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**NURCHOLISH MADJID –  
ISLAM AND PLURALISTIC DEMOCRACY IN INDONESIA**

*In this paper the author explores the political thought of Nurcholish Madjid (1939–2005), an Indonesian moderate Islamic intellectual, by placing it critically in contemporary theoretical tension between liberalism and communitarianism and recent discourse of post-secular society. He argues that Madjid understood the concept of civil society and religious tolerance in a communitarian way and approached the discourse of post-secular society in his insistence on translation of cosmopolitan values in Islam. The paper arrives at the conclusion that Madjid's moderate hermeneutics has opened the door for interreligious understanding in pluralistic democracy.*

Indonesia, a pluralistic democratic state in the present-day Muslim world,<sup>1</sup> counts more or less on the tolerant and moderate behaviors of the Muslims who are the majority in the country. The State's Constitution, *Undang-undang Dasar 1945* (the 1945 Constitution), has established Indonesia not as an Islamic state, but as a modern democratic *Rechtsstaat* that guarantees the freedom of religion to its people. However, interreligious conflicts have happened frequently. Intolerant actions such as the burning of churches and oppression of minorities such as the Ahmadiyah and Shi'ah communities had their strokes in the Indonesian political landscape. The hardline Islamic groups struggled to replace the constitution and set up a religion-based state in the country which has the largest Muslim population in the world. Nevertheless, the majority of Indonesian Muslims denounce the religious state option. One of the moderate Muslim intel-

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<sup>1</sup> See Masykuri Abdillah, Ways of Constitution Building in Muslim Countries, in: Birgit Krawietz et al. (eds.), *Islam and the Rule of Law*, Sankt Augustin/Berlin: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung 2008, 58.

lectuals who represented the moderate Muslims was Nurcholish Madjid, who was more popular with the nickname “Cak Nur.”<sup>2</sup>

One of Madjid’s opinions that caused a controversy among the Indonesian Muslims in 1970 was the secularization idea “Islam yes, Islamic party no!”<sup>3</sup> The basic assumption was the separation between religion and state that we can find in the literature about western secularization in the 1970s and 1980s. Since secularization has a close relationship with liberalism, Madjid’s idea can be viewed as liberalism in Islam. I will not explore too far into his theological views, which is not my competence. This article is about interpreting his political views in the horizon of contemporary political theories. Through this interpretation I will display Madjid’s contribution to the thoughts of the public role of religion in a pluralistic democracy.

To reach this goal, first, I will expose the methods I use to read Madjid’s thoughts about Islam and pluralistic democracy (1). Then, I will point out the uniqueness of Madjid’s views if we put them in the framework of theoretical political debates between liberalism and communitarianism (2). His views will be more obvious to us if we link them with the contemporary discourse about post-secular societies (3). I will close this writing with a conclusion (4).

### ***1. Madjid and Contemporary Political Theories***

Madjid developed his thought in several publications. The most important writing is *Islam, Doctrines and Civilization* (1992). In 2006, his thoughts were published as *Nurcholish Madjid Encyclopedia* in 4 books with a total of 3,741 pages. In his writings Madjid tried to integrate Islam with the humanities, modernity, contemporary

<sup>2</sup> Nurcholish Madjid was born in Jombang, East Java, on March 17, 1939, and died on August 29, 2005, in Jakarta. He was a moderate Muslim intellectual who led *Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam* (Islamic Student Group) and *Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia* (Indonesian Muslim Intellectual Association) and was Rector of Paramadina University in Jakarta. He was educated in some *pesantren* (Islamic religious schools), and from 1961 to 1968 studied in *Institut Agama Islam Negeri* (State Islamic Institute) in Jakarta. From 1978 to 1984 he was promoted in the University of Chicago, United States, with a dissertation on the thought of Ibnu Taimiyah. Madjid was known as one of the Islamic renewers in Indonesia whose ideas supported central modern values like freedom, equality, plurality and toleration. His political influence on the past Indonesian government during the turbulent time could not be overlooked, since on his advice President Suharto had resigned in 1998.

<sup>3</sup> See Fauzan Saleh, *Modern Trends in Islamic Theological Discourse in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Indonesia. A Critical Survey*, Leiden: Brill 2001, 249.

politics and Indonesia-ness. If religious consciousness in the middle of globalization can be discerned into two forms, i.e. fundamentalism and “reflective faith,” Madjid can be considered as a Muslim who developed the reflective faith and connected it to other religions, with observations on modern scientific knowledge and human rights.<sup>4</sup> His reformation ideas were known as Neo-Modernism in Islam which supported modern hermeneutics to read the Koran.<sup>5</sup> The neo-modernists were not anti-modernism nor anti-secularism, but were aware of the excess of secularism and individualism, so they were part of the “dialectics of traditions and modernism” in the Islamic world. The speaker of these neo-modernists was the Muslim intellectual from Pakistan, Fazlur Rahman, and in Indonesia, beside Madjid, Abdurrahman Wahid and Djohan Effendi could be counted in this reformation movement.<sup>6</sup> As he learned much about contemporary issues, Madjid was trying to link Islam with pluralism, gender equality, and democracy.<sup>7</sup> It could be said that there was a “dialogue between Islam and secularism” in Madjid’s thought.

The dialogical position in Madjid’s thought allows his readers to comment on two sides: the side of Islam or the side of secularism. The designation “Neo-modernist” given to him is an example of how his thinking was commented from the Islamic side by the Islam writers. In this article I will comment on his thought from the other side, i.e. the side of secularism and post-secularism. This side can be found in the western contemporary political theories, so I limit myself to Madjid’s writings which are relevant for commentary from the side of political theories.

My commentary on Madjid’s ideas is based on hermeneutic methods. There are at least three reasons why using hermeneutics is possible. First, a comment is an interpretation which contains a presup-

<sup>4</sup> I borrow the term “reflective faith” from Habermas. If fundamentalism is a dogmatic religious consciousness and is not open to the perspective of other religions, a reflective faith is comprehended as a critical religious consciousness which is open to the perspective of other religions. See Eduardo Mendieta, “A Postsecular World Society: On the Philosophical Significance of Post-secular Consciousness and the Multicultural World Society.” An Interview with Jürgen Habermas, translated by Matthias Fritsch, available online at <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2010/02/03/a-postsecular-world-society/>.

<sup>5</sup> See Saleh, op. cit., 244. Azhari Noer recorded three types of other contemporary Islamic movements, i.e.: Neo-revivalism, Mahdiism, and Traditionalism. See Kautsar Azhari Noer, Aliran-aliran Islam Kontemporer: *Titik Temu. Jurnal Dialog Peradaban*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (January-June 2009) 134-144.

<sup>6</sup> See Azhari Noer, 134.

<sup>7</sup> See Muhamad Wahyuni Nafis, *Cak Nur. Sang Guru Bangsa*, Jakarta: Penerbit Buku Kompas 2014, 331.

position or—taking Gadamer’s term—a “hermeneutic horizon.” I will commence from contemporary political theories as represented in the debate between liberalism and communitarianism as a hermeneutic horizon to articulate and comment on Madjid’s thought. Second, Madjid as well as contemporary political theorists like John Rawls, Michael Sandels, Alasdair McIntyre etc. have the same concern, i.e.: to find—in Kantian terms—“conditions of possibility” of political co-existence in the pluralistic democracy. There is a crossroad between Madjid’s and contemporary political theories, and the crossroad is a *locus* for the hermeneutics that I apply to this writing. The *locus* is the concept of “civil society.” At that crossroad his thought on tolerance can be interpreted by differentiating it from the contemporary political theories.

Third, both Madjid and the contemporary political theorists commence from the secularization process in the modern societies. Sociologist of religion, José Casanova, analyzed the secularization process into three components: institutional differentiation of secular aspects—such as country, economy, and science—from the religious institutions and norms; progressive decline of religious beliefs and practices, and privatization of religions as the precondition of democratic politics.<sup>8</sup> Madjid declined secularization in the second and third categorization, but he accepted secularization in Casanova’s first categorization. In the spirit of *Tauhid* and under the influence of Robert N. Bellah, Madjid predominantly supported the secularization concept as a demythologization.<sup>9</sup> There is freedom through secularization, which is “freedom from misapprehended sanctification” and “the eradication of *bid’ah* (heresy), *khurafat* (gentile), and other superstitious practices.”<sup>10</sup> Madjid accepted the separation between religion and politics, and also finally the problems of managing wellbeing in this world and problems of salvation of souls in the afterlife. As he acknowledged himself, Madjid accepted the sociological meaning of secularization, but he rejected secularism that he considered as ideological.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> See José Casanova, *The Secular, Secularizations, Secularisms*, in: Craig Calhoun et al. (eds.), *Rethinking Secularism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011, 60.

<sup>9</sup> See Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam, Doktrin dan Peradaban*, Jakarta: Yayasan Wakaf Paramadina 1992, xxviii. Madjid interpreted “Tawhid,” the teaching of monotheistic Islam, as deliberating in the personal as well as in social domains. See *ibid.*, 72-92.

<sup>10</sup> See Budhy Munawar-Rachman, *Ensiklopedi Nurcholish Madjid*, Bandung: Mizan 2006, 2969-2970.

<sup>11</sup> See Wahyuni Nafis, 79-80, and also Munawar-Rachman, 2971.

To be more concrete, there are two positions in the contemporary political theories which have become the hermeneutic horizon to comment on Madjid's: liberalism and communitarianism. Liberalism, as it is seen in the position of John Rawls, Ch. Larmore and Ronald Dworkin, defends secularization with the concept of proceduralism,<sup>12</sup> while communitarianism as represented by Sandel, McIntyre, Taylor and Walzer emphasizes religious and cultural values as the source of political legitimation. As for liberalism politics must be neutral with respect to comprehensive religious doctrine, for communitarianism politics is rooted in traditions and particular community values.<sup>13</sup> From both contradicting positions, I will comment on Madjid's thoughts on tolerance. To make his distinctive position of thought more obvious I will comment it also from the contemporary discourse about post-secular society initiated by Jürgen Habermas.

## **2. Madjid, Liberalism and Communitarianism**

The concept of civil society in western contemporary political theories is explained by linking it with two other components in the secular modern society: the state and the market. Through secularization, the liberal western states placed religions as one of the civil-society components. In his thinking, Madjid placed religion as an important component which is not merely plugged into the *civil society* category, but as a component which is equiprimordial with the *civil society*. To prove the equiprimordiality between religion and *civil society* Madjid entered into dialogue with western liberalism, as we can read in his writing "Mewujudkan Masyarakat Madani di Era Reformasi" (*Toward a Madani Society in the Reformation Era*) (2009). He argued that the universal values of secular western societies can be traced back to their origin in the religious communities. He reasoned that "secular democracy" was developed from "the seeds of deep religious contemplations, which were sowed by the views of George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams and his son John Quincy Adams, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and others."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> See Rainer Forst, *Kontexte der Gerechtigkeit*, Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp 1994, 56 etc.

<sup>13</sup> For the discussion about these "procedures" see Axel Honneth (ed.), *Kommunitarismus. Eine Debatte über die moralischen Grundlagen moderner Gesellschaften*, Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp 1994, 181 etc.

<sup>14</sup> Nurholish Madjid, Mewujudkan Masyarakat Madani di Era Reformasi: *Titik Temu. Jurnal Dialog Peradaban*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (January-June 2009) 19-20.

No doubt, Madjid was thinking like the communitarians who traced back the proceduralism and principles of neutrality to communitarian values—which is in this case—religions. However, there are two significant differences that we must pay attention to. First, while the communitarians saw the source of the universalism of liberal values in economic relationships in the market,<sup>15</sup> Madjid traced back the universalism to the religious traditions that were the root of liberalism. Madjid argued that the “moral views” and “personal and social ethics” of the founding fathers of the United States had their “metaphysical foundations in the teachings of Jesus Christ, their supreme Master of Wisdom.”<sup>16</sup> Second, while communitarianism defended the particularism of communitarian values, Madjid, on the contrary, agreed with western universalism. He argued that the communitarian values could be the basis of universal values as long as they were reconstructed as something inclusive. The argument to trace back proceduralism and secularism to religious traditions is very central to understand his thought about the inclusivism of Islam which he viewed as basic to strengthen a civil society in a democracy.

There is an interesting substance about the first difference which can be elaborated further. The principle of neutrality and proceduralism in liberal theories is intended to enable tolerance in a pluralistic democracy. Such tolerance, in the mind of liberal thinkers, can be developed if political relationships are modeled according to the transactional relationships in the market. The market is neutral towards religions, does not involve faith or salvation issues in its transactions, or—we can say—is secular. Of course buyers and sellers may pray for their success or have fellowship in the congregation, but they will do fair transactions if they comprehend the market as the place of buying and selling. While the market players have faith, this faith is not about divine interventions, but “faith in the honesty and competence of human actors, the accuracy of information, the wisdom of one’s own investment decisions, and the efficacy of legal and technological systems underpinning market exchange.”<sup>17</sup> That kind of faith is not a religious faith, but—as expressed by Calhoun—a “secular faith” which is neutral with respect to comprehensive religious doctrines. Liberalism takes relationships in the market as political relationships. So as the market can operate fairly by neutralizing buying and selling transactions from certain religious beliefs, politi-

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Will Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy. An Introduction*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1991, 217.

<sup>16</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Craig Calhoun et al. (eds.), Introduction, in: Craig Calhoun et al. (eds.), *Rethinking Secularism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011, 10.

cal relationships in a modern law state can work fairly if they are neutralized from certain religious beliefs.

I propose to call the tolerance model developed in the western secularism and liberalism “market-based tolerance.” According to this model, a state can secure tolerance in a pluralistic democracy, if religion is strictly separated from politics. Politics is a public sphere, while religion is placed in the private one to neutralize public policies from religion and protect them from the interventions of religion. In the separation of the public and private spheres, various religions can coexist freely as the preferences of personal values, as the players in the market are free to have their preferences in buying and selling things.

Through his communitarian perspective, Madjid declined that model for his concept of tolerance. On the contrary, he saw that the orientations of the universal values on which tolerance is based cannot be derived from economic relationships in the market, but from moral relationships in the religion itself. If we can call the intellectual presupposition in which Madjid’s statements were grounded a model, we can call the model he chose “religion-based tolerance.” Through that model he saw that western secular democracy could be seen to originate from Christian traditions which highly support universal humanitarian values. Getting more radical than communitarian critics of liberalism, he demonstrated moral relationships in religious communities to be something more primordial than transactional relationships in the market.

Madjid’s view about religion-based tolerance was affirmed by his thought about civil society. Instead of taking the concept of civil society developed in the West by thinkers such as Locke, Kant, Hegel and Habermas who abstracted it from any particular community, he explored the meaning of civil society from the concrete life in the history of the Middle East, i.e.: the Medina society in the era of the prophet Mohammad. Madjid designated civil society with a term that later became popular with Indonesian Muslims: the *madani society*. The term referred not merely to the city of Yatsrib which then was changed into al-Madinah which means “a city,” but to the public civility practiced by the people of the city, “the high levels of commitment, involvement, and participation of all community ranks” and moreover the “open leadership for skills tested by universal considerations and symbolized in the experiment to institutionalize the highest leadership position not based on heredity.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Madjid, 2009, 17.

The Islamic civil society is not a system of needs (Hegel), and is not an interconnection of various value preferences (Walzer), and is not free associations of people in the public sphere (Habermas), but an inclusive religious community. From that religious community's practices—not from transactional practices in the market—democratic values, such as tolerance, were derived to enlighten the political relationship in the pluralistic Indonesian society. Here, Madjid argued that civil society was equiprimordial with the religious community, therefore universal values should not be derived from Calhoun's "secular faith" of the market, but directly from religions. While the American founding fathers grounded the universal secular democratic values on Christian values, Madjid felt that Islam also offered inclusive universal values for a pluralistic democracy.

As someone who had studied for a long period of time in the West, Madjid had reasons not to take the market model as the basis of tolerance. In Liberalism, the strategy of neutralizing the public sphere from religion is surely able to calm down identity conflicts in plural societies, because people just shift attention from religious identity differences to the economic transactional relationships. The resulting tolerance is in fact a *laissez-faire* attitude toward religions. Madjid had seen a similar phenomenon happen in Indonesian society, when modernization grew with the liberal model. He argued that in Indonesia "the tremendous fear of the religious stance of common social life" had obstructed contacts between religious groups. Interreligious relationship became superficial because it was "impossible for people to genuinely ask what was the meaning of justice or the metaphysical foundations of human rights, because of (Indonesia's) plural society." This blockade of religious reasoning, if we can say so, does not support a pluralistic democracy because "we cannot involve one another in the points of differences among us."<sup>19</sup>

Without explicitly mentioning it, Madjid criticized the Hobbesian *modus vivendi* strategy. According to this classic liberal solution, pluralism can be guaranteed by removing religious reasons in the public sphere. Consensus on religious values does not need to be achieved. It is enough for society to reach the compromise of interests by removing all possible religious controversies. In other words, this *modus vivendi* is just a "ceasefire" which does not solve the real problems. Instead of taking the liberal solution Madjid demanded more than "a passive acknowledgement of plurality." He urged to continue the discourse of values to go deeper into "the direct general involvement with plurality" to prevent people from getting into "the trap of

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<sup>19</sup> See *ibid.*, 19.



meaningless procedural neutralism.”<sup>20</sup> Proceduralism can temporarily calm down the tensions among various orientations of values in a pluralistic society, but only by muzzling the religious aspirations in the private sphere. The calmness is apparent, and the harmony resulting is insincere because open conflicts are not coped with but are only postponed. For Madjid, Islamic thinking would be able to contribute to Indonesian pluralistic democracy only if it can surpass the *modus vivendi* of liberalism. Madjid’s support of a public role in Islam, I would say, is similar to An-Naim’s concept of “soft secularism,” wherein the secular state is “necessary for achieving sustained pluralism” but religion is also “necessary because the society needs the moral depth of religion as a resource of public policy.”<sup>21</sup>

### 3. Madjid and “Post-secular Society”

Recently the concept of religious tolerance has got a new impetus from the discourse about post-secular society. Discussing Madjid in the context of this discourse is not just additional. Instead, it will clarify his critical position toward liberalism. The discourse about “post-secular society” was started by Habermas when he received the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade in October 2001.<sup>22</sup> According to Habermas, the post-secular society is “the situation in which secular reason and a religious consciousness that has become reflexive engage in a relationship.”<sup>23</sup> In that situation, the community groups which embrace a certain religion, another religion, or even no religion, have the willingness to learn from one another. Obviously, pluralistic democracy is in the post-secular situation. Habermas urged the embracers of religion to find what he called an “epistemic attitude” (*epistemische Einstellung*), the willingness to learn, either from other beliefs with their unique doctrines of salvation or from the secular groups.<sup>24</sup> This epistemic attitude produces a “translation”

<sup>20</sup> See *ibid.*, 20.

<sup>21</sup> See Abdulahi Ahmed An-Naim, Islam and Secularism, in: Linel E. Cady et al. (eds.), *Comparative Secularism in a Global Age*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2010, 218.

<sup>22</sup> After that speech, he deepened the concept of post-secular society in several publications, one is: Jürgen Habermas, *Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion*, Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp 2005.

<sup>23</sup> Jürgen Habermas, Ein neues Interesse der Philosophie an der Religion? Ein Gespräch, in: Jürgen Habermas, *Nachmetaphysisches Denken II. Aufsätze und Repliken*, Berlin: Suhrkamp 2012, 103.

<sup>24</sup> See Habermas, *Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion*, 43.

from the truth content of religious contributions to the secular language understandable to all parties.

This inter-learning process was placed by Habermas in the context of his model of deliberative democracy, and in that model Habermas tried to “loosen” the neutrality principle of liberalism by giving a space to the religious role in the public sphere:

This relaxation of too strict a definition of neutrality toward competing world views must not level, however, the institutional threshold between the “wild life” of the political public sphere and the formal proceedings *within* political bodies. We better use the image of a filter that allows only secular contributions from the Babel of voices to pass through. In parliament, for example, the standing rules of procedure must empower the president of the house to have religious statements of justifications expunged from the minutes. The truth content of religious contributions can enter into the *institutionalized* practice of deliberation and decision-making only if the necessary translation already occurs in the pre-parliamentarian domain, i.e., in the political public sphere itself.<sup>25</sup>

This stance of Habermas’ refuses strict secularism which eliminates the role of religions in the public sphere, but maintains neutrality in the political systems.

Madjid did not talk about post-secular society but about secularization. But if the post-secular society is understood as a condition where religions have public influence within secularized people,<sup>26</sup> in that meaning Madjid was involved in the thinking about post-secular society because he thought on how Islam had a public role in Indonesia as a state. What Habermas meant with the “epistemic attitude” was intended by Madjid for Indonesian Islamic society, of course in his own way, i.e. community-based tolerance.

To become tolerant in the pluralistic democracy, as Madjid emphasized, one does not need to become *schizophrenic* by burying one’s religious identity when acting as a citizen. The real problem which threatens freedom in a pluralistic democracy is not religious identity which is normally possessed by each individual, but the absolutism of a single religious identity in front of many identities. On the contrary, self-neutralization from religious identity is not just unrealistic

<sup>25</sup> Jürgen Habermas, Religion in the Public Sphere, in: *A Seminar Report from the Holberg Prize Seminar*, 2005, 15.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Habermas, 2012, 3.

and creates hypocrisy, it generates the *laissez-faire* attitude or even a denial of plurality. Therefore, a Muslim is asked to overcome his ethnocentric perspective and direct himself toward cosmopolitan values in Islam which is useful to strengthen the solidarity of the civil society. He demanded the same thing from other groups of faiths for the sake of nationalistic solidarity.

The content of Madjid's demand is comparable with Habermas' urge that the groups with different worldviews in the pluralistic democracy should find an epistemic attitude which is mutually understandable. Madjid addressed his demand not only to the Muslims but to all parties in Indonesian society, as his own words are quoted here:

... we must endeavor with enough earnestness to find the *same vocabulary* or approach one another in the common life view. It means that each of us must strive to find in their historical or cultural realms something that metaphysically strengthens common view in the common life, by tracing back the seeds or potentials in the realm, not just the external changes; learning again the historical examples, not just the contemporary experience. Then all those things should be raised to the *generalization plateau* so they become *universal-inclusive*, valid for all, are not *particular-exclusive* valid for a certain group only.<sup>27</sup>

There are at least three main ideas in the quote which are comparable with what Habermas meant with epistemic attitude. First, every party, commencing from the *cultural life-world* or—in Madjid's term—its “historical or cultural realms,” strives to find the public language, epistemic content or—in Madjid's term—“the same vocabulary.” Second, the epistemic content is something metaphysic which can be the outlook of public life. Third, the epistemic content can be obtained by raising various concrete understandings in the *cultural life-world* to abstraction level or—in Madjid's term—“*generalization plateau*” until a universal-inclusive, valid-for-all general understanding results.

The first and third idea, except the presupposition of the instigating worldview, are exactly alike with Habermas' stand that “the content of religious expressions must be translated into a universally accessible language before it can make it onto official agendas and flow into the deliberation of decision-making bodies.”<sup>28</sup> A difference exists in the second idea, and the difference is fundamental because

<sup>27</sup> Madjid, 2009, 20-21. My emphasis.

<sup>28</sup> Habermas, 2012, 118.

it is precisely related to the difference of their assumed worldviews. While Habermas argued that the public language or epistemic content is “postmetaphysical,” i.e. neutral from comprehensive religious doctrine, Madjid on the contrary proposed a “metaphysical” epistemic content. This word “metaphysical” in the quote above does not refer to secular political theories, on the contrary, it refers to religious thinking. In his communitarian perspective Madjid argued that religious doctrine could be a meeting point of different religious groups if it was interpreted inclusively. That meeting point or the epistemic content is not the secular language, as Habermas wished, but an Islamic inclusive theology, a scriptural hermeneutics which matches the Islamic values with cosmopolitan values in the pluralistic democracy.

Although they use similar terms, i.e.: “translation” or “finding the same vocabulary,” Madjid and Habermas referred to two different hermeneutic methods. Through translation Habermas intended a process of interpreting religious terms to comprehend their epistemic content and then articulate them in secular terms which were accessible to all parties.<sup>29</sup> An example of this translation is the Christian specific concept of *imago Dei* (the image of God) which was translated by Kant as *Menschenwürde* (human dignity), a secular term which is accessible even to an atheist. Habermas’ translation is not about transmitting a term from one language to another language without changing the meaning, but removing the religious aspect of the term to leave only its secular aspect. That removal could not happen easily but had to pass through the long history of western secularization. Calhoun accurately called it a transformation; a process which he said was not fully rational, because it also involved beliefs.<sup>30</sup>

Different from Habermas’, Madjid’s hermeneutics can be better called an “adaptation,” because his inclusive theology is a hermeneutic effort to adjust Islamic terms with modernity and secularity. Commencing from Ibn Taymiyyah, for example, he tried to expand the meaning of “Islam” not as a certain religion, but as an attitude of self-surrender to God (*al-islam*). According to him, the generic meaning can be a “meeting point” of religions despite their plurality, because “in the beginning all religions hold the same principle, i.e. the obligation of the human being to surrender to the One and Only.”<sup>31</sup> The interpretation of the meaning of Islam is a semantic adaptation to

<sup>29</sup> See Craig Calhoun et al. (eds.), *Secularism, Citizenship, and the Public Sphere*, in: Calhoun et al., *Rethinking Secularism*, 85.

<sup>30</sup> See *ibid.*, 86.

<sup>31</sup> Madjid, 1992, 182-184.

the modern cosmopolitan values. Also, the concept of “*madani* society” is not a translation, but an adaptation from an existing modern concept, i.e. *civil society*. Because of their metaphysical presuppositions, they are not secular concepts, on the contrary they are theological concepts linked to a certain religion, i.e. Islam.

Observing the difference we can say that Madjid thought post-secularly without a post-metaphysical presupposition, because through his hermeneutics he tried to understand the Islamic concepts from other religions’ points of view and linked the concepts with secular views, as is seen in the concept of *madani* society.<sup>32</sup> Critics objected to his efforts because the *madani* society is nevertheless a concept which put Islam in front as the *dominant ideology* so it remains particularistic.<sup>33</sup> However, his hermeneutic effort is undeniably an example of the epistemic attitude which, according to Habermas, becomes a process of learning from one another in the pluralistic democracy. It is overreaching to demand a religious person to be secularistic by abandoning his religious metaphysical aspect, as it is also overreaching to demand a secular person to be religious. The willingness of a religious person to make his religious terms accessible to all people is an action of mutual approach.

Madjid’s communitarian presupposition brought him a difficulty to reach a “generalization plateau” which was absolutely free from Islamic insight. Also, when with that generalization he tried to release “faith” from his specific Islamic context by an invitation that “people must have faith in all holy books, prophets and apostles without discriminating a single one of them,” the faith he referred to meant the Abrahamic religions, not Calhoun’s “secular faith” which could be held by atheists.<sup>34</sup> From the perspective of liberal political theories Madjid was not free from a comprehensive religious doctrine, so he was not neutral toward particular community values. But is the neutralization still needed if one can “generalize” a religious teaching to find cosmopolitan values in it? Are not both generalizations in the construction of inclusive theology and the neutrality principle in liberal proceduralism intellectual instruments to find cosmopolitan values acceptable for all parties?

Through his moderate hermeneutics Madjid tried to touch the same cosmopolitan values as the liberal principle has reached about

<sup>32</sup> See Calhoun, *Secularism, Citizenship, and the Public Sphere*, 83.

<sup>33</sup> See Syamsul Arifin, *Masyarakat Madani: Bingkai Keadaban bagi Masyarakat Indonesia yang Demokratis-Pluralistis: Titik-Temu. Jurnal Dialog Peradaban*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (January-June 2009) 59.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Madjid, 2009, 16.

neutrality from comprehensive religious doctrine, such as: justice, equality, and plurality. Therefore both inclusive theology and the neutrality principle come to the same result though they go through different ways. In a pluralistic democracy the willingness to find the epistemic attitude as Madjid had done has opened a wide door of interreligious understanding. Madjid's moderate thought can de-radicalize Islamic fundamentalism that struggles ambitiously for political power in Indonesia. Although his stand is not totally secular or liberal but communitarian, his thought encourages the constructive role of religion in the public sphere and provides the seeds of civic Islam in pluralistic democracy.

#### 4. Conclusion

The goal of this article is to disclose the contribution of Madjid's thinking to nurture interreligious understanding within a pluralistic democracy. This interreligious understanding will not be reached if religion—in this case Islam in Indonesia—dominates politics or is removed from politics. Madjid tried to go beyond those choices through the hermeneutic effort which allowed Islam to have a constructive public role in a pluralistic democracy. The uniqueness of his contribution can be summarized into three ideas.

First, Madjid took the communitarian position in understanding the interrelations among religion, society and the state through his view that civil society or—in Madjid's Islamic term—"the *madani* society" was equiprimordial with religious community, therefore the values in pluralistic democracy could be obtained from religious traditions.

Second, criticizing the market-based tolerance model in liberal theories, he proposed a religion-based tolerance model which tried to overcome a *modus vivendi* in liberalism and urged the Muslims to discuss the inclusive values in Islam. The role of Islamic public is not performed through practical politics, but through inclusive theological construction which supports pluralistic democracy by facilitating interreligious understanding.

Third, Madjid's thought is an example of how the religious citizens in a pluralistic democracy have endeavored to find what Habermas called an epistemic attitude by making particular Islamic religious terms accessible to a wider public in the pluralistic democracy. He thought post-secularly but not post-metaphysically, because his thinking was grounded on his religious view, i.e. Islam.

## ABSTRACTS

Der Autor erörtert die politischen Vorstellungen von Nurcholish Madjid (1939-2005), einem indonesischen gemäßigten islamischen Gelehrten, indem er sie kritisch in die heutige theoretische Spannung zwischen Liberalismus und Kommunitarismus und in den aktuellen Diskurs über die post-säkulare Gesellschaft setzt. Er argumentiert, dass Madjid den Begriff der Zivilgesellschaft und der religiösen Toleranz in einer kommunitarischen Weise versteht und sich in seinem Appell zur Übertragung der kosmopolitischen Werte im Islam dem Diskurs der post-säkularen Gesellschaft annähert. Der Artikel zieht den Schluss, dass Madjids moderate Hermeneutik das Tor für die interreligiöse Verständigung in einer pluralistischen Demokratie geöffnet hat.

En este artículo, el autor explora el pensamiento político de Nurcholish Madjid (1939-2005), un intelectual islámico moderado de Indonesia, al ubicarlo críticamente en la tensión teórica contemporánea entre el liberalismo, el comunitarismo y el discurso reciente de la sociedad post-secular. Argumenta que Madjid entendió el concepto de la sociedad civil y la tolerancia religiosa de una manera comunitaria y se aproximó al discurso de la sociedad post-secular por su insistencia en la traducción de los valores cosmopolitas del Islam. El artículo llega a la conclusión que la hermenéutica moderada de Madjid abrió la puerta para una comprensión interreligiosa en una democracia pluralista.

Dans cet article, l'auteur explore la pensée politique de Nurcholish Madjid (1939-2005), intellectuel musulman indonésien modéré ; il le replace de façon critique dans la tension théorique contemporaine entre le libéralisme et le communautarisme et dans le discours récent de la société post-laïque. Il soutient que Madjid comprenait le concept de société civile et de tolérance religieuse de manière communautaire et se rapprochait du discours de la société post-laïque dans son insistance à traduire les valeurs cosmopolites de l'islam. La conclusion de l'article est que l'herméneutique modérée de Madjid a ouvert la porte à la compréhension interreligieuse dans une démocratie pluraliste.