

# The Shadow of Neo-Hanbalism: The Idea of Islamic Extremism in Indonesia

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## **Abstract**

This article seeks to explore how Neo-Hanbali approaches to Islam have played a key role in instigating Islamic extremism in Indonesia. Neo-Hanbali refers to those who identify themselves as the followers of Ibn Hanbal and his students, such as Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, and Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb. Many Indonesian Islamic extremist groups argue that their struggle is driven by their desire to implement a purer form of Islam and that the thinking of Ibn Hanbal and Neo-Hanbali scholars provide the justification for this goal. To begin with, this article outlines the emergence of Ibn Hanbal's thought and Neo-Hanbalism in the Indonesian Muslim community in general and Salafi groups in particular. The article particularly discusses: first, the discursive acceptance of Ibn Hanbal's students in Indonesia and their ties to Islamic extremism; second, the links between Ibn Hanbal's disciples on the one hand and Salafi and Wahhabi groups and movements on the other hand in the context of Islamic extremism; third, the connection between the concepts of tajdid (Islamic renewal) and takfir (excommunication) in Indonesia. This article attempts to understand Neo-Hanbali thought from a non-monolithic perspective in Indonesia. In this regard, it examines the acceptance of Neo-Hanbali ideas among social and political organisations in Indonesia. Finally, this article discusses Neo-Hanbalism in the context of the future development of political Islam in Indonesia to better understand whether these groups will be able to adapt to the changing political situation in Indonesia, or whether they will remain committed to Islamic extremism.

**Keywords:** Neo-Hanbalism, Islamic extremism, Salafism, Wahhabism, Tajdid, Takfir

## Introduction

Some studies argue that Indonesian Muslims are becoming increasingly intolerant and opposed to pluralism. Research by the Setara Institute<sup>1</sup>, for instance, has shown an increase in religion or faith-based violence and hatred promoted by Sunni groups in Indonesia against minority groups such as Ahmadis, Shias and Christians since 2005. Human Rights Watch has reported on a large number of acts of intolerance committed by some Muslim groups against 'deviant groups' (*kelompok sesat*) (MUI, n.d.; Hasyim 2021; Human Rights Watch 2012). Increased Islamic populism promoting symbolic violence against other groups has been apparent in elections in recent years, including the 2012 Jakarta elections, 2014 presidential elections, 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial elections, and the 2019 presidential elections (Hosen 2016; Hasyim 2021). Islamic extremism appears to have experienced significant growth since the end of the Suharto authoritarian regime in 1998.

The phenomena outlined above appear to contradict what many historians have described as the tolerant and inclusive attitude of Indonesian Muslims (Azra 2013, pp. 63-74; Eliraz 2004, pp. 23-24). Some historians have said that Indonesian Islam is renowned for its inclusive way in dealing with religious pluralism and diversity. This inclusive approach was often associated with the method by which Islam entered the Indonesian archipelago, namely peacefully and in a moderate form (Hefner 2011, p. 4; Ricklefs 2009; Azra 2006).

Recently the benign image of Indonesian Islam has faced challenges from rising religious extremism and terrorism, expressed in tragic incidents such as the 2002 Bali Bombings, the 2018 Surabaya bombings, as well as militant movements in Poso and many other parts of Indonesia. Studies have suggested that most of those involved in radicalism and violent extremism are linked to *Salafi*-jihadist groups, which largely adhere to the thought of Ibn Ḥanbal and his students (Hasan 2006; Rahmat 2005; Makruf and Jahroni 2004a).

This article examines the use of narratives and discourse derived from Ibn Hanbal, via his students, as the inspiration for Islamic radicalism and violent extremism in Indonesia. The article particularly discusses: first, the discursive reception of Ibn Ḥanbal's students and their links to Islamic extremism; second, links between Ibn Hanbal's students and *Salafi* and Wahhabi groups and movements in the context of Islamic radicalism and extremism; third, the connection between the ideology of Islamic purification, *tajdīd* (reformism) and *takfīr* (excommunication) in Indonesia.

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<sup>1</sup> The Setara institute is an NGO established by human rights activists and academics in Jakarta that works (1) to promote religious pluralism, humanitarianism, democracy and human rights religious freedom in Indonesia, (2) to study and perform advocacy on issues related to pluralism, humanitarianism, democracy and human rights and (3) to conduct dialogue and conflict resolution and (4) to undertake public education on the mentioned issues. See <http://www.setara-institute.org/id/content/profil>, viewed on 13 January 2014.

This article posits that Ibn Hanbal and his students such as Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah and Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb have become central reference points for Islamic radical and extremist groups in Indonesia (Meijer 2013, p. 3). Islamic violent extremists rarely emerge from Islamic organisations that do not frequently refer to the works of Ibn Hanbal and his students, such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Persatuan Tarbiyyah Islamiyyah (Perti) and al-Wasliyyah that adhere to the Shāfi'i school of Islamic law. This article also argues that Islamic radicals and extremists that use the works of Ibn Hanbal in isolation and pursue a purist form of Islam tend to develop an increasingly fanatical and exclusive in their approach to religion and become more judgemental towards other Muslims groups. This is because, among the four schools of Islamic thought (*madhāhib*), the Hanbali school of Islamic law provides more scope for fanatical, exclusive, and judgmental attitudes towards other Muslims through its scriptural and literal readings, and its focus on the sayings and deeds (*Sunnah*) of the Prophet Muhammad and the concept of purification.

### **Ibn Ḥanbal and Neo-Hanbalis in Indonesia**

Ibn Hanbal is often depicted as a source of inspiration for Islamic fundamentalism and extremism. This is because Salafism, which has a strong tendency towards radicalism and extremism, refers to the works of Ibn Ḥanbal, Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah and Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb. Christopher Melchert argues that Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal promotes Islamic fundamentalism through his defensive, intolerant, and irrational attitudes (2012, p. 9). In discussing Ibn Ḥanbal and Neo-Hanbalism in this section, the author refers to Ibn Ḥanbal when directly addressing his thoughts and to 'neo-Hanbalism' when referring to the thoughts of Ibn Ḥanbal's students such as Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah and Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb and so forth.

Historically speaking, the development of Ibn Hanbal's thought in Indonesia is often linked to the Padri movement in Minangkabau at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Laffan 2003; Ricklefs 2009, p. 182). The Padri war (1820-1837) itself was a local Islamic rebellion led by Tuanku Imam Bonjol (1772-1864) against Dutch colonialism. Imam Bonjol has long been recognised as a prominent puritanical Islamic leader in Indonesia. Jeffrey Hadler argued that Imam Bonjol adhered to Wahhabi-like-teachings (2008, p. 26). Parlindungan, in his controversial book, *Tuanku Nan Rao: Teror Mazhab Hanbali di Tanah Batas* (Tuanku Nan Rao: the terror of the Hanbali School of Islamic Law in the hinterlands), refers to the followers of Imam Bonjol as being adherents of Ibn Ḥanbal (Parlindungan 2007). Parlindungan specifically connects Imam Bonjol's followers to the three Minangkabau *ḥājj* figures who returned home from the Middle East in 1803. Merle Ricklefs outlines that the three *ḥājj* were "inspired by the conquest of Mecca" and sought to duplicate this model to reform the Islamic traditions of the Minangkabau in Indonesia (2009,

pp. 182-183). Jeffrey Hadler takes a more direct approach, simply referring to them as Wahhabis (2008, p. 25). Among the three *ḥājj*, who had stayed in Mecca for 12 years, was Hadji Piobang, a former officer of the Janissary cavalry of Turkey (Tezcan 2010, pp. 191-224), who was a gallant warrior, but no expert in religion. Second was Hadji Sumanik, a former officer in the Ottoman artillery who was described as being extremely thin, and who was an expert in algebra, but did not have a strong background in religious studies. Third was Hadji Miskin (1703-1792) who was depicted as mature and silent figure, but diligent. Hadji Miskin was more knowledgeable on matters of Islamic faith than the other two *ḥājj*. Furthermore, Hadji Miskin read the works of both Ibn Ḥanbal and Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb. He undertook the pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina in 1803 and there met with Hadji Piobang and Hadji Sumanik. During his stay in Mecca, Hadji Miskin studied the thoughts of both Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb.

In addition, the three *ḥājj* claimed to have received a mandate from 'Abd Allah Ibn Sa'ūd (the king of Saudi Arabia at the time) to disseminate and promote Wahhabism in the Minangkabau community, which had previously been affiliated with Shi'ism for hundreds of years. The three *ḥājj* began to preach Wahhabism in their village but faced stiff opposition. Villagers believed that the three *ḥājj* were promoting something new and different from the beliefs that the community had held up to that point. As a result, the three *ḥājj* were accused of being troublemakers. In order to win over the local community, the three *ḥājj* attempted to use anti-colonial sentiment as a vehicle for promoting their thoughts, but even this met with little success, because the Minangkabau region did not face significant repression at the hands of the Dutch at that time. Eventually, a war between different ethnic groups within the Minangkabau erupted, leading to general confusion and strife among the Minang people. They were reportedly so disappointed with the three *ḥājj* that these men were referred to as 'the three senseless men', according to local tradition (Parlindungan 2007).

Although they were rejected by village communities, the three *ḥājj* were protected by Hadji Darwis in Sungailandih, a region of Minangkabau. Hadji Darwis believed that in providing protection for the three *ḥājj* he was repaying a debt owed to Hadji Piobang, who had helped him while he was in Mecca. However, Hadji Piobang and Hadji Sumanik were frustrated due to their failure to disseminate Wahhabism in Minangkabau. Both wanted to return to their previous professed *madhhab*, namely the Ḥanafī school of Islamic law. Hadji Miskin was able to convince them to stick to the Hanbali school by leaning on the concept of "*pemurnian Islam*" (the purification of Islam). He argued that, through this concept, Wahhabism would be more easily understood and accepted by ordinary Minangkabau people. This strategy turned out to be quite successful, and Wahhabism gained a formidable following among the people of Minangkabau, especially in Ulakan, a sub-district

of Padang Pariaman, West Sumatera. Another reason why the Minang people, including the leaders of the *adat* community, came around to accepting the Wahhabi purification campaign was that the three *ḥājj* cut more pious figures than the local Shia leaders, who gambled, smoked opium and were often drunk (Parlindungan 2007). This kind of behaviour from the Shia in Minangkabau was heavily criticised by the new movement led by Hadji Piobang, Hadji Sumanik and Hadji Miskin (Muljana 2005, p. 161). According to Slamet Muljana, the tension between the Shia and the Minangkabau Wahhabis was a key factor behind the Padri war (Muljana 2005). Shia Islam was first introduced to Minangkabau by Tuanku Burhanudin Syah in 1513. In Islamising Minangkabau, Tuanku Burhanuddin Syah invited Islamic teachers from Kambayat, Gujarat, India who were Shia adherents (Muljana 2005). These teachers played a role in disseminating Shia teachings to the people of Minangkabau as well local ulama. Because of this, the Shia had a wide reach throughout Minangkabau.

Another extremely important Wahhabi figure in Minangkabau was Tuanku Nan Rentjeh (d. 1832) (Roff 1970, p. 165)<sup>2</sup>, one of the most important leaders in the Padri war. Tuanku Nan Rentjeh played a very important role in the spread of Wahhabism as prior to him, Wahhabism in Minangkabau did not have a leading social figure (Parlindungan 2007, p. 130). Nan Rentjeh was portrayed as resembling Muḥammad b. Sa'ūd (the king of Saudi Arabia) and was disappointed with the Shia ulama due to their tolerance for – or even engagement in – acts of immorality. Nan Rentjeh responded enthusiastically to news from Hadji Hassan Nasution – who had successfully spread Wahhabism in the highlands of Minangkabau – regarding a new movement led by the three Minangkabau *ḥājj*. Nan Rentjeh went to Pariaman (now a district of West Sumatera) and met with Hadji Piobang and Hadji Hassan Nasution. After discussing with both, Nan Rentjeh invited Hadji Piobang and Hadji Hassan Nasution to Kamang (Meede 2005, p. 213)<sup>3</sup> to further consolidate their *da'wa* (preaching) movement. Nan Rentjeh conveyed this offer to them because he had heard rumours that a group was conspiring to kill Hadji Piobang and Hadji Hassan Nasution due to their role in undermining the powerful Shia Mullah.

After their arrival in Kamang, Hadji Piobang claimed that he had a message from Muḥammad Ibn Sa'ūd for Tuanku Nan Rentjeh, saying that all Muslims in Minangkabau who were colonised by the *kuffār* (unbelievers) should wage a war of resistance (*jihād*). Islamic purification served as the driving spirit in fighting against colonialism in Minangkabau. They sought to establish a *Dār al-Islām* (Abode of Islam) in Indonesia in Minangkabau. From Minangkabau, this group led and organised similar movements in Sulu (the Philippines) and the island of Java (Javanese: *Tanah Djawi*). In Minangkabau, the establishment of a *Dar al-Islam* had three impacts.

<sup>2</sup> Tuanku is a title given to leading ulama.

<sup>3</sup> Kamang is name for the sub district of Agam, a district in West Sumatera. Kamang was a base for the Padri community led by Tuanku Nan Rentjeh.

First, it eradicated the matriarchal traditions of the Minangkabau. Minangkabau is identified as a matrilineal society (Sandy 2002), which contributes to the *adat* (traditional) law in this region. The concept of *Dār al-Islām* saw this matriarchal tradition as an identity marker that weakened the people of Minangkabau. Second, followers of this new Islamic state murdered the Pagarruyung royal family (1804), which was accused of being a puppet administration for the Dutch and British colonial governments. Third, the movement aimed to cleanse the region from the influence of Shia clerics. In the first instance, Tuanku Nan Rentjeh issued an edict on dress codes to visually distinguish those who had converted to Wahhabism and those who had not yet converted. White was determined to be the colour of dress for Wahhabi followers in contrast to the ordinary black-indigo dress colour of the Minangkabau (Parlindungan 2007, p. 132). It is worth noting here that Tuanku Nan-Rentjeh persecuted many of those who offered resistance against him. Some historians claimed that this persecution included his aunt, who was a smoker — after she died, her body was thrown into forest and was prohibited from being buried in accordance with religious custom.

In the post-Padri world, Indonesia's large mainstream Islamic groups, such as NU, Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI), Muhammadiyah and others recognise the works of Ibn Hanbal as an accepted *madhhab* of Islamic law. But more traditionalist leaning groups Muslim groups, such as NU and Perti, rejected the thought of Ibn Hanbal's students such as Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah and Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb. Ibn Hanbal's students found a greater following among smaller Islamic groups in Indonesia. In the context of Indonesian Islam, those who adhere to the thought of Ibn Hanbal's students depict themselves as the followers of the *Sunnah*. In this respect, they adhere to Ibn Hanbal's method for interpreting (*ijtihad*) Islamic law, which focuses on the *Sunnah* and differs from the *ijtihad* of other schools of Islamic law like Mālikī, Ḥanafī, and Shāfi'ī (Melchert 2012; Meijer 2013).

Although NU, since its founding in 1926, has recognised the existence of the Ḥanbali school of thought, it is rarely referred to it as a source for issuing religious guidance (*fatwa*) (Zahro 2004). Prior to NU's founding, Muhammadiyah (founded in 1912) had a close association with the Ibn Ḥanbal school of thought through the works of Ibn Taymiyyah. Although Muhammadiyah has declared that it does not adhere to any *madhhab*, it believes that the *madhhab* of Ibn Ḥanbal is the closest to the Islamic practices and thought of the *salaf al-ṣāliḥ* (the pious forbearers of Islam) (Gauvain 2012; Euben and Zaman 2009; Hasan 2008, pp. 249-250). In their view, Ibn Ḥanbal could serve as a legitimate source for the practice of Islamic purification. Deliar Noer states that Islamic reform efforts, referring to Muhammadiyah and other Islamic organisations such as the Persatuan Islam (Persis) in Indonesia, were shaped under the peculiar influence of Ibn Ḥanbal's

students such as Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, Muḥammad 'Abdu and Rashīd Riḍā (Noer 1973a, 317). Rashid Riḍā particularly sustained the thought of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb through his work on Wahhabism (Farmer 2007, p. 80; Schulze 2002, p. 71). Besides through Riḍā, Indonesian students also studied the tenets of Ibn Hanbal from *Salafi* ulama such as Shakib Arselan (1869-1946), who penned a book — *Limādha Ta'akhhkharā al-Muslimūn wa Taqaddama Ghayruhum*<sup>4</sup> — as a result of a question posed by Indonesian reformist, Basyuni Imran (Bluhm 1983; Kramer 2011).

So, the Indonesian roots of the spread of Ibn Hanbal's thought and Wahhabism can be traced back to a small number of Indonesian Muslims concerned with the discourse of Islamic reformism in Minangkabau, West Sumatera. The followers of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab repudiated the practices of *bid'ah* (unlawful innovations in matters of faith), *khurafat* and *takhhayul* (both meaning types of superstition and mysticism) and sought purification of the faith from these ills. Haji Rasul — a Sumatra-based Muhammadiyah figure — and other Indonesian reformists, for instance, drew their discourse on Wahhabism from Rashīd Riḍā especially through Riḍā's publication, *al-Manār* (Hamka 1958). In this way, neo-Hanbalism serves a label for religious thought resulting from the interpretation of Ibn Hanbal's students.

### **Salafism and Wahhabism as Neo-Hanbalism**

*Salafi* groups are one of the primary bearers of Neo-Hanbali ideology in Indonesia. Although the understanding of the term *Salafi* in Indonesia remains contested, this article utilises the definition of *Salafi*, widely used by many scholars, that limits its meaning to those who are linked to the thought of Ibn Ḥanbal, Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, and Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, Sayyid Quṭb, al-Albānī, Bin Bāz and Uthaymīn (Gauvain 2012). A key part of *Salafi*-jihadist discourse also includes promoting the ideology of *takfir*. As a result of the definition outlined above, although Indonesia's largest Islamic organisation, NU, also frequently uses the term *salafi* or *salafiyah* to describe its teaching activities, it is not categorised as a *Salafi* organisation.<sup>5</sup> This is also the case for the second largest Islamic organisation

<sup>4</sup> This book was first published in 1930.

<sup>5</sup> Nahdlatul Ulama employs the term *Salafi* to refer to its *pesantren* (traditional Islamic boarding schools). In East Java, one of the largest *pesantren* with 15,000 students (Indonesian: *santri*) is called Pesantren Salafiyah Syafi'iyah, Asembagus, Situbondo. There are still thousands of other *pesantren* which use the term *Salafiyah* in their names. Nahdlatul Ulama also declares that *Salafiyah* organizations are those who follow the four schools of Islamic law—Ḥanafī, Mālik, Shāfi'ī and Ibn Ḥanbal. NU positions *Salafi* in opposition to *Khalafī*—from Arabic root *khalāf* or *khalafa*, a name for all groups coming after the third generation following the death of the Prophet Muḥammad. NU appears to see Wahhabis as *Khalafī*, not *Salafi* because NU believes its definition of *Salafi* is not found in Wahhabism. Saïd Ramadan al-Būṭī regards *Salafi* as a name for the pious generations from the first period of the Prophet to the third period of A.H. This definition is also referred to Ibn 'Abd al-Barr and

in Indonesia, Muhammadiyah, which, although it adheres to the teachings of Ibn Taymiyyah in its *tajdīd* methodology, does not promote *takfīrī* ideology.

Wahhabism is included under the umbrella term of *Salafi*, as one of the groups seeking to emulate the example of the early generations of Islam. Generally speaking, Indonesian Muslims understand Wahhabism to be a specific term for the fanatical students of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb. This is despite efforts by Indonesian Wahhabis to recast themselves as *muwahhīdun* ('those who follow The One') (Abbas 1999). However, Wahhabism is not just about the thought of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, but also includes thinkers that preceded him and some who emerged afterward. Reinhard Schulze states that Wahhabis were inspired by classical Islamic thought, particularly that of Ibn Taymiyyah (Schulze 2002, p. 71). Aḥmad Ibn Sa'īd al-Baghdādī also outlines that Wahhabis adhere to the thought of Ibn Ḥanbal (Arabic, *Ḥanbaliyyi al-madhhabī*) and members of this group always state that they actually follow the teachings of Ibn Ḥanbal. In particular, Wahhabis adhere to the Hanbali school in Islamic legal jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and theology which was specially developed and interpreted by Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (Firro 2013 p. 772). In the African context of Mali, Neo-Hanbalism is associated with reformist Sunni Muslims (Chappatte 2018, p. 4).

Although the use of the term *Salafi* remains extremely contested by various Muslim groups, in Indonesia, Wahhabis aggressively employ the term to refer only to themselves. On this front they have achieved some success, narrowing the broad meaning of *Salafi* such that it now is often used only to refer to those who literally interpret the Qur'an and *Sunnah* based on Ibn Taymiyyah's model. Wahhabis have also successfully reframed Salafism as being opposed to philosophy and mysticism when discussing matters of *'aqīda* (faith). So, although the term *Salafi* has been widely used in Indonesian Islam, the limiting of it to just the students of Ibn Ḥanbal is relatively a new phenomenon. A key factor behind this change has been the massive flows of Saudi-sponsored translations of books into Indonesian language since the 1980s. This has resulted in the definition of *Salafi* becoming narrower.

As a result of this contest over the meaning of the term *Salafi*, we can see the usefulness of a term like 'Neo-Hanbali' as an umbrella concept to capture both Salafis and Wahhabis that display extremist tendencies. Neo-Hanbalism, therefore, covers Islamic activism that has strong roots in the tradition of Ibn Hanbal and his students, but who do not always fall strictly under the Hanbali school of Islamic law. Some of them show an inclination towards *Salafi* and Wahhabi doctrines, but they engage in extremism, which is rejected by most *Salafi* and Wahhabi groups. In this regard, Neo-Hanbali groups are closely connected to Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, and Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb. Neo-Hanbali groups

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is in accordance with NU's definition (363-463 A.H). See Said Ramadan al-Būṭī, *al-Salafiyya: Marḥala Zamaniyya Mubarraka lā Madhhaba al-Islāmī*, Damascus, 1988.

also include scholars of Islamic law outside the Hanbali school, such as Ibn Kathīr (b. 1300), who was well-known as a *mufassir* (commentator) on the Qur'an from the Shāfi'ī' *madhhab*. Ibn Ḥanbal's influence on Ibn Kathīr can be clearly seen in his seminal book on Quranic exegesis, the *Tafsir Ibn Kathīr* (Melchert 2012, p. 111).<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, Ibn Kathīr's book of *tafsīr* (exegesis) is also read widely in *Salafi pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) in Indonesia, such as the al-Mu'min *pesantren* Ngruki, Central Java. Al-Mu'min's founder, Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, uses Ibn Kathir's *tafsir* as one of the reading materials for the students of his *pesantren*. The Neo-Hanbali category accommodates a wide range of Islamic tenets, including the concept of purification of Islam, literalist understandings of the Qur'an and *Sunnah* (*ar-rujū' ilā al-Qur'ān wa al-Sunna*), the prohibition on *bid'ah* and condemning those outside their group as being *kāfir*. In many cases, these ideas lead Neo-Hanbali followers to become militant, fanatical and convinced of their own superiority to the exclusion of all other Muslim groups. So, we can see that Neo-Hanbalism serves as a continuation to – but also in some areas a divergence from – Ibn Ḥanbal as *al-imām al-madhhab*. Whether or not this is a path of continuation or divergence depends on the students of Ibn Ḥanbal, not Ibn Ḥanbal himself.

### **Post-Padri Neo-Hanbalism: Actors and Organisations**

Importantly, newer generations of radicals and extremists in Indonesia often have no historical ties to previous radical and extremist movements in Indonesia. Instead of referring to Imam Bonjol and three *ḥājj*, they tend to refer more to thoughts of their (more recent) teachers in Mecca, Medina and Yemen and so forth. Instead of following Kartosuwiryo (the leader of the Darul Islam/Tentara Islam Indonesia (DI/TII) rebellion from the 1940s to 1950s) (Formichi 2012) and Kahar Muzakkar (another key DI/TII leader) (Sjamsuddin 1985), for instance, they prefer to focus on the advice of newer Wahhabi preachers in Indonesia. As a result, previous local expressions of Ibn Ḥanbal's thought are rarely of interest to Indonesian Neo-Hanbali adherents. However, both the old Neo-Hanbalis and new Neo-Hanbalis share a similarity in their shared *madhab* reference to the thoughts of Ibn Ḥanbal and his students.

Neo-Hanbali thought arrived in Indonesia from the Middle East via several pathways. First, through the major Muslim pilgrimage (the *hajj*), which was evident in the case of the three *ḥājj*s mentioned above. But in more recent times, this mode appears to have been less of a factor due to the shorter time required for the pilgrimage than before (when the journey could take months or longer and involved longer stays in Saudi Arabia). Second, through the process of education, particularly via those who studied Islam in Mecca and Medina. Generally speaking, Saudi Arabia has become the most popular country for study by Indonesian Neo-Hanbalis. Third,

<sup>6</sup> See Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Azīm*, Bayrūt: Dār al-Fikr. In this book, the Neo-Hanbali tendency of Ibn Kathīr can be seen in his frequent use of Ḥadīths and other opinions quoted from Ibn Ḥanbal.

in the modern era, increasing numbers of Indonesian students have chosen to study at universities in Mecca and Medina by way of scholarship programs offered by the Saudi government and the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA). Fourth, through digital and social media as, in recent decades, Indonesian Neo-Hanbalis have displayed great progress in utilising digital and social media to reach their audiences, especially through radio and TV. Neo-Hanbali leaders also actively provide services for their community through Facebook and Twitter, which has also enabled them to communicate and respond rapidly to questions from their follower.

But the general spirit of the first generation of Minangkabau Wahhabis did have a great impact on future generations. Two important terms popularised by Minangkabau Wahhabism had a particularly significant impact, namely *tajdīd* and *takfir*, which were drawn from the tradition of Ibn-Hanbal's students, including Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, Muḥammad 'Abduh, and Rashīd Riḍā. *Tajdīd* refers to an effort of liberating religion as part of religious renewal, refreshing the essence of religion. This concept assumes that Islamic norms have been contaminated by outside influences, resulting in stagnation of thought (Arabic: *jumūd*) and fanaticism to *madhhabs*. Key to this renewal is purifying Islam from these contaminants and returning to the Qur'an and *Sunnah* as the only sources of Islam. From this approach, it is believed that Islam ultimately will no longer contradict modernity — this was a key element in Muḥammad 'Abduh's push to reform Islam. In light of this understanding, Nurcholish Madjid, an Indonesian Muslim scholar, states that *tajdīd* is an Islamic necessity (*keharusan Islam*) (Madjid 2008). In this regard, Wahhabi groups for instance, focus too much on *tawhīd* (the monotheistic property associated with God) in their *tajdīd*, and in doing so ignore the knowledge and science of non-Muslims. Wahhabis state that knowledge and science must be also pure from outside (non-Islamic) influences, resulting in the *tajdīd* efforts of the Wahhabis producing more *takfir* (excommunication) than *tafkīr* (thought) or *tajdīd*.

Post-Padri Neo-Hanbali generations appear to focus more on the tradition of *tajdīd* and *takfir*. The Neo-Hanbali movement inherited many of its traditions from a group referred to as the *kaum mudo* (modernists), which stood in opposition to the *kaum tuo* (traditionalists, Shāfi'i and Sufi). However, a perplexing connection between reformism, purification, and extremist ideas remain there (Abdullah 2009). Ahmad Khatib (b. 1855), from Bukit Tinggi, Minangkabau in West Sumatera was one of the *kaum mudo* whose thought bore resemblance to that of the three *ḥājj*. Khatib was regarded as a prominent ulama among the *kaum mudo*, who disseminated his reformist thinking from Mecca (Noer 1973b, p. 38). Although Khatib was a follower of the Shāfi'i school of *fiqh*, he inherited the thoughts of Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah which was evident in his rejection of two

local traditions rooted among the people of Minangkabau: first, the Naqshabandī Sufi order and second, the *adat* law on inheritance that follows the matrilineal line.<sup>7</sup> After Khatib, Thaher Djalaluddin (b. 1869) was another eloquent Islamic reform figure in Minangkabau. His sympathies for Wahhabi thought can be traced back to his father, who was a judge among the Padri. Thaher Djalaluddin utilised the *al-Imam* magazine and *al-Iqbal al-Islamiyya* school to spread his influence. *Al-Imam* was first published in 1906 in Singapore, covering Islamic issues from a reformist perspective. Meanwhile, *al-Iqbal al-Islamiyya* school was established in 1908 by Thaher Djamaluddin and his friend, Raja Haji Ali b. Ahmad of Singapore. Djamaluddin was deeply impressed by al-Azhar University in Cairo. Through *al-Imam*, he introduced some ideas contained in al-Azhar's leading publication, *al-Manār*. He used *al-Imam* to denounce Sufi orders and classical Islamic texts that were used by the traditional ulama of Minangkabau. Djamaluddin argued that *fatwa* must be strictly and literally based on the Qur'an and *Ḥadīth*. In one of his articles, he rejected the religious practices of traditionalist ulama, criticising the act of standing (*qiyām*) and imagining that the Prophet Muhammad is present and blessing of the faithful during the *al-Barjanzī* recitation<sup>8</sup> during the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday (*mawlid*). A similar denunciation of this practice is now propagated by contemporary Neo-Hanbalis. Djamaluddin's thoughts also appeared to be shared by Muhammad Djamil Djambek (d. 1947), Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah, also known as Haji Rasul (d. 1945), and Haji Abdullah Ahmad (d. 1933). Muhammad Djamil Djambek focused on promoting the purification of *tawhīd* (monotheism) and criticised the practice of Sufi orders (Noer 1973b).<sup>9</sup> Haji Rasul (1879-1945) was a very important and indispensable figure for the *kaum mudo*, in addition to his efforts to institutionalise the concept of Islamic purification during the early establishment of Muhammadiyah in Sumatera. Michael Laffan states that Haji Rasul played a role akin to that of Raṣīd Riḍā in Egypt (Laffan 2003, p. 405). Both Riḍā and Haji Rasul read the works of al-Ghazālī (*Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn?*), but did not adopt Sufism (Laffan 2003). As an important Islamic reformist, for instance, Haji Rasul argued that the thoughts of Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Qayyim al-Jauziyyah, and Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb provided important insights for Minangkabau people. With his Meccan educational background, Haji Rasul was a critical figure in the rejection of *adat* law in Minangkabau. In his personal life he was very strict, even with his own family, emphasising the need to purify Islam from the influence

<sup>7</sup> Minangkabau is famous for its matrilineal system of inheritance. Although this system was rejected by reformist groups in Minangkabau, ethnic Minang still utilize this system to this day. In addition, women's groups in Indonesia support the revitalization of this matrilineal system as part of efforts to promote gender equality.

<sup>8</sup> This book was written by Sayyid Ja'far ibn Sayyid Ḥassan al-Barjanzī, the *muftī* of Medina, who lived from 1126-1184 A.H.

<sup>9</sup> His criticism of *tarekat* was differed greatly from that of Thaher Djamaluddin and Haji Rasul. He took a softer and non-confrontational approach.

of *adat* law (Abdullah 2009). Haji Rasul played a central role in introducing Muhammadiyah to Minangkabau in 1925 and has contributed significantly to its popularity in Sumatera until the present day (Ricklefs 2009, p. 171; Hadler 2008).

Besides individual actors, post-Padri Neo-Hanbalism has often been associated with reformist Muslim organisations, including Muhammadiyah due to its doctrine emphasising the need to purify of Islam. Muhammadiyah was established by Ahmad Dahlan (d. 1923) in 1912 and emphasised Islamic purification as its primary struggle, with a focus on ‘returning to the Qur’an and *Sunnah*’ (Indonesian: “*kembali kepada al-Qur’an dan Sunna*,” Arabic: *al-rujū’ ilā al-Qur’ān wa al-sunna*), which also serves as the foundational doctrine of Neo-Hanbalism. As a result of this similarity, Muhammadiyah has often been accused of promoting Wahhabism and Salafism in Indonesia. However, many people argue that the injection of Neo-Hanbali aspirations into Muhammadiyah did not originate from Ahmad Dahlan in Yogyakarta, Central Java, but primarily emerged from the organisation’s Sumatran faction. Although Dahlan took on an active role in fighting against *takḥayyul*, *bid’ah* and *khurafāt* – referring to these as *penyakit sosial* (social diseases) – Haji Rasul played the most important role in dressing Muhammadiyah up in the garb of Neo-Hanbalism (Najib 2013, p. 135).

Still, puritanical views of Islam are no longer a dominant feature of Muhammadiyah. In the last two decades, there have been efforts attempted to minimise the theological influence of Neo-Hanbalism in the organisation, which can be seen through the emerging thoughts of Muhammadiyah scholars and activists that have sought to revive the reformist spirit of Muhammad Abduh, rather than that of Ibn Taymiyyah as pursued by Haji Rasul. Through the newer generations of Muhammadiyah leaders, beginning with Abdul R. Fahrudin (d. 1995), Azhar Basyir (d. 1994), Amien Rais (b. 1944) and most importantly Syafi’i Ma’arif (b. 1935) and Din Syamsuddin (b. 1958), Muhammadiyah has created more space for the accommodation of local traditions. This generation of Muhammadiyah leaders also played a role in stimulating the concept of moderate Islam pursued by progressive intellectuals such as Moeslim Abdurrahman (d. 2012), Amin Abdullah (b. 1953), and Abdul Munir Mul Khan (b. 1946). These three figures helped provide space for younger Muhammadiyah scholars and activists to redefine the meaning of *tajdīd* (renewal) and *iṣlāḥ* (reform) within the organisation (Fanani 2007). They reinterpreted *tajdīd* by adopting the spirit of liberation theology that focused on the place of marginalised groups in society. Although this progressive youth movement has faced challenges from the current *kaum tuo*, it has established itself within the broader Muhammadiyah movement (Pradana Boy 2008). In short, Muhammadiyah no longer exclusively pursues the purification of Islam as in previous generations and instead shows more respect for the diversity of religious reinterpretation.

Another key organisation is *Persatuan Islam* (Islamic Confederation, Persis), the third largest Islamic organisation in Indonesia. This organisation was established by Hadji Zamzam (1894-1952) and Hadji Muhammad Junus in Bandung in 1923 in response to Muslim societies' stagnation and failure to cope with modernity, owing to a perceived lack of purity in Islam (Luth 1999, p. 31). Persis was established for similar reasons as Muhammadiyah, namely, to promote the grand narrative of Islamic modernism proposed by Muḥammad 'Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā. Hadji Zamzam studied Islam in the Middle East (3.5 years), while Hadji Muhammad Junus was a merchant who established a small Islamic library in Bandung. According to Haji Zamzam, Indonesian Muslims did not base their faith exclusively on the core sources of Islam — the Qur'an and *Ḥadīth* — as could be seen by the prevalence of superstition, unlawful religious innovation, myths, and also fanatical adherence (*taqlīd*) to one of Islamic schools of law (Luth 1999). Similar to Muhammadiyah, Persis utilises only the Qur'an and *Sunnah* as its main sources. Persis argues that any Islamic viewpoint that does not have a direct reference in the Qur'an and *Sunnah* should be rejected (Federspiel 2009, p. 28). Ahmad Hassan (d. 1958), one of Persis' chief scholars and ideologues, argued that the Qur'an had to be understood by using a succinct language, and avoiding ambiguity that could lead to a multiple interpretations among Muslims (Federspiel 2009). Persis' textual approach to Islamic law can be seen from the organisation's various fatwas and other Islamic guidance. Hassan, who was a key driver for the spirit of purification of Islam in the organisation, studied Wahhabism while he resided in Singapore. Hassan's father was sympathetic to this stream of Islamic thought and also deeply critical of traditionalist Islamic practices, such as *talqīn* — reciting the principles of Islam (pillars of faith and Islam) to a person who passed away<sup>10</sup> — which was categorised as an *bid'ah*. Although Hassan was not one of the founding fathers of Persis, he successfully crafted the image of Persis as being students and followers of Ibn Ḥanbal. Persis continues to have strongholds in West Java, where several accounts have noted that Islam has taken on a rather conservative, puritan character, likely influenced by Persis' understanding of Islam.

#### The Suharto Turn

In 1966, General Suharto came to power in Indonesia, replacing the country's founding father, Sukarno (1945-1965), as president. Suharto ushered in the New Order Era (1966-1998), which saw a spread of Neo-Hanbalism connected with the oil boom in Saudi Arabia. Saudi wealth had a significant impact on the revival of *Salafi*-Wahhabi groups in Indonesia. The government and people of Saudi Arabia contributed a great deal of financial support to building mosques and Islamic schools throughout Indonesia. Saudi Wahhabis also sent their preachers to Indonesia and offered lavish scholarships for Indonesian students who wished to

<sup>10</sup> The tradition of the *talqīn* is still strongly practiced by the Nahdlatul Ulama community.

continue their studies in Saudi universities. Since then, many Islamic organisations in Indonesia have developed close ties with Saudi Arabia.

The Indonesian Council for Islamic Propagation (Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia, DDII) was one of the organisations that has established strong links with the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. DDII's founding father, Muhammad Natsir (d. 1993), was a Muslim politician who was respected by many Islamic countries in the Middle East due to his position as a Deputy Chairman of Rābiṭa al-Ālam al-Islāmī (The Muslim World League), which was based in Saudi Arabia. Due to his close ties with Saudi Arabia, Natsir and DDII were accused of promoting Saudi ideas in Indonesia. Natsir approached the Saudi government to pressure the Indonesian government to make domestic policies more in line with the Saudi version of Islam.

Historically and politically speaking, DDII was the reincarnation of the Masyumi party. Established on 7 November 1945, Masyumi was the first modern Islamic political party in Indonesia. DDII was established after Masyumi was banned by Sukarno in 1967 and in one of its first steps sought the re-instatement of the Jakarta Charter – which contained a clause mandating Islamic law for Muslims – as part of the Indonesian constitution (Anshari 1979, pp. 3-11; van Bruinessen 2002).<sup>11</sup> Natsir – who was a key figure in both Masyumi and then DDII – sought to use DDII establish Islamic identity as a common platform for the unification of the worldwide Muslim community. As a non-political organisation, DDII focused its agenda on social activities that encouraged Muslims to implement Islamic law (*sharia*) in Indonesia. This organisation provided training on Islam and other social and political issues for Islamic preachers who were then sent to Christian-dominated provinces of Indonesia, such as Papua and Nusantara Tenggara Timur. DDII has a well-earned reputation for obsessive criticism of Christian missionary movements in Indonesia (Hefner 2000). DDII leaders claim that ethnic Chinese dominance of the national economy has played a key role in an alleged 'Christianisation' campaign across the archipelago (Mujiburrahman 1999), as Chinese businessmen reportedly donated their money to fund the activities of Christian missionaries. DDII has published numerous books and magazines in support of its preaching activities, including *Media Dakwah* (Preaching Media), which is DDII's official magazine (Liddle 1996). This magazine is often used as a key reference source by Islamic conservative groups in Indonesia, particularly those who live in urban areas (Liddle 1996).

Although DDII's followers are dwarfed in number by those who associate themselves with NU and Muhammadiyah, DDII has still successfully established branches throughout Indonesia. This success was largely due to the charisma of Muhammad

<sup>11</sup> The Jakarta Charter resulted from 22 June 1945 meeting of the 'Committee of Nine' (Indonesian: *Panitia Sembilan*) that was tasked with reaching a compromise between Muslims and Non-Muslims on the basic ideology of Indonesia. The Jakarta Charter consists of the belief in God, with the obligation for Muslims to implement *sharia*, (2) moral and just humanity, (3) the unity of Indonesia, (4) guided democracy through consultations/representation, (5) ensuring social justice for all Indonesians.

Natsir who served as a magnet drawing in former members of the Masyumi party. In the New Order Era, DDII was the primary hub for Islamic conservatism — a role it has maintained to some extent until now. With its strong networks in Jakarta, DDII is often at the forefront in organising and facilitating activities promoting the revival of *sharia*. Several current leaders of this organisation have also played an active role in the persecution of Shia Muslims in Indonesia. One such leader, Cholil Ridwan, proactively calls for Indonesian Muslims to fight against Shi'ism, Ahmadiyah, and Christianity in Indonesia. Anti-Shia attitudes, which have become a key characteristic of international Neo-Hanbalis, have thus also emerged in Indonesia.

In West Java, besides Persis, Neo-Hanbali views can be seen in the Indonesian Pesantren Cooperation Body (Badan Kerjasama Pondok Pesantren Indonesia, BKSPPI). Historically speaking, BKSPPI was not originally founded to promote Neo-Hanbalism. Although BKSPPI had a close relationship with Muhammad Natsir (DDII), this did not mean that it had an association with Neo-Hanbalism. BKSPPI was established in 1972 by several ulama, including Sholeh Iskandar (b. 1922), Noer Ali (b. 1914), Chaer Affandi (Tasikmalaya), and Abdullah Syafi'i (b.1910). Most of these ulama were very close to Muhammad Natsir and lived in West Java. BKSPPI was primarily concerned with boosting the welfare of the *pesantren* community, especially in West Java. This was driven by the deep concern of BKSPPI founding's fathers regarding the low quality of *pesantren* ulama and the future of *pesantren* alumni. Many claimed to be ulama, but did not fulfil the knowledge requirements to be regarded as such. Many *pesantren* graduates expressed uncertainty about their future because they did not acquire soft skills and expertise during their study in the *pesantren* (Hasyim 2007, pp. 20-21). BKSPPI's founding fathers wanted to solve these problems by establishing an umbrella organisation for the *pesantren* community. BKSPPI members are usually *pesantren* outside NU and Muhammadiyah circles. At its foundation, the *pesantren* were mostly located in West Java, though in subsequent years this expanded to include *pesantren* in other provinces. Around 2,000 *pesantren* throughout Indonesia are now listed as members of the organisation and this number continues to grow — after the September 11 tragedy, the al-Mu'min *pesantren* in Ngruki became an active BKSPPI member.<sup>12</sup>

In order to achieve its goals, BKSPPI cooperates with several organisations, including international development agencies and nongovernmental organisations. Under Sholeh Iskandar's leadership, BKSPPI was very progressive and it obtained a great deal of financial support from international donor agencies, such as the Australian Agency for International Development (AUSAID), United State Agency for International Development (USAID), Friedrich Naumann Stiftung (FNS) and

<sup>12</sup> The *al-Mukmin pesantren* in Ngruki, Solo, Central Java, was founded by Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Ba'asyir. Abdullah Sungkar passed away in 1999, a year after the resignation of Suharto.

De Nederlandse Organisatie voor Internationale Ontwikkelingssamenwerking (NOVIB) (Hasyim 2007, p. 27). BKSPPI never made an issue of receiving support from Western countries, which were home to Christian-majority populations. The organisation, at that time, believed that support aimed at improving *pesantren* could be accepted from anyone and any organisation, regardless of religion, gender or ethnicity. This is a part of what was referred to as “mu'āmalah pluralism”, meaning that although Muslims and non-Muslims differ in theology, they can still cooperate with one another in the realm of human relationships. The most important reason for accepting funding was the drive to modernise *pesantren* and their surrounding communities. Through this funding, BKSSPPI successfully launched pilot projects in agriculture and cattle breeding. Under the leadership of its first generation, BKSPPI was widely recognised for its contribution in developing ‘agricultural *pesantren*’.

BKSPPI’s orientation shifted when the organisation’s leadership changed hands. Sholeh Iskandar (founding father and first leader) passed away and a new generation took up the mantle of leadership. The most phenomenal shift in BKSPPI took place when it was led by Cholil Ridwan in 1994. Under his leadership, DDII had significant influence in BKSPPI and this in turn resulted in a change of the organisation’s Islamic orientation from moderate and progressive to puritan. One of Ridwan’s most important policy changes was to cease cooperation with Western international agencies and to initiate a new relationship with Middle Eastern countries, especially Saudi Arabia. This decision was taken mostly for theological and ideological reasons. The policy shocked BKSPPI *pesantren*, and many of them opposed the move. The cessation of cooperation resulted in a lack of program stability for BKSPPI, because the support provided by Saudi Arabia paled in significance compared with the earlier support from Western development agencies. Funding from the Saudi government was usually focused on serving the interests of Wahhabi preaching, which differed from Western funding, which was provided for community development. This disappointed some BKSPPI members, but despite this Ridwan and his supporters have maintained their dominance in the organisation. The lesson to be learned from the case of BKSPPI is that although the promotion of Neo-Hanbalism may not be the initial purpose of an organisation, internal changes can shift an organisation from non-*Salafi* to *Salafi* in its outlook.

Another example of *Salafi* influence is the Institute for the Study of Arabic and Islamic Sciences (Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Islam dan Arab, LIPIA), which was established in 1980 as an Islamic tertiary education institution funded by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and serving as a branch of al-Imam University in Riyāḍ (Fealy and Bubalo 2005, p. 94). The university’s curriculum is largely adopted from that at al-Imam University including, for instance, including compulsory readings on Ibn Ḥanbal, Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, and Muhammad Ibn 'Abd

al-Wahhāb. Most importantly, 80-90% of LIPIA's teachers are recruited from the Middle East (Fealy and Bubalo 2005). Although LIPIA is open to all students who want to study Islam, once they become students, they must comply with and follow LIPIA's strict regulations, including regarding theological affiliation. Interestingly, most prominent leaders of *Salafi* movements and the Islamist Prosperous Justice Party (Partai Keadilan Sejahtera, PKS) in Indonesia were educated at LIPIA, including former Jihad Army (Laskar Jihad) leader Ja'far Umar Thalib; former PKS leader Anis Matta (b. 1968), and former PKS activist and now preacher Abu Ridlo. As a result, it is understandable that some see LIPIA as a breeding ground for Indonesian Neo-Hanbali intellectuals.

LIPIA has managed to attract significant numbers of Indonesian students because it provides full scholarships. Many *pesantren* and *madrasah* graduates who want to continue their study at the tertiary level attend this university. LIPIA usually offers 200 scholarship positions among 1,000-2,000 students and also produces 200 graduates each year (Fealy and Bubalo 2005). For talented students, LIPIA offers further study at the post-graduate level in Saudi universities. Many LIPIA students are recruited from traditionalist Muslim family backgrounds. Many come from rural areas, lower socio-economic backgrounds and are theologically affiliated with NU. Before joining LIPIA, many are open-minded in their understanding on Islam. Parents send their children — mostly sons — to study at LIPIA because it does not charge tuition fees. Furthermore, in the 1980s-2000s, many traditionalist Muslim families believed that sending their children to study at the LIPIA was prestigious. These parents did not suspect that LIPIA was a Wahhabi institution. Parents only became aware when their children graduated and returned home and they noticed a sudden change in their children's religious beliefs, often contradicting their parents' beliefs. Before studying at LIPIA, their children strongly respected traditionalist Islamic rituals, such as visiting graves every Friday, reciting the stories of the prophets (*Kitāb al-Barjanzī*), and so forth. After graduating from the LIPIA, their children criticised all these practices. According to these graduates, traditionalist Muslim practices are superstitious and heretical in nature. As a result of these kinds of incidents, many traditionalist Muslim parents are no longer interested in enrolling their children and they have become aware of the strong influence of Wahabism at LIPIA, resulting in a decline in the number of students attending the university since 2000.

### **The Non-Monolithic Expression of Neo-Hanbalism**

This section argues that besides creating more space of democracy, the reform era in Indonesia also provided greater opportunities for extremist expansion. Indonesian politics changed dramatically after Suharto's resignation in 1998. Freedom of expression was permitted and this promising political development was met with widespread support. The new regime led by B.J. Habibie

(Suharto's appointed successor) amended regulations and laws that had long suppressed human rights — including religious freedom — and democracy. Habibie introduced policies that provided more freedom for political parties and organisations to articulate their aspirations and to follow their own ideologies. Habibie's political policies permitted the use of Islam as the foundational ideology of Muslim organisations and political parties in Indonesia from 1999 onwards. This was a stark change from the Suharto era, during which all Muslim organisations and political parties were required to adhere to Pancasila as their sole organisational ideology. But this new era also paved the way for the resurrection of Islamic radicalism. Riding the momentum of the reform era, radical and militant Islamic groups, including *Salafi* groups, found they had greater space to pursue their ambitions, including their desire to establish an Islamic state — a form of public advocacy that was strictly prohibited in the Suharto era. In other words, the reform era was a momentous period for the revival of Neo-Hanbali movements. They expressed their aspirations in various organisations, political parties and associations that utilised Islam as their sole ideology. Although these groups were diverse, they shared a common agenda in their approach to and political vision for Indonesian Islam. Since the reform era, Neo Hanbali groups have had an increasingly visible public presence in Indonesia especially through online and social media, radio, and TV. They are riding on a decade-long wave of confidence.

PKS is perhaps the only Islamic party<sup>13</sup> whose ideological and theological platforms can be said to resemble Neo-Hanbalism. The party's Neo-Hanbali tendencies can be seen through the party's political platform (Majelis Pertimbangan Pusat PKS 2008). PKS was founded in 2004 as an evolution of the Justice Party (Partai Keadilan, PK). The PK was established in 1998 and ran in the 1999 general elections but failed to meet the parliamentary threshold requirements to run in the following elections, scheduled for 2004. But some party activists believed that it had good prospects in future — indeed, it received a generally positive response from many Muslim voters. So, in the 2004 general elections, the party changed its name from PK to PKS and managed to perform reasonably well, obtaining national parliamentary representation for the first time. PKS' relative success in the 2004 general elections was due to the party refreshing its political image and concealing its Islamist agenda, for instance, through its slogan of being 'clean' (*bersih* meaning it took an anti-corruption stance and supported good governance), 'caring' (*partai peduli*, meaning it would support poor and marginalised societies), and 'professional' (*partai profesional*, meaning it would be able to solve society's

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<sup>13</sup> All of Indonesia's elections since 1999 have featured Islamic political parties, such as PKB (Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa, National Awakening Party), PAN (Partai Amanat Nasional, National Mandate Party), PPP (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan, United Development Party), PBB (Partai Bulan Bintang, Star-Crescent Party) and PKS (Partai Keadilan Sejahtera, Prosperous Justice Party).

problems). Although PKS' program appeared to be secular, the party's support for Islamism did not shift significantly.

Neo-Hanbali tenets are visible within two facets of PKS: Firstly, its ideological foundation and secondly, its historical background. The stated ideological foundation of PKS displays at least three pieces of evidence highlighting the influence of Neo-Hanbalism on the party. The prevalent use of works by Neo-Hanbali ulama such as Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, Ḥasan al-Banna (d. 1949), Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966),<sup>14</sup> Sayyid Sābiq (d. 2000) and Yūsuf Qaraḍāwī. Although several of these figures are associated with the Muslim Brotherhood, their use of *Sunnah* and focus on purification mimics Neo-Hanbalism.<sup>15</sup> This can be seen in how Neo-Hanbali literature serves as the principal foundation of this party. PKS for instance draws its political concepts from Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah who propose a welfare and justice state based on *sharia* (Majelis Pertimbangan Pusat PKS 2008).<sup>16</sup> This indicates not only a terminological underpinning, but also an ideological encounter between the political trajectory of PKS' politics and Neo-Hanbalism, which is evident in the struggle to formalise *sharia* into national law. PKS's platform outlines that the ultimate goal of the party's struggle is to establish a *sharia*-based state in Indonesia. For PKS, Indonesia needs a *sharia*-based state to overcome its challenges. In contrast to other *Salafi* groups, PKS' push for *sharia* law is pursued deftly, focusing its campaign on secular issues, such as good governance and anti-corruption. By utilising these non-traditional Islamic issues, PKS created a "political benchmark" for itself as a clean and caring party. Furthermore, this has led some political observers to argue that PKS has shifted its struggle from the establishment of *sharia*-based state to more secular state. But this analysis seems to be disconnected from reality, especially when one examines the party's deep involvement in supporting *sharia* movements nationally. Some political scientists have argued that PKS uses a dual-track strategy of presenting a moderate face for the public and a conservative one for its members. This strategy met with failure in the 2014 general elections as the party placed on the bottom third of the 10 political parties that passed the electoral threshold.<sup>17</sup>

Historically speaking, PKS was established by *tarbiyyah* ('education') activists who believed that a political party would be an effective vehicle to promote *sharia*

<sup>14</sup> Some examples are *Majmū' at al-Rasā'il* by Ḥasan al-Bannā, *al-Siyāsa al-Ra'iyya fī Islāh al-Rā't wa al-Rā'iyya* by Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Turūq al-Ḥukmiyya* by Ibn Qayyim, and many other books.

<sup>15</sup> Some examples include *Majmū' at al-Rasā'il* by Ḥasan al-Banna, *al-Siyāsa al-Shar'iyya* by Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-Turūq al-Ḥukmiyya* by Ibn Qayyim, and many other works.

<sup>16</sup> Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya states that politics is a series of activities which can bring the people of Indonesia closer to the general good (*maṣlaḥa*) and to avoid the bad in order to achieve justice (keadilan) "*dar' al-mafāsīd muqaddamun 'alā jalb al-maṣāliḥ*."

<sup>17</sup> See <http://www.dw.de/tentang-islam-politik-dan-kelompok-tengah/a-17544306>, viewed on 19 April 2014.

in Indonesia, adopting a similar strategy from the Middle East.<sup>18</sup> Some political observers argue that PKS is a “copy” of the Egypt-based Muslim Brotherhood (Machmudi 2008; Rahmat 2008; 2005). This argument cites comments by Yusūf Qaraḏāwī, who regarded PKS’ ideology as similar to the Muslim Brotherhood’s. Interestingly, PKS activists have never outright rejected this statement. Former PKS leader Anis Matta (who has now established a new party, called Gelora) said that Qaraḏāwī’s opinion should be understood in the context of his desire to promote the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood worldwide. In this regard, Qaraḏāwī was attempting to position PKS as one of Islamic political parties in the Muslim world whose ideas and political practices were closely associated with the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>19</sup> However, the moderate wing of PKS tried to differentiate the party from the Muslim Brotherhood as they do not want PKS to be identified with the Muslim Brotherhood, believing this harms the political image of the party. A close association with the Muslim Brotherhood would place PKS within the orbit of radical Islamic movements, which in turn could impact support from moderate groups, who see the PKS as an alternative party for Indonesian politics in the future.<sup>20</sup>

Although PKS’s ideology is steeped in Neo-Hanbalism, this does not mean that other Neo-Hanbali groups automatically consider the party as their go-to choice in general elections. In fact, some Neo-Hanbali groups believe PKS is no different than other political parties in adopting Western political systems and values, such as accepting and respecting democratic elections and the parliamentary system. Neo-Hanbali groups such as Laskar Jihad opposed PKS by arguing that its adopting of secular politics contradicted the core values of Islam and could be categorised as a form of *bid'ah*. According to Laskar Jihad, Islam does not recognise democracy and general elections. The use of a Western secular political system is the equivalent of substituting God’s sovereignty for human control. Laskar Jihad argues that *hukm allā* (God’s law), true Islam in the form of *sharia*, should be established on earth, not ‘illegitimate rule’ (Arabic: *Ḥukm al-Ṭāghūt*) such as secular democratic political systems. (Makruf and Jahroni 2004b, pp. 117-119)

Furthermore, Neo-Hanbali groups also criticised PKS’s tendency to focus on short-term political interests, such as power sharing in government, rather than striving to reach the party’s underlying goal of implementing true Islam. The 2004 elections were a good example of PKS’s short-term political agenda. In the elections, the

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<sup>18</sup> Other ideological Islamist groups do not believe in the use of political parties as a vehicle for their struggle, because the concept of a political party is not recognized in Islam.

<sup>19</sup> *Pluralisme itu Fakta*. Panjimas interview with Anis Mata, Secretary General of PKS, 20 February-5 March 2003.

<sup>20</sup> Those who often claim PKS is not associated with the Muslim Brotherhood include Zulkiflimansyah and Fachry Hamzah. Both are PKS members of parliament that attempt to deny that the PKS has a hidden agenda to establish an Islamic state.

party did not nominate puritan Muslim figures such as Abu Bakar Ba'asyir (Sirozi 2004),<sup>21</sup> Ja'far Umar Thalib, or other extremist figures as the party's preferred presidential candidate for Indonesia, but instead established a coalition with secular parties – Democrat and Golkar – to support Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (b. 1949, Indonesian President, 2004-2014). The key consideration in this decision, of course, was not ideological or theological, but electoral pragmatism. As a result of this ambiguous political attitude, some Neo-Hanbali groups do not consider PKS to be representative of their aspirations. In addition, some of them have expressed their disagreement with the party and treated it as being no different than other political parties. The Indonesian Sunni Communication Forum (Forum Komunikasi Ahlussunnah Wal Jamaah, FKAJ) and Laskar Jihad are two examples of those who disagree with PKS.

Scepticism over the effectiveness of the political Islam approach has led many Neo-Hanbalis to persist with a cultural approach to extending their influence over Indonesian Muslims. This approach attempts to achieve the implementation of *sharia* without establishing a formal Islamic state. Actually, this cultural approach has existed for a much longer time than the relatively more recent structural approach (political Islam). This change of approach was triggered by Neo-Hanbali groups' disappointment with PKS' political performance during the 1999 elections. For Neo-Hanbali groups, PKS has strayed from the strict values of *Salafi* Islam as a result of agreeing to use the Western political system. These groups reject the democratic system and want to forbid Indonesian Muslims from participating in it. As long as the democratic system remains, Neo-Hanbali groups will refuse to participate in elections.

This phenomenon can be seen in the case of Laskar Jihad. Laskar Jihad was a radical Islamic paramilitary unit, established in 2000 by Ja'far Umar Thalib (d. 2019), which aimed to support Muslims, who were fighting against Christian militias in Maluku (Hasan 2006). Apart from sending Muslim militants to these regions, Laskar Jihad also actively campaigned for an Islamic state in Indonesia after the resignation of Suharto (1998). However, this organisation shifted its strategy from establishing an Islamic state to promoting a *sharia*-based state. This meant that Laskar Jihad was no longer interested in replacing the Pancasila state with an Islamic state but wanted to implement *sharia* law within the existing Indonesian state framework. The organisation claims its main priority is boosting the prosperity of the Muslim community. In order to do so, Indonesian Muslims must be educated in “the pure concept of *tawhīd*” as practiced by the righteous first generations of Islam (*salaf al-ṣāliḥ*). When the Muslim community is aware of and practices the true concept of union of God (*tawhīd*), they will automatically implement *sharia* law and God will provide prosperity for them (Makruf and Jahroni 2004b, p. 106). Laskar Jihad

<sup>21</sup> Abu Bakar Ba'asyir is the leader of the al Mu'min *pesantren* in Ngruki, Solo, Central Java. He is described by international media as an Islamist terrorist leader linked to al-Qaeda.

pursued this new strategy after the failure of the Neo Hanbali groups to include the Jakarta Charter in the Indonesian Constitution as part of the General People's Assembly in 2002.

Laskar Jihad's commitment to the Pancasila state was reflected in the organisation's National Consultative Meeting (Musyawarah Kerja Nasional, Mukernas) in 2002. This meeting resulted in several important recommendations related to Laskar Jihad's commitment to protecting Indonesia from separatist movements. In this regard, leaders of Laskar Jihad agreed not to rebel against the legitimate government, regardless of whether the government was just (*'ādil*) or unjust (*'ālim*). From Laskar Jihad's perspective, an unjust Muslim government is not necessarily un-Islamic (Makruf and Jahroni 2004b, p. 114). Rebelling against this authority is only permitted if the government clearly expresses its commitment to and practice of a non-Islamic form of belief. According to Laskar Jihad, it is not easy to assess whether a person or a state has committed to becoming a non-believer. Referring to Sunni theology, Laskar Jihad states that an evaluation of one's faith can only be made by *ahl al-Ḥadīth* (a group who follow the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad). An errant ruling on a state's faith could lead to a bloody war and crisis (Arabic: *fitna*) (Makruf and Jahroni 2004b). Laskar Jihad's position differs greatly from Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, who takes a stricter line in labelling and condemning other different groups as *kāfir* if they disagree with his own views. By comparison, Ja'far Umar Thalib is more mature and restrained. Personal conflict between these two prominent figures has also affected the cohesion of the Neo-Hanbali movement.

Although Laskar Jihad claims to be strongly committed to the Pancasila state, it still rejects the democratic system. For instance, the organisation has refused to participate in elections, arguing that these elections contradict the supremacy of *sharia*. From their point of view, the leader of a state has to be elected by the representatives of God — *ahl ḥall wa al-'aqd* — as practiced during the early generations of the Muslim community when leaders were elected by the select companions of the Prophet Muhammad (Makruf and Jahroni 2004b, p. 119). Laskar Jihad has argued that, in the modern era, a cadre of *ahl ḥall wa al-'aqd* could be established by recruiting experts in various social, political, cultural, regional, and other fields of human life. The organisation also argues that elections are a polytheistic system because they ignore the tenet of *al-wala wa al-bara*<sup>22</sup> (Hasan 2006, p. 138). Ultimately, the group does not want to involve itself in practical politics.

Another senior extremist, Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, (b. 1938) plays different role among Neo-Hanbali groups. He is often described by international media as

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<sup>22</sup> This is the principle of *Salafi da'wah* meaning that Muslim should love, defend, follow and support other Muslims but also should denounce and distance themselves from the influence of infidels.

the most influential figure in Islamic terrorism in Southeast Asia. He has earned a reputation as an inspirational figure, especially related to the campaign to establish *sharia* law in Indonesia, which has been a consistent focus of his over the years. Ba'asyir promotes what he refers to as "Allahcracy"<sup>23</sup> as an antithesis to democracy. In his paper presented at the State Institute for Islamic Studies (Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri, STAIN) Surakarta, Central Java, Ba'asyir reaffirmed his view that *sharia* needs to be implemented within a state framework. He begins from the idea that Islam is the sole acceptable religion (*dīn al-Islām*). Anyone who claims to be a Muslim must completely submit to Islam as a way of life (Arabic: *manhaj al-ḥaya*). Ba'asyir understands *sharia* law to be compulsory for Muslims, without any reservations. In support of his argument, he quoted Ibn Taymiyya on the enforcement of God's rule (*Ḥukm allāh*) as a theological necessity. Muslims who do not follow *Ḥukm l-lāh* in everyday life are categorised as *kuffār* (unbelievers). The direct quotation by Ibn Taymiyya cited by Ba'asyir is:

*"There can be no doubt that people who do not believe in the necessity of making decisions according to what has been revealed by God to the prophet can be called kāfir. Anyone who makes a decision on the affairs of human relations according to human-considered justice without taking sharia law into account is called unbeliever."*<sup>24</sup>

According to Ba'asyir, the formalisation of *sharia* law within a state is a prerequisite towards the total and comprehensive implementation of *sharia*. But as Indonesia has applied positivist secular law, he argues that the structure of the law in Indonesia must be deconstructed radically and systematically. Still, Ba'asyir sees the law on regional autonomy in Indonesia as an opportunity that can be used to achieve the partial implementation of *sharia* while remaining within the framework of the national system. He uses the Islamic legal maxim, "*mā la yudraku kulluhu, yudraku ba'uḍhu kulluhu*" (if something (good) cannot be implemented in its totality, it should be implemented in part). He claimed that God's commands (*taklīf*) for human beings must be undertaken in accordance with human beings' capacity. A human being's capacity is not measured on the basis of their desires, but on the basis of the real and concrete situation they face. Thus, he argues that the State Law on Regional Autonomy should be used as a gateway to implement *sharia* law, while simultaneously working towards implementing Islam as the ultimate source of law. This represents a dual-track movement from within and outside the state. In Ba'asyir's view, establishing Islam as the ultimate source of law is an undisputed *tawḥīd* obligation for all Muslims.

<sup>23</sup> See "Ba'asyir: Indonesia akan jadi Allahcracy", see at <http://indonesia.faithfreedom.org/forum/basyir-indonesia-akan-jadi-allahcracy-t4233/>, viewed on 1 August 2010 (Herriot 2008, p. 31).

<sup>24</sup> This is a quote from Abu Bakar Ba'asyir's speech at IAIN Solo.

## Conclusion

Neo-Hanbali groups are not monolithic entity. Although almost all of them support the supremacy of political Islam in Indonesia, they differ on various issues. Some of these differences have manifest in unreconcilable personal differences between figures like Abu Bakar Ba'asyir and Ja'far Umar Thalib, as mentioned above. Silent tension also exists between cultural Neo Hanbali groups, such as the *Salafi* movement, and Islamic political parties such as PKS. Neo-Hanbalis remain unsatisfied and disappointed with the political performance of PKS as an Islamic party. There is no single respected figure who can unify the interests and power bases of Neo-Hanbali groups, as Muhammad Natsir did in the Old Order.

The revival of Indonesian Neo-Hanbali movements has an international and transnational angle. Indonesian Neo-Hanbali groups have sought to capitalise on global issues such as the US invasion of Afghanistan, the conflicts between Israel and Palestine, the war in Syria, the emergence of Islamic State (IS) and other events as an effective means to foster solidarity among Indonesian Muslims and advance their political agenda. In this instance, Indonesian Neo-Hanbalis have succeed not only in obtaining support from Islamic allies, but also, to some extent, from secular groups. These kind of issues bring Neo-Hanbalis into contact with progressive Islamic groups and anti-Neo-Liberal movements. Indonesian Neo-Hanbalis believe that all Muslims must be united under one banner: the expulsion of Western imperialism from Muslim countries, including Indonesia. Neo-Hanbali groups have a singular view of Western societies, namely that all Western societies are Judeo-Christian in nature and aim to eliminate Islamic influence from Muslim communities. This understanding is based on what they perceive to be the unjust contemporary state of global affairs.

Neo-Hanbali groups are becoming more effective at running campaigns, movements and recruiting new cadres. They are also extending their networks and expanding cooperation, especially through social media platforms. However, these movements are not as frightening as they might seem. According to several national surveys, Islamist politics is on the decline. Still, this declining support does not necessarily mean that these movements will die or collapse entirely. Based on previous experiences, Neo-Hanbalism can re-emerge very quickly, depending on the national, regional and international environment. Neo-Hanbali groups are very deft at capitalising on public issues, whether at the local, national, regional or international level, and in using media and social media to pursue their campaigns. So, it is important that regional and international communities work to ensure that global politics is beneficial to Muslim societies.

Indonesia still appears to be very reluctant to enforce its national laws in the face of Neo-Hanbali movements, especially with regards to their intolerant actions and hate speech. These groups have seen increased opportunities for their agenda in

the last decade due to weak law enforcement. Sometimes, Neo-Hanbali activities, such as demonstrations or attacks on religious minority groups, like Ahmadis, could be categorised disturbing social order and even violating national laws. But the National Police are reluctant to take decisive and strict action against these groups because they do not want to be regarded as opposing Muslim groups. If the Indonesian state continues along this path, it will create a favourable environment for a Neo-Hanbali revival in Indonesia.

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