

Identity Politics of Radical Muslim Organisation in Democratised Indonesia: Transformation and Continuity in Laskar Jihad

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Abstract

Contemporary Indonesian political studies on political Islam have focused intensively on the emergence and development of Islamic-based political parties in domestic politics and also the significant role of long-established Islamic organisations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah. These studies, however, overlooked the transformation and continuity role of violent and radical Muslim organisations such as Laskar Jihad in democratised Indonesia. By examining the role of Laskar Jihad in the practice of identity politics in the democratised Indonesia helps to understand the missing link of identity politics in Indonesia's current democratic backsliding. By investigating the manoeuvres of Laskar Jihad over the past two decades, we attempt to clarify how identity politics being used as a political tactic or approach of the radical Muslim organisation to instil their ideology in the contemporary political situation in Indonesia.

Keywords:

Indonesia Politics, Laskar Jihad, Democratisation, Identity Politics, Paramilitaries

INTRODUCTION

For 32 years, Indonesia was governed by an authoritarian regime led by a former military general, President Soeharto. During Soeharto's administration (1967–1998), the president underlined the importance of stability and order. In 1998, massive demonstrations, led mostly by students, took place in Jakarta. The protesters demanded that President Soeharto resign, however, police officers and military personnel responded to the demonstrations with a vengeance. Apart from offering many positive elements, Indonesia democratisation also generates unintended consequences.

Soeharto's regime came to an end on 21 May 1998, when he resigned as president of Indonesia. The fall of President Soeharto is also known in Indonesia as the dawn of democracy and the beginning of the *reformasi* period. Researchers have found that the democratisation process begun in 1998 produced several positive changes in the Indonesian political situation (Anwar, 1999; Diamond, 2010; Sukma, 2010; and Mujani & Liddle, 2010), for example, the release of political prisoners who were detained during Soeharto's regime, the implementation of regional autonomy, the institution of direct elections, the increase in public political participation, and the establishment of corruption oversight institutions.

Swain (2007) has explained that for many new democracies, "It is a major challenge to establish how the minority population can be integrated while guaranteeing respect for their group rights as well as individual rights in the democratic consolidation process" (Swain, 2007, p. 7). While Indonesia faced this challenge during the early years of the democratisation process, it continues to face it today, with many cases of violence in the country linked to majority and minority rights.¹⁾

Moreover, the process of democratisation in Indonesia also resulted in unintended consequences for the Indonesian people. For example, there appeared a surge in various ideologies, identities, and interests that previously had been restricted under President Soeharto, including the emer-

1) A report from the Amnesty organisation in Indonesia in 2019 explained that minorities in Indonesia experienced some violence and difficulties in practising their religion, such as difficulties in establishing houses of worship, difficulties in carrying out worship, burning of houses of worship, and destruction of houses of worship. Report can be found at <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/ASA2184532018ENGLISH.pdf>

gence of political Islam. Political Islam is a general term in Indonesian politics, and the term has been applied to several contexts in Indonesian politics for the past few decades. The definition of political Islam in this article borrowing the definition of Baswedan (2004) who explains that “political Islam refers to efforts that promote Muslim aspirations and carry an Islamic agenda into laws and government policy through the electoral process and representative (legislative) institutions”. The term “political Islam” was often heard after the democratisation process in Indonesia due to the direct consequence of democracy, which opened up alternative Muslim identities for 225 million Muslims. As a result, Indonesian Muslims began to familiarise themselves with the concept of political Islam.

Muslim identity in Indonesia is highly diverse. In general, this identity is divided into four dominant concepts—extremists, conservatives, moderates, and liberals—with one or two significant organisations leading each thought. For example, during the first five years after democratisation, the extremist faction was led by two groups—Laskar Jihad, which was established and led by Jafar Umar Thalib (JUT), and Jamaah Islamiyah (JI), which was founded and orchestrated by Abu Bakar Baasyir. These organisations, which had developed an extremist school of thought, received significant criticism from Indonesians when they initiated several conflicts and became the masterminds of terrorist activities in Indonesia.²⁾ However, they continued to develop their ideology through restricted preaching within their internal networks and among close relatives.

Religious radicalism initiated by hard-line Islamic movements has started to emerge in post-Indonesia’s independence and began to reappear in Indonesia during the country’s democratisation period.³⁾ Affandy

2) Laskar Jihad involved in conflict in Maluku (Hasan, 2006) and Jamaah Islamiyah was responsible for the Bali bombings (Solahudin, 2011).

3) Religious hard-line in post-Indonesia’s independence in 1945 initiated by Darul Islam/Islamic Armed Forces of Indonesia (Darul Islam/*Tentara Islam Indonesia*-DI/TII) which founded by Sekarmadji Maridjan Kartosoewirjo in 1949. In Aceh, Daud Beureueh initiated Islamic State of Indonesia (*Negara Islam Indonesia*/NII) in 1953. In 1950, Amir Fatah a leader of revolutionary movement called Hizbullah Fisabilillah led a movement which support DI/TII cause. Kahar Muzakkar also led similar revolutionary movement in South Sulawesi in 1950. Moreover, some example of hard-line Islamic movements in post-independent Indonesia such as the religiously motivated conflict which happened in Ambon and Poso in 1999-2002. The growing number of Jamaah Islamiyah (JI) followers which triggered the Bali Bombing in 2001. The Islamic Defender Front (*Front Pembela Islam*-FPI) violence activities which heavily linked to religious *preman*, racketing, and protection.

(2016)⁴⁾ argues that, initially, the hard-line Islamic movements were motivated primarily by local politics—for example, political dissatisfaction and political and economic marginalisation. However, after the hard-line movements were established, religion offered both legitimacy and connectedness, which are essential for hard-line Islamic movements. These hard-line Islamic movements often channelled the hatred among the Indonesians toward ethnic Chinese, who controlled much of Indonesia's economy. They stigmatised the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia as greedy and cunning, often taking advantage of the majority of locals (Budiman, 2005; Hervandi, 2011; and Setijadi, 2017). Conversely, Laskar Jihad channelled that hatred toward non-Muslims, basing their actions on identity politics rather than race or ethnicity.⁵⁾ Similar to the organisations mentioned earlier, Laskar Jihad often used violence to achieve its political goals, an approach that harms democracy and pluralism at the same time.

The current discussion of identity politics and democratisation cannot be isolated from the discussion of the rise of hard-line Muslim organisations in Indonesia. As a result of the transformation of the Indonesian political system from authoritarianism to democracy, the state guarantees the existence of hard-line organisations. In a democracy, one of the basic principles is freedom of expression. Although the hard-liners reject the notion of democracy, these groups are obliquely forced to acknowledge democracy as the rule of the game in Indonesia (Hilmy, 2010).

However, Islamists have a variety of views about democracy, which can be defined by three main approaches: those who reject the notion of democracy but are inconsistent in practice;⁶⁾ those who reject the entire concept of democracy,⁷⁾ both in ideology and practice; and those who are

4) Affandy is one of the main leaders at the Board of Executive of Nahdlatul Ulama (*Pengurus Besar Nahdlatul Ulama-PBNU*). Nahdlatul Ulama is one of the biggest Islam Organisation in Indonesia.

5) Identity politics in this article defines as a political strategy which often eliminates the rights of minority groups and frequently benefits the majority groups. Identity politics resulted in political injustice experienced by minority social groups.

6) For example, Islamic Defender Front or *Front Pembela Islam* (FPI). They often reject the notion of democracy publicly and opposing the implementation of democracy in Indonesia. Their rejection is often done with the medium of demonstration, and when the government limited their activities, they will mention the freedom of speech (which is an essential pillar in the concept of democracy).

7) For example, the *Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia* (HTI), every concept that is from humans is a misconception, including democracy. HTI fully reject the notion and implementation of democracy.

open to the concept of democracy.⁸⁾ The first group often rejects the concept of democracy but, in practice, uses democratic concepts such as freedom of speech when criticised or attacked. The first and second groups also often draw on their political identity, campaigning about the privileges of the majority (Muslim) community, which has lagged behind other communities (non-majority/non-Muslim), especially concerning economic power.

The group who rejects the entire concept of democracy, both in practice and ideology, adheres to the school of thought called *Salafi*.⁹⁾ International Crisis Group (ICG) in a report in 2004 defines a significant split within Indonesian Salafism as being “between ‘purists’, who reject any association with groups or individuals willing to compromise religious purity for political goals, and more tolerant and inclusive groups willing to acknowledge some good even in deviant teachings”. Hasan (2006) explains that the term “political Islam” is used as an umbrella term interchangeably with Islamism, or alternatively known as fundamentalism. Islamists who support political Islam often conceive of Islam not merely as a belief but as a political ideology that highly respects the *sharia*.¹⁰⁾ The author argues that Laskar Jihad can be included with the group who reject the entire concept of democracy in practice and ideology, given that Laskar Jihad’s violent activities are often described as a justification from the word of God and they often rejected the man-made concept such as democracy.

Laskar Jihad is one of the most prominent Muslim hard-line groups; it was established during the chaotic political transition after *reformasi* in Indonesia.¹¹⁾ This paramilitary group was created to demand the imple-

8) For example, Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) two biggest Islamic organisation in Indonesia.

9) *Salafi* is a school of thought which aim to return to what they called ‘pure Islam’. Their main concern is the purity of *Tawhid* and other issues related to religious practices. *Salafi* often rejects of unwarranted innovations (*bid’ah*) of doctrine and practice that Muslims brought to the religion in the modern era.

10) Sharia defines as Islamic teachings which often interpreted as law-based of the Koran and the traditions of the Prophet.

11) In Indonesia, post-reformasi period, this radicalism movement and the use of identity in politics is often associated with Muslim vigilante organisations such as the Islamic Defenders Front (Front Pembela Islam—FPI) or radical ones such as Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), Jamaah Islamiyah (JI), Tauhid Wal Jihad, Islamic Armed Forces of Indonesia (Darul Islam/Negara Islam Indonesia-NII), Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid (ISIS’ leading supporter in Indonesia), and several others. Mietzner (2009) identifies three different groups in the early post-Soeharto era which often linked to violent Islamic extremism: first, terrorist cells, “anti-vice” militias, and paramilitary groups that intervened in communal con-

mentation of *sharia* law in Indonesia through raids on cafés, discotheques, casinos, and brothels (Hasan, 2006).¹²⁾ Additionally, Laskar Jihad was responsible for the deaths of many Muslims and non-Muslims in the Maluku conflict.¹³⁾ Laskar Jihad's involvement in that conflict can be understood from a religious point of view, as the group believed that Muslims in Maluku had been victimised, and even killed, by Christians. Therefore, they believed their presence in Maluku was to carry out religious missions.¹⁴⁾

Laskar Jihad was prohibited from engaging in paramilitary activities in October 2002. However, the group's true beliefs persisted under the name of the Communication Forum of the Followers of the Sunnah and the Community of the Prophet (*Forum Komunikasi Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jamaah—FKAWJ*). Twenty years later, Laskar Jihad became actively involved in religious teaching activities in Papua under the auspices of FKAWJ. Existing research has ignored a pattern of a conservative form of identity politics promoted by Laskar Jihad.

Therefore, this article focuses on Laskar Jihad's practice of identity politics in democratised Indonesia and is based on the author's long inter-

flicts. This paper aims to look at the activities and the role of these groups from two viewpoints, their religiosity spectrum and violence activities.

- 12) After democratization, Muslim vigilante organisations such as the Islamic Defenders Front (Front Pembela Islam—FPI) and radical ones such as Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), Jamaah Islamiyah (JI), Tauhid Wal Jihad, Islamic Armed Forces of Indonesia (Darul Islam/Negara Islam Indonesia-NII), Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid (ISIS' leading supporter in Indonesia), and several others emerged in Indonesia. Mietzner (2009) identifies three different groups in the early post-Soeharto era, which often linked to such violent Islamic extremism: terrorist cells, "anti-vice" militias, and paramilitary groups that intervened in communal conflicts. Laskar Jihad can be categorized into the third group.
- 13) Religiously motivated violence happened in Ambon, Maluku between 1999-2002; the violence occurred between Christians and Muslims in Maluku. The conflict in Maluku erupted during Indonesia's transition from authoritarianism to democracy; hence, the conflict was linked to the struggle of power and control over political resources on both the national level and local level in response to the implementation of decentralisation. The existing studies argued the conflict in Maluku as religiously motivated, and the perpetrators and victims alike were drawn from local Maluku Muslims, Christians, minority religious denominations, migrants from other Indonesian islands, and religious groups from outside Maluku. However, describing the Maluku conflict as entirely religious would be an oversimplification. Other factors were highly influential. Conflicts emerge and evolve according to the influence of several aspects such as the development of politics, the role of local actors, the significance of external and internal factors, and the impact of national politics. These factors are relevant in the emergence of conflict and are often overlooked in the discussion of roots of conflict and violence
- 14) Recorded interview, JUT, Jogjakarta, 24 October 2018

view with the leader of Laskar Jihad. This article begins by analysing the sordid past of Laskar Jihad, which has often been linked with massacres, anarchy, vigilantism, and guerrilla tactics. The second part of this article discusses the Laskar Jihad movement and its call for *jihād* in a Muslim-minority region, and the last part examines the use of identity politics by Laskar Jihad.

1. THE SORDID PAST OF LASKAR JIHAD: MASSACRE, ANARCHY, AND GUERRILLA TACTICS

The discussion of Laskar Jihad would not be thorough unless it includes a detailed examination of its leader, Jafar Umar Thalib (JUT), who died in 2019. Born in 1961, he was an Islamic cleric of Arab-Madurese descent.¹⁵⁾ In an interview, JUT¹⁶⁾ said that, in 1986, he attended Syed Mau-doodi's International Islamic Educational Institute in Lahore, Pakistan, to study Islamic literature. However, he did not finish his studies because, after a year in Lahore, he was busy attending military exercises and joining the *mujahedeen* in Peshawar, a province on the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. In his youth, he was actively engaged with and aided the *mujahedeen* in the Soviet-Afghan war. JUT earned a global reputation for his radicalist movement and was called the Indonesian bin Laden by *The New York Times* (23 January 2002). However, no clear evidence exists to demonstrate that Laskar Jihad was connected to the Al Qaeda network. The Al Qaeda movement in Indonesia was led by Baasyir and, in an interview, JUT claimed that he and Baasyir had differences about the practice of Islam.¹⁷⁾

15) He just died recently on 25 August 2019 due to heart attack in Jakarta. The court found him guilty of destruction of property in Papua on July 2019 and he was sentenced five months imprisonment (Raditya & Nancy, 2019).

16) Recorded interview, JUT, Jogjakarta, 24 October 2018.

17) Baasyir is known as a big supporter of Bin Laden and in 2014 according to (Witular, 2014) Baasyir also pledge his support to Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, the leader of Islamic State (ISIS). Baasyir is responsible for several bombings in Southeast Asian countries (Solahudin, 2011). The Bali bombers are students and the network of Abu Bakar Baasyir, and they have no affiliation to Laskar Jihad (Solahudin, 2011). Nevertheless, at that time, the Indonesian government was actively fighting the war on terror. As a result, many radical religious organisations were forcibly disbanded by the government, including Laskar Jihad. Schulze (2002) mentioned the link of Laskar Jihad to the Taliban and alleged ties to Abu Sayyaf; however, Laskar Jihad was not a threat to international terrorism but rather was treated as an internal threat to Islam in Indonesia.

In an interview,¹⁸⁾ JUT as the leader of Laskar Jihad, explained that the organisation was previously known as the Communication Forum of the Followers of the Sunnah and the Community of the Prophet (*Forum Komunikasi Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jamaah—FKAWJ*). It was first established as an Islamic teaching institution in the early 1990s after JUT's return to Indonesia from his long journey through Pakistan and Afghanistan. FKAWJ transformed into Laskar Jihad in January 2000 as a response to the failure of the Indonesian government to manage the conflict in Maluku.¹⁹⁾ The transformation occurred during the Wahid administration (1999-2001). During Habibie's administration (1998-1999), JUT claimed that Laskar Jihad was well-received, and the president took the FKAWJ's suggestions into consideration. FKAWJ exchanged letters with President Habibie and received warm replies from him.²⁰⁾ Conversely, President Wahid did not tolerate acts of violence by civilians. He twice ignored letters from FKAWJ. Upon receipt of FKAWJ's third letter, President Wahid answered it curtly, saying he did not care about what happened in Ambon. This is believed to be the turning point at which FKAWJ transformed into Laskar Jihad.²¹⁾

Due to many Muslim casualties in Ambon²²⁾, the provincial capital, and also due to excessive provocation from irresponsible parties²³⁾, tension

18) Recorded interview, JUT, Jogjakarta, 24 October 2018.

19) Recorded interview, JUT, Jogjakarta, 24 October 2018.

20) Recorded interview, JUT, Jogjakarta, 24 October 2018. It is unclear why President Habibie responded well to Laskar Jihad; we assume that President Habibie aware of the capability of JUT to make things worse for the conflict in Maluku. Besides, the involvement of Habibie in Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals (*Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia-ICMI*) compelled him to get sympathy from various Islamic circles, including Laskar Jihad. On the other hand, President Wahid is well-known as a moderate leader who prefers not to negotiate or giving space to the radical ones.

21) Recorded interview, JUT, Jogjakarta, 24 October 2018. However, the author believes that JUT seems naïve and eliminates other determinants which have a significant influence in maintaining conflict situations in Maluku, such as internal issue within the military institutions.

22) According to Varshney, Panggabean, and Tadjoeddin (2003) who conducted a research in the patterns of collective violence in Indonesia between (1990-2003) explained that there were approximately more than 2,794 people were dead in North Maluku during the bloody religious conflict in 1999-2002. While in Maluku it was more than 2,046 lives were taken during the conflict in Maluku.

23) During the conflict, both parties Muslims and Christians were frightened because of the spread of unknown letters, which were an incitement to religious hatred between Christians and Muslims. One of the letters known as the Bloody Sosol letter. Bloody Sosol was a letter which contained full information related to the plans of Christians churches attack-

among Muslims outside Ambon rapidly increased. As one of the earliest Islamist movements in post-*reformasi* Indonesia, Laskar Jihad organised a rally on 7 January 2000, which attracted hundreds of thousands of people. The rally was called *Aksi Sejuta Umat* (Action of a Million People) and took place at the Jakarta National Monument. JUT explains that its purpose was to demonstrate solidarity among Islamic organisations that were opposed to the massacre of Muslims in Maluku. The rally generated much sympathy, and approximately 10,000 people across Indonesia voluntarily registered to join the act of jihad in Maluku.²⁴⁾

Approximately 3,000 *mujahedeen*²⁵⁾ comprised the first deployment of Laskar Jihad members to Ambon. This was consistent with JUT's role as a leader who reliably defended the interests of conservative and fundamental Muslims in the bloody conflict in Maluku.²⁶⁾ Between 2001 and 2002, Islamic crowds under the command of Laskar Jihad claimed victories on many fronts in Maluku.²⁷⁾

ing the Muslim villages, and the letter was based on revenge towards the Muslim for the destruction of the Christian village. The letter was allegedly written by the head of Synod of the Maluku Protestant Church (Sinode GPM). The letter was also signed by the head of Sinode GPM, Priest S. P. Titaley. Not long after the letter was spread, Titaley denied such a letter. He claimed that he never wrote such a letter and never signed it. Titaley asked the Christian community to ignore such letter and do not attack anyone. This letter successfully increased tensions among Muslims outside of Maluku, including Laskar Jihad. The external Muslims groups outside of Ambon started to gather and plan to help their fellow Muslims in Maluku (Wilson, 2008 and Duncan, 2013).

24) This rally was supported by numerous of Islamic organisations including the fundamental ones such as FPI and Laskar Jihad and also the political party youth organisations took part such as the Kab'ah Youth Movement of PPP and Pemuda Bulan Bintang of PBB. In this rally, Amien Rais as chair of the People's Consultative Assembly (*Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat*-MPR) delivered a speech which calling all Indonesian Muslims to perform a *jihad* to help the Muslims in conflict areas such as in Poso and Maluku. Aforementioned information gathered from several sources. First, recorded interview, JUT, Jogjakarta, 24 October 2018. Second from Raditya & Nancy (2019). Third from Davis (2002).

25) *Mujahedeen* is a plural of *Mujahed* meaning those who engage in jihad acts.

26) Recorded interview, JUT, Jogjakarta, 24 October 2018.

27) While helping the Muslim community in Maluku, Laskar Jihad succeeded in opposing the Christian community who wanted to attack Islamic villages in several areas in Maluku, including North Maluku. On several occasions, Laskar Jihad also managed to capture and kill Christian Army (combatants from the Christian community). In an interview, JUT admitted that several active soldiers often assisted Laskar Jihad in the fight. JUT said several soldiers also assisted the Christian community. Schulze (2002) mentioned the link of Laskar Jihad to the Taliban and alleged ties to Abu Sayyaf; however, Laskar Jihad was not a threat to international terrorism but rather was treated as an internal threat to Islam in Indonesia because Laskar Jihad constantly used their religious belief as a motive for violence. Additionally, Laskar Jihad had been dissolved and banned not long after the Bali

Nevertheless, the political circumstances in Ambon had changed after the Malino II Accord, which was agreed to in Malino, South Sulawesi, on 12 February 2002. In the agreement, the central government initiated a meeting between Islamic and Christian representatives with a goal of immediately ending the interfaith dispute. Soon after the Malino II Accord, the Maluku Regional Civil Emergency Authority²⁸⁾, under the governor's leadership, launched the implementation of 11 principles of the Malino II²⁹⁾ declaration, including disarmament and the confiscation of weapons. However, the process of reconciling the communities of the two religions was marred by chaos because other factions, such as Laskar Jihad, which was supported by conservative elites in the province, were not satisfied with the results of the peace settlement. Laskar Jihad claimed that the settlement offered no advantages for Muslim people who had been victimised, even killed, during the conflicts in Maluku.³⁰⁾

In response, Laskar Jihad and several conservative elites (with the help of some military personnel) launched attacks on Christian villages in

bombing incidents. The Bali bombers are students and the network of Abu Bakar Baasyir, and they have no affiliation to Laskar Jihad (Solahudin, 2011). Nevertheless, at that time, the Indonesian government was actively fighting the war on terror. As a result, many radical religious organisations were forcibly disbanded by the government, including Laskar Jihad. Therefore, the author argues that for a brief time, Laskar Jihad was considered to be one of the main groups responsible for religious violence in Indonesia.

28) In 26 June 2000, President Wahid signed a Presidential Decree No. 88 of 2000, the Decree stated of a civil emergency status on both provinces, Maluku and North Maluku. The Decree gave full authorities to control and manage of civil emergency in the areas of Maluku Province and North Maluku Province, following their respective regions, is carried out by the Governor of Maluku or the Governor of North Maluku, assisted by: the Pattimura Military Regional Commander; Head of Maluku Regional Police; and Head of the Provincial Prosecutor's Office (National Archives of Indonesia, 2000).

29) Malino II agreement consist of eleven points which signed by 70 representatives of both Muslims and Christians. Malino II agreement points are, first, end all forms of conflict and disputes. Second, upholding the supremacy of the law fairly and impartially. Third, to reject all forms of separatist movements. Fourth, all people have the right to be in the Maluku region by paying attention to local culture. Fifth, the form of organization, group unit, or armed irregulars without permission is prohibited. Sixth, to implement all legal provisions, an independent national investigation team will be formed. Seventh, the two groups agreed to return the refugees gradually to their place. Eighth, the government promised to help the community rehabilitate industrial facilities and public facilities. The ninth emphasized the need for cohesiveness to maintain order and security of the entire region. The 10th, to maintain the relationship and harmonization of all people, and the 11th, to support the rehabilitation academic institution such as Pattimura University. (Wilson, 2011).

30) Recorded interview, JUT, Jogjakarta, 24 October 2018.

Maluku and North Maluku. Two months later, tensions in Ambon rose again. A bomb exploded outside the governor's office on 25 April, the 52nd anniversary of the founding of the South Maluku Republic (*Republik Maluku Selatan*—RMS), and numerous RMS and The Maluku Sovereignty Front (*Front Kedaulatan Maluku*-FKM) activists were arrested.³¹⁾ In response, JUT held a protest and mass gathering outside the Al Fatah Mosque and criticised the Maluku Regional Civil Emergency Authority (*Pengusaha Darurat Sipil Daerah*-PDSD), the central government, and security forces for their inability to prevent the separatist actions. A day later, on 26 April, the Soya village and Ahoru village in the Sirimau district were attacked. Hundreds of marauders wearing camouflage and unidentified black uniforms assaulted the two mountainous villages by blowing up several mortars and shooting at dozens of innocent civilians. As a result, 12 people were killed, dozens were injured, and dozens of houses were destroyed (*Tempo*, 6 May 2002). Some military personnel suggested upgrading the status from regional emergency to martial law, but President Megawati declined the request (Amru & Iskarpandi, 2002).

2. CALL OF JIHAD IN A MUSLIM-MINORITY REGION: THE CASE OF PAPUA

Laskar Jihad was officially disbanded on 7 October 2002. According to JUT, this was a decision of the legislative council of the FKAWJ at a meeting in Jogjakarta on 3-7 October 2002. JUT also admitted that the dissolution of Laskar Jihad came at the request of his teachers in Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and Afghanistan, who believed that Laskar Jihad had strayed from its initial intent and, as a result, had destroyed the image of Islam.³²⁾

After completing their acts of *jihad* in Ambon between 2002 and 2003, a majority of Laskar Jihad members returned to their homes.³³⁾ In an interview, JUT explained that he and his followers then began to shift their focus to religious lectures within a closed and exclusive network of their

31) RMS is a separatist movement and aims for independence for Southern part of Maluku which has been established since the 1950s. FKM is an organisation which also considered as the leading supporter of RMS, FKM aims for the independence of South Maluku region as promised by the Dutch during the colonisation period.

32) Recorded interview, JUT, Jogjakarta, 24 October 2018.

33) Recorded interview, JUT, Jogjakarta, 24 October 2018.

friends and relatives. Because these religious lectures were protected under the law as freedom of speech, Laskar Jihad had, in effect, adopted democratic practices by focusing on religious lectures instead of violence.

During this period, JUT returned to Jogjakarta to prepare for his trial on charges of insulting the president of Indonesia, Megawati Sukarnoputri.³⁴⁾ JUT was acquitted by the judge and, after his release in 2003, he returned to Jogjakarta to teach at his Islamic institution, Ihya As-Sunnah. Additionally, between 2003 and 2014, he often visited Islamic schools (*pesantren*) in Central and East Java to give lectures. During President Yudhoyono's administration (2004-2014), Laskar Jihad activities were restricted to *dakwah* (the invitation to Islam), sermons, and teachings.³⁵⁾

In addition to teaching in Jogjakarta, Laskar Jihad began to focus on developing Islamic teachings in Papua.³⁶⁾ In an interview with JUT, we have indicated about Laskar Jihad's recent activities and JUT also explained why the group moved to Papua after the Tolikara incident in 2015.³⁷⁾ The violence against Muslims in the Tolikara district of Papua on

34) In 2002, JUT was at the trial because he was considered guilty of insulting President Megawati and inciting hatred to the Christians during a public lecture at Al-Fatah Mosque in Ambon on 26 April 2002. Since 2001, JUT had publicly expressed its objection of Megawati because JUT argued, in Islamic teachings, women are not allowed to be a leader. However, the result of the trial decided he is not guilty. According to the panel of judges, Ja'far was not proven to insult President Megawati Sukarnoputri, incite hatred to the Christians, and stir up hatred in his speech (reference).

35) Recorded interview, JUT, Jogjakarta, 24 October 2018.

36) However, scholars who examine the role of Laskar Jihad in Muslim Minority region such as Papua opposed JUT statement (England, 2002; Timberlake, 2002; and Elsham, 2002). They examine that Laskar Jihad has been silently working with the military in Papua since 2002. "The alarming development is foreshadowing growing violence in Papua were reported throughout 2002 of the formation of civilian militias in Papua, with some indications of some military involvement. Local Papuan leaders express particular concern over the arrival of volunteers from Laskar Jihad, a militant Islamic group, and the formation of an East Timor-style militia group known as Red and White Front/*Barisan Merah Putih*".

37) Tolikara riot is a conflict which involved religious sentiment between Christian and Islam that occurred in Papua. The conflict happened on 17 July 2015, to coincide with the *Idul Fitri* celebration. The incident began with a pamphlet concerning the prohibition of Muslims from carrying out Eid prayers. The letter issued by the Council of Workers of the Evangelical Church Region in Indonesia (*Dewan Pekerja Wilayah Gereja Injil Indonesia-GIDI*) of Tolikara, Papua. The riots claimed one death and dozens were injured. This riot also caused the burning of a mosque which was the cause of Laskar Jihad's anger. According to JUT, the burning of a mosque in Papua makes Muslims became oppressed. Based on this, JUT moved to Papua to teach Islam, as well as to strengthen the bargaining position of Muslims in minority areas such as Papua (Recorded interview, JUT, Jogjakarta, 24 October 2018).

17 July 2015 had triggered the anger of Muslims throughout Indonesia, including JUT. After the incident, JUT announced *Jihad Fi Sabilillah* (struggle for the sake of Allah) for Papua, in essence declaring *ji-had* and war on groups that attacked Muslims in Papua.³⁸⁾

JUT claimed his presence in Papua was to preach and to establish a new *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) in the Arso Satu, Keerom, district of Papua. JUT said he chose Papua as the focus for his preaching because he believed that Muslims in Papua were unaware, uninformed, and ignorant of the *Sharia* of Allah; as a result, they remained far removed from Islamic religious knowledge. Therefore, he felt obliged to offer his teachings (*dakwah*) in Papua by establishing *pesantren* and by posting many preachers in various rural areas throughout the province.³⁹⁾

However, most of the Islamic groups that were rooted in Papua rejected JUT's presence there. His involvement caused significant social unrest among the religious communities in Papua, not only among Christians but also among Muslims themselves. Moreover, many people believed it would be more difficult to maintain peace in Papua if JUT remained there (Al-Makassary, 2017).

Halidin (2016) explained that the views of Muslims in Papua about JUT were based on five reasons.⁴⁰⁾ First, JUT's history included significant violence and intolerance. Muslims in Papua did not want the humanitarian tragedies that had occurred in Maluku in 1999 to be repeated in Papua. Second, communication and fellowship among Islamic groups in Papua had been quite successful to that point. Third, JUT's attitude in the declaration of *ji-had* in the "war against pluralism" was seen as a denial of the *sunatullah* (God's will). For Muslims in Papua, pluralism is a necessity and represents God's will. In Papua, plural religious diversity is often found in a single family. Fourth, JUT was not known for describing Islam as *rahmatan lil alamin* (a mercy to all creation), contrary to Islamic figures in Papua who were working to establish Islam as a "blessing to all". Fifth, the presence of JUT only further stymied peace efforts in Papua. Muslim leaders believed this noble effort should not be stopped or hampered by anyone, not even JUT and his group.

38) Recorded interview, JUT, Jogjakarta, 24 October 2018.

39) Recorded interview, JUT, Jogjakarta, 24 October 2018.

40) Halidin is a pro-religious pluralism activist who often advocates the rights of religious minorities in Indonesia. He is also actively involved in local NGOs in Papua

In February 2019, JUT was arrested by Papuan police for allegedly damaging a Papua citizen's electronic devices. After the morning prayer, JUT had continued his lecture with the students and some residents. However, during that lecture, a neighbour of the mosque named Henock Niki played Christian songs on several loudspeakers in his house. JUT and his group were disturbed, so they went to Niki's house and destroyed several pieces of the sound system. JUT and his students also threatened a teenager (Himawan, 2019). Al-Makassary (2017) argues that JUT's behaviour was dangerous for Papuan society since he often employed tactics designed to undermine any prospect of reconciliation between Christians and Muslim in Papua. Al-Makassary (2019) explains that JUT and Laskar Jihad sought to provoke the local Papuans with a goal of creating an assumption that democracy in Indonesia leads to instability. JUT's activities were often concentrated on areas of Indonesia where Muslims are a minority.

Moreover, JUT even attacked Islamic leaders who were relatively quiet during the Tolikara incident. In his announcement a few days after the violence there, JUT criticised the so-called cowardly religious teachers and cowardly preachers, saying, "Please find your excuses, find a justification to avoid *jihad* and to stay with your wife and children instead of doing *jihad*" (Suryanto, 2015). This statement seems to imply that Islamic leaders (*ulama*) in Indonesia do not care about what happened in Tolikara, that only JUT is concerned about the fate of Muslims in minority areas such as Tolikara and Papua. JUT sought to demonstrate that he was the only *ulama* with the genuine motivation to defend Islam by visiting and later permanently remaining in Papua to protect the Muslims there. This statement confirmed that JUT's ideology of continuing to justify violence and provoking Muslims to perform *jihad* had not changed, even 20 years after the Ambon conflict. He sought to implement the ideology that he had brought to Ambon two decades earlier in Papua in 2015. It became clear that JUT had been preaching and delivering lectures and teachings to internal Islamic groups, such as *pesantren*, but that he had not changed his views and attitudes about *jihad* or about how to treat people of different religions. Over the years, his ideology had remained the same.

3. IDENTITY POLITICS OF LASKAR JIHAD

Laskar Jihad attempted to develop the practice of identity politics in Indonesia by inciting hatred towards non-Muslims, specifically in Papua, by developing a narrative that Islam was being oppressed in minority Muslim areas. Laskar Jihad argued that Islam could not expand and develop in minority Muslim areas because of the many local rules and regulations (mainly from local custom/*adat*) that limit the expansion of Islam. As an example, JUT pointed out that rules governing the use of loudspeakers in mosques in Papua were not as flexible as in other regions in Indonesia. In Papua, the use of loudspeakers is limited at certain times and may not violate local agreements that have been determined in each respective region. In short, JUT argued that Islam in Papua did not enjoy the same privileges as in Muslim-majority regions in Indonesia.⁴¹⁾

Organisations such as Laskar Jihad often use identity politics as a political tactic or approach. Laskar Jihad frequently argued that Muslims were being oppressed in non-Muslim-majority regions such as in Papua. Moreover, Laskar Jihad not only used identity politics towards residents of different faiths but also towards citizens who shared the same Islamic beliefs. Laskar Jihad also labelled an Islamic ideology that was different from its beliefs as “pretended Islam”.⁴²⁾ In this context, Laskar Jihad prioritised the interests of its members in such a way as to attract people from the same spectrum, which is radical Islam. Since the Tolikara incident in 2015, Laskar Jihad continuously focused on the issue of identity politics in Papua; that issue also was arguably raised during the riots in Wamena in September 2019.⁴³⁾ Laskar Jihad and JUT made identity politics the focus in 2001 when they objected to Megawati because JUT argued that, in Islamic teachings, women are not allowed to be leaders. Two decades later, Laskar Jihad and JUT used the same approach in Papua when they created the narrative that Islam was an oppressed religion in Papua because Christianity, as the majority, restricted and impeded Muslim worship.

Laskar Jihad’s brand of identity politics was related to the struggle for political power in areas where Islam was a minority. Laskar Jihad be-

41) Recorded interview, JUT, Jogjakarta, 24 October 2018.

42) Recorded interview, JUT, Jogjakarta, 24 October 2018.

43) An anti-racism demonstration of students erupted into mass insanity that killed at least 42 lives and destroyed half of the largest city in the central mountain region of Papua.

lieved that the use of identity politics in Muslim-minority areas was allowed because, according to JUT, Islam in a minority area such as Papua was marginalised politically, socially, culturally, and economically.⁴⁴⁾

The activities of JUT in Papua aroused suspicion from the indigenous local Christians who assumed they were part of a mission of militant Muslims to Islamicise Papua (Himawan, 2019). JUT, meanwhile, attempted to cast the violence as part of an international Christian conspiracy against Islam in general and Papuan Muslims in particular. Through preaching Islam in Papua, JUT aimed to attract conservative Muslims in the minority region.

CONCLUSION

Democratisation often creates hope because it values diversity and robust control from the civil society, however, at the same time, democratisation also provides opportunity for extremist religious groups such as Laskar Jihad to grow. Laskar Jihad was established in January 2000 as a response to the failure of the Indonesian government to manage the conflict in Maluku. Jafar Umar Thalib (JUT), a veteran of the Soviet-Afghan war, was the leader of Laskar Jihad. He had a global reputation for violence, and even was characterised by The New York Times as the Indonesian bin Laden. Between 2001 and 2002, under the leadership of JUT, Laskar Jihad attracted 10,000 people to perform *jihad* in Ambon. On 7 October 2002, Laskar Jihad was officially disbanded and many of its members returned to Jogjakarta to spread Islamic teachings in *pesantren*.

However, violence against Muslims in the Tolikara district of Papua on 17 July 2015 triggered the anger of JUT and members of Laskar Jihad. As a result, JUT announced *Jihad Fi Sabilillah* (struggle for the sake of Allah) for Papua, in essence declaring *jihad* and war on groups that attacked Muslims there. After the Tolikara incident, Laskar Jihad and JUT committed themselves to defend, protect, and support Muslims in Papua by developing Islamic teachings there. However, this intention was rejected by many parties, especially local Papuans, both Muslims and Christians. They worried that JUT's involvement in religious conflict in Ambon would be repeated in Papua.

44) Recorded interview, JUT, Jogjakarta, 24 October 2018.

Laskar Jihad often used identity politics as a political approach or tactic, pointing out the oppression of Indonesian Muslims. Besides, Laskar Jihad has been using identity politics as a strategy to instil and develop its ideology to the main supporters. These identity politics were the actualisation of a closed ideology shared by many radical and conservative groups. The thought of Indonesian Muslims being oppressed in a minority region such as Papua became a justification for JUT to use violence in Papua, where in February 2019 he was arrested by Papuan police after allegedly damaging a citizen's electronic device because the man played Christian songs loudly while JUT was lecturing.

Laskar Jihad lost its momentum after it was disbanded in 2002. While JUT's move from Java to Papua does not sound logical, it is understandable as an attempt to prove to his followers his reason for existence. JUT and Laskar Jihad were looking for legitimisation from conservative and radical spectrums. The call of *jihad* to Papua was similar to what Laskar Jihad had done during the conflict in Maluku between 1999 and 2001.

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