Facing Uncertainty

Today the ever widening and ever more complex globalising market economy is causing a paradigm shift in cultural understanding. Thousands of villagers from the outer islands of Indonesia migrate to Java, Kalimantan and Papua each year looking for work. Schooling shifts youth from the interior to the coast, from village to town, from the outer isles to the Islâmic heartlands of Java. Even small towns have more than doubled in size in the past 40 years and the rate is accelerating, whereby ever more people are being dislodged from their cultural and linguistic roots. Sixty years ago in eastern Indonesia the kyai (Muslim teacher) and the pendeta (Christian pastor) were the main source of outside news as radios were few and literacy not yet universal. Today facebook is the most frequently used website (31 million Indonesian users in 2010), satellite disks bring CNN and other commercial value-systems into once remote villages, while 80% of the people have access to hand-phones.\(^1\)

Contrasting cultural trends are mutating the traditionally tolerant religious culture of the country, triggered by a creeping secularist tendency that is driven by modernity and post-modernity, particularly among those who weald power. While Islâm and Christianity maintain a public role in each sphere of Indonesian life, secular values such as competition, social standing and consumerism are making inroads. Neo-liberal capitalism believes that millions of selfish, price-driven decisions, when left to market forces, will create the greatest social good. In such an economy, driven by a lust for power and an insatiable greed for wealth, there is little room for authentic religious humanism, for conscience or compassion, for dignity or equity, for solidarity or cooperation, nor for integrity or sustainability. Unsurprisingly, a practical agnosticism holds sway among many of the stake-holders at the centre of power. As the urban elite find that they can function in a modern environment without a personal relationship with God, religion is relegated to group identity and cultural expression.

Change is not occurring at the same rate in all the islands, nor in each place within any one island. Some areas are more secularised than others. Change is proportionate to available access of any one place to the globalising economy.\(^2\)

Thus the modernisation process – initially introduced to eastern Indonesia by the Christian churches with their schools, clinics and training centres – is highly ambivalent.

\(^1\) For facebook and hand-phone frequency, see Louise Jefferies (2010). For an analysis of the impact of cyber-communications on the indigenous cultures of eastern Indonesia, see Prior, “Religion and Social Communication: Relations and Challenges”, Religion and Social Communication, 7/1-2 (2009), 113-132.
\(^2\) Uneven development leading to the globalizing of some areas and the localizing of others, has been termed glocalisation. See, www.glocalforum.org
Modernisation has brought about an openness to the wider world, but precisely that openness is marginalising the fragile cosmic cultures. Modernisation has brought about unprecedented material wealth for some, but is creating a poverty unknown in the past. Modernisation has replaced a cyclical, relaxed, “natural” sense of time with a lineal, “historical” model which grasps at the future, where the fittest survive and the weak inconsequential. Modernisation has given meaning to the individual over the group, and in doing so is fragmenting the symbolic world of the group so that the individual is becoming inarticulate: the individual is losing the language in which to express self-worth. In this situation of creeping social anomie, threatened groups can tend to become authoritarian.

This process has increased rapidly since 1968 when the global market economy was welcomed by the local Indonesian elite. While the political and economic stake holders have enjoyed an unprecedented increase in wealth, economic “development” has also brought about social disruption, mass displacement and rapid urbanisation which, since 1998, led to inter-communal violence once the military repression under Soeharto eased.

Contrasting Responses

The Threatened Seek Security

The collapse of the repressive regime of Soeharto in May 1998 led to a weakening of the national narrative and an upsurge of regional forces. Economic and political instability has accompanied Indonesia’s return to democracy.

One reaction is an exclusivist ethno-religious sub-culture arising among those threatened by rapid change. Those battered, and thus threatened, by rapid social change, the vulnerable poor and the marginalised who feel unable to build up solidarity across religious and cultural boundaries, tend to pull up the drawbridge and batten down the hatches. This is leading to a ghetto mentality, where religion is being reduced to internal ritual and community identity, and when provoked can tend towards violence. In 1999, under Soeharto’s successor, President Habibie, a local autonomy law was passed. Unintentionally, this law gave room for local, extremist elements and the national(ist) narrative became submerged in a wave of local ethnic and religious accounts. Fundamentalism reared its head in organisations such as Jemaah Islamiyah and Laskar Jihad. Radicalised after the September 9th 2001 incidents in New York and Washington, Indonesia experienced terrorist bombings in Bali (2002 and 2005), the Mariot Hotel in

3 For inter-communal strife in the Moluccas where over five thousand were killed (1999-2001), see, Prior, “Evil Abroad in Ambon”, The Tablet, 21st January 2001. The other major areas of inter-communal strife were in Kalimantan where the indigenous Dayaks attacked the migrants from Madura (2001), and the separatist violence in Aceh (peace accord 2005) and in Indonesian Papua against Javanese migrants and members of the armed forces, and in Timor Leste immediately following the independence referendum (September 1999). The most common initial cause of inter-communal clashes was economic and political, yet ethnic and religious issues quickly took over.

4 In the first Bali bombing in Kuta (2002) some 202 people including 88 Australians, and 38 Indonesian citizens were killed while a further 240 people were injured. The three surviving perpetrators, Imam Samudra, Amrozi Nurhasyim (the “smiling terrorist”) and Huda bin Abdul Haq were executed by firing squad in 2008. In the second Bali bombing in Jembaran and Kuta (2005) 20 people were killed including the bombers, and over 100 were injured. In mid 2011 the spiritual leader of Jama’a Islamiyah, Abu Bakar
Jakarta was bombed in 2003, and the Australian Embassy the following year. Thus an exclusivist ethno-religious sub-culture is growing among the vulnerable, visible among both Muslims and Christians.

Over the past dozen years the country has been moving in many directions at once. Positively, Indonesia is once again a multi-party State with five-yearly free elections (although somewhat marred by money politics). There is an independent media (although run by competing commercial and political interests). The three-decade conflict between Aceh and the central government was brought to a peaceful end in the aftermath of the tectonic earthquake and tsunami of 26th December 2004. Negatively, the prohibition of DVD and films considered “sexy” has turned into a new form of censorship, while police “sweep” entertainment centres and discothèques during the Ramadhan fast. More than one hundred and fifty local government laws have been establishing Shari’ah law in certain areas (such as in women’s dress); these have been declared unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court, but have yet to be abrogated. Virtually un-implementable laws with sectarian bias have been promulgated in education (2003), the arts (the Anti-Pornographic Law of 2008) and health (2009). Some 200 places of worship have been attacked over the past few years, mostly Christian. Majorities are still intolerant of minorities as for instance when Muslims in 2010 prevented the Huria Kristen Batak Protestant Church (HKBP) from celebrating their weekly liturgy in Bekasi (a satellite city of Jakarta). Incidents multiple as the police and central government are loathe to intervene.

Not all sectarian moves are aimed at Christians; the Jama’ah Ahmadiyah movement, from which Indonesia’s founding President, Sukarno, drew key ideas, has been declared heretical (1980, 2005) and, after being attacked by members of the Front Pembela Islâm, is being proscribed by certain local government authorities. These can be seen as political manoeuvres where religion is manipulated to further political and economic goals.

Central and local governments are increasingly and systemically corrupt and rife with political cartels. Of 50 cities surveyed by corruption watch, the most corrupt was found to be Kupang, the capital of the majority Christian Province of East Nusa Tenggara.

The movers and shakers of these extremist groups communicate through the traditional networks of mosque, madrasah and pesantren (Islâmic boarding schools). Hand-phone and cyber-communications are focused on their own internal networks and with their sympathisers. There is very little proselytising in the public media. They work to convert both kyai (traditional Muslim leaders) and influence, and on occasion intimidate, local and national politicians, which is possible in a country where civil society is weak. The most visible communicative sign of this network is the long flowing white robes of wandering preachers. What makes headlines are extremist incidents, such as those

Bashir (b. 1938), was tried and convicted of supporting a jihadi training camp and was sentenced to 15 years in prison.

5 At least in Soeharto’s day, corruption was centralised under the President’s family and close cronies and channelled through the army, these days it is anarchic!

6 The NTT province is also the second poorest and the fourth most corrupt.
outlined above. It seems that this minority press group has succeeded in casting the dominant stereotype of intolerant religion in the public sphere.  

Where, then, are the forces of moderation?

**Security in Open Communication**

*Jaringan Islâm Liberal* (Liberal Muslim Network, or JIL) was birthed as a response to exclusivist reactions to rapid change. This paper is concerned with the communicative means of this movement in contrast to that of the more fundamentalist movement to which it is responding.

At the beginning of the 21st century Luthfi Assyaukanie and Ulil Abshar-Abdalla (b. 1967) were instrumental in establishing *Jaringan Islâm Liberal* – The Liberal Muslim Network. Luthfi caused great controversy when he penned an article on the principles of Liberal Islâm in the largest circulation national daily broadsheet, *Kompas*, on 2nd November 2002.  

Abdurrahman Wahid (1940-2009), former long time chair of the *Nadlatul Ulama* (NU) mass movement (1984-1999), was a forceful influence behind this move. Abdurrahman Wahid, and afterwards Ulil Abshar-Abdalla, greatly predisposed the traditionalist NU movement to embrace secularism. The two sides of Liberal Islâm are the intellectuals and the activists (NGOs). The latter gave birth to “Progressive Islâm” which emphasizes practical social change. When Islâmic organisation like *Muhammadiyah* and NU were not judged to be reforming fast enough, activists formed NGOs as alternative movements for the younger generation.

Reacting to these forces, *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (MUI, the Council of Ulamas of Indonesia) issued a fatwa in 2005 which proscribed liberalism, secularism and pluralism, the three key terms advocated by liberal-progressive Muslims. 

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7 On a number of occasions I have asked non-Muslim groups outside Indonesia what immediately comes to mind when they hear the word “Islâm” and the most common image that appears is violence. International (Western) media, with their political and economic backers, play a major role in this “image making”.

8 Later expanded in book form. See, Luthfi Assyaukanie, *Wajah Islâm Liberal di Indonesia*. Jakarta: Jaringan Islâm Liberal, 2002.*Kompas*, the most respected daily broadsheet newspaper, was founded by Catholic Christians, although most of its journalists have always been Muslim.

9 The first generation of Islâmic liberal scholars includes Nurcholish Madjid, Abdurrahman Wahid, Djoohan Effendi, Ahmad Wahib and M. Dawam Rahardjo. Prominent among the second generation are Azyumardi Azra, Komaruddin Hidayat, Amin Abdullah, Bahtiar Effendi, Moeslim Abdurrahman, Munir Mulkhan, Jalaluddin Rakhmat and M. Syafi’i Anwar. Liberal Muslims of note within the *Muhammadiyah* movement are Amin Abdullah, Abdul Munir Mulkhan and Moeslim Abdurrahman. Liberal Muslims from within NU include Said Aqieil Siradj, Masdar Mas’udi and K.H. Husein Muhammad.

10 Secularism, liberalism and pluralism are being mainstreamed by Islâmic organisations rooted in the traditional movement NU. These include *Jaringan Islâm Liberal* (JIL), *Perhimpunan Pengembangan Pesantren dan Masyarakat* (P3M), *The Wahid Institute* (TWI), *Lembaga Pengembangan Sumber-daya Manusia* (Lakespadam) and *Lembaga Kajian Islâm dan Masyarakat* (LKIS). The reforming paradigm of secularism, liberalism and pluralism is also being mainstreamed by organisations rooted in the modernist movement of *Muhammadiyah* such as *Lembaga Studi Agama dan Filsafat* (LSAF), *Yayasan Paramadina*, *International Center for Islâm and Pluralism* (ICIP), *Maarif Institute for Culture and Humanity*, and *Jaringan Intelektual Muda Muhammadiyah* (JIMM). The two main Islâmic State Universities (UIN) of the country in Jakarta and Jogjakarta, as well as the Association of Islâmic
**Secularism:**
For progressive Muslims secularism is essentially about the State not interfering with peoples’ beliefs and worship, for religious truth is individual and personal, the choice of conscience. Secularism allows freedom of religion, is fair towards each religion and religious group, and supports tolerance in interactions between beliefs and forms of worship. Secularism does not privilege any religion; a secular society does not pressurize people in religious affairs.

Indonesians rarely distinguish between secularism and secularization.\(^{11}\) The key distinction is between an “empathetic secularism” and a “suspicious secularism”. Empathetic secularism acknowledges the need to separate religious authorities from State authorities, and views beliefs (creed) and worship (cult) as belonging to the private sphere, protected by the principles of freedom and democracy. Meanwhile activities and *akhlq* (ethical code) and social interaction (civilization) belong to the public sphere, overseen by the State in a democratic manner, rooted in moral and public principles. In such a secular society, religious communities are free to nurture a cultural space that insists on the priority of God.

Experience suggests that while the private sphere is rarely negotiable, we can, nevertheless, dialogue about our beliefs and worship in a rational manner. We can share our experiences and beliefs about transcendental realities. Such honest dialogue could well strengthen secularism, for we shall better understand and appreciate one another. As social tolerance is limited to the public sphere and does not impinge on the private sphere, there is no hint of relativism.

Progressive Muslims are not simply talking and writing about the issue of secularism, they are heavily engaged in mainstreaming their vision of faith in a secular society in order that Indonesian society becomes more democratic. Progressive Islâm assumes that a key to progress is to implement secularism, liberalism and pluralism in the practical politics of the country. Progressive Islâm acknowledges that there are a number of secular models available and Indonesia needs to implement a secular model in tune with Islâm and with the pluralistic nation. A secularism that is dynamic and adaptable will result in a balance between religion and the State. Such a contextualised, dynamic concept of secularism is rooted in the State ideology of *pancasila*. In the *pancasila* Muslims meet both with the universal values of Islâm and also with respect for, and celebration of, diversity.\(^{12}\)

**Liberalism:**
 Universities in Indonesia (STAIN/IAIN/UIN), also espouse reforming, tolerant Islâm within a secular, *pancasila* State.

\(^{11}\) In the 1970s to 1990s Nurcholish Madjid, known as Cak Nur, (1939-2005) avoided the term “secularism” preferring “secularization” and then “de-sacralisation”.

\(^{12}\) In Indonesia secularisation and secularism do not entail, and have never entailed, the removal of religion from the public sphere, nor its marginalisation or privatisation. Secularism does, however, deny any place to dogmatic absolutism. Concomitant with this, there is the ongoing tension between a western, colonial Christianity and local Indonesian cultures.
The second key concept proscribed by MUI, but embraced by progressive Muslims, is liberalism. Liberalism is the acknowledgement of civil rights and civil liberties which are enshrined in the rule of law such as freedom of thought, opinion, religion and conviction. A secular State should not divide the people into a large majority and small minorities as all enjoy the same rights and privileges. The more traditional, authoritarian form of Islâm arose from an orthodox consensus in *fikh, kalam*, philosophy and *tasawuf* which had been dominant in Indonesian Islâm.

According to progressive Muslims, civil society was first exemplified at Madinah “antum a’lamu bi umûri dunyâkum” (“you know better about worldly matters”). *Akal* – the intellect – makes humans higher than the angels. Liberalism did not come only from Greece, but also from Persia which moreover developed mathematics and modern medicine. Progressive Muslims revere three great Islâmic scholars, the medical genius Ibn Sina (980-1037), the philosopher Ibn Rusyd (1126-1198), and al-Ghazali (1058-1111), theologian, philosopher, jurist and mystic. Most influential in the *pesantren* of Indonesia - Islâmic village schools - is the synthesis of al-Ghazali where *ijtihad* (personal ethical decision making) is almost identical with liberalism.

Liberalism recognizes two spheres, the sphere of *iman* (faith, belief) and the rational (intellectual) sphere of *akal*. *Iman* and *akidah* are individual matters and are autonomous. Faith/belief should be left to the authority of the individual. Issues of the State and of society belong in the public sphere. Contemporary issues that liberal Islâm in Indonesia has been thinking through include democracy, human rights, gender justice, the parity of religions, and contact between religions. These conversations do not follow traditional patterns and are not confined to unalterable texts. Allah and his Messenger instruct believers to use their intellect: liberal Islâm gives parity to faith (*iman/fides*) and the intellect (*akal/ratio*).

**Pluralism:**
The third key concept being mainstreamed by Indonesia’s progressive Muslims is pluralism. The simple reality of Indonesian cultural and religious pluralism has become a necessary political principle. Threats to Indonesia’s integrity need to be met by tolerance, openness and equality. Dialogue can open the way to greater mutual understanding, tolerance and civility. In a plural society and in a secular State, the State has no right to declare one religion as correct and the others as false, as happened when the *Jama’ah Ahmadiyyah* movement was banned by the government in 2010. In a secular State, all religions must be held to be true according to their own followers. This ethical principle is the foundation of social justice, equality of rights and harmony between followers of different religions.

Looking at the major role religion is playing in public life, the concept of the marginalisation of religion from public life needs re-evaluation. Which aspects of religion are being privatised and which aspects need to play, and indeed are playing, a role in public life? Aspects such as ritual, worship and belief belong to the private sphere. The State and public institutions have no right to interfere in this subjective sphere, namely *ḥabîl-un min-a ‘l-Lâh*, one’s personal relationship with God.
This conviction leads to a willingness to learn from one another. Pluralism acknowledges difference and invites dialogue. Without pluralism, communities in the Indonesian archipelago would be dominated by hegemonic majorities – by Catholic Christianity in Flores, Protestant Christianity in northern Papua, Hinduism in Bali, and Islâm in Java and Sumatra and much of the rest of the country.

The liberalization of our thought is a consequence of the process of a modern, plural society which is becoming increasingly complex which in turn encourages open communication between its diverse members. History teaches that Islâm has been plural since its birth, and therefore diversity/pluralism is a grace. The civil society of Madinah in the Prophet’s time was born from within such a plural society. Without the plurality of Madinah, there would be no Madinah Charter which was formulated and agreed upon when Islâm was still a minority community. The Jewish community was the largest group, while there were also Christians and indigenous believers. The Prophet (s.a.w.) united these groups without establishing a conformist society. Within that plural society a unity was accepted (ummat-an wâhidah). In the social contract drawn up (the Madinah Charter), the identity of each religious group was acknowledged, while each agreed to form a common solidarity.

Similarly, when Islâm encountered other local cultures in Egypt, the Maghribi, Persia, India, Turkey, Central Asia and China, Muslim leaders did not destroy the local cultures or religions, but embraced them, creating a multi-coloured “rainbow Islâm”. A pluralist stance has long been held by the Sufis, for instance al-Hallaj (866-931), Ibn al-Arabi (1165-1229) and Jalaluddin Rumi (1207-1273). In contemporary times pluralist views have been advanced by Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998), Seyyed Hossen Nasr (b.1933), Hasan Askari and Abdulaziz Sachedina (b.1942). In Indonesia by Nurcholish Madjid (1939-2005), Abdurrahman Wahid (1940-2009) and Ahmad Syafi’i Maarif (b.1935). The motivation is nothing less than tolerance and harmony between followers of diverse religions.

Progressive Muslims see Islâm today as an integral element within the global plurality of cultures, while they view Western culture, at base Judeo-Christian, as attempting to hold onto a dominating cultural, economic and political hegemony. Precisely this global hegemony from the West is causing resistance to pluralism within Islâm.

The problem is how to nurture a plural identity without turning to “identity politics” which is pregnant with potential conflict. There are at least two concepts of “identity politics” alive in Indonesia. Firstly, an identity politics which wants to achieve and maintain the hegemony of the majority. And secondly, an “identity politics” launched by minorities to preserve and nurture the identity of their group over against the majority. Within a plural society, both of these concepts give birth to tension and conflict.

According to liberal Islâm, there is no need for “identity politics”, as a plural secular society acknowledges the identity of each group. Indeed, in multi-cultural politics the
government is tasked to assist and protect minority groups. With pluralism, a plural society becomes creative. The heart of pluralism is *ta’âruf* (mutual understanding).

**The Communication Strategy of Jaringan Islám Liberal (JIL)**

The communication strategy of JIL is open. Led by Muslim intellectuals who have prominent positions in Islâmic Universities, most centrally and importantly in Jakarta and Yogyakarta, and younger activists in NGOs, they publish widely in newspapers, magazines, books and pamphlets as well as in the electronic media. They are also movers and shakers in the two largest Muslim mass organisations in the country, *Nadlatul Ulama* (NU) with over 40 million members, and *Muhammadyiah* with over 30 million members. They are consciously and systematically working openly in the public sphere, combining intellectual argument and social and political activism in order to galvanise support from the grassroots.

**MUI: Perceived Threats of Pluralism**

The one official negative reaction to JIL comes from the Ulama Council of Indonesia, *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (MUI). They have countered the liberal-progressiv JIL by publishing a fatwa. In the fatwa they distinguish between plurality and pluralism. “Plurality”, according to MUI, is the social reality of Indonesia and so cannot be rejected, while “pluralism” is a foreign concept that should be viewed with suspicion. According to MUI, and their more fundamentalist supporters, pluralism of religion flows from Christian theology; behind the pluralism of religion, there hides the political and economic interests of the Western superpowers. For MUI, if pluralism is accepted, then *akidah* Islâm will be weakened and so will be easily swayed by efforts at Christianization (*murtad*). They also reject pluralism in religion as they claim that pluralism is founded on “relative truth”, while for MUI truth is absolute. Here pluralism is seen as a threat to *akidah*; acknowledging pluralism weakens faith.

Interestingly enough this fatwa has been received more as an important “point for discussion” – rather than as an edict to be obeyed! For liberal Muslims, truth, including religious truth, is a human perception of Truth which is absolute (*Allah*) but is inevitably understood only partially. Liberal Muslims see in MUI a cultural minority complex afraid to face other religious and ideological concepts and movements. The assumption behind pluralism is the acknowledgement of difference. Each religious tradition can “mutually nurture faith”. Pluralism gives rise to a dynamic that encourages each individual to perfect their beliefs by learning from another’s belief. This can be termed “mutual conversion” – we purify our own faith through contact with another’s.

Secondly, pluralism is also seen by MUI as a threat to identity, for in pluralism individual identity is part of a broader whole, where there is a danger that absolute truth will give way to relative truth; truth is no longer singular but plural. Muslims believe that, in line with a verse of al-Qur’an, the religion that Allah acknowledges is Islâm. However, liberal Muslims counter with alternative interpretations. Nurcholish Madjid, for instance,

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13 Not so different from what is happening in other religions, such as Christianity, where statements from bishops are accepted as important considerations to be taken seriously, rather than as the answer to the issue in question.
understands the term Islâm in the verse “God acknowledges only Islâm as religion” as a
generic term referring to all who submit to God. Madjid points to how the Prophet
(s.a.w.) acknowledged the religion of the Jewish prophets as they submitted to the will of
Allah. Also, liberals emphasise how time and again we meet in the Sufi mystical tradition
belief in “many paths that lead to God.” Liberals also add that perhaps more than 90% of
humanity who have a religion hold it “by chance” – as they were born in a particular
family in a particular place; the religion we hold is part of our “born” or “inherited”
identity as with the colour of our skin, and with our ethnic and national identities.

Thirdly, MUI is convinced that the existence of religion itself would be threatened if
Muslims were to acknowledge all religions. There is concern that a certain syncretism of
religions might occur which in turn would give birth to a public religion taken from all
the religions of the nation State in question. As in Western Europe, a public ethic would
take over the public role of religion.

Liberal-progressives respond that regarding all religions as equal is the political stance of
a government in a pluralistic society, not the stance of the believer towards another’s
belief. The government should have no favourites; this is not part of akidah but simply
State policy.

Such mutual understanding can occur only if rooted in the principle of pluralism.
Pluralism needs a clear epistemology and a clear ethics, as advocated by Budhy
Munawar-Rachman.14 The alternative to Samuel Huntington’s clash of civilisations
which is accepted by MUI, is an open society, which ferments a dialogue of civilisations.

Concluding Reflection:
Closed and Open Communicative Networks
Religious belief and commitment in Indonesia, both in the struggle for independence
during colonial times and today as we are buffeted by a global tsunami of commercialised
values, presents itself both as a moral force for public and personal ethics, but also as a
sectarian force that triggers communal violence.15 Thus religion has been called “bi-
polar”.16 While religion has been playing a decisive part in “structural violence”, that is,
in the legislating of discriminatory laws, religion is also proving to be a force for peace
and reconciliation.17

Those threatened, that is the extremists who form the sectarian face of religion,
proselytise in closed communication networks which undermine civility and the very
ethical basis of a plural civilisation. Their movement surfaces with mono-linguistic,
fundamentalist moral demands in public discourse; its religious sectarianism shakes
communal peace and harmony. On the surface, this minority network seems to be

14 Budhy Munawar-Rachman, Sekularisme, Liberalisme, dan Pluralisme: Islâm Progresif dan
15 In Indonesia inter-communal violence is known as “horizontal violence” in contra-distinction to “vertical
violence”, that is, violence between (groups of) citizens and the State.
16 The term used by Redem Kono, see “Kiprah Politis Agama di Indonesia”, Vox 55/01 (2011), 14-50.
17 Each and every inter-communal conflict has eventually been brought to an end by credible members of
each faith tradition.
becoming increasingly successful, if by successful we mean the passing of sectarian legislation by local assemblies and the national parliament. Seemingly, a closed, hard-line, communication network among fellow hardliners, is capable of shifting the political and social landscape in a fragile civil society.

Meanwhile, JIL has joined the discourse in the public domain by translating its moral and ethical values into universal values in a common tongue. In open debate in universities, by means of the printed and electronic media, through galvanising mass movements, activating NGOs and through the forum of the mosque and the church, JIL are furthering mutual enrichment. Unlike the extremists, JIL is working with the non-structural power of open communication. This, in itself, is a democratic mechanism of control through achieving a renewed consensus among both majority and minority communities. Here are not only networks of like-minded intellectuals, but an alliance of academics and activists who have formed a social movement.

The clash, then, is between a closed, extremist communication network which takes religious truth to be “euphoric infallibility”, and an open communicative strategy, which accepts religious truth as “inclusive-pluralistic”. The choice of “closed intimidating” and “open reflective” communication networks reveals quite different understandings of truth and the role of religion in society. The closed communication network which “erupts” into the media only when it disturbs harmony, is apparently strong and "successful", while the open network appears weak and ignored.

While it seems that the closed network of the extremists is making the running today, and whereas the open network of liberal-progressives is heavily under-reported as a “non-event”, it may well be the case that in the longer term, the open network from university to mass movement, from academic volumes to the printed and electronic media, from open forums to grassroots activism, is gradually creating an open, communicative pluralistic society. In the short-term the extremist stereotype is not being dislodged. And yet the open network is quietly forming a social movement that might in the longer term presage personal and social transformation.

And so, in the midst of all the ambiguity of the present moment, the liberal-progressive network is quietly shaping a reforming paradigm. Secularism is increasingly seen to open the road to social justice, equality, harmony in the archipelago’s multi-cultural and multi-religious communities. Secularism also provides the necessary freedom to religious bodies to grow fruitfully without distorting interventions from the State. Liberalism is freeing the mind from encapsulating dogma, rigid orthodoxy and fear of change. A liberal attitude is being accepted as a precondition for the practice of pluralism. The principle of

\[18\] One is reminded of Jürgen Habermas who states that creating a consensus through open dialogue in a common language is, “the tribune of public opinion that is dialogical and emancipatory” when justice is one of its constitutive elements. See, Andrew Edgar, *Habermas: The Key Concepts*. New York: Routledge, 2006, 3-4, 23. Also, “universal values” must not be code for Western (or any other) global hegemony, but rather lasting transcendental values at the core of what it is to be human

pluralism, enshrined in Indonesia’s national motto *binneka tunggal ika* (unity in diversity), is the historical root upon which secularism has been grafted. In appreciating pluralism we recognize the value of a liberalising process in our thinking and the practice of secularism in politics.

**A personal Postscript**

I write as a foreign-born Christian living with the Christian minority in Indonesia, which, since independence (1945/1949) has lost its pre-eminence in education, health services and social outreach. This Christian minority, like the JIL, has learnt that a tolerant, pluralistic society is feasible not only without reliance upon these traditional social institutions, but is better guaranteed when religions are more clearly visible as a moral force in the public sphere without any institutional stake in power.

I should also make it quite clear that in Indonesia harmony is still preferred over confrontation. However, more is needed than traditional tolerance, mutual respect and a formal acceptance of others. Rapid change uproots and unsettles. Inter-faith networks need to work assiduously towards a deeper mutual understanding and acknowledgement, translating the deepest values of each tradition into a common vocabulary. Faith-inspired political and economic strategies in a secular pluralistic State will surely only succeed in a society where everyone and each religion is important and distinct, but also willingly interdependent on the others. Open communicative networks connecting the academia and popular mass movements, with no stake in power or special interests, are a long-term response to the short-term intimidation of closed, intolerant pressure groups.

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