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Abdurrahman Wahid's Efforts at Consolidating Democracy in Indonesia at Soeharto Authoritarian Regime Era (1990-1998)

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Abstract- Abdurrahman Wahid, former President of Republic Indonesia, was the first president at the Reformation Era which toppled down the authoritarian Soeharto regime. His success on becoming president because of his idea of democracy as well as his tract records of his efforts to consolidate democracy was able to convince both the secular nationalists and Islamist Muslims. His thought of democracy had justification from the fiqh paradigm employed by the traditionalist Muslims, mean while his efforts at consolidating democracy was not partisan, involving different social political groups. He was also able to convince the supporters of Soeharto as he was not reluctantly to accommodate them as long as having commitments to establish democracy. It was due to his non-revolutionary approach to progress at the Soeharto regime era, but his zigzag strategies often confused both his supporters and his opponents. He had made a counter discourse both to Soeharto regime and the Islamist Muslims, besides his commitment to develop religious organization groups to play a role of civil society.

Keywords: *abdurrahman wahid, fiqh paradigm, democracy, counter discourse, civil society.*

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I. Introduction

Democracy was a main political issue in the 1990s when Wahid, together with other civil society elements, established *Forum Demokrasi* (Fordem, the Democracy Forum). This was due to the banning of *Monitor* magazine by President Suharto which was perceived by Wahid as contrary to democracy which requires the case to be tested in the courts.[1] Wahid made use of Fordem to develop a counter discourse to the monolithic interpretation of Pancasila by the Suharto regime. This establishment was also related to the issue of sectarianism with the establishment of ICMI as well as President Suharto's accommodation and co-optation of the rising middle class modernist Muslims. In this regard, Wahid also challenged the ideas of Islamisation and of democracy introduced by the modernist Muslims.[2]

Democracy became a national political issue in the 1990s following the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, signifying the breakdown of communism as well as the rise of liberalism which advocated capitalism in the form of globalisation. In line with the issue of globalisation, Suharto introduced the era of openness which would imply more political participation. In line with this Suharto's regime created a semi-formal body of the National Committee of Human Rights (*Komite Nasional Hak-Hak Asasi Manusia*, *Komnas HAM*) as a response to the international trend of globalisation and liberalisation for the purpose of securing the national interest.

In this regard, Wahid argued that the fall of the world ideology of communism did not automatically bring about a new era of democratisation in developing countries such as Indonesia. The fall of communism caused the Soeharto regime to strengthen the political system with the argument of avoiding the rising demand for separatism as had happened with the breakup of the Soviet Union and later Yugoslavia. In line with this, the regime argued that Indonesia should preserve the nature of Indonesian society. In this regard, Suharto followed the Sukarno regime's adoption of the integralistic nature of Indonesia, firstly introduced by Supomo,[3] similar to the idea of cultural relativism.[4]

The nature of the Soeharto regime was a militaristic regime which runs the government oligarchy with the help of bureaucrats and technocrats. In regard with bureaucracy and technocracy Soeharto accommodate the modernist Muslims. Suharto developed cooperation with the modernist Muslims since its establishment at the end of 1960s, as he was obsessed by modernisation, besides his plan was to marginalise the political role of the traditionalist Muslims. Indeed, Soeharto wanted to maintain power for himself

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[1] Thoha, Z. A. (1993). Gus Dur, NU dan Demokrasi [Gus Dur, NU, and Democracy]. Membangun Budaya Kerakyatan: Kepemimpinan Gus Dur dan Gerakan Sosial NU [Establishing Populis Culture: Gus Dur's Leadership and NU's Social Movement]. Z. A. Thoha and M. A. Mustofa. Yogyakarta, Titian Ilahi Press.

[2] Wahid, A. (1999). Mengurai Hubungan Agama dan Negara [Elaborating the Interface Islam and State]. Jakarta, Grasindo.

[3] Pranarka, A. M. W. (1985). Sejarah Pemikiran tentang Pancasila [The Intellectual History of Pancasila] Jakarta, CSIS.

[4] Wahid, A. (1994). Individu, Negara, dan Ideologi [Individual, the State, and Ideology]. Menjawab Perubahan Zaman: Warisan Pemikiran K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid [Responding to the Changes of the Time: The Thought of Abdurrahman Wahid]. J. Oetomo. Jakarta, Kompas.

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by centralizing the power and did not tolerate a strong political party, namely *Partai Persatuan Pembangunan*, PPP (the United Development Party, UDP) whose members came from the traditionalist Muslims.

The traditionalist Muslims never had a close relationship with the regime because the former was mostly associated with the United Development Party, main political force after the ban of Indonesian Communist Party (*Partai Komunis Indonesia*, PKI). The regime considered improperly that traditionalist Muslims developed an Islamic ideological, aspiring to establish an Islamic state or to interpret the national ideology of Pancasila by the Shari'ah. Actually, they developed fiqh paradigm which advocated the Pancasila state, but the regime did not tolerated any political opposition as an instrument for developing democracy. Accordingly the regime tried to intervene to political parties, namely UDP and *Partai Demokrasi Indonesia*, PDI (Indonesian Democracy Party, IDP).

Wahid considered correctly that the association of the traditionalist Muslims to UDP was not conducive to the development of Nahdlatul Ulama, NU (the Revival of the Clergy), a religious mass organization. It was very easy for the regime to intervene the internal affairs of the UDP as a fusion of some Islamic parties of different political orientations. In this regard UDP failed to formulate a coherent party platform which enabled them to do checks and balances to the regime. Accordingly Wahid did not want to consolidate Indonesian democratization by political party. In line with this he tried to empower NU to play a role of civil society: providing checks and balances to the government. For that purposes, Wahid, the chief executive leader of NU, released its affiliation to the United Development Party (PPP). At the same time, he tried to convince Suharto to adopt the idea of civil society for the purpose of development of democracy in Indonesia. His efforts were relatively successful to influence the regime to support the development of NU, however the regime was not concerned with the development of democracy. On the contrary, Suharto tried to maintain power by means of co-optation, but it was not easy for him to co-opted NU in which the leadership of *pesantren* (traditional Islamic system of education) under the clerics was not regulated hierarchal.

Soeharto was very successful to co-opt the modernist Muslims after his success to approach to its chief leaderships. Indeed, the modernist Muslims had tendency to develop the bureaucratization of Islam as well as the agenda of Islamization. In line with this, Soeharto believed that he was able to control them and accordingly he gave his approval for establishing ICMI. The establishment of ICMI on 6 December 1990 was one of the more successful Muslim efforts made to approach the secular Suharto regime.[5] It was concomitant with Suharto's efforts to expand his political basis to balance the rising power of the military.[6] Wahid did not agree with the cooperation, developed by the regime, with the modernist Muslims, which was considered as a kind of 'marriage of convenience', not strong enough to resolve the ideological conflicts between the followers of secular and Islamic aspirations.[7]

II. Soeharto and the Modernist Muslims on the Modernization

The neo-modernist Muslims had employed democracy as a tool for intellectual analysis in the 1970s[8] as they were educated in both religious and secular institutions so that they were proficient in both Islamic and secular knowledge. In this regard, Nurcholish Madjid was a pioneer who argued 'yes for Islam and no for Islamic parties'. This was as a response to Suharto's regime which was hostile towards Islam.[9] By so doing, Madjid informed the regime that Islam was different from Islamic parties so that he supported the idea of a secular state which differentiated the management of state and that of religion. In other words, he supported the idea of a democratic state. Wahid agreed with Madjid's proposition of 'yes for Islam and no for Islamic parties', but he, actually, had a slightly different understanding from Madjid on the concept of democracy. In this regard, Madjid was likely to insist on promoting Islam as the dominant culture for Indonesia akin to that of Christianity for people of the USA.[10] Accordingly, he, then, joined with ICMI in order to fulfil his idea of the bureaucratisation of Islamic affairs, with the help of the government.

As we know, the political power of the New Order regime was run by three elite groups that are the military, bureaucracy and technocracy. These three elite groups ran an oligarchic government as the dominant

[5] Rahardjo, M. D. (1995). Visi dan Misi Kehadiran ICMI: Sebuah Pengantar [Vision and Mission of ICMI]. ICMI Antara Status Quo dan Demorkatisasi [ICMI: Between Status Quo and Democratization]. N. Ali-Fauzi. Bandung, Mizan.

[6] Jones, N. (2010). "Rediscovering Pancasila: Religion in Indonesia's Public Square." The Brandywine Review of Faith and International Affairs **3**(1).

[7] Rahardjo, M. D. (1995). ICMI, Masyarakat Madani dan Masa Depan Politik di Indonesia: Sebuah Catatan Akhir [ICMI, Civil Society and the Future of Indonesian Politics]. ICMI atara Status Quo dan Demokratisasi [ICMI: Between the Status Quo and Democratization]. N. Ali-Fauzi. Bandung, Mizan.

[8] Assyaukani, L. (2004). "Democracy and the Islamic state: Muslim Arguments for Political Change in Indonesia." The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies **20**. These intellectuals were known variably as 'revivalist Muslims' (Hassan, 1980), 'neo-modernist Muslims' (Barton, 1995), and 'liberal Muslims' (Qodir, 2003).

[9] Ibid.

[10] Madjid, N. (2004). Indonesia Kita [Our Indonesia]. Jakarta, Gramedia.

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political power, namely the military elites, was not able to run the government without the supports of the bureaucrat and technocrat elites. It was not surprising that the new order regime pursued technocratic and bureaucratic approaches.[11] Indeed, the military had great political power since the establishment of the new order regime as military officers occupied the most governmental offices at various levels as well as strategic positions in the fields of economy and technology.[12] For that purpose, they tried to find justification from the doctrine of the dual function of the military (*dwi-fungsi ABRI*).[13] Howeve, mostly the technocrats and bureaucrats came from either the secular nationalists or the modernist Muslims. The modernist Muslims were relatively successful than their counterpart of the traditionalist Muslims to fill the offices of bureaucracy and of technocracy as the result of agenda of Islamic modernization. Wahid's critic to them is their adoption of ideological approach of the modern civilization which made them difficult to negotiate with their counterpart of the traditionalist Muslims. This ideological approach was not very detrimental in the West because of its ability to develop the mechanism of checks and balances within its societal systems, including its political system, as well as its tolerance to other social groups. Examples of this ideological approach were their ideas of bureaucratisation of Islam, of Islamisation, of Islamic culture, and of interpreting Pancasila through Shari'ah.

The modernist Muslims had not had a clear worldview on the relationship between Islam and the Pancsila state because of the different nature of modern nation state and Islam. They tended to make uses of modern state to implement Shari'ah (Islamic Law). This tendency contravened the nature of modern state which functions to protect individual as a citizenship, implying a neutral to any religious affiliations. This contradiction can be resolved only by following a true concept of modern state as well as to employ Islamic cosmology, namely the *fiqh* paradigm,[14] which considers phenomena in term of secular and religious knowledge at once. Another modernist Muslim who was still confused on the Pancasila state was Amien Rais. His association with ICMI was confirming his support of bureaucratisation, a part of his disagreement with an Islamic state, at least in 1982, in his interview with the Islamic magazine, *Panji Masyarkat*, with the bombastic title 'The Islamic State Does Not Exist' (*Panji Masyarakat*, 1 November 1982). His interview created agreement and disagreement for some weeks and one of the most important responses was the article written by Mohammad Roem, a leader of *Masyumi*, in February 1983. He supported Rais's statement. Rais's breakthrough has paved the way for other Muslim intellectuals and leaders to go in the same direction. Apart from this article, Syafi'i Ma' arif, his colleague in Muhammadiyah, gave an evident that in 1987 Amien Rais still believed in the unity of Islam and the state.[15] Encompassing by the idea of bureaucratisation of Islam, Amien Rais joined with the ICMI from the beginning of its establishment.

By the end of the 1980s Suharto was becoming worried about this military power under the leadership of General Benny Murdani, which was perceived as being out of control and, accordingly, he tried to reduce the power of the military. In doing so, Suharto made use of a professional argument that it was more appropriate for the the Ministry of Research and Technology, under B.J. Habbie, a modernist Muslim, to handle the military industries.[16] The modernist Muslims also noticed the rising tensions between Suharto and Murdani, a Catholic, and accordingly, they tried to approach the regime with their idea of Islamisation. They tried to establish a kind of institution for the purpose of strengthening their bargaining power. At the same time, Suharto also had an idea of co-opting Muslims. For that purpose, President Suharto endorsed the establishment of ICMI and his protégé, the Minister of Research and Technology, B.J. Habibie headed the organisation.[17]

The establishment of ICMI was a further development of the success of modernist Muslims who had been absorbed by the regime in the bureaucracy and technocracy. This did not mean that its member just came from Islamic modernist organisations, as some Muslims of the traditionalist background also joined to ICMI.[18] What I'd like to emphasise is that the idea of bureaucratisation of Islam was the thought of the modernist Muslims.[19] Indeed, Suharto tried to co-opt all Muslim groups for the purpose of balancing the political influence of the military.

The establishment of ICMI was just possible following the acceptance of Pancasila as the only basis for a political party and mass organisation in the 1980s.

[11] Kaisiepo, M. (1997). "Dari Kepolitikan Birokratik ke Korporatisme Negara: Birokrasi dan Politik di Indonesia [From a bureaucratic politics to a corporate state: bureaucracy and politics in Indonesia]." Jurnal Ilmu Politik(No. 2).

[12] Ibid.

[13] Adam Schwarz, A. (1994). A Nation in Waiting: Indonesia in the 1990s. Sydney, Westview.

[14] Saefur Rochmat, "The Fiqh Paradigm for Pancasila State: Abdurrahman Wahid on Islam, Democracy, and the Republic of Indonesia", *Al-Jami'ah*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (2014): p. 309.

[15] Ma'arif, S. (1988). Islam dan Politik di Indonesia: Pada Masa Demokrasi Terpimpin (1959-1965) [Islam and Politics in Indonesia at the Guided Democracy Era]. Yogyakarta, IAIN Sunan Kalijaga Press.

[16] Mahfud, M. (2010). Gus Dur: Islam, Politik, dan Kebangsaan [Gus Dur: Islam, Politic, and Nationalism]. Yogyakarta, LkiS.

[17] Kikue Hamayotsu, K. (2011). "Beyond faith and identity: mobilizing Islamic youth in a democratic Indonesia." The Pacific Review **24**(2): 225-247.

[18] Wahid, A. (1999). Prisma Pemikiran Abdurrahman Wahid [Abdurrahman Wahid's Prismatic Thoughts]. Yogyakarta, LKiS.

[19] Adam Schwarz, A. (1994). A Nation in Waiting: Indonesia in the 1990s. Sydney, Westview.

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Suharto did not see ICMI as dangerous as the latter did not challenge his policies, besides his belief was in his ability to control it. Indeed, ICMI gave more power to the Suharto regime with their idea of the bureaucratisation of Islam. In 1995 this was confirmed by ICMI's understanding of civil society in terms of *masyarakat madani* (the ideal society) which would give more power to the executive. In this regard, I agree with Wahid's conclusion that:

> I'd like to congratulate to [Emha Ainun Najib] on his resignation from ICMI. In my view, that organisation is the government's sub-ordinate, although I never say that.[20]

The majority of ICMI members were the modernist Muslims who aspired to the agenda of the Islamisation of Indonesia and pursued their goal not by political parties but by 'the cultural approach'. This was due to their position of being bureaucratic and technocratic elites. It is difficult to accuse these modernist Muslims of ignoring the democratic procedure as they pursued the democratic mechanism to achieve their goal, especially the Islamisation of Indonesia. In this regard, they did not want to establish an Islamic state, but rather to interpret Pancasila by Islamic law,[21] but in the long run it was possible to direct the creation of an Islamic state as some Islamists joined with ICMI. This political Islam was clearly stated by Bintang Pamungkas as follows:

> Nurcholish's concept of 'Islam, yes Islamic party, no,' is denigrating to the Islamic way of life. You can't do anything without political power.... Throughout the New Order Muslims have been in a very low position. For me, ICMI is a means to political power. [22]

III. Wahid's Counter Discourse to ICMI

a) Wahid's Critic on ICMI's Understanding of Democracy

Wahid did not agree with the dominant role of Islam in political life in Indonesia because this was contrary to the concept of the nation state which does not differentiate amongst people based on their religious background. Accordingly, Wahid refused to join with ICMI because of its use of Islam as a flag:

> Although I do not join ICMI, I hope that ICMI would produce something precious for our country. However, I have a strong conviction that I should not join with ICMI. The reason is because of its use of the Islamic flag.[23]

Wahid did not oppose the establishment of ICMI as long as it was for the purpose of political participation which would make the regime more democratic. Wahid was critical of the sectarian understanding of democracy by the modernist Muslims.[24] He evaluated that they were just concerned with power and not concerned with the democracy as the common interest of all Indonesians. Wahid considered correctly that the modernist Muslims' thoughts on democracy were contrary to the *raison d etre* of the theory of democracy which would justify the concept of the nation state. In this regard, Masykuri Abdillah evaluated precisely that these modernist Muslims just adopted the practical, not philosophical, concept of democracy for the purpose of a practical arrangement of public affairs, in regard to the fact that they did not live in an Islamic state. Philosophically, they argued that the nature of democracy, of negotiation, inherently meant compromising the truth so that it was contrary to Islam which, they believed, had dictated to them the absolute truth. Accordingly, they persisted in the efforts of interpreting Pancasila with Syari'ah by means of the mechanism of democracy, namely procedural democracy, which justified the rule of majority.

Wahid was also concerned with the Islamists' idea of proportionate democracy, that Muslims should have proportionate representatives in the governmental system such as in the parliament and ministry. It was one of political issues employed by the Islamists who considered that Christians were over represented in the government. In this regard, Wahid reminded the Islamists that those who worked for the governmental were not priests, but scholars. It was correct that Muslims per se, not the modernist Muslims, were proportionately represented in the governmental system.[25] Wahid was also concerned with the fact that these modernist Muslims of ICMI ignored the essential element of democracy which respects the rights of the minority. For example, these modernist Muslims insisted that different levels of governmental systems should facilitate the creation of the bureaucratisation of religious affairs.[26]

[20] *Jawa Pos*, 19 September 1991.
[21] Michael Feener, R. M. (2007). Muslim Legal Thought in Modern Indonesia. Leiden, Cambridge University Press.
[22] Adam Schwarz, A. (1994). A Nation in Waiting: Indonesia in the 1990s. Sydney, Westview.
[23] *Jawa Pos*, 6 December 1990.
[24] M. Dawam Rahardjo, M. D. (1995). ICMI, Masyarakat Madani dan Masa Depan Politik di Indonesia: Sebuah Catatan Akhir [ICMI, Civil Society and the Future of Indonesian Politics]. ICMI atara Status Quo dan Demokratisasi [ICMI: Between the Status Quo and Democratization]. N. Ali-Fauzi. Bandung, Mizan.
[25] Abdurrahman Wahid, A. (1999). Islam, Negara, dan Demokrasi: Himpunan Percekikan Perenungan Gus Dur. A. Wahid. Jakarta, Erlangga.
[26] Hakiem, L., T. Linrung and M. F. Rakasima (1995). Mereka Bicara tentang I.C.M.I.: Sorotan Lima Tahun Perjalanan I.C.M.I. [They discuss about I.C.M.I.: Evaluation on I.C.M.I.'s Its Five Year Establishment]. Jakarta, Amanah Putra Nusantara.

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I do not agree with Abdillah's assessment that Wahid just followed the liberal tradition.[27] In fact, Wahid developed a theology of Islamic democracy as his response to the modern concept of democracy from the Islamic point of view, namely the *fiqh*-plus paradigm. By so doing, he related religious aspirations to non-religious aspirations such as the concept of democracy, revitalising the *fiqh* paradigm to suit modern development.[28] More accurate was Mujiburrahman's argument that Wahid was a true Islamic thinker whose thought was based on the Islamic tradition rooted in the Qur'an.

Mujiburrahman argues that Wahid understood the concept of democracy as a kind of implementation of Islamic universal values such as mutual deliberations (*al-syura*), justice (*al-'adal*), equality (*al-musawah*), and freedom (*al-huriyah*) in the modern context.[29] In other words, the adaptation of Islam to the form of the concept of democracy was a kind of classical phenomenon of *ushul al-fiqh* which tried to accommodate culture (*al-'adah*) into the norm, namely Syari'ah.[30] In line with this, Muslims should support the Republic of Indonesia which is a commitment to the idea of liberal democracy. In this regard, he only committed to Islamic values, namely democracy, not the form of an Islamic state. Wahid argued that Islamic law functioned only to complement the existing culture, or in other words, Islam was a part of culture, not the other way around, with Islam as an alternative to 'non-Islamic culture', such as believed by the Islamists.[31] Accordingly, his thought on the theology of Islamic democracy was to resolve the conflicting ideas between secular aspirations and Islamic ones.

Wahid did not agree with a legal-formal approach developed by Islamists who still idealised the establishment of an Islamic state or at least the interpretation of the national ideology of Pancasila in the view of Islamic law (Syari'ah). Furthermore, radical Islamists such as *Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia* (HTI) and *Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia* (MMI) had opposed the idea of democracy because they considered that it was from the Western tradition.[32] He also did not agree with the secular nationalists who advocated the secular paradigm which tried to differentiate the public affairs of the state and those of the culture, including religion. In this regard, Wahid advocated the *fiqh* paradigm as a moderate form of aspiration which tried to relate the secular and theocratic aspirations. The *fiqh* paradigm believed in the concept of mutual legitimacy between Islam and the state. In this regard, in 1982 Wahid wrote an article entitled 'Jangan Paksakan Paradigma Luar terhadap Agama' [Do not Apply the Foreign Paradigms to Islam],[33] as his criticism toward the Islamists who made use of modern ideologies for understanding Islam. Wahid believed that theology should form the basis for Muslim responses to foreign concepts.[34]

Wahid did not agree with the idea of interpreting Pancasila through Syari'ah, namely the idea of Islamisation, as it was in contradiction to the slogan of Indonesian society that was 'unity in diversity' (*Bhineka Tunggal Ika*). Accordingly, he did not want any religion to dominate Indonesian political life. He did not agree with the dominant role of Islam in Indonesian political life in spite of the Muslim majority. This was due to the fact that the same status of the people's majority religion was also true for Hindu-Buddhism before the coming of Islam. Accordingly, the status of Islam as the majority religion was not enough to justify the dominant political role for its adherents. Indeed, Wahid was aware of the historical development of this country so that he was able to envisage the proper role of religion, namely Islam, in socio-political life in Indonesia. He had developed an open mind in accepting the plurality of the Indonesian people and he accepted the Pancasila state. In line with this, he argued that the Muslims should play the role of protector of the Republic of Indonesia and religious organisations to take a role in civil society which provides checks and balances to the state.

Wahid persuaded Muslims not follow the way of non-Muslims in their efforts of preserving their minority identities. If the Muslims tried to emphasise their identities, non-Muslims would increase their minority complex. By so doing, Wahid required the Muslims to develop a mature attitude of not imitating the way of non-Muslims, instead, approaching them to develop cooperation for the purpose of the unity of Indonesia. In line with this Wahid did not agree with ICMI's conception of *masyarakat madani* which clearly signified an Islamic identity and argued for a dominant role of Islam. Moreover, he did not agree with ICMI's understanding of civil society with *masyarakat madani* which would justify a strong executive institution in the hands of President Suharto.

[27] Mujiburrahman (1999). "Islam and politics in Indonesia: The political thought of Abdurrahman Wahid." Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations **10**(3): 339-352.
[28] Abdurrahman Wahid, A. (1999). Prisma Pemikiran Abdurrahman Wahid [Abdurrahman Wahid's Prismatic Thoughts]. Yogyakarta, LKiS.
[29] Achmad Mufid, A. (2010). Nyleneh Itu Indah [Idiosyncrasy is Beautiful]. Yogyakarta, Kutuh.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Wahid, A. (2007). Komplementer ataukah Alternatif [Complementary or Alternative?]. Gus Dur, Islam, dan Kebangkitan Indonesia [Gus Dur, Islam, and Indonesian Awakening]. A. M. Iskandar. Yogyakarta, Klik R.
[32] Abdillah, M. (1999). Demokrasi Dipersimpangan Makna: Respon Intelektual Muslim Indonesia terhadap Konsep Demokrasi (1966-1993) [The Competing Meanings of Democracy: Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals' Response to the Democracy] Yogyakarta, Tiara Wacana.
[33] Abdurrahman Wahid, A. (1999). Prisma Pemikiran Abdurrahman Wahid [Abdurrahman Wahid's Prismatic Thoughts]. Yogyakarta, LKiS.
[34] Wahid, A. (1989). Pengantar [Introduction]. Nahdlatul Ulama dan Pancasila [Nahdlatul Ulama and Pancasila]. E. M. Sitompul. Jakarta, Sinar Harapan.

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b) Wahid's Critic of ICMI's Understanding of Civil Society

Wahid did not agree with the idea of bureaucratisation of Islam because he believed that Islamic practices should be under the control of Islamic leaders. Moreover, Wahid tried to empower the existing Islamic organisations to play the role of civil society which would create checks and balances to the state and he provided the theological foundation for that purpose which enabled Muslims to develop cooperation with non-Muslims.[35]

In 1990s Wahid's implementation of Gramsci's idea of counter hegemony instigated a discourse of civil society in the national political life. This term of civil society was introduced by the young generation of NU in 1990s, namely the followers of Wahid, who tried to support Wahid's critical stance towards the regime.[36] There appeared intellectual debates about civil society amongst different socio-political forces and they proposed different terminologies.[37] In this regard, ICMI, which was accommodated by the regime, tried to understand civil society with *masyarakat madani* a comparable terminology explored through their understanding of the history of Islam.[38] By so doing, ICMI did not want to use the notion of civil society to confront the state as they did not want to confront the Suharto regime. In other words, they supported the position of the strong executive such as run by Suharto. This ICMI understanding of civil society was different from the modern concept of civil society which emphasised its relative independence from the state. However, as a discourse, this understanding can be justified by the original term civil society which came from the Latin *civilis society* introduced by Cicero.[39] Dr. Didin Damanhuri of ICMI also admitted that this different understanding was due to both having different historical backgrounds in their conceptualisation. He did not want to follow the European understanding of civil society.[40] Indeed, he, together with other members of ICMI, tended towards the bureaucratisation of Islam and he advocated the Islamisation of knowledge. Ahmad Baso, the young generation of NU, criticised ICMI, especially Nurcholish Madjid, who proposed *masyarakat madani* as an alternative of civil society.[41]

It was possible to Islamise the modern concept of civil society, but Wahid did not want to do so because this may divert the real meaning of the concept of civil society itself. Moreover, this may blurred his main concern of developing democracy in Indonesia. Accordingly, he preferred to use the prevailing institutions in order to eliminate the primordial social barricades amongst different social groups such as those based on religion, ethnicity, race, and religious denomination. He believed that the neutral institutions, namely an open system, was more conducive to the development of democracy in a plural society such as Indonesia. Indeed, Wahid wanted to play the role of the teacher of the whole of Indonesia so that he emphasised his identity as an Indonesian rather than as a Muslim. In this regard, he made use of Islam as the complementary factor, not a supplementary one, so that he was not concerned with the issue of the Islamisation of the knowledge. This was due to being more concerned with the substance of the ideas than with their terminologies. As a result, he did not want to give civil society an exclusive Islamic term. This did not imply that he opposed Muslims who wanted to develop Islamic concepts and institutions, as long as they did not intend to offer them as an alternative to the national state.

IV. Wahid's Counter Discourse on Soeharto's Monolithic Interpretation of Pancasila

Wahid did not agree with the sectarian character of ICMI and accordingly, he, together with intellectuals and activists from different religious backgrounds, established *Forum Demokrasi* (*Fordem*, the Democracy Forum) in the cause of the consolidation of democracy in Indonesia. Wahid established Fordem

[35] Mark Woodward, M. (2007). Translator's Introduction. Islam, pluralism, and democracy. Arizona, Consortium for Strategic Communication, Arizona State University.

[36] Thang D Nguyen and Frank Jurgen Richter, p. 76

[37] Rahardjo, M. D. (1999). Masyarakat Madani: Agama, Kelas Menengah dan Perubahan Sosial [Civil Society: Religion, Middle Class, and Social Changes]. Jakarta, LP3ES dan LSAF.

[38] This term of *masyarakat madani* was introduced by Anwar Ibrahim at the Festival Istiqlal seminar on 26th September 1995. This terminology was a translation from the Arabic word "*mujtama' madani*", introduced by Prof. Naquib Attas, a historian of Islamic civilisation from Malaysia. The word of "*madani*" means civil or civilised which reflects civilisation, similar to other Arabic words such as *hadlari, tsaqafi* and *tamaddun*. See Hamim, T. (2000). Islam dan Civil society (Masyarakat madani): Tinjauan tentang Prinsip Human Rights, Pluralism dan Religious Tolerance [Islam and Civil Society (Masyarakat Madani): In the View of the Principles of Human Rights, Pluralism, and Religious Tolerance]. Pendidikan Islam, Demokratisasi dan Masyarakat Madani [Islamic Education, Democratisation, and an Ideal Society]. I. SM and A. Mukti. Yogyakarta, Pustaka Pelajar.

[39] It is likely that when a concept becomes an area of contestation as a concept it is very often related to contestation of power. This concept of *masyarakat madani* is similar to the terms of *societas civilis* (civil society) introduced by Cicero (106-1043 B.C.) whose meaning reflects to the political society which has civic code as an instrument for managing societal life. The members of ICMI understand *masyarakat madani* in the same way as Cicero, as Muhammad the Prophet successfully built Madinah into an city state. Of course, they made uses of Cicero's terminology to suit the autocratic Suharto regime. Rowley, C. K. (1998). "On the Nature of Civil Society." The Independent Review **2**(3).

[40] M. Dawam Rahardjo, M. D. (1999). Masyarakat Madani: Agama, Kelas Menengah dan Perubahan Sosial [Civil Society: Religion, Middle Class, and Social Changes]. Jakarta, LP3ES dan LSAF.

[41] Saleh, F. (2004). Teologi Pembaruan: Pergeseran Wacana Islam Sunni di Indonesia Abad XX [Theology of Reformation: The Shift of Discourses amongst the Sunni Muslims in Indonesia in the 20th Century]. Jakarta, PT Serambi Ilmu Semesta.

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because he did not want to jeopardise Muslims' relationship with the military.

I would like to emphasise that Fordem was not a mass organisation or an advocacy organisation, but just a forum for those concerned with the development of democracy in Indonesia.

The Democracy Forum is not a mass organisation, but an education group, to improve the practices of democracy. This forum is also to deal with the problems of democracy for the future, for example, the problems of culture and of conducive political related factors for national integration. Recently, there appear some phenomena of groupings related to both regionalism and sectarianism....In the view of democracy, what is required is the condition of freedom of thought and of association, besides respecting different opinions amongst each other.[42]

It was interesting that Wahid did not make use of NU as the backbone of his political manoeuvre because he did not want to put people against the regime, indeed, it was in line with his commitment to NU as a religious organisation which should not deal with practical politics. Wahid realised that it was not easy for him to criticise the regime without negative impact for NU so he established Fordem for that purpose. Regarding the action plans of Fordem, Wahid mentioned four points:

> First is to expand the participation of people's voices in order to mature the country in the process of democratisation; second is to improve communication amongst the different groups of the supporters of democratisation; third is to develop a link amongst the supporters of democratisation which are still dispersed and small; fourth is to preserve the tradition of the democracy movements by all means, including publication.[43]

Wahid made use of the Forum Democracy to publicise some statements, namely a counter discourse, challenging the formal interpretation of Pancasila by a regime set on the integralistic nature of Indonesian society. On the other hand, he developed a counter-discourse which supported liberal democracy as well as his interpretation of the Islamic tradition following the *fiqh* paradigm. Accordingly, Fordem had put Wahid into a state of the highest tension with the regime.[44] Wahid's success as the leader of Fordem was recognised by Indonesian people of different religious background and this resulted in him being nominated by *Editor*[45] and *Tempo* magazines respectively as the man of the year.

Wahid's leadership reputation outside NU, as well as among Muslims generally, had caused the Suharto regime to be unable to accuse him of being a conservative or a radical eligible for silencing by the regime.

Prominent in Wahid's establishment of Fordem was his understanding of Antonio Gramsci's counter-discourse. Wahid was brave enough to create a counter-hegemony to the regime because he was able to form an alliance with some military officers under the leadership of General Benny Murdani, who felt disappointed with the increasing role of the modernist Muslims under the leadership of B.J. Habibie. Wahid knew how to make political moves and he saved his position by playing on the political balances amongst the different of the political forces. Moreover, he received support from other Indonesian people beyond his traditional NU circle as well as the Muslim circle generally in his efforts at consolidating democracy in Indonesia. Last but not least, Wahid obtained political influence from his position as a chairman of NU as the biggest mass organisation in Indonesia.

The military was traumatised and worried about the modernist Muslims' idealism about an Islamic state such as had manifested in the history of Indonesia. Accordingly, Wahid tried to keep the relations between the military and the modernist Muslims from breaking into conflict. He was worried about the military's response to the modernist Muslims whose interest was in interpreting Pancasila according to Islamic law. This was due to his belief that conflict would endanger the development of democracy in Indonesia.

Wahid kept a close eye on the political rivalry between the military and ICMI such as manifested clearly in their competition to install their people in the candidacy for the vice-president in 1992. In this regard, the military presented *a fait a accompli* to Suharto with the announcement of its faction in parliament which promoted General Tri Soetrisno to become the candidate for vice-president. It was clearly aimed at blocking any chance of B.J. Habibie becoming candidate for vice-president.

Wahid's political influence was greater than the leaders of political parties as he had real support from the people. Accordingly, he was able to assume the role that normally would belong to a political party to control the course of the government.[46] Gus Dur considered that the Suharto regime had ruled autocratically by assuming the role of true interpreter of the national ideology of Pancasila such as we see in his statement below:

The government's claim for being more knowledgeable about anything in society is a common feature everywhere in our country. This kind of attitude is not conducive to improving the quality of human resources and, moreover, causes the excessive

[42] *Jawa Pos*, 4 April 1991.
[43] *Jawa Pos*, 4 April 1991.
[44] Abdurrahman Wahid, A. (1999). Prisma Pemikiran Abdurrahman Wahid [Abdurrahman Wahid's Prismatic Thoughts]. Yogyakarta, LKiS.
[45] *Jawa Pos*, 17 December 1990.
[46] Wahid, A. (2007). "Islam, Pluralism and Democracy." Consortium for Strategic Communication: 10.

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bureaucratisation of the existing governmental institutions. This means that legislative institutions do not function as a tool for supporting democracy in long term.[47]

Wahid was also critical of the Suharto regime's policy of bureaucratisation of culture:

> Culture should not be interpreted monolithically by focusing on ...anything which is considered aesthetic just for a pure aesthetical goal. ...The prevailing authoritarianism is not a legacy of culture or a product of the national personality, but a side effect of a system which has been working out of control for more than 20 years.[48]

The character of an autocratic state manifested in all aspects of societal life and this also emerged for NU in the issue of national lottery (SDSB, *Sumbangan Dermawan Sosial Berhadiah*, a lottery with the name of Philanthropist's Social Contribution with a Prize). Wahid commented to the issue of SDSB as follows:

> ...the conflict within the national leaders of NU on the issue of SDSB is an internal NU problem which has been intervened in by the government, namely the Ministers of Religious Affairs and of Home Affairs. This is a dangerous precedent, namely reducing the independence of NU.[49]

V. Wahid's Non-Revolutionary Method and Zigzag Strategy

Indeed, it was not an easy job to be critical of the regime as he came under strong pressure from the government as well as other elements of society. At that time, all political parties and mass organisations had supported Suharto for the next presidential election. He did not want to support Suharto's autocratic regime and he argued that it would not be appropriate for NU to give support for presidential candidacy as NU was not a political party, but a mass religious organisation.

To avoid the pressure from the government and the some elements of society, in 1992 Wahid carried out a mass meeting (*Rapat Akbar*) of NU in Jakarta which confirmed NU's loyalty to the national ideology of Pancasila and the Constitution rather than surrendering to Suharto's pressure to support his leadership for the next election. This mass meeting was also to remind certain groups to not force decisions on the basis of group interest, such as stated by Mustofa Bisri:

> A mass meeting or rally is, indeed, to be an arena for a show of power or to challenge certain groups who want to pursue their interests by ignoring the constitution and neglecting unity and integrity. 'To break the constitution, NU would need to be defeated first' is likely what Wahid wants to say.[50]

The regime was not happy with the *Rapat Akbar* of NU just three months away from parliamentary elections and Wahid was warned by Lieutenant Colonel Prabowo Subianto, Suharto's son-in-law, that "he had strayed beyond the boundaries of acceptable political conduct ...[he] was to stick with religious issues and stay out of politics." As a result of Wahid's commitment to democracy, he opted to leave the Nahdlatul Ulama and headed up Democracy Forum.[51] In response to Wahid's manoeuvre, the government through its ministers accused him of being the follower of liberalism, with Abdul Gafur, former Minister of Youth and Sport, saying that:

> It is likely that the establishment of the Democracy Forum is to adopt foreign ideas which had been practised unsuccessfully during the old order regime. These foreign ideas belong to liberalism which is not suitable to Indonesian culture.[52]

Pressure on Wahid to decline the candidacy of the NU leadership also came from K.H. Ali Yafie', vice-*Rais 'Am* of NU, and K.H. Yusuf Hasyim, who were close with the government. The reason was Wahid's approval for proposing funding to YDBKS (*Yayasan Dana Bakti Kesejahteraan Sosial*, Monetary Foundation for Serving Social Welfare), management of the national lottery of SDSB, and his participation in Fordem. This issue of funding from YDBKS caused conflict between K.H. Ali Yafie and Wahid. It was not usual that Wahid was able to win support over the institution of *Rais 'Am*, as the ultimate body of NU. In this regard, K.H. Ali Yafie tried to bring NU closer to the Suharto regime in line with other Islamic organisations, while Wahid argued for the neutrality of NU toward the regime. In this regard, Wahid pulled something of a skilled political manoeuvre through his relationship to Fordem.

Responding to the pressure, Wahid asserted, in fact, he preferred to be a leader of Fordem than a leader of NU:

> If I am pressured to choose only one, I would like to be a chief of the Democracy Forum. ...There is no prohibition for me outside NU. The Democracy Forum is not an illegal organisation.[53]

In fact he would not leave NU if there was no guarantee for the role of NU as a critical force in civil society. In 1994 he postponed his intention of leaving NU and persisted in his willingness to head NU for the

[47] Jawa Pos, 10 August 1991.
[48] Wahid, A. (1991). Negara dan Kebudayaan [The State and the Culture]. Jawa Pos. East Java, Jawa Pos.
[49] Jawa Pos, 24 December 1991.
[50] Bisri, M. (1992). Gus Dur dan Rapat Akbar N.U.-nya [Gus Dur and His N.U.'s Great Gathering]. Jawa Pos. East Java, Jawa Pos.
[51] Adam Schwarz, A. (1994). A Nation in Waiting: Indonesia in the 1990s. Sydney, Westview.
[52] Jawa Pos, 24 August 1992.
[53] Jawa Pos, 28 July 1992.

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next term as he envisaged the danger of co-optation of NU under a new executive leader:

> I am prepared to be re-elected as the executive general leader [of NU] in the national congress, for nothing other than to block politicians who want to seize the position of the elite leaders of NU. This is due to no existing leadership candidates who are able to challenge these politicians. Their political moves should be blocked before they are able to bring disorder and the programs of *Khittah* 1926 fail, which has been achieved. If they come to power, *Khittah* 1926 will be dragged into political affiliations.[54]

Indeed, in 1994 Wahid was very vocal about the regime, although he was aware of the possibility of the Suharto regime blocking his desire to be re-elected as the general executive leader of NU. He already mentioned publicly that the new order regime was a kind of semi-authoritarian regime:

The nature of push and pull between political freedom on one side and political stability on the other side in the process of the development of our democracy will result in the semi-authoritarian nature of the new order regime....our democracy is not a complete democracy, but also not completely authoritarian. This nature of an in-between governmental system has caused some supporters of the pro-democracy movement as well as government officials to worry continuously. The supporters of the pro-democracy movement are worried about the narrowing individual sphere of political freedom, while the government officials are worried about the possibility of an out of control situation which may have a negative impact on economic development.[55]

The competition for the position of the general chief of the executive section of NU in Cipasung in 1994, indeed, was tense. There were three competing candidates, but Fahmi Saefudin cancelled his candidacy on seeing the government's intervention in internal NU affairs. At last, Wahid received more voices from the NU delegates than K.H. Abu Hasan who had backing from the government.[56]

Indeed, 1994, pro-democracy supporters became more frequent in expressing their political concerns than before and the Suharto regime became unable to handle them so that it was beginning to pursue repressive methods such as banning some books by the Supreme Court. In this regard, General Attorney Singgih S.H. accused pro-democracy supporters of spreading liberal democracy by saying that:

> ...if previously we were shaken by the forces of the left and the right extremists, the threat in 1994 right now is the presence of certain individuals who are seeking to spread and implement liberal democracy of the Western style in Indonesia. ... The government will face threats which would be dangerous to the state.[57]

Although the government accused Wahid of being the follower of liberalism, the Suharto regime was not able to get rid of him as he was a leader of an Islamic organisation, namely NU, which, of course, was critical of secularism. Furthermore, to such an extent Wahid was able to convince the majority of NU's followers that he was implementing Islamic values such as formulated in his conception of the theology of Islamic democracy.

Suharto did not want to give approval to Wahid's leadership of NU. It was also easy for Suharto to refuse to receive his visit together with other NU leaders as Wahid was careless, saying Suharto was stupid when he had an interview with Adam Schwarz. Accordingly, some NU clerics were getting worried about this situation as NU has a tradition of having a good relationship with the government. Accordingly, Wahid tried to approach the Suharto regime to make sure that there was no conspiracy to overthrow him from his position of general executive leader of NU.

Wahid's approach to the regime was confusing some pro-democracy groups. In this regards Franz Magnis Suseno argued that given Wahid was not an ideologist it was easy for Wahid to comply with the Suharto regime's requirement of supporting Golkar. However, Wahid did not pursue his purpose by all means, but he would not be stopped by abstract principles from doing something useful. Convinced in his role as democrat, he did not feel discomfort in approaching the regime if it was useful in avoiding violence.[58]

My research has shown that the relationship between Wahid and the Suharto regime was not always in confrontation, as claimed by Arif Rohman, although he mentioned the existence of another faction within NU which was close to the Suharto regime.[59] In line with humanism, Wahid did not always oppose the Suharto regime. At certain time, he approached this Suharto regime in order to ensure the latter did not repress

[54] *Jawa Pos*, 24 November 1994.
[55] Wahid, A. (1994). Tantangan Demokrasi Kita dalam Era Globalisasi [The Challenge of Democracy in the Global Era]. Jawa Pos. East Java, Jawa Pos.
[56] Wahid, S. (2012). Satu-satunya Lawan Politik Pak Harto [Wahid: the Only Opponent of Soeharto]. Demokrasi Aja Kok Repot: Retorika Politik Gus Dur dalam Proses Demokrasi di Indonesia [Democracy is not to be Confused]. N. Kholisoh. Yogyakarta, Pohon Cahaya., p. xii.
[57] *Jawa Pos*, 5 January 1994.
[58] Suseno, F. M. (1999). Gus Dur: Bangsa Mana di Dunia Mempunyai Presiden seperti Kita! [Gus Dur: A Distinguished President]. Gila Gus Dur: Wacana Pembacaan Abdurrahman Wahid [A Crazy Gus Dur: A Discourse of Understanding Abdurrahman Wahid]. A. Suaedy and U. A. Abdalla. Yogyakarta, LKiS.
[59] Arif Rohman, A. (2001). Hubungan N.U. dan Negara: Perlawanan Faksi Kritis N.U. terhadap Negara Orde Baru melalui Wacana Politik (1988-1997) [The Relationship between N.U. and the State: the N.U.'s critical faction's opposition to the new order through the political discourses (1988-1997).

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people for his political manoeuvre. Indeed, Suharto did not want any challenge to his power. This was clearly manifested in his using a repressive method[60] to suppress the supporters of Megawati who was persisting in being the candidate for president. In this regard, Gus Dur had suggested that Megawati withdraw her presidential candidature.[61] In a similar way, Amien Rais, previously associated with ICMI, also challenged the candidacy of Suharto as president and argued the need for the presidential succession in Indonesia.

Responding to the regime's repression of popular dissent, especially the October 1996 anti-Chinese and anti-Christian riots in East Java, the stronghold of Wahid's followers, Wahid moderated his stand towards the regime because he did not want people suffering out of his political stand. Accordingly, in November 1996, Wahid met with Suharto for the first time in a *pesantren* in Probolinggo. Moreover, Wahid accompanied Suharto's eldest daughter, Tutut, campaigning for Golkar NU's *pesantren*, thus he was disappointing his pro-democracy friends.[62] In this regard, Al-Zastrouw, once Wahid's secretary, argued:

> There was a tendency for Gus Dur to employ a devious communication. In the *fiqh*, it is called by *mukhollafah* (opposite understanding), not *mafhum muwaffaqah* (not understanding the text). For example, when Gus Dur was hand-in-hand with Tutut, it was likely that people viewed that Gus Dur supported Tutut. In fact, Gus Dur approached Tutut in order to instigate people's jealousy and accordingly, he did not need to criticise her as people already criticised her. To conclude, Gus Dur's objective was to instigate other political groups' jealousy. In this way, Tutut's burden increased with the result that her political career was effectively blocked.[63]

The explanation for Wahid's pro-Golkar movement in 1996, at the time of high level of public criticism of the regime, still remained unclear and incomplete. In this regard, I agree with Mohamad Sobary who tried to give an explanation based on Wahid's short article which employs the idea of *khariqul 'adah* (*nyleneh*, miraculous, but in positive meaning).[64] In line with this, Mohamad Sobary challenged Romo Mangun's argument that Wahid did not want to see the political breakout between the government, symbolised by Golkar, and Islam, symbolised by PPP. Sobary argued that it was difficult for PPP to manipulate Muslims' support against the government.[65] I would like also to add to Sobary's argument that Wahid's attitude can be referred to his status of being a cleric who has the task of providing religious teachings, neither opposing the government nor accumulating power for the purpose of imposing his political standpoint.[66]

VI. Conclusion

Wahid developed his thought on democracy in three phases; modernisation of *pesantren*, *pesantren* as civil society, and the establishment of Fordem. This suited his position at three periods, in which the previous stages was the foundation for sustaining the role of *pesantren* in the next stage, namely in the national political system with its advocacy of democracy. These stages also indicate that Wahid did not want to wage a revolution as he tried to transform his political influence from his traditional background of *pesantren* into nationwide support of the people for his advocacy of liberal democracy. He was conscious of not using Islam, but rather democracy, to challenge Suharto's autocratic regime, because he did not want to be accused of being a radical/militant Muslim, which would only justify the latter in repressing the former. In line with a non-revolutionary method, he did not oppose the regime frontally: at one time he approached the regime and at another time he remained at a distance from the regime. This was due to his realistic attitude to politics which forced him to pursue a means for establishing democracy tolerable to the Suharto regime. This realistic attitude was also based on his belief in the power of an idea, namely democracy, which could delegitimise authoritarian regimes. This non-revolutionary method was consistent with Wahid's role as a cleric, but he did not make use of Islam as his counter discourse against the Suharto regime, but rather democracy.

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[60] It resulted in the tragedy of 27 July 1996 involving the military's endorsement to the supporters of Soerjadi to attack and occupy PDI's headquarter controlled by the supporters of Megawati.

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[65] Ibid.

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