Review Essays

Reading Ideology in Indonesia Today

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Ideology is not dead. Herbert Feith and Lance Castle's classic Indonesian Political Thinking, 1945–1965 was first published in 1970 and delved into Indonesian political thoughts through passages and speeches of various leaders. Their analyses show that there were four dominant ideological positions. Two were imported from the West (democratic socialism and radical nationalism) while two came from below (Islam and Javanese traditionalism). Another major work to be published on Indonesian ideology appeared much later when David Bourchier and Vedi Hadiz published Indonesian Politics and Society in 2003. Bourchier and Hadiz stressed on the shifting nature of Indonesian political thinking. ‘Just as Indonesia itself is not a ‘natural’ entity, there are no ‘natural’ or permanent factors that divide it. Any discussion of cleavages and streams...
of thinking must therefore be situated clearly within their historical context’ (Bourchier and Hadiz, 2003: 2).

The purpose of this review article is to test the assumption of Bourchier and Hadiz about the impermanence of ideological thought in present day Indonesia. I shall try to do this by selectively reading the materials on current day publications available at the KITLV library. Although perhaps read by a minority of people, the ideas in these books often percolate throughout society and make their way into the various comments and opinions posted by anonymous individuals on the internet. It therefore seems worthwhile in the academic discussion on Indonesian politics and society to devote some attention to understanding the discussion and how political tropes are deployed. This review essay gives a preliminary assessment of these discussions.

Instead of seeing the end of ideology and the freeing of the individual from the historical and ideological myth that modernism and liberalism promises, the production of books entailing political ideas in post-New Order Indonesia is a continuation of the effort of various Indonesian thinkers to ground the Indonesian person within a value and a historical system, providing visions of both the past and the future. The themes and tropes of these ideological visions could be analyzed by perusing the political publications in an ordinary Indonesian bookstore. Some are tragic, others are optimistic or even triumphalist. It is important to note than none of these discourses represents fully formed ideologies in a sense of a political program. I would argue that they represent visions of yearning that are constantly evoked as strategies of speech acts without being a political programme. The groupings made in this article are based on my own subjective reading. I leave out the variety of local discourses that arose as a result of decentralization.

Engaging with the Problem of Indonesia

I read books that have been published within the last five or six years. The books are randomly chosen but must engage in what may be called the 'Indonesian problem', that is, it engages in the various discourses dealing with Indonesia’s problems and future. The writers belong to a variety of Indonesian 'intellectual' groups composed of academics, politicians, religious leaders and so forth. The publishers also represent a wide selection from a large and famous national publishing company to smaller local ones.

I will be discussing the aforementioned four books in the context of related recent publications listed below, which I feel represent the four major themes that connect to four ideological positions in present day Indonesia. I call these
themes or tropes because, similar to tropes used in novels or television drama, the set up of the book is geared to convey a certain politically motivated feeling which includes betrayal, pride, suspicion, or hope. Tropes involve the use of rhetoric and symbolism to suggest ways of seeing, and rely on the use of myth and popular understandings of figures and events. Political speech often employs tropes which may not represent the most powerful or influential discussions, but do reveal the broader ideological landscape. My ambition is not to analyze in detail but to suggest the scope of the present Indonesian intellectual landscape.

In particular, I am interested in examining the liberal discourse within this wider Indonesian context. Indonesian nationalism appeared and grew in a period of colonial welfarism. Imbued by Marxist and socialist ideas, the new Indonesian political elite was wary and suspicious of liberalism and capitalism, seeing a strong overlap with imperialism and colonialism. Nationalist and traditionalist ideas of the 1930s and 1940s drew leftist leaders like Soekarno to corporatist and familial ideas espoused by aristocrats like the legal expert Soe-pomo. No other ‘isms’ were as lambasted and publicly derided as liberalism in the 1950s; in fact, Soekarno used it in a derogatory manner to attack his political nemesis. Yet, since the 1980s, the shifts toward a more liberal Indonesia seem apparent. Starting from deregulation and the opening up of the economy to foreign investment, neoliberal ideology placed the market as a better allocator of economic factors than the state. Although the celebration of a liberal victory by Francis Fukuyama seems premature, expansion of liberal ideas concerning the primacy of the individual, as opposed to the collective, continued during the late and post New Order period. The rise of an international human rights regime, democratization and the expansion of the internet allowed for people to break away from the collective groupings that had been imposed by the state and by history. The rise of the individual must be considered to be one of the most important events of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, as evinced by the explosion of identities not traditionally recognized by authorities in the state and society.

David Bourchier in his recent book *Illiberal Democracy in Indonesia* (2013) argued that post New-Order Indonesian ideologies are illiberal in nature. This is a paradox. How could Indonesia, and Indonesian citizens, experience various institutional changes in the political (democratic), economic (neoliberal capitalist), and social systems (social media) without becoming liberals themselves? Is there a drive toward collectivist ideas, both state (Pancasila) and non-state (for instance, particular schools of Islam) that override the liberal nature of their present society? Where are the liberals and why have they failed to effectively argue for the value of the individual? Locating Indonesian liber-
alism within the wider discourse was the original purpose of the article. Yet, the complexity of the discourse in question forces me to limit this analysis. In the conclusion, I will offer my take on the weakness of present day Indonesian liberalism. This contradiction may perhaps represent a source of tension within Indonesian democracy and explain the constant appeal to strong state or strong leader collectivist notions that became such a major point during the last presidential election.

Liberalism

_Ar gumen Islam untuk Liberalisme_ (Islamic arguments for liberalism) is one of a four-part book series written by Budhy Munawar-Rachman and published in 2010 (Munawar-Rachman 2010a,b,c). It tries to provide an Islamic foundation for the support of liberal ideas like pluralism, secularism, and multiculturalism, and was published after the so-called Islamic turn of the mid 2000s, which saw greater radicalism in the Indonesian Muslim discourse. Munawar-Rachman is a graduate of the prestigious Driyarkara Philosophical College, he also lectures in both Driyarkara and Paramadina University, founded by Muslim intellectual Nurcholis Madjid. He is also the founder of the Nurcholis Madjid Society. He is part of a group of intellectuals known collectively as Islam Liberal. The roots of Islam Liberal lay in what Greg Barton has called the neomodernists that arose in the 1970s (Barton 1999). This includes the late President Abdurrahman Wahid, Nurcholis Madjid, Ahmad Wahib, and Dawam Rahardjo.

The neo-modernists promoted a new interpretation of Muslim political culture that was in line with Indonesian nationalism promoted by the New Order regime. They supported the abandonment of political Islam and the re-interpretation of Islamic theology within the context of present day society. They contextualized the Koran and Hadits allowing for the reinterpretation of the religious texts to support progressive social values. A de-politicization of Islam was conducted with the integration of Islamic organization such as the traditional Nadhatul Ulama into the developmental programmes of the state. There was an increase of _NGO’s_ such as the LP3ES, founded in 1971 by economists like Emil Salim and Dorodjatun Kuntjoro-Jakti (see Kuntjoro-Jakti 2012). The muslim economist Dawam Rahardjo worked there for a decade. _NGOs_ and traditional religious Muslim schools (pesantrens) alike pushed for a new generation of Muslims to work in the development field, opening access to education and the production of Muslim intellectuals. There was also an increase of religious affiliated _NGOs_, such as the Perhimpunan Pengembangan Pesantren dan Masyarakat (The Association for the development of Islamic
schools and society, p3M), which created an institutional relationship between the traditional Nadhatul Ulama and progressive social movements (Latif 2011: 508–510).

In the Post-New Order period, the Islamic Liberal Network (Jaringan Islam Liberal, JIL) grew as cooperation with ‘secular liberals’ at the Utan Kayu Community, comprising of artists, intellectuals, and journalists. JIL continued the neomodernist project by providing a theological basis for liberal ideas. Using a text-centric approach, this resulted in the limitation of their popular appeal. It is also in this field that JIL has been criticized by various anti-JIL Islamist authors (Husaini 2006; 2009a; Jaiz 2005; Mutawalli 2009; Artawijaya 2012). Yet, the liberalism that is espoused by Indonesian liberals is ambivalent. Munawar-Rachman divides it into bad versus good liberalism (Munawar-Rachman 2010: 23). Good liberalism is basically liberal political values: anti-theocracy, pro-democracy, the rights of women and non-Muslims, as well as free speech. Bad liberalism is its economic equivalent: neoliberal policies. Few publicly support economic liberalism (i.e. neoliberalism), except for some of what I would call the ‘secular liberals.’

Secular liberals, those that promote liberal values without contextualizing Islam, seem to be a smaller group, with two major intellectuals Rizal Mallarangeng and Goenawan Mohammad (Goenawan 2013). Mallarangeng supports a pro-market form of liberalism. Mallarangeng’s discussion is more faithful to the liberal ideas of the West, is presented without any effort to connect Western liberal ideas to Indonesia’s history or Indonesian problem. ‘Our intellectual tradition has been mostly based on a socialist, nationalist and religious plane’ (Mallarangeng 2008: xxvii). Integrating Western liberal ideas into the Indonesian story is a problem that has never been resolved though the JIL makes an attempt. Luthfi Assyaukannie’s dissertation analyzes the position of various Muslim politicians during the 1950s in relation to the secular state (Assyaukanie 2011). But unlike various other tropes, the liberal progressives have not sought to develop a mythical history of Indonesia that stretches back in time. Instead, they promote aspects of Pancasila as the founding tale of the modern Indonesian state.

There is no single book that explores the importance of the individual in the context of Indonesian culture or nationalism. Budhy Munawar-Rachman’s division of liberalism of good political versus bad economic liberalism (Munawar-Rachman 2010c: 23) never addresses the fact that position is rooted in the idea of the importance of the free individual. In fact, the strength of the anti-neoliberal trope in Indonesia lay in their claim to the backing of the Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution. His discussion on liberalism is purely defined toward Islamic liberalism, which, according to Luthfi Assyaukannie, is rooted in the
shock resulting from the intrusion of Europeans in the Middle East during the late eighteenth century. The Western roots of liberalism are expunged and replaced with a different historical overview that is Islamic.

Thus, the books on liberalism in Indonesia either lack contextualization within the Indonesian story or they expunge much of the Western discussion. The liberals have failed to historicize their position. Instead of dealing with this, there is a tendency to look for salvation in a Pancasila revivalism interpreted to support liberal values. One might argue that they have never made a case for a liberalism based on Western philosophy within the Indonesian context. Even though Western liberals have proclaimed the victory of the ideology against all other ideological opponents, Indonesian liberals have failed to make a convincing historical case. Despite being the predominant ideology implemented in state-society relations, it has a weak legitimacy within the national ideology.

Islamist Revivalism

Susiyanto’s 2010 book *Strategi Misi Kristen Memisahkan Islam dan Jawa* (Christian mission strategy to divide Islam and Java) aims to bring the Muslim back to the forefront of Indonesian history. He asserts that the divide between the idea of Java and Islam is a Christian and colonial by-product. He attacks what he sees as a Christian strategy of embracing pre-Islamic Javanese religion, the *Kejawen*, as having similar spiritual roots with Christianity. He also disdains Christian Javanese cultural amalgamation as part of the Christianization strategy. This suspicion of conventional history results in the effort to downgrade a cultural product of feudal Java. Indonesia’s iconic images of Hindu-Buddhist temples like Borobudur and Prambanan have been deeply woven into the idea of Indonesian nationalism. Yet Susiyanto says that ‘these temples are merely owned by the elites in power, those of the Brahmana and Ksatriya castes. For the regular persons who are of the Sudra and Paria castes, these are the monumental symbols of the oppression of a political elite class’. He argues that high culture and monumental buildings are not automatically connected (Susiyanto 2010: 84).

Islamic revisionism aims at bringing back the Muslim at the forefront of Indonesian history. Authors like Susiyanto and Adian Husaini, are part of the anti-liberal movement that arose out of their disagreement with the contextualization of Islam by the neo-modernist and the *jil*. They are often connected to academia; Susiyanto completed his master’s degree at Muhammadiyah University in Surakarta, and Husaini is a lecturer at the Ibn Khaldun University in Bogor. Other revisionists include Fahmi Basya, a lecturer in mathematics at
the UIN Syarif Hidayatulah in Jakarta, and Ahmad Mansur Suryanegara a historian at Padjadjaran University, Bandung. Husaini is part of the Institute of the Study of Islamic Thought and Civilization (Insists) which provides an alternative intellectual position than those of the conventional Islamic intellectual position espoused at the State Islamic Academic Institute (IAIN) or by the neomodernists above.

Their perspective is confrontational: they tend to imagine history as a long Islamic-Christian feud. The assumptions of many Islamists has been to link pluralism and multiculturalism with Christianization. Like much of the other tropes above, the Islamist view of Indonesian history engaged within the critical discussion of history, especially the deconstructivist approach that grew from the postmodern turn in the 1980s. The deconstructivist approach to Indonesian history placed Indonesian Muslims under the assault of a campaign of lies created by Christians and secular people in interpreting the past to fit their worldview. The machinations of Western (mostly Dutch) intellectuals like Snouck Hurgronje and others in robbing Muslims of their past is a primary concern (Baso, 2005: 74–104). Islamists thus represent one of the few intellectual movements that actively identify and celebrate aspects of an Islamic past, instead of denying or erasing it, or sacralizing its pre-Islamic features. Such views follow on the intellectual heels of the orientalist school and its effort at a politicized re-interpretation of history is used to support its argument for an Islamic Indonesia. The strategy employed by progressive intellectuals in order to provide a voice to the subaltern is turned on its heels in the Indonesian case in order to support the shift toward majority rule. Thus, authors in this line of thought make the Hindus and Buddhists of the past suspicious, their monuments a sign of the decadence of their elites and the religion purely held by the elites and not the masses (Susiyanto 2010: 82–90). Various Indonesian heroes are rendered as Muslim, like Diponegoro, the Javanese prince who led a heroic fight against Dutch colonialism in the early nineteenth century. This belief in a Christian conspiracy to hold back Islam’s rightful place in Indonesian society and the Christianization of the ummat represent a long suspicion Indonesia has had with the Western world (Husaini 2009b: 123, 209).

On the other hand, there was also an effort to appropriate Java’s Hindu-Buddhist past as Islamic. These revisionist strategies are at odds with Susiyanto’s call to rethink past monuments, but it is quite popular. Islamists conducted more brazen revisionism that is pseudo-scientific. The entire Hindu-Buddhist past is either Islamized or is reduced to their position within a history that is re-contextualized in an Islamic story. Fahmi Basya’s book Borobudur and peninggalan nabi Sulaiman (Borobudur and the Legacy of the Prophet Solomon) purport to show with mathematical means why the kingdom of Sheba is
located in central Java, and thus, Borobudur is an Islamic monument (Basya 2012). This pseudo-scientific approach is an extreme form of revisionism in which the Indonesian past is Islamized. Ahmad Mansur Suryanegara’s *Api Sejarah* (*Fire of History*) purports to uncover the lies and misinformation that has been produced by an anti-Islamic Western intellectual tradition of the Christian Dutch (Suryanegara 2010). Agus Sunyoto’s *Wali songo: rekonstruksi sejarah yang disingkirkan* (*Nine Saints. The Reconstruction of a Removed History*, 2011) claimed that the saints hadn’t had the appropriate place within Indonesian historiography. Similar to the way in which an *Indonesian-centric* national history is created out of a *Netherlands-centric* history of Indonesia, the Islamist re-contextualization is also quite crude. The story thus engages with the Indonesian national historiography but merely supports an interpretation that puts Islam in the forefront.\(^1\)

Such revisionism is distrustful of Western interpretation and, as a consequence, distrustful of academic interpretation by Indonesian historians, whom they consider are tainted with the teachings of Dutch or Western historiography of Indonesia. Following these revisionist strategies, one can then legitimize the Islamic turn of the Post-New Order period in ways that the liberals have not been able to. The secular definition of the Pancasila, which many consider the basis for Indonesia’s secular and multicultural policies, is seen to be a Western or Christian interpretation brought about to stymie the growth of Islam as a political power. This active movement of freedom does not exist within any of the liberal books that support an essentially conservative reading of the Pancasila and the maintenance of Indonesia’s harmonious relationship that was developed during the height of the New Order. This sort of thinking has resulted in forming a legitimizing base to attack the integrity of Indonesian and Western academic writings on Indonesia.\(^2\)

**Anti-Globalism**

Amien Rais’s, *Agenda Mendesak Bangsa. Selamatkan Indonesia!* (*Pressing agenda for the nation. Safe Indonesia!* 2008) was published prior to the 2009 Presidential Election when a series of books criticizing President Susilo Bam-bang Yudhoyono’s neoliberal credential came out. Rais is a political scientist

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1 Compare Suwignyo 2014.

2 This is not an isolated case. Marxist attack on subaltern history as being ‘fascist’ and supporting Hindu supremacy was leveled at Indian postcolonial historiography. For instance Sumit Sarkar’s criticism of Dipesh Chakrabarty (Chakrabarty 1995: 751–759).
graduated from Gadjah Mada University obtaining his PhD at University of Chicago, was head of the Muhammadiyah and one of the main actors during the end of the New Order. He is a politician who has contested for the presidency in 2004. Rais picked up the anti-globalization trope, discussing the role of the IMF and the World Bank. This trope is connected to the international anti-globalization or anti-neoliberal discussion. It seems to be mainly used by two groups in Indonesian society: modernist Muslim who may have been drawn to this because of the strong anti-American strain and leftists. Within the leftist tradition, its roots can be found in Soekarno's defiant ideas in relation to international aid. Indonesia's 1945 constitution promotes a socialist view of the economy, with a strong state that controls much of the economic sectors deemed 'important for the people'. The vagueness of the wording within the constitution represented the vagueness of the Indonesian approach toward its own economy. The problem was that the shift toward Reformasi resulted in the liberalization of the Indonesian economy.

The anti-globalization movement highlights a continuity of exploitation, along the same trajectory as colonialism and imperialism. This historiography continues with neo-colonialism and the peripheralization of the Third World. The post-colonial historiography of Indonesia follows leftist interpretations of the American empire and Cold War discussions on the secret machination of the CIA. The fall of Soekarno and the rise of Soeharto, with his team of so-called Berkeley Mafia economists, ushered in the New Order. When Soeharto fell in 1998, many writers like Amien Rais and others continued on the neo-colonial or neo-imperial discussion by looking at domestic capture by a global, albeit fuzzily defined, enemy rooted in international financial circles. According to Rais, the take-over of government policy in favour of multinational corporations represented state-hijacked corruption. He attacked the legal allowance of foreign ownership in Indonesia, especially its high ceiling of 99% ownership. He praised nations who stood up against the global power of the United States and their international organizations like the IMF and the World Bank (Rais 2009: 187).

Rais and many others assume the problem of Indonesia to be located in the outside world: in this case, America and its global economic system (Rais 2009: 67). While he focused much of the later chapter of his book on the failure of the government to curb foreign ownership, there was practically nothing in his book that discusses the problems of Indonesia as a failure on the part of the local political system and economy. The discussion on corruption focuses on the assumed foreign control of the government’s policy-making bodies, especially those related to the economy. It was assumed that policy makers were co-opted by international agencies such as the World Bank and
the IMF and worked for multinational corporations (Rais 2009: 182). Economic development was to come purely through maintaining the economy within the hands of nationals. Developmental theories are absent.

Anti-globalization books have been produced from within the NGO movement in Indonesia. Mansour Fakih has produced critical books on development theory and the problems of development in association with Indonesia (Fakih 2001). Eko Prasetyo wrote two books about the Islamic Left in which a Marxist reading of the Indonesian problem is made palatable by a reinterpretation of Islamic theology (Prasetyo 2003; 2004). Partly inspired by the Catholic Liberation Theology, Islamic leftists like Prasetyo reinterpreted Islamic doctrines to their revolutionary potential, placing the figure of Muhammad within class-conflict and Islam as pushing forth an egalitarian society. Engaging with other Muslim liberation theologists like Ali Ashgar Engineer, Prasetyo wants a social revolution in which the Islamic movement could be revolutionized against capitalism and neoliberalism. This push for a progressive revolution is the most significant part of the Islamic Left as it confirms much of the progressive Marxist values. This support for progressive Marxism is one of the most important features, which set it apart from the Islamic revivalism that was inherently conservative and promoted reactionary Islamic values.

NGOs in Indonesia grew initially as part of the state’s development strategy and, until the 1980s and 1990s, were uncritical of its part in New Order developmentalism. A new critical outlook appeared after greater access toward foreign higher education produced a new generation of highly educated, non-government intellectuals. Exposed to progressive thoughts in the West, activists like Mansour Fakih and others, ‘re-discovered’ the Sukarnian idea of populist participation by reading through works of Antonio Gramsci and Paulo Freire (Fakih 1996). What these activists have in common was distrust toward power in general, but especially that of the state. Yet, many anti-neoliberal economists and intellectuals are part of the state elite, although they are not part of the government decision makers.

**Indonesian Exceptionalism**

Yudi Latif’s *Negara Paripurna. Historisitas, Rasionalitas dan Aktualitas Pancasila* (A Complete State. The Historicity, Rationality and Actuality of Pancasila) was published in 2011 with the support of a large section of Indonesia’s intellectual, political and religious elites. Latif is an activist connected with the liberal Muslim community and also a founder of the Nurcholis Madjid Society and the Reform Institute. Latif’s book on Pancasila is a particular example...
of what I would term Indonesian exceptionalism, a triumphalist trope that is nationalist in nature and is rooted in the belief of Indonesian exceptional uniqueness compared to the outside world. Similar to Munawar-Rachman’s book, it seems to be part of a series of publications meant to counter the growing Islamist interpretation of Indonesian identity, by focusing on the importance of Pancasila, the state ideology. Latif argues for an inclusive and plural society based on the Pancasila as a truly national document. Yet in doing so, it inadvertently strengthens a historiography that takes its cue from the state-sponsored nationalist history.

Latif’s *Negara Paripurna* discusses each of Pancasila’s five pillars and historicizes these values in Indonesian history. Instead of looking at Pancasila as part of social and political values that were prevalent in the early twentieth century, Latif interprets them as having its roots deep in the history of the nation. Similar to Munawar-Rachman’s Islamization of liberal values, Latif nationalizes the values of Pancasila. Like Munawar-Rachman, he also sees economic liberalism in a negative light. Pancasila itself is never problematized; it is merely reinterpreted to suit the conditions of the present. Instead of affirming the familial and integralist state of the New Order, the present Pancasila is taken out of its box to argue for the liberal values of post-Soeharto Indonesia: multiculturalism, a mild-form of secularism, and the protection of minority rights. Yet, such an act requires the reinterpretation of history; the support of a national narrative that smoothens out the imperfection of history and its contradictory character. Fascist ideas, for instance, are taken completely out of the picture. Nationalist Indonesian historical figures are often portrayed as caricatures framing a myth of Indonesian unity. Instead of exploring the inherent divide between Soepomo’s integralist state and Muhammad Yamin’s plea for individual liberty, the various discussions surrounding the formation of the Pancasila is almost always seen to be accommodating and inclusive. Instead of dealing with the past or with Indonesian identity on its own terms, the triumphalist trope caricatures Indonesian history and identity as icons to be deployed in the rhetoric of present day arguments.

One interesting aspect of this is the tendency to link up to pseudoscience that supports the idea of an Indonesian exceptionalism. This explains the popularity of such works as Arysio Santos’s *Atlantis: The Lost Continent Finally Found*, with the Indonesian subtitle *Indonesia ternyata tempat lahir peradaban dunia* (Indonesia is actually the birthplace of world civilization) and Stephen Oppenheimer’s *Eden in the East: Benua yang tenggelam di Asia Tenggara*—both published in 2010. Latif’s book doesn’t dwell on it, but he does refer to these authors in his discussion. Sometimes, it reflects the utterly bizarre, as exemplified by Yusep Rafiqi’s book *Nabi Adam dan Peradaban Nusantara,*
which purportedly shows scientific proof of the relationship between Indonesia and the Biblical Adam (Rafiqi 2013). Following on the heels of Oppenheimer, he tries to locate the geographical roots of the first prophet to the submerged subcontinent. The interest in prehistoric monuments such as the Gunung Padang Neolithic site in West Java (Akbar 2013) and the resurrection of the capital of the Majapahit Empire in East Java signify both the need to maintain a national myth while at the same time a triumphant assumption of Indonesia’s special place in the world.

The theme of cultural exceptionalism found even more fertile ground within the historical discourse of Indonesian Islam, which is considered a special kind of Islam, a model of Muslim democracy, by both Western leaders like Hillary Clinton and President Barack Obama, and Indonesians alike. In the Post 9/11 World, the notion of an Indonesian Islam was used by the government to spearhead a foreign policy focused on using what Yudhoyono called a Soft Power approach. This approach represented the institutionalization of Indonesian cultural exceptionalism, particularly its non-violent, inclusive, and democratic character. The evidence of success lies in Indonesia’s democracy, a democracy that support the idea that Islam is compatible with the modern, liberal world. 3

Nasir Tamara’s *Indonesia Rising. Islam, Democracy and the Rise of Indonesia as a Major Power* (Tamara 2009) points to the indigenous nature of the refor-masi idea and not from Western concepts of the French and American revolutions and the liberal values that animated western political convention. Instead he focuses on the ‘lessons’ of the Indonesian revolutionary period as central to understanding why Indonesian democracy succeeded in the present period (Tamara 2009: 11). This denial of Indonesia’s liberal roots and its replacement within both Indonesian and Islamic exceptionalism is part of many Indonesian’s triumphant approach to deal with the outside world. Nanat Fatah Natsir’s *The Next Civilization* (Natsir 2012), locates Indonesia as part of the Islamic world and contends that Indonesia’s special brand of tolerant Islam, coupled with its Pancasila ideology, represented a middle ground from Western neoliberalism versus Islamic terrorism and would be the bedrock for a more enlightened civilization.

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3 Despite the fact that experts were warning of changing Muslim values. In 2005, Martin van Bruinessen along with several prominent Indonesian Muslim scholars published a book that pointed out that Indonesian Islam was at a turning point and the import of extreme interpretation from the Arab world had resulted in the shift in Muslim perspective away from democracy toward Islamic radicalism (Bruinessen 2013).
This triumphalist trope is rather conservative in the sense that it does not advocate for a particular change, but instead wants to maintain the position of the Pancasila in a Post New Order world. Its supporters are political, social, and religious elites that see the importance of maintaining the national mythology. Yet, this maintenance of a national historiography that celebrates Indonesian exceptionalism also reduces the critical faculty. Pluralism and liberalism, in this case, seem to be favored not on the basis of merit, but merely as a result of Indonesian exceptionalism, placing liberal values as an extension of a state-sponsored national ideology.

Conclusion: Historicizing the Tropes

There are four tropes discussed above. The first trope is that of liberalism. The presentation of liberalism and liberal ideas bifurcate into two general strategies: it either assumes that liberalism is rooted in Indonesian or Islamic history, thus forgetting its Western enlightenment source. Or it focus on Western liberalism and forgets to link it to the Indonesian context. The second trope is that of Islamist Revivalism. Its goal is to put the Indonesian Muslim as the agent of historical change. It is deconstructive and is suspicious of ‘official’, ‘academic’ history as part of a suspicion with the Christian world. The third trope is foreign or neoliberal intervention. This trope is an Indonesianized anti-globalism, or a criticism of the liberal condition of the country. Writers here propose a change in Indonesia’s attitude toward the outside world and create a strong state. It sees Indonesia as a victim of a global, imperial strategy of control. And the last theme is that of Indonesian exceptionalism. Writers are often conservative because they promote the status quo. They are also often easily attracted to pseudo-scientific discussions that elevate Indonesia. These various books allow us to tentatively propose several characteristics of present day intellectual discourse.

First, all the discussion can be traced to larger, although often unrelated, political or intellectual discourses outside of Indonesia, usually based in Europe or the US. These discourses serve as a legitimizing backdrop to the discussion, a footnote that eases the need for the Indonesian writer to provide compelling arguments or research. Instead, they rely on arguments by authority.

Second, all the discussions relate to Indonesia’s position with the outside world, with either an imagined Western or Islamic world. There are positive and negative Western themes. The level of trust and distrust between Indonesia and the outside world, the foreigners, the West, the Arab world and so forth is a
constant tension in Indonesia, and this tension animates Indonesian political discourse. Few Indonesian intellectuals or leaders clearly position themselves on one or the other line of the divide.

Third, various Islamic authors and thinkers participate in all four discussions. Indonesian Islam lay across a wide political spectrum and their participation in the intellectual process in Indonesia is significant. Often discussion tends to look at Islam as a discrete ideological field (Hefner 2000:7–20). Yet, many of the books discussed in this review contextualize Islam within their respective ideologies. This may be related to the decimation of leftist intellectuals after 1965/1966 massacres of the Indonesian communist party. The willingness of Muslim leaders like Abdurrahman Wahid to depoliticize Islam, the creation of Islamic academics like the IAIN and the rise of NGO’s with strong links with local Islamic schools (pesantren) created an institutional environment which allowed greater access to post-graduate Western schooling of Muslim intellectuals and their broadening into various intellectual traditions.

Fourth, the divisions between individualism and collectivism, between liberalism and the rest of the discussion, point to the increasing clash between the rise of the individual in the twenty-first century and the appeal of collectivism. Some of the tropes point to yearnings to move away from the individual toward the collective: toward re-creating a strong state. The reason for this may be rooted in distrust of the outside world. The economic question has focused on how Indonesia should maintain ownership of its mineral wealth and redistribute it equitably. It says that Indonesia’s politicians and political system have been corrupted by the global order, that Indonesia’s culture also corruptly serves global capitalism. Interestingly, and similar to older colonial tropes, the various anti-Western tropes place the Indonesian as a spectator to his own history. Indonesia’s problem with productivity, for instance, is a product of its interaction with the outside world, instead of problems associated with Indonesian policies. The Islamist revisionism is also a reaction to what they consider to be the hegemonic nature of Western knowledge and the necessity to break it down in order to allow an Islamic expression in Indonesia.

The liberal viewpoint requires a positive or trustful attitude not only toward the individual as capable beings, but also toward the outside world and the Western dominated global system. Erich Fromm wrote that individual freedom is a terrifying psychological prospect (Fromm 1941). Sometimes people want the comfort of being within collective groups. The ambivalent attitude toward globalization during the late New Order period may represent this fear. The fear of individual freedom in the post-New Order period resulted in Pancasila revivalism and the distrust against the outside world and the promotion of an Indonesia-centric worldview. The shifting ideological landscape represents
what, at its roots, is a tension of global proportion: the triumphant ‘end of history’ and worldwide liberal revolution (Fukuyama 1992: 13–54) pitted against a clash of civilizations (Huntington 1993: 22–49). Indonesia’s position as a ‘secular’ state with the largest Muslim population on earth resulted in an interesting pattern of ideological positioning: between the appeal to the strong state and that of the individualizing world of the twenty-first century.

The failure of the liberals to make a convincing case for Indonesian individualism may perhaps continue to haunt the national discussion. Liberalism is internally incoherent, as it fails to address the philosophical problem of dealing with the malignancies of capitalism and individual property rights. The strategy to protect the liberal values of multiculturalism and pluralism is to place it in the context of the revival of a conservative reading of Pancasila. This opens up the possibility for abuse or vulnerable to the attack of Islamists on the basis of a deconstructive reading of history. Liberals will have to engage in the national discourse in order to make a convincing argument for its values and principles. It will have to be part of a national discussion and actively criticize the collectivist vision of the founder of the state while at the same time making a case for individualism.

References


