Political Islam and Religious Violence in Post-New Order Indonesia

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Abstract

This paper tries to understand why religious violence increasingly occurs in post-New Order Indonesia. There are two dominant views in understanding this. First, the security approach that perceives the violence as a result of the emergent of “radical” agent of political Islam in the more open political space. In this regard, the state is considered weak because the iron hand as used by the authoritarian regime in the past New Order has disappeared. Thus, the strong security instruments are needed as a solution, such as the law on anti-terrorism and the police force of anti-terrorism (Densus 88). Second, the cultural approach views violence as caused by the inability of society to build the religious tolerance. Society is considered weak. Religious expression in the political arena is believed as the source of the emergent of intolerant acts. To conquer this, intensive inter-religious dialogues are required. The author argues that those two approaches are not adequate. The historical fact shows that the emergence of political Islam today is the result of the oscillated relationship between Islam and the authoritarian state during the New Order period. In addition, the Indonesian historical experience also clearly illustrates that the presence of political Islam is nothing but a form of response to the critical social-political-economic situation. Political Islam does not appear in a vacuum, but it emerges from the crisis where another populist response from the left is absent.

Keywords: political Islam, post New Order Indonesia, religious violence, political-economy
INTRODUCTION

This paper examines religious violence that increasingly occurs in decentralized democracy in Indonesia. This phenomenon as if implies a contradictory in democracy. On one hand, political participation and freedom are widely open, but on the other hand it gives an opportunity to the strengthening of communalism than can threaten democracy. According to Hasan (2003), such phenomena usually happen in a transitional period of the democratic process. In that period, the elements of status quo try to uphold their power through manipulation and mobilization of ethnic, racial, and religious sentiments that can lead to conflict. The same argument is also expressed by Bertrand (2004) who stated that the institutional changes that disrupt the political stability have opened the space for ethnic and religious groups to redefine their identity that politically can be mobilized that lead to cultural conflicts. Such explanation may seems relevant in understanding conflict at the beginning of Reformation (Reformasi) era, but less useful to understand the religious violence that happen in the period where many democratic institutions have been ‘consolidated’ throughout the era of decentralization. Violence in this regards is understood as an outcome of coercive actions, extortion, and intimidation based on any rhetorics such as ethnicity or religious, that can lead to discrimination and marginalization to the victims.

Until now, journalistic and scholarly scrutiny focus upon the act of Islamic radical groups that utilize the widely open political arena as well as the increasingly devolving power as a reason to explain religious violence in a decentralized setting (see Hasan 2008; ICG 2010). In addition, ICG report (2010) also mentions the growing tension of Muslim-Christian relations is caused by the escalation of aggressive proselytism by the Christian in Muslim-majority regions. In other words, decentralization has opened up space for the emergence of new groups, both Muslim and Christian which are expressive and exclusive so that susceptible to friction. Decentralized democracy is also often perceived as having made the state to be weak, as its iron hands are disappear, and thus always fail in preventing intimidation against religious minorities that make religious violence continues to occur (see ICG 2010). The implication of this view, as expressed by Hadiz (2008), is there is an unspeakable desire to return to the authoritarian regime that is considered powerful to ensure social and political stability. Though, it should be
noted that in the New Order, inter-religious tensions have also occurred, ranging from the elite debate in parliament to unrest and conflict in the streets level of politics.

For the reason to secure the social and political stability, the New Order regime continues to prevent the existence of formal opposition forces as well as eliminate any underground movements that can threaten power. At that time, the opposition mostly came from Muslim groups, especially after Soeharto enacted Pancasila as the sole source of legitimate ideology for any social and political organizations. The fact that the majority for the population is Muslim, but those who control the power are dominated by Abangan and Christian was also the reason for the emergence of political opposition from Muslim groups. However, historically the exponent of Muslim since in the colonial period has always provided a critique of social-economic injustice. Meanwhile, other challenger from the left had been exterminated at the beginning of the New Order state. To maintain his power, Soeharto then placed Muslim groups on the periphery of the political arena and accommodated Christian and Abangan groups. From here the ‘religious’ tension in the political arena was began (Mujiburrahman 2006).

To sum up, the phenomena of religious violence in decentralized Indonesia is not because the state is weak and thus need to strengthen its capacity nor because society is weak that cannot maintain harmony and tolerance and thus need to promote pluralism principles constantly. I argue that the essentialist view of culture should be avoided since ethnic and religious conflicts will not arise without any prior political-economic problems (see Mudhoffir 2014). Moreover, cases of religious violence that involving Islamic exponents as contenders not only happen in Indonesia, but also become world attention. Agree with Hadiz (2008), this tension is also has a correlation with the end of the left opposition in many countries following the end of Cold War. Hence, the study of political Islam and its exponents is important to understand inter-religious tension in decentralized Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHOD

This paper is based on qualitative research using a case study in Solo, Central Java. This region was chosen as it was a basis of Islamic movement since in the New Order although dominated by the nominal-Muslim inhabitant, in the previous period it was a basis of commu-
nism. In the post-authoritarian, despite the political arena dominated by the nationalist-secular (such as PDI-P, Democratic Indonesia Party of Struggle), exponents of political Islam and paramilitary groups have wide influence in the public sphere. This region is also frequently scrutinized by anti-terror police department (Densus 88) to hunt suspected terrorists allegedly linked to Ngruki boarding school and other Islamist groups in Solo. Data taken to be analyzed in this paper not only gathered from fieldwork research, but also from a variety of literatures and documents as secondary data.

NEW ORDER POLITICS AND INTERRELIGIOUS TENSION

During the first two decade of Soeharto administration, Islamic forces that were considered as a potential political opposition were suppressed using variety of political instruments. The most obvious threat was the idea of the establishment of Indonesian Islamic state in the early days of Soeharto, despite the key figures had been arrested. Islam as an ideology was regarded as dangerous as communism, albeit many elements of the Muslim had played an important role in exterminating the left in the early reign of Soeharto (Munjib 2009). Any ideologies outside the formal-state ideology based on Pancasila were not recognized. Pancasila as an official philosophical foundation of Indonesian nation-state was used as an instrument of indoctrination and de-politicization policy. This had led Islam to be de-politicized. Political Islam, in the sense of an effort to make its values as the foundation of formal politics, was discarded to accommodate the so-called cultural Islam or coined by Hefner (2000) as a civil Islam; it is simply placed merely as ethical and cultural norms.

The secular orientation of the New Order’s politics in the 1970s until 1980s eventually accommodated more Christian-Chinese groups in the ranks of the bureaucracy and the military. Soeharto was a nominal Muslim or Javanese abangan that shared a similar view with Christian and Chinese groups in perceiving Islam (santri) as a common enemy. Among many influential figures behind this policy were Ali Murtopo, Yoga Sugama, and Sudjono Humardani (Bertrand 2004:81). Sugama was a chairman of National Intelligence Agency (Bakin), while Murtopo and Humardani were the actors who established Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in 1971, a think tank organization that en-
endorsed political and economic policies of New Order. This organization was mainly composed of a group of Catholic and Chinese intellectuals. CSIS at that time also had a strong network with Chinese business groups that influence the progressive growth of this ethnic business group (Hadiz 2008:642). Another influential Christian leader in supporting New Order regime was Sudomo when he served as Commander of Operational Command of Restoration of Security and Order (Kopkamtib) in 1978-83. Maraden Panggabens is another Christian general who also served as commander before Sumitro which later became the Commander of the Armed Forces (Pangab) and Minister of Defense. Meanwhile, LB Murdani is another Christian Javanese who became the most influential commander of the Armed Forces which later became a commander of Kopkamtib and Defense Minister.

According to Bertrand (2004:82), the abangan-Christian-dominated government was further affected the increasing marginalization of Muslim groups. It should be noted, Muslims in this context cannot be seen monolithically: beside abangan and santri using Geertz’s terminology, there was also another category such as traditional and modernist Muslims (Porter 2002). The first group was represented by Muhammadiyah which was also become the main supporter of Masyumi party, whereas the traditionalist group was represented by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). However, Soeharto had a different approach in dealing with these groups. Masyumi, the largest Muslim party who gained the second place (20 percent) in the 1955 election, after the fall of Soekarno regime, remain prohibited although its leaders had been released (Bruinessen 2002). Parmusi (Muslim Party of Indonesia), a new party formed in 1968 to accommodate the modernist Muslims, without the presence of the former leader of Masyumi in politics made this party gain only 5.2 percent in 1971 election (Hasan 2008; Porter 2002). In addition, the sunk vote of Parmusi was also influenced by political intervention by the regime trough special operation (opsus) conducted by Murtopo.

According to Porter (2002), there were four things that made New Order paid attention to modernist Muslim as a target of de-politicization. First, this group was perceived can reactivated Masyumi where its leaders had a grassroots base that can challenge military power. Second, military figures prevented the realization of Maysumi’s political aim to impose Jakarta Charter (Piagam Jakarta) which placed Islam as ideological base of the Indonesian state. Third, Masyumi was suspected to support Darul Islam movement in establishing Indonesian Islamic
state in West Java. Fourth, there was also a presumption that the most influential figures of Masyumi such as Muhammad Natsir, Sjafrudin Prawiranegara and Burhanuddin Harahap were supporting the rebellion in Sumatera. Nevertheless, the establishment of a new party by modernist Muslims was not perceived seriously as a threat since it can distract their votes. However, Soeharto also made some interventions during the election of its first leader and at the same time prohibited senior figures of Masyumi to involve in the new party. The first leader elected in 1968 was Djarwani Hadikusumo and Lukman Harun, but in 1969, their position was overthrown by Jaelani Naro and Imran Kadir who have closed relation with Murtopo and known as pro-military political orientation (Porter 2002:41). As a result, during the election campaign in 1971, Parmusi precisely aligned with Golkar and the military to face NU and PNI. This political alliance made Parmusi lost its mass base support primarily because it made Muhammadiyah and HMI (Islamic Student Association) withdraw their support shortly before the election. This was the beginning of the New Order’s success story in co-opting the power of modernist Muslims.

However, despite Soeharto managed to eliminate modernist Muslim political forces, Ward (1972 in Porter 2002) argues that the Golkar-military efforts to deflate the NU, traditionalist Muslim groups, was not successful. This was because NU structurally decentralized organization that made it much more difficult to be co-opted and intervened by the state. Nevertheless, the vote amounted by NU to 18.67 percent in 1971 remained insignificant compared to Golkar that won 62.8 percent, albeit it was still higher than the vote that was obtained by Parmusi. This reality that was considered to put NU regarded as a threat to the future of New Order and constantly targeted intimidation.

The next attempt to co-opt Muslim political forces was by making a fusion of Islamic political party into United Development Party (PPP) in 1973. Here, the competition between modernist and traditionalist Muslim became sharper and certainly advantageous Soeharto that aimed to divide the Islamic political forces. However, unexpectedly under its first chairman, Mintaredja that came from Parmusi faction and Bisri Sjansuri NU leader who became chairman of the Shura Council of the party, the PPP can consolidate its Muslim supporters. Sjansuri influence was also quite strong, especially in the Islamic-based region like Aceh, South Sumatera, South Kalimantan, and East Java. Thus, worried by the influence of these figures, ahead of 1977 general election emerged.
issues of Komando Jihad bombing in some places, such as in the hotels and Christian hospitals. Many people believed this was an attempt to undermine political supports for PPP by arresting prominent figures of the Islamic movement, although particularly from Darul Islam faction.

RELIGIOUS CONFLICT TOWARD THE END OF SOEHARTO REGIME

As the relationship between Soeharto and the military began tenuously since the late 1980s, elements of Islamic forces started to be regime supporters. The estrangement originated from the feud between Soeharto and Murdani, a commander of Pangab as well as Kopkamtib, who criticized Soeharto’s family and his selected groups of cronies that centralized its power and wealth. This was made Soeharto treated Murdani as a threat so that in the following years he put more civilian-Muslims into the ranks of his administration. Conflict with Murdani escalated when a civilian faction of Golkar won Sudarmono from military faction who nominated other candidate Try Sutrisno. With its authority under Kopkamtib, Murdani then tried to discredit Sudarmono’s position in Golkar by stating that this party had been infiltrated by a communist (Porter 2004). Feud peak occurred when Soeharto finally dethroned Murdani from his position as a commander of Kopkamtib which was replaced with a less powerful position as Defense Minister.

Alarmed by the weakening supports from military factions, Soeharto began to consolidate its power from civilian Muslim forces, particularly by supporting the establishment of Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectual (ICMI). Habiebie was chosen to lead this organization since he was a Muslim figure that was considered did not have any relationship with any political Islamic movement, but represent a conservative Muslim. However, many Muslim activists who previously critical to this regime also accommodated in this vehicle (see Hadiz 2008), like Indonesian Islamic Proselytism Council (DDII) that was established by Masyumi figures. This organization eventually provided an opportunity for the Muslim middle class in politics so that in this period they have a strong position in the New Order administration. ICMI then published Republika daily newspaper and Ummah magazine to emulate the Kompas daily newspaper as well as established a think tank organization, Center for Information and Development Studies (CIDES) to counter CSIS. Among military elites, after the ousting of Murdani, have risen
some new names that considered having a close relation with Muslim
groups, such as Feisal Tanjung and Hartono who became a commander
of Pangab. In the bureaucratic level, Christian technocrats who previ-
ously had helped New Order to the successful of economic development
were replaced with Muslim technocrats.

In the societal level, Islamization also got a great support from Soe-
harto including the establishment of Yayasan Amal Bhakti Pancasila,
a foundation that supported the construction mosques in all regions in
Indonesia. Since 1988 to 1993 this foundation had established 38,476
mosques (Bertrand 2004:87). The government also sponsored 1000
preachers to be sent into many Christian-populated areas. As a result,
this Islamization policy was perceived as a threat to Christian groups
that worried Indonesia will be transformed into religious state. Further-
more, this situation eventually led Muslim-Christian tensions escalated
which was compound by the poverty and social-economic disparities
in the regions. The first conflict occurred in East Timor which was
followed by similar events in Flores, Surabaya, Situbondo, and Tasikma-
laya. The Muslim-Christian conflict that continues to rise throughout
this Reformasi period then encouraged the emergence of jihadis groups
to help the Muslim in the conflict areas like Ambon and Poso (Hasan
2003). In the next period in the context of decentralized democracy such
religious violence remains prevalent, ranging from sweeping the place
of entertainment, destruction of place of worship which was considered
unlicensed, and the terrorist act bombings.

ISLAM AND POLITICS IN DECENTRALIZED INDONESIA

In the post-authoritarian era, attention to political Islam in Indo-
nesia has increased. It is not only because the number of incidents of
religious violence involving a certain group of Islam is growing, but
also because de-radicalization programs gained strong support from the
West. Australia, for instance - after the Bali bombing that killed many
of its citizens – has become a major sponsor of counter-terrorism and
de-radicalization programs in Indonesia, most notably supporting the
establishment and training of elite counter-terrorist unit Detachment
88. Financial support was also provided by the United States as a part
of its global “war on terrorism” initiated after the event of September 11,
2001. This, as stated by Hadiz (2008), means attention to political Islam
in Indonesia has now shifted to its “radical” agents; not only are these
agents correlated with “terrorist” acts, but also with the acts of local violence, as well as the agent who takes a path of formal politic. The first group of the most famous is the Indonesian Mujahidin Council (MMI), and the main figure, Abu Bakar Ba’asyir, now form a new organization called Jamaat Tawhid Ansorut (JAT). This figure is considered to have links with Al Qaeda network of global terrorism through the Jemaah Islamiyah organization founded in 1993. The second group received the most attention is the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) led by Rizieq Shihab in addition to the local army-paramilitary troops who appeared in some areas, particularly in Solo, Central Java.

ANTI-STATE ISLAMIC MOVEMENT

To date, there is a presumption that acts of terrorism that occurred in the post-reform period have links with the Darul Islam (DI) movement, which aspires to establish the Negara Islam Indonesia (NII). MMI, which was established by Ba’asyir after returning from Malaysia, is often accused of being responsible for various bombings in several places in Indonesia and also considered to have a link with DI. According to Solahudin (2011), Ba’asyir was a member of DI who in 1976 was recruited together with Abdullah Sungkar by Haji Ismail Pranoto (Hispran). Both figures were then asked to develop the recruitment of DI’s members in Central Java, particularly in Solo and Yogyakarta (see Solahudin). Before this, Sungkar and Ba’asyir is a preacher who has had a wide influence in Solo. They both were activists of Al Irsyad, the organization that has done much to increase the influence of wahhabism in Indonesia. In 1967, Sungkar with Ba’asyir and Hasan Basri founded ABC Radio Propagation (Al Irsyad Broadcasting Commission) (Solahudin 2011:141). On this radio, their talks contain very harsh criticism concerning the importance of cleansing tauhid from all polytheism and the importance of enforcement of Islamic law. However, the board of Al Irsyad Solo did not like the way they talked to the audiences and it made them established a new radio program, called Radis. Through this radio program, Sungkar and Ba’asyir gained many followers in Solo.

Previously, Solo was known as abangan area, and was also one of the bases of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). Post-1965, Soeharto through No.1/PNPS/1965 Act, enforced the policy that all citizens must be religious. This was to prevent the re-emergence of communism. As a result, the surviving former PKI were required to adhere to one
recognized religion. This situation has become fertile ground for the movement of Christianization and Islamization in Solo. However, in Solo, there were more people that convert to Christianity than Islam (Interview I, March 2011). This was because most of the massacres of the communists were the Islamic paramilitary groups, and thus the number of Christians in Solo is quite large beside another factor regarding the Dutch colonial history that made this region as a center of Christian missionaries in Java.

From this, it makes sense how the social changes in Solo from abangan based region became one of the most important bases of the Islamic movement in the New Order. However, this is also has a correlation with the influence of two prominent figures of the Islamic movement in Solo. Before joining DI, Sungkar and Ba’asyir also often criticized Soeharto via Radis radio. Consequently in 1975, this radio was banned by the military. Sungkar was also known at that time as an activist of DDII, a missionary organization established by Mohammad Natsir, a former president of the largest Islamic party Masyumi. Sungkar was also a vice chairman of the DDII Solo Branch office. In 1970 Natsir asked them to establish a pesantren in Gading Kidul, Solo, which then in 1972 moved to Ngruki, Sukoharjo, eventually known as Pesantren Al Mukmin Ngruki or Pesantren Ngruki. The inauguration of this pesantren was attended by Natsir.

After joining DI and leaving DDII, their criticisms of Soeharto’s regime grew increasingly harsher and more outspoken. For example, in 1977 when they gave a lecture in the Great Mosque of Solo, Sungkar openly invited people to abstain from voting in elections, to become Golongan Putih (Golput), as there were no “proper” candidates like Natsir and Muhammad Roem, whose political activities had been banned by Soeharto. They also criticized Pancasila, the nationalist ethos considered by the government as the supreme law and as the only legitimate principle of political activity. After Sungkar and Ba’asyir had became a member of DI, the Islamic movement in Solo and Yogyakarta were growing.

According to Solahudin, in Solo, they started recruiting close friends, students, and also teachers at Pesantren Ngruki. This story then becomes the reason in which Pesantren Ngruki turn into a basis of terrorist recruitment or at least a place that teaches Islamic “radicalism”. Dakwah became the main media for recruiting and training members of DI. In the following years the recruitment conducted in Yogyakarta
that targets the more educated people from campuses, as in the State Islamic Institute (IAIN), Indonesian Islamic University (UII), and University of Gajah Mada (UGM). Many students from IAIN eventually became a follower of DI; one of the famous ones is Irfan Awwas (see Solahudin 2011).

In 1985, Sungkar and Ba’asyir fled to Malaysia. There, they recruited the cadre of DI for the military training in Afghanistan. In 1992, though, Sungkar had a falling out with Ajengan Masduki, one of the top leaders of DI. Sungkar and Ba’asyir subsequently left DI in 1993 to establish a new organization called the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) (see Solahudin 2011). Many people believe this organization formed ties with Osama bin Laden’s Al Qaeda network. In this regards, the various bombings in Indonesia after reformasi is always associated with JI and because the founder of JI is a former member of DI, the contemporary terrorist acts are also considered inherited the ideals and methods performed by DI. This is one of the reasons that makes the jihadist ideology of Al Qaeda found the right place in Indonesia. Such arguments, for example, put forwarded by Sidney Jones (2011), Zachary Abuza (2007), and reviewed at length by Solahudin (2011). However, according to Ba’asyir (2011), the accusation of being a terrorist is part of the conspiracy played by US and Australia to intervene Indonesian state.

The same conspiracy theory was also expressed by Muzakir, the leader of Pesantren Al Islam in Gumuk Solo, who was also visited by Densus 88. He accused the special police force of anti-terror was engineering religious conflict and engaging in abuses of power, ranging from the killing without trial and without publication of the autopsy of the suspects (interview March 30, 2011). According to Irfan Awwas, Chairman of MMI, the stigmatization as terrorist by Densus 88 is also similar to the stigmatization of Komando Jihad, carried out by Murtopo, an official Indonesian intelligent agent. Not to mention the emergence of terrorism cases that demonstrates the success of Densus 88 almost has gone hand in hand with the political turmoil involving the elites in Jakarta. As with the issue of Komando Jihad, the arrests of terrorist suspects also seem to have a cloudy mystery. This occurs because the movements take the form of underground resistance so that it can be co-opted and consequently the definition of who they are can be distorted without clarification.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that political Islam will always exist as a response to inequalities of socio-economic situation. Religion
in general and political Islam in particular, constitutes a kind of escapism from an unfavorable situation because he can provide hope for the fulfillment of the order of life improvement through total changes of the social system. Moreover, since the New Order state had successfully eliminated the left, political Islam can be considered as the alternative challenge to the state power. In other words, the emergence of political Islam historically comes from a long relationship between Islam and the state since the colonial period. According to Benda (1980), adjacent connection between Islam and politics has made the political content become a dominant feature of this religion. Islam is not appropriate to simply be understood as an expression of brutal and extreme resistance to the “enemy” that continues to be reconstructed, starting from the Netherlands, to the Soeharto regime, until the United States and its allies like in Jones’s analysis. This phenomenon should be understood as a product of political dynamic and conflict between Islam and the state, which was rooted in Indonesian history, especially in the New Order period.

**ISLAMIC PARAMILITARY GROUPS**

The phenomena of Islamic paramilitary groups in post-New Order Indonesia have grabbed more attention as they often exercise coercive forces and extortion, either related to morality or religious relation issues. These features will not emerge in previous authoritarian order since the violence are monopolized and centralized by the state, both in the legal form and in the illegal form. However, since the decentralization of power, the illegal form of violence is also decentralized. A study from the Wahid Institute (2011) stated that mass organization and unidentified mass are the actors who are the most frequently involved in religious violence. The actors refer to Islamic militias that emerge in Reformasi period and mostly concern in the eradication of sinful behavior (pub, prostitution, and blasphemy) by enforcing ‘Islamic’ morality or referred to as nahi munkar (forbidding the vice). Included in their agenda is imposing the enactment of syariah bylaws via extra-parliamentary efforts.

They use their role as a pressure group to influence the local politics. In West Java, for example, such groups could maintain the dominant role in pursuing Islamic agenda that made this region have many Islamic by-laws as well as a lot of religious violence cases. The historical legacy of this region as the main basis of the old Islamic movement (Darul Islam) could
have a link with the current situation of West Java. The similar feature also happen in Solo (Central Java), where the Islamist groups are limited in number compared to secular groups due to this region is dominated by secular-nationalist population, yet surprisingly they could influence the formal politics (such as rejecting un-Islamic policy or enforcing Islamic agenda). Thus, it cannot simply be understood that the secular-nationalist based region simultaneously make political elites ignore Islamic agenda to mobilize support, and vice versa, as stated by some scholars (see Bush 2008; Buehler 2008).

However, since they are different with Islamist political movement and outside of formal politics, I agree with Wilson (2014) that it is irrelevant to conclude that the emergence of Islamic militias is indicating the rise of Islamic radicalism threatening social and political life as frequently stated by alarmist-security oriented analysis (see Abuza 2007; Singh 2007; Chandler and Gunaratna 2007). Moreover, although some of them have an attachment with actors of the previous Islamic movement, their feature is more like protection racketeers that it is by no mean a new phenomenon in Indonesia (see Ryter 2009; Cribb 2009). As stated by Cribb (2009) gangsters are ancient feature in Java. Since the state always maintains mutual relationship with gangsters, they will always exist and are well placed in informal politics. Along Indonesian history they have oscillated relationship with the state. On the one hand they are recruited and mobilized to service the interests of the state and political elites, but on the other hand they could be suppressed and excluded.

During the first decade of New Order regime, for instance, thugs and gangsters have been mobilized as a gali (gabungan anak-anak liar) to ensure the success of Golkar (Golongan Karya), the ruling party, in the elections (see Ryter 1998). However, since this strategy made crime rate increases where this condition will contradict the logic of industrialization that need social and political stability, thousands of gali were killed under the banner of mysterious shooting (pembunuhan misterius or petrus) (see Wilson 2010). After petrus incident, thugs and gangsters were increasingly institutionalized through various secular-nationalist and youth organization, such as Pemuda Pancasila and Pemuda Pancamarga (Wilson 2010). In this feature, illegitimate violence engages in by vigilante groups as oppose to legitimate coercion exercised by the state, is become more organized to act on behalf of the state. The Institutionalization of gangsters was part of the strategy of the state.
to maintain control over thugs as vigilante groups. It means that in the authoritarian New Order regime, vigilante actions are not always outside of formal power due to government ineffectiveness (as referred to by Rosenbaum and Sederberg 1974) or the absence of legitimate law enforcement. Inside of formal power, Pemuda Pancasila and Pemuda Pancamarga also perform as a repressive state apparatus. They acted as a state proxy that legitimately could use violence to control over a localized sector of the economy.

Even in the democratic era, gangsters like militias and vigilante groups still have played the role as an instrument of coercion through which predatory local elites maintain and secure their position (Hadiz 2010). Thus, as militias—who use Islamic rhetoric—is almost always incorporated by the condenting elites in the context of decentralization, the rise of religious violence involving them are not merely a problem of intolerance as it is often argued by alarmist account and cultural oriented analysis (see ICG 2012; Hasani and Naipospos 2012; Hasan 2008).

Indeed, the emergence of inter-religious problems in today’s social life associated with the role played by militias is due to these groups is utilizing the symbols and rhetoric of Islam. And, it is due to the last decade of Soeharto’s sectarian politics which accommodated the conservative Muslim groups that brought fundamentalist interpretation of Islam into the mainstream of public discourse that coloring the dominant feature of militias’ identity.

ELITE COMPETITION AND RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE IN DECENTRALIZED INDONESIA

To address religious relations issues, the central government delegates the management of interfaith relations to the Forum for Religious Harmony (FKUB), based on the Joint Regulation of the Minister of Religious Affairs and Minister of Home Affairs (PBM) Nos. 9 and 8 of 2006. This forum was established by the community, and its members include representatives of religious organizations, in accordance to the proportion of followers of a religion, and facilitated by the government (art. 1 pt. 6). Its main task is to maintain and create religious harmony, inter alia through holding dialogues with religious and community leaders (art. 9) and providing written recommendation on the request for the establishment of a house of worship (art. 10). This particular issue
of establishment permit causes the most concern for FKUB in several areas, including in Solo. According to Crouch (2007), regulation of the permit makes it difficult for minority groups to establish a place of worship.

There are several requirements to obtain a permit for the establishment of a house of worship, including a list of at least 90 names and ID cards (KTP) of the users of the religious facility approved by the local official; support from at least 60 local community members approved by the head of the village, a written recommendation from the head of the Office of Religious Affairs at the district/city level, as well as a written recommendation from the FKUB at the district/city level (art. 14 pt.2). Muslims do not experience any problems related to the establishment of mosques, except in several areas where non-Muslims are majority. However, these regulations pose problems for Christians who sought to establish churches, especially those of the newly emerging denominations. Often in question is the validity of the ID cards and signatures from local citizens, leading to accusations that there have been forgeries to meet the requirements. Another issue is the use of a house for worship purposes. This issue is somewhat related to the difficulty of obtaining permits for the establishment of proper houses of worship. On the other hand, the other parties often assume that it is the minorities who make things complicated, and that they are looking for trouble for building a church in the middle of a predominantly Muslim area. Besides, the churchgoers are also mostly from outside the community, and they are regarded to show off their wealth by parking their vehicles on the sidewalks. This causes another problem of disturbing other road users. There is also an issue related to the way several Christian communities worship, regarded by community members as causing commotion and noise. This does not happen with mainstream Christian groups, however.

FKUB members, who are predominantly Muslims, often have a dilemma related to requests for permits to establish churches by Christian groups. On one hand, they should be responsible for providing assurance and recommendation to the heads of the region, but on the other hand, doing that gives an opportunity for Christians to grow. As a result, religious minorities have always suffered from difficulties to provide church facilities for religious services.

In Solo, Muslim groups have rejected three proposed churches since FKUB’s inception in 2007. The leaders of the forum mediated the case
by bringing together church board members and Muslim groups who reject the development. One case is the Full Gospel Bethel Church (Gereja Bethel Injil Sepenuh, GBIS) in Pucangsawit, in the district of Jebres. The problem was caused by incomplete permits. The church was later forced to close by a group of locals and people claiming to represent Islam, in October 2006. There were allegations that the forced closure of the church in Pucangsawit was related to a business competition. The land where the church was built was earlier targeted by a businessman, who wanted to buy it for a high price, yet it was sold for a lower price for the church. This later provoked objections from the local residents. The church building has been completed, yet it was forced to close and no longer used for worship. After some time, thanks to the mediation from the FKUB, under the leadership of Solechan Machdum Cahyono, the church has reopened, with the building permit obtained in July 2009.

Another case in Solo related to interfaith tolerance is the termination of the cheap meals program provided by the Javanese Christian Church (GKJ) in Manahan. According to Ratih, the pastor of the church, the program began in 1997 and was forced to be terminated in 2008, following demands for termination by Islamic militias in Solo. The reason for the complaint was that the cheap meals program was held only in the fasting month, and the targets were the poor such as Pedi cab drivers and beggars who usually hung around the church, and thus this activity was regarded to attempts to proselytize. Ratih questioned the reason, because the complaint was only made after the program has been implemented for thirteen years, and if it had been considered as a disturbance, the complaint should have been made much earlier. She also stated that during the early years, other similar programs were also present, considered part of the interfaith dialogue. Among these programs were religious lectures held before breaking the fast, and weekly discussions about Islam led by Muslim leaders. This means that the cheap meals program also had the support of Muslim leaders in Solo. Thus, Ratih wonders why the program was regarded as proselytization. In her opinion, the emergence of rejection was related to the increasing number of Islamic fundamentalist groups in Solo, which often brings the issue of proselytization.

The former chairman of the Solo branch of Nahdlatul Ulama, and also the head of the Al Muayyat pesantren in Sukoharjo, Dian Nafi, is one of the Muslim leaders who supported the cheap meals programs. He also gave a lecture at GKJ Manahan before the breaking of the fast,
in which nearly five hundred people attended, adults and children. According to him, such a program was part of the embodiment of inter-faith tolerance. However, a contrary view was expressed by Muzakir, although he claimed that he was not involved in the militias’ protests against the program. According to him, such activity is hard to interpret not to have a specific motive, and if the intention was to help those who could not afford meals, it should be done in a more neutral location or left for Muslims. Similar views were also expressed by the local police who according to Ratih also tended to oppose the program, by allowing the militias to protest. According to local police officers, they are not institutionally opposed to the activity, but merely called that it be held elsewhere. Meanwhile, an academic from Solo State University regarded that the issue faced by GKJ Manahan was not solely a religious issue, but was also related to the struggle for economic resources. According to him, the opposition of the cheap meals program was related to the presence of a cafe in front of the church, owned by a local Golkar functionary.

Contestation of power in the fight over resources at the local level characterizing religious violence in Solo can also be clearly seen in the case of the murdered gang leader Kipli. This case illustrates the competition between Islamic paramilitary groups and organized thugs, which in some ways is a manifestation of elite competition in Solo. This can be seen in Kipli’s funeral, which was attended by the deputy mayor of Solo. This does not mean that Kipli was formerly a PDI-P member, or that Gondes, Kipli’s organization, was affiliated to PDI-P; this clearly shows that certain elites provide support to certain groups, and not to others. The emergence of Islamic paramilitary groups in Solo, whose membership is supplied from the lumpenproletariat, can be considered a threat to existing thug organizations as a means to mobilize support for the ruling party. Thug organizations are considered to accommodate the urban poor, who are the main constituents of PDI-P. The sociocultural context of Solo society is considered beneficial for the party. Approximately twenty percent of the population of Solo is Christian, while more than fifty percent of the rest are nominal Muslims, and political orientation of the two groups is nationalist. As a result, PDI-P gained the largest proportion of seats in the legislative elections, as many as 15 of the total 40 seats. Islamic parties as a group gained only a fifth of the seats in the regional parliament. However, PDI-P’s votes are influenced by the popularity of Mayor Joko Widodo. Therefore, there is a reason-
able concern that the emergence of Islamic paramilitary groups will shift support of the masses, from nationalist to Islamic political parties.

In contrast to Solo, some areas such as Padang, West Sumatra and Bogor, Cianjur, Tasikmalaya and Garut in West Java Islamic-nuanced agenda have a strong influence on the dynamics of politics, especially through the establishment of regional regulations. As proposed by Bush (2008), the regional head bearer Islamic-nuanced agenda was mostly derived from nationalist parties like Golkar, PDIP, or PKB. This is to demonstrate the commitment of Islamic heads of regions to ally with groups supporting the agenda in the next election. Not only through the establishment of Islamic by laws, but commitment to Islam was also shown to provide indirect support to Islamic militias in anti-vice and anti-apostasy confronted with Christian groups and in anti-cult dealing with groups such as Ahmadiyah and Shia.

CONCLUSION

To understand why religious violence increasingly occurs in a decentralized order requires a deep attention to the phenomenon of the relation between Islam and politics. This is not merely as majorities of the Indonesian are Muslims, but because religious violence both as national and local cases, always involving exponents of Islam. Religious minorities are also often become victims of violence in many cases involving certain Islamic groups, and brought the issue of anti-disobedience, anti-desecration of religion, and anti-Christianization. This seems to show that Islam as the majority cannot tolerate the minority group.

However, it is noteworthy that a hasty response would not help in understanding the majority-minority relations on the religious matter in the decentralized era. The historical fact shows that interreligious tension in this period is not a new phenomenon but the legacy of the fluctuated relationship between the state and religion throughout the New Order. Likewise, the same explanation could be applied to understand the emergence of “radical” agents of political Islam that are often considered to be associated with the incidence of religious violence. Some of them are new and usually have a special relationship with the influential military figures. However, it does not mean that decentralization is present without problems although the Muslim-Christian tensions and its agents are a product of socio-historical legacy. The dominant view is that decentralization and democratization has provided guarantees of
freedom and the protection of human rights, but ironically, this makes religious violence continues to occur. On one hand, the state is considered weak, but on the other hand the apparatus are required to pay more attention to human rights aspects. The further conclusion is civil society is considered weak; they cannot maintain civility and unable to promote harmony and tolerance. Understanding this fact reflects the attitude of the inferiority and ultimately ignores the role of the state and the market over the emergence of horizontal conflicts in a decentralized era. On that account, today’s discourse on tolerance and intergroup relations received great attention in academic studies.

The results of this study show the opposite; the tension of interfaith relations does not arise simply because there are cultural differences. Conflict and violence were more an expression of struggle in the political-economic contexts. Moreover, the emergence of agents of political Islam and Islamic paramilitary groups who are often involved in the religious violence in decentralized Indonesia cannot be understood without considering political-economic aspects. Up to now, there are two approaches in responding to the emergence of political Islam in this era of decentralization. The first is security approach that analyze the emergence of political Islam as a result of the absence of a strong authoritarian regime. The solution is it is necessary to enforce a strong law and apparatus. The existence of Densus 88 and the law on anti-terrorism is the consequence of such perspective. In fact, the emergence of political Islam today is the result of the fluctuated relationship between Islam and the state during the New Order period. The second is cultural approach, as adopted by the bearers of the idea of pluralism and tolerance. This approach saw the values of Islam should be simply placed as cultural and ethical norms of conduct, and should not be manifested in the forms of formal political expression. Inter-religious violence is always seen as a cultural issue because of the particular groups that are intolerant. Furthermore, the political idea in Islam is considered as the source of the emergence of intolerant attitudes. This approach ignores historical aspects to understand the emergence of such groups. Their existence is a product of the response to the political repression during New Order and social and economic marginalization as a particular effect of capitalist development.
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