

## THE DYNAMICS OF IDENTITY POLITICS IN INDONESIA: A STUDY OF NURCHOLISH MADJID'S



Donna Ramadhan Fitri<sup>1</sup>, Miswardi<sup>2</sup>, Ferdi Yufriadi<sup>3</sup>,  
Irvan Refliandi<sup>4</sup>, Syafriadi B.<sup>5</sup>

### \*Correspondence :

Email :  
ramadhandonna01@gmail.com

### Authors Affiliation:

<sup>1</sup> Universitas Islam Negeri  
Sjeh M. Djamil Djambek  
Bukittinggi, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup> Universitas Islam Negeri  
Sjeh M. Djamil Djambek  
Bukittinggi, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup> Universitas Islam Negeri  
Sjeh M. Djamil Djambek  
Bukittinggi, Indonesia

<sup>4</sup> Universitas Islam Negeri  
Sjeh M. Djamil Djambek  
Bukittinggi, Indonesia

<sup>5</sup> Universitas Islam Negeri  
Sjeh M. Djamil Djambek  
Bukittinggi, Indonesia

### Abstract

Islamic political power is not always related to Islamic parties. Nurcholish Madjid tried to convey a more substantial view of Islam, not just symbolism. This research uses the library research method. Research carried out using literature, both in the form of primary sources, namely research data sources obtained from original sources that contain this information and secondary sources, namely data sources obtained from books and other literature that discuss the topic of the problem. The data processing techniques in this study using content analysis techniques, namely after the data is collected, the next step is to describe the data completely, sequentially, and regularly, and after that the analysis is carried out by looking at each discussion of the themes discussed. Based on the results of this research, it is revealed that Nurcholish Madjid chose Islam that is more substantial than just symbolism. This is rooted in the universal values of Islam, not just the symbol of the "Islamic party" itself. If we look at the current situation, Nurcholish Madjid's criticism is still relevant because currently the politicisation of religion is generally used to attack political opponents or increase party electability.

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*Kekuatan politik Islam tidak selalu berkaitan dengan partai Islam. Nurcholish Madjid mencoba menyampaikan pandangan yang lebih substansial tentang Islam, bukan sekedar simbolisme. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian kepustakaan (library reseach). Penelitian yang dilaksanakan dengan menggunakan literatur (kepustakaan), baik berupa dari sumber primer yaitu sumber data penelitian yang diperoleh dari sumber-sumber asli yang memuat informasi tersebut dan sumber sekunder yaitu sumber data yang diperoleh dari buku dan literatur lain yang membahas tentang topik permasalahan. Adapun teknik pengolahan data dalam penelitian ini dengan menggunakan teknik content analisis, yaitu setelah data-data tersebut terkumpul, maka langkah selanjutnya adalah memaparkan data tersebut secara lengkap, urut, dan teratur, dan setelah itu dilakukan analisis dengan mencermati setiap pembahasan tema yang dibahas. Berdasarkan hasil penelitian ini, terungkap bahwa Nurcholish Madjid memilih Islam yang lebih substansial dari sekedar simbolisme. Hal ini berakar pada nilai-nilai universal Islam, bukan hanya simbol "partai Islam" itu sendiri. Jika melihat situasi saat ini, kritik yang dilontarkan Nurcholish Madjid masih relevan karena saat ini politisasi agama umumnya digunakan untuk menyerang lawan politik atau meningkatkan elektabilitas partai.*

## INTRODUCTION

The author has an interest in studying identity politics in Indonesia. The research question posed is to what extent Nurcholish Madjid's views contribute to the political framework in this country. This research aims to identify the impact of Nurcholish Madjid's thoughts on identity politics in Indonesia. Currently, Muslims are facing an impasse in thinking about the question of whether the concept of an Islamic state is still being debated or not. But actually, this problem has been solved since the 20th century, when state ideology was determined. In the Islamic socio – political movement, there is a division into two streams, namely substantive Islam and symbolic Islam. Substantive Islam



refers to Islam that focuses more on social piety or as a liberation theology that emphasises social goodness; as Muhammad Abduh once said, "I found Islam in Paris, although there were no Muslims there, and I did not find Islam in Egypt, even though there were many Muslims here." This expression shows that substantive Islam has a more socialist orientation, as explained by Ashgar Ali Engginer in his book "Islam and Liberation Theology": "No society can be called Islamic if there is still exploitation of the weak and oppressed, even though Islamic ritual practices are carried out even formalised as law."<sup>1</sup>

The people must be good at seeing who is among the *dhu'afa* and *mustadha'fin*, people who must be sided with by the people. The aim of taking sides is not to achieve material victory for one party but to seek justice and the common good. Muslims remain *a Wasathan community*, but if there is an inevitable conflict between *Mustadh'afin*, The Ummah is not a political unit that moves based on purely rational measures but moves based on awareness. It is this normative awareness—awareness of truth and justice—that has the potential to conflict with class consciousness.<sup>2</sup> According to Kuntowijoyo, our state administration had proceeded with the political transformation of *natural society*, leading to *civic society*. The concept of democracy has started to work even though it is halting, especially regarding the concept of democracy because there are still bans, courts, telephone culture, and restrictions. We still need to see whether historical developments towards progress are only superficial, preamble, and symbolic. What is important is that people's political participation will determine the nation's political future. Efforts are needed to ensure that political will and awareness continue to have the momentum, support, and historical opportunities to develop. For this reason, the attitude that is completely in opposition to society and the attitude that is completely in power from the government need to be abandoned. Currently, the important issue ahead is industrialization. The apathy that occurred in the past due to the political marginalisation of Muslims must be replaced with a more participative attitude. Muslims are no longer allowed to act passively like people who only give consent but must act as citizens who are active, critical, and aware of their rights and obligations.

Indonesia is not an Islamic or secular country but a religious country, which means that the country supports and facilitates its citizens in carrying out their religious obligations. This statement is based on the situation in this country and the existence of government policies that are in line with the teachings of the Islamic religion. Through this policy, the state has provided assistance to its citizens in fulfilling their religious obligations. In the 1980s and 1990s, there was a process of political relaxation between Islam and the state. The state is starting to show a "friendly" attitude towards Islam and is willing to develop accommodation. In Nurcholish Madjid's view, political Islam can be interpreted as a strong tendency towards Islam that is always associated with opposition to the government. According to him, this happened because Islam had a consistent role as a "rallying" ideology against colonialism. This role contributed to the struggle for national independence because Muslims put forward political ideas that were inconsistent with the practical demands of today. As a result, political prejudice emerged that linked Islamic orientation with a nationally – oriented government.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Donna Ramadhan Fitri dan et al., "Partisipasi Masyarakat Pada Pemilihan Umum Tahun 2019–2024 Menurut Tinjauan Fikih Siyasa (Studi Kasus Di Nagari Tiku Selatan)," *Al Imam: Journal Islamic Studies, Civilization and Learning Societies* 4 (2023).

<sup>2</sup> Catur Widiat Moko, "Pluralisme Agama Menurut Nurcholish Madjid (1939–2005) dalam Konteks Keindonesiaan," *Intelektualita* 6, no. 1 (2017).

<sup>3</sup> Donna Ramadhan Fitri et al., "Pemikiran Neo–Modernisme dalam Hubungan Agama dan Negara di Indonesia: Studi Komparatif Nurcholish Madjid dan Abdurrahman Wahid," *Al Imam: Journal Islamic Studies, Civilization and Learning Societies* 3 (2022).

According to Bahtiar Effendy, there is a political conflict between Islam and the state in Indonesia, which is mostly caused by idealism and Islamic political activism, which tends to prioritize legalistic and formalistic aspects. The idealism and activism of Muslim politicians are characterised by a formal and legalistic approach, which results in a complex political relationship between Islam and the state in Indonesia. He argues that through intellectual transformation, the state's attitude towards political Islam can change. During the independence and post-reform eras, political Islam was seen as a power competition that had the potential to disrupt the country's national foundations. This view has an impact on the state's desire to obstruct and control Islamic political movements ideologically. The antagonistic politics between Islam and the state are largely due to the idealism and activism of political Islam, which tends to be legalistic and focused on formality.<sup>4</sup>

According to Nurcholish Madjid, Islam is not a theory or ideology. Furthermore, he stated that in the political context, Islam is in a position that is in line with Sharia and closer to philosophy, with its characteristics and dynamics. The concept of the Islamic State is seen as a deviation from the proportional relationship between religion and the state. The state is an aspect of worldly life that has a rational and collective dimension, while religion is an aspect of life that has a spiritual and personal dimension.<sup>5</sup>

This term describes a change in Islamic political ideology in Indonesia from a focus on formalism in state structures or making Islam the basis of the state towards a more substantial understanding of Islamic values about the state. In this context, Islam is no longer seen symbolically but is understood in the spirit of the values it promotes, such as the values of justice (al-'adl), equality (al-musawah), and deliberation (shura), which are then applied in the life of the state. The goal to be achieved is not the establishment of an Islamic state or the dominance of Islamic ideology, but a just and prosperous society. In this context, Islam is seen as being in line with the construction of the Indonesian national unitary state. There is no need for a legalistic approach between Islam and the state as long as the state operates within a framework of values that do not conflict with Islamic teachings and values, ideologically or politically.<sup>6</sup>

The tradition of the relationship between Islam and politics in Indonesia has a very old history. Its roots can be traced to the late 13th and early 14th centuries when Islam was first introduced and spread widely in the Indonesian archipelago. Throughout its history, Islam has interacted significantly with socio-cultural and political realities at the local level and has been involved in the world of politics. In fact, it can be said that Islam has been an integral part of political history in Indonesia throughout its development. However, it cannot be concluded directly that Islam is a political religion. The perception that existed at the time of independence and after the reformation considered the extension of political Islam as a competition for power that could disrupt the nation's foundations. This view has an impact on the state's desire to hinder and try to control the ideological movements of Islamic politics. The political tension between Islam and the state is mostly caused by idealism and Islamic political activism, which tends to be formalistic and legalistic in nature. The disharmony of this relationship was caused by the

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<sup>4</sup> Bahtiar Effendy, *Teologi Baru Politik Islam Pertautan Agama, Negara Dan Demokrasi* (Yogyakarta: Galang Press, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> Miftakhul Munir, "Modernisasi Pendidikan Islam dalam Perspektif Nurcholish Madjid," *Jurnal Evaluasi* 1, no. 2 (2017).

<sup>6</sup> Wijoyo, "Pemikiran Politik Islam Di Indonesia Dari Formalistik Menuju Substantif," *Jurnal Ri'ayah* 01 (2018).

different views of the founders of the republic, who were mostly Muslims, regarding the direction of the Indonesian state, whether it was based on Islam or was nationalist.<sup>7</sup>

Although efforts to create a harmonious and complementary relationship between Islam and the state have not been fully successful, there are important signs indicating the return of political Islam to the political life of this country. This new indication is seen in the increasingly friendly attitude of the state towards Islam, which is marked by the implementation of certain policies that are considered in line with the social, economic, cultural, and political interests of Islam. Evidence of accommodation can be categorised into four different types: (1) accommodation in government structures; (2) accommodation in legislation; (3) accommodation in infrastructure; and (4) accommodation in the cultural sector.

One of the most striking forms of accommodation is the appointment of a new generation of thinkers and activists from political Islam circles into the state's executive and legislative bodies. This phenomenon has two main reasons, namely sociological reasons and political reasons. Structural accommodation develops both in terms of quantity and substance. Not only are more Muslim activists being recruited into the bureaucratic and political machine, but they are also being promoted to higher positions. More broadly, the state's cultural accommodation of Islam is not a new phenomenon. This is even an ongoing discourse that is influenced by the process of acculturation between Islam and the peculiarities of space and time in Indonesia. The results of these cultural encounters varied widely, depending on the abilities of the groups involved in the reconciliation process. In general, these accommodations can range from a partial (syncretic) scale to a total (pure) scale. Given that "Islam has developed very quickly and peacefully in most of the archipelago," it is no exaggeration to say that many aspects of Islamic culture have long been accommodated.

Islam does not make it a problem that the Indonesian state or government must become an Islamic state or government. For Islam, what is important is the content or essence, not the formal symbolic form. The establishment of the state is a human obligation in the context of democracy. Although Islam does not require the existence of an Islamic state, the establishment of a state can provide principles that support the realisation of the desired society. This includes, first, just and democratic government (deliberation); second, the existence of dynamic government organisations; and third, sovereignty.<sup>8</sup>

When Nurcholish Madjid explains the relationship between Islam and Pancasila ideology, he discusses in more detail the integration of Islam with Indonesia. According to him, Indonesian Muslims have accepted Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution for clear reasons.<sup>9</sup> Madjid considers that Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution have positions and functions similar to those of the earliest political documents in Islamic history, namely the Medina Charter. Muslims at that time accepted the Medina Constitution to reach a mutual agreement on forming an inclusive political society.<sup>10</sup>

Based on this research, Nurcholish Madjid's thought has significant relevance to identity politics in Indonesia. His inclusive views, promoting the values of pluralism, inter-religious dialogue, and respect for differences, have made a positive contribution

<sup>7</sup> Edi Rosman, "Politik Hukum Islam di Indonesia (Kajian reformasi hukum dalam kerangka pemikiran Ibnu taimiyah)," *Jurnal Alhurriyah* 02 (2017).

<sup>8</sup> Nurcholish Madjid, *Suatu Tahapan Terhadap Masa Depan Politik Indonesia* (Jakarta: Prisma, 1984).

<sup>9</sup> Sasmianti, "Implementasi Politik Hukum Islam Dalam Perumusan Piagam Jakarta," *Jurnal Islam Transformatif*, 2018.

<sup>10</sup> Ali Romdhoni, *Piagam Madinah Bukan Konstitusi Negara Islam* (Depok: Literasi Nusantara, 2014).

to constitutional politics in the country. This thinking has helped to mitigate conflicts and improve understanding across groups in society. The application of Nurcholish Madjid's thought to identity politics in Indonesia has been instrumental in promoting unity in diversity. The principles put forward by Nurcholish Madjid have helped ease tensions between groups and encourage constructive dialogue. In the context of constitutional politics, this inclusive view has supported the formulation of policies that respect the rights and interests of all citizens, regardless of their identity and background.

## METHODS

This research is library research, using data in qualitative form with a content analysis approach. To use the technique for the problem and research objectives, it is first necessary to understand the term content analysis by looking at the definition of the term. Then the results of the analysis were described in the form of a descriptive narrative. In this case, the author uses library research, which begins with visiting various physical libraries, including electronic libraries. Then, in the library, the author begins by classifying books and other scientific papers, in particular, various references that are closely related to the problems the author discusses. From various references that have been classified according to their respective subject matter, the author performs editing and formatting. With this data collection technique, the author can get an overview as well as conclusions about the problems discussed in this study. In this paper, the author concludes continuously throughout the writing process, so that in the end, the author draws a conclusion that is supported by valid and consistent evidence. So, the author focuses on the method of concluding by examining the problems that the author describes above using the deductive method. So what is expected from this research is to reduce general problems to a detailed conclusion.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### *Biography of Nurcholish Madjid*

Nurcholish Madjid was born on March 17, 1939, in Mojoanyer, Jombang, East Java. Precisely on the 26th of Muharram in 1358 Hijriyah. Nurcholis Madjid is usually called 'Cak Nur' because "Cak" is a term commonly used in Java to greet older people with great respect. "Cak" can be interpreted as an abbreviation of "Grandpa" or "Brother," which shows kinship or closeness. Meanwhile, "Nur" is part of the name Nurcholish, and the use of "Nur" as an additional nickname gives a touch of familiarity and intimacy to calling him. He comes from a family of farmers. His father, KH Abdul Madjid, was a graduate of the Tebu Ireng Islamic Boarding School in Jombang, which was founded by Syekh Hasyim Asy'ari, the founder of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and one of the pioneers of Islamic boarding schools in East Java. Nurcholish Madjid is also the nephew of an activist from the Islamic Trade Union in Kediri, Hajjah Fathonah Mardiyah.<sup>11</sup>

Nurcholish Madjid studied primary and secondary education at the Mojoangar People's School and Madrasah al-Wathaniyah in Jombang. After that, Cak Nur continued his education at KMI Gontor Darussalam Ponorogo, East Java, and completed his studies in 1960. Next, he continued at IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta in 1965, majoring in Arabic literature and Islamic culture, and graduated in 1968. In 1978, Nurcholish Madjid was allowed to continue his studies at the University of Chicago. Nurcholish Madjid passed away on August 29, 2005, at the age of 66. Nurcholish Madjid's

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<sup>11</sup> Siti Nadroh, *Wacana Keagamaan dan Politik Nurcholish Madjid*. (Jakarta: Raja Grafindo Persada, 1999).

role was very significant in contributing to contemporary Islamic thought, especially in the 1990s, which he called a preparation for Indonesian Muslims to face the modern era.

### **Religion and the State according to Nurcholish Madjid**

According to Cak Nur, the relationship between religion and the state, especially the Islamic State of Indonesia, is not known historically. He points out that after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, his funeral was tumultuous, and there was uncertainty over the succession because these complex legacy leadership issues are difficult to solve. Therefore, Cak Nur believes that the state issue is not an obligation or an integral part of Islam. According to him, the idea of an Islamic state is more likely to be an apology or a plea for forgiveness.<sup>12</sup> Cak Nur seemed very impressed with the explanation that true Islam is not only related to legal aspects, government structures, or a combination of both. For him, Islam involves the essence of monotheism, namely the belief in the oneness of God. The concept of monotheism has a spiritual power that can produce good (*hanif*) character, tolerance, a democratic spirit, and respect for diversity in society.

Because of this, the concept of an Islamic state disrupts the established relationship between state and religion. For Nurcholish Madjid, the state is a rational and collective dimension of the world. At the same time, religion has a spiritual and personal dimension. Although it is difficult to separate religion and state, they must still be distinguished from inappropriate measures and manners. Cak Nur refuses to see Islam only as an ideology because that would ignore and degrade religious values and place it on the same level as other ideologies in the world.

Islam does not demand that the state or government be in the form of an Islamic government or an Islamic state. What is more important is the essence or substance of the religion, not just a symbol. Forming a form of state is a right and an obligation in the context of democracy, although Islam does not oblige the formation of an Islamic state. In general, for the establishment of a state, several principles must be realised to achieve state goals, namely: democratic government (involving deliberations), fair, dynamic government, and recognition of sovereignty.

After declaring that the national ideology of Pancasila had reached perfection, Cak Nur debated again the essence of Islam as well as the ideology and spirit of the Indonesian nation. Perfection here means perfection in the context of its function as the foundation of national and state life in Indonesia. This concept is also related to the function of sentence structure and word order described in the Preamble to the 1945 Constitution. This concept is comparable to the da'wah of Islam in Indonesia. For example, in the socio-political context of the state, we can refer to the founding of the state of Medina by the Prophet Muhammad SAW.

During the process leading to its finalisation, there was intense debate and controversy among the political elite, government, and society, especially regarding the first precept of Pancasila, namely "Belief in One Almighty God." Cak Nur understands the first precepts of Pancasila as a meeting point between adherents of Islam and other religions in Indonesia. Cak Nur's understanding is based on verse 64 of Surah Al – Imran in the Koran, which states, "Say: "People in the book, in which there is no dispute between us, let (hold) one sentence (rule) that we worship none but Allah, we do not associate Him

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<sup>12</sup> Ngainun Naim, "Islam Dan Pancasila: Rekonstruksi Pemikiran Nurcholish Madjid," *Epistemü: Jurnal Pengembangan Ilmu Keislaman* 10, no. 2 (2015).

*with anything, and several others. As gods other than Allah."If they turn around and leave, then say to them, "See, we are the ones who submit to Allah."*

However, Pancasila as an ideology is flexible and not static. There is a possibility that Pancasila could be rearranged or given a religious dimension, and this is a possible possibility. To consider this possibility, support from the Islamic political elite and the enthusiasm of the Islamic Party are needed.

## **The Relevance of Nurcholish Madjid's Thoughts on State Politics in Indonesia**

### **1. Secularization**

It should be noted first that Cak Nur has a different understanding of secularisation and secularism. Secularism is an ideological system that is separate and independent from religion.<sup>13</sup> Basically, secularism rejects the interference of religion in life. From an Islamic perspective, secularism is considered a modern interpretation that is contrary to the teachings of the Koran, as mentioned in Surah Al – Jatsiyah verse 24, that some people only talk about world affairs.<sup>14</sup>

According to Nurcholis Madjid, secularism is not in line with religion, especially Islam. Cak Nur stated that he did not want to make Islam a political tool. He rejects the politicisation of Islam in the interests of ideological and political groups within Islamic parties. During the 1970s, Cak Nur and his team fought against the Islamic Party movement. The famous motto at that time was "Islam Yes, Islamic Party No!" For Cak Nur, Islamic political power does not always mean being part of an Islamic party, especially when the political institution is plagued by corruption, nepotism, and conflict between party elites. He firmly rejected the idea of Indonesia as an Islamic state because, according to him, the Pancasila State conformed to the ethical principles of Islamic politics.

In the early 1970s, Cak Nur's idea of Islamic secularisation shocked many political parties. Before this idea was proposed, Cak Nur was known as a young Muslim scholar who inherited the Natsir intellectual tradition. That's why he was nicknamed "Young Natsir." Therefore, many hope that he will become a substitute and play an important role, like Masyumi. Like Natsir in his thinking, this hope is not just an empty fantasy. Cak Nur has a deep understanding of classical Islamic intellectual thought as well as modern thought from Western philosophy, so his thinking is very broad. This is possible because Cak Nur, like Natsir, has good foreign language skills. Natsir is fluent in English, French, Arabic, and Latin, while Cak Nur is fluent in English, French, and Persian.

Cak Nur argued that the concept of secularisation that he proposed was a sociological concept, not a philosophical concept, as his critics believed. In the context of this sociological interpretation, secularisation is a social movement that aims to separate religion from world life so that only God has absolute holiness. Everything outside of God is temporal and secular.<sup>15</sup>

### **2. Pancasila as an Open Ideology**

The *Pancasila* ideology serves as the foundational principle of the state and the core national belief system. It encompasses honourable principles and the aspirations of the Indonesian people. Rooted in the nation's customs, culture, and ethical values, *Pancasila*

<sup>13</sup> Ridha Ahida, "Sekularisasi: Refleksi Terhadap Konsep Ketuhanan," *Jurnal Tajdid* 25 (2019).

<sup>14</sup> Hisam Ahyani dan Mutmainah Naeli, "Konstruksi Epistemologi Islam (Studi Komparasi Konsep Mushawwibah dan Mukhaththiah dalam Ushul Fiqh)," *Jurnal MEDIASAS: Media Ilmu Syari'a* 4, no. 2 (2021).

<sup>15</sup> Budi Prayetno, "Konsep Sekularisasi Dalam Pemikiran Nurcholish Madjid," *Sulesana: Jurnal Wawasan Keislaman* 11, no. 2 (2017).

is a reflection of the Indonesian way of life and heritage, making it the authentic ideology of the nation. Rather than adopting external ideologies, *Pancasila's* principles are elevated above those of their foreign counterparts, representing a fusion of local values, culture, and the Indonesian worldview. This ideology mirrors the essence and distinctiveness of the nation, aiming to ensure societal concord, cohesion, and the populace's welfare. Throughout history, *Pancasila* arose as a response to various foreign ideologies infiltrating *Indonesia* while simultaneously striving to amalgamate pre-existing societal values into a comprehensive, all-encompassing national framework. Within its historical and cultural context, *Pancasila* significantly moulds the Indonesian national identity and provides guidance for political and social choices that align with the nation's esteemed principles.<sup>16</sup>

When we look at *Pancasila* as an open ideology, then this ideology can experience developments in modern times. Therefore, *Pancasila* should not be considered a formula that is fixed and eternal. This is because it will make *Pancasila* obsolete and unable to adjust to the changes that occur. By adopting a dynamic approach to *Pancasila*, *Indonesian* society seems content with the view that connects religion with the state, in which *Pancasila* is seen as a meeting point for all groups. This fact shows that we believe changes are happening and are recognized.<sup>17</sup>

### 3. Examples of Democracy

The discussion on dealing with the complexity of problems that are classic, fundamental, but still relevant. This complexity is considered fundamental because democracy involves the basic values of life that determine how the system of life is used, with humans as subjects and objects. As a source of legitimacy in today's modern world order, the presence of democracy is difficult to avoid. Democracy has given an important position to the people because the democratic system still adheres to the principle that the people are the holders of sovereignty.<sup>18</sup>

According to Nurcholish Madjid, the root of democracy is a process that leads to improvement. A country can be called democratic if it involves developments that apply humanitarian principles and provide rights to individuals and society as a whole, regardless of race, language, religion, and economy. Democracy is a human effort that aims to achieve the common good. Meanwhile, according to Nurcholish Madjid's understanding, Islam has a universal nature, defined as a mercy for all nature, which protects all forms of humans and other living things in the universe (Al-Quran, Surat Al-Anbiya/21:107).

The condition of democracy in Indonesia is still facing serious challenges, both from a cultural and structural perspective. Cultural factors, for example, are reflected in the arrogant attitude of society, which tends to lead to anarchic behaviour and no respect for the law. Communities are easily provoked and often show acts of violence and threats in various forms.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, structural factors are reflected in undemocratic government policies, statements, and actions by the apparatus that ignore democratic principles. Some discriminatory policies and regulations reduce the civil liberties of

<sup>16</sup> Heri Herdiawanto dan et al., *Spiritualisme Pancasila* (Jakarta: Prenada Media Group, 2018).

<sup>17</sup> Naim, "Islam Dan Pancasila: Rekonstruksi Pemikiran Nurcholish Madjid."

<sup>18</sup> Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam Agama Kemanusiaan: Membangun Tradisi dan Visi Baru Islam Indonesia* (Jakarta: Yayasan Wakaf Paramadina, 1995).

<sup>19</sup> Busyro Busyro, Adlan Sanur Tarihoran, dan Aditya Hari Nanda, "Moderasi Islam (Wasathiyah) di Tengah Pluralisme Agama Indonesia," *Jurnal Fuaduna: Jurnal Kajian Keagamaan dan Kemasyarakatan* 03 (2019).



society, especially for vulnerable and minority groups such as gender, religion, race, and belief groups.<sup>20</sup>

### **Identity Politicisation: Islam Yes, Islamic Party No**

In the early 1970s, Cak Nur issued one of his most important treatises, "Islam, Yes; Islamic Party, No!". Through this jargon, Cak Nur wanted to break the symbolic thinking model of some Muslims regarding Islam and politics while breaking the monotony of thinking so that Indonesian Muslims could rise and compete with other nations in the world. What was conveyed by Cak Nur was not to put Islam and politics in opposition but as a form of criticism of the work of Islamic parties that did not contribute to the progress of Muslims.

Islamic parties at that time were not aspirational and became the hope for the citizens of the nation. Even at that time, Islamic parties had not been able to properly 'ground' the language of religion into the multicultural Indonesian society. To break the silence, Muslims needed to do what Cak Nur called secularisation, a thought process that distinguished religious matters from political matters. In early 1970, in a *halalbihalal* speech with the Islamic Youth Movement (GPI), the Islamic Student Association (HMI), and the Indonesian Islamic Students (PII) entitled "The Necessity of Renewal of Islamic Thought and the Problem of Integration of the Ummah," then Chairman of the HMI Nurcholish Madjid observed symptoms that reflected the attitude of "Islam Yes, Islamic Party No."<sup>21</sup>

The background is that during the New Order era, the Islamic party Masyumi was denied rehabilitation after it was dissolved in 1960, which was interpreted as stemming from the political movement that aspired to form an Islamic state in Indonesia. As a result of the New Order's Islamic politics, Muslims were afraid of being involved in the political Islam movement. The situation of political Islam was generalised as a symptom of the rejection of Islamic political parties.

At that time, the observation that had previously received a direct rejection from two figures of the former Chairman of PB HMI, namely Ismail Hasan Metareum and Sulastomo, both PPP activists, replaced Cak Nur's conclusion with the view "Islam Yes, Islamic Party (also) Yes." For these two figures, Islamic parties are needed as a means of struggle and a medium of da'wah, which NU figure and former Minister of Religious Affairs, KH Saefuddin Zuhri, calls "political da'wah." During the Reformation period, Cak Nur did not oppose the establishment of new Islamic parties, although he was not involved in any of them.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, the perception of rejection of Islamic parties was related to the goal of the political Islam movement, namely the establishment of an Islamic state through the application of Islamic law in personal, family, community, and state life, as stated in the Articles of Association of the Masyumi Party, which was also championed by all Islamic parties as seen in the 1958 – 1959 Constituent Assembly. During the Liberal Democracy period, Islamic parties struggled through democratic mechanisms. Cak Nur's observation was misunderstood as reflecting his view that he rejected Islamic parties. In fact, in the 1977 elections, he was directly involved in the campaign to support the PPP with the agenda of "Pumping up Flat Tyres." But in a cultural speech at TIM in 1972 entitled

<sup>20</sup> Ahmad Zainuri, "Konversi Iain Menjadi Uin Di Era Globalisasi Perspektif Epistemologi Sains (Studi Analisis Desain Kurikulum UIN Raden Fatah Palembang)" (Palembang, UIN Raden Fatah Palembang, 2019).

<sup>21</sup> Masykuri Abdillah, "Hubungan Agama dan Negara Dalam Konteks Modernisasi Politik di Era Reformasi," 2, XIII (2013).

<sup>22</sup> Yudi Latif, "Politikasi Agama: Islam Yes, Partai Islam No," 2018, <http://nurcholishmadjid.net/haul-cak-nur-ke-13-politisasi-agama-membaca-kembali-islam-yes-partai-islam-no>.

"Refreshing the Understanding of Islamic Thought," he did reject the discourse of an "Islamic state" and instead advocated a discourse on "social justice".<sup>23</sup>

The views expressed by Cak Nur almost coincided with the 1971 election. Whether by coincidence or not, Cak Nur's views seemed to be in line with what was in the minds of the people. This can be seen from the results of people's choices in the 1971 elections. The election results showed that Islamic parties suffered a landslide defeat. This was the end of the long journey of Islamic parties since 1955. On the contrary, this was the beginning of Islamic renewal in Indonesia.

Ulil Abshar Abdalla said that Cak Nur's views were a description of the era. Ulil argued that Cak Nur's words were not meant to contradict politics and Islam. According to Ulil, Cak Nur's words were a form of criticism of what happened in Islamic parties in the 1970s. "Cak Nur's statement at that time was a description of the era. Cak Nur at that time gave a view of Islam that was substantial, not one that depended on symbols alone. So if it is related now, there is still relevance," he said. According to Ulil, Islam and politics can go hand in hand. However, he argues that symbolising Islam in the form of a party is not a step forward. According to him, it would be ideal if Islam were able to show its substance rather than its form as an Islamic party.<sup>24</sup>

Cak Nur stated that he was not anti-Islam as a religion but anti-politicisation of Islam. He rejects the politicisation of Islam for the benefit of ideological-political groups that are members of Islamic parties. He and his group campaigned against Islamic parties throughout the 1970s. His famous slogan at that time was: Islam Yes, Islamic Party No! In Cak Nur's perspective, Islamic political power is not always synonymous with Islamic parties, especially when political institutions are plagued by corruption, nepotism, and endless conflicts among party elites. He strongly rejects Indonesia as an Islamic state because the Pancasila State is founded on the principles of Islamic political ethics.

### **Secularization of Constitutional Politics in Indonesia**

Political secularisation in Indonesia, as proposed by Nurcholish Madjid, is a concept that emphasises the separation between government and religion. This political secularism implies that religion should not be used for political purposes and that the usual rights granted to citizens in society should not be based on one's religion or religious identity. The aim of this concept is to create law and order and social order in the state by emphasising civil norms or values and universal social justice. Further, it emphasises pluralism as an important principle for government, meaning that everyone has the right and freedom to embrace spiritual symbols and values of his or her choice. The state administration should also protect the rights of citizens to rediscover the meaning and politics of nature.<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, the government should prioritise tolerance and protect citizens' rights to information about religion and spirituality. The government should also be proud of the cultural and religious heritage bequeathed to the nation. On the other hand, as Nurcholish Madjid argues, the government should also act in an inclusive, open, and welcoming manner towards all human beings. It must also recognise the right of citizens to embrace spiritual symbols and values of their choice. It must also promote inclusiveness and

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<sup>23</sup> Nurcholish Madjid, *Karya Lengkap Nurcholish Madjid* (Jakarta: Nurcholish Madjid Society, 2020).

<sup>24</sup> Latif, "Politisasi Agama: Islam Yes, Partai Islam No."

<sup>25</sup> Alex Medani, "Pola Hubungan Agama dan Negara Menurut Farag Fouda dalam Siyasah Syar'iyah," *Al hurriyah: Jurnal Hukum Islam* 2, no. 2 (2018).

equality in its behaviour and the legal system. Governments must also reject segregation and discrimination and uphold the principle that all human beings are equal.<sup>26</sup>

According to Nurcholish Madjid, political secularisation in Indonesia does not mean that religion or religious identity will disappear or be ignored. Instead, he sees political secularisation as an important tool to create a more pluralistic, tolerant, and inclusive atmosphere in Indonesia. Political secularisation supports the level of cultural and religious pluralism in Indonesia and encourages the government to protect the right of every citizen to embrace spiritual symbols and values of their choice. Overall, political secularisation is considered by Nurcholish Madjid as a way to build a democratic state that is pluralistic, inclusive, and supports the rights and freedoms of all citizens.

Nurcholish Madjid came up with the idea of secularisation to respond to the challenges of modernization, which became the central orientation of the New Order government. The idea arose from Nurcholish Madjid's concern and anxiety about the political situation in Indonesia, especially the politics of Muslims. The anxiety was then expressed in the idea of renewal, which culminated in his speech at the evening gathering of Muslim youth organisations, students, and scholars incorporated in HMI, GPI PII, and Parmusi on January 3, 1973, at the Islamic Research Centre Meeting House, Menteng Raya, Jakarta. In a lecture entitled "The Necessity of Renewal of Islamic Thought and the Problem of Integration of the Ummah," Nurcholish expressed a frank observation that Indonesian Muslims experienced stagnation in religious thought and had lost the "power of psychological movement" in their struggle.

An important indication of this stagnation, he observed, was the inability of the majority of Muslims to distinguish between transcendental and temporal values. The two values are often reversed: values that are supposed to be transcendent are understood as temporal values, and vice versa. Everything seems to be seen as transcendental and, therefore, without exception, sacred. As a result of this kind of religiosity, Islam is seen as equal to tradition. It is in this regard that he considers the need for Muslims to secularise Islamic thought. The secularisation in question is not the application of secularism in the philosophical definition, in the sense of an understanding that contains the separation of religion from the state or separates the life of the world from the life of the hereafter, but the secularisation he means, as he admits, is taken from Talcot Parson, Harvey Cox, and Robert N. Bellah, which contains a sociological meaning that can be interpreted as "liberation or worldly values that should be worldly and release Muslims from the tendency to mengukhrawikan it." Or more clearly, what Nurcholish meant by secularisation, as he said.<sup>27</sup>

Secularisation is a form of liberating oneself and the ummah from the wrong way of approaching and solving various problems, especially political problems." In this sense, according to Nurcholish, secularisation is essentially rationalisation and desacralization. There is consistency between secularisation and rationalisation because the substance of secularisation is to solve and understand worldly problems by exerting intelligence (ratio). Rationality, in the sense of scientific thinking, is possible if the world as an object of scientific thought is released from the myths that sacralize it.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> David M. Bourchier, "Two Decades of Ideological Contestation in Indonesia: From Democratic Cosmopolitanism to Religious Nationalism," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 49, no. 5 (2019).

<sup>27</sup> Ilham Ironi, "Paradigma Postmodernisme: Solusi untuk Kehidupan Sosial?," *Jurnal Sosiologi USK* 12, no. 1 (Juni 2018).

<sup>28</sup> Zainal Abidin, "Teologi Inklusif Nurcholish Madjid: Harmonisasi Antara Keislaman, Keindonesiaan, dan Kemoderenan," *Jurnal Humaniora* 5, no. 2 (2014).

Firstly, it should be pointed out that Cak Nur makes a principled distinction between secularism and secularisation. Secularism is a closed ideology, an ideological system independent of religion. The essence of secularism is the denial of any other life beyond this worldly one. Secularism is incompatible with religion, especially Islam. Meanwhile, secularisation can indeed be defined as a socio – political process towards secularism, with the strongest implication being the idea of total separation of religion from the state. However, this is not the only meaning of the term secularisation. Another meaning of the term is sociological, not philosophical, as used by Talcott Parsons and Robert N. Bellah. Parsons points out that secularisation, as a form of sociological process, mostly implies the liberation of society from the shackles of superstition in some aspects of its life. And this does not mean the elimination of religious orientation from the norms of societal values. The process of liberation from superstition can only occur because of the impetus or is a logical continuation of a form of religious orientation, especially monotheism. This was the view of Robert N. Bellah, for example, when he pointed out the characteristics of classical Islamic society (the time of the Prophet and al – Khulafa' al – Rasyidūn), which he considered to be a modern society. Bellah mentions several structural elements of classical Islam that are relevant to his argument (that classical Islam was modern), namely strong monotheism, personal responsibility before God, radical devaluation or secularisation of the tribal institutions of ignorant Arabia, and, finally, a democratic political system. To be clear, regarding secularisation, he says that classical Islam has carried out "a radical devaluation, and one might justifiably call it secularisation, of all social structures that exist vis – a – vis the central relationship between God and man. Above all, it meant the removal of the institution of tribalism or kinship, which had been central to the sanctity of pre – Islamic Arabia, from its central meaning". In other words, the process of "radical devaluation" or "secularisation," in Bellah's sociological view, stems from monotheism, which, among other things, results in a decline in the value of tribal and kinship institutions, which in the pre – Islamic era were central to a sense of sanctity to God alone. Cak Nur's idea of Islamic secularisation came as a surprise to many. He was known as a young Muslim scholar who inherited Natsir's intellectual tradition. That is why he was nicknamed 'Young Natsir'. Therefore, the hope of the people that he would emerge as a successor and play a historical role like the Masyumi figure was so great. That hope is not wishful thinking either, given that he is intellectually like Natsir. He has a wide range of ideas because of his mastery of the (classical) intellectual treasures of Islam as well as modern (western) thought (philosophy). So Cak Nur, like Natsir, is a cosmopolitan thinker who can absorb the two treasures of Islamic and Western civilization at once. The breadth of thought was possible because both Cak Nur and Natsir mastered foreign languages. Natsir mastered English, French, Arabic, and Latin, while Cak Nur mastered English, French, and Parsi.<sup>29</sup> Cak Nur himself claims that his idea of secularisation is a sociological concept, not a philosophical concept, as his critics believe. In the context of sociological interpretation, secularisation is a social movement that aims to demythologize and demystify Islam so that only God is sacred in this world. Outside of Allah is worldly and secular.

## CONCLUSION

Nurcholish Madjid's thoughts on identity politics underline the importance of respecting and embracing diversity in society. His inclusive view emphasises that differences in religion, culture, and identity are not obstacles but instead a source of

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<sup>29</sup> Ahyani dan Naeli, "Konstruksi Epistemologi Islam (Studi Komparasi Konsep Mushawwibah dan Mukhaththiah dalam Ushul Fiqh)."

wealth and potential to build a harmonious society. It shows that identity politics should be based on values of tolerance, interfaith dialogue, and respect for differences rather than exclusivity or confrontation. Nurcholish Madjid views identity politics as a means to build unity in diversity, not as an instrument to divide society. His critical view of extremism and efforts to maintain inclusive values in identity politics reflect his dedication to peace and social harmony. Through the application of these principles, Nurcholish Madjid seeks to create a society based on mutual understanding, cooperation, and respect for all individuals, regardless of their identity or background. In his series of thoughts, Nurcholish Madjid illustrates that identity politics that focus on cooperation and tolerance can have a positive impact on the state and society. His thoughts provide inspiration for efforts to promote sustainable peace, stability, and prosperity amidst diverse identities and views in society. In conclusion, Nurcholish Madjid's thoughts on identity politics offer a constructive and inclusive alternative view to address identity-related challenges in political and social contexts.

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