Productive Intolerance: Godly Nationalism in Indonesia

Jeremy Menchik
Boston University
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JEREMY MENCHIK

International Relations, Boston University

In Islamic jurisprudence one of the duties of the state is hirasatud-din wa siyasatud-dunya: guarding religion and managing the world. Guarding religion from the people who would tarnish, damage, and destroy it. In Indonesia, there is religious freedom but there cannot be freedom to defile religions that are followed by other citizens, either by harassment, undermining doctrine, or through activities that cause social conflict as was done by the deviant sects.

———Maman Abdurrahman, Chair of Persatuan Islam (Persis)

INTRODUCTION

Since the fall of President Soeharto in 1998, Indonesia has played host to a curious form of internecine conflict: Islamist vigilante groups have been attacking members of a small, socially marginal Muslim sect called Ahmadiyah. Ahmadiyah is a controversial sect with followers around the globe. Many Sunni Muslims charge that Ahmadis are not true Muslims due to their belief that their founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, was a prophet. The vigilantes claim that Ahmadiyah is damaging Islam by propagating the belief that another prophet came after Muhammad and have dubbed Ahmadiyah a “deviant sect,” invoking a 1965 presidential decree that demands all Indonesians adhere to one of the six religions sanctioned by the state: Islam,

Acknowledgments: This article is based on two years of field research in Indonesia, from September 2008 to October 2010. Archival material is from the National Library, the National Archive, and the archived publications of the organizations Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, and Persatuan Islam. Ethnographic material is based on personal observation in the 2010 Constitutional Court hearings, interviews, and court transcripts. I gratefully acknowledge support from Fulbright-AMINEF and the Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center at Stanford University, as well as generous feedback from Graham Brown, Donald Emmerson, Greg Fealy, Howard Federspiel, Jeffrey Hadler, Yoshiko Herrera, Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, Rachel Beatty Riedl, Lisa Wedeen, and the anonymous CSSH reviewers. The Constitutional Court hearings would have been less intelligible without the patient guidance of Mark Cammack, Asrul Sani, and Luthfi Widagdo Eddyono. All translations from Indonesian are by the author.

1 Constitutional Court of the Republic of Indonesia, Court Transcript no. 140/puu-vii/2009 Concerning the Examination of Act No. 1 of 1965 Presidential Decree on the Abuse and/or Blasphemy against Religion based on the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia (hereafter “Court transcript”), no. 140/puu-vii/2009, VI, 70–73.
Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. For over ten years, the pillars of Indonesian democracy—the state, the police, and Muslim civil society—have been either unwilling or unable to stop the attacks.

What explains the prolonged violence toward Ahmadiyah? What, if anything, is significant about the targeting of Ahmadiyah members? The leading explanation treats the attacks as a product of democratization, decentralization, and the influence of small but vocal vigilante groups like the Islamic Defender’s Front (FPI) and Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia, who use the issue to gain public support. As the International Crisis Group explained, “With the advent in 2005 of direct local elections including at the district level, hardline groups have found it expedient to lobby locally for policy changes, from banning alcohol to closing Ahmadiyah mosques.”

Human rights advocates have lambasted the state for bowing to pressure from these hardline groups. Against U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s lauding of Indonesia for its democratic transition, longtime human rights advocate Andreas Harsono branded

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2 Indonesian Muslim civil society is rooted in Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, which together run thousands of schools and universities, hundreds of hospitals and clinics, youth organizations, mosques, prayer circles, political parties, and women’s wings, and choose leaders at the national, province, district, village, and neighborhood levels. Of Indonesia’s two hundred million Muslims, 75 percent identify with one or the other. Saiful Mujani and R. William Liddle, “Politics, Islam, and Public Opinion,” Journal of Democracy 15, 1 (2004): 109–23, here 120.


Indonesia “no model for Muslim democracy” due to the state’s unwillingness to protect religious minorities.\textsuperscript{6}

This explanation for intolerance toward Ahmadiyah is consistent with assumptions about the moderate character of Islam in Indonesia and the secular state; scholars have long argued that in contrast to Middle Eastern states, in the world’s largest Muslim-majority country Islamist movements have failed to find a foothold.\textsuperscript{7} For example, the historian Robert Elson asserts that Islam exerted little influence on Indonesian politics before independence in 1945 and thereafter remained “marginalized and relatively unimportant in a political sense” and “greatly overshadowed by a form of political thinking usually called ‘secular nationalism.’”\textsuperscript{8} Yet this assumption is not supported by empirical data. Contemporary surveys with leaders of Muslim civil society suggest that rather than being tolerant toward Ahmadis, an overwhelming majority believes Ahmadis should not be allowed to hold public office, build houses of worship, or teach Islamic studies.\textsuperscript{9} Those same leaders, however, believe that Christians and Hindus should be permitted greater religious and political freedom. Ahmadiyah, it would seem, marks the boundary of Indonesia’s much-lauded “generally tolerant brand of Islam.”\textsuperscript{10}

Nor is intolerance toward Ahmadis a recent by-product of democratization; it preceded the establishment of the state in 1945 and continues to


\textsuperscript{9} In a survey that I conducted in 2010, 75 percent of Muhammadiyah leaders and 59 percent of NU leaders said that no Ahmadiyah member should be allowed to become the mayor in Jakarta. Eighty percent of Muhammadiyah leaders and 67 percent of NU leaders said that Ahmadiyah members should not be allowed to build a house of worship in Jakarta. Eighty-eight percent of Muhammadiyah leaders and 82 percent of NU leaders said that Ahmadiyah members should not be permitted to teach Islamic studies in public schools. Jeremy Menchik, “Tolerance without Liberalism: Islamic Institutions and Political Violence in Twentieth Century Indonesia,” PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2011.

reflect its policies. The first closing of an Ahmadiyah mosque in Indonesia was by order of the Regent of Batavia in 1936. Leading Muslim organizations deemed Ahmadiyah heretical in the 1920s and 1930s, and in 1980 and 2005 the quasi-governmental Indonesian Council of Ulamas (MUI) and its regional bodies issued fatwas against the sect. Municipal and provincial government bans on Ahmadiyah occurred throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. According to the Ministry of Religion (MORA), religion is a privileged category, and syncretic movements like the Javanese kepercayaan and heterodox movements like Ahmadiyah have long been refused recognition. Despite claims to being a “secular democracy,” the state is fully involved in the firm demarcation of religious orthodoxy.

In this essay, I suggest an alternative reading of intolerance of Ahmadiyah by excavating overlooked aspects of the tangled relationship between religion and nationalism. I suggest that the privileging of religious orthodoxy and the truncated pluralism of the Indonesian state constitute a theoretically neglected form of religious nationalism that I dub “godly nationalism.” The term “religious nationalism” is usually invoked as a conceptual placeholder for particular instances of Jewish, Islamic, Hindu, Christian, or Buddhist nationalism. Yet in demanding that citizens believe in God, while being ambivalent as to which path to God they should choose, Indonesia’s brand of nationalism is exclusively religious but not particular.

I theorize godly nationalism as an imagined community bound by a common, orthodox theism and mobilized through the state in cooperation with religious organizations in society. As long as citizens believe in one of the state-sanctioned pathways to God, they become full members of civil society and receive state protection and other benefits of citizenship. Conversely, the advocacy of disbelief is actively discouraged; not only are disbelievers thought incapable of ethical behavior, they are thought to make belief in God more difficult for the rest of society by confusing true beliefs with false ones, propagating falsehoods, and undermining religious education. For a

15 Orthodoxy is locally and temporally defined. Talal Asad, The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam (Washington, D.C.: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1986).
godly nation to endure, it must privilege some beliefs and prosecute acts of
deviance as blasphemy.

Like other forms of nationalism, Indonesia’s godly nationalism is a
product of specific practices; I demonstrate that the persecution of heterodox and
liminal faiths brings together groups that are otherwise at odds due to
differences in religious doctrine, political interests, or economic class. In that
respect, the answer to my question, “What, if anything, is significant about
the targeting of Ahmadis?” is that intolerance and nation building are part of
a mutually constitutive process. The campaign against Ahmadiyah is part of
a broader effort by civil society and the state to constitute the nation through
belief in God. In that respect, contemporary intolerance to Ahmadiyah is
merely the most recent manifestation of a longstanding effort to promote
godly nationalism while dislodging secular or Islamic alternatives.

Indonesia is not the only country to host debates over belief in God, reli-
gious freedom, and blasphemy. In one prominent case, the High Court of Egypt
convicted a professor of Arabic language and literature, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd,
of apostasy on the grounds that he was no longer a Muslim because he sup-
ported liberal ideas. The international human rights community decried the
verdict against Abu Zayd as an affront to freedom of religion, and labeled
his accusers “intellectual terrorists.”16 Such accusations of ideological intol-
erance are often read backward into debates over blasphemy. Yet, focusing on the
ideological origins of intolerance overlooks the productive, community-
forming practices that acts of exclusion make possible. Instead, I suggest that
the debates over blasphemy are an attempt to affirm (by Muslim civil
society) or disrupt (by liberals) norms and laws that help constitute the
nation through belief in God. While highlighting the productive effects of intol-
erance may be normatively discomforting to scholars, ignoring the results of
intolerance means misunderstanding a long-standing and perhaps increasingly
common form of nationalism.

In the next section I describe the trajectory of scholarship on religion and
nationalism to highlight overlooked areas. Two empirical sections on “Pro-
ductive Intolerance” that follow focus on key events in twentieth-century Indo-
nesia to illuminate the coming together that the exclusion of heterodoxy
enables: “Part I” explores primary-source archival material on the history of
Ahmadiyah and its relation to early state formation. “Part II” shows how
godly nationalism was institutionalized in 1965, and then draws upon ethno-
graphic observations from the most important court hearing on religion and
politics during Indonesia’s post-1998 democratic period. I conclude the
article by drawing parallels to other cases and intervening in a recent debate
about religious freedom and imperial intervention.

16 Baber Johansen, “Apostasy as Objective and Depersonalized Fact: Two Recent Egyptian
Studies of nationalism in the postcolonial period overwhelmingly rely on Benedict Anderson’s definition of an “imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”

Anderson argues that beginning with the French Revolution and print-capitalism, groups of people began to see themselves as connected with other people through their linguistic and cultural practices. Nationalism developed slightly differently in postcolonial states: secular schools created an educated indigenous upper class; the census created categories of racial groups with which to organize formal political institutions; maps defined the nation’s political boundaries, along which narratives of conquest and control were woven; and museums manufactured the archaeological truths of the nation.

Anderson’s conception of modern nationalism has been criticized for ignoring religion. In an influential early critique, Peter van der Veer suggested religious practice and discourse may be a constitutive part of national identity rather than epiphenomenal or a smokescreen for hoary political interests. He focused on everyday practices, including conversion, pilgrimages, and the deployment of religious symbols, to argue that the activities that underpin nationalism are dynamic rather than a relic of colonialism.

Since the late 1990s, accounts of religion and nationalism that emphasize hybridity and fluidity have become dominant and, in doing so, have challenged the secularity of core concepts in political theory. Drawing on a comparison of Asian and European nationalism, van der Veer and Hartmut Lehmann suggest that hybridity is not the exception but the norm. Van der Veer moreover suggests that the modern subject is produced alongside the modern public, and both are infused with religion. Likewise, in critiquing the history of nationalism, Partha Chatterjee suggests that classical nationalist historiographies often hide the religious solidarities that underpin national loyalties.

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18 Ibid., 163–85.
While the first generation to rethink religion and nationalism crossed religious lines, the second has drawn its inspiration more from the Muslim world. Talal Asad built on his earlier work on the anthropology of Islam by arguing that the social solidarities of the Muslim umma (community) neither mimic nor compete with nationalism, since the modern community is theologically rather than territorially defined, self-governing rather than unified by an overarching political unit, and produced through embodied ritual rather than the formal institutions of the modern state.23 Asad’s student, Charles Hirshkind, echoed van der Veer in suggesting that the ethical sensibilities cultivated by modern religious movements redefine the boundaries between public and private, religious and secular. In doing so, religious movements return religious authority to the public sphere but do not undermine nationalism.24

Like Hirshkind and van der Veer, Lisa Wedeen focused on everyday practices rather than formal doctrine or nationalist historiography. She argued that nationalism is no more static than any other aspect of culture. Drawing on the synthesis of theological and nationalist imagining in the Yemenese newspaper al-Imān, Wedeen persuasively argued against teleological conceptions of secularism as either following religious nationalism or competing with it.25

In parallel to these advances on Anderson’s conception of nationalism, scholars of Indonesia have developed sophisticated alternative visions. Among the more underappreciated theoretical critiques of Anderson is Michael Laffan’s 2003 book Islamic Nationhood and Colonial Indonesia, which maps the writings of Muslims from Southeast Asia who studied in the Hijaz and Cairo during the late nineteenth century. Once abroad, Laffan found, members of the emergent Indonesian Muslim ecumene felt a heightened sense of belonging to Muslim Southeast Asia, and upon their return their periodicals al-Imam and al-Munir were instrumental in forming a sense of community.26 The subtitle of al-Imam, “The voice of Indies Muslims who love their religion and their homeland,” captures the reformers’ overlapping commitments.27 Rather than working against nationalism, Laffan suggests, Islamic reform played a key role in the imagining of the Indonesian umma.

More recently, Chiara Formichi and Kevin Fogg, though they emphasize the repeated failures of Islamists in national politics since the 1950s, have shown how religious and national commitments can be coterminous. While Elson claims, “Islamist ideas were late in emerging in modern Indonesia, and

26 Michael Laffan, Islamic Nationhood and Colonial Indonesia: The Umma below the Winds (RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 176.
27 Ibid., 18.
long remained marginal to Indonesians’ ideas of what their nation should be and do,” 28 Formichi shows how, in fact, pan-Islamic and then Indonesian Islamic nationalist ideals endured beyond the late colonial period in the writings of the influential leader of *Darul Islam*, Kartosuwiryo. 29 On the grassroots level, Fogg reveals how pious Muslims experienced the 1945 revolution as an explicitly Islamist struggle, even while their leaders in Jakarta were hopelessly fractured by theology, political practice, and an inability to pass their legislative agenda. 30 Fogg, Formichi, and Laffan demonstrate that Islamism was crucial to the coming together of the Indonesian nation, and thus provide a vital historical corrective to Anderson’s vision of the triumph of secular nationalism.

That said, insofar as Fogg, Formichi, and Laffan delegate religious nationalism to the dustbin of history or the geographic and intellectual periphery of national politics, these advances are incomplete. As I will show, Indonesian nationalism continues to be rooted in religious solidarities even while it is not an Islamic state. My argument challenges scholarly conceptions of the triumph of the “secular” state and the failure of its counterpart, the Islamic state, by mapping the genealogy of the godly state and its concurrent practices. 31

As Indonesian politicians often point out, the Pancasila state is not secular. Pancasila is the basis of Indonesian national ideology; its five principles are belief in God, humanitarianism, national unity, social justice, and democracy as expressed through representatives of the people. In the 1950s, both secular nationalists and Islamists saw Pancasila as an alternative to Islamic nationalism. In the 1970s, Soeharto made it the ideological pillar of the regime and forced civil society organizations to pledge their allegiance to it. In the 1980s, opponents of the regime articulated a diverse set of goals employing the language of Pancasila. In a thoughtful text, Douglas Ramage described this hybridity and embraced Pancasila as supportive of nation building and democratization, and a bulwark against an Islamic state. 32 Yet Ramage

ignores the place of heterodox faiths and the inherent limits of tolerance in a state that makes belief in God obligatory while defining religion narrowly. He celebrates the non-Islamic aspect of Pancasila but ignores the non-secular element. Similarly, Saiful Mujani and R. William Liddle tweak the definition of secular actors so as to include those who identify with Pancasila and its demand that adherents possess “belief in the one high God.” Like Ramage’s view, this surprising redefinition is made possible by the endurance of a false binary between Islamic and secular nationalism. Since Pancasila is not Islamic, the reasoning goes, it must be secular.

Luthfi Assyaukanie, however, provides a hint of a middle category by delineating three “models” of state-Islam relations. The first is an Islamic democratic state governed by Islamic law. The second is a secular liberal democratic state. The third model is a religious democratic state. Importantly, in differentiating the religious democratic state from the liberal democratic state, Assyaukanie notes that followers of heterodox faiths are not recognized in the former. Yet Assyaukanie’s sympathies are with the liberals and, as a result, he does not discuss the limits of his third model. This is likely deliberate, since making the state secular and liberal would demand a radical restructuring of Indonesian nationalism.

In what follows, I build on the work of van der Veer, Asad, Wedeen, Laffan, and Assyaukanie to argue that Indonesia contains a form of nationalism that is neither Islamic nor secular, but rather exclusively and assertively religious. Active state support for religion did not die in 1945 with the failure of the Jakarta Charter and the state’s embrace of Pancasila, or in 1952 with the rejection of Islamic law, or in 2002 when the parliament again rejected the incorporation of Islamic law into state law, or with the repeated failures of Islamists in electoral competition despite moderating of their demands. Rather, the privileging of religion is made manifest through state support for religious orthodoxy over liminal and heterodox faiths.

I define godly nationalism as an imagined community bound by a common, orthodox theism and mobilized through the state in cooperation with religious organizations in society. Godly nationalists feel that belief in God is a civic virtue that accrues both individual and social benefits. For individuals, belief in God brings an enlightened understanding of the world that is preferable to premodern beliefs such as animism, heterodox beliefs, or secular worldviews. Individuals who believe in God are seen to be wiser, more compassionate, generous, and tolerant. The archetype of a good citizen is one who believes in God and uses that belief to motivate his or her behavior.

33 Mujani and Liddle, “Muslim Indonesia’s Secular Democracy,” 577–78.
34 Luthfi Assyaukanie, Islam and the Secular State in Indonesia (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009), 155–58.
Likewise, social and political institutions are thought to perform better if individuals working within them believe in God.

While belief in God is a goal for good citizens, it is not necessarily based on coercion. Godly nationalism may be formally established by the state and coercively enforced by the police, bureaucracy, and courts, such as through personal status laws based on religious principles and limits on individual freedom. Alternatively, godly nationalism may be informally policed through social norms, religious organizations, media, and the family. Regardless of the degree to which godly nationalism is enforced, belief in God is seen as a virtue that should be promoted through education, ethical guidance, and social norms. A godly nation limits individual freedoms so as to ensure that disbelievers do not tarnish, damage, or destroy the world’s religions.

Godly nationalism should not be conflated with being compatible with but contrary to secular nationalism, as Hirshkind and Asad contend is the case with religious nationalism. Rather, godly nationalism occupies one middle position between religious and secular nationalism. Nor does this make Indonesia an example of the ambiguity that accompanies modern secularism. In contrast to religious nationalism, godly nationalism is plural; the state promotes belief in God through multiple religions. In contrast to secular nationalism, godly nationalism is predicated on theological rather than geographic or ethnic exclusion; liminal groups, heterodox groups, and nonbelievers are denied the full benefits of citizenship. While Hussein Agrama’s astute reading of Egypt suggests that the blurring of the religious and the secular serves the expanding regulatory capacity of the modern state, I detail an alternative that is not necessarily moving toward either liberal secularism or theocracy. Godly nationalism is also distinct from Robert Bellah’s “civil religion.” The state is not the focus of worship in godly nationalism; it is rather the conduit for religious belief, guiding its citizens toward proper faith and behavior.

In the next section, I delve into key events in the history of religion and politics in Indonesia to flesh out the argument that godly nationalism is an overlooked form of nationalism, in which intolerance toward heterodoxy constitutes the nation. I show that the earliest contacts between Ahmadiyah representatives and Muslim organizations were respectful but soured quickly, culminating in Ahmadiyah’s exclusion from membership in the country’s first important Muslim political coalition. This act of exclusion helped to congeal the fractious Muslim groups and contributed to the institutional foundation for the postcolonial state, thereby demonstrating the productive power of exclusion for generating solidarity in the emergent nation.

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Ahmadiyah is a small Muslim sect that originated in Qadian, South Asia, in the late nineteenth century and spread to Sumatra and Java in the 1920s. The movement’s founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, was a controversial figure who made two claims that ran counter to mainstream Sunni doctrine. First, against the Sunni Muslim belief that the prophet Jesus had not died a natural death but had been taken from the earth by God and would return to earth on Judgment Day, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad held that Jesus had died a natural death and could not return. His second, related claim was that he was the Mahdi, the prophesied messiah of Islam heralding Judgment Day.

From 1923 to 1929, Ahmadiyah and the leading Islamic reform movement, Muhammadiyah, were able to work together based on a shared commitment to Islamic modernism. After 1925, however, Muhammadiyah leaders began to ask whether these two Ahmadiyah beliefs—that Jesus died a natural death and that Ghulam Ahmad was a prophet or “renewer”—were sufficiently deviant to be considered non-Muslim. In 1928 Muhammadiyah’s central board declared that, because Ahmadis believed in a prophet after Muhammad, it would be forbidden to teach the views of Ahmadiyah, and the next year the religious council proclaimed that members of any group that believed in a prophet after Muhammad were unbelievers. After the split, Ahmadis became objects of ridicule and were removed from their positions in Muhammadiyah.


Ichwan notes that a translation and exegesis of the Qur’an by Ahmadi leader Maulvi Muhammad Ali was condemned by Rasyid Ridha as including distorting verses to claim revelation for Ghulam Ahmad and for being a literal translation of a text that should be read in the original Arabic. While the condemnation influenced Muhammadiyah’s break from Ahmadiyah, the translation continues to be used by Indonesian Muslims, and was even approved and certified by the MORA. Moch Nur Ichwan, “Differing Responses to an Ahmadi Translation and Exegesis: The Holy Qur’an in Egypt and Indonesia,” Archipel 62 (2001): 143–61; see also Hadji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah (Hamka), Ajakku (Jakarta: Widjaja, 1982), 137–41.


Another Islamic reform group, Persis, underwent a similar evolution from embracing to repudiating Ahmadiyah. From 1930 into 1931, Persis extolled Ahmadis as leaders of Islamic reform, promoted their founding principles, circulated speeches from the Ahmadiyah Lahore congress, and published letters from Muslims who had been tempted to convert to Christianity but were “reclaimed to Islam” by Ghulam Ahmad. In June 1931, however, Persis leader Ahmad Hassan published a critical study of Ahmadis, which examined whether they believed that Muhammad was the final prophet. Ghulam Ahmad’s claim to prophethood rested on the notion that other prophets could be sent by God to reform religion. Ahmad Hassan followed up by challenging the Ahmadiyah Qadian to three nights of public debate in which he interrogated Ahmadiyah representatives on whether the prophet Jesus had died, and thus whether he could return to earth on Judgment Day. A second round of debates was held in November 1934. Between these two debates, Persis published an open letter to Ahmadiyah leaders, describing its disputes with Ahmadi belief and practice. Persis invited the Ahmadiyah members to read foundational Ahmadiyah texts and see the teachings, and offered to visit Ahmadis’ homes. The March 1934 edition of Pembela Islam featured articles in which the beliefs of Ahmadiyah were derided, not merely categorized as outside mainstream belief. An article on the opposite page told why Ahmadiyah doctrine betrays the pillars of Islam and declared its fundamental beliefs erroneous. This marked the first instance when Ahmadiyah was

47 Federspiel, Islam and Ideology, 151–54.
designated deviant (aliran sesat) by an Islamic organization. In later years the Indonesian state would echo this designation.

Designating Ahmadiyah a deviant sect was the first step toward excluding its members from Muslim civil society. In various articles in 1936, the Persis magazine Al-Lisaan labeled Ahmadiyah followers apostates, non-Muslims, and crazy, and repeatedly called Ghulam Ahmad a false prophet, liar, and deceiver. Seventeen Ahmadis who had left Ahmadiyah and joined Persis were celebrated.52 The back cover of the April issue featured a photograph of an Ahmadiyah Qadiani mosque in Batavia that had been closed by decree of the regent, and in June the magazine announced formation of the Anti-Ahmadiyah Committee, aimed at calling the issue of Ahmadiyah to the attention of Muslims.53 Similarly, the Committee for the Elimination of Ahmadiyah in Medan was formed in November 1935 to issue a fatwa against Ahmadiyah.54 The staff at the office of marriage in Medan subsequently refused to marry Ahmadis and prohibited them from entering prayer houses, mosques, or other Islamic sites.55 In 1936, the Sultan of Deli in East Sumatra, the region’s religious leader, determined that Ahmadis could not be buried in Muslim cemeteries, and in 1937 in Bukittinggi, 180 ulama declared that Ahmadiyah Qadiani were non-Muslims.56 On multiple occasions, Al-Lisaan stated that Ahmadiyah was a “British tool” for destroying Muslims.57 In short, by the end of 1936 Ahmadiyah had been pushed outside of the theological and social boundaries of the umma. In the coming years, as shared opposition to Ahmadiyah provided the glue for Muslim organizations to work together politically, the policies of the nascent Indonesian state would formalize Ahmadiyah’s marginalization.

Like Muhammadiyah, the traditionalist58 Islamic organization Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) warned its followers that Ahmadiyah denied the articles of faith.59 In a debate between NU and Persis on the practices of taklid (adherence to legal precepts set by the early schools of jurisprudence) and ijtihad (setting aside precedent in favor of a new interpretation), Ahmadiyah was cited as a

53 Al Lisan 1, 5 (27 Apr. 1936): 38; and “Comité Anti Ahmadijah,” Al Lisan 1, 7 (25 June 1936): 31.
58 In the Indonesian vernacular, a “traditionalist” is someone who identifies with practices of Islam laid down in the Syafii school of jurisprudence.
59 Swara Nahdlatul Ulama 2, 5 (1928 [1347]): 102–3; and 2, 6 (1928 [1347]): 122–23. Harry J. Benda noted that opposition to Ahmadiyah was one of very few causes that NU and Muhammadiyah shared in the late 1920s; in The Crescent and the Rising Sun: Indonesian Islam under the Japanese Occupation, 1942–1945 (The Hague: W. van Hoeve, 1958), 54. Another was the dissolution of the caliphate.
problem that resulted from independent reasoning by individuals untrained in Islamic law. Persis, meanwhile, used the question of Ahmadiyah to attack the NU practice of talkin (giving instructions to the deceased). As with NU and Muhammadiyah in the late 1920s, Ahmadiyah’s deviance was one of the few issues on which NU and Persis took a similar stance. And when Sukarno was accused of being an Ahmadi, he too used the Ahmadi question as an opportunity to denounce his enemies. He wrote that while he admired Ahmadiyah for its rationalism and modernism, it was also “devoted to British imperialism.”

This opposition to Ahmadiyah enabled a coalition that other pressing issues facing the Muslim community—Dutch colonialism, the dissolution of the caliphate, the restrictions on religious propagation, and opposition to Christian missionaries—did not. Throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, events in which the major Muslim organizations came together were marked by clashes rather than cooperation. In 1935, however, NU leader Kiawih Hasjim called for traditionalists and reformists to set aside their differences concerning minor questions: “Do not make the differences [in fur’iyah] a reason for disunity, discord, treachery … while our religion is one and the same, Islam! Our mazhab is one and the same, Sjafi’i! Our region is one and the same, Djawa! All belong to Ahlu Sunnah wal-Djama’ah.” Hasjim’s use of the term Ahlu Sunnah wal-Djama’ah is instructive, since Sunni Muslims used it to describe themselves, usually in distinction to the Shi’ite and other sects.

Despite the growing cooperation of modernist and traditionalist Muslims, NU maintained its distance when the modernists created the Great Islamic Council of Indonesia (MIAI) in 1937. Two issues kept NU from joining. First, the meeting was framed as a continuation of previous congresses, in which modernists had derided traditional practices. NU’s response was to propose that the previous congresses be treated as merely “provisional.”

62 For example, the NU magazine Berita Nahdlatuel-Oelama reprinted wholesale a Persis denunciation of Ahmadiyah, while other pages of the magazine were used to dispute Persis doctrine. “Achmadijah: Dari Pembela Islam Lahat kita soerat sebaran berikoet ini; Sifat Propaganda Achmadijah, Perloe Awas!” Berita Nahdlatuel-Oelama 5, 11 (1 Apr. 1936): 14–16.
65 Quoted in Deliar Noer, The Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia 1900–1942 (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1978), 241. Fur’iyah is a term in Islamic jurisprudence that describes matters of difference among Muslims that do not affect basic belief and doctrine. Fur’iyah is contrasted with usuliyah, which are issues of core doctrine. Ahmadiyah’s denial of the finality of the Prophet is considered a question of usuliyah.
regarding future policies. The MIAI leadership agreed, and NU joined the 1939 meeting.\footnote{Noer, \textit{Modernist Muslim Movement}, 243–44; “T. Wondoamisen dan Secretariaatnja ‘Madjilis Islam Loehoer,’” \textit{Berita Nahdlatool-Oelama} 7, 15 (1 June 1938): 12–13.} The second issue was that Ahmadiyah was permitted to join MIAI when leading Muslims from both inside and outside Indonesia had made it clear that the organization was outside Islam.\footnote{“Ma’loemat Officieel tentang moendoernja Delegatie H.B.N.O. dari Al-Islam Congress,” \textit{Berita Nahdlatool-Oelama} 7, 11 (1 Apr. 1938): 5–7.} From 1938 into early 1939, NU published a three-part essay on Ahmadiyah that focused on its collusion with British imperialism and Ghulam Ahmad’s claim to prophecy.\footnote{“Achmadiah,” \textit{Berita Nahdlatool-Oelama} 7, 22 (15 Sept. 1938): 8–10; continued in 7, 24 (15 Oct. 1938): 11–12; and 8, 1 (1 Jan. 1939): 30.} This brought the issue of Ahmadiyah to a head, and at the 1939 MIAI meeting it was resolved: “During the proceedings of the Second MIAI Executive Council in Jombang, a question arose which demands answering: is the door of MIAI open to the Achmadiah? To the question, the Executive Council gave the answer: the doors of MIAI are closed to the Achmadiah.”\footnote{Madjlis Islam A’laa Indonesia, \textit{Soeara Madjilis Islam A’laa Indonesia} (Jakarta, n.p., n.d. [1941]).}

From 1925 to 1939, then, Muhammadiyah, Persis, and NU pushed Ahmadiyah from the center of Muslim civil society to outside the incipient community united around MIAI.\footnote{Not surprisingly, MIAI’s goals were those of an emergent \textit{umma}: to strengthen bonds between Islamic organizations, defend Islam, and promote pan-Islamic ties. R. E. Elson, “Disunity, Distance, Disregard: The Political Failure of Islamism in Late Colonial Indonesia,” \textit{Studia Islamika} 16, 1 (2009): 1–50, here 28.} And while MIAI lasted only from 1937 to 1943, it profoundly influenced the nationalist movement. As Mizan Sya’roni wrote, “Its establishment marked a turning point in the history of the Indonesian Islamic movement in particular and the nationalist movement in general, since the federation was a pioneer in the drive for Islamic and to some extent national unity.”\footnote{Mizan Sya’roni, “The Majlisul Islamil a’la Indonesia (MIAI): Its Socio-Religious and Political Activities (1937–1943),” MA thesis, McGill University, 1998, 2.} Indeed, the coalition of Islamic organizations established in MIAI endured through the Islamic political party Masyumi, which, like MIAI, did not accept Ahmadiyah Lahore when it applied to be a member in the 1950s.\footnote{Noer, \textit{Modernist Muslim Movement}, 244 n. 106. While the coalition splintered when NU broke off from Masyumi in 1953, its position on Ahmadiyah remained unchanged.}

From 1942 to 1943, the occupying Japanese transformed MIAI from an Islamic federation into the political party Masyumi and embedded it in the institutional structures of the proto-state through the Office of Religious Affairs, which became the MORA. Harry Benda notes that by 1944, “The Masyumi … had for all intents and purposes become part of the government itself.”\footnote{Benda, \textit{Crescent and the Rising Sun}, 166.}
organizations that had formed MIAI only seven years earlier became the governing religious authorities in the new state. Since the MORA’s creation, those organizations’ control over the ministry and its penetration into every level of government have allowed it to shape the meaning of religion and its place in public life. The ministry’s mission included: (1) to make belief in the One and Only God an operative principle in public life; (2) to be watchful that every inhabitant is free to adhere to his own religion and to worship according to his own religion; and (3) to assist, support, protect, and promote all sound religious movements.75 The first task is a reference to the national ideology of Pancasila, with belief in God as the first principle. The second professes freedom of religion, but the meaning of the Indonesian word for religion, agama, is narrower than its English equivalent. Agama was defined in 1952 as a monotheistic religion with belief in the existence of One Supreme God, a holy book, a prophet, and a way of life for its adherents.76 This definition closely resembled Muhammadiyah’s definition of religion.77 Islam, Roman Catholicism, and Christianity (Protestantism) were recognized as religions in 1951, while Hinduism and Buddhism were later included under pressure from Sukarno.78 The third task suggests the limits of official tolerance—“unsound” movements like Ahmadiyah were designated deviant streams (aliran sesat, from the Persis designation of 1935) or faiths (kepercayaan) rather than religions.79

76 Abalahin, “A Sixth Religion?” 121; Mulder, Mysticism, 4.
79 In 1948 the MORA published a book by the traditionalist Muslim author and activist H. Aboebakar which included an appendix listing the Ahmadiyah as one of many “false revelations” (Sedjarah al-Qur’an, Jogjakarta: Kementerian Agama, 325). A delegation of Ahmadiyyah leaders protested their inclusion on the list. The response by the ministry was ambiguous. The young NU leader Wahid Hasjim distanced the ministry from the publication of the book and subsequent editions were published by a private publisher. One month later, however, on August 16, 1951, the MORA’s Secretary General Mohammad Kafrawi responded to the Ahmadiyah in a letter saying that he had consulted with H. Aboebakar, who defended his conclusions. I am grateful to Kevin Fogg for sharing his notes on this incident. See Wahid Hasjim to Pengurus Besar Djema’at Ahmadiyah Indonesia, 20 July 1951, in ANRI, RA7 Kabinet Presiden, #163; Letter from the Ministry of Religion to Pengurus Besar Djema’at Ahmadiyah Indonesia, 16 Aug. 1951, in ANRI, RA7 Kabinet Presiden, #163.
Since the 1950s, adherents to deviant streams and faiths have been pressured to join the “sound” religious movements.\(^{80}\) In 1954, the MORA set up a special section for the Supervision of Faith Movements in Society (Pakem) that monitored heterodox, heretical, and apostate faiths.\(^{81}\) As I will show in the next section, the policing of heterodoxy got a boost in authority in 1965 when President Sukarno affirmed that there were only six recognized religions and declared that any group that threatened these religions should be prohibited.

This history reveals that opposition to Ahmadiyah, as a heterodox faith, stretched across theological and political cleavages in Muslim civil society. To Muhammadiyah, Ahmadiyah was a fifth column within Islam. To Persis, Ahmadiyah stubbornly held onto beliefs that perverted the pillars of Islam. To NU, Ahmadis were apostates and stewards of imperialism. That Ahmadis deny the pillars of Islam while calling themselves Muslim has provoked opposition across the diverse Muslim world;\(^{82}\) different groups dislike Ahmadiyah for diverse reasons, but nearly everyone agrees on their distaste for the sect. This history further suggests that intolerance is a productive part of the process of transforming a latent identity into one that is politically salient, bringing new attitudes to the fore and enabling new political institutions to emerge. I now turn to showing how these patterns of productive intolerance endure in contemporary, democratic Indonesia.

**PRODUCTIVE INTOLERANCE, PART II**

The final years of the Sukarno administration were marked by tensions between Indonesia and its new neighbor, Malaysia. Sukarno saw Malaysia and its British military bases as an outpost of counterrevolutionary imperialism, and he mobilized the public behind a campaign of confrontation (konfrontasi), consisting of mass demonstrations, low-level military engagement, and support for revolutionary movements in Southeast Asia. Mass organizations proclaimed their support for Sukarno as the president, leader of the revolution, and commander in chief.\(^{83}\)

Sukarno also sought to mobilize support as the self-proclaimed leader of the Muslim world. On 27 January 1965, he signed Presidential Order No. 1: “Every person shall be prohibited from deliberately before the public telling, encouraging, or soliciting public support for making an interpretation of a religion adhered to in Indonesia or performing religious activities resembling the activities of such religion when the interpretation and activities are deviant from


\(^{81}\) Abalahin, “A Sixth Religion?” 134.

\(^{82}\) See, for example, Sir Muhammad Iqbal, *Islam and Ahmadism* (Lucknow: Islamic Research and Publications Academy, 1974), 7.

the principal teachings of such religion.” Sukarno’s “blasphemy law” formalized the orthodox definition of religion that the Islamic organizations had long sought. Mystical sects were only marginally tolerated; they were recognized as a category of faith (kepercayaan) rather than as religions, and were not entitled to resources from or protection by the state.

Six weeks after the signing, the law was publicly announced, flanked by a joint statement by NU, Muhammadiyah, Partai Sarekat Islam Indonesia, the traditionalist group Jamiatul Washliyah, and the Indonesian Joint Trade Union declaring their support for Sukarno’s broader agenda of revolution, confrontation, and NASAKOM (Sukarno’s shorthand for uniting the streams of national politics: nationalism, religion, and communism). In March 1965, Sukarno hosted a sequel to the 1955 Asia-Africa Conference in Bandung, the international body that became the Non-Aligned Movement. At this Islamic Asia-Africa Conference, leaders from thirty-two countries awarded Sukarno the title “Champion of Islam and Freedom in Asia and Africa.” The front page of the newspaper shown in figure 1 encapsulates what Sukarno was trying to do; the right side announces the law against blasphemy, while the left headline introduces Sukarno’s speech: “Bung Karno Is Also Leader of The Islamic World.” By demarcating the boundaries of tolerance, Sukarno brought together and placed himself at the head of a coalition of organizations, just as MIAI had done in 1939. In another act of productive intolerance, Sukarno strengthened the framework for godly nationalism put into place by the Muslim organizations, the MIAI, and the MORA.

Since 1965, the organization of godly nationalism has become more formally institutionalized in the state. Laws concerning personal identity are based on membership in one of the six recognized religions inscribed on each individual’s identification card. The state privileges recognized religions, and any educational institution under the auspices of the MORA receives

85 The law has been used to prosecute both blasphemy (offensive speech about sacred matters) and heresy (belief that runs counter to orthodox doctrine).
89 Suharto’s attempt to make Pancasila the “sole foundation” (Azas Tunggal) for social organization’s policies strengthened godly nationalism by making belief in God mandatory, although mass organizations interpreted Pancasila in diverse ways. Ramage, Politics in Indonesia, 15–18.
funding while being subject to oversight. Other ministry mechanisms for promoting and controlling orthodox religious belief include support for mosques, guidance in Qur’an recitation, and organization of religious ceremonies. Most of the ministry’s work focuses on Islamic development, although there are also offices for Protestant, Catholic, and Hindu/Buddhist affairs.90

While the institutional structure of religion crystallized in 1965, two new developments have since arisen: the creation of the Indonesian Council of Ulamas (MUI) and the emergence of a new generation of intellectuals. In 1975, Soeharto created the MUI to co-opt domestic organizations and represent the government abroad in the Organization of Islamic States (OIC) and the World Muslim League (Rabithah Alam Islamy Kerohanian). The MUI was the first state agency to disseminate the views of the OIC. In April 1974, the OIC urged Muslim governments to declare the Ahmadis a non-Muslim minority, which led to anti-Ahmadi resolutions in Jordan, Mauritania, and

Mecca, and exacerbated conflicts in Pakistan.\(^91\) The MUI issued its own fatwa ten years later when it decried Ahmadiyah as a heretical sect. In 2005 it reissued its fatwa against Ahmadiyah with the support of vigilante groups FPI and Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia, as well as Persis.\(^92\) While the content of MUI sentiment harks back to the 1930s, the current scale of mobilization against Ahmadiyah is greater than ever before.\(^93\)

Since the 1970s, Indonesia has also witnessed a growing presence of intellectuals with liberal leanings, including former Muhammadiyah chairs Syafii Maarif and Amien Rais, former NU chair and former Indonesian president Abdurrahman Wahid, and the Islamic intellectual Nurcholish Madjid.\(^94\) They influenced young scholars who today are prominent in promoting liberal notions of tolerance. These two developments have contributed to polarizing contemporary public opinion even while the origins of intolerance of Ahmadiyah and its institutional manifestation can be traced to the 1930s and 1960s.

In 2001–2002, local government bans on Ahmadiyah and physical attacks on Ahmadiyah mosques launched the most recent debate about heterodoxy.\(^95\) In response, a group of human rights activists began researching legal remedies to the state discrimination against heterodox groups.\(^96\) The activists gained momentum with the involvement of the National Alliance for Freedom of Religion and Belief (AKKBB), a network of interfaith organizations that in May 2008 published an advertisement calling for respect for Ahmadiyah, and held a rally that was attacked by four hundred vigilantes.\(^97\) In 2009, the coalition

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\(^93\) Indeed, my conversations with the younger generation of Persis leaders suggest they are more supportive of violence against Ahmadiyah than the older generation is. Author’s interviews, Tasikmalaya, 25–27 Sept. 2010.


\(^96\) Uli Parulian Sihombing, interview by the author, Jakarta, 12 Feb. 2010.

of Indonesian activists submitted a petition to the Constitutional Court to strike down the 1965 blasphemy law.98

In positive legal terms, the activist’s petition questioned whether the blasphemy law was consistent with the 1945 constitution. Article 28e, paragraph 1, provides that “Every person shall be free to adhere to a religion and to worship in accordance with his/her religion.” Paragraph 2 states, “Every person shall have the right to the freedom to hold a belief, to express his/her thoughts and attitude in accordance with his/her conscience.” These obligations are echoed in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Indonesia acceded to in 2006. The opponents to the petition—the government and the interested parties who submitted evidence—pointed to clauses in the constitution that recognize the state’s right to limit individual rights to promote the community’s values. Article 28j, paragraph 2, states, “In exercising his/her rights and freedom, every person must be subject to the restrictions stipulated in laws and regulations with the sole purpose to guarantee the recognition of and the respect for rights and freedom of other persons and to fulfill fair demand in accordance with the considerations of moral and religious values, security, and public order in a democratic society.” The opponents pointed to laws from 1964, 1970, 2003, 2004, and 2009 that affirm the centrality of belief in the One and Only God by the state. They argued that since 1950–1951, when Mohammad Natsir was prime minister, promoting belief in God had been a part of the educational curriculum for all public institutions, helping to unify the country’s diverse groups. While acknowledging that promoting belief in God could limit individual religious freedom, they suggested that only external practices (forum external) were limited, not internal faith matters (forum internal).99

Subsuming the legal arguments was a set of abstract debates: how to govern religion, how to balance protecting religious freedom and promoting belief in God, whether groups can democratically curtail their own rights, and whether determining religious truth is less subjective than other policy issues. The petitioners argued, “The blasphemy law forces the state to determine the proper stream of religion: which is deviant, and which is an acceptable religion. When the state is involved in this decision it is no longer neutral. This is the problem.”100 This second set of debates shows how arguments over the

98 The petitioners included the Indonesian Human Rights Monitor, the Institute for Policy Research and Advocacy, the Indonesian Legal Aid and Human Rights Association, the Center for Democracy and Human Rights Studies, the Equal Community Association, Desantara Foundation, the Indonesian Legal Aid Institute Foundation, Abdurrahman Wahid, Prof. Dr. Musdah Mulia, Prof. M. Dawam Rahardjo, and Maman Imanul Haq.
100 Uli Parulian Sihombing, interview by the author, Jakarta, 12 Feb. 2010.
blasphemy law produced a consensus about the proper relationship between God and nation in Indonesia. Heterodoxy is excluded from that relationship.

Although both the AKKBB and the petitioners emphasized the need to expand religious freedom in the country to protect the Ahmadis, no Ahmadis were present in the courtroom. One of the lawyers for the petitioners, Uli Parulian Sihombing, stated that their inclusion would be “too sensitive.”

His caution was inspired by the presence of vigilantes who dominated the courtroom’s second floor and the courthouse’s front lawn, and hung banners naming activists that they judged apostates. Figure 2 displays the vigilante groups creating a tense atmosphere at the court. Yet an equally important reason for prudence in the court was the petitioners’ call for a radical reformulation of the social contract that prominent leaders of civil society believed to be in place. Sihombing called for the state to be neutral in all matters of faith; as described already, the contemporary state privileges orthodoxy over heterodoxy. By excluding the Ahmadis, the petitioners hoped to sidestep the thorny question of whether the state must become secular in order to be neutral.

As a result of their exclusion, the Ahmadis were discussed as an example of the necessity of promoting proper belief in God. Amidhan from the MUI testified that human rights and religious freedom had nothing to do with the Ahmadi question because Ahmadiyah was not a recognized religion; if it were, members would be free to practice their faith. Dr. Atho Mudzhar, a professor of Islamic law and head of the Office of Research and Development in the MORAI, testified for the government that the Ahmadis were permitted to their internal beliefs, but the state was obligated to prohibit the dissemination of deviant religious beliefs in order to promote belief in God. Sudarsono, from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, testified that belief was a matter of internal faith in which the state could not intervene. The expression of faith, however, was a public matter that could be restricted, as with the successful ban on the Ahmadiyah. During brief mentions of violence toward Ahmadiyah by the intellectual Azymardi Azra, as well as Dr. Kunthi Treiwiyanti and Dr. Yunianti Chuzaifah of the National Commission on Women, the crowd on the second

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101 Author’s observation at the petitioners’ strategy meeting, Wahid Institute, Jakarta, 9 Feb. 2010.
102 Uli Parulian Sihombing, interview by the author, 19 Apr. 2010. Representatives from Jemaah Ahmadiyah Indonesia said that Choirul Anam, a petitioner, did not want Ahmadis to testify because he feared the debate would then revolve around them. Jemaah Ahmadiyah Indonesia, interview by the author, Jakarta, 22 Sept. 2010.
103 Author’s observations, Constitutional Court Building, Jakarta, 10, 17, and 24 Feb., and 3, 10, 12, and 17 Mar., 2010.
104 See Ramage, Politics in Indonesia, on the continuing debates over the social contract.
105 Court transcript, 140/puu-vii/2009, III, 33. The court heard similar testimony from Muhammad Al Khotob and Wirawan Adnan from Forum Ummat Islam (FUI), Muhammad Al Khatthath from FUI, and Habib Riziek Shiyab from FPI.
106 Ibid., V, 93–95.
107 Ibid., X, 14.
floor screamed at the witnesses until the chief justice threatened to clear the gallery and the lawyer for the MUI signaled for his allies to quiet down.  In sum, while the petitioners intended to support Ahmadiyah, the witnesses’ testimony focused on the state’s obligation to promote belief in God and prevent blasphemy.

Ahmadiyah’s exclusion allowed the interested parties and the state to proclaim their commitment to a limited form of pluralism without extending religious freedom to heterodox faiths. Muhammadiyah supported maintaining the blasphemy law, and implicitly referenced its support for the ban on Ahmadiyah: “Muhammadiyah believes that freedom of religion or religious freedom is not freedom without limits.”

Abdul Mu’ti, one of the leading advocates for tolerance in Muslim civil society, read from a “Guide to an Islamic Life for

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108 Author’s observations, Constitutional Court Building, Jakarta, 10 and 12 Mar. 2010.
Members of Muhammadiyah” to exemplify Muhammadiyah’s commitment to virtuousness with non-Muslim neighbors. The guide is a vivid expression of both the centrality of tolerance to Muhammadiyah’s values and how Ahmadiyah falls outside tolerable limits: “Islam teaches mutual respect and freedom to practice, but not by mixing religions and not by insulting the religious beliefs of others.”

Mu’ti’s scholarship further confirms this relationship. His book Kristen Muhammadiyah describes the curriculum of Muhammadiyah schools in areas where the population is overwhelmingly Christian or Buddhist. Teachers of any faith can provide instruction in secular subjects to students of any religion, while the doctrines of each specific religion are taught by a member of that religion. In a 2009 interview, former Muhammadiyah chair Syafii Maarif touted Mu’ti’s research as an example of the group’s tolerance, while also making it clear that there would never be a book titled “Ahmadiyah Muhammadiyah.”

In its court testimony, NU also supported pluralism while emphasizing that freedom of religion has limits:

From the Islamic perspective on wellbeing, religious freedom is not a new thing. Long before the Western world’s campaign to guarantee the freedom of religion, Islam has for fifteen centuries guaranteed [religious freedom] using verses of the Qur’an, the Hadith, and practices of the Prophet and his companions demonstrating that granting religious freedom in Muslim society is religiously compulsory, just like religion is obligatory. … But something that should be underlined is that this freedom to express diverse beliefs or practices concerns subjects related to fur’iyah, the branches…. The position and attitude of companions of the Prophet and the scholars are clear and firm on matters concerning the usuliyah: those differences of opinion or interpretation of religious practices that oppose points of religious doctrine, especially those ideologies and ideas that differ from the main/basic teachings of religion and are raised in a provocative manner to foment anarchy. If the problem concerns fur’iyah, then we will witness a high tolerance and appreciation by scholars against parties who have different views; yet the Islamic scholars will demonstrate an uncompromising attitude in matters of usuliyah.

The lawyer for NU, Asrul Sani, built on the usuliyah/fur’iyah distinction to argue for democratically delineating the boundary between the two. Under Sani’s proposal, witnesses would be able to provide their opinions, lawyers argue their cases, and justices rule in a transparent manner:

The State has the right to determine if religious groups are deviant and force them to choose among the recognized religions…. The majority can decide in a democratic, transparent manner if a group is outside Islam. Catholics could object to Jehovah’s [Witnesses]

110 Ibid., 47–51.
111 Abdul Mu’ti and Fajar Riza ul Haq, Kristen Muhammadiyah: Konvergensi Muslim dan Kristen Dalam Pendidikan (Jakarta: Al-Wasat, 2009).
112 Syafii Maarif, interview by the author and Alfred Stepan, Jakarta, 30 Sept. 2009.
and ban them, Protestants could object to Mormons and ban them. Each community can regulate themselves. … [The problem of Ahmadiyah] could be solved if they were declared non-Muslim. As it stands, they are not entitled to the protection of being Muslim.  

Sani’s proposal would allow the state to promote belief in God while creating a system for the definition of orthodoxies that could change over time. It would also allow the state to expand the scope of recognition to other religions; heterodox groups would be able to become orthodox and receive state support and protection. Although illiberal, his proposal attempted to balance the state’s mandate to promote belief in God with the protection of minorities.

While the National Protestant Council and National Catholic Council called for the law to be either revoked or revised, most representatives of the country’s minority groups supported the law. Matakin, the High Council for the Confucian Religion in Indonesia, advocated maintaining the blasphemy law on the grounds that it helped protect the minority religions, although it also sought to extend the law to include “small religions.” The government’s witness for the Buddhists, Philip K. Wijaya, argued that the law was important to protect minority religions and maintain peace between sects of the same religion. The representative of the Indonesian Buddhist Community testified that the 1965 law was key to maintaining tolerance in the country. Yanto Jaya of the Indonesian Hinduism Society supported the law on the grounds that its revocation would lead to violence.

As in the 1930s, Persis enthusiastically backed the eradication of heterodoxy. Persis chair Maman Abdurrahman argued that the law was consistent with the values of the republic: “Indonesia is not a secular state that ignores the values of religion in national life and tolerates blasphemy. The founders of the Republic of Indonesia consciously made sure that religion was integral to the founding of the Republic.” Persis leader Amin Djamaluddin listed ten examples of deviant sects whose leaders had declared themselves prophets or tried to merge multiple religions into one. He reported these cases to the police, who successfully applied the blasphemy law and imprisoned the leaders. Rather than being unconstitutional, he argued, the blasphemy law was more important than ever.

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115 Expanding the scope of recognition of orthodox religions has precedent in the reformulation of Balinese religion into Hinduism (Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*).
116 A spokesperson for Ahmadiyah, however, rejected the proposal on the grounds that their religion is Islam and not Ahmadiyah. Ahmad Masihuddin, interview by the author, Jakarta, 22 Sept. 2010.
118 Ibid., VII, 28–30.
119 Ibid., VI, 69.
120 Ibid., V, 13–15.
121 Ibid., VI, 70–73.
122 Ibid., VII, 30–35.
The trial did include testimony about victims of the 1965 law. Arnold Panahal, from one kepercayaan group, The Coordinating Authority for Faith Organisations, described how kepercayaan followers have been discriminated against since the end of the colonial period. They are denied access to funding for their schools, cannot list their religion on their ID cards, are prohibited from entering the military, and often refuse to send their children to school because the state would force them to register and be educated in one of the recognized religions.\textsuperscript{123} Representatives of other kepercayaan groups testified that the 1965 law degrades their beliefs, discriminates against them in favor of orthodox faiths, and leads to their stigmatization in society. They pointed to the elucidation of the law that treats kepercayaan as problems to be solved rather than beliefs that must be respected.\textsuperscript{124}

The response to the testimony of kepercayaan groups played out in a session when the chief justice asked the parties whether faith in God without subscribing to one of the six religions should be recognized. The answer came from Dra. Hj. Nurdiati of the Irena Center Foundation, which is dedicated to preventing religious conversions from Islam: The regulations of the MORA are clear; kepercayaan is not a religion but only a cultural practice. She went on to say that that the country had experience with another people without religion: the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). And just like the PKI, groups that do not believe in religion should be banned and their members socialized into belief in God.\textsuperscript{125} Azam from the Indonesian Council for Islamic Propagation said that because kepercayaan consisted of practices stemming from culture rather than religion, their experiences were irrelevant to the law and only germane to the Department of Tourism.\textsuperscript{126}

Two routine court practices reinforced the marginality of heterodox groups. At the start of each session, the chief justice asked the day’s witnesses what religion they followed and then swore them in under their respective faiths. On 3 March 2010, the petitioners presented a witness, Sardy, who followed a kepercayaan faith. When it was time for the swearing-in, the chief justice asked, “What would you like to swear on?” and Sardy replied, “Panca-sila.” The courtroom erupted in laughter, and there was a moment of confusion while the court figured out what to do. Eventually the chief justice replied,

\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., VI, 74–78.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., XI, 79–85. The interfaith spiritual guru Anand Krishna, atheists, and Shi’ites have been arrested and brought to trial under the same law and could have testified as victims. I am grateful to an anonymous CSSH reviewer for this point.
\textsuperscript{125} Court transcript, 140/puu-vii/2009 VII, 61. At least five hundred thousand members of the PKI were killed in a coup orchestrated by Soeharto from 1965 to 1966. It is still illegal to belong to the PKI.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 57–58. The dismissive invocation of ritual as cultural or folkloric has parallels in Turkey, where Alevism has served as the site for contestation over the religious imaginaries of the nation. Kabir Tambar, “The Aesthetics of Public Visibility: Alevi Semah and the Paradoxes of Pluralism in Turkey” \textit{Comparative Studies in Society and History} 53: 3 (2010): 652–79.
“There is no oath for Pancasila,” and proceeded to swear Sardy in on the basis of a personal oath: “I promise to state the truth and nothing but the truth.”

Similarly, most witnesses began and ended their statements with greetings from their respective faiths. For example, orthodox Muslims opened their statements with “Assalamu alaikum” (peace be unto you), to which the audience reciprocated with “Waalaikum salam” (and also unto you). More secular Muslims said both “peace be unto you” and “good morning.” The five participants that adhered to kepercayaan began and ended their statements with rahayu (a Javanese expression of greeting) and sangkalingkong (thank you). While the chief justice reciprocated the kepercayaan greetings on two occasions, none of the other judges or participants acknowledged them. To the contrary, the kepercayaan greetings were challenged. Dr. Eggy Sudjana of the Fraternal Body of the Islamic Scholars for Madura Schools mocked the use of rahayu as an artifact of an outdated culture. Only greetings based on religious or secular vernacular were deemed appropriate.

By the end of the trial the outcome was certain; eight of the nine justices and the overwhelming majority of witnesses supported the continued exclusion of heterodox faiths from state recognition. Recognition that the heterodox faiths had been discriminated against would have necessitated a redefinition of the meaning of religion in the state, reorganization of the MORA, redistribution of the state patronage system, and an end to the privileging of religious organizations like NU and Muhammadiyah as the backbone of civil society. The judges pointed to these organizations as partners of the state: “Indonesia as a country which upholds the concept that religion is not separated from the state has the MORA which serves and protects the growing and development of religions fairly…. religious organizations that are deeply rooted and have historical foundation are parent organizations of religions recognized in Indonesia. It is these religious organizations that in the end shall be able to become partners of the state in creating religious social order to respect and tolerate one another.”

The decision reaffirmed the existing structure of religion-state relations, and a consensus emerged that the law is vital to promoting the core national value of belief in God. A representative from the Irena Center summarized:

Honored Justices of the court, my name is named Sulaiman Zachawerus, the son of a mother from Ternate and the father from Sanger Talaud, both of whom were Christian from a family of Christians. The only Muslim in the Zachawerus family is me…. Although the law is being appealed by the petitioners, for us this is a blessing in disguise. Because before now, Act no. 1 of 1965 was lost. But now it is a blessing because laymen everywhere will know that we have a law against blasphemy. And they will know that

128 Ibid., 53–55.
religion is the ultimate concern of humanity, the preeminent concern of every human being. And after [today], if religion is disgraced, then the cost is their soul.\(^{130}\)

The consensus that Zachawerus, NU, Muhammadiyah, Persis, the minority religions, and the justices helped constitute is plural, modern, and godly. Outside the courtroom, former NU chair Hasyim Muzadi has been a vocal critic of the vigilante group FPI and has refused its repeated requests to engage in dialogue.\(^{131}\) Inside the courtroom, FPI and NU were on the same side.

Some of the country’s most public proponents of pluralism excluded Ahmadis from the jurisdiction of tolerance and characterized the blasphemy law as irrelevant to freedom of religion even while denying the political quality of this move. In the interview I conducted with Shaafi Maarif in 2009, I asked him the following: “Muhammadiyah is vocal in defending the rights of the Christians and Catholics. Why not Ahmadiyah?” Maarif responded: “Because Muhammadiyah sees this as politics! If Muhammadiyah is involved in defending Ahmadiyah, they will be seen as entering partisan politics. Muhammadiyah was fed up with politics in the 1960s when we exited Masyumi.”\(^{132}\) Maarif defines the political in a way that allows him to deny Muhammadiyah’s responsibility for the status quo, deny its exclusion of Ahmadiyah, and embrace the liberal injunction to avoid mixing religion and politics. His statement resonates with scholarship on the Islamic revival, where Saba Mahmood suggests that liberal secularism and Islamism compete on terrain that is often considered apolitical but is crucial for demarcating the influence of these two movements.\(^{133}\) By excluding the Ahmadis, the discussion in the courtroom shifted from religious freedom and discrimination to a different set of priorities: promoting belief in God, maintaining the state’s religious identity while respecting pluralism, distinguishing internal freedom from external freedom, combating deviant beliefs through law rather than violence, and protecting the dignity of religion. This is a vocabulary imbued with commitments to pluralism while differentiated from that of the ostensibly secular West:

The constitution of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia does not allow any possibility for a campaign for the freedom of non-religion, freedom of anti-religion as well as any possibility to insult or defile religious teaching or holy books serving as sources of religious beliefs or to defile God’s name. This element constitutes one of

\(^{130}\) Court transcript, 140/puu-vii/2009,VII, 56–57. Zachawerus’s belief that the state has jurisdiction over the welfare of the soul hints at support for more aggressive coercion of individual belief than practiced by the MORAs, which says individuals must publicly believe in God but possess absolute internal religious freedom.


the elements marking the existence of a principal difference between the constitutional state of Indonesia and the constitutional states of the West. Accordingly, in the implementation of state administration, the formation of law, and the implementation of government and judicature, the basis of belief in God and teaching as well as religious values serve as a benchmark to determine whether or not a certain law is good, or even whether or not a certain law is constitutional.134

Rather than overturning the law, the case helped create a broad, institutionalized, and durable consensus on the values of state and society as rooted in godly nationalism.

CONCLUSION

We have to be able to differentiate between democracy and moral deviation.

——Hasyim Muzadi, Chair of Nahdlatul Ulama from 1999 to 2010135

Indonesia’s successful transition to democracy has not been accompanied by an increase in individual religious freedom. The promotion of belief in God and the exclusion of heterodox faiths help unify the country’s diverse population behind a common theism: the state mobilizes religion against secessionist movements, in favor of economic development through family planning, against Islamist militants, and in civic education.136 While the vigilante groups use antidemocratic violence, they share a common goal with those large swaths of civil society seeking to live in a nation where belief in God is part of the “overlapping consensus” necessary for a functioning democracy.137 Their goal is a polity where individuals, organizations, and the state are partly responsible for one another’s moral condition rather than it being the domain of self-determining individuals.138

Godly nationalism is not limited to Indonesia. Globally, majorities in over twenty countries say that belief in God is necessary for a person to have good values.139 These attitudes are not only influential in the private sphere; nine out of ten Americans would vote for a presidential candidate who is Catholic or Jewish, and eight out of ten for one who is Mormon, yet only 54 percent

134 Constitutional court verdict, 2010, 140/puu-vii/2009, 3.34.11, my emphasis.
137 I borrow the concept of an “overlapping consensus” from John Rawls, Political Liberalism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 134.
138 For a parallel social account of the role of nasīha (advice) in creating a public sphere distinct from that of the liberal tradition, see Talal Asad, Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), ch. 6.
would vote for one who is an atheist. Likewise, in a speech to commemorate the four hundredth anniversary of the King James Bible, British Prime Minister David Cameron sought to link citizenship in Britain with holding strong religious values, whether Christian or another faith: “Those who say being a Christian country is doing down other faiths simply don’t understand that it is easier for people to believe and practise other faiths when Britain has confidence in its Christian identity.” Cameron suggests that religious values like belief in God underpin national values; here he echoes the arguments of the Indonesian modernist intellectual Mohammed Natsir, who in the 1950s argued that Islamic nationalists, not secular nationalists, provided the best protection of minority Christians due to their shared devotion to God. Cameron, like Natsir, sought to create a system of godly nationalism where diverse faiths are mobilized by the state and society is bound by a common theism.

Recent work on religious freedom has stressed its place in the production of a global power differential between imperial states and the developing world. Mahmood persuasively argues that the demarcation of groups as “minorities” is both descriptive and useful for projects of Western imperialism. Mahmood’s comments elucidate the situation in Indonesia, where Christian missionaries have used the guise of religious freedom as an entry point for the conversion of Muslims. It was not an Islamist vigilante but rather Indonesia’s most outspoken spokesperson for liberal Islam, Ulil Abshar Abdalla, who expressed this sentiment most succinctly: “Even I think that too much liberalism is bad, like with the freedom of religion. That is how the Christians have spread their proselytization, via ‘freedom of religion.’ When I was in Washington, D.C., I met with a group of Christians and they had a very sophisticated operation to promote freedom of religion. But I think this is not the same freedom that I am talking about. That is Christianization.” Abshar Abdalla distinguishes between the right of Indonesians to explore their country’s diverse belief systems and the right of foreign organizations to build churches in Muslim villages. He supports the first but not the second.

Yet there is more to the debates over religious freedom and religious blasphemy than imperial domination. The war against blasphemy under way in

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144 Ulil Abshar Abdalla, interview by the author, Jakarta, 12 June 2009.
Indonesia is part of a productive effort by Muslim civil society to further develop a system of godly nationalism and communal tolerance while avoiding the templates of liberal secularism or theocracy. Indonesia’s Muslim civil society values the country’s religious diversity but does not want to sanitize the public sphere of religion in order to promote liberal values; its vision for a godly democracy aims to balance individual rights, group rights, religious pluralism, and belief in God. Putting this vision into practice is difficult at a time when liberal secularism is equated with tolerance, and religion is synonymous with intolerance, but the rising influence of pious democrats in Tunisia, Turkey, and the United States hints toward a future of godly nations.

Abstract: Since democratization, Indonesia has played host to a curious form of ethnic conflict: militant vigilante groups attacking a small, socially marginal religious sect called Ahmadiyah. While most scholars attribute the violence to intolerance by radicals on the periphery of society, this article proposes a different reading based on an intertwined reconfiguration of Indonesian nationalism and religion. I suggest that Indonesia contains a common but overlooked example of “godly nationalism,” an imagined community bound by a shared theism and mobilized through the state in cooperation with religious organizations. This model for nationalism is modern, plural, and predicated on the exclusion of religious heterodoxy. Newly collected archival and ethnographic material reveal how the state’s and Muslim civil society’s long-standing exclusion of Ahmadiyah and other heterodox groups has helped produce the “we-feeling” that helps constitute contemporary Indonesian nationalism. I conclude by intervening in a recent debate about religious freedom to suggest that conflicts over blasphemy reflect Muslim civil society’s effort to delineate an incipient model of nationalism and tolerance while avoiding the templates of liberal secularism or theocracy.

145 On the concept of communal tolerance, see J. Menchik, “Tolerance without Liberalism.”