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## Redefining “Political Islam” in Indonesia: Nahdlatul Ulama and Khittah ’26

**Abstraksi:** *Perbincangan sekitar hubungan politik dan agama di Indonesia senantiasa menempatkan Islam pada posisi yang sangat signifikan. Sebagai agama mayoritas, Islam berperan penting dalam menentukan wacana politik yang berkembang di Indonesia. Hal ini antara lain tampak pada perkembangan Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), organisasi Islam terbesar di Indonesia yang berdiri pada 1926. Dalam sejarah Indonesia, NU ikut menentukan warna wacana politik di Indonesia. Berbagai upaya telah dilakukan kalangan NU untuk merumuskan hubungannya dengan struktur politik dan negara.*

*Artikel ini mendeskripsikan satu dinamika dalam tubuh NU dalam rangka merumuskan posisi organisasi tersebut di tengah berbagai perubahan politik yang terjadi dalam sejarah Indonesia. Mulai dari keputusan NU untuk keluar dari partai politik Masyumi pada 1952, keputusan untuk ikut dalam pemilu 1955, perdebatan tentang asas negara di konstituante, dukungan pada Presiden Soekarno, dukungan pada Orde Baru, hubungan dengan PPP (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan)—gabungan dari partai-partai Islam—masalah Pancasila sebagai asas tunggal, sampai naiknya Abdurrahman Wahid sebagai presiden RI; Semua sikap NU terhadap peristiwa-peristiwa di atas jelas-jelas mengandung strategi dan visi politik tertentu.*

*Meski demikian, momen paling penting bagi NU dalam merumuskan visi politiknya adalah keputusan kongres NU di Situbondo pada 1994. NU saat itu menyatakan menarik diri dari politik praktis dan kembali menjadi organisasi sosial-keagamaan. Keputusan itu, yang dikenal dengan “kembali ke khittah 26”, kemudian menjadi landasan penting bagi perumusan orientasi intelektual dan politik NU selanjutnya. Kalangan NU pada dasarnya memiliki penafsiran yang beragam terhadap makna “khittah” tersebut. Bagi sebagian kyai dan politisi NU, keputusan tersebut merupakan kesempatan mereka untuk menjalin hubungan dengan Golkar dan rezim Soeharto guna memperoleh keuntungan politik. Sementara bagi intelektual dan aktifis muda*

NU, keputusan Muktamar Situbondo telah menciptakan ruang lebih bebas untuk menjadi oposisi pemerintah dengan wadah informal yang tidak mudah dikooptasi, seperti kelompok kajian dan LSM.

Namun demikian, lepas dari berbagai penafsiran di atas, hal terpenting untuk dicatat adalah bahwa “kembali ke khittah 26” tampaknya lebih berfungsi sebagai sebuah strategi NU dalam merumuskan visi dan agenda politik mereka. Keputusan tersebut bahkan dapat dipahami sebagai “instrumen politik” NU dalam menjawab suasana politik yang berkembang saat itu. Jika sebelumnya mereka berpolitik memakai panggung partai politik—yakni PPP—maka sejak khittah, NU berpolitik “tanpa panggung.” Artinya, NU berpolitik dengan tidak menggunakan struktur formal politik seperti partai politik, melainkan berpolitik di luar kerangka politik negara. Dengan demikian NU dapat dengan leluasa memberdayakan kesadaran politik di tingkat grass-roots dengan kegiatan-kegiatan advokasi dan kegiatan semacam LSM.

Makna politis dari khittah 26 tersebut selanjutnya bisa dilihat pada perkembangan NU kemudian. Pada era reformasi setelah kejatuhan Orde Baru, seiring dengan dibukanya kran kebebasan politik, warga NU ikut dalam euphoria politik dengan mendirikan partai politik PKB—di samping sebagian mendirikan PKU, PNU dan SUNI, dan sebagian lagi masih tetap dalam PPP. Keterlibatan mereka dalam partai politik di atas berarti melibatkan NU kembali dalam kancah politik formal. Meskipun secara struktural NU tidak terikat dengan partai-partai politik, keterlibatan kalangan NU yang intensif—bahkan sebagai pendiri partai-partai politik—menjadikan keduanya sulit dipisahkan. Lebih lanjut, hal itu sekaligus membuktikan bahwa politik praktis pada dasarnya merupakan bagian inheren dari struktur budaya NU.

Bila demikian, sikap kritis terhadap negara, bersamaan dengan isu toleransi, keterbukaan, dan pemberdayaan masyarakat—yang disuarakan pada masa kepemimpinan Abdurrahman Wahid—hanya mewakili kalangan elit tertentu dalam tubuh NU. Kongres NU di Lirboyo pada Nopember 1999 lalu, semakin membuktikan kondisi demikian. Dalam kongres tersebut, NU menghasilkan beberapa keputusan yang jelas-jelas bertentangan dengan gagasan keterbukaan dan toleransi di atas. Selain menetapkan kembali Islam sebagai azas organisasi, menggantikan Pancasila, Muktamar NU juga mengharamkan pelaksanaan ibadah bersama pemeluk agama lain, dan mengharamkan non-Muslim menjadi pemimpin negara. Mengamati hasil keputusan Muktamar tersebut, maka harapan terhadap peran NU dalam pembentukan civil society di Indonesia tampaknya patut dipertanyakan. Bahkan, sangat mungkin bahwa gagasan-gagasan di atas lebih merupakan “alat politik” kalangan elit NU untuk kepentingan kekuasaan.

## Redefining “Political Islam” in Indonesia: Nahdlatul Ulama and Khittah '26

خلاصة: كل كلام يدور حول العلاقة بين السياسة والدين في إندونيسيا فلا بد أن يضع الإسلام دائما في مكانة لها أهميتها، ذلك لأن الإسلام دين الجمهور الأعظم من الشعب وكان له دور حاسم في الدراسات السياسية الواسعة بإندونيسيا، ويظهر ذلك في تاريخ جمعية نهضة العلماء، أكبر الجمعيات الإسلامية التي أنشئت سنة ١٩٢٦م، فلقد شاركت هذه الجمعية في دفع عجلة التاريخ السياسي بإندونيسيا إذ قامت بمحاولات عديدة لوضع تصور عن علاقتها بالتركيب السياسي والدولة.

تعرض هذه المقالة لحركة ديناميكية داخل جمعية نهضة العلماء من أجل وضع تصور عن موقفها إزاء التغيرات السياسية المختلفة في تاريخ إندونيسيا، فابتداء من قرارها الانفصال عن حزب ماشومي (Masyumi) سنة ١٩٥٢م وقرارها الاشتراك كحزب سياسي مستقل في الانتخابات العامة لسنة ١٩٥٥م والجدل الذي كان يدور حول أساس الدولة في البرلمان، وتأييدها للرئيس سوكارنو (Soekarno) وكذلك تأييدها للرئيس سوهارتو (Soeharto) وعلاقتها بحزب الاتحاد الإسلامي (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan/PPP) — وهو اتحاد الأحزاب الإسلامية — ثم قضية البانتشاسيلا أي مبادئ الدولة الخمسة التي فرضتها الحكومة الأساس الوحيد للجمعيات والمنظمات حتى نصب الشيخ عبد الرحمن عبد الواحد رئيس للدولة فإن المواقف التي اتخذتها الجمعية إزاء هذه التطورات كانت تعبر عن استراتيجية ورؤية سياسية معينة.

ومع ذلك فإن أهم الفترات التي قامت فيها الجمعية بوضع تصور عن رؤيتها السياسية كان في مؤتمرها السنوي المنعقد بسيتوبونندو (Situbondo) سنة ١٩٩٤م، إذ قررت الانسحاب عن العمل السياسي والعودة إلى سابق عهدها كجمعية دينية واجتماعية، ذلك القرار الذي اشتهر فيما بعد باسم العودة إلى خطة ١٩٢٦م، والذي يمثل أساسا هاما لاتباعها الفكري والسياسي لاحقا، والحقيقة أن لرجال الجمعية تفسيرات مختلفة حول مفهوم العودة إلى خطة ١٩٢٦م، فقد ذهب البعض ومنهم الشيوخ والساسة إلى أن القرار كان فرصة لبناء علاقة طيبة مع الحزب الحاكم غولكار

(Golkar) ونظام سوهارتو من أجل الحصول على مصالح سياسية، بينما رأى المفكرون والشبان منهم إلى أن القرار قد أتاح فرصة أكثر حرية لبناء موقف معارض للحكومة ليس من السهولة احتواؤه كما حدث لمراكز الدراسات والمنظمات غير الحكومية.

بيد أنه بصرف النظر عن ذلك فإن من الأهمية ملاحظة أن العودة إلى خطة ١٩٢٦م كانت فيما يبدو استراتيجية وضعتها الجمعية لوضع تصور عن رؤيتها ومخططاتها السياسية، بل يصح القول إنها كانت موقفا سياسيا اتخذها إزاء الواقع السياسي في ذلك الوقت، فإذا كان لها نشاطها السياسي قبل ذلك من خلال حلبة سياسية إذ تنضم لحزب الاتحاد الإسلامي فإنها بعد العودة كانت تمارس نشاطها السياسي خارج الحلبة، أي أنها تمارس السياسة دون استخدام الوسائل السياسية الرسمية من الأحزاب وإنما كان ذلك خارج الإطار السياسي، وهكذا استطاعت بحرية أن تزيد من فعالية الوعي السياسي لدى الجمهور الأعظم من أتباعها والقيام بأعمال المحاماة وأنشطة مثلها في ذلك مثل المنظمات غير الحكومية.

إن المفهوم السياسي لقرار العودة إلى خطة ١٩٢٦م ليكشف عن نفسه في تطور الجمعية فيما بعد، وذلك في قيام حركة الإصلاح وبعد سقوط نظام الحكم الجديد، تمشيا مع انفتاح الأبواب على الحرية السياسية، فقد سارت الجمعية مع التوجهات السياسية فأنشأ بعض رجالها حزب النهضة الوطنية (Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa/PKB) بجانب قيام بعضهم بإنشاء أحزاب أخرى مثل حزب نهضة الأمة (Partai Nahdlatul Ulama/PNU) وحزب نهضة العلماء (Partai Kebangkitan Umat/PKU) بينما بقي الآخرون في حزب الاتحاد الإسلامي، وكان تورطهم في هذه الأحزاب يفضى بالجمعية إلى الممارسة السياسية مرة أخرى، ومع أنها أي الجمعية لم يكن لها ارتباط رسمي بالأحزاب السياسية إنما كان تورط رجالها في السياسة الحزبية يؤدي إلى عدم انفصالها عن السياسة، وهذا يعني أن الممارسة السياسية كانت جزءا لا يتجزأ عن التركيب الثقافي للجمعية.

وإذا كان الأمر كذلك فإن اتخاذ موقف المعارضة ضد الحكومة مواكبا لموقف التسامح والفتح وتفعيل القوى الشعبية وهي قضايا كان لها صدها الواسع طوال فترة رئاسة عبد الرحمن عبد الواحد للجمعية إنما كانت تمثل نظرة النخبة من رجالها، والدليل على ذلك ما كان يجري في المؤتمر السنوي المنعقد بلبويو (Lirboyo) سنة ١٩٩٩م إذ توصل المؤتمر إلى قرارات تتعارض بوضوح مع موقف التسامح والفتح، فبجانب القرار الخاص بوضع الإسلام مرة أخرى أساسا للجمعية بدل البانتشاسيلا أي مبادئ الدولة الخمسة فإن المؤتمر قرر حرمة الاشتراك في العبادات التي يقوم بها الأديان الأخرى كما أنه قرر حرمة نصب غير المسلم رئيسا للدولة، ومن هنا فإن الأمل المعقود على الجمعية أن تحقق المجتمع المدني مشكوك فيه، بل من المحتمل أن تكون هذه الأفكار مجرد وسائل سياسية استغلها نخبة من رجال الجمعية للوصول إلى السلطة.

Observers of Islam and Muslim politics in Indonesia over the past year could not fail to note the explosion of political parties bearing the banner of Islam as well as the re-emergence of a discourse on a "political Islam" and the specter of an Islamic state that became a subject of anxiety among some and enthusiasm among others. This was hardly a new issue—Indonesians have struggled since even before the formation of their state to negotiate the relationship between Islam and the state. Indonesia's founding fathers, upon developing its Constitution, were mired in the debate over the role of Islam and the *syari'ah* in their new nation. This issue raised its head time and time again at key points during the Soekarno regime—as discussed below. Soeharto artificially muted the potential political role of Islam through enforcement of *asas tunggal* Pancasila<sup>1</sup> and careful balancing of Islam with the military. Almost immediately after Soeharto fell, however, there was an explosion of political parties bearing the banner of Islam, and the discourse on the shape of the new Indonesian political system was dominated by the debate over the role of Islam.

One of the primary actors in the struggle over the relationship between Islam and the state has been the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU—literally, Revival of Religious Scholars). NU, with between 30 and 40 million members constituting the world's largest Muslim organization, was formed in 1926 with the purpose of fostering and maintaining the traditions and practices of the largely rural, Java-based *ulama* that constitute its backbone. NU's position on the role of political Islam in Indonesia has fluctuated throughout its history—a fluctuation that will be traced in this paper. Since 1984 however, under the leadership of Abdurrahman Wahid, NU has developed a reputation for strongly opposing a formal role for Islam within the political structure. Thus the election of Wahid to the highest possible position within the formal political structure, that of President, has important implications not only for the direction of NU to the future, but also of the relationship of Islam and the state in a political system which is undergoing transition. This paper will argue that Wahid's active opposition to a "political Islam" does not reflect an NU-wide view on this issue, but is a relatively new and possibly even minority position, and indications are that its current popularity may be undergoing change.

## NU in the time of the Old Order: Shaping Political Orientation

In 1952, the withdrawal of NU from Masyumi<sup>2</sup> and the establishment of its own political party signified the formal splitting of the modernists and traditionalists<sup>3</sup> for the first time since Indonesia's independence in 1945. This split stemmed from ideological, theological, and sociological differences that had existed for decades, however by formalizing these differences within political organizations, a chasm between these two 'streams' of Islam was created that was to remain to this day.<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, however, although the organizational lines remain the same, the essence of their political thought and positions have reversed themselves. In the 1950's NU strongly advocated a political expression for Islam, and pushed for appointments of Muslim ministers, called for an Islamic basis to the state, and expressed suspicion of relationships with the West. In comparison, Masyumi at this time did not request specific postings for Muslims and actively sought expanding ties with the West (Madinier and Feillard, 1999: 17; Fealy 1998: 170). These positions were to reverse themselves during the New Order period, as will be discussed later.

In 1952 a raging battle took place within NU itself between *ulama* who wanted NU to establish itself as a political party, and those who felt it should remain an organization focused on religious and social issues. That NU was going to withdraw from Masyumi was fairly obvious, but strong arguments were made by Wahid Hasyim, son of NU founder Hasyim Asy'ari, and at the time general chairman of NU, that NU had strayed far from its true purpose of promoting social and religious traditions and its involvement in the political world had brought it nothing but detriment (Fealy 1998: 98). These arguments were countered by Wahab Chasbullah, one of NU's founders, and Rais Aam<sup>5</sup> from 1947-1951, who led the faction calling for NU to take a strong political role by establishing its own party, precisely in order to maintain its religious interests (*ibid*). The dynamics of this debate were to repeat themselves at least twice more in NU history, once in the early 1980s when NU made its historic *Khitah* '26 decision, and then again over the past year, with the development of PKB and the election of Abdurrahman Wahid to the Presidency of Indonesia.<sup>6</sup>

In 1952 the politicians won that debate, setting NU on a course to take a surprisingly large win in the 1955 elections—with 18% of the vote taking third place nationally. NU had established itself as a po-



litical force to be reckoned with by quickly and effectively mobilizing its huge electoral base into a political machine. As a result of its strong showing in this election NU was able to secure control over the Department of Religion, as well as a solid presence in parliament. NU's political stance during the remainder of Soekarno's regime was marked by accommodationism and flexibility, more than any other time in its history—a stance which was roundly criticized as political opportunism at the time.

In the latter half of the 1950s, increasing pressure from separatist movements and growing dissatisfaction with the party system led to attempts by Soekarno to establish "Guided Democracy".<sup>7</sup> While NU shared Masyumi's fundamental opposition to this move, on the basis of its clear threat to Islam and party power, at each step along the way, such as the formation of the Dewan Nasional (National Council) and Kabinet Karya, NU ultimately conceded to Soekarno, while Masyumi did not.<sup>8</sup> This cooperation with Soekarno, in the face of earlier professions of Muslim solidarity and in spite of the obvious authoritarian results of these moves, was not without intense internal debate within NU. In the end however, NU leaders argued pragmatically that all-out opposition to Guided Democracy would merely result in NU being excluded completely from the cabinet and structures of political power, and they felt they would have more influence from within, even within this authoritarian system. Furthermore, NU received substantial funding for its pesantren from the state, and this as well as the futures of tens of thousands of NU civil servants serving in the bureaucracy were dependent upon good relations with the government (Fealy 1998: 189).

Masyumi's support of the PRRI separatist effort and general oppositional stance throughout the 1950s resulted eventually in Soekarno dissolving the party in 1960. PBNU during this period distanced itself from Masyumi, in a purely self-preservational move, a stance which was strongly opposed by NU branches at the provincial and district level.<sup>9</sup> Finally, however, PBNU overcame this resistance from the branches and maintained its position of accommodation with the Soekarno regime (*ibid*, 204).

In the context of overall NU accommodation during this period, NU put up more of a fight within the Konstituante, the Constituent Assembly which met from 1956-1959, and which was charged with drafting a new constitution. Embedded within this task, and the source of the hottest polemic in the Konstituante, was the decision on wheth-

er the state was to have an Islamic or “secular” basis, the latter symbolized by the Pancasila. Islamic leaders insisted that the state be based on Islam, a stance NU supported for the first two years of this period. Lev points out the complicated relationships this issue spawned, as he notes that in parliament NU was much closer in political orientation to PNI (National Party of Indonesia) than to Masyumi, its “Islamic ally” in the Konstituante (Lev 1966: 8). NU and seven other Muslim parties formed a ‘Muslim block’ within the Konstituante, which demanded that the original Jakarta Charter be returned to the Preamble of the constitution.<sup>10</sup> In 1958, after a couple of years of debate on this issue with no resolution achieved, NU leaders began to feel that the debate was eroding public support for the parties, and actually giving weight to Soekarno’s authoritarian tendencies (Fealy 1998: 210).

In 1959 Soekarno called for a return to the 1945 Constitution, which initially NU opposed uncompromisingly—both because it would accord Soekarno disproportionate power in their eyes, and because of the Jakarta Charter’s non-inclusion in it. After much negotiation, Idham Chalid, NU’s chair at the time, agreed to endorse Soekarno’s position, on the basis of arguments that by making this concession NU would be able to extract commitments from Soekarno to maintain the existence of the parliament and Konstituante (*ibid*: 211). Lev views this move more cynically, arguing that NU was in essence being blackmailed by threats to bring various party leaders up on charges of corruption (Lev, 1966: 246). At any rate, this move infuriated NU regional branches, nearly causing an internal “coup”, and ultimately PBNU’s decision was reversed (*ibid*: 335). In subsequent voting sessions in the Konstituante, NU refused to back down and give the government the two-thirds majority it needed to reinstate the 1945 Constitution, in spite of barely veiled threats that the alternative was military control (*ibid*: 339). The issue was, again, the status of the Jakarta Charter, with NU insisting that it be included within the text of the Constitution, which Christian and secular groups could not accept. Finally, in frantic last minute maneuvers, NU let it be known that it would accept the reinstatement of the 1945 Constitution by decree, which then took place on July 5<sup>th</sup>. by making this concession, NU had to accept the Jakarta Charter’s non-inclusion in the Constitution, with merely a statement by the government that the Jakarta Charter was a “historical document” influencing the Constitution—a status which did not provide for state

implementation of the *syari'ah*. This ultimate cooperation, however, secured NU representation in the new structures of power such as the Kabinet Kerja and Gotong Royong parliament, gave them the coveted Minister of Religious Affairs appointment, and, with the ultimate demise of Masyumi, meant that NU was the only major Islamic party in the new government (Fealy 1998: 222).

Fealy argues that a major backlash within NU against its accommodationist policies took place in the early 1960s, though this criticism came from two separate sources with conflicting agendas. One group of influential *ulama* wanted NU to withdraw from politics and return to its roots as a social and religious organization (*ibid*: 234). The second group wanted NU to remain active in politics, but argued for a less acquiescent role, and specifically sought NU to take a stand against the strengthening Communist Party (PKI). Part of this effort was the establishment of Banser, a para-military unit ostensibly designed to protect party activities, but according to Fealy, in effect galvanized as an anti-PKI force (*ibid*: 237). Throughout 1964 and '65, NU members and Banser increasingly became involved in conflicts with PKI over land-reform, sometimes resulting in violent clashes.

In the chaos of the period of transition from the Old Order to the New Order NU was internally divided and unclear on its own position. Banser and Ansor, the NU young men's organization, cooperated closely with the Army and were deeply involved in the mass killings of 1965, while senior NU leaders known to be close to Soekarno went into hiding (Feillard 1996: 45). Conflicting edicts were issued, some urging members to remain loyal to Soekarno, others condemning Soekarno's pro-communist affiliations and pledging support to Soeharto. Eventually Subchan ZE and other young-generation leaders prevailed over the older *ulama* and committed NU to installing Soeharto as President, and forming an alliance with the Army (*ibid*: 49).

### NU in the Time of the New Order: Redefining Political Islam

Almost from the beginning of the New Order, however, fissures appeared in this NU-army alliance. Feillard describes conflicts over several issues, from the date and system of the approaching elections to anti-party bills proposed by the army, which ultimately pushed NU into exchanging the accommodationist stance it had taken with Soekarno for an oppositional stance toward the New Order (*ibid*: 54-64). The issue of the relationship of Islam or the *syari'ah* to the state,

and the debate over the Jakarta Charter was another contentious point of conflict between NU and the regime during this time. Between 1966-1968 NU along with other Muslim organizations tried on several occasions to get the Charter integrated into political institutions as a source of law, however by late 1968 Idham Chalid, the general chairman (*ketua* Tanfidziyah) of NU from 1955-1982, had persuaded more Islamist elements in NU to drop the debate for the sake of their standing with the government.

In 1973, Soeharto, in an attempt to reduce Islamic opposition, among other things, combined all the Muslim parties into a new party, the PPP (United Development Party), and the non-Muslim parties into PDI (Indonesian Democratic Party). Chalid, for his cooperative stance, was rewarded with the prestigious but somewhat unimportant position of President of the party. In spite of this, NU continued to play a more and more oppositional role as the 1970s progressed. By the late '70s, NU was often engaged in head-on conflict with the government, and in the 1977 elections, NU-affiliated PPP candidates experienced physical attacks from Golkar-affiliated 'thugs' (Bruinessen 1994: 105).

In 1979 Idham Chalid faced severe internal criticism from NU at its Semarang Congress, for his apparent lack of advocacy on behalf of NU within PPP. He made a public apology however, and was reinstated as head of NU in 1979. Shortly afterwards however, conflicts between NU and PPP's modernist leader Jaelani Naro sharpened, resulting in the extreme marginalization of NU politicians within PPP. When Chalid still did nothing to protest, an even fiercer struggle took place between his supporters, the "Cipete" group, and those who wanted him removed as head of NU, the "Situbondo" group.<sup>11</sup> After a struggle spanning several years, the Situbondo group was able to gain the upper hand in the conflict, eventually installing its choice of leadership for NU—the Achmad Siddiq-Abdurrahman Wahid team, at NU's Situbondo Congress in 1984.<sup>12</sup>

Two momentous decisions were made at this Congress, which completely altered the course of NU. The first decision was to accept the Presidential proposal in which all organizations or "socio-political groups" must adopt the Pancasila as their *asas tunggal* (primary ideological foundation).<sup>13</sup> This initiative was actually aimed largely at Islamic groups, as William Liddle explains, "the government perceived Islam as the only social force not yet brought to heel, not yet fully willing to accept the government's notion of where authority

ultimately resides," (quoted in Ramage 1995: 36). Islamic opposition to *asas tunggal* was strong, and within NU opinions were divided on the subject. Achmad Siddiq, who was elected as Rais Am at this Congress, was able to convince the ulama that the Pancasila was actually not incompatible with Islam, thus clearing the way for NU to become the first Islamic organization to accept *asas tunggal*.<sup>14</sup>

The second momentous decision made at the 1984 Situbondo Congress was the decision to withdraw NU from formal politics. This decision, known as "kembali ke Khittah 1926" and referred to hereafter as Khittah '26, espoused a return to a focus on social and religious, as opposed to political, issues. It had been discussed seriously since the 1979 Semarang Congress, and was part of a progressive agenda of reform promoted by Siddiq and Wahid, among others. What exactly Khittah '26 meant was, unsurprisingly, interpreted differently by different currents within NU, and it was sufficiently vague in wording itself that even to the present day there is little consistent agreement on what Khittah '26 actually means. According to Kyai Muchid Muzadi, Kyai Siddiq's secretary, and himself a member of the "Majelis 24" (Council of 24) which created original formulations of Khittah '26, the document was meant to be a platform for NU, for the first time setting out in writing NU's mission and vision and the religious tenets upon which these were based (interview, Oct 23, 1999).

Kembali ke Khittah '26, formalized in Decision 02/MNU-27/1984, was composed of nine points which laid out NU's religious purpose, the theological tenets upon which its purpose was based, its social agenda, its organizational function and role of the ulama within it, and its relationship with the state and nation (*Khittah NU*, 1985). The majority of the document was unexceptional in that it merely placed into one compact statement the primary religious and social tenets that NU adhered to, and that were commonly known and widely accepted. There were three points, however, which were remarkable in that while presented in the form of a restatement of fundamental and unchanging principles, they in fact effected a change in direction for NU: Point 6a—NU would return to its original power structure in which the role of the ulama within the Syuriah superseded the role of the Tanfidziyah; Point 6 b,c, and d—NU would emphasize programs and activities relating to education, religious education, and social well-being; and Point 8—NU no longer was to have organizational ties of any form to political organizations (*ibid*). The first two of these points work together to emphasize withdrawal

from politics and emphasis on “social” activities. The third point while it appears to be working toward a similar end, actually contains a more complicated intention and has resulted in a fair amount of controversy.

The first of the three points mentioned above refers to a prevailing sentiment among NU members that NU had, to its detriment, shifted away from its original balance of power between its two-pronged leadership structure in which the Syuriah, composed of senior ulama, held ultimate authority within NU, and the Tanfidziyah, as its name suggests, managed purely administrative affairs. In the decade preceding Khittah '26, as has been discussed, the technocrats and officers of the Tanfidziyah, who were for the most part not religious leaders or ulama, had gained preeminence (Muzadi 1994: 90). This happened because during NU's years as a political party, these “politiko” amassed a great deal of personal and political power, which they implemented by frontrunning NU's high-profile political stance (Tebba 1993: 13). Thus the desire to reinstate the supremacy of the ulama is clearly intertwined with the desire to leave the arena of formal politicking in favor of a renewed emphasis on educational, social and religious affairs.<sup>15</sup> Not only was it felt that the neglect of “social” affairs was resulting in a lack of development within NU, but also that NU's oppositional stance was becoming increasingly costly, politically and economically. With the Ministry of Religion removed from NU control in 1971, its political influence was lessened; at the same time the government cut off much of its development and educational aid to NU members in retaliation for their oppositional stances. It was felt, therefore, that NU's “period of politics” was benefiting only a small elite to the detriment of rural ulama and santri (Muzadi 1994: xi). In addition, some felt that one implication of a return to supremacy of the ulama and to a concentration on religious affairs was also a return to a more “traditional” religious orientation, specifically reinscribing the value of “*bermadzhab*”, or relying on the collective wisdom of the Sunni tradition rather than personal interpretation of the scriptures (*ibid*: 59). Thus in some ways Khittah '26 resonated with a more conservative, ‘hardline’ position of NU during the 1940s and 50s.

In terms of the first two points discussed above, there is widespread feeling that point one, the return of the supremacy of the ulama, has not actually taken place, and the technocrats and administrators of the Tanfidziyah still hold primary power within the or-

ganization (Ida 1999: 69).<sup>16</sup> More success has been had in achieving point two, the refocusing of NU toward social and religious as opposed to politically oppositional activities, which has seen the reinstatement of some government assistance. As a result of Khittah '26 implementation of programs for pesantren-based community development and education, legal aid assistance, entrepreneurship-promotion, and the like have begun (Bruinessen 1996: 155; Woodward 1989: 139).

The implementation of the third point mentioned above however, the disassociation of NU as an organization with formal politics, has been the subject of widespread discussion and controversy. At its most practical and immediate level, this point meant the withdrawal of NU from membership within the PPP (United Development Party)—which many observers interpreted as NU exercising revenge on the then-leader of PPP, Jaelani Naro, who, as discussed earlier, was attempting to limit NU's power within his party (interview with Muchid Muzadi, Oct. 23, 1999). As Muzadi explains, this supposed "withdrawal" from politics was in fact a political tool which released NU politicians from their association with PPP and freed them up to strengthen ties with Golkar and pro-regime political figures. This had immediate and practical benefits not only to individual *pesantren* which received government funding, but to NU's political standing as a whole (*ibid*).

Thus one argument is that Khittah '26 was a political instrument enabling NU to shed its oppositional image and integrate itself into the prosperous and powerful ranks of the Golkar inner circle. A case can be made, however, that Khittah'26 had precisely the opposite intention, and effect.

According to this argument point eight of Khittah '26 was an response to the increasingly limited "*ruang gerak*" (room to maneuver) permitted within the New Order-defined political sphere (Muzadi 1994; xi; Bruinessen 1996; Amin 1999). It was felt that Wahid through Khittah '26 sought to circumvent the New Order's attempts to regulate political activity and political organizations through its Pancasila ideology by removing itself from the political arena in order to have more room to in fact maneuver politically. As NU intellectual Hairus Salim has argued, "There was no formal political platform that would have provided space for NU to rise politically. Thus, it was equally disadvantageous for NU to stay with PPP, or to join with Golkar or even PDI. The only way out, and that which was

more strategic for NU, was to conduct 'politics without a formal platform' (*politik tanpa panggung*). This kind of politics is a politics which does not require affiliation with formal structures of political power....it can be understood as politics outside of the framework of the state," (Salim 1999: 87). Thus by leaving the sphere of formal politics, NU activists were free to conduct grass-roots empowerment and advocacy activities, and political education which exposed people to the hegemonic nature of the New Order regime.

Thus, while Khittah '26 became commonly known as the decision to "withdraw from politics", it is more accurately understood as a political instrument, and a response to a particular political environment. It was a political instrument whose effect was to diversify the political stances and agendas of NU. In the hands of certain kyai and NU politicians, it was used to draw closer to Golkar and the Soeharto regime for political or financial gain. However, in the hands of young activists and democratic-minded intellectuals it was used to create a space to be oppositional in informal, indirect means which could not easily be regulated by the state. An important part of this process was the subversion of the New Order definition of "political". By refusing to accept the narrowly restricted, highly regulated political sphere of the New Order, but instead being political from outside that sphere, in what was labeled by the New Order, and NU, as a "social" sphere, NU created a whole new understanding of what was "political". Some academics and NU activists referred to this as the difference between "formal" and "informal" politics, others referred to NU's "cultural approach", but by the mid-1990's it was recognized that NU had all along been political, and had created a new understanding of "political", one which "was understood as raising the quality of life for its people, rather than only competing for seats in formal political institutions," (Amin, 1999: p. 142 ).

One important element of the redefining of "political" was the development of a discourse on civil society within NU. Over the 15 years since Khittah '26 was first implemented, a cadre of young intellectuals grew up under the leadership of Abdurrahman Wahid, promoting the idea of a critical voice outside of formal politics, to serve as a watchdog for the "peoples" interests. A number of NU-affiliated NGOs or social organizations were formed during this period, such as LkiS ( Lembaga Kajian Islam dan Sosial; Institute for the Study of Islam and Society), P3M (Perhimpunan Pengembangan Pesantren dan Masyarakat; Institute for the Development of Pesantren and Com-



munity) and ISIS (Institute Studi Islam dan Sosial; Institute for the Study of Islam and Society). These organizations created a network of activists and intellectuals committed to criticizing the government, to raising awareness of democracy or the lack thereof under the Soeharto regime, and to advocating for the interests of small farmers and villagers being exploited by local government. These efforts largely the result of the group of intellectuals such as Abdurrahman Wahid, Masdar Mas'udi, Moeslim Abdurrahman, Muchid Muzadi, Kyai Sahal Mafudz, and Nasihin Hasan who, in the late 1970s and early 1980s spearheaded a renewal of thought on interpretations of religious texts, and sought to make the pesantren a basis for social development. By the early to mid 1990s the discourse had shifted from a paradigm of pesantren-based community development, to civil society, and focused on fostering a critical political awareness among grassroots populations. These intellectuals, and a new 'young generation' of activists that grew up under their tutelage, like Ulil Abshor Abdallah and Syafiq Hasyim, began speaking out on issues of human rights, pluralism, and political and social justice.

One of the primary aspects of this burgeoning discourse on civil society among these NU intellectuals and organizations was a strong stance on the relationship between Islam and the state. Through seminars, talks, articles and training sessions, these young NU intellectuals argued using Qur'anic texts that political aspirations and activities of the state should not be channeled through religion, nor should religious symbolism be used to forward political interests. This had been a long-held conviction of Abdurrahman Wahid, who waged an on-going battle and debate against what he saw as the dangerous encroachment of "political Islam", or those who sought political legitimation by using the banner of Islam.<sup>17</sup>

### NU in the Time of the Reformation Era: Questioning NU's Political Direction

As the 'reformasi' movement began, in early 1998, the divisions within NU replicated the divisions during the 1965 chaos. That is, the young generation of activists, students, PMII, Ansor, Banser as well as the intellectuals and "civil society" component described above were vocal and critical in protest of the regime, while older NU leaders and kyai were much more careful, calling for "constitutional" means, and a gradual process of reform rather than quick upheaval. This divergence was expressed most strikingly at the respective Halal

bi Halal (gathering traditionally held after Idul Fitri) programs held by the *Generasi Muda NU* (“young generation”—consisting of NU youth organizations like *Ansor*, *PMII*, *Fatayat*, and *IPNU*), and the *PBNU* in late February. The *Generasi Muda Halal bi Halal* was a fairly ‘hot’ affair—swarms of press, activists, and *Banser* added an edge to the evening, as did the yells of “New President!” from the audience during the reading of *GMNU*’s official statement. This statement itself was quite unusually forthright, “The closed and centralized political system has shut off the possibility of criticism and control by the public, ...” “The people are experiencing a crisis of trust (the lack thereof) in our government” ...and called for immediate “reform in areas of economics, politics, and culture.” Only at the end, did they rather weakly tack on an acknowledgement that they “resisted any divergence from the constitution,” (“*Tadzkiroh*” *Keluarga Besar GMNU*, 20 Februari, 1998).

This final element clearly is a concession to the “official NU” line, expressed at the *PBNU Halal bi Halal* held the next morning. In striking contrast to the carnival/uprising atmosphere of the night before, *PBNU*’s *Halal bi Halal* was dormant. The 30 or 40 NU leaders who showed up were offered boxed snacks, and sat quietly in their seats during a short sermon by *Kyai Ilyas Ruchiyat*, followed by the reading of the official NU statement. This statement affirmed that NU “supports the Constitution...the nomination of the President and Vice-president must follow constitutional processes and mechanisms,” and strongly forbade its members from making Presidential or Vice-Presidential nominations outside of the formal election procedures in effect (“*Tarajji*”, *Pengurus Besar Nahdlatul Ulama*, 20 Februari, 1998). The absence of *Wahid* due to a stroke suffered on the 20<sup>th</sup> of January, and subsequent hospitalization through March, left the NU without strong leadership, during which time this divergence continued. Finally *PBNU* came to a position of cautious reform, saying the student movement should be supported, but that rather than completely doing away with the system, they should work with in it and perfect currently existing structures (*Kompas*, April 16, 1998 p.1).

A combination of the student movement and international pressures resulted in May 1998 in the eventual stepping down of *Soeharto*, who passed the presidency on to his Vice-President, *BJ Habibie*. In the months that followed, Muslim organizations joined the rest of the nation in a frenzy of political party-formation, and the number

of Islam-based parties in Indonesia mushroomed from one to forty-two, twenty of which fulfilled the requirements for participation in the general elections on June 7<sup>th</sup>. As Eep Saefullah Fatah has noted, immediately after Soeharto stepped down, Islamic groups experienced sense of politicization and integration, which was followed a few months later by a phenomenon of disintegration (Fatah, 1999: 10).<sup>18</sup>

The politicization and integration was perhaps most visible in the events surrounding the Special Session of the MPR in November 1998, when a Kongress Umat Islam was held in an effort to unify Muslim political voice in support of Habibie, who was seen to represent modernist Islam and was expected to restore Islam to its rightful place within Indonesia's political system. Not only did the KUI not succeed in unifying the Muslim ummat, but Muslim political leaders soon became disillusioned with Habibie, arguing that he did not fulfill the above-mentioned expectation, and citing his lack of action on issues like Tanjung Priok and Aceh as evidence that he was not the savior that political Islam had awaited (interview with Fadli Zon, 8 Oct. 1999).

What was striking was that throughout this period the discourse on politics in Indonesia, and the attempts of politicians, intellectuals and public figures to create a new political system, was heavily colored by the debate on the role of Islam. Suddenly the possibility of an Islamic state, and discussion of the Jakarta Charter, which had been nearly non-existent since 1968, erupted in the media and public discourse.<sup>19</sup> Islamic organizations and parties saw this as their chance to finally promote a more political role for Islam, and with the revisiting of the question of secular vs. religious state foundation, to remove once and for all the possibility of Indonesia as a secular state. While voices and stances within this general position varied, of course, a prevailing understanding emerged, one that advocated a strongly influential role for Islam within the political system, while stopping short of calling for an Islamic state. As Kyai Yusuf Hasyim, chair of the PKU (Partai Kebangkitan Umat, one of the NU-based parties) stated, "We must prevent this nation from becoming a secular nation. For that reason we have a heavy responsibility to make sure that the aspirations of the Islamic people are reflected in our legal system," He went on to emphasize, however, that while he was urging Islamic parties to work together to achieve a greater political role for Islam, he was not calling for an Islamic state. "We are not aiming to create an Islamic state—do not misunderstand us," he says, speak-

ing of the PKU and of the umat Islam in general (“Indonesia Jangan Jadi Negara Sekuler”, *Republika*, 24 March, 1999, p.1). The line most frequently heard from these circles is that political Islam in Indonesia today is not seeking to establish an Islamic state, but rather to integrate “Islamic values” into the legislative system in Indonesia. What is meant by “Islamic values” remains unclear and often unelaborated upon, but most frequently is attached to principles such as *amar ma’ruf nahi munkar* (seeking the good and avoiding the bad in a situation), *rahmatan lil ‘alamin* (Islam as a religion of love) and *fastabiqul khairat* (outdoing one another in doing good). Lev argues that the lack of clarity on what modernists want from “political Islam” or a state based on Islam is precisely what has allowed opponents of political Islam to create extreme and frightening visions of an “Islamic state”, and which has allowed non-modernists to dominate the debate (Lev 1972: 241). While he wrote this in 1972, I believe it is still largely true today, though it may be changing with the appointment of Yusril Ihza Mahendra, a very modernist legal expert, as Minister of Law and Legislation.

NU of course, had a major stake in this debate, having put forth a clear position against “political Islam” for the past 15 years. At the same time, politicians within NU saw this as a perfect opportunity to bring NU back into formal politics. There was a great deal of demand from politicians and kyai alike for NU to form a political party—pressure which Abdurrahman Wahid resisted at first, but eventually reading the situation that it was inevitable, he acquiesced and became the founder and primary spokesperson, though not the formal head of, PKB (Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa; National Awakening Party), which was founded on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July, 1998.

PKB however, was not the only party to form out of the NU “*keluarga besar*” (large family). PKU (Partai Kebangkitan Umat, Awakening of the Ummat Party), headed by Yusuf Hasyim, Wahid’s uncle; PNU (Partai Nahdlatul Ummat; Party of the Rising of the Ummat) headed by Syukron Makmun; and SUNI (Solidaritas Uni Nasional Indonesia; Solidarity of the Indonesian National Union), headed by Abu Hasan, a rival of Wahid’s since the early 1990’s, were all formed shortly after PKB. Conflict quickly emerged between these four parties, with PKB asserting that it was the only party to be given “*restu*” (blessing) of PBNU and that the other parties were formed by those who were “*barisan sakit hati*” (just jealous because they were not included in PKB), while the smaller parties accused PKB of un-

fairly claiming to be the "only" NU party, a claim which they said went against the ideals and principles of Khittah '26 (Bisri, 1998, pp. 83-92). This conflict reached its peak when Wahid made a very controversial remark about PKB being the egg that is laid by the chicken, while the other parties are the feces excreted by the chicken ("Telor Ayam ala Gus Dur," *Republika*, 29 May, 1999, p.1).

The issue of the Islamic state, or a more formal role for Islam within the political system, was also wrapped up in the conflict between the four parties. SUNI did not have a strong stance either way, but PKU and PNU both held more hardline positions than PKB, arguing for a political system which reflected the fact that Islam was the majority religion in Indonesia. Wahid and his brother, Salahuddin Wahid, a PKU leader, engaged in a public debate through a series of editorials in *Media Indonesia*, in which they argued over the Jakarta Charter and the role of Wahid Hasyim, their father, in calling for an Islamic state in Indonesia. Abdurrahman insisted that Hasyim had always called for a state based upon Pancasila, while Salahuddin referred to documentation of Hasyim's stance during negotiations on the Constitution of 1945 in which he insisted that the President should be Muslim, and the state based on Islam (*Media Indonesia*, 8, 9, 17 and 23 October, 1998).

After months of frenzied campaigning, politicking and hype, Indonesia's general elections were held on June 7, 1999. Despite many public fears to the contrary, the campaign period, as well as the elections itself, were relatively free of violence, and went fairly smoothly. The results of the elections were generally endorsed as "free and fair", despite some reports of violations, in part due to the remarkable absence of violence surrounding the elections. In spite of a long and endlessly delayed vote-counting process, the public remained patient and even when the results were announced, the widespread protests that were expected did not occur. PDI-P won hands down, with 35 percent of the votes giving it 153 seats in parliament. Golkar took second place, with 22 percent and 104 seats in parliament. PKB came in at third, with 12 percent of the vote and 51 seats. This was a disappointment to most PKB politicians, who had been strongly convinced that they had a chance of taking the winning spot.

In the months after the elections, a great deal of maneuvering, alliance-forming and general politicking went on. Eventually a kind of loose alliance emerged between the nationalist parties (PDIP and PKB) on one side, and a coalition called Poros Tengah (Axis force)

which consisted of the Muslim parties, PAN, PPP and some elements of Golkar.<sup>20</sup> After an on-again off-again courtship, PKB decided in August to formally endorse Megawati Soekarnoputri as its Presidential candidate—based not only on their ideologically based alliance, but also on the fact that Megawati legitimately won the majority vote in the July elections. In a surprise move, Amien Rais in August nominated Abdurrahman Wahid as the Presidential candidate for the Poros Tengah, which he led.<sup>21</sup>

Thus ensued a few months full of more maneuvering and speculation. Would Wahid accept the Poros Tengah nomination and run against Megawati, the candidate of choice of his own party? When Wahid publicly accepted the nomination, in mid-August, most people both within NU circles and in the Poros Tengah parties still doubted that he was serious. Mutual suspicion prevailed. The prevalent theory from the Poros Tengah side was that Wahid was going to pretend to run up until the very end, thus preventing the Islamic parties from fielding another candidate, and at the last minute step down, handing his votes to Megawati. From the NU side, almost no one really trusted that the Poros Tengah was serious—they were suspected of using Wahid to deflect momentum from Megawati, and of planning to dump him at the last minute.

Meanwhile, amidst all of the suspicion and rumors, the facts remained that PKB, headed by Matori Abdul Djilil, was faced with the highly ironic situation of fielding a candidate in competition to the founder of PKB and chair of NU. As time went on and it became more and more apparent that Gus Dur was serious about running for the presidency, PKB itself became highly factionalized, with some siding with Matori's commitment to remain true to the results of the PKB leadership meeting in August which resulted in Megawati's nomination, and others saying that it would be unthinkable for NU's party not to nominate its general chairman. The lines of this fragmentation were not clean, but somewhat counter-intuitively it was the senior kyai, who made up the Dewan Syuro (leadership council), who wanted to stick with the PKB party decision, while many of the younger politicians wanted to switch their candidacy to Wahid <sup>22</sup>(Interview with Effendy Choiri, Oct. 26, 1999).

The Syuriah held four different meetings to discuss the issue of Wahid's candidacy. While they gradually became more convinced of the Poros Tengah's sincerity, they never gave full endorsement to Wahid. Their last meeting, on the 19<sup>th</sup> of October, the day before the

presidential elections, they released an official statement that was characteristically ambivalent—they neither forbade nor endorsed Wahid's candidacy, but just said that they would "pray" for him. The more positive spin that this decision got in the press was, according to one PKB member, a "creation" of Wahid himself (Interview with Ahmad Khaliq, Oct. 21, 1999). What they did do at this meeting was form contingency plans—if Wahid didn't make it (either because Poros Tengah or Wahid himself withdrew at the last minute) they formed a team to lobby Megawati for NU positions in the cabinet. If he did, they formed a "think tank" to "advise" Gus Dur (Interview with Kyai Imron Hamzah, Oct. 22, 1999).

In the end, in a two-phased voting sequence that was full of last minute shifts, negotiations and maneuvers, Wahid was elected President with a narrow margin—373 for Wahid, 313 for Megawati, and 5 abstentions. While the Islamic factions erupted in shouts of "Allahu akbar", the prevailing sentiment within NU and PKB was surprise, and deep ambivalence. While they were at one level delighted that their leader had succeeded, and were pleased about the inevitable benefit this would bring to NU, at another level many were deeply anxious about Wahid's ability to perform as President, and many expressed sentiments such as "If Gus Dur fails, NU will be destroyed and will not be able to rise again for a very long time," (Interviews with PKB members, 23 October, 1999).

In November 1999, NU held its 30<sup>th</sup> Muktamar, or National Congress, in Lirboyo, East Java. This was a pivotal point in NU history not only because at this Muktamar NU would elect a replacement for Wahid, who had led NU for the past 15 years, but also because NU would have to make a decision on its own relationship with the political system. That is, it would have to decide whether to continue to implement *Khittah '26*, and permit its members to be active in any party, or to formally endorse PKB as NU's only party. In the months leading up to the Muktamar this issue was discussed at various seminars and preliminary meetings.

Perhaps because of all the build-up and discussion leading up to it, the Muktamar itself seemed somewhat anticlimactic. Because of the internal politicking going on, it was highly chaotic and extremely unorganized. Discussion of central issues of policy and identity were overshadowed by campaigns for the leadership of NU. Nevertheless, some important decisions were made. Firstly, the Organization committee made a historic decision to switch the ideological basis of NU

from the Pancasila to Islam. Secondly, NU did not officially “endorse” PKB, but retained the freedom outlined in Khittah ’26 to be involved in any party, with an ambiguous caveat that NU members should “consider the historical and emotional ties of NU with PKB”. The anticlimax was in the complete lack of debate on the issue of the Khittah ’26. Touted as the most contentious issue to be discussed several months before the Mukhtamar, there was almost no formal or informal debate on the Khittah ’26 as such. While obviously the issue of the relationship between PKB and NU is directly related to the Khittah ’26, the fact that this debate took place without reference to it indicates to me that the powers that be within the leadership of NU, who also determined the agenda and content of the Mukhtamar discussions, realized that any formal recognition of a relationship between NU and PKB would violate the spirit and essence of the Khittah—a fact which was recognized by many Mukhtamar participants as well. Thus, in order to achieve their political goals while also at the same time maintaining the sacrosanct status of Khittah ’26, it was removed from the agenda as an item of discussion.

One final significant development of the 1999 Mukhtamar was the heightened “Islamic” tone of the results. This was reflected in several important decisions. One was the decision, taken by the Bahtsul Masail committee (a committee of senior *ulama* which issue fatwa-like scripturally-based decisions) to *mengharamkan* (forbid) inter-religious prayer meetings of the kind frequently held at Abdurrahman Wahid’s home in Ciganjur before he became President. This kind of event was deemed to be in conflict with the *syari’ah*, and therefore *haram*. A second example, was the decision, also taken by the Bahtsul Masail committee, that it was *haram* for a non-Muslim to be a political leader in Indonesia. A third example, mentioned above, was the reinstatement of Islam as NU’s fundamental ideological foundation, rather than Pancasila.

These decisions not only reveal a move to have a more visible and symbolic expression of Islam on the part of NU, but also represent a fairly dramatic change in direction, away from the religiously tolerant, nationally oriented, and pluralist discourse promoted by Wahid and his followers over the past 15 years. Many of the young NU activists and intellectuals saw these decisions as representing a huge step back for NU. As one young intellectual said, “These decisions undermine the values that we’ve been struggling for over the past 15 years,” (personal communication with Syafiq Hasyim, 28 November



1999). On the other hand, it can also be argued that this move represents the results of internal democratization within NU. It is well known that many of the mid-to-low level *kyai* and *ulama*, who make up the quantitative if not qualitative substance of NU, do not agree with Wahid's efforts to revitalize and in some cases revolutionize traditionalist Islam. Furthermore it is also true that the discourse of civil society, secular government and religious tolerance is an elite discourse, prevailing largely within the urban-based, young generation of intellectuals and activists, with the exception of a few notable *kyai*. Thus, as Wahid steps down from his position of almost supreme authority within NU, and in the context of a general heightening of Islamic activity and public presence nationally, it may be that NU is articulating a position that is more reflective of the majority of its *ulama*, rather than the elite intellectuals that have been influential over the past 15 years.

### Conclusion

NU has always been a political organization. Whether or not its political maneuvers are conducted in the interests of protecting and maintaining a particular religious tradition is the subject of another paper. Many scholars have argued that Sunni tenets call for at the very least cooperation with political powers and more commonly active involvement in positions of political power in order to protect and maintain religious practice. There also is a long-standing debate about whether religious politicians use politics in the interests of religion, or religion to legitimize their political interests. My purpose here is not to debate issues of motivation, but merely to argue that NU, while it calls itself a socio-religious organization, is also a political organization. It has survived throughout the history of Indonesia like no other political or religious organization, being cooperative with the regime in power when necessary, being oppositional when it can get away with it, but playing whatever political game it requires to survive. Abdurrahman Wahid's paradigm of "cultural Islam" is a political maneuver in itself, and his discourse of tolerance and pluralism, while I believe sincere, is a discourse which is largely limited to an elite group of intellectuals and activists. Now, with Wahid no longer at the helm of NU, at least formally, a form of political Islam which may be more historically authentic and representative of the majority of NU *ulama* may emerge.

With regard to NU's relationship to the state, an approach of "in-

formal politics” or “*politik tanpa panggung*” (politics without a platform) is no longer necessary, as NU perhaps for the first time in its history is able to dominate the political bureaucracy and government. The question on everyone’s mind now is, having spent the last 15 years becoming the most vocal critical voice in civil society, will NU be able to remain critical, and maintain its position as the primary motor behind civil society development in Indonesia? It is too early to answer that question definitively at this point, however I suspect that it will be very difficult for NU to maintain its critical stance. Its history of political accommodationism, combined with strong theological justifications for cooperating with the state, especially a state which is sympathetic to its interests, provide a strong pull in that direction. Furthermore, the NU intellectuals and activists who have the skills and the ability to play a critical, watchdog function are also Wahid’s “*anak buah*” (protégés), and the social and cultural pressure on them to support Wahid, and the regime that Wahid currently leads, is immense.

In 1972, Daniel Lev wrote that Islam in Indonesia “has always suffered from a kind of minority status. Despite the fact that Muslims are a numerical majority, Islam in Indonesia represents what is basically an under class,” (1972: 242). While many Muslim intellectuals and activists still claim that Muslims are marginalized within power structures in Indonesia, Islam can no longer truly be considered an “under class” in Indonesia. The public discourse and space in Indonesia is strongly colored by Islam, with public speeches almost always commenced by “*assalamu’alaikum*”, public events structured around the five daily prayer times, and *jilbabs* (headcovering) abounding. Wahid is in the somewhat tricky position of needing to accommodate members of the modernist Poros Tengah who facilitated his rise to power, and who would like to see this public expression of Islam extended to a more explicit political role, while maintaining his own long-held commitment to a “secular” government. If NU, which has been his power base heretofore in this struggle, is beginning to shift itself to a more Islamist position, he may be facing quite a challenge. On the other hand, very few people actually expected Wahid to get this far, so at this stage, all bets are on.

## Endnotes

1. The Pancasila is the Indonesian state ideology, consisting of 5 Principles: 1) belief in one God, 2) humanitarianism, 3) national unity, 4) democracy through consultation and consensus, and 5) social justice. It was originally conceptualized by Soekarno, and later resuscitated as an instrument of organizational control by Soeharto. In 1982 he decreed that all "mass organizations" and "socio-political organizations" must have Pancasila as the sole ideological foundation of their organization.
2. Masyumi was an umbrella Islamic party, and the primary vehicle for Islamic politics in the 1940s and '50s. With the withdrawal of NU, it became known as a modernist party. It was disbanded by Soeharto in 1960.
3. "Modernist" and "traditionalist" are problematic but widely used labels to describe two main "streams" of Islam in Indonesia. "Modernists" are largely urban-based Muslims, who refer only to the Qur'an and hadist for divine guidance, while "traditionalists" are largely rural-based Muslims, who adhere to decisions of ulama from the classical era, as handed down within four primary *madzhab*, or schools of jurisprudence.
4. In the June 1999 general elections, for example, the political lines within Islam remained the same, though they have diversified internally—there were 3 parties claiming to represent the old Masyumi electorate and agenda (PMB, PPIM, PBB), while 4 parties held claim to the NU electoral base (PKB, PKU, PNU, and SUNI).
5. NU organizational structure involves a dual-leadership position: the *Rais Am* is chair of the Syuriah (religious council) and the *ketua*, or general chairman, is head of the Tanfidziah (administrative body).
6. The configuration of the sides of this debate would also reverse itself later. In this instance the head of the Tanfidziyah was calling for a return to a socio-religious focus while the head of the Syuriah advocated a role for NU in formal politics—in the early 1980s it would be the Tanfidziyah attempting to maintain a political role for NU, while senior ulama and members of the Syuriah would call for a return to a socio-religious focus.
7. Guided Democracy was the period of time from 1959 to 1965 in which President Soekarno accrued a great deal of personal power, dismantled the parliamentary system, and became more directive in the leadership of the country.
8. For an extensive discussion of this process, see Daniel Lev, 1996, *The Transition to Guided Democracy in Indonesia 1957-1959*. Ithaca: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project Monograph Series.
9. PBNU, or Pengurus Besar Nahdlatul Ulama, is the Central Board of the NU. NU organizational structure consists of this Central Board, which is composed of the Tanfidziyah (administrative council) and the Syuriah (religious council) as well as the Mustasyar (advisors). This leadership structure is replicated at the provincial level (PWNU) and at the kabupaten (district) level (PCNU). Leadership hierarchy is fairly rigid within NU, with most decisions made by the PBNU, and merely passed down to, and implemented by, the PW and PC bodies.
10. The Jakarta Charter was a document drafted in June of 1945 in an attempt to break a similar deadlock over the basis of the state upon its formation. The contested passage stated that "Indonesia ...is based upon: Belief in One Supreme God with the obligation to carry out the Syariat for adherents of Islam...". The

last seven words were the source of fierce debate, with Muslims interpreting them as giving the responsibility for implementation of the *syari'ah* to the state, while non-Muslims viewed this as a personal religious obligation. In 1945 this issue was finally resolved, unsatisfactorily to some, by eliminating the contentious seven words from the Jakarta Charter, which was placed in the Preamble of the Constitution.

11. While often seen as a split between the “politicians”—ie the Cipete group, referring to Chalid’s home in the Jakarta suburb of Cipete, and the “ulama”—ie the Situbondo group, referring to the home of Kiai As’ad, an influential kiai who led the push away from formal politics in the late 1970s, the actual configuration of interests was more complex. Within the Situbondo group there was a subgroup of ‘radical’ politicians led by Yusuf Hasyim among others, who had been recently removed from their positions in the DPR due to their oppositional stance, who coexisted with another subgroup of “progressive” intellectuals, such as Abdurrahman Wahid, Muchit Muzadi, Said Budairy, etc. who were spearheading an intellectual revival within NU. These two groups would eventually face off themselves, but at this time were joined in their efforts to remove NU from PPP. For a more extensive discussion of this period, see Feillard 1999: 227-232.
12. At this Congress Siddiq was elected as *Rais Am*, and Wahid as *Ketua*.
13. See footnote 1.
14. For a close look at Achmad Siddiq’s line of argumentation, see *Islam, Pancasila dan Ukhuwah Islamiyah*, a small book based on a series of interviews with Kyai Siddiq on this topic. For a short English-language discussion of this book, see Barton 1996: 119-128.
15. While this move was consistently articulated as a “return to” NU’s “original” state of emphasis on the social rather than the political, the observation has been made that in fact NU was birthed in a highly political context and had a well-developed political agenda at the time (Suryanegara, 1994). Furthermore, it should be remembered that this ‘withdrawal’ from formal politics was the explicit aim of one faction within NU.
16. This was widely felt to be due to the personal “charisma”, power, and genealogical clout of Abdurrahman Wahid within NU, in that as long as he occupied the position of ketua Tanfidziyah, any other formal position within NU, including the Rais Am of the Syuriah, would automatically come second. While this was widely acknowledged in private, I heard it openly discussed for the first time only at NU’s Muktamar (National Congress) in 1999, after Wahid had stepped down from this position.
17. In the early 1970s Dan Lev wrote that Muslim leaders were loathe to discuss the political and ideological differences between them (referring to the modernist vs. traditionalist divide) publicly, for fear of “showing weakness to the non-Islamic opposition.” (Lev, *Islamic Courts*, p. 246). The fact that this is no longer the case, that there is much public discussion of these differences is possibly in part due to Wahid’s outspokenness on this issue of “political Islam”. Wahid would not need to fear the “non-Islamic opposition” because in his paradigm, non-Muslims are rarely the opposition.
18. The sudden and highly visible prominence of Islam on the public scene immediately after Soeharto’s fall was only an acceleration of a process of growing public

expression of Islam in Indonesia. Some mark this growth from the early 1990s, with the establishment of ICMI, others from the mid to late 1980s, however it is interesting to note that Lev, writing in 1971, is already observing an increase in observation of public rituals of Islam, such as fasting, praying at the mosque, etc. (Lev, 1972: 262)

19. This explosion of "political Islam" had been predicted by William Liddle, among others, several years before the fall of the New Order when he argued that the prominence of moderate Islam in Indonesia was partially a product of New Order suppression. He wrote, "...the success of the substantiality...has been too dependent on the support of authoritarian politicians whose needs happen to have coincided with theirs. In a more open or democratic political climate...it is probable that the scripturalists would have many more political resources, in mass acceptance of their ideas...than they have now." (Liddle 1996: 284).
20. Clear echoes here, again, of the nationalist/traditionalist vs. modernist face-off that existed in the 1950s.
21. The surprise here was largely due to the personal enmity and hostility that existed between Wahid and Rais. This hostility not only reflected the historic divide between the modernists and traditionalists which each man represented, but also an antagonism between them on a personal level. During the 'reformasi' period, this antagonism foiled several attempts to create a joint reform platform.
22. This was possibly because many of the kyai had deep reservations about Wahid's ability to perform as President, based on his erraticism and frequent controversial statements. These reservations were compounded by the fact that ideologically many of the kyai did not approve of Wahid's efforts at theological renewal within NU. On the other hand, many of the younger generation PKB politicians were not only related to Wahid (Muhaimin Iskandar, for example), but most of them owed their careers and their positions to Wahid.

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Robin L. Bush was former program officer of *The Asia Foundation in Indonesia* and is a PhD candidate at the Department of Political Science, Washington University at Seattle.