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# Nahdlatul Ulama and Democratisation in Indonesia

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Master's Degree Programme in Human Rights  
and Democratisation in Asia-Pacific



**EIUC**

European Inter-University  
Centre for Human Rights  
and Democratisation

NAHDLATUL ULAMA AND  
DEMOCRATISATION IN INDONESIA

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
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MASTER OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRATISATION

BY

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## **Abstract**

*Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU), was formed in 1926 to promote the interest of traditional Muslims of Indonesia, is currently the largest Muslim organization in the world with about 40 million members. This dissertation is the study to find out whether the activities of this organization are helping to mainstream the marginalized and excluded communities in Indonesia or not. The activities of NU that help to mainstream marginalized Indonesians are understood in this research as the process of democratisation. In this study the ethnic minorities, women, non-Sunni Muslim minorities, and non-Muslim religious minorities are identified as excluded and marginalized communities of Indonesia.

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## **Understanding Democratisation In the Largest Muslim Country**

The compatibility between Islam and democracy is an important topic as Islam is the second largest religion in the world with one fourth of humanity following it. Many influential critics of Islam have argued that it is not compatible with democracy because its values oppresses women<sup>1</sup>(Warraq 1997), contradicts human rights<sup>2</sup> (Warraq 2004) and promotes violence<sup>3</sup>(Huntington 1996:209). Among the social scientists who believe in the contradiction between Islam and democracy Samuel P. Huntington is the most prominent. In his book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Huntington had written that “Islamic culture explains in large part the failure of democracy to emerge in much of the Muslim world”(Huntington 1996:29). This research was conducted to test such claims and see whether Islam and democracy were incompatible with one another or not. For this purpose *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU), the largest Muslim organization in Indonesia with about 40 million members was chosen as the subject of this research. The purpose of this research is to see whether NU - a community organization established by Islamic scholars - is supporting the process of democratisation in Indonesia or hindering it.

### **1.1. Relevance of the study**

There are many examples from around the world in which the majority community in diverse societies have used the mechanism of free election to legitimize their dominance over the marginalized minority. This study is about NU, a civil society organization in Indonesia which represents a majority and dominant community. The findings of this research would be relevant to find answers to the following questions that could challenge the arguments presented in this paragraph:

1.1.1. Do activities of NU support ethnic minorities in Indonesia?

1.1.2. A very large majority of NU leaders are religious Muslim males. Will such organization support reform that help women in Indonesia to have more rights?

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<sup>1</sup> “Islam is deeply anti-woman. Islam is the fundamental cause of the repression of Muslim women and remains the major obstacle to the evolution of their position. Islam has always considered women as creatures inferior in every way: physically, intellectually, and morally.” (Warraq 1997)

<sup>2</sup> “Indeed, in 1981 several Muslim countries issued their own Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights, which denies many of the individual freedoms guaranteed under UDHR, especially the right of any individual to change his or her religion as established in UDHR’s Article 18.”(Warraq 2004)

<sup>3</sup> “Some Westerners... have argued that the West does not have problems with Islam but only with violent Islamist extremists. Fourteen hundred years of history demonstrate otherwise.”(Huntington 1996: 209)

- 1.1.3. NU is a Sunni Muslim organization. Will this organization seek to defend the rights of minority non-Sunni Muslim sects in Indonesia?
- 1.1.4. NU is the largest Muslim organization in Indonesia formed to promote the interest of the traditional Muslims. Will this organization help non-Muslim religious minorities of Indonesia to have equal rights as the majority Sunni Muslims ?

## **1.2. Research objectives**

There are two research objectives:

- 1.2.1. The first objective of this research is to find out if NU is enhancing the process of democratisation in Indonesia by conducting activities that weaken the culture of social exclusion and enhances and spread the culture of tolerance and social inclusion.
- 1.2.2. The second objective of this research is find out if the activities of NU to support or hinder social inclusion process in Indonesia have created social factors that further support the social inclusion based democratisation in Indonesia.

## **1.3. Democratisation as an inclusive process: A conceptual framework**

Democratisation in this research is regarded as a process that reduces the practices of social exclusion and increases the practices of social inclusion. This process has been chosen because the hegemonic notion of democratisation simply means the replacement of authoritarian government with system that allows people to choose the government via free and fair elections. This dominant notion of democratisation is rejected in this research because the system of free and fair elections alone often empowers the majority and dominant community and excludes the weak and minority communities. This unfair system of socially excluding the weak and minority communities cannot be called democratisation but rather the process that helps the social inclusion of the excluded communities in a society is understood as the process of democratisation in this research. Along with the state the civil society also plays an important role to reduce social exclusion and increase social inclusion in society. NU is the largest civil society organization in Indonesia and this research is to see whether social inclusion process have increased through the activism of NU or not. The table below will provide rationale for why social inclusion was chosen and why the dominant understanding of election focused democratisation process is regarded as necessary but not sufficient for deeper democratisation.

Table 1.1: Types of state system

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE STATE SYSTEM	TYPE OF STATE SYSTEM		
	Authoritarian paradigm	Liberal Democracy (hegemonic western concept of democracy)	Democracy with local context
The system of decision making	Top to down approach	Free and fair election system.	Free and fair election system and people's participation via civil society space
Drivers of democratisation	Banned political parties, oppressed civil society, and International community	Elected representatives of the people and the state.	Civil society creates social and moral pressure on the state and the parliament for further democratisation.
Who gets empowered	The top ranking state officers	Elected representatives from majority communities (ethnic and religious majority ).	Elected representatives of the people, the state, and civil society. The civil society organizations speak for ethnic and religious minorities who are not proportionately represented in the parliament. Hence every community is empowered. The civil society plays an important role to empower the excluded minority and weak communities who are not ideally represented by the parliament.
Who gets socially excluded	Majority of the people who are not affiliated with the regime.	Minority community like ethnic and religious minorities, and women	Although the weak and minority communities are excluded in this system but the presence of vibrant civil society to speak on their behalf hence social exclusion of minority exists but the system of that maintains this exclusion is weakened.
Role of civil society for democratisation	Important support for the banned or oppressed political parties who are the prime force of democratisation.	Electoralism: Civil society's role is eclipsed by the emphasis on the role of elected representatives of the people.	Role of civil society is vital because...??
Understanding of the concept of democratisation	Change from authoritarian state system to a democratic one.	Government and the parliament chosen by free and fair elections.	Government and the parliament chosen by free and fair elections and the social inclusion of weak and minority communities in society.

#### 1.4. Democratisation and the limitations of electoralism

Huntington - who coined the term democratisation - had stated that "...the critical point in the process of democratization is the replacement of a government that was not chosen this way by one that is selected in a free, open, and fair election" (Huntington 1991:9). He highlighted the importance of elections as a key element in democratisation. He also stated that "Elections, open, free and fair, are the essence of democracy, the inescapable sine qua non" (Huntington1991: 9):

Government produced by elections may be inefficient, corrupt, shortsighted, irresponsible, dominated by special interests, and incapable of adopting policies demanded by public good. These qualities make such governments undesirable but they do not make them undemocratic. (Huntington 1991: 9-10)

Huntington's understanding of democracy showed that election was the essence of democracy. This election-focused understanding of democracy has been called "the fallacy of electoralism" by social scientist Terry Karl. "Electoralism" according to him is a fallacy in which elections are given priority over all other aspects of democracy (Clarke and Joe 2001:151). Electoralism-influenced analysis limits democracy to free and fair elections alone. Mere fair and free elections in the absence of other democratic values could prove to be unfair for marginalized and weak minority groups in a society. The "experience or democracy" in a society that is focused solely on the election and not on other sociocultural components of it have created a type of society in which "in which majorities have-often quietly, sometimes noisily-eroded separations of power, undermined human rights, and corrupted long-standing traditions of tolerance and fairness" (Zakaria 2003:106). This perspective of Zakaria (2003) reveal the fact that in an election-focused democracy the majority has sway over other communities. Such democracy often creates a society that practices social exclusion.

### **1.5. Need of civil society to counter social exclusion**

Civil society is understood to be a domain between family<sup>4</sup>, market and the state<sup>5</sup>. It is composed of self-regulating private groups<sup>6</sup> that have voluntary<sup>7</sup> and non-coercive<sup>8</sup> membership. This space is neither directly controlled by the state<sup>9</sup> nor by the market and

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<sup>4</sup> Fukuyama described civil society as 'the groups and associations that fall between the family and the state' (2000: 99).

<sup>5</sup> Cohen and Arato define civil society 'as a sphere of social interaction between economy and state, composed above all of the intimate sphere (especially the family), the sphere of associations (especially voluntary associations), social movements and forms of public communication' Cohen and Arato (1992:ix). Anthony Giddens too saw civil society as the 'realm of activity which lies between the state and the market, including the family, schools, community associations and non economic institutions' (Giddens 2001: 684).

<sup>6</sup> "... the largely self-generating and self-regulating world of private groups and institutions – family, business, advocacy, sports, locality, religion, ethnicity" (Selznick, 2002: 44).

<sup>7</sup> 'Civil Society is a cluster of institutions and associations strong enough to prevent tyranny, but which are, none the less, entered and left freely, rather than imposed by birth or sustained by awesome ritual. You can join (say) the Labour Party without slaughtering a sheep, in fact you would hardly be allowed to do such a thing, and you can leave it without incurring the death penalty for apostasy. (Gellner 1994: 103)

<sup>8</sup> "... all social groups that are or can be understood as voluntary and non-coercive, thus excepting only the family, whose members are not volunteers, and the state, which, even if its legitimacy rests on the consent of its members, wields coercive power over them" (Walzer, 2002: 35).

<sup>9</sup> "... social institutions such as markets and voluntary associations and a public sphere which are outside the direct control, in a full or in a mitigated sense, of the state" (Pérez-Díaz, 1993: 57).

yet it is influential<sup>10</sup>. Civil society has been regarded as “essential to vibrant democratic societies” (Giddens 2001: 684) and “critical to the success of democracy” (Fukuyama 2000: 99). Many social science scholars consider the study of civil society to be as important as the study of formal politics, a democratic election system and the state if the study is to better understand democracy and democratisation (Howell and Pearce 2000:75-88; Wood 1997). This focus on civil society has been more attractive to scholars who see its role as imperative in promoting social values of tolerance and justice (Diamond 1996; Schmitter and Karl 1996).

The study of civil society became important because in many of the election focused democratic countries the socially excluded communities like ethnic minorities, women, religious minorities and other vulnerable communities face discrimination and marginalization. The democratic system which was supposed to mainstream these excluded communities through the process of social inclusion could not take place in a meaningful way. The ethnic or religious majority community in many of these countries voted for political candidates who were mostly from their own community. This prevented the minorities from having access to parliament where the state policies are made and from the government that implemented these policies. The exclusion of minorities and excluded communities from the state system led to the creation of a state system where majority and dominant community and their interest were mostly represented. The interest of minorities and marginalized communities on the other hand were only superficially represented. The political parties on the other hand did not raise the issues of minorities and marginalized communities because such actions had the potential to anger the majority community during elections. Such calculative strategy by major political parties led to a highly conformist political system where minorities and marginalized communities faced continued social exclusion and discrimination. The issues of marginalized women, ethnic minorities and religious minorities could not be raised via the elected representatives of the people. Even when such issues were raised it was raised merely as a law without serious implementations. In such a context different citizens who felt that their elected representatives were not representing the issues of the socially excluded communities began to organize themselves to create social pressure on the government. It was not only the marginalized and minority communities who were active in such civil society-based activities but even people from the mainstreamed majority communities who felt uncomfortable with the existing social exclusion system prevalent in their society joined such movements.

The activism of civil society organizations were not just about pressurizing the state but also involved activities of educating masses about the need to treat the excluded community with respect and tolerance (Howell and Pearce 2000:75-88; Wood 1997). Civil society organizations played an important role in organizing interfaith dialogues, educating people about peace, and creating awareness among people about the importance of social inclusion (Diamond 1996; Schmitter and Karl 1996).

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<sup>10</sup> “... the ensemble of organized social activities, formal and informal, that are not directly grounded in family and kinship, economic production and exchange, or the state but are politically relevant” (Rueschemeyer, 1998: 18).

Similar to various nation-states where democracy came during the third wave of democratisation era (1974-1990s) Indonesia's democracy have not been able to effectively address the issues of social exclusion. Ethnic minorities, women, non-Sunni Muslim sects, and religious minorities are socially excluded communities of Indonesia have faced discrimination and social exclusion. There are various civil society organizations in Indonesia who are working for their social inclusion in society and NU is one of them. This research analyzed various activities of NU to understand whether its activities helped to create an Indonesian society that supports social inclusion of socially excluded communities or not.

## **1.6. Conceptual framework of social exclusion/inclusion in this research**

One of the fundamental values of democracy is the belief that every human being is equal and should enjoy an equal degree of dignity and have equal access to opportunities, power and rights. In the real world however there is an enormous incompatibility between these ideal beliefs of democracy and the implementation of these beliefs. There are cases in which people or a group of people are denied access to their rights due to their gender, ethnicity, religious beliefs, sex, sexual orientations, geographical locations, or economic status. Such practices have been called "social exclusion" by social scientists. Anthony Giddens defines social exclusions as "The outcome of multiple deprivations which prevent individuals or groups from participating fully in the economic, social and political life of the society in which they are located" (Giddens 2001:699). Similarly the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions define it as "the process through which individuals or groups are wholly or partially excluded from full participation in the society within which they live" (European foundation for the Improvement of Living and working Conditions cited in de Haan and Maxwell 1998:2). Kabeer explains it as mechanisms through which "particular groups of people" are denied "resources and recognition which would allow them to participate fully in the life of that society" (2000:9).

Social exclusion is dangerous to democracy because it denies individuals the chance to "participate in normatively expected social activities and to build meaningful social relations" which "reflects inadequate social cohesion" and "integration" (Silver n.d:4411). It contradicts the values of democracy because the practice of it curtails the right of the discriminated group to have "access to power and decision making bodies" and make them "feel powerless and unable to take control over the decisions that affect their day-to-day lives" (European commission quoted in Böhnke 2008:305). Social exclusion has also been explained as a "concoction (or blend) of multidimensional and mutually reinforcing processes of deprivation, associated with progressive dissociation from social milieu, resulting in the isolation of individuals and groups from mainstream of opportunities society has to offer" (Vleminckx and Berghman 2001:46). Social exclusion is against the values of democracy because it discriminates certain individual or groups and prevents them from having equal access to rights, power, resources, and dignity.

The reverse side of the social exclusion process is the process of social inclusion. "Social inclusion" is "based on the belief that we all fare better when no one is left to fall too far behind..."(Boushey et al. 2007). This process "simultaneously incorporates

multiple dimensions of well-being” because everyone would then have “the opportunity and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social, and cultural activities” (Boushey et al. 2007). A “socially inclusive society” is one where “all people feel valued, their differences are respected, and their basic needs are met so they can live in dignity” (Cappo quoted in World Bank 2013:256). Amartya Sen argues that “Inclusion is characterized by a society’s widely shared social experience and active participation, by a board equality of opportunities and life chances for individuals and by the achievement of a basic level of well-being for all citizens” (Sen 2001:74). In other words, social inclusion means a process “which ensures that those at risk of being left out gain opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social, and political and cultural life and enjoy a standard of well-being that is considered normal in the society in which they live” (European Commission quoted in World Bank 2013:225).

### **1.7. Operational definitions of democratisation and social exclusion/ inclusion in this research**

Operational definitions are constructed for this research to reduce ambivalence and vagueness about the three key concepts that are used in this research. The definitions of these concepts in this research are given below.

#### **1.7.1. Democratisation**

In this research democratisation means those activities that directly or indirectly weaken social exclusion, and enhances social inclusion. Democratisation enhances people’s access to fundamental democratic rights and access to social, political and economic resources that are guaranteed to people in a democratic society.

#### **1.7.2. Social exclusion/inclusion**

Social exclusion in this research means the exclusion of a community from having access to dignity and a secure livelihood and when a community is treated unfairly due to the legal provisions of a country. Social inclusion in this research means the removal of hindrances that is preventing a community from having access to dignity and secure livelihood and a process of removing those provisions from the law that treats a community unfairly. The table below explains what is meant by social exclusion and inclusion in this research:

Table 1.2: Meaning of social exclusion and social inclusion in this research

<b>Social Exclusion</b>		<b>Social inclusion</b>	
I.	Exclusion of a community from having access to dignity	I.	Removal of hindrances that is preventing a community from having access to dignity
II.	Exclusion of a community from having access to a secure livelihood	II.	Removal of hindrances that is preventing a community from having access to secure livelihood
III.	When a community is treated unfairly due to certain legal provisions of a country.	III.	Process to remove those legal provisions that treats contain community unfairly

### **1.8. Research method**

This research is focused on studying only one organization, hence the strategy for research is “case study”<sup>11</sup>. The design for this research is qualitative<sup>12</sup> design while the method of data collection is secondary analysis<sup>13</sup>. Only four types of secondary data were analyzed for this research. The four types of secondary data that were used in this research are as follows:

- Type one: Official documents of the NU were chosen for analysis because the guiding ideology of NU is formally expressed in these documents. The information in these documents helped the researcher to correlate the ideas in it with the democratisation process that the NU led. It should be noted however that only those official documents were used for the research that were available to the public. Secret documents were not be studied nor used for this research.
- Type two: Research based academic books and journal articles were analyzed in this research because they are reliable and creditable source of information.
- Type three: Many news and opinion articles have been published by newspapers and magazines about NU. They were used in this research
- Type four: Reports that were published by various organizations were used in this research.

### **1.8.1. Authenticity of the research findings**

The research interpreted NU according to what NU’s official documents and leaders said about it and its activities. This is because this research regards NU as what it officially says and does about itself rather than what it secretly says or does. Secret statements or activities of NU are not a part of this research because such information can neither be verified by the researcher for its authenticity nor does it represent the official NU which is the main focus of this research.

### **1.8.2. Scope of this research**

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<sup>11</sup> “Case studies are a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process or one or more individuals. Cases are bounded by the time and activity, and researcher collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time” (Stake 1995 in Creswell 2009:13).

<sup>12</sup> ‘Qualitative research designs begin with specific observations and build towards general patterns. Categories or dimensions of analysis emerge as a researcher comes to make sense of and organise patterns that exist in the empirical world which he is studying. He then begins to focus on testing and elucidating what appears to be emerging. The qualitative researcher this develops analytical, conceptual and categorical components of explanation from data itself. (Mouton and Marais 1988: 204)

<sup>13</sup> “Secondary analysis is a method for exploiting primary data gathered for other purposes to explore a different research issue...Secondary analysis also has considerable potential for creativity, since new variables and definitions can be derived by combining categories” (Glover 1996: 28)



The research attempted to identify whether NU was involved in the social exclusion or inclusion of ethnic minorities, women and religious minorities of Indonesia. The study focused on the role of NU, a civil society organization rather than formal political parties and the state in the social inclusion based democratisation process.

### **1.8.3. Limitation of the study**

This research is focused on the study of only one civil society organization and its contribution to the democratisation process in Indonesia. The contribution made by other civil society organizations and political parties were not studied by this research in detail. Another limitation of this research is that it is focused on studying only three socially excluded groups (i) ethnic minorities, (2) religious minorities, and (3) women and did not study any other socially excluded social communities besides them. Another limitation of this research is that since it is based on the study of secondary data, the researcher could not interview stakeholders of NU.

### **1.8.4. Ethical consideration**

This research was built on information contained in various items of scholarly literature, hence the researcher has acknowledged all the sources of information. No information contained in other literature was manipulated or misused by the researcher. The researcher did and will not use this research for any objectives other than the ones that are mentioned in “The Objective of this research”(Chapter I:1.2) section of this dissertation.

## **1.9. Overview of dissertation**

Chapter II of this dissertation explains what NU is, why was it formed and its contribution to the nationalist movement during the colonial period. The chapter also explains the political participation of NU in post-independence state building process. The conclusion of this chapter explains why NU left party politics and transformed itself into a civil society organization that constantly caused friction between itself and the authoritarian state. The chapter concludes by showing the contribution of NU in fighting against the dictatorial state and bringing democracy in Indonesia. The next chapter shows how NU helped the social inclusion of ethnic minorities, women and religious minorities of Indonesia. Chapter IV explains how NU helped in the creation of various social factors that promote social inclusion based democratisation in Indonesia. Chapter V explains the conclusion argument of this dissertation.

## Chapter II

# Understanding the Social Evolution of NU

Despite having an official identity as an organization, NU is more like a cultural community of traditionalist Muslims who follow the distinctive school of mystical Sufism within the Sunni branch of Islam. NU members are loyal not to the organization in itself but rather to the culture that it represents. The organizational hierarchy within NU finds its authority, legitimacy, and loyalty not from the official position in itself but rather from what these positions mean within the Sufi cultural beliefs that NU members adhere to. This chapter set out to explain why the Sufi culture that binds the traditionalist Muslims to NU is what NU essentially is, rather than seeing it as a mere organization. Understanding NU as a cultural organization is important because the culture that is in the foundation and heart of NU is what makes it capable of conducting various informal programs that help to spread and shape the process of democratisation in Indonesia. NU was born during the colonial era when highly organized *Muhammadiyah*, the modernist Muslim organization theologically challenged the traditional Islamic practices of Sufi Muslims. The Sufis met this challenge by forming NU. NU later played an important part in resisting Dutch colonization. The chapter also deals with the involvement of NU in post-independence Indonesia in which it first participated as a political party and then as a civil society. The transformation of NU from political party into the civil society entity that is dealt in this chapter is important for this research because it was during this avatar of NU that it boldly confronted the authoritarian regime and formed many organizations to promote tolerance, empowerment, and reform, whose activities in the late 1990s and post 1990 Indonesia are evidences used in chapter III of this dissertation. This chapter is thus a prequel to the preceding chapter. It depicts the tolerant culture that sustains NU while the next chapter shows how this culture is expressed in the social inclusion process of Indonesia.

### 2.1. Mystical Sufis bring Islam to Indonesia

Indonesia has the highest number of Muslims in the world. Among 200 million Indonesians, 87 percent practice Islam (van Doorn-Harder 2004:644). The religion of Islam was brought to Indonesia in two major waves. The introduction of Islam to Indonesia by Arab traders in the eighth century is considered as the first wave (Wanandi 2002: 105). In the second wave, Indian Muslim traders and mystics from the Gujrat region of India again brought Islam to Indonesia in the twelfth century (Wanandi 2002: 105). The philosophy of Islam that came “from India was suffused with elements of Sufism and thus did not have much discontinuity with Hindu-Buddhist tradition existent on Sumatra and Java” (Bush 2009: 25). This Sufi version of Islam laid down a set of values, tolerance and compassion that established a foundation for a socially inclusive Islam to flourish in Indonesia. NU is an Islamic organization that is rooted in this version of Islam and is based on these Sufi traditions even today.

By the thirteenth century the Aceh region of the north western tip of Sumatra became the most Islamized area of Indonesia. Along with Arabian and Indian missionaries and traders the Sufi Muslims of Aceh also played an important role in taking

Islam to various islands of Indonesia<sup>14</sup> (Ricklefs 2003). A major victory for Islam in Indonesia came in 1525 when the king of Majapahit and influential Hindu kingdom of Java converted to Islam (van Doorn-Harder 2004:645; Bush 2009: 25). Islam in Indonesia “has a long tradition of being more tolerant than the Middle East” (Landler 2009):

As Islam began to spread in the Middle East in the 7th century and later elsewhere, it often did so through violent conquest. In contrast, Islam came peacefully to this part of Southeast Asia in the 13th century via traders from India, and Indonesians often layered its beliefs atop existing Buddhist or Hindu practices. (Landler 2009)

By the seventeenth century Islam became the dominant religion in Java and other major islands of Indonesia (van Doorn-Harder 2004:645; Bush 2009: 25).

## **2.2. Islam in Indonesia during the Dutch rule**

The rich natural resources and rich varieties of spices of South East Asia attracted not just Arab and Indian traders but also the Europeans (van Doorn-Harder 2004:645). The Europeans entered the region as traders and began to colonize it. In 1511, the Muslim majority Melaka (current day Malaysia) became a Portuguese colony. In 1570, the Muslim majority country of what today is The Philippines became a colony of Spain. Like its neighbors, the present day Indonesia became the colony of the Dutch in the seventeenth century.

In order to strengthen their grip on their colony, the Dutch colonizers had taken help from various social science scholars for a better understanding of Indonesian society. Among these social scientists Snouck Hurgronje - who was also the internal affair advisor to the colonial Dutch regime - became the most useful for the Dutch. Hurgronje explained to the regime that a very large percentage of Indonesian people, despite having ethnic and linguistic differences, were socially united under the religion of Islam. He claimed the religion of Islam claimed had a powerful positive and negative side for the Dutch rule. From one angle the religion of Islam was positive force for the Dutch because it could create social harmony and stability between different ethnic communities in Indonesia and thus ease the colonial governance. On the other hand the political side of Islam was revolutionary and had potential to mobilize the colonized people against colonizers. To Hurgronje the purely religious aspect of Islam was an asset while the political side of it was a danger. The Dutch regime as per Hurgronje’s logic encouraged the religious aspect of Islam and brutally oppressed the political side of it (Benda 1958:20-29; Bush 2009: 26).

### **2.2.1. Islamic and nationalist resistance against the Dutch**

Indonesia was not an easy place for the Dutch to rule as since 1628 they had faced various sporadic armed insurrections against them. Although they had managed to subdue almost all these movements in Indonesia, in early 1900 a different kind of highly

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<sup>14</sup> It has been argued that “ Sufi works written in early seventeenth-century Aceh spread across the archipelago” (Ricklefs 2003).

organized and ideologically well-structured resistance movement against them emerged. This resistance movement was the Indonesian nationalist movement that was led by highly educated Indonesians who were influenced by modern secular revolutionary and democratic ideologies. The only other ideological group within the resistance movement that could match their organized capacity and effectiveness were the anti-colonial Muslim activists (Benda 1958: 57; Bush 2009: 26).

Like the nationalist activists, the anti-colonial Muslim activists were products of modern western education system and like the nationalists they too were committed to emancipating Indonesia from the Dutch colonization. These two pro-independence factions however disagreed on the sociopolitical system of the future independent Indonesia. The nationalists for example sought to create a secular and modern Indonesia, the anti-colonial Muslim activists sought to create a theocratic Indonesia that was governed according to Islamic laws (Bush 2009: 26). The anti-colonial Muslim activists, despite their ideological clarity, were however divided between modernists and traditionalists groups. This division weakened them and paved the way for the nationalists to be the dominant force for the independence movement of Indonesia (Bush 2009: 26).

### **2.2.2. Birth of the *Muhammadiyah* movement and its impact on traditionalist Islam**

In the early twentieth century, the educated Indonesian Muslims were alarmed by the high rate of conversion of Muslims to Christianity (Hilmy 2014:185). As a reaction, various Muslim organizations were formed. Some of these organizations developed a simplistic conspiracy theory to explain why such conversions were taking place. Serious and mature scholars however began an in-depth introspection and identified internal weakness within the Indonesian Muslims as the main reason behind the success of Christian missionaries in attracting large numbers of Muslims. The reason for this internal weakness among Muslims according to them was the extensive influence of pre Islamic Indonesian traditions on Islam that was practiced in Indonesia. The Sunni Indonesian Muslim scholars who held such beliefs were called modernist Muslims.

The Modernist Muslims of Indonesia were inspired by the Middle Eastern version of Islam that were developed by Egypt's Muhammad "Abduh", his disciple Rashid Rida, "South Asia's Maulana Maududi" and by "the Wahhabi Salafism of Saudi Arabia" (Barton 2014:296). In the initial period the modernists were mostly inspired by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792) of Saudi Arabia. Wahhab believed in a type of theological interpretation of Islam that sought "to rid Islam of what he saw as corruption and laxity, including many of the Sufi practices and elements of 'popular Islam' that had become integrated into the religion over the years" (Bush 2009: 31). During the twentieth century a large number of Indonesian Islamic scholars who studied Islamic theology in the Middle East were influenced by Wahhab's interpretation of Islam (Bush 2009: 32). These modernist scholars - when they returned to Indonesia - formed various organizations to spread the Middle Eastern version of Islam. One of the major modernist organizations that the modernists formed was the *Muhammadiyah*. *Muhammadiyah* established in November 1912 by K.H. Achmad Dahlan (1868-1923) (Bush 2009: 32). From its start, this movement took upon itself the task of "purifying Islam from indigenous and Sufi practices" (van Doorn-Harder 2004:645).

### 2.2.3. The Sufi traditions and the inception of *Nahdlatul Ulama*

Sufi traditions of Islam that are labeled as “Traditional” Islam by western scholars was “the predominant expression of Islam in Indonesia...especially on the island of Java” (Bush 2009: 29). It was the Sufis who were responsible for “relatively peaceful infiltration” of Islam in “Indonesia” (Bush 2009: 29). The Sufi led project of Islamization of this archipelago “was achieved in many instances by integrating pre-existing beliefs and customs rather than wiping them out” (Bush 2009: 29). This traditional Islam in Indonesia is structured around *Kiai*, the scholar of Islam. *Kiais* who are “often medium-sized landowners” had organized and operated traditional Islamic boarding schools called *pesantren* where the children of farmers from the “surrounding communities” come to be “*santri*, or students in the *pesantren*” (Bush 2009: 30). The *pesantren* are often called the “backbone of traditional Islam” for three reasons (Bush 2009:30). The first reason is because the “knowledge of classical texts is passed from generation to generation” in *pesantren*, thus making it an important center of transformation of traditions. The second reason is because it constructs the “culture of unquestioning obedience of *santri* for *kiai*” which is “daily” reinforced (Bush 2009: 30). The third reason is because it is the place where many ideas of “Sufism” and many aspects of mysticisms” that “evolved in local cultural context over the centuries” in Indonesia are taught (Bush 2009: 30).

The differences between the traditionalists and *Muhammadiyah* were however not just limited to the dispute in theological interpretations alone. The traditionalists were mostly rural based agriculture related population while the modernists were professionals and intellectuals from urban and coastal areas (Bush 2009: 33). Until 1910, their social and theological differences were not bitter and often were dealt “quite amicably” (Bush 2009: 33). In the early 1920s however, the “modernists sharpened their criticism of the *kiai*” and penetrated deeper into central and eastern Java, the heartland of traditionalist school (Bush 2009: 33). The arrival of the *Muhammadiyah* into the traditionalist domain and the weakening of the traditional authority of the *kiai* was seen by rural elites as a threat to their traditional authority. Another threat the encroaching *Muhammadiyah* imposed was the attraction of middle class and rural elites to those who were the “financial base” of the traditionalist Muslim traditions (Bush 2009:33). The 1920s was also a period when the traditionalists recognized that they were being pushed towards the edge by the ever growing forces of the mammoth *Muhammadiyah* movement.

By the early 1920s, *Muhammadiyah* became a prominent Muslim organization capable of organizing various national level programs. In 1922, *Muhammadiyah* along with other modernists and traditionalist Muslims came together to organize the first *Al-Islam* Congress. One of the goals of the congress was to unify Indonesian Muslims. Despite the excellent intentions in organizing this event the theological disputes between the *Muhammadiyah* and the traditionalists split Muslim unity even further apart. KH Abdul Wahab Chasbullah, and KH Asnawi the two prominent traditionalist leaders who had participated in the congress had to leave it in the middle of the program after they felt insulted by modernist slanders (Bush 2009: 34). The offended traditionalists even boycotted the second *Al-Islam* Congress of 1923. However in the 1924 *Al-Islam* Congress, the majority of the modernist organizations including the *Muhammadiyah* saw the danger of marginalizing the traditionalists and thus invited them again to join the

congress. To further relieve the tension the *Muhammadiyah* articulated to the traditionalists that they were neither Wahhabis whom the traditionalists disliked nor were they against holding dialogues with the traditionalists (Bush 2009: 34). This mature move of the modernists once again brought the traditionalists to the congress.

The thinning of theological cleavages between the traditionalists and modernists however were rudely interrupted by political events in Saudi Arabia. King Ibn Saud, who came to power in 1925, had introduced Wahhabism-based interpretation of Islam as the official religion of the kingdom (Bush 2009: 34). The traditionalists in Indonesia were disturbed by this as the state-backed *Wahhabi* zealots in the Saudi Arabia were demolishing Sufi and traditionalist shrines and graveyards that the traditionalists of Indonesia revered. They believed that the only way to prevent the destruction of traditional sacred sites in Saudi Arabia was by asking the king of Saudi Arabia to protect these sites. To make this request they thought of forming a delegation team. Coincidentally the Saudi king had also invited all the established Muslim organizations from all the countries to participate in the 1926 World Islamic Congress, which was to be hosted by the king in the holy city of Mecca. The traditionalists of Indonesia wanted to be part of the Indonesian Muslim delegation team participating in this congress but only the *Muhammadiyah* dominated *Al-Islam* Congress of Indonesia had the authority to select this delegation team. The *Muhammadiyah* formed a delegation team for the World Islamic Congress that not only excluded the traditionalists but also rejected their plea to ask the Saudi king to preserve the traditional sites of Islam (Bush 2009: 34). The excluded traditionalists decided to form their own delegation team to convey their message to the Saudi king. KH Abdul Wahab Chasbullah (1888-1971), a prominent traditionalist scholar formed a committee called the *Komite Hijaz* to represent traditionalists in the World Islamic Congress. This delegation committee in order to participate in the World Islamic Congress needed to represent a formal Islamic organization. Since traditionalists had no such formal organizations to represent them they formed one: *Nahdlatul Ulama* (Bush 2009: 35-36; Barton 2014:298).

#### **2.2.4. The rise of *Nahdlatul Ulama***

*Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) or The Revival of the Religious Scholars was established by various religious scholars (*ulama*) on January 31, 1926. After its formation it shifted its focus from the anti-traditionalist environment of Saudi Arabia to their home country of Indonesia where the modernist *Muhammadiyah* movement was threatening the very foundation of their traditions. NU's call to preserve the traditional Islamic scholarly traditions that were nurtured in *pesantren* found widespread support among the people of rural Java and its membership also grew rapidly (Fuad 2004:404). In eastern Java they became an instrumental organization to keep at bay the young, passionate, highly committed, highly educated and highly organized missionaries of the *Muhammadiyah* movement who were spreading modernist Islamic theology that rejected indigenous and Sufi influence on the Islam (Wanandi 2002:106; Barton 2014:298).

#### **2.2.5. Organizational structure of *Nahdlatul Ulama***

NU followed the Dutch colonial division system to structure their organization. They had provincial and district office which had locally elected chairman. This elected chairman needed the approval of the central religious and administrative council of the NU to be officially functional. The Executive Board of NU (PBNU) was composed of the Supreme Council (*Syuriah*), the Administrative Council (*Tanfidziyah*) and the Advisory Council (*Mustasyar*). The *Syuriah*, consisted of 20 *kiai*, became the “highest” and “most authoritative” body that was “responsible for formulating policy” and most importantly for having the “final say in all major decisions” of NU (Bush 2009: 35). The *Tanfidziyah* with 19 members was an administrative group for the daily operation of NU. They needed “approval” of *Syuriah* in all important decisions. The respected Islamic scholars who advised the executive body of NU were kept in the *Mustasyar* section of NU (Bush 2009: 35).

### **2.2.6. Muhammadiyah-NU rapprochement**

During the 1930s both NU and *Muhammadiyah* despite their theological differences managed to rise above it and work with each other. This improvement in relations was primarily caused by four main factors (Benda 1958:51-76). The first major cause of this was the decline of Wahhabism in Indonesia. This decline brought these two organizations together because NU that despised Wahhabism had always suspected the *Muhammadiyah* to be an adherent of it. During the mid-1920s and during the 1930s *Muhammadiyah* had publically denied that it was a Wahhabi organization. When the mainstream modernist organization like *Muhammadiyah* distanced itself from the Wahhabis then the Wahhabism shrank in Indonesia, thus improving relationship between NU and *Muhammadiyah*. The second reason for the improvement of the relationship was that the Dutch had ended the state sanctioned tradition of favoring the traditionalists over the modernists. This tradition which had marginalized the modernists so far had fueled their resentment against the traditionalists who were favored by the Dutch. The end of this discriminatory system indirectly helped in ending the prevalent resentment modernists had against the traditionalists. The third factor that brought them together was the rise of a new type of highly organized Islamic movement that sought to merge Islam, socialism and ethno-nationalism. Such organizations opposed both of NU and *Muhammadiyah* and were encroaching into their social base. In this situation, both organizations found cooperation with each other to protect their social base more important and rational than to fight with each other and lose one’s base to the new type of Islamic movement. The fourth cause of it was the threat posed to them both by the nationalist movement. The nationalist movement was united, organized, widespread and attracted large number of youths to it. This movement however was secular in their outlook and hence both NU and *Muhammadiyah* felt it. The four above mentioned factors improved the relationship between NU and *Muhammadiyah* to such an extent that by 1937 the leaders of both organizations came together to work under a single banner of the Supreme Council of Indonesian Muslims (MIAI) (Fealy 1998:39). The Japanese occupation of Indonesia in 1942 further pushed them closer (Benda 1958:142).

In 1943 the Japanese colonial officers replaced MIAI with *Masyumi*. *Masyumi*’s “single purpose was” of “strengthening the unity of all Islamic organizations” and “aiding” Japan in “Greater East Asia” (Benda 1958 :150). KH Hasyim Asyari of NU

became the chair of this *Masyumi* while the eight member based powerful executive board of it had four members from NU and four from *Muhammadiyah* (Bush 2009: 42). The Japanese thought that they were using *Masyumi* for their own interest but KH Hasyim believed that NU was “using the infrastructure of *Masyumi* to strengthen” the position of the Indonesian Muslims (Bush 2009: 42). The *Masyumi* continued to exist even after the end of World War II. After the Japanese left Indonesia this organization became an important force in resisting the Dutch who were reentering Indonesia to recolonize it. To fight the Dutch, in 1945 the NU issued the Jihad Resolution that declared “the war against the Dutch to be a holy war” (Bush 42). The armed front of NU called the *Hisbullah* was an important guerilla organization that militarily confronted the Dutch army (Bush 2009:42).

### **2.3. NU and state formation after the independence**

On August 17, 1945 Indonesia gained its independence. Since then Indonesia has gone through three different political eras: (i) the Old Order, the New Order, and the Era of *Reformasi*. The Old Order era began immediately after the independence of Indonesia. Most of the post-independence political forces sought to build a multiparty system-based democracy in Indonesia. This effort of theirs however was seriously challenged by the widespread social disturbance caused by various ethnic and secessionist movements (Vasil 1997:43). President Sukarno, in order to control the situation took support from General Nasution and established a state ideology called Guided Democracy (McCormack 1999:52). From the power gained from this new system, Sukarno dissolved the constituent assembly (Vasil 1997:43), declared himself as “President for Life”, sought to balance the political forces of military with that of the Communist Party of Indonesia (Liddle 1996), sought to create a unified Indonesian identity by promoting Bahasa Indonesian as the single national language (Kingsbury 2002), and pushed the concept of “*Bhineka Tunggal Ika*” (unity in diversity) to socially unite Indonesia (Nguyen 2003:2). This ideology of Guided Democracy (1959 – 1965) was based on concentrating state power to the president, dismantling the legislative body, and the oppression of political dissent. The leadership of NU despite the divisions of opinion among its Islam scholars decided to support Sukarno’s Guided Democracy. Idham Chalid and KH Abdul Wahab Chasbullah, two prominent NU leaders were able to convince a majority of the leadership to support Sukarno’s Guided Democracy by arguing that any opposition to Sukarno’s regime could mean the not only the exclusion of NU from state and politics but also that thousands of its *pesantren* would be deprived from the much needed state funding (Bush 2009: 52). They had also warned that to go against the President Sukarno would mean endangering the fate of thousands of NU members who were serving as civil servants in various organs of the state (Fealy 1998:189).

#### **2.3.1. Involvement of NU in democratic process via *Masyumi***

After the agreement was reached between senior NU and *Muhammadiyah* leaders the *Masyumi* became a political party within two months of Indonesia’s independence. The energy of these two mammoth organizations greatly contributed to the rapid expansion of the political party (Kahin 1952:157). While the technocrats from *Muhammadiyah*



efficiently managed the party organizations, the expansion of the party in grassroots were done by NU members (Feith 1962:24-25). NU and *Muhammadiyah* both understood the need and importance of the other (Feith 1962:24-25; Bush 2009:44). This arrangement however proved to be uncomfortable for the NU members within *Masyumi* because despite their hand work at the grassroots level the technocrats of the *Muhammadiyah* were in control of the party apparatus (Bush 2009:44). Even the senior NU members within the party felt that they were given merely the ceremonial positions (Bush 2009:44). NU affiliates within *Masyumi* also felt that the “advice” given by senior NU scholars within the party was ignored by the *Muhammadiyah* members of *Masyumi* (Bush 2009: 48). In 1950 the marginalized NU decided to split from *Masyumi* (Fealy 1998:83). A year later they formed the Advisory Council for Politics (*Majelis Pertimbangan Politik*) that made the strategy to transform NU into a political party (Fealy 1998).

### **2.3.2. NU joins democratic system as an independent political party**

In 1954, NU officially became a political party. During this period their political campaigns were to “firmly establish the Shari’a according to one of the four schools of law” (Madinier and Feillard 1999:15 quoted in Bush 2009: 50). During the 1955 election campaign NU and *Masyumi* both were saying “whoever chooses our party (NU or *Masyumi*) will go to heaven, and whoever chooses the other party (NU or *Masyumi*) will go to hell” (Feith 1962:233-245). Later on however, in order to “strengthen the distinction between themselves and *Masyumi*” NU “changed their rhetoric to one of greater tolerance and acceptance” (Bush 2009: 51). This adaptation of a moderate face was correlational with their campaign of portraying *Masyumi* as a “hardline” Islamic party (Bush 2009: 51).

### **2.3.3 NU becomes civil society by adopting the resolution *Khittah 26***

In September 1965 General Suharto was able to overthrow Sukarno’s regime. This military coup d’état established Suharto as the new president of Indonesia. The new regime passed laws that made it illegal to criticize or insult the president, his family, government policies and the five principles of Pancasila philosophy (Kingsbury 2002:12). Those who spoke against the state faced constant danger of being tried for subversion (Kingsbury 2002:193). This authoritarian era was called “The New Order”.

President Suharto, in order to have more sway over the existing political parties, sought to reduce their number and strength by merging them. As per this plan different political parties were forced to merge to form large parties. In 1973 as per Suharto’s plan NU, *Parmusi*, PSII and *Perti* the four Muslim political parties merged to form the United Development Party (PPP). Similarly, five major non-Muslim parties fused to form Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI). These merges reduced the number of political parties in Indonesia to just three: PPP, PDI and Golkar<sup>15</sup> (Bush 2009: 66). NU’s irreconcilable ideological difference with the rest of the PPP leadership (Marijan 1992:112), reduction of the number of NU candidates by the non-NU members of PPP (Haidar 1998:203-204), and the marginalization and patronization of NU’s *ulama* dominated Advisory Council (*Majelis Syuro*) within PPP led to the split of NU from PPP (Ida 1996:54; Bush 2009:

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<sup>15</sup> Golkar party was loyal to President Suharto.

67). Another reason for the split was that the NU affiliated politicians within PPP were becoming more powerful than *ulama* itself (Bush 2009: 69). This was because in order to weaken the leadership of Islamic scholars, the Suharto regime had deliberately worked to “shift government resources at village level from the *ulama* to the local politicians” (Bush 2009: 69). This regime engineered development of bipolar power centers within NU almost split them between powerful NU politicians and religious scholars of NU. Due to all the above factors NU leadership saw the danger of politics to it. In December 1984, NU’s 27<sup>th</sup> congress (*muktamar*) in Situbondo regency announced that NU would return to the guidelines of 1926 (Bush 2009: 75). The guidelines of 1926 refer to a set of rules that were formulated for NU by founders of NU. The guideline contains various advices on leading and organizing NU. One of the advices in the guidelines was about the need for NU to avoid politics. The adaptation of this guideline in 1984 meant that NU could no longer be a political party.

#### **2.3.4. NU’s contribution to The Era of Reformasi (1998 –current)**

For the authoritarian state NU was a difficult organization to tame. In 1973, NU had launched a huge protest demonstrations against the government to pass a bill that sought to put ceilings on polygamy and reduce the authority of Islamic courts on marriage (Bush 2009: 68). In 1980, NU made a brave but dangerous decision of not to issue a “request” to President Suharto “to serve another five years as president” of Indonesia (Bush 2009: 68). This request was a mandatory ritual that was “expected of all social and political organizations” in Indonesia during that time (Bush 2009: 68). Such moves to irk the state proved to be detrimental to NU because the regime reacted to it by reducing state funds for *pesantren* and other programs that sustained cultural and economic apparatus of the NU (Bush 2009: 68).

#### **2.4. Chapter conclusion**

Abdurrahman Wahid became the leader of NU during the 1990s. Under his leadership the organization became “increasingly critical of government” (Bush 2009: 88). Within the NU he “created a network of activists and intellectuals” who were “committed to raising the political awareness of ordinary Indonesians” (Bush 2009: 88). In rural areas NU adopted more social justice based agendas. NU in rural areas began advocating “on behalf of small farmers and villagers who were being exploited by local government” (Bush 2009: 88). The 1990s was a period when “NU was able to broaden the ‘political space’ available to civil society in the face of state attempts to restrict it, and was successful in constructing in an indirect way” to counter this hegemony (Bush 2009: 91).

In May 28, 1998 the Suharto regime and the so called New Order state system that it represented came to an end following mass scale demonstration throughout Indonesia. Constitutional provisions that contradicted core democratic values were scrapped in October 1999 (Indrayana 2008:143). In June 7, 1999 the first democratic election since the 1965 coup was held (Evans 2003: 21). In October, 1999, the elected National Assembly of Indonesia elected Abdurrahman Wahid as the first democratically elected president of Indonesia after the New Order (Fawthrop 2010). Before being elected as president, Wahid was the elected chairman of NU and had played a “critical role” in mobilizing NU members “behind the “Reformasi” movement” that eventually

had led to “the downfall of Suharto” (Fawthrop 2010). The civil society watchdog role that NU adopted made it involved in activities that spoke for the inclusion of women and minorities in Indonesian society. The following chapter explains these social inclusion based activities of NU.

## **NU and Social Inclusion**

This chapter endeavors to investigate whether NU is reducing social exclusion of the marginalized communities in Indonesia and helping the social inclusion process or not. Social inclusion is understood in this research as either of these concepts or combination of any of them or all of them (see chapter I:1.7):

1. Removal of hindrances that is preventing a community from having access to dignity
2. Removal of hindrances that is preventing a community from having access to secure livelihood
3. Process to remove those legal provisions that treats contain community unfairly

Social inclusion process removes the social injustices brought to society by the practice of social exclusion. Social exclusion is understood in this research as either of these concepts or combination of any of them or all of them (see chapter I:1.7):

1. Exclusion of a community from having access to dignity
2. Exclusion of a community from having access to a secure livelihood
3. When a community is treated unfairly due to certain legal provisions of a country.

This chapter explains how NU supports the social inclusion of ethnic minorities (ethnic Papuans of Indonesia and Indonesian Chinese), women, and religious minorities (Shiites, Ahmadis and non-Muslims) of Indonesia.

### **3.1. NU and inclusion of ethnic minorities**

Indonesia is multiethnic country with over 300 ethnic groups and 700 languages (Nanda 2000: 90). Some ethnic communities like the Papua and Indonesian Chinese feel socially excluded. NU has played an important role in reducing this process of exclusion and conducting activities that are socially inclusive.

#### **3.1.1 Dignity for Papua's Indonesian**

NU have helped the social inclusion of the socially excluded Papuan people by holding dialogues with them, respecting their unique identity, speaking for their human rights and pressurizing the government to take their grievances seriously. Erstwhile Indonesian president and NU's chairman Abdurrahman Wahid initiated serious dialogue with rebels in Papua (erstwhile Irian Jaya) while he was president. He talked "frankly about the past abuses" by the Indonesian state and "went a long way to convince the leaders of Irian Jaya that he was serious about making changes" (Barton 2006: 293). It was under his

presidency that he fulfilled the demand of the Papuan people to rename their province as “Papua” instead of Irian Jaya (Barton 2006: 293). NU’s social inclusion based activities in Papua are however not limited to these symbolic gestures. In October 2011, KH Said Aqil Siroj, general chairman of the Central Board of NU asked the government to handle the events in Papua “with dignity” (KH Said Aqil Siroj quoted in NU Online 2011). He also said that the Papuan people of Indonesia “should be drawn into conversation” and “their problems addressed through the cultural, humane approach”. His statements came as a reaction to the report that in October 2011 people who attended the meeting of a secessionist organization called Papua People’s Congress, were arrested while some others were found dead (NU Online 2011). On behalf of NU he made it clear that “NU ...deeply deplore the continued application of the security approach or violent methods in Papua, including the handling of the Third Papua’s Congress” (NU Online 2011). In November 2011 KH Said Aqil Siroj also urged that the “central government” and “the president” to be physically present in Papua so that they would have a better understanding of the grievances of Papua’s people (NU Online 2011). KH Said Aqil Siroj further added that “If the president decides to really go there, I will accompany him” (NU Online 2011).

### **3.1.2. Social inclusion of Indonesian Chinese minority**

NU has played an important role for the social inclusion of the Indonesian Chinese community in Indonesia. NU members protected them during violent riots and even helped them to open an NGO for the protection of their human rights. It should be noted that it was during the Presidency of Abdurrahman Wahid that the ban on Chinese religion and culture was lifted thus giving them cultural rights. It was a major step towards their social inclusion.

In January 2001, Banser, the civilian taskforce of NU, mobilized their members to help the police in eastern Java to protect Chinese minorities during the Chinese lunar new year (The Jakarta Post 2001). Banser was mobilized because a wide spread rumors of possible anti-Chinese riots had terrified the ethnic Chinese minority there(The Jakarta Post 2001). This move of Banser however is not the only activity of NU to make the Indonesian Chinese community feel safe and included in Indonesian society. NU’s intellectuals in Surabaya had “helped” in establishing “two important non-governmental organisations to represent minorities and repressed groups, particularly the ethnic Chinese” (Muzzaki 2010:20). These two NGOs are “FLA (Forum Lintas Agama/Interfaith Forum) and JIAD (Jaringan Islam Anti-Diskriminasi/Anti-Discrimination Islam Network)” (Muzzaki 2010:20). “The key figures behind these two organisations” according to Muzzaki (2010) “are Ali Maschan Moesa (head of the East Java branch of NU) and Rubaidi (deputy secretary of the East Java branch of NU): Rubaidi’s role has been crucial, and he is the executive director of both organisations”(Muzzaki 2010:20). JIAD is “active on behalf of Chinese victims of local government discrimination in Surabaya notably those who remain ‘stateless’ (without identity cards and formal citizenship)” (Muzzaki 2010:20).

FLA and JIAD are not the only organizations that NU works with for the rights of the Indonesian Chinese minority. GANDI (The Indonesian Anti-Discrimination Movement) formed by Indonesian Chinese minorities after the three days riots (May 13-

15) that erupted in Solo, Jakarta and other cities of Indonesia in 1998 is also an organization that was helped by NU to be formed. The violence against the Indonesian Chinese during this riot included “burning of homes and shops”, and “the killing and raping of innocent people, young and old” (Indonesian NGO Alternative Report\_ICERD 2007:54). During the riot “thousands of people disappeared and died” (Indonesian NGO Alternative Report\_ICERD 2007:54). As a reaction to it “a group of Indonesian Chinese businessmen and executives gathered” and decided to form an organization to fight for their “dignity and human rights” (Indonesian NGO Alternative Report\_ICERD 2007:54). Abdurrahman Wahid, the President of NU, “responded instantly” and declared “his support” for this idea (Indonesian NGO Alternative Report\_ICERD 2007:54). The organization claims that “the name GANDHI” was Wahid’s idea that referred to Mahatma Gandhi (Indonesian NGO Alternative Report\_ICERD 2007:54). Wahid however not only gave the name and support to this organization but also officiated it in his own home (Ciganjur) in November 6, 1998 (Indonesian NGO Alternative Report\_ICERD 2007:54).

It was because NU stood for the rights and dignity of Indonesian Chinese minorities that when Abdurrahman Wahid, the chairman of NU and former president of Indonesia became seriously ill in 2009 that “hundreds of Chinese-Indonesians” prayed for his “recovery” (The Jakarta Post 2009). Harjanto Halim, a Chinese-Indonesian representative, even called him “the father of Chinese-Indonesians” (The Jakarta Post 2009). During the presidency of Wahid he issued Presidential Decree Number 6/2000 on January 17, 2000, which revoked the presidential instruction number 14/1967, which had prohibited the development of the Chinese religion and culture in Indonesia (The Jakarta Post 2009). After the passing of this decree the “Chinese cultural expressions, such as dragon and lion dances” were “exhibited freely in public” and “Confucianism” was accepted as the “sixth official religion, after Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism and Buddhism” (The Jakarta Post 2009). In December 30, 2009, when Wahid passed away, hundreds of Indonesian Chinese from all over Indonesia traveled to Jombang located in East Java to pay their respect to him (Harsaputra 2010).

### **3.2. NU and women’s right**

The rights that Indonesian women enjoy today are very much related with social inclusion based programs and activism of NU members. NU has two women organizations: *Muslimat* NU and *Fatayat* NU. *Muslimat* NU was established in March 29, 1946 for women members of NU who were above the age of 40. *Fatayat* NU was established for women members of NU who were between the ages of 20 and 45 (Rinaldo 2011:546). Both *Muslimat* NU and *Fatayat* NU are active in over 14,000 villages across Indonesia (Coleman:154; Arnez 2010:69).

#### **3.2.1 NU’s sister organizations and activism against polygamy**

One of the most daring issues that *Fatayat* NU raised was the call to end polygamy because they believe that the “chances for abuse is reportedly higher for children living in households where polygamy is practiced than it is in family where it is not” (Arnez 2010:83-84). Another reason they believe that it is important to end polygamy is because “there are more cases of domestic violence in polygamous marriages than in

monogamous” ones (Arnez 2010:84). They believe that polygamy also creates social conflict between first and second wives (Arnez 2010:84). *Fatayat* NU members spread message against polygamy in society by using not the secular arguments but arguments that are based on Islamic scriptures. One such example is the publication and distribution of a booklet called “Islam Criticizes Polygamy” (Rinaldo 2011:553). The author of the booklet *Musdah Mulia* is *Fatayat* NU’s former head. Many *Fatayat* NU members spread the message that certain verse of *The Quran* tell that polygamy is allowed only in exceptional conditions. *Fatayat* NU members for example use chapter 4 verse 3 of *The Quran* to argue that Islam allows polygamy only on the condition that the husband is able to support all the wives equally. Based on this logic they further argue that since husbands are required to fulfill not just economic but also emotional needs of all their wives equally, hence it becomes almost impossible for any Muslim male to accept polygamy (Rinaldo 2011:554).

*Fatayat* NU members have also use cultural context to understand and explain why polygamy took place during the time of Prophet Muhammad and why it is currently no longer necessary to follow. One example of such argument was raised by Maria Ulfah Ansor, the head of *Fatayat* NU. She wrote an article in newspaper in which she argued that polygamy happened during the time of the prophet because many women were widowed during that time due to tribal wars. These widows needed protection and the best protection for them was through the medium of marriage. Such circumstances she argued have changed in modern times and since *The Quran* makes it clear that it is not necessary to have polygamy hence it would be wrong to accept it during normal events (Rinaldo 2011:554). It should however be noted that *Fatayat* NU and *Muslimat* NU members cannot use Islamic scriptures to justify their cause unless their arguments are backed and authorized by Islamic scholars of NU (Arnez 2010: 85). Hence it is not just *Muslimat* NU and *Fatayat* NU who are working for women’s rights, rather it is the majority of religious scholars and leaders of NU who are directly contributing for this positive social change by justifying women’s rights issues through the deep interpretation of *The Quran*.

### **3.2.2. NU’s sister organizations’ activism for equality between women and men**

*Fatayat* NU members widely quote chapter 49 verse 13 of *The Quran* to justify that women and men are equal. This verse states that it is righteousness and piety and not the gender differences that are the determining factors to please God (Quran 49:13 cited in Badwa 2002). *Fatayat* NU widely uses this verse of *The Quran* to argue that male and female are equal. Their activisms however are not limited to memorizing this verse of *The Quran* alone. They are also actively involved in women emancipatory projects where they train “its members in Islamic *fiqh* (jurisprudence)” which helps women to use evidence from *The Quran* to justify their struggle for equality (Coleman 2006). As a result of such training many of the members of *Fatayat* NU have “acquired specialist knowledge of Sharia and *fiqh* (law and Jurisprudence)” (Arnez 2010:79).

The use of Islamic scriptures to defend their position has become a very strategic and important instrument for women members of NU. Such use of religious scriptures has played an important role in making women aware that domestic violence is not accepted by Islam. To reduce domestic violence *Fatayat* NU launched *Penguatan Hak-*

*hak Perempuan* (Strengthening Women's Rights) program in 1997. In the year 2000, they launched LKP2 (Consultative Institute for Women's Empowerment) program. These programs had "26 branches in 25 regencies all over Indonesia" (Arnez 2010:74). The program was aimed at reducing domestic violence by making women and men aware that Islam does not condone domestic violence and those who support it are guided by "gender-biased interpretations of Islamic" doctrines (Arnez 2010:74). Through this program *Fatayat NU* not only raised awareness about the evils of domestic violence but also provided counseling services to women who were victims of it. One of the reasons why *Fatayat NU*'s version of feminist activism against domestic violence became so popular was because they used Islamic scriptures to convince people that violence against women were wrong (Arnez 2010:79).

### **3.2.3. NU and women's right to abort**

*Fatayat NU* is also involved in activism that supports abortion in certain conditions. They are not in favor of absolute legalization of abortion but rather demand that in cases in which women are pregnant due to "rape or incest" then abortion should be allowed (Rinaldo 2014: 839). This demand of theirs was fulfilled by the Indonesian parliament in 2009 by passing a new Health Bill that permitted "early abortions in the case of rape or if the mother or fetus is endangered" (Rinaldo 2014: 839).

### **3.2.4. NU's sister organizations and advocacy for women national leaders**

Women sister organizations of NU are helping the democratisation process by raising awareness about the problem of inequality between men and women and working to secure more rights for women. These rights however are not based on norms that reject Islamic values but rather it is based on norms that reinterpret these values and use the newly understood religious values as a foundation for their struggle for equality. On the solid foundation of consciousness the women organization of NU have been active in enhancing the role and number of women in the state decision making areas. One of the most significant displays of their commitment for this issue occurred in 1999 when Megawati's party won elections but Islamic groups began a campaign that stated that a woman could not lead a public office. During this time women organizations of NU argued that they could accept women as a national leader of Indonesia (Blackburn 2008:98). In June 2004 when some clerics of NU announced its fatwa that it is forbidden for a woman to be the president of Indonesia then *Fatayat NU* leaders reacted to it by stating the following:

Fatwa Pasuruan, which includes the prohibition of choosing a woman president, put activists and figures of the movement for women's empowerment in Indonesia on alert (at that time) because it is in conflict with universal principles about women's rights, both in Islam and Universal Declaration of Human rights and other declarations such as the Convention on the Eradication of All forms of Discrimination Against Women. NU, circles, especially *Fatayat NU*, regret if charismatic NU figures issue a fatwa only to serve the short-term interests of certain groups. (M.U. Anshor quoted in Arnez 2010:82)

In their struggle for a greater inclusion of women in Indonesian state, women organizations of NU have also "actively conducted voters' education for female voters"



in 2004 (Arnez 2010:82). These programs encouraged “women” to “vote for women” (Arnez 2010:82). This clearly reflected their desire to put more women in the decision making organs of the state in order to reduce the gender imbalance in Indonesia and thus reduce social exclusion. *Muslimat* NU and *Fatayat* NU have played an important role to help women in Indonesian society. They are not only making women aware of their rights but also making them a part of the movement that is seeking to guarantee it.

### **3.3. NU against sectarian violence**

Shiite and Ahmadiyya are minority Muslim sects in Indonesia who have faced various forms of social exclusions in forms of discriminations and violence. NU has always openly and officially condemned any forms of discrimination and violence against them. NU have made it clear that its theological disputes between NU and Shiites or between NU and Ahmadiyyas are irreconcilable, but it respects the right of these sects to practice their faith in peace.

#### **3.3.1. NU and Shiite Islam**

The relationship between Sunni and Shiite or Shia Muslims in the postmodern world is rigged with tensions. Their theological differences originated over the leadership of Muslim community after the passing away of Prophet Muhammad in 632 AD (Blanchard 2009:1). The heart of debate was centered on whether the leadership of Muslim community should be given to the people having family ties with the Prophet or whether it should be awarded to pious Muslim individual who practiced the teachings of *The Quran* and lived by the traditions of the Prophet. Many people believed that the leadership should go to Ali ibn Abi Talib who was not only Prophet’s cousin but also husband to Fatima, Prophet’s daughter. There were however others who believed that Prophet’s companion Abu Bakr should be the *Caliph* (successor of the Prophet). Abu Bakr became the first *Caliph* of the Muslim community. Many of the followers of Ali believed that the Prophet himself had chosen Ali as his successor and hence believed that choosing Abu Bakr as a *Caliph* was a violation of Prophet’s personal instructions. The followers of Abu Bakr on the other hand believed that not only was Abu Bakr qualified due to his religious piousness and maturity but also because the Prophet himself had chosen him as his successor. This dispute about the successor of the Prophet divided the Muslim community into two camps: Sunni and Shiite.

By the time of Uthman ibn Affan, the third *Caliph*, the supporters of Ali began to launch rebellion against him. In 656 AD, Caliph Uthman was murdered by the partisans of Ali and Ali was declared as a *Caliph*. In 661 AD, the Muslim faction that opposed Ali as a Caliph murdered him (Blanchard 2009:1). The Muslims who believed that the Ali and his descendants should be caliphs came to be known as Shia. The word Shia has its root in the statement “Shi’at Ali” which means “supporters” or “helpers of Ali” (Blanchard 2009:1). The Muslims who believed that the *Caliph* of the Muslim community should be selected on the basis of consensus and not according to blood tie with the prophet came to be known as Sunnis (Blanchard 2009:3). The word Sunni is connected with the Arabic word “Sunna” which means “customs” (Blanchard 2009:1). The Sunnis believe that they are the followers of customs that were practiced by Prophet Muhammad himself (Blanchard 2009:1).

In the course of time this political differences between these two groups evolved into theological differences. Despite these theological differences and sporadic violence many Sunnis and Shias had coexisted with each other for many centuries (BBC 2014)<sup>16</sup>. This history of coexistence however is slowly disappearing in many parts of the Muslim world (BBC 2014)<sup>17</sup>. In Pakistan for instance over 4000 Shias have been killed in the past 20 years (BBC 2006; Hussain 2012). Pakistan's leading civil rights activist describes sectarian tension in Pakistan in the following manner:

Shias, about 20 per cent of the population, have been picked out-Gestapo style. Last year, men in army uniforms stopped four buses bound from Rawalpindi to Gilgit, demanding that all 117 persons on board alight and show their national identification cards. Those with typical Shia names, like Abbas and Jafri, were separated. Minutes later 46 corpses lay on the ground; the earlier massacres of Hazara Shias in Mastung and Quetta had been repeated. (Hoodbhoy 2013)

One of the most grim examples of Sunni Shia conflict in the modern times is the civil war in Syria where the violence between Sunni rebels and Alawites (a branch of Shia Islam) controlled state have claimed over 100,000 lives (The Economist 2013)<sup>18</sup>.

This sectarian conflict is not something new in the largest Muslim nation of Indonesia. On April 20, 2014 an alliance called Anti-Shia National Alliance held a meeting at *Al Fajr* Mosque in Bandung city of West Java. The most pertinent demand of this group was to ban Shia teachings in Indonesia. Athian Ali, the chairman of the alliance approved the "use of violence to prevent "heretical" teachings" of the Shiites (Dipa 2014). In the gathering he said "There's growing public concern about the spread of the Shia [branch Islam]. It's our duty to protect society" (Dipa 2014). Abdul Hamid Baidlowi and Cholil Ridwan, two prominent clerics of *Nahdlatul Ulama* also participated in this meeting. Immediately after this event *Nahdlatul Ulama* made it clear that it was not against Shias. Muhammad Imdadum Rahmat, deputy secretary-general of NU, told The Jakarta Post that "NU considered Shiites their Islamic brothers" (Perdani 2014). Siti Musdah Mulia, an influential member of NU's intellectual association also spoke against the Anti-Shia National Alliance by stating that the government should take action against those who were promoting intolerance in Indonesian society (Perdani 2014). This is however not the first time that NU have stood for the rights of the Shiite minorities in Indonesia. In 2012, Suryadharna Ali, Religious Affair Minister of Indonesia and the chairperson of United Development Party labeled Shiite Muslims as heretics. Malik Mahdani of NU immediately reacted against it by making a statement saying that the use

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<sup>16</sup> "Members of the two sects have co-existed for centuries and share many fundamental beliefs and practices. Though they may not interact much outside the public sphere, there are always exceptions. In urban Iraq, for instance, intermarriage between Sunnis and Shia was, until recently, quite common. The differences lie in the fields of doctrine, ritual, law, theology and religious organisation." (BBC 2014)

<sup>17</sup> "In Pakistan and Afghanistan, hardline Sunni militant groups - such as the Taliban - have often attacked Shia places of worship." (BBC 2014)

<sup>18</sup> "THESE are unhappy times in the Middle East for relations between Islam's two main branches, the majority Sunnis and minority Shias. The ugly sectarian undertones of the civil war in Syria, where the death toll may now have passed 100,000, are echoing far more widely than during Iraq's similar tragedy a few years ago." (The Economist 2015)

of the word “heresy” by the minister to describe Shiites was unwise. He further commented “We must be careful not to use the word because it could provoke anarchic actions toward Shiite communities nationwide” (Malik Mahdani cited in Jakarta Post 2012).

There have been several Sunni militant-led attacks in Indonesia against the Shiite minorities. NU, the largest Sunni organization in Indonesia, has however always condemned such attacks. In 2012, KH Said Aqil Siroj, general chairman of the Central Board of NU condemned the forced conversion of Shiite into Sunni sect in Nanggernang, Sampang, Madura and East Java:

I consider the incident was a pure crime, because dakwa (religious propagation) could no longer be justified if it has to hurt each other, moreover to kill each other. Therefore law enforcement agencies, in this case are police, must be able to act in accordance with the existing laws. (Said Aqil Siroj cited in NU Online 2012)

He further stated,

It is not justified if the solution is through violence...there is no compulsion to enter (Islam) religion, there is no violence in religion...NU and Shia are clearly different, especially with the Ahmadiyah, it is clearly different. But in social intercourse we do reject any violence, because a call to change requires such methods as dakwa, dignified discussion, and that's all we've done so far. (Said Aqil Siroj cited in NU Online 2012)

Prof. Dr KH Said Aqil Siradj, chairman of the executive board of NU has made it clear that the Shiite version of Islam and mainstream Islam differed but “NU has never asked the government to ban Shia Islam”. He further stated that “The Prophet Muhammad has told us that we must not fight each other regardless of our differences” (Said Aqil Siradj cited in BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific 2012).

NU has played an important role in not only condemning slurs and violence against the Shiites but has also treated them with respect and dignity. Abdurrahman Wahid, a prominent NU leader despite being a devout Sunni still allowed Shiites to use his mosque for prayers (Barton 2006:174). Such unique tolerant features of NU are not limited to Shiites of Indonesia alone but NU is also concerned about ending sectarian violence in the Middle East. In 2007, the government of Indonesia formed a team that represented NU, *Muhammadiyah*, and president's special envoy for Middle East affairs. The team was formed to hold dialogues with different Sunni and Shia factions in Iraq so as to curb and reduce sectarian violence there(Xinhua News Agency 2007).

### **3.3.2. NU and tolerance for Ahmadiyyas**

Ahmadiyya (also called Ahmadiyah) is a sect within Islam that was founded by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad in the Punjab province of British India in 1889 (Powerll 2004b:30). Many Muslims from both Sunni and Shiite sect of Islam regard this sect to be deviant and heretical because it rejects the fundamental beliefs of Islam. The Ahmadis (the adherent of Ahmadiyya sect) like other Muslims also believe in monotheism and the prophethood of Muhammad but reject “*khatm al-nubuwwa* (finality of Muhammad's prophethood)” (Powerll 2004:32) which is the most important component of the Islamic faith. Furthermore the Ahmadis also believe that God appointed Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as “the

mujaddid” or “renewer of Islam” (Powerll 2004:32). This concept of “renewer of faith” also challenges the fundamental tenets of Islam because Muslims believe that the final revelation of God (*Allāh*) was given to prophet Muhammad and hence the Islamic faith is perfect, final, and complete (Friedmann, Perlmann, and Hirschberg 2007:91).

Ahamadis have faced persecution in many parts of the world where they are in the minority. In Pakistan for example the National Assembly of 1974 declared them as non-Muslims (Powell 2004:31). In 1984, Ordinance XX of Pakistan, passed by Zia ul Haq, prohibited them “from calling themselves” “Muslims” (Powell 2004:31). Apart from legal restrictions they are frequently targeted by religious extremist groups. In June 2010, militants killed 93 Ahmadi in Lahore, Pakistan while they were in two Ahmadiyya mosques for Friday prayers (The Associated Press 2010). Similarly in December 2012, over “100 tombstones were desecrated” at the “Ahmadi graveyard” in Lahore (Pakistan Observer 2012).

Although the Ahmadi community in Indonesia are safer than they usually are in other Sunni and Shia majority countries but they are nonetheless not immune to Sunni militant led violence against them. Indonesia has witnessed many violent attacks against them. Even at state level there have been several attempts to legally ban them in Indonesia. In 2010, Suryadharma Ali, Minister of Religious Affairs, expressed his opinion in the House of Representatives that the Ahmadiyya sect should be banned in Indonesia because it offended the mainstream Muslims. The Minister’s suggestion was immediately criticized by NU. Reacting to Minister’s suggestion, Masdar F. Masudi, deputy chairman of NU, said that “We do not need to rush in dissolving Ahmadiyya, even if [the NU] is in clear dispute with them on Islamic teachings,” (Masdar F. Masudi quoted in The Jakarta Globe 2010 ). He further stated,

We have to conduct dakwah [spreading the word of Islam] wisely. And we believe in conducting dialogue with elegance. Remember, the Koran [says] nothing about the forcible conversion to Islam...If, after we have conducted a dialogue with them and they are still steadfast in their beliefs, [we will] leave them alone. The correct way, after all, is already clearly detailed in the Koran. (Masdar F. Masudi quoted in Webadmin 2010)

Said Aqil Siradj, Chaiman of NU, also stated that,

Ahmadiyah has been in Indonesia since 1925. Why is it being made a problem now? (Said Aqil Siradj quoted in *Webadmin* 2010)

Reacting to the Minister’s suggestions, Mohamad Guntur Romli, a prominent Muslim intellectual criticized the minister and supported NU’s stance on the issue,

From the time of [NU’s founder] Hadratus Shaikh Hasyim Asyari to [former President] Abdurrahman Wahid, the NU’s stance has been very clear: defend Ahmadiya’s right to live in accordance with their constitutional rights as Indonesians. (Mohamad Guntur Romli cited in Webadmin 2010)

NU, like all other Sunni Muslim organizations regards their theological differences with Ahmadiyya as irreconcilable. This doctrinal difference for NU however is not something that needs to be resolved through the means of threat, violence, and other forms of

punishment. NU, despite having differences with Ahmadiyyas does not seek to destroy them or convert them by force.

The Central Board of NU issued its *fatwa*<sup>19</sup> on Ahmadiyya on September 2005. The *fatwa* was entitled “*Taushiyah: Sikap PBNU tentang Ahmadiyah*” (*Taushiyah: The stance of the Central Board of the NU on the Ahmadiyya*). It was issued by Ma’ruf Amin, Said Agil Siradj, Masdar F Mas’udi, and Rozy Munir, the four chairmen of NU. The fatwas had four major points:

(1) Ahmadiyya is a deviant sect (aliran sesat) and exiting out of Islam (keluar dari Islam) since they do not accept the Prophet Muhammad as the last prophet as obviously stated in the Qur’an, al-Sunna, and the consensus (Ijmā’) of the ulama. However, regarding the activities of the Ahmadiyya community, it is forbidden for people to take the law into their own hands. The ban of the beliefs and activities of the Ahmadiyya is fully given over to government discretion, and is obviously not the right of any people or group. (2) In expressing their objection to the activities of the Ahmadiyya in their neighborhood, it is recommended for any people to express it in peaceful and polite ways. (3) To the Muslim community, it is expected to study Islam comprehensively in order to avoid mistakes and errors in their religious interpretations. (4) The government is expected to have a firm and consistent policy in dealing with the existence of the Ahmadiyya sect in Indonesia. (Burhani 2014:295-296).

The first point of the *fatwa* clearly states that although Ahmadiyya is a deviant sect but people who disagree with them should not break the law while disagreeing with them. The second point states that the objection to Ahmadiyya should be not only through peaceful but also polite. The second point is not only about peaceful disagreement but also about not hurting the dignity of the opponent. The third point of the *fatwa* states that Muslims should be more aware of their own religion through scholarship so that they can understand the difference between Islamic beliefs and Ahmadiyya doctrines. This is a democratic method because rather than appealing the Sunni majority to socially and economically strangle the Ahmadi minorities and push them into desperation, the NU is arguing that the majority Sunnis should study their own scripture and be intellectually equipped to deal with Ahmadi. The fourth point indicates that NU seeks government rather than non-state actors to deal with Ahmadiyya issues. The *fatwa* of NU is an example of a democratic nature that NU has.

### **3.4. NU and non-Muslim communities in Indonesia**

In 1998, when Suharto’s thirty year old military dictatorship ended, then many analysts feared that the security vacuum would be filled by hardline Islamists and ethnic militias. The truth however was that the deep, tolerant and pluralistic interpretation of Islam that NU had always upheld played a major role in preventing such dystopic society to evolve in Indonesia. Abdurrahman Wahid, the first democratically elected president to be elected after the collapse of the military dictatorship was also the chairman of NU at that time. President Wahid is credited for bringing Indonesia from a military dictatorship to a multi-party democracy without overturning “the country’s ideological commitment to religious pluralism” (Mishra 2011). Abdurrahman Wahid is also credited for strengthening “the

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<sup>19</sup> A “*fatwa*” is an Islamic law based “advisory opinion” that are “issued by a recognized authority on law and tradition in answer to a specific question” (Peterson 2004).

legal rights of minorities” during this volatile transitional period<sup>20</sup> (Mishra 2011). He was very lucid about his disdain for Islamic extremists who wanted to turn Indonesia into an Islamic state. He used to argue that “the idea of a fully-fledged Islamic state” and the institutionalization of Islam in Indonesia would marginalize the non-Muslims (Tran 1999):

Clergy should act on the basis of morality, not law. We have to understand the minorities have their own thoughts about law and state. Because of this we should be careful. We should practice secularism without saying it's secularism (Abdurrahman Wahid quoted in Tran 1999)

Indonesia, despite being a tolerant pluralist society, is not immune to religious violence. Many incidents of religious violence have occurred in Indonesia in which hundreds of people were killed. However whenever there is an outbreak of religious violence NU has always condemned it and has attempted to reassure the religious minorities that it does not support any forms of violence and oppression against them.

In October 1997 a mob of 10,000 “burned 21 churches and a number of other buildings” in Tasikmalaya and Situbondo area where NU had a stronghold. Immediately after the incident NU’s leader Abdurrahman Wahid condemned such activities by saying “I ask for God to forgive those who did this thing without knowing the serious consequences for the community, nation, and state” (Casey 1997). He further stated that “I condemn this incident even if there were Nahdlatul Ulama members among the perpetrators” (Wahid quoted in Casey 1997). NU not only supports secularism by condemning Muslim led violence against non-Muslims but also shows its commitment to the concept of secularism and pluralism through actions. During religious strife for example it mobilizes volunteers to protect churches and other non-Muslim places of worship from being attacked by Islamic extremists<sup>21</sup>. NU volunteers have protected churches in sensitive areas of Indonesia during Christmas times. In the year 2000, an NU member who was protecting church from Islamic extremists was among 19 people who were killed when *Jemmah Islamiyah*, an extremist Islamist group exploded bombs in a “dozen churches across Indonesia” (Marianne 2005). The reason why NU members are willing to protect non-Muslims and their places of worship is because NU has taught them that this is how Muslims are supposed to act.

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<sup>20</sup> Wahid himself had said that the doctrine of Islam was an “inspirational base for a national framework of democratic society” (Wahid quoted in Bush 2009: 91).

<sup>21</sup> “A youth wing affiliated with Indonesia's largest Muslim group Nahdlatul Ulama, some 40 million strong, said members would guard churches for the coming Christmas festivities and it had persuaded youths from other religions to join the project” (Townsville Bulletin 2005). Similarly during the Christmas of 2014, the Surabaya chapter of NU’s youth wing, Barisan Ansor Serbaguna, mobilized “1,250 personnel” to guard church in the city (Harsaputra 2014). Regarding the event Muhammad Asrori Muslich, chairman of Ansor Surabaya commented that “Religious pluralism is a non-negotiable matter; therefore, we will help provide security for Christians who carry out Christmas religious ceremonies. We also urge NU followers to respect the Christmas religious ceremonies being held” (Muhammad Asrori Muslich quoted in Harsaputra 2014)

## **Inclusionary Politics: Enhancement of Sociocultural Factors For Social-Inclusion-Based Democratisation**

This chapter aims to show that NU is not only promoting social inclusion of socially excluded ethnic minorities, women, and religious minorities as shown in Chapter III but is also promoting and disseminating cultural practices that help the democratisation process in Indonesia by creating a fertile social base for the further progression of social inclusion based activities.

### **4.1. Citizen consciousness and awareness building**

Citizen awareness is important for democracy because conscious citizens are capable of pressurizing the state for various forms of reform. The higher the number of citizens who are aware of their rights the more they pressurize the state to work for their rights. The conscious citizens make the state sensitive about social issues like social exclusion and discrimination which would not have attracted much attention had the state felt that people were not aware of such issues. NU activists have been active in educating villagers and raising their consciousness about inequality and oppression prevalent in Indonesian society (Bush 2009: 189). The activism of NU were able to generate “widespread political participation and efforts by the citizenry to oppose such oppressive structures and systems” (Bush 2009: 189). It was such awareness building programs that made NU members aware of the issues of social exclusion and need to promote and comfort excluded communities. Consciousness helps the issue of awareness to spread.

### **4.2. Culture of making state accountable**

An important sociopolitical factor for democratisation that NU has empowered is the serious practice of a civil society watchdog role that constantly scrutinizes the state. Some of the examples of these roles are found in chapter III when they criticized the state for using highhanded tactics to deal with ethnic Papuan people and criticized the president for not visiting Papua to understand the grievances of the people there. It was also their watchdog role in 2012 when NU criticized the Religious Affair Minister for planning to pronounce the Shiite sect of Islam as heretics (chapter III:). Such watchdog role of NU is making government more accountable because NU, a society of Islamic scholars with about 40 million members, is constantly watching them. The statements of government officers that calls for mistreatment and exclusion of marginalized communities like women and minorities are checked and scrutinized by NU scholars. Such watchdog activities of NU have made marginalized people feel comfortable and supported. Extremist views of government ministers or officers often lose their legitimacy after the Islamic basis of their arguments is called misinterpretation or distortion by Islamic scholars of NU.

### **4.3. Secular state and opposition to political Islam**

“NU intellectuals...based on Qur’anic texts” argues that “political aspirations and the activities of the state should not be channeled through religion, and that religious symbolism should not be used to forward political interests”(Bush 2009: 93). Such secular views of the largest Islamic organization in the world helps the non-Muslims and non-Sunni Muslims of Indonesia to realize that they are being accepted as Indonesians and despite being from religious minorities. NU, despite being the largest and most influential religious organization in the country has never officially asked the government to give special privileges to the Muslims of Indonesia. They struggle for Muslim rights but at the same time have equally supported the democratic concept that all citizens in Indonesia should be treated equally by the state. In June 2011 Said Aqil Siradj, the chairman of NU made a strong statement about people who wanted to establish an Islamic state in Indonesia. He said that such people “know very little of Islam as a comprehensive teaching -but they are boasting that they know everything” (BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific 2011). He argued that what Prophet Muhammad “himself always referred to” was “the idea of a civilized country” and not an Islamic state. He further criticized those who wanted an Islamic state in Indonesia as “misleading” others by contradicting what The Prophet had “always taught”: “to live in harmony with everyone”( BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific 2011).

The leaders of NU constantly make public statements in which they remind their supporters that NU supports the provision in the Indonesian constitution that everyone should have a right to practice their religion in peace and dignity. Their support for secularism, tolerance of religious minorities, organizing interfaith dialogue, and promoting culture of pluralism and tolerance greatly helps the process of democratisation and build a cohesive society. The concept of pluralism for NU does not come from philosophies that contradict Islam but rather it comes from Islamic sources itself.

### **4.4. Culture of accountability for Islamic organizations**

NU established a culture of accountability for Islamic organizations as everything these organizations say about the rights of women, ethnic minorities, and religious minorities would be supported or challenged by NU. If they speak against these marginalized groups by distorting Islam then such statements of theirs would find public criticism from Islamic scholars of NU. The Islamic organizations have to be very careful about what they say about women and minorities because if NU clerics question the claim made by these organization then these organizations would lose their Islamic credibility among its followers.

### **4.5. Make Islamic extremism uncomfortable and un-Islamic**

Extremist Islamic organizations find it difficult to find recruit and supporters among Muslim masses in Indonesia. This is because their ideologies are challenged and denounced by NU. Since the clerics of NU are Islamic scholars hence their denouncement of extremist Islamic ideologies has a huge influence on Muslim masses.



The overwhelming majority of the Muslim masses of Indonesia believe the Islamic credentials of NU's clerics more than the Islamic credentials of the clerics of extremist organizations. Since the vast majority of the people have a high level of faith and respect for the Islamic credentials of Islamic scholars of NU, they find the extremist ideologies of extremist Islamic organization to be un-Islamic. Islamic scholars of NU have played an important role in delegitimizing violent ideologies of extremist Islamic organizations and deprived them from gaining large number of followers. It is for these reasons that NU have been defined as an important force in their "opposition to political Islam; and promotion of pluralism and tolerance within Islam" (Bush 2009: 191).

#### **4.6. Construction of empathy**

NU's activities such as condemning ethnic and religious slurs against minority communities and mobilizing volunteers to protect ethnic and religious minorities are examples of empathy that NU practices. One of the examples of showing such empathy was when Hasyim Muzadi, chairman of NU, immediately offered condolences and expressed his sorrow when Pope John Paul II passed away on April 2, 2005<sup>22</sup> (Aglionby et al. 2005). This expression of sorrow by the largest Muslim organization showed that it had respect and high regards not only for the Pope but also for thousands of Indonesian Catholic minorities. The empathy that is expressed by NU leadership is something that 40 million followers of him will look up to and learn. Such empathy is an important force to develop a feeling of mutual respect in a multicultural society.

#### **4.7. Culture of dialogue**

In 2014, the King of Jordan said "It is an honour to support Nahdatul Ulama in its work for dialogue" (King of Jordan quoted in Petra News 2014). Similar statements were also made in October 26, 2011 by Julian Wilson the EU Head of Delegation at the EU-Indonesia Civil Society Seminar, "Human Rights and Faith in Focus", in his opening statements:

It is not just the government and the courts that have a responsibility to safeguard the rights of minorities, but society more broadly. I wish to pay tribute here to the leadership shown by Nahdlatul Ulama in this regard. (Julian Wilson quoted in European Union Delegation to Indonesia, Brunei Darussalam and ASEAN 2011)

Statements made by the King of Jordan and Julian Wilson were based on the long series of dialogue that NU had hosted for peace and pluralism in Indonesia. From February 26 to March 1, 2013, Indonesia hosted the conference of Muslim and Christian Religious Leaders of Asia. This conference was held by the International Conference of Islamic Scholars (ICIS), Catholic Bishops' Conference of Indonesia (KWI), and the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI). The conference was supported by the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) and the Federation of Asian Bishop Conference (FABC). NU's role in this conference was imperative not only because it is the largest Muslim

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<sup>22</sup> "In predominantly Islamic Indonesia, Hasyim Muzadi, the leader of the world's largest Muslim organisation, Nahdlatul Ulama, said: "We ... certainly feel sorrow for the passing away of the Pope, because he has dedicated himself all his life to humanitarian and peace efforts." (Aglionby et al. 2005)

organization in the world but also because KH Ahmad Hasyim Muzadi, chairman of NU (1999-2010) had established ICIS in February 24, 2004 for the sole purpose of organizing serious of impactful and fruitful interreligious dialogue programs (NU Online 2013). NU is heavily involved in allowing the culture of dialogue in Indonesia (Bush 2009: 97-98) to flourish.

Holding interreligious dialogues has become an effective tool for NU to resolve problems that are related with religious disputes. One of the examples where NU played an important role in solving interreligious dispute was the Bogor church dispute. The dispute started in 2008 when the Jakarta High Court “rejected a request from the Bogor City Planning and Parks Agency to revoke the church building permit (IMB)” (Sundaryani 2014). In 2010, the Supreme Court upheld the ruling of the Jakarta High Court (Dewi 2015). Despite these rulings, Diani Bubiarto, mayor of Bogor revoked the IMB of the church (Dewi 2015). The Christians protested against the mayor. In January 2015, NU, announced that it was willing to volunteer to mediate between the Indonesian Christian Church (GKI) and those who opposed the building of their church (Yasmin church). Bona Sigalingging, the spokesman of GKI Yasim, responded to NU’s gesture by saying:

We have a long history with NU as NU figures have long been assisting us in fighting for our rights to build our church. We also feel comfortable with them because we know that they are committed to upholding the Constitution. (Bona Sigalingging quoted in Dewi 2015)

The above statement made by spokesperson of Indonesian Christian Church shows that they trust NU. Gaining trust of non-Muslim community for NU was not an easy achievement<sup>23</sup>. It was the fruit of their decades of work that involved interacting with non-Muslim minorities of Indonesia. NU’s cultures of holding dialogues with people from other religious communities have made them an important force of social inclusion and tolerance. In 2014, NU and the Council of Buddhist Communities (*Walubi*) collaborated to hold talks with Buddhist monks in Myanmar in order to end the persecution of the Rohingya Muslim minority who have been persecuted there for over three decades by Buddhist extremists (Jong 2014).

In the absence of social dialogues people from different religious and ethnic communities will misunderstand and misjudge each other. Their involvement in dialogue however creates a healthy social relation by helping them to understand that they and people from other communities share various common social problems. Such understanding creates a stronger unity among different ethnic and religious communities. NU played an important role in creating a healthy environment for social dialogues and thus a healthy environment for social inclusion.

#### **4.8. Educating for democratic culture and human rights**

NU “took several important measures to enforce human rights in Indonesia” (Farid and Simarmatra 2004:41). It was involved in “campaigns” and “education at the community

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<sup>23</sup> During the Christmas of 2011, the NU volunteers guarded the house where Bogor Christians went to pray after their church were sealed by the police following the rejection of its permit by the mayor (Junaidi 2015)

level on human rights values” and “justice” (Farid and Simarmatra 2004:41-42). In addition to this NU affiliated organization *Lembanga Kajian Islam Dan Sosial* (Institute for Islamic and Social Studies) (LKIS) have played an important role in creating a tolerant Indonesian society. They developed a “training module” for “kiai” and their “santri” that expose them to the concepts of “human rights, pluralism and religious tolerance as these existed in Islam” (Bush 2009: 96). This module is based on the Islamic doctrine called *al-dloruriyat al-khomsah* which was guided by five core principles: (1) Right for the Muslims and non-Muslims to practice their religion, (2) right to life, basic necessities, freedom and justice, (3) right to speak and work as according to one’s conscience, (4) reproductive rights and (5) right to own property (Bush 2009: 96). The dialogues on human rights that LKiS organized are often based on “critical approaches to religious texts and a comparison of the secular versus Islamic versions of human rights” (Bush 2009: 96).

Lakpesdam is another NU affiliated organization that was formed to professionalize NU members (Bush 2009: 97). In 1996 their purpose became “the creation of the NU community into an autonomous social force that can become a model for civil society in Indonesia” (Kadir 1999:255 quoted in Bush 2009: 97). Lakpesdam is working in grassroots level to educate people about socioeconomic inequality, religious tolerance, and human rights (Bush 2009: 97-98).

NU has also been “surprisingly successful in articulating the values of pluralism and religious tolerance beyond its own confines” (Bush 2009: 191). NU dominated Indonesia’s State Institutes of Islamic Studies (IAIN) developed new curriculum for 26 higher education based institutes. This new curriculum was to “provide more effective education on “democratic institutions, political participation and civic values” (Bush 2009: 195). The *Muhammadiyah* also altered their curriculum shortly after the IAIN reforms and introduced curriculum that valued democratic values (Bush 2009: 196). NU through education is also creating space for a society that is inclusive and tolerant.

#### **4.9. Construction of a vibrant society**

The official stance of NU leaders about their support for religious freedom and the mobilization of NU youths to protect the religious minorities of Indonesia have created a society where religious minorities have very little to fear. This is also the case of ethnic minorities who feel safe because of the acceptance of ethnic pluralism by NU. A society where minorities are safe is a society that is vibrant, dynamic, open, and progressive. This because fear does not allow creativity to be expressed and if creativity is not allowed to be expressed then society becomes stagnant, and regressive. One example for the creation of a fearless society and NU’s commitment to it is the freedom of expression in May 2012, when Banser NU, a youth wing of NU protected the “book discussion” program of “Canadian author Irshad Manji” who is “an open lesbian” (The Jakarta Post 2012). Banser NU were guarding this event from Islam Defenders Front, a hardline Islamic group who had warned that “Irshad Manji must leave this country, otherwise we will keep looking for her” (Habib Novel quoted in The Jakarta Post 2012).

#### **4.10. Sense of ownership among marginalized communities**

NU has played an important role in maintaining the secular nature of the Indonesian state and officially recognizing festivals of ethnic minorities as national festivals during the presidency of Abdurrahman Wahid. Such activities have made minorities feel that Indonesia is as much their country as it is the country of other major ethnic or major religious groups. Had NU not conducted activities such as protecting minorities during riots and supporting multicultural constitution then these minorities would have felt alienated from Indonesia.

#### **4.11. Culture of tolerance, peace and harmony**

The state-based law alone cannot maintain peace and harmony in society. Peace maintained by the state is peace that is imposed on people and could be resisted when the state is weak. Since it is an imposed peace people accept it, not because they are convinced of it but because they fear the state. Such peace cannot be sustainable as people cannot be forced to do what they don't believe in. A sustainable peace can only come when people are not forced but are convinced that peace is morally superior to violence. A culturally diverse and demographically huge society of Indonesia needs not only the state but also active civil society to maintain interethnic and interreligious peace and harmony. The state may maintain peace and harmony through the medium of coercion but as long as people do not believe in peace or harmony they will find ways to use the loopholes of the state to express their views through violence. However when the cultural leaders of the dominant community is able to convince them that harmony and peace is morally superior to violence, then people who have high regard for their culture will feel psychologically disarmed. In case of Indonesia, the majority Muslim community follows the ethical guidelines of Islam and look towards Islamic scholars of NU for guidance. The scholars of NU using their deep and vast knowledge of Islam have constantly expressed opinion that people should be tolerant and maintain dialogue with people from different religious communities. Such views of Islamic scholars are backed by Islamic scriptures and hence have power to make people serious and committed about these issues. This cultural engineering conducted by NU is an important support to the legal system of Indonesian state to maintain peace. In the absence of NU's cultural engineering the legal system of the Indonesian state alone would have found it difficult to maintain interethnic and interreligious peace and harmony. Had NU not taken the secular provision and multicultural nature of Indonesia seriously, then the state alone could have done very little in maintaining a healthy multicultural and secular society. It is due to the presence of strong civil society organizations like NU that secularism and multiculturalism in Indonesia could be maintained. Had NU opposed it then the state alone could have found it profoundly difficult to implement it. The larger the number of people who are sympathetic and empathic to the issue of minority rights and peace, the greater is the possibility that such rights are protected and peace maintained.

#### **4.12. NU acts as early warning system regarding social tensions**

In February 2015, Hazam Bisri, NU's Cilacap branch secretary warned about the growing extremism in the Nusakambangan prison in the Cilacap regency of Central Java. He stated that

The hard-liners grow well in Nusakambangan and the surroundings. Cadres are trained and indoctrinated at a Hazam Bisri number of sites there...( Maryono 2015 )

Based on the information provided to him by local NU members, Bisri stated that at least seventy “convicted terrorists” in the prison were indoctrinating “an average of five people on each visit”( Maryono 2015). Similar warning had come from NU also a year earlier in August 4,2014 when Hasyim Muzadi, former chairman of NU “warned Indonesian Muslims” to be cautious as the “influence” of terrorist organization Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL or ISIS) in Indonesia was growing (The Jakarta Post 2014).

#### **4.13. Chapter conclusions**

Activities of NU that promotes tolerance, cultural diversity, and social inclusion mostly find positive response from Indonesian Muslims because these values are promoted by NU as ideals that are based on Islam and guided by it. Had people felt that these values were western democratic values or something alien to their Islamic culture then their respond to it would not have so open and positive. The Islamic scholars of NU use Islamic scriptures to justify their emphasis on tolerance, dialogue and equality. These emphasized values of theirs have helped in constructing a strong social factors that promote social inclusion based democratisation.

## Conclusions

In many Muslim countries the process of democratisation has not found a strong foundation for its growth. This is because the effort for democratisation there is focused on empowering the democratic state and westernized civil society but they are not doing enough to win support of Islamic leaders to support this process. In vast number of cases the democratic system in Muslim counties are planted on a cultural soil that is hostile to the growth of democratic system because people feel that the state and civil society in their country are imposing western cultures on them on the pretext of spreading democratic values. This rejection of western democratic values by a significant number of Muslim populations is often wrongly portrayed by Eurocentric social scientists as the rejection of democratic values and human rights which is in reality is the rejection of what they consider to be an alien culture that is harmful to their traditions.

The relationship between Islam and democracy however is very different in Indonesia. The democratic values (not the western democratic values) in Indonesia are accepted and embraced by the majority of the Muslims because they find very little difference between the ethnical living principals of Sufi Islam that they adhere to and the democratic values. This attitude of treating democratic values as something that is not alien to Islam has helped the intensification and dissemination of democratisation process there.

The majority of Indonesians follow the Sufi school of Sunni Islam which is represented by *Nahdlatul Ulama* that was founded in 1926. Since its inception, NU has been involved in holding interreligious dialogues, educating people about the dangers of religious extremism, and expressing empathy for marginalized communities. These activities of NU are based on following the ethical teachings of Sufi Islam that ask its adherents to be tolerant, compassionate, and helpful. These activities of theirs have however also built a solid social foundation for the growth and proliferation of democratisation process. On the other hand the Sufi Islamic philosophy also put moral pressures on NU members to conduct activities that can lessen the suffering of socially excluded communities of Indonesia. NU has responded to such moral pressures by organizing activities that help these marginalized communities to have more security and rights in society.

The encounter between Islam and democracy in different parts of the Muslim world shows that the democratisation process cannot grow in these countries if the people there feel that an alien culture is being imposed on them in the name of introducing democracy. In Indonesia democratic values are welcomed because people feel that it is not hostile to their Islamic culture. The Islamic Sufi culture that is dominant in Indonesia is supportive of this process but it is also NU with its 40 million members that is playing an imperative role in explaining the compatibility between Islam and democracy to the Muslim masses and thus convincing large numbers of them to support the democratisation process.

For the marginalized women, ethnic minorities and religious minorities of Indonesia, NU is a friend that they can count on. Indonesia without NU would be a Muslim majority country that would be without thousands of Islamic schools and

mosques that condemn Islamic extremism almost every day. Indonesia without NU would be a country without a strong civil society that is capable of protecting minorities like Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, Shiite, Ahmadis and Indonesian Chinese. Without NU, Indonesia would not have founded a community of highly respected and widely followed Islamic scholars who support the process of social inclusion by making it compatible with the teachings of Islam.

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