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Islam and Democracy: In Search of a Viable Synthesis

Abstraksi: *Telah banyak studi dilakukan sehubungan dengan demokrasi di dunia ini. Namun demikian masih sangat sedikit yang memberikan perhatian pada perkembangan demokrasi di dunia Islam. Ini bersumber dari persepsi bahwa negara-negara Islam pada umumnya tidak memiliki banyak pengalaman demokrasi dan secara umum punya prospek yang kecil bagi transisi ke semi-demokrasi sekalipun. Mempelajari negeri-negeri Muslim dalam rangka mencari pengalaman demokratisasi, dengan demikian, dianggap hanya sebagai upaya yang sia-sia.*

Persepsi banyak pengamat politik seperti itu tentu saja menantang para peminat studi tentang Islam politik: apakah betul bahwa Islam tidak sejalan (compatible) dengan demokrasi?

Demokrasi sebenarnya merupakan konsep yang difahami dan dipraktikkan secara heterogen. Namun demikian ada unsur-unsur dasar atau "family resemblance" dari demokrasi: adanya proses rekrutmen elite secara bebas dan lewat kompetisi terbuka, dan adanya hak untuk memilih atas dasar hak pilih universal. Apakah dua elemen ini tidak bisa diterima dan dipraktikkan di negara-negara Islam?

Masalah tersebut sangat tergantung pada bagaimana Islam dipahami. Selama ini pengamat politik cenderung mendefinisikan Islam sebagai agama monolitik. Huntington dan Fukuyama misalnya, memandang bahwa Islam pada dasarnya tidak sejalan dengan demokrasi. Islam dipandang menyimpan benih yang mengancam praktik-praktik liberal.

Pandangan semacam itu biasanya didasarkan atas referensi terbatas pada Islam radikal atau militan, terutama yang berkembang di Timur Tengah. Islam bukanlah agama monolitik. Di samping itu kegagalan mereka menangkap Islam yang plural itu berakar dari "bias sekular" mereka dalam memahami Islam. Mereka tidak mudah menerima argu-

men bahwa agama merupakan alat ilahiah untuk memahami dunia. Dan Islam adalah agama yang paling tidak mengalami kesulitan menerima argumen ini. Alasannya terletak pada salah satu watak Islam yang paling jelas: kemenyeluruhan. Ini merupakan konsep yang mengakui di manapun Islam hadir harus memberikan sikap moral bagi tindakan manusia. Gagasan ini memang telah mendorong di antara umat Islam untuk memahami Islam sebagai pandangan hidup menyeluruh, yang diungkapkan dalam shari'ah. Bahkan ide ini telah ditafsirkan lebih jauh bahwa Islam merupakan "totalitas integral yang menawarkan solusi bagi semua persoalan kehidupan".

Memahami shari'ah sebagai pandangan hidup menyeluruh adalah satu hal. Sedangkan memahaminya secara tepat adalah hal lain. Sumber masalahnya ternyata terletak di sini: bagaimana shari'ah difahami? Dan ternyata tidak ada jawaban monolitik atas masalah ini. Islam kemudian berkembang menjadi agama poli-interpretasi. Watak ini kemudian menjadikan Islam sebagai agama yang fleksibel dalam perjalanannya.

Kenyataan itu seringkali luput dari pengamatan para pengamat politik, padahal berkembang di negeri-negeri Muslim. Bukanlah pandangan minoritas di negeri-negeri Muslim bahwa mendirikan negara Islam bukanlah suatu keharusan. Sejauh prinsip-prinsip moral Islam diakomodasi suatu sistem politik, maka mendirikan negara Islam menjadi tidak signifikan. Atas dasar ini, tidak ada dasar teologisnya untuk mempertentangkan Islam dengan sistem politik moderen, mempertentangkan Islam dengan kedaulatan rakyat atau demokrasi.

Karena itu kemudian masalahnya bukan "apakah Islam sejalan dengan demokrasi?" melainkan "seberapa besar dan bentuk-bentuk Islam apa yang sejalan dengan pembangunan politik di dunia Muslim?"

Bentuk Islam yang menghendaki Islam dijadikan ideologi negara akan menghadapi persoalan serius dalam negara yang multi-agama. Ini pernah dialami Indonesia pada tahun 1950-an. Ketika itu ada kelompok Islam yang ingin Islam dijadikan ideologi negara Indonesia. Apa yang terjadi justru keinginan tersebut ikut meruntuhkan demokrasi konstitusional. Ironisnya demokrasi konstitusional itulah justru yang memungkinkan kelompok Islam menyatakan aspirasinya.

Dalam suatu bangsa dan negara yang multi-agama, tidak ada keharusan untuk menjadikan Islam sebagai ideologi negara. Kalaupun ada konsep ahl al-dhimmi, yakni konsep yang mengakui posisi non-Muslim di negara Islam, ia tetap memperlakukan warga negara non-Muslim tidak setara dengan warga Muslim.

الإسلام والديمقراطية؛ بحث عن قضية التطابق

بيينهما

الملخص: الربع الأخير من القرن العشرين هذا يمكن أن يكون المدة المفتوحة لمجال تطور الديمقراطية في تاريخ الحضارة الحديثة. كثرت البحوث التي أجريت، وآلاف من الصفحات قد حررت المتصلة بالديمقراطية في هذه المعمورة، غير أن ذلك مازال قليلا عما يعطى اهتماما عن التطور الديمقراطي في العالم الإسلامي.

عزل الدول الإسلامية في البحث عن الديمقراطية نابع من الشعور بأن الدول الإسلامية على وجه العموم ليست لها معرفة واسعة عن الديمقراطية، وعلى أى وجه فإن لها صورة مصغرة في التحول إلى إنصاف الديمقراطية مهما كان الأمر. إن دراسة البلاد الإسلامية في إطار البحث من التجارب الديمقراطية، تعتبر ذلك سعيا عابثا. الإحساس بكثرة ملاحظي السياسة مثل ذلك لا شك يتحدى راغب دراسة السياسة الإسلامية وهل صحيح أن الإسلام لا يتمشى مع الديمقراطية؟ هذه الكتابة إنما تحاول إجابة هذه المسألة.

الديمقراطية في الواقع، تعتبر فكرة مفهومة وتنطبق بطريقة متغيرة. إذا كان الأمر كذلك، توجد عناصر أساسية أو عائلية متماثلة من الديمقراطية، ويوجد إجراء تجنيد البارزين بطريقة حرة وبواسطة مسابقة مفتوحة؛ ويوجد حق الانتخاب على أساس حق الانتخاب العلى. هل هذان العاملان لا يمكن قبولهما و تطبيقهما في الدول الإسلامية؟!

هذه المسألة المذكورة كذلك كثيرا ما تتعلق بكيفية فهم الإسلام. طيلة هذه المدة الملاحظ السياسي مائل إلى تعريف الإسلام بأنه دين منفرد الزاوية. Huntington (هنتنجتون) و Fukuyama (فوكوياما) مثلا ينظران إلى أن الإسلام من أساسه لا يتمشى والديمقراطية. ينظران إلى الإسلام بأنه يحمل بذرة تهدد التطبيقات الحرة.

إن مثل هذه النظرة في العادة مبنية على إدراك الدين المنفرد الزاوية على مرجع محدود فعلى عن الإسلام المتطرف أو المكافح ولاسيما المنتشر في الشرق الأوسط. هذه نتيجة لتحديد معلومات هؤلاء الملاحظين المذكورين عن الإسلام الذي في ظاهره ليس بدين منفرد الزاوية. بجانب ذلك فإن فشلهم في فهمهم عن الإسلام أنه ذلك المجموع الذي جذوره من محاكاة العلمانية عند تفكيرهم عن الإسلام. إنه ليس من السهولة قبول الحجة القائلة أن الدين إنما هو آلة إلهية لفهم الدنيا، والإسلام دين أبعد إدراكا من صعوبة قبول هذه الحجة. والدليل على ذلك موجود في الإدراكات الإسلامية

الأكثر وضوحاً على وجه العموم. هذه هي الفكرة المعترف بها بأن الإسلام أينما وجد ليعطي خطة أخلاقية لخطوات الإنسان. هذا الأسلوب في الحق قد دفع الأمة الإسلامية لفهم الإسلام كنظرية حيوية شاملة والتي انكشفت واضحة في الشريعة، بل هذه الفكرة قد فسرت أكثر بعداً بأن الإسلام يشكل المجموعة الكاملة العارضة للحلول لكل مسائل الحياة: هذه النظرة تعتبر أساس التوحيد لدى بعض الكتل الإسلامية المعروفة بالأصوليين الإسلاميين.

وفهم الشريعة كنظرية حيوية شاملة حالة قائمة بذاتها: بينما فهمها مطابق للواقع الشرعي هي حالة أخرى. ومصدر الموضوع يتبين أنه موضوع: كيف تفهم الشريعة؟ في الظاهر لم يوجد جواب عن التوحيد الانفرادي في هذه المسألة. فالإسلام أخيراً قد تطور حتى أصبح ديناً لنا مرناً في مسيرة تاريخه أو بجانب ذلك يوافق على التعدد في التقاليد الإسلامية. هذه الظاهرة - كثيراً ما - متروكة لملاحظة مراقبي السياسة، بيد أنه تتطور في البلاد الإسلامية، وليست بنظرية الأقلية فحسب في البلاد الإسلامية فالاعتقاد بأن إنشاء دولة إسلامية ليست بضرورة، طالما المبادئ الأخلاقية الإسلامية غير ملائمة مع أحد البرنامج السياسي، فإنشاء دولة إسلامية عندئذ غير ذات معنى. على أساس أن هذا المبدأ لا يوجد أساساً في الفلسفة اللاهوتية المواجهة للإسلام في البرنامج السياسي الحديث، فإن هناك مواجهة الإسلام بالسلطة الشعبية أو الديمقراطية. ولذلك فإن المسألة أخيراً ليست هل الإسلام متمش مع الديمقراطية، ولكن كم كبر حجم الإسلام وتشكيلاته الذي يتمشى مع البناء السياسي في العالم الإسلامي؟

التشكيل الإسلامي الذي يريد جعل الإسلام إيديولوجياً دولياً سيواجه مشاكل حادة في الدول ذات أديان متعددة، هذا قد أدركته إندونيسيا في الخمسينات، في تلك الأونة توجد جماعة إسلامية تفرض جعل الإسلام إيديولوجي الدولة الإندونيسية، والذي حدث أن ذلك الضغط قد شارك في الإطاحة بالديمقراطية الدستورية ومن التحكم أن الديمقراطية الدستورية تلك هي التي مكنت الإسلام من إظهار تطلعاته. في داخل شعب ما ودولة ذات أديان مختلفة، لا توجد ضرورة جعل الإسلام كإيديولوجية الدولة. إذا كانت هناك فكرة أهل الذمة بمعنى فكرة الاعتراف بوضع غير المسلم في البلاد الإسلامية، ولكن دوام الشعور بعدم مساواة المسلم بغير المسلم في المعاملة الدائمة، ولكن الإسلام يشكل تعاليم أخلاقية أكثر ليونة ومرونة لبناء النظام السياسي الحديث وكذلك لإعطاء قاعدة للأمة الإسلامية لتعيش في داخل النظام السياسي الحديث المبني على الديمقراطية. على مدى النظام السياسي المتفق عليه مستند على القيم الإسلامية كالمشاركة والعدالة والمساواة، فإن النظام السياسي المذكور يمكن النظر إليه بأنه إسلامي الفكرة.

على هذا الأساس، بناء على الفلسفة الألوهية، فإن فشل العالم الإسلامي في مساعيه لبناء الحركة السياسية على الديمقراطية، إنما البعض منها لسبب الخطة الرسمية والمنطقية في النظر إلى علاقة الإسلام بالسياسة. وهذا هو الذي جعل التركيز التنهني للمراقبين المشائمين لإمكانية وجود الديمقراطية في البلاد الإسلامية. فالتقرب الإسلامي جوهري ولكن لا يطرؤ على انتباههم. بينما هذا التقرب هو الذي يجب التنبيه إليه لإظهار ما هو أكثر وضوحاً في سعيها لخلق الأسلوب المطابق يجمع بين الإسلام والديمقراطية.

”“C onfucian democracy’ is clearly a contradiction in terms. It is unclear whether ‘Islamic democracy’ is.”

Samuel P. Huntington¹

“The most important of these premises is what one can term the monolithic perception of Islam and, therefore of the Muslim World. This assumption, whether it underlies a basically hostile or a basically sympathetic analysis of the current ferment in many parts of the Muslim world, tends to downgrade and underplay (if not totally deny) the divergence in the social, economic and political contexts among the various regions and countries which constitute the world of Islam.”

Mohammed Ayoob²

Introduction

As many have suggested, the last quarter of the twentieth century has perhaps become “the greatest period of democratic ferment in the history of modern civilization.”³ Such a statement is based not on a provocative argument that “liberal democracy may constitute the ‘end point of mankind’s ideological evolution’ and the ‘final form of human government,’ and as such constitute the ‘end of history,’”⁴ but more on the fact that more countries have become democratic in the last two decades. It is noted that between 1974 and 1992, beginning with the transitions of regimes from authoritarian rule to democracy in Southern Europe, Latin America, Eastern Europe (including Russia), and a handful of African countries, that “at least 30 countries made the transition to democracy.” This figure doubles the number of democratic regimes in the world.⁵

In line with this emerging phenomenon of a “democratic moment,” democracy has become something like a snowball, and in the past ten years we have seen an outpouring of intellectual interest and a “flood of writing” on democratization.⁶ Thousands of pages have been written on the subject. This includes the four series on transitions to democracy edited by Guillermo O’Donnell, Philippe Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule* (1986-1987); the four volume series on democracy in the developing countries put together by Larry Diamond, Juan Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset, *Democracy in Developing Countries* (1988-1991); *Giuseppe Di Palma’s To Craft Democracies: An Essay on Democratic Transitions* (1990); the two volumes collected by Abraham Lowenthal, *Exporting Democracy*

(1991); Samuel Huntington's *The Third Wave*, an essay on the role of elites and democratic consolidation put together by John Higley and Richard Gunther, *Elites and Democratic Consolidation in Latin America and Southern Europe* (1992); a series of articles edited by Larry Diamond and Marc Plattner, *The Global Resurgence of Democracy* (1993); Jeffrey M. Puryear, *Thinking Politics: Intellectuals and Democracy in Chile* (1994); and the two volumes edited by Juan Linz and Arturo Valenzuela, *The Failure of Presidential Democracy* (1994).

It is rather unfortunate, however, that these works exclude most of the Islamic countries.⁷ The decision to put aside most of the Islamic world, and all of the Arab world, from this democratic survey has been based on a perception that these countries "generally lack much previous democratic experience, and most appear to have little prospect of transition even to semidemocracy."⁸

Students of democracy such as Larry Diamond, Juan Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset are entitled to their own judgment that most of the Islamic countries are "unpromising in terms of democratic transitions." Thus, they seem to argue that "studying them would be an unprofitable use of scarce academic resources." This, however, has intrigued many students of political Islam, not necessarily to challenge the validity of their proposition, but to look and examine inwardly whether or not Islam is actually compatible with modern political arrangements in which democracy is one of the major elements.⁹

This essay is about the relationship between Islam and democracy. It tries to answer whether or not Islam and democracy are compatible. In doing so, first, it is important to describe the basic element or "family resemblances" of democracy.¹⁰ Second, given the fact that most of the Islamic countries have been excluded from the study of democratization, it is also necessary to assess how Islam is perceived by many western observers. Third, given the focus of this paper, it is also imperative to examine some of the basic principles of Islam, especially those which are perceived as compatible with democratic values. Finally, drawing on the state of political development in the vast majority of Islamic countries, where authoritarianism has been so pervasively evident, it is my intention to speculate on the viability of Islam and democracy in terms of their synthesis.

Some Basic Elements of Democracy

Contrary to a popular belief that democracy is conceptualized and practiced homogeneously, the vast majority of democratic literatures suggest otherwise.¹¹ This is to say that there is no single, unified conception of democracy. Its basic elements or “family resemblances” are shaped and enriched by the existing culture and structure. In other words, the concept and the practice of democracy are sociologically and culturally driven. Depending on the sociological and cultural contours of any given society, democracy — along with all of its variations — will manifest accordingly. Thus, the quality and degree of the North American democracies differ from those of their counterparts in the Far East (e.g. Japan) or Western Europe (e.g. Sweden, Italy). The existence of one-party dominant regimes in the latter countries, for instance, has led many to question the quality and degree of democracy in those countries. At least, they have been portrayed as countries with “uncommon” characteristics and traits of democracy.¹²

Similarly, the overwhelming emphasis on the procedural dimension of democratic theorizing, as conceived by many leading theorists of democracy, has inspired some to raise the issue of “for whom the ‘outputs’ of the democratic system are actually directed.” In this regard, it has been generally suggested that in “the struggle over authority” it is the elites — especially those in business circles — who usually enjoy “the privileged position.”¹³ Because of this many have argued that democracy should not only be conceived as a “political method,” but also as an “ethical end.”¹⁴

Despite the fact that democracy can be construed differently (though it cannot “be just anything”), there are some basic elements or “family resemblances” in democracy. Robert A. Dahl has specified that a political regime can be considered democratic insofar as it (1) allows free and open elections; (2) develops genuine political competition; and (3) provides wide protection of civil liberties.¹⁵ Following Dahl, Juan Linz elaborates that a political system can be regarded as democratic “when it allows the free formulation of political preferences, through the use of basic freedoms of association, information, and communication, for the purpose of free competition between leaders to validate or regular intervals by non-violent means their claim to rule, ... without excluding any effective political office from the competition or prohibiting any members of the political community from expressing their preference.”¹⁶

Obviously, as such this is a very demanding conception of democracy. All of its defining characteristics (i.e. free formulation of political preferences, freedom of association, free and open election) have to be met before a regime can be perceived as democratic. Given today's wide-world democratic experience, no single political regime fits this ideal type of democracy perfectly. For this, Michael Burton, Richard Gunther, and John Higley have observed that

[M]any regimes that hold regular elections fall far short. Some regimes tie voting rights to stringent property qualifications, as in most Western countries during the nineteenth century. Some deny the suffrage to whole ethnic categories, as in South Africa or the American South until quite recently. Some outlaw parties that espouse radical ideologies and programs, as has happened to Communist parties in a number of countries. Others marshal majority support for governing parties through corrupt and coercive practices, as the Mexican regime has done for decades. Some regimes sharply limit the effects of democratic procedures by reserving powerful government posts for individuals or bodies that are neither directly nor indirectly responsible to the electorate. Thus, conceiving of democracy in procedural terms does not lead to a simple distinction between democratic and undemocratic regimes. Between these two poles lie a variety of systems that we will refer to as "limited" and "pseudo" democracies.¹⁷

Based on this procedural notion of democracy, it is safe to suggest that the basic elements of democracy include (1) the process of elite recruitment through free and fair competition, and (2) the right to vote based on universal suffrage. The implementation of this democratic procedure guarantees the formulation of individual as well as collective preferences. Moreover, given the fact that election is perceived as a means of elite recruitment, it implies that public figures are held accountable for their actions while in office.

The Monolithic Perception of Islam: A Critique

Recent accounts of the relationship between Islam and democracy, as advocated by Samuel Huntington and Francis Fukuyama, provide a different explanation with regard to the decision of many students of democratization to exclude the vast majority of the Islamic countries from their analysis. The emphasis on the "interior" dimension of Islam, as opposed to "some social requisites of democracy"¹⁸ in any given country has led them to believe that Islam is inherently incompatible with democracy. In fact, Islam poses "a grave threat to liberal practices."¹⁹

This viewpoint, I would argue, derives chiefly from a monolithic perception of Islam, with an exclusive reference of militant or radical Islam especially those which have developed in the Middle East. As John L. Esposito has pointed out, “[a]ctions, however heinous, are attributed to Islam rather than to a twisted or distorted interpretation of Islam by certain individuals or political movements.” Thus, the term radical or militant Islam “is used facilely and indiscriminately to encompass a broad and diverse array of leaders, states, and organizations.”²⁰ And largely because of this, for Huntington, Islam not only contradicts the idea of democracy, but represents a threat to Western civilization.²¹

Obviously, the monolithic tendency of many Western observers in understanding Islam is largely due to their limited knowledge of the nature of Islam. While it may be true that “secular bias,” as Esposito contends to believe,²² has contributed to the failure of many non-Muslim scholars to understand Islam properly, their major pitfalls lay in their ignorance of the fact that Islam is a polyinterpretable religion. Because of this, an expose on the polyinterpretability of Islam in relation to Muslims’ attitudes toward modern political systems, albeit brief, needs to be presented.

Religion, as some have argued, may be seen as a divine instrument to understand the world.²³ Islam — in comparison to other religions — conceivably has the least difficulty in accepting such a premise. An obvious reason lies in one of Islam’s most conspicuous characteristics: its “omnipresence.” This is the notion which recognizes that “everywhere” the presence of Islam should provide “the right moral attitude for human action.”²⁴

This notion has led many adherents to believe that Islam is a total way of life. The embodiment of this is expressed in the *shari’ah* (Islamic law). A sizeable group of Muslims push it even further, asserting that “Islam is an integrated totality that offers a solution to all the problems of life.” Undoubtedly, they

believe in the complete and holistic nature of revealed Islam so that, according to them, it encompasses the three famous ‘Ds’ (*dīn*, religion; *dunyā*, life and *dawla*, State). ... [Thus] Islam is an integrated totality that offers a solution to all problems of life. It has to be accepted in its entirety, and to be applied to the family, to the economy and to politics. [For this group of Muslims] the realization of an Islamic society is predicated on the establishment of an Islamic State, that is, an ‘ideological State’ based on the comprehensive precepts of Islam.²⁵

In its present context, it is not surprising, though it is sometimes alarming, that the contemporary world of Islam witnesses many Muslims who want to base their socio-economic, cultural, and political life exclusively on Islamic teachings, without realizing their limitations and constraints. Their expression is found in today's popularly symbolic terms such as Islamic revivalism, Islamic resurgence, Islamic revolution, Islamic reassertion, or Islamic fundamentalism.²⁶ While such expressions are well motivated, they are not well thought out and in fact are rather apologetic in nature.²⁷ Their central ideas, as Mohammed Arkoun has put it, "remain prisoners of the image of a provincial, ethnographic Islam, locked in its classical formulations inadequately and poorly formulated in contemporary ideological slogans." Furthermore, "[their] presentation [is] still dominated by the ideological need to legitimate the present regimes in Muslim societies."²⁸

The holistic view of Islam as described above has its own implications. One of these is that it has excessively encouraged a tendency to understand Islam in its "literal" sense, emphasizing merely its "exterior" dimensions. This has been carried out so far at the expense of the "contextual" and "interior" dimensions of Islamic principles. Thus, what might lie beyond its "textual appearance" is almost completely neglected, if not avoided. In the extreme case, this tendency has hindered many Muslims from understanding the message of the Qur'ân as a divine instrument which provides the right moral and ethical values for human action. On the question of the holistic nature of Islam, Qamaruddin Khan noticed that:

There is a prevailing misconception in the minds of many Muslims that the Qur'ân contains exposition of all things. This misunderstanding has been created by the following verse of the Qur'ân: 'And We have sent down on thee the Book making clear everything and as a guidance and a mercy, and as good tidings to those who surrender' (16:89). The verse is intended to explain that the Qur'ân contains information about every aspect of moral guidance, and not that it provides knowledge about every object in creation. The Qur'ân is not an inventory of general knowledge.²⁹

Recognizing the Islamic sharî'ah as a total way of life is one thing. Understanding it properly is quite another. In fact, it is in the context of "how is the sharî'ah to be known," as noted by Fazlur Rahman, that the crux of the problem is to be found.³⁰ There are a number of factors which can influence and shape the outcome of Muslims' un-

derstanding of the sharīʿah. Sociological, cultural, and intellectual circumstances, or what Arkoun describes as the “aesthetics of reception,” are significant in determining the form and substance of interpretation.³¹ Different intellectual inclinations — whether the motive is to recover the true meaning of the doctrine as literally expressed in the text, or to find the general principles of the doctrine beyond its literal or textual expression³² — in the effort to understand the sharīʿah may lead to different interpretations of a particular doctrine. Thus while accepting the general principles of the sharīʿah, Muslims do not adhere to a single interpretation of it.

The emergence of a number of different schools of thought in Islamic jurisprudence or various theological and philosophical streams, for instance, shows that Islamic teachings are polyinterpretable.³³ The interpretive nature of Islam has functioned as the basis of Islamic flexibility in history. In addition, it also confirms the necessity of pluralism in Islamic tradition. Therefore, as many have argued, Islam could not and should not be perceived as monolithic.³⁴

This means that empirical or actually-existing Islam — because of “the divergence in the social, economic and political context” — has meant different things to different people. And quite equally, “it is both understood differently and utilized differently.”³⁵ To put this in the context of contemporary Islamic politics, the struggle to form an Islamic state — even though its theological/religious necessity remains a controversial issue — may denote different meanings to other Muslims. As a consequence, to state the most controversial and extreme position on this issue, what is perceived as an Islamic state by Iranian Muslims has been seen rather differently by their brothers in faith in Saudi Arabia. In fact, as widely understood, both have been campaigning for the repudiation of each other’s claim for being Islamic.³⁶

Islamic politics cannot escape this history of polyinterpretability. On the other hand, many have in general admitted the important role of Islamic principles in politics. At the same time, because of Islam’s potential for differing interpretation, there has been no single unified notion of how Islam and politics should be properly related. In fact, as far as can be deduced from both the intellectual and historical discourses of Islamic political ideas and practices, there has been a wide range of different — some even contradictory — opinions regarding the proper relationship between Islam and modern political systems (democracy).³⁷

By and large, there are two different intellectual currents in contemporary Islamic political thinking. While both recognize the importance of Islamic principles in all spheres of life, they differ greatly in their interpretation, their congeniality to the modern situation — thus, some may need further reinterpretation beyond their textual meaning — and their applicability in the real world.

At one end of the spectrum, there are those who argue that Islam should be the basis of the state; that sharī'ah ought to be adopted as the state constitution; that political sovereignty rests in the hands of the Divine; that the idea of the modern nation-state is contradictory to the concept of the *ummah* (Islamic community) which recognizes no political boundary; and while recognizing the principle of *shūrâ* (consultation), its realization is different from the contemporary notion of democracy.³⁸ Put differently, within such a perspective, the modern (Western) political system — upon which many of the newly independent Muslim states are based — is placed in a contradictory position to Islamic teachings.

At the other end of the spectrum, there are those who believe that Islam does not “lay down any clear cut and dried pattern of a state theory [or political theory] to be followed by the *ummah*.”³⁹ In the words of Muhammad ‘Imara, an Egyptian Muslim thinker,

Islam as a religion has not specified a particular system of government for Muslims, for the logic of this religion's suitability for all times and places requires that matters which will always be changing by the force of evolution should be left to the rational human mind, to be shaped according to the public interest and within the framework of the general precepts that this religion has dictated.⁴⁰

According to this theoretical stream, even the term ‘state’ (*darwlah*) cannot be found in the Qur’ân. Although “there are numerous expressions in the Qur’ân which refer or seem to refer to political power and authority, [t]hese expressions are, however, incidental remarks and have no bearing on political theory.” Indeed, they argue, “the Qur’ân is not a treatise on political science.”⁴¹

Nonetheless, it is important to note that this position recognizes the fact that the Qur’ân does contain “ethical values and injunctions ... on human socio-political activities.” These include the principles of “justice, equality, brotherhood, and freedom.”⁴² For them, therefore, as long as the state adheres to such principles, it conforms to Islamic teachings.⁴³

In this line of argument, the establishment of an Islamic state in its formal-ideological terms is not terribly significant. What is important is that the state — recognizing the state as instrumental in the realization of religious teachings — guarantees the existence of those basic values. As long as this is the case, there are no theological/religious reasons to reject the idea of popular sovereignty, the nation-state as the legitimate territorial modern political unit, and other general principles of modern political theory. In other words, there is no legitimate basis for putting Islam in a position contradictory to the modern political system (democracy).

The first Islamic theoretical model reflects the tendency to emphasize the legal and formal aspects of Islamic political idealism. This is typically signified by the direct application of *shari'ah* as the constitutional basis of the state. In contemporary nation-states such as Turkey, Egypt, the Sudan, Morocco, Pakistan, Malaysia, Algeria, and Indonesia, this formalist model has the potential to conflict with the modern political system.

Conversely, the second model stresses substance rather than the formal and legal construct of the state. Given its substantialist character (emphasizing values such as justice, equality, consultation, and participation which do not contradict Islamic principles), it has the potential to serve as a viable approach to relate Islam to modern politics in which democracy is one of its major ingredients.

At this point, it seems fair to conclude that the tradition of Islamic political thinking is actually rich, diverse, and flexible. Given this perspective, following Michael C. Hudson's argument in his "Islam and Political Development," "[t]he question to be asked is not the crude, falsely dichotomous 'Is Islam compatible with political development [democracy]?' but rather 'How much and what kinds of Islam [in an interpretive sense] are compatible with (or necessary for) political development in the Muslim world?'"⁴⁴

Some Basic Principles of Political Islam: Their Affinity with Democratic Values

Briefly reiterated, the above expose suggests the existence of two different modes of political Islam or Islamic political theorizing. There are a sizeable number of Muslims who believe that Islam should be formally and legally linked to politics. In this respect, several implications are in order. Most notably, it will pose "obstacles to plural politics and a pluralist polity in Islam," especially in a country where

its religious and cultural contours are heterogenous. In the context of the Indonesian experience, it contributed to the decline of constitutional democracy in Indonesia in the 1950s.⁴⁵

In this regard, the matter of *ahl al-dhimmi*, the position of non-Muslims in an Islamic state, often becomes a case in point. Their rights and duties are construed as deriving exclusively from their membership as a protected community. Therefore, many have perceived that their status is one of inferiority vis-a-vis their Muslim counterparts.⁴⁶

On the other hand, there are those who argue that the Qur'ân and Sunnah do not set forth a detailed model of how a political system should actually be formulated. Yet, because of their deep conviction on the holistic nature of Islam — that it provides knowledge about every aspect of life and recognizes no separation between religion and politics, between the transcendental and the temporal — they believe that Islam does provide a set of ethical principles relevant to administering politics and its governing mechanism. They point out that the Qur'ân repeatedly mentions the normative ideas of *shura* (consultation), *'adl* (justice), and *musâwâh* (egalitarianism).⁴⁷

Because of this, they believe that the relationship between Islam and politics should be substantialist in nature. As long as a political system is based on the principles of consultation, justice, and egalitarianism, it is sufficient to consider such political methods as Islamic.⁴⁸ Given the democratic perspective presented above, it can be said that these normative ideas of Islamic political principles are compatible with the notion of democracy. At this point, even Huntington (in spite of his negative perception of the relationship between Islam and democracy) actually believes that Islamic values “are also generally congruent with the requirements of democracy.”⁴⁹ It is the lack of democratic experience in many of the so-called Islamic countries which has led him to believe in the incompatibility of Islam with democracy. But therein lies his blunder as, if the development of democratic practices is determined by a single factor, it is religion as a cultural basis of democracy.

Virtually all Muslims believe in the normative ideas of consultation, justice, or egalitarianism. The realization of these values, however, depends largely on how Islam — with regard to its relationship with earthly life in general and politics in particular — is conceived. The legalistic and formalistic viewpoint of Islam, a position which,

among other things, necessitates the elevation of *shari'ah* as the law of the land, tends to hinder the realization of the principle of egalitarianism. It poses obstacles to religious as well as political pluralism, not necessarily in the context of the Muslims-non-Muslims relationship, but also within the Muslim community itself.

On the other hand, the substantialist mode of Islam, a standpoint which stresses more the importance of substances than forms, values rather than symbols, would contribute greatly to the development of democratic practices.

However, this does not imply the idea of automaticity, in the sense that a substantialist perception of Islam alone would automatically lead to the enhancement of democratic values. In fact, as in any other areas, it has been strongly suggested that the emergence and consolidation of democratic regimes are very much dependent on wider aspects of socio-economic and cultural requisites.⁵⁰

Conclusion

The foregoing pages have sought to speculate on the viability of Islamic political principles with democracy in terms of their synthesis. In addition, this paper has also tried to place a word of caution regarding the danger of monolithicism in understanding Islam. While it is not necessarily concerned with the judgmental outputs of such a mode of perception, it is the theoretical generalization deriving from such a viewpoint that has raised the eyebrow of many a student of political Islam. Given the fact that Islam does contain some basic principles of democracy (i.e. consultation, justice, and egalitarianism), I have indicated that the lack of democratic experience in the vast majority of the Islamic world has nothing to do with the "interior" dimension of Islamic teachings. Theologically speaking, the failure of the Islamic world (Indonesia included!) in its attempt to establish and develop a democratic political mechanism is partly due to its legalistic and formalistic attitude in understanding the relationship between Islam and politics. It is the substantialist approach of Islam that needs to be highlighted to shed further light on our endeavors to create a viable synthesis between Islam and democracy.

End Notes

1. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991, p. 307.
2. Mohammed Ayoob, "The Myth of the Monolith," Mohammed Ayoob (ed.), *The Politics of Islamic Reassertion*, London: Croom Helm, 1981, p. 3.
3. Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner, "Introduction," Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner (eds.), *The Global Resurgence of Democracy*, Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993, p. ix.
4. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, New York: The Free Press, 1992, p. xi. His earliest argument was made in "The End of History?" in *The National Interest*, No. 18, 1989, pp. 3-18.
5. See, for instance, Samuel P. Huntington, "Democracy's Third Wave," Larry Diamond and Marc Plattner (eds.), *The Global Resurgence of Democracy*, p. 1. For a fuller account, see his *The Third Wave*.
6. According to John Higley and Richard Gunther, they are "drawn on the expertise of more than fifty scholars, containing extensive analyses of at least thirty countries" John Higley and Richard Gunther (eds.), *Elites and Democratic Consolidation in Latin America and Southern Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. ix.
7. In spite of such staggering works, only Diamond, Linz, and Lipset's piece include Pakistan, Turkey, Malaysia, and Indonesia in their survey. See Diamond, Linz, and Lipset (eds.), *Democracy in Developing Countries: Asia*.
8. Larry Diamond, Juan J. Linz, Seymour Martin Lipset (eds.), *Democracy in Developing Countries*, p. xx.
9. See, for instance, "The Democratization Process in the Arab World: An Assessment," a paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, 30 August—2 September, 1990. See also his "Islam and Political Development," John L. Esposito (ed.), *Islam and Development*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1980, pp. 1-24.
10. The term "family resemblances" is taken from Martin E. Marty and R. Scoot Appleby, "Conclusion: An Interim Report on a Hypothetical Family," Martin E. Marty (ed.), *Fundamentalism Observed*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 816.
11. See, for instance, Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1950; Giovanni Sartori, *The Theory of Democracy Revisited*, Two Volumes, Chatam, N.J.: Chatam House Publishers, 1987; Robert A. Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989; Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Evelyne Hubber Stephens and John D. Stephens, *Capitalist Development and Democracy*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
12. See, T.J. Pempel (ed.), *Uncommon Democracies: The One-Party Dominant Regimes*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990.
13. See, Charles E. Lindblom, *Politics and Market: The World's Political-Economic Systems*, New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1977.
14. See, for instance, Peter Bachrach, *The Theory of Democratic Elitism: A Critique*, New York: University Press of America, 1980.
15. Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1971, especially pp. 1-16.

16. Juan Linz, "Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes," Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby (eds.), *Handbook of Political Science*, Vol. 3, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1975, pp. 182-183. Cited from Michael Burton, Richard Gunther, and John Higley, "Introduction: Elite Transformations and Democratic Regimes," John Higley and Richard Gunther (eds.), *Elites and Democratic Consolidation in Latin America and Southern Europe*, p. 1.
17. Michael Burton, Richard Gunther, and John Higley, "Introduction: Elite Transformations and Democratic Regimes," pp. 1-2.
18. This term is borrowed from Seymour Martin Lipset's "Some Social Requisites of Democracy," *American Political Science Review*, No. 53, 1959, pp. 69-105.
19. See, Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave*, pp. 307-311; Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, p. 45.
20. John L. Esposito, "Secular Bias and Islamic Revivalism," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 26 May, 1993, p. A44.
21. Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Agenda 1994: Critical Issues in Foreign Policy*, New York: Foreign Affairs, 1994, pp. 120-147.
22. John Esposito, "Secular Bias and Islamic Revivalism."
23. This argument is advocated rather strongly by Robert N. Bellah. See, "Islamic Tradition and the Problems of Modernization," Robert N. Bellah, *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditionalist World*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991, p. 146. See also Leonard Binder, *Islamic Liberalism: A Critique of Development Ideologies*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988, p. 4.
24. Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, New York, Chicago, San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1966, p. 241.
25. Nazih Ayubi, *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World*, London and New York: Routledge, 1991, pp. 63-64.
26. In this movement, Mohammed Arkoun identifies two different groups of supporters. "Those who enjoy all economic and social privileges are ready to share conformist and very conservative views on Islam, because they do not have access to intellectual modernity! We also know that many students in technical sciences adhere to the fundamentalist movements: they have no notion of critical views developed in human and social sciences, especially history." See his "The Concept of Authority in Islamic Thought," Klaus Ferdinand and Mehdi Mozaffari (eds.), *Islam: State and Society*, London: Curzon Press, 1988, pp. 70-71.
27. A general criticism of such a tendency is also discussed in Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1982. See also his, "Roots of Islamic Neo-Fundamentalism," Philip H. Stoddard, David C. Cuthell, and Margaret W. Sullivan (eds.), *Change and the Muslim World*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1981, pp. 23-35.
28. Mohammed Arkoun, "The Concept of Authority in Islamic Thought," pp. 72-73 and 53.
29. Qamaruddin Khan, *Political Concepts in the Qur'an*, Lahore: Islamic Book Foundation, 1982, pp. 75-76.
30. Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, p. 101.
31. In his critiques Arkoun says that much attention has been given treating "the texts [Qur'anic verses] as material documents to be used by historians." In so

- doing Muslims have generally overlooked the aesthetics of reception, that is "how a discourse — oral or written — is received by listeners or readers." This issue "refers to the conditions of perception of each culture, or, more precisely, each level of culture corresponding to each social group in every phase of historical development." See his "The Concept of Authority in Islamic Thought," p. 58.
32. A comparable theory is also developed by many social theorists. An excellent introductory remarks on this issue is made by Michael T. Gibbons in his *Interpreting Politics*, New York: New York University Press, 1987, pp. 1-31.
 33. A lengthy socio-historical discussion on this issue is found in, among other, Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, Volume I-III, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974.
 34. On the tendency to perceive Islam in a monolithic way, see Mohammed Ayoob's introductory remarks in *Politics of Islamic Reassertion*, pp. 1-6.
 35. Nazih Ayubi, *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World*, pp. 60-61.
 36. See, *Al-Jazirah*, Riyadh, 22 August 1987; *Al-Nadwah*, Mecca, 22 August 1987, and *Kayhan al-Arabi*, Teheran, 25 May 1991. Cited from Nurcholish Madjid, "Agama dan Negara dalam Islam: Sebuah Telaah atas Fiqh Siyasi Sunni." A paper delivered at the Paramadina Religious Study Club, Jakarta, 1991, pp. 6-9.
 37. For a wide range of discussion on the relationship between Islam and politics (classical, medieval, and contemporary periods), see W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Political Thought*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1960; Erwin I.J. Rosenthal, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam: An Introductory Outline*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958; Munawir Syadzali, *Islam dan Tatanegara: Ajaran, Sejarah, dan Pemikiran*, Jakarta: UI Press, 1990; Qamaruddin Khan, *The Political Thought of Ibn Taymiyyah*, Lahore: Islamic Book Foundation, 1983; Qamaruddin Khan, *Political Concepts in the Qur'an*, Lahore: Islamic Book Foundation, 1982; Muhammad Asad, *The Principles of State and Government in Islam*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1961; Darlene R. May, "Al-Mawardi's Al-Ahkam as-Sultaniyyah: A Partial Translation with Introduction and Annotations," Ph.D. Dissertation, Indiana University, 1981; Erwin I.J. Rosenthal, *Islam in the Modern National State*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965; James P. Piscatori, *Islam in a World of Nation States*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986; P.J. Vatikiotis, *Islam and the State*, London, New York, and Sidney: Croom Helm, 1987; John L. Esposito (ed.), *Voices of Resurgent Islam*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983.
 38. Among those who fall into this theoretical current are Egyptian Rashid Rida and Sayyid Qutb; Pakistani Abu A'la al-Maududi and Ali al-Nadvi. Comparative accounts on this issue are discussed in James P. Piscatori, *Islam in a World of Nation States*; and Erwin I.J. Rosenthal, *Islam in the Modern National State*.
 39. Ahmad Syafii Maarif, "Islam as the Basis of State: A Study of the Islamic Political Ideas as Reflected in the Constituent Assembly Debates in Indonesia," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1983. p. 23.
 40. Muhammad 'Imara, *Al-Islâm wa al-Sultan al-Dîniyyah*, Cairo: Dâr al-Thaqafâ al-Jadîda, 1979, pp. 76-77. Cited from Nazih Ayubi, *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World*, p. 64.
 41. Quotations are from Qamaruddin Khan, *Political Concepts in the Qur'an*, p. 3.
 42. Ahmad Syafii Maarif, "Islam as the Basis of State," p. 23. Upon a closer look at the earliest political document in the history of Islam, these principles are also men-

- tioned in the Constitution of Medina (*al-Mithaq al-Madīnah*). It contained, among other things, the principles of equality, participation, and justice. On the Constitution of Medina, see Muhammad Husayn Haykal, *The Life of Muhammad*, Translated by Isma'il Ragi al-Faruqi, North American Publications, 1976, pp. 180-1983; Ibn Hisham, *The Life of Muhammad*, a translation of Ishaq's *Sirat al-Rasul Allah*, with introduction and notes by A. Guillaume, Lahore, Karachi, Dacca: Oxford University Press, 1970, pp. 231-233; W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1956, pp. 221-228.
43. Advocates of this view, among others, are Egyptian Mohammad Husayn Haykal; Pakistani Fazlur Rahman and Qamaruddin Khan.
 44. Michael C. Hudson, "Islam and Political Development," John L. Esposito (ed.), *Islam and Development*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1980, pp. 1-24.
 45. A similar argument has been made, among others, by Djohan Effendi. See his "The Contribution of Islamic Parties to the Decline of Democracy in the 1950s." Unpublished paper, n. d.
 46. For a fuller account, see for instance, P.J. Vatikiotis, *Islam and the State*, London: Croom Helm, 1987, pp. 84-99.
 47. See, for instance, the Qur'ān 3:159; 42:38; 6:115; and 42:15.
 48. In the context of Indonesian politics, I have discussed this issue further in my "Islam and the State: The Transformation of Islamic Political Ideas and Practices in Indonesia," Ph.D dissertation, The Ohio State University, 1994.
 49. Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave*, p. 307.
 50. See, Seymour Martin Lipset, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy." See also Robert Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*, pp. 48-80.

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