

**SEMINAR INT'L AT UNIVERSITY OF MUHAMMADIYAH MALANG, JUNE 14,
2008 by MUHADJIR EFFENDY - RECTOR**

**THEMA: CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC MOVEMENT IN SOUTHEAST ASIA IN THE
CONTEXT OF SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND CULTURAL CHANGES**

Ladies and gentlemen

Welcome to the University of Muhammadiyah Malang to all the participants and speakers. Today we have Dr. David Damrel from the United States of America, Prof. Dr. Mohd. Fauzi Hamat from Malaysia, and Dr. Philip King from Australia. Thank you for your support.

It is my pleasure to have you at this campus to participate in this international seminar on "Islam and Democracy." The relationship between Islam and democracy is complex. The Muslim world particularly the one in South East Asia is not ideologically monolithic. It presents a broad spectrum of perspectives : 1) from those who argue that Islam and democracy are more than compatible; 2) to those who deny a connection between Islam and democracy.

To begin with, let's explore further those two conflicting ideas.

There are many individuals who see no conflict between Islam and democracy and they would like to see the Muslim world pursue a path of change and transformation toward democracy. For examples, Robin Wright, a well-known American expert on the Middle East and the Muslim world who writes that neither Islam nor its culture is the major obstacle to political modernity.

Nobel Laureate Gunnar Myrdal identifies that if democracy is intimately related to egalitarianism, Islam can provide support for one of the modernization ideals in particular: "egalitarian reforms."

John O. Voll and John L. Esposito, two bridge-builders between Islam and the West, say that the Islamic heritage contains some concepts that provide a foundation for contemporary Muslims to develop Islamic programs of democracy.

Turning to our own Islamic root and heritage, there are now a growing number of voices that are making the case that Islam and democracy are not just compatible; their association cannot be avoided because Islamic political system is based on *Shura* (mutual consultation). Khaled Abou el-Fadl, Ziauddin Sardar, Rachid Ghannoushi, Hasan Turabi, Khurshid Ahmad, Fathi Osman and most notably, Shaikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, are just to name a few among the contemporary Islamic scholars and intellectuals who are working to move both the Muslim world and the West toward better mutual understanding in regard to the relationship between Islam and democracy.

Most participants in this seminar, I guess, also have similar idea concerning the relationship between Islam and democracy: "Islam is compatible with democracy."

The second view, however, proposes that Islam and democracy are NOT compatible. Iranian intellectual, Amir Taheri, justifies it by tracing the used language. To understand a civilisation, we can do it by tracing comprehending the language that shapes it. There was no word in any of the Muslim languages for democracy until the 1890s. Even then the Greek word entered Muslim vocabulary with little change: *democrasi* in Persian, *dimokraytiyah* in Arabic, *demokratio* in Turkish.

Furthermore, democracy is based on one fundamental principle: equality. The Greek word "isos" is used in more than 200 compound nouns, including isoteos (equality), isologia (equal or free speech) and isonomia (equal treatment). Again we find no equivalent in any of the Muslim languages. The words "barabari" in Persian and "sawiyah" in Arabic mean juxtaposition or separation.

The idea of equality is unacceptable to Islam, according to those who oppose the compatibility of Islam and democracy. For example, the non-believer **cannot be the equal** of the believer.

Democracy means the rule of the demos, the common people, or what is now known as popular or national sovereignty. In Islam, however, power belongs only to God: al-hukm l'illah. The man who exercises that power on Earth is known as Khalifat al-Allah, the regent of God. Even then the Khalifah, or Caliph, cannot act as legislator. The law has already been spelt out and fixed forever by God.

Islamic tradition holds that God has always intervened in the affairs of men, notably by dispatching 124,000 prophets or emissaries to inform the mortals of his wishes and warnings.

Many Islamist thinkers regard democracy with horror. For example, the late Ayatollah Khomeini called democracy "a form of prostitution", because he who gets the most votes wins the power that belongs only to God.

Last year Yussuf al-Ayyeri, one of the leading theoreticians of today's Islamist movement, published a book in which he warned that the real danger to Islam did not come from American tanks and helicopter gunships in Iraq but from the idea of democracy and the government of the people.

In the past 14 centuries Muslims have, succeeded in creating successful societies without democracy. And there is no guarantee that democracy never produces disastrous results (after all, Hitler was democratically elected). Socrates ridiculed the myth of democracy by pointing out: "Men always call on experts to deal with specific tasks, but when it comes to the more important matters concerning the community, they allow every Tom, Dick and Harry an equal say." In other words, we can say that the vote of a professor is equal to the one of a "becak" driver.

Protagoras argued: "People in the cities, especially in Athens, listen only to experts in matters of expertise, but when they meet for consultation on the political art, ie of the general question of government, everybody participates." Traditional Islamic political thought is closer to Socrates than to Protagoras. The common folk, al-awwam, are regarded as "animals". The interpretation of the divine law is reserved only for the experts.

Islam is about certainty (iqan) while democracy is about doubt. Islam cannot allow people to do as they please, even in the privacy of their bedrooms, because God is always present, all-hearing and all-seeing.

There is consultation in Islam: wa shawerhum fil amr (and consult them in matters). But, here, consultation is about specifics only, never about the overall design of society.

In democracy there is a constitution that can be amended or changed. The Koran, however, is the immutable word of God, beyond amendment or change.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Those are the two conflicting ideas about the relationship between Islam and democracy. Which one do we belong to? I will not try to drive you to certain direction. "We can force a horse to go a river but we cannot force him to drink." Please, decide by yourselves whether you will drink or leave the river. APALAGI, you all are not horses. (Please, smile . . .)

Thank you.

Their relationship is all in how it's defined