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**POLITICIZATION OF RELIGION AND THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY
IN INDONESIA IN POPULISM THEORY**

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Abstract: After the fall of Soeharto's repressive New Order, spirit for displaying religious symbols, especially Islamic symbols, into public sphere in Indonesia was getting stronger. In certain contexts, such a spirit has morphed into a political movement, or what is commonly referred to as populism. The most actual populist movement that has attracted attention of many in Indonesia recently can be found in Aksi Bela Islam (the Islam Defense Action) or ABI concerned with the issue of Al-Maidah: 51. The movement has successfully terminated Ahok, the incumbent governor, from political power in Jakarta. This study aims to analyze the politicization of religion in Indonesia according to populism theory. The result of the study shows that religious populism in Indonesia can be seen from two sides. On the one hand, populism is viewed as a result of social inequality in both national and global contexts, and on the other hand, it is a threat to the future of the consolidation process of democracy in Indonesia because of its exclusiveness, anti-multiculturalism, and anti-pluralism, so that it may create a tyranny of the majority over the rights of minority.

Key words: politicization of religion, populism, Indonesia's democracy, Perda Sharia, Islam in Indonesia, Islamic populism, anti-multiculturalism, anti-pluralism.

1. Introduction

Unlike Western countries that build democracy by first eliminating the dominant role of the Church, which is, thus, considered a barrier to democracy, Indonesia builds democracy based on the values contained in religion (Madjid 1995, 218-219). This notion could be due to the fact that majority of Indonesian people are religious, so that they could not completely separate religion in public (secular) areas. The involvement of religion in building democracy in Indonesia certainly has its own dynamics and consequences, especially because of two different characteristics that religion has. On the one hand, religion plays an important role in guiding people to show moral behavior, and on the other hand the truth claim it holds may become a barrier to democratic enforcement. This truth claim tends to blame those who are of different beliefs, and very often it becomes a barrier in building a life of mutual respect among people of different religions, even among the same religious adherents. Religious teachings, in this sense, are often dogmatic and doctrinal (Hidayat 2010, 160, Susanto 2017, 235).

A relevant example of religion in politics in Indonesia is the rampant enactment of Islamic Regional Regulations, called *Perda Sharia*, in several local governments. Some analysts are quite concerned that the implementation of the *Perda* is more politically nuanced in order to get sympathy of the predominantly Muslim society rather than to improve the welfare of the society (Kamil, 2007). The National Commission on Anti-Violence against Women reported that, from 1999 to 2009, there were 154 Regional Regulations that contained elements of discrimination both directly and indirectly against women. The commission also claimed that 40% of the *Perda Sharia* had elements of discrimination and even violence against women (Komnas Perempuan 2010, 19). In addition, a research by Fanani also showed that 78 Sharia laws, which are ready to be ratified, and 52 local governments, which have implemented Sharia laws, are considered to be very detrimental to women. These laws have, for instance, restricted women activities at night, eliminated their rights to work in public sectors, regulated the way they should dress, express, and obtain proper education, and discriminated against women in terms of public services (Fanani 2017, 171).

Although criticism of *Perda Sharia* has been carried out by many scholars, research conducted by Ikhwan revealed something quite interesting. He said that in Cianjur Regency the implementation of *Perda Sharia* could go hand in hand with the democratization process because of some compromises. The compromises are related to three reasons. First, the local culture is not entirely the same as the Arab culture. The second is the absence of a single dominant religious view, supported by the

presence of a political alliance between the Islamic party and the nationalist party. Third, the *Perda Sharia* has been practically applied to real life in a growing, profane society (Ikhwan 2018, 17).

The most contextual example of the politicized religion, whose impact is still felt until today and that has generated identity politics (Foong and Burhani, <https://www.matamatapolitik.com>), can be seen in the case of the gubernatorial election of Jakarta in 2017. Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, popularly known as Ahok, that represents the candidate from religious and ethnic minority continues to get pressure from the conservative Muslim majority, especially through ABI concerned with Al-Maidah: 51. Both those who have different political stance from Ahok and those who are affiliated with conservative Muslims are united to remove Ahok from the power. The alliance succeeded in defeating Ahok, although almost all survey institutions had predicted that Ahok would gain victory in the election leading to his second term of administration in Jakarta by considering innovations and achievements he made in the province (Tempo.co, <https://pilkada.tempo.co>).

After the fall of Soeharto's New Order in 1998, Islamist movement was indeed getting stronger. This movement tended to display religious symbols into public sphere, and, thus, it politicized the religion. Martin van Bruinessen calls this phenomenon a return of the conservative Islam in Indonesia (Bruinessen, 2013), while Al Makin calls it the homogenization movement of Islam (Al Makin 2015, 195–229). This study will try to explore the movement of the politicization of religion in Indonesia according to populism theory.

2. Politicization of religion as the inevitable

Religion and politics are difficult to separate. Habermas, as quoted by Lars Rodhin and Xin Maom, said that, in the process of democracy transformation, the role of religion cannot be separated completely from politics. He said that there is inherent religious dimension in politics. Therefore, discussion about religion and politics cannot be placed separately between one another (Rhodin and Mao 2017, 60).

Meanwhile, in the context of Islam, political dimension has also been inherent in Islam since the early history of its development. This notion could be found from the fierce dispute among the prophet's companions regarding who would probably replace the prophet's authority after his death, and even this dispute almost led to a war (Yunus, 75). According to Arkoun, as quoted by Muqtada, it is interesting to know that political touch in Islam is able to turn something profane into something sacred through a massive process (Muqtada 2017, 145). This is what seems to underlie the emergence of different schools of theology in Islam, whose

historical process are often associated with political dimension (Nasution, 1983).

Furthermore, Arkoun said that political contestation often dragged religion as a legitimacy to realize the political interests of certain parties or groups. Although the Qur'an lives in a free dialectical space, by some Islamists its meaning is often reduced and carried to support the agenda of establishing *Khilafah Islamiyah* or Islamic state. This idea is seen by Arkoun as something utopian (Muqtada 2017, 145).

Although religion and politics are difficult to separate, Sandu Frunza as quoted by Boldea reminded us about the dangers of religion when involved in political domain. Boldea wrote that religion as a private area must be separated from politics in the public domain. Public (state) constitutions should not be disturbed by religious doctrines (Boldea 2017, 105).

Furthermore, Sandu Frunza argues that the separation of religion from politics can encourage ethical politics, in which society and the State can more freely make joint rules in accordance with the national culture and ideology. This situation is best exemplified by the Jews when they were able to separate their sacred religion from profane politics. With *the death of God* mythology, they were able to refrain from the religious dogmas and doctrines to grow into a great and respected nation through various breakthroughs in the field of science and technology (Boldea 2017, 106).

3. Politicization of religion in Indonesia

3.1. Islam and democracy in Indonesia

Some scholars argue that Islam is not compatible with democracy. This argument is supported by the fact that very few Muslim-majority countries are truly democratic. They rely on this argument from the strong intolerance and violence exhibited by Islam, as well as weak civic culture in the Islamic politics (Huntington 1996, Kedourie 1994, 5-6). However, argument regarding this incompatibility is denied by other scholars with various analyses and other arguments. According to them, there is nothing to do between Islam and attitudes towards democracy (Steven 2002, 4-37, Tessler 2002). Robert N. Bellah, for instance, said that the social system –and hence the values of democracy– practiced in Islam of the early generation was very modern –and therefore very democratic. The system was even considered too modern for its era, so that the social institutions of community at that time were not able to support this overly modern value. This situation eventually brought Muslims back to the dynasty era, namely the pre-Islamic era (Bellah, 1970).

Furthermore, M. Ayoob said that there are scholars of social science in the West who straighten out popular assumption about Islam as it is

considered identical with violence, terrorism, savage, and so on, and hence it is viewed incompatible with democracy. Those scholars maintained that such an assumption is wrong because almost every movement in the name of Islam emerges as a form of protest against the Western dominance and foreign policy towards Islam. According to Mudhofir Abdullah, as quoted by M. Ayoob, the view about intolerant Islam is the view about the minority group of Muslims since most of them are moderate. According to M. Ayoob, the assumption made by the Western society has negated the fact that the Islamic movement is complex, and it depends on the social conditions in which the movement emerges (Ayoob 2004, 1-14).

In relation to Islam and democracy in Indonesia, some scholars stated that Indonesia is a good example of the implementation of democracy in Muslim countries, or countries with Muslims as the majority of population. This can be seen especially after the fall of the New Order era under Soeharto's administration, where Indonesia was still relatively democratic compared to other Muslim countries in the world. According to Lussier and Fish, as quoted by Testriono, Indonesia underwent various advances after the fall of the New Order, such as free and periodic multi-party elections, political authority decentralized through regional autonomy, improved civil liberties, and reduced military role in politics (Testriono 2015, 565). Other scholars, still by Testriono, maintained that the success of democratization in Indonesia can be traced from the increase of social associations and of political involvement among the Indonesian Muslim society, the development of humanist Islamic civil society, and the significant role of Indonesian Muslim leaders in organizational activities, such as in Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, in influencing the regime. In addition, according to Stepan, as quoted by Testriono, Indonesia is the best example of the twin tolerance model, namely a friendly separation between the church and the state where mutual respect between religion and a democratic state can be expected (Testriono 2015, 566).

3.2. Politicization of Religion in Indonesia

Statements of several scholars who call Indonesia the best model for the application of democracy to Muslim countries in the world need to be tested. In fact, the role of religion with its doctrinal nature still influences the journey of democracy in the country. This situation can be felt from the high enthusiasm in implementing sharia-based regional regulations (Perda Sharia) by some regional governments in Indonesia, following the decentralization policy (regional autonomy) with reference to Law No. 32 of 2004. The enactment of the Perda Sharia can be found in the ratified regulations in the city of Padang, Bukittinggi, Cianjur, Tangerang, Jombang, Bulukumba, and Tasikmalaya.

The widespread implementation of Perda Sharia in Indonesia has

drawn controversy. Some experts are quite concerned that such an implementation is more based on political motives to get the sympathy of the citizens, who are predominantly Muslims, than to improve the welfare in the regions (Kamil et al, 2007). In addition, implementation of Perda Sharia is also said to violate the rights of some citizens, especially women. The National Commission on Violence against Women reported that from 1999 to 2009 there were 154 regional regulations that discriminate women both directly and indirectly. Of the 154 regional regulations, 19 include regional regulations at the provincial level, 134 regional regulations at the district or city level, and 1 regional regulation at the village level. These regulations are applied to 69 regional governments at district or city level, and 21 regional governments at provincial level. The National Commission on Violence against Women also claims that 40% of the Perda Sharia imposed contains elements of discrimination and even violence against women (Komnas Perempuan 2010, 19).

According to Arskal Salim, as quoted by Fauzi, the implementation of the Perda Sharia in Indonesia can be grouped into 3 categories, namely: 1) related to social diseases in the community, such as prostitution, gambling, and drinking, 2) related to the increased appreciation on religion, such as reading the Quran, zakat (alms giving), etc. and 3) related to the symbolization of religion, such as wearing a veil. According to Salim, the last two categories of the Perda refer to the internal teachings of Islam, while the first is more directed towards moral issues, in which all religions and regions have similarities (Salim 2012, 98-99).

Another example of the politicization of religion in Indonesia is concerned with the process of general election in the capital city of Jakarta, where supporters of the candidate representing the majority religion, i.e. Anis-Sandi, established a harmonious alliance with the Islamists to defeat the candidate coming from the minority religion, i.e. Basuki Tjahaja Purnama or Ahok (Al Qurtubi). Next, the phenomenon of the politicized religion can also be seen in the expression of the former religious minister Surya Dharma Ali, who at that time was also the chairman of the United Development Party (PPP). Surya Dharma Ali accused the Shi'ite minority group in Indonesia as being heretic, and, therefore, he indirectly legitimized the violence against the group in Sampang Madura. Al Makin looked at this phenomenon as an act of a politician to win the sympathy of Muslims, as the majority group in Indonesia (Al Makin 2017, 12).

It is here that the author would like to highlight more about the phenomenon of the political process in the general election in Jakarta happening in 2017. According to the author, this phenomenon is quite interesting because the issue has been the subject of extensive debate in Indonesian society, on both social and other media. The debate still continues until today, even though the election has been completed and the new Jakarta governor has been elected. The impact of the election in

Jakarta made the Indonesian people split into two, namely between the nationalists (pancasilaist) versus the Islamists, the moderates (liberal) versus the salafists (conservative), and even between the pro-government versus the opposition.

The central issue in Jakarta's election was initially the relationship between religion and politics. For conservative Muslims –which in turn are affiliated with the political forces supporting Anis-Sandi– a government leader, in this context the regional head of Jakarta, must be Muslim with reference to Surah Al-Maidah: 51. Meanwhile, for moderate Muslims –which in turn are affiliated with the candidate pair of Ahok-Djarot– a government leader does not have to be a Muslim. The division between conservative Islam and moderate Islam seems to be sticking out due to the presence of the gubernatorial candidate who came from a minority religion (Protestant Christians), i.e. Ahok. Although Ahok comes from a minority religion, he has large fanatical supporters because of his good track record and performance in building Jakarta. This makes the pro and anti Ahok forces equally strong.

The resistance of the conservative Muslims culminated after a speech made by Ahok as the incumbent Governor during his visit to Kepulauan Seribu region. In the speech, Ahok said: "So you don't need to worry, dear Sir and Madam, as the election is held more early. Even if I am not elected, dear Sir and Madam, I will be in the office until October 2017. So, if we run this program well, you still have to harvest with me even though I am not the elected governor. I am telling you this fact, dear Sir and Madam, so that you will be enthusiastic. Please don't think "if Ahok doesn't win the election, the program will break up." I'll be in the office until October 2017. Don't trust those (who try to mislead you). It is always possible in your little heart that you may not choose me because you are being fooled with Al Maidah: 51 or others, you know (people laughed-ed). That's your own right, dear Sir and Madam. So, if you feel that you can't choose me because you, being fooled, are afraid of hellfire, it's okay. (I know) this is a personal call, dear Sir and Madam. The program will be running. You don't need to feel bad. Supposed that you can't choose Ahok because you don't like him, and at the same time if you accept his program, you don't feel good with him. If you have a feeling that you don't feel good, you will die slowly because you will get a stroke (people laughed-red)." (Batubara 2016).

Anger by the conservative Muslims was triggered by the phrase because you are being fooled with Al Maidah 51 as written in bold on the transcript above. Besides, the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) also gave a fatwa that Ahok's speech was a form of blasphemy against religion. The anger has made the speech go viral through social media and was shown with several mass actions claimed to involve millions of people, which were later referred to as Aksi Bela Islam (ABI) or action for defending Islam. The core demand of the mass action was the arrest of Ahok for

being accused of doing blasphemy against Islam. Among the mass actions were named Action 411 (held on November 4, 2016), Action 212 (held on December 2, 2016), and Action 313 (held on March 31, 2017).

Photo 1. The Islam Defense Actions concerned with Al-Maidah: 51



Mass Action of 411.



Mass Action of 212.



Mass Action of 313.

The phenomenon of the anger of the Indonesian Muslims shown in the mass actions attended by not only Jakarta residents as constituents of the election but also other regions in Indonesia as proved arguments proposed by scholars that the conservative Muslims after the fall of the New Order have strengthened (Bruinessen 2013, Hefner 2010, Al 2015). This phenomenon made the political style using the name of religion in Indonesia finds its momentum. It also seems to be in line with what was stated by Habermas and Arkoun that religion cannot be separated from politics.

Politicization of religion concerned with Al Maidah 51 has been discussed by many scholars (Hifni 2017). Simply speaking, it is quite clear that if Ahok were neither non-Muslim nor a candidate for the governor of Jakarta, then the impact of people's resistance to his speech was likely not so strong. As a comparison, some of the blasphemy cases that occurred in Indonesia have not been as widespread as Ahok's even though the cases were carried out with more extreme actions than Ahok's slip of the tongue, such as the case done by Kapry Nanda in West Pasaman who stepped on the Qur'an or by Lia Eiden who several years ago claimed herself as a prophet.

In addition, statement given by Eggi Sudjana that compared the elect Jakarta governor, i.e. Anis Baswedan, to *a nut that forgot its skin* as the governor did not attend the one-year commemoration of Action 411 carried out by a group calling themselves the 212 Alumni in South Jakarta at al-Azhar Mosque has confirmed that the mass actions of 411, 212 and 313 are a form of politicization of religion, as believed by many. As a matter of fact, Eggi Sudjana on his remarks as a lawyer and advisor to the 212 Alumni Presidium openly said that he was afraid the 212 Alumni would consider Anies that he only use them during the election campaign for the DKI Jakarta governor (Purba 2017).

The latest evidence of political motives in the mass actions above is seen from the case that happened to La Nyalla Mataliti. Mataliti felt it was difficult for him to get the party's recommendation to advance in the

election in East Java although he had received a recommendation from the Islamic Forum led by al-Khatath and the great imam of the Indonesian Muslims, i.e. Habib Rizieq. Mataliti, supported by the 212 Alumni, claimed to have contributed to bring Anies-Sandi on the Jakarta's top position through the massive mass actions. On that occasion, al-Khatath also conveyed Rizieq's message to duplicate the strategy used in Jakarta in other regions in Indonesia (Ibrahim 2018).

Thus, although some scholars, such as Lussier, Fish and Stevan, claimed that Indonesia is a good model of democracy in Muslim countries, the conservative stance of some religious figures is often exploited by political groups to achieve their political goals. This fact can certainly be a stumbling block in the consolidation process of democracy in Indonesia.

4. Populism as a contemporary political phenomenon

Discourse on *populism* has been widely talked in the contemporary political world today. This phenomenon has been indicated by the many political communications using slogans on behalf of "people", "public", "commoner", "ummat", etc. (Jati 2017, 24). Being much talked, the term is still difficult for scholars to define. Even so, there is at least a general picture in understanding the term *populism*. Political analyst Burhanudin Muhtadi, citing from the dictionary of sociology, defines populism as a distinctive form of political rhetoric which considers the primacy and legitimacy of politics lies in the people, views the dominant elite as corrupt, and that political goals are best achieved through direct relations between the government and the people without mediation of the existing political institutions (Muhtadi in <http://www.saifulmujani.com>).

To make it easier for us to understand more about populism, it is better to identify some of the characteristics of populism offered by Meny and Surel as follows. (1) The people are on the top priority. Here, the feeling as a collective community is emphasized, social-horizontal segregation and right-left ideological divisions are less highlighted, but vertical *conflict* is shown in order to distinguish the people from the elites. (2) The populists focus more on the elites' betrayal of the people through the mode of corruption, abuse of power and others. (3) The demand of the populists is to restore the *primacy of the people* through the placement of a charismatic leader who is able to voice the people's aspirations (Meny and Surel 2002, 1-21).

More specifically, Moffitt and Simon stated that populism departs from the perception of crisis. This crisis requires a quick and convincing solution. It may occur due to migration process, economic difficulties, unjust feelings, military threats, social changes, and so on. The crisis further opens up a space for debate in the political realm. Politicians with a populist political style will immediately exploit those situations with the

jargon of "defending the people" through simple language, i.e. language easily understood by the people. A clear example is exhibited by Hugo Chavez that made use of the issue of the crisis associated with imperialism carried out by the United States. Another example is shown by Geert Wilders who accused Islamist movement –as a minority religion– in his country as a real threat to economic growth in the Netherlands (Moffitt and Simon 2014, 391-392).

As populism grows from a crisis, then its movement may occur in almost all countries. This is due to the fact that the crisis may occur in all countries, even in the US. The US, known to have a strong economic foundation, may experience crises, such as an increase of social disparity, uneven welfare distribution, an increase of poverty in the lower and middle class, etc. (Wejnert 2014, 170). In the context of Indonesia, the economic crisis that hit Asian countries in 1997 has opened up the development of the populist movement and, at the same time, has given birth to populist leaders who promised the public to get free from the crisis quickly (Wejnert 2014, 166).

In a democratic country, populism and politics have a close connection because the communication pattern the populism provides is very effective in gaining the sympathy of people as constituents. This notion is in line with what Stoica stated that through political style of populism, political struggle seems to be a mythological battle between goodness and evil, in which the populist group are positioned as good, and the elites are as evil (Stoica 2017).

Dealing with populism as a contemporary political phenomenon, further arguments can be traced from Laclau's statement, as quoted by Benjamin Moffitt and Tormey Simon, when synonymizing populism with politics. He stated that people as the basic word of term *populism* are the biggest subject in politics, whereas populism itself is the political logic. Thus, according to him, populism is the politics itself (Moffitt and Simon 2014, 384).

5. Islamic populism in Indonesia

Populist movement often emerges from religious doctrines that promise salvation and eternal life. The doctrines make people unite under religious symbols. In this sense, the relationship between religion and the populist movement is very close because religion has the potential to give birth to populist actions. According to Zuquete, religion is a potential source to create populism through the politicization of religion centered on charismatic leaders who give promises of salvation embellished with religious symbols and rituals to unite people in a common mission to deal with anything viewed as enemies and to fight crises (Zuquete 2013, 263-271).

Islam as a religion followed by the majority of the Indonesian people is very potential to permeate the populist movement. According to Jati, Islamists who later form a populist movement in Indonesia come from the new middle-class Muslims which have been previously dominated by *santris* –one of the three Muslim groups according to Geertz's division of Indonesian Muslims, i.e. *santri*, *priyayi* and *abangan* (Gertz 1976). As a new group, they see Islam not only as a religion, but also as a need both for socialization and for symbolization. Jati argued that such a middle-class penetrates the bureaucrats, professionals, intellectuals, and so on. Jati added that the spread of the middle-class Muslims is caused by the modernization of Islamic da'wah which prioritizes the practical rather than theological and religious aspects. Socio-economic and socio-political conditions, according to Jati, also cause people to search uniformities in identity, be they religion, ethnicity, language, and so on as a way to strengthen their community. The term *ummah* is then lifted to form a collectivity. The term is no longer representing a member of the Islamic studies (*pengajian*) or of *pesantren* community, but a member of mass action in the name of Islam (Teak 2017, 28).

5.1. Populism as ideology, political communication and political style in Indonesia

Dwayne Woods categorizes populism into three forms, namely populism as an ideology, populism as political communication and populism as a political style (Woods 2014, 9).

In Indonesia, populism as an ideology can be traced to the beliefs of some Muslims regarding the necessity of establishing an Islamic state or Islamic caliphate (Ayoob 2014, 1-14). Efforts to establish an Islamic state actually had emerged when Indonesia declared its independence. Based on historical records, the Islamist movement faded especially during the reign of the Soeharto's New Order. However, after the fall of the New Order in 1998, the Islamist movement re-emerged. Barton maintained that this Islamist movement could become an embryo for the emergence of radical Islamic movements (Barton 2002, 2).

The rise of the Islamist movement in Indonesia, according to Bruinessen, is not departing from a zero point, but it is a continuation of the movement that has already existed in Indonesia, in addition to the support by international forces; the movement has both national and transnational networks (Bruinessen 2002, 118). From the inside, the embryo of the Islamist movement can be traced to the Kartosuwiryo's Darul Islam (DI) movement and the Masyumi Party in the early days of Indonesian independence. Meanwhile, the transnational network can be traced to the rise of the Islamist movement originating from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Pakistan (Bruinessen 2002, 149).

In the context of populism, Islamism arises from the feeling of oppression, or the perception of crisis as mentioned by Moffitt and Simon

before. This feeling is rooted in the Western control over almost all important sectors in Muslim countries. In this case, Ayoob said that every movement in the name of Islam is born as a form of protest against the dominance and Western foreign policy towards Islam (Ayoob 2014, 1-14). In line with this, Jati said that Islamic populism is driven by a classic fight between Islam and the West (Teak 2017, 34).

Furthermore, Vedi said that Islamic populism causing political turmoil, violence in the name of religion, religious radicalism and terrorism emerges as a result of inequality in access to economic resources. Vedi added that the emergence of populism is also caused by the defeat of the neoliberal Muslims which had an impact on welfare inequality; that is, welfare is only enjoyed by a handful of elites. In the Indonesian context, Vedi believed that Islamic populism is caused by a political system named oligarchy that gives special places to the secular nationalists (Hadiz 2016, 44-45).

According to Jati, the feeling of oppression of the Muslims raises awareness to strengthen the existence and coexistence of the middle-class Muslims in relation with the state and society. Next, Islam both in formal and informal politics is established through slogans using the name of *ummah*, referring to Islamic groups. Therefore, the term *ummah* is actually a political construction to refer to Muslim societies which have been politically and socio-historically alienated and discriminated (Teak 2017, 28). In this context, Jati mentioned that Islamic populism can be understood as an effort to popularize Islam in the public sphere and a way to make it a power that represents interests and is suppressive (Teak 2017, 27).

The use of *ummah* to refer to the Muslims' interests can be seen as a form of populism in political communication. This populism is more characterized with how to construct a charismatic figure, so that a populist leader is then considered as leader of the people. In this sense, the people are collectively crystallized into a figure. This agenda is reinforced through the political slogans, such as *the extension of people's voices*, *the leader of the commoners*, or *the public servant* (Jati 2017, 25).

Populism as a political style has been described by scholars, one of whom is Moffit and Simon saying that it is a political style departing from slogans in the name of the people in order to mobilize them to get out of the crises. This political style can also be seen from the political construction that connects the people and with the leader directly. It is done by avoiding complex issues and using simple language, i.e. the one easily understood by the people. This political style also offers a simple and straightforward solution. It creates a clear dividing line between *us* and *them* (Moffit and Simon 2014, 387).

Concerning the relationship between populism as an ideology and a political style, Moffit and Simon say that it is not always interrelated between one another (Moffit and Simon 2014, 389). In other words, the

political style of populism is not always based on the people's ideology as its constituents. Populism as a political style is merely a rhetoric to get the sympathy of the majority, even though the ideology of political actors is actually different from the ideology of the people, who are their constituents.

5.2. Islamic Populism in Indonesia Concerning Al-Maidah: 51

The case of Al-Maidah: 51 which triggered the actions and was attended by millions of masses as described above when viewed from populism theory can be understood as a form of protest against the marginalized feeling of Muslims, i.e. Western domination over Islam in a global context or secular government that does not represent aspirations of the Islamists. In the global context, the actual issue of the establishment of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel unilaterally by Donald Trump as the US President also hurts Muslims throughout the world. Indeed, for the Islamists, Trump's policy has only strengthened the rise of Islamic populism, including in Indonesia.

In the most recent context of Islamic populism in Indonesia, namely the coalition between the Islamists, the anti-Ahok political power, investors, conservative Muslims and Muslim community who feel insulted in general is something interesting to analyze. Another interesting phenomenon is an action to defend Hary Tanoesudibjo carried out by the Islamists though he was once excluded by them. Vedi called these two phenomena a new style of populism in Indonesia (Garadian 2017, 387), where ideological differences in fact unite those who share the marginalized class of power. This phenomenon is also in accordance with Moffit and Simon's argument that ideology and political style in populism are sometimes mutually unrelated to one another (Moffit and Simon 2014, 389), or with Stoica's conclusion that categorizes populism as a super-strategy (Stoica 2017, 67).

Regarding Stoica's thesis that categorizes populism as a super strategy for realizing certain political agendas with reference to the case of Al-Maidah: 51, the success of eliminating Ahok from Jakarta has helped the political forces along with the Islamist movement initiate the 212 Alumni Reunion in 2017. The mass joining the reunion and claimed to reach 7.5 million made them plan to hold a similar action in 2018. 2018 is often referred to as a political year because Indonesia will hold general elections, both legislative and presidential elections. From the side, it is hard not to see the 212 Reunion from the political aspect. The politicization of religion here is obvious as the Action 212 still exists even though Ahok has been convicted of the blasphemy case. Logically, the Action 212 should no longer occur because it was initially a demand to punish Ahok.

However, looking at the historical record of the Indonesian politics, the alliance between ideology and the groups of interests is not always

solid. An example can be found in the alliance between Islamic groups and the army during the Soekarno's Old Order, which had succeeded in getting rid of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) from political power in Indonesia. After the army under General Soeharto's New Order gained the political power in the country, Islamic groups' forces were gradually reduced and paralysed. The alliance finally disbanded. Similar case was also seen in the alliance between Gerindra Party, who nominated Anis Baswedan as Jakarta Governor, and the Islamist groups. After succeeding in removing Ahok from political power in Jakarta, the Islamist groups began to look disappointed as shown in the one-year commemoration of the Action 411 at the Al-Azhar Mosque in Jakarta. Eggi Sudjana as the lawyer and advisor of the 212 Alumni Presidium expressed his disappointment saying that Anies seemed to be *a nut that forgot its skin* when not attending the invitation to commemorate the mass action.

Critics of the populist movement are often made by scholars, one of whom is Xin Mao who said that populism does not contribute to the benefit of society as promised. Mao insisted that the political power possessed by populism is not practiced rationally, and the leader of the populist movement often abuses that power. Absolutism, which is a characteristic of populism according to Xin Mao, does not create a movement of liberation, but instead it becomes an oppressive force. This is because populism rejects the idea of diverse human relations, making its members no longer fully human. They are exclusive; they do not open communicate with neighbors to solve social problems around. The tendency of populism, which is anti-intellectual, makes their actions unrealistic, but imaginative and illusory through mystical lines. The goal of human welfare and happiness becomes blurred and reduced by sacrity difficult to understand (Mao 2017, 62-75).

The sacredness that cannot be understood by the Islamists in the case of Al-Maidah case: 51, as said by Xin Mao above, can be seen from the way they intimidate Ahok's supporters; the Islamist groups will not pray over nor take care of the dead bodies of those who are considered supporters of religious blasphemy, i.e. Ahok. In fact, in Islamic teachings, both praying and taking care of the dead Muslim bodies are mandatory.

Photo 2. Banners for banning prayer over supporters of religious blasphemy before the Jakarta Election



Image 4 and 5.
Banners for banning prayer over supporters of religious blasphemy.

Intimidation by the Islamists through the prohibition on taking care of the dead bodies of those who are considered as defenders of religious blasphemy seems to be called, by Arkoun, as religious sublimation. Through the creation of binary categorization, i.e. believers/ Muslims versus infidels/ apostates, the populists are able to intimidate the lay Muslims with dogmatic threat, namely either the promise of eternal happiness or the threat of eternal torment. According to Arkoun, this religious sublimation often arises because of socio-political tensions between supporters and opponents of the authorities (Arkoun 1998, 227).

In addition, the sacredness is also evident in the Action 212 which was carried on an agenda to establish an Islamic state or Islamic caliphate. The Islamic caliphate itself was allegedly an idea of an organization that was recently declared banned in Indonesia, namely HTI (Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia). The idea to establish an Islamic state in Indonesia by HTI was seen, for example, from a banner that read: "caliphate is an Islamic teaching, Islamic caliphate is what Allah promises", "democracy is a failing system, replace it with the caliphate", "save Indonesia with Sharia and the Islamic caliphate," and so on.

Photo 3. Slogans and demands for the application of an Islamic state (Islamic caliphate)



Image 6, 7, 8. Photos of demands for the application of Islamic caliphate in Indonesia.

Apart from being categorized as an incomprehensible form of sacredness, the above slogans can also be read as a simplification of problems. Slogans calling democracy as a failing system that must be replaced with the caliphate, or the Sharia and Islamic chaliphate as a solution to save Indonesia are expressions that avoid the complexity of problem using a straightforward language. In fact, the problems of the nation are complex, starting from economic, environmental, socio-cultural, educational matters, etc. But, this complexity seems to be reduced and claims that everything will be resolved by the application of an Islamic caliphate. In addition, the application of Islamic laws as the ideals of the Islamic caliphate became absurd or utopian, a term used by Arkoun, given the existence of various sects in Islam. Indeed, Muslim interpretation of the Islamic laws is also diverse. The question is, thus,

whose version of Islamic laws should be used? A form of communication that tries to simplify problems through simple language is an important feature of the populism as described above.

6. Populism and the future of democracy in Indonesia

According to Canovan, the emergence of populism is a sharp criticism of the failure of representative democracy (Canovan 1999, 2). This failure can be seen from the inexpedient promises offered by the democratic system resulting in various crises, such as the economic crisis, poverty, unemployment, growth inequality, and exploitation of natural resources as the impact of globalization. It is these crises that the populist leaders then exploit through political rhetoric. The conception of democracy as the government from the people, by the people and for the people provides a space to disappoint them because they are involved only in the electoral process, but not in the policy-making process.

Hence, it is evident that populism also has a positive side, as explained by some scholars, because it helps remind the elites of the weakness of the representative democracy. Panizza in his *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, for example, said that populism can be used as a "mirror of democracy", where populism can function to remind the elites, so that they may not forget to accommodate the people's interests in the policy-making process (Panizza 2005).

On the other hand, other scholars, such as Meny and Surel, call populism a democratic pathology because the populists tend to use the people's interests merely for the purpose of electoral interests, while spreading illusory propaganda through personal charisma of a figure but ignoring a more substantive aspect of democracy, i.e. political education to society (Meny and Surel 2002, 1-21). In addition, populism as a democratic pathology tends to be exclusive, intolerant, racist, anti-multiculturalism and anti-pluralism since it is considered detrimental to the interests of the majority. In this sense, the populists in the name of the majority may tyrannize against the rights of the minority. In Indonesia, this threat has been experienced by the Ahmadiyah and Shi'ite minority groups.

Furthermore, Pasquino maintained that the democratic system do not have an automatic barrier to counteract the danger of the populist movement (Pasquino 2008, 15-29). The populists are too dependent upon the goodwill of the charismatic leaders. They forget that a mere goodwill is never enough to build a civilization. Therefore, it is important to create a system that is able to prevent the birth of new dictators on behalf of populism.

As one of the world's most populous countries, Indonesia needs to jointly create such a system, so that the consolidation process of

democracy in the country can run well. The government and all Indonesian people also need to be careful in responding to the populist movement using the name Islam, given the fact of the religious Indonesian society. Spaces for dialogues in the community need to be increased, so that religious doctrines, which by the populists are often used as a means of propaganda, and the diverse realities of Indonesian society can be reconciled. In addition, important accesses to economic resources also need to be opened in the most possible and fairest way, so that the future of the Nation and the State may grow better.

7. Conclusion

As in other countries in the world, populist movement also occurs in Indonesia. Populism in Indonesia involves the use of religious symbols since the majority of Indonesian people are Muslims. The most actual case of Indonesian populism is related to Aksi Bela Islam (the Islam Defense Action) or ABI concerned with the issue of Al-Maidah: 51, which has been successfully eliminating Ahok that represents the ethnic and religious minorities from the political power in Jakarta. The impact of the issue is still felt until today, i.e. the split of the Indonesian people into the nationalists (pancasilaist) versus the Islamists, the moderates (liberal) versus the salafists (conservative), and even between the pro-government versus the opposition.

At the very least, populism in Indonesia can be seen from two sides. On the one hand, it is useful to remind the elites both in national and global context of the importance of welfare distribution, and, on the other hand, it is very dangerous because of its exclusiveness, anti-multiculturalism and anti-pluralism which may lead to create a tyranny of the majority over the rights of minority. Therefore, a system capable of controlling populism is highly needed to preserve the human values, so that the consolidation process of democracy in Indonesia can run well.

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