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Dealing with Difference/Antagonism: Pancasila in the Post-Suharto Indonesia

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Background

This study is an exploration of the interpretations and practices of Pancasila—a state ideology—in post-Suharto Indonesia. With the end of Suharto’s authoritarian rule, the question of how Indonesia deals with political antagonism and differences poses an important challenge for the very fabric of its newly democratic political system. Antagonism as negativity, Chantal Mouffe once suggests, is “constitutive and can never be overcome,” while the idea of antagonism also refers to the existence of conflicts for which there are no rational solutions (Mouffe, 2013).

As an entry point to understand how the country will come to grips with such antagonism and differences, my study will deal with these two competing forces that have dominated the Indonesian political landscape. These competing forces are the tensions and competition between “secular nationalists” and “Islamic fundamentalism or radical Islam.” Assuming that the interpretations and practices of Pancasila in post-Suharto Indonesia provide a good starting point to further explore how difference and political antagonism are being dealt with in a country like Indonesia, this research will address the following key question: how and why has Pancasila been re-interpreted and developed by the secular nationalists in response to radical Islam in post-Suharto Indonesia? My preliminary argument is that while the secular nationalist attitudes have focused on the deployment of the Pancasila, their responses to radical Islam have never been
homogenous, but are varied in accordance with their perceived democratic rules and practices as well as their different ideological orientations.

**Research Aims and Objectives**

This study is an attempt to analyze the normative and empirical aspects of Pancasila as a state ideology in post-Suharto Indonesia through the lens of secular nationalism in its encounters with radical Islam in Indonesia. In particular, it will critically interrogate the practices and interpretations of Pancasila among secular nationalists after the end of Suharto’s authoritarian rule and their response to radical Islam. The underlying issues and concerns of the radical Islamists have to do with the notion that as a state ideology or “dasar negara,” one of the implications of Pancasila is that Islam is only one of many tolerated religious streams with no legitimate claim to exclusivity (cf. Weatherbee, 1985: 188; cf. Purdy 1982). However, the radical Islamist position would deny a place for Islam under the banner of Pancasila and argue against Pancasila (including pluralism, liberalism and democracy) for the superiority of Islamic Sha’riah.

In order to address this conflict, the normative theoretical contributions found in the tradition of political theory and philosophy provide a useful handle. It will be demonstrated that Pancasila is interpreted and theoretically developed in two different ways: on the one hand, as communitarian, collectivist ideology, and on the other hand, as a liberal ideology. It should be noted, however, that many scholars see the Pancasila state not as liberal but instead as a communitarian, collectivist kind of conception (cf. Chua 1993; Fogg 2010; Antlov 2000; Kim 1998; Menchik 2011: 2013; Intan 2004; Bourchier 2001: 1997).
Following in the steps of post-structuralists such as Chantal Mouffe this study will put forth an alternative argument on the Indonesian secular nationalists’ response to radical Islam and its wider implications, which goes beyond the normalized frameworks of liberalism and communitarianism. This study will, however, also be attentive to, and engage with other approaches including modernization, institutional oriented democratic theories, and social theories as delineated by Heiduk (2012); Bellin (2000); Hadiz (2003); Robison and Hadiz (2005); Weber (2005); and Slater (2006), and the ideological, normative considerations underlying the interpretation and practices of Pancasila evident in the literature.

**Significance**

Using the perspective of the agonistic model, this study will reveal the operations and dimensions of political power. In line with a Foucauldian conception of power, I expect to show that power is not about “attribute” (an ability), but about a relation that is “one that induces effects, especially in the making of human subject and social order” (cited in Brown 2006: 65). According to Foucault, power is not simply wielded by the subjects but is constitutive of them; power “operates in the forms of relations among subjects and is never merely held by them,” and so, power “‘irrigates’ society and is not an object within society…but “travels along threads of discourse by which we are interpellated and which we also speak” (cited in Brown 2006: 69-70). While my case study on Pancasila is aimed at exploring the views and attitudes of Indonesia’s secular nationalists in relation to radical Islam during the post-Suharto era, it is also intended to reveal the operations and dimensions of political power underlying the conflicts between the two groups (secular nationalism and Islamism).
The subjects that are under investigation in this study are the Indonesian secular nationalists. As noted, secular nationalists constitute groups and individuals within Indonesian society. They include selected organizations and individuals involved in the activities of government institutions and civil societies that are concerned with the politics of radical Islam or Islamic fundamentalism. How Pancasila is being interpreted and implemented by the secular nationalists in response to radical Islam is expressed in three categories or variants. The first is “the marginalized, radical secular nationalists.” This category refers to the attitudes of secular nationalists that are mainly anti radical Islam and anti-to all ideas of Islamism. Their ideological orientations are communitarian and republican-oriented, but they may also be aware or unaware of their ideological positions and be blind to the risks of excluding Islamic politics for the sake of the principle of state secularism. The second category is “the mainstream, compromised secular nationalists.” This group is generally unaware of its ideological orientations and does not bother with questions of ideological principles in dealing with radical Islam and the groups of Islamism. Members of the group may have liberal or communitarian orientations, but they are mostly unreflective of their own ideological positions and their attitudes to radical Islam can be opportunistic. This means that they generally compromise their secular principles for the sake of power or other reasons. The last group or category is “the reformist, enlightened secular nationalists.” This group of secular nationalists is aware of and can be thoughtful of their ideological orientations and preferences, which mostly are liberal in orientation. They have a considerable tactical or even strategic calculation in dealing with radical Islam. They do not appear willing to compromise their political principles and show a strong commitment to political transformation and public engagement. It is clear that the above three categories account for the pluralistic identities of the secular nationalist group. Moreover, as the three categories are
composed of the possible varieties of belief systems and emotions that contingently attach to their identities as secular nationalists, the above three categories may constitute a useful analytical framework by which the very ambiguities of secular nationalists’ responses to radical Islam can be understood.

**Methodology and Plan of Research**

This study will utilize primary data as well as extensive secondary data. The secondary data will be mainly drawn from the archival and library research, news media, and other related published and unpublished documents. The data will include information from discussion groups in social media (Internet) that are related with the views and perceptions of Indonesian secular nationalists vis-à-vis radical Islam. The library research in Indonesia will be focused on works related to normative insights of citizenships, nationalism, and democracy, in addition to scholarly publications dealing mainly with such concepts as Pancasila, civil society, tolerance and the political parties’ platforms, policies and strategies. The identification of the subjects for the primary data will also be conducted during the research on the secondary data. The primary data is gathered through the employment of in depth qualitative field interviews and observations. My primary field research will consist of:

1. Interviews with selected leaders of secular nationalist political parties and organizations of civil society and individuals who are concerned with the politics of radical Islam. I will gain detailed information about their views and perceptions of Pancasila in relation to radical Islam in Indonesia. I will conduct both open-ended and structured interviews of these leaders (See Addendum: Sample Interview Questions).
2. Focus group discussions with the representatives of people or activities who are working or are active in the political parties as well as various research centers/institutions and civil society organizations. These discussions will be conducted in order to assess their views and perceptions about radical Islam.

3. Participant observations gained by attending meetings, conferences, and discussions in Indonesia held by secular nationalist groups or individuals during my field research in 2015.

This dissertation consists of five chapters. After an Introduction, chapter 2 will deal with “the marginalized, radical secular nationalist.” In chapter 2, the attitudes of secular nationalists that are anti radical Islam and anti-to the very idea of Islamism are presented while their ideological orientations are evaluated. Chapter 3 will discuss “the mainstream, compromised secular nationalists,” who may be unaware of their ideological orientations or even maybe do not bother by the matter of principles in dealing with radical Islam and the groups of Islamism. Chapter 4 will discuss “the reformist, enlightened secular nationalists” who are the secular nationalists aware of their ideological orientations, and who have a considerable strategic or tactical calculation in dealing with radical Islam. Chapter 5, the concluding chapter, will contain summary and analysis based on previous chapters and indicates which variant of secular nationalists may be most relevant to future political outcomes.
References


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