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REINTERPRETING DEMOCRACY AND PLURALISM: NURCHOLISH MADJID'S INTELLECTUAL LEGACY AND ITS RELEVANCE FOR CONTEMPORARY INDONESIA

Budi Ichwayudi[1], Nuril Atfiani Purwanti[2], [*]Moh. Iqbal Firdaus Saputra[3], Syabrowi[4]
[1,2,3,4]Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel, Surabaya, Indonesia
[*]Email: firdaussaputra1404@gmail.com

Abstract

This article examines the contemporary relevance of Nurcholish Madjid's thought on democracy and pluralism in Indonesia. Through a qualitative literature review guided by Miles and Huberman's analytical framework, the study synthesizes Madjid's intellectual formation, core democratic principles, and his nuanced approach to the relationship between Islam and the state. The findings highlight Madjid's persistent insistence that democracy is not a finished project but an ongoing, adaptive process—one that demands ethical substance, critical participation, and continuous negotiation between religious values and civic institutions. By comparing Madjid's ideas to those of prominent Muslim thinkers such as Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Abdullahi An-Na'im, Khaled Abou El Fadl, and Asef Bayat, the article situates his contribution within both Indonesian and broader Islamic discourses. Madjid's advocacy for substantive democracy and active pluralism is shown to be deeply rooted in both his personal experience and his reading of Indonesia's diverse society. The analysis demonstrates that, in the face of growing populism, the instrumentalization of religious identity, and persistent challenges to civil rights, Madjid's vision remains urgently relevant. Rather than offering a static blueprint, Madjid's legacy is framed as a provocation to rethink and revitalize democracy as an open, unfinished process. His call for loyal opposition, civil courage, and social learning is presented as both a challenge and a guide for Indonesia's ongoing democratic experiment. The article concludes that Madjid's ideas offer not easy answers, but a critical lens and a moral discipline for navigating the dilemmas of democracy, pluralism, and national identity in Indonesia today.

Keywords: Nurcholish Madjid, democracy, pluralism, Indonesian Islam, political thought, comparative Islamic studies

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A. Introduction

Over the past three decades, the call for democratization has become a defining trend across the developing world, including in many Muslim-majority countries. Today, democracy has entered everyday discourse and is widely regarded as the normative framework for modern governance, often sidelining alternative paradigms (Dar, 2024). The perceived capacity of democracy to maintain public order while enabling social,

political, economic, and cultural transformation underpins its global appeal. As an ideal, democracy is envisioned as a system fostering equality, justice, and compassion—an antidote to the emergence of authoritarian and oppressive institutions (Nihaya, 2011).

Within this context, Nurcholish Madjid, widely known as Cak Nur, has articulated a vision of democracy that resists static or rigid interpretations. Madjid contends that democracy is never a finished project nor a "one-off" achievement; rather, any form of democracy that closes itself to ongoing evolution is, in effect, a kind of dictatorship. Experience shows that attempts to codify democracy into an inflexible, closed ideology ultimately undermine its very essence. Instead, democracy must remain an open system, encouraging internal critique and collaborative experimentation, with transparency and innovation at its core (Hawi, 2019; Majid, 2008).

The dynamic evolution of democracy, however, cannot occur in a vacuum. Institutional and cultural preparedness are crucial preconditions for its optimal growth. Democracy will not take root or flourish without foundational elements such as the rule of law, respect for human rights, and a robust, independent civil society. Evidence from countries with diverse social, political, and religious backgrounds—including those with Muslim majorities—demonstrates that democracy is not the preserve of any single culture. Rather, it is a system adaptable to local contexts, so long as its universal principles are upheld (Zakaria, 2007; Culla, 2005; Daha, 2021; Elsalhy, 2023).

Yet, challenges persist. In many developing countries, democracy is reduced to a procedural formality, where regular elections are held but core democratic values—such as accountability, transparency, and the genuine distribution of power—remain weak. In some cases, democracy is manipulated as a tool for legitimizing authoritarian rule disguised as popular sovereignty. These trends highlight the urgent need to move beyond a purely procedural approach and to foreground substantive democracy rooted in moral values, social justice, and respect for human dignity (Diamond, 1999).

Here, the roles of intellectuals, religious leaders, and civil society become vital in ensuring that democracy remains inclusive and just. Madjid's vision of democracy as an open-ended, evolving process serves as a crucial point of reference for constructing a democratic system that is not only dependent on formal mechanisms but is also deeply informed by ethical and spiritual dimensions (Majid, 2008). Sustainable democracy

requires not just strong institutions, but also a collective social consciousness—one that is always willing to learn, adapt, and continually improve the system.

For Madjid, any definition of democracy that is rigid and unidimensional, that denies the possibility of development and transformation, ultimately amounts to a form of dictatorship. History demonstrates that efforts to render democracy permanent and unchanging tend to result in closed ideologies. Conversely, democracy, by its nature, must be open to change—embracing collaborative experimentation and ongoing adaptation. Its true strength lies in its ability to critique itself and to develop through processes grounded in openness and innovation (Hawi, 2019).

In this vein, Madjid introduced the idea of "Islamic democracy," integrating the presence of God within the democratic system. Unlike Maududi's theo-democracy—which sees God as the direct sovereign and insists that Islam prescribes the formalities of statecraft—Madjid's perspective acknowledges the people as the ultimate authority, drawing upon Islam as a foundational source of public morality. While his ideas were initially controversial, they have since become integral to contemporary debates on democratization in Indonesia.

It is important to note that numerous studies have already explored Madjid's thought. For example, Jamhari (2020) emphasizes Madjid's dynamic conception of democracy as an ongoing process; Hawi (2019) discusses Madjid's proposal of "Islamic democracy," integrating Islamic values such as consultation (*shura*), justice, accountability, and freedom; Faqihuddin (n.d.) highlights Madjid's distinction between procedural and substantive democracy, and his insistence on the centrality of civil rights and political participation.

The key distinction of this article lies in its explicit focus on the contemporary relevance of Madjid's thought in addressing Indonesia's democratic challenges—namely, the rise of populism, identity politics, and the fragility of substantive democracy. The argument advanced here is that Madjid's conception of democracy, as a dynamic and open-ended process, offers a critical lens for evaluating the limitations of procedural democracy and the dangers of electoral formalism. Further, this article adds value by comparing Madjid's ideas to those of global Islamic thinkers such as Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Abdullahi An-Na'im, representing normative-shari'ah and secular-humanist approaches, respectively. This comparative and contextual reading expands the

interpretive horizon for Madjid's legacy, positioning it as a living resource for reflecting on—and responding to—the complex realities of democracy in contemporary Indonesia.

B. Method

This study employs a qualitative research design using a comprehensive literature review as its primary approach. The research process was guided by the analytical framework developed by Miles and Huberman, which encompasses data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification (Safarudin et al., 2023). The analysis began with an extensive search and selection of scholarly sources addressing Nurcholish Madjid's intellectual biography and his conceptualization of democracy within the context of Islamic thought in Indonesia. All relevant data were systematically gathered from primary texts written by Madjid, as well as secondary academic literature that critically engages with his ideas. The collected data were then carefully reduced—filtered and organized to highlight essential concepts, recurring themes, and the most significant findings pertaining to Madjid's approach to democracy, its philosophical foundations, and its socio-political implications in Indonesia. The next stage involved synthesizing the core themes and arguments into concise and coherent narratives, with special attention paid to the evolution of Madjid's thought and its contemporary resonance. The results of this synthesis are presented as structured discussions and critical comparisons, aimed at situating Madjid's ideas within both national and global Islamic discourses on democracy. Finally, conclusions were drawn and verified through an iterative process of reflection and cross-comparison with existing literature.

C. Result and Discussion

1. Biographical Context and Intellectual Formation

Nurcholish Madjid, affectionately known as Cak Nur, was born in Jombang, East Java, on March 17, 1939, and passed away in Jakarta on August 29, 2005. His formative years were deeply influenced by his family's religious commitment and strong educational background (Sani, 1998). Madjid began his education at Sekolah Rakyat (People's School) in Jombang, then attended Madrasah Ibtidaiyah founded by his father. His journey through formal and religious schooling shaped both his intellectual openness and his early exposure to the diverse traditions within Indonesian Islam.

Initially, Madjid enrolled at the Darul Ulum Islamic boarding school in Rejoso, Jombang, but after two years, he transferred to Pondok Modern Gontor in Ponorogo. This transition was pivotal—not only due to personal reasons and his family's affiliations with Masyumi, but also because Gontor offered a more modernist orientation compared to traditionalist pesantren (Efendi, 2018; Barton et al., 1999). At Gontor, Madjid's intellectual curiosity and engagement with reformist Islamic thought deepened. He graduated in 1960, having absorbed the pesantren's ethos of critical inquiry and openness to modern knowledge.

Madjid continued his academic journey at the Faculty of Adab, State Islamic Institute (IAIN) Jakarta, where he completed his undergraduate studies between 1961 and 1968. During this period, he became actively involved in the Islamic Student Association (Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam, HMI), which would later be associated with liberal intellectual circles. His engagement with HMI exposed him to the debates on liberalism, democracy, and secularism—concepts that would become central to his later work (Ridwan, 2002). After earning his undergraduate degree, Madjid pursued doctoral studies at the University of Chicago, initially in the Department of Political Science under Leonard Binder, and later under the mentorship of Fazlur Rahman in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations. This experience profoundly influenced his approach to the Qur'an, Islamic philosophy, and the challenges of modernity. During his time in the United States, Madjid was exposed to Western academic traditions and participated in international student organizations, further broadening his intellectual horizons (Madjid, 2019).

Growing up in a pluralistic environment in Bareng, Jombang—where Muslims, Christians, and followers of other faiths coexisted—Madjid's worldview became defined by tolerance, respect for diversity, and an appreciation for dialogue across religious boundaries. These early experiences, combined with his rigorous formal and informal education, equipped him with a unique perspective that seamlessly integrated Islamic tradition and critical engagement with modern thought (Anggraini, 2022; Zainiyati et al., 2021). Throughout his life, Madjid's intellectual formation was shaped not only by his academic achievements but also by the social and cultural dynamics of Indonesia. His exposure to diverse communities and schools of thought inspired his commitment to pluralism and humanism—values that would underpin much of his later work. As a result,

Madjid emerged as one of Indonesia's most prominent Muslim intellectuals, whose ideas have continued to inform religious, social, and political discourses well beyond his lifetime (Nasr, 2006; Abdullah, 2018; Amir & Rahman, 2021; Munawar-Rachman, 2022; Nasution, 2019; Khaeroni, 2021)

2. Core Tenets of Nurcholish Madjid's Democratic Thought

Nurcholish Madjid's conception of democracy is rooted in a dynamic, inclusive, and open framework that reflects both Islamic principles and the realities of Indonesia's plural society. Central to Madjid's thinking is the conviction that democracy must not be understood as a static or final system, but rather as a continuous process of renewal and self-critique. For Madjid, any effort to render democracy permanent and unchanging results not in democracy, but in a new form of authoritarianism. True democracy, in his view, is characterized by adaptability, internal critique, and a willingness to experiment collaboratively (Hawi, 2019; Majid, 2008).

Madjid distinguishes sharply between procedural democracy—characterized by regular elections and formal political mechanisms—and substantive democracy, which is defined by genuine accountability, social justice, human dignity, and the protection of civil rights. He maintains that procedural mechanisms alone are insufficient; democracy must be embedded in a society's ethical and spiritual fabric, reflected in practices of consultation (*shura*), justice, and respect for difference (Jamhari, 2020; Naim, 2015).

An integral part of Madjid's vision is the concept of loyal opposition. He argues that disagreement and critical participation are not only natural in a democracy but essential for its health and vitality. According to Madjid, legitimate opposition operates within a framework of shared goals and constitutional principles, contributing to societal progress rather than simply undermining authority. This perspective is particularly relevant in Indonesia's context, where criticism is often stigmatized as anti-national or destabilizing, rather than valued as a check on power (Alfanny et al., 2025).

A further hallmark of Madjid's thought is his position on secularization and the relationship between religion and the state. Rather than advocating the exclusion of religion from public life, Madjid proposes a distinction between the ethical foundations of Islam—which serve as a moral compass for society—and the formal apparatus of the state. His renowned slogan, "Islam Yes, Islamic Party No," encapsulates his belief that

Islamic values should inform public ethics and culture, but that religion should not be reduced to political identity or instrumentalized for partisan gain (Nulhakim, 2020; Yusuf, 2019).

Madjid's reflections on pluralism and inclusivity are deeply informed by his own experiences in Indonesia's religiously diverse society. He does not merely appeal to the idea of tolerance as an abstract principle; instead, he frames pluralism as a lived necessity—one rooted in the realities of daily interaction among communities of differing faiths. For Madjid, Islamic teachings obligate Muslims to recognize and respect religious diversity, not as a reluctant concession, but as an ethical imperative integral to both faith and nationhood (Hakim, 2018; Firnando, 2024; Zuliana, 2015). However, he does not ignore the tensions this vision faces. Madjid is forthright about the persistent obstacles in Indonesia, where populist politics and identity-based mobilization often exacerbate sectarian divides, making pluralism more an ongoing struggle than an achieved reality (Atmaja, 2020; Hanik, 2014).

Throughout his work, Madjid repeatedly points out that a democratic society cannot be sustained solely through formal institutions. The daily practices of civic engagement—participation in civil society, the willingness to debate openly, and the ability to question those in power—are, for him, just as crucial as legal frameworks or political parties. He argues that Indonesia's prospects for a more mature democracy hinge as much on nurturing political literacy and a culture of critical dialogue as on the robustness of its legal and governmental institutions (Zakaria, 2007; Diamond, 1999). Thus, Madjid's core tenets do not constitute a static doctrine, but rather an evolving project: one that must be negotiated, at times painfully, against the background of Indonesia's ongoing contestations over justice, citizenship, and identity. His legacy lies not in offering a finished blueprint, but in insisting that democracy—if it is to have meaning in Indonesia—must remain open, unfinished, and intimately tied to the country's social realities.

3. Comparative Perspectives: Madjid and Other Islamic Thinkers

Nurcholish Madjid's efforts to reinterpret democracy within an Islamic framework have consistently engaged with—and at times pushed against—the prevailing ideas of contemporary Muslim thinkers. His contextual approach is informed by

Indonesia's plural society and distinct national ideology, which set his thinking apart from more legalistic or doctrinal models in the Middle East.

Yusuf al-Qaradawi, for example, is a persistent critic of secularism. Drawing from Egypt's context, Qaradawi maintains that Islamic law must shape all spheres of public life. For him, secularism is not merely foreign but fundamentally incompatible with Islamic teachings. He points to the historical roots of secularism in Western trauma and cautions against borrowing terms like *al-'Ilmaniyah*, arguing instead for *al-Ladiniyah* or *al-Dunyawiyah* to describe secularism's disconnection from religion. Qaradawi further insists that the Christian basis of Western secularism makes it ill-suited to Muslim societies, as Islam's teachings on law and governance are far more integrated into daily life (Yusnaini, 2017; Rasito & Mahendra, 2022; Watinka et al., 2024).

Madjid, by contrast, treats secularization as a pragmatic concept, not a rejection of faith, but as a means to prevent the political manipulation of Islam. His slogan, "Islam Yes, Islamic Party No," encapsulates a commitment to separating spiritual values from the drive for state power (Nulhakim, 2020; Yusuf, 2019). In this sense, Madjid's perspective is not only a response to Indonesia's multicultural reality but also a safeguard against the politicization of religion—a trend he saw as threatening the ethical core of Islamic life.

Abdullahi An-Na'im offers another angle, emphasizing that democracy can only thrive where faith remains a matter of free individual conviction, not state compulsion. While both Madjid and An-Na'im reject theocracy, Madjid remains rooted in Indonesia's political culture, seeking harmony between Islamic ethics and national identity, while An-Na'im calls explicitly for a secular state, arguing that only such a system can truly protect freedom of belief (An-Naim, 2008; Musawamah et al., 2025). This difference underscores Madjid's conviction that democracy in Indonesia requires cultural and moral negotiation rather than a wholesale import of Western models.

Khaled Abou El Fadl, meanwhile, is sharply critical of any attempt to freeze Islamic law into an authoritarian code. He insists that justice and human dignity must be central to both Islamic thought and democratic practice (Hishom & Rofiq, 2025). While Madjid similarly resists formalism, his route is less a critique of classical jurisprudence and more a push to embed democratic values in Indonesia's evolving civil society. Both

thinkers, however, agree on the dangers posed by religious exclusivism and the need for a more open, dialogic approach.

Asef Bayat, focusing on the everyday experiences of Muslims living under political constraint, highlights how democratic aspirations survive in informal social practices, even when formal institutions are lacking. In contrast, Madjid's reformism is oriented toward public ethics and institutional transformation—his vision is shaped by the challenge of building pluralism and justice into the legal and cultural fabric of the nation (Bayat, 2007; Muslim, 2021; Bahaf, 2015). Bayat's "post-Islamism" concept points to the creative agency of ordinary Muslims, while Madjid's thought insists on a sustained, top-down and bottom-up negotiation of values between state and society.

It is important to note that Madjid's distinctiveness lies in his continuous negotiation between Islamic principles and Indonesia's plural, constitutional order. He does not propose a rigid blueprint, nor does he reject tradition wholesale. Instead, he works at the intersection of competing discourses—balancing between universal ideals and local realities, between religious heritage and civic demands. In the process, he acknowledges that the realization of substantive democracy is always provisional, always open to further critique and adjustment. This openness, far from being a sign of weakness, is perhaps Madjid's greatest contribution: a democratic vision that is adaptive, grounded, and persistently self-critical—qualities that remain vital as Indonesia continues to confront populism, polarization, and the ongoing negotiation of its national identity.

4. Democracy, Pluralism, and the Ongoing Struggle in Indonesia

The intellectual legacy of Nurcholish Madjid remains central to Indonesia's struggle to maintain a democratic order that respects pluralism and upholds the principles of justice. Madjid's vision of democracy goes far beyond procedural mechanics. For him, democracy is valuable only when it is animated by an ethical substance—by the practical realization of justice (*al-'adl*), consultation (*shura*), and the protection of every citizen's rights (Jamhari, 2020; Majid, 1999). He repeatedly argued that Indonesia's experiment with democracy could not succeed if it failed to take root in social practice and collective consciousness.

Madjid's commitment to pluralism was forged not just in theory, but through lived experience in Indonesia's multi-faith society. He observed firsthand how interreligious

engagement and mutual respect were not simply ideals but necessities for national harmony. For Madjid, pluralism is grounded in both Islamic ethics and the Indonesian context, where diversity is not a problem to be managed, but a resource to be cultivated for the common good (Anggraini, 2022; Zainiyati et al., 2021; Hanik, 2014). This conviction informed his critique of political Islam that sought to monopolize religious truth for partisan gain, and underpinned his insistence that Islamic values must not be reduced to tools of political mobilization (Nulhakim, 2020; Yusuf, 2019).

Despite this, the persistent tension between Indonesia's constitutional ideals and the realities of everyday politics demonstrates the scale of the challenge Madjid identified. Periodic outbreaks of intolerance and sectarian violence, the politicization of religious symbols during elections, and ongoing legal discrimination against minorities continue to test the resilience of Indonesia's pluralist project (Atmaja, 2020; Moko, 2017). Madjid was not naïve about these difficulties. He warned that pluralism and substantive democracy could easily be hollowed out when political elites and religious leaders retreat into rhetoric rather than enacting real reform (Majid, 2008).

He was also acutely aware that democracy cannot be sustained on the basis of institutions alone. Civil society—the space for open dialogue, criticism, and the development of political literacy—was for Madjid the crucial "missing middle" in Indonesian democracy. He maintained that the health of a democratic polity depends on a strong culture of civic participation, the willingness to engage in honest debate, and the ability to challenge power without fear of being branded disloyal or subversive (Alfanny et al., 2025; Zakaria, 2007). This vision is embodied in his defense of "loyal opposition": the idea that dissent and critique, when grounded in constitutional principles and the common good, are not threats to unity, but the very engine of democratic progress.

However, the progress Madjid envisioned remains uneven. The persistence of populist mobilization and the instrumentalization of identity politics reveal the fragility of Indonesia's pluralism. In recent years, the manipulation of religious sentiment for short-term electoral gains, the closing of minority houses of worship, and the criminalization of dissent have shown that the risks Madjid highlighted are not relics of the past, but enduring features of Indonesia's democratic landscape (Hanik, 2014; Moko, 2017). While formal protections for pluralism exist, he observed that legal and constitutional guarantees often fall short of genuine social acceptance and practice.

Madjid's response was not to abandon hope for democracy, but to insist on a longer, more difficult process of negotiation and self-critique. He refused to offer simplistic solutions or utopian blueprints. Instead, he consistently called for a "never-ending dialogue" within society—between religious traditions, between citizens and the state, and among diverse social groups—to ensure that democracy remains open to revision and improvement (Majid, 2008). This willingness to revisit foundational questions, to admit shortcomings, and to seek practical remedies rather than merely rhetorical affirmation is perhaps the most distinctive and durable aspect of Madjid's contribution.

In the context of today's Indonesia, the relevance of Madjid's ideas is not a matter of abstract theory but of daily political and social urgency. He recognized long ago what many are only now beginning to admit: that democracy's gravest threats come not just from outside—from open authoritarianism or military intervention—but from within, in the form of routine, procedural politics that have lost their ethical center. The last decade has repeatedly exposed how quickly democratic processes can be reduced to mere rituals, stripped of substance by leaders willing to mobilize religious or ethnic majorities for short-term advantage. Madjid was particularly wary of this drift. He saw that, in a country as plural as Indonesia, democracy's survival depends on the courage to defend minority rights, the willingness to challenge populist sentiment, and the capacity to distinguish legitimate dissent from opportunistic disruption (Zakaria, 2007; Hanik, 2014; Alfanny et al., 2025).

What sets Madjid apart from many of his contemporaries is his blunt recognition that no legal or institutional design is ever enough. He argued—often in opposition to mainstream political currents—that real democratic culture is shaped by the small, unglamorous habits of everyday citizenship: speaking up even when it is unpopular, refusing to let group identity dictate all loyalties, and staying attentive to the gap between constitutional promise and social reality. For Madjid, the work of pluralism is less about tolerating differences from a distance and more about forging genuine solidarity, often in the face of suspicion or backlash.

He was not naïve about the risks. In his own time, Madjid watched as intellectuals, activists, and ordinary believers were silenced by appeals to "unity" or the supposed sanctity of the majority. He warned that when democracy is reduced to procedural

compliance and when the rule of law bends to popular pressure, the stage is set for the very kind of exclusion and repression Indonesia claims to have left behind (Majid, 2008; Atmaja, 2020).

If his arguments feel uncompromising, it is because he refused to flatter either the liberal ideal or the romanticism of national consensus. He was impatient with empty slogans about diversity, and he distrusted appeals to "Indonesian values" that served as cover for injustice or abuse. Instead, Madjid kept returning to the basic, uncomfortable fact that democracy is never finished—always at risk, always requiring vigilance, and always in need of self-correction. This is what gives Madjid's thought its particular urgency. He understood, as Indonesia's recent history has shown, that every generation must confront the temptation to sacrifice principle for convenience, or to treat pluralism as a box checked rather than a discipline practiced. The country's current challenges—polarization, rising intolerance, and the weaponization of identity—are not signs of democratic failure, but reminders that democracy was never promised to be easy, or even permanent.

In this light, Madjid's legacy is not a set of answers but an ongoing provocation: an insistence that Indonesians resist resignation, reject the seduction of majoritarian comfort, and commit themselves again and again to the slow, often thankless labor of building a society where justice and dignity are not just words but lived realities. He knew that democracy, if it is to have meaning here, would have to be re-won and re-argued, every day, in ways both large and small. His vision endures not in institutional blueprints or empty optimism, but in a restless, searching attitude toward power, faith, and belonging. It is a vision as unsettling as it is hopeful—a reminder that Indonesia's future, for all its uncertainties, will be determined less by formal politics than by the moral imagination and everyday courage of its citizens.

D. Conclusion

Nurcholish Madjid's vision of democracy remains an unfinished project—one that calls for constant negotiation and honest reckoning with the contradictions and challenges of Indonesia's plural society. He refused the comfort of easy answers or rigid formulas, insisting instead that democracy, if it is to endure, must be built on a foundation of justice, consultation, and the defense of human dignity. For Madjid, pluralism was not a passive

acceptance of difference but an active, ongoing practice that required both moral courage and political humility. The last two decades have shown just how prescient Madjid's warnings were. As Indonesia has struggled with the resurgence of identity politics, the manipulation of religious sentiment, and the erosion of civil discourse, his insistence on the ethical substance of democracy—its grounding in fairness, accountability, and openness—has only grown more urgent. Madjid saw that democracy could fail just as easily through apathy and exclusion as through outright repression.

Crucially, he challenged Indonesians not simply to rely on institutions or legal reforms but to cultivate the habits of democratic citizenship: questioning authority, listening across divides, and refusing to let majorities silence or marginalize the rest. This, for Madjid, was the only way to ensure that Indonesia's experiment with democracy would not be reduced to empty ritual or hollow rhetoric. Madjid's work remains a challenge as much as a guide. His refusal to romanticize either Islam or democracy as fixed solutions has left a legacy of debate, discomfort, and, at times, frustration. Yet this very restlessness is what keeps his ideas alive and relevant. As Indonesia moves forward, the tensions he described—between conviction and compromise, inclusion and exclusion, vision and reality—will continue to shape the nation's democratic journey. In the end, Madjid offers no blueprint—only a stubborn faith that democracy, with all its messiness and risk, is still worth struggling for. His legacy invites Indonesians to resist the easy comfort of consensus, to stay alert to the dangers of complacency, and to believe that pluralism and justice, however imperfectly realized, remain the truest measures of the country's democratic promise.

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