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Challenging democracy?

The role of political Islam in post-Suharto Indonesia.

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1. Introduction

More than 80 percent of Indonesia's population of more than 200 million people are Muslim, making Indonesia the biggest Muslim-majority nation in the world. Since the fall of the authoritarian Suharto-regime in 1998, Indonesia has made significant strides towards democracy. Indonesia's democratization featured (just to name some of the more important tasks):

- the liberalization and overhaul of the political system, including the establishment of a multiparty system, freedom of the press and the first free and fair elections since 1956
- the decentralization of a highly centralized political system in which political power to a large degree was concentrated in the hands of Suharto and channelled through his vast patronage-network
- a reform of the powerful military that had backed Suharto's new order and had been the main instrument to oppress any form of opposition movement in the country
- a reform of the economic system once dubbed as Suharto's 'crony capitalism', the fight against endemic corruption, and the tackling of the disastrous effects of the Asian crisis on the national economy
- the strengthening of the country's weak institutions and the implementation of rule of law

Most reviews of Indonesia's transition to democracy have so far been very positive. It is widely acknowledged that for the time being Indonesia does not seem to be in danger of falling back into authoritarian structures. Many researchers (Rieffel 2004, Qodari 2005) as well as international institutions (World Bank, UN etc.) have described the free, fair and peaceful elections of 1999 and 2004 as a historic landmark for Indonesia. Meanwhile the country has had several rotations of government, legislatures and courts are much more independent from the central government and Indonesians enjoy extensive political freedoms, while countless civil society organizations and other pressure groups try to exercise some sort of a 'watchdog function' over the elected governments on the national and local level (Nyman 2006). Along these lines Indonesia possesses many attributes of a consolidated democratic political system and therefore has remained largely "stable" during the post-Suharto era.

When trying to determine the role political Islam has played with Indonesia's democratization process, the existing theoretical literature as well as policy-strategies emphasizes the existence of democratic institutions. Accordingly, free and fair elections, freedom of press and a multiparty system help to marginalize radicalism by giving radicals an opportunity for political participation. The regime type, democratic or not, therefore obviously seems to determine the strategies and politics implemented by Islamists. While looking at the situation in the Middle East this hypothesis makes sense, as relaxed autocratic control of certain regimes allowed the participation of radical Islamists. Facing the opportunity to participate however, Islamists were ready to adjust former radical positions and in the end became more moderate (Nasr 2005). Very simplified the argument hereby would be: inclusion through participation leads to moderation, exclusion through repression leads to radicalization (Hafez 2003).

How far does this hypothesis carry us with regard to the case of Indonesia? In Indonesia, democratic, or at least reform-oriented, Islamists did in fact play a vital part in the ousting of the authoritarian Suharto regime. They took part in the reformasi-movement demanding free and fair elections and press freedom; they founded democratic parties and civil society organizations etc. But the transition to democracy not only opened up space for moderate Islamists to participate in electoral politics, but also opened up space for a militant fringe of radical Islam. Political liberalization seems after all to be a double-edged sword as it did not prevent the emergence of radical, violent Islamist groups such as the infamous Jemaah Islamiyah terror network or the various Islamist militia groups operating in the country. Thus the ambiguous role Islamists have played in post-Suharto Indonesia questions the aforementioned hypothesis. Democratization not only enabled moderate Islamists to play a reform-oriented role within the electoral politics, but it also weakened the states security apparatus. The weakening of the states security apparatus, which had come under pressure by the reformasi movement for having served as the backbone of the Suharto regime, enabled militants to take up an armed struggle for the establishment of an Islamic state in Indonesia. Thus the correlation between democracy and political Islam seems to be highly ambiguous: the existence of democratic institutions alone can obviously not directly be equated with Islamist moderation. As we have observed, radicalization/ militancy and moderation, has been the case in post-Suharto Indonesia.

On the other hand such observation proves theories of “Muslim exceptionalism” wrong:¹ although a Muslim majority country, Indonesia did not descend into theocracy after the fall of Suharto. For the time being it seems safe to state that the majority of the population, as well as the country’s political elite, regard the idea of an Islamic state as counter-productive to Indonesia’s democratisation (Fealy 2004). Neither the 1999 nor the 2004 elections have featured a significant increase in votes for parties with an Islamist agenda. The country has remained on course towards democracy and many (mostly foreign) observers reiterate the importance of a democratic Indonesia as a potential role-model for the whole Muslim world regarding the compatibility of Islam and democracy.

My argument hereby is, that in order to clarify the ambiguous relationship between democracy and political Islam in Indonesia, we need to go beyond an institution-centred understanding of democracy and look at the configurations of social forces that have determined the shape, scope and practices of Indonesia’s transition to democracy. For this we need a not only an analysis of the resurgence of political Islam in Indonesia, but also a critical examination what lies behind the democratic institutions and the free and fair elections? How does the democratic practice look like and how much leverage do Islamists really have to achieve their reform agenda? What are alternative policies for those moderate Islamists, which have accepted as the “only game in town” (Linz)? And which role does the violent fringe of the Islamists play hereby? Any examination of the role political Islam will fall short, if it lacks assessment of the state of the (democratic) state and politics. Therefore it is pivotal to contextualize the role of Islamists in the political and economic order it is situated in.

Hence my understanding of political Islam is one, which lacks any clear, theoretical definition of “political Islam”. For Ayoob has pointed out that “in practice, no two Islamisms are alike” (Ayoob 2004: 1), such observation in my opinion stresses the need to contextualize political Islam in its historic, socio-political and economic settings. While common definitions define Islamism as a “form of instrumentalization of Islam by individuals, groups and organizations that pursue political objectives (...)” providing “political responses to today’s societal challenges by imagining a future, the foundations of which rest on reappropriating, reinvented

¹ The theorem of “Muslim exceptionalism” is backed by the rather general findings of authors such as Huntington (1997, 1991), Lipset (1994) or Gellner (1994), who see Islam as responsible for the absence of democracy or, if democracy has been introduced to a Muslim state, as at least responsible for the aforementioned challenges of a democratic consolidation in Muslim states. Underlying this is the belief in a “unique relationship between religion and politics in Islam that precludes the separation of the religious and political spheres” (Ayoob 2006: 2). This means to say that political thought and political action in the Muslim world is mainly driven by religious goals or at least by religious convictions.

concepts borrowed from Islamic traditions” (Denoux 2002: 61), such an understanding helps little to take into account the structural context that political Islam is situated in and seems to be reflexive to.

Islamism, like Islam itself as prominent scholars have pointed out with regard to the heterogeneity of Islam in Asia (Esposito 2008), is not only inherently culture-specific but also shaped by and responsive to the underlying socio-political and economic structures. Political Islam in Indonesia like anywhere else is therefore to be determined by, and analyzed within, the contexts in which it is situated. Therefore Achcar (1987) has emphasized that:

“Beneath their agreement on otherworldly matters, beyond their agreement on problems of everyday life (...) and notwithstanding their similar, even identical, denominations and organizational forms, Muslim movements remain essentially political movements. They are thus the expression of specific socio-political interests that are very much from this world”.

Without denying the fact, that Islamic ideas, symbols and Islamic vocabulary have transcended the boundaries of local communities as well as those of Muslim nations, even these ideas, symbols and vocabulary are adopted in different ways in response to different contexts and challenges (Ayoob 2004: 2).

Critical positions towards religion in general as well as towards the rise of Islam have always followed Marx critique of religion along two lines: First, they criticize religion as a factor of alienation by the compulsion to respect obligations, which often hamper the full development of the individual, and the submission to religious authorities. Second, a critique of religious social and political doctrines, all of which are ideological survivals of historical epochs of the past, assisting those on power by offering divine justification for the status quo and thus serving a legitimating function. Marx has described religion as the “false consciousness of the world”, but also made the important observation that religion can also be understood as the “sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions” - meaning that religion, while more often than not serving as a tool in the hands of those in power, is at the same time an “expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering”. Thus religion may provide some sort of compensation (either in material terms or as some sort of a utopia) to hardships, but only by ultimately accepting a status quo that

requires such forms of compensations in the first place (Achcar 2004). I will try to further discuss this at the end of this paper.

In order to proceed with my argument, I will first try to give some insights on the historical relationship between Islam and politics in Indonesia. This is mainly to prevent us from seeing political Islam in Indonesia as a “new” phenomenon. The next chapter of this paper will then explore the resurgence of political Islam after the ousting of Suharto, while afterwards the specifics and limitations of Indonesia’s transition to democracy shall be taken into count. In the last chapter I will try to conclude with an outlook on the prospects and perils of Islamism in Indonesia ten years after *reformasi*.

2. Indonesian Islam and politics in historical perspective

Coming from Marx' observation of religion serving as the "sigh of the oppressed creature" it is to no surprise that Islam as a political ideology came into existence during the colonial era. Demanding liberation from the colonial rule of the Dutch, it competed for mass support during Indonesia's struggle for independence (and beyond) with two other ideological currents: nationalism and communism. Contrary to that of nationalism, the history of political Islam in Indonesia is "a history crowded with failure" (Fealy 2005: 161). Fealy divides its history into three main periods: the first period – from 1949 until 1959 – was shaped by the independence of Indonesia and the country's first experiments with democracy, characterized by relatively free political competition between parties and Indonesia' first free and fair elections. The second period – from 1959 until 1998 – was in turn shaped by the faltering of Indonesia's flirt with democracy. What followed were decades of authoritarianism, first under Sukarno's 'guided democracy' (1959-1965) and then under Suharto's 'new order' (*ordre baru*). Both regimes put, with the exception of Indonesia's first experiment with democracy in the 1950s, tight restrictions on political Islam. Following Suharto's ousting in 1998 until present is the third period, which is shaped by the country's transition from authoritarianism and its second experiment with democracy (Fealy 2005).

After Indonesia became independent from Dutch colonial rule in 1949 the main political conflict line ran between Muslim and secular forces about the question, whether Indonesia should become an Islamic state or not. The Islamists favoured the inclusion of the *Sharia* into the Indonesian constitution and the establishment of a *Negara Islam Indonesia* (Islamic State of Indonesia). Secular forces in turn, amongst them Indonesia's first president Sukarno, feared that an Islamic constitution could lead to secessionist aspirations among the then mainly Christian eastern provinces of the archipelago and ultimately cause the break-up of Indonesia. These fears of a break-up of the young nation tipped the scales in favour of a constitution that did not include the Jakarta Charta. The constitution that was later adopted was based on the religious neutral Pancasila as the state philosophy². The majority of Islamic actors, although deeply disappointed by Indonesia's 'secular' constitution, took comfort in the prospect that the Islamic parties would, if united, certainly win Indonesia's first elections and would then change the constitution. A minority of Islamists even started local uprisings with the goal to

² The Pancasila, literally to be translated as 'the five principles', was formulated by Sukarno as the *Desar Negara* (state philosophy) in 1945. It comprised the belief in one god whereas the Islamists wanted a formulation where the religion of Indonesia is Islam), humanitarianism, nationalism, democracy, and social justice.

establish an Islamic state (*Negara Islam*) by military force. The so-called Darul Islam-movement (House of Islam) eventually managed to establish of Islamic government in parts of Sumatra, Java and Sulawesi, but these were short-lived and eventually crushed by the central government after a decade-long civil war (Dahm 2007: 203).

The first free elections in 1956 provided the Islamist parties with a fierce defeat. Not only was the dream of a politically unified Islam (one Islamic party) crossed by various fragmentations between 1949 and 1956, but the hopes for a victory in the elections became crestfallen when the Islamic parties gained only 43.1 % of the votes. While from 1956 Islamic parties took part in the coalition governments under Sukarno, their political influence was often outplayed by the secular nationalists of Sukarno and the PKI (*Partai Komunis Indonesia* – Communist Party of Indonesia). When Suharto did come into power after a military coup in 1965, his first move was directed at the powerful PKI. With the help of Islamic militias and the military the PKI was de facto liquidated. It is estimated that between 300,000 and one million alleged communists were killed and thousands more imprisoned during the first two years of the new order. But after the consolidation of the *ordre baru* political Islam as basically the only potential powerful source of opposition to the regime was marginalized. This included a demand to conform to the state philosophy, restrictions on the use of Islamic symbols and language, and limiting the number of Islamic parties. In 1973 all Islamic parties were forced to merge and form the PPP (*Partai Persatuan Pembangunan* - United Development Party). The name of the new party is a proof of the nearby complete marginalization of political Islam under the first decades of the new order as it didn't even bear any reference to Islam anymore. Thus political Islam had in fact very little political influence for decades in Indonesia (Baswedan 2004: 671). The authoritarian politics of the new order were legitimized by the Suharto regime through state-led developmental strategies. These enhanced the legitimacy of the new order by delivering continuing high economic growth rates and rising living standards, for which, in the mindset of the architects of the new order, (political) stability was preconditional. The latter was achieved through the backing of the new order by the state-security apparatus and massive support from the West. For the West Suharto was an effective ally to prevent a decline of Indonesia into communism or Islamic theocracy.

As growth rates started to crumble Suharto, aware of the fact that its (secular) power-base started to become somewhat unstable, began a turn towards Islam in order to further legitimize his authoritarian regime. What followed was a whole bundle of state-led

Islamization policies leading to a gradual Islamization of the Indonesian society: the appointment of pious Muslims to leading positions in the government and the military, increased support of Islamic teachings in schools and universities, the lifting of the banning of girls wearing the headscarf in school, and expanding the authority of Sharia courts only to name a few. This also included the foundation of the IMCI (*Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia* – Muslim Intellectuals Association of Indonesia) as well as the establishment of an Islamic bank and insurance agency. In line with this was a change in Suharto's public appearance: he took the *hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca, became a guest at Islamic celebrations and in general showed more commitment to Islam in public than in previous years. During the late 1990s Suharto even briefly tried to co-opt Islamist forces as a tool against the emerging pro-democratic reformasi movement. Within a decade Islam made the transition from being an 'enemy of the state' to the occupation of a somewhat favoured status within the regime (Singh 2004) – although one must acknowledge that this mainly comprised of the sought for an increase in personal piety. Political Islam, being in opposition to the authoritarian and corrupt regime of the new order, was likewise any other opposition group still repressed.³

The Islamization of the late new order, which has influenced the trajectories of Indonesian Islam up until now, is only to be understood against a variety of interconnected factors. First and foremost, tensions between regime and military, which had been one of the main pillars of the regime stability, drove Suharto to look for other supporters and sources of legitimacy. Secondly, the mounting divisions within the regime were paralleled by a rapid growth of the traditionally very pious middle classes caused by the economic boom of the 1970s and 1980s. The middle classes embraced Suharto's gradual renunciation from the military insofar as "they welcomed the opportunity to gain access to senior government positions" (Fealy 2005: 164). Nevertheless the Suharto-regime offered access to power only in exchange for political loyalty. It wasn't until Suharto's retreat from power in the wake of mass demonstrations triggered by the devastating effects of the Asian crisis, that the political liberalization opened up space for a large variety of Islamist actors – ranging from terrorist groups like Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), Islamist militias, civil society organizations to various political parties like the PKS. After all the relationship between political Islam and politics in Indonesia is not easy to

³ One example of this is the event known as the "Tanjung Priok massacre". On September 12, 1984, an anti-government demonstration against the imposition of a law which required all organisations to adopt the sole ideology of the state, the Pancasila, took place in the Tanjung Priok harbour area of north Jakarta. The protests followed the arrests of several individuals who were accused of giving anti-government sermons at Tanjung Priok Rawa Badak Mosque. They were encircled by security forces, which opened fire on the demonstrators. Survivors claimed that several Hundred people were killed during the incident.

pin down: while political Islam for a large part has been effectively marginalized under Suharto's "new order", the Islamization of Indonesia from the 1980s onwards nevertheless must be understood as a social and political process with very strong historical roots. While one can not fail to notice the growing influence of conservative (*Wahabi*) interpretations of Islam through charitable foundations and other Islamic organizations based in the Arab world from the 1970s onwards (Bubalo/ Fealy 2005), the struggle for the establishment of an Islamic state as well as various forms of Islamic militancy can be traced back to before the country's independence.

Hence the Islamization of Indonesia owes, on the one hand, much to a rising middle class seeking for moral orientation and identity in a drastically changing socio-political and economic environment. For many Islam became a reference point, an adamant and consistent element of identification with in an ever-changing, modernizing socio-political and economic order. On the other hand the rise of Islam is to some extent intertwined with the Islamization policies implemented by the Suharto regime itself. This is what Ruf (2002: 51) has called an 'irony' of the aforementioned macro-political developments: that exactly 'secular' regimes in the Muslim world such as the Suharto-regime in Indonesia became promoters of the Islamization processes by pushing for the implementation of a wide variety of Islamic policies in an attempt to regain or strengthen their own legitimacy and to control the increasing Islamic political expressions (Hasan 2007: 88). Against this background the, as we shall note, often ambiguous relationship between Islam and politics in post-Suharto Indonesia is to be analyzed. Over and above, a range of historical events (the Jakarta Charter, the Darul Islam-rebellion) described in this chapter questions the prominent image of Indonesian Islam as being inherently tolerant and moderate. However biased such an image has been, it most certainly (unintentionally) reflected upon the fact, that Islam as a political force had for decades been marginalized or even repressed under the new order. With the ousting of Suharto this was about to change drastically.

3. The Resurgence of Political Islam in post-Suharto Indonesia

The end of the new order, which happened in the wake of the Asian crisis, led to opening of the political sphere for a great variety of Islamic actors.⁴ Moderate Muslim intellectuals were active in the pro-democratic reform movements which took the streets in 1997 and early 1998 were amongst the first to demand Suharto's resignation. While playing a vital role in the immediate events that led to the downfall of Suharto, the "movement for a democratic Muslim politics in Indonesia" (Hefner 2005: 274) was soon effectively marginalized by a rising conservative (and often militant) Islamist spectrum, ranging from transnational terrorist networks like Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), Islamist militias to regular Islamist political parties. All of which are very heterogeneous concerning their organizational structure, goals, the strategies they apply, and their relationship with the state.

Closely following the opening of the political system was an outbreak of inter-communal violence between Muslims and Christians, the establishment of Islamist militia groups as well as the attacks by the terror network Jemaah Islamiyah on christian churches (2000), nightclubs in Bali (2002 and 2005 respectively), the Australian embassy (2004) and the Marriott Hotel (2003).⁵ Shortly after the ousting of Suharto nominal Christian paramilitaries sprung up attacking what happened to be nominal Muslim communities in Poso (Sulawesi), Central Kalimantan and the Moluccas. While all these conflicts - all of which had been effectively suppressed by the iron rule of Suharto - were rooted in the competition over political and economic power, local leaders effectively mobilized support amongst 'their' constituencies by portraying the conflicts in religious rather than in political-economic terms (van Klinken 2007). The following outbreaks of sectarian violence between Christians and Muslims in the three provinces have cost more than 12.000 lives so far. The outbreak of sectarian violence in 1998/ 1999, paralleled with the intensification of long-running separatist conflicts in the provinces of Aceh, West-Papua and East Timor, led many analysts to the

⁴ While the impact of 9/11 and its aftermath is not part of this analysis, it needs to be noted that the ramifications of 9/11, the "war on terror" and the invasion of Iraq certainly had implications on the resurgence of political Islam in post-Suharto Indonesia. Von der Mehden (2008) argues that these events reinforced a sense of Islamic identity amongst Indonesia's Muslims while at the same time amplifying perceptions of a clash between the "West" and the "Muslim world". Furthermore 9/11 and its aftermath helped to facilitate the radicalization of elements within Indonesia's Muslims and it increased support for the goals and actions of these radicalized elements. The general public as well as the majority of the political elites, while initially condemning the 9/11 terrorist attacks, reacted very negatively to the "war on terror" and the invasion of Iraq, leading to an increased negative perception of the U.S. and their allies amongst Indonesia's Muslims.

⁵ Timothy Mapes: For Indonesia, Security Woes Persist, in: Asian Wall Street Journal, May 30, 2005, p. A1

assumption, that a break-up of Indonesia (often termed 'balkanization') could very well be underway (Wanandi 2002; Mally 2003).

Even more worrying, especially the escalation of violence in Ambon (Moluccas) owed a great deal to the establishment and deployment of Islamist militia groups such as the at present disbanded Laskar Jihad (Jihad militia), that was reportedly involved to a large deal in the killings between Muslims and Christians on the Moluccas. Besides the LJ the Front Pembela Islam (Defenders of Islam-Front), another Islamist militia, made headlines by patrolling the streets of Jakarta and other cities in order to prevent what their members perceived as "vice" (i.e. massage parlours, nightclubs, the vendor of 'nudist' literature etc.). Furthermore the FPI conducted raids during the Ramadan, targeting businesses and individuals who were deemed disrespectful to the holy month. As of lately the organization attacked the then newly founded office of the Indonesian edition of Playboy in April of 2006 as well as gatherings and demonstrations of newly founded left-wing Papernas party in 2007, accusing the party of spreading 'communist ideals'.⁶ Doing so various militia groups were often backed by political elites as well as businessmen. The Laskar Jihad for example was reportedly armed and trained by members of the Indonesian military. The FPI attacks on leftist gatherings and bookstores were backed by local elites to suppress "un-Islamic" democracy activists. As long as their existence and "street politics" were of any use for the power politics of various elites, they did often gained significant support from such sources.

With bomb attacks on Christian churches (2000), nightclubs in Bali (2002 and 2005 respectively), the Australian embassy (2004) and the Marriott Hotel (2003) an Islamist terror network, the Jemaah Islamiyah, made headlines. Especially the resurgence of militant Islamist groups seemed only to highlight the country's growing problem with a radicalizing Islam and its militant fringe. In addition to that, some political observers claimed that Jemaah Islamiyah had close ties with international terror-network Al Qaeda (Abuza 2003). Although the empirical evidences behind such assessment have turned out to be scarce to say the least (Hamilton-Hart 2005), they led to concerns amongst many security analysts over the threat posed by radical Islam in post-Suharto Indonesia. Some even mentioned the possibility of a destabilization of the country's course towards democracy as a consequence of the rise of radical Islam. In line with such analysis it seems to be that Islam is currently Indonesia's biggest problem.

⁶ Prodi Sabarini: Militants attack new leftist party, in: The Jakarta Post (online), March 30, 2007.

Apart from the “uncivil society” (Hefner), another striking feature of the resurgence of political Islam in Indonesia is the remarkable rise of Muslim Brotherhood-inspired PKS party during the last national elections in 2004. The PKS, a party that did not even gain two percent of the votes in Indonesia’s first free and fair elections in 1999, managed to gain win more than seven percent in 2004. Thus the PKS became Indonesia’s seventh strongest political party and joined the ruling coalition of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. Analysis of the 2004 elections has shown that PKS won many votes through their somewhat “secular agenda”, i.e. demands for a reform of the welfare system and anti-corruption policies.⁷ The party has not openly demanded the establishment of Sharia law and mainly broached governance issues. In general during the 1999 and 2004 national elections political Islamist parties to establish comprehensive Sharia law on the national level failed latest in 2003 due to a majority voting against the implementation of Islamic law. Nevertheless such attempts have been increasingly successful on the local level through the establishment of local *Sharia*-style bylaws in currently over 10 percent of the Indonesia’s districts and provinces (Hasan 2007b). But then such policies are often implemented with the support of non-Islamist parties like the former Suharto-party Golkar. This shows that the adoption of *Sharia*-style bylaws has become a strategy used by local politicians to mobilize and to gain political support. Parties that support the adoption of *Sharia* regulations are often seen as more credible to deliver services and good governance on the principles of Islam by their constituencies (Assyaukanie 2007).

It seems clear that Indonesia’s democratization has opened up space for a great variety of Islamist actors. Democratization encompassed the establishment of a multiparty system a lifting of the ban on the freedom of press and an enormous decentralization-process, allowed Islamists to spread their ideas legally through wide communication networks. It also enabled the return of Islamist parties to the political arena. Furthermore the decentralization process made possible the implementation of local *Sharia* style bylaws, because the regional autonomy law from 1999 states that local governments at the district level are entitled to implement their own regional regulations. The weakening of the state security apparatus, which under Suharto seemed to have almost unlimited power,⁸ made possible the establishment of various Islamic civil society organizations; amongst those as mentioned before moderate, liberal organizations but also what Hefner has termed as the “uncivil

⁷ Jusuf Wanandi: Legislative elections and Indonesia's future, in: The Jakarta Post (online), May 21, 2004.

⁸ Benedict Anderson has described this as the “triumph of the state vis-a-vis society” – it being a main characteristic of Suharto’s new order (Anderson 1990).

society”. While post-Suharto Indonesia certainly proves the hypothesis wrong, that democratic institutions automatically facilitate Islamist moderation, realities on the ground have also questioned an alternative “the state vs. the Islamists” perception. Especially militant Islamists have often acted in a grey zone between repression and co-optation and therefore have largely remained with impunity. The varying relationship between the state and Islamist actors, ranging from inclusion, over cooptation to repression, only emphasizes that political Islam is instrument of specific social forces to foster specific socio-political interests. Hence neither the Islamist actors nor the Indonesian state can be considered to be somewhat like a “monolithic bloc”; rather it is a stark characteristic of the post-Suharto Indonesia that the relationship between state and Islamist actors has lot its cohesion. The ambivalent relationship between political elites and the “uncivil society”, as well as the rise of the PKS in the 2004 elections, again must be understood within the wider context of Indonesia’s transition to what Hadiz has termed “illiberal democracy” (Hadiz 2003).

4. Contextualizing political Islam in post-Suharto Indonesia: The oligarchic continuum

When analysing the end of the new order and Indonesia's transition to democracy, the aforementioned positive reviews of the democratization process mainly refer to factors such as elite choices, leadership and the importance of political institutions for the course and outcome of the democratization process (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986). Following these tracks the crafting of democratic rules and institutions, combined with democratic forms of governance and the existence of a pro-democratic, enlightened civil society serving as a "watchdog" of the government, is equated with the consolidation of democracy (Rieffel 2004). While such new institutional arrangements may be pivotal for the establishment of a democratic political system, they largely exclude the constellations of social forces (or classes) that "determine the parameters of possible outcomes in any given situation (...) the direction of political change following the end of authoritarian rule is primarily the product of contests between these competing social forces" (Hadiz 2003: 592, see also Bellin 2000). Bellin has pointed out that therefore capital and labour are "contingent, not consistent, democrats" – support for democracy or the authoritarian state depends on whether these specific social forces see their political and economic interests served by the respective form of rule or not. When political and economic conditions change, interests may change, too. Thus social forces might see the need to redefine their position towards the respective regime (Bellin 2000).

The change of the political and economic conditions in Indonesia was brought about by the Asian Crisis in 1997. With the new order descending into a vast economic crisis, more than one third of the population slid under the poverty line, living standards of large parts of the population declined, and the economic growth-rates amounted less than zero. Once legitimized by high economic growth rates and rising living standards, the new order regime, personalized at large by Suharto, who was often referred to as *Pak Pembangunan* (Father of Development), saw itself confronted with a looming political and economic crisis. As Suharto proved to be incapable to solve the crisis and hundreds of thousands demanded reforms, the minions withdrew their loyalty and forced Suharto to step down (Smith 2003). A coalition of moderate reformers and old elites under the leadership of Suharto's deputy Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie took over power and initiated democratic reforms – effectively marginalizing social forces that demanded more radical reforms. Many elite figures of the new order, who connived the oustering of Suharto, did so in order to protect their own resources of political and economic power (Slater 2006: 208). Therefore while the political institutions were widely

reformed, the socioeconomic power-structures of the new order (i.e. the vast informal patronage networks of the elites) thus remained largely unaffected through this quasi-“evolutionary”, elite-driven transition process. The result being what Slater (2004) has called the construction of a “political cartel”. Although elections are formally competitive, the cartel of political elites protected those in power from outside competition. Slater (2006: 208) has even made the point that the political cartel has made Indonesia’s oligarchy “practically irremovable through the electoral process, even though elections themselves have been commendably free and fair”. Coming from such an assessment it is not surprising, that corruption, political violence, collusion and nepotism - “old” phenomena associated with the new order - are still common in Indonesia. According to the Bertelsmann Transformation Index while “electoral democratic institutions seem to be working in Indonesia, the political system is still constrained by a high level of corruption, patronage politics and other informal institutions”.⁹

Indonesia today is still amongst the thirty most corrupt nations according to Transparency International’s annual Corruption Index. Corruption is so endemic, that for example an estimated 85 percent of judges¹⁰ and 60 percent of all police officers believed to be corrupt (Webber 2006: 408) and company’s working in Indonesia are believed to use about 10 percent of their overall budgets to “smooth” business operations (Henderson/ Kuncoro 2004). While collusion and nepotism were largely directed through Shafto’s patronage networks under the new order, nowadays the political democratic parties serve as patronage vehicles of Indonesia’s “new” elites. Although distinct from illegal corruption practices, the fact that many government officials from the local to the national level either hold position of have holding in private sector businesses, further adds up to the lack of public scrutiny and accountability of the political elites.¹¹

Voter buying is common in all districts of Indonesia as more than 7,000 election violations were reported, including multiple vote-buying incidents, during the 2004 parliamentary elections. During the presidential elections of 2004 the NGOs Indonesian Corruption Watch (ICW) and Transparency International Indonesia (TII) suspected nearly all presidential candidates of vote-buying. All of this left an Australian journalist to wonder whether corruption is running so rampant, that it fully undermines democracy: “Democracy is a good

⁹ Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2008: Country Report Indonesia, online: http://www.bertelsmann-transformation-index.de/fileadmin/pdf/Gutachten_BTI_2008/ASO/Indonesia.pdf (20.02.08)

¹⁰ Frans H. Winarta: Judicial corruption not only rampant but also shameful, The Jakarta Post (online), October 31, 2005.

¹¹ Kristian Tamtomo: Conflicts of interest a source of corruption, The Jakarta Post (online), August 27, 2007.

thing. But what is the point of it when the state apparatus is so corrupt that most laws are subverted to the point of irrelevancy? Who cares whether this or that leader is elected when corruption will mean that their policy platforms are unlikely to be implemented, and certainly not in the way that they would intend”?¹²

What fuels the “money politics” is a party system in which political parties have not emerged out of “broad-based social interests” and therefore with the backing a different social forces – this wasn’t possible due to the elite-controlled transition process - , but mainly as “patronage machines” of elite factions. While according to democracy theories the constituents of the political parties should nominate party leaders to run as their candidates for local and national elections, in reality these decisions are made by the party elites who support the candidate with the highest bid. One possible example during the 2007 local elections in Jakarta is the backing of former deputy governor Fauzi Bowo by the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P). This decision came as a surprise to the PDI-P party chapters and the public as former Suharto-party Golkar had been previously supporting Bowo. Nevertheless PDI-P gave Bowo a chance to register as independent candidate, although various other candidates had been selected by the party cadres in the city. Disappointed party members as well as political analysts described this as a “political ploy played by the elite” who hold the tickets to enter the race for lucrative and sought-after posts within the local and national government. These tickets are usually sold to the highest bidder, which effectively marginalises democratic decision-making processes inside the parties.¹³ In a country, in which according to the common poverty definition of the World Bank (less than two US-dollars per day) more than 50% of the population continue to live below the poverty line,¹⁴ the practice of money politics severely restricts political decision-making to competing wealthy elite factions. Hence workers and farmers who make up the majority of Indonesia’s population have de facto no political representation (Hillman 2006: 27). Furthermore political violence has also not significantly declined after the fall of Suharto. Almost on a weekly basis media reports present the occurrence of acts of violent committed by state- and non-state actors alike. Nearly all parties command their own militia groups, which are deployed to secure political events as well as to intimidate possible opponents.

¹² Michael Backmann: Bribery and Corruption on the Election Trail, in: *The Age* (online), April 9, 2004.

¹³ Prodi Sabarini: Party nomination process blasted as undemocratic, in: *The Jakarta Post* (online), March 21, 2007.

¹⁴ Urip Hudiono: Poverty numbers down 'slightly', in: *The Jakarta Post* (online), July 03, 2007.

While as a matter of fact the institutional reforms have been tremendous, the power structures behind Indonesia's continuing problems have remained intact and the benefits of democracy are still not felt by many Indonesians. Thus Robinson/ Hadiz (2004) have described Indonesia's transition process as the "oligarchization" of democracy. Within the democratic oligarchy, as opposed to the authoritarian new order of Suharto, the state has lost its cohesion. It therefore can not be understood as a monolithic bloc, but as a focal point of competing social forces. Against this background not only the deployment of Islamist militias serving as instruments in the hands of competing elite factions, but also the success of the Islamist PKS must be understood. Against what is perceived by many Indonesians as the "old", ineffective and corrupt political establishment, the PKS presented itself as an "anti-establishment" party with a political agenda mainly focussing on anti-corruption policies and socioeconomic reforms. The success of the "clean and caring" message during the 2004 elections is a result of the many shortcomings of the "new" democratic order.

5. Conclusion: The prospects and perils of political Islam ten years after *reformasi*

The analysis of the substance of democracy as well as the realities of “democratic” practices in post-Suharto Indonesia have shown a widening gap between the formal aspects of democracy (i.e. free elections, democratic institutions) and the democratic rhetoric of elected elites on the one hand, and the realities on the ground. Although the democratic institutions are largely considered to be intact and consolidated, they have been “captured and appropriated by the predatory interests” (Hadiz 2003) of the old elites. Thus old elites, nurtured under the new order, have reinvented themselves within the new “democratic” context. In the absence of a political program that is able to tackle these issues, the moderate Islamists lack a mass base amongst the farmers and workers. To a large extent, political Islam has remained an urban, middle class phenomena. Hence PKS and others have so far tried ineffectively to put through their reformist agenda by forming alliances with the predatory elites. Ironically though, the “clean and care” campaign that gained the PKS many votes during the 2004 elections, could not be successfully transformed into “realpolitik” under the Yudhoyono government and thus currently has the party in a state of decline.

“Realpolitik” has provided the PKS with some serious blowbacks throughout the last years. By being a part of the Yudhoyono government, the party had to carry some of the responsibility for “tough” policies such as the cuts on fuel subsidies. More damage to the party’s “clean and care” image was done through corruption charges against PKS members serving in regional governments. While Islamist parties like the PKS managed to gain electoral success with an agenda focused on governance issues, it seems rather hard for them to deliver. Public opinion polls seem to provide further evidence for this lesson as they’ve recently shown flagging support for political Islam in general. Only 9 percent of the population, versus 20 percent in 2004, currently support a larger role for Islam in government. PKS support in polls at the national level also declined from 8 percent in 2004 to just 2.5 percent currently.¹⁵ Another poll showed that whereas 43 percent of Indonesians would vote for secular parties in the upcoming elections, only 5 percent would vote for Islamist parties. The rest of the population would opt for moderate Muslim parties.¹⁶

¹⁵ „Islam and Politics in Indonesia“, in: The Wall Street Journal (online), 24.10.06.

¹⁶ Ary Hermawan: Gloomy outlook for Islamist parties, in: The Jakarta Post (online), 16.10.06.

Consequently the party lost the local elections in Jakarta in August of 2007. According to many observers the reasons for that¹⁷ were the fears of many voters that the PKS, if it was to win, might establish Sharia-style bylaws in the city. The inability to push through the “clean and care” reform agenda had in turn led to a switch to moral policing. This was shown through the participation of the PKS in bringing forward the controversial “anti-pornography bill” in 2006, which would have banned bikinis as well as Hindu minority’s traditional dances, as well as supporting the implementation of local Sharia style bylaws. The public outcry that followed the proposal of the “anti-pornography” bill did cost the party many voters. Plus, in a society that is in a process of Islamization for nearly two decades now attempts to increase political legitimacy through moral policing are not the sole domain of the Islamists, as local Sharia laws have been implemented by “normal” Muslim and even “secular” parties, too.

At the same time the once weakened state security apparatus, that was largely blamed for its tough stance on opposition forces during the Suharto-era, has staged a comeback by cracking down on the militant fringe of political Islam. The *amir* (leader) of JI and the organization’s military commander were both arrested, amongst other members, during spring and summer of 2007. During these operations, large caches of weapons and explosives were found by the police, further weakening JI’s military capabilities. This came months after a split within JI had occurred: Noorhaidin Mohammed Top, the mastermind behind JI’s various attacks between 2002 and 2005, is believed to have left JI due to differing viewpoints about future tactics. He is also believed to run a JI splinter group now that is planning further attacks on western targets, while JI is now in the midst of recruiting new members and restructuring itself (ICG 2007: 5). Besides JI, the security apparatus has also cracked down on many other local and national militant groups such as Laskar Jihad, many of whom it once had forged tactical alliances (i.e. to silence democracy activists) in the past. Again, this must be understood in the context of the post-9/11 (and post-Bali) politics: the crackdowns have served the military well to polish its damaged image and to present itself once again as the guardian of the nation. This even led to the reinstatement of military relations with the US, EU and Australia – all of whom had abandoned military relations in the aftermath of the East Timor massacres.

¹⁷ The term “loss” does not reflect precisely on the outcome of the local elections in Jakarta in August 2007, because the PKS, while opposing a 20 party strong coalition of nearly all other political parties, still managed to win more than 40% of all votes. Notwithstanding it did not succeed in providing Jakarta’s next governor.

Of course this does not mean that the decline of political Islam in Indonesia is not irreversible. The continuum of predatory interests, graft-ridden political institutions, rampant poverty and unemployment still – despite high economic growth rates – still serve as a breeding ground for radicalism. Yet it seems to be some kind of an “irony” of the democratization of Indonesia that it did open up space for Islamists to participate in electoral politics by democratic means. But while institutions are democratic, the elites behind them and their power politics are, more often than not, not democratic at all – this has minimized the positive effects of the moderate Islamists to a large extent. In addition to that, their power politics have often instrumentalized, or in the case of Laskar Jihad even initiated, the existence of militant Islamist groups for their own purposes. The real challenge ahead of Indonesia’s democracy therefore is not political Islam per se, but rather the appropriation of the democratization process by the power politics of predatory elites.

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