



ISLAM AND NEO-MODERNISM IN INDONESIA: REVISITING NURCHOLISH MADJID AND ABDURRAHMAN WAHID'S THOUGHT ON CIVIL SOCIETY

Dito Alif Pratama

Universitas Islam Internasional Indonesia

dito.alif@uiii.ac.id

Abstract

Nurcholish Madjid and Abdurrahman Wahid are regarded as two of Indonesia's most influential Muslim intellectuals at the turn of the twentieth century. Adapting the concept of Barton (1997), both Madjid and Wahid are not only prominent public intellectuals but also can be considered intellectual *ulama*, scholars who combine the best of classical scholarship and intellectual leadership with modern secular and Islamic learning and participated alongside other public intellectuals in Indonesia's civil society forums. In addition, Greg Barton labels these personalities and characteristics of thought as Neo-Modernists or Neo-Modernist thinkers. This paper examines the interpretation of Madjid, who studied in a more Western academic culture, and Wahid, who studied in a Middle-Eastern country, on civil society as the manifestation of both Neo-Modernism's thought, followed by a discussion on the similarities and differences between the two ideas. Through an exploratory and comparative analysis, this study reveals that the Neo-Modernism interpretation of civil society articulated by both can be seen in their progressive thought towards Islam and society, Madjid with his idea of *secularization* and further changed into *de-sacralization* while Wahid with his thinking on the indigenization of Islam (*Pribumisasi Islam*). Their thoughts introduce an open, inclusive, progressive understanding of the relationship between Islam and civil society, asserting social pluralism and modernity and stressing the need for tolerance and understanding. Moreover, this paper also argues that both interpretations of Islam and civil society have been constructive for Indonesia in promoting democratic reforms, strengthening the importance of the *Pancasila* (the five pillars) foundation and state constitution, not religious



sectarianism (theocracy), thus refuting the notion that Islam is incompatible with democracy and pluralism and assisting Indonesian society in the productive synthesis of Islamic ideas and modern concepts such as democracy, liberalism, and secularism.

Keywords: *Neo-Modernism, Abdurrahman Wahid, Nurcholish Madjid, Civil Society.*

Introduction

This article discusses the relevance of the views of Nurcholis Madjid, also known as Cak Nur, and Abdurrahman Wahid, who is familiar with Gus Dur, on civil society to Neo-Modernism. According to Greg Barton, both Madjid and Wahid's Islamic thought movement belongs to Indonesian Neo-Modernism, a new movement in Indonesian Islamic thought that emerged amid much debate in the early 1970s and has since had a significant impact on the development of Islamic thought, especially among younger Muslim intellectuals. Although this paper seems to be more aligned with Wahid and Madjid's Neo-Modernism philosophy after the 1970s and at the start of the Reformation era, this paper argues that the Islamic Neo-Modernism approach and civil society are inseparable, as they could be undeniably significant for Indonesia, not only in providing a critical discourse of the relationship between Islamic ideas and modern concept but also in aiding in the preservation of democratic reform and religious-cultural diversity.

The meaning of civil society, which this article seeks to revisit in light of

the Neo-modernist ideas of Nurcholish Madjid and Abdurrahman Wahid, will be limited to the understanding of civil society as a political space between state and society in which citizens work to improve the well-being of the people. Theoretically, the existence and emergence of civil society positively affect democracy as it enables citizens to play a more active role in political processes that are otherwise controlled by or in the hands of political parties and their leaders. Civil society is essential to a democratic system because it enables the expression of diverse interests and perspectives within a society and challenges the state's dominance over its citizens. However, civil society develops in various contexts, so its growth and expansion are heavily influenced by each society's unique political and historical contexts.¹

With a population of over 275 million, Indonesia is the fourth most populous country in the world and the country with the largest Muslim majority. Indonesia is home to the world's largest Muslim population,

¹ Michael Edwards, *Civil Society* (Cambridge, UK & Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2004).

indigenous people, and people of diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds who reside in rural and urban areas. The official motto of Indonesia, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, or "Unity in Diversity," captures this vast social, cultural, and religious environment.²

Due to this diversity, Islam in Indonesia is also intimately connected to the dynamics of thought and reform movements. These ideas have influenced the Islamic thought pattern in Indonesia. According to Moeslim Abdurrahman,³ as cited by Abdullah,⁴ the style of Islamic thought in Indonesia results from dialectical relations. It is done by examining the outcomes of Islamic thinkers' struggles with Islamic issues, modernization or modernity, Islam's encounter with nationality and state strength, and Islam's encounter with local cultural forces.

As a religion revealed hundreds of years ago, it has a long historical trajectory and has been in contact with various civilizations. Islam must always make its teachings relevant to the times to adapt to the context of its era. In

² M. Amin Abdullah, "Nurcholish Madjid and Religious Pluralism in Indonesian Islam," in *Pluralism in Islamic Contexts - Ethics, Politics and Modern Challenges*, ed. Mohammed Hashas (Cham, Switzerland: Springer Verlag, 2021), 189–199, DOI: 10.1007/978-3-030-66089-5.

³ Moeslim Abdurrahman, *Islam Transformatif* (Jakarta: Pustaka Firdaus, 1997), 66–67.

⁴ Abdullah, "Nurcholish Madjid and Religious Pluralism in Indonesian Islam."

this sense, Islam and Islamic thought are distinct. Islam is a revelation, and Islamic thought is the subjective truth that results from one's comprehension of objective revelation messages. As a subjective truth, Islamic thought can evolve in response to the advancement of information surrounding the reading of God's message that someone has mastered, both at the level of knowledge and belief.

The term 'Islamic teachings reform' will continue to recur and appear frequently. Islamic reform attempts to present Islamic religious teachings more contextually and temporally appropriately. Islamic reform responds to the demands of actualities in religious doctrines and social realities such as economics, politics, and customs.

The presence of Wahid and Madjid is crucial in responding to the demands of new trends. Islam is being battered by modernity's needs while being asked to maintain its traditional values. Wahid and Madjid, with their breadth and adaptability of knowledge and experience, provide new perspectives and positive breakthroughs to ensure that the understanding of Islamic values is always conducted with an active and substantive interpretation, allowing them to adapt to changing circumstances.

Moreover, this paper is based on various research findings from prior

studies on the ideas of Abdurrahman Wahid and Nurcholish Madjid. Here is a brief summary of the literature I considered most relevant to my paper. This article relies heavily on two works by Greg Barton, "Neo-Modernism: A Vital Synthesis of Traditionalist and Modernist Islamic Thought in Indonesia" and "Indonesia's Nurcholish Madjid and Abdurrahman Wahid as Intellectual "Ulama": The Meeting of Islamic Traditionalism and Modernism in Neo-Modernist Thought." Through his work, Barton analyses how the new school of thought by Nurcholish Madjid and Abdurrahman Wahid represents the convergence of Islamic traditionalism, Modernism, and Western education in the persons of a generation of traditionalist thinkers who, as youths, received a *pesantren* (traditional religious boarding school) religious education and then pursued modern Western-style, higher education.⁵ Unlike this paper, Barton's works do not provide a detailed analysis of the relevance of Madjid and Wahid's Neo-Modernist ideas to the discourse of civil society.

⁵ Greg Barton, "Neo-Modernism: A Vital Synthesis of Traditionalist and Modernist Islamic Thought in Indonesia," *Studi Islamika* 2, no. 3 (1995): 1-75, DOI: 10.15408/sdi.v2i3.827; Greg Barton, "Indonesia's Nurcholish Madjid and Abdurrahman Wahid as Intellectual "Ulama": The Meeting of Islamic Traditionalism and Modernism in neo-Modernist Thought," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 8, no. 3 (1997): 323-350, DOI: 10.1080/09596419708721130.

Furthermore, Bakti's "Islam and Modernity: Nurcholish Madjid's Interpretation of Civil Society, Pluralism, Secularization, and Democracy" was also highly pertinent. According to Bakti, Madjid created his concept of civil society through Paramadina. He is one of the most prominent proponents of "neo-modernism" in Indonesia, where "modernism" and "traditionalism" are combined when appropriate and relevant to society.⁶ Although Bakti attempted to establish the relationship between Madjid's Neo-Modernism and civil society, his work, unlike this article, needs to analyze the relationship between Madjid's and Wahid's Neo-Modernist ideas and civil society.

In a nutshell, this article focuses on the intellectual journey of both Muslim scholars, the debate on the civil society discourse, and the contextualization of Neo-Modernisms thought within the civil society, as exemplified by the Nurcholis Madjid and Abdurrahman Wahid's thought.

Intellectual Journey of Abdurrahman Wahid and Nurcholis Madjid

Even though Madjid and Wahid are outstanding intellectual pioneers, it must be acknowledged that they are

⁶ Andi Faisal Bakti, "Islam and Modernity: Nurcholish Madjid's Interpretation of Civil Society, Pluralism, Secularization, and Democracy," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 33, no. 3 (2005): 486-505, DOI: 10.1163/156853105775013634.

both products of their immediate family environment and can be said to have inherited a reformist tradition. In several significant ways, Madjid and Wahid resemble their fathers, Abdul Madjid and Wahid Hasyim. Wahid Hasyim and Abdul Madjid had a close relationship (and happened to be related through marriage). Both were well-known figures in Jombang, the traditional Muslim community of East Java.

Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) was born in 1940 in Tebuireng, Jombang, East Java, into a prominent Javanese Muslim and a *pesantren* (Indonesian Islamic Boarding School) family. Both of his grandfathers, Hasyim Asy'ari and Bisri Syansuri, were prominent religious leaders who founded pesantrens that educated thousands of students at that time and founders of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), today's Indonesian largest Islamic organization with an estimated 90 million members.⁷ During the old order regime, his father, Wahid Hasyim, was also a NU leader and the Republic of Indonesia's Minister of Religion. Wahid Hasyim was among the contributors to the formulation of the Pancasila, a collection of five fundamental ideas that serve as the cornerstone of Indonesia's national philosophy, and the Jakarta Charter, the preamble to the country's

⁷ Greg Barton, "Indonesia's Nurcholish Madjid and Abdurrahman Wahid as Intellectual 'Ulama'."

constitution. Gus Dur formed his views on the relationship between Islam and the state because of his youthful observation of constitutional discussions (1956–1959). In particular, he was persuaded of the certain "failure of formalizing Islam in the life of a state like Indonesia" by the religious compromise that led to the formulation or doctrine of Pancasila, the principle of belief in one God or supreme principle, which was formulated to include all of Indonesian's faiths.⁸

Despite being from a pesantren family, Gus Dur began his academic journey by completing his elementary education at a government school (*sekolah rakyat*) in Jakarta from 1947 to 1953 while living in Jakarta when his father was minister of religion. In addition, he attended the Yogyakarta Junior High School of Economics (SMEP) between 1953 and 1957, the Tegalrejo Islamic Boarding School between 1957 and 1959, and the Yogyakarta Krapyak Islamic Boarding School between 1959 and the present (1959-1963). His parents made a concerted effort to ensure he engaged with politicians, NU kiai (*ulama*, Islamic leader), and a wide range of non-Muslim elements of society.⁹

⁸ John L. Esposito, "Abdurrahman Wahid: Scholar-President," in *Makers of Contemporary Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito and John O. Voll (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 199–218.

⁹ Greg Barton, "Indonesia's Nurcholish

Soon after, he began to forsake al-Azhar classes in favor of the American institution's library. In addition to extensive reading, he attended seminars, engaged in conversations, and sought a very informal education overall. Consequently, in 1966, he left Al-Azhar and came to Baghdad to enroll in the Arabic literature and culture program at the University of Baghdad. While there, he examined critical literature on social theory, philosophy, religion, and politics. He hoped to formalize this study by receiving a Master's degree in Europe but could not find a school that would accept his Middle Eastern studies.

Upon his return, Gus Dur immediately allied himself with the reform movement, and in December 1984, he was appointed executive chairman of NU. Since being appointed executive chairman of NU, he has presided over a remarkable cultural reformation within this traditionalist institution despite always being controversial. Furthermore, Gus Dur's level of support within the organization has been demonstrated in recent years by the fact that his leadership of NU has remained intact despite significant efforts by government forces to depose him.¹⁰ As NU's executive chair-

Madjid and Abdurrahman Wahid as Intellectual "Ulama"; Greg Barton, *Biografi Gus Dur: The Authorized Biography of KH. Abdurrahman Wahid* (Yogyakarta: LKiS Pelangi Aksara, 2003).

¹⁰ Abdullah Saeed, "Ijtihad and Innovation

man, outside of the Indonesian military and government, he has enjoyed enormous popularity and an unrivaled public profile. However, his rise within this largely rural and traditional organization was not the result of a single brilliant individual, despite his later association with the regime.

Furthermore, the younger generation of NU members, also IAIN system graduates, is among the critical evidence of Gus Dur's effect on thought and leadership. Although many of these younger members are still committed to NU, they no longer see themselves as only traditionalists. For them, the term "neo-modernist," which suggests a synthesis of traditionalism with Modernism, is a much better description.

Meanwhile, Madjid's academic career was impacted and formed by his family and educational background, as he is the son of the madrasa's founder, a traditionalist Middle Eastern-based education system. He was born and raised in Jombang, East Java, where the largest traditional Islamic organization, NU, was founded. He studied traditional Islamic institutions or pesantren in Darul Ulum Jombang and the modern-based system of Pesantren in Darussalam Gontor Ponorogo, where he was greatly influenced by this remarkable pesantren, which was

in Neo-Modernist Islamic Thought in Indonesia," *International Journal of Phytoremediation* 21, no. 1 (1997): 279-295, DOI: 10.1080/09596419708721127.

also one of the first to attempt to integrate traditional pesantren learning with modern education

Madjid moved to Jakarta in 1961 and earned a bachelor's degree in 1968 from the Faculty of Adab, Department of Arabic Literature, IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah Ciputat Jakarta. He became acquainted with the Islamic Student Association (HMI) organization at this IAIN. His involvement in HMI was motivated by his father's influence, so he would highly regard Masyumi leaders such as Muhammad Natsir. HMI is an organization that both raised and raised him. Madjid was very active in this organization, going through every level of cadre formation with enthusiasm and seriousness. His career at HMI began at the commissariat level, then progressed to General Chair of the HMI Ciputat Branch until he was elected General Chair of the HMI Executive Board for two consecutive terms, 1966-1968 and 1968-1971.

Madjid also read a lot of books while he was at HMI. Besides Islamic works such as Abul A'la al-Maududi and Hasan al-Bana, he also reads philosophical, sociological, and political works by Karl Marx, Karl Mannheim, Arnold Toynbee, and other prominent thinkers.¹¹ His experiences and read-

¹¹ Syamsul Kurniawan M. Rais, "Neo Modernisme Islam Nurchalish Madjid: Relevansinya dengan Pembaruan Pendidikan Islam," *Khatulistiwa: Journal of Islamic Studies* 1, no. 2 (2011):

ings inspired him to write *Nilai Dasar Perjuangan* (NDP), a guidebook of the Basic Values of Struggle for the HMI organization that every member must read. This book influenced how the organization moves forward, responds to social and political issues, and teaches students to think critically, primarily through the perspectives offered by the organization or predecessors within an academic setting, most notably through his Islamic perspective.¹²

Madjid has been influenced by Fazlur Rahman, a Pakistani-American scholar at the University of Chicago; members of the Renewal Movement became more familiar with Rahman's ideas upon Rahman's first visit to Indonesia in 1973. Afterward, due to Rahman's 1973 visit, Madjid was invited to spend nine months at the University of Chicago in 1976 to participate in the international symposium Rahman and Leonard Binder organized. Then, Madjid returned to Chicago in 1979 to pursue doctoral studies. Rahman's ideas about the need for a new movement of Islamic thought that would pick up where Modernism left off and represent a synthesis of traditional Islamic schol-

135-150, DOI: 10.24260/khatulistiwa.v1i2.187.

¹² M. Ahalla Tsuro, "Intellectual Legacies for the Youth: Nurcholis Madjid's Ideas on History and Development in Indonesia," in *Heritage, Culture and Society: Critical Voices of Young Malays*, edited by Azhar Ibrahim Alwee and Norshahril Saat (Singapore: The Malay Heritage Foundation, 2021), 201-215.

arship, Islamic Modernism, and Western learning have significantly impacted Madjid. It is why, in his Ph.D. from 1984, Madjid specifically investigated reason and revelation in Islam, focusing on the ideas of Ibn Taymiyya.

After returning from Chicago, he joined IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah as a teaching faculty member, becoming crucial in Harun Nasution's efforts to restructure the university. Along with this, Bruinessen noted that one of Madjid's intellectual legacies after his return from Chicago was the establishment of a sophisticated "religious studies club" called Paramadina or Yayasan Paramadina, which aimed to promote "inclusive" religious views and intellectual discourse.¹³ With the assistance of Madjid's friends from his HMI days who were experienced organizers and others who were economically successful, the Yayasan Paramadana managed to provide a new type of religious sermons, or rather seminar lectures, presented in posh modern surroundings, catering to the spiritual needs and intellectual ambitions of the new Muslim middle class. The country's finest thinkers were asked to offer lectures at Paramadina, which were followed by a highly open discussion. It was so successful that Paramadina

had to gradually increase the number of lectures and provide courses on a broader range of religious topics, among which Sufism became more prominent and constructive appreciation of other religions remained a central focus. Paramadina has played a crucial role in expanding the intellectual depth of public discourse on Islam and has not shied away from challenging topics.

Wahid published an opinion piece titled "Pendekar dari Chicago" in *Tempo magazine* on March 27, 1992. The article referred to three prominent first-generation Indonesian scholars who graduated from the University of Chicago in the 1970s and 1980s: Amien Rais, Syafii Maarif, and Nurcholis Madjid. Regardless of the roles and contributions of the first two names to the national political and socio-religious aspects of society, Wahid observes that Madjid took a different approach to various social, religious, and political issues at the time, emphasizing openness to community and searching for a place where people could discover shared values. For example, Madjid spoke out against Partai Islam (Islamic Political Party) because of their exclusivity and the use of Islam to serve the political agenda of a select few; thus, his statement "Islam Yes, Partai Islam No" represented his thought aiming to criticize the stigmatization of some Muslim circles that championed Islamic Sharia (law) by offering critical and libe-

¹³ Martin van Bruinessen, "Nurcholish Madjid: Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals," *ISIM Review* 17, issue 1 (2006): 22–23, <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/17055>.

ral concepts as a counter-balance to a formal-exclusive understanding.¹⁴

The Contested Discourse of Civil Society

It must be recognized that understanding civil society is neither a definitive nor a ready-made idea. Nevertheless, this discussion must be regarded as an ongoing process. Historically speaking, the concept of civil society developed from socio-political and historical upheavals caused by the shift from a feudal life pattern to an industrial life pattern, where the modernization process involved the move from a feudal to a modern society.¹⁵

Thus, civil society is not a significant concept in the social sciences, according to Cohen and Arato (1992), as cited by Bakti.¹⁶ Its definition is based on at least three competing definitions. The first definition, developed by Hegel and others, emphasized a non-state sphere of influence derived from individualism, capitalism, and industrialization. Both

Hegel and Marx, however, did not distinguish—a feature shared by social scientists—between the various groups and networks involved in this sphere.

The second definition was introduced by Gramsci (1971), who defined state behavior by judging it concerning citizenship and determining whether the state develops an effective civil mechanism or institutions that prevent individuals or groups from being victimized and abused. Gramsci saw business corporations as central to civil society, alongside industrialization and individualism. The state and public spheres overlap and merge to the point where it is difficult to tell where one ends and the other begins. The third definition is introduced in the works of Lipset (1981), Colas (1997), and Habermas (1996, 1989), which focus on the interaction of voluntary groups with other spheres and is shared by all social sciences. Aside from the above definition, Ibn Khaldun introduced civil society discourse in the fourteenth century. He illustrated the concept of *hadara*, which translates as civilization (from the root civil as in civil society). Then, this term is articulated by scholars with the terms *masyarakat madani* and *masyarakat sipil*. However, neither refers to the market or the private sphere nor does it regard the sphere as independent, as the Western authors mentioned above.¹⁷

¹⁴ Nurcholis Madjid, *Indonesia* (Jakarta: Yayasan Paramadina, 2004); Tsauro, "Intellectual Legacies for the Youth," 201–215.

¹⁵ Iskandar Agung and Runtini, "Civil Society Pendidikan Karakter Bangsa," *Jurnal Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan* 16, no. 9 (2010): 267–279, DOI: 10.24832/jpnk.v16i9.518.

¹⁶ Andi Faisal Bakti, "Islam and Modernity: Nurcholis Madjid's Interpretation of Civil Society, Pluralism, Secularization, and Democracy," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 33, no. 3 (2005): 486–505, DOI: 10.1163/156853105775013634.

¹⁷ Bakti, "Islam and Modernity"; Robert W.

In the Indonesian context, the discourse on civil society only emerged in the early 1990s. It intensified after the middle of the decade when the military regime hinted at the possibility of reducing its dominance over the state. The discourse has grown significantly since 1997, when the Asian economic crisis began, and has continued through the fall of Soeharto's New Order regime to the present day. The discourse has progressed along two lines: the discussion of an ideal society where justice and tolerance reign and a theoretical framework to explain the emergence of civil organizations regarded as counterbalancing the state.¹⁸ Furthermore, the search for the genealogical concept of civil society narrows to two poles of thought represented by modernist and traditional groups. This conception is likely influenced by Ibn Khaldun's Analysis of Civil Society, as the discourse arose when modernists translated civil society into *masyarakat madani*. In contrast, traditionalists translated it literally into *masyarakat sipil*.¹⁹

Hefner, "Islam, State, and Civil Society: ICMI and the Struggle for the Indonesian Middle Class," *Indonesia* 56 (October 1993): 1-36, <https://hdl.handle.net/1813/54013>.

¹⁸ Muhammad Fuad, "Civil Society in Indonesia: The Potential and Limits of Muhammadiyah," *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 17, no. 2 (2002): 133-163, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41057084>.

¹⁹ Agung and Rumtini, "Civil Society Pendidikan Karakter Bangsa"; Adi Suryadi Culla, *Masyarakat Madani: Pemikiran, Teori,*

Further investigation reveals that the term civil society originates in Arabic, *mudun*, and *madaniyah*, which means civilization. The term is synonymous with the term civilization in English. Civil society refers to the idea that an ideal society is one with advanced civilization. Civil society is a social system based on moral principles that balance individual liberty and social stability. The paradigm for using the term civil society is likely to be influenced by Naquib al-Attas' concept of *al-Mujtama' al-Madani*,²⁰ which defines it as the concept of an ideal society consisting of two major components, namely urban society and civilized society. Civil society is, in essence, a community structure that promotes the values of tolerance and plurality. The definition of civil society refers to the Prophet Muhammad's Medina society, which is described as an ideal prototype of a democratic, egalitarian, just, and civilized society.

In the meantime, the academic discourse examines the relationship between the state and civil society. One viewpoint considers civic society as a state function. The state has the

dan Relevansinya dengan Cita-Cita Reformasi (Jakarta: Rajawali Pers, 1999); Tajuddin, Muhammad Saleh, Muhamad Amar Mahmad, and Solahuddin Abd. Hamid. "Ibn Khaldun's Concept of Civil Society and its Relation to the Discourse of Indonesian Civil Society." *JICSA* 3, no. 2 (2014): 1-11. DOI:10.24252/JICSA.V3I2.781.

²⁰ Culla, *Masyarakat Madani*.

authority to enforce the norms that ensure civility and order. Based on this premise, it is suggested that, particularly in Indonesia, what has to be stressed is not "civil society" but a "civil state"—a state capable of maintaining democratic civility and order. This argument suggests that the development of a civil society is wholly dependent on the development of a civil state. A civil society has not formed in Indonesia because a civil state has yet to develop. The concept that the relationship between the state and civil society in Indonesia is fundamentally complementary exemplifies an alternative viewpoint.²¹

Another critical point to highlight is that civil society should meet some essential characteristics as a distinguishing feature. Civil society differs fundamentally from feudal society, characterized by excessive service values for rulers, officials, bureaucrats, or elders.

As a result, civil society has prerequisites that become its characteristics, such as:

1. The existence of enforcement pillars meant enforcement pillars are institutions that are part of social control that function to criticize discriminatory policies issued by authorities and can

also participate in fighting for various inspirations from oppressed people. These enforcement pillars may include:

- a. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), whose roles and vision are to assist and fight for the aspirations and interests of people oppressed or harmed by government policies.
- b. The press, which is tasked with and can criticize, is part of social control; thus, it can analyze and publish various government policies relating to the general interests of society.
- c. Supremacy of law (Law Enforcement). Every citizen is obligated to adhere to the applicable legal rules. To create a civilized order of life, the supremacy of law should also provide guarantees and protection against all forms of oppression by individuals and groups that violate legal norms, as well as all forms of suppression of human rights.
- d. College/university is a gathering place for the academic community to exchange ideas, experiences, and knowledge to find breakthroughs and other alternative measures to solve various problems the larger community faces.
- e. Political party. Political parties are also an integral part of these pillars of civil society because they serve as a vehicle for citizens to channel

²¹ Fuad, "Civil Society in Indonesia"; Robert W. Hefner, "Islam, State, and Civil Society: ICM and the Struggle for the Indonesian Middle Class," *Indonesia* 56 (October 1993): 1-36, <https://hdl.handle.net/1813/54013>.

their aspirations through political channels.

2. the availability of free public space as a vehicle for expressing opinions in which every individual has freedom and is in an equal position to carry out discourse transactions, exchange ideas, and political praxis without fear of threats from power or the government.²²

Neo Modernism and Civil Society: An Alignment Point

Fazlur Rahman, a Pakistani-born professor from the University of Chicago, is credited with introducing Neo-Modernism to Indonesia. Since his first visit to Indonesia in 1974, when he became well-known among Indonesian Muslim scholars, he has maintained regular touch with several Indonesian intellectuals, including Madjid. Majid's association with the two encouraged him to pursue his PhD in Chicago.²³

According to Rahman, Neo-Modernism emerges when Islamic intellectuals become dissatisfied with Modernism and its call for the need for rationalism and Islam's purification at the expense of classical Islamic scholarship. Rahman compared this neo-Modernism to Abduh's early Modernism,

²² Agung and Rumtini, "Civil Society Pendidikan Karakter Bangsa."

²³ Barton, "Neo-Modernism; Barton, "Indonesia's Nurcholish Madjid and Abdurrahman Wahid as Intellectual "Ulama".

which sought to incorporate secular Western learning within Islam. However, unlike later Modernism, Rahman believes that neo-Modernism will not trample on classical Islamic scholarship and cultural practices.²⁴

What is the relationship between Fazlur Rahman's Neo-Modernism and Madjid and Wahid's movement theory? Nevertheless, despite their different academic backgrounds and environments, Nurcholish Madjid and Abdurrahman Wahid were undeniably the two most influential intellectuals of Indonesia's Islamic Neo-Modernist movement. Due to his genealogical solid ties to Nahdlatul Ulama and his descent from the organization's founder, Gus Dur belongs to the more traditionalist group. Cak Nur was raised in a modernist culture, as evidenced by his attendance at Gontor Islamic Boarding School and his membership in the Masyumi despite being born into a traditionalist culture.

Furthermore, although, in many cases, Gus Dur uses a more casual (non-formal approach), whereas Cak Nur appears to use a more scholarly approach to disseminate those ideas to the public, it is, indeed, remarkable to highlight some essential points among the civil society ideas of Madjid

²⁴ Greg Barton, Ihsan Yilmaz, and Nicholas Morieson, "Authoritarianism, Democracy, Islamic Movements and Contestations of Islamic Religious Ideas in Indonesia," *Religions* 12, no. 8 (2021): 1-20, DOI: 10.3390/rel12080641.

and Wahid reflect several aspects of the notion Neo-Modernism.

First and foremost, it is crucial to understand the value of progressivity, which is illustrated in how they align that meaning with modernity, progress, and development. Both Cak Nur and Gus Dur are critical in paying attention to social justice issues, accompanied by optimism about the direction in which humans are progressing and a willingness to appreciate the rapid course of social change. In the early 1970s, Madjid often used terms like secularization and de-sacralization, whereas Wahid preferred dynamization over secularization or de-sacralization. Madjid defined "secularization" further as the "de-sacralization" of all concepts and institutions that the Muslim community had turned into sacred objects. Through speeches and writings, Madjid promoted his ideas about Indonesian Islam. For instance, he did not want to remove Islam from the public sphere and confine it to private piety. He actively encouraged his Muslim brothers and sisters to interpret Islam openly, to practice tolerance (*al-hanifa al-samha*), to recognize plurality (*al-ta'addudiyya*), and to embrace inclusivity (*al-taqdāmuniyya*). He demonstrates the intersection of Islam and democracy through the principle of *maslaha*.

The best example of Gus Dur's Progressivity in Islamic thought can be seen in his thoughts on the Indigeniza-

tion of Islam (*Pribumisasi Islam*). Gus Dur believes there is a concerted effort to inculcate in the minds of Indonesian Muslims the notion that Islam is associated with the Middle East. Consequently, local cultural aspects have been removed and have lost their vitality. For instance, Men must maintain a beard; a mosque must have a dome. Additionally, lives are affected and become highly formalistic. Wahid, even though Islam began in Arab countries, believes that Arabic culture is synonymous with Islam because there are fundamental contrasts between Islam and Arabic culture. Profound Islam, the context of education is the material found in the Qur'an and Sunnah, while its manifestation in the Arab world is a cultural product. Therefore, Middle Eastern cultural patterns do not need to be included in the daily lives of Muslims in this country. However, the reconciliation of Islam as a religion into local culture allows innovative adaptation to that cultural diversity. It is the essence of the Islamic indigenization.²⁵

Moreover, Esposito's work also revealed that despite the NU's traditionalist, Gus Dur has followed an accommodationist path that goes beyond that of his more traditional predecessors

²⁵ A. Soheh Mukarom, "Pribumisasi dalam Pandangan Abdurrahman Wahid," *Religious: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama dan Lintas Budaya* 2, no. 1 (2017): 63–74, DOI: 10.15575/rjsalb.v2i1.2217.

and modernist organizations like the Muhammadiyah. Gus Dur's thought is based on three pillars: 1) His conviction is that Islam must be creatively and, at times, substantively reinterpreted or reformulated to respond to modern life's demands; 2) He believes that Islam should not be the state religion in the Indonesian context; 3) Islam should be an inclusive, democratic, pluralistic force rather than an exclusive state ideology.

Gus Dur exemplifies the Neo-modernist trend among the new generation of Muslim intellectuals in Indonesia due to his outstanding contributions and dedication to liberating the Muslim community from the constraints of conservative and modernist scripturalism. He makes a concerted effort to comprehend the Qur'an and Sunnah in light of their historical context to reconstruct socio-ethical principles for modern Muslims. He argues that Islamic principles underpin values such as fundamental human rights, social justice, equitable development, and democracy; consequently, modern Muslims' pursuit of these values is neither an ideological compromise nor a cultural blending with Western liberalism but rather an endeavor firmly rooted in Islamic teachings.²⁶

In light of the preceding discussion, both scholars' conceptions of movement

are a solid basis for constructing a civil society, as they refer to the same objective: the demand for change within the ummah in response to the challenges of modernity while remaining rooted in Islamic tradition. In the 1980s, however, this expression was not used because it led to numerous public misunderstandings.

Second, the thoughts on the importance of the foundation and state constitution are based on Pancasila, not religious sectarianism (theocracy). Madjid and Wahid undeniably impacted the formation of a new concept of democracy and pluralism after the establishment of the Reformation era. Gus Dur is opposed to Indonesia becoming a secular state. However, he opposes Islamic fundamentalism and asserts that Islam is a superior, all-encompassing way of life compared to existing secular regimes. He believes that Islam should not be viewed as an alternative to any human-made ideology but rather as an eternal source of moral and ethical guidance for Muslims under any regime. In Indonesia's Pancasila pluralism, neither Islam nor any other religion should conflict with the state or another religion. In practice, he founded the Democratic Forum in 1991 as an interreligious coalition, primarily comprised of Christian intellectuals, to counteract the recent trend of exclusivism within the Muslim community.

²⁶ Barton, "Neo-Modernism".

Gus Dur believes that modern Muslims have two options: a more traditional legal-formalistic Islam or a more universal, cosmopolitan, pluralistic, Islamically informed worldview. Its monotheism (*tawhid*), law (*fiqh*), and ethics (*akhlaq*) all reflect the universalism of Islam. These result in Islam's profound concern for human dignity: The principles of equality before the law, protection of society from despotic powers, maintenance of the rights of the weak, and limitation of the authority of political power reflect Islam's concern for human dignity.²⁷

Cak Nur, in particular, argued that Islam does not need to be represented in Parliament by specific political parties to define the character of Indonesia and its people, as it is also well presented in his famous statement, "Islam Yes, Islam Party No." Indeed, one of Cak Nur's most significant accomplishments was demonstrating how religion can contribute to a modern, pluralistic, and democratic society. Indonesia has a type of nationalism that is neither Islamic nor secular but is solely and vehemently religious.

Active state support for religion, he added, did not die with the failure of the Jakarta Charter and the state's embrace

of Pancasila in 1945, with the rejection of Islamic law in 1952, or with the rejection of Islamic law in 2002, or with the repeated failures of Islamists in electoral competition despite moderating their demands. Instead, the state's support for religious orthodoxy over liminal and heterodox faiths demonstrates the prioritization of religion.²⁸

According to Cak Nur, the Pancasila (five principles) are the best alternative to Islamic theocracy: belief in God, humanitarianism, national unity, democracy manifested through people's representatives, and social justice. Pancasila provides a comprehensive foundation for establishing a modern state without abandoning the interests of existing religious groups, which have also played an essential role in the formation of Indonesia. This process of nation-building results in what Jeremy Menchik refers to as "godly nationalism," an imagined community constituted by a shared theism and mobilized by the state in collaboration with religious organizations in society.²⁹

²⁸ Abdullah, "Nurcholish Madjid and Religious Pluralism in Indonesian Islam."

²⁹ Jeremy Menchik, "Productive Intolerance: Godly Nationalism in Indonesia," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 56, no. 3 (2014): 591-621, DOI:10.1017/S0010417514000267; Abdul Rozak et al., "Political Thoughts and Socio-Cultural Nationalism Ideologies of Nurcholish Madjid on Strengthening Democracy, Civil Societies and Civic Virtues in Indonesia," *Asian Social Science* 11, no. 27 (2015): 142-154, DOI: 10.5539/ass.v11n27p142.

²⁷ John L. Esposito, "Abdurrahman Wahid: Scholar-President," in *Makers of Contemporary Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito and John O. Voll (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 199-218.

Cak Nur's critical points of view may also be found throughout his different works, which is another crucial element to emphasize. For instance, he writes in his book, *Islam, Doktrin dan Peradaban: Sebuah Telaah Kritis tentang Masalah Keimanan, Kemanusiaan, dan Kemodernan [Islam: Doctrine and Civilization—A Critical Study on the Problem of Faith, Humanity, and Modernity]*, that understanding the plurality of society is crucial for social order in a developed society; according to him, accepting pluralism indicates the health and fairness of a democratic society; pluralism implies not only a readiness to accept the right of other groups to exist but also a willingness to act reasonably toward the others based on peace and mutual respect.³⁰ Ultimately, a comprehensive understanding of pluralism and democratic society would be a significant factor in developing civil society.

Conclusion

Despite their diverse academic backgrounds and academic surroundings, Nurcholish Madjid (Cak Nur) and Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) were the two most influential thinkers of Indonesia's Islamic Neo-Modernist movement. Cak Nur accomplished his education in a more Western academic atmosphere,

³⁰ Nurcholis Madjid, *Islam, Doktrin dan Peradaban: Sebuah Telaah Kritis tentang Masalah Keimanan, Kemanusiaan, dan Kemodernan* (Jakarta: Yayasan Paramadina, 1992).

while Gus Dur completed his education in a Middle Eastern country. Furthermore, Gus Dur is a member of the more traditionalist group due to his deep ancestry ties to Nahdlatul Ulama and descent from the organization's founder. Despite being born into a traditionalist culture, Cak Nur was reared in a more modernist culture, as indicated by his attendance at Gontor Islamic Boarding School and membership in the Masyumi.

This paper also discussed the relevance of the Madjid and Wahid's views on civil society to Neo-Modernism in two crucial aspects: how they define the value of progressivity and the significance of the foundation and state constitution being based on Pancasila, not religious sectarianism (theocracy)

Both invite an open, inclusive, and progressive perspective of the relationship between Islam and civil society to uphold the desire for change within *the ummah* in response to the difficulties of modernity while being rooted in Islamic tradition. Moreover, it argues that neo-Modernist interpretations of Islam and Civil Society have been constructive for Indonesia in promoting democratic reforms, as they believe that Pancasila is the state's final constitution and that in Indonesia's Pancasila pluralism, neither Islam nor any other religion should be in conflict with the state or another religion.

Finally, while diminishing insight and enthusiasm for the spirit of progressive Islamic studies, revisiting both Cak Nur and Gus Dur's Neo-Modernism ideas can foster a spirit of progressive and moderate thought for the future advancement of Islam and Indonesia.

Bibliography

- Abdullah, M. A. "Nurcholish Madjid and Religious Pluralism in Indonesian Islam." In *Pluralism in Islamic Contexts: Ethics, Politics and Modern Challenges*, edited by Mohammed Hashas, 189–199. Cham, Switzerland: Springer Verlag, 2021. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-030-66089-5.
- Abdurrahman, Moeslim. *Islam Transformatif*. Jakarta: Pustaka Firdaus, 1997.
- Agung, Iskandar, and Rumtini. "Civil Society Pendidikan Karakter Bangsa." *Jurnal Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan* 16, no. 9 (2010): 267–279. DOI: 10.24832/jpnk.v16i9.518.
- Bakti, Andi Faisal. "Islam and Modernity: Nurcholish Madjid's Interpretation of Civil Society, Pluralism, Secularization, and Democracy." *Asian Journal of Social Science* 33, no. 3 (2005): 486–505. DOI: 10.1163/156853105775013634.
- Barton, Greg. "Neo-Modernism: A Vital Synthesis of Traditionalist and Modernist Islamic Thought in Indonesia." *Studi Islamika* 2, no. 3 (1995): 1–75. DOI: 10.15408/sdi.v2i3.827.
- _____. "Indonesia's Nurcholish Madjid and Abdurrahman Wahid as Intellectual "Ulama": The Meeting of Islamic Traditionalism and Modernism in neo-Modernist Thought." *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 8, no. 3 (1997): 323–350. DOI: 10.1080/09596419708721130.
- _____. *Biografi Gus Dur: The Authorized Biography of KH. Abdurrahman Wahid*. Yogyakarta: LKiS Pelangi Aksara, 2003.
- Barton, Greg, Ihsan Yilmaz, and Nicholas Morieson. "Authoritarianism, Democracy, Islamic Movements and Contestations of Islamic Religious Ideas in Indonesia." *Religions* 12, no. 8 (2021): 1–20. DOI: 10.3390/rel12080641.
- Bruinessen, Martin van. "Nurcholish Madjid: Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals." *ISIM Review* 17, issue 1 (2006): 22–23. <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/17055>.
- Culla, Adi Suryadi. *Masyarakat Madani: Pemikiran, Teori, dan Relevansinya dengan Cita-Cita Reformasi*. Jakarta: Rajawali Pers, 1999.

- Edwards, Michael. *Civil Society*. Cambridge, UK and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2004.
- Esposito, John L. "Abdurrahman Wahid: Scholar-President." In *Makers of Contemporary Islam*, edited by John L. Esposito and John O. Voll, 199–218. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Fuad, Muhammad. "Civil Society in Indonesia: The Potential and Limits of Muhammadiyah." *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 17, no. 2 (2002): 133–163. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41057084>.
- Hefner, Robert W. "Islam, State, and Civil Society: ICMI and the Struggle for the Indonesian Middle Class." *Indonesia* 56 (October 1993): 1–36. <https://hdl.handle.net/1813/54013>.
- Madjid, N. *Islam, Doktrin dan Peradaban: Sebuah Telaah Kritis tentang Masalah Keimanan, Kemanusiaan, dan Kemodernan [Islam: Doctrine and Civilization—A Critical Study on the Problem of Faith, Humanity and Modernity]*. Jakarta: Yayasan Paramadina, 1992.
- _____. *Indonesia Kita [Our Indonesia]*. Jakarta: Yayasan Paramadina, 2004.
- Menchik, Jeremy. "Productive Intolerance: Godly Nationalism in Indonesia." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 56, no. 3 (2014): 591–621. DOI:10.1017/S0010417514000267.
- Mukarom, A. Soheh. "Pribumisasi dalam Pandangan Abdurrahman Wahid." *Religious: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama dan Lintas Budaya* 2, no. 1 (2017): 63–74. DOI: 10.15575/rjsalb.v2i1.2217.
- Rais, Syamsul Kurniawan M. "Neo Modernisme Islam Nurchalish Madjid: Relevansinya dengan Pembaruan Pendidikan Islam." *Khatulistiwa: Journal of Islamic Studies* 1, no. 2 (2011): 135–150. DOI: 10.24260/khatulistiwa.v1i2.187.
- Rozak, Abdul, Dasim Budimansyah, Endang Sumantri, and Udin S. Winataputra. "Political Thoughts and Socio-Cultural Nationalism Ideologies of Nurcholish Madjid on Strengthening Democracy, Civil Societies and Civic Virtues in Indonesia." *Asian Social Science* 11, no. 27 (2015): 142–154. DOI: 10.5539/ass.v11n27p142.
- Saeed, Abdullah. "Ijtihad and Innovation in Neo-Modernist Islamic Thought in Indonesia." *International Journal of Phytoremediation* 21, no. 1 (1997): 279–295. DOI: 10.1080/09596419708721127.
- Tajuddin, Muhammad Saleh, Muhammad Amar Mahmud, and Solahuddin

Abd. Hamid. "Ibn Khaldun's Concept of Civil Society and its Relation to the Discourse of Indonesian Civil Society." *JICSA* 3, no. 2 (2014): 1–11. DOI:10.24252/JICSA.V3I2.781.

Tsauro, M. Ahalla. "Intellectual Legacies for the Youth: Nurcholis Madjid's Ideas on History and Development in Indonesia." In *Heritage, Culture and Society: Critical Voices of Young Malays*, edited by Azhar Ibrahim Alwee and Norshahril Saat, 201–215. Singapore: The Malay Heritage Foundation, 2021.