

Social And Politic Islam

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Abstract: This paper traces the roots of the emergence of Islamic religious and political movements in Indonesia especially during and after their depoliticization during the New Order regime. There were two important impacts of the depoliticization, first, the emergence of various study groups and student organizations in university campuses. Second, the emergence of Islamic political parties after the fall of Suharto. In addition, political freedom after long oppression also helped create religious groups both radical on the one hand and liberal on the other. These radical and liberal groups were not only intellectual movements but also social and political in nature. Although the present confrontation between liberal and moderate Muslims could lead to serious conflict in the future, and would put the democratic atmosphere at risk, the role of the majority of the moderates remains decisive in determining the course of Islam and politics in Indonesia.

Keywords: *Islamic religious-political movement, liberal Islam, non-liberal Indonesian Muslims*

Introduction

The rise of Islamic political parties and Islamic religious movements after the fall of Suharto was not abrupt in manner. The process was gradual, involving numbers of national and global factors. Under the Sukarno and Suharto regimes, Muslim students' and political movements suffered political oppression, but this merely had the effect of encouraging Muslims to mobilize themselves through underground organizations and movements. The resignation of President Suharto and the succession of his Vice President, B.J. Habibie in 1998 marked the end of four decades of authoritarian rule and the beginning of democratization in Indonesian politics. The era of authoritarian rule, with considerable restriction and repression in socio-political life, was subsequently replaced by the so-called Reformation Era with its extravagant euphoria of freedom. Repression against Muslim and other groups decreased somewhat under the Habibie regime and dramatically under the regime of Abdurrahman Wahid. Habibie started by lifting the existing ban on the number of political parties and announced that a general election would be held within a year. He also abolished the regulation of the media. Wahid, who was later known as a

pluralist figure, began by lifting the ban on ex-communist party members participating in social and political activities. The situation became considerably more conducive for the rise of diverse movements of various ideologies, the two most interesting being the rise of Islamic political parties, and the emergence of Muslim groups regarded as taking extreme positions either radical extremist group or extreme liberal groups. This paper will analyze the rise of those movements from their background, the present situation, and finally, the future.

Brief Historical Background

Studies on the current rise of political Islam in Indonesia presuppose the study of the longstanding historical process of the Muslim struggle in building a nation state, prior to and after independence. Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim population and is the world's fourth most populous nation overall. It embraces within its territorial boundaries the largest concentration of Muslims in the world. From its total population of more than 210 million, 87% are listed as Muslim. Moreover, as the religion of the majority, Islam and its institutions historically played a pivotal role in mobilizing and organizing the masses against the colonialist power. Prior to independence Islamic organizations in Indonesia were also among those who spearheaded the Indonesian nationalist movements. Countless Muslim politicians, educators, social and religious leaders and others took part in the struggle for Indonesian independence. The establishment of Syarikat Islam in early 1920s, comprising Muslim traders from Java and Sumatra, provides evidence of such social mobilization. In addition, traditional educational institutions, like pesantren with their religious scholars (ulama>), also displayed a remarkable ability to mobilize forces against the Dutch colonialists. The formation and collaboration of PETA (National Defenders) and Hizbullah (The Army of God) during the Japanese occupation bear further witness to this.

After independence Muslims were the key actors in the formation of the new state and even in the building of the nation as a whole. However, these Islamic social movements, like Islam itself, were not monolithic. Rather, the movements were comprised of a diverse array of Muslim actors with different goals and myriad means by which they sought to achieve their objectives. Some social movements might seek an Islamic state by winning elections, others attempted to implement Islamic laws among the Muslim community, others sought to improve the system of Islamic education through establishing schools, universities, or training centers, while other groups aimed to create their own economic systems and the like. In short, Islam became the major impetus and the unifying factor of the Indonesian nation that formed the Indonesian state. However, after long debate among the founding fathers of Indonesia the idea of an Islamic state supported by Muslim leaders was rejected in favor of a unitary state.

In the early twentieth century two important organizations were established. First, Muhammadiyah, which was formed in 1912 to assert reformist or “modern” Islamic ideals. To date, it is the second largest Islamic organization in the country and has 9,527 educational institutions of various types, and 3,775 health and welfare-related centers. Second as a counterweight to Muhammadiyah, in 1926 an organization reflecting the traditionalist outlook was established under the name Nahdatul Ulama (literally, “revival of the religious teachers, ”but commonly referred to as the Muslim Scholars' League).

This organization is now the largest Islamic organization in Indonesia, claiming to have hundreds of traditional schools (pesantren) and 30 million supporters. It runs schools and community associations throughout the country. Interestingly, the founders of both NU and Muhammadiyah graduated from Saudi Arabia in 19th century, during which time Mecca and even in the building of the nation as a whole. However, these Islamic social movements, like Islam itself, were not monolithic. Rather, the movements were comprised of a diverse array of Muslim actors with different goals and myriad means by which they sought to achieve their objectives.

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finally declared in 1945, the prominent figures of these two organizations became committee members for the preparation of Indonesian Independence (PPKI).

After the proclamation of Indonesian independence in 1945, a large number of competing parties emerged. Among these parties Masyumi (Indonesian Muslim Consultative Council) was in a strong position. Masyumi was a federation of Islamic parties and organizations, including Muhammadiyah, Syarekat Islam and Nahdlatul Ulama. Its leader was Mohammad Natsir who during the early period of parliamentary democracy (1950 - 1957) became Prime Minister (from September 1950 to March 1951). Within the first decade, strains among the party members began to emerge. Syarekat Islam party (in 1948) and Nahdatul Ulama (in 1950) withdrew from Masyumi. Nonetheless, in 1955 election Masyumi still won 22 percent of parliamentary vote, equal to forty-four seats. However, due to the hostility of party members toward Sukarno, the party was then banned in 1960.

During the New Order regime, under the leadership of Suharto, the Muslim parties were oppressed. Pancasila was established as the state ideology and Suharto expressed his intention to do away with parties based on religion. He then decided to reduce the number of political parties. In the 1971 general election there were nine parties, four of them Muslim parties (PMI, NU, PSII, Tarbiyah). In 1973 the government merged these four parties into a single body identified by a name that had nothing to do with Islamic aspiration, the United Development Party (PPP). At the same time it merged five minority parties including the Catholic party, the Protestant party and the remnant of the former Indonesian Nationalist Party to form the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI). Finally came the party that supported the government; Golkar. Thus, the number of parties at a single stroke was reduced to three parties, signaling the end of parties based on religious ideology.

Aside from the political situation in 1970s, there occurred, particularly among the Indonesian Muslims and generally among the youth in the Muslim world, certain mass religious phenomena. In Indonesia these were called 'santri-ization', which means the increase of religious consciousness in Muslim society. This increasing public practice of their Islamic faith, like the consciousness to attend Friday prayers at the mosque, for women to wear the tudung (Muslim head dress) and for Muslims to eat separately from non-Muslim colleagues has also characterized Malaysian and Singaporean Muslims. Although this change might be on the level of religious practice and not necessarily on religious thought or the substance of religious belief, it marked the rise of a greater awareness of Islam's global identity. Therefore, it should not be surprising that these phenomena occurred simultaneously with the growing support for the Palestinian cause. Thus, the increase of religious practices grew simultaneously with a global political awareness.

However, these phenomena suggest only religious identification, and cannot be generalized as the emergence of transnational terrorist networks nor the desire to

establish exclusionist Islamic states in Southeast Asia. Usually observers correlate the phenomena with the 1979 Iranian Revolution or Wahhabism's school of thought. Indeed, the evidence that Wahhabism-inspired ideas have been promoted in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asia in the last thirty years through a variety of semi-official and official actors is undeniable. One would assume that the Taliban movement was "the final and the most formidable product of this long term strategy of Wahhabism." However, so far Muslims in these areas remained Hanafi adherents and, in Southeast Asia, are Shafii strong holders. In Southeast Asia the Wahhabi influence can also be seen in the emergence of the group called Salafi, but it has nothing to do with the rise of religious movements, let alone the current political movement, since the school forbids its members to join any political activity. The spread of the Shi'ah school of thought from Iran to South and Southeast Asia is also an irrefutable fact, but Muslims in these areas are still predominantly Sunni and not Shi'i like the Iranians. So the phenomena can hardly be traced from a single cause, or be inferred as the rise of extremism and radicalism. John L Esposito regards it as Islamic revivalism and a global reassertion of Islam that had already been under way and that extends from Libya to Malaysia.

Conclusion

The gulf that is growing between the supporters of a liberal interpretation of religion on the one hand, and fundamentalist, and radical Islamic currents on the other is quite dangerous for the future unity of the Indonesian nation, especially for the Muslims community. The two have taken up extreme standpoints, one condemning the other. The liberals blame not only the radical interpretation but attack almost the whole Islamic tradition including the fundamental teachings of Islam.

I believe that militant Islamic groups do not have enough support to be considered a major threat to the stability and viability of Indonesian democracy, for the majority of Indonesian Muslims remain moderate. In the political sphere, elections and the democratic processes that have taken root since 1999 have offered hope for the Islamic parties, which gained votes in 2004 election not only because of their moderate causes, but also because of the outstanding performance and integrity of their members in the parliament. Finally, it is safe to assert that the future of Islamic political parties will be in the hands of the moderate Muslims who uphold religious tolerance, appreciate the diversity of races and religions, promote not only human rights but also human obligations to God, help the poor and cooperate with other nations in politics, economics, education and the social welfare of human beings.

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