

Chapter 3 Indonesian Islam

For some time now, we have been concerned that the majority Muslim *umat* of Indonesia and the quality of their lives have been lagging badly, placing them far behind in every field, especially in science, technology, and economics. For that reason, in order to move forward, the Muslim leaders of our country must address the problem of quality so that this gap in achievement can be steadily reduced. Otherwise, the disadvantaged majority will become a burden on Islam, which seeks to build a strong and sophisticated civilization.

Education is a decisive factor. We are being punished for our lack of serious regard for education by the backwardness of our *umat* in the fields I have mentioned. When I say “our *umat*,” I mean almost 90 percent of the population of Indonesia. An encumbered *umat* is no different from an encumbered nation. It is irrelevant to speak of national construction when the majority of the people are neglected.

The Quality of Education in Indonesia

Even though illiteracy has been vanquished to a great extent, the quality of education in Muslim-majority Indonesia is far from what it should be. Indonesia as an independent nation has never developed or prioritized educational strategies. This is the main reason why the level of development and achievement in education in Indonesia is still below regional standards, to say nothing of global ones. Indonesia is not competitive in science, technology, and economics. If we use the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) report as a measure of progress in education, we see that Indonesia is still at the back of the pack. The Human Development Index (HDI) for 2015 shows how far back that is. In the UNDP report for 2016, Indonesia's HDI for the year 2015 ranked 113 out of 188 countries. Compared to other countries in Southeast Asia, we are far behind Singapore (fifth position), Brunei Darussalam (thirtieth), and Thailand (eighty-seventh).¹

If we take the Human Development Index that places Indonesia at 113th out of 188 countries as a measure of the quality of its education, then our backwardness looks extremely serious. Without the support of high-quality education, it will be very difficult for Indonesia to be considered an advanced nation. How did this happen? The answer

is connected with the low priority the government generally gives education policy. Suyanto writes:

An increase in educational funding will not have much of an effect on the situation of education in Indonesia. From early on right to the present, our education policies have been general in character and not marked as a priority, for example, pursuing excellence by the year 2020. In response to this, we need a breakthrough in development that does not constantly depend on government capability alone. To clarify, the United States should be our point of reference. In the United States, many educational institutions – from elementary schools to post-secondary education – behave like businesses or participants in the world of industry. The result is that many institutions of private education are excellent in their fields.²

In fact, in Indonesia, the private sector plays quite a large role in national education, although very few private institutions are on a par with government schools. How can they catch up? Should the curricula of private schools follow government standards? This network of private educational institutions needs government assistance, because it lacks virtually every resource. Copying the private schools popular in the United States would not be a simple matter, to say nothing of moving education into “the world of business” or “the world of industry.” The implications would surely be far-reaching. One of these would be a steep increase in school fees, especially in post-secondary institutions, and result in a more elitist system of education. Only those who could afford the private school would be able to attend at this level. If this happens, bright children from rural areas are sure to be disappointed.

The problem of education in Indonesia is a true dilemma. In steering education toward “business” and “industry” models, we would certainly place it beyond the reach of poor youth in the tens of millions. But if we do nothing about current conditions, the quality of our education will simply mark time, or even regress. But at least, as Suyanto writes, if the government developed a consistent strategy, our backwardness in the area of education would not be as serious as it is now.

As to the issue of teacher welfare, the government has been giving this area serious attention since 2008. Though long overdue, this is nonetheless something to be grateful for. However, the improvement in teacher welfare will not automatically lead to an improvement in the quality of instruction. Ongoing self-criticism is still needed in the effort to address the problem of quality. But at least we no longer need to hear

about, for example, a school principal who doubles as a ragpicker in order to put food on the table. Hair-raising stories about the conditions of teachers have been around forever, but improvement had to wait many decades. Teachers belong to that part of society that is the most patient and long-suffering in Indonesia; it is as if their modest destiny is inscribed in the lines of their palms.

The number of teachers with a true calling is very small. The majority of them teach simply to have some kind of work. So after the government has paid attention to teacher welfare, the next step will be to improve the teacher training. This will certainly take time and have a high price tag. Although the process has started, we are still in a transition period. Once a bachelor's degree becomes a requirement for primary school teachers, we hope that, step by step, teacher competency will improve. If our teachers are well trained, future generations will definitely receive a better education. The long-term indifference of government in tackling the problem of education is the main reason Indonesia's position on the Human Development Index is so far below standard.

But, despite all the gloom, there are still sparkling stars that light up the heavens. By this I mean that, despite the deplorable state of education in Indonesia, there are students who do progress. This is not thanks to the educational system they pass through, but because of their strong drive not to surrender to the conditions they are in. They study independently with total discipline. It is certain that they will make full use of the internet and cybertechnology to improve themselves. The spread of the internet to the rural areas has barely begun, and the number of villages that have access to it is still very limited. In the future, teachers and students will have no other choice but to immerse themselves actively in sources of information they access online. That is a truly limitless source, and the cost is relatively affordable. In this way, the backward state of Indonesian education can be overcome, slowly but surely.

It is impossible for the Ministry of National Education (Depdiknas) to work all by itself to speed up this "internetization" process. It is going to have to work together with other ministries, such as the Ministry of Communications, and entities in the private sector. When rural areas do not have access to the internet, the gap in perspective and insights between urban students and rural students will widen to an unsustainable degree. If this gap is not quickly bridged, the pull of urbanization cannot be blocked, since the centers of excellence in education will continue to be monopolized by the cities. Yet the rural population is far greater than its urban counterpart. In the nation's march forward, unhealthy tendencies such as this will greatly affect the national integration process, which even to this day is not firmly grounded.

What I have been speaking about here is connected with the problem of national education overall. Since the colonial era, the Muslim *umat* has also established centers of general and specifically Islamic education, in the form of the *pesantren* (rural Islamic boarding school) and *madrassa*. After Independence, these came under the aegis of the Ministry of Religion (Depag). Thus, Indonesia had two “commanders-in-chief of education,” in addition to various departments that organized and operated schools to accommodate special interests. As is the case with education managed by Depdiknas, *madrassas*, which are under Depag, may be either public or private. Only education within the *pesantren* system is fully private. As far as I know, there are no government-owned *pesantren*, even though to some extent they receive state assistance.

Assistance for education is of course the state’s obligation, because according to the Preamble to the Constitution, it is the responsibility of the government to provide enlightenment to the people. This assistance is not given out of the goodness of the government’s heart but entirely because it is carrying out the will of the Constitution. By operating private schools, the private sector has helped the government in this enlightenment process. Therefore, private parties need not feel indebted when they receive assistance or subsidies from the state for education – which is the state’s responsibility. I repeat: state aid for private education is not done out of the goodness of the government’s heart, but because that is its constitutional obligation.

The “Unity of Knowledge” Concept

Recently, we have begun to hear the idea of putting education in Indonesia under the one roof of Depdiknas for easier regulation and more efficient management and quality control. This is actually quite ideal, but it would appear that historical and political considerations need to be studied further. If we speak of political considerations, for example, Depdiknas is open to being led by a non-Muslim minister, while this could never happen with Depag. However, since Proclamation, Depdiknas has never been under a non-Muslim, even though the provisions of the Constitution do not prohibit this. Therefore, perhaps the historical experience has become a kind of convention for the two “commanders-in-chief of education” to be reduced to one under Depdiknas. In other words, the system of *madrassa* education and the like, right up to university level, would be adequately handled by a director-general within Depdiknas. And private non-Muslim education can be placed below a directorate-general within Depdiknas.

My question, however, especially for the Muslim *umat*, is, with a dual system, even one placed under the one roof of Depdiknas, will the quality of Islamic education become first-rate in the long term? There is no quick answer to this so long as the dichotomy of religious education and Western-style general education is not overcome. To this day, the Muslim *umat* has not yet arrived at the concept of “the unity of knowledge.” In this concept, what we know as secular education and what we know as religious education will have lost their relevance. Instead, all the branches of science will be directed at bringing humanity closer to Allah, as the highest source of all there is. To put it differently, the term *Islamic* for various branches of science, such as Islamic medicine, Islamic psychology, and so on, will no longer be necessary. Those attributes will lose their meaning under the big tent of “the unity of knowledge.” And under this tent, the efforts at “Islamicizing science” by some contemporary Muslim thinkers will be fruitless. If all the activities of science are to find Allah and draw near to Allah by reading the signs of His greatness and power, attaching Islamic attributes to academic disciplines will no longer be needed. If we still must speak about Islamicizing, *what needs to be Islamicized is the center of human consciousness, which is in the brain and in the heart.*

The Quran itself, notes Fazlur Rahman,³ seems drawn to three types of science for the benefit of humankind. First, the natural, or physical, sciences – those sciences that can be mastered by humanity. Second, history and geography – both very important for the progress of human civilization. Pay attention to this verse: “So have they not traveled through the earth and have hearts by which to reason and ears by which to hear? For indeed, it is not eyes that are blinded, but blinded are the hearts which are within the breasts.”⁴ By wandering on the face of the earth, humankind will understand what has happened to civilizations in ages past, the factors that gave rise to them and the reasons for their downfall. In this, the sciences of history and geography become crucial for humanity, so we do not go astray in our wanderings.

Third, knowledge about humanity itself – in addition to knowledge about the natural world. The Quran proclaims: “We will show them Our signs in the horizons and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that it is the truth. But is it not sufficient [for you] concerning your Lord that He is, over all things, a Witness?”⁵

Based on the verses in the Al-Hajj and Fussilat suras just cited, what is meant by knowledge here is *scientific* knowledge, because it is based on observations through the eyes and ears. But ultimately, that science is to touch the heart and kindle the perceptions of humankind. In this way, humankind will transform its scientific and technological capabilities in

accordance with moral perceptions that we hope will be born within humankind itself. Rahman then concludes, “Without this perception, scientific and technological knowledge can – and definitely will – become positively dangerous.” He tells us that the Quran, in its criticism of the Meccans who were materially prosperous in their worldly existence, makes the following comment: “They well know the external side of worldly existence, but show no concern for the final consequences of this.”⁶ In the language of the Quran itself: “... they, of the Hereafter, are unaware.”

The dualism of the educational system almost everywhere in the Islamic world may perhaps gradually be resolved into the concept of the unity of knowledge. What I am suggesting here still requires a comprehensive and rational framework, in the form of a philosophy of Islamic education. I admit that writing a philosophy of Islamic education is probably beyond me. Therefore, the following discussion produces, with occasional modifications, the rough ideas on education I brought forward several years back. These were then developed by Muhammadiyah, which so far has not formulated a philosophy of Islamic education.⁷

The Muhammadiyah on Education

Speaking of Muhammadiyah education from the philosophical point of view is no easy matter, because this Islamic movement – as far as I have read – has not yet made any comprehensive and articulate formulation of its educational philosophy. The word *pendidikan* for “education,” for example, first appeared fleetingly in 1943, during the Japanese occupation. (Arabic terms were current at the time.) The word now is part of a package of formulations that are becoming increasingly comprehensive; my discussion of the official documents of Muhammadiyah will touch upon these. But formulations of a philosophical nature about Muhammadiyah education are still nonexistent, especially if an understanding of the Quran is our departure point.

The term *mendidik* (“educate”) first appears in the Articles of Association of Muhammadiyah in 1934, that is, in article 2f, which says: “to educate children and young people so that later they will become Muslims who are “meaningful” [*orang Islam yang berarti*].” (This is a difficult formulation, which I will develop in the following pages.) In article 2a here, we find the words “teaching and training” in the following context: “to advance and enliven teaching and training in the Islamic religion in the Dutch East Indies”⁸ When did the word “education”

(*pendidikan*) appear in the Articles of Association of Muhammadiyah? From the documents I have traced, this word first appears in the Articles of 1943, as I have suggested; but it is only mentioned briefly in a letter of Ki Bagoes Hadikoesoemo as the deputy founder of Muhammadiyah to the head of the Dai Nippon (Japanese occupation) military government in Jakarta, as follows: “disseminate printed materials for the propagation of the faith [*tabligh*] and general education.”⁹

The following formulation appears in article 3b of the Articles of 1950: “to advance education and teaching [*memajukan pendidikan dan pengajaran*].”¹⁰ A more complete formulation only appears in Chapter IV, article 4c, of the Articles of Association of 1959: “to advance and renew education, teaching and culture, as well broaden knowledge according to the demands of Islam.”¹¹ This formulation survived in the Articles of 1968. In Chapter II, article 4c, of the Articles of Association of 1985 resulting from 41st Congress in Surakarta, the formulation was expanded, but the word “teaching” (*pengajaran*) was left out, so that it now read “advance and renew education and culture as well as broadening knowledge, technology, and research according to the demands of Islam.”¹² The words “technology” and “research” only appeared in the Articles after Muhammadiyah had been in existence for seventy-three years.

Chapter I, article 3, paragraph 1 of the Standards of Primary and Secondary Muhammadiyah Education of 1988 clarifies the objective of Muhammadiyah education as follows: “the realization of pious Muslims of noble character, intelligent and with self-confidence, loving the motherland and useful to society and state, doing good works for the realization of the main society, just and prosperous, blessed by Allah, glorified and exalted be He.” Paragraph 2 states the further objective: “to advance and stimulate the growth of knowledge of society, the nation and the State.”¹³ This formulation is clearly guided by the Articles of Association that resulted from the 1985 Congress in which political pressure by the authorities was so strong that certain articles had to be amended.

From the above documents it should be clear that we have not been able to fully grasp the philosophical aspects of Muhammadiyah education, because what is available are floating and general fragments. In several of these formulations, the concept of the unity of knowledge is seen only vaguely. But what is stated in the Articles of 1934 is “to educate children and young people so that later they will become Muslims who are meaningful,” and this can be developed further into a philosophy of Islamic education in line with the vision of Muhammadiyah. The key expression in the formulation of this objective is that the members

should be educated “to become Muslims who are meaningful.” Who are these people and what are their criteria? The attribute “meaningful” is crucial and fundamental, in my view.

To find out just who that Muslim is naturally cannot be separated from the concept of humanity, because a Muslim is a part of the human *umat*, though with special criteria: a Muslim is someone who, with full consciousness, surrenders himself or herself to Allah. As we know, the discussion of the concept of humanity has never ceased since it began in ancient times. The higher the level of the philosophy, the less clear are our perceptions of that very creature known as the human. But we must not despair, because we have the Quran to consult and discuss, and according to our belief this Sacred Book comes from *Al-Khaliq*, the Creator of humankind and all that is in the universe. In my opinion, education of this sort is an effective means to form the type of humanity that we wish for, that is, humanity that matters, based on a certain view of life – in this case the Islamic view of life, or even more specifically, the Quranic view of life. There is yet to be a satisfactory formulation of the Quranic view of life made by the Muslim *umat* of Indonesia, other than individual works that need to be developed further, especially those that directly relate to the problems of education.

Humans Who Are Meaningful in the Perspective of the Quran

Who are those humans who are “meaningful”? Physically speaking, humans do not greatly differ from other creatures. When humans die, their bodies return to the earth, exactly like other living creatures. The Quran explains that humans were first created of “an extract of clay”¹⁴ or “clay from an altered black mud.”¹⁵ Then, in the womb, the creative process goes on and on until there is formed the physical shape of a human being. Additional information about the process of the creation of humans comes from the Surah Al-Mu’minun: “And certainly did We create man from an extract of clay. Then We placed him as a sperm-drop in a firm lodging [a womb]. Then We made the sperm-drop into a clinging clot, and we made the clot into a lump [of flesh] and We made [from] the lump, bones, and We covered the bones with flesh; then We developed him into another creation [a creation with another shape]. So blessed is Allah, the best of creators.”¹⁶

But what was special in the process of that creation was the key expression: “So when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My [created] soul”¹⁷ Here occurs a spiritual revolution. If I may be permitted to use symbolic language in this connection, I would say:

“There is seen in this process of creation an intervention of a spirit from Heaven into the chemical makeup of the earth for the perfection of the creation of a creature called human. Extraordinary!” The Quran gives a noble position to humankind: “And We have certainly honored the children of Adam” is an affirmation of this Sacred Scripture.¹⁸ After the process of creation was completed to perfection, all the angels were commanded to prostrate themselves and do homage to that glorious creature, but a malevolent spirit rejected that command because this spirit had originated in a furiously hot fire.¹⁹ In this way, the malevolent spirit looked askance at the human creature, which originated from the soil – why should he have to prostrate himself to it?

But the glory of that human being was not unconditional, for there was this provision: “And by the soul and He who proportioned it [with facilities well-suited for its creation], and inspired it [with discernment of] its wickedness and its righteousness, he has succeeded who purifies it, and he has failed who instills it [with corruption].”²⁰ It is clear, according to these verses, that human beings have within themselves wicked and good potential. Thus, among the functions of education is to motivate the potential for good within the learner to grow and develop almost without limit, while controlling the potential for wickedness through guidance so that it is not activated. I have already mentioned the formulation of Muhammadiyah’s Articles of Association of 1934. Its words “to educate children and young people so that later they will become Muslims who are meaningful” must be read in the light of the verses above, so that the philosophical dimension has a firm spiritual foundation. In modern philosophical terms, we would say, “so that the building of Muhammadiyah education has ontological security as well as functioning to shape capable and skilled people who have faith in themselves.” The “ontological security” here from the perspective of the Quran is only possible if belief in Allah and the future is made the foundation of human existence. Without that foundation, all discussion of good character, morality, a just, prosperous society, and a civilized society will not be relevant.

Before concluding this section, we should analyze the definition of education provided by the Mu’tazilah writer Al-Jahiz (d. 869). Al-Jahiz provides his definition as follows: “a comprehensive system of education of a Muslim who is both civilized and of good character and who makes the whole world a target of his curiosity and knowledge.”²¹ Note the use of the word “civilized.” This definition does not differentiate between what is termed religious knowledge and knowledge of the physical world, a dichotomy that is foreign to the eyes of the Quran but has been retained as a myth for centuries in the world of Islam. My sense is that Al-Jahiz’s

definition is closer to the sense of the Quran because through it runs the red thread of the concept of the unity of knowledge. Verbal signs are no longer pitted against phenomenal signs and indications, or sociological terms, an opposition that has produced fragmented individuals within the learning environment from the lowest levels to the university. Over recent centuries, the world of Islam has been densely inhabited by such fragmented personalities, with all the negative results for the structure of the collective life of the *umat*. There are factory guards or politicians who do not know how to pray, and there are many who are good at praying but do not understand the world around them.

Regarding the description of such fragmented personalities, we may follow the complaints Muhammad Iqbal made in his book *Bal-i-Jibril* (1935) to Rumi, his spiritual teacher:

My lofty thoughts reach up to the heavens;
But on earth I am humiliated, frustrated, and in suffering.
I am unable to manage the affairs of this world,
And I constantly face stumbling blocks in this path.
Why are the affairs of the world beyond my control?
Why is the learned in religion a fool in the affairs of the world?

Almost without a pause, Rumi provides a reply that is right on the mark: Anyone [who claims to be able to] walk on the heavens / Why should it be difficult for him to walk on earth?²²

Totally false claims, the result of ignorance in understanding the doctrines of the Quran on the concept of knowledge, are the main reason why the Muslim *umat* is powerless in the face of other civilizations that keep moving on, their wheels constantly turning. The solution for breaking through this dead end could be to leave behind the concept of dualism in the education system. Do not Allah's signs stretch to all corners of the universe and within humankind?²³ Do not the natural sciences, astronomy, history, sociology, geography, economics, and many others besides, represent an organic part of Allah's signs that some, however, categorize as secular knowledge? The integration of knowledge in a conceptual-philosophical manner is not yet complete in the Islamic system of education. What we have witnessed is a system of education sheltering under one roof, while its spirit has long been split in two. Briefly, then, the learner who is meaningful in the eyes of the Quran is the one who is free from a personality that is split and disintegrated. He or she is a good person, whole and complete, self-confident, and able to perform works on the face of the earth that are based on faith and pious deeds, for the benefit of all creatures.

Toward the Formulation of a Philosophy of Muhammadiyah Education

Muhammadiyah has the right and obligation to formulate a philosophy of Islamic education based on an intelligent and creative understanding of the Quran. This philosophy of education, I propose, must be broadly capable of reconciling the demands of the brain with those of the heart. This is not what is developing in the modern world today. The West is too preoccupied with matters of the brain and technology, while a part of the East is still sunk in spiritualism and horoscopes. In the language of the Quran, this is a system of education that can unite the power of *fikr* (thinking) and *dhikr* (chanting praise of Allah), whose aim is to give birth to *ulu al-albab*,²⁴ humans whose hearts and brains exist dynamically and creatively in comprehending and feeling the presence of the Source of their intellectual and spiritual development and explorations.

Other terms in the Quran that have almost the same meaning as *ulu al-albab* are *ulu al-nuha*²⁵ (having understanding, thoughts, and intelligence) and *ulu al-absar*²⁶ (having vision, sight, and sharp perception). In brief, the essence and stages of Muhammadiyah education must be directed at the formation of an individual who is at once *ulu al-albab*, *ulu al-nuha*, and *ulu al-absar*, as well as being part of *ummat al-‘amal* (the community of action). So far, Muhammadiyah has given a stronger impression of being an *ummat al-‘amal* that is very active in sharpening the intellectual life of the nation. Certainly, what may be gained through a process of education that is directed in that way is a diversity, not a uniformity, of individual qualities, something that is quite natural and mutually enriching. In this process, the role and quality of the teacher will be decisive. Muhammadiyah to a great extent has not yet moved seriously to shape educators of high quality in conformity with the reality it faces, however.

If this great philosophical idea can be realized within a period of time that is not too protracted, then wisdom (*al-hikmah*) will return to the collective life of the Muslim community, whose rays will penetrate the collective life of the community of mankind. The modern world, focused on the doctrine of *cogito, ergo sum*, which is overly reliant on the achievements of brainpower, has long been silent on the culture of wisdom. According to the Quran, the *ulu al-albab* are those who are filled with virtue and wisdom: “He gives wisdom to whom He wills, and whoever has been given wisdom has certainly been given much good. And none will remember except those of understanding.”²⁷

The quality described above is the ideal quality for the direction we must head in, if indeed Islam is believed to be the antithesis of an increasingly secular and even atheistic Western civilization. Without a deep awareness of the need and the willingness to formulate and understand the philosophy of Islamic education as outlined above, the Muslim community spread over the face of the earth will continue to wander without a clear road map, exactly like other communities who do not have the Quran. This is the heaviest challenge for which Muslim thinkers who care about changing the philosophical paradigm of the Islamic education system must find a solution.

In line with what has been discussed above, another important dimension that must enter into the content of Muhammadiyah's philosophy of education is the need to emphasize the trilateral relationship between humankind and God, humankind and the universe, and humankind and itself. In many official Muhammadiyah documents since 1968, those dimensions have been touched on here and there, but they have yet to be woven together into an integrated construction that takes as its starting point our understanding of the sources of Islamic teaching: the Quran and the Sunnah. The formulation of this basic issue needs to be worked out by a cross-disciplinary team of visionary experts who truly understand what is at stake here and have a strong commitment to shouldering this collective task.

Once we have Muhammadiyah's philosophy of education, no matter how imperfect a construction it still is, a curriculum can be designed systematically upon it. This great task will take quite a while to complete, but it needs to be undertaken now. Hasn't the educational process that has existed in Indonesia for such a long time chalked up more failures than successes? Therefore, we need to make a serious effort to think of an alternative system of education for Indonesia's future.

Indonesia's national system of education is still unable to produce graduates of high quality, with the exception of those who are willing to undertake the hazards of sharpening their own intellect and enlightening themselves. Indonesian education, over the course of time, has been co-opted by the interests of power politics. The statement in the Preamble to the Constitution that one of the tasks of the government of independent Indonesia is "to sharpen the intellectual life of the nation" has never been seriously committed to; as a result, Indonesian education drags along, directionless. Therefore, every breakthrough to advance education must be supported and appreciated. This leaves the government in the position of facilitating the activities of nonstate education and, wherever necessary, providing guidance so that it does not stray beyond the bounds of the Constitution. Once again, each piece of creative thinking by private

institutions that helps to break through the dead end in Indonesian education will surely be a strategic contribution to the progress of the nation on the long road ahead.

Education in the Nahdlatul Ulama Environment

Unlike Muhammadiyah, the NU, which has thrown its support for too long behind the tradition of the *pesantren* – the rural Islamic boarding school – has been a slow performer in the wider world of education. Conversely, Muhammadiyah has been left far behind in the *pesantren* system because its energies have been absorbed too much by general education and too little by the *madrassa*. But now the NU, with its Perguruan Darul Maarif educational institute, is working hard to also advance general education. Muhammadiyah also does not want to be left behind in developing a *pesantren* system. Among its best known *pesantren* is the Pesantren Darul Arqam Muhammadiyah in Garut, West Java.

Actually, Muhammadiyah and the NU are not the only movers and shakers in the world of education of the Indonesian Muslim *umat*. The list includes Sarekat Islam, Persatuan Islam Al-Washliyah, Al-Irsyad, PUI (Persatuan Umat Islam; Islamic Community Union), Perti, Perguruan Thawalib, Nahdhatul Wathan, Mathlaul Anwar, Al-Khairat, and many others. We should note that *pesantren*-based education is not conducted by the NU alone, even though the majority of *pesantren* have sheltered under the umbrella of the NU; other Islamic movements have offered equal services in developing this traditional educational system. In East Java, for example, the Gontor Modern Islamic Pesantren is active. However, for the purposes of this book, I will limit myself to the two big waves of the Muslim *umat* of Indonesia: Muhammadiyah and the NU.

Although the NU was only officially established in 1926, the main basis of its strength lies in the world of the *pesantren*, whose roots may be traced back to the end of the nineteenth century.²⁸ There is no clear indication just when this traditional educational institution first appeared, however: “We know very little about the origins of the *pesantren*.”²⁹ These centers of traditional learning of the Muslim *umat* are mostly located in rural areas. In contrast to the centralized system of education developed by Muhammadiyah, the *pesantren* have belonged to *kiyai*, religious sages who mostly joined the NU out of a commonality of religious understanding within the Sunni environment. In addition to *pesantren*, the NU has recently developed a more modern general educational system like that of Muhammadiyah, extending from kindergarten to

the university level. These schools are still quite limited in number and present a challenge for the NU, whose religious scholars have had years to devote their efforts to the *pesantren*.

I will present here the awakening of a profound awareness in the NU of the need for a new educational orientation, especially as reflected in the 27th NU Congress at Situbondo, East Java, December 8–12, 1984. Two important decisions on education were made at that congress:

1. The educational orientation in NU circles must be ... reorganized, given the development of new and correct methods for measuring the ability of students to perform real humanitarian and civic work, and directed to an introduction to the necessities of life and the sources of its fulfillment, without interfering with its basis in the Islamic faith of the adherents to the Sunnah and the Community.
2. Transparency, autonomy, and capability [are needed] in cooperating with others to prepare a better future [as well as] the skills in introducing science and technology, which are the realization of dedication to Allah, glorified and exalted be He, and to create an attitude of life that is oriented to the hereafter, and that is balanced and dynamic, as reflected in the curriculum of education within the environment of the Nahdlatul Ulama³⁰

Decision number 2 includes items (d) and (e), containing formulations that are very advanced and may be appearing here for the first time in an NU educational document. In item (d) we read of “awareness of the need to use rationality in their [the students’] lives, the need to anticipate and look closely into the future [to be future-oriented] toward scientific and technological developments and their impact in later life.” Item (e) emphasizes preparation for a professional career: “growing a spirit of autonomy and creativity through the training of practical skills.”³¹

The above statement clearly reflects the new wave of thinking about education that has washed into NU circles. Previously, the NU was known for its traditional Islamic education in the form of *pesantren* with nonstandard curricula, or even without any formal curricula at all. The appearance of this radical new wave is linked to the influence of Abdurrahman Wahid, who was chosen to chair the Situbondo Congress, replacing Idham Chalid, who had led the NU for twenty-eight years (1956–1984)³² in spite of obstruction by the New Order regime. Apart from the controversy inherited by Wahid in the NU, the breakthrough of his revolutionary thinking transformed the NU into an Indonesian Islamic movement that is quite phenomenal. Its 1984 statement on education

illustrates that the NU really is changing dynamically, at least at the elite level, although inclusion of the NU's trademark expression "adherents to the Sunnah and the Community" was not overlooked. In other words, the NU is structuring itself to deal with modernity in education, something long wrestled with by Muhammadiyah.

As mentioned, the *pesantren* in NU circles are the private property of the *kiyai*, not the property of the organization. For example, Idham Chalid, long before emerging as a national figure, had established the Perguruan Darul Maarif in 1954, even though its vision and mission were only formulated in 2000. (Its vision: "excellence in educational, social, and civic services"; its mission: "First, to shape the youth of this nation to have a noble character, be knowledgeable, and have faith and religious devotion to Allah the One and Only God, to prepare [them] to be skilled, of good quality, and able to live in society."³³) Both in vision and in mission this academy did not greatly differ from the official educational policy of the Indonesian government. The NU expression "adherents to the Sunnah and the Community" was not contained in that vision and mission.

The Perguruan Darul Maarif has the objective of empowering the common people who have limited financial resources. Thus, it is a populist institution. This is illustrated in the philosophy of Idham Chalid: "I established this academy, not to earn profits like the Islamic elite schools, but I wanted to provide schooling so that the children of the three-wheeler taxis, the street sweepers, truck farmers in this district [Cipete, South Jakarta] could get some minimal knowledge and receive a diploma. I wanted to benefit the people who were neither rich nor well-educated."³⁴ Such a philosophy limits Darul Maarif's potential for growth and financial stability.

Abdurrahman Wahid, the revolutionary thinker in NU circles, was an alumnus of a *pesantren* and also studied in Egypt and Iraq. Wahid wrote about *pesantren*:

The *pesantren* hut is a cultural symbol that uses symbols of Javanese culture; it is an agent of renewal that introduces ideas of rural development; it is a center of community learning; and it is also the symbol of Islamic education, which depends on the syllabus drawn up by the prolific intellectual Imam Jalaluddin Abdurrahman Al-Suyuti more than five hundred years ago, in *Itmam Al-Dirayah* [*The Perfection of Knowledge*]. This syllabus became the reference point of traditional *pesantren* huts until now, with the development of Islamic studies, which are divided into fourteen disciplines that we now know, from classical Arabic grammar to the interpretations of the Quran and the texts of

the hadiths of the Prophet. All of this was studied in the *pesantren* environment as an institute of Islamic education. And also, through these *pesantren* huts, Islamic values were disseminated from generation to generation.³⁵

The question is: can the contents and methods of Islamic education, handed down for centuries, be relied upon to release the Muslim *umat* from its atmosphere of backwardness? As an intellectual with a far-flung circle of acquaintances and contacts, Wahid's answer seems to be in the negative, although it is not made explicit. With further reference to the weakness of the system of Islamic education, especially when responding to the challenges of modernization, Wahid writes:

Islamic education, of course, is willing and able to "straighten itself out" in response to the challenge of modernization; however, awareness of that issue is precisely what does not yet exist in Islamic education anywhere at all. It is this very matter that is so worrisome to observers including this writer, because in the end a proper reply to the following question is needed: how do we make structural awareness a natural part of the development of Islamic education? To put it differently, we have to pay close attention to the development of Islamic education in various places and to make a clear map of the configuration of Islamic education itself. This is a task that, like it or not, has to be handled well.³⁶

Because the models of Islamic education are so varied and complex in all the different regions that have shaped the many different types of Muslims, and we do not yet have a complete map of these things, Wahid in the end seems to surrender to the changing times: "The best road would be to allow a high degree of diversity to stay in Islamic education and let time and place be the determinants."³⁷

To conclude this discussion of Islamic education as it is developing in both Muhammadiyah and NU circles, the one issue that needs to be underlined is that we have not yet satisfactorily concluded *how Islamic* the education should be. Every human population imaginable needs a well-developed system of education that appeals philosophically to its self-worth. This book proposes formulating a philosophy of education that makes the concept of the unity of knowledge its starting point by using the Quran, assisted by the authentic Sunnah, as the main point of reference. Work on this philosophical formulation cannot be done individually; it must be the product of collective thinking, or, say, collective reasoning and judgment (*ijtihad jama'i*). In today's

Indonesian intellectual environment, great minds are ready to start thinking about how to formulate just such a philosophy of Islamic education.

Conflicts in Form and Content

There is nothing wrong with the efforts of different groups to use Islamic attributes as an emblem of their struggles or activities: Islamic government, Islamic banking (*muamalat* banks), Islamic schools, Islamic students, Islamic paramilitaries, Islamic restaurants, and the like. But they will harm their own cause if these forms and features fail to present Islamic values of high quality consonant with the great claim of this religion: blessings and mercy for the universe. People are apt to neglect quality: this is what I mean by the expression “form grappling with substance.” The form can be magnificent but the content unworthy and unconvincing. The gap between form and substance has long been obvious in all Muslim nations around the world. For me, this phenomenon constitutes a very serious problem that has beset the Muslim *umat* to this day. The solution to it is none other than the need for courage to make a breakthrough so that form and substance support each other.

Why is all of this still happening? The simple answer is that the Muslim *umat* continues to be pinned down by form while at the same time it neglects substance. In Chapter 4, where I discuss the “philosophy of salt and lipstick,” this problem will be analyzed further in the dimension of sociology. Here I will highlight only one example: the image of Indonesia’s Islamic parties is steadily sinking, not because of growing waves of Islamophobia, but entirely owing to unpleasant behavior displayed by some of the elites of parties with Islamic attributes or names that represent those attributes. Some of the party elites gnaw at the foundations of the state instead of repairing and constructing it. The result is public skepticism, because the Islamic parties and the secular parties behave no differently.

In various forums I often toss out my view about the behavior of party elites in Indonesia: there is not a lot of difference between those elites who claim to believe in divine revelation and those who couldn’t be bothered with religion. They all get down together in the mud of dirty politics: corruption, opportunism, and cheap pragmatism. In such a political culture, democracy has been made a tool, not to struggle for justice and the prosperity of the people, but for the interests of the elite and the groups that support them. Thus, democracy in the hands of opportunists can become a disaster for the entire nation.

To my mind, a strong and healthy democracy is a political system supported by politicians who have a visionary outlook and, above all, a moral commitment. One example who is not too distant from our time is H. Agus Salim, a student in the Islamic Youth Association, who after independence was active in leading the Masyumi Party until it was forced to dissolve in late 1960. These were politician-visionaries and intellectuals who had a high degree of commitment to the ideals of democracy as a means of achieving the objectives of independence, as discussed in Chapter 2.

Democracy will only become a healthy political system when the participants in that system are people of morals with a sense of responsibility. In one of my writings, I conveyed the bitter reality I saw on the contemporary Indonesian political stage as follows:

But the aspirations of democracy will directly turn disastrous if the politicians, those holding the cards in the game, are a gang of opportunists for whom politics is an industry for making a living and holding power. Their philosophy is very contemptible and consists of “eat as much as you can while the eating is good.” We note Erich Fromm’s theory of “acquire it and assimilate it.” In such a society, Fromm says, not only are many things being produced that are of no use (the law, for example), but at the same time useless humans are being born as well. This is the perfect *Homo consumens* who always thrashes and destroys democracy in practice.³⁸

In the hands of the opportunists “there is no hope for democracy as a political system to achieve its noble ideals of realizing the common good.”³⁹

Therefore, the people must be ever more intelligent in determining their political choices so that the opportunist politicians can be marginalized and deterred from entering the political arena. An intelligent people can never again be tricked by worthless politicians, because they will be able to penetrate into brains and hearts, beyond politicians’ external posturings. Indonesian political culture must move in this direction so that democracy energizes and excites instead of being boring. There must be healthy competition to pit the positive values of democracy against each other on the political stage. Indonesia’s experiences as a nation and a state since Proclamation have handed us quite enough bitter experiences to teach us to look at ourselves honestly in the mirror with one single purpose: to build an Indonesia that is outstanding and dignified. Most regrettably, we are reluctant to look at ourselves in the

mirror – this is characteristic of nearly everyone. This is the sign of a culture that lacks self-confidence.

Islam and Indonesia's Future

In Chapter 1, I explained that Islam came to Nusantara long before Indonesia was inscribed as a nation on the world map. Although I tried to show from various angles the process by which the followers of Islam have become the majority throughout this archipelago, it is impossible to give a complete account. Historical reconstruction of the Islamization process needs to be continued by gathering more comprehensive and refined data, as difficult as this is to do. But one fact is impossible to refute: Islam has been able to survive in Nusantara for centuries, with all its strengths and weaknesses. After Indonesia emerged as a nation in the 1920s the followers of Islam remained the majority. The resilience of this religion in its struggles in all weathers and seasons is truly extraordinary. However, it is less praiseworthy that this majority community is still bound up in the shackles of poverty, ignorance, and backwardness.

In spite of all concerns, the experience of the centuries shows that this majority will continue to survive in the face of all challenges. Indonesia too as a country that is some six decades old, despite all the bitter experiences it has undergone, is still relatively whole as of this writing. That, too, is a fact of history that cannot be denied. But moving forward will depend on the ability of leaders and the people to govern and defend the Indonesian nation and state with honesty, intelligence, and responsibility. It is here that resides the importance of the idea I have expressed, that the Muslim *umat*, the majority of the people of Indonesia, no longer live in hollow pride. In outlook, they must appear as humanitarian cadres, cadres of the nation, cadres of the community, and only then as cadres of their respective organizations.

It has been my observation that, with all our vigilance to ensure that our *umat* does not decrease in numbers, it is its improvement in quality that must be prioritized. With good quality we can raise our collective face in world society with complete self-confidence. The Quran's dictum about the need for the marriage between faith and knowledge as the condition for becoming a first-class⁴⁰ community must be taken as an axiomatic truth. If this dictum really is axiomatic, the Muslim *umat* has no other choice for moving forward but to shape the message of this verse into our living reality. That is why this work has spoken at length about strongly urging the reform of the problem-filled education system in the Islamic world, particularly in Indonesia, which people hope will

become an example of a peaceful, open, and moderate Islam. If this hope is realized, then Indonesian Islam will be the antithesis of the image of Islam that has been marred by a handful of people who have chosen the path of violence.

From my experience of over a decade of meeting and socializing with leaders of all sorts of religious groups, cultures, and backgrounds, I have come to the almost definitive conclusion that they all can accept the leadership of a political Islam that is inclusive, broad-minded, pluralistic, and fair. Non-Muslim groups have come to terms with the sociological fact that Muslims are the majority group in Indonesia. But they will be tormented and troubled if they are discriminated against and deprived of the freedom to practice their religions and traditions. Their places of worship have frequently been the targets of blind violence in the name of God. These groups are quite open with Muslim leaders who are inclusive and fair, and tell them their internal problems, which sometimes are no less knotty than those within the Muslim community in all its diversity.

In this regard, I must emphasize that the democratic system, which normally relies on the voice of the majority in reaching decisions, must be operated very carefully. Democratic leaders must be sure not to sideline fairness and consideration. Democracy is the chosen system, but it was not chosen to allow the majority group to act simply as it wants. There is also the principle of traditional customs that should and must be considered. The safety of the future of Indonesia cannot be detached from the willingness of the majority to hold to this doctrine: "Even though we are the many, we will not trample you; and even though we are the larger, we will use our size to shelter and shade." This saying comes easily to the tongue but is not always easy to put into practice, except by those with a broad humanist and nationalist outlook and who are filled with tolerance. At the same time and with the same breath, minority groups must learn to carry themselves wisely in a democratic environment that is still unhealthy. We are tired of seeing victims being made every so often, simply because of the provocations triggered by irresponsible parties or by the friction of amoral political interests.

Indonesia with its motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* [Unity in Diversity] is a multiethnic, multifait, and multicultural nation of multiple political expressions. This diversity, if managed well, intelligently, and honestly, will undoubtedly be a cultural treasure. That is the future of Indonesia that we must defend and fight for with all our hearts, patiently and broad-mindedly. Such a cultural treasure must never again be gambled against meaningless and parochial interests. Parochialism is the enemy of Indonesia's future. *Eman-eman*, as the saying goes in Javanese, "it's regrettable" if we still suffer from the disease of shortsightedness in

governing a nation and a state as big as this. An Indonesia that is led by Mr. Myopia will surely be confused when looking into the future, because of a vision that sees only its front yard and the eaves of its roofs.

Another important matter that needs to be highlighted is the sociological fact of the increasing weakness of the entrepreneurial spirit of the Muslim *umat*. If we scrutinize the pyramid of Indonesian wealth, the group that we know as the *santri* (observant Muslims) is a real minority among those who manage to make it to the top. For the future of Indonesia, such conditions will surely be dangerously explosive if there is no reform and improvements are not quickly implemented, because the impoverished and powerless majority will very easily become victims of extremist ideology from whatever direction. The experience of post-Proclamation history is authentic proof that poverty and powerlessness of a part of society always triggers off and encourages acts of violence. Poverty and hunger are the true enemies of Pancasila. Why then have not the two of them been subdued yet?

An interesting proposal has come from the Muslim feminist writer Irshad Manji about how to overcome poverty in the Islamic world by mobilizing businesswomen in rural districts through small-scale enterprises, using loan capital. Manji sees such efforts succeeding in parts of Kabul, Afghanistan, a city torn apart by foreign invasions and civil war. As to the importance of mothers, Manji stated her philosophy as: "Educate a boy and you educate only that boy. But educate a girl and you educate her entire family."⁴¹ An educated woman will make a great contribution to the well-being of the family. She continues, "Muslim businesswomen can not only save a family and its neighbors, but also the people and places outside it. Entrepreneurial mothers create spaces for trade – and imagination – for their children."⁴²

There are many examples of Muslim "business mothers" in various cities in Indonesia: Pekalongan, Ponorogo, Solo, Padang, Makassar, and many others. However, because of the lack of skills training in business, those ventures are still unable to overcome wide-scale poverty. The Afghan example can spur us on and inspire us to develop the talents of entrepreneurial mothers in Indonesia. Once mothers are empowered in the commercial world, their positive impact for driving out poverty will increase. Are not mothers more careful in trading, particularly in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)?

When the monetary crisis hit in 1998, people then concluded that the economic force that could ensure the survival of the Indonesian nation was the SME sector. But when the winds of crisis subsided, the conglomerates that had been flung about by these events adroitly resumed their position at the top of the pyramid; meanwhile the SMEs, which had

provided the necessary services, began to be crushed once again. They were unable to compete with the conglomerates, which were benefited by the wave of global neo-capitalism. The bulk of the SMEs have their basis in the majority population, which happens to be Muslim. It was their ancestors, when Nusantara was still under the colonial system, who defended Islam, so that they wear the badge of the majority to this day.

But once again, the label of majority minus quality will shake our Indonesianness, so to speak, over the long term. The social explosions that often hit this nation cannot be detached from the conditions of the Muslim *umat*, which are far from being just or fair. If the rate of poverty in Indonesia reaches 40 percent, then 90 percent of these poor will be Muslims. If the government is unsuccessful in empowering this majority, it will not stay silent. Their brains and hands must be set into motion to change their lot in life. Their only choice is to rehabilitate their lives by entering the world of education and enterprise consciously and with total determination. Poverty cannot be made the scapegoat for not making progress. Take the example of the Palestinians who have struggled for over sixty years to gain their independence but have never given up.

In striving to improve and raise the quality of life in the countryside, for example, there are many roads that might be taken, on condition that brains and hands are not kept unemployed. As someone who comes from the isolated village, or *nagari* (to use the Minangkabau term), of Sumpur Kudus in West Sumatra, I saw many opportunities available for people to change their social status and move beyond dependence on only one source for their livelihood. In Sumpur Kudus, out of an entirely Muslim population of around 4,600, about 60 percent were in the grip of poverty, although no one died of hunger. In this *nagari*, the source of income in recent times has been almost entirely from rubber, so when the price of rubber rose, life there sparkled. But the atmosphere would change to overcast immediately if the prices plunged, as happened in 2008–2009. Because in general people there had yards and rice fields, such property could be used for planting marketable non-staple crops. From my experience of having lived in that village for eighteen years, I remember everywhere there was empty land – while young people busied themselves playing dominos or drinking coffee at the food stalls, or just dozing away.

As a result, poverty inevitably throttled the village for decades. Over the past twenty years, some of the people have become migrant workers in Malaysia. Those who were thrifty and whose heads were full of calculations succeeded in bettering their socioeconomic status after returning to their *nagari*. There was only one condition: you had to use

your brain and your hands to change your fate. If you didn't, and just stayed at home, the risk was that you would become an "unemployed person" with all the problems resulting from that. Another way of changing your life would be to *merantau*, to seek your fortune in the world outside your *nagari*, a choice reinforced by Minangkabau tradition for centuries.

The situation in other isolated villages in West Sumatra in general does not differ greatly from that of Sumpur Kudus. The facts are similar: the yards and rice paddies are never exploited to the maximum.⁴³ For the population of Sumpur Kudus, gradual improvements in the transportation of goods and people, along with electrification, which was brought in beginning in 2005, truly opened up opportunities for improving one's economic lot in life. The question is, what percentage of the *nagari* population is good at perceiving opportunity? Sumpur Kudus is a part of Indonesia, no matter how small. That is the reason I have used it as an example to look through a telescope, as it were, into the future of our country. Isn't Indonesia made up of thousands of small villages, almost half of which are in backward conditions?

Thousands of villages in Indonesia are thus still squeezed by poverty and still have not felt the meaning of independence in the sense of having been touched by prosperity. Speaking of rural areas is no different from speaking about Indonesia, since 57.6 percent of our territory consists of rural areas. According to data from 2006, the number of villages in Indonesia totals 70,611. Of this figure, 32,379 (45 percent) are included in the category of backward villages.⁴⁴ These are very high figures. The *nagari* Sumpur Kudus, which I have cited, is but one of those many backward villages.

Although the problem of nutrition is usually directly linked with the level of welfare, based on direct experience I find that this assumption does not always absolutely determine a person's intelligence. At the same time, we cannot deny that improvement in nutrition is an indicator of a village's progress. The 45 percent figure for backward villages is clear proof that development in Indonesia since the Proclamation of Independence has been precarious and verges on failure. So it is not surprising that some people become nervous when speaking about the future of Indonesia the moment they see these figures. Does this nation have a proper future if the gap in development levels is not quickly closed up? And the majority of those who live in backward villages belong to the Muslim community. I do not know if the Muslim ministers in the cabinet or the Muslim politicians have seriously consulted with each other about these statistics. This question needs to be answered as honestly as possible.

If the answer is “Yes, they have consulted,” the next question is, to what extent has the substance of their consultations been translated into reality? The reason I submit such questions is simply because I want to see, as quickly as possible, this biggest Muslim majority liberated from a false pride, as if development has succeeded, while the statistics refute it. Honesty in stripping oneself bare is one sign of maturity in living in society, and as part of a nation and a state. Political rhetoric voiced during presidential elections that covers over the running sores on the body of the nation are a hidden betrayal of the nation. The risk is that the people will become divorced from reality. A real statesman will explain honestly exactly what the condition of this nation is. Concealing the reality will only increase the height of the inevitable fall.

The title of this section is “Islam and Indonesia’s Future.” I have explained how the followers of Islam quantitatively have survived for so many centuries in Nusantara, up to the present day. Yet for the future, the quantitative will not have much meaning if the followers of this religion keep marching in place, in the sense that there are no radical breakthroughs in thinking about improvement in the quality of the religious character of the *umat*. If Islam dealt only with the vertical relationship between humankind and God, then matters might be less problematic, because that is completely personal and subjective. But because the scope of Islamic teaching goes beyond the realm of the personal, in the sense that it also demands the proper arrangement of horizontal relationships within society at large as a reflection of the vertical relationship with God, many problems arise that need to be resolved. If they are not resolved, Islam will always exist in protracted crisis. It is the tension between these vertical and horizontal dimensions that calls for Islamic thinking of high quality. This is the field of *ijtihad* (reasoned judgment and interpretation of the Quranic code) in a broad sense.

There has not yet been complete agreement among Muslim thinkers in various parts of the world, including in Indonesia, on how Islam is to regulate political, economic, social, cultural, and other systems. In building the nation, for example, what is the position of women? Can a woman be the head of state or hold other executive offices, or are these exclusively the domain of men? Neither Muhammadiyah nor the NU has settled this matter conclusively, even as we argue in the meantime that Islam is “suitable for every time and place.”⁴⁵

The broader issue is, if change and social development turn out to be ever farther away from the domain of Islam as it is understood, arguments like this surely will no longer be relevant. The weakness is in our inability

to understand the religion's teachings contextually, with the result that changes occurring in society are increasingly removed from the safeguard of revelation. In other words, the environment grows ever more secular and unconstrained, while religion retreats into an ivory tower. Religion's adherents are busily squabbling over inconsequential matters that were already tedious centuries ago. Islam's great mission to build a civilization that is both beautiful and just on the face of the earth is buried under the dust of history. This is the tragedy of religion in the modern era. Will Indonesian Islam appear at the forefront to provide an example of how to build that beautiful civilization? The answer very much depends on the quality of its ability to first solve its domestic problems in all earnestness.

Once its internal problems have been resolved, it is not impossible that inclusive and moderate Indonesian Islam will be able to contribute to erecting the pillars of a firm and friendly civilization over the entire planet for the benefit of the human species. But we cannot simply speculate. We need to cultivate a deep self-awareness to continually criticize ourselves plainly and objectively, so we can enter a new era free from the false pride that has afflicted the Muslim *umat* over the years.

Finally, for this section, I need to reemphasize that in the effort to improve the economy of the Muslim *umat*, women entrepreneurs in SMEs need sincere attention in the period ahead of us. This is not only because women's SMEs tend to outnumber men's, but because trade in the hands of women can develop in a more balanced fashion. In this connection, the tradition of some heads of households to forbid their wives from leaving the house, let alone from doing trading, is long outmoded and thus needs to be buried, bearing in mind that the wives must preserve their honor and morality in business interactions. Denying the role of mothers in economic activities would be the same as not respecting them as complete human beings, creatures of Allah, with the potential to contribute to the well-being of the family no less than that of men. So for that reason, Irshad Manji, with her broad and varied experience, highly praises mothers who are active in business. Manji also nominates Indonesia with its thousands of islands as an example of democracy for the Muslim world, with its philosophy of "unity in diversity."⁴⁶ Of course, external observers greatly hope that Indonesian democracy will succeed in bringing justice and prosperity to the people. If Indonesia succeeds in building a nation and a state on the pillars of democracy, it may even win the recognition of other Muslim nations that are mired in dynastic and authoritarian political systems.

I have spotlighted how democracy in the hands of opportunists brings calamity to a nation and a state. But even given that fact, there is no argument that democracy is *haram*, or theologically proscribed, and its

supporters are *kafir* (unbelievers). Thinking like this is more appropriate to the dark ages when the rulers decided everything and their subjects were little more than the slaves of those same rajas, sultans, caliphs, and other titles that symbolized antipathy to the common people. If bizarre ideas such as that still appear in these modern times, we will simply let history judge them. As human values become increasingly universal, surely, in the end, the people will be all the more aware of their own value and dignity. The moment the people have a direct view of the corruption that usually accompanies a system of concentrated power, sooner or later they will surely oppose these despots.

We can be proud of Indonesia because democracy has been the choice of this nation from the beginning, even if its road has frequently been blocked by people with uncertain commitment to true democracy who emerged on our political stage. For democracy in Indonesia not to lose its luster, we must always make every effort to present competent political players. If parties want to be long-lived, then they must carry out planned political education for their supporters. Among the important elements that must be incorporated in their curricula are the democratic principles and political systems that have been known throughout history. In this way, we hope that politicians will no longer appear to be deficient in even the most elementary knowledge.

To end this chapter, I present a stern warning by Mohammad Amien Rais about the habit of the government in the Reform era of selling the nation's assets without adequate calculations. We very much need to take this warning to heart when looking to the future of Indonesia. Rais writes:

The Indonesian government has become a foreign servant. Many national assets such as state-owned enterprises and banks have systematically moved into foreign ownership. A part of our forests and land has been rented out to foreign corporations for terms of almost one hundred years, and our mineral wealth, both oil and gas and other forms, almost all of it, is managed by foreign corporations. The colonization of the Indonesian economy by foreign corporate powers is given a legal umbrella by statutory law and various political decisions.⁴⁷

The irresponsible sell-off of assets is the same as pawning the sovereignty of the nation and the state to foreign interests. Is this any different from economic colonialism by modern neo-imperialist powers?