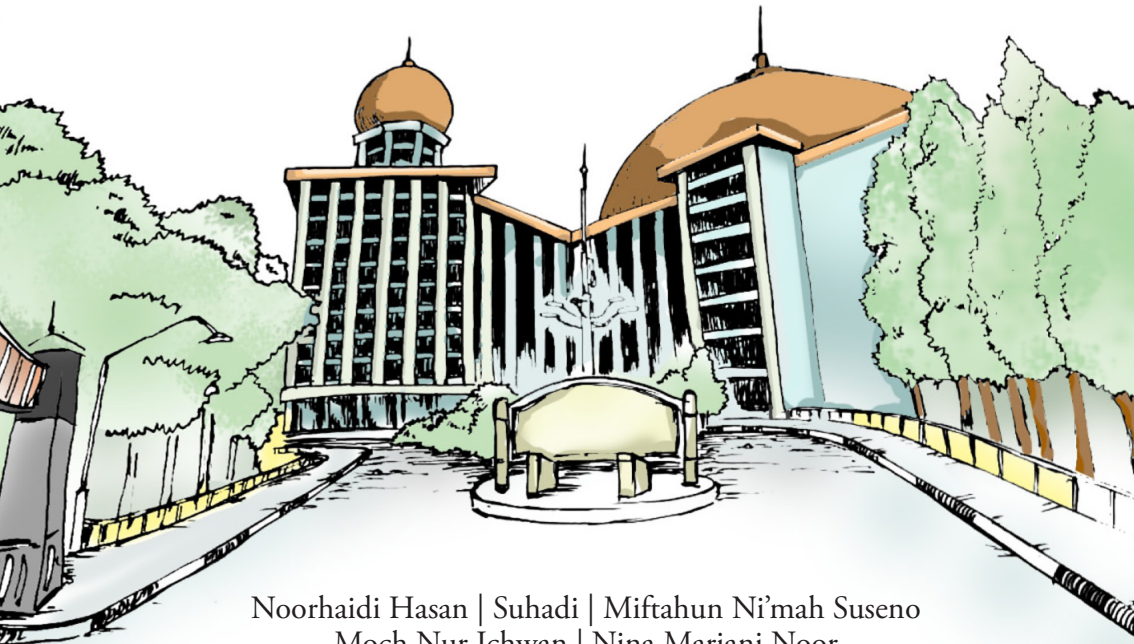


ULAMA AND THE NATION-STATE

Comprehending the Future of Political Islam in Indonesia

Edited by: Noorhaidi Hasan



Noorhaidi Hasan | Suhadi | Miftahun Ni'mah Suseno
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Comprehending the Future of Political Islam in Indonesia**

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Transliteration

Consonant

ء	‘	ز	z	ك	k
ا	a	س	s	ل	l
ب	b	ش	sy	م	m
ت	t	ص	sh	ن	n
ث	ts	ض	dh	و	w
ج	j	ط	th	ه	h
ح	ḥ	ظ	zh	ي	y
خ	kh	ع	‘	ال	al and ‘l
د	d	غ	gh	ة	ah
ذ	dz	ف	f		
ر	r	ق	q		

Vocal

Long	آ	ā	Short	اَ	a
	إِ	ī		إِ	i
	أُ	ū		أُ	u

Double	يْ	iyy (ending ī)	Diftong	أَيْ	ai
	أُوْ	uww (ending ū)		أُوْ	au

FOREWORD

The fall of the New Order's authoritarian government in May 1998 has opened the door to freedom and political participation and social transformation that may not have been predicted before. Democratization which is the main demand of the reform movement has opened up public spheres and provided an open stage for political, social and religious figures to help discuss the formulation of the benefit of the nation which is facing a great economic and political crisis in its history. The most important figures in this contestation are the ulama and the religious leaders. They have actively participated in conceptualizing the benefit of the Indonesian people in the framework of religious thinking in a diverse spectrum. Islamic and ulama discourse that once covered peripheral areas in the national and state issues have begun to move into the center stage and have become an important idiom in socio-political debates, especially when identity politics began to cover many contestations and struggles for political and religious authority, both at the national and regional levels.

This book reviews the central issues related to the perceptions of Indonesian ulama to the idea of nation-states and their derivative concepts. The strengthening of the role and discourse of ulama in political debates has encouraged our researchers to carry out serious studies to analyze the future of the nation and the politics of Islam in Indonesia. The survey of the ulama's perceptions of the nation-state is the first step to see the level of acceptance of ulama towards the concept and its dimensions and character. Indeed, some ulama reject the idea of a nation-state, but this refusal needs to be analyzed carefully. Not all of these rejections are based on the idea of rejecting the nation-state. In the survey, the researcher found that "reservation" of ulama against the nation-state is based not only on ideological aspects but also on the strict understanding of tradition and dimensions of locality wrapped in ethnicity.

The Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) became an important entry in analyzing the shift in the orientation of ulama affiliated with the state from having the paradigm mind-set of “government servants” to “servants of the people”. Outside the MUI, democratization provides an open stage for ulama from various educational backgrounds and socio-political affiliations to expand their influence by carrying out orthodoxy politics. Democratization and the communication media revolution have recently necessitated fragmentation of political and religious authority. One consequence is that a new authority arises in the logic of populism and capitalism which is much loved by the urban middle-class Muslim community. These figures introduce Islamic discourse that is populist in style and not hierarchical, but their content is rigid and dogmatic. Moderate-conservative Islamic discourse which is quite dominant in the public sphere is interesting to be studied thoroughly. Ulama are no longer only involved in the production of discourse but also their encouraging actions that affirm the ‘orthodoxy’ in the public sphere. This phenomenon has an unpleasant effect on social and religious minority groups and women emancipation groups. This is not only felt in contestation in the socio-political region but also the jurisdiction, especially when Sharia law becomes part of political negotiations at the national and local levels.

This book is the second book that is processed and developed from surveys and research on the perception of ulama about the nation-state conducted by researchers from the Center for the Study of Islamic Democracy and Peace (PusPIDeP) and Postgraduate UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta. This research is part of the Indonesian CONVEY Program in 2018 which was initiated by the Center for Islamic and Community Studies (PPIM) UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta in collaboration with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Indonesia. This book was originally planned to be published in conjunction with the first book of Ulama, Politics, and National Narrative which highlighted the dynamics and perceptions of ulama towards the nation-state in fifteen cities: Banda Aceh, Medan, Padang, Jakarta, Bandung, Surakarta, Surabaya, Denpasar, Pontianak, Palangka Raya, Banjarmasin, Kupang, Makassar, Manado, and Ambon. However, because of several technical obstacles and campus assignments outside of the research, the publication of this book can only be realized at this time.

This research can not be separated from the contribution, hard work, and dedication of the fifteen researchers, namely Noorhaidi Hasan, Suhadi, Najib Kailani, Munirul Ikhwan, Moch Nur Ichwan, Muhammad Yunus, Euis Nurlaelawati, Roma Ulinnuha, Ibnu Burdah, Sunarwoto, Ahmad Rafiq, Rofah Muzakir, Nina Mariani Noor, Eva Latipah, and Muhrisun Afandi. The success of the research that this

book was able to be produced is also inseparable from the role of research assistants who have worked hard to help researchers in the field. Hard work and dedication were also shown by the management of the PusPIDeP-Postgraduate of Sunan Kalijaga UIN: Noorhaidi Hasan, Suhadi, Najib Kailani, Munirul Ikhwan, Erie Susanty, Siti Khodijah Nurul Aula and Nisa Friskana Yundi who oversaw the research project from the beginning to the end.

A huge thanks to CONVEY Indonesia and PPIM Jakarta who trusted PusPIDeP and the Postgraduate UIN Sunan Kalijaga as partners in the CONVEY research project, especially the role of Prof. Jamhari Ma'ruf, Saiful Umam, Yusuf Rahman, Fuad Jabali, Ismatu Ropi, Jajang Jahroni, Dirga Maulana, Utami Sandyarani, Jaya Dani Mulyanto, Hidayat, Narsi, Sachiko Kareki and others. In addition to the names above, also thanks to Miftahun Ni'mah Suseno, Ema Marhumah, Jazilus Sakho ' , Prof. Syamsul Arifin, and Maria Widagdo who were involved in the workshop on the preparation of the research instruments, also Prof. Kadir Ahmad, Wahyuddin Halim, Reza Indria, and Ahmad Suaedy who gave enrichment in the seminar on the research results.

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Last but not least, thank you to the Chancellor of UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Prof. K.H. Dr. Yudian Wahyudi, and vice-chancellors: Prof. Dr. Sutrisno, Dr. Phil. Sahiron Syamsuddin and Dr. Waryono Abdul Ghafur who always provided support and an academic atmosphere that spurs the productivity of quality research. Thanks also to the Postgraduate professors of Sunan Kalijaga UIN; Prof. Amin Abdullah, Prof. Machasin and Prof. Abdul Karim, who is warm-hearted, and willing to discuss many of the actual issues that develop in society. Happy reading!

Yogyakarta, May 14 2019
Puspidep Team

----- 3 -----

ISLAMIC CHALLENGES OF POLITICS AND THE CRISIS OF LEGITIMACY OF ULAMA

Noorhaidi Hasan

As explained in the previous chapter, 71.56 percent of today's Indonesian ulama accept the nation-state with levels of acceptance varying from conservative, moderate, inclusive to progressive ulama. 16.44 percent reject the nation-state with a degree of rejection that also varies, from exclusive, radical to extreme ulama. The rest cannot be identified because of the lack of response to their questions. The majority of ulama fall into the moderate and inclusive category, 34 percent and 23.33 percent respectively. Only a few are classified as progressive, which is 4.89 percent. Those who are progressive are generally ulama from minority groups such as Shia and Ahmadiyya who see the nation-state as their only hope to depend on their fate in the midst of a stream of intolerance and the threat of persecution from the majority group. The ulama with radical and extreme characteristics occupy the two lowest levels, 4 percent, and 2.67 percent respectively. If radical ulama reject fundamentally and fundamentally all the nation-state conceptual buildings, along with the basic principles that support them, extreme ulama move further because they justify the use of violence to realize their vision of rejecting the nation-state system.

The number of 16.44 percent of scholars who reject nation-states is not a small percentage. This sends a signal about the existence of fundamental problems related to nation-states in the perceptions and views of scholars. But this kind of symptom seems not typical of Indonesia. European countries, the United States and many other countries in the world are also beginning to face a crisis of trust in the nation-state, as evidenced by the increasing popularity of extreme right-wing political groups and a wave of populism. Many people began to question the ability of the nation-state to solve common problems as a result of depletion of natural resources, widening socio-economic disparities, globalization, environmental crises,

natural and humanitarian disasters, and various other problems. The problem is getting worse when it happens in Muslim countries that are still struggling with basic structural issues and endless clans, tribes, political forces and religious affiliations.

Therefore, I dare to say that the figure of 71.44 percent shows not only the acceptance of the majority of scholars towards the nation-state but also the position of the nation-state which is quite strong in the view of the ulama. Accompanied by the refusal of almost all ulama to violence, the figure of 71.44 percent can be understood as an indication to the failure of Islamists in competing to seize the public sphere in Indonesia, by peddling *Khilafah* ideology and violent extremism. Factors contributing to this failure include the success of the government and the power of civil society to wage a war against radicalism and terrorism as well as the dynamics of global politics related to ISIS's actions and the various impacts they have caused.

The main role of civil society organizations, pioneered by NU and Muhammadiyah, lies in their efforts to strengthen awareness and resistance of grassroots communities to the threat of radicalism and terrorism. Their efforts focus on how to deal with what they define as internal and external issues related to the threat of radicalism and terrorism (Hasan 2017). At the internal level, civil society organizations pay attention to the task of inculcating *wasatiyyah* Islam, a more tolerant, moderate and inclusive religious understanding, which is wrapped in the spirit of nationalism among Indonesian Muslims. At the external level, their attention is directed at seeding the image of Islam as the *rahmattan li 'l-ālamīn* and part of solving major problems that occur both at the local, domestic and international levels.

Although the acceptance figure of 71.44 percent sent a positive signal about the future of Indonesia, it does not mean that I have considered all the problems have been dealt with. There are several reasons, namely (1) There is still 16.44 percent of ulama who reject the nation-state, as explained above; and (2) The high level of reservation of ulama, especially towards tolerance and citizenship. Ulama who firmly reject the nation-state emphasize their belief in the doctrine of inseparability between *din wa daulah*. Tawhid for them means that Allah is the Creator who must be worshiped and glorified. This view demands the regulation of life in the world with laws that have been revealed by Allah, and reject all ideologies of human creation, be they Pancasila, capitalism, communism, socialism, and others, all of which are considered as pagan systems. They also actively voiced the importance of the struggle to save the people from oppression and mischief in the framework of what they called *amar makruf nahi munkar*. In contrast to those who reject it, ulama who accept the nation-state with some reservations appear to have finished with the

format of the nation-state through their reinterpretation of religious doctrines. But they still often express grievances and disappointments when assessing certain social, economic and political situations. Some complained about a 'dysfunctional state', in conspirative nuances of narration.

This fact is more or less correlated with the results of the research I conducted — assisted by dozens of other researchers — regarding the narrative of Islamism and identity politics in twenty Indonesian provinces in 2013 which showed that the majority of Indonesian people, including ulama, community leaders, students, and students, are quite aware of the existence of radical groups that they consider to have tarnished Islam through the misuse of jihad symbols. They believe the Unitary Republic of Indonesia and Pancasila are non-negotiable. Maintaining the Unitary Republic of Indonesia and Pancasila are seen as meaningful in maintaining the existence of Islam in Indonesia (Hasan et al. 2013). Some circles do question democracy and compare it with Islamic sharia. But democracy is questioned not about its substance, but rather about anomalies and irregularities that still often occur in the exercise of power based on the democratic system. Therefore, the wishes of some people applying the Shari'a can be read in protest at these anomalies and irregularities. This research ironically also shows that despite accepting the Republic of Indonesia and Pancasila and considered to be something that is non-negotiable, the majority of Indonesians have intolerant outlooks towards followers of other religions. The intolerant attitude that afflicts Indonesian society seems to be closely related to a siege mentality and overtrust in conspiracy theories. They believe that Indonesia is always under siege by global conspiracy forces.

ISLAMIC POLITICAL COMPLEXITY

The situation facing Indonesia today, as reflected in the perceptions and views of ulama regarding the nation-state, not only shows that there are still a number of claims and inconveniences towards the nation-state but also reflects the complexity of Islamic politics that develops amid the swift flow of social change and the wave of globalization. In the Indonesian context, the transition to democracy in the Reformation era encouraged the presence of Islamic symbols more prominently in the political arena, accompanying the development of identity politics. Its presence is increasingly prominent as the institutionalization of democracy and electoral politics allows these symbols to be appropriated in political contestations that demand direct public support. The symbols of Islam are not only transformed into important variables in the daily lives of the people of big cities who are increasingly eager to consume these symbols

through their participation in recitations, grand *tablighs*, and various other religious events, but also develop as major political attributes in electoral contestation.

It is difficult to avoid the paradoxical impression that plagues various aspects of the life of today's Indonesian society. On the one hand, democracy is growing as marked by press freedom, freedom of expression and expressing opinions and holding relatively free elections. But on the other hand, more and more Indonesian people are trying to openly express their religious identity, making a difference, and opening new public spheres that are in line with the demands of religious and Islamic lifestyles by consuming Islamic symbols, which simultaneously increases intolerance. In addition, the political sphere developed more openly allowing oligarchic political elites to play all kinds of moves to gain constituent support and dominate the grip of political power. They not only actively roll out political discourses that are conspiratorial but they also do not hesitate to play around with religious symbols and money politics.

Dale Eickelman and James Piscatori (1996) have long demonstrated the complexity of Islamic politics. They define it as politics that is characterized by competition and bargaining through interpretation and meaning of religious doctrines and symbols in order to support their respective political claims. The contestation involved a variety of figures, from school students in France who came to school wearing headscarves, Islamic and activist intellectuals and activists with traditional and Western education, mostly people involved in da'wah activities and Islamic philanthropic services, to government officials who played various religious stance in carrying out their political, bureaucratic and administrative duties. State and non-state figures and among figures in each of these categories are in the core vortex of competition in the political arena that Eickelman and Piscatori describe as marketplaces. In this context mass education and the advancement of science and technology, especially information technology, play an important role in the dissemination and fragmentation of religious authorities.

The ulama's outlook of the present nation-state, as described above, is clearly inseparable from the political dynamics of Islam. Their choice to support or reject, support with some reservations, and reject with varying degrees of rejection of the nation-state reflects their involvement in the competition to provide meaning and interpretation of religious doctrines and symbols in the context of competing for their respective political claims. The competition is very intensive as seen from the increasingly complex diversity of the composition of religious public spaces, which in this study is shown by the broad spectrum of ulama' views. Differences in choice in the spectrum reflect their efforts to negotiate their respective positions

dealing with the state, on the one hand, and with other ulama who differ in their views and interests.

The fact that there are not many ulama who progressively accept the nation-state, in terms of recognizing the totality of the nation-state system and all its derivative principles, shows a challenge for ulama to not only maintain their relevance in the context of the nation-state, but also understand and actualize the position they are in the present life. Likewise, the fact that only a few ulama really reject the nation-state shows the desire of their majority to remain within the framework of the nation-state, although many are increasingly doubtful about their relevance in the dynamics of rapidly changing the nation-state. They express their doubts with reservations that vary in degree, depending on each experience and the dynamics that occur in local, national and international contexts.

With different nuances, this contestation can be felt in the discursive dynamics of the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) which has a fluctuative relationship with the state (Mudzhar 2000; Ichwan 2005). Their efforts to contextualize themselves facing the state are evident in *Ijtima' Ulama* (Ulama Meeting) on May 8-10 2018 in Banjarbaru, South Kalimantan. The *Ijtima'* was attended by representatives of the Indonesian Fatwa Commission and representatives of the fatwa institutions of Islamic organizations, and several Islamic tertiary institutions. One of the interesting commissions was the *masā'il asāsiyyah wathbaniyyah* commission (national issue) because it worked on recommendations or decisions related to national problems. For this purpose, the committee has prepared a draft decision, which was then discussed by the commission. This initial draft reflected the MUI's perspective on political and national issues in the context of the Islamic *wasathiyah* (moderateism), in line with the understanding of NU and Muhammadiyah.

However, when the important points of this draft were read one by one, different views emerged from the participants. Some of them suspected that there was a power interest in the MUI draft. The discussion at the forum reflected efforts to strengthen identity politics, majority domination in the name of democracy, legitimacy on the inseparability of Islam from politics, validation of the use of mosques and religious symbols for political purposes. There was no attempt to change the basis of the state, but to encourage the Jakarta Charter to be the soul of the 1945 Constitution, the state based on Belief in the One and Only God (in religious terms), Islamization of the Pancasila interpretation, and the Islamic NKRI, which is one of the 212 movement slogans. Interestingly, the final result of the commission's decision, which was formulated by a small team drawn from several participants, appeared to be a synthesis between the

initial draft and the results of the deliberations. Although in general it is moderate, it does not reject the nation-state, but the decisions of *Ijtima' MUI Ulama* reflect the strengthening of the reservation against it, which accompanies the development of identity politics.

Undoubtedly, the expansion of the nation-state system has shifted the privilege of ulama who closely cooperated with patrimonial rulers. They must be willing to leave the position as *ablu 'l- \square all wa' l- \square aqd* in the system of the Caliphate, for example, which is very important and decisive for the course of government. They are no longer the main source of knowledge and legitimacy. Nation-states develop as secularization develops in the context of changes in social organizations, from communal-based societies to systems-based societies. Bryan Wilson (1982) calls this phenomenon "societalization". According to him, the pre-modern period was determined by a communal system of social organizations, whose characteristics were limited to the local scope and were done face-to-face. Society is bound by trust in the supernatural. In this context the role of religion and religious authority is still very significant. Religion is the ideology of society, with which they manage power, maintain status, and validate the privileges of life.

The nation-state brings the destruction of the communal system and replaces it with a societal system. This new system is a very broad impersonal association and extensive network that changes the local life order. Community collectivity and individuals are depicted in complex interdependent relationships in their roles and involvement which are rationally articulated. The legal system and the rational set of rules determine the economic system, cultural space, and political organization of society. Relationships in society are taken over by human dependence on technical equipment and the order of rational action. Likewise the authority system, is now built rationally. Communities remind themselves of the nation-state through social contracts. Tied to the principle of citizenship, they are domiciled as citizens of the nation-state that have the same rights and obligations before the state. There is no difference. The government appointed to oversee the social contract is chosen rationally, through elections involving all citizens. In exercising its power the government is responsible for citizens. Their power is limited both in the context of time and type.

In his seminal work on ulama, Muhammad Qasim Zaman (2002) complained about the slowness of ulama in response to the major changes that occurred in the 21st century, especially related to changes in the criteria of power in the modern world as measured by mastery of science and technology, not merely politics. Ulama generally remain locked in the classical political worldview. As a result, they only see the problem of "injustice, conspiracy and suffering," rather than

new opportunities and opportunities presented by modernization and globalization. They are in limbo between legitimizing the status quo and seeking alternatives to their actualization and relevance in shared life (Van Bruinessen 1990). Along with the desire to maintain traditional identity and privileges, the suspicions of some ulama towards the nation-state were finally inevitable (Tayob 2015). The nation-state that was present accompanied modernization and globalization developed the concept of citizenship, as mentioned above. But this concept is still very foreign in the political worldview of the ulama. Citizens require acceptance of the principle of equality and human rights (Kymlicka 1996), which contributes to undermining the authority and traditional privileges of the ulama.

CHALLENGES OF POLITICAL ISLAM

This situation allows political Islam to develop. As thoughts, discourses, actions and movements that see Islam as not only a religion but also a political ideology and totality of the system of life, political Islam constantly tries to remind of the superiority of “Islamic textual sources and transcendental ideas” dealing with “ideology and human made institutions“. While Islamic ideologues offer “new understanding on Islam,” which are contextualized with the latest world developments, ulama still have to endure as guardians of religious traditions. The power of the ulama to defend the credentials as orthodoxy guards was constantly challenged and tested by the persistence of Islamists to push the concept of Islamic totality and Islamic supremacy, while singing the romanticism of the Caliphate’s glory.

Political Islam developed since the nation-state was accepted as a new format of political management among Muslim communities. The momentum is marked by the birth of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the Jama’at-i Islami in Indo-Pakistan in the first half of the 20th century. Founded consecutively by Hasan al-Banna (1906-1949) and Abul A’la Maududi (1903-1978), the two movements actively introduced thinking that sought to define Islam as a political ideology, facing the big political ideologies other 20th century (Mitchell 1969; Nasr 2004; Ahmad 2009; Kennedy 2017). These two prominent ideologues legitimized their new vision by referring to the call for purification (Salafism) which had been previously introduced by Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792) - which was later better known as Wahhabism - and Islamic modernism initiated by Jamaluddin al-Afghani (1838-1898), Muhammad ‘Abduh (1849-1905), and Muhammad Rashid Rida (1865-1935). If the first focuses on the theme of returning to the texts of the Qur’an and hadith and the inspiration of the early generation of Muslims and the purification of Islam from shirk, heresy, and other traditional religious expressions,

the latter tries to encourage the acceptance of rationality and the advancement of science modern West which is claimed to be an inherent part of pure Islam (Hourani 1983; Voll 1994). The ideas of the great reformers blew amid the strong pressure of the wave of colonization, which gave birth to anti-Western (domination) sentiments and at the same time an obsession with the revival of Muslims and the system of the Caliphate (pan-Islamism) that had flourished for centuries.

The Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic Jama'at-i lament the decline and backwardness of the Islamic world while working hard to call for the revitalization and solidarity of the people. Both emphasized that the decline of Muslims was due to the lack of a sense of solidarity and brotherhood between them and the fading of awareness of moral and religious values. Both the Muslim Brotherhood and the Jama'at-i Islami experienced ups and downs, rowing between the flows of repression and accommodation by the authorities, and the leaders involved in the spread of revolutionary ideas, which they borrowed from militant Marxists (Roy 1996). For them, taking control of the state will provide a way for the spread of Islam in a society that has been tarnished by Western values.

Undoubtedly, both of them have considerable influence in various parts of the Islamic world and spread severe threats to the ruling elites and the nation-state system.

The development of the Islamic world in the past century shows clearly how the political arena has grown into a field of contestation between various agents who share a strategic position and access to resources and capital. Contestation that occurs both at discursive and praxis levels involves competition for ideology and value in an open field of discourse. The results of the contestation determine the configuration of power with all aspects that surround it. In the contestation, the agents are equipped with a series of continuously internalized patterns that are useful for them to feel, understand, and assess the social world. It is what Bourdieu (1977; 1992) calls *habitus*. *Habitus*, in this context, develops as an internal subjective structure obtained by agents through their experience of internalizing the objective structure of the social world and playing a role in shaping social practices.

The failure of Islamists in taking political control and changing the format of the nation-state, according to Oliver Roy (1996; 2002), did not reduce the dynamics of the contestation. Instead, they reorient the movement to grassroots activism in the Muslim world. Active Islamists hold recitations, seek to dominate community mosques, offer religious services, sermons, philanthropy, etc. while continuing to voice *gazwu 'l-fikr*, fearful and conspirative narratives regarding the position of Islam in local, national and international constellations.

Their real actions at some level can win the hearts of the community and then move towards political tendencies and activism, especially when trigger events — both on a local, national, and international scale — can be capitalized by the elite- conflicting political elite. This kind of actions resonates through the walls of educational institutions, influencing the perspectives and perspectives of students, students, teachers, and lecturers, mainly when society is divided in political polarization.

New Media and Ulama

Globalization has made the situation more complicated, mainly because of the expansion of the latest communication media technology is taking place massively into the daily lives of Muslims. Blending in the contemporary life experience of the community, the media shape the life and identity of each Muslim in the face of social change and significant transformation in the era of globalization. Media culture creates new connections, new imaginations, and new desires that make it difficult for Muslims to separate their contemporary experience and identity from the development of global dynamics. Undeniably, the advancement of information and communication technology has significantly affected the daily lives of Muslims in almost all parts of the world, with some significant impacts. Because globalization has changed the way people relate to space, many people are deprived of the root of the locality as a structure of emotional feelings, the property of social life, and community ideology (Appadurai 1995). They experience an identity crisis (Castells, 2000).

The contemporary experience of Muslims dealing with the expansion of the latest communication media is one of the most critical factors in influencing the latest dynamics and manifestations of Islamic politics throughout the world. Contestation of symbols and interpretations of religion and the institutions that control them, which are the main features of Islamic politics, often occur through the media and are indeed closely related to the way information, ideas and discourses are shared, communicated and produced. The growth of new modes of interactive communication, such as the internet, satellite television, cellular phones, and smartphones, has increased their capacity to understand the world, on the one hand, while at the same time eroding their grip on the locality that is very meaningful in managing daily life.

Although it does not automatically encourage the birth of public spaces that allow people from diverse backgrounds to engage in discussing common issues, new media contribute significantly to the formation of public structures. Public Islamic embryos are born in

this context and provide room for broad community participation in interpreting the relevance of Islamic symbols with the increasingly complex dynamics of everyday life (Salvatore and Eickelman 2004). The transparency generated by new media increases the scope, intensity, and form of community involvement in religious discourse. New religious figures have emerged and do not have religious authority in the traditional sense. Although they are not as fluent as traditional ulama in delivering religious texts, they can package religious symbols and contextualize them with the present life of society. Using new interactive media, these “new religious ulama” package Islamic symbols and offer them for mass consumption. The commodification of religion flooded these media.

The centrality of the media lies in its ability to build bridges between local and global ones. Through the mediation process, people form and rearrange their experiences and distinctiveness in a shared social space. Media plays an important role not only in giving shape to the social and cultural environment of everyday life but also in providing a framework for understanding the world. At the political heart of everyday life, media can form the basis of dramatic social and cultural changes in the short term and a more extensive process of social transformation in the long run (Eickelman and Anderson 1999). By proposing the centrality of the media to the contemporary experience of Muslims in the face of significant transformations, the researcher would like to underline that the media contribute to the birth of new ulama. Unlike traditional ulama, that have classical knowledge about Islam, new ulama try to present Islam in ready-to-use standards that directly correlate with the interests and lifestyles of the general public who need practical references on how to understand and apply religious messages.

As in other Muslim countries, what is called ‘religious public spheres’ has flourished in Indonesia. The public religious spheres have more character as a space for participation and at the same time a variety of competing elements of society in interpreting and articulating religious symbols and discourses, plus their relevance to contemporary life, for a central position in the field of discourse. The democratic climate contributes significantly to facilitating new figures from various educational backgrounds and professions to share and define Islam and its relationship with the state and society. The emergence of new figures offering new discourses and habitus has implications for the destabilization of conventional religious authorities.

The nuance of contestation over the central position in the field of discourse was felt when the political configuration underwent a change that triggered competition between constellations. The trigger

is none other than the electoral competition, which sometimes forces ulama to be divided into polarizing interests. Religious public spheres are transformed into an arena where ulama not only compete with each other to give meaning to religious symbols and texts and their relevance to contemporary life but also negotiate their respective political interests. In this context, sectarian politics targeting minority groups such as the Ahmadiyya and Shia thrives.

CONCLUSION

In the dynamics of competition and complex competition as described above, ulama are caught in the middle. Complexity occurs not only because of the many figures who seek to negotiate a place in the changing political arena but also because the ulama position exists between state forces and Islamists. While the former actively encouraged people to accept the fact that power is no longer conducted above the legitimacy of religion, but the principles of citizenship and science and technology, Islamists stood challenging by offering the centrality of Islam as a perfect system (*kāffah*) which governs all aspects of life at once build a base in the grassroots. Between legitimizing the status quo and looking for alternatives to maintain the relevance and self-actualization of public life, ulama are involved in the competition and also interact with one another.

In the process of competition and interaction, the problem is always how much the country can accommodate the interests of ulama who are very diverse. The level of state accommodation capabilities of the ulama gave birth to the establishment of ulama and oppositional ulama - borrowing the term Muhammad Qasim Zaman. It is important to note that the boundary between establishment and oppositional positions is fragile because ulama share a vision of the central position of Islam in society and their role in this regard. A person can move quickly from the establishment position to oppositional or vice versa, or stand between the two. The movement is determined by our success in improving the quality of democracy while continuing to encourage economic growth and accountability of state institutions.

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