

NAHDLATUL ULAMA AND THE PRODUCTION OF MUSLIM INTELLECTUALS IN THE BEGINNING OF 21ST CENTURY INDONESIA

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Abstract: Social transformation carried out by the New Order government through the development program resulted on the emergence of various face of Muslim intellectuals in Indonesia. They are divergent and located in a great variety of institutional settings as well as in the interstices between a number of institutional orders. This paper aims at analysing the production and dynamics of Muslims intellectuals within the largest Muslim mass organisations in Indonesia, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU/The Awakening of Muslim Scholars). It begins with the discussion of scholarly perspectives of the correlation between Islamic organisation and Muslim intellectuals. It then examines the production of Muslim intellectuals within NU, questioning the issue of young and old generation, and finally analysing the relationship between institution and the development of intellectualism within NU.

Keyword: Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Muslim intellectuals, Indonesia.

Introduction

As the greatest Islamic organizations in Indonesia, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) should be discussed, if we would like to trace the existence of Indonesian Muslim intellectuals. The question is, may Muslim intellectuals in Indonesia be classified to the NU intellectuals, Muhammadiyah intellectuals and others? This question was posed to several Indonesian Muslim intellectuals in interview while collecting the material for this study. The positive answer indicated that such

classification can be justified as long as it refers to the organizational affiliation.

Masykuri Abdillah is one of the Muslim intellectuals who acknowledges this classification. But, he does not agree with the implementation of such classifications in differing intellectual features of Indonesian Muslims.¹ Syafiq A. Mughni also justifies this classification. According to him, such classification does not always indicate the character of thought of Indonesian Muslim intellectuals. It merely indicates the organizational affiliation of Muslim intellectuals. “As a matter of fact”, he said, “there are many Muslim intellectuals who affiliated with organizations other than NU and Muhammadiyah”.²

The classification of Indonesian Muslim intellectuals to the NU intellectuals and Muhammadiyah intellectuals is not very significant, if it is intended to refer to intellectual thought. In the NU, for example, there are intellectuals who are primarily concern to the traditional Islamic thought and combining it with the contemporary one. NU intellectuals adopt the guideline of *al-muhāfazatu ‘alā al-qadīm aṣ-ṣaliḥ wa al-akḥḍu bi al-jadīd al-aṣlah* “maintaining the old thing which are still good, and adopting the new one which are better”. In response to new development, for example, both of the NU intellectuals and Muhammadiyah intellectuals are using modernism as their method of thought.³ In addition, in expressing and defending Muslim interests during the process of social transformation, both of the NU intellectuals and Muhammadiyah intellectuals use the structural

¹ Interview with Masykuri Abdillah, Jakarta, 20.8.2000.

² Interview with Syafiq A. Mughni, Surabaya, 26.7.2000.

³ Masykuri Abdillah borrowed the term of modernism from Fazlur Rahman which is characterized by the effort of Muslim movement in combining the Islamic tradition with Western system of institution such as democracy, science and university. For further summary of Fazlur Rahman’s idea of the Renewal movement see Awad Bahason, “Gerakan Pembaharuan Islam, Interpretasi dan Kritik,” in *Prisma*, No. Extra (1984), p. 110. Masykuri idea in labelling NU with a “modern” term here is rather different from what is conventionally understood which is characterized NU’s method of thought as traditionalist. Another Muslim intellectual, e.g. Azyumardi Azra, is also questioned the conventional distinction between traditionalist and modernist movement in Indonesia. He criticized that such distinction is not relevant anymore. See, Azyumardi Azra, *Islam Reformis, Dinamika Intelektual dan Gerakan* (Jakarta: Rajawali Press, 1999), pp. 61-62.

and cultural strategy.⁴ There are many NU intellectuals whose intellectual thoughts tend to Amin Rais (former Head of Muhammadiyah, 1994-1998, and a leading Muhammadiyah intellectual) who advocated the structural strategy in struggling Muslim interest. On the other hand, there are many Muhammadiyah intellectuals whose intellectual thoughts tend to Abdurrahman Wahid, (former head of the NU, 1984 – 1999) and leading NU intellectuals) who advocated cultural strategy in “struggling” Muslim interest. For example, Masykuri Abdillah pointed out that Muslim Abdurrahman and Habib Hirzin are Muhammadiyah’s intellectuals, but their intellectual thought converge with Abdurrahman Wahid.⁵

Many of Muhammadiyah intellectuals are affiliated with higher education institutions or become government employees. The reason for this, according to Masykuri, is that to associate with or to become Muhammadiyah and HMI (*Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam*, The Islamic Students’ Association) is exceptionally beneficial from a political point of view, especially during the New Order government era.⁶ Muhammadiyah and HMI were among those who closely related to the New Order government.⁷ Although Muhammadiyah and HMI are independent organizations, many of their cadres and activists were associate with the New Order government system. This made both of the organizations closely related with the center of power. In line with the government development program, the New Order government needed more professional and educated people. Muhammadiyah and HMI had a lot of human resources in this case. In contrast, many of the NU cadres and activists were eliminated from the government. One reason was the lack of human resources within NU capable of handling the economic and technological development task.⁸

⁴ See Masykuri Abdillah, *Responses of Indonesia Muslim Intellectuals to the Concept of Democracy: 1966-1993* (Hamburg: Abera Network, 1997), pp. 187-190.

⁵ Interview with Masykuri Abdillah, Jakarta, 20.8.2000. More discussion to the personality of Habib Hirzin see Syamsul Arifin, “Tokoh Muhammadiyah di PKB,” *Jawa Pos*, 1 August 2000.

⁶ Interview with Masykuri Abdillah, Jakarta, 20.8.2000.

⁷ See Howard M Federspiel, *A Dictionary of Indonesian Islam* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University, Center for International Studies, 1995), pp. 81 - 82. See also Martin van Bruinessen, *NU, Tradisi, Relasi-relasi Kuasa dan Pencarian Wacana Baru* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 1994), p. 101.

⁸ Laode Ida, *Anatomi Konflik NU, Elit Islam dan Negara* (Jakarta: Pustaka Sinar Harapan, 1996), p. 31.

Politically, despite of NU anti-communist movement, at the beginning of the New Order government NU was under the suspicion of government for its active role in the former “Guided Democracy” that was led by Soekarno.⁹

In comparison with NU, Muhammadiyah is more appreciated of its intellectuals. The appreciation is indicated by their recruitment as board members of organization. Most of Muhammadiyah board members are intellectuals and scholars, while the NU’s board members are *kiai* or *‘Ulama*.¹⁰

Muhammadiyah has further developed its method of thought by implementing *ijtihad*.¹¹ The different between Muhammadiyah and NU in implementing *ijtihad* is that Muhammadiyah has no bond with traditional or classical product of thought or *kitab kuning* (the yellow book, Arabic works from Muslim writers of the middle period). Muhammadiyah refers directly to *al-Qur’an* and *Hadith*. Meanwhile, NU uses the *madhhab* doctrines (school of jurisprudence in Islam) and the yellow books. According to Muhammadiyah intellectuals, by using the NU method of thought there is a psychological obstacle for thinking independently. This type of *ijtihad* is institutionally used by *Majlis Tarjih*¹² in Muhammadiyah and *Lajnah Babth al-Masail*¹³ in NU.

It is difficult to verify the difference between present younger generation of Muhammadiyah and NU intellectuals. In both cases, they are educated in the modern education or even in the foreign education

⁹ van Bruinessen, *NU, Tradisi, Relasi-relasi Kuasa*, p. 90. Between 1959 and 1966 Indonesian government was under the banner of “Guided Democracy”. It was as a result of the disintegration, overthrow, and abandonment of the constitutional democracy of the earlier years of independence. See for further information, Herbet Feith, “Dynamic of Guided Democracy,” in Ruth T. McVey (ed.), *Indonesia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, Southeast Asia Studies, 1963), pp. 309-409.

¹⁰ Interview with Masykuri Abdillah, Jakarta, 20.8.2000.

¹¹ *Ijtihad* (Intellectual striving). Among legal scholars (*fuqaha*) in the middle period, it implied using reason to develop religious principle. In the modern era it implies setting aside the interpretations of past scholars (*ulama*) for a fresh look at an issue in light of religious sources. Among modernists the term is contrasted with the practice of *taqlid*, the doctrine of excepting an older jurist’s thinking. Federspiel, *A Dictionary of Indonesian Islam*, p. 91.

¹² *Majelis Tarjih* is a unit of the Muhammadiyah composed religious scholars that issues decisions (fatwas) on matters referred to it by the association and its members.

¹³ *Lajnah Babthus Masail* is a unit of the NU composed kiai and ulama that issues decisions (fatwas) on matters referred to it by the association and its members.

institutions. They communicating intensively with each other and conduct dialogues. According to Syaifiq A. Mughni, in the future it will not be relevant to differentiate between the Muhammadiyah and NU intellectuals.¹⁴ Meanwhile, according to Azyumardi Azra the different between the younger generation of Muhammadiyah and NU intellectuals are located with the pioneering work of intellectual venture. Many of the NU younger intellectuals creatively establish independent intellectual institutions such as LKiS (*Lembaga Kajian Islam dan Sosial*, Institute for Islamic and Social Studies) in Yogyakarta, òLSAD (*Lembaga Studi Agama dan Demokrasi*, Institute for the Study of Religion and Democracy) in Surabaya or affiliated with the existing intellectual oriented institution within NU such as *Lakpesdam* (*Lembaga Kajian dan Pengembangan Sumberdaya Manusia*, Institute for Human Resources Development Studies). The activity of those institutions concentrates on creating an intellectual circle that make it possible for them to discuss, to do research, to advocate, and to seek the correlation between religion (Islam) and the universal problem of democracy, human rights and gender. Conversely, most of the younger generation of Muhammadiyah intellectuals are directly associated with a large number of Muhammadiyah unites of organization which already existed, such as education institution, health, and economic institution. Their orientation is “quick gelding”, to earn money as fast as possible by entering the Muhammadiyah system.¹⁵ In creating new intellectual circles Muhammadiyah young intellectuals surpassed by NU intellectuals.

The Nahdlatul Ulama and the Production of Its Muslim Intellectuals

The term ulama is more commonly used in the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) than the term Muslim intellectual. In fact, the organization’s formal name rather clearly indicates that it is an organization of ulama.¹⁶ Nevertheless, it does not mean that NU has no Muslim

¹⁴ Interview with Syaifiq A.Mughni, Surabaya, 26.7.2000.

¹⁵ Interview with Azyumardi Azra, Jakarta, 27.8.2000.

¹⁶ The name of Nahdlatul Ulama (the renaissance of the ulama) was originally suggested by K.H. Mas Alwi Abdul Aziz from Pesantren Ampel Sawah Surabaya. See Choirul Anam, *Pertumbuhan dan Perkembangan NU*, Bisma Satu, Surabaya, 1999, p. 198. For further survey on the background of NU establishment and its dynamic see Andree Feillard, *NU vis a vis Negara* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 1999); van Bruinessen, *NU, Tradisi, Relasi-relasi Kuasa*.

intellectuals. The people categorized as intellectuals within NU usually have modern school education and pesantren education. The ulama or kiai, however, have only pesantren education. The term “ulama-intellectual or intellectual-ulama” is given to those who combine their status as ulama and also as intellectual. Aly Yafi represents this last category. According to Masdar Farid Mas’udi, the leadership of NU is always in the hands of ulama, especially those who occupy the “Syuriyah” or Advisory board of NU.¹⁷ They are people who have normative knowledge of Islam, who have mastered religious sciences. Mastering religious science is an authoritative requirement of those who are called ulama in the NU tradition.¹⁸

The influence of the kiai, according to Zamakhsyari Dhofier, initially derive primarily from their qualifications as Muslim scholars whose energies are directed to developing pesantren. Teaching santri (a term which is here applied to students of these pesantren) is their main daily activity. The more advanced a kyai’s knowledge in the many branches of Islam, and the more proficient he is in developing his pesantren, the larger the number of santri attracted to study there. The influence of the kiai of the large pesantren can extend throughout the nation and beyond, and, consequently, the kiai are included as part of the national elite. During the first two decades of independent Indonesia, many of the kiai were appointed as government ministers, members of parliament, ambassadors, and as high government officials.¹⁹ However, since 1971, when the Suharto Government stopped recruiting members of the cabinet from various political groups, the Javanese kiai have not been represented in the executive body, but they are well represented in the legislative body, at both the national and regional levels.²⁰

Masykuri Abdillah has criticised mass NU members understanding of the ulama. In their understanding the consideration why, someone is called ulama is not based on how deep his or her religious knowledge, but it based rather on symbolic and normative

¹⁷ NU has mainly two important boards. “Syuriyah” or advisory board and “Tanfidziyah” or executive board. Syuriyah is always occupy by ulama, while tanfidziyah can be occupied by other than ulama.

¹⁸ Interview with Masdar Farid Mas’udi, Jakarta, 18.7.2000.

¹⁹ Dhofier, Zamakhsyari, “Kinship and Marriage Among the Javanese Kiai,” *Indonesia*, No. 29 (April 1980), p. 49.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

considerations, such as to what extent he or she professes the attitude of ulama, e.g. using the *Songkok*, *Sarung*; or establishing or having pesantren. In the process of recruitment, the important consideration is whether someone has pesantren. According to Masykuri, this consideration is historically justified, but contextually cannot be justified. Because in the contextual manner, the status of the ulama implies not only symbolically showing the attitude of ‘alim (ulama) or formally having pesantren but also intellectually mastering religious science. As an example, he argues, a graduate of ‘Āliyah (Senior Islamic High School) or Islamic Tertiary Education, who has only less proficient religious knowledge, may be recruited as ulama or included in the elite group of NU because he has a pesantren. In contrast, someone, who does not have pesantren, although he has advanced religious knowledge, has even graduated from post graduate program, has an academic degree and become lecturer in a university, is not called ulama or included in the elite circle of NU. This, according to Masykuri, is not an appropriate understanding of ulama.²¹

The emergence of NU intellectuals, according to Masdar Farid Mas’udi, is a new phenomenon. As a result of the development of education, the NU members among the last generation, those from 20-30 years old, have had better access to education than their predecessors. It is also the result of the pesantren’s adoption of national school system, such as SD (*Sekolah Dasar*, Elementary School); SMP (*Sekolah Menengah Pertama*, Lower Secondary School); SMA (*Sekolah Menengah Atas*, Upper Secondary School) among others. Nevertheless, the role of NU intellectuals remains under the shadow of the ulama or kiai.²² As the different understandings of who should have the authority in the matter of knowledge emerged in the NU, the tension between the ulama and scholars highlighted the relationship between them. (What described by Masykuri above, is just an example of this). Each of them claimed equal status as a man of knowledge (*ahl ‘ilm*). In Qur’an, a general form is used to indicate a man of knowledge, it does not indicate only for those who have religious knowledge.²³ Meanwhile the mass NU members argued that the ulama or kiai has more authority than the scholars or intellectuals. Therefore, the

²¹ Interview with Masykuri Abdillah, Jakarta, 20.8.2000.

²² Interview with Masdar Farid Mas’udi, Jakarta, 18.7.2000.

²³ Qur’an 58:11.

leadership of the NU is entrusted to the ulama or kiai, who have an authority in religious science.²⁴

The existence of NU intellectuals has fluctuated according to the social and political situations surrounding it. When NU associated with a political party, the organizational concentration was paid to the political activities and the dynamic of NU intellectuals was reduced. Many of the NU activists, ulama, and intellectuals were recruited to occupy political posts.²⁵ As noted in the history of NU, this organization became a political party in Indonesia from 1952 until 1973.²⁶ After the depolitization policy of the New Order Government in 1973, NU was marginalized in the government system. NU itself was unified in the *Partai Persatuan Pembangunan* (PPP, United Development Party) together with other Islamic parties such as *Partai Serikat Islam Indonesia*, (PSII, Islamic Political Association of Indonesia); *Pergerakan Tarbiyah Islamiyah*, (Perti, Movement for Islamic Education) and *Partai Muslimin Indonesia*, (Parmusi, Party of Indonesian Muslims). The marginalization of the political activity of the NU attracted NU activists to use other strategies in “struggling” for their interests. The move to return NU back to purely social and religious organization become greater. But this intention was realized only in 1984. In this year, NU conducted its congress in Situbondo which resulted in the decision to withdraw from its affiliation with The *Partai Persatuan Pembangunan*, (PPP, The United Development Party), and return the NU to the *khittah 1926* (Return to the Commitment of 1926, when it was established). The *khittah 1926* is intended to make NU a purely religious and social organisation not contaminated by political activities.²⁷ In the Situbondo congress Abdurrahman Wahid was elected as chairman of NU, ending the long and rather dull

²⁴ Interview with Masdar Farid Mas’udi, Jakarta, 18.7.2000. As what acknowledged by Masykuri Abdillah, Muhammadiyah is more appreciated its intellectual than NU. Interview with Masykuri Abdillah, Jakarta, 20.8.2000.

²⁵ Interview with Muhammad AS Hikam, Berlin, 21.5.2000.

²⁶ See for further NU activity as political party in Ida, *Anatomi Konflik NU*, especially pp. 18-32.

²⁷ Compare with Abdillah, *Responses of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals*, p. 206. For further description on this subject see Ida, *Anatomi Konflik NU*, especially pp. 46-73; Arif Mudatsir, “Dari Situbondo Menuju NU Baru,” in *Prisma*, No. Extra (1984), pp. 130-142; Ali Munhanif, “The Khittah of 1926 Re-examined: Views of the NU in Post-Cipasang Congress,” *Studia Islamika*, Vol. II, No. 2 (1996), pp. 85-119; Feillard, *NU vis a vis Negara*, pp. 262-278.

chairmanship of Idam Chalid who had taken over the leadership of NU when Wahid Hasyim, Abdurrahman's father, was killed in an automobile accident in 1956.²⁸ Under the pioneering work of Abdurrahman Wahid, the intellectual activity within NU grew dynamically. The pioneering intellectual work of Abdurrahman Wahid is described by Greg Barton:

His first move was to declare that NU would no longer participate as an organization in party politics, rather that it should instead return to its original charter as a social/religious organization. In this matter he enjoyed early success, but he has also largely succeeded in achieving a profound change in NU's outlook. He has demonstrated that it is to the advantage of both the organization and its people to turn away from party political activity, not only on the basis of pragmatics but also in the name of pluralism. Certainly, not everybody within NU, and not all of his supporters outside of NU either, understand or share his concern that sectarianism is a serious and ever present threat to the harmony of Indonesia's very plural society. Nevertheless, to a large degree Abdurrahman has succeeded in engendering a respect, even a passion, for pluralism within NU, particularly amongst the young. He has also succeeded in influencing broader Indonesian society to understand the links between pluralism and democracy as he has tirelessly campaigned for a new maturity both in the Islamic *ummah* and in broader society.²⁹

The important contribution of Abdurrahman Wahid is his effort to open the intellectual dynamic within NU. He adopted a freedom of thought in responding to challenging problems. He can respectfully communicate with the older traditionalist kiai or ulama and with the younger generation of educated NU members. His personality has attracted the interest of many people. Some of them coming from the internal circle of NU, especially its younger generation of intellectuals such as those who are affiliated with LKiS, P3M, Lakpesdam and èLSAD. Besides adopting a freedom of thought, they try to interpret and develop Abdurrahman Wahid's intellectual ideas. Because in many cases, the intellectual thought of Abdurrahman Wahid is too

²⁸ Greg Barton, "Neo-Modernism: A Vital Synthesis of Traditionalist and Modernist Islamic thought in Indonesia," *Studia Islamika*, Vol. 2, No.3 (1995), p. 46.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47.

high for the consumption of the mass NU. Therefore, a mediator is needed to make his ideas practicable.

After the establishment of ICMI in 1990, the position of Abdurrahman Wahid within Indonesian Muslim intellectuals circle became more apparent. He represented a liberal Islamic movement that advocated a non-sectarian religious identity. His opposition to joint with ICMI is based on his idea that ICMI's establishment resulted only in a sectarian religious identity. Many NU members and other Indonesian Muslim intellectuals argued that Abdurrahman Wahid ideas and attitudes are controversial (for instance his opposition to the ICMI). According to them, Islam must be considered as an important part of identity in Indonesian society. Therefore, Islamic symbol should be formally adopted in Indonesian social structure. The establishment of ICMI is considered as part of symbolic adoption of Islam. Abdurrahman Wahid is not interested in this kind of symbolic and formal approach. He preferred to adopt normative approaches which emphasize the important of Islamic values as the basis of social structure without being formally identified as Islamic identity. According to AS Hikam, the important thing for Abdurrahman Wahid is the fact that he is Muslim and NU, but his intellectual thought must be universally acceptable.³⁰

The process of becoming an intellectual within NU, according to Masykuri Abdillah, can be developed through organizational activity, through educational activity or through a combination of the two. Most NU intellectuals were educated in religious educational institutions. According to Masykuri, during the New Order era, political considerations eliminated the possibility of many NU human resources to develop their educational achievement. They could do so only if they identified themselves as non-NU members. Therefore, — in terms of educated people in subjects other than religion—only a small number were identified as NU.³¹

There are also intellectuals who developed their intellectual capacity in the organization. As observed by Martin van Bruinessen, PMII (*Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia*), Indonesian Muslim Student Movement), an organization indirectly connected to NU, in the 1990s became one of the dynamic Muslim student organization for

³⁰ Interview with Muhammad AS Hikam, Berlin, 21.5.2000.

³¹ Interview with Masykuri Abdillah, Jakarta, 20.8.2000.

intellectual discussion. Contrary to other modernist student organization (HMI), PMII members usually have a strong root in traditional Islamic books. Their reading consists of not only traditional books but also contemporary Islamic books. While most modernist students were influenced by Maududi and Sayyid Qutb, the students of PMII showed greater interest to the writers like Hassan Hanafi. Recently they have also been discussing universal themes, such as economic justice, human rights, and women's right in Islam.³²

In term of intellectual community within NU, there is an institution that accommodates this community. However, there is a technical problem in relation with the recruitment of NU organizational elites. NU intellectuals are not identical with NU organizational elites. NU organizational elites are recruited by using patron clan and familial bond.³³ The recruitment is also determined by whether someone has *pesantren* or not. As described above, education is not the only aspect in determining whether someone can become ulama or NU elite, but the important factor is their position in *pesantren*. In order to accommodate those who have no kind of *pesantren* background but are formally educated in modern education institution, an *Ikatan Sarjana NU* (ISNU, Association of NU Scholars) was established. This establishment not only accommodated the NU scholars, it was also motivated by the booming of NU scholars as the result of development in education. But this organization was not effective, according to Masykuri Abdillah. He argued that it is better if NU scholars associated with the existing NU organizational structure, such as Lakpesdam, education institution of NU (*Lembaga Ma'arif NU*) and others.³⁴ Differing with Masykuri, AS Hikam argued that, in anticipating the new development and the increasing numbers of NU scholars, ISNU will become a strong and important organization within NU. The need for professional human resources in technological fields has increased. The problem is whether ISNU will be interested in political activity or not. If yes, in the sense that ISNU will become an association that recommends its members to occupy a

³² Van Bruinessen, *NU, Tradisi, Relasi-relasi Kuasa*, p. 234.

³³ Interview with Masykuri Abdillah, Jakarta, 20.8.2000. Formally, the chairman of NU is elected in a democratic way. But informally the familial bond, such as the family of those who have *pesantren*, play an important role in determining whether someone becomes a candidate for NU chairman or not.

³⁴ Interview with Masykuri Abdillah, Jakarta, 20.8.2000.

political post, it will be dispersed from the society together with a decline of its political occupation. Meanwhile, if ISNU concentrates on becoming a think tank of NU in anticipating new developments, it will be better for the future of organization.³⁵ In reality, the role of this organization is not that significant in Indonesian context, in comparison with other organizations such as ICMI.

In responding to new developments and in accommodating intellectuals within NU, NU established in July 1999 The Centre for Strategic and Policy Studies (CSPS). This institution originated from Masdar Farid Mas'udi's idea to give input of ideas on national and state issues. The institution is also intended to carry out the strategic studies and give advice to the NU board members on the process of organizational policy making.³⁶ After Abdurrahman Wahid become the fourth Indonesian President in 1999, it was necessary to back up the board members of NU with an institution that functioned as a think tank for NU because the personality and the position of Abdurrahman Wahid cannot be separated from the NU entity. Whatever he decides as president will influence the NU and the Indonesian society. Therefore, CSPS is important to establish in this context. But the contribution of this institution could not be verified. Meanwhile, Masykuri Abdillah expects that this institution can at least be used as a medium to discuss, to convince, and to change the argument on the problem of secularism in Indonesian context. The problem, according to Masykuri Abdillah, is that the intellectual environment of the NU is not yet suitable.³⁷

The vertical mobility of NU intellectuals in the government, according to AS Hikam, is on the one hand, because of the position of Abdurrahman Wahid as the fourth Indonesian President (1999-2001).

³⁵ Interview with Muhammad AS Hikam, Jakarta, 16.7.2000.

³⁶ The decree of the NU No. 057/A.II.03/7/2000 on the foundation of The Centre for Strategic and Policy Studies (CSPS) the period of 1999-2004. According to this decree the structure of the board members of CSPS is as follows: Patron: KH. Abdullah Faqih, KH: Abdullah Abbas, KH.M.A. Sahal Mahfudh, KH.E. Fakhruddin Masturo, H.A. Hasyim Muzadi. Advisers: KH.A. Muchit Muzadi, Prf. Dr. KH S. Aqil Husin Almunawar, LC, MA, H. Ahmad Bagdja, H. Muhyiddin Arubusman. Executive Director: Drs. Masdar Farid Mas'udi, MA. Vice Director: Ir. Husni Santropnanoto, Ahmad Suaidy. Director of Research: Anas Saidi, Dede Wardiyat. Director of Policy Studies: Dr. Masykuri Abdillah, Saiful Umam. Director of Advocacy and Information: Drs. H. Masduki Baidhawi, Ulil abshar Abdalla.

³⁷ Interview with Masykuri Abdillah, Jakarta, 20.8.2000.

During his presidential term, there are four NU intellectuals occupying ministerial posts. Muhammad AS Hikam as Minister of Research and Technology; Alwi Shihab as Minister of Foreign affairs; M. Tolhah Hasan as Minister of Religious Affairs; Khofifah Indar Parawansa as Minister of Women's Role.³⁸ In the other hand, the vertical mobility of NU intellectuals is seen as the consequence of the modernization process that resulted in significant social changes, including the emergence of a new class who formerly did not have access to the state. An example can be seen in the NU members. The basis of NU members is in the village societies, usually agricultural societies. After the introduction of societal modernization, the basis of mass NU structure was changed. The members of NU are not only from village agricultural societies but also from urban industrial societies. Another factor that led to the vertical mobility of NU intellectual was the development in education. Many NU members have successfully completed their study in modern education institutions. The modernist group of society (e.g. Muhammadiyah members) had previously had access to modern education, but today the condition has changed. Many traditionalist groups now have equal access to modern education.³⁹ "If the NU intellectuals associated with the government system do not continuously develop themselves intellectually, their position as intellectuals will be replaced by groups other than NU", said AS Hikam.

Concerning to the thought of NU intellectuals, it can be differentiated into two categories. First, the thought formally adopted by NU. Second, the thought of the individual NU intellectual. The first category can be traced from the decision of *Lajnah Bahthul Masail*, a unit of the NU composed of kiai and ulama that issues decision (fatwas) on matters referred to it by the association and its members. The tradition of discussing religious matters was formally adopted at NU's first congress in 1926.⁴⁰ As a matter of fact, this institution was dominated by kiai or ulama and become a discussion forum for pesantren people. Later, a number of intellectuals basically educated in pesantren and in modern universities, such as Masdar Farid Mas'udi, contributed to this forum.

³⁸ <https://www.detikcom>, accessed on 26/10/1999.

³⁹ Interview with Muhammad AS Hikam, Jakarta, 16.7.2000.

⁴⁰ Marzuki Wahid, "Membaca Tradisi Bahtsul Masāil NU," in *Tashwirul Afkar*, No. 7 (2000), p. 114.

The decision from *Lajnah Bahthul Masāil* is formulated in the form of *fatwā*.⁴¹ NU has organized *Bahthul Masail* in its provincial and regencies branches. The highest fatwa is that released by the ulama in the National Congress of 'Alim-'Ulama. Recently, the decision of the National Congress of 'Ulama has been collected By KH Aziz Masyhuri, and published under the title *Masalah Keagamaan, Hasil Mukhtamar dan Monas Ulama NU dari 1926 – 1994* (Religious Problem, The result of the NU National Congress of Ulama, from 1926 – 1994).⁴²

According to Martin van Bruinessen, the fatwa of traditionalist ulama is rarely innovative in nature.⁴³ The traditionalist ulama opposed interpretation directly from the Qur'an and Hadith. Before issuing the fatwa, they usually formulate once again the new problem and look at the recognized middle period books⁴⁴ whether or not the same problem already existed there. The fatwa will be issued according to what has been said in the recognized middle period books. In these books, there are many descriptions of daily religious or ritual problems, but, the NU ulama have complained, the economic, social, political and moral problems are discussed little in such books. This problem, then, has been responded to individually by those called intellectuals within NU, such as Abdurrahman Wahid, AS Hikam and others.

The Issue of Young and Old Generation

There are young NU ulama who try continuously to enlarge their knowledge. Many of them have studied in Egypt or Saudi Arabia where they came into contact with schools of law (*madhhab*) other than Shafi'i.⁴⁵ Most of the traditional ulama opposed *taljīq* (adopting many *madhabs* ideas eclectically, by choosing the easiest one). But they

⁴¹ It was made in the context of the past interpretations of other religious scholars of the same school of jurisprudence, namely *Madhhab Syafi'i*.

⁴² See K.H.A Aziz Masyhuri, *Masalah Keagamaan, Hasil Mukhtamar dan Munas Ulama NU dari 1926-1994* (Surabaya: Dinamika Press, 1996).

⁴³ Van Bruinessen, *NU, Tradisi, Relasi-relasi Kuasa*, p. 213.

⁴⁴ From the list of referents of the documented fatwa in the *Masalah Keagamaan, Hasil Mukhtamar dan Monas Ulama NU dari 1926 – 1994*, there are 162 recognized books that used as reference in formulating the fatwa within *Lajnah Bahthul Masāil*. For detail, see Masyhuri, *Masalah Keagamaan*, pp. 405-413.

⁴⁵ Among of them are Said Aqil Siradj, Said Aqil Munawar and Nur Samad. They received doctoral degree from Saudi Arabian and Egyptian universities.

agree that if they cannot find the answer to a problem in the Syafi'i madhhab, they may adopt an idea of another school of law.⁴⁶

One of the young kiai, who introduced the change of the form of the *bahthul masā'il*, is Kiai Musthofa Bishri. When he was a Syuriah member of the NU in Middle Java, he expected the advisory board members of NU to be more comprehensive in answering the religious question, not merely saying "yes, it is" or "no it is not". He intended to see the problem from many aspects, if necessary it should be explained by many experts, such as expert in economy, politics, and Medicine before issuing the fatwa.⁴⁷

At the Situbondo congress in 1984, it was decided to adopt the model of discussion introduced by Mushthofa Bishri and develop it on a wide scale. After that, at Yogyakarta congress in 1989, the new model of discussion was used. The problem which was discussed, was not simple one. It was complicated and connected to many issues and demanded serious discussion. For instance, the problem of euthanasia. The effort is not very successful. Many of the ulama involved in the discussion did not actively engage in the rational discussion. They preferred to use the old method by referencing to what was said in the recognized middle books.⁴⁸

There is disappointment in the younger generation of ulama within NU, especially in dealing with the form and the content of the fatwa issued by the older ulama. They complain that there are many irrelevant problems in the fatwa, while the more relevant ones are abandoned because the older ulama try to avoid critical and sensitive problems. The younger generation of NU ulama also criticised the references of the fatwa. The quotation of the recognized middle period books in the fatwa which contain no kind of contextualization effort or any explanation of its relevance to the problem, is among this criticism to the form of older ulama's fatwa. The criticism is not coming from the modern-educated NU members but from the more intelligent pesantren members. This disappointment resulted in a renewal movement within the internal NU circle. According to Bruinessen, the traditionalism of pesantren and the charismatic authority of the kiai is not hampering the emergence of new

⁴⁶ Van Bruinessen, *NU, Tradisi, Relasi-relasi Kuasa*, p. 214.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 214-215.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 215-217.

intellectual thought.⁴⁹ Critical thought and the effort of seeking a new alternative was backed by Abdurrahman Wahid, who became a chairman of NU (1984 -1999). It was also motivated by a number of kiais such as Kiai Musthofa Bisri, Kiai Muchith Muzadi, and Kiai Sahal Mahfudh.

One of the most influential young NU “ulama-intellectuals” is Masdar Farid Mas’udi. He was educated in pesantren and IAIN. He has done more to forward critical study among the santri circle as an alternative to memorization methodology in learning Islamic classical book (*Kitab Kuning*, yellow book), the methodology that for a long time had not been questioned in the pesantren tradition. Of course, he does not want to displace the pesantren tradition, but he is trying to introduce a new, creative and radical interpretation of the classical book.

Masdar has begun to organize discussion on the *kitab kuning* (Islamic classical book) in NU headquarters in Jakarta in 1987 under the umbrella of the Syuriya (advisory board) by inviting many Syuriya members. The prominent *kitab kuning* was used as a subject of analysis by a number of young IAIN lecturers and its critics in textual and contextual ways. However, the discussion should have been stopped, after protest from the senior influential kiai, who did not agree with such discussion. But the discussion, as what reported by Bruinessen, has continued.⁵⁰ One of the institutions that facilitated such discussion is P3M, The Indonesian Society for Pesantren and Community Development. Masdar is one of the staff in this institution. From its establishment in 1983, this institution has had a significant influence among pesantren in Indonesia. “Pesantren”, a journal that was published by P3M from 1984 until 1993 has also contributed to the critical attitude of the young pesantren members in studying traditional scripture. Each edition of the journal was contained an article that critically discussed a *kitab kuning*.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 220.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 222.

⁵¹ See for example, in “Pesantren” vol. V, No. 2, 1988, there is an article about *Tafsir Ibn Kathir: Bayangan Ibn Taimiyah dalam Tradisi Santri*; in “Pesantren” vol. IV, No. 3, 1989, there is an article about *Fiqih yang Semarak (Kitab Himat ash-Shari’ah)*; in “Pesantren” vol. IV, No. 3, 1989, there is an article about *Mabkota Muslimah yang Tertinggal (Kitab ‘Uqud al-Lujayn fi Bayani Huquq az-Zaujain)*; and in “Pesantren” vol. IX, No. 1, 1992, there is an article about *Insan Kamil dalam Konsep Mistik al-Jilli*, among others.

Since 1988, Masdar has introduced what he called *halaqah*, a roundtable study between the younger kiai and the older kiai of NU, during which they discuss many themes related with the problem of *fiqh*⁵² with emphasis on the societal problems which were neglected by NU ulama. The *halaqah* is organized by P3M and Rabithah al-Ma'ahid al-Islamiah (RMI, League of Islamic Education/pesantren Institutes). A number of senior kiais such as Kiai Sahal Mahfudh and Kiai Imron Harnzah have given their protection to the *halaqah* activity. However, most of the initiatives came from Masdar. The first *halaqah* was held in 1988 in Pesantren "Watu Congol" at Muntilan, Middle Java, when the RMI congress was conducted there. This *halaqah* was conducted especially to understand *kitab kuning* contextually. Masdar and his friends issued the problem of textual application of *kitab kuning* and recommended studying the glorious inheritance of the past ulama historically and contextually. They did not recommend *taqlid* (to strictly adhere the precepts set earlier by the ulama) in their books (*qaul*), but rather recommend understanding and applying their method of analysis and thought (*manhaj*) in a new context and situation.

The contextual approach in understanding Islamic doctrines became a main theme among liberal Muslim in Indonesia during the 1980s. This approach made it possible for them to flexibly interpret the Islamic doctrines and continuously adapt to different situations. In contextual approach something that the traditionalists, literalists and fundamentalists would declare absolute, is declared as relative.

The idea of contextualization of *kitab kuning* was, at first, a response of a discussion held outside of the NU circle. However, this idea was introduced to the member of *halaqah* by using an appropriate term for the kiai. For instance, what Masdar had introduced in explaining *qaul qadim*⁵³ and *qaul jadid*.⁵⁴ It is known that in a certain subject there is a difference between *qaul qadim* and *qaul jadid*. Both of them are considered valid and neither is thought to be superior. "It is implied that the difference between *qaul qadim* and *qaul jadid* reflected the

⁵² Fiqh is the codification of principle of conduct drawn by religious scholars from the Qura'an, Hadith, analogy of those two sources, and consensus of legalist.

⁵³ Shafi'i thought and teaching during his live in Iraq, it was codified in his book "ar-Risalah".

⁵⁴ Shafi'i thought and teaching during his live in Egypt, it was codified in his book "al-Umm".

contextual difference, socially, economically and politically between Iraq and Egypt at Shafi'i's time", Masdar has explained.⁵⁵

This argument seems to be successful in convincing many kiais that the context has played a dominant role in codifying an important book within Shafi'i school of law. However, it was natural that this argument be not easily received because it opposed the *taqlid* attitude and gave priority to a more free interpretation of Islamic doctrines. It directly criticized the identity of NU, namely the *taqlid* attitude to the four schools of laws (practically NU emphasized on the application of the Shafi'i school of law). The question aroused in the *halaqah* is, "should the *taqlid* attitude to the school of law refer to what has been codified as unchanged rule of law (*madbbab qawly*) or should it refer to the method of codifying the rule of law (*madbbab manhajy*)? The younger "ulama-intellectuals-reformers" prefer to adopt the second alternative. As reported by Bruinessen, year by year this idea has successfully obtained more support from many of the senior ulama.⁵⁶

According to Bruinessen, the "contextualist group" has carefully formulated their criticism of the tradition. Their suggestion to replace *madbbab qawly* with *madbbab manhajy* was not that different from what had been suggested by the reformist group (Muhammadiyah) in opening the gate of *ijtihad* (using reason to develop religious principle), but it was more moderate than reformist group's suggestion. One aspect of this suggestion was then declared as a formal religious decision of NU during its national congress in 1992 in Bandar Lampung. At that time there was an agreement and consciousness that neglecting a problem without giving an answer cannot be justified, therefore any aspects (of thought or methodology) that hinder the process of making decisions should be solved (eliminated).⁵⁷ The congress also recommended that in solving the social problem, *Bahthul Masail* should use the method of problem solving which consider the following aspects: a) analysis of the problem; b) analysis of the impact;

⁵⁵ Van Bruinessen, *NU, Tradisi, Relasi-relasi Kuasa*, pp. 223-224.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

⁵⁷ The decision of Ulama congress of NU in 1992, No. 01/Munas/1992, as what described by Marzuki Wahid, "Membaca Tradisi Bahtsul Masail NU," in *Tashwirul Afkar*, No. 7 (2000): pp. 113-114. See also, Masyhuri, *Masalah Keagamaan, Hasil Mukhtamar*, pp. 366-367.

c) analysis of the law; c) analysis of the action, role and supervision as the consequence of the fatwa.⁵⁸

The *halaqah* resulted in a more dynamic process of deciding religious problems in the NU. There were innovative suggestions that made it possible for NU to become dynamic. One of the suggestions was related to making religious decisions collectively for the problems that do not have any answers in the *fiqh* books. *Halaqah* also gave the attention to the most urgent social and political problems.⁵⁹

One of the *halaqah*, held in January 1992, discussed the land plundering and the condemnation of its inhabitants by the government for the purpose of the development program. The “Kedung Ombo” project⁶⁰ was the dominant theme under discussion in the *halaqah*. Many ulama knew of the similar cases, but in smaller and in their own territories. They could not bridge the gap between their instinctive understanding of the social justice and the land discourse in the *fiqh* books.

Another *halaqah*, held in Mai 1992, discussed the relation between *zakāh* (the yearly religious tax required of all Muslims as part of their religious obligations) and tax. Masdar himself wrote a provocative book about this matter.⁶¹ In this book, he argued that the tax that was collected by the modern state has replaced the *zakāh*, therefore it is not necessary to pay zakah if the tax was paid. According to Bruinessen, this idea is not a new one, although it had not been previously suggested by someone in NU circle.⁶² Masdar, then, argued that the payment of the tax and its utilization should obey a moral imperative of zakah. Most of the kiai, those present at that halaqa opposed Masdar’s way of reasoning, but they agree with his conclusion. Kiai Wahid Zaini, from Probolinggo, East Java, had more supporters because of his statement. He said that although the tax is not identical with zakah, both of them are collective resources. Therefore, the

⁵⁸ Wahid, “Membaca Tradisi Bahtsul Masail, p. 120.

⁵⁹ van Bruinessen, *NU, Tradisi, Relasi-relasi Kuasa*, pp. 225-229.

⁶⁰ A government project in Middle Java that intended to build a dam. Because of this project the inhabitant of that area was removed, they were given a minimum compensation.

⁶¹ Masdar Farid Mas’udi, *Agama Keadilan* (Jakarta: P3M, 1993). See especially pp. 100-106.

⁶² van Bruinessen, *NU, Tradisi, Relasi-relasi Kuasa*, p. 230.

public should have power in controlling the usage of zakah and the tax.⁶³ The *halaga*, that was organized by Masdar, was the most explicit forum where the idea of the important of renewing of the fiqh was introduced, but it was not the only one.

Institution and The Development of Intellectualism within NU

Another institution that contributed to the development of intellectualism within NU is Lakpedam, *Lembaga Kajian dan Pengembangan Sumberdaya Manusia* (Institute for Human Resources Studies and Development). This institution was established in April 1985, four months after NU congress in Situbondo, where Abdurrahman Wahid was elected as the new chairman of NU. From the beginning, the establishment of Lakpesdam was designed by the younger generation of NU, who brought a new thought, a new perspective and a new paradigm, about NU in contrast to the older generation represented by Idam Chalid and his supporters. After Abdurrahman Wahid became chairman of NU, the younger generation of NU thought it necessary to establish an institution that functioned as a think tank for NU. According to Ulil Abshar Abdallah, almost all of the NU institution did not function well. Especially when it was under the chairmanship of Idam Chalid, the centralistic policy brought about difficulties in organizing the potentiality of NU. During the political struggle of NU, when it was declared a political party (1952-1973), the societal and cultural dimensions of NU were neglected. Because of this background, many of the younger generation of NU, who also actively engaged in nongovernment organization, supported by young kiai such as Kiai Musthafa Bisri, intended to establish a new institution within NU. At first it was called “*Lajnah Kajian dan Pengembangan Sumberdaya Manusia NU*” and then, after the Cipasung congress in 1994, it was changed to “*Lembaga Kajian dan Pengembangan Sumberdaya Manusia*”.⁶⁴ The activist of Lakpesdam at the beginning

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 230-231.

⁶⁴ In the organizational structure of NU there are “Lembaga” (similar with department in the government system) and “Lajnah” (Literally, office). “Lajnah” is an ad hoc or committee responsible for undertaking special tasks which are not covered by the department. The different between “Lembaga” and “Lajnah” in the NU tradition is as follows: Lembaga usually exists in all of NU organizational levels (at central, provincial or regional), such as *Lembaga Pendidikan Ma’arif* (Department of Education within NU). “Lajnah” has no structure except at the central level, such as Lajnah Falakiyah

were: Fahmi Syaifuddin, MM Billah, Arif Mudatsir, Umar Basalim, Said Budairi, and Abdullah Syarwani among others.⁶⁵

As what previously mentioned, most of the first Lakpesdam activists also had a record as NGO activists of the 1970s and 1980s, where they came into touch with the liberal and transformative paradigm of Islam. This idea basically emphasized the importance of the effort to liberate Muslims from the stagnation of traditional interpretation of Islamic doctrines. This progressive idea also coloured the character of Lakpesdam. Because of this character, many study club activists (from IAIN and among others), were interested in joining Lakpesdam. In following generations, Lakpesdam was supported by many open minded young generations, and therefore it was known as a “liberal” intellectual circle within NU.⁶⁶ Meanwhile, AS Hikam has criticized that at the beginning of Lakpesdam establishment, it could not be categorized as a “liberal” intellectual circle, in the sense that it is represented the liberal attitude of Abdurrahman Wahid. The evolution toward such a category started after the Cipasung congress in 1994. Before this, Lakpesdam was dominated by Said Budairi, Fahmi Syaifuddin and others, who are not representative of liberal intellectuals, they are rather more aptly called scholars.⁶⁷

In the late 1990s, Lakpesdam began to be coloured by young NU intellectuals who identify themselves as “the left” group of NU, in the sense that they oppose the stagnation of thought within NU, oppose the tradition, and support progressive social action. They have a strong network represented in various cities such as Surabaya, Yogyakarta, Jember, Wonosobo, and Jakarta. They are familiar with many issues on labour and farmer.⁶⁸ Their reading is enlarged with the theoretical perspective of “lefties” movement. LKiS, Yogyakarta based Institute for Islamic and Social Study, for example, in 1993 published the

(Committee for determining a calendar). Lajnah reported its responsibility only to the central board of NU.

⁶⁵ Interview with Ulil Abshar Abdalla, Jakarta, 17.7.2000.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Interview with Muhammad AS Hikam, Berlin, 21.5.2000.

⁶⁸ Interview with Ulil Abshar Abdalla, Jakarta, 17.7.2000. Journal “Gerbang”, published by eLSAD, a Surabaya based institute for the study of Religion and Democracy, which is mostly dominated by NU young intellectuals, has issued a edition on the State, Labour and Capital. See “Gerbang” edition No 08, Vol. 03, August – October 2000.

translation of Hassan Hanafi's work on *Madbā ya'ni al-Yasār al-Islāmi* (what is meant by Islam left) as an appendix of the more comprehensive translation of Kazuo Shimogaki's critical study on Hassan Hanafi's thought.⁶⁹ After the fall of the New Order government, the freedom of press is more guaranteed, and cheerful discussion of the "left" discourse in Indonesia can take place. At the same time the publication on the Marx related books, has boomed. One of these was what has published by LKiS with the title: *Peta Pemikiran Karl Marx* (The Outline on Karl Marx's thought).⁷⁰ Kompas, a daily newspaper, also reported the mushroomed publications on such themes. The discussion about the "left" discourse is also reported to have become more lively.⁷¹ Many of Indonesian Muslims have responded apprehensively. In their mind it indicates the revival of communism in Indonesia. Others view this discourse as a purely intellectual exercise and therefore a normal thing from an academic point of view.⁷²

After Hasyim Muzadi become NU chairman (in 1999), there was a different vision between him and young NU intellectuals, especially those affiliated with Lakpesdam. According to Ulil Abshar Abdalla, Hasyim Muzadi differ with Abdurrahman Wahid in terms of their intellectual orientation. Abdurrahman Wahid gave more support to the progressive young NU intellectuals, while Hasyim Muzadi does not indicate his backing to them. The different orientation was evidenced when Hasyim Muzadi organized a workshop on the relation between civil, military, and *kiai*. It was held in Pesantren "al-Hikam" at Malang in 2000. In designing the workshop, NU young intellectuals had hoped that the result of this activity could make the society be more critical of the military, and *kiai* should give more support on the civil society.

⁶⁹ The original book that was translated into Indonesia entitled: *Between Modernity and Post-modernity, The Islamic Left and Dr Hassan Hanafi's Thought: a Critical Reading*, wrote by Kazuo Shimogaki. Indonesian translation: *Kiri Islam, Antara Modernisme dan Postmodernisme, Telaah Kritis Pemikiran Hasan Hanafi* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 1993). Until 2000 it was reprinted for four times.

⁷⁰ Andi Muawiyah Ramly, *Peta Pemikiran Karl Marx* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2000).

⁷¹ See *Kompas*, 14, 15 and 17 April 2000.

⁷² See, Rumadi, "Agama dan Wacana 'Kiri,'" *Kompas*, 19 May 2000. Rumadi is an activist of Lakpesdam.

However, Hasyim Muzadi drove the kiai to show their sympathy to the military.⁷³

After Abdurrahman Wahid become the fourth Indonesian president (in 1999), young NU intellectuals were disappointed and disillusioned. They argued that for a long time Abdurrahman Wahid has supported the civil society movement, suddenly he is involved in the center of power and stands vis-à-vis civil society. One of the manifestation of their disappointment was reflected in their opposition to and dislike for the political party supported by NU which used the NU mass as their basis. According to them, political parties have only absorbed societal energy of NU. For example, many prominent members of NU, who were previously engaged in empowering civil society have joined with political parties (PKB, PKU and among others). Eventually the society has lost—or at the minimal level has seen a reduction in—its power. In addition, a large amount of money is paid for political activity. The young NU intellectuals, who are culturally related with NU and its political party face this problem ambiguously. In the one hand, they are culturally related with NU political party, on the other hand they should radically distance themselves from political parties and concentrated on developing civil society. Lakpesdam, however, formally decided to separate from political parties. Therefore, its member must decide whether they will join a political party or Lakpesdam. This decision is intended to serve the best interests of Lakpesdam independence.⁷⁴

The function of Lakpesdam is like a “foot” of Abdurrahman Wahid’s ideas developed in the 1980s. He has concerned with the idea of religious pluralism, respecting the diversity of minority groups, advocating democracy, and human rights among others.⁷⁵ Lakpesdam activists are trying to interpret these universal ideas in a practical manner. For example, by conducting “Training of Ulama” which are oriented to enlarge ulama’s view, to offer a more critical method of

⁷³ Interview with Ulil Abshar Abdalla, Jakarta, 17.7.2000.

⁷⁴ Interview with Ulil Abshar Abdalla, Jakarta, 17.7.2000.

⁷⁵ See on Abdurrahman Wahid’s thoughts, Hairus Salim HS (ed.), *Prisma Pemikiran Gus Dur* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 1999). This book consists of Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) original thought that was previously published in “Prisma”, a periodical journal of LP3ES, Jakarta. Gus Dur has continuously wrote an article in Prisma from 1975 until 1991.

interpretation of the tradition and to try to contextualize the sacred text with the continuously developing reality.⁷⁶

Lakpesdam has also made a program that called *Program Pengembangan Wawasan Keulamaan* (PPWK, Program for Developing the View on Ulama). As many as 25 of young ulama from Java and Madura were trained in five phases in a one year program. They were given a broad view of social analysis and the history of Islamic doctrines. From this activity, they understood that Islamic theology and fiqh were codified contextually according to the historical background of the writer. Previously, they had an understanding that the doctrine of “*abl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a*”⁷⁷ is absolute in nature, and it was not influenced by different place and time. As a matter of fact, from the historical point of view, fiqh was an intellectual product which was formulated in response to certain problem and condition. In training, Lakpesdam has used terminology that seems to be familiar to their mind, such as the concept of *naskh* and *mansukh*, *asbāb an-Nuzūl*, and the paradigm of “public benefit”, and by combining it with the sociological perspective, sociological theory, historical analysis and situational analysis. The goal is to give the kiai a new unit of analysis which is more contextual to the new social developments.⁷⁸

How is the communication between the younger generation of NU “intellectuals-ulama” and their seniors? In this case, Ulil Abshar Abdalla argued that there is mutual understanding between them. Ulil said that the groups of young NU “intellectuals-ulama” show its strong current. Abdurrahman Wahid liberal ideas triggered the emergence of the young NU intellectual segments in various cities in Indonesia, such as Surabaya, Yogyakarta, Jember, Wonosobo, and Jakarta. After a long time, many young intellectuals, who had formerly actively engaged outside of NU institutions, became interested in joining NU, in this case Lakpesdam, where they could have intellectual interaction with the senior kiai. Inside the NU, they influenced and coloured NU

⁷⁶ Interview with Ulil Abshar Abdalla, Jakarta, 17.7.2000.

⁷⁷ A term used by Sunni Muslims to describe themselves, usually in distinction from the Shī‘ah, as well as other sects regarded as heretics by the Sunni Muslims. Generally speaking the criteria for being able to use this epithet is to adhere to the religious teachings of al-Ash‘ari and/or al-Maturīdi and the legal teachings of one of the recognized legal schools (madhhab). See, Federspiel, *A Dictionary of Indonesian Islam*, p. 10.

⁷⁸ Interview with Ulil Abshar Abdalla, Jakarta, 17.7.2000.

policy. As evidence of this, Ulil Abshar shows that the recommendation of NU national gathering in 1997 in Lombok was conceptionally formulated by young NU intellectuals.⁷⁹ Greg Barton and Andr e Feillard’s conclusion in their article reported that the event of NU national gathering in Lombok indicates the justification of Ulil Abshar’s statement. Barton has concluded as follows:

Whilst both the Munas and the Konbes were relatively subdued affairs, they were anything but insignificant events. They were important for several reasons, not least being the way in which they served to measure the level of support for the liberal reformist ideas being promoted by NU Executive Chairman Abdurrahman Wahid and other progressives over the previous thirteen years. In a general way, the Lombok gathering can be considered as a meeting that endorsed reformist ideas. More specifically, one can distinguish (following) main aspects of this attitude:

Firstly, the two meetings clearly subscribed to progressive religious thought. This was evident in the flexible and open approach that was shown in interpreting Islamic law, regarding the rights and role of women. Whilst the discussion in Komisi B appeared to have got off to a bad start it certainly ended well, though it also served as a reminder that many of the NU ulama remain reasonably conservative in their views. In any case, what was most significant was the final outcome of that commission, its formulation of recommendations which very clearly endorsed a liberal understanding of the role of women. The fact, however, that it could not decide on whether a woman could be head of state, but only a “leader” in general terms, may be an indication of conservatism, but probably just as much it represents the key role of political interests in decisions about what is “allowed” and what is not.

With regard to matters of social justice, the findings of the Munas and of Konbes were even clearer. The general discussion in the Konbes about the need for reform to achieve an equitable economic system, for example, implied a significant critique of the developmentalist policies of the Soeharto regime. Even clearer, however, were the findings of the Munas about the wrongful appropriation of land, and the endorsement of demonstrations to achieve political change.

⁷⁹ Interview with Ulil Abshar Abdalla, Jakarta, 17.7.2000.

Secondly, it was clear that the Lombok gathering supported the leadership of younger ulama, particularly in intellectual initiatives. Abdurrahman Wahid's reformist ideas were being operationalized and further developed by the generation of young ulama and activists. It was people such as Said Aqil and Masdar Mas'udi who led the way in these discussions, where Wahid's only contribution was now his blessing to their reforms. Thus, Wahid clearly stated to the press his approval that women could become presidents.⁸⁰

From the above quotation it is clear that the younger generation of NU "intellectuals-ulama" has played a significant role in the last decades. According to Ulil Abshar, the senior kiai within NU are less articulate than the younger generation of NU intellectuals. The younger generation of NU intellectuals show their fluency in articulating modern idioms, frequently formulate their ideas in a form of academic writing fluently, and systematically argue. Most of them understood well the tradition, the intellectual instruments and the senior ulama's way of thinking, and they are able to criticize the senior ulama argument's in a critical way while considering the tradition and the art or the ethic of interaction between senior and junior ulama or intellectuals. Because of this, Ulil Abshar adds, there is no significant intellectual conflict between them. There is no wide gap between the liberal group (represented by young generation) and the conservative group (represented by old generation).⁸¹ In determining problems, there is compromise between them.

The membership of Lakpesdam is open, but Lakpesdam has a core "creative community" that consist of a number of young intellectuals who study at post graduate program at IAIN or become NGO activists. They are continuously involved in a discussion forum, conducted by Lakpesdam. This "creative community" has a network with the similar communities in many cities in Indonesia, such as Surabaya, and Yogyakarta among others. This makes it possible for them to produce intellectuals thought on many aspects of Islam.⁸²

One of their products of intellectual thought is published in the form of a Journal. Lakpesdam itself frequently publishes a journal. The

⁸⁰ Greg Barton and Andr e Feillard, "Nahdlatul Ulama, Abdurrahman Wahid and Reformation: What does NU's November 1977 National Gathering Tell Us?," *Studia Islamika*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (1999), pp. 29-30.

⁸¹ Interview with Ulil Abshar Abdalla, Jakarta, 17.7.2000.

⁸² Ibid.

name of its journal is “*Taswirul Afkar*”. It has been published since May 1997 in order to develop the quality of religious and cultural thought, especially among NU members and generally among Indonesians.⁸³ Many themes are discussed throughout the journal, covering the specific issue on the identity and the understanding of NU on “*Abi sunnah wa al-Jama’ah*”,⁸⁴ the struggle of NU and Islamic groups in Indonesia,⁸⁵ *fiqh siyabah*: Islam and politic⁸⁶ and others. The journal also discusses universal issues such as Islam and civil society⁸⁷, Islam and democracy.⁸⁸ In addition, the journal publishes the Indonesian translation of the thought of Middle East intellectuals,⁸⁹ such as the intellectual thought of Muhammad ‘Abid al-Jābiri, and Hassan Hanafi among others. The advantage of this publication is, internally, as medium for intellectual exercise among young NU intellectuals.⁹⁰

Another successful activity of Lakpesdam, was an action oriented activity. During 1998 Lakpesdam organized “the Management of the Crisis” in cooperation with the Asia Foundation as much as eight times in many Indonesian cities.⁹¹ The activity was intended to empower the society to solve the existing problem within its society with the leadership of its own society and without the assistance of outsiders in order to avoid the more dangerous impact of the violence.⁹² This activity was held in response to many existing violations among religious communities, especially in Java during the last 1990s.⁹³

Another institution that interests many young NU intellectuals is LKiS (*Lembaga Kajian Islam dan Sosial*, Institute for Islamic and Social

⁸³ See *Laporan Kegiatan Pengurus Pusat Lakpesdam NU, Januari 1995-November 1999*, p. 7.

⁸⁴ See *Taswirul Afkar*, No. 1/ May-Jun 1997.

⁸⁵ See *Taswirul Afkar*, No. 2/ May-Jun 1998.

⁸⁶ See *Taswirul Afkar*, No. 3, 1998.

⁸⁷ See *Taswirul Afkar*, No. 7 2000.

⁸⁸ See *Taswirul Afkar*, No. 3, 1998.

⁸⁹ See *Taswirul Afkar*, No. 8, 2000.

⁹⁰ Interview with Ulil Abshar Abdalla, Jakarta, 17.7.2000.

⁹¹ See *Laporan Kegiatan Pengurus Pusat Lakpesdam NU, Januari 1995 – November 1999*.

⁹² Interview with Ulil Abshar Abdalla, Jakarta, 17.7.2000.

⁹³ For further description on religious violence see Republika’s report on this issue. It was electronically published in the Republika Online, 1 September 1999. See also Khoirun Niam, *Menyimak “Catatan” Media Massa Kita tentang Agama, Kekerasan dan Dialog antar Agama di Indonesia*, unpublished article.

Studies), a Yogyakarta based institution founded in 1989 by a number of PMII activists (PMII, *Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia*, Indonesian Muslim Student Movement, a student organization culturally closed to NU) such as Imam Aziz, Fajrul Falakh, Abdul Muin DZ, Jadul Maula, Hairus Salim, Eman Hermawan, and Nuruddin. LKiS started as an informal study group consisting of the 1989 students of the IAIN (State Institute for Islamic Studies) Yogyakarta, UII (Indonesia Islamic University), and UGM (State Gadjah Mada University). At first, they were mostly activists in the student press at their own university.⁹⁴ As metamorphosis of the student club, this institution inherits the idealistic vision of intellectualism. According to its pamphlet, the Islamic vision of LKiS is characterised by transformative character and intended to open the future of democratic Indonesia that bears mutual respects to the human dignity. Indonesian society characterized by the spirit of tolerance, pluralism and inclusiveness is among other idealistic visions of this institution. LKiS sees religion as a progressive and liberating force, not as a stifling and oppressive influence that hinders relations with others.⁹⁵

For the realization of this idealistic vision, LKiS tries to build a communication network within NU and with other institutions. In October 1990, LKiS organized a gathering between the young generation of NU in Yogyakarta which resulted two important agreements. First, they decided to build an intellectual network that functioned as media for conducting intellectual activities within NU. Second, they decided to organize an intensive dialogue with pesantren, NU, and other Indonesian elements.⁹⁶

The background of conducting intellectual activities and establishing such an institution is based on the consideration that, first, at that time it was difficult for the activists of LKiS to promote social change by using state institution as a vehicle. The state's power was too dominant. Hairus Salim has doubted the possibility of civil servants carrying out significant social change by using state institutions. They were contaminated with the powers of the state machinery. Because of this consideration, the LKiS activists tried distance themselves from

⁹⁴ Interview with Hairus Salim H.S, Yogyakarta, 6.8.2000.

⁹⁵ See pamphlet of LKiS in a "Katalog of LKiS, n.y, p. 2.

⁹⁶ Muhammad Sodik, "Gerakan Kritis Komunitas LKiS," Unpublished Master Thesis, Universitas Gajah Mada, Yogyakarta (1999), pp.45-46.

the state institution. Second, in opposing the power of state it is necessary to cooperate with many people. In addition, there was a consciousness among them that NU has only a few qualified human resources capable of carrying out social change and dynamizing intellectual activity.⁹⁷

LKiS focuses its activities on study and research concerning Islamic and social-cultural problems, publication and training. Publication is an effort to distribute the ideas of LKiS broadly and to build discursive-written-culture. LKiS has published books regularly. These could be classified into three themes: (1) religious thought, (2) Social-cultural, and (3) philosophy. In supporting the book publication program, the dissemination of alternative concepts and ideas is implemented systematically. On the methodological level, education and training are considered by LKiS as part of the dissemination process. LKiS organizes a regular course on *Wawasan Islam Transformatif dan Toleran* (Transformative and Tolerant Islamic Insight). Moreover, discussions and seminars are conducted regularly, especially to understand contemporary Islamic and social issues.⁹⁸

As acknowledged by Jadul Maula, Hairus Salim and Farid Wajidi during the interview, Abdurrahman Wahid's personality and intellectual views has interested them in navigating LKiS. "There is no one like Abdurrahman Wahid in NU, he is an exception", Hairus Salim said. He is concerned with the ideas of religious pluralism, respecting the diversity of minority group, advocating democracy, and human rights among others.⁹⁹ The position of LKiS activists affirms Abdurrahman Wahid's intellectual views. LKiS is envisioned as "feet" of Abdurrahman Wahid's intellectual views.¹⁰⁰

In introducing a new perspective of intellectual thought LKiS usually borrows other prominent intellectuals from Arabic or from the West, such as Hassan Hanafi, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, Muhammad

⁹⁷ Interview with Hairus Salim H.S, Yogyakarta, 6.8.2000.

⁹⁸ Unpublished pamphlet of LKiS. For detail activity of LKiS see the appendix of Sodik, "Gerakan Kritis Komunitas LKiS."

⁹⁹ See on Abdurrahman Wahid's thoughts, Hairus Salim HS (ed.), *Prisma Pemikiran Gus Dur* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 1999). This book consists of Abdurrahman Wahid original thought that has been previously published in "Prisma", a periodical journal of LP3ES, Jakarta.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Jadul Maula, Hairus Salim and Farid Wajidi, Yogyakarta, 6 and 7 .8.2000.

Arkoun, Muhammad Abid al-Jabiri, Fatima Mernissi, Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, Abdel Wahab Effendi, Martin van Bruennesen, Andr e Feillard, Greg Barton, Greg Fealy, and Benedic Anderson. Many of the books of those intellectuals are translated into Indonesian and published by LKiS.¹⁰¹ The main themes of the books are Islam and society, Islam and democracy, Islam and human rights, the syari'ah, tradition and modernity, Indonesian Islam, and NU's relation with the government. Individually, the LKiS activists do not feel capable of introducing the complexity of those themes. For this reason, they use the translation of an important book considered as a tool in introducing a new intellectual perspective among Indonesian Muslims. According to Hairus Salim, LKiS introduces a new alternative in Islamic reading. He realises that most of the Arabic books used in pesantren are intellectual works of Muslim scholars or ulama in the middle ages. Therefore, it is important to introduce a new one.¹⁰²

There is a positive response to the intellectual activity of LKiS within NU and outside the NU circle, besides the existing negative response from a few of NU's kiai and from the fundamentalist Muslim circle. A positive response comes from the NU segment which appreciates the dynamization effort of Islamic intellectualism within NU that for a long time was neglected by its activist. Abdurrahman Wahid, Muhammad AS Hikam along with other young NU intellectuals appreciate the intellectual activity of LKiS. From the outside NU appreciation of LKiS intellectual venture activity is acknowledged by Azyumardi Azra.¹⁰³ An individual negative response is given to the activist of LKiS by K.H. Zainal Abidin Munawwir, a prominent kiai in Yogyakarta. Imam Aziz, an activist of LKiS, has questioned the apostasy issue during the training for santri in Yogyakarta, 9 – 13 December 1998 by saying "... is it just when someone becomes a Muslim and then he will be praised and informed everywhere, while if he apostates from Islam he will be accused and treated irrespectively? Whereas, everyone has the same religious rights and has the right to choose his/her religion. In my opinion, to be fair,

¹⁰¹ Interview with Hairus Salim HS., Yogyakarta, 6.8.2000. For the list of translated and published books by LKiS see *Katalog LKiS*.

¹⁰² Interview with Hairus Salim HS., Yogyakarta, 6.8.2000.

¹⁰³ Interview with Azyumardi Azra, Jakarta, 27.8.2000.

if someone becomes a Muslim, he should be treated naturally”¹⁰⁴ K.H. Zainal Abidin Munawwir responded to this statement, calling Imam Aziz’s statement deviant and calling on the santri in Yogyakarta and other Muslims to not be influenced by such understanding. He uses many arguments from the Quran such as 3:19 and 85; 32:18; 5:56; 9:23; and 3: 217. He also pointed out an argument from Hadith. Meanwhile, the positive response of LKiS is greater than the negative one. According to Hairus Salim, the real conflict of ideas is coming from the fundamentalist movement in Yogyakarta that has a basic in certain mosques and campuses.¹⁰⁵

In Surabaya some of the young NU intellectuals affiliate with èLSAD (*Lembaga Studi Agama dan Demokrasi*, Institute for the Study of Religion and Democracy). It is a metamorphoses of “Forum Study Mahasiswa Gerbang”, a student study club founded in 1993 that consisted of a number of Airlangga University and IAIN “Sunan Ampel” Surabaya students.¹⁰⁶ As a “post-student” institution, the intellectualism and idealistic view was promoted by conducting activity that oriented toward studying the relation of religion and democracy, and by conducting research, discussion and publication.¹⁰⁷ èLSAD publishes “Gèrbang”, a periodical journal on religion and democracy. This journal is acknowledged by Muhammad AS Hikam as a “high intensity” journal.¹⁰⁸ Hikam also rendered the activists of èLSAD, as well as other young intellectuals within NU, as people who have a

¹⁰⁴ This statement was submitted to the public letter of K.H. Zainal Abidin Munawwir, on 16 December 1998.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Hairus Salim HS., Yogyakarta, 6.8.2000.

¹⁰⁶ Most of the activist of “Forum Study Mahasiswa Gerbang” are the activists of PMII in Surabaya. See “Ini-Buletin” a Bulletin published by Forum Studi Mahasiswa Gerbang, No. 01 (March 1997), p. 4. The Board member of èLSAD in 2000 is as follows. Director: Maulidin, Division of Study: Siti Nurjanah, S.Sos., Aminoto Sa’doellah, Saifuddin Zuhri, M.Ag., Division of Publication: Anom Sury Putra, S.H., Muhaimin Syamsuddin, Drs. M. Masyhur Abadi, Division of Research: Mulli Trisna. S.Sos., Ilyas Sirodj. M.Ag., Mochtar Wahyu Oetomo, M.A., Division of Training: Maftuhin R. Rasmani. M.Ag., Khotib Sholeh, M.Ag., Agus Rahman Hakim, Secretariat: Agus Miftahus-Surur, Fitrotin, Board of Expert : KH Abdul Muchith Muzadi, Drs. Abdul Mun’im DZ., Muhammad A.S. Hikam, Ph.D., Dede Oetomo, Ph.D., Volunteer: Pdt. Yusak Santoso, S.Th., Anita Lie, Ph.D., Pdt. Simon Filanthropa, M.Th., Hadi Susanto, M. Saiful Bahri, S.H.

¹⁰⁷ Unpublished pamphlet of èLSAD.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Muhammad AS Hikam, Jakarta, 16.7.2000.

“hybrid culture”. This culture is not only based on the traditional sources of Islam but also based on the other sources.¹⁰⁹

The mission and vision of èLSAD, according to its pamphlet, is to elaborate the hidden discourse on religion and promote it to the public discourse. The raising of a new discourse is not intended to extinguish the religious thought that previously existed in the public life. Extinguishing this thought would only lead to an a-historic attitude, and would nullify the thought that already found its relevance with the society and its tradition. This vision influenced the èLSAD to encourage a respective attitude between one and another and promote a serious review and discussion on the religious doctrines. In line with this vision, an edition of “Gèrbang” specifically discussed the critical theme of *Revolusi Agama* (The Revolution of Religion).¹¹⁰ Many intellectuals gave their contribution to this edition. Dr. Machasin, lecturer at IAIN Yogyakarta, wrote his article under the title “*Islam dan Revolusi?*” (Islam and the Revolution). ST. Sunardi, a Christian Intellectual and lecturer at Sanata Dharma University Yogyakarta, has contributed a “bombastic” entry entitled “*Tuhan Tidak Butuh Agama?*” (God does not Need Religion). Dr. Alwi Shihab, NU intellectual and former Minister of Foreign Affairs during Abdurrahman Wahid presidency (1999-2001), focused his attention on the importance of “The Revolution from the Inside” at the rubric of interview.

Forum Cendekia Muda (FCM, Young Intellectual Forum) is one of the important forums within èLSAD. It is organized by the Division of Study that intended to disseminate the idea of democracy through religious study. The participants of this forum are mostly located in East Java consisting of 70% from local religious elites (young kiai or ulama), 20% activists/journalists/NGO (Non-Government Organization) staff that voluntarily advocate Democracy, and 10% from student activists and young intellectuals. The most important target participant is the local religious elite. According to an èLSAD activist, they have a maximum chance to play a role in the process of democratisation. The charisma of local religious elites makes it possible for them to mobilize their followers. In addition, they potentially can participate in the intellectual improvement of their followers. This

¹⁰⁹ Muhammad AS Hikam, “Anak Muda NU, Kultur Hibrid dan Negara,” Hairus Salim HS and Muhammad Ridwan (eds), *Kultur Hibrida, Anak Muda NU di Jalur Kultural* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 1999), pp. 259-260.

¹¹⁰ See, *Gerbang*, No. 02, April-June 1999.

activity is identified by Anom Suryaputera, activist of èLSAD, as the effort to seek out potential young NU intellectuals.¹¹¹ Another activity of èLSAD is “Training for santri”. The target of this activity is introducing the process of stagnation of religious thinking in Islam to the santri. From this point, it is possible to introduce a new perspective on religious thinking that may solve the challenges of the new era proactively.¹¹²

In its main activity, P3M, Lakpesdam-NU, LKiS and èLSAD are identical, namely empowering society by improving their understanding of religion and its social reality. All of the above institutions have no structural affiliation with NU, except Lakpesdam. However, culturally they have a close relationship with NU. Most of their activists are influenced by the NU environment and institution, such as pesantren, and PMII among others. The scope of activity is also identical, i.e. the pesantren and society, but they more emphasize the pesantren. They also build an intellectual network and support each other. In commenting on these institutions, it is not surprising that Azyumardi Azra argued that the younger generation of NU are the more dynamic in intellectual ventures.

Conclusion

From the above description it can be concluded that the production of NU intellectuals in the beginning of 21st century Indonesia is as a result of the development of education. NU members among the last generation, those from 20 – 30 years old, have had better access to education than their predecessors. It is also the result of the pesantren’s adoption of national school system. Nevertheless, the role of NU intellectuals remains under the shadow of the ulama or kiai. The ulama or kiai has more authority than the scholars or intellectuals. Therefore, the leadership of the NU is entrusted to the ulama or kiai, who have an authority in religious science.

The existence of NU intellectuals has fluctuated according to the social and political situations surrounding it. When NU associated with a political party, the organizational concentration was paid to the political activities and the dynamic of NU intellectuals was reduced.

¹¹¹ Anom Surya Putra, “Menjaga NU dari Luar,” Hairus Salim HS and Muhammad Ridwan (eds), *Kultur Hibrida, Anak Muda NU di Jalur Kultural* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 1999), p. 248.

¹¹² Unpublished pamphlet of èLSAD.

Many of the NU activists, ulama, and intellectuals were recruited to occupy political posts. For those who are not associated with political party, younger NU intellectuals prefer to establish an institution that might accommodate their intellectualism.[]

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