

Chapter One

DEMOCRATIZATION IN AN AGE OF RELIGIOUS REVITALIZATION

GLOBAL POLITICS at the turn of the millennium has been marked by two far-reaching events. The first has been the diffusion of democratic ideas to disparate peoples and cultures around the world. A skeptic might point out that politics varies greatly among societies and movements waving the democratic banner, and political civility is not guaranteed by good words alone. Nonetheless, as with the earlier notion of nationalism (equally varied in its ideals and practice), there can be little doubt that the cross-cultural diffusion of democratic ideas is one of the defining globalizations of our age.

The second event marking world politics at the turn of the millennium has been the forceful reappearance of ethnic and religious issues in public affairs. Whether with Hindu nationalism in India, Islam and citizenship in France, the culture wars in the United States, or Islamist movements in the Muslim world, the end of the twentieth century demonstrated convincingly that high modernist reports of the demise of religion and ethnicity were, to say the least, premature.¹ The scale of the ethnoreligious resurgence also reminded us that the cultural globalization so rampant in our age does not bring bland homogenization. Rather than making everything the same, globalization brings with it vibrant contestation and localization. The growing demand for ethnic and religious “authenticity” is a notable example of this trend.² Whether the resulting upsurge of ethnic and religious identities is compatible with democracy and civil peace is a question central to this book.

Of these two developments, the diffusion of the idea of democracy at first caused the least surprise. After all, for decades it has been a truism of Western political thought that with industrialization, education, and the development of a middle class, pressures for popular political participation increase, unleashing democratic struggles like those that transformed the modern West. In the euphoria following the collapse of communism in 1989–90, policy makers’ faith in this modernist credo was, if anything, only strengthened. The Eastern European revolutions, we heard, proved that the world had arrived at “the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.”³ Having sailed through the troubled seas of middle modernity, it seemed, the world was about to pass into a pacific ocean of market economies and liberal democracy.

4 CHAPTER ONE

Just a few years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, however, these titanic visions of an ideology-annihilating “end to history” hit an iceberg. Political realignments in Eastern Europe were followed by an upsurge in ethnic and regional conflict.⁴ In India, Bosnia, Burma, Ruanda, and several Western countries, ethnoreligious issues asserted themselves with a force not felt since the Second World War.⁵ Where before there was talk of an end to history, now there were warnings of its resumption “on traditional lines, but on a yet vaster scale—an epoch of Malthusian wars and religious convulsions, of ecological catastrophes and mass deaths of a magnitude far greater even than those of our century.”⁶

Not all observers of international events were moved to such grimly apocalyptic conclusions. But the surge in ethnoreligious violence gave rise to a new pessimism concerning democracy’s possibility. One of the more startling changes of heart was that of Harvard political scientist and U.S. State Department adviser Samuel Huntington. An upbeat spokesperson for democracy’s “third wave” a few years earlier,⁷ in 1993 Huntington presented a deeply relativistic reassessment of democracy’s future. We are mistaken to assume that all societies can develop democratic institutions, Huntington argued, because the principles of democracy are incompatible with the cultures of many. The list of alleged incompatibilities underscored the enormity of the problem. “Western ideas of individualism, liberalism, constitutionalism, human rights, equality, liberty, the rule of law, democracy, free markets, and the separation of church and state have little resonance in Islamic, Confucian, Japanese, Hindu, Buddhist, or Orthodox culture.” Although Huntington conceded that a few civilizations might yet be won to the democratic cause, most, he implied, would not. The new world order was not to be that of democracy triumphant, it seems, but of primordialism resurgent.

Professor Huntington went on to argue that some among these undemocratic nations will develop interests deeply contrary to those of the West. “The fault lines between civilizations,” he warned, may soon replace “the political and ideological boundaries of the Cold War as the flash points for crisis and bloodshed.”⁸ Among the most likely trouble spots on the horizon, Huntington advised, was the Muslim world. “Conflict along the fault line between Western and Islamic civilizations has been going on for 1,300 years,” he observed, and in the future this “*military interaction* between the West and Islam is unlikely to decline” (emphasis added).⁹ Other commentators sounded equally dire warnings, hinting of a new Cold War in which a resurgent Islam might play the role earlier assumed by Leninism.

In these and other examples, analysts assessed the relationship between democratization and ethnoreligious revival, and some concluded that the two processes are often antithetical. For these commentators, there was no better example of this negative relationship than the religious resurgence shaking the Muslim world. In the face of the slaughter in Algeria or Taliban brutalization

in Afghanistan, it seemed reasonable to these observers to conclude that there was a general incompatibility between democracy and Islam.¹⁰ The silence of some Western leaders in the face of the dismemberment of democratic Bosnia suggested that these views of the Muslim question were, sadly, no longer merely academic.

In the face of this ferment, the attitude of Western policy makers toward democracy's future went from breezy confidence to edgy uncertainty. Eastern Europe's cruel communist winter was not everywhere followed by a democratic spring. Capitalist growth in East and Southeast Asia did not automatically bring democratic decency. And the Muslim world seemed awash in violence. Examples like these lent credence to a newly minted cultural relativism which asserted that democracy is, in the end, incompatible with many non-Western cultures.¹¹

Some suggested, however, that there is another way of viewing these deviations from the democratic plan. Rather than proving it is only possible in Western settings, these setbacks show that democracy's achievement depends heavily on local cultural resources. For proponents of this view, democracy requires more than elections and constitutions. It depends on traditions and organizations that teach ordinary citizens habits of the democratic heart. Embedded as democracy is in local life worlds, its culture and organization will vary across societies, too. Buoyed by this confidence, students of comparative politics in the 1990s moved beyond formal institutions to understand the informal conditions that, to borrow Robert Putnam's now famous phrase, "make democracy work."¹²

This new wave of research stood in striking contrast to earlier discussions of democracy in Western political theory. During the 1970s and early 1980s that theory had been dominated by arid philosophical debates over democracy's first principles. "This American liberal doctrine understood political philosophy to be a branch of legal theory."¹³ Rather than focusing on legalistic principles, research in the 1990s took a sociological or anthropological turn. There was a heightened awareness of the multicultural nature of the contemporary world and the need to attend to this pluralism when considering democracy's possibility.¹⁴ Now even "the West" was understood to be diverse in its cultural genealogies. With this recognition, there was a parallel expansion of interest in the variety of cultures within which democracy can work. What conditions encourage tolerance and democratic participation? Can human rights take hold in cultures whose concepts of personhood differ from those of liberal individualism? Can democracy tolerate or even benefit from the energies of public religion?¹⁵ Questions like these showed that, for students of comparative politics, the conditions of democracy's cross-cultural possibility had become the order of the day.

6 CHAPTER ONE

ISLAMIZATION AND DEMOCRATIZATION

In this book I examine the relationship of Islam to democratization in the majority-Muslim nation of Indonesia. For many Western observers, of course, Indonesia is not what first comes to mind when one thinks of the Muslim world. The average Westerner is perhaps more familiar with its ancient Hindu-Buddhist temples and graceful Balinese arts than with the fact that Indonesia—the fourth most populous nation in the world—is also the world’s largest majority-Muslim country. Some 88 percent of this nation’s 210 million people officially profess Islam. On these grounds alone, what Indonesian Muslims think and do should be a matter of general interest. An investigation of Muslim politics in this tropical milieu, however, has another benefit. It allows us to distinguish features of Muslim politics that owe more to Middle Eastern circumstances than Islamic civilization as a whole. Marginalized in treatments of classical Islam, Indonesia must be central to any effort to come to terms with the diversity of modern Muslim politics.

Islam and politics in Indonesia are also of interest because, after years of sustained economic growth, this nation ranks as one of Asia’s political and economic giants. With its huge domestic market and manufacturing industry, Indonesia in the early 1990s seemed poised to join the ranks of the world’s largest economies early in the twenty-first century. By the end of 1998, however, this achievement was in doubt. The financial crisis that erupted in East Asian markets in August 1997 had an especially destructive impact on Indonesia. After growing at a brisk annual rate of 6–7 percent for almost thirty years,¹⁶ Indonesia’s gross domestic product shrank almost 14 percent in 1998. A poverty rate that had declined to just 13.7 percent of the population in early 1997 had [the figures have been revised down recently] shot back up to 40 percent eighteen months later. Equally alarming, a country long praised for its multicultural tolerance found itself caught in a downward spiral of ethnoreligious violence. Better off than most of the public, Chinese Indonesians (3 percent of the population) became the target of angry Muslim crowds. In a cycle of anti-Christian violence never before seen in Indonesian history, some four-hundred churches, many owned by Chinese-Indonesian congregations, were damaged or destroyed between 1997 and 1998. Indonesia’s rare flower seemed to be wilting.

The political and economic crises of 1997–99 dampened the optimism of those who had hoped that Indonesia might serve as a beacon for democracy to the larger Muslim world. For other observers, the crisis only confirmed the dim prospects for democratization in any Muslim nation. Both of these conclusions, however, miss the larger point. Indonesia *does* have rich civic precedents, as well as the world’s largest movement for a democratic and pluralist Islam. At the same time, however, the regime that ruled Indonesia from 1966 until the fall of President Soeharto in May 1998 was also one of the

world's most shrewdly authoritarian. The crisis of 1997–99 did not prove the earlier claims of democratic Islam a fraud, then, but underscored the scale of the challenge faced by Indonesian democrats of all faiths. This fact only makes more urgent the task of understanding Muslim politics in Indonesia and the circumstances that lead some Muslims to embrace democratic ideals.

The Pluralism of Muslim Politics

To come to terms with questions like these requires that we rethink some of our basic assumptions on Islam and democratization. The first step in such an effort is to recognize that Muslim politics is not monolithic but, like politics in all civilizations, plural. Several recent studies have reminded us that this was always the case.¹⁷ Even in the Umayyad and Abbasid empires of Islam's first centuries there was a lively pattern of extra-state religious organizations, centered around the twin institutions of learned Muslim scholars (the *ulama*) and religious law; neither was totally controlled by the state.¹⁸ From a sociological perspective, the differentiation of religious and political authorities was inevitable as the Muslim community developed from a small, relatively homogeneous movement into a vast, multiethnic empire. From a religious perspective, too, the separation was necessary if the transcendent truth of Islam was not to be subordinated to the whims of all-too-human rulers.

More than Western Europe during the same period, medieval Muslim society was religiously plural, with Muslims living alongside Christians, Jews, Hindus, and others. There were several notable attempts to develop a practice of toleration, although, as in every other premodern tradition, no systematic theology on the matter was ever devised.¹⁹ Contrary to the claims of conservative Islamists today, the medieval Muslim world also knew an extensive separation of religious authority from state authority. In most Muslim countries, religious scholars developed the healthy habit of holding themselves at a distance from government.²⁰ So, too, did many of the great mystical brotherhoods that served as vehicles for popular religious participation.²¹ During the long Muslim middle ages, concepts of sacred kingship coexisted in uneasy tension with contractual notions of governance, with the result that religious leaders sometimes challenged rulers' authority.²² For reasons that will become clearer in the Indonesian case, Muslim scholars in this era were reluctant to amplify these latter precedents into an explicit theory of political checks and balances. The full reformation of Muslim politics awaited the great upheavals of the modern era.

In the early modern era, reform-minded rulers in the Muslim world initiated modernizations intended to respond to the political challenge of the West. The enormity of Western colonization also prompted Muslim reformists outside the state to demand that the door of religious interpretation (*ijtihad*) be reopened. Over the course of its long history, the Muslim world had seen a series of religious reformations, most of which called for a return to scripture and

8 CHAPTER ONE

the recorded example of the Prophet Muhammad. But the reformers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century gave this scripturalist imperative a new twist. For them, the message of Islam required that Muslims avail themselves of science, education, and modern forms of association. *This* reformation was intended to give Muslims not just the purity of the Word but the means for achieving cultural modernity.²³

By the middle of the twentieth century, however, Islamic modernism seemed to have settled into a staid orthodoxy. Certainly, in several Middle Eastern countries, Muslim brotherhoods continued to call for the establishment of an Islamic state.²⁴ But these movements did not play a determinant role in the politics of their homelands nor did they critically engage the terms of Muslim politics. In the postwar period the dominant political discourse in most Muslim countries was socialist and secular nationalist, not Islamist. Politics was visualized through the shapes and colors of the nation-state, and the nation to which the state was supposed to conform had, if any, an only vaguely Islamic hue.²⁵

However secure the idea of the nation might have appeared, the world of ordinary Muslims was anything but stable. In the early twentieth century most Muslims still lived in predominantly agrarian societies.²⁶ In the aftermath of the Second World War and independence, however, the circumstances of ordinary Muslims changed forever. Nationalist regimes launched ambitious programs of mass education. They also developed roads, markets, mass media, and intrusive state administrations. Local communities were opened wider than ever to outside ideas and powers. Mass migrations to cities and distant nations furthered this detraditionalization, forcing whole populations to develop new habits of livelihood and association. In the 1980s and 1990s this restructuring of life-worlds went further with the expansion of high-speed travel and electronic communications, both of which made Muslim societies even more permeable to new information and lifestyles. As in other parts of the world, the resulting “global ecumene”²⁷ heightened popular awareness of the world’s pluralism and posed serious challenges to established authorities and moralities.

In this manner, social change in our age has drawn great masses of Muslims onto a teeming public stage. Having done so, it has given special urgency to the question of the political and ethical scripts by which they are to act once there. As in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century West, one response to these changes has been to call for equality, freedom, and democracy. Whatever their historical etymology, in most of the Muslim world these ideas are no longer just the stuff of Westernized academics or coffee-house intellectuals. Drawn down from the academic stratosphere into local life-worlds, democratic ideas have become one stream in the larger effort to give ethical shape to public life.²⁸

Some observers have interpreted this diffusion of democratic ideas as “Westernization” pure and simple. Native conservatives agree, although they typically equate the process with spiritual pollution. What is really at play in this process, however, is a more subtle interaction between the local and the (rela-

tively) global.²⁹ Viewed from the ground of everyday practice rather than the dizzying heights of official canons, the normative diversity of preindustrial societies was always greater than implied in classical Western sociology. In all societies there are values and practices that hover closer to the ground and carry latent possibilities, some of which may have egalitarian or democratic dimensions.³⁰ These low-lying precedents may not be heard in high-flying canons. Nonetheless they are in some sense available to those reflecting on what to become when the world takes a new turn. As Robert Weller has shown in his study of China's prodemocracy movement, local actors there seized on what at first looked like the exogenous idioms of democracy and civil society to legitimate principles of equality and participation in public life. Weller demonstrates that these principles were already "present" in indigenous Chinese kinship and folk Confucianism, although in an undeveloped and politically bracketed way.³¹ The concept of democracy proved useful for Chinese activists, then, not just because it was in the global air (although this certainly helped) but because it amplified a long latent potential in Chinese society.³²

It is for Muslim democrats as it is for Chinese. The tumult of recent decades has led many to aspire to a just and egalitarian public order. Although broadly democratic, the political discourse these Muslims are forging is not identical to Western liberalism. One reason this is so is that Muslims have looked to their religion to provide some of the terms for this new public ethic.³³

It is now a truism of comparative studies that religion in the post-Enlightenment West was marked by widespread "privatization," which is to say, the growing tendency to see religion as a matter of personal ethics rather than public order.³⁴ The reasons for this development are too complex to detail here. We now realize, however, that the change had more to do with the peculiarities of European history and Western Christianity than with any universal modernizing tendency. We also know that this privatization was never as extensive as portrayed by some enthusiasts of Enlightenment secularism. After all, the post-Enlightenment West witnessed not merely attacks on public religion but new religious movements, such as Methodism in England, Pietism in Germany, and the Great Awakening in the United States.³⁵ It was no accident that the great French sociologist Alexis de Tocqueville concluded that congregational Christianity was a vital element in the democratic culture of early-nineteenth-century America.³⁶ De Tocqueville understood that the American separation of church and state took government out of the business of coercing conformity, but it did not take religion out of public life. The arrangement relocated religion not so much to the private musings of isolated individuals but to a civil sphere of voluntary association and public debate. The result was not religion's decline but an extraordinary efflorescence characterized by vigorous denominational competition and continual public argument. Renouncing the union of church and state, religion in America was pluralized and contested, but it was not reduced to the realm of the purely private.³⁷

10 CHAPTER ONE

In light of our revised understanding of Western religion and modernity, it should come as no surprise to us that the privatized model of religion has not gained great ground in the contemporary Muslim world.³⁸ Although classical liberals might wish otherwise, most Muslims still look to their religion for principles of public order as well as personal spirituality. What they take from their tradition, however, is not immutably fixed but reflects an ongoing interpretation informed by the changing circumstances of our world.

The participatory revolution now sweeping the Muslim world has, for example, provoked fierce debates over questions of Islam's social meaning and by whose authority it is defined. In a pattern that resembles the competition between Protestant fundamentalists and liberal modernists in the United States a century ago,³⁹ the destabilization of hierarchies in the Muslim world has unleashed "competition and contest over both the interpretation of [religious] symbols and control of the institutions, formal and informal, that produce and sustain them."⁴⁰ Mass education and mass marketing have intensified the competition, creating vast but segmented audiences for Islamic books, newspapers, and arts.⁴¹

This pluralized landscape has also seen the appearance of a host of religious activists with backgrounds and interests different from those of classically educated Muslim scholars (the *ulama*). Today populist preachers, neotraditionalist Sufi masters, and secularly educated "new Muslim intellectuals" challenge the monopoly of religious power earlier enjoyed by the *ulama*.⁴² Having originated in circles apart from the *ulama*, these new activists orient themselves to a broad public rather than to a few religious adepts. In place of esoteric legal debates, the spokespersons for this public Islam present their faith in quasi-ideological terms, as a source of practical knowledge "that can be differentiated from others and consciously reworked."⁴³ Traditional scholars find the discourse of the new Muslim activism bizarrely eclectic. It mixes passages from the Qur'an with discussions of current affairs, modern moral dilemmas, and, sometimes, Western political theory. But it is precisely this heady mix that allows the new public Islam to address a diverse mass audience.

In this manner, Islam in recent years has drifted away from its earlier elite moorings into an unsteady societal sea. In a fashion that resembles the expansion of evangelical Protestantism in contemporary Latin America,⁴⁴ one segment of the new Islamic leadership has moved down-market in its appeals, crafting its message for an audience of ordinary and, sometimes, destitute Muslims. More than is the case for Latin American evangelicals (although not unlike their North American counterparts), however, others have moved up-market into the political and philosophical debates of public intellectuals. A few others, finally, have been drawn into the netherworld of off-stage intrigue and statist violence. The long-term fate of Muslim politics everywhere depends on the balance struck between these divergent tendencies.

A Muslim Public Sphere?

In many respects, what is happening in the Muslim world resembles what the German sociologist Jurgen Habermas described some years ago as the emergence of the “public sphere” in the West.⁴⁵ Habermas’s study of eighteenth-century European society emphasized that public arenas, like coffee houses, literary clubs, journals, and “moral weeklies,” helped to create an open and egalitarian culture of participation. Habermas suggests that this development provided vital precedent for the next century’s struggles for democratic representation.

Habermas has been criticized for overlooking the degree to which there were competing notions of public interaction in eighteenth-century Europe and other public spheres, not least of all religious. Habermas has also been rightly faulted for exaggerating the egalitarianism of the eighteenth-century public by overlooking exclusions based on wealth, gender, and religion.⁴⁶ Like Alexis de Tocqueville’s observations on democracy in America, however, Habermas’s analysis has the virtue of emphasizing that democratic life depends not just on government but on resources and habits in society at large. Formal democracy requires a culture and organization greater than itself.

The question this comparison raises, of course, is whether the heightened participation and pluralization so visible in the Muslim world heralds an impending acceleration of the democratization process. For some observers, the answer to this question is a resounding no. These skeptics argue that the Muslim resurgence contradicts one of the central premises of democratic and Habermasian theory, namely, that for a society to democratize, religion must retreat from the public stage to the privacy of personal belief.⁴⁷ Privatization, critics insist, is a condition of democratic peace.⁴⁸

As noted above, our revised understanding of religion in the West now casts doubt on this unitary view of democracy and modernity. Nonetheless some specialists of Islam have lent their voices to this pessimistic view by arguing that Muslims have a unique cultural malady that makes it difficult for them to get noxious religious emissions out of the public air. Bernard Lewis, a respected historian of Turkey and the Middle East, has invoked the oft-cited phrase that Islam is *din wa dawla*, “religion and state,” to observe that Muslims have an entirely different understanding of religion from that of liberal Christianity or the post-Enlightenment West:

When we in the Western world, nurtured in the Western tradition, use the words “Islam” and “Islamic,” we tend to make a natural error and assume that religion means the same for Muslims as it has meant in the Western world, even in medieval times; that is to say, a section or compartment of life reserved for certain matters. . . . That was not so in the Islamic world. It was never so in the past, and the attempt in

12 CHAPTER ONE

modern times to make it so may perhaps be seen, in the longer perspective of history, as an unnatural aberration which in Iran has ended and in some other Islamic countries may also be nearing its end.⁴⁹

Lewis is right to emphasize that many Muslims regard their religion as a model for public order as well as personal ethics.⁵⁰ His generalization is too sweeping, however, if it implies that no good Western democrat has ever viewed religion in so comprehensive a manner. His generalization also misleads if it implies that Muslims have just one way of interpreting *din wa dawla*, and one way, therefore, of organizing Muslim politics.

Recent history has demonstrated that there is an enormous range of opinion among Muslims on precisely these matters. Some new activists *do* invoke the idea of Islam as “religion and state” to justify harshly coercive policies. They advocate a fusion of state and society into an unchecked monolith they call an “Islamic” state. They insist that the only way to enforce the high standards of Muslim morality is to dissolve the boundary between public and private and use the disciplinary powers of the state to police both spheres. The Qur’an of course knows no such concept of an “Islamic” state, least of all one with the coercive powers of a modern leviathan. The Qur’an also abhors compulsion in religion. For believers, however, the biggest problem with this arrangement is that it ends by degrading religion itself. By concentrating power in rulers’ hands, statist Islam only increases the likelihood that Islam’s high ideals will be subordinated to vulgar political intrigues. Time and time again we see unscrupulous despots wrap themselves in the mantle of Muslim piety. Not coincidentally, the Islam they promote is typically a neofundamentalism hostile to pluralism, justice, and civil decency.⁵¹

But the Islamic reformation⁵² of the late-modern era is greater than the claims of hypocritical dictators. In part this is so because the Qur’an and its commentaries are rich with other, pluralistic possibilities. This is also the case, however, because the politics of the Muslim reformation depends not only on the recovery of hallowed textual truths but on a reading of the realities of the larger modern world. To quote the great Syrian Muslim democrat Mohammad Shahrour, Muslims “have been used to reading this book [the Qur’an] with borrowed eyes for hundreds of years.”⁵³ More are reading it today with their own eyes. Like all thoughtful readers, however, they draw on what they see around them to enrich their understanding of the text. In so doing, they notice meanings previously overlooked. For many Muslims, the charge of this new reading is to recover and amplify Islam’s democratic endowments so as to provide the ethical resources for Muslims in a plural, mobile, and participatory world.

Civil pluralist Islam is an emergent tradition and comes in a variety of forms.⁵⁴ Most versions begin, however, by denying the wisdom of a monolithic “Islamic” state and instead affirming democracy, voluntarism, and a balance of

countervailing powers in a state and society.⁵⁵ In embracing the ideals of civil society, this democratic Islam insists that formal democracy cannot prevail unless government power is checked by strong civic associations. At the same time, it is said, civic associations and democratic culture cannot thrive unless they are protected by a state that respects society by upholding its commitment to the rule of law.

Recovering and amplifying elements of Islamic tradition, civil Islam is not merely a facsimile of a Western original. As Bhiku Parekh has noted, Atlantic liberalism (the version most popular among liberal philosophers in Great Britain and the United States) “defines the individual in austere and minimalist terms . . . as an essentially self-contained and solitary being.”⁵⁶ Of course, recent debates in the United States have reminded us that contrary to philosophical portrayals, real-and-existing democracy must always find ways to accommodate social as well as individual goods.⁵⁷ As Adam Seligman and Michael Sandel have both emphasized,⁵⁸ it is nonetheless true that the language of modern liberalism, with its image of the “autonomous agentic individual,” has often made the affirmation of social goods difficult.

As will become clearer in the following chapters, Muslim democrats, like those in Indonesia, tend to be more *civil* democratic or Tocquevillian than they are (Atlantic) liberal in spirit. They deny the need for an Islamic state. But they insist that society involves more than autonomous individuals, and democracy more than markets and the state. Democracy requires a noncoercive culture that encourages citizens to respect the rights of others as well as to cherish their own. This public culture depends on mediating institutions in which citizens develop habits of free speech, participation, and toleration. In all this, they say, there is nothing undemocratic about Muslim voluntary associations (as well as those of other religions) playing a role in the *public* life of civil society as well as in personal ethics.⁵⁹

The success of civil Islam will ultimately depend on more than the ideas of a few good thinkers. In all modern traditions, religious reformation requires a delicate balance between a changing society and its orienting ideas. The ideas must be expansive enough to attract and guide the attention of a fast-moving people. But the ideas must not run so far ahead that they leave the great mass behind. It is a premise of the present book that a democratic politics is indeed developing in the Islamic world, and it is not too far ahead of those whom it would guide. In sociological terms, the reformation depends on achieving a delicate balance between structural changes in state and society, on the one hand, and public culture and ethics, on the other.

In this book, of course, I am especially interested in the trials and tribulations of civil Islam in the Southeast Asian nation of Indonesia. The Indonesian example is interesting for several reasons. It provides a striking illustration of the varied ways in which a universal religion has been adapted to local worlds. The example challenges most of our stereotypes of Muslim history and politics.

14 CHAPTER ONE

It also enlarges our sense of the plural nature of modernity and the way the modern world has presented similar challenges to believers in all the world's religions, even while allowing them different outcomes.

CIVIC SEEDLINGS

Although an earlier generation of Western scholars identified its most distinctive trait as the strength of so-called Hindu-Buddhist survivals, the more distinctive quality of Indonesian Islam has long been its remarkable cultural pluralism. The archipelago that in modern times became Indonesia and Malaysia was never conquered by invading Muslim armies, smothered under a centralized empire, or supervised by an omnipresent clergy. Certainly there was the occasional despot who aspired to religious absolutism. But the striking feature of political organization in the early modern archipelago is that it was organized around a "pluricentric" pattern of mercantile city-states, inland agrarian kingdoms, and tribal hinterlands. In comparative terms, regional organization here resembled not so much the great empires of China, India, or Byzantium as the pluralized polities of early modern Europe (chapter 2).

The variety of states and societies in the archipelago had a profound influence on the subsequent development of Muslim politics and culture. Even in an era when virtually all Javanese, Malays, or Minangkabau called themselves Muslims, neither the courts nor religious scholars (the *ulama*) exercised monopolistic control over the practice of Islam. There were always different Muslim rulers, diverse religious associations, and alternative ideas as to how to be Muslim. From the beginning, people in the region grappled with what social theorists today sometimes regard as a uniquely modern problem—cultural pluralism.

There was nothing inevitable about the outcome of this engagement. Distributed across a vast territorial expanse and three hundred ethnic groups, the Muslim community could have dissolved into a maelstrom of ethno-Islams, in which each community claimed an opposed understanding of religion's truth. At times local Muslim rulers did encourage exclusive or chauvinistic professions of the faith. From early on, however, the mainstream tradition recognized that there were different ways of being Muslim, and different balances of divine commandment and local culture (*adat*). This cultural precedent may well explain why, in the late colonial period, so many Indonesian Muslims rallied to the nationalist cause (chapter 3). In Indonesia at least, the nationalism they embraced was plural and multiethnic rather than, as in so much of Europe, premised on a single ethnic prototype.

This pattern of political and ethnoreligious pluralism was put to a test in the colonial era. The Dutch replaced the archipelago's many states with a unified empire. The colonial government placed strict limits on Muslim participation in public affairs, trying to squeeze Islam into an illiberal version of Enlighten-

ment privatism. Rather than reinforcing a union of religion and state, then, colonialism pushed Muslims away from the corridors of power and out into villages and society. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a vast network of Qur'anic schools spread across the archipelago. The leaders of these schools were suspicious of Europeans and their native allies, and they located their institutions at a safe distance from state capitals. In the early twentieth century, when the first modern Muslim organizations were established, most showed a similarly healthy skepticism toward the pretensions of rulers.

These practical precedents for civic autonomy and a balance of social powers, however, did not yet enjoy sufficient cultural authority to serve as the basis for a reformed Muslim politics. Indeed, on this point the struggle for national independence after 1910 introduced contradictory trends (chapters 3, 4). Many Muslims, including pious ones, rejected the notion that Islam requires an Islamic state. Joined by Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, and secular nationalists, these Muslims advocated a plural and democratic nation-state. Others in the Muslim community, however, insisted that the end of colonialism heralded a new age of cooperation with the state. Muslims' ascent into government, these leaders argued, was the answer to their prayers for a deeper Islamization of state and society.⁶⁰

This dream, of course, was not merely a matter of political ambition. As in other parts of the Muslim world, Islamic reformists in the early independence era were determined to put an end to the mysticism, saint cults, and ancestral veneration widespread in native society, all of which they regarded as polytheistic deviations from Islam.⁶¹ In some of the archipelago these campaigns for religious purification were an unqualified success. On the densely populated island of Java (and a few other areas), however, the results were mixed. Javanese Muslims were divided between those committed to a more or less normative profession of the faith, known as *santri*, and those who spiced their piety with Javanese customs, known as *abangan*.⁶² The reformist campaign left a few *abangan* wondering whether they were really Muslims at all.⁶³ By the 1920s many were looking away from Islamic orthodoxy to socialism, secular nationalism, and Marxism to make sense of their new world (chapter 3). Although in some parts of the archipelago reformist Muslims could portray their rivals as backward heathen, then, this was not the case in Java. The *abangan* leadership was educated and organized.⁶⁴ The conflict between Javanists and reformist Muslims did not pit parochial traditionalists against cosmopolitan modernizers. It set two rival visions of religion and nation against each other. This was to become the basis for an enduring political argument.

By the time Indonesia declared its independence on August 17, 1945, then, the neat union of Islam and ethnicity among Javanese had been shattered; politics and religion had been pluralized.⁶⁵ Indonesians favoring a formal Islamization of state faced increasing opposition as the independence era advanced. By the late 1950s the anti-Islamist opposition included most of the

16 CHAPTER ONE

military leadership, which had done battle with Muslim separatists; Christians, Hindus, and Buddhists, all disproportionately represented in the ranks of the middle class; secular nationalists and modernizers; the Communist Party; and most of the Javanist community.

As time went on, the debate between Islamists and nonconfessional nationalists became even more strident. Contrary to general expectations, Muslim parties failed to win a majority of the vote in the first national elections in 1955. The vote was evenly divided between nonconfessional nationalists and proponents of an Islamic state. With the impasse at the nation's center, the big political parties launched furious mass mobilizations, organizing peasant associations, labor unions, cooperatives, and religious clubs. Although 88 percent of their support was concentrated on the island of Java (where 55 percent of the population lived), the Communist Party proved the most skilled at this mobilization. Having won 18 percent of the vote in the 1955 elections, the party went on to recruit twenty million people to its affiliate organizations. By 1960 Indonesia had the largest Communist Party in the noncommunist world (chapters 3, 4).

The rapid pace of the Communist Party's growth hid a fatal organizational flaw. Although less massive than their communist rival, Muslim organizations were more evenly dispersed across the country and more deeply rooted in society. The Communists were also at a disadvantage in that they were bitterly opposed by the army high command. This struggle between the Communists, on one side, and the military and the Muslims, on the other, came to a tragic climax in the aftermath of a failed left-wing officers' coup on September 30, 1965. In the weeks that followed, Muslims joined forces with the conservative army leadership to destroy the Communist Party; as many as half a million people died. Muslim organizations sacralized the campaign, calling it a holy war or *jihad*. The Muslim heritage of civil autonomy and skepticism toward state power seemed a faded memory indeed.

In the aftermath of 1965–66, the military-dominated “New Order” government made political and economic stabilization its top priority (chapter 4). To the surprise of Muslim leaders, the regime also moved gingerly to restrict independent political parties, especially—now that the nationalist left was destroyed—Muslim ones. In the face of government repression, the Muslim community split into two camps. Some sought to defend the faith through a program of Islamic appeal (*dakwah*), intended over the long run to revive the Islamic parties and recapture the state. Another group in the Muslim community, however, criticized this reduction of Muslim interests to state-centered struggle. The obsession with party politics in the 1950s, they said, had only polarized the nation and impeded Muslim progress. What was really needed, then, was not another campaign to capture the state but a vigorous program of education and renewal in society. The ultimate goal of this program should

be the creation of a Muslim civil society to counterbalance the state and promote a public culture of pluralism and participation (chapter 5).

This intra-Muslim debate might well have remained an insignificant issue had Indonesian politics remained in a steady state. Instead, however, the rivalry between these two visions of Islam and nation eventually became one of the defining features of the New Order. This had to do with changes in society. Contrary to the expectations of its rulers, in the late 1970s and early 1980s Indonesia experienced a historically unprecedented Islamic resurgence (chapters 5, 6). There was an upsurge in mosque construction, Friday worship, religious education, alms-collection (*zakat*), and pilgrimage to Mecca. In 1977 the Unity and Development Party (PPP), a government-tolerated Muslim party, astonished the nation by winning the lion's share of the vote in the capital.

Government programs had unwittingly contributed to the resurgence. Between 1965 and 1990, the percentage of young adults with basic literacy skills skyrocketed from 40 percent to 90 percent.⁶⁶ The percentage of youths completing senior high school was equally impressive, rising from 4 percent in 1970 to more than 30 percent today.⁶⁷ The educational expansion occurred after 1966, when regulations mandating religious instruction in all schools were enforced with a new vigor. Before Soeharto's rise, most schools had implemented requirements for religious education casually, if at all. But by the early 1970s all elementary school students were receiving the same religious instruction from state-certified teachers.

A second influence on the resurgence was that many Indonesians in these years were searching for a new ethical compass for their fast changing world. They were doing so, moreover, at a time when other arenas for public association and debate had been closed.⁶⁸ Islam was "seen as a safe alternative to the heavily circumscribed political structure."⁶⁹ After street battles in January 1974 the regime muzzled the news media. In 1978 it clamped down on campus politics. Between 1983 and 1985 the government required mass organizations to recognize the state ideology, or *Pancasila* ("five principles"), as their "sole foundation"; those that refused were banned. Nothing escaped the regime's reach. It launched regular sweeps against campus activists, labor organizations, and even independent business associations.⁷⁰ The regime also reduced the two official political parties, the nationalist-oriented Democratic Party (PDI) and the Muslim-oriented Unity and Development Party, to pliant ineffectuality.

The Soeharto government also regularly meddled in Muslim affairs (chapters 5–7).⁷¹ Muslim associations were nonetheless better able to withstand the state's repressive storm. Indeed, in their campaigns against the national sports lottery, against government regulations on marriage,⁷² and in support of Islamic banking, among others, Muslim organizations showed a striking ability to circumvent the state and influence public policy.

Although the Islamic resurgence displayed the pluralization of authority seen in other Muslim countries, it also showed the impact of state controls.

18 CHAPTER ONE

With its regulations recognizing only five faiths (Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, and Buddhism) as legitimate options for its citizens, the New Order effectively outlawed the indigenous religions practiced in local communities across eastern Indonesia, Kalimantan, and interior Sumatra. Anthropologists working in these areas in the 1970s and 1980s provided vivid accounts of the deleterious impact of these policies on indigenous religions, and, conversely, their role in catalyzing conversion to Christianity or Islam.⁷³ State policies had a similar impact on *abangan* Islam. Over the past thirty years the institutions through which Javanist Islam once operated as a *public* alternative to orthodox Islam have declined, whereas institutions for Islamic education and devotion have grown (chapter 4).⁷⁴ Upset by Muslim participation in the anticommunist massacres,⁷⁵ some 3 percent of ethnic Javanese converted to Hinduism or Christianity in the first years of the New Order.⁷⁶ Others took shelter in mystical associations. Both developments pale, however, in comparison with the growing numbers of Javanists who have adopted a more pious profession of Islam.

Political observers have long suspected that the relative decline of Javanist Islam has serious political implications. In the 1950s, after all, secular and *abangan* Muslims formed the core of the Communist and Nationalist Parties. Opposition to political Islam became one of the rallying cries of the populist left. The conversion of nominal Muslims to a more mainstream Islam has been seen by many observers, then, as portending enormous changes in Indonesia's political landscape.

The consequences of the resurgence are more complex, however, than a simple shift from secular-nationalism to "conservative" Islam. As the growing public interest in Sufi mysticism has illustrated, many Indonesians prefer an independent and tolerant spirituality to the controlled Islam of the state.⁷⁷ Equally important, as Muslim students in the anti-Soeharto movement showed, many pious youth find democratic and egalitarian values in their reading of Islam. Indeed, although conservative Islamists disapprove, the remarkable feature of the resurgence was that its central streams were democratic and pluralist (chapters 6, 7).⁷⁸ In the 1990s Muslims were the single largest constituency in the prodemocracy movement against Soeharto.

But not all has been sweetness and light for Indonesian Muslims. In the last years of his rule, Soeharto changed course and, rather than suppressing Muslims, courted them. The president's rapprochement was in part intended to counterbalance his worsening relationship with powerful military commanders. But Soeharto's actions also reflected his awareness of the strength of the Islamic resurgence (chapters 6, 7). Whatever his precise motives, the president's policies had an electrifying impact on Muslim affairs. Having obstructed organized Islam for twenty years, in his last twelve Soeharto encouraged it. He supported the establishment of an Islamic bank, expansion of the authority of Muslim courts, an end to the prohibition on the wearing of the veil (*jilbab*) in

schools, the founding of an Islamic newspaper, abolition of the state lottery, expanded Muslim programming on television, increased funding for Muslim schools, and the appointment of armed forces leaders sympathetic to (conservative) Islam.⁷⁹ Among conservative Muslims in the 1990s there was talk of a “honeymoon” with Soeharto.

In political terms, however, the opening to the Muslim community was always circumscribed. Muslims seen as too critical or democratic were excluded from presidential favor. Rather than a *civil* Islam, in other words, Soeharto sought to create a *regimist* Islam untroubled by his authoritarian ways. As it became clear that mainstream Muslims *were* interested in democratic reforms, the president upped his ante. From 1996 on, his strategists began to make stridently anti-Christian and anti-Chinese appeals in an effort to divide the opposition along ethnic and religious lines. Responding to these overtures, a few Muslim ultraconservatives moved out of the opposition into alliance with the regime. They collaborated in the campaigns of intimidation and terror that marked Soeharto’s final years (chapters 6, 7).

Soeharto’s actions betrayed the principles of *Pancasila* pluralism earlier promoted, if often hypocritically, by his regime.⁸⁰ In exploiting ethnoreligious divisions for personal power, Soeharto also made a dangerous run on the reserves of civic decency in society. Civil society, and civil Islam, were threatened by the uncivil depredations of the state.

The state itself was far from unitary, however. By the end of Soeharto’s rule, there were many decent people in the military and bureaucracy who were shocked by Soeharto’s desperate dealings. In the face of Soeharto’s repression the state elite split into rival factions—some opposing the president, others supporting him. The state’s loss, however, was not civil society’s gain. As had been the case in the final years of Soekarno’s rule,⁸¹ intra-state rivalries led some among the elite only to intensify their efforts to exploit divisions in society. Fortunately many in the state, and the great majority of people in society, rejected these uncivil abuses. In the first months of 1998 Muslim and secular democrats joined forces in a prodemocracy campaign that ultimately brought Soeharto down (chapter 7).

What guided Soeharto throughout his career was not, as many once thought, his commitment to a consistent ideology, least of all the tolerant Javanism attributed to him a generation ago. Soeharto’s obsession was power, and he was happy to change ideological garb to keep it. A master of divide and conquer, he played religious rivals against one another until none could stand on their own. On this point Soeharto’s actions reflected less an “idea of power” unique to Javanese culture than a strategy of divisive control widely used by authoritarian rulers. The tactic threatened the most precious of Indonesia’s democratic resources: the depth of tolerance and nationalist pride among citizens of all faiths.

In the end, Indonesia survived Soeharto. Its long-term prospects look hopeful, although its democratic transition is still young. More specifically, although

20 CHAPTER ONE

Soeharto stepped down in May 1998, most of his supporters did not. Despite the victory of pro-reform parties in the elections of June 1999, then, the road toward justice and reconciliation is still far from clear.

What is apparent, however, is that democratic consolidation will require not just a civil society of independent associations (although these are important too) but a public culture of equality, justice, and universal citizenship. In this majority-Muslim society, and in the aftermath of a great Islamic revival, the creation of such a public culture of democratic civility will be impossible unless it can build on the solid ground of civil Islam. While affirming the legitimacy of religion in public life, civil Islam rejects the mirage of the “Islamic” state, recognizing that this formula for fusing religious and state authority ignores the lessons of Muslim history itself. Worse yet, without checks and balances in state and society, the “Islamic” state subordinates Muslim ideals to the dark intrigues of party bosses and religious thugs.

The Indonesian example reminds us, then, that while a civil society and civic culture are required to make democracy work, by themselves they are still not enough. A healthy civil society requires a *civilized* state. In the Indonesian case, such a state would work with, rather than against, the greatness of its citizens and the humanitarianism of civil Islam. On the challenge of these achievements, the Indonesian story has much to tell.