



The Emergence of Religious Nationalism: Facing the Challenges of Pluralism in Indonesia

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Abstract

This study examines the ways in which Islam has been exploited as a political tool that contributes to the awakening of a sense of religious nationalism and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism through the existence of intolerant Muslim vigilantes in Indonesia. By focusing on the exploitation of Islam as a political strategy used by the government and Islamic organizations in the three political periods: the Old Order era, the New Order regime, and the era of the reformation in 1998, this article in particular aims to address two critical questions: 1) How religion has been exploited as a form of political strategy in the three political periods of the Indonesian history, and 2) How religious freedom and tolerance are negotiated

amid growing concerns about religious intolerance that affect inter and intra-religious relationships in the era of the reformation. This article embraces a critical interpretive paradigm that aligns with the literature research methodology. The aim is to deepen the insights and understanding about the ways in which religion has been exploited to benefit the conflicting parties and advance their political agendas. Such political manifestations are viewed as a threat to religious freedom and tolerance in the current Indonesian pluralistic nation.

Keywords: religious nationalism, political strategies, Islamic fundamentalism, inter-faith dialogue, Indonesia

Introduction

Islam and political dynamics have long been engaged in shaping the history and change of the ideological landscape of Indonesian politics, starting from the Old Order era to the political transition of the New Order regime and followed by the era of the reformation in 1998. Demanding independence and freedom from the occupation of the Dutch government for over 350 years, Indonesian nationalism and movements, such as the armed forces, the Nationalists, the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), and the Islamist organizations including, Darul Islam and Sarekat Islam were united to struggle against Dutch colonialism (Bourchier & Legge, 1994; Formichi, 2012). They finally declared Indonesian independence on the 17th of August, 1945. Following the culmination of Dutch occupation, Soekarno was then elected as the first Indonesian President who came to power from 1945 to 1966. A unitary state of parliament government was later formed in 1950 to assist the

country in getting out of economic and political instability. This system, however only survived for seven years due to the struggle of regional rebellions led by a variety of competing forces, including the army, the Nationalists, the Communists and the Islamist movements. All of them later claimed that their own group was the most influential in contributing to the country's independence, and therefore each of them felt they had earned the privilege of adopting their own political ideology as the foundation of the state (Bourchier & Legge, 1994).

Being known as the most populous Muslim majority nation in the world, Indonesia in the Old Order era, especially in the 1950's, had a more diverse ideological landscape than in the era of the reformation (Bourchier & Legge, 1994). This political era was marked with a prolonged battle of the PKI to spread its Communist ideology, and the exploitation of Islam by Islamic political parties and Islamic movements to demand that Islam have a special status as the foundation of the state. The general election conducted in 1955 disclosed that many of the Islamic parties fought to make Islam the state ideology in an effort to oppose the ideology of communism and secularism run by the Indonesian Communist Party and other secular parties in the nation (Bourchier & Legge, 1994; Fealy & White, 2008). Amid growing concern about the Communist ideology and the spread of Islamic fundamentalism, President Soekarno took an unpopular decision to adopt the Pancasila, the five moral principles that guide the lives of Indonesian people, as the foundation of the state. The Pancasila reflected the ideology of secular nationalism that had been playing an important role in the strategy and development of the nation-state as its principles accommodate the existence of pluralism of Indonesian nationals. Those five moral principles include:

“(1) belief in the one and only God, (2) just and civilized humanity, (3) the unity of Indonesia, (4) Democracy guided by the inner wisdom and the deliberative decision making among representatives, (5) social justice for the Indonesian people” (Yumarma, 1996, p. 23). Those principles have been contributing to national character building by promoting the spirit of cooperation, understanding, humanism and deliberative decision-making, engaging communities with constructive dialogues to bridge religious and cultural differences.

In an attempt to fight against the awakening of religious nationalism manifested through the formation of an Islamic state as forced by the Islamic political parties, President Soekarno, who is well-known as a nationalist reformist, asserted in his interpretation of Islam the importance of employing general scholarship to interpret the Quran and its tradition (Effendi, 2003). His idea was to enable Islam to run forward, catching up with the current times to produce a moderate perspective of Islam instead of returning to the Arab’s glorification of the past, grounded upon the conventional precepts of the pure belief of “the ancestors.” Thus, the birth of Pancasila on the 1st of June 1966 was actually a manifestation of his secular nationalism ideology in his effort to respect the “Unity in Diversity” embedded within the national character of the Indonesian pluralistic society. Such a moderate perspective of Islam that he introduced had automatically ignored the pleas of Islamic parties that asked for the inclusion of the Jakarta Charter, a preamble interpreted as enforcing Muslims to submit themselves to the obligation of Sharia Law (Bourchier & Legge, 1994). While the position of Islam as a political ideology in the Old Order era experienced a setback, the manifestation of Pancasila in people’s daily lives on the other

hand, flourished culturally. Such a cultural approach to peace and democracy was acknowledged by the diverse of Indonesian people as it was understood as a way to resist the political maneuver of the Pan Islamism ideology, growth in the form of Islamic movements, such as Darul Islam that struggled for the creation of an Islamic federal system around the 1960s (Formichi, 2012). Accordingly, the manifestation of Pancasila, became essential in the political transition and consolidation from the Old Order era to the New Order regime under President Soeharto, as it was contextualized to accept the challenges of democracy and the separation of state and religion that reflected a form of secularization to respond to the need of New Order regime in advancing his political agendas.

The political transition from the Old Order era to the New Order regime in 1966, marked with a bloody coup attempt led by the Indonesian Communist party on the 30 September 1965, however, changed the Indonesian ideological landscape. While demanding that Islam have special status as the foundation of the state was no longer promoted as formal aspiration of the existing Islamic parties, Islam was, in contrast politically exploited by government authorities through the manifestation of centralized policies that obstructed the celebration of diversity. One example of such a political manifestation can be blatantly seen in the way in which Soeharto had exploited the disappointment and anger of Muslim societies in response to the adoption of Pancasila. Soeharto a little known General in the armed forces, instigated the army and Islamist organizations to embark on a campaign of violence and terror against the Communists. In the mean time, he also made his own power play by claiming that he received a mandate from President Soekarno that allowed him to install

himself as acting president, and he later manipulated that kind of authority to put Soekarno under house arrest until his death. Other manifestations that showed how religion was exploited as a political tool in the New Order regime were through the politicization of SARA (Ethnic, Religion, and Race), the implementation of the “Dual Function” of the military forces, and the manipulation of the interpretation of the Quranic verse Al-Maida 51. All of this indirectly contributed to the awakening of a sense of religious nationalism and the rise of religious sentiments, which fueled the escalation of many identity-based conflicts during both the New Order era and in the era of the reformation.

Even though there has been abundant research in the fields of peace studies and/or political science addressing the topic of Islam and Indonesian politics, such as an article written by Madinier (2015) entitled: “Islam and Politics in Indonesia: The Masyumi Party between Democracy and Integralism,” and another by Carnegie (2008) called “Political Islam and Democratic Change in Indonesia,” however, there has been relatively little research that examines the ways in which Islam has been exploited as a political tool that indirectly contributed to the awakening of a sense of religious nationalism and religiou sentiments in the three periods of Indonesian politics: the Old Order era, the New Order regime, and the era of the reformation, starting in 1998. This study aims to bridge this gap by emphasizing the influence of Islam on the dynamics of Indonesian polities and its contribution to the emergence of Islamic fundamentalism and radicalism.

For the purpose of clarity, this article will be divided into five sections. The first section of the article deals with the methodology

chosen to strengthen the foundation of the study. This is then followed with a discussion about how Islam was politicized and marginalized by the New Order regime under President Soeharto who came to power in 1965, through his political strategies and secularization ideology in which the army played a central role. The third section examines the challenges of the current Indonesian democracy and its influence to the emergence of Islamic fundamentalism and radicalism, which is seen as a result of the political exclusion and marginalization of Islam during the New Order regime. The fourth section addresses the ways in which a culture of peace can be built through inter-faith dialogue to foster religious tolerance and co-existence which also reflects the leadership style of the current President Joko Widodo to respond to the growing concern about religious nationalism and the rise of fundamentalism provoked by intolerant Muslim vigilantes. The discussion ends with a conclusion highlighting the complexity of Indonesian politics and its affects on the continuation of religious freedom, tolerance and pluralism in the nation.

Methodology

The framework of the study embraces a critical interpretive paradigm that aligns with the literature research methodology (Willis, 2007). The use of the paradigm is deemed to be the most appropriate way to deepen the insights and understanding about the ways in which religion has been exploited as a political tool to awaken a sense of religious nationalism in the phase of political transition and consolidation in Indonesia. To widen the understanding of the topic being investigated, this article focuses more on the three political periods that marked the influence of Islam towards Indonesian

politics: the Old Order era, the New Order regime, and the era of the reformation, starting in 1998.

In light of this, the analysis of the study was developed by reviewing the existing valuable and representative literatures and the progress made by other researchers to bridge the gap of knowledge on the topic being investigated. The identification of the authenticity of pieces of literature was also conducted with an emphasis on the basic thoughts and points of view that the authors had given. The aim was to understand and determine their own objectivity on the contents being read, as well as to support and strengthen the development of the arguments presented in this article.

The politicization and marginalization of Islam in the New Order era

Marked with the coup attempt led by the Indonesian Communist Party on the 30 September 1965, Soeharto came to power in 1966 by receiving a mandate through a document, called *Supersemar* (Order of March the Eleventh), signed by President Soekarno to restore the political chaos during the Indonesian killings of 1965-1966 (Bourchier & Legge, 1994). To strengthen his influence and power, Soeharto exploited the fear of the population regarding the resurgence of the communist party and forced the formation of a strong coalition between the military and civil society groups, including secular intellectuals, students, professionals, anti-communist party leaders, and urban and rural Muslims to back him against the communist alliances (Effendi, 2003; Formichi, 2012). Even though he cooperated with many elements of society, including Muslim societies in his battle against the communist ideology in the

early phase of his New Order era, however, driven by his fear of the spread of Islamic radical ideology, Soeharto tended to see religious diversity as a political threat to the survival of his regime. Hence he counted the Indonesian Communist Party as his number one threat, while the development of political Islam led by Islamist reformist leaders was second. As such, Islamist and communist leaders were subjected to harsh measures of suppression and surveillance.

In handling such a political situation, Soeharto stressed the importance of secularization in order to separate the state and religion through the state policies and political acts in which he endorsed the military forces to play a significant role as the ultimate guardian of the state. With the doctrine of *Dwi Fungsi* (Dual Function), the army played both the traditional role of protecting state security as well as a social and economic role as the guarantor of “national resilience” (Bourchier & Legge, 1994; Formichi, 2012). As a result, this power enabled the army to engage in political affairs, while determining and controlling the state and national ideology, including the religious life of the citizens in the advancement of national cohesion. At the same time, in order to control party activities, Soeharto launched a fusion mechanism in 1973 that allowed him to restrict the number of political parties in the parliament to three: PPP (United Development Party) - a coalition of the Islamist parties; Golkar, created by him and backed by the military forces; and PDI (Indonesian Democratic Party) - a unification of the nationalist parties (Carnegie, 2008; Bourchier & Legge, 1994). The overwhelming victories of Golkar in every legislative election, which used to be held every five years, revealed how Soeharto’s political exclusivity aimed to weaken the power of Islamist parties in the parliament as it

allowed him to easily control their religious and political movements. The New Order regime is thus best described as a strong combination of the implementation of militarization and secularization in which Soeharto used the army as a political tool to enable them play a central role as the ultimate guardians of the state, while strengthening his power as president.

Built upon the politics of fear strategy that he used to control society by exploiting the power of the military in politics and, social and economic life, Soeharto also marginalized the Muslim majority and restricted their political participation as a means to minimize the growth of underground Islamist movements (Fealy & White, 2008; Formichi, 2012). Such a political manifestation took place by banning Islamic political parties to thrive and be part of the parliament. This included Masyumi and other Islamic organizations, which were seen as a threat to the existence of Pancasila as they might lead to a nation under Sharia Law which is not compatible with a pluralistic Indonesian society (Formichi, 2012). While some Islamic political parties were being marginalized from being involved in political life in the early years of his regime, in contrast however, the politicization of Islam was continued through the implementation of an Islamization policy to bring the decline of the Indonesian Communist Party and other secular organizations. Such a double game political strategy was tangibly played by Soeharto and one of the examples can be seen through the manipulation of the interpretation of the Quranic verse Al-Maida 51. The government authorities claimed that the aim to change the interpretation was to maintain inter-religious tolerance in harmony and build a long lasting peace among religious groups as they valued Islam as a

religion with the biggest number of followers in the nation (Bourchier & Legge, 1994; Effendi, 2003). In fact however such religious politicization contributed to the escalation of identity-based conflicts that heightened asymmetrical power relations between Muslim and other religious and/or ethnic groups in many provinces across the nation, especially outside Java Island. This was built upon an understanding that religion is sometimes seen as an integral part of the life of an individual and/or particular social group, which shapes the identity formation of who they are and to what ideology they belong (Omer & Springs, 2013). Therefore, religious and cultural identity is also intertwined and thus the politicization of religion is acknowledged as one of the sources that contributed to the escalation of violent conflicts and the spread of radical ideology. Such a case happened to the prolonged identity-based conflict in the Moluccas Island in 1999. The underlying cause of the conflict was triggered by the implementation of the Islamization policy that directly heightened the asymmetrical power relations between the local Christians and the transmigrant Muslims on the island in which the majority of population is Christian (Bertrand, 2004).

The manipulation of the interpretation of the Quranic verse Al-Maida 51 was also another example of how Islam was exploited to strengthen the president's secularization and militarization's ideologies. The verse literally prohibits those who are non-Muslims from being a "leader" in a country where the majority of the population is Muslim. The verse is literally written in the Quran as follows: "O you who believed, do not take the Jews and the Christians as allies. They are [in fact] allies of one another. And whoever is ally to them among you - then indeed, he is [one] of them. Indeed,

Allah guides not the wrongdoing people" (the Quran, Al-Maida 51). In this context, the use of word *auliya* in the Arabic language was translated by the regime as "leader." However, according to the most contemporary translations, the word *auliya* must be translated as allies because such an interpretation will only make sense if it is understood in a time of war as occurred in the past (Fachrudin, 2016). Therefore it cannot be interpreted literally such as "when the Jews had betrayed the Muslims by violating social agreement made between the two parties to defend the city of Medina together when it was under attack; hence the later prohibition to make the Jews "allies" (Fachrudin, 2016). As such, those who are non-Muslim were not allowed to take positions as leaders, especially in the government levels, such as becoming a mayor or of a city or a governor of a province while the majority of the population in that city or province were Muslim. Such a political manifestation was later legitimated by the Indonesian Council of Ulema (MUI), in which it is also known as the *hirabah* verses, which literally means "warfare." The verse used to be applied under the principle of Islamic jurisprudence to crimes such as unlawful rebellion, highway robbery, sedition, and piracy (Fachrudin, 2016). This kind of verse is also the one used by the Islamic fundamentalist groups, such as Al-Qaeda and the Islamic state (IS) to justify their radical ideology and violent acts in the name of religion. In the context of Indonesian politics, however such an interpretation went against the principles of Pancasila, especially the fifth principle of the foundation of the state, stating the importance of "social justice for all of the people of Indonesia" (Yumarma, 1996, p. 23). This means that equality and equity are the rights to which all Indonesian citizens are entitled that must be fulfilled by the government without any exception. Thus since Indonesia did not

adopt Islam as state ideology, those who are non-Muslims should be allowed to take positions as leaders in governmental levels or other institutions and companies. It is manifested in the 1945 State Constitution that guarantees the freedom of religion and therefore the national government recognizes six official faiths existing in the world to be practiced widely in Indonesian communities, including Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Catholicism, Protestantism and Confucianism.

While the government authorities played a double game by praising Muslim communities about their privilege to take positions as leaders in many governmental levels, in fact many of the government authorities were dominated by non-Muslims. At the same time, the Islamic organizations were repressed under Soeharto's regime (Bourchier & Legge, 1994; Aspinall & Fealy, 2003; Aspinall & Mietzner, 2010). Taking into account this double game political strategy played by Soeharto, the New Order regime was then identified as the bad old days of Indonesian politics when religion was exploited to pursue anti-Islamic policies in order to implement secularization and militarization. Similar to the fate of socialism and communism which was banned in the early phase of the regime, Islam had now to be satisfied with becoming merely a political orientation subordinate to the national ideology of Pancasila (Bourchier & Legge, 1994). Furthermore, in an attempt to be part of global democratic practices, the regime employed a concept called Democratic Pancasila, which was interpreted differently from that of the West. This kind of democracy should protect the rights of the citizens regarding freedom of expression, religious freedom, and political participation. However, the implementation

of such democratic practices was fully controlled by the state, and the regime effectively ensured that all forms of demonstration and protest were banned in the name of state security and economic stability. By stressing the five moral principles of Pancasila as the basic concept of democracy, it was clear that the regime tried to marginalize Islam in the political and social life of the state. Through the separation of state and religion, the regime made no room for bargaining in the implementation of Islamic ideology, while imposing and extending the role of the army in social and political life through its Dual Function slogan (Bourchier & Legge, 1994; Formichi, 2012).

In practice, the implementation of such secularization ideology through the separation of state and religion can be seen for example, through the ways in which the government banned the use of religious symbols, such as the wearing of the hijab by Muslim women in public spheres, including in schools (Lyn, 2005; Effendi, 2003). This kind of prohibition was built upon an understanding that a religious symbol can be easily exploited to trigger religious sentiments and religiously-motivated communal violence at the grassroots level. Therefore the wearing of the hijab by Muslim women does actually represent an Islamic symbol of religion and is believed to be a form of religious campaign to spread Islamic values to society which in some ways would probably be seen as a threat to the existence of other religions and religious tolerance. Hence, those who wore the hijab in the 1980s were interpreted to be more radical and conservative in understanding the ways in which Islamic values must be practiced in day-to-day life. Moreover, the political landscape in the Islamic world during the 1980s to 1990s was marked with religious and political upheavals especially in the Gulf Sea where

Iran experienced a revolution in 1979 and an Afghanistan civil war also took place in 1979 followed by an Islamic radical movement of Al-Ikhwan al Muslimin in Yemen (Barton, 2005; Hasan, 2006). Such Islamic movements awakened the awareness of young Muslims in Indonesia to wear the hijab like those living in the Arab Peninsula, while at the same time contributing to the growth of intolerant Muslim vigilantes in the nation. The awakening of Islamic fanaticism among young people, including the wearing of the hijab by Muslim women made the government concerned about the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and radicalism. In an attempt to prevent the growth of such a radical ideology, the government released various legal prohibitions that restricted Muslim women from wearing the hijab in public spheres, such as Law No. 052/1982 regarding the prohibition of wearing the hijab in the State schools (Effendi, 2003). In addition, the government also released the Directive of Higher Education General Directory No. 1128/D/0/84 and No. 3206/D/T/92, prohibiting the wearing the hijab for official photographs (Effendi, 2003). The birth of those laws was seen as a form of violation against the religious freedom and human rights of Muslim communities in the country. The impact of such oppressive policies were incredible in the transition period. As soon as Soeharto was fallen from power, Muslim societies seem to regain their power and have freedom, which possibly encouraged them to explore a mass religious identity, including the resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism and radicalism in the nation. Such political manifestations were seen as the biggest handicap in the political transition and consolidation from the New Order era to the early phase of the era of reformation, started in 1998.

Political Islam and Islamic fundamentalism in the era of the reformation

The fall of Soeharto's New Order regime in 1998 through the people's power movements, which was also supported by Muslim reformists including such prominent Muslim leaders as Abdurrahman Wahid and Amien Rais, brought the country to experience democratic change purely based upon the Pancasila. Given the turbulent political climate in the early phase of the era of the reformation, military and civil society organizations made a turning point by abandoning Soeharto and seeing him as a susceptible in promoting Islam as part of the Indonesian democratic change (Fealy & White, 2008; Effendi, 2003). This wind of change showed that there was a desire to accept different interpretations of Islamic practices, which opened the path for the development of a moderate form of Islam. With the purpose of building a more democratic nation, the early phase of the era of the reformation was acknowledged as an awakening era in Indonesian political history and, was marked with a political openness that encouraged people to have freedom in determining their identity, including religion (Aspinall & Fealy, 2003; Aspinall & Mietzner, 2010). This included shifting the mindset of people about the ways in which Islam should be understood as part of the national democratic change, especially in the phase of the democratic transition and consolidation. The emphasis was on the compatibility of Islam with democracy in which it offered the possibility for all the citizens to experience religious freedom, tolerance and diversity, while preventing the emergence of Islamic fundamentalism and radicalism, including the escalation of religiously-motivated communal violence.

In the era of the reformation, the country has experienced a period of political openness through the implementation of democratic local governance. The policy of decentralized government was formally legalized in 1999 through the Regional Autonomy Law (22/1999) that allows citizens to elect local representatives for government and parliament positions through a democratic, fair and competitive election in all levels of the government, including the levels of province, city, district, and regency (Aspinall & Fealy, 2003; Aspinall & Mietzner, 2010). This kind of decentralized political structure has paved the path for all citizens to fully engage in decision-making processes in the name of a culture of accountability and transparency. The effort to adopt Sharia Law (the Islamic code of conduct) as part of the Regional Autonomy Law in any regions, especially in Nanggroe Aceh and Darrussalam (Aceh) was also successful. To a degree, the adoption of Sharia Law in the province was a result of a political drive in an attempt to suppress separatism led by the Free Aceh Movement (GAM), which fought against the central government in Jakarta from 1976 to 2005. Therefore, the law was offered as part of an autonomy package following a peace agreement signed between the government of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) on 15 August 2005 in Helsinki. The aim was to end the prolonged violent conflict and promote sustainable peace in the province. Hence Aceh has become the only province in the country that was authorized by national legislation to adopt and implement Sharia Law (Aspinall, 2005). Such an implementation discloses how Islam is compatible with democracy based upon the principles of Pancasila. In practice, one of the policies rules in favor of the right of Acehnese people to wear the hijab in public spheres (Aspinall & Fealy, 2003; Aspinall & Mietzner, 2010). Such a policy

indicates that the progress on religious freedom and the absence of power in religious control indeed gives space for people to show their aspirations and religious identity with more freedom. This kind of significant progress in religious life shifted the feature of Islam which has politically been exploited and marginalized under the New Order regime, but which is now revived both politically and socially in accordance with the climate of openness in the era of the reformation.

While a culture of freedom was experienced by Indonesian citizens in the early phase of the era of the reformation, including progress on expressing religious identity and the protection of religious freedom, its negative implication has also emerged, namely the rise of religious fundamentalism and radicalism. Inevitably, the winds of change contributed to the growth of intolerant Muslim vigilantes. Some of them include the Indonesia Defender Front (FPI), Indonesia Mujahidin Board (MMI), and Hisbut Tahrir. On the other hand, other groups which are more radical in terms of their approaches and activities are classified as Islamic fundamentalist groups and include groups such as the branch of Islamic State of Indonesia, Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), Defenders Of Islam Militia (Laskar Pembela Islam), Jihad Militia (Laskar Jihad), and Indonesian Mujahidin Militia (Laskar Mujahidin Indonesia) (Barton, 2005; Hasan, 2006). The first two have been linked to the similar form of the rise of radical movements taking place in many parts of the world, such as Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and the Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria. These fundamentalist groups have been providing training for young people in an attempt to prepare them to become martyrs in the name of the principle of jihad (Barton, 2005). Of more concern is that they have

been growing as a result of the prolonged Islamic marginalization carried out under the Soeharto' regime, while the euphoria of the rise of Islamic movements in the Islamic world has also been contributed to the growth of such militant groups in the nation.

In particular, those Islamic fundamentalist groups have roots in the Islamic organizations' independence struggle, which emerged in the Old Order era, however their radical movements adopted the Islamic teaching of hadrami (Indonesians of Middle Eastern descent) who have been developed by the Mujahidin in Afghanistan to fight against Russia in the late 1980s (Barton, 2005; Hasan, 2006). One of example is JI, which relies on the ideology of Pan-Islamism and has long been dreaming of creating an Islamic state in the country. The ideology and purpose of this organization are to implement *Khilafah* (Islamic state) and impose the implementation of Sharia Law as guidance for people daily lives. To pursue its political agenda, this militant group has been associated with the Al-Qaeda network operating in Southeast Asia (Fealy & White, 2008; Hasan, 2006). In carrying out their radical activities, the JI was also allegedly involved in the 2002 Bali and Central Sulawesi' bombings, the 2003 JW Marriott Hotel bombing in Jakarta, and the 2004 suicide bombings at the Embassy of Australia in Jakarta. In addition, the recent deadly terror attack that took place in downtown Jakarta in January 2016, which was allegedly carried out by a branch of the IS (Islamic State) in Southeast Asia also revealed how the emergence of Islamic fundamentalism and radicalism has been threatening the state and human security, while detracting from the religious co-existence that has been built for a long time since the Old Order era.

Meanwhile, the Indonesia Defender Front (FPI) is broadly considered as one of the intolerant Muslim vigilantes that developed in the nation in the aftermath of the New Order regime. Its establishment can be traced back to the early phase of the era of the reformation in 1998 when such an organization received backing from the police and military to help protect the New Order regime from people's power movements initiated by students and intellectuals demanding Soeharto step down after a series of human rights violations that he conducted over his thirty years in power. Even though the mission of the FPI is the same as the JI, which is to implement Sharia Law through the use of a violent approach this organization has never terrorized society with the use of weapons or explosive devices. Instead, they position themselves as guardians of the city, who have the rights to sweep activities which are considered contradictory with Sharia Law. Such a violent approach built upon their understanding that the state does not have any power to control immoral activities that take place in the secular state (Barton, 2005; Hasan, 2006; Fealy & White, 2008). Therefore it is their responsibility to conduct *jihad*¹ by protecting Muslims from any sinful actions, especially those carried out by the *Kafirs* (infidels), although some of their actions often end with violations causing the feelings of fear, prejudice and mistrust among society. One of the examples of how Islam has been politically manipulated by the FPI and Hizbut Tahrir to

¹ “The Arabic word ‘Jihad’ is translated as ‘holy war,’ yet in a purely linguistic sense, the word ‘Jihad’ means struggling or striving. In a religious sense as described by the Quran and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, ‘Jihad’ has many meanings. It can refer to internal as well as external efforts to be a good Muslim or believer, as well as working to inform people about the faith of Islam” (Kabbani & Hendriks). In short, the meaning of *jihad* in a religious view is a form of religious struggle against evil in our self and/or in society.

pursue their political agenda, which is to support a Muslim candidate to become the next governor of Jakarta, can be seen through the case of religious blasphemy experienced by the current governor of Jakarta Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, a.k.a Ahok. He is somewhat a symbol of pluralism and the democratic progress of current Indonesian politics in which he represents the first Chinese Christian governor to lead the capital city of Indonesia, Jakarta since 2014. To achieve their goal, the FPI accused him of insulting Islam through his speech made during his campaign visit to the Thousand Islands of Jakarta in September 2016 in which he talked about the Quranic verse Al-Maida 51. Ahok personally claimed that the verse had been used by Islamic hardliner organizations to mislead voters and justify the assertion that Muslims must vote for a Muslim candidate to become governor as they should not be led by a non-Muslim like him. Even though he has already apologized about what he said, confirming that he had no intention of hurting the Islamic followers a short version of his edited speech was later circulated online by one of the FPI partisans in which this person provoked the Muslim communities to take action by saying that what Ahok had done through his speech was considered an act of religious blasphemy. This kind of propaganda caused anger among Muslim communities, and later these organizations managed to gather over a hundred thousand Muslim protesters in Jakarta on November 4th and December 2nd 2016 in attempts to force the national government to charge Ahok under the Blasphemy Law.

Apart from its political strategy through the manipulation of the interpretation of the verse Al-Maida 51 and the principle of *jihad*, recently school textbooks are also considered as one of the new

weapons utilized by Islamic fundamentalist groups and intolerant Muslim vigilantes to justify the single truth of their own religion while increasing prejudice and hatred towards the “other” (Barton & Levstick, 2004). An example of this can be seen in a controversial text available in the Islamic religious textbook for high school grades published in 2015. The text contains radical religious notions of the Wahhabi school of thought that teaches people to kill those who are not Muslims as they are considered *Kafir* (infidel). It was specifically written on page 78 that “People who worship anything other than Allah are infidels and it is permitted to kill them” (Azra, 2015). The text actually does not represent Islamic values as it is clearly explained in the Quran that Muslims are not allowed to kill others, and instead they are encouraged to interact with those who are different both in religion and culture. Another example is how the school textbook *Muslim kids love to read*, which was published in 1999 for playgroup students taught about radicalism. The book specifically highlighted the importance of becoming a martyr to fight against the infidels which could help them go to heaven. Some sentences in the book also suggested the readers commit violence in order to kill Islamic clerics whose ideology diverged from them (BBC Indonesia, 2016). It was indicated that one of the writers of this controversial school textbook was a partisan of Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia, an Islamic fundamentalist group that is allegedly affiliated with the Southeast Asian network of Jemaah Islamiyah. The organization has been led by Abu Bakar Ba’asyir, who is well-known as the spiritual leader of radical Islamists in Indonesia and is also the leader of Ngruki Islamic School, located in Solo, Central Java province. Following his involvement with the Bali bombings in 2002 which killed more than one hundreds people,

he was sentenced to jail since 2004. Nowadays, all the activities of his Islamic school are banned by the national government due to its radical ideology taught to students that does not reflect the values of Pancasila as the foundation of the state (Barton, 2005).

These examples revealed how school textbooks and their contents can be utilized as a tool to aggravate ethnic and religious conflicts while spreading radical ideology to the young generation rather than developing conciliatory potential for the promotion of peace, mutual understanding and tolerance. Despite the threats to the existence of religious tolerance and pluralism, the emergence of such Islamic fundamentalist groups also created a danger to social and political stability at the grassroots level, especially through the way in which they have created polarization between those who believe in conservativw Islam and those who are more moderate in understanding the Islamic perspective. Most moderate Islamic followers accept Pancasila as an ideal foundation of the state that accommodates diversity instead of just implementing the Sharia Law that does not value pluralism. In fact, however, a 2016 survey conducted by the Wahid Institute, a civil society organization that promotes a moderate form of Islam, revealed that the number of violations against the practices of religious freedom and tolerance has significantly increased from 154 in 2014 to 190 cases in 2015. According to Yenny Wahid, the director of the institute, “Muslims are being bombarded by these very black-and-white ways of framing issues” (Topsfield, 2016, p. 1). She further added that “If you love the Koran (Islamic bible), then you have to be against the one who blasphemes against it” (Topsfield, 2016, p. 1). The political strategy played by the fundamentalist groups and intolerant

Muslim vigilantes, such as Islam Defenders Front (FPI) is to frame religiously related issues in ways that encourage people to see them just as white and black or right and wrong without giving a room for conflicting parties to engage in a constructive dialogue. Therefore it is necessary to rethink about building a culture of dialogue as it gives an opportunity for conflicting parties to reach a consensus through which both sides' stories are heard to achieve mutual respect and understanding. However, the fundamentalist movement's priority is always concerned with stopping the eroding implementation of religious values in people's daily lives. They therefore protect some religious contents and sets of the traditional cosmological beliefs associated with norms of conduct to be implemented. The aim is to use them as a powerful tool that can provoke people to engage in the *jihad* activities and convince them to fight against the *Kafirs* in the name of religion.

In accordance with this, to strategically stem the seeds of a culture of violence and radicalization, an adequate rehabilitation strategy with non-violent approaches becomes essential to transform the radical ideology rooted within the mindset of the Islamic fundamentalist followers while decreasing the need for militaristic ways to foster a profound long-term change in society. Encouragingly, the parliament issued anti-terrorism Decree No.1 and No.2/2002 in 2002, which has been designed to enable the National Intelligence Agency (BIN) to have greater capacity in the identification of terrorist suspects (Barton, 2005). In the context of rehabilitation programs in Indonesia, the National Counter-terrorism Agency (BNPT) has also formulated a form of the de-radicalization campaign by initiating the "hard" and "soft" approaches as the umbrella of counter-

terrorism strategies (Abusa, 2008, p. 7). Unlike the hard approach that emphasizes the role of the police or other government agencies in the interrogation processes of the detainees, the soft approach, in contrast, is more likely to respond to the need for transforming the radical ideology that suits the local culture. Such an approach relies on the “cultural and personal method,” that promotes religious dialogue in the interrogation processes (Abusa, 2008). The current Indonesian government has also been actively cooperating with other neighboring countries, such as Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, and Australia, to combat terrorism acts and the spread of radical ideology in the region.

Building a culture of dialogue in the era of the reformation

The practices of religious freedom and tolerance have actually been manifested in the Preamble of the 1945 State Constitution, demonstrating that the state guarantees the rights of all citizens to their freedom to embrace one religion and worship based upon their own religious belief. The decree of the Minister of Religious Affairs No. 70/1978 also acknowledges that “the state has no rights to intervene those who voluntarily change their own religion in accordance with their own will and conscience” (Ropi, 2017, p. 19). The state, therefore, positions itself as a neutral party both religiously and politically, which indirectly underlines a secular model of state-religion relations that has been built since the New Order era in order to promote and protect diversity. In principle, the state is responsible to guarantee the religious freedom of the citizens, while protecting the rights of religious minorities to live their religious lives as a means for religious tolerance and pluralism.

The protection of religious freedom and diversity is also manifested in the *Nawa Cita* policy introduced by the current President of the Republic of Indonesia, Joko Widodo, who was elected through a fair and democratic election in October 2014. This policy has been used as guidance for the improvement of human development and the promotion of peace, justice, and pluralism to deal with the nation-state building strategy (Jong, 2014). One of the nine points underlined in the policy is to engage communities in processes that open the opportunity for them to build a culture of dialogue, including inter-faith dialogue, as a means for solving problems and promoting mutual understanding so as to strengthen the existence of religious and cultural diversity (The Indonesian Commission for Election, 2014). In practice, the policy also emphasizes the transformation of the mindsets of people and the enhancement of their integrity through the promotion of dialogue to combat critical issues that hinder the acceleration of human and social development in the country, including the emergence of Islamic fundamentalism and radicalism. To build a culture of dialogue, President Joko Widodo started the campaign by inviting the Islamic clerics from diverse schools of Islamic thought to the Presidential Palace in December 2016 and asking for a solution in an attempt to reduce tension and religious sentiments between Muslim and Christian communities in regards to the case of religious blasphemy, which was allegedly conducted by the current Chinese Christian governor of Jakarta, Ahok. Building a culture of peace through dialogue is essential to foster tolerance and pluralism. However, that kind of activity requires a political and communicative climate where differences and disagreement are viewed as learning opportunities rather than sources of violent conflict that must be transformed for co-existence (Fetherson & Kelly, 2007; Keaten & Soukup, 2009).

In an attempt to prevent the growth of Islamic fundamentalism and the spread of radical ideology, the aim of inter-faith dialogue must not be limited to cognitive understanding of the “other.” Rather, it should play a transformative role by deconstructing the mindsets of the “other” to challenge the stereotypes and prejudice that exist in their minds. At the same time the promotion of inter-faith dialogue is also geared to reconstruct people’s understanding of the importance of working together for the creation of social and political justice, which is at the root of many issues involving people of different religions and cultures in the current Indonesian pluralistic society. This kind of peace building effort is aimed toward the advancement of democracy, peace, and social justice for the protection of religious freedom and tolerance that reflects the national identity. The importance of building a culture of dialogue among different religious groups is that such activities have emerged as a mechanism for creating the conditions for religiously diverse people to come together for transformational conversations (Heckman, Neiss, & Ficca, 2008). The argument is built upon an understanding that meaningful inter-faith dialogue can help to achieve religious pluralism and inclusion that may lead towards the acknowledgment of viewpoints, mutual needs, and aspirations of conflicting parties, so as to foster the facilitation of transformative inter-religious groups’ understanding that can minimize inter-group prejudice (Castenada, 2004; Ross, 2000; Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005). Often, prejudice is constructed based on the perceived differences that come in the form of assumptions shaped by religious beliefs and/or cultural traditions that hinder the ability to be more open-minded. Such assumptions, thus, are not built upon tangible life experiences shaped by the possibilities of religious and cultural encounters with the “other” (Robinson, Keltner, Ward, & Ross, 1995). The purpose

of such an encounter is “for each participant to learn from “Others” so that s/he can change and grow and thereby the respective groups or communities as well” (p.407). Accordingly, inter-faith dialogue must be open to a beginner’s mind perspective and to considering that a single truth created by an individual or religious group is not an absolute. Such an understanding only comes through a sense of self-awareness and embracing reflection practices to respect differences based on mutual recognition that can bridge religious otherness.

Taking into account that inter-faith dialogue in this context is viewed as learning opportunities to foster tolerance and mutual respect about religious otherness, such activities, therefore, have the potential to actualize deep transformative peace education processes if they embrace discursive communication and delve deeply into subjects of difference and disagreement. The essence of interfaith dialogue according to Garfinkel and Zymelman (2004) is thus emphasized in its attempt to “unlock the power of religious traditions and provide the inspiration, guidance, and validation necessary for populations to move toward non-violent means” (p.2). In other words, inter-faith dialogue has the capacity to transform a culture of violence into a culture of peace by mobilizing a shared “moral imagination” which helps people to see and honor divine connectedness in the diversity and complexity of their differences and similarities (Lederach, 2005). To hear another religions’ story is to hear someone else’ story that could challenge our own assumptions about “the other” in order to transform discord (Hoffman, 2006; Veverka, 2004). Hence, the emphasis on the transformative power of such experiential learning through inter-faith dialogue is central for the promotion of peace and religious tolerance. The underlying idea is that such an activity

is a form of educative practice that can enable conflicting parties to listen to each others' stories and experiences, while practicing solving problem mechanisms through consciousness-raising and critical thinking in environments that reflect the real changing and challenging world to foster long-term change in society.

Conclusion

Being known as the most populous Muslim majority nation in the world, the dynamics of Indonesian politics cannot be detached from the influence of Islam that marks the development of the recent Indonesian political democracy, starting from the New Order era to the New Order regime and on to the transition and consolidation phase in the era of the reformation. The birth of Pancasila on the 1st of June 1966 in the New Order era was identified as a turning point in how Islam was marginalized in Indonesian political dynamics. The existence of Pancasila as the foundation of the state was actually a form of President Soekarno's political manifestation to fight against the Islamic parties and movements as he wanted to produce a moderate perspective of Islam instead of returning to the Arab's glorification of the past. The political dynamics of Islam in the New Order regime was even worse as it was being exploited as a political tool by the government to pursue anti-Islamic policies in the name of secularization and militarization. Hence during the New Order regime, Islam had to be satisfied with being merely a political orientation subordinate to the national ideology of Pancasila.

While a culture of freedom and political openness was experienced by Indonesian citizens in the early phase of the era

of the reformation in 1998, including the progress on expressing religious identity and the protection of religious freedom, its negative implication has also emerged. One of the negative impacts is the rise of religious fundamentalism and radicalism brought by the Islamic militant groups and intolerant Muslim vigilantes that aim to implement Sharia Law and change the current foundation of the state away from Pancasila. Through the awakening of a sense of religious nationalism and aggravating religious sentiments as a tool for political propaganda, these organizations attract the young generation of Indonesian Muslims to join such them and commit violent acts in the name of religion.

To prevent the emergence of Islamic fundamentalism and the spread of radical ideology, especially at the grassroots level, it is necessary to build a culture of peace through inter-faith dialogue to foster religious tolerance and strengthen pluralism in the nation. Thus inter-faith dialogue must be seen as learning opportunities that can enable a beginner's mind to engage in a constructive dialogue that embraces discursive communication and delves deeply into subjects of difference and disagreement. Such an activity may help conflicting parties to consider that a single truth created by an individual or religious group is not an absolute, while promoting understanding through a sense of self-awareness and embracing reflection practices to respect differences based upon recognition to bridge religious otherness.

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