

THE ETHICAL-DIALECTIC  
RELATIONSHIP OF ISLAM AND INDONESIA:  
Reviewing Ahmad Syafii Maarif's Thought

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**Abstract:** Ahmad Syafii Maarif—affectionately known as Buya Syafii—is one of the Indonesian leading Muslim intellectuals and is a well-known national figure. This article examines Maarif's Islamic thought and his dialectical-ethical link between Islam, national identity, and humanity. Using an in-depth textual analysis of the primary sources and supported by selected secondary sources, this study attempts to reveal Maarif's intellectual legacy. This study concludes that Maarif was a Muslim intellectual who developed the model of a religious and democratic state. He bases his main argument that Islam does not need to be placed in a 'binary opposition' to the political reality and the national consensus, i.e., Pancasila as the last stated entity evidently accommodates the teachings of the Qur'an. He insisted that the ethical principles of Pancasila, which are in line with Islam, should be absorbed into public life in order to bring forth the right nation and the right state. To him, Islam in Indonesia must thus manifest itself as an 'ethical entity' to become the basis for modern Indonesia. He also called Muslims in Indonesia and elsewhere to comprehend the universal moral message of the Qur'an which has a versatile and immutable reach.

**Keywords:** Dialectic-ethics; Indonesian Islam; Ahmad Syafii Maarif; Islamic intellectualism.

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## Introduction

Islam in Indonesia has always attracted the attention of several academics from within and outside the country due to its unique characteristics and dynamics, even though it is situated on the periphery of the Islamic world when viewed from a strictly geographical perspective. From the standpoint of area studies, Islam in Indonesia is often referred to as a 'peripheral Islamic phenomenon' due to geographical factors.<sup>1</sup> The dynamics of Islam in Indonesia can be studied from various angles. The sheer number of Muslims in Indonesia owing to the rapid population growth has consolidated Indonesia's position as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world. Further, the dynamics of Islam in Indonesia can also be examined in terms of its intellectual output, focusing on Islamic thought and scholarship produced in scholarly circles. The Islamic thought developed in Indonesia is largely due to the productivity of the local Muslim scholars (*ulema*) following the formation of the so-called Azra,<sup>2</sup> a network of Nusantara clerics in the Middle East in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century did a new group of intellectuals in the modern sense appear, who brought a new Islamic discourse<sup>3</sup> and challenged the

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<sup>1</sup> Yanwar Pribadi, *Islam, State, and Society in Indonesia Local Politics in Madura* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 6.

<sup>2</sup> Azyumardi Azra, *The Origin of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Network of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern Ulama in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Honolulu: Allen & Unwin and University of Hawai'i Press Honolulu, 2004). See also, Azyumardi Azra, *Jaringan Ulama Timur Tengah dan Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII dan XVIII: Melacak Akar-akar Pembaruan Pemikiran Islam di Indonesia* (Bandung: Mizan, 1995), and Azyumardi Azra, *Islam Nusantara: Jaringan Global dan Lokal* (Bandung: Mizan, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Nor Huda, *Islam Nusantara: Sejarah Sosial Intelektual Islam di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Raja Grafindo, 2015), 339.

status quo of religious authority in Muslim society.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, the *ulema* carried on producing their own works and retained their status due to their ability to adapt to a modern way of life.<sup>5</sup>

Intellectuals—in the sense of formally educated individuals able to think critically and objectively about the social reality of their surroundings—can be found in Muslim Indonesian society. Each historical period produced capable individuals who were intellectually active and produced scholarly works of value to Muslim society. However, the historical period which significantly altered the state of affairs in Indonesia in particular is the New Order (1966–1998), which resulted in the emergence of a new class of modern intellectuals in Muslim society. This recent development has attracted the attention of researchers and academics within and outside the country.

The study conducted by Karsono<sup>6</sup> makes the New Order era under President Soeharto an important chapter in contemporary Indonesian history. Due to rapid economic growth, improved political stability, and cultural change, a new middle class began to emerge in Indonesia, consisting of young Indonesian professionals who had received formal public education. This new social group was characterized by economic independence, rational thinking, and scientific interest,<sup>7</sup> one of them being Ahmad Syafii Maarif.

Maarif received his higher education in the United States. The experience of Muslim intellectuals studying in the West, according to Abbas,<sup>8</sup> provided an opportunity to experiment with cross-discursive forms of knowledge such as history, hermeneutics, and other social science approaches, which in turn helped them to shape new patterns of thinking and to revise old ideas which had been accepted blindly before, such as ideas about the relationship of Islam and the state.

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<sup>4</sup> Jajat Burhanuddin, *Ulama & Kekuasaan: Pergumulan Elite Muslim dalam Sejarah Indonesia* (Bandung: Mizan, 2012), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Jajat Burhanuddin, “Traditional Islam and Modernity: Some Notes on the Changing Role of the Ulama in Early Twentieth Indonesia”, in Azyumardi Azra, Kees van Dijk, and Nico J.G. Kaptein, *Varieties of Religious Authority: Changes and Challenges in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Indonesian Islam* (The Netherlands and Singapura: International Institute for Asian Studies and Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2010), 69.

<sup>6</sup> Soni Karsono, *Cendekiawan dan Transformasi Sosial: Studi Kasus Sejarah Intelektual LP3ES Era Orde Baru* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 2022), 1.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>8</sup> Megan Brankley Abbas, *Whose Islam? The Western University and Modern Islamic Thought in Indonesia* (California: Stanford University Press, 2021), 3.

Maarif together with Nurcholish Madjid, Abdurrahman Wahid, and M. Amien Rais, later dubbed by Wahid as the “three warriors from Chicago”<sup>9</sup> were “among the emblematic religious intellectuals who had been at the forefront in the promotion of Islamic discourse, ranging from various fields”<sup>10</sup> by publishing inspiring articles and presenting their often controversial ideas in public seminars and discussion forums. However, far from limiting their role to academia and theoretical discourse, these new Indonesian intellectuals also actively involved themselves in various civil societies and engaged in political and social issues. In other words, the new intellectuals did not contend themselves to remain in their ivory tower far removed from social reality;<sup>11</sup> rather, they were true activists,<sup>12</sup> as exemplified by Maarif who was appointed as the general chairperson of the Muhammadiyah central executive (1998-2005).

This article will further explore the significance of Maarif's thought as one of the Muslim intellectuals in Indonesia, remembered by Beck<sup>13</sup> as “a highly respected and influential Indonesian intellectual and moral leader” and the individual subject of several studies such as Effendy,<sup>14</sup> Anwar,<sup>15</sup> and Abdillah.<sup>16</sup> Among the names of all known Indonesian intellectuals, Maarif's name is the one best known, and there is hardly an Indonesian today who does not know it. This study heavily relies on the works produced by Maarif used as primary sources, in addition to authoritative references such as the abovementioned dissertations. Even though the intellectual heritage of Maarif has been extensively studied, there is a renewed interest in

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<sup>9</sup> Abdurrahman Wahid, *Tuban Tidak Perlu Dibela* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 1999), 2-3.

<sup>10</sup> Azhar Ibrahim, “Being Authoritative but No Authority? Muslim Religious Intellectuals in Shaping Indonesian Islam Discourse” in Norsharil Saat and Ahmad Najib Burhani (eds.), *The New Santri: Challenges to Traditional Religious Authority in Indonesia* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2020), 32.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Brym, *Intelektual dan Politik* (Jakarta: Grafiti, 1993), 2.

<sup>12</sup> John L. Esposito and John O. Voll, *Makers of Contemporary Islam* (USA: Oxford University Press, 2001), 6.

<sup>13</sup> Herman L. Beck, “An Introduction to Ahmad Syafii Maarif: The Man and This Book” in Ahmad Syafii Maarif, *Islam, Humanity, and Indonesian Identity: Reflection on History* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2016), 11.

<sup>14</sup> Bahtiar Effendy, *Islam and the State in Indonesia* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2003).

<sup>15</sup> M. Syafii Anwar, *Pemikiran dan Aksi Islam Indonesia: Sebuah Kajian Politik tentang Cendekiawan Muslim Orde Baru* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1995).

<sup>16</sup> Masykuri Abdillah, *Responses of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals to the Concept of Democracy (1966-1993)* (Hamburg: Abera Verlag, 1997).

his ideas following his recent death on May 27, 2022. Maarif has left Indonesia with a rich legacy that will be appreciated for a long time to come, and his ideas are still highly relevant today.

Maarif is ostensibly one of the most prolific intellectuals in Indonesia. Apart from leaving behind his many dissertations on various subjects produced abroad, later translated into Indonesian,<sup>17</sup> Maarif also left behind an array of complete studies,<sup>18</sup> collections of his articles published in leading newspapers,<sup>19</sup> and several authoritative biographies.<sup>20</sup> This present study focuses on exploring Maarif's thought by linking the three dimensions of Islam, Indonesian identity, and humanity. His intellectual discourse is framed by certain scientific concepts, theories, and methodologies while being supported by practical considerations so that it can further develop

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<sup>17</sup> Ahmad Syafii Maarif, *Islam dan Politik di Indonesia pada Masa Demokrasi Terpimpin, 1959-1965* (Yogyakarta: IAIN Sunan Kalijaga Press, 1988) and, *Islam dan Masalah Keneagaan: Studi tentang Percaturan dalam Konstituante* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1987).

<sup>18</sup> See: (1) *Ibn Khaldun dalam Pandangan Penulis Barat dan Timur* (Jakarta: Gema Insani Press, 1996); (2) *Benedetto Croce dan Gagasannya tentang Sejarah* (Yogyakarta: Suara Muhammadiyah: 2003); (3) *Gilad Atzmon: Catatan Kritis tentang Palestina dan Masa Depan Zionisme* (Bandung: Mizan, 2012); (4) *Islam dalam Bingkai Keindonesiaan dan Kemanusiaan: Sebuah Refleksi Sejarah* (Bandung: Mizan, 2009); (5) *Islam, Humanity and the Indonesian Identity: Reflection on History* (Leiden: Leiden University, 2016); (6) *Mala: Oase di Bumi yang Tandus* (Yogyakarta: Ombak, 2020).

<sup>19</sup> See: (1) *Al-Qur'an, Realitas Sosial dan Limbo Sejarah: Sebuah Refleksi* (Bandung: Pustaka, 1985); (2) *Peta Bumi Intelektualisme Islam di Indonesia* (Bandung: Mizan, 1993); (3) *Islam Kekuatan Doktrin dan Kegamangan Umat* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 1997); (4) *Mencari Autentisitas dalam Kegagalan* (Jakarta: PSAP Muhammadiyah, 2004); (5) *Al-Qur'an dan Realitas Umat* (Jakarta: Republika, 2010); (6) *Krisis Arab dan Masa Depan Dunia Islam* (Jakarta: Maarif Institute, 2018); (7) *Mencari Autentisitas dalam Dinamika Zaman: Merawat Nilai-nilai Esensial Ajaran, Meraih Makna-makna Keadaban* (Yogyakarta: Ircisod, 2019); (8) *Menerobos Kemelut: Catatan-catatan Kritis Sang Guru Bangsa* (Yogyakarta: Ircisod, 2019); (9) *Membumikan Islam dari Romantisme Masa Silam Menuju Islam Masa Depan* (Yogyakarta: Ircisod, 2019); (10) *Tuhan Menyapa Kita: Menghidupkan Hati Nurani dan Akal Sehat* (Yogyakarta: Ircisod, 2020); (11) *Al-Qur'an untuk Tuhan atau untuk Manusia: Refleksi Kritis atas Keberagaman Kita* (Yogyakarta: Suara Muhammadiyah, 2022); (12) *Indonesia Jelang Satu Abad: Refleksi tentang Keumatan, Kebangsaan, dan Kemanusiaan* (Bandung: Mizan, 2022); (13) *Bulir-bulir Refleksi Seorang Mujahid* (Jakarta: Kompas, 2022).

<sup>20</sup> See: (1) *Refleksi 70 Tahun Ahmad Syafii Maarif Cermin untuk Semua* (Jakarta: Maarif Institut, 2005); (2) *Otobiografi Ahmad Syafii Maarif: Titik-titik Kisar di Perjalananku* (Yogyakarta: Ombak, 2006); (3) *Si Anak Kampoeng Berdasarkan Kisah Maarif Maarif* (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2010); (4) *Muazim Bangsa dari Makkah Darat* (Jakarta: Serambi 2015); (5) *Ahmad Syafii Maarif sebagai Seorang Jurnalis* (Yogyakarta: Suara Muhammadiyah, 2018).

and be institutionalized in certain spaces. Maarif pays particular attention to the dialectical link between Islam and politics, which is rejected by some Muslim groups who do not wish these two spheres to intersect, thus supporting a binary view of religion and state to avoid social upheaval and violent confrontations between opposing factions. One aspect of public life most frequently targeted by binary-oppositional perspectives is politics. Politics in Indonesia is still a sensitive issue because Islam does not form the ideological and legal basis of the modern, secular state of Indonesia.

This article supports the hypothesis that the Islamic intellectualism developed by Maarif is an endeavor to establish an ethical-dialectical relationship between Islam, Indonesian identity, and humanity with the moral principles depicted in the Qur'an. The argumentation followed in this article is based on the social construction of reality theory developed by Berger and Luckmann.<sup>21</sup> This theory is used as a starting point in the discussion for the following reasons: (1) Maarif is an actor who created social reality through ideas published in public media; (2) there is a relationship between Maarif as an individual and his surrounding environment, the production and externalization of his ideas, and an encounter, struggle, and response; (3) Maarif's intellectual activity extended beyond the discourse level when he became the general chair of the Muhammadiyah central executive. Maarif's ideas on certain topics became institutionalized ideas and were subsequently internalized by individuals.

These three points resemble a dialectical process according to the social construction theory of reality in terms of externalization, objectivation, and internalization. This gained insight led the researcher to explore Maarif's biography, considering that there are many documents that reveal his life journey in more depth.<sup>22</sup> In addition, Maarif's ideas have been documented in various publications which deserved more scrutiny. However, the study's approach is selective, and not all topics worthy of discussion are presented here.

As will be seen in the section below, Maarif was deeply immersed in the Qur'an, similar in measure to Fazlur Rahman.

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<sup>21</sup> Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in The Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Penguin Books, 1979).

<sup>22</sup> Damien Dematra, *Si Anak Kampoeng Berdasarkan Kisah Buya Syafii Maarif* (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2010).

However, he gave greater attention to the ethical dimension of the Qur'an and how its message can be applied in the context of modern Indonesian statehood and identity as well as humanity at large. Regarding this constructed dialectical context, Maarif focused his attention to the reality of Muslims being the majority group in Indonesia, yet without achieving to realize the ideal social reality inspired by the Qur'an.

Another issue worth discussing is the issue of democracy. Maarif saw democracy as the best model of governance because it afforded the public more freedom and personal responsibility as well as more space for engagement. In his view, this modern system of governance did not conflict with Islamic principles and values; therefore, instead of being rejected, democracy needed to be supported and defended by the Muslims. Maarif's concerns and views are still relevant today, as evident from the recent developments and the many problems it is facing, most of which were recognized by Maarif<sup>23</sup> and further examined by other scholars.<sup>24</sup>

The discussion of Maarif's thought as presented in the following sections focuses on the role of the Qur'an in Indonesian society, Indonesian identity, and humanity to draw a complete picture of the dialectical-ethical pattern of his ideas.

### **The Qur'an: Points of Interest and Entry-Points**

Maarif studied the Qur'an, as all Muslim boys did in the madrasas of Sumpur Kudus and Lintau, West Sumatra, and

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<sup>23</sup> In the *Reflections of a Mujahid* (2022), a collection of his articles that were recorded by Kompas, there is a discussion in Part II entitled "Corruption, a Disease of Democracy". In this section, there is Maarif's statement as follows: "*Corruption continues to be rampant, drugs seem unstoppable, the actions of police officers and other officials really hurt our feelings. It just keeps happening.*" According to Maarif, this phenomenon is a denial of the reform movement that has been rolling out since 1998 which aims to establish a strong and healthy democratic system but is held hostage by the pragmatism of the political elite which, among other things, results in practices of corruption and other practices of abuse of power.

<sup>24</sup> For example: (1) B. Herry Priyono, et.al., *Kratos Minus Demos: Demokrasi Indonesia: Catatan dari Bawah* (Jakarta: Buku Obor, 2012); (2) Edward Aspinall and Ward Berenschot, *Democracy for Sale: Pemilu, Klientelisme, dan Negara di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Buku Obor, 2020); (3) Aisah Putri Budiatri, et. al., *Demokrasi Tanpa Demos: Refleksi 100 Ilmuwan Sosial Politik tentang Kemunduran Demokrasi di Indonesia* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 2021); (4) Thomas Power and Eve Warburton (eds.), *Democracy in Indonesia: From Stagnation to Regression?* (Singapura: ISEAS, 2020).

Yogyakarta, according to the tradition of the Minangkabau people.<sup>25</sup> However, upon completing his school education he opted for historical studies at the university level and went to Ohio, USA for his postgraduate degree. In 1983, Maarif earned a doctorate in Islamic thought from the University of Chicago. However, his dissertation "Islam as the Basis of State: A Study of the Islamic Political Ideas as Reflected in the Constituent Assembly Debates in Indonesia" focused on political history, rather than Qur'an studies, unlike his colleague, Sukidi studying at Harvard. However, Maarif attended lectures taught by Rahman in Chicago, who was known for his expert knowledge of the Qur'anic studies. Undoubtedly, Rahman's ideas had a lasting impression on Maarif who wrote, "My struggles with Rahman's lectures for four years fundamentally altered my attitude [on the subject]."<sup>26</sup>

Instead of studying the Qur'an or Islamic thought as done by Nurcholish Madjid, Maarif was more concerned with exploring the political history of Muslims in the constituent assembly; however, Rahman's influence on his thought is unmistakable. In the conclusion of his dissertation, Maarif explicitly states that there is no state theory mentioned in the Qur'an or in established in early Islamic history. This standpoint places him in the post-Islamist camp, as noted by Bayat<sup>27</sup> who argued that Maarif opted for a course that led him away from political Islam along traditionalist lines. Islamism, as explained by Roy,<sup>28</sup> is a political ideology that limits Islamic governance to a specific political system.<sup>29</sup> The inner transformation, or one might say political 'conversion'<sup>30</sup> experienced by Maarif in his student days, allowed him to develop his own concept of cultural Islam which could be applied in the New Order. This unique stance set him apart

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<sup>25</sup> Elizabeth E. Graves, *Asal-usul Elite Minangkabau Modern: Respons terhadap Kolonial Belanda abad XIX/XX* (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 2007), 207.

<sup>26</sup> Ahmad Syafii Maarif, *Otobiografi Ahmad Syafii Maarif: Titik-titik Kisar di Perjalananku* (Yogyakarta: Ombak, 2006), 224.

<sup>27</sup> Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn* (California: Stanford University Press, 2007); see also Asef Bayat, *Post-Islamism: The Changing Faces of Political Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>28</sup> Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 35-47.

<sup>29</sup> M. Imdadun Rahmat, *Islamisme di Era Transisi Demokrasi: Pengalaman Indonesia dan Mesir* (Yogyakarta: LKIS, 2018), 24-27.

<sup>30</sup> Abbas, *Whose Islam?*, 147.



from other figures like Qodir,<sup>31</sup> Weck,<sup>32</sup> and Ricklefs<sup>33</sup> who put more emphasis on the ideological and political formalization of Islam at the state level, as FPI (Islamic Defenders Front),<sup>34</sup> by instrumenting the Islamic discourse<sup>35</sup> and engaging in contestation with cultural Islam in the public sphere.<sup>36</sup>

### **Anxiety and Response: The Qur'an, Ideals and Social Reality**

The discussion in this section was inspired by *The Qur'an, Social Reality, and Historical Limbo: A Reflection* (Al-Qur'an, Realitas Sosial, dan Limbo Sejarah: Sebuah Refleksi) published in 1985.<sup>37</sup> Like so many Indonesian students in the 1980s, this author had read Maarif's work in the first year of his studies.<sup>38</sup> This decade is marked by increased intellectual productivity among Muslim scholars in Indonesia.<sup>39</sup> This was due to the return of students who had completed their doctoral studies abroad. Nurcholis Madjid and M. Amien Rais had just

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<sup>31</sup> Zuly Qodir, "Public Sphere Contestation: Configuration of Political Islam in Contemporary Indonesia", *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 1, no. 1 (2011), 123-149.

<sup>32</sup> Winfried Weck, et. al., *Islam in the Public Sphere: The Politics of Identity and the Future of Democracy in Indonesia* (Jakarta: CSRC, 2011), 7.

<sup>33</sup> M.C. Ricklefs, *Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java: A Political, Social, Cultural, and Religious History, C.1930 to the Present* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2012), 447.

<sup>34</sup> Gabriel Facal, "Islamic Defenders Front Militia (Front Pembela Islam) and its Impact on Growing Religious Intolerance in Indonesia", *TRANS: Trans-Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia* 8, no. 1 (2020) 7–20. <http://doi:10.1017/trn.2018.15>.

<sup>35</sup> Ihsan Yilmaz, Nicholas Morieson, and Hasnan Bachtiar, "Civilizational Populism in Indonesia: The Case of Front Pembela Islam (FPI)", *Religions* 13, no. 12 (2022), 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13121208>.

<sup>36</sup> Muhammad Ansor, "Post-Islamism and the Remaking of Islamic Public Sphere in Post-Reform Indonesia", *Studia Islamika*, 23 no. 3 (2016), 471-516.

<sup>37</sup> Ahmad Syafii Maarif, *Al-Qur'an Realitas Sosial dan Limbo Sejarah: Sebuah Refleksi* (Bandung: Pustaka, 1985).

<sup>38</sup> See also Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam Kemodernan dan Keindonesiaan* (Bandung: Mizan, 1986); Jalaluddin Rakhmat, *Islam Alternatif: Ceramah-ceramah di Kampus* (Bandung: Mizan, 1986); M. Amien Rais, *Cakrawala Islam: Antara Cita dan Fakta* (Bandung: Mizan, 1987); M. Dawam Rahardjo, *Perspektif Mekkah: Menuju Ekonomi Islam* (Bandung: Mizan, 1987); A.M. Saefuddin et.al., *Desekularisasi Pemikiran: Landasan Islamisasi* (Bandung: Mizan, 1987).

<sup>39</sup> Azyumardi Azra, "Kelas Menengah Muslim Indonesia: Sebuah Pengantar" in Wasisto Rahardjo Jati, *Politik Kelas Menengah Muslim Indonesia* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 2017), xxv.

obtained their doctorate degree from the University of Chicago, and so had Maarif.

Although Maarif's reflection on the Qur'an, social reality, and the historical limbo was unfinished, it serves as an entry-point on the discourse between the Qur'an, scientific enquiry, and the space-time context. He concluded that the original message of the Qur'an has been neglected, forgotten, and discarded by the Muslims, stating that the "adherents of the faith, whether they realize it or not, have long cast this holy book in the historical limbo."<sup>40</sup> He then calls upon all Muslims to return to the Qur'anic message, study it anew and be inspired by it, rather than blindly accepting its narrow interpretation by others. He writes, "Let us embrace the Qur'an again. We let it reign in our hearts. We make it the final arbitrator at the crossroads of our thinking."<sup>41</sup>

Maarif was a prolific writer and activist in his lifetime, even in the later phase. In his work *Islam in the Frame of Indonesian Identity and Humanity: A Reflection on History* (Islam dalam Bingkai Keindonesiaan dan Kemanusiaan: Sebuah Refleksi Sejarah, for example, one finds expressions of anxiety such as, "There is a kind of deep worry in my heart."<sup>42</sup> Maarif's anxiety was triggered by the reality of Muslim society still far from the envisioned ideal. Indonesia had the largest Muslim population, and Muslims constituted the religious majority group, yet Islam did not seem to inspire them to greatness. Therefore, Maarif insisted on the Muslims' return to the original message of the Qur'an and away from empty dogma and ritual. He prescribed "an in-depth and systematic study of the Qur'an"<sup>43</sup> to remedy this deplorable state of affairs.

When immersing oneself in Maarif's writings, often compiled in an anthology, one can easily discern his expressed anxiety about the state of Islam and Muslim society in Indonesia. In addition to his *Reflections*, this sentiment is also present in his work *Islam: The Power of Doctrine and Religion of the Ummah* (Islam: Kekuatan Doktrin dan Keagamaan Umat) and his *Search for Authenticity in Confusion* (Mencari Autentisitas dalam Kegalauan). In the introduction of the first book,

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<sup>40</sup> Ahmad Syafii Maarif, *Al-Qur'an, Realitas Sosial, dan Limbo Sejarah: Sebuah Refleksi* (Bandung: Pustaka, 1985), 2.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>42</sup> Ahmad Syafii Maarif, *Islam dalam Bingkai Keindonesiaan dan Kemanusiaan: Sebuah Refleksi Sejarah* (Bandung: Mizan, 2009), 13.

<sup>43</sup> Ahmad Syafii Maarif, *Islam dan Pancasila sebagai Dasar Negara: Studi tentang Perdebatan dalam Konstituante* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 2017), 5.

Maarif wonders why Islamic civilization, which used to be at the forefront of human civilization, is now lagging behind the West.<sup>44</sup> In the second book, Maarif explains that Islamic principles and values are no longer internalized by Muslims and have been substituted by religious dogma.<sup>45</sup> Maarif was painfully aware of the difference between the Islamic ideal and Muslim history and argued that the message of the Qur'an reflects the Islamic ideal, while historical Islam reflects the reality in the past but also in the present.<sup>46</sup>

Maarif persistently pointed at this gap between the reality of Muslim society and the ideals of the Qur'an and grew never tired of urging the Muslims to return to the Qur'an. In his view, the Qur'an is a primary source of knowledge, which deserved his devoted study and reflection upon its truths. Maarif was admittedly not a leading expert in Qur'an studies<sup>47</sup> and his knowledge of the Qur'an cannot be compared to Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid and Muhammad Shahrur; however, he acknowledged its vital importance for Muslim society.

According to Sirry, Maarif did not offer a new methodological framework in his writings and contented himself with the inspiring ideas of his teacher, Fazlur Rahman, who wrote the following words in his *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*:

From the present situation to Qur'anic times, then back to the present, because the Qur'an was a Divine response through the thoughts of the Prophet, to the social-moral situation of the Arabs at the time of the Prophet, especially to the problems of the trading society of Mecca at that time.<sup>48</sup>

Sirry gave due credit to Maarif's efforts in approaching the Qur'an when he observed, "What Buya is doing is in line, although

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<sup>44</sup> Ahmad Syafii Maarif, *Islam: Kekuatan Doktrin dan Keagamaan Umat* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 1997), vii.

<sup>45</sup> Ahmad Syafii Maarif, *Mencari Autentisitas dalam Kegagalan* (Jakarta: PSAP Muhammadiyah, 2004), xii.

<sup>46</sup> Ahmad Syafii Maarif, "Islam, Politik dan Demokrasi di Indonesia" in Bosco Carvalho and Dasrizal (eds.), *Aspirasi Umat Islam Indonesia* (Jakarta: LEPPENAS, 1983), 38-41; Muhammad Ridwan, "The Reflective-Accommodative Approach to the Quran: Ahmad Syafii Maarif's Contribution towards Contemporary Approach to the Quran", *Ulumuna* 25, no. 1 (2021): 199-227. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v25i1.432>.

<sup>47</sup> Mun'im Sirry, "Ahmad Syafii Maarif dan Rekonfigurasi Pembacaan Al-Qur'an" in Ahmad Najib Burhani, et.al., *Muazjin Bangsa dari Makkah Darat: Biografi Intelektual Ahmad Syafii Maarif* (Jakarta: Serambi, 2015), 44.

<sup>48</sup> Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, 5.

not necessarily the same, with the passion of Muslim scholarship in various parts of the world.”<sup>49</sup> He further noted that “his skills in framing ideas developed with commitments oriented to the Qur’an made him relatively widely accepted and not (so) controversial.”<sup>50</sup>

There is no doubt that Maarif’s ideas were strongly influenced by Fazlur Rahman, including his understanding of the significance of the Qur’an, who positioned it as the ethical foundation of Muslim society.<sup>51</sup> In his work *Islam: History of Thought and Civilization*,<sup>52</sup> Rahman highlighted the ethical dimension of Islam, which is the leading spirit of the Qur’an. In another work, he wrote, “We have emphasized that the main spirit of the Qur’an is morality, and we have also shown the idea of social and economic justice in the Qur’an that was born from this spirit.”<sup>53</sup> It comes, therefore, as no surprise when he stresses emphatically that “the Qur’an is a book of religious, moral principles and appeals, not a legal monument.”<sup>54</sup> Similarly, Maarif argues that the message of the Qur’an is first of all a moral message that “is fully functional, has practical value, both for individual life and for collective life.”<sup>55</sup> which corresponds with the opinion of Rahman.<sup>56</sup>

However, the difficulties facing Muslim society have reached an alarming level because Muslims have failed to grasp the comprehensive and perfect moral guidance of the Qur’an, which was sent down from the Heavens for the benefit of humankind.<sup>57</sup> Maarif lists examples of the paradox between the Islamic ideal and the moral reality; for instance, when discussing the principle of brotherhood in Islam in his article “Islamic Brotherhood and the Qur’anic Ethics” (Ukhuwah Islamiah dan Etika al-Qur’an, a chapter in his *book One*

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<sup>49</sup> Sirry, “Ahmad Syafii Maarif”, 46.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ahmad Najib Burhani, “Transmission of Islamic Reform from The United to Indonesia: Studying Fazlur Rahman’s Legacy through the Works of Ahmad Syafii Maarif”, *Indonesia and the Malay World* 41, no. 119 (2013), 29-47. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2012.750097>.

<sup>52</sup> Fazlur Rahman, *Islam: Sejarah Pemikiran dan Peradaban* (Bandung: Mizan, 2017).

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>55</sup> Ahmad Syafii Maarif, *Al-Qur’an untuk Tuban atau untuk Manusia?: Refleksi Kritis Abad Keberagamaan Kita* (Yogyakarta: Suara Muhammadiyah, 2022), 9.

<sup>56</sup> Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur’an* (Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1994), 1.

<sup>57</sup> Ahmad Syafii Maarif, *Membumikan Islam: Dari Romantisme Masa Islam Menuju Islam Masa Depan* (Yogyakarta: Ircisod, 2019), 17-33.

*Islam, One Dilemma* (Satu Islam Sebuah Dilema),<sup>58</sup> and *The Arab Crisis and the Future of the Islamic World* (Krisis Arab dan Masa Depan Dunia Islam),<sup>59</sup> apart from being alluded to in his article “The Ethics of the Qur’an and Group Ethics” (Etik Al-Qur’an dan Etik Golongan)<sup>60</sup> as discussed in his *Burying Islam: From Romantic Past Towards Islam of the Future* (Membumikan Islam: Dari Romantisme Masa Silam Menuju Islam Masa Depan).

Maarif is particularly interested in the concept of “best of nations” (*khayr umma*) mentioned in verse 110 of Surah Al ‘Imran, which is inseparable from the expression “moderate nation” (*ummatan wasaṭan*) mentioned in verse 143 of Surah al-Baqarah. In his Enlightened Commentary (*Tafsīr al-Munīr*), Wahbah al-Zuhaili<sup>61</sup> explained that *khayru umma* describes the Muslim society that enjoins good (*al-amr bi-l-ma‘rūf*), forbids evil (*al-nahī ‘ani-l-munkar*) and believes in Allah. Similarly, in verse 142 of Surah al-Baqarah Muslims form a “middle society” between the two extreme ends of excess (*ifrāṭ*) and negligence (*tafrīṭ*). This ideal form of moderation is reflected in their (1) views, perceptions, and beliefs which achieve a balance between spiritual activities and worldly pursuits; (2) their lack of blind fanaticism and acceptance of rational thinking; and (3) their individual and social life orientations.<sup>62</sup>

The Egyptian reformist Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966) and author of *In the Shade of the Qur’an* (*Tafsīr fī Zilālī-l-Qur’an*) did not deny the paradoxical reality of Muslims with the ideals of the Qur’an as depicted in the above two verses, and Maarif expressed the same concern. Although supposed to be a moderate society, the Muslims show excessive fanaticism towards their group, which results in social tension and violence. Early Muslim history is full of such grievous episodes, and Maarif uses these examples to make his point by commenting on the murder of the third caliph, ‘Uthman bin ‘Affan (d. 656), the Battle of the Camel (656) between the supporters of ‘Ali

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<sup>58</sup> Ahmad Syafii Maarif, “Ukhuwah Islamiah dan Etika al-Qur’an” in Jalaluddin Rahmat, et.al., *Satu Islam Sebuah Dilema* (Bandung: Mizan, 1986), 37-60.

<sup>59</sup> Ahmad Syafii Maarif, *Krisis Arab dan Masa Depan Dunia Islam* (Jakarta: Maarif Institut, 2018), 2-50.

<sup>60</sup> Maarif, *Membumikan Islam*, 67-70.

<sup>61</sup> Wahbah Zuhaili, *Tafsīr al-Munīr: Aqidah, Syariah, Manhaj (al-Fatihah – al-Baqarah) – Jilid I* (Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2013), 267-277.

<sup>62</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *Tafsīr Fi Dżilālī Qur’an: Di Bawah Naungan al-Qur’an (Surat al-Fatihah-al-Baqarah) – Jilid I* (Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2000), 157-159.

bin Abi Talib (d. 661), the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, and the supporters of 'Aisha, one of the Prophet's wives and Mothers of the Believers (*ummahāt al-mu'minin*), and the Battle of Siffin (657) between the supporters of 'Ali bin Abi Talib and the supporters of Mu'awiya bin Abi Sufyan. Early Islamic history shows a Muslim community already far from the ideal community, divided into hostile factions competing for power, even though their leaders were companions of the Prophet and had lived by his side.<sup>63</sup> After the Battle of Siffin, the Muslim community was divided into three rival groups: the supporters of 'Ali bin Abi Talib, the supporters of Mu'awiya, and the Khawarij. The Khawarij Ibn Muljam stabbed 'Ali bin Talib in the holy month of Ramadan, and after a few days, he succumbed to his injuries and died. However, the conflict did not end there and culminated in the Battle of Karbala (680) between the supporters of Husayn, the son of 'Ali bin Abi Talib and grandson of the Prophet, and the supporters of Yazid, the son of Mu'awiya.

These horrific events stand in stark contrast to the Qur'anic ethics which call for true brotherhood among the Muslims (*al-ukhuwwa al-islamiyya*); however, if one group is bent on assuming complete control at the expense of the other, Islamic group ethics no longer apply, and the Muslim community has abandoned this ideal. With the fragility of the building of Islamic brotherhood, the Muslims, Maarif warned, disobey the Qur'anic principles of equality, justice, and tolerance which should govern public life, as in Surah al-Hujurat (verses 10–15), al-Nisa' (verse 58), al-Nahl (verse 90), al-Ma'idah (verse 8), al-Zumar (verse 18), and al-Baqarah (verse 256).<sup>64</sup>

Areas are often marked by tensions that turn into conflicts and physical violence between competing Muslim groups who wish to gain political power.<sup>65</sup> In Muslim history, the three major conflicts mentioned above are referred to as trials and major disasters (*al-fitān al-kubrā*) which shook the early community and left deep scars in the community that are still felt today. Immediately after the death of the Prophet the Muslim community was divided in the political sphere, with various factions vying for leadership and authority.

Unfortunately, the Muslims failed to take these lessons seriously, leading to another major dispute between the two sons of

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<sup>63</sup> Maarif, "Ukhuwah Islamiyah", 37–41.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 41.

Caliph Harun al-Rashid (d. 809), Amin and Ma'mun, as noted by Madjid,<sup>66</sup> which proved to Maarif how difficult the dictum of Islamic brotherhood truly is in practice. He argues that religion, instead of being used as a moral framework, is merely used as a means to achieve political gains. This is the moral lesson that is taught through the study of the history of Muslim society, including that of Indonesia. In his view, such instrumental political practices can only thrive when personal or group interests and egoism take precedence over morality, which are harshly criticized in the Qur'an, such as in Surah al-Rūm (verse 32) and al-Mu'minūn (verse 53).<sup>67</sup>

### **Indonesian Islam, Politics, and Democracy**

Maarif's concern about contradictions or paradoxes between Islamic ideals and historical Islam does not only revolve around the verses of the Qur'an related to Islamic brotherhood (*al-ukhūmah al-islāmīyah*) but also highlights the other verses that touch on public issues which can be read in the context of Islam in modern Indonesia. Maarif also pays attention to the Muslim world in other regions, such as in his *The Arab Crisis and the Future of the Islamic World (Krisis Arab dan Masa Depan Dunia Islam)*.<sup>68</sup> In his opinion, Islam in Indonesia has great potential, especially when considering its role as the largest Muslim population in the world.

As the largest religious group in Indonesia, Muslims contribute considerably to today's discourse on democracy, and two major questions are being raised. First, does Islam provide theological support for democracy or are they incompatible with each other? Second, what is the position and role of the Muslim population in the democratization process?<sup>69</sup> The first question arises because there is still the predominant view that political Islam does not have a strong democratic basis.<sup>70</sup> Maarif is aware of those groups who reject

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<sup>66</sup> Nurcholish Madjid, "Menegakkan Fahaman Ahlus-Sunnah Wal-Jamaah Baru" in Jalaluddin Rahmat, et. al., *Satu Islam Sebuah Dilema* (Bandung: Mizan, 1986), 14.

<sup>67</sup> Ahmad Syafii Maarif, *Mencari Autentisitas dalam Dinamika Zaman* (Yogyakarta: Ircisod, 2019), 51.

<sup>68</sup> Maarif, *Krisis Arab*.

<sup>69</sup> Md Nazrul Islam and Md Saidul Islam, "Islam and Democracy: Conflicts and Congruence", *Religions* 8, no. 104 (2017), 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel8060104>.

<sup>70</sup> Sabri Ciftci, F. Michael Wuthrich, and Ammar Shamaileh, "Islam, Religious Outlooks, and Support for Democracy", *Political Research Quarterly* 72, no. 2 (2019), 435-449. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912918793233>.

democracy as a secular system of governance. However, he knows that most Indonesian Muslims have accepted democracy, which makes them more advanced in their political views than Arab Muslims, who find it challenging to accept democracy and modernity.<sup>71</sup> Islam in Indonesia, continues Maarif, has shown a positive attitude towards aspects of modern civilization. The 2013 Freedom House survey reinforces Maarif's statement. According to Kuru,<sup>72</sup> the data collected in 49 Muslim-majority countries indicated that less than one-fifth are in fact electoral democracies. However, another study by Chen and Yan concluded that the level of democracy in Muslim countries is generally lower than in non-Muslim countries,<sup>73</sup> which are known for their discrimination against minority groups.<sup>74</sup> On the other hand, Indonesian Muslims tend to be more assertive towards democracy, thus demolishing Huntington's thesis about the clash of civilizations.<sup>75</sup> It also strengthens Hashemi's argument that acceptance of democracy, especially in a society where religion is the main identity marker, does not require the privatization of religion, provided that religion is reinterpreted as an ethical basis for legitimate political authority and human rights.<sup>76</sup> The overwhelming support of democracy by most Indonesian Muslims, of course, cannot be separated from the religious perspective. Some political parties have successfully instrumentalized Islam and used it as their ideological basis to rally support among the Muslim populace.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Ahmad Syafii Maarif, *Tuhan Menyapa Kita: Menghidupkan Hati Nurani dan Akal Sehat* (Yogyakarta: Ircisod, 2020), 15-26.

<sup>72</sup> Ahmed T. Kuru, *Islam, Authoritarianism, and Underdevelopment: A Global and Historical Comparison* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 1-3.

<sup>73</sup> Naiwan Chen and Tsai-Chen Yang, "Islam and Democracy: A Dynamic Perspective", *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 17, no. 3 (2016), 329-364. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S146810991600013X>.

<sup>74</sup> Emilia Justyna Powell, et.al., "Islam-Based Legal Language and State Governance Democracy, Strength of the Judiciary and Human Rights", *Constitutional Political Economy* 32 (2021), 376-412. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10602-019-9298-y>.

<sup>75</sup> Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 2004), 135.

<sup>76</sup> Nader Hashemi, *Islam, Secularism, and Liberal Democracy: Toward a Democratic Theory for Muslim Societies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 12.

<sup>77</sup> Hamdan Zoelva, "The Development of Indonesia and Democracy in Indonesia", *Constitutional Review* 8, no. 1 (2022), 37-61. <https://doi.org/10.31078/Consrev812>.



Among the Indonesian parties that understand themselves as “Islamic parties” are the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) and the National Awakening Party (PKB) which has never won a majority of votes and is entrenched as a minority opposition party.<sup>78</sup> However, these parties are not free from internal conflicts that end in divisions and the emergence of new splinter parties. Therefore, political Islam has not produced encouraging results in Indonesia, which suggests that the political power of Muslims has not yet been consolidated and crystallized. Yet, Muslim voters showed an increasing level of maturity in the 2004 general elections<sup>79</sup> after which Indonesia was celebrated as the third largest democratic country in the world.<sup>80</sup> For the first time, Muslim voters directly elected legislative members in DPR, DPD, and DPRD as well as the President and Vice President of the republic.

There were doubts about implementing the 2004 general elections, which put considerable pressure on the Muslim community due to various political, cultural, and economic factors. This perspective has long been used by several experts in the field of democracy studies, such as Lipset who, in the late 1950s, pointed at the close relationship between democracy and economic development, in addition to culture which includes political beliefs, attitudes, and values.<sup>81</sup> According to Diamond,<sup>82</sup> the differences in political culture influence the development of democracy in a country. In this respect, Muslim countries are characterized by their cultural incompatibility with democracy,<sup>83</sup> as claimed by Huntington, Kedourie, and Lewis. Mujani summarized their views as follows:

Islam is a total way of life-based on sharia which regulates all aspects of the life of individuals and Islamic society, and therefore there is no difference between religion and politics;

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<sup>78</sup> R.E. Elson, “Nationalism, Islam, ‘Secularism’ and the State in Contemporary Indonesia”. *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 64, no. 3 (2010), 328-343. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357711003736493>.

<sup>79</sup> Asrori S. Karni (ed.), *Hajatan Demokrasi: Potret Jurnalistik Pemilu Langsung Simpul Islam Indonesia dari Moderat hingga Garis Keras* (Jakarta: Era Media Informasi, 2006), 5.

<sup>80</sup> Robert Hefner, “Islam and Institutional Religious Freedom in Indonesia”, *Religions* 12, no. 6 (2021), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12060415>.

<sup>81</sup> Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation* (Yogyakarta: IRE, 2003), 205.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> Sabri Ciftci, “Islam, Social Justice, and Democracy”, *Politics and Religion* 12 (2019), 549–576. doi:10.1017/S1755048318000810.

(2) this view of life is not a peripheral symptom, but a mainstream one; (3) Islam is antagonistic towards democracy; and therefore democracy in Muslim societies will not grow.<sup>84</sup>

For decades it has been the predominant view that Islam is incompatible with modern thought and modern values and principles including democracy. According to Cesari,<sup>85</sup> this unsupported and unfounded view stigmatized Islam as an oppressive and intolerant religion and Muslim society as being fatalistic, irrational, and dismissive of modern ideas and their derivatives, such as democracy and human rights.<sup>86</sup> Tibi argued this negative view is largely due to Muslim hardliners, fundamentalists, and other extremist minority groups who claim to be Islamic,<sup>87</sup> even though Islam is itself a moderate religion that condemns all forms of excessiveness.

It is undeniable that there are radical Islamist groups whose existence seems to validate those who understand Islam as being inherently undemocratic. Salim<sup>88</sup> points at groups like the Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), a group within Islam called Maksum as Islamic revivalists.<sup>89</sup> Maarif was determined to put an end to any forms of extremism and correct their views by citing the authentic sources of Islam and defending the progressive views of contemporary Muslim intellectuals. In his work *Islam in the Frame of Indonesianness and Humanity: A Reflection*, in the section on *Islam and Democracy*, Maarif explains the pro-democracy views of contemporary Muslim intellectuals, which were later consolidated by Effendy<sup>90</sup> and

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<sup>84</sup> Saiful Mujani, *Muslim Demokrat: Islam, Budaya Demokrasi, dan Partisipasi Politik di Indonesia Pasca Orde Baru* (Gramedia: Jakarta, 2007), 14-15.

<sup>85</sup> Jocelyne Cesari, *When Islam and Democracy Meet: Muslim in Europe and in the United States* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 21-42.

<sup>86</sup> Rachel M. Scott, *The Challenge of Political Islam: Non-Muslim and the Egyptian State* (USA: Cornell University Press, 2021), 3.

<sup>87</sup> Bassam Tibi, *Islamism and Islam* (New Haven: Yale University, 2012), 2-5.

<sup>88</sup> Arskal Salim, "Discourse on Democracy Within Debates on State Islam Relations in Indonesia", *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 2, no. 1 (2008), 103-128.

<sup>89</sup> Ali Maksum, "Discourse on Islam and Democracy in Indonesia: A Study on the Intellectual Debate between Liberal Islam Network (JIL) and Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI)", *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 11, no. 2 (2017): 405-422. <https://doi/10.15642/JIIS.2017.11.2>.

<sup>90</sup> Bahtiar Effendy, "The Crescent and the End of History: Some Notes on the Compatibility of Islam with Democracy" in Fuad Jabali and Jamhari (eds.), *Islam in Indonesia: Islamic Studies and Social Transformation* (Jakarta-Canada: Indonesian-Canada Islamic Higher Education Project, 2002), 129-135.

Hilmy<sup>91</sup> who argued that Islam is compatible and congruent with democracy and that democracy is actually an intrinsic part of Islam. This dialogue is continued today by prominent figures such as Khaled Abou El Fadl and Fahmi Huwaydi, the authors of *Islam and Democracy (al-Islām wa-l-Dimuqrāṭīya)* which was translated into Indonesian.<sup>92</sup>

Huwaydi expressed his astonishment at those Muslims who reject democracy as a system of disbelief (*kufr*) system that stands in direct antithesis to Islam. In his view, this rejection is the result of the Muslims' failure to understand the true nature of democracy; otherwise, they would not oppose it. The essence of democracy, according to Huwaydi, is the involvement of the community in the election of someone who will later govern and regulate their lives. In a democracy, people are recognized for their rights to control those in power and hold them accountable,<sup>93</sup> even to reduce them if they commit fraud. Huwaydi agrees with Fadl's views expressed in his *Islam and the Challenge of Democracy*:

Although Islamic jurists debated political systems, the Qur'an does not prescribe a particular form of government. But it identifies a set of social and political values important to Muslim governance. Three values are fundamental: the pursuit of justice through social cooperation and cooperation (49:13, 11:119); developing consultative government methods that are not autocratic; and institutionalizing compassion and compassion in social interactions (6:12, 6:54, 21:107, 27:77, 29:51, 45:20). So, all being equal, Muslims today must support the form of government that is most effective in helping them promote these values.<sup>94</sup>

According to Huwaydi, the authorities cannot arbitrarily direct the people to economic, cultural, and political ideas and methods that the people do not support. Therefore, democracy provides opportunities for opposition, freedom of the press, independence of the judiciary, and the ability to emerge many or multi-party. If democracy opens up socio-political space and creates an "equal

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<sup>91</sup> Masdar Hilmy, "Muslim's Approaches to Democracy: Islam and Democracy in Contemporary Indonesia", *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 1, no. 1 (2007): 42-74.

<sup>92</sup> Maarif, *Islam dalam Bingkai Keindonesiaan*, 148-160.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>94</sup> Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Islam and the Challenge of Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 5.

playing field,”<sup>95</sup> how can it be against Islam? Huwaydi then explored the arguments in the Qur'an and Hadith that are in line with the main principles of democracy. Huwaydi offered a series of convincing arguments for the compatibility of Islam and democracy when discussing the question of whether democracy is indeed a *kufr* system and touched upon other issues such as Islamic attitudes towards democracy, characteristics of an Islamic political system, and the multi-party system in line with the Sharia.<sup>96</sup>

To support Huwaydi's view, Maarif writes, “Indonesia in the future must consciously state that a democratic system is the only option; people should not turn to other systems.”<sup>97</sup> He pays particular attention to the principle of freedom in democracy as an embodiment of the monotheistic doctrine, which emphasizes freedom. Freedom in a democratic system of governance, however, is not limited to electoral political moments and must also be reflected in all aspects of public life marked by diversity and the protection of minority groups.

Maarif expresses his concern about the true meaning of religious pluralism which must not be misunderstood as lowering the position of Islam, especially if it leads to pointless theological arguments and further divisions. Regarding the notion of religious pluralism, the Qur'an offers a far more progressive view because it recognizes diversity as the reflection of the real state of humanity, which is characterized by different views, customs, and beliefs. However, every human being has a right to have a place on Earth. Maarif seems to be lifting an admonishing finger when he writes, “The Qur'an is more tolerant than most Muslims: it is hostile to atheists.”<sup>98</sup> With this view, it does not mean that Maarif denies the fundamental and existential value of faith for humans. Faith provides the ontological security every person needs in their journey through life which is full of upheavals and challenges. However, those who deny the existence of God, they choose to live without security. He

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<sup>95</sup> Arolda Elbasani and Olivier Roy, “Governing Islam and Religious Pluralism in New Democracies”, *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 19, no. 1 (2017), 1-3. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2016.1201983>.

<sup>96</sup> Fahmi Huwaydi, *Demokrasi, Oposisi, dan Masyarakat Madani: Isu-isu Besar Politik Islam* (Bandung: Mizan, 1996), 151-159; 209-256.

<sup>97</sup> Maarif, *Islam dalam Bingkai Keindonesiaan*, 163.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

ends this line of thought with the question, “Should it be punished based on religion?”<sup>99</sup>

### **Concluding Remarks**

Exploring Maarif's ideas through his work, it becomes clear that he played a significant role as a modern Muslim thinker who contributed much to the Islamic discourse in Indonesia. The quality of Maarif's scholarship can be seen in his thesis and dissertation, which discusses the history of Islamic politics in Indonesia, and strengthened the influence of Pancasila as the foundation of the modern state of Indonesia. At the same time, he dispelled the common erroneous notion that authentic Islam is not commensurable with local culture and values. Rather than listening to the impatient cries for an Islamic state, Maarif offered a different approach by transforming and reforming the Muslims' attitudes towards political Islam.

Maarif's thought was significantly influenced by his exposure to Western scholarship and culture; however, it was due to his teacher, Fazlur Rahman, that he became a passionate and inspirational voice of the Islamic narrative and was able to develop a harmonious synthesis between Islam, Indonesian identity, and humanity in his own dialectical-ethical approach to Islamic intellectualism. His ideas were rooted in Islamic sources, especially the Qur'an, whose ethical principles he then contextualized in the socio-political reality of modern Indonesia. He lamented the fact that the Muslims, in Indonesia and elsewhere, are ignoring the universal moral message of the Qur'an, which has a versatile and timeless reach. Therefore, the Pancasila, which has provided ethical principles that are in line with Islam, has not been absorbed into public life and brought forth the right nation and the right state.

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

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