

**Zainal Abidin Bagir & Suhadi Cholil**

**Mapping Study Summary**  
**The State of Religious Pluralism in Indonesia**

*Literature Review of the Discourse on  
and Practice of Pluralism, 1998 - 2007<sup>1</sup>*

## **Introduction**

The focus of this mapping study is to understand the state of pluralism in Indonesia. The study takes the form of a literature review, including writings published in mass media, journals, books and other relevant (judicial) documents<sup>1</sup>. Its time frame, the past ten years, is intended to capture the developments in Indonesia in the period of *Reformasi*, the reforms after the forced resignation of President Suharto in May 1998.

This summary consists of four parts: Part A on the 'Practice of pluralism' portrays Indonesian Muslims' views and attitudes towards the religious others and reviews governmental policies regarding religion. Part B on the 'Discourse on pluralism' describes both supporters' and opponents' views about the idea of pluralism as a response to religious diversity. Part C provides an 'Analysis: The state of discourse and practice of pluralism in Indonesia' and Part D 'Conclusion: How to achieve social harmony' recommends to focus the discourse on: (1) the practice of pluralism in society and the daily lives of citizens and (2) the way the state is instrumental in this purpose. The authors of this study propose to continue the work on the concept of 'civic pluralism', in order to better understand pluralism and in order to devise strategies to further develop a healthy relationship between communities in Indonesia.

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<sup>1</sup> This Mapping Study Summary is edited by Ute Seela and Connelie Klijn. The authors of the original report are Zainal Abidin Bagir and Suhadi Cholil, Center for Religious and Cross-cultural Studies (CRCS), Graduate School, Gadjah Mada University. The other members of the research team were: Budi Ashari, Maufur, Siti Sarah Muwahidah, and Fuad Faizi. The authors would like to thank them and the participants of the workshops who helped us clarify a number of issues. This paper is part of the Hivos mapping study for Promoting Pluralism Knowledge Programme, July 2008.

The authors would like to remind readers that what is captured here about the state of religious pluralism in Indonesia was sourced entirely from the available literature. While we are confident that the literature reviewed for this study are representative, there are other aspects of religious pluralism in Indonesia not covered by the literature and therefore not represented here. A more complete assessment is part of the ongoing study by the authors.

This study does not depart from a clear cut definition of the term ‘pluralism’. Rather, it uses several ideas as indicators of pluralism. Pluralism relates to the views and attitudes of a religious community (or persons) towards the religious others. Included here are more specific issues such as attitudes toward what is regarded as justified violence, and ideas about the best model of governance (*shari’a*-based or democracy), as well as the role of government in regulating people’s religious affairs.<sup>2</sup>

## **A – Practice of pluralism**

### ***Who Are Indonesian Muslims?***

The focus here is on Indonesian Muslims: how ‘Muslim’ they are, their views and attitudes towards religious others (both in terms of theological understanding as well as social attitudes toward the religious others, including attitudes towards violence) and their ideas about democracy and *shari’a*.

In the past few years, starting around 2002, many surveys were done – both international and in Indonesia - about Muslims and their views on a variety of contemporary issues. This section will look at 15 such surveys, and in particular those related to our topic. Some methodological issues related to the surveys are discussed in the full report, but will only be briefly mentioned in this summary.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Since the term ‘pluralism’ is contested, the research team decided to work with these indicators as a pragmatic first step. They are suggested by the literature reviewed here. One of the recommendations of this mapping study is that any decisions about what shape the Knowledge Programme should take would have to clarify the different concepts and uses of the term ‘pluralism’; only then can we outline more practical goals and outcomes and translate them into indicators of success.

<sup>3</sup> The most important sources for this section are: the survey done by Riaz Hassan, an Australian sociologist, comparing seven Muslim countries (published in *Faithlines* [2004] and the final result was released as a journal article in *The Muslim World*, 2007); the Gallup Poll massive survey from 2002-2007 in almost all Muslims countries (released in early 2008, John L. Esposito and Dalia Mogahed, *Who Speaks for Islam?*); while from Indonesia there are three main sources: PPIM-UIN (Research Center for Islam and Society – State Islamic University, Jakarta), LSI (Indonesian Survey Institute), and the Wahid Institute. There are three books published in Indonesia: Saiful Mujani, *Muslim Demokrat* (“Democrat Muslims”, Gramedia, 2007); *Benturan Antar Peradaban?* (“Clash of Civilizations?”, PPIM and Gramedia, 2006); Dicky Sofjan, *Why Muslims Participate in Jihad, an Empirical Survey on Islamic Religiosity in Indonesia and Iran* (Mizan, 2006).

## Level of Religiosity

Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in the world; in fact more than all the Arab countries put together. For the majority of Muslims all around the world Islam is a primary marker of identity, a source of meaning and guidance. All the surveys, without exception, show that Indonesian Muslims are very religious, sometimes to a surprising extent.

RIAZ HASSAN, who devised an index of religiosity and orthodoxy for comparing Muslims in seven countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Egypt, Turkey, Iran, and Kazakhstan) found that Indonesia, Malaysia and Pakistan are among the “very strongly religious”. With regards to Indonesian Muslims, this finding is confirmed by other surveys. Included in the index of religiosity are the basic theological beliefs (*aqidah*) and the performance of rituals (*ibadah*; such as the frequency of performance of the five daily prayers; fasting during the month of Ramadan, payment of *zakat*/almsgiving, etc). As an example, 90 to almost 100% of respondents in Indonesia, Pakistan, Malaysia and Egypt have a strong belief in the existence of God and the hereafter, while in Turkey and Iran it's 70 to 85%. In terms of performance of rituals, Indonesia is the highest in performance of the five daily prayers (96%), higher than Egypt and Malaysia (90%), Pakistan and Iran (60%), and Turkey (33%). From the national surveys, we know that for Indonesian Muslims religion is the most important marker of identity, compared to nationalism (*kebangsaan*), ethnicity or types of employment.<sup>4</sup>

## Views and attitudes towards religious others

In terms of attitudes towards the religious others, we may differentiate the theological and the social. The theological views are not necessarily fully translated into social attitudes or actions. That is, theologically exclusive views are different from socially intolerant attitudes or even violent actions toward the others.

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<sup>4</sup> This conclusion is in contrast to the views of many anthropologists which seem more popular among the international audience. Saiful Mujani's findings (in *Muslim Demokrat*) refute the views of anthropologists such as Clifford Geertz and Koentjaraningrat, who believe that Indonesian Muslims, at least the Javanese, are mostly nominal Muslims. According to his study, while this group does exist, their population is actually very small. However, at this point we need to remember that the anthropologists' description of the religiosity of Muslims are more nuanced and richer than what may be captured in the more exact indicators of religiosity used in the surveys.

In HASSAN's survey, there are two relevant questions which show Muslims' theological understanding of the others. The majority of Muslims in the world agree with the statement "Only those who believe in the Prophet Muhammad can go to heaven". However, the level of agreement is much lower compared to other fundamental theological beliefs such as the existence of God or belief in the hereafter. Interestingly, among the three countries of very strong religiosity, Indonesia is the less theologically exclusive. Regarding the question "Would you agree that a person who says there is no Allah is likely to hold dangerous political views?" we see a consistent pattern. This, and other surveys - most prominently that carried out by SAIFUL MUJANI - show that someone with strong religiosity is not necessarily an exclusivist, though it does follow that the more religious tend to be more exclusive. (MUJANI, 186-187)<sup>5</sup>

On a social level, we see that the overwhelming majority of Indonesian Muslims in the Wahid Institute's survey disagreed with a statement that said "Islam teaches a strong attitude toward non-Muslims" and thought that such an attitude would not benefit Islam.

The situation is different when it comes to issues that are more or less 'political' (unfortunately in this regard, there is no comparative data in countries outside Indonesia). In several Indonesian surveys this is what we found: more than half of all Indonesian Muslims do not want a non-Muslim to be president; a smaller number (around 40%) would not allow churches or (non-Muslim) religious services in their neighbourhood.

When it comes to violence, the Gallup Poll (as reported in ESPOSITO and MOGAHED [2008]) confirms that most Muslims reject attacks on civilians as morally unjustifiable. One indicator of a tendency to support violence is asking the respondents' approval of a major violent attack, for instance the 9/11 attacks and, specifically for Indonesia, the Bali bombings. The Gallup Poll found a population of around 7% Muslims worldwide who approve of violence. Gallup calls them the "politically radicalized"—i.e. people who have radical political orientations but do not necessarily commit acts of violence. The remainder is called "the moderates". The 7% group is considered as a potential source of recruitment or support for terrorist groups.

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<sup>5</sup> There are other sets of data which show an interesting pattern in Hassan's survey: in general, men tend to be more conservative than women; and the old more conservative than the young.

Looking at their profile, we can say that in terms of social condition the politically radicalized and the moderates are more or less the same.<sup>6</sup> In terms of their religiosity, there's also not much difference: 94% of the politically radical and 90% of the moderates say that religion is an important part of their daily lives. The radicalized may actually have a stronger belief, compared to the moderates, that moving toward greater democracy will foster progress in the Muslim world (50% of the radical, 35% of moderates).<sup>7</sup>

So what distinguishes them? Partly, according to ESPOSITO and MOGAHED, it is their views on world affairs and international politics and in particular about the seriousness of the US in supporting democracy. In other words, the radical are marked not by their strong religiosity nor by the social conditions, but mostly by their political orientation, and more specifically with regards to American international politics.<sup>8</sup>

Another indicator relates to the understanding of *jihad*. We note with interest that a 2001 Gallup Poll finds that in non-Arab countries *jihad* is mostly understood as “the fight against the opponents of Islam” or “sacrificing one’s life for the sake of Islam/just cause”. The majority of Indonesians, for example, understand it as such. However, in the four Arab nations (Lebanon, Kuwait, Jordan, Morocco), *jihad* is mostly understood as “duty/worship toward God”, with no reference to warfare. Does this mean that Indonesians give too much ideological weight to this word, stemming from an ignorance of its original meaning? Everywhere in the Muslim world *jihad*, as suggested by ESPOSITO and MOGAHED, almost always has a positive connotation. So when it’s understood as involving fight, it is always for the sake of a just cause. “Calling acts of terrorism *jihad* risks not only offending many Muslims, but also inadvertently hands radicals the moral advantage they so desperately desire.” (ESPOSITO and MOGAHED, 21) In Indonesia, although a majority of Indonesian Muslims associate *jihad* with violence, a survey by LSI (2006) showed that 80% refused to say that the Bali bombing was a form of *jihad*; only 10% do so.

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<sup>6</sup> We may actually say that they are more optimistic about their own lives; but we should remember that there must be a difference in the statistical accuracy when we look at the 7% of all the respondents. So a stronger claim may not be warranted.

<sup>7</sup> This is shown also in the fact that in questions related to democracy, the radicalized are also more or less the same as the moderates, with one exception: 59% of the radical versus 32% of the moderates want to see *shari’a* as the only source of legislation.

<sup>8</sup> In *Benturan* (113), 46% of Indonesian respondents say that Muslims in the world have been treated unjustly by non-Muslims; the percentage that doesn’t agree is 44%. So there’s no majority here.

## Muslims and the State: *shari'a* and democracy?

One issue which receives attention in many surveys, and the Indonesian surveys are no exception, is the aspiration for implementing Islamic law (*shari'a*). This is directly related to Muslims' views and attitudes towards other forms of governance—the most visible alternative obviously being democracy. However, it turns out that we need not always see the two as alternatives. There are indications of strong support for both democracy and *shari'a*.

From the Gallup Poll it is clear that the majority in most Muslim countries wants to have *shari'a* as a source of legislation. Furthermore, in a handful of countries they want *shari'a* as the *only* source of legislation. Interestingly, among this last group of countries, Indonesia and Iran show the smallest percentage (Egypt: 66%; Jordan: 55%; Indonesia: 14%; and Iran: 13%). In a national survey by the Wahid Institute the majority (63.3 %) rejects implementation of *shari'a* in local governments. However, almost the same percentage also says that the government needs to regulate religious life and things such as the building of houses of worship, marriage and religious education.

In both the Gallup Poll and the Indonesian surveys, there is, in general, a very positive view of democratic values. In the Gallup Poll this is seen, for example, in the positive answers to these two indicators: "In drafting a constitution, we would guarantee freedom of speech" (Egypt: 94%; Iran: 93%; Indonesia: 90%) and "Women should have the same legal rights and rights to vote as men" (Indonesia: 90%; Iran: 87%; Pakistan: 70%).

Moreover, significant majorities in many countries say religious leaders should play no direct role in drafting a country's constitution, drafting new laws, determining foreign policy and international relations, or deciding how women dress in public.

Looking closer at Indonesia, we see that more than 80% of Muslims believe that democracy is the best system of government (LSI, October 2006). They also say that the philosophical principles of *Pancasila*<sup>9</sup> and the 1945 constitution are the best model for Indonesia and in accordance with Islamic teachings. This is confirmed more strongly in a PPIM survey.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Pancasila consists of two Sanskrit words, "panca" meaning five, and "sila" meaning principles. These five principles are the basis of the Indonesian national ideology: belief in the one and only God, just and civilized humanity, the unity of Indonesia, democracy and social justice.

<sup>10</sup> It is interesting, but may also be confusing, that the same survey shows that more than 20% of Indonesian Muslims do have aspirations for an Islamic state. The furthest interpretation that can be given to this is that there is ambivalence among a group of respondents.

It seems that we cannot view *shari'a* and democracy as alternatives. Indeed, most Muslims do not understand *shari'a* in political terms. In a survey by PPIM (*Benturan*, 148) more than 60% of respondents understand *shari'a* as Muslim obligations in general, such as daily rituals. Only 16% understands *shari'a* as implementation of Islamic laws—yet, as far as the survey data are concerned, even this does not necessarily mean enforcement by government.

What may be concluded from this data is that most Muslims want to have a form of democracy which can accommodate *shari'a*; and *shari'a* may simply be a symbol expressing the strong religiosity of Muslims, and not necessarily be related to a specific political and legal system.<sup>11</sup> However, numbers may mislead. Beyond what the surveys tell us, *shari'a* means quite different things to different Muslim groups and the way questions about *shari'a* are posed in the surveys also varies. While *most Muslims*, as shown by the surveys, may hold that view, a relatively small number of Muslim groups who have a more exclusive view are more determined. The new, post-*Reformasi* political dynamics have made it possible for some of these groups to pursue implementation of *shari'a*, understood narrowly, at the the context of local government.

In more general terms, in MUJANI's research, which focuses on Muslims and democracy (and as such is much more detailed and sophisticated compared to other polls) the author concludes that all his hypotheses which state a negative association between 'Muslimness' and elements of democracy are refuted. Even Islamism does not negatively associate with democracy in general. Yet we cannot say that Islam strengthens democratic values either, though it may have the potential to do so.

### ***Government's Policy on Freedom of Religion***

Another challenge in the existing practice of pluralism concerns the state's role in dealing with its citizens' religious life. This research finds that Indonesia has made some progress in the protection of freedom of religion in the first seven years of the *Reformasi* (1998-2005). But a lack of harmonization of laws and Muslim exceptionalism hinder this progress. To face these challenges, we need to consider two integrated processes: legal advocacy to uphold the spirit of freedom of religion in the national constitution; and transformation of views to reconstruct the concept of Muslim exceptionalism.

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<sup>11</sup> A comparison with the US is interesting. In 2006 it was found that more than half of Americans say that the Bible should be a source of legislation. Of these, 9% said that the Bible should be *the only source*. Also, 42% said that religious leaders should have a direct role in writing a constitution (Esposito and Mogahed, 49, 153).

After the fall of the regime in 1998, the demand for democracy exploded. The *Reformasi* government issued three important policies on human rights in the first three years of its administration: The decree of People's Consultative Assembly on human rights in 1998; the Law on Human Rights in 1999; and the Second Amendment of the 1945 Constitution in 2000. This legislation has indeed strengthened the freedom of religion in Indonesia and the impact of those policies has already been felt, to some extent, by its citizens.

Confucian believers, for example, can enjoy their civil rights and freedom of religion much better than the previous generation since Confucianism is recognized as an official religion. To some extent, the impact of freedom of religion is also felt by members of local or indigenous religions. During the New Order they had to declare on their identity card one of five recognized religions, now they can choose to leave the religion column on the ID card blank.

In spite of this positive achievement, the concept of freedom of religion has not yet been mainstreamed into all governmental policies. This can be seen in the lack of harmonization of laws. Old laws still exist which are contrary to the spirit of freedom or religion. For instance, legislation on religious blasphemy has been referred to in the cases of *Lia Aminudin* and *Ahmadiyah*.

Freedom of religion is also compromised by a widely existing notion of Muslim exceptionalism. The concept of human rights exceptionalism ("it does not apply to us") has been legitimized by the practices of several countries. For example, the US government rejected the international opposition to its attack on Iraq; it also rejected the international convention of the Kyoto Protocol on climate change. Saudi Arabia rejects the international consensus of free marriage choice and freedom of belief. Likewise, in Indonesia freedom of religion faces resistance from the practiced – although rarely mentioned—“Muslim exceptionalism”. This is actually rooted in colonial policies, which segregated civil laws based on race and religious identities such as ‘Native-Christian’ and ‘Native-non-Christian’. This segregation of civil law after Independence—especially in the area of family law and policies about religions—shifted into segregation of Muslim and non-Muslim. Consequently, the issuance of the Law of Civil Administration has provided freedom of religion in inter-faith marriage administration for the Christian-Buddhist or Hindu-Catholics spouses; but not for Muslims.

## **B - Discourse on religious pluralism**

This study reviews the debate on issues related to pluralism in twelve mass media from the past ten years<sup>12</sup>. It is divided into views expressed by proponents and opponents of religious pluralism. Taking 243 articles into consideration, this study attempts to weave parts of the discourse which were scattered in quite different kinds of media, at times simplifying these for more coherence.

### ***Proponents of Pluralism***

Proponents of the idea of pluralism initially concentrated on theological issues in the discourse. What does our religion, especially Islam, tell about pluralism? Part of it was adapted from philosophical-mystical-theological arguments such as the perennial tradition advocated by contemporary Muslim philosophers SEYYED HOSSEIN NASR, FRITJHOF SCHUON and HUSTON SMITH; the mystical tradition developed by ANNEMARIE SCHIMMEL and HAZRAT INAYAT KHAN; and the philosophical arguments by JOHN HICK, HANS KUNG and EDWARD SCHILLEBEECKX.

More recently a different, less theological, discourse is developing which focuses on how to respond to religious diversity and how to manage religious diversity in the political and public sphere. This concept is inspired by scholars such as DAVID HOLLENBACH on intellectual solidarity, DIANA ECK on pluralism as engagement between communities, ABDULLAHI AHMAD AN-NA'IM on civic reason, and JOHN RAWLS on public reason. These writers put more emphasis on how to manage diversity, including how the state should act to develop and protect pluralism in society, without requiring theological meeting points between the religions.

There are determined efforts by advocates of pluralism to probe and develop the pluralism discourse from a specifically Indonesian Muslim perspective. It is not difficult to find writings in daily newspapers which try to re-interpret certain Qur'anic verses within a pluralist framework. In 2005 for instance, the Indonesian Council of Ulama MUI issued a *fatwa* prohibiting the discussion of the terms pluralism, secularism and liberalism. The *fatwa* brought about a long and intensive debate in the media. What is fascinating is that efforts to contextualize the teachings and history of Islam within a pluralist perspective also appeared quite often in the mass media 'op-ed' pages. In general, we can say that the discussions on the (re-) construction of the Islamic tradition of

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<sup>12</sup> Five newspapers: *Jawa Pos*, *Kompas*, *Republika*, *Suara Pembaharuan*, *Jakarta Post*; four magazines: *Suara Hidayatullah*, *Sabili*, *Syir'ah*, *Tempo*; three journals: *Studia Islamika*, *Tasywirul Afkar*, and *Paramadina*. Some of them were not published continuously throughout the 10 year period covered in this study.

pluralism have been quite vibrant in the past decade. In turn, this also elicits an equally intense response from the opponents.

The idea of pluralism brings its proponents to interfaith dialogue. It is interesting to see that the term 'dialogue' has become an intrinsic characteristic of the proponents of pluralism, while the opponents try to avoid it. The theological dialogue between Islam and Christianity reaches deep into the question of whether the two are equally valid. In general there is an intense discussion about the main theological similarities and differences. The term 'inter-*faith* dialogue' (not inter-*religious*) is often used to show the personal engagement of the actors in this dialogue. This is meant both as a critique of the institutionalized character of religions as well as the state's policies on religion which emphasize the politics of 'harmony' instead of dialogue.

At a different level, non-theological pluralism receives support from the ideology of *Pancasila* and '*bhinneka tunggal ika*' (unity in diversity, Indonesia's motto, taken from Sanskrit). This support became more meaningful in the period of heightened communal conflicts after the *Reformasi*. A number of writers explored ways to revitalize *Pancasila*. Pluralism here is shown to be rooted in the Indonesian culture, and as such is not seen as an imported concept. Discussions about *Pancasila* focus on attitudes towards diversity and on how the state stands on neutral ground, transcending particular religions.

## **Opponents of Pluralism**

The opponents reject theological pluralism and de-legitimize the pluralism discourse by questioning its authenticity. They accuse pluralists of being influenced by Western ideas and of receiving funding from Western agencies that aim to destroy Islam.

This opposition departs from an understanding of religious pluralism as a doctrine preaching that all religions are the same, and as such all religious truths are relative. Pluralism is seen as teaching that all believers will be saved and live eternally together in Paradise. A popular slogan is: "Tolerance Yes, Pluralism No"; "Plurality Yes, Pluralism No".

Opponents of pluralism give five reasons to reject the concept: pluralism being grounded on materialism and secularism; the idea that truth is relative; pluralism forcing people to unify the view that all religions are true; pluralism blurring identity; and it being domination in disguise. The opponents point out that pluralism negates the importance of mission in Islam (which is called *da'wah*) as well as in Christianity. Nevertheless, they understand that plurality is a necessity, and tolerance is a 'sufficient' attitude to deal with the plurality.

There is an assumption of different degrees of theological claims about the others, with 'pluralism' as the most open, and 'tolerance' less open but sufficient for good relations between people.

Opponents criticize the westernization of Islamic studies in Indonesia which supposedly started with NURCHOLISH MADJID's speech (January 3, 1970) on "The Renewal of Islam". They cynically call JIMM (Intellectual Network of Muhammadiyah Youth) and JIL (Liberal Islam Network) "ignorant reformers" who are trapped in secularization and liberalization.

One of the most important criticisms launched by the anti-pluralists is the use of hermeneutics in the reading and interpreting of the Qur'an. This way the Qur'an is seen to be on a par with the Bible or even with (fictitious) texts from literature. Among Muslim scholars, the use of hermeneutics to study the Qur'an was pioneered by NASR HAMID ABU ZAYD and MOHAMMED ARKOUN, and then widely adapted in Indonesia. This, according to the anti-pluralists, means secularization of Qur'anic texts and a threat to Islam. They regret the disappearance of traditional approaches such as *ushul fiqh* (principles of jurisprudence), or *ilmu tafsir* (scriptural interpretation) in contemporary studies of Islam and they blame the State Islamic Universities for this liberalization and westernization of Islamic studies.

The anti-pluralist group argues further that besides taking its methodology from the West, the pluralism discourse also receives large amounts of funding from the West. Among the agencies mentioned are The Asia Foundation, USAID, and Ford Foundation. Such donor agencies are seen as sponsoring Islamic institutions, including Islamic universities and *pesantrens* (Islamic schools?), to campaign for pluralism. There are no less than 153 Islamic institutions mentioned in the media as having been indoctrinated by the West, including the Liberal Islam Network, LS-ADI, Paramadina, Lakpesdam NU, LKiS, P3M, Muhammadiyah University, ICRP, *Syir'ah*, and the State Islamic Universities.

Pluralism, just like liberalization and secularization, is considered a threat to the solidity or unity of the Islamic community. It is also a threat to Islamic communalism and politics. Pluralism discourse is seen as a discourse that destroys the *dakwah* (mission) movements, and the theological pillars of beliefs and the *shari'a*.

Secularism, pluralism, and liberalism—the three isms declared as 'forbidden' by the Indonesian Council of Ulama in 2005—are regarded as a virus attacking Islam from within. This idea relates to the Indonesian experience during colonial times when the Dutch injected the 'virus of communism' into the body of the then prominent Islamic movement Syarikat Islam, which subsequently split into two factions—the red SI and the white SI. Opponents think that the virus of the three isms –

introduced by Indonesian scholars who studied abroad – is the West’s last resort, since it is unable to confront Islam face-to-face. Therefore it needs to destroy Islamic unity by inciting minority religious communities against the majority.

## **C - Analysis: The state of discourse and practice of pluralism in Indonesia**

Having examined the practice of and discourse on pluralism in Indonesia, the following observations can be made:

### **Visible improvements**

By examining the trends that occur among Muslims in general (as shown in the surveys), the very lively and free discourse of pluralism among intellectuals and activists (in all media: newspapers, magazines, radio, TV, books), and some visible improvements at the level of governmental policies with regard to religion, we see great potential for improvements. However, this is matched by equally lively and aggressive opposition to those ideas.

The period covered in this study is marked by two significant events. The beginning of the period coincided with the *Reformasi* of 1998, following which there was an explosion of freedom which created a more or less level playing field for actors of the discourse discussed here. The other significant event was September 11, 2001, which triggered the war on terrorism—mainly terrorism carried out in the name of Islam. As the war on terror was increasingly and unfortunately perceived as a war on Islam, the Muslim ‘fundamentalists’ or ‘revivalists’ were seen as one party in the battle. The other party being advocates of democracy and pluralism.

The existence of tensions is hard to avoid in a diverse and free country like Indonesia—free, that is, compared to pre-*Reformasi*. Many of the positive as well as negative developments that may be the source of worries are actually inseparable from the freedom that results from *Reformasi*. What gives cause for concern is the polarization which threatens to severely limit exchanges of opinions.

## Polarization

Polarization is not simply differences of opinions, or reflection of plurality, but failure of communication. In public debates on new legislation, such as the anti-pornography bill or the bill on harmony of religious communities, there were very few constructive exchanges of arguments. Groups were quickly identified as belonging to the pro or contra sides. This process is frequently followed by stigmatization of the other side.

Media, especially newspapers, can also be easily identified as supporting a particular side. Many groups have found their own niche in the media to display their position and identity. As JONATHAN SACKS describes, this is a global trend. Progress in technology has made it possible for each group to channel their ideas in particular media and 'broadcast' to its own groups. As a result, the media are less of an arena where differences of opinion can be discussed. SACKS is not only speaking here about religious groups, but also groups such as the anti-globalization movement.<sup>13</sup> The situation is similar in terms of book publishers, as discussed in the review of books. It's not difficult to identify which publishers support books on pluralism and related issues and which support the contrary discourse.<sup>14</sup>

However, there are some exceptions in the Indonesian media landscape. The newspaper *Republika* - labelled as the (conservative) 'Muslims' newspaper' - has regularly published writings by pluralist/liberal Muslims. There was also an example where every week for two full months the newspaper published debates on pluralism and the Qur'an, which featured both proponents and opponents of the idea of pluralism. However, this does not seem to be the case regarding other controversial issues, such as the debate on anti-pornography bill or the education bill.

In the anti-pluralist camp, there is the striking example of *Islamia*, a journal which is, on the whole, well done and has survived for more than four years. Topics related to pluralism appear quite frequently in the journal in the form of long research articles. This journal is one of the most important rivals of the media used by the moderate and liberal Muslims. We have not come across such a journal published by the proponents of pluralism. What needs to be attempted is the

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<sup>13</sup> Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference*, Continuum, 2002. Fouad Zakariyya, a contemporary Egyptian scholar, sees the same phenomenon in Egyptian society with regard to the issues of implementation of *shari'a*. See his *Myth and Reality - The Contemporary Islamist Movement*, Pluto Press, 2005, especially the Third Part.

<sup>14</sup> Though we cannot fully confirm this yet in this study, but it seems Mizan Publication (which now is 25 years old) is exceptional in this regard in the sense that it publishes books in quite a wide ideological spectrum, from the conservative to the liberal.

creation of a 'non-partisan' (or bi-partisan) media (journal or magazine) which could reach a diverse audience and enable the constructive exchange of opinions.

## **De-secularization**

ERNEST GELLNER once remarked that “in the last hundred years the hold of Islam over Muslims has not diminished but has rather increased. It is one striking counter-example to the secularisation thesis.” (GELLNER 1993, 36) GELLNER is wrong if he supposes that Islam is the only case: in many places in the world, with a few exceptions, religions—in the plural—have been re-asserting their place in the public life. The sociologist PETER BERGER, the proponent of the thesis of secularization, admitted that and spoke about de-secularization.

In another sense, GELLNER may be right as we see very clearly from the surveys reviewed in this study: Muslims, including Indonesian Muslims, are strongly religious. This strong religiosity is reflected in the theological conviction that Islam is superior to other religions and that salvation belongs solely to Muslims, the followers of Muhammad. This is a view labelled in theological discussions as 'exclusive', the opposite of inclusive and pluralist views. For Muslims, this is a corollary of the strong religiosity, the seriousness in keeping the tradition and the faith commitment.

The pluralism discourse reviewed here reflects this. The group which opposes the idea of pluralism actually acknowledges the existence of religious diversity; that it is natural and cannot be avoided, but disagrees on how to respond to it. They are most resistant when it comes to the theological idea that salvation doesn't belong to one particular religion. However, for some proponents of pluralism, one cannot give a good response to pluralism—or even be tolerant to the religious others—if theological exclusiveness is upheld. “Pluralism is needed to deal with plurality,” as mentioned by a leading pluralist.

## ***Shari'a* and democracy:**

One of the main points of dissension concerns *shari'a*. Anti-pluralists aim for a strong role for *shari'a*, enforced by the state—whether at the national, provincial, or local level. Regardless of how *shari'a* is understood—whether it is simply a symbol of religiosity, or understood narrowly—we see in the surveys how most Muslims show a very strong commitment to *shari'a*. At the same time, however, they—and this includes Islamists—also show a strong commitment to democracy. Thus, *shari'a* and democracy should not be approached as mutually exclusive concepts.

Similarly, the surveys also show strong loyalty to the idea of Indonesia as a non-religiously based state. But if such loyalty requires the weakening of the religiosity, or the two are put in diametrical opposition, then this would become unrealistic. So it seems that part of the question about the authenticity of pro-pluralism discourse hinges on how aspiration for *shari'a*, the strong religiosity, democracy, and the idea of Indonesia as a non-religious state can all be simultaneously accommodated.

## **D - Conclusion: How to achieve social harmony?**

Ultimately the main point of concern of pluralism discourse is what we can variably refer to as “harmony between religious communities” or “social cohesion”. The question is whether theological pluralism is a required for this or whether we could settle for tolerance, even without theological inclusivism or pluralism.

As some of the empirical surveys reveal, theological exclusiveness may have implications for (social) tolerance, but it cannot be entirely blamed for it. In the index of tolerance discussed in Section A, we actually see that despite theological exclusiveness, the level of tolerance among Indonesian Muslims is quite close to that in many advanced countries in Europe and the US. However, there are other indicators which show the strong resistance of Muslims toward the religious others (especially the Christians) holding important public positions as well as building places of worship—as evidenced by many events in recent years. This may come *not* (exclusively) from the theological view, but could also be the shadow of the troubled political history of the Muslim-Christian relationship inherited from the colonial Dutch, and strengthened in the policies toward religions in the subsequent regimes.

What differentiates Indonesia from those countries with a similar level of intolerance are its laws and their enforcement. A certain level of intolerance, which somehow necessarily exists in any society, could be controlled by good laws and their enforcement which would prevent negative actions toward the religious others. However, as we have seen in this study, in Indonesia there are still problems in how religion is regulated by governmental policies.

It is probably not surprising to find great resistance when it comes to theology, as it is indeed the least progressive part of religion. One issue that comes up frequently as a way to de-legitimize the discourse is the questioning of the authenticity of the discourse as a Western invention. The objection to the perceived Western influence comes in several forms. First, the very notion of pluralism is accused of being an import from the West. Second, it is assumed that the spread of the

idea of pluralism is funded by Western agencies. Overall, in this situation it is not helpful when, for example in the recent case of *Ahmadiyah*, human rights-based arguments are put in diametrical opposition with the effort to maintain theological purity (i.e. the argument that *Ahmadiyah* is a case of deviation or the blemishing of Islam).

The defenders of pluralism responded to this by trying to show that the discourse is rooted in Islamic tradition. At times they also invoke the unquestionable authority of past Indonesian intellectual figures, such as HAMKA. In this regard, we can see that there have been serious efforts to “indigenize” the pluralism discourse.

The rejection of pluralism, then, is centred on a theological understanding of ‘normative Islam’. At this point it is important to note that the dominant pluralism discourse seems to lean heavily towards a theological discussion. This study recommends a new approach:

*First*, instead of seeing the strong religiosity, the aspiration for *shari’a*, or the theological exclusiveness of Muslims as the source of problems, it is more productive to see them as constraints. Not in the negative sense, but as factors which make up the framework within which pluralism discourse or programmes are conceived. Otherwise, we may become unrealistic.

*Second*, there needs to be serious attempts at bridging the divide and to work against the polarization. Given that this paper is rooted in the pluralist camp, we would suggest that the first step in this direction be taken by this camp.

*Third*, governmental policy is another constraint that would partly determine how the efforts to develop pluralism should be shaped, and at the same time reflect challenges for promoters of pluralism to respond to. It also needs to be remembered that the flaws in the policy which hinder the realization of freedom of religion are deeply rooted in Indonesian history, and as such cannot be easily changed. The main point is that government is a determining factor. As BRYAN TURNER reminds us: “social harmony is unlikely to emerge on the basis of political indifference on the part of governments” (TURNER 2008, 53-55). Thus, one needs to engage with government, not merely criticise it.

## **Civic pluralism**

We don’t recommend abandoning the theological discourse completely, but rather a shift in emphasis. DIANA ECK, who heads the Pluralism Project at Harvard University and is one of the important figures of reference in the Indonesian discourse, may provide us with a suitable concept.

ECK distinguishes between arenas of discourse of pluralism, most importantly those of theological pluralism and civic pluralism.<sup>15</sup> Each has its own language, but she notes a common mistake, what she calls “confusion of arena of discourse”. This confusion occurs when a theological objection is translated into civic rejection or denial of right. This phenomenon is quite often seen in Indonesia, including in the case of *Ahmadiyah*. A religious person would most probably be involved in both, as everyone may assume multiple identities, in this case as a citizen and as part of a religious community. However, clarity is necessary in order to distinguish the languages. “When we switch lanes, we learn to use signals.”

The notion of civic pluralism is fertile, as it focuses on how people can live together, while to some extent avoiding divisive theological lines. MARTIN MARTY, who headed the Fundamentalism Project at the University of Chicago in the 1990s, recognizes the theological concern that pluralism would relativize or weaken religion. Indeed, pluralism—acknowledgment of and respect for other religions’ freedom—is not high in the hierarchy of values in any religion. What is more important in religion is truth, or justice, the intention to save people. As such, a certain degree of exclusiveness—the sense that it is what is right—will always be there. This is especially true in religions such as Christianity and Islam, but other religions are not immune from it either. What MARTY focuses on is not theological pluralism. This is not the main issue in the conflicts between people of faiths. The conflicts are usually between ‘belongers’ and ‘strangers’ who have to share the same space and resources. His focus is on what he calls “religiously informed civic pluralism”.

This pluralism is fully located in politics. It is about arrangements of how to live in a plural society, which MARTY calls “pluralist polity”. Its starting point is the minimal structural pluralism: society is constituted by competing elements, such as religions, ethnicities, and government. Because diversity is unavoidable, what is needed are rules of the game. In Indonesia, we have seen such rules in constitutions and several other legal regulations. But the rules of the game never—and we may add, should not—exhaust all areas of interactions. In addition to the rules, there is *ethos*, i.e. unwritten agreements, the violation of which would isolate the violators or result in the loss of the whole community. The laws are the jurisdiction of government, while the *ethos* is created and maintained by society. The main issue here is negotiation of laws and, more crucially, of *ethos*.

There is a question whether theological pluralism and civic pluralism are inseparable, or whether the latter presupposes the former—in other words: to what extent civic pluralism requires

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<sup>15</sup> Diana L. Eck, “Prospects for Pluralism: Voice and Vision in the Study of Religion”, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (December 2007, 75: 4, 743-776)

theological pluralism. Theology may not be inseparable, but it can be distinguished and, in many cases, postponed. A stronger distinction may be trapped in the old paradigm of secularism, which draws bold lines between the religious and the public. While not abandoning the theological issues, these kinds of questions needs further exploration to enrich and develop the pluralism discourse. Recent discourse on multiculturalism is directly relevant to this issue and needs to be explored as well.

This is only half of the whole idea. The other half is the acknowledgment of religious communities' right to see that the (religious) values they take as important in their lives can play some role in the public sphere. What distinguishes pluralism from secularism is this allowance. The main question is: how? It is here that the ideas of ABDULLAHI AN-NA'IM may help us. This prominent Sudanese scholar developed the concept of 'civic reason'. This is an idea which acknowledges the aspiration to bring *shari'a* into the public sphere, not through state intervention, but through civic reason. It is a modification of John Rawls' notion of public reason, which is criticized by many as being too liberal. Civic reason is an attempt to channel the aspiration in ways that are acceptable to the ideals of democracy, and which respect the rights of others too.<sup>16</sup>

Not all of this is new. Many Muslim reformers in Indonesia since the 1970s, notably the late NURCHOLISH MADJID, have fought for the ideas that synthesized Islam and democratic ideals, which would prepare Indonesian Muslims to accept a pluralist and democratic country of Indonesia. But his ideas, formulated in the authoritarian atmosphere of the New Order regime, may not be sufficient today. Other players who were suppressed in the past, such as the Islamists, now have more freedom to propagate their views.

**To sum up**, we recommend that the discourse of pluralism and the movement for pluralism focuses on two main issues: (1) the practice of pluralism in society and the daily lives of citizens (including negotiation of 'the ethos' of pluralism); and (2) the way state is instrumental for this purpose (laws and regulations, or 'rules of the game', as part of a pluralist polity, and law enforcement). Rather than speaking in universal terms such as the ideals of human rights, common humanity grounded in religions, etc., we need to bring the discourse to the level which is closer to the *practices* of society and sensitive to what is held as normative. This discourse will be essential to further develop a

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<sup>16</sup> See his *The Future of Shari'a* (Harvard University Press, 2008), which was published in Indonesia a few months before the English edition. An-Na'im pays special attention to Indonesia in the book (besides Turkey and India). While he is well-known in Indonesia—he visited Indonesia a number of times—he doesn't figure prominently in the pluralism discourse. This may be because he doesn't fit easily in either the liberal or the conservative camps.

healthy relationship between communities in Indonesia – a state of social harmony that we want to achieve.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The full report continues with an inventory of possible activities to be carried out by the Promoting Pluralism Knowledge Programme. For more information refer to Zainal Abidin Bagir ([zainbagir@gmail.com](mailto:zainbagir@gmail.com)).