



# A Portrait of Contemporary Indonesian Islam

Editor  
Chaider S. Bamualim



## **A Portrait of Contemporary Indonesian Islam**

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## Preface

Murni Djamal

This book is derived from a collection of papers presented by various experts and Islamic scholars at an International Seminar entitled: “A Portrait of Contemporary Indonesian Islam: Remapping and Responding to the Worldwide Social Agenda”, which was held in Jakarta on December 14-15, 2004. Presenters at the mentioned seminar were renowned experts from a wide range of fields and more than 100 invitees attended from varied backgrounds including scholars of social sciences, scholars of Indonesian and religious studies, researchers, government officials, NGO activists, students and public participants.

The speakers successfully depicted a portrait of contemporary Indonesian Islam and, then suggested on how this country should re-



spond to issues on the worldwide social agenda, such as pluralism, democracy, human rights, etc.. In his words of welcome, Dr. Norbert Eschborn, Konrad Adenauer Foundation's (KAS), representative to Indonesia, said that being the fourth most populous nation and the biggest Muslim country in the world, Indonesia had carried out liberal political reform in 1998 followed by direct and democratic presidential elections in 2004, however unfortunately, these developments have gone largely unnoticed by the majority of experts and politicians in the West. Furthermore, Eschborn stated that viewed from its geo-strategic importance, Indonesia deserved a lot more attention from the West in viewing its success in completing two major elections under extremely difficult logistical conditions.

Eschborn makes a valid point here because Indonesia has unquestionably successfully demonstrated to the world, that the argumentation of the 2004 presidential election was one of the most successful elections ever carried out in this country. There was no serious conflict among the participants of the "democratic festival" and no blood shed in the country of two hundred and twenty million people. Although different in target, mechanism and procedure another successful story of a democratic general election was the first ever election conducted in Indonesia, in 1955. At that time, ten political parties fully participated in the election which was executed on a democratic basis without causing any socio-political conflict after the election.

After Indonesia's independence in 1945 until the end of 1998 a multitude of domestic problems hindered the country's progress in regaining its prominent position of leader of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), a position that Indonesia once held for decades. This was the time when the world witnessed how Indonesian foreign policy, in addition to the countries of India, Egypt, and Yugoslavia, played an important role in establishing the NAM (Non-Aligned-Movement). Indonesia also hosted the KAA (Conference of Asian and African Countries) and KIAA (Conference of Asian and African Islamic Countries) both of which were held in the nineteen-sixties. In those two Asian-African conferences, the economic, political, cultural and educational aspects became the main areas of cooperation among member countries. Meanwhile, the execution of GANEFO (Games of

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the New Emerging Forces), that is, the games for athletes of Asian Countries and, CONEFO's (Conference of the New Emerging Forces), politically based gathering were two other significant international events organized by Indonesia. During the nineteen fifties and sixties, despite Jakarta being troubled by political and military uprisings, the country still remained stable in terms of political, economic, religious and cultural activities mainly due to its active participation on the international front. This was when Indonesia could be seen to have clearly mapped her position and to have responded effectively to the world-wide social agenda of the time; in matters such as democracy, human rights, etc.

Eschborn stated that, "It is natural that the West has viewed Indonesian Islam, at least before the Bali bombing as being Islam "with a new face". Meanwhile, said Eschborn, "In 1996, international media called Islam in Indonesia modernist, progressive and a friend of the West and other cultures and perceived it as an example of successful harmony between Muslims and modernity". In this case, the writer believes that Eschborn is not exaggerating but it should be admitted, however, that Indonesian's fellow Muslims in the Middle East expressed different opinions. They rejected Indonesian Islam as being "unoriginal", that is it did not originate in Saudi Arabia or the Middle East. Indonesia is located far distant from the Middle East, and on its way to reach Southeast Asia, Islam became less original, less radical and less progressive. In addition, Islam is a little obscure to people in Indonesia; for not many researchers, writers and scholars ever wrote or even discussed the development of Indonesian Islam.

The questions that must be addressed nowadays by the present Indonesian government and the Indonesian people are: Firstly, how do they map their position in the existing world in general and in the Asian continent in particular. Secondly, how well does this country and its people respond to the world-wide social agenda, such as to the problems of human rights, democracy, etc. Indonesia must still settle its domestic problems before it can become an active player at the international level again: It is essential that the government addresses the important questions on how to achieve socio-political and economic stability, religious harmony, literacy, education for all, and pov-

erty eradication before embarking on any wider agendas otherwise, socio economic cultural tensions, political and religious conflicts, human rights violation and criminal actions will continue to hinder the realization of peace and harmony in this country. The writer believes that Indonesian Muslims, and Muslims all over the world are waiting to contribute to the realization of a more peaceful, more harmonious world where mutual understanding and mutual cooperation between nations and civilizations could be well-realized.

At present, Eschborn's opinion on this deserves consideration from those in charge of the future development of Indonesian Islam, such as government officials, political leaders and Islamic scholars so that, "...Indonesia can probably reposition its role in the international world and become a pioneer and activist in the reconstruction of Islam in line with the aims of the world wide social agenda; democracy and human rights."

Azyumardi Azra, a professor of history and the incumbent Rector of the State Islamic University (UIN) Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta shared a similar view with Eschborn regarding the declining roles of Indonesian foreign policy due to internal problems of a political, economic and cultural nature. As a consequence of the "policy of ambiguity", which was implemented by the Soeharto government from the late 1970s until the end of his era, Azyumardi says that, Indonesia was still involved in the NAM (Non-Aligned Movement), negotiations relating to the Bangsa Moro problems in the Philippines, and has established strong relations with certain countries of the Middle East, such as Palestine, Bosnia in Europe etc. Nevertheless, said Azyumardi, the so called, "Islamic revival", which gained popularity in the last decade of the Soeharto period seemed to gain more momentum in the post-Soeharto reform period, as manifested by the reappearance of political Islam, representing the voices of hard-line groups. These groups, such as Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI), the Council of Indonesian Muslims, Front Pembela Islam (Front of Islam Defenders) etc., demonstrated their anti American sentiment, by appealing to the Indonesian government to play an active role in addressing Middle-Eastern problems (Palestine) and curb American aggression in Iraq. These hard-line groups seem to have exchanged Indonesian





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political maps. Almost everyday their opinions, views, and criticisms, appeared in newspapers or on television programs where they clearly opposed President Abdurrahman Wahid's foreign policy to open trade and economic relations with Israel; and at the same time they blamed President Megawati Soekarnoputri for her "surrendering" foreign policy to the pressures of American President George W. Bush in his war against terrorism.

They also criticized the parliament, government ministers and the two major Islamic parties of NU and Muhammadiyah who all adopted a low profile in promoting, implementing or enforcing the implementation of Islamic *shari'ah* on Muslims in Indonesia. They also condemned the municipal government officials who did nothing to enforce disciplinary measures on those who acted immorally or contrary to the teaching of Islam. These hard-line groups harshly implemented *shari'ah* law upon those who did not fast during Ramadan by crashing hotels which facilitated dealing in narcotics and prostitution. Poverty, low levels of education, crime, corruption, violation of human rights and democracy, have all prevented the Indonesian government from implementing its program successfully. The government has been overwhelmed with a multitude of pressing domestic problems. Nevertheless, "the reappearance of political Islam", said Azyumardi "represented by Islamic parties, has brought about a new emphasis on the importance of an Islamic factor in both domestic and foreign policy".

Eschborn and Azyumardi, were only two of the many speakers that shared similar views on how Indonesian Islam should be depicted so that it could respond to the worldwide social agenda; that is the protection of human rights and the implementation of democracy. They all believed that, the Muslim dominated country of Indonesia could once more play an important role internationally, as soon as it could overcome its own domestic problems. Nobody expects this to be easily accomplished and neither will it be easy to convince the Middle Eastern Muslims not to underestimate Indonesian Islam or view it as 'not real Islam'.

In addition, Indonesian Islam with its genial mien and sincere attitude must be prepared to open up dialog with Westerners on global



issues such as human rights, democracy, terrorism, environment, etc. These dialogues are hoped to be able to minimize misunderstandings and suspicions between the two world civilizations and, at the same time unify the world to work together for peace and harmony for all people and creatures here on earth.

Azyumardi perceives that the role of Indonesian Islam in international foreign policy has still a long way to go, but it is attainable provided that Indonesia improves its domestic situation, particularly in the fields of politics and economy. At the same time, we appeal to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs to advocate Muslim activities and disseminate accurate information to the world to promote the truth that Islam in Indonesia pioneers peace at all times.



## Introduction

# Indonesian Islam: A Chance to Solve Islam's Perception Problem in the Western World?

Norbert Eschborn

**T**his book is based on the outcomes of an international seminar entitled “A Portrait of Contemporary Indonesian Islam: Remapping and Responding to the Worldwide Social Agenda”, which took place in Jakarta in December 2004. The event was jointly organized by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation of Germany (KAS) in cooperation with the Center for Languages and Cultures (CLC) of the State Islamic University Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, KAS’ long term partner, nationally and internationally acknowledged for its academic achievements in Islam research and inter-religious dialogue. KAS, on the other hand, has been involved in development cooperation in Indonesia for

almost 40 years.

Since 2001, KAS and CLC have conducted international seminars on the following topics:

- "Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Indonesia Today" (September 2001);
- "Islam and the West, One Year After September 11, 2001: Obstacles and Solutions in Search of a New World Civilization" (September 2002);
- "Inter-cultural Dialogue for a New Global Equilibrium: Constraints and Possibilities" (October 2003).

All these events were followed by publications, supported by KAS and presenting the findings of more than 30 Indonesian and international experts from more than ten countries on the respective subjects. These books have been much requested and well received among experts and the interested public all over the world. The ongoing demand for these publications shows that the need for substantial and qualified information on topics related to Islam and the relationship between the Islamic and the Western world is still high. Therefore institutions such as CLC and KAS are being called upon to continue their joint efforts in order to promote an organized, systematic and goal-oriented dialogue between Islam and the West.

### **Why Dialogue with Islam?**

Development cooperation is largely equal to politics beyond cultural borders and depends upon building bridges between cultures and finding ways of intercultural understanding in order to enter into a dialogue about ethical, religious, and political differences and similarities with other cultures. The intercultural dialogue with Islamic societies has gained growing importance after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and in response to the criticism which since then has been expressed in Islamic societies about Western politics towards developing countries.

The relationship between the "West" and Islam has been suffering from mutual wrong perceptions of each other which support anti-Western and anti-Islamic feelings and attitudes. Each other's cultures are predominantly interpreted as a monolithic enemy and not, as it should be, an area of cultural diversity. For a long time the neighbor-

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like relationship between Western and Islamic countries has not been maintained resulting in increasing tensions on religious and cultural issues, such as the discussion about the ability of Islam to adjust its value system to the modern world. On the other hand, Islamic extremists could be observed for more than a decade doing everything to pursue a course of action of politicizing culture and religion in accordance with their belief that Islam is the solution to everything. Therefore, this long running process supports the creation of an un-reflected paradigm “Islam versus the West”.

Given this background the approach of cultural difference must be supplemented with the perspective of cooperative coexistence. Mutual interest in and understanding of each other’s culture, history, and social relations are a necessary condition for the dialogue of the West with Islamic states and societies. Such a dialogue should not only underline similarities between both cultures but also identify possible areas of conflict in order to mark the positive potential of religious, cultural, and political exchange between both regions which are very heterogeneous within them and, at the same time, share a common history. As tensions in the relationship between Western and Islamic cultures have been growing, any kind of dialogue, therefore, has not only to be intensified but must take into consideration the changing situation of world politics.

### **Why Does Indonesia Deserve More World Attention?**

Almost every political observer involved in examining the international profile of Indonesia since the beginning of the political reform process in 1998 must conclude that, despite the remarkable progresses which have been made since then and notwithstanding the usual setbacks, what has happened in Indonesia within such a short time concerning the transformation processes in politics and society is so extraordinary that one wonders, why all these developments have largely gone unnoticed by the majority of experts and politicians in the West and particularly by the international media; given the fact that Indonesia is the fourth most populous nation and the biggest Muslim country in the world. After all, Indonesia (and not Afghanistan as one might conclude from the international media coverage)

was also the first Muslim country to directly and democratically elect a president in 2004. With respect to the geo-strategic importance of Indonesia it deserves a lot more attention due to the successful implementation of two major elections under difficult logistical conditions. Instead, even a respected international weekly such the London-based *Economist* did not dedicate more than one title story to Indonesia on this occasion, i.e. one in *three* years. In the view of many political analysts inside Indonesia and abroad this shows a significant misperception and also a considerable misjudgment of the historic developments in the archipelago.

Admittedly, Indonesian politics has had plenty of other problems – mainly of a domestic nature – to contend with during the last six years. In the context of this change of focus of the policy and decision-makers the continuing task of sharpening the foreign policy profile of this country temporarily might not have been regarded as a primary objective nor received adequate attention in this period. Compared to its pre-1998 standing, Indonesia has, according to both domestic and foreign observers, still a lot of ground to regain before it can reclaim the position of sub-regional leader which it held for decades in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The official initiative in late 2004 to try to sound out whether Indonesia as the world's biggest Muslim country should become a permanent member of the United Nations' Security Council was laudable and looked for international support. The subdued reaction of the international community and the critical echo from meaningful members of the Indonesian academic community to this proposal, however, has proven that such ambitious projects, even when expressed by big countries, need to be substantiated by factors other than mere numbers and attributes.

### **Why is Indonesian Islam Special?**

The publishers of this book firmly believe that Indonesia can and should play a more important role at the international level again. They wish for Indonesia to once more become an influential voice in world politics. Therefore, everything this country can contribute towards making the world more peaceful and improve the understand-

ing between nations and cultures should be thoroughly analyzed and its comparative advantages be underlined in order to achieve this epochal objective. CLC and KAS think that Indonesian Islam is among the country's most important assets. Islam in Indonesia did not generally clash with Western modernity as introduced through colonialism from the 17th to the 20th century. Consequently, patterns of Islam in Indonesia are quite different than those from other areas.

As mentioned already before, since the 2004 polls Indonesia became the first Muslim country in the world to carry out direct presidential elections. The country, therefore, can be regarded as a champion of democracy - or at least democratic transition - for Muslim nations, although this must still be tested by the passage of time. It is natural that the West has viewed Indonesian Islam, at least before the Bali bombing, as being "Islam with a new face". In 1996, international media called Islam in Indonesia modernist, progressive, and a friend of the West and other cultures and perceived it as an example of successful harmony between Muslims and modernity.

As a result, Indonesia can probably reposition its role in the international world and become a pioneer and activist in the reconstruction of Islam, in line with the aims of the worldwide social agenda: democracy and human rights. This means that Indonesia can return to playing a significant role in the Islamic world, the United Nations, and Asia. Therefore, it is a necessary condition to further analyze and examine what makes Indonesian Islam so special compared to the varieties in other, predominantly Arab countries. Be that as it may, Anthony Reid's (University of California) theory that Indonesian Islam still remains a "grossly understudied world" appears to be true today ever more than before. This is exactly the reason why this publication is hoped to be a turning point in order to inspire studies and research on Indonesian Islam which should be disseminated throughout the world to remedy this unacceptable vacuum of knowledge.

This could also be helpful in the context of general perception problems from which Islam has been suffering not only since September 11, 2001, but already for a long time, particularly in the Western world. Therefore, at this point, a Western or to be more precise: European exemplary perspective of how Islam is being regarded today in

the biggest country of the European Union shall be presented here together with the factors that contribute to this perception problem.

### **Some Reasons for Islam's Perception Problem in the Western World: The German Example**

In the context of globalization the problem of Islamic immigration into Germany has reached new dimensions. Originating in poor, overpopulated regions a migration movement came into being which also brought members of certain political movements to Germany. Such groups participated in the preparation of the September 11 attacks. They were able, as Bassam Tibi wrote, to pursue their murderous plans under the protection of a free society. Himself a German Muslim of Syrian origin, Tibi, in view of these events, wrote a book in the German language the title of which translates "Islamic Immigration – the Failed Integration" which was published in 2002. The author argued in favor of systematic political and legal control of immigration in order to prevent the formation of so-called "parallel societies" which, in his opinion, represented a danger for the security and the inner peace of Western societies and their civilization.

The question of the compatibility of Islam and democracy gains, indeed, more and more importance in German domestic politics. After all, today 3.2 million Muslims live Germany, 0.5 million of whom have German citizenship. Up to now there are 2,500 mosques, prayer halls, and Koran schools where 70,000 Muslim students receive instruction. Many projects are currently blue printed for construction. Berlin alone plans four big mosques in the near future. For all these reasons, politicians and security agencies have concluded that an increase of conflicts around Islamic activities is highly likely in the future. "Islamism" in this context means the certainty of religious and cultural superiority and the reprehensiveness of Western values. Both are dressed in rhetoric of violence of which nobody knows when it will turn into naked aggression.

Undoubtedly, the overwhelming majority of Muslims in Germany do not have problems accepting the democratic rule of law in Germany. Substantial research resulted in the conviction that the majority of Muslims living in Germany support the society and political sys-



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tem of the country. However, there are plenty of Muslims in Germany who are dreaming of an Islamic theocracy between the rivers of the Rhine in the west and Oder in the east of Germany where the separation of worldly and spiritual powers will be overcome. According to analyses of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV, the German domestic intelligence agency) approximately 31,000 Muslims in Germany can be qualified as Islamist extremists who are willing to implement their idea of a society outside the limits of the constitution although the level of force they may use differs considerably among them.

Until now no critics of Islam in Germany have been killed yet. The murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh in early November 2004, though, might contribute to the increased interest of the police in such incidents. This provocative film director was killed in Amsterdam on 2 November. A 26-year-old Dutch Moroccan apparently emptied a magazine of bullets into his victim, knifed him as he lay dying and left a note stabbed on his body. The victim was an outspoken and offensive critic of Islam and was killed a few months after the screening on television of his film "Submission". The film, based on a screenplay by a Dutch parliamentarian, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, (herself a Muslim woman of Somali origin) features a Muslim woman telling a story of abuse within her marriage; she has text from the Koran condoning family violence written on her naked body. The Chairman of the German Central Councils of Muslims, astonishingly, conceded immediately that a murder such as van Gogh's could be possible in Germany at any time. He argued that this was due to the imperfectness of the individual and that there were Muslims everywhere who did not understand their religion. It is officially assumed that these misguided believers are especially receptive to the statements of radical Imams, a group for which the German media in 2004 has created a special term which made its way into the public debate on the issue: "hate preachers". By definition, a hate preacher is a foreigner who is committing seditious offences under criminal law by glossing over religious issues. Generally, it is implicated that such a person will be found in an Islamist environment.

The "black sheep" among the mosques are those places where

segregation for many years preached. Around 100 of the total of 2,500 mosques in Germany are under permanent surveillance of the domestic security agencies, predominantly in the big cities. The Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) assumes that there are still Islamist terror cells in the country but also makes clear that according to the agency's assessment, "99% of all members of the Muslim communities have nothing to do with terrorism". BKA supports intensive dialogue with Muslim communities all over the country to prevent their radicalization through hate preaching.

Yet, religion is only one aspect of Muslim integration in Germany. How many problems Muslims have with integration in general has recently been made clear by the Deputy Chairman of the Central Council of Muslims in Germany. He mentioned that "Muslims lack a theology of integration" and that there are no recommendations in the old scriptures on how to behave as a Muslim in a non-Muslim society. Nonetheless, integration requires people who are willing to integrate. But it is already the German constitution which leads to the first collisions of thought and opinion, e.g. on the separation of state and religion, the equality of men and women, and the outlawing of violence. Ideals on the Islamic side include a theocratic state. Also, teachers complain that Muslim citizens are not in touch with the German education system, which makes parents' bans on their children participating in sports, swimming, and sex education lessons quite common.

The two largest churches in Germany have recently expressed their positions in the upcoming conflicts. The present Chairman of the German Catholic Bishops' conference, Karl Cardinal Lehmann, Bishop of Mainz, underlined his conviction that Islam regards aggressive values as absolute. For this reason he doubted the value of dialogue with Islam unless, at first, a reciprocal acknowledgement of basic rights with other religions must be secured as otherwise no dialogue can be possible. Lehmann insinuated that some public statements by Islamic organizations in Germany were made only for tactical reasons in order to calm down the German public. In his opinion the current dialogue efforts lack a clear goal definition which is the reason why he regards them as mere gabbing. The cardinal supported Islamic religion lessons in German schools but under the provisions of German

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school laws. He also insisted that the history of the relationship between state and churches in Germany had developed over time, and both live in freedom of each other – a traditional element which must be preserved. Lehmann denied that a specific European Islam could be shaped within a short time and that such a religion could be “created” in the first place. The current Chairman of the Protestant Church in Germany, Bishop Wolfgang Huber, focuses on the willingness of all religions to critically deal with their aggressiveness and the black shadows in their history and is afraid that such a willingness is not very popular among Muslim organizations.

German critic of Islam, Hans-Peter Raddatz, foresees, that Islam will become a touchstone for Europe forcing it to a renaissance of its own culture. Over-dimensioned immigration of the past decades, in his eyes, has created an enormous integration backlog which cannot be overcome through pre-modern problem solutions such as terror and political murder. Raddatz stresses that only the one who practices tolerance can claim the right of tolerance for himself. The one who questions this basic consensus shows that he does not have a problem with violence. Raddatz is afraid of a historic period of violence in Europe should Muslims not fulfill the condition of freedom of religion: the separation of the law from the ritual. “Militant Islamism is only a tiny force in Europe”, wrote the daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, “yet it is dangerous, because many societies on this continent have elevated their defenselessness into a virtue.” Yet the risk is that rather than the intolerant learning tolerance, the tolerant become intolerant too.

### **The Role of Indonesian Islam in Future Dialogue**

In Indonesia the early confrontation of Islam with already established spiritual beliefs appears to have led to a considerable plurality of Islam interpretations within the dominant group of the population. Discrepancies between Muslims exist predominantly on the secularity of the state. Although the overwhelming majority of the population must be classified as Muslims, the underlying idea of the state (or, in German, *Staatsverständnis*) since independence has neither been a religious nor a secular *modus vivendi*. In the Indonesian case, there is

a special form of a religious, predominantly Muslim, although not Islamic state.

The long standing image of a flexible, automatically tolerant, even apolitical and peripheral Islam has been shattered by recent political developments. The politically disintegrative power of Islam was shown in the form of the separatist *Leitmotiv* to establish an Islamic state in Aceh. But there was also an integrative potential because there has been no split up of the territorial integrity of this country. That means, Indonesian Islam has lost nothing of its normative influence.

This normative influence of Indonesian Islam should be used in favor of the Muslim world as well. It can contribute to improving the image of Islam and to promote a better understanding between people of different ethnic and religious origins. Indonesian Islam can help us to better understand what the late Indonesian political activist Munir meant when he said:

“Extremism always makes you absolute and reject others. We can see it from Indonesian history: how many died in the name of different ways of thinking. Isolation of people and killing: It’s all for the sake of extremism. Life is like a war, where we fight in order to get a space in heaven. This is the problem.”

Many in our world share the vision that in the future human dignity will become the uniting basis of inter-human civility. The aspirations of the publishers and the co-authors of this book focus on the better mutual understanding between believers of all religions in this country, especially between Muslims and non-Muslims.

KAS is indebted, once again, to the Center for Languages and Cultures of the State Islamic University Syarif Hidayatullah and in particular to its director, Drs. Murni Djamal, M.A., and his team of editors and supporting staff for their invaluable work which made the completion of this project possible. These dedicated people, together with the KAS team of Lia Yulianingrum, Evy Kurniawati, Amalia Roselynn Satochid and Sarah Sabina Hasbar, stand for the truth of the proverb that enthusiasm is nothing more or less than faith in action.