

Chapter 5 Islam, Humanity, and Indonesian Identity

This work was written at a time when the map of global humanity presented a particularly ominous picture, one very far from an image of justice and conviviality. The genocide in the Gaza Strip at the end of December 2008 and through January 2009, a barbarity that was criticized worldwide, was allowed to continue for twenty-two days. Even within Indonesia the situation was far from calm and hopeful. In the formulation of the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, “In a society, justice is only called justice where there is no difference between those who are near to us and those who are far from us.”¹ Here, “we” and “they” must be seen from the perspective of a humanism that is sound and unimpaired, not a bogus humanism. The inequality between rich countries and the rest of the world is vast. The Islamic world, which controls a decisive proportion of the world’s oil energy reserves, has not yet awakened sufficiently to play its historical role, owing to poor leadership. I find this situation alarming. Others, too, who are honest and clear-headed in their thinking are surely aware of it, but the magnitude of the problem has thwarted them. Fortunately, they still speak out on behalf of justice for all.

Those at the apex of the pyramid of power are generally not interested in the serious problems that the Muslim *umat* must face in achieving a just and civilized society. They are not even genuinely interested in defending the dignity of their own people, whose conditions continue to deteriorate. Their energy is drained by the never-ending struggles of power politics. These rulers think nothing of selling the dignity and sovereignty of an entire nation to foreign interests just to earn foreign exchange to cover the corruption-riddled and chronically deficit-saddled national budget. Indonesia is well known in the ranks of such countries for its many sales of state assets, but it continues in this path. Our nation still has a “low birth rate” of political visionaries who are ready to defend this country consciously and responsibly.

But, as the analysis presented in this book shows, Islam, Indonesianness, and humanity can not only walk together, but these three values can unite in building a uniquely Indonesian “pleasure park.” These three “value forces” must be complementary. In this pleasure park, the universal character of Islam appears in the form of a just and civilized human-

ity. Islam is the religion embraced by the majority of the population of Nusantara, and all movements of an Indonesian character must always bear in mind this socio-historical reality in the interest of security and peace.

The success of this religion in achieving its noble aim must be pursued in noble and civilized ways. Off this path, Islam will halt at the level of soulless ritual, while its main mission will have fallen along the wayside. What remains will only be its skeleton in a formal, if not monstrous, shape, silent as to the subtle, refined, and refreshing values of humanity. It would no longer be an Islam that lives and brings life, nor indeed, prophetic Islam or Quranic Islam, which is always the inspiration for doing what is best for all creatures: Did not Allah create death and life to test who amongst us is best in deed?²

Even without evaluating the various sociological factors scientifically, I now see, after years of observation, two possibilities for all radical movements on the left or the right: First, there are movements that will never grow, their energy dissipated in fruitless pursuits, even if they act in the name of God. Second, there are movements that are born to fail, lasting only till the first harvest season and then disappearing, leaving behind much historical trauma and many victims. The PKI throughout Indonesia and DI/TII (Dar'ul Islam/Tentara Islam Indonesia – the House of Islam/the Indonesian Army of Islam) in Java, Sumatra, and Sulawesi are examples; their historical legacy has not been long gone from us. We will never know for sure to how many lives were cut short and how much of the people's property was stripped from them in the name of "belief" or of Marxism. If movements like these represent the mainstream, then you can imagine the fate of Islam in Indonesia. Perhaps all that will remain will be memories. Luckily, its mainstream still advances in reason and conscience, even though the pull of power politics frequently weakens the main mission of this mainstream. At a time when politics has become a livelihood, there are naturally not many leaders who can survive in the sphere of idealism.

W.S. Rendra's proposal of a "Culture Machine" [*Mesin Budaya*] representing the people's sovereignty for shaping a just and creative Indonesia of the future interests me. In his speech upon being awarded the title of Doctor Honoris Causa from Gadjah Mada University on March 4, 2008, Rendra proposed the following: "The 'Cultural Machine' that is the people's sovereignty, just, humanitarian, and appreciative of the dynamics of life, is the 'Cultural Machine' that can stimulate the vitality and creativity of the members of society within this state. But the 'Cultural Machine' that is the rulers' sovereignty, which oppresses and colonizes, is elitist, not populist, and is very dangerous."³

Rendra is speaking to the level of the state in Indonesia that is not much changed since the colonial period. "The rulers' sovereignty" nearly always defeats "the people's sovereignty." "People's sovereignty" is another name for a healthy democracy. The historian Anhar Gonggong makes a point about the relationship between democratic institutions and their protagonists that is well worth reflecting on: healthy democracy is maintained "not only by having the institutions of a democratic state, but particularly by the emergence of leaders of character and personal integrity in those institutions."⁴ As mentioned repeatedly here, democracy always demands political players of honesty, responsibility, broad-mindedness, and, obviously, integrity. This integrity is what Indonesia needs to form and nurture in its political players, for the building of a democratic system that will always be on the side of the common good.

At the same time, in society, we perceive a culture of harshness displayed by a small group of people lacking in wisdom. This has given rise to a widespread negative reaction holding that Islam is no longer the source of blessings, as has been often said; that instead, Islam has been forced to become the source of calamity and of violence by irresponsible people teaching mistaken and ahistorical interpretations. Muslims must bring meritorious deeds to confront them. This means that we must be able to provide a better alternative if we assess a system as unjust or un-Islamic. This can only be accomplished by great minds that are sincere, patient, and intelligent. It is not the work of rioters or demonstrators with cries of "*Allahu akbar!*" but of one who is noble, serious, and properly directed. The weakness of Islamic civilization in this century is an *umat* that still fails to offer a system of life that realizes the dictum, "a blessing for the universe." This great historical claim awaits the appearance of young people who are talented, inclusive, and broad-minded, who have humanitarian commitments that are genuine and knowledge-based. Creating an Islam in Indonesia that shows a friendly face to its surroundings is the main task that cannot be forgotten for even a second.

The mainstream as represented by the NU and Muhammadiyah, with all its various shortcomings, has nevertheless been a trade mark for Islamic movements that are moderate, modern, open, inclusive, and constructive. This does not mean that there are no scoundrels in this mainstream, but they have not put their stamp on it and they are usually sidelined from the inner management and leadership. Their thinking seems too foreign to be able to fuse with a mainstream that is Indonesian in character and promotes a friendly Islam. Contemporary Indonesia is fortunate because these two big currents are not moving apart, but rather coming closer to complement each other's strengths and cover each other's weaknesses and shortcomings.

Although the strength of the NU is almost entirely concentrated in Java and South Kalimantan, its national influence must always be considered. Naturally, the instinct for power politics of some of its leading figures often disrupts the advance of the NU as a cultural and intellectual movement. This problem has forced the NU to rethink the future framework of Indonesian Islam. For me, cultural movements have to be supported by bold intellectual qualities, but also accompanied by patience and sympathy. The NU has charted an extraordinary path in intellectual development, thanks to the modern education that has spread far into the world of the *pesantren*.

In the meantime, Muhammadiyah, which is slightly more impervious to the temptations of power politics, has the slogan, "Muhammadiyah doesn't go anywhere, but is everywhere." In reality, such a position cannot always be maintained, to say nothing if a top cadre is involved in national politics. Experience during the rather chaotic Reform era presents strong proof of that statement. Naturally, it would be ideal if the NU and Muhammadiyah were led by cultural power that was cohesive but not allergic to politics. Taking part in power on these two cultural bases would be decisive in influencing the path of Indonesian history, before, now, and in the future.

As to the young intellectuals of the NU and the Muhammadiyah, I hope they devote their innovative and creative thinking to an Indonesian Islam in the post-Muhammadiyah and post-NU paradigm. I have often been in dialogue with and associated with young people in this mainstream. My conclusion is that they have a very open attitude, quite different from the elder generation. We have to understand that Muhammadiyah and the NU are not religions, but rather movements to achieve the aims of Islam – which include the entire dimension of human existence – to uphold justice, brotherhood, and community in pluralistic Indonesian society.

Therefore, seeing the shining intellectual development among the young people of these two major streams, we may ponder whether perhaps it is only a question of time before the leadership falls into their hands in a democratic fashion. With that in mind, these young folk should not lose hope when faced with leaders whom they view as neither visionary nor engaged, and they should beware of running off to form new splinter groups. These would be very difficult to grow, and all the while they consume so much energy and thought in the effort.

In my view, the wise approach would be for them to stay within the wave of the mainstream. They should maintain strong, but respectful, critical powers, while creating a field conducive to the appearance of a new generation of leaders possessing moral and intellectual integrity that is recognized on all sides. The young members of the NU and

Muhammadiyah must constantly conduct intensive dialogue in their efforts to formulate and settle the form of the relationship of Islam and Indonesian identity. Movement in that direction has commenced, but we still need a sharper vision so that the Islamic image that appears is that of an Islam that shelters and protects all groups. The war drums being beaten by a small clutch of individuals must be confronted with the drumbeats of peace, justice, courtesy, inclusiveness, and pluralism. In this effort we employ means that are fully authoritative because we are certain of the principle of truth that we hold.

What I have written here is far from perfect; these young people and the young people of other religions will perfect it for me. My message to them is to keep up their spiritual stamina and sincere commitment to a just and prestigious Indonesia. We look to the structuring of Indonesia as a “dwelling,” to borrow the expression of Jakob Oetama, “to provide that feeling of comfort in our lives together as a nation and as a state”⁵ – not an Indonesia torn to pieces by centrifugal forces or the clash of parochial interests in the name of faction, religion, ethnic group, and history.

Indonesia is still in the process of becoming an intact and united nation. Indonesia is not a given. Rather, it has to be constantly and ceaselessly struggled for. Our negligence since Proclamation shows that we take a frivolous attitude toward maintaining and guarding this thing that is no given. It is a sign of thinking that everything is in order. This parochial point of view is one of the reasons why Indonesia frequently faces sociopolitical explosions that drain energy and attention, and, not infrequently, blood.

The potential within the NU and Muhammadiyah for guarding the integrity of the Indonesian nation is really extraordinary. That the older leadership occasionally feels uncomfortable with the doings of these youth is nothing strange. After all, every progressive intellectual breakthrough is sure to create shock and possibly even suspicion; provided the ideas being offered stand on a sufficiently strong religious and rational foundation, however, the old order will quietly go along. We generally see this occurring because of the generation gap in reading, information, and the scope of social intercourse. Young people are perhaps more ravenous in devouring new and fresh reading material, while the old cling to the treasury of classics whose relevance to new developments is uncertain. This appears to be the historical tendency in almost all Muslim countries. Islamic civilization cannot be allowed to become the proverbial dry *sirih* leaf on the stone, that is, “reluctant to live and afraid to die.” We need courage for making a breakthrough by standing with both feet on religious arguments that are understood properly and intelligently, textually as well as contextually. Let us not make an idol of classical

Islamic exegesis so that no one has the courage to interpret Islam in a new, fresh, and responsible way. Such new interpretations must be valid in scientific terms, but still remain within the parameters of sincere belief.

All Islamic movements in Indonesia must always remember and carefully take into consideration that clashes that carry the scent of religion, ethnicity, and culture must not happen again in the future. The price to be paid is too high. To a certain extent these have already wrecked the atmosphere of our lovely pleasure park of Nusantara. Indonesia, a nation-state that is less than a century old and has experienced the bitter and the sweet, must learn as skillfully as it can and pluck wisdom from a past that is filled with beautiful experiences and things of great value. Because Indonesians have chosen democracy as their political system and have struggled in its name for a century now, since the beginning of the national movement, we cannot be half-hearted in defending it, however exhausting it can be.

Once again, democracy in the hands of political adventurers can be a source of disaster and suffering, as has been well demonstrated by America's imperialist foreign policy under President George W. Bush, who used various false pretexts to destroy other nations. Similar abuses of democracy happen everywhere on earth. But here is another question: has any political system in history been known to establish equality among people except democracy? The Islamic political system in the period following the era of the Rightly Guided Caliphs (after 661 CE), even though there were some who still governed properly as caliphs, was no more and no less than a system of monarchs who trampled the principles of basic human rights and the freedom of humankind, deviating in both very far from the egalitarian teachings of the Quran.

If we speak about Islam, Indonesianness, and humanity, it means we have entered a domain that is deep and wide. The future of Indonesia we are to build must be accomplished in such a way that anyone who lives in Nusantara feels true pleasure and security, because the principle of justice is valid for all. There will be no discrimination of any kind. Because the majority of the population is Muslim, its responsibility is to create an Indonesia that is just and presents a friendly face, an Indonesia that is very great, in line with the great numbers of this population. But such a responsibility will be hard to carry out if the quality of the Muslim *umat* remains below what it should be, impoverished, badly educated, and volatile. Some even espouse the doctrine of a quick death because they are not being brave enough to live, a doctrine of madness and chaos.

In my opinion as a Muslim, even people of no faith must be protected by the state so long as they obey the constitution and the statutory laws

prevailing in Indonesia, and so long as similar provisions also are in effect for those who acknowledge profession of a faith. The state has no right to punish someone of no faith, so long as this person has not broken the law. Having or not having faith is one's free choice, as long as that is conducted honestly and with full responsibility, and it is not exclusionary. In this perspective, converting from one religion to another or choosing not to have a religion is a basic human right that must be respected. Classic Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), which condemns apostates to death, must be reexamined, as it goes against the spirit of the Quran, even if Allah is angry at those who change their faith.

Perhaps the picture I am drawing here is too idealistic, but isn't progress nothing more than dynamic and creative movement toward the ideal? The more a reality nears the imagined ideal, then it is our task to shift that ideal to a higher level, and so continue on like that without stopping. The moment reality fuses with the ideal, we might say that civilization-building has reached a dead end, if not indeed begun to decay. Therefore, the historical dialectic must always be examined so that worn-out elements are put aside without hesitation or placed in the museum of history, while those that are positive and fresh are allowed to unite with new elements in a synthesis that invigorates life. The Quran commands: "O you who have believed, respond to Allah and to the Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life. And know that Allah intervenes between a man and his heart and that to Him you will be gathered."⁶ This command calls out for humankind to move toward a life that is meaningful, pleasant and creative, under the divine shelter of theology and prophethood – not to futile death, even in the name of God.

The Quran must be understood holistically, and the red thread of its teaching followed, so that before our eyes stretches out a clear view of the world that is refined, beautiful, and filled with a sense of justice and with blessings for all creatures, without exception. Perhaps such an ideal may be unattainable on the face of this earth. Still, the wheels of civilization must move tirelessly in that direction, even if the way is choked by brambles and thorns. What we call the struggles of life consist in pushing aside those brambles and thorns, bravely and wisely. Whenever the Muslim *umat* can present the colors of life replete with humanistic values, that is the essence of the mission that invigorates, the true mission. Caliph Umar bin Khattab's carrying out the mission through excellent example is what made the Palestinians, who were still not Muslim at that time, weep when he was about to return to Medina. They seemed to be saying, "Umar, do not leave Palestine, even if we and you are not of the same faith." Can Indonesian Islam

bring the nation into the future under the umbrella of “a civilized and just sense of humanity,” where non-Muslims feel free and comfortable living in Nusantara? A Protestant clergyman from North Sulawesi once asked me, “What does ‘properly religious’ mean?” to which I quickly answered, “To be authentic in one’s own religion, in accordance with one’s own holy scripture, understood properly and with complete sincerity.”

In order to strengthen our Indonesianness and humanity, we should no longer look at the Jakarta Charter from a formal and legal perspective, but rather we need to take its spirit by establishing justice for all, without discrimination, throughout Nusantara. At the same time, Pancasila must open the door as widely as possible to accept the moral sources of the religions that flourish in Indonesia. And Islam must provide the greatest contribution. Why Islam? Not simply because it is practiced by the majority of the population, but because the quality of its teaching makes that very much a possibility. None of the five principles of Pancasila, if understood properly and fully, need to be questioned from the angle of Islamic theology. Yet the first *sila*, “God, the One, the Only,” will become an empty principle if justice and prosperity for all do not become the reality in Indonesia. The traumas of the past, when Islam was involved in power politics, must never recur. To put it differently, the Islam that must be offered is an Islam that is prepared to walk hand in hand with the values of Indonesianness and the values of civilized humanity.

Thus, a proper religious attitude must be seen in the honest, whole-hearted, and broad-minded behavior of the religion’s adherents. The differences in each theological system must not be used to diminish the quality of friendship between communities, but rather should be made into a source of mutual enrichment in the religious experience of the Indonesian nation. So, the proposal of this book – to place Islam in the framework of Indonesian identity and humanity – may be something for all groups to reflect on, so that we will be ready to speak with each other in language that is sincere, tolerant, and constructive. Constructive, I mean to say, of an Indonesia that is sovereign, endowed with self-esteem, just, and prosperous – not an Indonesia that is like a *kampung* (village) with no *kampung* head, mocked and manipulated by foreign powers.

In the context of Indonesian Muslim thinkers’ concerns about the future of Islam in the framework of Indonesian identity and humanity, the words of Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana are still worth pondering. STA spoke them at the end of his oration on February 11, 1975, at the Building of National Awakening, in Jakarta:

If we look at and compare various expressive cultures, that is, cultures that are ruled by intuition, feelings, artistic and religious fantasies, perhaps the culture of Islam, professed by the majority of Indonesians and which is strong in its religious, scientific, and economic values, seems intended and searches for the answers to human questions of the twentieth century.

But to do that, it may be that the great Islamic thinkers must return to formulating a balance between religion and science, between the secret sanctity of life and the universe with the reality of the empirical world. Who knows, in this age, Indonesia with the largest number of Muslims in the world, may lead the Islamic community of the whole world in facing the times that are coming.⁷

STA's optimism about the future of Islam is a qualified optimism and not an automatic one. The expression "a balance between religion and science" outlines one condition required for Indonesian Islam to appear to lead. For STA, in scrutinizing the map of Indonesian Islam, "the approach through the deductive method is what must be constantly put to the test by the inductive method in the form of empirical experience. In other words, Islamic doctrine that has religious, economic, and scientific value must be brought down to earth to give a basic answer to the questions confronting the human *umat* in this century and in the ones to come."⁸

I have said many times that to make Islam the deciding factor in Indonesia's future, the legal-formal approach will not be effective because it is blind to the sociological reality of this diverse and rich nation. Only a person who cannot read a map would attempt to import to Indonesia the experiences of contemporary Arabia or Afghanistan with Islam as a political and cultural force. It could have only one ending: failure. The sociocultural maps of these counties are very different from the map of Indonesia. Therefore, domestic Indonesian sharia regulations cannot be imposed by force, as this would invite unrest and suspicion. And not just suspicion. In practice, such local regulations themselves do not bring virtue and justice. Yet is the final purpose of sharia not to establish justice and prosperity for all?

Those imports, whether inspired by Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, the Jamaat-e Islami of Pakistan, or the Hizb Al-Tahrir (Party of Liberation) of Palestine, whether they bear the banner of the transnational caliphate or of the jihad ideology of Afghanistan, will wither in the soil of Indonesia. The cultural makeup is very different in Indonesia, which will surely reject them. The experience of communism, which tried to subjugate Indonesia, also ended in national catastrophe, while at a global level this

ideology was led to the gallows of history. In short, the soil of Nusantara is not fertile for extremist political ideologies in any format, right, left, or center. Historical experience shows that the chemical makeup of Indonesian culture rejects all forms of extremism. Nonetheless, we are aware that forms of extremist ideology will still appear sporadically so long as the justice demanded by the Pancasila does not descend to earth in Nusantara, as a result of the defective consciences of the nation's elite. In their hands Pancasila is turned into amoral political rhetoric. This is the main reason why the Indonesian nation finds it so very difficult to rise up authentically and with dignity.

Thus, the next task is to fill the Pancasila with prophetic values that are rich in morality, ethics, the sources of the law, and eschatological doctrine that would be impossible for humans alone to devise. In the face of these great questions, the Pancasila must stand ready to admit its limitations and to govern itself within the confines of Indonesianness, even though the universal elements of the other four *sila* can be developed much further.

If the Pancasila remains a play of the lips, while its principles are ignored in civic, national, and state life, it is very difficult to imagine any improvement in Indonesia's future. Indonesia has been independent for sixty years, and I have seen almost no administration that truly took the side of the impoverished masses. In the period of Liberal Democracy in the 1950s, two or three cabinets proposed very good programs for the people's welfare, but they had no time to implement them. Interparty squabbling was the major reason for the instability and brief lifespan of the cabinets in that period.

Constructing an edifice of Islam within the framework of Indonesianness and humanity is more the work of proselytization and culture than of politics. Through the approach based on proselytizing and cultural activity, the basic values of Islam, of the "Indonesian soul," and of humanity can be defined carefully and patiently for the long term. If these basic values are strong, then their effect will also be felt in the political realm, that is, in the emergence of the politics of solidarity, not the politics of force that pushes others to the side. Politics led by prophetic values is sure to take the road of peace and justice, even when its actors have different ideologies.

Differences of outlook in the framework of Indonesianness and humanity must be made the motive force for finding a better meeting ground in social, national, and state life. Here is where we find the main key for strengthening the nation's spirit of integration. We must always keep in mind that Indonesia is a young nation still searching for more

appropriate forms through an approach that is intelligent, honest, and responsible. My great desire, before I close my eyes for the last time, is that there will begin to appear, however faintly, the signs of an Indonesia of justice, dignity, and cohesiveness. If such signs do appear, I will feel that my appeals have not been in vain. As someone fascinated by history, I am very aware that to build an Indonesia comprising thousands of islands is no simple task, but that it is nevertheless not impossible. All depends on the good intentions and the capabilities of the people of our nation. Do they want to see Indonesia last for time without end, or fall apart because of leaders who lack vision?

Why do I have hope in the young people of Indonesia? The answer is simple: I still see the potential in our nation's idealistic and knowledgeable young people for leading us toward the goal proclaimed at the time of our independence. I have mentioned this goal several times already. It is the creation of justice for all, prosperity without favoritism, and sincere brotherhood between fellow members of the nation, whatever their ethnicity or religion. This nation now awaits their presence: young people of sensitivity, of conscience. I only hope that we do not have to wait long.

As the author of this book I am fully aware that building such a vast Indonesia is no simple task. But have our experiences of success and failure over so many decades not been enough to make us a nation that has come to its senses? We need not only great minds, but also, and perhaps even more urgently, a clean conscience, as clean as the water of Lake Matano in Sorowako, Sulawesi. Many intelligent minds have been born, but intelligent and sincere hearts must be struggled for. How to marry brain and heart – that is the task for our entire educational system in a not-too-distant future. Development of the brain can give birth to great scientists and technologists. That is not enough, though. It must be accompanied by development of the heart to bring forth wisdom and disinterested sympathy. Indonesia, a large heterogeneous and pluralistic nation, greatly needs leaders who have that intelligence and wisdom. Indonesia's weakness ever since independence lies in its insufficient attention to the dimension of the heart.

In the hands of leaders with these qualities, the “chemical compound” that binds Islam – supported by the other religions that exist in Indonesia – to the values of Indonesianness and humanity will allow this nation to find its genuine and harmonious identity. This compound will give Pancasila the spiritual foundation of resilient prophethood. An Indonesia of the future that is sound and complete needs a spiritual-cultural base that is strong in its endeavors to support the standing and dignity of the nation for the long run, the limitless run.

The spirits of the founders of the Indonesian nation and state will smile in delight in the land beyond if their successors are intelligent, wise, and sensitive of conscience. But these same spirits will weep if the next generations have no more use for the noble values that were engraved in the spirit of this nation from the moment of its formation in the 1920s. This work is my attempt to bring back those great values to guard the course of this nation in a world that is not always friendly. Before my closing appeal, permit me to quote from “Between Karawang and Bekasi,” written in 1949 by Chairil Anwar. This well-known poem is a deeply felt remembrance of those who are not with us but whose services for the nation and state were truly extraordinary:

We are but scattered bones,
which now belong to you.
It is you who decide their value:
Whether we died for freedom, victory, hope,
or for nothing at all.

We do not know, cannot say.
You are the ones who must now speak.

We speak to you in the stillness of a silent night
When the chest feels empty and the wall clock ticks.

Remember, do remember us,
Carry on, carry on our lives.⁹