

Reformasi, Religious Diversity, and Islamic Radicalism after Suharto

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Abstract

This paper examines the rising tide of ethno-religious conflicts and Islamic radicalism in the political arena of post-Suharto Indonesia. In the climate of *Reformasi* that heralded freedom of expression, ethnic and religious violence flared up in various regions of Indonesia, threatening a society apparently imbued with a culture of tolerance based on harmonious inter-ethnic and inter-faith relations. In a flurry of conflicts, a number of militant Muslim groups arose and engulfed the political arena of post-Suharto Indonesia by calling for jihad and other violent actions. The rise of the groups gave a remarkable boost to the explosion of militant religious discourses and activism that threaten Indonesia's reputation for practising a tolerant and inclusive form of Islam and threaten, too, the integrity of the Indonesian nation-state as well. Against the backdrop of the state-Islam relationship in the New Order, this paper looks at how this phenomenon is embedded in the state's failure to manage properly religious diversity and civic pluralism. In the context of mounting competition among elites, religion has become tremendously politicised and has served more as a tactical tool used by political contenders in their own interests. Herein lies the importance of the proper management of religious diversity as a mechanism to guarantee individual freedoms and maintain the rights of religious minorities.

Introduction

The demise of Suharto's authoritarian regime gave rise to religious discourse and activism that espoused norms, symbols, and rhetoric

imbued with animosity in the Indonesian public sphere. Although the militant Islamist groups that engulfed the political arena of Indonesia by calling for jihad and other violent actions have lost their momentum as a consequence of the on-going democratic consolidation and the global war on terror, the discourses of violence in the name of religion continue to resonate. Demonstrations organised by conservative Muslim groups, including the Indonesian Muslim Solidarity Forum (*Forum Solidaritas Umat Islam Indonesia*) and the Anti-Apostasy Movement Alliance (*Aliansi Gerakan Anti Pemurtadan*), repeatedly erupted against minority religious groups. These groups threatened to close and burn down a dozen churches regarded as having been built illegally and suspected of being the headquarters where hidden Christianisation projects were being organised. Conflicts occurred not only between religious groups but also within religious groups. Key instances of conflicts within religious groups include the recent attacks on Ahmadiyah, a minority sect in Islam.¹

The growing tide of religious conflicts after Suharto seems dissociated from the failure of *Reformasi* to touch upon the fundamental issue of reforming the state's management of religious diversity. In the changing political landscape arising from the opening of political opportunity, religion has increasingly been caught between political forces that are fighting for their own political interests. This paper argues that the *Reformasi*'s failure to reform the management of religious diversity has disrupted the democratic consolidation and the reform direction itself. For religion is at the intersection of a struggle between state, society and political forces. Individuals, groups and political forces thereby compete to represent the right to define boundaries in support of their organised claims and to delegitimise the rights of others.

Islam and State in the New Order

A country whose population is tremendously large, with a great diversity of religion, ethnicity, culture and tradition, Indonesia indisputably needs an effective strategy to manage religious diversity for it to guarantee

1 For reports on a series of attacks on Ahmadiyah, see Aris Mustafa et al. (2005).

intercultural tolerance and peaceful coexistence among different groups. This was not entirely unknown by the Suharto New Order, which, since its establishment in 1967, endeavoured to manage the diversity, but through a mechanism that often manipulated the diversity itself. Being aware that Sukarno's failure might have been caused by his focus on ideological and political affairs, which resulted in never-ending tension between religion and the state, Suharto decided to focus on a strategy of development and modernisation. Consequently, religious expressions were marginalised in the political process, in spite of the considerable role that was played by Muslims in bringing the New Order into existence. The quest for the revitalisation of Muslim politics was rejected by Suharto, under the influence of his two primary advisers, Ali Murtopo and Sujono Humardani. Rather, a policy of regimentation of political Islam was advanced. Masyumi, the first and largest banned Islamic political party, which had been placed second in the 1955 general election, did not obtain a green light to be resuscitated. Rather, a new party, Parmusi, without the leadership of former Masyumi figures, was designed to accommodate Muslim modernists. As a result of the regime's intervention in the party's internal affairs, the new party failed to draw votes in the 1971 general election. Other Islamic parties were likewise ineffective in challenging the Golongan Karya (Golkar) [Functionalist Group], the new political machine created by Suharto's regime, which gained 62.8 per cent of total votes (Thaba 1996; van Bruinessen 1996).

After the 1971 general election, which gave an absolute victory to the Golkar, Suharto explicitly intensified the marginalisation of political Islam by implementing the 'parties fusion' policy. This policy obliged all Muslim parties to be fused into one, the Partai Persatuan Pembangunan (PPP) [United Development Party], just as the nationalist and Christian parties were fused into the Partai Demokrasi Indonesia (PDI) [Indonesian Democratic Party]. To shore up his policy, Suharto popularised development jargon and imposed the Pancasila as the state's governing doctrine. Any aspirations that challenged the Pancasila could be easily labelled either 'left extreme' or 'right extreme'; the Anti-Subversive Act inherited from Sukarno was used by the state to justify its methods. Through the indoctrination program called the *Pedoman Penghayatan*

dan Pengamalan Pancasila (P4) [Guide to Comprehension and Practice of the Pancasila], as well as other instruments, the Pancasila was systematically embedded in the minds of Indonesia's citizens. The spread of the Pancasila doctrine served to isolate dissidents from the 'left' and the 'right' and ensured the constant threat of surveillance, in Foucaultian terms, replacing a less subtle form of control: domination of the body (Foucault 1979).

To strengthen its hegemony over society and expand its power and control, the New Order attempted to domesticate the social force of *ulama* (religious Muslim scholars), by proposing the creation of a semi-governmental body, the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (Indonesian Council of *Ulama*). To this council would be assigned the function of issuing religious legal opinions (*fatwas*) and religious advice (*tausiyah*). The idea was made known to the public during a national conference of Muslim preachers held in 1970 by the Pusat Dakwah Islam Indonesia (Centre for Indonesian Islamic Propagation), an institution established by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Yet, it could not start immediately, partly because of criticism from a number of participants, notably Hamka, a leading modernist religious scholar. Hamka saw in the idea one Islamic political party's attempt to mobilise support from other Islamic groups (Hosen 2004). Mukti Ali, a modernist Muslim scholar appointed as a minister of religious affairs in 1971, rescinded the idea and facilitated another conference of Muslim preachers in 1974. Suharto delivered the opening address at this conference, in which he insisted on the need for a nationwide body of *ulama* that could serve as, among other functions, the translator of the concepts and activities of development as well as the mediator between the government and *ulama* (Ichwan 2005). This body was also expected to be the representative of Muslims in inter-religious dialogues, a project launched by Mukti Ali to build what he frequently referred to as 'the harmony of religious life', that is, the peaceful coexistence of religious groups (Mujiburrahman 2006). The Majelis Ulama Indonesia was officially established a year later and Hamka was elected as its first chairman. The nature of the Majelis Ulama Indonesia as a body whose creation was instigated by the government was soon visible. It was involved in polemics and issued a number of (controversial) *fatwas* legitimising government policies (Mudzhar 1993).

Suharto's endeavour to block access to power to Islamic political forces triggered resistance in the form of uprisings in the name of Islam. A group called Komando Jihad (Jihad Commando), led by Ismail Pranoto, perpetrated bombing attacks in Java and Sumatra; another, led by Abdul Qadir Djaelani and calling itself 'Pola Perjuangan Revolusioner Islam' (the Model of Revolutionary Islamic Struggle), stormed the building of the Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat (MPR) [People's Consultative Council Assembly] during its general session in March 1978. No less important was a series of murders and robberies committed by a band of radicals led by M Warman, known as 'Terror Warman', and the attacks by a group led by Imran M Zein, aimed at a number of government facilities, that culminated in the hijacking of a Garuda Indonesia aeroplane on 28 March 1981. Led by West Javanese Darul Islam veterans, who had initially been employed by Murtopo's intelligence operators to destroy communism, these groups acted for a common cause; to rebel against Suharto and establish an Islamic state (Santosa 1996; van Bruinessen 2002).

Yet Suharto remained undeterred and consistently wiped them out by force. Following the Tanjung Priok affair on 12 September 1984, at which at least nine people were killed and more than fifty demonstrators injured, Suharto promulgated the Mass Organisation and Political Bill, which required all mass organisations and political parties to accept the Pancasila as the *asas tunggal* (the sole foundation), thus forbidding Islam from being used as the basis for any organisation. This bill was ratified in 1985. In reaction to this policy, the Nahdlatul Ulama, the Indonesia's largest organisation of traditionalist Muslims, quickly declared its acceptance of the Pancasila, but the Muhammadiyah, a modernist-Muslim umbrella, took some time before doing the same (Ismail 1995).

At the end of the 1980s, however, Suharto began to recognise the emotive and familiar message of Islam by introducing a policy of accommodating Islam, focusing particularly on the accentuation of Islamic symbols in public discourse. Islam was thus systematically incorporated in the frame of reference of the state to offset the increasingly plausible challenge to the legitimacy of Suharto's political leadership. In this context,

the Directorate General of Elementary and Secondary Education, for instance, issued a new regulation on student uniforms, lifting the ban for female students to wear headscarves (*jilbab*) at school. Suharto himself and his family went to Mecca to perform the *hajj* pilgrimage in 1991. On her return from Mecca, Mbak Tutut, Suharto's eldest daughter and a popular figure, began to demonstrate her piety publicly by wearing colourful, elegant headscarves. The model and the way she wore her headscarf provided the ultimate example for the whole nation. Since then cabinet members and high ranking officials have no longer hesitated to declare the Islamic greeting, *Assalamu'alaikum*, in the opening passage of their speeches and this greeting is becoming increasingly popular. They also sought to demonstrate their concern with various Islamic affairs by, for instance, participating in religious festivals and celebrations.

A number of organisations and institutions that made use of Islamic symbols appeared on the scene, including the Indonesian Muslim Intellectual Association (ICMI) [Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim se-Indonesia], which was led by BJ Habibie and established under Suharto's patronage (Hefner 1993). The ruling party, Golongan Karya, began to line its cloak with Islam as more and more Muslim intellectuals were absorbed into it. While thousands of mosques were built under the sponsorship of the state, the Islamic Court Bill was introduced, followed by the Presidential Decree on the Compilation of Islamic Law.² The Bank Muamalat Indonesia, which has as its slogan the words *pertama sesuai syariah*, or 'the first [bank in Indonesia] in accordance with the *shari'a*', was set up and its establishment initiated the mushrooming of Islamic *shari'a* banks and insurance companies (Möller 2005). No doubt, these policies were part of Suharto's political strategy to hold onto power (Liddle 1996). Various Islamic (opposition) groups saw the New Order's accommodation of Islam as a promising opportunity to enter the political arena of the state. They believed that through this way they would be able to change the fate of their society, their nation, and

2 The Islamic court bill no. 1/1989 guarantees the equal position of the Islamic court vis-à-vis the other court systems, including the public, military and administrative courts. The presidential decree on the compilation of Islamic law no.1/1991 was issued to provide a unified reference for judges in the Islamic courts in dealing with the cases brought to them.

their state—not to mention bringing about changes at a personal level.

In this sense, the strategy of the regime appeared to succeed in ‘subduing’ pro-Islamist groups and indeed created ‘regimist Muslims’, who did not recoil from showing themselves as a real partner of the state (Hefner 2000). This incorporatist inclusion of Muslim interests had in turn contributed to a re-politicisation of Islam and the diversifying demands and challenges of society difficult for the state to contain, channel, neutralise, or co-opt effectively (Porter 2002). In his comparative study on Pakistan and Malaysia, Nasr (2001) refers to such a strategy as ‘Islamic leviathan’ which allowed regimes in power to avoid fundamental reforms in their economies, political structures, and policy making. He argues that as a facet of the state’s drive to expand its power and control through manipulation of ideology, the leviathan strategy hardly bears any positive result. In fact, the New Order’s Islamisation trend was showing signs of decay when a wave of *Reformasi* forced Suharto to step down in May 1998.

Political Configuration after Suharto

The fall of Suharto seriously disturbed the political configuration in the final years of the New Order that was in favour of pro-Islamist groups. By the time he left office, these groups were still quite optimistic that the Islamised direction of the state would be maintained as Habibie, the main symbol of the Islamisation of the state, was now in power. However, Habibie immediately had to confront strong opposition from different elements in society. In response to these challenges, he tried to convince the opposition about his commitment to reform by, among other measures, restructuring and strengthening the financial system and proposing an extraordinary session of the Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat, with the primary aim of setting a new date for general elections (Anwar 1999). Despite these efforts, the opposition groups that did not support his ascendancy to power persistently protested against him and demanded his resignation. At one point, they threatened that if he were not prepared to step down at the Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat’s extraordinary session in November 1999, ‘people power’, a united front composed of leftist students and the Barisan Nasional (National Front), would force him out of office (Schwarz 2000).

In reacting to this pressure, Habibie's supporters came out in force to stand behind him. They were mobilised by a number of influential Muslim figures, leaders of hardline Islamic organisations associated with the Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia (DDII) [Indonesian Council of Islamic Propagation]³ or Muslim parties, criticising Habibie's rivals as the parties responsible for the political instability of the state. Fearful of the consequences of this instability, they supported the attempts made by some military elites close to Habibie to mobilise thousands of massed forces armed with bamboo spears, known as Pam Swakarsa, from Jakarta, Bogor, Tangerang, Bekasi, and Banten. During the extraordinary session in November, this paramilitary force blocked the area around the headquarters of the Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat in Senayan to prevent the storm of anti-Habibie demonstrators (Van Dijk 2001). In the run-up to the general elections in June 1999, the challenges faced by Habibie increased in relation to the candidacy for presidency of Megawati Sukarnoputri, the leader of the Partai Demokrasi Indonesia-Perjuangan (PDI-P) [Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle], known for her close relations with secular-nationalist and Christian politicians. Her candidacy immediately sparked a sharp rivalry between the pro-Islamist groups, on one side, and secular-nationalist groups, on another. Supporters of each camp attacked the other by exploiting ethnic, religious, and other primordial sentiments.

This rivalry contributed to a surge in ethno-religious conflicts that had exploded in various regions of Indonesia and fuelled further tensions among different religious communities. It has even broken down the foundation of interfaith dialogue and tolerance—albeit artificial—that had been built by the state. In the context of the rivalry, a merciless debate developed about, for instance, whether a woman could be president. The Kongres Umat Islam Indonesia (KUII) [Congress of the Indonesian Muslim Community] in November 1998 passed a recommendation that the president should be male, according to Islamic injunctions (Riddle 2002). As part of the rivalry, pictures of Megawati praying at a Balinese Hindu temple had appeared in Indonesian newspapers. Megawati's

3 DDII is a *da'wa* organisation established in 1967 by former leaders of Masyumi as a strategy to deal with various political impasses that had blocked their ambition to play politics. On this organisation see, for example, Husin (1988).

detractors immediately seized upon these images to suggest that she was a Hindu. AM Saefuddin, a Partai Persatuan Pembangunan minister in Habibie's cabinet, went even further, asking: are we ready to be led by a Hindu president? In an attempt to disqualify Megawati, and thus guarantee Habibie's victory, the Majelis Ulama Indonesia issued a *tauksiya* just six days before the election suggesting Muslims vote for parties that 'struggle for the aspiration and interests of the *umma*, nation and state' and not to vote for non-Muslim political leaders and parties dominated by non-Muslims (Ichwan 2005).

This campaign provoked reactions from Megawati's supporters, who felt the time had indeed come to stand behind her to win the election at all costs. Some pro-Megawati groups in Surabaya, for instance, stated their determination to die for Megawati, a pledge confirmed by a petition signed in blood. In their counterarguments, Habibie's supporters insisted that to defend their candidate essentially meant to defend Islam and guarantee the state's continued progress toward Islamisation. They continued to organise demonstrations against the opposition and echo religious sentiments, one that was taken by his opposition as evidence of Habibie's incapability to cope with the situation and introduce fundamental reforms to the economy, political structure and policy making. Here the state-run Islamisation project apparently backfired. Instead of creating a greater harmony in state-society relations, it facilitated ideologisation of the public arena of political discourse and encouraged Islamist activism and militant attitudes

Rivalries and conflicts occurring at that time indicate that Indonesia's transition from an authoritarian state to a fledgling democracy disturbed the nation's political equilibrium; consequently, proponents of the status quo tried hard to involve new political allies in their negotiations with the opposition. This problem was exacerbated by the fact that the emerging Indonesian democracy was still fragile, because of, among other causes, a serious lack of functional democratic traditions and the narrow interests of the political parties involved. As O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986) have argued, transition is typically a period during which regimented relations in a society become blurred and uncertain because the hegemonic discourse controlled by the state has undergone

fragmentation. Many possibilities may be on the horizon, including the emergence of a chaotic situation that paves the way for the return of authoritarian rule. Even if democracy is to some extent manifested, it is frequently followed by uncertainty, because the rules of the game continue to change. The players in an era of transition do not strive simply to fulfil their temporary political ambitions but also to establish control over the state (Gill 2000). Within this context, transition often stimulates the formation of a coalitional structure linking ‘exemplary individuals’ to societal organisations representing the masses.

There is no doubt that *Reformasi* has brought about some fundamental changes in the structures of statecraft. In response to the growing opposition against him, Habibie was eventually tempted to mobilise Islam and use extra-parliamentary forces as a means to counter the opposition’s challenges. In the context of shoring up his frail political legitimacy, he also liberalised the regulation on the establishment of political parties and abolished the *asas tunggal*, thus explicitly allowing Islam to enter the political arena of Indonesia. A dozen political parties that endorsed the *shari’*a and other conservative positions thus came to the political arena of post-Suharto Indonesia. Of these, seven, including the Crescent and Moon Party (PBB) [Partai Bulan Bintang] and the Justice Party (PK) [Partai Keadilan], explicitly declared Islam as their sole ideological basis and philosophy. The United Development Party (PPP) [Partai Persatuan Pembangunan], the only Islamic party under the party fusion system introduced by Suharto in 1973 and that had accepted the Pancasila as its sole ideological foundation, also rigorously returned to Islam and its old symbol, *ka’ba*.⁴

***Shari’*a Bylaws**

In the atmosphere of *Reformasi* brought about by Suharto’s departure, the idea of *shari’*a came to the centre stage. It provided the medium through which any actors associated with any movements could mobilise support and assign their aspirations and interests. The demand for the *shari’*a has in fact facilitated the attempts made by Islamic

4 *Ka’ba* is a large cuboidal building in Mecca which has become the direction Muslims face during prayer.

political parties, including the United Development Party (PPP) and the Crescent and Moon Party (PBB) to gain votes and broaden their Islamist constituency by reviving debate on seven words '*dengan kewajiban menjalankan syariat bagi pemeluknya*', which had been removed from the Preamble to the Indonesian Constitution only a day after Independence.⁵ Known as the *Piagam Jakarta* (Jakarta Charter), the words stipulate the obligation for adherents of Islam to follow the *shari'a*. Later, the debates shifted from the idea of Islam becoming the foundation of the state (*Dasar Negara*) to the amendment of Article 29 of the Constitution (Hosen 2005). Although these attempts ended in failure, the demands for the application of the *shari'a* have resonated across the country and to some extent materialised with the enactment of *shari'a* bylaws (*perda*). The introduction of regional autonomy packages and direct elections of regional administrators (*pilkada*) gave a remarkable boost to the attempts made by the *shari'a* supporters to appropriate religious laws for their own interests, at the expense of individual freedoms and the rights of women and religious minorities.

Aceh was the pioneer in implementing the *shari'a* when, in November 1999, a young man accused of committing adultery was punished by being whipped in public. This province received a special autonomy package from the central government that granted it privilege rights to implement the *shari'a*.⁶ Although the implementation of the *shari'a* in the province should be seen as an attempt by the central government to curb the protracted bloody conflict between the Indonesian Armed Forces and the Aceh Freedom Movement (GAM) [Gerakan Aceh Merdeka] which claimed thousands of Acehnese lives, it provided a model for the application of the *shari'a* bylaws for other provinces and regencies across Indonesia. The demands for the application

5 The attempt made by Muslim leaders to include the seven words in the Indonesian Constitution was strongly challenged secular *abangan* nationalists and like-minded leaders who preferred a secular republican model based on the Pancasila and the Constitution of 1945. As a result, many Muslim leaders felt betrayed. See BJ Bolland (1982).

6 This is the Law No. 44/1999 on the governing of Aceh special status, articles 3 and 4, and the Law No. 18/2001 on the special autonomy for Aceh and the Law of 2006 on the administration system of Aceh, see Rusjdi Ali Muhammad (2003: 227-228).

of such bylaws have since gained momentum in various Indonesian provincial towns. Officials and local parliament members from other regions came to visit Aceh and admire how ‘Islamic nuances’ have become more visible in the province as the result of the application of the *shari’a* bylaws. They neglect paradoxes felt by many Acehnese themselves, especially women, who are forced to wear headscarves and not infrequently stopped by police officers and the *wilayat al-hisba*, local *shari’a* police, in the streets if they fail to do so. Banners in the main streets of Aceh condemned unveiled women as evil.⁷

The *shari’a* supporters emphasised that what they endorsed is not the application of the *shari’a* itself, but rather moral and social regulations supporting the accelerated programmes to bring ‘people prosperity’ (*kesejahteraan rakyat*) into reality. This sort of argument has been justified by the amended 1945 Constitution (article 18:5), which reads: ‘Regional Government should implement *autonomy in its broadest sense*, except governmental affairs decided by laws to be parts of the Central Governmental affairs’. In line with this argument, the regulations are regarded as being non-religious, but fall under moralistic issues related to social welfare, so that their scope belongs to the definition of ‘autonomy in its broadest sense’. This line of thinking is also supported by another article (18:6), which states that: ‘Regional Government has the right to set up regional regulations and other regulations to implement autonomy and (other) supporting tasks’. The supporters of the *shari’a* found these loosely defined articles a blessings in disguise in the euphoria of *Reformasi*, which demands wider autonomy for regional administrations.

Shortly after Aceh implemented the *shari’a*, Solok in West Sumatra ratified a regional regulation on Qur’anic literacy and regulations to compel Muslim women to adhere to Islamic dress codes. A number of districts in West Java followed this step. Tasikmalaya issued a district head (*bupati*) decree in an effort to boost the quality of belief and religious practice, which includes the Qur’anic literacy for students at

7 Many Acehnese women felt that the enforcement of headscarf does not necessarily reflect their faith and that Acehnese are respectful of women and have long given a high position to them. See Syukron Kamil et al. (2007: 264-268).

primary and secondary schools.⁸ Cianjur issued a district head's decree on the dissemination of Islamic moral codes among government officers and Cianjur society in general.⁹ Indramayu issued regional regulations to prohibit prostitution, to limit the distribution of liquor, to enforce the wearing of headscarves, and to promote Qur'anic literacy.¹⁰ Similar phenomena occurred in some outer islands of Indonesia. Several districts in South Sulawesi, including Maros, Gowa, and Bulukumba, issued a number of regulations on dress code, on Qur'anic literacy for students at primary and secondary schools and for intending brides and bridegrooms, and on the administration of *zakat* (Islamic tax), *infaq* (charity) and *sadaqa* (donations).¹¹ Martapura, in South Kalimantan, demonstrated the same tendency to implement a number of regional regulations governing the opening hours of restaurants and food stalls during the fasting month of Ramadan, the administration of *zakat*, *infaq* and *sadaqa*, Friday congregations, Qur'anic literacy and dress codes.

The demands continue for the *shari'a* through the enactment of *shari'a* bylaws—despite their superficiality. In the districts where the *shari'a* bylaws have been implemented, the need to strengthen existing regulations and provide clearer legal sanctions has been expressed. In other districts or cities where such regulations have not been implemented, the aspirations for the *shari'a* remain vocal. For instance, in Depok, a neighbouring city of Jakarta led by a mayor from the Party of Justice and Prosperity (PKS) [*Partai Keadilan Sejahtera*], the *shari'a* supporters succeeded in consolidating themselves by establishing the so-called *Forum Mudzakaroh Syariah Islam* (the Forum for Discussing the *Shari'a*).¹² In Bogor, also a neighbouring city of Jakarta, a hard-

8 Regent's Decree No. 421.1/Kep.326 A/Sos/2001 and Regent Circulated Letter No. 451/SE/04/Sos/2001.

9 Regent's Decree No. 451/2719/ASSDA/2001.

10 Regent's Decree No. 7/1999, Regent's Decree No. 7/2005, Regent's Circulated Letter dated 22 January 2001, and Regent's Circulated Letter dated 17 January 2004, respectively.

11 On the movement for implementing the *shari'a* in this province and other regions, see for instance, Taufik Adnan Amal and Samsu Rizal Panggabean (2004: 53-104).

12 See <http://gerbang.jabar.go.id>. The establishment of this sort of organisation reminds us of the history of the application of the *shari'a* in South Sulawesi which began with the establishment of the Preparation Committee for the Enforcement

line Islamic organisation, Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), pioneered the call for the application of the *shari'a* by organising a *Tabligh Akbar* on 6 March 2005, with the central theme: *Galang Ukhuwah, Satukan Langkah, Menuju Bogor Bersyariah* (Strengthening Islamic solidarity and uniting steps towards the implementation of the *shari'a* in Bogor). It is noteworthy that a number of Bogor's government officers, including Saiful Anwar, Endang Oman, Rachmat E Sulaeman, attended this gathering.

It is obvious that the mounting demand for the application of the *shari'a* constitutes an inevitable consequence of the inappropriate management of religious diversity by the state. As we have seen, the interest of the state to maintain its legitimacy by politicising religious symbols has made religion function more as a means of social control. Religion plays no role in fostering social cohesion, which Putnam (2005) explains as a term that encompasses 'issues of social justice, tolerance, inclusion and social integration'. Coupled with the weakening of state power, failure to instil these values would risk an increase in distrust and conflict in the society (Bouma 2008; Sajoo 2008).

The absence of trust that tied different social groups also facilitated the eruption of riots and communal conflicts along religious, racial and ethnic lines. Reflecting a common outcome of economic and socio-political instability, ethnic and religious conflicts that flared in various regions of Indonesia threatened a society apparently imbued with a culture of tolerance based on harmonious inter-ethnic and inter-faith relations. In the Moluccas, a fight between two youths quickly evolved into bloody communal violence between Christians and Muslims, which claimed thousands of lives and injured many more. Likewise, in Central Sulawesi, West and Central Kalimantan, protracted bloody communal confrontations that involved different ethnic groups resulted in property destruction and the mass exodus of refugees.¹³

of the Islamic *Shari'a* (KPPSI) or in Garut with the Institute for the Study and Development of the *Shari'a*.

13 For detailed accounts of these conflicts, see, for instance, CA Coppel, (ed.) (2005) and Gerry van Klinken (2007).

Islamic Militancy and Jihadist Activism

The complexity of the transition process following the fall of Suharto is confirmed by the fact that, in tandem with the spread of democratic discourse, a number of militant Islamist groups, including the Front Pembela Islam (FPI) [Front of the Defenders of Islam], the Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) [Indonesia's Party of Liberation], the Laskar Jihad (LJ) [Jihad Paramilitary Force], the Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI) [Indonesian Holy Warrior Council] and the Jamaah Islamiyah (JI), achieved notoriety by taking to the streets to demand the comprehensive implementation of the *shari'a* and by raiding cafes, discotheques, casinos, brothels and other reputed dens of iniquity. In response to the bloody communal conflicts in various trouble spots, they stated their determination to fight jihad and mobilised members and other aspirants of *mujahidin* to venture to the frontlines.

The key to the success of the groups' mobilising process lay in the existing Islamist networks that had become widespread across the country in tandem with the efflorescence of Islamist ideology. Taking the form of Islamic study cells, *da'wa* groups, *madrassa* clusters, mosques, and media, among other things, the networks constituted a crucial intermediate level for understanding the process by which individuals become involved in collective action. It is within such networks that individuals interact, influence each other, negotiate, and hence establish conceptual and motivational frameworks for their actions. Framed in general terms, that what happens in Indonesia has very much to do with the global crisis in the Muslim world, the groups proclaimed their determination to offer the *shari'a*, *khilafa* system and jihad as the only solution to curb the continuing crises and disasters afflicting Indonesia today. Implicitly and explicitly they questioned the format of the modern nation-state and expressed their profound desire to establish an Islamic state. They asserted that only then would the Indonesian Muslim *umma* be protected and saved from the attacks of 'belligerent infidels.'

Action frames developed by the militant Islamist groups could resonate widely in the public sphere of Indonesia, which is friendly to Islam. As a result of the Islamisation process over the past two decades, Islam has increasingly served as a determining variable behind political

negotiations and become the most important frame of reference for many Indonesians to reflect upon the socio-political system they imagined capable of bringing about justice and attaining veritable development. Keeping pace with the growing influence of Islam on politics, Indonesia has witnessed new global forms of religious identity, whose effect is mediated by specific, historically situated, local institutions. The expansion of this so-called ‘glocal’ Islam appears to be correlated with the accentuation of religious symbols in the public sphere, the increase of personal religiosity as well as the proliferation of Islamic institutions and new life-styles.

In this context, luxurious mosques with new architecture (usually derived from the Middle East) have been constructed—and they have large congregations, mostly youthful. More and more people have gone on the *haji*, the pilgrimage to Mecca, complementing the popularity of the use of the *jilbab* (scarf) for women and *baju koko* (Muslim shirts) for men. Islamic print media popularising *da’wa* themes thrived, complete with the birth of new *da’wa* genres, such as cyber *da’wa* and cellular *da’wa*. At the same time, the so-called integrated and quality Islamic schools were formed as well as institutions for collecting increasingly large amounts of religious alms and donations. These institutions, reaching even remote villages in the countryside, facilitated the efflorescence of Islamic banks (also known as *shari’a* banks), Islamic insurance (*Takaful*), Islamic people’s credit unions (*Bank Perkreditan Rakyat Syari’ah*), and Islamic houses of treasury (*Bait al-Mal wa al-Tamwil*).

In this socially and politically ‘Islamised’ public sphere, the FPI came to the fore with a basic agenda to raid cafes, discotheques, casinos and brothels. These actions were claimed to be part of their attempts to secure Indonesia from the hegemony of a Zionist–Christian global conspiracy to undermine Islam. HTI appeared to the public to criticise the existing political system and to propose the *khilafat* system as an alternative to cope with all the problems facing Indonesia today. It claimed that the collapse of the *khilafat* system in 1923 was the prime cause of the crisis afflicting the Muslim world, which remains under the shadow of the Zionist–Christian hegemony. Under the leadership

of Ja'far Umar Thalib, Laskar Jihad pioneered the call for jihad in the Moluccas, deemed to be a pilot project of the Zionist–Christian conspiracy to Christianise all the Indonesian archipelago. Likewise, the Laskar Mujahidin and Jamaah Islamiyah (JI) were preoccupied with a campaign to send fighters to the Moluccas, and to Poso in Central Sulawesi, in their attempts to assist local Muslims against Christians.

The role of the militant Islamist groups in facilitating the escalation of the conflicts cannot be overlooked. In the transitional phase after Suharto, the eruption of the conflicts provided a pretext on which a resonant action frame, crucial for a mobilisation process, was constructed by the groups. As we have seen, the Laskar Jihad was set up in response to the escalated conflict in the Moluccas. The presence of LJ in the islands in turn inspired the local Muslims to take up arms till the last drop of their blood.¹⁴ There is no denying that after the coming of LJ fighters to Ambon, for instance, the aggressiveness of the Muslim side intensified significantly. In mid-May 2000, Muslim forces attacked and took over Ahuru. In the same month, they attacked Galala and the headquarters in Tantai of the police Mobil Brigade (Brigade Mobil, Brimob). Simultaneously, they seized the Efrata Church and the Otto Kwick Hospital in the same area. Subsequently, they attacked and seized the Christian University of the Moluccas at Talake and the State University of Pattimura at Poka. The increase in Muslim attacks on Christian targets also occurred in the North Moluccas. Under the leadership of Abu Bakar Wahid al-Banjari, Muslim militias in the islands sought to, and did, retaliate for the events of December 1999, when Christian militias killed more than five hundred Muslims in Galela and Tobelo. Because of the upsurge in the aggressiveness of the Muslim forces during these months, almost forty Christian villages were ruined. The Moluccan Muslims believed that the hour had come to take revenge against Christians, who had previously had the upper hand. They were ready to defeat the core Christian forces mobilised by Protestant churches.

The Laskar Mujahidin preferred to operate secretly in small, skilled, well armed combat units. Sometimes, side-by-side with the Mujahidin

14 For a further account on the Laskar Jihad, see Noorhaidi Hasan (2006).

of Kompak, a DDII-linked Muslim charity set up in 1998, which had established its footprint in the Moluccas after the outbreak of violence in January 1999, it attacked Christian villages and organised Islamic outreach activities and humanitarian relief.¹⁵ But Laskar Mujahidin had no structural links. Although its membership did not exceed three hundred, including a dozen foreigners from France, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia and Algeria, the Laskar Mujahidin appeared to have been more effective than the efforts of thousands of LJ combatants. This operation was made possible thanks to the sophisticated weapons they had received from abroad, such as the Abu Sayyaf group in the southern Philippines. Local sources in the Moluccas revealed that the Laskar Mujahidin indeed played an important role in teaching local Muslim militias the technology of assembling bombs. They appeared to be the favourite external jihad group among local Muslim militias. For the Laskar Mujahidin, these Indonesian spice islands were the second jihad field of operation after Poso in Central Sulawesi.¹⁶ One of its constitutive member groups, the Laskar Jundullah, began to deploy members when phase 3 of the Poso conflict broke out in May 2000. Together with other militia groups from outside, including JI, Mujahidin of Kompak, Laskar Wahdah Islamiyah, Laskar Bulan Sabit Merah, Laskar Khalid bin Walid and Laskar Jihad, as well as local groups, such as Forum Perjuangan Umat Islam led by Adnan Arsal, it formed the Muslim jihad force active in attacking Christian forces.¹⁷

It should be noted, however, that despite enthusiastic responses, the Laskar Jihad and the Laskar Mujahidin had received from local Muslims, the scope of ideological influences that they brought with them remained limited. Since the beginning of their jihad operation in the Moluccas, LJ has attempted to spread Wahhabism among local Muslims. True to their stated purpose, they set up numerous Qur'anic learning centres

15 Kompak helped Muslims in the Moluccas with the evacuation of bodies and documenting everything with video cameras. In the initial stage of emergency responses, it worked closely with the community assistance post (Pos Keadilan Peduli Umat) of the Partai Keadilan.

16 Interviews with members of a local Muslim militia group in Ambon, March 2002.

17 For a further account on the presence of the Mujahidin Force in Poso and its relations with other militia groups, from outside and local, see International Crisis Group, 'Indonesia Backgrounder: Jihad in Central Sulawesi' (2004).

called 'Al-Manshurah' and rehabilitated mosques that eventually had fallen into their possession. They also organised a variety of *da'wa* activities and social services, such as garbage disposal, that had stopped functioning at the outbreak of the conflict. In a praiseworthy endeavour, they succeeded in building in Kebun Cengkeh a medical clinic bearing the name of Laskar Jihad Medical Team, AhMed, which provided free health services. All these religious and social activities were deemed to be part of jihad and to some extent regarded as more important than the jihad operation itself.

However, there is no evidence that confirms the success of their campaign to spread Wahhabism. Moluccan Muslims remained reluctant to accept that particular kind of Islam. In their eyes, Islam introduced by the Laskar Jihad is inapplicable to their efforts to cope with imminent threats from Christians. They felt it necessary to work hand-in-hand and forget any religious divides. They also believed that what they had been practicing is indeed a true Islam. In response to the Laskar Jihad's increasingly aggressive campaigns for Wahhabism, they preferred to make closer alliance with the Laskar Mujahidin whom they believed to have a more flexible standpoint in terms of religious beliefs and practices. As viewed by local Muslim militias, the Laskar Jihad fighters were skilful only in reading the Qur'an and preaching to people to follow their doctrines. They conspicuously lacked the required tactical and strategic skills.

In Poso, the presence of the Laskar Jihad was truncated and insignificant compared with the Laskar Mujahidin and other militia groups from outside. It also failed to establish close links with local militias, and to exert their ideological influences among local Muslims. Unlike LJ, the Laskar Mujahidin was relatively successful in establishing branches across Central Sulawesi and in recruiting people, including locals, to fight in Poso. It collaborated with JI and the Mujahidin of Kompak and together used the training camp set up in Pamona Selatan designed to replicate the military academy at JI's Camp Hudaibiyah in Mindanao (International Crisis Group 2004: 11). In the time leading up to the Malino peace accord in 2002 they began to see Poso as fertile ground for the kind of intensive *da'wa* and religious study circles that could

expand the community prepared to live by Salafi principles and it served as a recruiting mechanism for their sustainable operations (International Crisis Group 2004: 14).

The absence of an umbrella organisation for Muslims in Poso was a contributing factor to the sustainability of JI operations. There, JI continued committing terrorist acts. Their space for manoeuvre narrowed only recently when the Indonesian police succeeded in several major raids in arresting a group of men, whose identities became known as local members of JI.¹⁸ Unlike Muslims in Poso, Muslim leaders in the Moluccas quickly consolidated themselves and, under the sponsorship of the local government, set up an umbrella organisation, the Badan Imarat Muslim Maluku (the Council of United Moluccan Muslims). Chaired by Ali Fauzy, this council was responsible for efforts at reconciliation between Muslims and Christians initiated by the local government, and also to counter what they considered as an Arabised Islam that would further divide Moluccan Muslims, at the expense of their determination to live in harmony with themselves and with other religious communities.¹⁹

Towards Islamisation from Below

The determination of the militant Islamist groups to spark violent discourse and jihadist activism can not be dissociated from the complicated dynamics of Indonesia's transition towards electoral democracy, which ushered in a plethora of opportunities for different groups and interests to emerge and compete in the newly liberated public sphere. The longevity of such discourse and activism is, therefore, largely the result of how long the political opportunity is available. The attempts made by the Indonesian government to strengthen anti-terror campaigns as a response to the rising threat of terrorism after 9/11 have significantly reduced room for the groups to manoeuvre. In the context of the global campaign against terror, President Megawati Sukarnoputri issued the Government Regulation in Lieu of Statute No. 1/2002 on War against Terrorist Crimes and the Presidential Instruction No. 4/2002 that

18 On the latest issue on jihad in Poso, see International Crisis Group, 'Jihadism in Indonesia: Poso on the Edge' (24 January 2007).

19 Interview with Ali Fauzy, Ambon, April 2003.

ordered the Coordinating State Minister of Politics and Security Affairs to take the necessary steps to curb terrorism. These regulations were subsequently strengthened by the Law No. 15 and 16/2003 on Anti-Terrorism. Megawati's successor, President Susilo Bambang Yudoyono has continued the campaigns by strengthening anti-terrorist capabilities through networking and programs of training and education, seminars, conferences and joint operations.

As a result, many terrorist cells have been destroyed and their operational areas reduced. Dr Azahari, a Malaysian believed to be behind the terror bombings in Indonesia in past years, was shot by the anti-terror police in a raid on his hideout in Malang, East Java. His supporting cells in Semarang, Wonosobo, Kebumen, Solo, Sleman, and Surabaya were subsequently discovered as a result of the intensified operations by the police anti-terror unit against JI-linked jihadists in Poso, Central Sulawesi.²⁰ Recently, the police have even succeeded not only in arresting Abu Dujana, who was frequently reported to be the current *amir* (commander) of JI, but also to discover the remnants of the JI network operating in West Java and Sumatra, which allegedly had a link with a Malaysian terrorist, Nordin M Top, and had prepared a series of bomb attacks in various provinces in Indonesia. These arrests reveal the weakening base and network of JI support and show its current status as a shattered terrorist network with no central leadership and command. Since released in mid-1996, Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, former *amir al-mujahidin* (commander of holy warriors) and chairman of the *ahl al-hall wa'l-aqdi* (advisory board) of MMI, has been active in promoting non-violent endeavours in defending Muslim solidarity and the struggle for the application of the *shari'a*. He claimed that violence would give a bad image to Islam itself. He even stated his disagreement with the methods used by Dr Azahari and Nordin M Top. In the absence of organisational support and institutionalised access to politics, however, the remaining JI cells may remain dangerous because they are likely to keep their anger and grievances to themselves, fearing retribution by authorities.

20 On arrests by the police anti-terror unit and implications for weakening Indonesia's militant Islamist network, and especially JI's current status, see International Crisis Group, 'Weakening Indonesia's Mujahidin Networks: Lesson from Maluku and Poso' (2005) and International Crisis Group, 'Indonesia: Jamaah Islamiyah's Current Status' (3 May 2007).

In tandem with government attempts to combat terrorism, various pro-democracy groups expressed their concern and anxiety about the Islamists' threats against Indonesia's pluralist and democratic society. They are particularly concerned with the discourse on the supremacy of the *shari'a* and jihad, which has been used by the militant groups to circumscribe the rights of minorities and marginalise pluralist sentiment. Representatives of the majority of Indonesian Muslims, the Nahdlatul Ulama and the Muhammadiyah, have worked closely together to promote discourses on inter-religious harmony, democracy, egalitarianism, and sexual equality. At the same time, the two organisations continued to exercise a profoundly moderating and democratic influence on Islam and Indonesian politics through their campaigns asserting that Islam and democracy are compatible and their condemnation of Islamic radicalism. Their campaign against Islamic militancy and radicalism has encouraged the MUI to express their opinions. The head of the *fatwa* (religious edict) commission of MUI, Ma'ruf Amin, for example, stated that 'terror and suicide bombing are totally forbidden in Islam. It is not the form of jihad and martyrdom whatsoever'. This council issued a *fatwa* on terrorism²¹ and set up a special team charged with the main task of challenging terrorism by using a religious approach (*Tim Penanggulangan Terorisme Melalui Pendekatan Ajaran Islam*) through, among other means, the publication and distribution of religious anti-violence sermons (*khutbah anti-kekerasan*). Because of its willingness to accommodate diverse streams of Indonesian Islam and show its status as the 'servant of *umma*' (*khadim al-umma*), MUI paradoxically incorporated representatives from hard-line groups. In this context we should understand why MUI issued a number of controversial *fatwas* prohibiting religious pluralism and liberal Islam. Instead of guarding the harmonious relations among the different religious groups, MUI in this regard acted as a religious authority that triggers tensions and conflicts in society.

21 This is the MUI's *fatwa* no. 2/2004 stating that terrorism, individual and collective, is forbidden (*haram*). It is considered a *hirabah* crime from the Islamic legal perspective as it is harmful to the public order and engenders worries and uncertainties. Terrorism in this *fatwa* is contrasted to jihad, which is considered compulsory to defend Muslims from the aggression and attacks by their enemies, thus rendering the *fatwa* somehow vague.

The government and pro-democracy groups' pressure against violent discourse and jihadist activism has gradually forced the militant Islamist groups to leave behind their high profile politics and shift to a strategy of implementing the *shari'a* from below. These militant groups apparently no longer see any relevance of jihad as a means to realising the application of the *shari'a*. Instead, they argue that *da'wa* (Islamic proselytising) is more appropriate to endorse the Indonesian Muslims' awareness of their duty to uphold the supremacy of the *shari'a*. They also believe that non-violent endeavours would be more suitable to Indonesia's current situation and crucial to defend Muslim solidarity and long-term struggle for the comprehensive application of the *shari'a*. The campaign to apply the *shari'a* from above is considered less effective if there are no activists working at the grass-roots level to boost Muslims' commitment to the application of the *shari'a* in their everyday lives.²²

As Ba'asyir pointed out, the strategy for implementing the *shari'a* suitable for current situation in Indonesia is not jihad, but rather informing the Indonesian Muslims about the magnificence of the *shari'a*. In his eyes, it is the prophetic strategy of *da'wa* to give hope (*tabshir*) and threat (*indhar*); the hope of heaven and the threat of hell. Following the prophet, he relates the implementation of the *shari'a* to the relationship between man's life in this world and that in the hereafter. Every individual is leader: leader for himself, his family, his village, and above all his country. They are responsible in the hereafter for whatever they have done in this world. Political leaders who do not take any initiatives to create laws that might prevent their people from being put in hell will fall into trouble in the hereafter; they will be responsible for all people's sins caused by the absence of the *shari'a*. (Interview, August 2006).

However, this does not mean that Ba'asyir totally neglected the importance of jihad; he just sees that *da'wa* is more appropriate for current peaceful Indonesia. For him, *da'wa* and *jihad* are twin concepts to establish God's laws on earth. In his eyes, the West has demonised

22 For a further account on the shift of the Indonesia's militant Islamist discourse and activism towards Islamization from below, see Noorhaidi Hasan (2007).

and criminalised *jihad*, because they are afraid of Muslim's return to the past glorious victory of Islam. He argued that if separated from *jihad*, Islam becomes weak. Islam will gain honourable victory only with *jihad*. However, he emphasised that *jihad* should not be understood simply as holy war. It connotes any effort to establish God's laws, and *da'wa* in this context is considered the most suitable condition for realising the spirit of *jihad* (Interview, August 2006). This view has been shared by Irfan Awwas, the chairman of the executive committee of MMI, who perceived *da'wa* as necessary to prepare the minds of Indonesian Muslims to accept the *shari'a* (Interview, July 2006). Claiming that MMI has violated the *shari'a*, Ba'asyir recently set up Ansharut Tauhid, a new umbrella organization for militants around his orbit to intensify *da'wa* in the sake of the *shari'a* supremacy.

Commenting on the need to conduct *da'wa* to prepare for the application of the *shari'a*, Muhammad Ismail Yusanto, the spokesperson of HTI, emphasised the basic nature of Islam as a peaceful religion. In his opinion, *jihad* should be interpreted in its broadest sense, that is, any struggle for doing good deeds, like commitment to perform daily prayers, fasting, pilgrimage to Mecca, that will serve other people and assist the poor. In other words, *jihad* is no other but *da'wa* itself, meaning *amr ma'ruf*, enjoining good, and *nahy munkar*, opposing vice (Interview, July 2006). In a similar tone, M Rahmat Kurnia, another HTI activist, said that HTI promoted 'non-violent *da'wa*' (*dakwah tanpa kekerasan*). He even said, 'Violent *da'wa* simply engenders negative impact on Muslims as a whole' (Kurnia 2005).

The strategic change of the militant Islamist groups to Islamisation from below justifies the critique of Francois Burgat (2003) on Olivier Roy's thesis (1996) on the historical shift of Islamism. Roy defines Islamism as a modern political Islamic movement that claims to re-create a true Muslim society by creating a new Islamic order through revolutionary and militant political action. As a result of its failures to change the political landscape of the Muslim world, Roy argues that the movement shifted towards so-called neo-fundamentalism, which he defines as a non-revolutionary Islamic movement attempting to re-Islamise society at the grassroots level without being formed within an Islamic state.

The militant Islamist movements have never undergone a profound transformation from revolutionary to social modes of action. Both tendencies have continuously coexisted, and the choice of a particular mode has very often been determined by political constraints.

In fact, the democratic consolidation occurring over the past five years in Indonesia only forced the militant groups to reduce their jihadist activism. This situation did not remove the groups' opportunity to spread violent discourses and activism in the name of religion. As we have seen, demonstrations organised by core elements of the groups, like the Indonesian Muslim Solidarity Forum (*Forum Solidaritas Umat Islam Indonesia*) and the Anti-Apostasy Movement Alliance (*Aliansi Gerakan Anti Pemurtadan*), repeatedly erupted against minority religious groups (Suaedy et al. 2007). Clothed in the rhetoric of *da'wa*, they attacked minority sects in Islam, including Ahmadiyah, which had gained ground in Indonesia not long after the established Muslim organisations, the Muhammadiyah and the Nahdlatul Ulama, came into existence.²³ Interestingly, only recently has the issue of Ahmadiyah appeared to be a battle cry that has unified aspiring jihadists and other conservative Indonesian Muslims into one same concern, rhetoric and action. In a recent bloody event in the area around the National Monument (*Monas*) in Jakarta, they stood shoulder-to-shoulder to seize the masses of the pro-democracy National Alliance for Religious and Faith Freedom (*Aliansi Kebangsaan untuk Kebebasan Beragama dan Berkeyakinan*) which staged a peaceful demonstration to support Ahmadiyah. The state's reluctance to side with the pro-democracy alliance in this regard indicates that the state has apparently still failed to fulfil the *Reformasi* mandate to maintain religious diversity and civil pluralism.

23 On Ahmadiyah and the origins of its growth in Indonesia see Herman L Beck, 'The Rupture between the Muhammadiyah and the Ahmadiyya' (2005: 210-246); see also Iskandar Zulkarnain (2005).

Conclusion

This paper has shown that the demise of Suharto's authoritarian regime gave rise to religious discourse and activism that espoused norms, symbols, and rhetoric imbued with animosity in the Indonesian public sphere. This phenomenon constitutes an inevitable consequence of the inappropriate management of religious diversity by the state. The interest of the state in maintaining its legitimacy by politicising religious symbols has made religion function more as a means of social control. Religion plays no role in fostering social cohesion. Coupled with the weakening of state power, failure to strengthen social cohesion, would invite the risk of an increase in distrust and conflict in the society. In fact, in the absence of social cooperation and civic culture of pluralism, *Reformasi* has allowed mutual suspicion and distrust in the Indonesian society to explode into bloody communal conflicts in various Indonesian provincial towns.

No doubt, the collapse of Suharto's regime provided a structure for political opportunity that allowed various identities, groups and interests to register themselves and demand greater acceptance. A dozen Islamist groups arose to negotiate and contest the new space created in post-New Order Indonesian public sphere. The most radical among the groups, including the Front of the Defenders of Islam, the Laskar Jihad, the Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia and the Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia, among other organisations, rejected participating in the existing system and instead called for jihad in various trouble spots that had been afflicted by bloody communal conflicts between Muslims and Christians. Their presence in the area of conflict had primarily a symbolic meaning, to demonstrate their concern with the fate of their Muslim brothers who claimed to have faced a threat of genocide by Christians, and thus, they reinforced their status as the most committed defenders of Islam.

Apart from their contribution to spur retaliation among local Muslims in their conflict with Christians and to provide an aura of righteousness and jihad to their struggle, the scope of the groups' ideological influence remained limited. They only succeeded in convincing a small group of young militants to join their activism and secret cells that they had built. Along with the democratic consolidation, the room for manoeuvre

available for such groups has narrowed. The police have succeeded in uncovering various terror groups linked to the JI network. The fading influence of the militant Islamist groups in the Indonesian public sphere as a result of the democratic consolidation and the global war on terror has forced the militant actors to shift their strategy of activism towards Islamisation from below through outreach activities. They sought to maintain the relevance of their discourse and to mobilise support by exploiting new sensitive issues. It is against this background that the recent attacks on Ahmadiyah should be understood

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