

# The Resistance of Islamic Organization in Indonesia to Globalization and How to Handle It

*A Discourse Analysis on Sharia Cooperatives 212*

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**Abstract**— This paper discusses the rise of far-right groups in Indonesia which is represented by Islamic organizations and how the government handle it. This phenomenon can be seen as a part of the rise of far-right groups on the global stage, signified by Donald Trump’s victory in America and Britain’s vote to exit the European Union. The similarity between these phenomena is the appearance of groups claiming to represent a particular traditional identity who opposes international authority. In this case, the international authority is a neoliberal-capitalism regime which enters their respective local territory through globalization. This paper will use Richard Falk’s theory of globalization and resistance. According to Falk, Globalization will make neoliberal economics the only government agenda and force them to ignore programs that benefit society, such as social welfare. Because of that, resistance from local groups will be inevitable. By using discourse analysis on the declaration of Sharia Cooperatives 212, this paper finds that the rise of far-right groups in Indonesia is a form of resistance to the neoliberal-capitalism regime. In the end, this article argues that the government’s sensitivity toward the people’s well-being is the first step that must be taken to deal with the rise of far-right groups in Indonesia.

**Keywords**—Globalization, Neoliberalism, Resistance, Far-right.

## I. A NEW KIND OF TRAGEDY

Terrifying things happened in Jakarta in the past decades. There was the Malari Incident in 1974 which results in 11 protestors dead, and hundreds of cars and buildings destroyed [1]. There was the Tragedy of May 1998 where mass violence, civil unrest, and bodies lying on the roadside was a common thing [2]. There was, and still, many student gang-fights (*tawuran*) on a daily basis which killed some students from time to time [3]. All of those tragedies were nothing compared to what happened in Jakarta on December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2016.

On that fateful day, hundreds of thousands of people wearing white robes and clothes rallies to the center of Jakarta shouting a single demand: “Ahok (the then-Governor of Jakarta) must be jailed [4]!” What makes this so-called ‘212 Demonstration’ scary, despite the absence of violence, is the fact that this was not an angry mob. It was a highly organized group unified by a single agenda, hellbent on overthrowing democracy and replace it with their more tyrannical version.

What makes these people truly scary is the fact that they might succeed.

Together with the rise of Neo-Nazi and Radical Nationalists in Europe [5] as well as the presidency of Donald Trump [6], these movements are part of ‘the global rise of far-right groups.’ Despite having an ideological difference, all of these movements have similar characteristics. First, all of them claim to represent the certain traditional identity of which, they claim, have been ignored for years. Secondly, all of these movements were motivated by a strong hatred to the political ‘others’ that they consider as evil. In the case of Indonesia, this is the Islamic religious extremist claiming to represent Muslim people to fight the ‘reign of Chinese minority.’

The advent of this far-right groups signifies a massive wave of change in the practice of politics. Whereas we thought that the era of globalization would bring forward an age of stable political economy, the far-right groups resurrect the dreaded identity politics once more [7]. The impact of this phenomenon can be felt, not at the material level, but at the immaterial level. Despite their few numbers, these groups are quite vocal and have the effective method of producing ideas and discourse which can disrupt the liberal/mainstream conversation. Just by khutbah and social media, they were able to convince thousands of people that Islam is the most superior religion while others are merely blasphemy, eliminating the value of tolerance and diversity in the process.

It is quite clear that these far-right groups are problematic because their value and their existence are inherently against democracy. In other words, should the Islamic extremists succeeded in their goal, the sacrifice of countless people who have paved the way for democracy in Indonesia will be in vain. That will be a far more dreadful tragedy than what had happened in Jakarta previously. To deal with this problem, I believe that we must first understand the nature of these far-right groups. What is their background? How did they develop their motivation? Why were they able to be so determined at their goal? Those questions will be answered by analyzing the discourse provided in their most important achievement: “The Declaration of Sharia Cooperatives 212.”

## II. A RESISTANCE TO GLOBALIZATION

Before beginning the discussion on globalization, we must first understand the true nature of this phenomenon. Unlike what is being popularized through media, globalization is not innocent. It is not a natural phenomenon triggered by the advancement of technology which will benefit all humanity. It is, in fact, technology itself, devised by a particular regime to achieve specific agenda. The regime, in which, goes by the name of 'neoliberal-capitalism regime' and an agenda simply known as global capital accumulation. By understanding this, we can now safely say that globalization exists to lay the foundation for such agenda. Therefore, globalization is no longer virtuous.

By unmasking the true nature of globalization, we can now reflect it to the ever-growing problem in the contemporary society. As has been stated by Stephen Castles, globalization has the power to transform the social structure of any country to reflect the real ideology of neoliberal-capitalism regime which favors liberalization, deregulation, and market privatization [8]. It means that in every part of the society, all of their resources were directed to the success of establishing such capitalistic regime.

The real problem with globalization as a discourse is the fact that it is marketed as a part of modernization: an inevitable force that the average mass has no choice but to accept and adapt to it [9]. As such, a mass-urbanization from rural to a metropolitan area is seen as something normal while complaints about such phenomenon are treated as a grumbling from an old fart. Globalization is actively trying to separate people from their socio-cultural and political value to embrace the economic efficiency that it brought.

Back in 1997, Richard Falk has predicted that the advancement of technology will trigger a severe social problem. He said that globalization would make the economy becomes the most critical government agenda – if not the only list. By doing so, globalization would force the government to abandon social welfare program to fulfill a particular standard established by the neoliberal-capitalism regime [10]. This kind of behavior can be seen from Mr. Joko Widodo's statement during his public appearance in APEC CEO Summit 2014:

*"Today, I am very happy, to be with you ...I am very happy because we can talk about business, about investment with all of you ...we have national one-stop service office that can help you, that will serve you, that will facilitate you, that will give you your business permit ...We are waiting for you to invest in Indonesia [11]."*

In that speech, Mr. Widodo gave a sales pitch about how valuable his country and his people are as products and stated his willingness to make it easier for foreigners to gain access to these products. Despite all of his campaign pep talk about the economy for the people [12], it seems more likely that he would go in-length to make sure that his country aligns with

the neoliberal-capitalism regime's agenda, that is: to open his market and give access for the global capital for an easier incorporation.

The opening of Indonesian market is beneficial for transnational companies and bigwig investors, but what about for the people? As can be seen from the implementation of MP3EI, the effect of such policy for the people is pretty ugly. After millions of Indonesians were displaced from their home due to the need of developing infrastructure, we can no longer believe that such action is beneficial for most people [13].

Due to the destructive nature that globalization cause to the ordinary people, Falk called it a 'globalization from above' which he defined as "a political scheme devised by the elite to further their own agenda." The neoliberal ideology embedded in globalization will shove away all aspect of society to make the economy as the only agenda that matters. In consequence, the alienated people will start a resistance against such scheme. The goal of such resistance will be to seize the popular discourse and disrupt it by using their own. Falk called it the 'globalization from below' [14].

According to Falk, there are at least four phenomena that can be seen as a form of globalization from below. *First*, society begins to see the futility of electoral politics. No matter who got elected, people will see them as a linchpin of the neoliberal-capitalism regime. *Second*, politicians, most likely in the opposition camp, will respond to society's anxiety by offering an alternative policy which aligns with their interest. It will lead to the rise of populism in political practice. *Third*, the rise of populism will trigger the rise of right-wing extremism which will cause the governments to reconsider their alignment with neoliberal-capitalism regime [15].

*Fourth*, the government will lose control over identity politics. As people were able to empower themselves as well as self-producing knowledge, the party can no longer rally these people under the same banner of identity. The increasing intensity of interaction between like-minded people will create a new identity politics – a new formation of 'self' and 'others.' As such, the forgotten traditional identity will arise as a form of new ultra-nationalism or religious extremist. The elements of populism, right-wing extremism, and traditional identity will merge as a part of globalization from below [16]. It is in this framework that we can assess the genesis of far-right groups in Indonesia.

## III. THE RISE OF FAR-RIGHT GROUPS IN INDONESIA

Most literature on the increase of far-right groups in Indonesia usually refers to the rise of Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) and Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI). However, extremist Islamic movement has always been part of Indonesia's political history [17]. Together with communism, the threat from Islamic extremism toward this country's ideology has been prevalent since the Independence Day. The only reason

we have not become the ‘Islamic Republic of Indonesia’ is the ruthlessness of our two dictators, Sukarno and Suharto, who repressed such movement with sheer force. Ironically, the return to liberal-electoral democracy is the most significant contributing factor that allows those moves to arise once more.

Ever since 2004, Indonesia’s political spectrum has started to veer to the right. The legislation of Anti-Pornographic Law, Anti-LGBT law, Anti-Extramarital Sex Law and internet censorship law, is a proof of how conservative value has gained power over Indonesia’s politics [18]. The urge to establish a certain moral standard and interfere with private life is the result of our leader’s support base. In every kind of election, religious groups will always show up as the leading supporter of a particular candidate to the point that they can decide the result of an election by themselves. The Islamic groups are gaining power by using the election as a way to incorporate their values into the leaders’ policy [19].

The religious extremists also have a firm grip on the construction of morality at the grassroots level. The right to free speech granted in this era has allowed these organizations to produce and distribute their idea in a comprehensive manner [20]. Moreover, Islamic community is led by an indisputable *Imam* whose words are akin to the will of God. Like a military, the word from an *Imam* became an order that must be followed by his followers. However, the mind of the people could not be easily influenced if they do not somehow relate to the idea being promoted by their *Imam*. The idea that Muslim people have been oppressed by Chinese minority is agreed widely because the exact thing is what happened in Suharto’s regime.

Back then, Suharto repressed any community which upheld ideology other than Pancasila. First, he blocked any Islamic leader from entering political stages. Then, many Islamic parties were forced to fuse into one, rendering them weak compared to Suharto’s party. As if it was not enough, Suharto also stripped them of their value by prohibiting Islamic attribute to be worn in public place. A law from Education Minister even explicitly says that women cannot wear *Hijab* in school [21]. The fact that Suharto’s regime was mostly supported by Chinese Taipans fueled the rage of Muslim people today. They felt that they were wronged, so they believed it is only justice if they do the same to their oppressor.

Another factor contributing to the rise of the far-right organizations is the lack of their ‘left counterpart.’ The ban on communism as an ideology means that there is nothing that can counter the widespread influence of Islamic extremism. In fact, the ban on communism serves as leverage to demonize the term ‘communist’ [22]. The lack of socialization of communist idea has developed several myths about the actual ideology. For some reasons, communism in Indonesia is associated with atheism. Moreover, the word ‘communist’ itself brings into mind the horror of Indonesian army general

massacre, famously depicted in Arifin C. Noer’s film. Because of these myths surrounding the forbidden ideology, it is easy to trigger people’s rage by merely labeling someone as this so-called communist.

We can notice how much the patterns of far-right groups’ rise in Indonesia is aligned with what Richard Falk has predicted. Disbelief towards electoral democracy has already begun as Mr. Widodo is proven to be another linchpin of neoliberal-capitalistic regime just like Mr. Yudhoyono. Political populism is also on the rise as an easy way to gain power by siding with the far-right groups who happen to have more headcount. Another thing that is true is the rise of traditional identity, represented by the Islamic community, and the identity politics it brought. Globalization from below has started in Indonesia.

#### IV. THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

It is easy to judge people by our own opinion, but it is not so easy to judge people by who they are. Just like there are two sides of the same coin, every story has its duality. What is seen as the rising threat towards democracy can also be seen as the strongest resistance toward capitalism that this country has ever had. Indeed, the word “collapsing capitalistic economy” is the very word used in the declaration of Sharia Cooperatives 212:

*“From head to toe, the products used by (our) community are products made by the capitalists. The money spends by the community is brought to the producer’s country. This is what led GNPf MUI to strengthen the community’s economic foundation by creating Sharia Cooperatives 212 and collapsing capitalistic economy [23].”*

The word ‘212’ from Sharia Cooperatives 212 is meant to remind people of the 212 Demonstration which is now hailed as the day of Islamic resurgence in Indonesia. By using the term ‘*fardhu kifayah*’ which they define as a collective obligation for the Islamic community to seize the means of production to themselves, the Sharia Cooperatives 212 invites Indonesian Muslim people to help themselves being independent in their effort to disrupt mainstream political discourse.

It is a pretty innovative movement since it complements the extremist religious narrative to replace Indonesia’s political system. After all, no political system, even the Islamic Caliphate one, can stand without its economic policy. Therefore, the discourse brought by Sharia Cooperatives 212 can tackle both the issue of establishing Islamic regime as well as resisting the globalization from above.

However, it is quite ironic that the group who demonizes communism actually offers a communist solution themselves. Despite the fact that cooperative is rooted in Indonesia’s history as an idea proposed by Muhammad Hatta, it cannot be denied that the very idea originates itself from the social-

communism thinking. After all, the idea ‘seizing means of production’ is a very communist thing used in an effort for class struggle [24]. The religious extremists can offer such solution without any problem because the idea of communism in Indonesia has been subverted into something that resembles atheism. As long the idea is being provided by honorable *Imam*, then it is not communism, it is part of Islamic value which should be compiled and promoted. Such is the mentality of most Muslim people in Indonesia.

But aside from the inherent contradiction of Sharia Cooperatives 212, the idea itself is very brilliant as a part of resistance toward capitalism. To this statement, Hizkia Polimpung wrote that nowadays, it is not so easy to organize and implement such resistance on a large scale. Most anti-capitalism experimentation in Indonesia is usually done in small size by different leftist groups who, most of the time, cannot unite under the same banner. The end product itself is mostly just a small coffee shop or another kind of small businesses. However, the Sharia Cooperatives 212 plans to build a franchise of minimarket around Indonesia which sells basic needs. He believes that this is a considerable achievement that must be appreciated. It is not impossible for the religious extremists, which is more united and have strong supporter around the country, to amass enough economic income that they can finally be a loud voice of resistance toward capitalism and globalization [25].

#### V. TO TAME THE RAGING EXTREMISTS

So, does the rise of far-right groups in Indonesia contribute to the anti-capitalist discourse? Yes, it does very brilliantly. But does it threaten the establishment of democracy and freedom in Indonesia? Yes, it does horrifically. It puts us in an awkward spot. The government would like to eradicate this group since it threatens their alignment with the neoliberal-capitalism regime. In fact, such effort has already begun by the legislation of Civil Society Organizations Law which allows them to disband any organization they deem unnecessary [26].

However, this kind of policy will only lead to the repetition of what Suharto has done. Alienation can only be effective for as long as you can maintain your regime, but once it collapses, the alienated will burst from its exile and disrupting the new regime once more. Most importantly, such solution is no longer effective in the contemporary era where the far-right groups have garnered enough means to produce and distribute their discourse. Therefore, such legislation will never get full support from the society.

Another thing that makes it impossible to alienate the far-right is the fact that the politicians need their power in number to maintain their position. Even if the current government does not want to be related to these religious extremists, it does not mean that their opposition will not. It is what happened in the Jakarta Gubernatorial Race, where underdog candidate, Anies

Baswedan, won the election due to sheer support from Islamic community [27].

The only efficient way to tame these extremists is to understand their rage. Try to talk to these people one by one and see the world through their eyes. This kind of manner is supposed to be Mr. Widodo’s marketed feature as a leader who can put himself on the same level with his people [28]. Instead of flirting with world’s leader in G-20, Mr. Widodo should speak with these extremists and socialize how vital Pancasila is for the sustainability of this nation. Perhaps, he can also teach them about what communism is and expose the inherent contradiction in the far-rights’ movement.

When we have understood the cause of the rise of far-right, we can see how the history of injustice dramatically contributes to this phenomenon. To handle this problem, the government has first to address that issue and state their willingness to fix it. An apology might be far from enough, but it is sufficient as a first step and would be better instead of continuously ignoring their suffering by aligning with an international regime who will only add to that pain. Otherwise, it is highly likely that the past regime will do it instead.

The recent alliance between Suharto family and Islamic groups is an example of how easy these people to forgive someone who has caused them so much suffering [29]. Unfortunately, instead of the current government using this influential group for building the nation, that power is used by the opposition for a goal no other than seizing control for themselves. If we learned anything from Brexit phenomenon in Europe, the far-right groups are far more dangerous if they are on the side of opposition as they will channel all of their energy and resources to topple an already establishing regime. Based on their determination to resist the neoliberal-capitalist regime, I believe it is better if Indonesian government can go hand in hand with the far-right to oppose the globalization from above together.

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