Islam in the Past Ten Years in Indonesia and in the World[1]

Mudjia Rahardjo[2]

The history of religions and especially Islam in Indonesia is very complex. It also reflects the diversity of Indonesian cultures. In the 12th century, many predominantly Muslim traders from India arrived on the island of Sumatra, Java and Kalimantan where their religion flourished between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries. The dominant Hindu and Buddhist kingdoms of the time, such as Majapahit and Sriwijaya, were in decline and the numerous Hindus and Buddhists mostly converted to Islam, although a smaller number, as in the notable case of Hindus immigrating to Bali, moved off Java and Sumatra. Islam in Indonesia is in many cases not fully practiced in comparison to Islam, for example, in the Middle East regions.

As stated in the first principle of the state ideology, belief in the one and only God, religion holds significant roles in Indonesia. Derived from that principle, the Indonesian Constitution guarantees the right to the freedom of religion. However, the government only recognizes six official religions, namely Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism.

To this day, a number of religions are practiced in Indonesia. It is logical therefore; their collective influence on the country's political, economical and cultural life is very significant. As of 2007, the population was estimated at 234,693,997. Based on the 2010 census, approximately 85.1% were Muslims, 9.2% Protestant, 3.5% are Catholic, 1.8% Hindu, 0.4% Buddhist and other or unspecified.

With 87% of its citizens identifying as Muslim, it is well known also that Indonesia is the world's most populous Muslim-majority country. Generally, Muslims have been concentrated in the more populous west-

---

[1] A personal reflection presented in the Symposium of Interreligious Dialogue on Islam in Prigen, Indonesia, August 7-17, 2011, initiated by International Commission on Islam of the Vincentian Family.

[2] Mudjia Rahardjo is the Vice Rector for Academic Affairs, The State Islamic University of Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang.

ern islands of Indonesia such as Java and Sumatra. In the less populous eastern islands, the Muslim population is proportionally lower.

Indonesia is the world's third-largest democracy, after India and the U.S. Ninety percent of Indonesians are Sunni Muslims. But with many different religions practiced in Indonesia, conflicts between believers are often unavoidable. Moreover, Indonesia's political leadership has played an important role in the relations between groups, both positively and negatively.

Politically, parties based on moderate and tolerant Islamic interpretations have had significant, but not dominant success in the national parliamentary elections in most of elections. Hard line Islamist parties, however, have had little electoral success and their bases of support remain. One form of Islam, known as neo-fundamentalist, adapted for new ways of thinking about the relationship between Islam, politics and society. Nonetheless, a number of fundamentalist groups have been established, including the Majelis Mujahiden (MMI) and their alleged associates Jamaah Islamiyah (JI). The Islamist Justice and Prosperous Party (PKS) has a different point of view from the neo-fundamentalists, notably the anti-Semitic views and anti-Western conspiracy theories of some of its members.

The Nature of Islam in Indonesia

In terms of religious teachings and the fundamentals of faith (aqeedah), Islam in Indonesia is no different from that of Islam in other places, the Middle East alike. As a monotheistic religion, Islam is widely understood and well practiced as the religion of peace. Islam came to the archipelagic Nusantara (ancient lands of Indonesia) through various ways and from various places, mostly South India, Persian, and Southern Arabian Peninsula. Islam was spread through the works of merchants and scholars, who were able to blend in and mixed well with the local predominantly Hindu and Buddhist societies, as early as 13th century. Just in the span of seven centuries, there are more Muslims in today's Indonesia compared to the entire Muslims in the Arabian Peninsula, the birthplace of Islam. Compared to other religions, Islam is then the fastest religion spread around the world.

From the outset, pluralism has always been the nation's religious spirit. One theory illustrates that such spirit stems from the geographical nature of Indonesia, where the country is rightly situated between Asia and Australia, and between the two world's oceans, the Pacific and the Indian. It allows the local inhabitants to receive constant influences from all places through trading and economic activities, and adapt well to it. Yet, such a theory should be coupled with our objective understanding on the nature of religious teachings. At its core, Islam, like

other religions, always puts a special respect for diversity. It also embraces tolerance and care for others.

But those two factors – geography and foundations of religious teachings – while necessary and important, are inadequate to explain the true face of Islam in Indonesia today. We need to take another important element into our account, and that is the Muslims in Indonesia themselves.

Here we are talking about the devoted, true, and enlightened Muslim scholars who gained their prominence through their moderate interpretation and moderate voice of Islam. But the question is why in fact violence tends to be attributed to Islam? The most probable answer is that due to the growing number of Muslim inspired by the success story of Islamic revolution and radicalization rooted from the Middle East regions.

Indonesia is fortunate to having moderate Muslims and Islamic organizations that form the majority of its body of Islam in the country. The works of the Nadhlatul Ulama and Muhammadyah, two largest Muslim organizations in Indonesia, in the promotion of unity, prosperity and tolerance, are commendable and exemplary. Even in the early formative years of the Republic in 1945, despite their strong influence over our national politics, moderate Islamic leaders at that time made the decision not to make Indonesia an Islamic state. And at the subsequent stages of our statehood, the question of Islam and the state remains at the realm of a constructive dialogue, leading to a deeper mutual understanding on the role of state to ensure the harmony and tolerance amongst peoples of different faiths in Indonesia.

The majority of Muslims in Indonesia are convinced that the difference(s) within and across faiths should be settled through intensive dialogues. This provides a strong rationale for Indonesia to take an active role in promoting inter-faith, inter-civilization, and inter-cultural dialogues with our friends and at all levels. In the Islamic perspective, interfaith diversities are viewed as a "blessing from God". The duties of human are, therefore, to love each other (*tahabbub*), to help each other (*ta'awun*), and to forgive each other (*ta'afuf*). The prerequisite for all of the duties, of course, is the presence or existence of mutual understanding (*ta'aruf*) through continuous dialogues among the religion adherents.

Arguably, settling differences in a peaceful manner is not the biggest problem that everywhere Islam is facing nowadays. All conflicts and collisions in the name of religions may have something to do with a mistaken sense of religiosity or simply competing and contentious interpretations of the religions concerned. While many perceive that radical groups as proponent of violence are growing, there are also

counter movements from the moderate Muslim. That is why the most acceptable approach to overcome the radical groups is not by military power, but by strengthening the power of moderate Muslims. The expected outcome of this approach is the process of moderation among Muslims.

Muslims in Indonesia are now also continuously strengthening their education system, and enhancing the modern curriculum of Madrasahs (Islamic schools), while restlessly improving the welfare of and justice system for the peoples. The origins of anger mostly result from ignorance, hunger, and injustice. Hence, we must not fail to address them in a comprehensive and effective manner.

Most of Muslims in Indonesia believe that Islam, democracy and modernity are solution for their social and economic problems that often bother social harmony and threaten national unity. And they are the true face of modern and transformed Indonesia today and in the future.

Tolerant Islam

Islam in Indonesia has a long tradition of being more tolerant than in the Middle East. As Islam began to spread in the Middle East and elsewhere, it often did so through violent conquests. In contrast, Islam came peacefully to this part of Southeast Asia via traders from India. Indonesians saw the new religion was more logical and therefore more culturally acceptable than the existing system of beliefs.

The way Muslims in Indonesia see Islam is like the way American Christian see Christianity. They follow the basic beliefs, but their lives do not revolve around religion in an ideological sense. That's why some Islamic parties never win absolutely in Indonesian politics. It proves that Indonesians are religious but not in an ideological term.

However, some fear that the rise of militant and fundamentalist Islam around the world is also having an impact in Indonesia. Islamic observance has turned more conservative in parts of the country, more women are wearing the veil, and Islamic political parties have gained strength: As Indonesia moves toward democracy, the radical Islamists have no place anymore in government.

As we noted, in 2002, a terrorist group bombed a nightclub on the predominantly Hindu island of Bali, killing 202 people, most of them tourists from Australia, Britain, and the U.S. Since then, the government's counterterrorism efforts have led to the capture of many Jemaah Islamiya operatives. While the group still poses a threat, it is believed that its abilities have been significantly degraded. Indonesian Government has been working hand in hand with the people to fight against Islamic extremism.

The Need for New Interpretation

From its name alone, Islam is a religion that clearly incorporates the meaning and aspirations of peace and the welfare of mankind. Yet it must be admitted that this pure and basic sense is often blurred, owing to various happenings in the history of Islam, which seem at a glance, not to reflect peace. Of the Prophet's first four successors to the leadership of his followers, i.e., those known as "the wise and clever successors", only Abu Bakar died naturally, while Umar, Utsman, an Ali did not die peacefully, but, for different reasons, were killed tragically.

At present the world stage is laid waste by violent conflicts, in which various religions are involved. In the Middle East, conflict involves both Islamic and non-Islamic people. In various other parts of the world, religious conflict also increases and spreads, both within and among faiths. In Northern Ireland, conflict within the Christian religion is between Protestants and Catholics. Conflict within Islam continues between Iran and Iraq. In addition, in the Middle East, especially in the coastal region of the Eastern Mediterranean, conflicts of a deeply religious hue, are currently raging; among Jews, Muslims and Christians; between Christians and Muslims, Christian against Christian, and Muslim against Muslim in Lebanon.

In South Asia, there is a series of religious conflicts between Hindus and Muslims, Hindus and Catholics, Hindus and Sikhs, particularly in the Punjab, Hindus and Buddhists in Eastern India, and the conflict between the Tamils and the Singhalese in Sri Lanka. The Southeast Asian region is also beset by religious conflict; in Myamar and Thailand, between Islam and Buddhism; in the Philippines, between Catholics and Muslims, and in Indonesia, within certain limits, there is still potential for religious conflicts, of which the explosions at some places are signs. Of course, religion is not the only factor. Political factors and the problem of the arms trade, both legal and illegal, also generate conflicts.

Religion and Peace

As a Muslim, I ask myself, "Is there peace in Muslim society?". Indeed, what has happened in the Islamic community today is what was feared in the Qur'an. Conflict arose amongst them from differences in interpretation and implementation of God's teaching.

It is ironic that disputes and conflict arose precisely after the revelation of truth and the proof to support that truth. However, the irony is probably only in the passing view. Because truth that is clear and supported by proof, in order to be able to function in a society, must

be further spelled out, interpreted, and specified. This is where the basis of disagreement lies, i.e. when differences in detail, interpretation and specification are accompanied by jealousy, giving rise to a spirit of competition among various groups of believers. In other words, conflicts arise after the strengthening of subjectivism and the implanting of self-interest.

Although God's Word was spoken about in the past, yet the lesson behind it is a call for mankind to draw an analogy with the present situation, especially as it can be historically proven that this kind of conflict and disagreement was experienced by Muslims. This is *i'tibar*, meaning an analogy which is a method of understanding the Holy Book, particularly the symbolism it contains. Thus the Qur'an narrative of the early people contains the warning of how men received the truth, yet then disputed amongst themselves "in the name of that truth". In other words, the message is that Muslims should not be like that.

This wider and deeper observation of disputes and conflict among people can be explained and brought back to the nature of man. Furthermore, it is possible that the threat to world peace can be brought back to the natural negative character of mankind, always in disagreement and in conflict.

Attempts to find a solution for the problem of the threat to peace, and to discover the form of the contribution of religion towards realizing world peace, actually constitute the ideal form for man. This is also probably utopian because it is human nature itself which cannot make peace. The Qur'an narrates the cosmic drama when God created Adam as a caliph on earth, amid protests from the angels, that man was bound to do damage in the world, and to spill much blood. God rejected the protests of the angels, and persisted in His decision to make man His guardian deputy on earth, relying on the ability of man to know his environment through his intellectual ability, which was to produce science.

However, the protest contained an important truth which is very relevant to the problem of the peace we want to achieve now. Thus in the Qur'an it is mentioned that human beings, although created as the best creatures, can change into the lowest creatures.

It is not easy to achieve peace, but peace can be realized by paying attention to three problems:

- To develop a strong sense of responsibility to humanity. As the earth becomes smaller and smaller, that responsibility must now be global in nature, not just national, and even less of a local character.
- To foster and develop the field of religious contact, that is, to educate the individual to be always good; and

- The third, relates to the problem of disarmament, particularly of the powerful states.

Then what can we do in connection with religious conflict, and religion as a source of conflict and dispute? According to my interpretation and understanding, the Qur'an in principle, teaches pluralism! In a pluralistic society, it is a fact that only God can claim the truth. One principle which is closely connected with pluralism is, for example, the principle: "There is no compulsion in religion". God has provided indeed determined, different paths for various groups of people in their efforts to seek and discover truth.

In addition, the above words are also directly linked with an injunction on expecting all people to follow the same way of life, and on forming a monolithic society. The fundamental impossibility of creating a monolithic society owing to the human talent for plurality is the principle which underlies the teaching of not justifying religious coercion, even less the enforcement of individual opinions or ordinary social concepts as ideologies.

As a way to God, religion, especially Islam, which teaches surrender to God, must be dynamically understood. It is this dynamic which probably constitutes the essential spirit of Islam. This dynamic is the logical consequence of the basic view, that each different time and place demands a different personification and materialization of the way to God. It is this dynamic which takes form in the doctrine of ijtihad, because ijtihad is the methodology available to mankind in its attempt to understand God's message. Nevertheless we must realize that, because each ijtihad is none other than man's attempt to understand truth, the product also continues to have human characteristics, subject to the quality of human relativity.

This dynamic of religious understanding is also reflected in the teaching that faith, or religious feeling alone is not obtained "once for all time" (i.e. is static), but rather is something which is subject to the laws of growth and change. It can increase or decrease, strengthen or weaken.

Concluding Remarks

I want to restate that in terms of number of adherents, religious practices and world views of Muslims in Indonesia, there is no significant change in the last ten years. Some minor changes happen to world views of young Muslim inspired by the success story of Islamic revolution in Middle East. However if we contextualize the phenomenon in Indonesian history, such radicalization is not really

new. They are still attracted by the obsession of establishing an Indonesia Islamic State.

This ideology is not well accepted due to the moderate nature of Islam in Indonesia. The moderate regardless of being commanded or not by the government will always be loyal to the Pancasila as the state ideology. What makes me optimistic to the future of Islam in Indonesia is that the majority of Muslims will be with the other religion adherents in whatever condition, and give no respect to those who violate other religious believers.

As other Indonesian Muslims, I believe that the Holy Book of Qur'an does not explicitly command Muslims to live in an Islam-based state. So let us struggle to live in harmony based the three pillars of togetherness: *to love each other, to help each other, and to forgive each other.*