

The Novelty of Abdurrahman Wahid and Mangunwijaya's Way of Nurturing Pluralism: A Bourdieusian Analysis of Capital and Social Transformation

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Abstracts:

This article comparatively examines how Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) and Y.B. Mangunwijaya nurtured pluralism through different fields of action and distinct configurations of capital. The study employs Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus, cultural capital, social capital, symbolic capital, capital conversion, and symbolic violence as its theoretical framework. Methodologically, it is a qualitative comparative analysis organized around four operationalized criteria: (1) primary field of action, distinguishing the political/state field from the civil-society/grassroots field; (2) capital endowments, distinguishing institutional social and symbolic capital from cultural and localized social capital; (3) conversion mechanisms, distinguishing executive/legal intervention from pedagogical and aesthetic transformation; and (4) target sphere, distinguishing normative legal protection from resistance to symbolic violence and transformation of subaltern habitus. The cases selected are Wahid's leadership in Nahdlatul Ulama and Presidential Decree No. 6/2000 concerning restrictions on Confucian religious practice, and Mangunwijaya's advocacy for the people of Kedung Ombo, the Dinamika Edukasi Dasar educational experiment, and his literary and architectural work. The analysis identifies a two-part typology. Wahid exemplifies a top-down conversion of institutional social and symbolic capital into legal-institutional protections, whereas Mangunwijaya exemplifies a bottom-

up deployment and redistribution of cultural and localized social capital to transform the habitus of marginalized communities and contest symbolic violence. The comparison further refines classical Bourdieusian assumptions by introducing the analytical notions of prophetic habitus and self-transcending capital redistribution: capital can be mobilized not principally for status accumulation, but to relinquish power, enlarge the agency of others, and pursue universalistic goods. The article argues that sustainable pluralism requires a dialectical synergy between top-down state guarantees and bottom-up transformation of civil-society habitus. Legal recognition without social

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Introduction

Pluralism in Indonesia cannot be reduced to the absence of interreligious conflict or to the cultivation of courteous relations among religious communities. It also concerns the distribution of recognition, voice, cultural resources, and institutional protection. A society may appear harmonious while minorities or marginalized communities continue to experience unequal access to legal recognition, public legitimacy, education, and cultural authority. For this reason, the study of pluralism requires attention not only to dialogue but also to the structures through which social differences are valued, regulated, and reproduced.

Abdurrahman Wahid and Y.B. Mangunwijaya offer particularly productive cases for examining this problem. Both challenged exclusionary structures and articulated a vision of human dignity, yet they did not operate through identical strategies. Wahid moved between the religious field of Nahdlatul Ulama, civil society, and the political field, eventually using the institutional authority of the presidency to remove discriminatory restrictions on Confucian religious practice.

Mangunwijaya, by contrast, worked primarily through proximity to marginalized communities, especially in Kedung Ombo and in educational initiatives, while using architecture, literature, pedagogy, and community organizing as instruments of empowerment.

Existing discussions frequently describe both figures as champions of pluralism, but this common label can obscure the distinct mechanisms through which their interventions became socially effective. Media Zainul Bahri's study of Wahid, for example, emphasizes the depth of his religious universalism and its relationship to humanity, diversity, and peace.¹ Achmad Munjid's study of Indonesian interreligious thinkers likewise situates Wahid and Mangunwijaya within a broader intellectual and dialogical tradition.² Studies of Mangunwijaya's educational thought further show that his educational model sought to liberate learners through exploration, creativity, and integral development rather than reproduce passive conformity.

This article therefore asks: how did Wahid and Mangunwijaya convert and redistribute different forms of capital in order to nurture pluralism, and what does their comparison reveal about the relationship between institutional reform and grassroots transformation? The central argument is that their difference should not be interpreted as a competition between political and social approaches. Rather, they represent complementary modes of pluralist transformation. Wahid primarily altered the rules of the political and legal field, while Mangunwijaya worked to alter the dispositions and cultural resources through which marginalized people could inhabit social space with greater agency.

¹ Media Zainul Bahri, "Abdurrahman Wahid, Depth Islam, and Religious Pluralism," In *Ulumuna* 19(2), 2015, 302, <https://doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v19i2.333>.

² Achmad Munjid, *Building a Shared Home: Investigating the Intellectual Legacy of the Key Thinkers of Inter-Religious Dialogue in Indonesia*; PhD dissertation, Temple University, 2014, 189.

The article makes two contributions. Sociologically, it refines a Bourdieusian account of capital conversion by showing how religiously motivated actors can mobilize accumulated capital for self-transcending purposes rather than for personal accumulation. Theologically and in terms of public policy, it argues that pluralism should be understood as a reciprocal process in which legal protections and everyday habitus transformation continuously reinforce one another.

Methodology: An Operationalized Comparative Design

This study uses a qualitative comparative analysis of two strategically selected cases. The comparison is not intended to establish that Wahid and Mangunwijaya were identical actors or that their contexts were equivalent. Instead, the cases are treated as analytically contrasting pathways through which pluralist transformation can occur. The comparative design is structured across four operationalized axes.

Comparative Axes

Axis 1: Primary Field of Action-the political or state field in Wahid's case versus the civil society/grassroots field in Mangunwijaya's case.

Axis 2: Capital Endowments-institutional social and symbolic capital in Wahid's case versus cultural and localized social capital in Mangunwijaya's case.

Axis 3: Conversion Mechanisms-executive or legal decrees and institutional authority in Wahid's case versus pedagogical, aesthetic, literary, and community-based habitus transformation in Mangunwijaya's case.

Axis 4: Target Sphere-normative legal protection and recognition for minorities in Wahid's case versus resistance to symbolic violence and the strengthening of subaltern agency in Mangunwijaya's case.

Case and Data Selection

The primary cases were selected because each provides observable evidence of capital being converted into a pluralizing intervention. For Wahid, the study focuses on his leadership in Nahdlatul Ulama, his presidency, and Presidential Decree No. 6/2000, which revoked the discriminatory restrictions associated with Presidential Instruction No. 14/1967 and restored administrative space for Confucian religious practice. The analysis deliberately avoids describing the decree simply as the state 'creating a sixth official religion'; the more precise analytical point is that it removed state restrictions and strengthened the legal recognition of citizens' freedom to practice Confucianism.

For Mangunwijaya, the selected evidence consists of his advocacy for communities affected by the Kedung Ombo reservoir project, his work through *Dinamika Edukasi Dasar* and the Experimental Mangunan school, and his literary and architectural production. These cases are selected because they demonstrate not merely charity but an attempt to redistribute cultural resources, develop critical capacities, strengthen horizontal networks, and create spaces in which marginalized actors could speak and act.

The sources include Bourdieu's primary theoretical writings; peer-reviewed scholarship on Bourdieu and social transformation; scholarly work on Wahid's pluralism; research on Mangunwijaya's educational and architectural thought; studies of Kedung Ombo and Indonesian civil society; and selected institutional and archival materials. Journalistic sources are used only as supplementary contextual evidence rather than as the principal analytical foundation.

Analytical Procedure

The analysis proceeded in three stages. First, concept coding identified passages and evidence referring to field, habitus, cultural capital, social capital, symbolic capital, capital conversion, and symbolic violence. Second, capital-conversion mapping traced how each actor's existing resources were mobilized, transformed, and redistributed toward pluralist ends. Third, cross-case synthesis compared the two pathways across the four operationalized axes and generated a typology of top-down institutional conversion and bottom-up habitus transformation.

Theoretical Framework and Critical Engagement With Bourdieu

Field, Habitus, Capital, and Symbolic Violence

Bourdieu's structuralist-constructivist sociology conceptualizes social life through the interaction of field, habitus, and capital. A field is a structured social space in which actors occupy unequal positions and compete or struggle over valued resources. Habitus refers to historically produced dispositions through which actors perceive possibilities, evaluate situations, and act without requiring constant conscious calculation. Capital exists in multiple forms, particularly economic, cultural, social, and symbolic forms. Cultural capital may be embodied as competencies and dispositions, objectified in cultural goods, or institutionalized in credentials; social capital consists of durable relationships that can be

mobilized; and symbolic capital refers to recognized legitimacy, honor, or prestige.³

Capital is not fixed. It can be converted across forms and fields when particular resources become recognized as legitimate. A network, for example, can become political influence; educational credentials can become professional authority; and moral reputation can become symbolic legitimacy. Fowler's analysis is important here because it shows that Bourdieu's sociology contains a theory of social transformation as well as social reproduction. She highlights Bourdieu's treatment of prophets, symbolic revolutions, and universalistic intellectual projects as mechanisms through which established doxa can be challenged.⁴

Symbolic violence is especially relevant to the present comparison. It occurs when historically contingent hierarchies become misrecognized as natural, legitimate, or inevitable. Dominated groups may therefore participate in their own subordination because the categories through which inequality is perceived have already been incorporated into habitus. Pluralist transformation consequently requires more than changing formal rules. It may also require changing the cultural dispositions and classificatory schemes through which people understand themselves and others.

Beyond a Purely Accumulative Reading of Capital

A limitation of a purely instrumental reading of Bourdieu is the temptation to interpret every mobilization of capital as an attempt to maximize status, authority, or positional advantage. Such a reading risks underestimating actors whose religious or ethical commitments lead them

³ Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," In *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, edited by John G. Richardson, New York: Greenwood, 1986, 243.

⁴ Bridget Fowler, "Pierre Bourdieu on Social Transformation, with Particular Reference to Political and Symbolic Revolutions," In *Theory and Society* 49, 2020, 441, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-019-09375-z>.

to use accumulated resources in ways that reduce their own monopoly over recognition and enlarge the agency of others.

This article therefore introduces two analytical refinements. The first is 'prophetic habitus,' used here not as a claim that Bourdieu himself established a separate category under this name, but as an interpretive concept for describing durable dispositions that orient accumulated authority toward criticism of established doxa and toward universalistic goods. The second is 'self-transcending capital redistribution,' referring to the deliberate conversion of social, cultural, or symbolic resources into opportunities, recognition, knowledge, or institutional protection for people who possess less capital.

These concepts are compatible with Fowler's observation that Bourdieu allowed a role for prophets and intellectuals in symbolic transformation. They also sharpen the analysis of religious actors because the decisive question becomes not only 'how much capital does an actor possess?' but 'toward whom is that capital redirected, and what relations of power does the redirection alter?'

In this perspective, Wahid's and Mangunwijaya's authority becomes analytically significant precisely because it was not exhausted by personal prestige. Their pluralist practices can be read as attempts to convert recognition into protection, cultural competence into empowerment, networks into solidarity, and moral authority into greater voice for marginalized communities.

Findings: Two Pathways of Pluralist Capital Conversion

Wahid: Institutional Conversion and the Political Field

Wahid's pluralist intervention is best understood through the interaction of the religious, organizational, and political fields. His position within Nahdlatul Ulama provided extensive social capital, while his religious scholarship, intellectual formation, public reputation, and

moral authority generated symbolic capital. The presidency then created an institutional position from which these forms of capital could be converted into legal and administrative consequences.

His conception of pluralism was not merely tactical. Bahri (2015) demonstrates that Wahid's pluralist thought emerged from what he terms 'Depth Islam': an understanding of Islam that moves beyond literalism toward the principles of humanity, diversity, and peace. The theological notion of *sunnatullah*, as employed in discussions of Wahid, provides a moral grammar for recognizing diversity rather than treating difference as an abnormality that must be eliminated.⁵

Presidential Decree No. 6/2000 provides the clearest institutional example. Its significance lies not simply in the symbolic recognition of Confucianism, but in the removal of state restrictions that had affected Confucian religious and cultural expression. The decree thus illustrates a conversion mechanism: social and symbolic capital accumulated through religious leadership, intellectual credibility, and political office was translated into a formal institutional change that expanded the legal space for minority practice.

The strength of this pathway is structural reach. A legal decision can change the rules that govern millions of citizens and can make previously vulnerable practices publicly legitimate. Its limitation, however, is that legal recognition does not automatically transform social dispositions. Formal equality may coexist with prejudice, stereotyping, or local exclusion if symbolic classifications remain unchanged. In Bourdieusian terms, institutional capital can modify the field while leaving parts of habitus relatively intact.

⁵ Media Zainul Bahri, "Abdurrahman Wahid, Depth Islam, and Religious Pluralism," In *Ulumuna* 19(2), 2015, 302.

Mangunwijaya: Cultural Redistribution and Habitus Transformation

Mangunwijaya operated differently. His principal field was not the state but civil society, especially spaces inhabited by poor, displaced, and educationally marginalized communities. His cultural capital was unusually heterogeneous: theological knowledge, architectural competence, literary production, pedagogical experimentation, and public intellectual authority. His social capital was localized through sustained relationships with communities, educators, activists, and other civil-society actors.

The Kedung Ombo struggle illustrates this bottom-up orientation. Rather than treating affected residents as passive recipients of assistance, Mangunwijaya accompanied them, helped develop their capacity to articulate grievances, connected local concerns to wider public discourse, and used his symbolic standing to make their claims more difficult to ignore. Research on his nonviolent activism shows that his role combined ethical commitment, strategic resistance, community accompaniment, and the public articulation of marginalized claims.

His educational work adds a second dimension. *Dinamika Edukasi Dasar* and the Experimental Mangunan model were designed around learning that was exploratory, creative, and integral. The objective was not simply to transfer information but to form persons capable of asking questions, developing their abilities, and participating in social life with greater autonomy. In Bourdieusian terms, this is a cultural-capital intervention: access to valued competencies and symbolic resources is broadened so that marginalized children are less constrained by inherited positions.

Literature and architecture functioned in a similar way. Literary works created symbolic space for reflection on identity, power, and

marginality, while architecture could reorganize physical and social space around participation and cultural recognition. The significance of these interventions is therefore not only aesthetic. They can be understood as attempts to alter the everyday environment in which habitus is produced and reproduced.

Mangunwijaya’s pathway consequently targets symbolic violence more directly. If domination is sustained partly because inequality is perceived as normal, then education, cultural production, community organization, and public testimony can create alternative categories of perception. The marginalized person is no longer represented merely as an object of pity but as a subject capable of knowledge, judgment, creativity, and collective action.

Comparative Typology

The four operationalized axes generate the following typology. The distinction is analytical rather than absolute: both actors crossed fields and mobilized multiple forms of capital. The purpose of the matrix is to identify their dominant mechanisms of pluralist transformation.

Comparative Axis	Abdurrahman Wahid	Y.B. Mangunwijaya
Primary field of action	Political or state field, connected to the NU organizational and religious fields. The presidency supplied institutional authority for structural reform.	Civil-society or Grassroots Field: Kedung Ombo, educational communities, cultural and architectural spaces.

Capital endowments	Institutional social capital from NU networks; symbolic capital from religious scholarship, public reputation, and presidential office.	Cultural capital in education, literature, architecture, and theology; localized social capital built through sustained community presence.
Conversion mechanism	Conversion of social and symbolic capital into legal-administrative authority and institutional protection, exemplified by Presidential Decree No. 6/2000.	Redistribution of cultural capital and mobilization of social capital through pedagogy, literature, architecture, accompaniment, and nonviolent advocacy.
Target sphere	Normative recognition, legal equality, and removal of state restrictions affecting minority religious practice.	Transformation of subaltern habitus, expansion of voice and agency, and resistance to symbolic violence in everyday social relations.
Dominant transformation logic	Top-down institutionalization: changing the rules of the field so pluralism becomes legally protected.	Bottom-up habitus transformation: changing the dispositions and cultural resources through which pluralism is lived.
Dialectical contribution	Provides durable normative guarantees and institutional legitimacy.	Provides social ownership, cultural internalization, and everyday enactment of equality.

The matrix reveals a dialectical rather than merely binary relationship. Wahid's approach has a wider institutional reach, but its durability depends on social internalization. Mangunwijaya's approach is more intimate and formative, but grassroots transformation is vulnerable when legal structures do not protect the rights that communities seek to exercise. Pluralism is therefore most sustainable when the two processes become mutually reinforcing.

Discussion: From Top-Down Recognition to Bottom-Up Habitus Change

The comparison challenges two common reductions of pluralism. The first is the reduction of pluralism to interpersonal harmony. The second is the reduction of pluralism to formal legal recognition. The two cases demonstrate that pluralism involves both the distribution of institutional recognition and the transformation of social dispositions.

Wahid's contribution shows why state power matters. A minority may have strong internal solidarity and cultural vitality while remaining structurally vulnerable if public institutions continue to encode discrimination. Legal reform changes the objective conditions of the field: it alters what citizens can officially claim, what institutions must recognize, and which forms of discrimination can be contested.

Mangunwijaya's contribution shows why state reform is insufficient on its own. A decree cannot by itself teach people to recognize the dignity of others, give marginalized communities confidence to speak, or provide children with the cultural competencies necessary for participation. Those transformations occur through relationships, education, symbolic production, and repeated practice.

This is where the Bourdieusian concepts of field and habitus become particularly productive. Fields provide the structural conditions of

action, while *habitus* mediates how those conditions are perceived and enacted. Changing one without the other can produce an unstable transformation. Institutional reform without *habitus* change may be formally inclusive but socially shallow; *habitus* transformation without institutional protection may generate courageous local practices that remain vulnerable to coercion or exclusion.

The concept of self-transcending capital redistribution also helps clarify the ethical dimension of both cases. Wahid's authority was significant because it could be converted into protection for people outside his own religious constituency. Mangunwijaya's cultural competencies were significant because he made them available as instruments of empowerment rather than treating them as exclusive markers of elite distinction. In both cases, the most consequential question is not the possession of capital but its direction.

The comparison also suggests that religious actors can occupy a distinctive position in pluralist transformation. Their authority may originate in a religious field, but it can be translated into universalistic claims concerning dignity, justice, and equal citizenship. This does not erase religious particularity; rather, it demonstrates how religiously grounded commitments can enter public life without requiring the exclusion of other traditions.

The policy implication is clear: pluralism requires institutional and cultural feedback loops. States need to protect minority rights through impartial law and administrative practice. Civil society, educational institutions, religious communities, and cultural actors need to cultivate the dispositions that make those protections socially meaningful. The two levels should therefore be evaluated together rather than treated as competing models.

Conclusion

This comparative study demonstrates that Abdurrahman Wahid and Y.B. Mangunwijaya nurtured pluralism through different but potentially complementary pathways of capital conversion. Wahid primarily converted institutional social and symbolic capital into legal and political protections, most clearly through his intervention in the state's treatment of Confucian religious practice. Mangunwijaya primarily mobilized and redistributed cultural and localized social capital through community advocacy, education, literature, architecture, and nonviolent action, thereby seeking to transform the habitus of marginalized groups and challenge symbolic violence.

The sociological contribution of the study is to refine Bourdieusian capital theory by emphasizing a form of capital mobilization that is not adequately captured by a simple accumulation model. The concepts of prophetic habitus and self-transcending capital redistribution identify situations in which actors use accumulated recognition, knowledge, networks, and authority to reduce exclusion and enlarge the agency of others. This refinement is particularly useful for studying religious and ethical actors whose motivations include universalistic or faith-based commitments.

The theological and policy contribution is to reconceptualize pluralism beyond romantic dialogue. Dialogue remains important, but pluralism becomes sustainable only when dialogue is accompanied by the redistribution of recognition, institutional protection, cultural resources, and social agency. Wahid demonstrates the importance of legal guarantees; Mangunwijaya demonstrates the importance of transforming the social habitus through which those guarantees become lived realities.

The central conclusion is therefore dialectical: sustainable pluralism requires top-down state guarantees and bottom-up civil-society habitus transformation to continuously reinforce each other. Legal

protections create the institutional space in which equality can be practiced; grassroots transformation creates the social dispositions and collective capacities that give legal equality substance. Pluralism is not achieved once a law is enacted or once dialogue occurs. It is reproduced through an ongoing cycle in which institutions protect difference, communities internalize equality, and citizens continually challenge forms of symbolic violence that make exclusion appear normal.

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