

BOOK REVIEW

Islamic Populism: Asymmetrical, Multi-Class Coalition-Based Social Mobilization

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The emergence of 212 and 414 Islamic movements (popularly known as *aksi bela Islam*) in 2016 triggered discussions among scholars. Various academic arguments and speculations have sprung up to respond and understand the phenomenon of raising Islamic agenda on public stage. One of the oldest journals in Indonesia, *Prisma*, is clearly critical to this by labelling the maneuver as populist threat to democracy. The title of “The Rise of Populism and the Crisis of Democracy” in one of their publications is a clear indication of its interpretation toward the usage of popular narration to attract public interest. It is the Islamic narrative that makes the discussion of populism gets more attention among scholars as it has powerful message toward the Muslims and in the end is able to mobilize support from various Islamic groups. Therefore, Islamic populism has become a term to label the rise of Islamic discourse among the public in Indonesia.

Surely Islam is not new at the center of the study of populism. Iranian Revolution under Khomeini is an important step of this study. Saad Edin Ebrahim is one of the known scholars to label populism in this revolution by coining Islam and populism. Many have followed his approach by looking at the power of religious jargon either to attract public support or in the opposite, to suppress the mass. However, Islamic narrative is not only working on revolutionary platform as many

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are failed to materialize the call to act for God at any costs or means. In fact, democracy has become an arena for the call, instead of revolution or violence. Turkey is one of the examples that democracy can be used for a popular Muslim leader to step the ladder into power. Many writers from different backgrounds have tried to understand this new face of populism and get involved in numerous discussions, all debating the rise of populism with its so called 'modernistic face'. In general, the writer's debates come to the conclusion that the rise of populism based on religious identity is in the opposite direction of democracy and Indonesia's recent Islamic call in public sphere has been marked as the period of democratic crisis (Djani 2017; Hardiman 2017; Jati 2017).

However, there has been a gap that these debates that have been overlooked, which is the link between populism and Islamic groups which has so far been left untouched. Some scholars have tried to see the link between Islam on one side and Populism on the other side and the link between the two as a whole. There is a trend that these writers see populism in terms of ideology, mobilization, representation, while some look at Islamic populism as a political style (Mudhoffir, Yasih, & Hakim 2017; Aspinall 2015; Mietzner & Muhtadi 2018; Moffitt & Tormey 2014; Aspinall 2015; Mietzner & Muhtadi 2018; Moffitt & Tormey 2014; Pepinsky, Liddle, & Mujani 2012). From their arguments, it seems that the writers consider the connection between populism and Islamic groups as an effort to mobilize the people amid the chaotic process of institutionalizing aspirations. Unfortunately, they end their discussions at how to respond to Islamic populism in Indonesia, instead of questioning further about what kinds of situation that allow Islam and populism to co-exist in Indonesia.

A book entitled *Islamic Populism in Indonesia and the Middle East* written by Hadiz can be considered as an attempts to fill in the niche. Hadiz, with his academic position, seeks to explain the emergence, formation and development of Islamic populism in Indonesia. Many scholars are convinced that the translated version of the book, translated by the LP3ES publisher, has become the first and only book that

thoroughly discusses the development landscape of Islamic populism in Indonesia.

The novelty of the method and the center of discussion has become one of the virtues presented in this book. So far, most of the studies of Islamic politics in Indonesia use comparative methods by comparing Southeast Asian countries, such as Saudi Arabia and Indonesia (Hadiz and Chryssogelos 2017). As a result, Islamic political literature in Indonesia is often associated with the issue of Islamic political separatism. Meanwhile, in this occasion the author will invite the readers to see a comparison of the development of Islamic politics with Middle Eastern countries, such as Turkey and Egypt, that take place in Indonesia.

Furthermore, the author provides a fresh perspective in understanding the development of populism in Indonesia and the Middle East. The political-economic approach as a concept will guide the readers in understanding the development of Islamic populism with a point of study grounding in the search for historical heritage and the upheaval of social agents in Indonesia and the Middle East. This perspective is very different from ones used by many previous researchers who put more emphasis on political studies alone or with a sociological-historical approach (Aspinall 2015; Mietzner 2018; Mietzner & Muhtadi 2018). Consequently, these writers often tend to see only the political-economic relations as a part that fundamentally shapes Islamic populism. For the context of Indonesia, the evolution and development of Islamic populism are tracked by the author by looking at the form of Islamic politics, starting from the Colonialism, Cold War, the Old Order, the New Order and up to Post-Reformation eras, which all phases are the result of a long upheaval from the political-economic clash.

The author comes to the conclusion that in three countries, the economic-political evolution varies in different social situations, which then has a domino effect on the development of Islamic populism in each country. In Indonesia, Islamic populism fails to govern civil society and is at the same time mandated in the electoral process, even fragmented both by social agents and the political parties. As a result,

Islamic Populism can be considered as a failure both inside and outside the electoral pathways.

NEO-POPULISM AND ISLAMIC POPULISM IN INDONESIA

Discussions of populism are always identical to the call to “the people”. Latin America and Europe are countries that first popularized Populism in political dictionaries. One of the scholars who promoted this term was Alan Knight. Knight (1998) sees the link between populism and people as a whole. Populism often comes to invite people inherently (Knight 1998). Then, along with the development of neo-liberalism economic that took place in 1997/1998, Populism also experienced adjustments. At this stage Knight referred Populism as neo-Populism. Furthermore, Knight, saw when entering the era of neo-liberalism in the world, neo-populism changed its form into a political style. Knight’s belief, in line with Moffitt & Toemey’s opinion (2014), also sees neo-Populism in Indonesia for the current context is more precisely depicted as a political style (Moffitt & Tormey 2014).

On the other hand, Weyland strongly rejects the arguments of Knight (1998) and Moffitt & Toemey (2014) about the development of neo-populism in the era of neo-liberalism. According to Weyland, Knight and Moffitt & Toemey’s arguments seemed to see neo-Population as being independent from the basis of economic interests. In addition, Knight and Moffitt & Toemey also missed seeing the class coalition or what Weyland called as “elite manipulation” that took place in neo-Populism. For this reason, Weyland came up with a notion on neo-Populism as a result of the upheaval of economic interests, which indirectly facilitated the market. Weyland saw that neo-Populism was compatible, with its compatible nature being able to embrace two things at once. Neo-Populism on one hand cooperates with market mechanisms and the other side threatens the existence of regulation of private property rights (Weyland 1996; Weyland 1999) Although different, both of these main streams are equally in agreement with the

conclusion that neo-populism still rests on “the call to the people”. It’s just that the manifestation of neo-Populism is seen differently.

Significantly different things actually come from Hadiz’s argument. For Hadiz, the evolution of populism in the midst of building neo-liberalism is not enough to just stop at looking at the people alone. In countries with a major Muslim population such as the Middle East and Indonesia, the development of populism has cooperated with religion (Hadiz 2017; Heryanto & Hadiz 2005). People’s terminology that has been used to uncover populism is not enough to see the phenomenon of neo-Populism in the Middle East and Indonesia, as is the case in Latin America and Europe. More specifically, for Hadiz, neo-populism in the Middle East and specifically in Indonesia has partnered with Islam, so Hadiz offers the idea of neo-populism to become Islamic populism.

If populism uses the term “people”, Islamic populism the term “*ummah*” is preferred to replace the term “people”. Through Islamic Populism, there are efforts to initiate a movement by burning the spirit of the people through the labeling of the *ummah*. This labeling is inseparable from the economic situation which increasingly marginalizes the “people” who incidentally in the context of Indonesia are mostly Muslim (Hadiz 2018). *Ummah* is used to gather support and mobilize economically-marginalized people in an asymmetrical, multi-class coalition (Hadiz 2018). This pattern is similar to the development of populism which took place in Latin America and Europe, as noted by Weyland that Populism was formed through a multi-class coalition (Weyland 1996). In Indonesia, Hadiz found the formation of a multi-class coalition taking place between middle class, urban poor, and small bourgeoisie both in rural and urban areas.

THE ABSENCE OF PROGRESSIVE POLITICS IN THE MIDST OF NEO-LIBERALISM DEVELOPMENT

Populism greatly benefitted from the absence of left-wing politics. The cold war that took place on the left hemisphere succeeded in reducing the influence of left-wing politics. For the context in Indone-

sia, the impact of the cold war was the suppression of the PKI. Hadiz's observations saw that the suppression of the PKI along with its political affiliation eliminated progressive politics on the political stage (Hadiz & Robison 2017). This situation posed a very significant impact on socio-political conditions. PKI as a political party has a very strong ideological cadre even to remote villages. Borrowing Laclau's terminology, ideological nihilism grows along with the absence of class politics (Laclau 2006). This situation also took place after the cold war in Indonesia. After the disappearance of the PKI, there were hardly any political groups and organizations that appeared to echo the ideology and class-based politics as practiced by the PKI, thus automatically only separating two social groups, namely nationalist-secular groups and religious groups.

Then, the situation becomes more complicated in the absence of progressive politics along with the development of modernization and neo-liberalism which is market-centered. Market-oriented development was increasingly striking in the New Order regime. This process was quite effective because the New Order regime changed the nature of the state as a servant to capitalism, serving the interests of the development of market orientation. In return, at the same time the coffers of development were centered and concentrated on the New Order Regime, which at that time was closely associated with Suharto. This situation further strengthened the New Order regime to consolidate its economic and political interests, which in turn further alienated the people from the economic center.

This momentum was ultimately used to ignite the political spirit of the Indonesian people. The rhetoric about economic injustice was brought up to the surface with religious narratives. This rhetoric aims to mobilize and gather greater masses, namely the people who are at once confirmed as the Ummah. Mobilization of the people in the name of religion is also widely sponsored by religious groups. Looking at this phase, after the abolition of progressive politics in Indonesia, only religious and secular nationalist groups remained. At that time, secular nationalist groups greatly benefitted from the development currently

taking place. This situation served as timely opportunity for religious groups that are increasingly isolated from to ignite the spirit and mobilize *ummah* to fight back, especially with the growing number of Muslim *ummah* bearing the title of educated people. This condition also put the issue of economic injustice alongside the electoral democratic process in Indonesia (Mietzner & Muhtadi 2018). As noted by Waynedt in Latin America and Europe, the strengthening of neo-Populism was thanks to an economic crisis compounded by the fragmentation of institutionalization and class-based political disappearances. Hadiz also noticed that the development of neo-liberalism kept out *ummah* from access to economic resources. Moreover, Hadiz believed that this incident was aggravated by the chaotic organization of *ummah* and the fragmentation of parties claiming to be representatives of Muslims in the electoral process.

This situation rose to its climax when the New Order regime fell, which also marked a new chapter in the journey of democracy in Indonesia. After the New Order, things did not change much. Islamic political instruments that had long been formed since the past only transformed to adapt to the ongoing social climate. That is to say that reform era has allowed Islamic populism to claim more space in the public sphere, allowing Islamic populism to flourish in Indonesia.

ISLAMIC POPULISM AND THE FUTURE OF ISLAMIC DEMOCRACY

Hadiz's work that provides new theoretical insights in understanding the emergence of Islamic populism in Indonesia has greatly contributed to the body of populism-related knowledge. For Hadiz, the emergence of Islamic populism in Indonesia was formed from a long historical process, with quite complex political-economic upheavals, starting from the era of colonialism, which was then strengthened by the occurrence of the Cold War in the world. As a result of the cold war, domestic conflicts between the right wing and the left wing took place in Indonesia. The conflict continued with the removal of left-wing politics on the national political stage. Then, entering the year of 1997/1998, there was

an ongoing development of neo-liberalism with market patterns and the pressure of globalization that took place in Muslim countries, including Indonesia. The series of political-economic instability then made the progressive politics in Indonesia ceased to exist, and at the same time created a space for the strengthening of the influence of right-wing populism, including Islamic populism (Hadiz 2014).

For the future of democracy in Indonesia, at least, in certain contexts, Islamic Populism will still fill in the spaces in electoral democracy. This has even been supporting by Hadiz and Robinson believing that the oligarchs will use Islamic populism to maintain and simultaneously expand oligarchies in Indonesia (Hadiz 2018; Hadiz & Robison 2017).

This process is conducted through a democratic political strategy and accommodation of populist actors and voters. Through electoral democracy, oligarchs will focus oligarchic power on controlling the state. After conquering the state, it is easy for oligarchs to exercise control over their constituents, including populist actors and voters who pose a threat to oligarchs, by taking advantage from the available state apparatus. Furthermore, oligarch will take Islamic populism's heart by gaining sympathy from groups and actors who have a great influence in directing the majority of Muslim voters in Indonesia One way is by establishing policies that are vaguely accommodating but patronage-oriented (Aspinall 2015; Mietzner 2018; Mietzner & Muhtadi 2018). This method is employed to get Islamic populism to support the oligarchy as part of self-perseverance.

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