

## **THE INDONESIAN CLERICS COUNCIL (MUI) AND THE ISSUE OF THE FREEDOM OF RELIGION IN THE CASE OF AHMADIYAH**

**Saefur Rochmat**

The Department of History Education, the Faculty of Social Sciences,  
The State University of Yogyakarta  
(rochmat@yahoo.com)

### **Abstract**

*The Republic of Indonesia does not follow the pure concept of nation state as the national ideology of Pancasila recognizes the role of religion in the national political system. Based on this conception, the government has facilitated the establishment of the ministry of religious affairs which often breaks the principle of religion freedom. In the case of Islamic sect of Ahmadiyah, MUI, established under the auspice of the ministry of religions, has accused the Islamic sect of Ahmadiyah of having done the act of blasphemy. Actually, this will not become a problem if the state consistently applies the separations of power between public and private affairs. In this regard, religious communities take in a role of civil society which would provide checks and balances to the government in the pursuance of democracy. In line with this, the ministry of religious affairs, by means of MUI, should not judge people based on their beliefs. Al-Qur'an also recognizes the existence of different religions as well as some sects within a certain religion. Moreover, it is useful to implement Richard Niebuhr's theory of denomination. Last but not least, MUI should act following the concept of nation state in order to moderate power which tends to corrupt.*

*Republik Indonesia didirikan berdasarkan dasar negara Pancasila. Sejalan dengan itu, negara memfasilitasi pendirian kementerian agama, yaitu sebuah institusi yang sering melanggar prinsip kebebasan beragama. Sebagai contoh, MUI, yang didirikan di bawah naungan kementerian agama, menuduh Ahmadiyah, salah satu aliran dalam Islam, telah melakukan penistaan agama. Sebenarnya, model negara Pancasila tidak bermasalah bila negara secara konsisten menerapkan pemisahan kekuasaan antara urusan publik dan urusan privat. Dalam hal ini organisasi-organisasi keagamaan, seperti Ahmadiyah dan MUI, memainkan peran sebagai unsur civil society, dalam arti menjadi penyeimbang bagi negara, demi terciptanya masyarakat yang demokratis. Oleh karena itu, MUI, tidak menilai orang berdasarkan keyakinannya, karena al-Qur'an mengakui keberadaan beberapa agama dan aliran-alirannya. MUI perlu menilainya berdasarkan teori denominasi karya Richard Niebuhr. MUI juga perlu memposisikan diri sebagai bagian dari civil society, mengkritisi penguasa yang cenderung menyalahgunakan kekuasaan.*

**Key words: the Republic of Indonesia; nation state; ministry of religion; MUI; Ahmadiyah**

## A. Introduction

The Republic of Indonesia was established in 1945 following the concept of nation state. It is neither an Islamic state, nor a secular state, as Pancasila, the national ideology, recognizes the role of religions in the national political system. This recognition has been stated in the Indonesian Constitution of 1945, but at the same time, the Constitution also guarantees the idea of freedom of religion. This implies that the state protects the rights of its citizen to choose his/her own religion, including his/her understandings of the religion. This state guarantee of the individual rights of religion is to protect its citizens from religious institutions' monopoly of truth.

The freedom of religion is still a sensitive issue in Indonesia as the state recognizes the role of religious institution, such as MUI (the Indonesian Clerics Council) in the case of Islam. MUI tries to control the Muslims' understanding of Islam and, accordingly, tantamount to freedom of religion. In the face of democratization, following the collapse of the Soeharto authoritarian regime in 1998, the repression to freedom of religion become more apparent and MUI, to such extend, has some contributions to this repression. This break of freedom of religion manifests in the forms of the acts of blasphemy, the close of religious places, violent attack, an intimidation both physical and psychological, and intolerant religious *fatwa*.<sup>1</sup>

This article purports to offer some alternative solutions to the conflicts between MUI and Ahmadiyah, a religious sect accused of diverting from the straight path of Islam.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the followers of the different religions often fight against each other about the truth claim with the assumption that the unity of humanity should be followed by the unity of the God's guidance (Al-Qur'an, 10: 47).<sup>3</sup> They neglect other features of the unity of humanity such as the essence of the human beings itself: namely, life. In this regard, I like to analyze the issue of MUI and Ahmadiyah in the views of God's recognizance of the plurality of religions, of Richard Niebuhr's theory of denomination and of the concept of nation state.

---

<sup>1</sup>Mahfud MD, *Kebebasan Beragama dalam Perspektif Konstitusi*, ICRP, (Jakarta: 2009), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup>Novriantoni, *Aspek Sosiologis Gerakan Sempalan*, (Jakarta: JIL, 2007), p. 1. If we include the radical groups into the category of sect, the number of religious sect would become bigger. See Syafi'i Anwar, "Kekerasan itu Mode Temporer", in *Jaringan Islam Liberal*, (Jakarta: JIL, 2002) <http://islamlib.com> (Diakses 28 Nopember 2007).

<sup>3</sup>Anthony H. Johns and Abdullah Saeed, "Nurcholish Madjid and the Interpretation of the Religious Pluralism and Tolerance", in *Modern Muslim Intellectuals and the Qur'an*, ed. Suha Taji-Farouki (London: Oxford, 2006), p. 85.

## **B. Ahmadiyah in the View of God's Recognizance of the Plurality of Religions**

Ahmadiyah was not born in Indonesia but it was imported to Indonesia when its organization had become well established in Pakistan. At first, Ahmadiyah manifested its messiah character, and then it changed into introvert without leaving its original spirit. Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the charismatic leader, remains the focus of the honor as well as of religious guidance. Once, Ahmadiyah performed as a reformist sect either in India, Pakistan, or Indonesia. For example, once Ahmadiyah played an important role in the role of Islamization process for the Indonesian intellectuals during the period of Dutch colonization. Its influence can be seen very clearly in Islamic organization, especially *Jong Islamieten Bond* and Sarekat Islam, but then its influence was gradually lost after the development of other Islamic organizations such as Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama.<sup>4</sup>

Orthodoxy which functions to systemize and simplify Islamic teachings can be a prisoner to the freedom of thinking because, quite often, any creative thought is accused of diverting from the straight path of Islam (*bid'ah*). Accordingly, we should view orthodoxy as a product of reasoning in the form of a system or an ideology. A system or an ideology is formulated based on the assumption which exists in the society and as a result, it is bound to the limits of the time, space, and history of the society. For example, Muhammadiyah is identical to the urban Muslims as it was established following the interest of those who lived in urban areas, meanwhile Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) is identical to the rural Muslims as it was established following the interest of those who lived in rural areas. As a result, both have produced different systems of thought.<sup>5</sup>

Al-Qur'an does not represent a system of social life, but it can be implemented into any kinds of system. Indeed, al-Qur'an mentions some systems prevailing in the Middle East at the time of Muhammad the Prophet just as the context for the implementation of Islamic teachings. The Qur'an only offers a brief explanation of the systems and these explanations were logically for people to apply to their own time and culture. These societal regulations may change through the time.<sup>6</sup> Indeed the Al-Qur'an does not

---

<sup>4</sup>Martin van Bruinessen, "Gerakan Sempalan di Kalangan Umat Islam Indonesia", *Ulumul Qur'an*, Vol. 3, Number 1, 1992, p. 22 and p. 28.

<sup>5</sup>Saefur Rochmat, *Sejarah Islam Indonesia: Kontinyuitas Tradisi dan Modernisasi*, (Yogyakarta: BPFSS, 2004), p. 92.

<sup>6</sup>Chandra Muzaffar, "Al-Qur'an: Nilai dan Peraturan", in *Islam Indonesia Menatap Masa Depan*, Muntaha Azhari and Abdul Mun'im Saleh eds. (Jakarta: P3M, 1989), p. 21.

emphasize the system but the ethical principles (*Akhlaq*) which should be induced into any kind of societal systems. It is parallel to the mission of Muhammad's prophecy that "*innama bu'itstu li utammima makarimal akhlak*" (Really I [Muhammad PBUH<sup>7</sup>] am delegated to complete proper behaviours). It implies that ethical principles that exist in society could be improved by the teachings of Muhammad. What is meant by this prophecy mission of Muhammad is related to an aspect which is very often forgotten by those who experience a spiritual feeling with the Absolute, that is they tend to be occupied by their individual religious experiences and consequently neglect their humanistic mission. In contrary, Al-Qur'an is sent to Muhammad for providing guidance to people on how to relate spiritual aspect (individual life) and societal aspect (societal life).<sup>8</sup>

Dichotomy of the sect and orthodoxy is related to the problem of truth claim, as a response to Muhammad's sayings that "my disciples will divide themselves into 73 groups and only one of them will enter into paradise that is those who are categorized as *ahlul sunnah wal jama'ah*. This saying was a response to the reality of Christianity which had been divided into 72 groups, and it is likely that Muslim will be divided into greater groups, so the number of 73 was chosen, and the people who belong to a true group is those who follow the Muhammad's traditions and *jama'ah*, a part of their groups.<sup>9</sup> I argue that Muhammad's traditions is not only Hadits but also Al-Qur'an, regarding both are the legacies of the Prophet. I also argue that *jama'ah* does not mean the major group, but it is a kind of *jama'ah* in prayer so that it represents the community which consists of some elements such as in the views of gender, social status, age, and the places for living. Furthermore, the major group is not universal identity because it is very likely that one religious group will become a major group in one area but it can be a minority in other area. To conclude, the term of *jama'ah* refers to those who commit to pursuing the interest of the community as a whole.

These religious groups were a kind of response from the Muslim to the demands of the societies for the purposes of contextualization of Islamic teachings. They are a part of the Muslim communities as long as they refer to the Al-Qur'an as their guidance. Accordingly, they have rights to be included into the criteria of *ahlul sunnah wal jama'ah*. We do not have the right to judge the truth of their teachings and only the God has rights for judging a

---

<sup>7</sup>PBUH is an abbreviation of Peace Be Upon Him, an honor provided by Moslem to call Muhammad the prophet.

<sup>8</sup>Chandra Muzaffar, "Al-Qur'an: Nilai dan Peraturan" p. 21.

<sup>9</sup>Djohan Effendi, *Pembaharuan tanpa Membongkar Tradisi*, (Jakarta: Kompas, 2010), p. 273.

matter of belief. Despite this, clerics may be mistaken in their *ijtihad* (or responses) they still receive the reward "one" from God because they have faith, which indicates the sense of sincerity and honesty as the core of religions. Meanwhile those who make a proper *ijtihad* will receive reward "two".

Although what we believe is true, we are not allowed to force our faith to others. It is explained clearly by God to Muhammad the prophet who felt sad because of his failure to persuade his uncle, Abu Thalib, to enter into Islam. God explained to Muhammad that the duty of man is to make the most possible efforts in the course of the God and it is the God's blessing that man enters into Islam. As stated in the Al-Qur'an (5: 48) "...If Allah had willed, He would have made you one nation, but that (He) may test you in what He has given you; so compete in good deeds...".<sup>10</sup> It implies that we are not allowed to use violence in the world, which is not the place of the Absolute Truth. Only the God has rights to punish the people in this world as well as in the Hereafter as the holder of the Absolute Truth.

The truth claim is not justified by the Qur'an as it also mentions the existence of other religions such as Christianity, Judaism, and Saba. The plurality of religions reflect the differences of human characters which influence the differences of the emphasis on religious experiences as well as the context for the implementation of religious teachings and consequently that God sent down different religions. For example, the Abrahamic traditions namely Judaism, Christianity, and Islam can be explained by dialectical approaches of thesis, anti-thesis, and synthesis. The first Abrahamic tradition, Judaism, is the religion focusing on the aspect of law and it is very strict so that it is impossible for non-Judaism to adopt Judaism. Then, God sent down Christianity as the anti-thesis of Judaism, but it did not mean that Judaism and Christianity opposed each other and did not imply that there was only one true religion. Christianity emphasizes the aspect of belief, so that it makes possible for other traditions to be incorporated to it. Meanwhile Islam represents as the synthetical process within Abrahamic traditions because it is concerned with both aspects namely law as well as belief.

The plurality of religions does not contradict the principle of the unity of God's guidance; in opposition it does show us that the God is continuously guiding human beings by sending down some prophets. Al-Qur'an mentions

---

<sup>10</sup>Muhammad Taqiuddin Al-Hilali dan Muhammad Muhsin Khan, *The Noble Qur'an*, p. 152.

that more than 124.000<sup>11</sup> prophets have been sent down to human beings which reflects the spread of human beings, who require different guidance regarding to their environments. It was possible also within one religion to be sent more that one prophet such as Moses and Khidr, in which Torah was sent down to Moses. The birth of Ahmadiyah within Islam can be seen in this view, that is Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as its founder can be viewed as the prophet who was preaching the religion of Muhammad, in this regard Al-Qur'an. Islam also considers *Rasul* is different from *Nabi* (prophet) in which the first is the prophet who received the holy book. In the case of Ahmadiyah, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad did not claim as the *Rasul* but as the prophet.<sup>12</sup>

The followers of Ahmadiyah are convinced that they are a part of the Muslim community in regard to their adherence to the six pillars of faith (*Rukun Iman*) and the five pillars of Islam (*Rukun Islam*). As stated by Abdul Musawir, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad once said that "I am able to become a prophet because I follow the traditions of Muhammad. I am not able to reach this level of spiritual experience if I do not follow Muhammad", "I am not comparable to Muhammad, even I am lower than the dust on His shoes". The above mentioned statements show us how Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as well as his followers are very respect to Muhammad as well as pay honour to Him.<sup>13</sup> In regard to the spiritual experience of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, it shows us that God continuously provides guidance by showing His Majesty to those who are preparing and trying to obtain a religious experience. The religious experiences of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad enabled him to understand some verses in the Qur'an so that he was able to elaborate the messages of the Qur'an. Some verses of the Qur'an also reflect the universality of the prophecy such as Al-Qur'an (10: 47)<sup>14</sup> and (3: 113-115)<sup>15</sup> and consequently some people possess the knowledge of the God and its manifestation is in the form of good behaviors (*akhlaq*) so that those who are experiencing the spiritual experience have difficulty committing misconduct. Inevitably, it is unlikely for the followers of Ahmadiyah to commit misbehaviors and it is improper to force out them from the houses as long as they do not break positive laws.

---

<sup>11</sup>M. Mazzahim Mohideen, "Islam, Anti-Kekerasan, dan Hubungan Antar-Iman", in *Islam tanpa Kekerasan*, eds. Glenn D. Paige, Chaiwat Satha-Anand, and Sarah Giliatt, (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 1998), p. 166.

<sup>12</sup>Abdul Musawir, "Tentang Kasus Ahmadiyah: Polisi tidak Boleh Mendinginkan Kasus ini", in <http://islamlib.com>, (Diakses 28 Nopember 2007), p.1.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup>Muhammad Taqiuddin Al-Hilali dan Muhammad Muhsin Khan, *The Noble Qur'an*, , p. 277.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 69.

Relating to the worldly life, Qur'an clearly forbids us to claim the truth just ourselves and requires us to accept mutual recognition amongst different groups: your religion is for you, meanwhile our religion is for us. All of the parties may implement what they consider to be true and good without enforcing their belief on others and at the same time they know what they are believing is absolutely true. Why do people justifiably formulate this? It is because absoluteness requires looking inward and does not demand conformity from external others who do not believe in it. It is in line with Mahmud Syaltut who believes in two aspects of religious teachings that are *nazhary* (theoretical) and *'amaly* (practical). The former is related to the soul which requires understanding and believing, while the later, is related to the understanding of the actual world of the society so that it is socially grounded, for example, as happens through the formulation of Islamic law (Shari'a).<sup>16</sup> For example, at the time of Muhammad the Prophet, when non-Muslims were firmly opposed to Islamic teachings, for the goodness of all members of the society, the God is said to have ordered the Prophet to state that: Really, you or us, who are on the true path or on the mistaken direction, you are not responsible for our mistakes and also we are not responsible for your mistakes. Because it is the God who will collect all of us and then He will judge wisely what we have disputed. Really He is the true judge and He is the most learned.<sup>17</sup>

### **C. Ahmadiyah in the View of Richard Niebuhr's Theory of Denomination**

The sect is defined as a movement diverting from the prevalence orthodoxy in religious teachings, such as in the forms of its theology, ritual, and other practices, which can imply some characteristics such as the exclusive claim of the truth, fanaticism, and a strong but stiff belief.<sup>18</sup> This implies that the issue of sect arises from the point of view of an orthodox or a mainstream group, MUI reported that, in East Java alone, in 2007, there were about 250s sects which potentially divert from Islam.<sup>19</sup> This fact, indeed, is very surprising for us, but at the same time it raises a teasing question: Was it not because MUI formulated the criteria very specifically and tended to a kind

---

<sup>16</sup>Achmad Mufid A.R., *Nyleneh itu Indah*, (Yogyakarta: Kutub, 2010), p. 73-74.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 74-75.

<sup>18</sup>Martin van Bruinessen, "Gerakan Sempalan di Kalangan Umat Islam Indonesia: Latar Belakang Sosial Budaya", *Ulumul Qur'an*, Vol. 3, Number. 1, 1992, p. 16.

<sup>19</sup>Novriantoni, *Aspek Sosiologis Gerakan Sempalan*, (Jakarta: JIL, 2007), p. 1.

of the monopoly of the truth? If MUI accused a sect of diverting from the true, was it objective enough? Had MUI developed dialogues with those who were accused of diverting from the straight path? Had they (MUI and the sect) monopolized the truth for themselves?

As the representative of the majority, should MUI respond to the sect wisely and try to find out why the sect has been established. If the sect monopolizes the truth in any way, MUI should keep a cool mind, considering itself as the representative of the majority. MUI should not over react and tend to a kind of violence, considering it is unlawful in any religion. Politically, the existence of the majority is not endangered by the minority of the sect so that MUI does not need to issue a religious decree (*fatwa*) to negate the existence of the sect. It is very common for people to make uses of the *fatwa* to commit violence against followers of a sect.

In the case of Ahmadiyah, it is very clear that MUI is very worried about the prospect of Ahmadiyah becoming a denomination, in the term of Richard Niebuhr. Denomination is defined as a religious sect possessing its own values system; although the differences from the others are just in a few the details, the existence is recognized by other sects in a certain religion.<sup>20</sup> The theory of denomination is formulated by Richard Niebuhr, a sociologist of religion from America. This theory is similar to Ibn Khaldun's theory of history. It is said that the origin of the theory of denomination came from the existence of some religious sects in the church. The sect emerged as a protest to the conservatism of the church (and quite often to the state) and gradually its views became more modest and then it became more established as well as formally organized. After two or three generations, the voluntary character of its membership gradually passed away and accordingly, the members were not equal any longer and the germ of internal hierarchy had been built and then the class of priest emerged and they viewed that the layman needed their help for understanding the religion. In other words, the ex-sect had developed into a kind of church and it was recognized as one of the denominations. And then as a protest, there appeared a new sect which wanted to revitalize its original spirit... and it also gradually developed into a denomination...and so on continuously.<sup>21</sup>

We can take a lesson from the history of denomination that a religious sect will not develop if it fails to accommodate different thoughts circulating amongst its followers. Moreover, it may diminish through passing the time as

---

<sup>20</sup>Martin van Bruinessen, "Gerakan Sempalan di Kalangan Umat Islam Indonesia", p. 19.

<sup>21</sup>Melissa Crouch, "Ahmadiyah in Indonesia: A History of Religious Tolerance under Threat", *ASIA-PACIFIF*, 2011, p. 1.



it does not respond coherently to the development of social changes. Based on this consideration, we find out that Ahmadiyah has survived its long history and moreover, it has successfully built a global link. In Indonesia alone, Ahmadiyah has followers between 100,000 to 300,000 people.<sup>22</sup> Politically, it is very risk to ban the followers of Ahmadiyah. By doing so, internationally, Indonesia has received a bad report on the issue of freedom of religion.<sup>23</sup>

The birth of the sect can be seen also in the lens of the dialectical approach as the anti-thesis to orthodoxy. The different interpretation of the religion should not cause violence because this contradicts the essence of the religion which respects life. The people should be able to develop constructive mutual dialogues, considering the truth is linked to the commitments of emancipation and solidarity.<sup>24</sup> For these purposes, they carry out humanitarian programs such as to fight against illiteracy, poverty and injustice. The religious sect as well as the mainstream group should be in a team of civil society which should be critical towards the state which tends to be corrupt.

#### **D. Ahmadiyah, MUI, and the State in the view of the concept of nation state**

To solve the conflict between MUI and the religious sects such as Ahmadiyah, people should know the map of the problem of the relationship between Islam and the state. MUI as elements of civil society should be critical to the state which tends to corrupt as well as misuse the mandate from the people. It was improper for MUI to request the government to intervene in other elements of civil society such as that of categorized into sect. It is very often the members of the sect that are the victim of government policies so that it was very sad to see MUI give another burden to them.<sup>25</sup>

Donald Eugene Smith defines that the secular state involves “three distinct but interrelated sets of relationships concerning the state, religion, and the individual”, that are.

First, as regards the relation between *religion and the individual*, “[t]he secular state ...guarantees individual and corporate freedom of religion”.

---

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 1

<sup>23</sup>Moh. Mahfud MD, “Kebebasan Beragama dalam Perspektif Kontitus”i, in *ICIP* (Jakarta: 2009), p. 2.

<sup>24</sup>M. Amin Abdullah, “Agama, Kebenaran dan Relativitas: Sebuah Pengantar”, in Gregory Baum ed. *Agama dalam Bayang-Bayang Relativisme*, (Yogyakarta: Tiara Wacana and Sisiphus, 1999), p. xxiii-xxiv.

<sup>25</sup>Saefur Rochmat, ”MUI dalam Kasus Ahmadiyah: Ditinjau dari Struktur Politik”, in *Inovasi*, <http://io.ppi-jepang.org> (Japan: PPI, 2006).

Second, as regards the relation between *the state and the individual* the secular state “deals with the individual as citizen irrespective of his religion”. Finally as regards the relation between *the state and religions*, the secular state “is not constitutionally connected to a particular religion, nor does it seek either to promote or interfere with religion”. In other words, the secular state constitutes three elements that are religious freedom, state indifference to religious affiliation, and separation (i.e., neither interference nor promotion).<sup>26</sup>

The secular state is a state which is not established based on religion; but this does not imply the clear-cut separation of the public and the private sphere, a problem that has continued to stimulate hot debate over the centuries between followers of secularism and disciples of religions. It is impossible to limit religion to just the matter of the private sphere, considering that religion consists of belief and practice in which the latter is subject to state regulation of religious practice under the headings of public order, morality, health, social activities, etc. Under these categories the United States of America gives funds to non-profit organizations and some of them are deeply religious in their character and practice. In short, the American non-profit sector is alive, growing, and plays a vital role in many key areas of American life and it plays the role of civil society which supports the process of democratization by assuming the role of checks and balances to the state. This implies that there is no excessive centralization of power in the political system which endangers democracy. In this regard, some observers have coined terms such as the “third sector” and the “third-party government” because it is a third phenomenon not accounted for by the public-private bifurcation with which most Americans are familiar. Moreover, some Western countries recognize the role of religion, such as the King/Queen of the United Kingdom assumes the leadership of the England church, namely Anglican Christianity.<sup>27</sup>

As a nation-state, Indonesia should be built based on the true concept of a modern state by implementing the concept of secularization properly namely the separation of the public sphere and the private sphere. This separation is to create transparency about the management of the state and religion so that it will protect the possibility of justification of politic by religion as well as politicization of the religion. The separation of the power is

---

<sup>26</sup>Marc Galanter, “Secularism, East and West”, in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Volume 7, Number 2, p. 133.

<sup>27</sup>Stephen V. Monsma, *Religious Nonprofit Organizations and Public Money: When Sacred and Secular Mix* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1996) at p. 3-5.

to adjust to the principle of check and balance namely the balance between the state power and civil society. In this regard, non-government organizations, including the religious ones, should take in a role of civil society.<sup>28</sup>

However, the Republic of Indonesia was built following the idea of an integralistic state which is dream of the Greatness of Indonesia at the times of Sriwijaya and Majapahit kingdoms.<sup>29</sup> This kind of government is also indicated by the Indonesian Constitution of 1945 which gives more power to the executive, regarding at that time most Indonesians were not educated so that the development of the state depended on public officers. Accordingly, the Constitution was not built following the separation of power, amongst executive, judicative, and legislative institutions, which would create checks and balances amongst the state institutions. Recently, following the fall of the Soeharto autocratic regime, the Constitution was amended for the purpose of creating checks and balances amongst the state institutions. However, it is not an easy task as the Pancasila state does not follow a pure concept of nation state and, accordingly, it facilitates the existence of the Ministry of Religious Affairs often cause tantamount to the principle of freedom of religion. It is not always by this ministry alone, but by religiously related institutions established under the auspice of this ministry of religion.

As different from the West, Indonesia assumes herself not as a secular state as well as theocratic state. In my view it is conducive to the birth of theology of the public sphere<sup>30</sup> and it makes possible for religions to influence the public policies through public reason processes as well as to avoid the use of double standard of international relationship such as pursued by some presidents of the United States of America. On the other hand, this assumed status of Indonesia can be problematic as this allows one religion to

---

<sup>28</sup>Abdurrahman Wahid, *Prisma Pemikiran Abdurrahman Wahid [Abdurrahman Wahid's Prismatic Thoughts]* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 1999) p. 13.

<sup>29</sup> This idea of an integralistic state was believed by the secularists, constituting the majority members of PPKI, however, the traditionalist Muslims understood the Pancasila state based on the Fiqh paradigm which considers Islam and the state as different entities. See Saefur Rochmat "The Fiqh Paradigm and the System of Knowledge for the Pancasila State: Abdurrahman Wahid on Islam and the Pancasila State", *International Seminar on Social Sciences, Politics, History, and Education for Schools and Societies* held by the Department of History Education of Yogyakarta State University on 1-2 December 2014.

<sup>30</sup>Gus Dur considers rightly that the public theology is the middle way between *Rukun Iman* [The Pillars of Beliefs] and *Rukun Islam* [The Pillars of Islam] and he calls it as *Rukun Sosial* [The Pillar of Societal Sphere]. Abdurrahman Wahid, *Menggerakkan Tradisi: Esai-Esai Pesantren*, (Yogyakarta: LKiS. 2001), p. 149.

monopolize public policies as well as to force the state to intervene in the private sphere. This phenomenon is very often dominant in the history of Indonesia as the state often accommodate the interest of the majority, or, conversely, President make use of religion for the purpose of maintaining his/her power.

The establishment of MUI in 1975 was a kind of cooptation by Soeharto for the purposes of centralization of the power which is very often misunderstood as the only feature of modern state. Democratic states such as the USA and that United Kingdom do not centralize power such as was done by Soeharto, who for example co-opted MUI to consolidate power. Instead, the USA and the United Kingdom provide financial support to non-government organizations, including religious organizations, so that non-government organizations constitute elements of civil society and are able to maintain their function to create welfare as well as to control the government. Of course, Soeharto did not want to follow the track of a true modern state because he had personal ambition to hold power as long as possible, so he did not want the elements of civil society to flourish.<sup>31</sup>

Indeed Soeharto was aware of the important role of the clerics so that he was very careful to neutralize their influence by separating them from their masses. Furthermore, MUI was used to challenge the existing religious organizations by establishing its branches hieratically at the levels of province as well as regencies. Last but not the least, Soeharto let Islamic organizations quarrel among themselves so that they became weak and it was, then, easy for Soeharto to suppress those who endangered his power by receiving legitimacy or not from MUI. In regard with education, Soeharto did not support the existing education system of pesantren under control of the clerics. On the contrary, he continued the Soekarno regime's policy of the national education system with its national curriculum as the governmental tool of control. As a result, education has lost its liberation spirit because of the government's cooptation. The agendas of co-optation materialized also into all elements of civil society such as religious organizations, youth organizations, and intellectual organizations and consequently they did not have autonomy for formulating their programs as well as choosing their leaders. This kind cooptation remains up to now such as the intervention of the government to close the activities of Ahmadiyah.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup>Stephen V. Monsma, *Religious Nonprofit Organizations and Public Money: When Sacred and Secular Mix*, p. 5

<sup>32</sup>Melissa Crouch, "Ahmadiyah in Indonesia: A history of religious tolerance under threat?", in *PACIFIC*, 2011, pp. 1-2.

Abdurrahman Wahid (well-known as Gus Dur) and those who are unified in *Aliansi Masyarakat untuk Kebebasan Beragama dan Berkeyakinan* [the Alliance of the Societies for Religious Freedoms as well as Faiths] (AMKBB) protested about MUI's request to the government to close the activities of Ahmadiyah. MUI claimed that Ahmadiyah was causing the restlessness in society. President Susilo Bambang Yudoyono (SBY) promised to follow the MUI in the matter of religious guidance at the opening of the seventh National Congress of MUI on 26 July 2005. As a result, the local government of Bogor closed the center of Ahmadiyah in Parung soon after the attack of *Gerakan Umat Islam Indonesia* [The Movement of Indonesian Muslim] (GUII) on 15 July 2005. The preceding of this close was a religious decree (*fatwa*) from the local MUI of Bogor that reemphasized the 1980 religious decree of MUI that Ahmadiyah is outside of Islam. From this time on, threats to the followers of Ahmadiyah continues.<sup>33</sup>

Because MUI achieved its success in pushing its will on the government, MUI will continue to do the same things. MUI is playing the card of political Islam and it does not feel that the government is playing its political interest by using the card of MUI. It is likely that the intervention of President SBY to close the activities of Ahmadiyah is for his short-purpose political interest for gaining the supports of the Muslim majority in his 2009 candidacy. It can also be used to shift the people's attention from the true problems such as poverty, disparity, and injustice. President SBY's intervention manifested in the issuance of Joint Regulation 3/2008 which warns the followers of Ahmadiyah, though stopping short of an outright ban.<sup>34</sup>

## **E. Conclusion**

I argue that the true judgment for the religious sect is history, following Richard Niebuhr's theory of denomination, because it is impossible for the sect to lie all the time. Religious sects will never become denominations if they divert from the essence of the religion. No people will enter into sect if they consider the sect has hidden the truth; and consequently its followers will quit one by one. This theory of denomination give a time for religious sects to develop a dialectical relationship between norm, namely their religious beliefs, and power, playing in the society, in the form of the supports of the people.<sup>35</sup> The issue of religious sects should be viewed in the

---

<sup>33</sup>For more details, please read Melissa Crouch, "Ahmadiyah in Indonesia: A history of religious tolerance under threat?", in *PACIFIC*, 2011, p. 1-2.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> See Saefur Rochmat, "Pandangan Abdurrahman Wahid tentang Relasi Islam dan Negara", in "*Millah*", Vol. X, Number 2, 2011, p. 349.

view of God's continual guidance of spiritual life as well as the Qur'an's recognizance of different religions. For that purpose, there is no need for MUI issuing the *fatwa* as well as the government intervening the religious sects as long as its members do not break the positive laws. Both MUI and the government facilitate religious communities to take in a role of civil society for the purpose of the consolidation of democracy.

## REFERENCES

- Abdullah, M. Amin, 1999, "Agama, Kebenaran dan Relativitas: Sebuah Pengantar", in *Agama dalam Bayang-Bayang Relativisme*, Gregory Baum ed., Yogyakarta: Tiara Wacana and Sisiphus.
- Al-Hilali, Muhammad Taqiuddin and Muhammad Muhsin Khan, 1996, *The Noble Qur'an*, Riyadh: Alharamain.
- Anwar, Syafi'i, 2002, "Kekerasan itu Mode Temporer", in *Jaringan Islam Liberal*, Jakarta: JIL, <http://islamlib.com> (Diakses 28 Nopember 2007).
- Bruinessen, Martin van, 1992, "Gerakan Sempalan di Kalangan Umat Islam Indonesia", "*Ulumul Qur'an*", Vol. 3, Number 1.
- Crouch, Melissa, 2011, "Ahmadiyah in Indonesia: A history of religious tolerance under threat?", *ASIA-PACIFIC*.
- Effendi, Djohan, 2010, *Pembaharuan tanpa Membongkar Tradisi*, Jakarta: Kompas.
- Galanter, Marc, 1965, "Secularism, East and West", in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Volume 7, Number 2.
- Johns, Anthony H. and Abdullah Saeed, 2006, "Nurcholish Madjid and the Interpretation of the Religious Pluralism and Tolerance", in *Modern Muslim Intellectuals and the Qur'an*, Suha Taji-Farouki ed., London: Oxford.
- Mahfud MD, 2009, "Kebebasan Beragama dalam Perspektif Konstitusi", in *ICRP*, Jakarta.
- Mohideen, M. Mazzahim, 1998, "Islam, Anti-Kekerasan, dan Hubungan Antar-Iman", in *Islam tanpa Kekerasan*, Glenn D. Paige, Chaiwat Satha-Anand, and Sarah Giliatt eds., Yogyakarta: LKiS.
- Monsma, Stephen V., 1996, *Religious Nonprofit Organizations and Public Money: When Sacred and Secular Mix*, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Mufid A.R., Achmad, 2010, *Nyleneh itu Indah*, Yogyakarta: Kutub.

- Musawir, Abdul, 2007, "Tentang Kasus Ahmadiyah: Polisi tidak Boleh Mendingkan Kasus ini", in <http://islamlib.com> (Diakses 28-11-2007).
- Muzaffar, Chandra, "Al-Qur'an: Nilai dan Peraturan", in *Islam Indonesia Menatap Masa Depan*, Muntaha Azhari dan Abdul Mun'im Saleh (eds), Jakarta: P3M.
- Novriantoni, 2007, "Aspek Sosiologis Gerakan Sempalan", Jakarta: JIL.
- Rochmat, Saefur, 2004, *Sejarah Islam Indonesia: Kontinuitas Tradisi dan Modernisasi*, Yogyakarta: BPFSS.
- Rochmat, Saefur, 2006, "MUI dalam Kasus Ahmadiyah: Ditinjau dari Struktur Politik", in *Inovasi*, <http://io.ppi-jepang.org>, Japan: PPI.
- Rochmat, Saefur,, 2011, "Pandangan Abdurrahman Wahid tentang Relasi Islam dan Negara", in *Millah*, Vol. X, Number 2.
- Rochmat, Saefur, 2014, "The Fiqh Paradigm and the System of Knowledge for the Pancasila State: Abdurrahman Wahid on Islam and the Pancasila State", *International Seminar on Social Sciences, Politics, History, and Education for Schools and Societies* held by the Department of History Education of Yogyakarta State University on 1-2 December 2014.
- Wahid, Abdurrahman, 1999, *Prisma Pemikiran Abdurrahman Wahid [Abdurrahman Wahid's Prismatic Thoughts]* (Yogyakarta: LKiS).
- Wahid, Abdurrahman, 2001, *Menggerakkan Tradisi: Esai-Esai Pesantren*, Yogyakarta: LKiS.