endured and cross-fertilized each other over many decades and even centuries.

is also an excellent place for dialogues between different civilizations. Those civilizations enrich each other in the long term, albeit with many ups and downs. Such enrichment is still going on, in a process that shapes not only governance, but also relations among ethnic and religious groups.

The ups and downs relate to the capability of Indonesians to understand the sources of conflict, which cultural gaps and differences in beliefs potentially could foster. But conflicts arise for many reasons, not only due to differences in culture and beliefs. Other factors that should be recognized as important in provoking discord include social inequality and unequal access to or participation in power. Those factors have been present in many of the conflicts that have occurred in Indonesia, although it is not always easy to pin down their precise role.

The first factor behind social tensions does indeed involve cultural gaps and differing beliefs, i.e., what are often called cultural issues. That should come as no surprise given the country's extreme diversity, which must be managed wisely. One Indonesian social scientist, Supardi Suparlan (in PSIK-Indonesia 2017), has suggested that we should

pay attention to the balance of power relations between ethnic communities and national systems. That balance is a prerequisite for social stability. If the national system is too strong or dominant, then the values espoused by ethnic communities will be depressed and weakened. This condition could lead to expressions of disappointment in satire or farce.

When addressing diversity policies in Indonesia, Suparlan argues, one should emphasize the diversity of cultures. In this case he distinguishes between the ethnic diversity of perspective and cultural diversity. We must take a community perspective, since we are a multicultural society, not a plural society. He understands multiculturalism as a way of life that celebrates the cultural differences or a belief that recognizes and promotes cultural pluralism as a way of life. Multiculturalism celebrates and protects cultural diversity, including the cultures of the minorities. "In multiculturalism, all cultures are in a position of equality. Not only that, but cultural enrichment has a unique dynamics in that each culture adopts elements of the others--a cross enrichment."

When we consider the way in which this multicultural life functions, we should notice that the factor of social equality (or inequality) might end up playing a major role in enabling multicultural life to work smoothly. The current level of social equality could be assessed by looking at many different variables such as changes in socio-economic life. Particularly important here is the state of rural life today and the ability of farmers to earn a decent living. Related issues include the flight from the countryside ("de-agrarianization") and marginalization (on both topics, see van Klinken 2007). I would argue that the factor of social equality or inequality should be assessed not in economic, but in socio-cultural terms.

A SECOND LOOK AT RELIGION AND STATE IN THE POLITY OF INDONESIA

If we wish to understand how religious communities and other associations within the Indonesian polity live and interact, we must first grasp the distinction between the “state that protects religion” and “the state that represents religion.” Religion and politics are not necessarily separate as long as the state acts as a neutral referee and is committed to protecting the liberty of each and every faith to express its convictions and conduct its own affairs as it sees fit. However, what must be avoided is the identification of the state with the creed or practices of any one religion. This is especially true of Indonesia since, as we have seen so often, it is a nation-state that contains a multicultural society.

The politicization of religion, or rather, manipulation of religion for sectarian political gain should be prevented. When religion becomes politicized, certain groups will claim that God is always on their side, an assertion that leads to triumphalism, attitudes such as “I own the truth,” and the danger of theocracy. Religion can contribute most to public life by emphasizing that the views of all groups must be taken seriously and understood. Fortunately, this scenario is quite plausible given that all religions have as their core message the virtues of peace and understanding. It is also important that political parties and the nation should allow the true prophetic voice of religion to be heard and felt. Belief in God should encourage the faithful to feel free to challenge the ideological dichotomy of “left” and “right” and to

subsume those ideologies under a broader moral canopy. This is the deepest meaning of the credo of Nurcholish Madjid, as expressed in his saying: “Islam, Yes; *Partai* Islam, No.” On this reading of Madjid, society and politics should interact in such a way that all citizens will be guaranteed the right to live together. It is on this foundation that the constitutional rights of religious freedom in Indonesia have been built.

After 1998 (overthrow of Suharto), Indonesia carried out a reform of its constitution by approving four amendments. The second amendment (out of four) concerns the constitutional sanctity of human rights, a clause that firmly protects the human rights of all citizens. This amendment further extends the grant of rights to Indonesia’s citizens that had been incorporated into the original text of the constitution¹². Essentially, the constitution also provides the legal basis for citizens to defend their lives, and to achieve and manage their welfare in a timely manner through political means and organizations, law, and public reasoning, all without being stamped as subversive forces or enemies of the state. This conception also implies

¹² The original (pre-amendment) text of the Indonesian constitution (UUD 1945) enumerates the rights and immunities of citizens in articles 29 to 34. These articles essentially already enshrined the rights of the citizen in the polity. However, during New Order, with its autocratic tendency, discourses and legal procedures based on this set of articles were profoundly neglected. This neglect spurred Reformasi-era lawmakers to make human rights protections more obvious, stipulative, and readable by common Indonesians.

the citizens' right to access information that is vital to their personal security. Citizens, then, develop, practice, and enjoy their constitutional rights through various means and by leading active lives, including by consulting the media.

However, Indonesians have raised legitimate questions about whether religious freedom has been protected and upheld sufficiently. Many wonder whether such constitutionally protected freedoms are being used or abused, and even whether the constitution has outlived its time where religion is concerned. There is no perfect constitution under the sun. Nevertheless, when it comes to the nation's ethical principles and the objective of safeguarding diversity, the constitution (of which Pancasila is the very foundation) is unambiguous. As matters stand, Indonesia continues to face crises and conflicts relating to religious freedom. Yet it has also achieved significant progress—something that cannot go unrecorded in the history of the world.

Today, nation-building in Indonesia undoubtedly is moving toward greater democratization and the progressive realization of human rights. However, opposition and antagonism to this move also have emerged. Our world today is significantly influenced by the tidal wave of identity politics pushing the world toward ways of life centered around ethnicity, language, and religion. Every search for identity calls for a form of self-realization. That, in turn, may create a gap between one kind of identity and another. Indonesians should be alert to learn more about how to understand the unavoidable dialectic of self-realization, and to refuse an atavistic simplification in which persons may think that the only way for their own identities to survive is for difference and otherness to perish.

The present and future of nation-building lies in its capacity to promote and enhance the ongoing integration of a society that increasingly must cope with divisive forces. Thus, nation-building must try to develop political recognition and a politics of recognition designed to guarantee individual rights, especially those of diverse cultural groupings and social strata, so they can peacefully co-exist and to be actively engaged in the life of the republic.

Ethics and religiously-based systems of morality play important roles as the foundation and catalyst for efforts to unify the nation-state and insure its survival. It is important that religious communities should understand more fully the need to separate scrupulously “the public affairs of religion” from “the private affairs of religion”: i.e., to know when they should be integrated and when they should be kept distinct and separate. Still, all religions should have a shared concern about public affairs that touch on matters of justice, welfare, humanity, and civility.

The Pancasila value-system on which Indonesian nation-building is based includes the legitimate expectation that the nation will protect and support the development of religious life as the vehicle for introducing ethical values into public life. Yet Pancasila never aspires to the creation of a theocratic state that would exclusively represent the goals of one single religion or faith community. The very existence of Pancasila does a great deal to deter the rise of a religiously-based tyranny that would leave no room for plurality in the life of the nation, and which would create a two-tier system of citizenship, whereby the second class would be reserved for “different” religions or religious communities.

THE ROLE OF MUSLIM INTELLECTUALS IN INDONESIAN NATION-BUILDING

The Indonesian Muslim intelligentsia played a fundamental role both in developing a nationalist movement leading to independence, and in clarifying the challenges that would have to be faced both then and in the future. This conjunction of nation-building and Islamic thought has been arguably the most pivotal development in the history of multicultural Indonesia. In the formative years following the country's independence, Muslim intellectuals dared to reflect upon the very essence of a nation called Indonesia. They also were able to inspire future debates about how Indonesia should be envisioned.

In most cases, those debates echo many of the experiences of the Indonesian intellectuals themselves. Their constant concern was, and is, to transform post-colonial Indonesia into a living, dynamic, multicultural nation. Of course, matters concerning the balance of power, the shape of institutions, socio-economic policy, and limitations of government power always have been controversial. Nevertheless, Muslim intellectuals repeatedly urge their audience to understand and value the very existence of multicultural Indonesia.

Soedjatmoko, in his concept of "the intellectual in developing nations," explained the matter as follows:

What changed in the light of the post-independence experience was the intellectual's awareness of power, its function, its limits, and its character. Among intellectuals there is now a greater awareness of the need for a strong central government capable of pursuing the goals of nation-building and economic development in the face of intractable obstacles posed by tradition, ignorance, and backwardness. There is also a greater awareness of the need to establish and develop countervailing forces within the society that can limit abuses of power and ensure voluntary popular participation, initiative, and organization. The intellectuals of developing nations have aligned themselves on both sides of this dividing line...[T]he difficulties of setting economic development in motion, especially in some of the larger developing nations, have made many intellectuals realize that power is not an indifferent commodity that can be applied to all problems and all tasks... (Soedjatmoko 1970, in "Transforming Humanity," 1994)

On another front, Cak Nur (Nurcholish Madjid) held leadership in high esteem:

The founding fathers of the state held a preliminary but crucial idea of the state and the nation of Indonesia. But, as explained above, the idea has not yet come to full fruition. Parts of the idea that already have matured, especially the state form of the Republic of Indonesia, furnish us with an important foundation. They are the legacy of the nationalist-patriot element of the founding fathers. Other parts, the ones that have yet to emerge fully, include the issue of national development for the common good based on justice and honesty. This is the source of everything that has gone wrong with our national life. Reflecting the youth of the founding fathers, which was partly responsible for the immaturity of the new nation, the excellent idea (of the founding fathers), in the manifestation of the nation's life, faced what Bung Hatta called a dwarf-soul of our leader....

[“Para tokoh pendiri negara telah merintis usaha penggalian ide-ide terbaik untuk negara dan bangsa Indonesia. Tetapi, sebagaimana dikemukakan di atas, ide-ide itu belum semuanya terlaksana dengan baik. Bagian-bagian yang telah terlaksana, khususnya wujud negara Republik Indonesia itu sendiri, merupakan modal utama bagi kita, sebagai peninggalan baik para patriot nasionalis pendiri negara itu. Tetapi, bagian-bagian yang belum terlaksana, seperti pembangunan nasional demi maslahat umum dengan keadilan dan kejujuran, merupakan sumber berbagai krisis yang melanda kita sekarang ini. Disebabkan oleh faktor kemudaan yang juga berarti kekurangmatangan kita semua sebagai bangsa baru, ide-ide terbaik para pendiri negara itu, dalam pelaksanaannya sering berhadapan dengan apa yang dikatakan Bung Hatta sebagai jiwa-jiwa kerdil sebagian pemimpin kita...” (Nurcholish Madjid, 2004).]

Both thinkers are among the many proponents of the role of the intelligentsia in shaping the nation-building process. Soedjatmoko won fame as a United Nations diplomat during the independence movement (Lake Success, New York 1947), then later as the rector of United Nations University. Cak Nur himself was a Muslim intellectual, and at present, the role of the Muslim intellectual is alive and well. The intelligentsia has developed numerous initiatives that address the challenge of populism as it appears in the midst of the transformation from post-colonial to multicultural life. Its members also played a considerable role in governance, especially those who eventually served in one way or another as government officials. This great contribution has been a hallmark of the Muslim intelligentsia from its beginnings in the 1900s up to the present day.

Reflecting on such contributions, one sees that the Muslim intelligentsia in Indonesia always has supported openness and recognition both in public life (especially in governance) and in inter-communal relations. Their contributions have been notable in several fields, including education, discourse, and even advocacy in behalf of minorities. At the same time, space for recognition also means being able to live with many contributions from other groups.

The role of the Muslim intelligentsia gives greater legitimacy to Pancasila, in a historical sense. The promulgation of Pancasila at the dawn of the nation has continued to influence Indonesia ever since, not least through the acknowledgement that Indonesia is a highly diverse nation. Several conflicts with religious overtones remind Muslim intellectuals of their continuing role. Repeatedly, they have made an effort to respond to the “contest of legitimacy.” This too provides a deeper understanding of Pancasila even in several uniform parts of the nation¹³.

The arrival of “electoral life” in 1999 and its continuing role, and of decentralisation from 2004 onwards provided the Muslim intelligentsia with both challenges and opportunities. The values of

¹³ In several regents (*Kabupaten*), administrative levels below the Province, there are situations in which ethnicity and/or the local spoken language and/or religion is much closer to uniformity.

“emancipation” and “renewal” were still framed by the Muslim intelligentsia as a process of nation-building. The likes of Syafii Maarif, Azyumardi Azra, Syafii Anwar, and later Budhy Munawar-Rachman and Yenni Wahid played prominent roles in responding to the new wave of democracy with openness. They saw an opportunity to influence the contemporary understanding of emancipation, such that distinct forms of otherness can coexist. They also saw that democracy helps to prevent the rise of a “strong person” and “autocratic rule”, and that it affords greater scope for broad participation in the nation. At the same time, this kind of democracy requires them to be active in promoting the discourse of “emancipation” and “renewal.” This consciousness by Muslim intellectuals of their own responsibilities has broadened the space of recognition for otherness.

Already in period from 1999 to 2010, the active role of the Muslim intelligentsia in developing the space of recognition was challenged by a series of sectarian conflicts and episodes of ethno-nationalism. Furthermore, the contest of transnational persuasions in an intra-faith context posed another challenge. The social and human costs of those conflicts have brought about a rather different situation than the one that prevailed during previous decades. Those challenges have induced Muslim intellectuals to revisit the ideals of Indonesia. They have often collaborated with intelligentsia from various other communities to examine the meaning of multicultural life of Indonesia and underscore its importance to the country.

Part of this collaboration has involved the question of “representation.” The electoral dynamics of Indonesia raise the question of whether representation should or does take place exclusively through electoral processes: i.e. government by elective officeholders, political parties, and via rules and regulations. How much should political life be changed by elections? This collaboration among intellectuals from different faiths and world-views resulted in the advocacy of inter-communal relations that would be shaped by one of two factors: electoral processes or local practices and traditions. The exchange of visits between religious leaders happened more often in

this period. Especially influenced by the Ambon and Poso conflicts¹⁴, cooperating religious leaders dedicated considerable time and energy to nurturing a new generation of leadership that would continue to reflect on and reform the matter of representation. Pancasila has been interpreted in novel ways that amplify this type of leadership.

Muslim intellectuals also have had to face the new wave of populism in which the wisdom of emancipation and renewal are disputed. The advocates of this kind of populism exploited both electoral processes (as in the context of the Jakarta election of 2017 and the Ahok case¹⁵) and socio-cultural life (as in the context of Hizbut Tahrir) in order to advance their ideas and political agenda. This form of populism argues for unilateral and uniform ways of life (thus offering a challenge to the usual notion of “representation”). The challenges posed by populism are not easy to deal with since its advocates have called into question all of the assumptions behind emancipation and renewal (see page 7-8), thus undermining the foundations of Indonesia’s constitution and political institutions.

The concepts of emancipation and renewal offered not only an understanding of the era of colonialism (and thus why independence was a must), but also emphasized the equality of all human beings in a nation called Indonesia. The idea of religiously-based emancipation is an integral part of the active role played by the Muslim intelligentsia in framing nation-building. Their active role, in which they supported both the broader narrative and the specific measures of the central government¹⁶,

¹⁴ Although complicated by nature, the Ambon and Poso conflicts (circa 1999-2001) were highly influenced by religious persuasions. Especially in those areas, religious affiliations are often confined to one particular ethnic group (“cuius regio, eius religio”). This makes it much harder to respond to such conflicts. In any event, the local leaders themselves “woke up” and dealt with the matters by themselves with the understanding that their future lies in their own decision only.

¹⁵ History will further assess the context of the Jakarta election of 2017. What many agreed concerning that particular cycle is that the use of social media with strong negative language, especially those that stirred up popular passions against Ahok, the Chinese-decent candidate for governorship, played a role in his fall.

¹⁶ Including in the then event of administrative ban against Hizbut Tahrir (in 2017).

further revealed that nation-building is justified and should be progressive. In socio-cultural life, they have been stimulating discourse on Pancasila and the socio-historical roots of the Muslim intelligentsia and working with Islamic boarding-schools (*pondok pesantren*). Their varied and changing roles have proved important in shaping the Indonesian polity.

When they see Western-based modernization in many parts of the world, Muslim intellectuals may respond by placing a high value on an aspect of their own traditions: the principle that the “face value” of truth should be questioned. The generation of Muslim intellectuals that rose to prominence in the era of Indonesia’s struggle for independence played a major part in fostering this atmosphere of free inquiry. They questioned the worth of colonialism and paternalism, and rejected the notion that somebody else ought to think for them rather than letting them do their own thinking. Furthermore, they transformed the tradition of learning even up to the present day, even including the practices of faith-based (Islamic) educational institutions. The Muslim intelligentsia sees free inquiry and questioning as one part of modernity that they want to foster. They also emphasise that the message of earlier generations of Muslim intellectuals should continue to shape public life. Religion, they believe, should play a prophetic role in public life rather than withdrawing from it. However, they still think that Pancasila should be the common ground and agree that nation-building should be based on Pancasila even today.

Perhaps, when looking into the challenges raised by present day modernity, Indonesia has much to

assess. When it comes to models of governance, the use of persuasion in public life, inequality, contemporary conflicts, and many other things, Indonesia must collaborate with other nations in developing and refining the discourse on nation-building. The Indonesian polity has engaged in nation-building, but that process is still very much ongoing. The transformation of the post-colonial polity is supported by intellectuals from various communities, with the Muslim intelligentsia playing a very strong role. In that context, Indonesia combines a tradition of learning from Western-based modernity with the process of encouraging the many communities of Indonesia to share their lives and experiences. This also addresses the question of representation: i.e., whether and in what ways various communities are and should be legitimate members of the public sphere. Of course, persistent and emerging challenges always should be faced by the Muslim intelligentsia. By keeping the standard of learning high, and high enough, the Muslim intelligentsia provide a large pool of wisdom in the context of nation-building, not least by reexamining the rich civilisation of Islam in Indonesia.

The intellectuals’ role keeps supplying the energy for renewal, and never has failed to revive the capability and willingness of Indonesians to absorb and manage contradictory forces throughout critical phases of the country’s history. Those are the aspects of continuity that I have come to see in efforts by the Muslim intelligentsia to advance nation-building, both in their own setting and with others in public space.

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