

GATRA

The NU, Muhammadiyah and Pancasila

By Ahmad Syafii Maarif

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Last January 30th, I was contacted by C. Holland Taylor of LibForAll Foundation, who asked about my health. I told him that I had recovered from my illness. Taylor continued to say that Gus Dur (Abdurrahman Wahid) wanted to visit me in my home in Yogya. "Wouldn't it be better if I visited Gus Dur in Jakarta?" I suggested. "No," replied Taylor, "because Gus Dur himself wants to come to you." I replied, "If another agenda is bringing Gus Dur to Yogya, and then he visits my house, there's no problem. I'll be waiting for him."

Just like that, the following day – January 31st, at around 3:45 p.m. – Gus Dur and his companions indeed became my guests for about two hours, until 5:45. The historian M. Nursam was also present, and the former first lady, Mrs. Shinta Nuria, came in her wheelchair, although she didn't stay long because of other engagements.

For two hours Gus Dur spoke with me, accompanied by interludes from Taylor, and all that time the former president did not budge from his wheelchair. I observed that Gus Dur's enthusiasm for life is indeed remarkable. It was as if he didn't pay the slightest attention to the various physical afflictions which ail him. His mobility remains great, whether traveling domestically or internationally. Not long before this, he had visited South Korea for a week.

Taylor had earlier informed me that Gus Dur was quite concerned about my health, which deeply touched me. Our discussion during these two hours did not focus upon a single topic; rather, it encompassed a variety of problems concerning our nation, the Muslim community, the Muhammadiyah, the NU and politics. Gus Dur spoke at length about the path followed by the NU since its birth, having become a political party at one point, and then returned to its founding charter of 1926. He mentioned several figures who had pushed the NU to enter the world of politics in the 1950s, and the various effects this had upon the path traveled by this enormous Muslim organization.

A recent development which has made Gus Dur breathe more freely, is the fact that relations between the NU and Muhammadiyah have grown increasingly close, especially with regard to the issue of Islamic thought and moderate/inclusive behavior, which these two main wings of Indonesian Islam carry upon their shoulders. My commentary that afternoon: "All this has occurred because of the 'Gus Dur factor.' You created a 'thought revolution' within the NU, although not all NU leaders were able to accept it. But among the younger generation, Gus Dur has become an intellectual icon, with an enormous influence. Gus Dur's service to those younger than him have been truly awe-inspiring."

It's important to mention here that the younger generation of NU leaders formed by Gus Dur, whether consciously or by chance, are very close to me. We exchange thoughts at every opportunity, and increasingly feel that we share the same views about Islam, humanity and our nation, just as Gus Dur saw and felt these same things before us. This positive development is highly significant for the future of Indonesia, for the NU and Muhammadiyah no longer need to waste energy debating Pancasila as the foundation of our nation state.

But there is a requirement; namely, that the glorious values of Pancasila be manifest in actual behavior, and not simply hung from a pole or employed as empty political rhetoric in order to achieve worldly purposes. The process of accepting Pancasila was indeed more smooth in the NU than the Muhammadiyah, where its acceptance was accompanied by tough debate during the Surakarta Congress of 1985. In connection with this debate, the earlier statement by NU Chairman Kyai Ahmad Siddiq – that the NU had achieved final consensus, and fully embraced Pancasila as the basis of our nation state – had already entered the public domain.

Because I'm older than Gus Dur, at least in years, I felt no burden that afternoon, suggesting that he free himself from involvement in power politics, which devours so much energy. After a decade in politics, Gus Dur could return to his original habitat, and become a sheltering umbrella to unite and protect our nation. Gus Dur agreed, but said that there must be a transition period of two years, in order to straighten out [his political party] the PKB.

Still, Gus Dur observed, change in Indonesia must occur through politics, and this cannot be divorced from the position of political parties. Perhaps this consideration is what first pushed Gus Dur to form the PKB, a political party whose path has not always been smooth.

That afternoon was the most recent of many meetings for me with this great figure. We had previously met in the Muhammadiyah headquarters in Jakarta, and also the NU headquarters in Jakarta, several months before Gus Dur became president in 1999, in addition to various other forums, whether formal or informal. For all our differences of opinion on certain topics, that afternoon's meeting will be followed by others in the near future. Perhaps in Jakarta, or a different location.

The Nadhlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah are the world's largest and second-largest Muslim organizations, respectively. Pancasila is Indonesia's state ideology, adopted by Indonesia's founders in preference to the formation of an Islamic state.

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