

TRADITIONALIST MUSLIMS AND POPULISM IN INDONESIA AND TURKEY

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Abstrak

Dalam artikel ini saya mengedepankan kajian sosiologis terkini tentang populisme untuk menunjukkan karakter-karakter penting yang membedakannya dari gaya kajian politik dan ideologis. Belajar dari analisis populisme di Turki sebagai kajian perbandingan, artikel ini mengeksplorasi fenomena populisme Muslim di Indonesia. Dengan menelusuri pengalaman selama era Kemerdekaan, Orde Lama dan Orde Baru, saya memfokuskan studi untuk menjawab pertanyaan apakah mobilisasi anti-Ahok 2016-2017 merupakan gerakan populis? Saya berpendapat kita akan salah arah bila menyimpulkan bahwa tradisionalisme Islam, sebagaimana diwakili oleh NU (Nadhlatul Ulama), secara sistematis bertentangan dengan populisme Islam sepenuhnya. Alih-alih memperhadapkan Islam tradisional melawan populisme Islam, saya berpendapat lebih tepat untuk menyebut Islam tradisional tidak dapat lepas dari kekuatan populis itu sendiri. Di dalam tubuh NU sebenarnya juga terdapat oposisi populis, dan lebih mengancam lagi, adanya para pemimpin tradisional di luar pengurus struktural NU yang memiliki daya tarik tersendiri bagi kalangan Nahdliyyin (warga NU).

Kata Kunci: Muslim Tradisional; Populisme; Indonesia; Turkey

Abstract

In this article I follow some of the recent sociological literature on populism to bring out some important characteristics that distinguish it from other styles of politics and ideologies. Learning from the analysis on populism in Turkey as a comparative study, this article explores Indonesian Muslim populism phenomenon. Through tracing the experiences during the struggle for Independence and during the Old Order and the New Order, I do focus my study dealing with the question was the anti-Ahok mobilization of 2016-17 populist? I argue it would be wrong to conclude that Islamic traditionalism, as represented by the NU (Nadhlatul Ulama), is systematically in conflict with

Islamic populism. Instead of a struggle between traditionalist Islam and Islamic populism, therefore, I believe it is more correct to speak of populist forces within traditionalist Islam. There is populist opposition within NU and, even more threatening, there are populist traditionalist leaders outside the association who strongly appeal to the community of Nahdliyyin (NU followers).

Keywords: Traditionalist Muslims; Populism; Indonesia; Turkey

Introduction

The title of this article contains a few words whose meaning may not immediately be obvious to the reader, as well as the suggestion that Turkey and Indonesia may be facing a similar tension between traditionalism and populism – whatever those terms may mean. When Lakpesdam invited me to present a keynote lecture at the Afkar Forum 2021 and suggested this title, I wondered which recent developments in Indonesia provided the background for this title. “Traditionalist” is a term that I had myself often used when writing about NU and *Nahdliyyin*, as an English term that roughly corresponded to *Aswaja*, and I knew that the term was also regularly used by Indonesian authors in more or less the same sense. To what extent the term also makes sense in the case of Turkey, and which community or movement there represents a form of traditionalism comparable to that of the NU is a moot point, however. Some reflection will be needed about the helpfulness of comparisons between Indonesia and Turkey, apart from the fact that I happen to have carried out research and been involved in teaching in both countries. But it is true that many activists in Indonesia and Malaysia, from the founding fathers of the independent nations to contemporary Islamists, have looked at Turkey as an example to be emulated, first for its struggle for independence and secularist modernization, and later for the Islamist conquest of the state by democratic means.

I did not recall having heard the terms “populism” and “populist” often when I still lived in Indonesia (1983-94) or during later visits. A recent book by Vedi Hadiz on what he calls “Islamic populism” is the only publication known to me that uses the term in connection with developments in Indonesia, and I wondered whether the title given to me was indirectly inspired by that book.¹ Hadiz discusses a rather wide range of Islamic movements in his study, and I believe it may be helpful to choose a sharper focus by defining “populism” more narrowly. Hadiz does not define clearly what he means by “Islamic populism” and discusses as Indonesian examples almost the entire range of Islamic movements beyond the mainstream of NU, Muhammadiyah and similar mass organizations. His comparisons with Egypt and Turkey show that his main interest is in the Muslim Brotherhood and Erdogan’s AKP, movements that are commonly called Islamist rather than populist. As I shall argue below, Islamist groups in Indonesia have been involved in instances of social mobilization resembling populist movements

¹Vedi R. Hadiz, *Islamic Populism in Indonesia and the Middle East*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

elsewhere, but it may be useful to distinguish between Islamism as an ideology and populism as a style of politics and mobilization.

How to Define Populism?

In the mid-twentieth century, the term populism was strongly associated with a type of leadership and political movement that was quite common in Latin America: political strongmen who appealed to “the people” as opposed to the oligarchies that had long controlled the economies. There was something leftist and progressive about the Latin American populist leaders: they attempted to break the power of the establishment and to provide social services to the poor. But they were by no means socialists and they were fiercely opposed to the idea of class struggle. In their discourse, the people were a homogeneous entity without class distinction; class struggle would only divide the people and thereby weaken them. In more recent times, Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez and his successor Nicolás Maduro, and the former Bolivian president Evo Morales have represented varieties of this left-leaning Latin American populism. In the Venezuelan case, fierce opposition to American imperialism was combined with increasing authoritarianism at home and oppression of opposition figures, who were accused of being collaborators with the foreign enemy (which in many cases they were). In Bolivia, Morales acted as the representative of the indigenous (“Indian”) population against the elite that was of foreign origin and had appropriated all economic resources; here, populism has a definite ethnic or racial dimension.

Another place where the term populism has long been in use but referred to a somewhat different style of politics, is the USA. Populist politicians present themselves as outsiders in the political system and claim to represent the voice of “the people” as against the established elite that runs the political parties and institutions. This appeals to ideals of direct democracy that are well-entrenched in American society; it is not necessarily associated with progressive or conservative politics. In the past few years, both Bernie Sanders and Donald J. Trump have been called populists, in spite of the enormous differences in their political ideals. Both drew strength from their direct relations with their supporters, unmediated by the party apparatus, and both received support from groups that, for different reasons, mistrusted the political establishment.

But it was especially Trump who represented a style of populist politics that we have seen sweep across the globe and undermine established democratic procedures, human rights, press freedom and the independent judiciary, all in the name of “the people.” In spite of major

cultural and political differences, Narendra Modi in India, Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, Benyamin Netanyahu in Israel, Viktor Orbán in Hungary, and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey have some basic characteristics in common: they have a large base of supporters who are easily mobilized, possibly constituting majorities of their populations, and they insist that they are the true representatives of “the people,” unlike their political rivals. Like Trump, when they speak of “the people” they do not mean the entire population of their country but exclude many groups: Blacks and Latinos in the USA, Muslims in India, Jews and refugees in Hungary. These are the populists who are (or were until recently, in the case of Trump) in power; there are many more who are as yet in the opposition but are striving to overthrow the liberal-democratic order in their countries.

All over Europe, right-wing nationalist movements with an anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim and anti-globalization program have been gaining strength. They claim to speak for the original population of their countries, who are feeling marginalized by Muslim immigration, globalization, and the neoliberal policies of European economic and political elites. Geert Wilders and his Freedom Party in the Netherlands, Marine Le Pen and her National Front in France, the Alternative für Deutschland in Germany and their counterparts in other European countries share the same dislike of immigrants (especially but not exclusively Muslims) and distrust of the European and national political elites.

Populism, Elitism, Pluralism

I shall follow here some of the recent sociological literature on populism to bring out some important characteristics that distinguish it from other styles of politics and ideologies.² Populist leaders often resort to demagoguery and blatant opportunism, but as the Dutch sociologist Cas Mudde argues, this does not go to the core of what populism is, and not every demagogue or opportunist is a real populist.³ Populism is perhaps most

² Two little books by two of the most prominent scholars nicely sum up the findings of recent literature: Jan-Werner Müller, *What Is Populism?* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016; Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. On the right-wing populism in Europe, see also Cas Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist.” *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 4 (2004), 542-563, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.2004.00135.x>; Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. On the earlier “progressive” populism in Latin America, see Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser (eds), *Populism in Europe and the Americas: Threat or Corrective for Democracy?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

³ Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist,” 542-3; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism*, 5-6. Müller puts it in very similar words: “Populism, I suggest, is a particular moralistic

usefully defined as a political discourse that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite.” Politics should, according to this discourse, be an expression of the general will (*volonté générale*) of the people. The general will is not something that emerges from public debate and political deliberation, and it cannot be empirically established through opinion polls and elections. It is an almost mystical truth shared by the “true people” and expressed by the populist leader. The leader claims to speak on behalf of, and to personify, the people and the general will. Those who oppose the populist consensus and the populist leader are excluded from the “true people” and are considered as traitors or internal enemies.

This implies that populism, as Mudde puts it, has two opposites: elitism and pluralism. Elitism is also based on the perception of a clear division between the “enlightened” and knowledgeable elite and the mass of the people, who are ill-informed, uneducated and easily manipulated by shrewd demagogues. Elitism claims that the political, economic and intellectual elite have a moral right to govern and make decisions for the masses, who are incapable of wise policies themselves. Populism intensely distrusts those elites and demands power for the masses – or rather for the populist leaders who claim to represent the common people.

Populism is also the opposite of pluralism because it makes the claim that the people constitute a homogeneous whole, without internal division. Pluralism holds that within society there are many legitimate differences of belief, values, life style, etc. It “rejects the homogeneity of both populism and elitism, seeing society as a heterogeneous collection of groups and individuals with often fundamentally different views and wishes.”⁴ Populists perceive pluralism as a threat to the true people’s unity and homogeneity and are hostile towards those who are not considered as part of the true people: various elites as well as (ethnic or religious) minorities, immigrants, or foreigners. Müller even sees this as the essence of populism: “The core claim of populism is thus a moralized form of antipluralism. Political actors not committed to this claim are simply not populists.”⁵

Populist movements are typically led by charismatic leaders – without a leader who speaks in the name of the “true people” and who tells them

imagination of politics, a way of perceiving the political world that sets a morally pure and fully unified—but, I shall argue, ultimately fictional—people against elites who are deemed corrupt or in some other way morally inferior.” (Müller, *What is Populism?*, 16).

⁴ Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist,” 543-4; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism*, 7-8.

⁵ Müller, *What is Populism?*, 16.

what they (should) think, feel and believe a populist movement is not really possible. The leader usually claims to be an outsider in the political system – after all, his discourse is hostile to the established elite – but he is certainly not one of the common people either. In the Netherlands, Geert Wilders has been a member of parliament, initially for an establishment party, for longer than almost anyone else. Donald Trump was part of New York’s economic elite long before he decided to run for president of the USA. Populist leaders differ from other politicians in that they claim direct rather than mediated relations with those for whom they speak. Direct democracy through mass mobilization is preferred over representative democracy, in which political parties, news media and other institutions stand between the ordinary citizen and the political elite. The populist leader often takes pride in rudely violating established norms of polite debate to show his disdain for the establishment. As much as possible he speaks to his followers directly and not through the channels of political institutions or establishment journalists.⁶ The communication is strictly top-down; the leader does not have to listen to what his followers have to say, for he already personifies the general will. Donald Trump’s excessive recourse to Twitter to communicate directly with his followers is an extreme example of the populist style. He sidelined not only most of the government institutions and major news media but also the Republican Party apparatus to which he owed his election and communicated with almost half of the US population through tweets and conservative hosts on Fox TV and talk radio.

Islamic Populism

Much more can be said about populism and populist politicians in Europe and the Americas, but the brief summary above may help us to reflect on what we might mean by “Islamic populism” and to distinguish between Islamic movements that are populist and those that are not.

Reformist movements in Islam, from the original Wahhabi movement and Abduh’s Modernism to the Muslim Brotherhood and contemporary Salafism, have been fiercely critical of traditional ulama and the style of Islamic learning that they represent. In that sense, they may be called anti-elite but their anti-elitism should not be confused with populism, for they did not criticize the established elite in the name of the “true people” but in

⁶“Populists always want to cut out the middleman, so to speak, and to rely as little as possible on complex party organizations as intermediaries between citizens and politicians. The same is true of wanting to be done with journalists: the media is routinely accused by populists of “mediating,” which, as the very word indicates, is what they are actually supposed to do, but which is seen by populists as somehow distorting political reality” (Müller, *What is Populism?*, 23).

the name of the original sources of Islamic knowledge, the Qur'an and the Sunnah. It makes little sense to call Salafis or Muslim Brothers or the Kaum Muda in the Malay world populist. In the first half of the twentieth century, when nationalist movements were sweeping across the globe, populism was typically secular in nature, speaking on behalf of the common people against colonial powers and the collaborating indigenous elites.

The experience of Turkey is important, for it was the first country in Asia that fought a war of liberation against Western powers that occupied it (after the First World War) and especially against the Christian populations (Greeks and Armenians) that were considered as collaborators with the foreign enemy. Under Mustafa Kemal, the Republic of Turkey, established in 1923, adopted six principles as the foundations of the state, one of which was populism (*halkçılık*). Secularism (*laiklik*) was another of these principles. *Halkçılık*, as understood in Kemalist Turkey, was perhaps not exactly the same thing as the populism discussed in the previous section, but it did imply that the leader, Ataturk, personified the true people and spoke in their name. It meant the rejection of the Ottoman elite culture and the replacement of ulama and Islamic learning by a language and culture based on those of the common people. It also came to mean the claim that the people were undivided, denying the existence of the Kurds and other ethnic minorities. The anti-elitism and anti-pluralism were very obvious; moreover the *halk*, the common people, were supposed not to be very religious. The state had to protect them from backward religious ideas and guide them towards enlightened modernity.

Besides the prominent secular populism of the Kemalist era, Turkish history also provides us with some interesting examples of what we may call Islamic or Muslim populism. A closer look at Turkey may therefore be helpful before we turn our attention to the question of what forms Islamic populism has taken in Indonesia.

Islamic Populism in Turkey: From Marginal Rebellions to Struggle for Emancipation to Conquest of State Power

Turkey provides some more convincing examples of what might be called Islamic populism. Under Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk)'s modernization from above, all traditional Islamic institutions were replaced by modern secular ones, based on Western examples. The Shariah was replaced by a system of laws borrowed from Western countries (even family law was entirely secular), and the Shariah courts were replaced by secular law courts. Madrasas were closed and the only education available was in Western-style schools with a modern secular curriculum. Traditional

Islamic dress and hairstyles were banned. The country was controlled by a small Westernized minority, and traditional-minded Muslims, who long constituted the majority of the population, was marginalized and powerless. In those conditions, it was easy to perceive that society was divided into a morally corrupt, secularized elite and the conservative Muslim majority and to consider the latter as the “true people.” In the first decade of the Republic there were several uprisings against the secular regime, which were at once populist and Islamic; their leaders spoke for Islam as well as the “common people.” Turks who went along with the new regime were seen by the insurgents as lost souls or traitors; they did not belong to the “true people” in their view.

In the 1970s, a German-trained engineer and self-styled politician, Necmettin Erbakan led a political movement that he named “National Vision” (*Milli Görüş*) and that aimed to mobilize the conservative traditionalist Muslims who were until then not properly represented in the political system. Through a string of political parties, banned one after the other for violating Turkey’s official secularism, Erbakan sought to broaden his following among conservative Muslims, always presenting himself as an outsider fighting the secularist elite on behalf of the true nation. These parties had an economic and social program, also called *Milli Görüş*, that appealed to the marginalized sections of the Muslim middle class. Erbakan’s discourse was anti-Western and obsessed with Jewish and Christian conspiracies. He wished to replace the economic dependence on the West by a common market of Turkey and its Middle Eastern neighbours, and proposed development plans that should replace the modern and internationally oriented businesses of the coastal areas by a “national” industry in the conservative heartland of Turkey. The *Milli Görüş* political parties took part in several coalition governments and succeeded in gradually expanding the availability of Islamic education.⁷

The very name of Erbakan’s ideology implied the populist division between the corrupt elite and the pure people: the word *Milli* (National) had connotations of a community of good Muslims, from which non-Muslims and the secular elite were excluded. The ideology was clearly influenced by the

⁷ Madrasas were never reopened in Turkey, but since the 1950s there existed schools for the training of imams and khatibs (*imam-hatip* schools), somewhat comparable to Indonesia’s MAN. The number of these schools slowly increased and they became popular as the only official means to receive a little religious education. Later the rights of *imam-hatip* graduates to have access to higher education became an important rallying point for conservative Muslims. See: Martin van Bruinessen, “The Governance of Islam in Two Secular Polities: Turkey’s Diyanet and Indonesia’s Ministry of Religious Affairs.” *European Journal of Turkish Studies* 27 (2018), <http://journals.openedition.org/ejts/5964>.

Muslim Brotherhood, with which Erbakan had narrow relations, but unlike the Brotherhood it was not influenced by Muslim reformism but staunchly traditionalist. The most important religious authority associated with *Milli Görüş* was in fact a Naqshbandi shaykh, and many party members actively took part in Naqshbandi ritual.⁸ It was a movement of traditional Muslims with a strong populist character.

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan made his early career in the *Milli Görüş* movement, as a youth activist in the 1970s and later, in the 1990s, as the elected mayor of Istanbul on the ticket of the Refah (Welfare) Party. In 2001 he was one of the founders of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), which was a modernized successor to the *Milli Görüş* parties, with a liberal-democratic and pro-European program that represented a break with Erbakan's conservative Islamic populism. The AKP was an electoral success, winning a majority of the seats in parliament in 2003 and performing even better in later elections. During the first five years his party was in power, Erdoğan carried out a number of major political reforms that amounted to democratization of the country, in order to fulfil the preconditions for Turkey's accession to the European Union. The role of the military in politics was reduced, the legal position of the small Christian and Jewish minorities was improved, the independence of the judiciary and the press strengthened. In an attempt to solve two of Turkey's major political problems, the AKP initiated a dialogue with the country's two largest minorities, the Kurds and the Alevis.⁹

Erdoğan and the AKP appeared to be champions of democratization, not only refreshingly more open-minded than the older generation of *Milli Görüş* leaders but also more liberal in their attitude to minority rights than the secularist political elite had been. Internationally, Turkey became the prime example to show that Islam and liberal democracy were compatible.

Even in those early years, however, there were some reasons to question Erdoğan's commitment to democracy. In a famous statement, Erdoğan once observed that democracy was not an aim in itself but a useful vehicle, which one could ride as long as it took him in the desired direction

⁸ Hakan Yavuz, "The matrix of modern Turkish Islamic movements: the Naqshbandi order." In *Naqshbandis in Western and Central Asia*, edited by Elisabeth Özdalga, 129-146. Istanbul: Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, 1999.

⁹ The Kurds, who are concentrated in the less developed Eastern part of Turkey, constitute almost 20 per cent of the population. Since 1984 a radical Kurdish political movement, the PKK, had been carrying out a guerrilla war against the Turkish armed forces. The Alevis are a heterodox religious minority (15 – 20 per cent of the population) who were often oppressed by the state and suffered violence from their Sunni neighbours.

and from which he could step down when a change of direction was needed. That point was reached after the first ten years in power, when he ran into the first broad opposition to his policies: mass protest against a construction project in Istanbul, criticism from former allies for rampant corruption and for his policies towards Syria and ISIS, challenges from the pro-Kurdish party HDP, and a break with the Gülen movement that had long been a strong ally and that was entrenched in the police force and the judiciary. An attempted military coup in July 2016, for which Erdoğan and his circle blamed the Gülen movement, was the last straw. Erdoğan attacked and attempted to politically destroy all his critics, including many of the founding members of his own political party and other former collaborators.

His rule became increasingly authoritarian and paranoid, mistrusting even his closest former allies and surrounding himself with people who unquestioningly followed his every whim. Every independent institution – the press, the judiciary, the universities, civil society organizations – was seen as an enemy and thoroughly purged. Tens of thousands of police officers, judges, public prosecutors, school and university teachers, other civil servants, and journalists lost their jobs; many of them were put in jail on trumped up charges. Within a few years' time, all independent newspapers and television stations were either closed down or placed under control of caretakers appointed by Erdoğan. Something similar happened to the law courts, the police force, the universities and even the banking sector. Elected mayors of Kurdish cities unceremoniously removed from their offices and replaced by centrally appointed caretakers.

Erdoğan spoke of all these measures as “the people” taking control of institutions that had been usurped by a corrupt elite and enemies of the people. He had always communicated with his supporters through televised addresses at mass meetings, and he made his union with “the people” his chief claim to legitimacy. He had lost the support of many segments of society that had backed him in the first ten years and came to rely more and more on the traditionalist conservative core of supporters who kept voting for him and taking part in his mass meetings. In the night of the failed coup, after an alleged attempt to assassinate him, he sought to mobilize his followers directly by speaking to them on FaceTime. Hours later, his voice was further amplified when the loudspeakers of major mosques called upon the people to take to the streets and fight the military involved in the coup. His public discourse not only became more and more anti-elite, identifying judges and officers and professors as enemies of the people, but also stridently anti-pluralist. Kurds and Alevis and Christian minorities no longer were seen as partners in dialogue but as real or potential enemies against

whom the true Turkish people were mobilized in the name of Islam and Turkish nationalism.¹⁰

In this turn to populism, Erdoğan has retained the support of his core constituency, conservative religious and nationalist circles (besides those sections of the business world that benefit from his policies). These are by and large traditionalist Muslims. Turkey has a large number of Sufi orders and similar *jama`at*, and with the exception of the now disgraced Gülen community, all these *tarikats* and *jama`ats* continue to give their support to Erdoğan and receive various forms of reward in return. Traditionalist Islam, neoliberal economic policies, and Erdoğan's populist style of politics appear to go well together.

As criticism of Erdoğan in Turkey and abroad increased, an activist minority of his followers turned to violence against the "enemies and traitors" of the true Turkish Muslim people: Kurds, Alevis, Gülen followers, critical journalists. Some of the violence is probably spontaneous, but some of it appears incited directly by Erdoğan's incendiary speeches and articles in the pro-Erdoğan press. Moreover, Erdoğan has a private army that is personally loyal to him, established by a retired officer turned defense contractor, which has been taking part in various military actions against Kurds and other enemies.¹¹ Erdoğan's populist style has become increasingly divisive, alienating large parts of the population.

Who are Indonesia's Islamic Populists?

During the Reformasi period following the fall of the Suharto regime, a wide variety of new Islamic movements, some of which had previously existed underground, took up prominent positions in the public sphere. Several of them were the Indonesian branches of transnational Islamic movements, such as the PK/PKS (affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood),

¹⁰ On the rapid turn to populism in Erdoğan's second decade, see Hakan Yavuz & Ahmet Erdi Ozturk (eds), *Erdoğan's Turkey*, Special Issue of *Middle East Critique*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (2020), especially the guest editors' introduction and Fumiko Sawae, "Populism and the Politics of Belonging in Erdoğan's Turkey," *Middle East Critique* 29(3), 259-273. doi: 10.1080/19436149.2020.1770443.

¹¹ Hay Eytan Cohen Yanarocak and Jonathan Spyer, "Turkish militias and proxies." *Trends Research and Advisory*. Abu Dhabi, 2021, <https://trendsresearch.org/insight/turkish-militias-and-proxies/>; "Despite his tone of reconciliation, Erdogan remains a populist with a radical ideology", *The Economic Times (India)*, 11 Februari 2021, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/view-despite-his-tone-of-reconciliation-erdogan-remains-a-populist-with-a-radical-ideology/articleshow/80849104.cms>.

the HTI (the Indonesian chapter of the Hizb ut-Tahrir), Jamaat Tabligh or the Salafi da'wa (more loosely affiliated with Salafi groups in the Gulf states). Others were largely homegrown though influenced by ideas and political activism elsewhere in the Muslim world. These included the various new incarnations of the Darul Islam, such as Jamaah Islamiyah, Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia, and Hidayatullah, as well as a new group that emerged from the volunteer militias and vigilante groups that formed in the chaotic early days of Reformasi, the Forum Pembela Islam.

These movements were quite different from one another, both in religious ideology and in form of organization, but they had in common that they represented fierce competition to the established Muslim mass organizations, NU and Muhammadiyah, and recruited members among the younger members of families affiliated with these “national” Muslim associations. There were a few cases in which Salafis gained control of neighbourhood mosques, PK/PKS activists took over a Muhammadiyah mosque or school, and the HTI succeeded in influencing kiai who were nominally affiliated with the NU. This was widely perceived as an assault or attempt at infiltration of the established national associations by foreign-inspired transnational movements. The people who perceived those movements as a threat often tended to lump them all together under a single label such as “transnational,” “Salafi” or “striving for an Islamic state,” without paying attention to the vast differences between the various movements.¹²

All these movements are to some degree critical of the established Muslim organizations and demand a high degree of commitment and participation from their members. They tend, moreover, to reject religious pluralism and to oppose especially the idea of minority rights for “deviant”

¹² Two influential books about the threat to “moderate Islam” that these movements represented refrained from taking account of the major differences in ideology, strategy and organization between them, suggesting that they were all Salafi or that they all aspired to establish an Islamic state – two aspects that in practice go rarely together: Jamhari and Jajang Jahroni (eds), *Gerakan Salafi Radikal di Indonesia*. Jakarta: PT. RajaGrafindo Persada, 2004; Abdurrahman Wahid (ed.), *Ilusi Negara Islam. Ekspansi Gerakan Islam Transnasional di Indonesia*. Jakarta: The Wahid Institute, Gerakan Bhinneka Tunggal Ika & Maarif Institute, 2009. The same neglect of major differences between the various movements mars two otherwise perceptive studies: John T. Sidel, *Riots, Pogroms, Jihad: Religious Violence in Indonesia*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006, and Vedi R. Hadiz, *Islamic Populism in Indonesia and the Middle East*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. For an overview that does attempt to distinguish between the different ideologies of all those movements see Martin van Bruinessen, “Overview of Muslim Organizations, Associations and Movements in Indonesia,” in Martin van Bruinessen (ed.), *Contemporary Developments in Indonesian Islam: Explaining the “Conservative Turn,”* pp. 21-59. Singapore: ISEAS, 2013.

sects in Islam. It may therefore be tempting to call them all “populist,” but in my opinion that would obscure more than it explains. As argued above, an important aspect of populism is the concept of the pure, true people in whose name the populist leader speaks and confronts the corrupt elite. In most of these movements the contrast of the people and the elite is not the dominant idea, although some have at times been involved in actions and demonstrations that were arguably populist in nature, such as the series of “212” actions. But it is important to note that in those same actions, members of NU and Muhammadiyah were also involved, against the wishes of the national boards of these associations.

Secular and Islamic Populism in the Struggle for Independence and During the Old Order

For clearer examples of Islamic (and secular) populism in Indonesia, it is perhaps instructive to turn to the period of the struggle for Independence. Both Sukarno and Kartosuwirjo were leaders who were inclined towards populism, deriving their power and influence from direct connections with their followers rather than from existing institutions. In the case of Sukarno, this inclination was initially balanced by Hatta, who was a man of institutions and the formal rules of liberal democracy. Sukarno’s populism was most pronounced in the years of Guided Democracy, when he had suppressed all opposition and replaced representative institutions by a putative direct link between himself and the common people, of whom he claimed to be the personification. His idea of Marhaenism, which denied major class divisions among the common people, was a populist alternative to the class-based discourse of the Communists and the Liberalism of the middle classes. In his conception of NASAKOM, ideological differences were overcome in the name of the undivided true people in whose name he spoke. Sukarno spoke of foreign and internal enemies of the people, with whom he sought confrontation: Imperialism and Neocolonialism, aided by traitors from within belonging to the economic and political elite (mainly the leaders of Masyumi and especially the PSI).

Kartosuwirjo had, like Sukarno, come up through established political organizations, the Sarekat Islam and Masyumi in his case. In the years of the Independence struggle he frequently clashed with other nationalist leaders over his uncompromising attitude towards negotiated agreements with the Dutch colonial forces. His final break with the Republican government occurred in January 1948 after the Renville agreement, according to which Republican forces had to withdraw from West Java to Central Java. Kartosuwirjo and his armed men remained in the parts of West Java where they had a strong following among the population, to defend the *umat Islam*

against the external and internal enemies: the Dutch as well as the Indonesian left. For a decade and a half, until his final capture in 1962, he remained in opposition to Indonesia's new elite, in the name of the true people, the *umat Islam Indonesia*.

The Darul Islam was an armed movement for the establishment of an Islamic state; it was not aiming to transform the Republic of Indonesia from within but rather to replace it. Its claim to legitimacy was based in Kartosuwirjo's interpretation of Islam rather than the popular will. This makes it rather different from the various populist movements that were briefly discussed in the introduction. But if Holk Dengel's conclusions from interviews and Darul Islam documents are correct, Kartosuwirjo saw himself not only as implementing Islam but as speaking for the Muslim people of West Java against the unprincipled political elite.¹³ He rejected the very idea of democracy, liberal as well as guided, and had no trust in the existing political parties or other institutions. His idea of the Islamic state did not accommodate any form of pluralism; no other ideologies or different interpretations of Islam were acceptable. In these respects he resembled other populist leaders.

Islamic Populism Under the New Order

If we take anti-elitism and anti-pluralism to be the core of populism, Indonesia's New Order history offers some interesting examples. In the mid-1980s, there was considerable mobilization of protest against Suharto's policies of depoliticizing Islam. The religious establishment was criticized for betraying religious principles: in the case of the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) the criticism concerned it is delivering fatwas that supported controversial government policies (family planning, a sports toto that many people considered as gambling), whereas the boards of NU and Muhammadiyah were blamed for accepting Pancasila as their sole ideological foundation (*azas tunggal*). Radical preachers fanned people's anger, which erupted in the mass protests of 12 September 1984 in Tanjung Priok. The protest was directed against the Suharto regime and not against the ulama that supported it, but it had clearly the aspect of the people versus the elite. In the course of the protests, moreover, a Chinese family

¹³ See Chapter 3 of Holk H. Dengel, *Darul-Islam. Kartosuwirjos Kampf um einen islamischen Staat in Indonesien*. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1986, translated into Indonesian as *Darul Islam dan Kartosuwiryo : Angan-angan yang Gagal*. Jakarta : Pustaka Sinar Harapan, 2011.

(who happened to be Muslim) was killed, showing the anti-minority sentiment of the mobilized mass.¹⁴

In the Tanjung Priok events, there was a clear leader, the charismatic businessman and mosque administrator Amir Biki (who was shot dead by the military in the event). He was an informal leader of the neighbourhood but did not appear to have wider ambitions and does not fit the profile of a populist leader. The larger protest movement did not have a sole leader speaking in the name of all; there were moral authorities such as M. Natsir, A.M. Fatwa and H.R. Dharsono who gave voice to the widely felt anger and disaffection but whose role in the protest movement remained unclear. It was popular preachers such as Abdul Qodir Djaelani, M. Nashir, Usman al-Hamidy, Mawardi Noer and Syarifin Maloko who were closer to the grassroots and played a part in mobilizing protest. Cassette recordings distributed clandestinely broadened their audience, but the strict surveillance by the New Order authorities prevented a broad public protest movement emerging.

My reason for highlighting this moment of anti-New Order protest as a case of populist mobilization is the strict distinction made by its various actors between the elite – which included the New Order military and political establishment but also the leadership of NU and Muhammadiyah that accommodated with them – and the “true” Muslims, who were marginalized politically and economically. The rejection of Pancasila was an act of anti-pluralism: for the protesters, Pancasila stood for Suharto’s patronage of Kebatinan and favouring of Catholics and Chinese over “true” Muslims. The voices of protest operated outside the established channels, not trusting any New Order institution. One aspect of populism was missing however: there were no proposals of how “the people” or the “true Muslims” might change society or the polity; vague proposals involving the Shariah did not invoke the people but only some abstract concept of Islam.

¹⁴ A good overview of the events, based on the press coverage at the time and some documentation from Muslim activist sources, was given in Tapol, *Indonesia: Muslims on trial*. London: Tapol/Indonesian Human Rights Campaign, 1987. For a more recent overview, see the Wikipedia article, https://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peristiwa_Tanjung_Priok. I discussed the background of the Tanjung Priok affair and the broader anti-government sentiment in Muslim circles, in Martin van Bruinessen, “Islamic State or State Islam? Fifty Years of State-Islam Relations in Indonesia.” In *Indonesien am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts*, edited by Ingrid Wessel, pp. 19-34. Hamburg: Abera-Verlag, 1996, translated as “Negara Islam atau Islam Negeri? Lima Puluh Tahun Hubungan Islam-Negara di Indonesia.” In Martin van Bruinessen, *Rakyat Kecil, Islam dan Politik*, pp. 223-260. Yogyakarta: Gading, 2013.

The anti-elite protest cut right through the established Muslim associations. Within NU, for instance, the Jakarta and South Sulawesi branches were fiercely critical of the central board and especially of Abdurrahman Wahid, whom they perceived as a traitor to the struggle for Islam and collaborator with the regime and with non-Muslims. Commitment to pluralism and anti-pluralism have continued to divide the NU as well as Muhammadiyah.

In this respect the evolution of the MUI after the fall of Suharto is of some interest. In the 1980s, when it was a state-appointed body whose members were selected by the regime from the various Muslim association, the MUI was repeatedly the object of populist protest. In the Reformasi period, however, the MUI declared itself the “servant of the Muslim people” (*khadim al-ummah*) instead of “servant of the government” (*khadim al-hukumah*) – note the populist terminology – and henceforth held periodical congresses to elect its officers and decide on policy issues. The well-known fatwas adopted by the MUI’s 2005 congress, in which it firmly rejected secularism, pluralism and religious liberalism, show that populist voices had taken control of the Majelis. I have written about these fatwas previously as part of what I called a “conservative turn” in Indonesian Islam.¹⁵ This does not mean that I consider “populist” and “conservative” as interchangeable terms, but it is certainly the case that Indonesia’s populist Muslim movements and their leaders tend to be culturally conservative, anti-liberal and certainly anti-pluralist. Such conservatism is not unique to the populists, however; we also find it entrenched among members of the elite of the established Muslim associations.

Was the Anti-Ahok Mobilization of 2016-17 Populist?

The massive demonstrations against Jakarta’s governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok) in late 2016 and early 2017, which indirectly also targeted the incumbent President Jokowi, were no doubt the largest and most successful case of mass mobilization in the name of Islam in recent years. I believe that when people speak of Islamic populism in Indonesia, it is especially these demonstrations and the main organizations behind them that they have in mind.¹⁶ Deliberately manipulated religious emotions

¹⁵ Bruinessen, *Contemporary Developments in Indonesian Islam*, pp. 3-7.

¹⁶ Serious analysts such as Marcus Mietzner and Burhanuddin Muhtadi use the term populist quite freely and without further explanation in their analyses of these events: Marcus Mietzner and Burhanuddin Muhtadi. 2018. "Explaining the 2016 Islamist Mobilisation in Indonesia: Religious Intolerance, Militant Groups and the Politics of Accommodation." *Asian Studies Review* 42(3), 2018, 479-497, doi 10.1080/10357823.2018.1473335; Marcus Mietzner, 2018. "Fighting Illiberalism with

played perhaps a decisive part in the mobilization: people were led to believe that the outspoken and blunt Chinese Christian governor had deliberately insulted Muslims and Islam in a speech during the campaign for his re-election. Social media had been instrumental in inciting outrage by spreading an edited recording of Ahok's speech and amplifying the voices of those who claimed Islam had been insulted. There were outbursts of anti-Chinese resentment but the anti-elitism of the demonstrations was less explicit: it was Ahok and his supporters who were targeted (and thereby implicitly Jokowi, whose Islamic credentials were weak and who was rumoured to be part Chinese or from a communist family himself).

There are good reasons to interpret the events as part of an intra-elite struggle that was fought out on the street by activists who may not have been aware of the interests behind the mobilization.¹⁷ For the participants, however, dismay with the non-Muslim, secular and not-so-good-Muslim sections of the elite was a clear motivating factor, and the movement's various spokespersons claimed their aim was to replace that "morally corrupt" elite by one of good Muslims. Members of the (Muslim) elite and more marginal actors collaborated to mobilize masses in the pursuit of that goal. The established Muslim associations were not directly involved (although many of their members were); the boards of Muhammadiyah and NU informed their members that they were free to join or not to join but only as individuals, not as representatives of their associations.

The actual organizers, with a few exceptions, were rather marginal to the social and political system. For legitimation they needed an authoritative statement that Ahok had committed a punishable offence, which was provided by a letter written by the head of the MUI, KH. Ma'ruf Amin (who also was the Rais Aam of NU at that time). Dubbing the letter a fatwa, the organizers could claim that they were acting to implement the MUI's fatwa. A lower ranking officer of the MUI, Bachtiar Nasir, became one of the more prominent organizers. Nasir was a relatively young graduate of the famous pesantren of Gontor and the Islamic University of Medina and the chairman of the alumni associations of both institutions as well as until recently a popular television preacher. His networks served him well in the

Illiberalism: Islamist Populism and Democratic Deconsolidation in Indonesia." *Pacific Affairs* 91(2), 2018, 261-282. doi: 10.5509/2018912261.

¹⁷ This is the argument put forward in Vedi R. Hadiz and Richard Robison, "Competing populisms in post-authoritarian Indonesia," *International Political Science Review* 38(4), 2017, 488-502. They stress that "populist rhetoric and ideas have become part of struggles for power within oligarchy itself and are vehicles for the entry of new players into its ranks" (489).

mobilization.¹⁸ Another graduate of Medina Islamic University who played a highly visible part, Zaitun Rasmin, commanded a similar network among the educated middle class of a puritan Muslim persuasion, through the Salafi association Wahdah Islamiyah. Neither Nasir nor Rasmin had previously been involved in oppositional politics or called for an Islamic state or the formalization of Islamic law. Their focus was on the Islamization of the individual's everyday life.

The “muscle” of the protest movement was provided by two organizations with a longer history of activism, the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) and the Indonesian Hizb ut-Tahrir (HTI), or rather the action front led by the former HTI organizer Muhammad Al-Khaththath, Forum Umat Islam (FUI). Al-Khaththath had earlier been expelled from the HTI by the Hizb ut-Tahrir's international leadership for his involvement in hardline political activism but he probably could still count on the loyalty of old comrades. The degree of involvement of the official leadership of HTI is not clear, but the flags of the organization were very prominently present in the demonstrations. The other major Islamist party, PKS, refrained from open involvement – it was on its way to full incorporation in the political establishment, whereas the organizers of the protest movement all rejected liberal democracy.

The most visible leader in the mobilization was the FPI's founder and “Grand Imam” (Imam Besar), Habib Rizieq Syihab, whom his followers hoped to grow into the Grand Imam of the entire nation. Among the Islamist movements that emerged in the post-Suharto years, the FPI is an exception in that it is not a transnational movement but one with strong roots in local political conditions and local culture, including traditionalist Islam and the Betawi veneration of the *haba'ib*, the Arabs claiming descent from the Prophet. Originating as a vigilante group with military connections, taking care of security and morality in Jakarta's rough districts, forcing bars and night clubs to close, they came to use street politics as a way of enforcing moral norms where they found the government failing. In actions against the publisher of the Indonesian *Playboy* and against the “deviant sect” of the Ahmadiyah they deployed threats of violence, or actual violence, to suppress the magazine and the sect, with the utmost disregard for the laws protecting them. Besides these open challenges to the liberal democratic order, FPI improved its credibility at the grassroots by providing charitable support in poor neighbourhoods at times of floods and other disasters.

¹⁸ See the interview with Bachtiar Nasir and information on his networks in the excellent IPAC report “After Ahok: The Islamist Agenda in Indonesia.” IPAC Report No. 44, 6 April 2018.

Among the various activist groups and movements, FPI is undoubtedly the one whose discourse and style of political action are most clearly populist. Its anti-elitism and anti-pluralism are very outspoken and the “defence of Islam” in its name appeals to the core Islamic beliefs of common people that are believed to be under threat from elite liberal Islam, secularism, other religions, deviant sects and Western influences. The FPI claims it is not opposed to the established Muslim associations NU and Muhammadiyah but accuses them of carrying only the first half of the obligation to “command good and forbid evil” (*amr ma’ruf, nahy munkar*).¹⁹ Executing the second half of this obligation is the task the FPI has taken upon itself, which inevitably implies a challenge to the established rule of law. The FPI’s street politics are an explicit rejection of the representative politics of liberal democracy. The FPI acts in the name of the true Muslim people, especially the economically marginalized, who cling to a strict understanding of Islam, against the wealthy and powerful sinners and all who are morally or religiously deviant. Habib Rizieq is seen as the voice of these people, who puts into words what they feel and think and who leads them to action.²⁰

Conclusion

In this conclusion I do revisit the question does populism represent a threat to traditionalist Islam?

Several developments of the past two decades have involved major shifts in the pattern of religious authority in Indonesia, challenging established institutions and established authorities. These developments were compatible with populist mobilization but not identical with it.

One of these developments was the explosive growth of the social media, which completely changed the method and style of communication of religious messages. In the 1980s there were radio speakers who reached an audience of possibly hundreds of thousands, such as Kosim Nurzеха; in the

¹⁹ See Habib Rizieq’s statement in Akip Purnomo, *FPI disalahpahami*. Jakarta: Penerbit Mediatama Indonesia, 2003, pp. 98-102.

²⁰ There are interesting observations on the social background of FPI activists and activities in Al-Zastrouw Ng., *Gerakan Islam Simbolik. Politik Kepentingan FPI*. Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2006, and Andri Rosadi, *Hitam Putih FPI: Mengungkap Rahasia-Rahasia Mencengangkan Ormas Keagamaan Paling Kontroversial*. Nun Publisher, 2008. See also Ian Wilson, “Resisting Democracy: Front Pembela Islam and Indonesia’s 2014 Elections,” *ISEAS Perspective* 10, Singapore, 2014, 1-7, and Ian Wilson, “Morality racketeering: vigilantism and populist Islamic militancy in Indonesia,” in *The Transformation of Islamic Politics in the Middle East and Asia*, ed. K.B. Teik, Vedi R. Hadiz and Y. Nakanishi, pp. 248-274. Houndsville: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

1990s the popular preacher Zainuddin MZ addressed people in mass meetings and reached many more through his cassette recordings. These popular preachers reached much larger audiences than the most popular muballighs of NU or Muhammadiyah. Around the turn of the millennium Aa Gym made a revolutionary change with his SMS messages, which established a more direct, more personal relationship between himself and his followers (although as in radio and television sermons, the communication remained vertical and only went in one direction). Since SMS messages are necessarily extremely short, the medium imposed simplification of the religious content. The Internet, however, brought new possibilities, from which especially the youngest preachers benefited. YouTube and Instagram allowed the most popular of them to reach millions of viewers (and make a lot of money) with sermons that can last over an hour and may contain complex messages. There is a large variety of popular online preachers, from Salafis such as Khalid Basalamah and traditionalists such as Abdul Shomad to the cool urban types of the Bandung-based Pemuda Hijrah such as Hanan Attaki.²¹ The earlier preachers were commonly referred to by the honorific title “kiai haji” (KH.) before their names; the current Internet-based preachers are typically called “ustad” and many cultivate the image of being available as personal guides to their numerous followers. The more traditional authorities of NU and Muhammadiyah find it hard to compete with these popular *ustad*, and the younger generation now growing up is much more influenced by these media preachers than by learned ulama and kiai. WhatsApp groups and the like appear to be more effective in shaping religious attitudes than more traditional study circles (*halqah*).

Another relevant development is the emergence of new Islamic movements that was discussed above. Some all of these movements are transnational and answer to a leadership that is based abroad; others, such as FPI and Hidayatullah, are homegrown but show great interest in Islamic issues and Muslim struggles all over the world. The cadre training of all these movements is significantly different from that in the established Indonesian Muslim associations; instead of ke-NU-an and ke-Muhammadiyah-an a whole range of different issues are discussed and

²¹ Martin Slama, "A subtle economy of time: Social media and the transformation of Indonesia's Islamic preacher economy," *Economic Anthropology* 4(1), 2017, 94-106; Hamdani, "New religious preacher in the changing religious authority: the offline and online preacher of Abdul Shomad," in *The New Santri: Challenges to Traditional Religious Authority in Indonesia*, ed. Norshahril Saat and Ahmad Najib Burhani, pp. 258-277. Singapore: ISEAS, 2020; Quinton Temby, "Shariah, dakwah, and rock 'n' roll: Pemuda Hijrah in Bandung," *New Mandala* 30 June, 2018, 2018, <https://www.newmandala.org/shariah-dakwah-rock-n-roll-pemuda-hijrah-bandung/>.

different books studied – and many young people appear to find this curriculum more interesting. Satellite television and the Internet have speeded up international communications and made much more detailed knowledge of events and developments elsewhere in the world available, which strengthened the international orientation of the new Islamic movements.

The rapid democratization of Indonesia in the Reformasi period is a third relevant development. The Muhammadiyah and the NU were directly involved in this process, spawning political parties that appealed to (parts of) their constituencies while de facto endorsing political and religious pluralism. Through their participation in the political system the established Muslim associations legitimized liberal democracy and implicitly pluralism. Most of the new Islamic movements, on the other hand, vocally rejected liberal democracy as incompatible with their vision of Islam. (The PKS is an interesting exception among the new religious movements: coming from an ideological tradition that rejected liberal democracy in favour of an Islamic state based on divine sovereignty, it showed unexpected pragmatism and gradually adapted to the existing system.)

The liberalization of the party system and reforms of the legal system affected the political and economic elite only to a limited extent. A part of the New Order elite had to take a step backward for a few years and some new members joined the power elite, but there were no major shifts in the power structure and many of the key players remained in place. There were waves of populist mobilization both secular and Islamic, directed in part against sections of the elite and supported if not organized by rival sections. The rise of new political parties did not bring about a much broader political participation; trust in parliament and the government, which was high in the hopeful early days of Reformasi, gradually declined as more and more people were disappointed in the performance of government institutions. This opened the space for populist mobilization, which became a major factor influencing government policies under President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) and, in a different way, under Jokowi. SBY, who did not have strong Islamic credentials, allowed himself to be pressured by Islamist populist mobilization (against religious minorities, against liberal Islamic views).²² Jokowi, with equally weak Islamic credentials, was himself threatened indirectly by the anti-Ahok mobilization, and responded with a combination of repression (banning HTI, though it was not the major

²² Robin Bush, "Religious politics and minority rights during the Yudhoyono presidency," in *The Yudhoyono Presidency: Indonesia's Decade of Stability and Stagnation*, ed. Edward Aspinall, Marcus Mietzner and Dirk Tomsa, pp. 239-257. Singapore: ISEAS, 2015.

organizer of the mobilization) and co-optation, embracing NU as a major partner in his second presidential period.

As Jokowi's partner, NU (or the faction within NU that opted to align with Jokowi) plays a legitimating role as an antidote to populist anti-government mobilization. The concept of "Islam Nusantara," which had been around in NU at least since the 2015 Jombang congress and was presumably a more tolerant and open-minded alternative to the Arab Islam attributed to the transnational movements, received strong endorsement from the government. This placed the NU increasingly in a position of on the one hand calling for tolerance towards religious minorities while on the other hand supporting heavy-handed suppression of Islamist groups – an attitude that Greg Fealy has appropriately called "repressive pluralism."²³

In politics, therefore, the NU has aligned itself against the Islamist movements, some of which have been involved in populist agitation. As religious authorities, the NU's kiai have experienced increasing rivalry from a broad range of highly mediated young *ustad*, many of whom are more or less affiliated with the new Islamist movements and whose use of social media resembles populist mobilization and may in fact have played a part in several cases of actual populist mobilization.

It would, however, be wrong to conclude from this that Islamic traditionalism, as represented by the NU, is systematically in conflict with Islamic populism. As argued above, many of the participants in the anti-Ahok movement and other cases of populist mobilization were in fact traditionalists, and within the NU there have long been many who were inclined to populism. The pluralism and tolerance of which many young NU activists are proud has always been the attitude of only a small section of the NU elite, which gained dominance in the Gus Dur years. Among the rank-and-file as well as within the elite, there have been many others who fiercely opposed this liberal elite. The opposition to Gus Dur of the Jakarta and South Sulawesi branches, as well as the later NU Garis Lurus movement may well be considered as populist opposition within the association against the "structural" NU.

²³ Greg Fealy, "Jokowi in the Covid-19 Era: Repressive Pluralism, Dynasticism and the Overbearing State," *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies* 56(3), 2020, 301-323. Fealy's colleague at the Australian National University, Marcus Mietzner, went even further and argued, on the basis of opinion surveys, that the NU was not the beacon of religious tolerance and pluralism that its leaders claimed it to be: Marcus Mietzner and Burhanuddin Muhtadi, "The Myth of Pluralism: Nahdlatul Ulama and the Politics of Religious Tolerance in Indonesia," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 42(1), 2020, 58-84.

Instead of a struggle between traditionalist Islam and Islamic populism, therefore, I believe it is more correct to speak of populist forces within traditionalist Islam. There is populist opposition within NU and, even more threatening, there are populist traditionalist leaders outside the association who strongly appeal to the community of *Nahdliyyin* (NU followers). Such men as Habib Rizieq Syihab and Ustad Abdul Shomad may be more popular and have more authority among the rank-and-file of the NU than most of the *kiai*. Salafi preachers, on the other hand, challenge the authority of the *kiai* by their different styles of religious reasoning and teaching but most Salafis refrain from involvement in politics or speaking in the name of the people. Salafism no doubt is a threat to traditionalist Islam, but it is not populism.

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