# Political Islam beyond Islamic Political Parties:

## The Case of Muhammadiyah in Yogyakarta[1]

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### Current Development of Political Islam

The recent development of political Islam in Indonesia has showed such a paradoxical trajectory. With the continuous declining public popularity of Islamic political parties, at least, in the last two general elections (2004 and 2009), the wave of Islamisation has unstoppably extended to larger parts of Indonesian society (Pepinsky, et. al., 2010; Ricklefs, 2012; van Dijk, 2013).

To note, I refer political Islam as a political ideology that takes its root and inspiration from Islam even though it must be keep differentiated from Islam as a set of religious beliefs, practices and tradition *per se*. The core idea of political Islam is derived from the undifferentiated connection between religion and state/ government, termed in a normative doctrine '*Din wa Daula*' (Roy, 1994; Sayyid, 1997). The administration of the state including its public policies governing the society is understood to be guided by Islamic tenets with limited public deliberation except for the leaders and religious elites. In the broader understanding, Islam embodies an extended role as a source of moral value and practical ways to rule the society.

Due to the lack of separation between religion and state and/or society itself in political Islam, it has been widely assumed that Muslim societies possess an internal hindrance to adopt democracy (democratic deficit in Bernard Lewis's term). The substantive forms of democracy espousing social differentiation between various social institutions, i.e. religion, state and others, equal participation for all its members and public deliberation for diverse policies affecting the whole populace have been believed to be not easily adapted and accepted by Muslim religious elites and lay populace (Tibi, 2008).

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[1] The paper is presented at Discussion Forum - Networking Event UK/ CHEVENING ALUMNI of Indonesia & Timor-Leste, placed in Pub Med, Melia Purosani Hotel, Yogyakarta; 06 March 2014.

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Indonesia with large percentage of Muslim society also experience uneasy relation with democracy and politics in general, since its independence in 1945 and especially when democratic practices are implemented in certain periods. Thus, is not aggravated to say that political Islam is not new in the country. The struggle of Indonesians for the independence against the Dutch in the years of 1940s had involved both national-secularists (-communists) and political Islamists together. This uneasy coalition had broken up with the initiation of Indonesian Islamic State by some political Islamists, which seemed to be minority within the whole Indonesian Muslim society at that time, thus sparked terrorist attacks and activities of military resurgences across regions in the country. These subsequent developments seem to be fit with the current dominant discourse of political Islam that is proposing a *Jihadi* movement through violent activities and failing to work with other political groups within the democratic framework (Eliraz, 2004; Formichi, 2012).

However, all of them were not without any cause. Vedi Hadiz (2011) insists that any form of politico-social movements inspired by political Islam arises as populist responses that takes Islam as the defining element in itself. The 1950s Islamic military resurgences could be understood as domestic political problems in the early period of Indonesia post-independence due to the lack of capacity of Soekarno's regime to consolidate all elements of the new nation. The crisis had stimulated some political Islamist to take a chance for securing the power though subsequently failed.

Hadiz further points out the varied forms of political Islam in Indonesia that cannot simply be connoted with the initiation of Islamic state or any violent/terrorist activities to impose the application of Islamic law, i.e. *Shariah* for the populace. It is a special case in Indonesia that political Islam has been a major cultural and ideological basis for diverse social dissents against social injustice, inequality or political fraud rampant in the Indonesian society.

To some extent, the forms of political Islam in Indonesia have been transformed in the last 40 years. Referred to Asyaukanie (2011), though the dream to create an Indonesian Islamic state still marginally exists, most political Islamists have accepted Indonesia as a republic and democratic state. Their Islamo-political aspirations are thus manifested in the efforts to inspire local/national government policies and programmes adopting Islamic religious doctrines though in substantial forms rather the formal ones, leaving political parties as less significant for many Muslims as their political representation.

The current transformation of political Islam has been exemplified by the waning public supports for Islamic political parties yet with the continuous stream of

Islamisation in the unprecedented speeds and areas of Indonesian society. It must be understood that the actors involved in political Islam are not merely members of Islamic political parties but also members of Muslim social (-political) organisations, including politically moderate like Muhammadiyah and Nahdatul Ulama and non-moderate like *Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, Majelis Mujahidin*, and their sympathisers in the society. We may also add some radical-militant groups similar to *Front Pembela Islam* (FPI or Islamic Defender Front) who likely without doubt to use violent approaches and physical intimidations to impose their religiously-inspired agenda.

The Islamic political agenda also vary from on group to another yet all of them work in the same stream to implement Islamic traditions and practices in the Indonesian society (see Nashir, 2013). However, there is a general tendency to address their varied Islamo-political projects to the state as laws, ordinances and public policies either at local and national levels. Since the democratic era in 1999 after the first post-Soeharto election, there are several laws and ordinances laden with political Islam have been passed through the parliament or adopted by the ruling government. Take for examples, those include the National Education Laws that oblige the provision of religious teachings for students at schools, anti-pornography laws including the application of the Internet filter, and the current debate on the halal certification bill.

The Islamo-political project is unlikely to be systematically coordinated between those groups yet each of them seems to take a different social, religious or political role in it. Some might be in charge to run the project in the parliament, which are political parties. Other groups took responsibility to influence the mass society through campaign in mosques and mobilising the mass for public rallies articulating their project. At the end, there is an ongoing process, which is irreversible, unstoppable and extended, of Islamisation within the Indonesian society as a whole (Ricklefs, 2012).

The variety of roles and aspirations of political Islam led to a question of individual organisation in Indonesian politics. Among two major social organisations, Muhammadiyah attracts more attention not only because of its long history older than the history of the republic but also because of its different approach toward politics. It has an experience as part of political party under the banner of Masyumi in 1950s as well as supporting the idea of not involving in political activities through elections. In fact, during the period of non-political involvement recently, there are also association of its members to a certain political parties as a notion of more obvious political activism.

Therefore, it is interesting to trace the pattern of its political aspiration of the organisation in contrast with what its members (or groups) think and aspire. This research gives focus on the recent phenomenon in which the organisation (or its members) seems to lose its grips in politics through political parties while at the same time is challenged by the growing of more puritan Islamic organisations. With a dynamic political arena as mentioned before, Muhammadiyah can express their objectives in different ways which will be revealed by this research to draw its pattern. To narrow its focus, this research will give more attention on local activism where which political aspiration can be conducted by its members and Yogyakarta is one of the focal arenas in this context.

**The Case of Muhammadiyah in Yogyakarta**

There exists a unique fact about Muhammadiyah as a non-profit and mass-based organisation leaned to the Muslim reformist movement in this country. The organisation have been surviving in five different political regimes, including (i) the Dutch colonial rule; (ii) the Japanese military power; (iii) Soekarno's guided democracy; (iv) Soeharto's authoritarian regime; and (v) the current post-1998 democratic transition, that all of them espouse different positions, either accommodative, supportive, hostile or even repressive, to political Islam.

The organisation was founded in Yogyakarta in 1911 yet formally approved by the Dutch official in the late 1912. Though imbued by the idea of political Islam in terms of (re-) islamising the (Javanese) society through religious reformation and adaptation of modern ideas, Muhammadiyah has taken a non-political and cooperative strategy. During the colonial era, the organisation had ever without doubt to make collaboration and cooperation in order to achieve its primary goals, i.e. delivering public education, health and other social services (see Alfian, 1989).

Next, though the two presidents of the post-independence Indonesia had favoured the secular-nationalist idea and tended to limit political Islamism, both Soekarno and Soeharto had publicly and proudly claimed to be parts of this organisation. Because of this informal relation, Muhammadiyah were relatively free from the interventions, repression and securitisation perpetuated by the two regimes, the Old and New Order, targeting anti-nationalist (political-radical) Muslim groups. Due to its moderate political standpoint, Muhammadiyah had become a safe haven for Muslim activists from the 'witch-hunt' operation of the regimes (see Ricklefs, 2012).

The last two decades, however, particularly related to the post-1998 democratic transition and the growing influence of the conservative Islamic politico-religious ideology (e.g. *Salafis, Hizb-ut Tahrir*), spanned transnationally from the Middle East in the last few decades, there has a turning point in the fate of Muhammadiyah in the Indonesian society. In the realm of politics, the current transitional democracy has somewhat discredited the political position of Muhammadiyah, which for years has enjoyed such political privileges from the previous regimes.

To note, in response to the political change, the 12th Muhammadiyah chairman (1994-1998), Amien Rais, had founded *Partai Amanat Nasional* (*PAN* or the National Mandate Party) in 1998 as a political carrier of the organisation. Interestingly, *PAN* took a religiously pluralist and nationalist stance for its political ideology rather than political Islamism yet still highly influenced by the Islamic reformist ideas of Muhammadiyah.

In 2006, some young exponents of the organisation initiated another political party, *Partai Matahari Bangsa* (*PMB* or the National Sun Party) with rather similar religiously pluralist and nationalist ideology to the previous one. With the waning trend of Islamic political parties in the last two general elections, both *PAN* and *PMB* have experienced the continuous declining political supports from the public. Moreover, *PMB* failed to obtain any seats in the national parliament thus disbanded just after the last election.

This development, off course, has attested a huge disappointment and worriedness for Muhammadiyah elites and lay members particularly its consequences to limit and marginalise their political aspiration and position vis-à-vis the state (and the society) both at local and national levels.

The recent turn of the conservative Islamic politico-religious ideology (e.g. *Salafis, Hizb-ut Tahrir, Tarbiyah*), spanned transnationally from the Middle East in the last few decades, can be perceived as the socio-religious and ideological challenges to the organisation (see *inter alia* van Bruinessen, 2013). Having had rather similar religio-culturally orthodox tradition, members and affiliates of Muhammadiyah are likely to be more prone to the influence of this conservative turn. There have some conflicts, though not escalated in to bloody and wider sphere, involving members of this organisation and members from its now new rival ones in the society (for example between Muhammadiyah and PKS in Permata, 2013; Zuhri, 2013).

Yet, the real challenges are lied on the more conservative forms and initiatives of political Islam that embraced by those socio-religious groups to Muhammadiyah. The initiatives include the implementation of *Shariah*, the re-establishment of the

transnational Islamic Caliphate and other socio-religious projects to Islamise the Indonesian society with or without political accommodation and supports from the state. Moreover, the advance use of the Internet either websites or social media networks disseminating the ideas combined with their social campaigns attracting Muslim youths have made Muhammadiyah's socio-religious initiatives in providing educations, health services and other social welfare activities looked rather obsolete.

The current situation has produces such a politico-religious dilemma for Muhammadiyah. To accept this new conservatism might be in line with the current Islamic reformist project of Muhammadiyah yet designates a betrayal of its moderate political ideology, and the religiously pluralistic idea of Indonesia. Whilst rejecting it seems to be unpopular within Indonesian Muslim groups, particularly the modernist ones, considering it as such cowardice, religiously weaknesses and contradicted with its puritan Islamic ideology. The rejection would potentially cost Muhammadiyah to lose its legitimacy and credibility within the Indonesian Muslim society.

I take the case of Muhammadiyah in Yogyakarta to elaborate the response and reaction of this organisation. During the early period of the democratic transition since 1999, both provincial and regency boards of Muhammadiyah in this city had relied on un-officially linked party, PAN, to articulate their political agenda. However, with the continuous declining political supports to PAN in the last two local legislative elections, the reliance has become unreliable thus forced Muhammadiyah to take more practical political approaches.

Based on my preliminary observations, Muhammadiyah have issued some unusual policies (i) to formally support candidates in local mayoral elections (succeed in Sleman but failed in Yogyakarta city); and (ii) to mobilise its members and affiliates to vote candidate for a seat in *Dewan Perwakilan Daerah* (Regional Representative Council) representing the Yogyakarta province.

Surprisingly, the policy has been welcomed by grass-root Muhammadiyah especially the youths. The formal supports for such candidates in the election are likely to give them a new cause and energy for social-religious and political activities beyond their routine jobs in the organisation. Additionally, the involvement in these political activities has provided an opportunity for Muhammadiyah and its affiliates to show up their cultural supporters to the public and head-to-head to challenge their socio-religious political rival groups in the real battle.

These current developments, off course, are not without any costs and consequences both for Muhammadiyah as a social-religious organisation with leading

initiatives in education, health services and now in disaster emergency response but also for the Indonesian political system as a whole. For Muhammadiyah, there are some potential slips from its ideological standpoints and socio-religious role in the Indonesian Muslim society. Additionally, for some who have unlimited economic capital and require such political supports outside political parties, s/he might consider to turn to Muhammadiyah with some compensations.

To our political system, the decline of Islamic political parties yet replaced by the active role of socio-religious Muslim organisation in political activities would potentially undermine the current democratic transition.

**Conclusion**

Muhammadiyah has faced dilemma in responding to sparkling image of more conservative Islamic ideas. Supporting this tendency will give the organisation a support or sympathy from this segment which is clearly seen in the case of supporting the education and anti-pornographic bills. However, there is also potential breach of its political standpoint as moderate Islamic groups. There is also a dilemma of dealing with politics in practical term. It seems that the party has lost its political influence through political party as its associative parties of PAN and PMB either losing its supporters or failed to enter national parliament. In the case of Yogyakarta, the response is quite practical which is to support candidates in local election in order to maintain its influence in local politics, which is surprisingly responded by its members, especially the youth with high enthusiasm.

In short, Muhammadiyah seems to offer its position based in parallel with the demand of some of its members, either individuals or groups. To some extent it can describe its ability to define new development within its organisation as well as its surround political and social circumstances. By this, it is not surprising that Muhammadiyah has different approaches to different political and social settings in Indonesia which is vital to its survival.

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# Discussion Forum - Networking Event

**UK/ CHEVENING ALUMNI of Indonesia & Timor-Leste**

**Topic: Towards Political Elections 2014**

Date: Thursday, 06 March 2014

Time: 16:00 – 18.00 Hrs (registration opens at 15:30 hrs) – Afternoon tea and dinner will be served

Venue: Pub Med, Melia Purosani Hotel, Jalan Mayor Suryotomo No.31, Kota Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta

## Short Bio:

### Guest Speakers:

**Purwo Santoso,** graduated from Government Studies, Faculty of Social and Political Science, University of Gadjah Mada (UGM) and has been working in the same institution until now. He obtained a scholarship from the Government of Indonesia to pursue PhD at Department of Government, London School of Economics and Political Science, University of London in 1998. While studying the UK, outside academics' activities, he was actively involved as a Secretary in the Association of Scholars of Indonesia (PPI) United Kingdom and worked part timely in BBC World Service – Indonesia Section. Purwo is currently the Head of Political Science and Government Department at the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences, University of Gajah Mada. This unit known as PolGov Department is a trend setter and policy maker in the issues such as the agenda of asymmetrical decentralisation and democracy towards prosperity in Indonesia. Further, Purwo also sits as a Member of Regional Autonomy Consultative Council (DPOD). He is appointed by the Rector of University of Gadja Mada to develop in UGM a Centre of Borderland Studies due to his intensive involvement in the study of decentralisation and regional autonomy.

**Amika Wardana,** is a lecturer in Sociology, Department of Sociological Education, Faculty of Social Science, Yogyakarta State University. He graduated from the Department of Sociology, University of Gadjah Mada in 2003. In 2006, he won Chevening scholarship to pursue his Master's degree MA (Research Method in Sociology) at University of Nottingham. He obtained his PhD (Sociology) from University of Essex in 2013. His PhD thesis focuses on the multiple integration trajectories of Indonesian Muslim immigrants in London. His areas of specialisation include Sociology of Religion and Muslim Society. At present, Amika is working on a research: the impacts of the current political democratisation on the socio-religious movement of Muhammadiyah.

**Rimawan Pradiptyo,** is a lecturer in Economics at the Department of Economics, Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Gadjah Mada. His research interests are in the areas of Crime Economics, Game Theory, Experimental Economics, Economic Evaluation and Industrial Economics. He has published his papers in several peered-review journals including: Review of Law and Economics, and Criminal Justice Policy Review, and also in several UK government department websites (Home Office Research Online and YJB website). Rimawan has been joining the Department since 1994 and other appoinments among others:Visiting Associate Professor, IDEC, University of Hiroshima (1 Oct – 27 Des 2013), Regional Economist, Ministry of Finance Republic of Indonesia (2012, 2013), Visiting Professor, ESC Clermont Graduate School of Management, Clermont-Ferrand, Perancis (2011, 2012, 2013) and Research Fellow at the Centre for Criminal Justice Economics and

Psychology (CCJEP), University of York, UK (Aug 2003 - Dec 2007). During his appointment in the CCJEP, Rimawan has actively involved in various research project funded by UK government departments (i.e. Ministry of Ministry of Justice/ previously Home Office, Department for Education and Skills [DfES], Youth Justice Board for England and Wales [YJB], Essex Police Constabulary, Norfolk Youth Offending Team dan North Yorkshire Probation Centre) and also non-government organisations (i.e. Esmee Fairbairn Foundation & Barrow Cadbury Trust).

*Moderator*

**Poppy S. Winanti** is a member of teaching staff at Department of International Relations, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, University of Gadjah Mada (UGM). She graduated from the Department of International Relations, UGM. In 1997 she earned her Master's degree from the Korea Development Institute (KDI) School in 2002 and the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) in 2005. She obtained her PhD from University of Glasgow in 2011. Her PhD thesis focuses on developing countries' compliance and non compliance with the TRIPs Agreement. Her teaching responsibilities include Global Political Economy, Natural Resources and Conflict Management and Politics of International Trade. Her recent publications include Corporate Power in Global Economic Institutions: The Case Studies of the MAI and the TRIPs Agreement (2012) and 'Ekspansi Global Industri Farmasi India' dalam Adidaya dari Selatan: Kemunculan dan Transformasi Perusahaan Multinasional Negara Sedang Berkembang (2013). In addition to her teaching activities, she is also actively involved as a researcher at the Centre for World Trade Studies (CWTS) UGM.

Supported by