Introduction

Sanwar was a young girl of sixteen when she married Anwar Jalil, a teacher of exegesis at a local Islamic school in the nearby town of Padang Panjang. She remembered it as the first day of Ramadan – the Muslim fasting month – in the year 1364 on the Islamic calendar; that was August 9, 1945 on the Western calendar. After the small village wedding, her husband kept commuting by foot to the school. A few weeks after they were married, on Ramadan 17 (August 25) “he came home from Padang Panjang and said maybe we were free. We had no radio. No one trusted the newspapers. We trusted what the leader of the school said.”1 The world’s largest Muslim country had thrown off the burden of non-Muslim rule. This news of independence came to Sanwar on the authority of an Islamic scholar, at the holiest time of the year for Muslims.

This picture looks very different from the thoroughly secular nationalist affair celebrated every year in Indonesia on August 17, commemorating a proclamation by the country’s first president and vice-president. When Indonesia proclaimed independence in 1945, most of the country’s inhabitants learned about it during the holiest part of the Islamic calendar. Muslims gathered in Islamic schools to hear about what independence meant, and they followed their Islamic leaders into battle. Those same leaders issued instructions about the revolution as a holy war and told their followers how to treat the bodies of fallen soldiers as martyrs. In light of all this, seeing the historical moment from the perspective of the new president and vice-president in Jakarta is not enough. To fully understand the history of Indonesia’s war of independence, one has to look at the religious context that colored the experience for millions of Muslims across Indonesia. In fact, it is not even enough to contrast the experience of pious Muslims at the grassroots levels with secular politicians at the center; one must also look at the struggle of

1 Author’s interview with Hj. Sanwar, Pandai Sikat village, Kab. Tanah Datar, West Sumatra, February 12, 2010.
Islamic politicians at the highest rungs of government, who made their own efforts to add an Islamic flavor to this fight for decolonization.

The struggle to liberate Indonesia from 1945 to 1949 is called the Indonesian Revolution. The territory of the former Netherlands East Indies had been occupied by the Japanese during World War II. Shortly after Japan’s surrender, Indonesia proclaimed its independence. This proclamation was rejected by the Dutch (and, to some extent, their allies), who then tried through military force to reestablish their control over the archipelago. Indonesians struggled both militarily against the colonial troops and politically to set up a new state. The Dutch achieved a tenuous hold over most territory again before the United Nations forced them to the negotiating table, where they finally agreed to recognize Indonesia’s independence.

As the place of Islam in the Indonesian state has been debated ever more fiercely in the last few decades, the time is ripe to re-examine the role of Islam in the birth of the nation. This book uses archival records, published sources, and a broad range of oral history material to look at Islam in the Indonesian Revolution, first at the grassroots level (in Indonesia’s war of independence), then at the elite level (in Indonesia’s political revolution). Doing so helps us to better understand the revolution, to document the impact that the revolution had on Muslim life in the country, and to examine the historical roots of the position of Islam in Indonesia today. Thinking more broadly about revolutions, this case demonstrates how the type of Islamic revolutionary ideology that fuels a revolutionary war on the ground differs from the Islamic revolutionary ideology put forward by elites.

**Indonesia’s Islamic Revolution**

Indonesia’s revolution was an Islamic revolution in two senses. First, looking at the war of independence, the pious Muslims who fought against the Dutch understood this as an Islamic struggle toward Islamic ends and organized themselves in Islamic ways. Thus, the change of state that took place through military struggle had an Islamic flavor for a sizable slice of participants (between one-quarter and one-half of Indonesians, judging by data about pious Muslims in the 1950s).

Second, looking at the political revolution with the establishment of a new state, there were fundamental transformations in the way that Islam affected politics and in the way that politics impacted Islamic life. These transformations caused a revolution in the practice and understanding of Islam in Indonesia, consolidating the structures to implement a state-defined orthodoxy, privileging laypeople as temporal leaders for the...
Muslim community, and breaking the political unity of pious Muslims. The most prominent pious Muslim leaders in the political revolution also subscribed to a very different understanding of Islam than pious Muslim participants on the grassroots level; these leaders emphasized rationality and modernity.

“Pious Muslims” is a category of analysis drawn from Indonesian society. The Indonesian term santri, denoting those who are particularly devoted to prayers and other practices of Islam or who have studied in Islamic schools, has been in use (alongside other terms for this group) since at least the 1840s. The santri, called “pious Muslims” here, have been understood as a religious bloc in Indonesian society throughout the twentieth century, intersecting with other identities such as ethnicity, class, and geographic location. At the level of government, there has constantly been a group of Islamic interests active in Indonesian politics ever since independence, called by different names such as golongan Islam. As individuals and as collectives, these Islamic groups are under-studied in the revolution, both at the level of fighters and at the level of elites.

In unpacking the dual meanings of an “Islamic revolution” for Indonesia, this book does not consider all things to be Islamic. In the colonial era, some Dutch bureaucrats believed that Indonesians saw Islam as “everything the native can identify as his own territory,” and scholars of anthropology and religion since independence have sometimes taken very broad definitions of what should be classified as “Islam.” Such a catholic view is not particularly helpful in identifying the real religious changes of the revolutionary era, so this book takes a more limited approach based on local understandings of what constituted the Islamic religion. These understandings might be unexpected for those more familiar with modern, textual Islam in other parts of the Muslim world, and indeed there was contention even within the Indonesian Muslim community at the time about what was properly Islamic. At the grassroots level, Muslims wore amulets and recited spells as part of Islamic

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2 M. C. Ricklefs, Polarizing Javanese Society: Islamic and Other Visions (c. 1830–1930) (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2007), 49.
3 For more on this bloc and its position in Indonesian society and scholarship, see Chapter 1.
practice in a way that was condemned by Western educated political elites; those same elites strove for a type of religious socialism in government as an outgrowth of their faith, but their treatises on religious socialism would have been entirely inaccessible to Muslim peasants in the fight. The standard that brings these two together is for practices to have a distinctly Islamic narrative among the participants, such that Muslims conceived of doing them as part of their religion.

The story of this book is not meant to rewrite the entire Indonesian revolution nor to claim that Islam was the only or the most legitimate prism through which to view the war. The revolution was sprawling and diverse, with different participants understanding it in very different ways based on their location, ethnicity, class, gender, religion, and other factors. Indeed, some of the individuals interviewed for this book did not see a special role for Islam in the revolution, and their accounts should be considered alongside the narratives of interviewees who did engage in the struggle through an Islamic prism. Rather than claim that all Indonesians thought of the revolution as an Islamic movement or experienced it in Islamic ways, the argument here is that a distinct but significant sector of Indonesian society participated in the revolution Islamically, and the revolution also deeply impacted the practice of Islam in Indonesia because of the political transformations it brought. Better recognition and analysis of this religious aspect of Indonesia’s independence struggle should impact not only the broader vision of the revolution but also thinking on the place of Islam in Indonesia since the 1940s.

Revolution, Ideology, and Islam

Beyond its importance for the country, the Indonesian Revolution presents a major case for the comparative history of revolution, especially revolution in a Muslim context. Its size, its precedent-setting recourse to the United Nations for resolution, and its success in establishing a new state all make it important to consider. This book, though, focuses on...
how the Indonesian Revolution can contribute to studies of ideology in revolution.

The “fourth generation” of scholarship on revolutions that emerged in the late twentieth century recognized the place of ideology, correcting the exclusive interest on structures in earlier work.⁹ Recent scholarship has pointed to “revolutionary ideas as action and discourse,”¹⁰ in other words, scholars should look for ideology not just in what people said about their revolutions but also in how they conducted their revolutions. This is a useful approach for Muslim contexts – bearing in mind that Islam places heavy emphasis on orthopraxy as well as orthodoxy.¹¹

Islam is an obvious, though not always natural, basis for revolutionary ideology. Jack Goldstone laid out the key requirements of a revolutionary ideology thus: “(a) inspire a broad range of followers by resonating with existing cultural guideposts, (b) provide a sense of inevitability and destiny about its followers’ success, and (c) persuade people that the existing authorities are unjust and weak.”¹² Of these, the third is the trickiest for Islamic ideologies to accomplish; Nikki Keddie has noted how revolt is difficult to justify theologically in Islam.¹³ Still, many different iterations of Islamic revolutionary ideology have been formulated to fuel movements around the Muslim world.

If this book’s argument for the study of Indonesia is that a large subset of society understood the revolution as Islamic, then its argument for the comparative study of revolutions is that Islam as a revolutionary ideology is divergent – even contradictory – between the grassroots and the elite. In the Indonesian revolution, religion was key for many participants, but different religious visions were mobilized at different levels. Scholars of ideology in revolution have already noted the potential for an ideological gap between leaders and “the masses.”¹⁴ As James C. Scott said in the context of nationalism (but equally applicable to revolution), “the meaning of independence at the base of many nationalistic movements

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¹² Goldstone, “Toward a Fourth Generation of Revolutionary Theory,” 156.
diverged markedly from its meaning to the intelligentsia who nominally led them.”

15 This book demonstrates that even when the ideology appeared rooted in the same cultural framework – in this case, Islam – it could still “diverge markedly” in action and in discourse.

This case shows the difference clearly because the revolution had two rather distinct realms: popular mobilization in the war of independence and elite jockeying in the political revolution. At the grassroots level, Indonesia’s pious Muslims believed that fighting for independence was a holy war, that any victims in this fight would be Islamic martyrs, and that Islamic forms of magic would protect them and help ensure victory. Many of these beliefs were anathema to the country’s political elites, who issued warnings against the proclamation of holy war and derided magic as superstitious and un-Islamic. Still, these popular visions of Islam flourished among everyday people and community-based Islamic scholars.

That revolutionary ideology – which was locally rooted, often radical, and open to the supernatural – stood in contrast to the Islamic ideas espoused at the elite level. The Islamic politicians struggling to put an Islamic stamp on independence agreed with the grassroots that freedom from the Dutch was a religious necessity. However, pious Muslims at the elite level wanted to prove that Islam was a rational religion that could form the basis of a leading state in the modern world. They created mechanisms by which orthodoxy could be defined and promoted by the state; they sought to write Islamic law into the constitution as a key feature of “Islamic-ness” – in line with Shahab Ahmed’s observation that Islamic law is “a discourse par excellence of an educated, specialized scholarly elite”; and they emphasized textual approaches to Islam, inspired by both Middle Eastern and European approaches to the religion. Islam was still central, and these politicians still had an Islamic vision in their experience of the revolution, but this vision was distinct from the one seen among nonelite Indonesian Muslims.

The divergence of discourse and actions between Indonesia’s grassroots movements and pious Muslim elites in the revolution also fits into a wider historical pattern. Indeed, Indonesia in the 1940s is hardly the first modern revolution when participants on the ground had strong religious beliefs about the fight that were not shared by political leaders nor reflected in the outcome. For the Philippines, Reynaldo C. Ileto has demonstrated how grassroots ideas of the passion of the Christ colored

participation in popular uprisings and the Filipino revolution. In a Muslim context, Islamic actors (including ulama as well as pious Muslim laypeople) played a key role in the Iranian Constitutional Revolution between 1906 and 1911, but the resulting state did not reflect their religious vision. Even before the Constitutional Revolution, ulama had played key roles in the major Iranian social uprising of 1890–1892, the Tobacco Movement, where Islam was also the idiom in which they expressed resistance.

For Muslims, religious action and discourse fueling revolt were not only limited to successful cases (revolutions) but also to many other uprisings and conflicts. Thus, Islamic forms of resistance, protest, and rebellion formed a cultural framework to underlay the specific Islamic ideology that would rise in a particular revolutionary context. This cultural framework gave birth to locally rooted, but still very Islamic, ideologies – especially as Muslims rose up against European colonialism. These ideologies often built on a long-standing tradition of millenarianism in Islam, which was still visible in some parts of the Indonesian revolution, such as among the fighters of the Darul Islam movement. When resistance against European empires framed itself in terms of an Islamic struggle (ideology as discourse), this ideology mobilized the masses to participate in the fight in Islamic ways (ideology as action). This could be seen for example in Abd al-Qadir’s movement in Algeria in the 1830s; resistance to Russian imperialism in the Caucasus.
in the mid-nineteenth century\(^\text{24}\); or the uprising in Terengganu, Malaysia, in 1928.\(^\text{25}\) This mode of Islamic mobilization had also been used in earlier conflicts in Indonesia,\(^\text{26}\) such as the Java War,\(^\text{27}\) the Revolt of 1888,\(^\text{28}\) and the Aceh War.\(^\text{29}\)

It was not only the grassroots ideology in Indonesia that echoed broader Islamic trends, the Islamic revolutionary ideology of the elites also mirrored developments elsewhere. Whereas Islamic revolutionary ideas had previously leaned heavily on millenarianism, in the twentieth century, elites around the Muslim world replaced such justifications with new forms of politics in a modern mode.\(^\text{30}\) Modern forms, such as the emergence of Western-educated elites, also defined Indonesia’s political revolution. The extreme case of modern innovation in Islamic politics, whicheschewed not only millenarian uprising and armed revolution but also traditional territorial or ethnic nationalism, occurred at the same time as Indonesia’s revolution: the creation of the state of Pakistan.\(^\text{31}\)

In other ways, however, Indonesia provides an exceptional example. Indeed, other cases of modern revolution in Islamic countries either do not have Islamic ideology at both levels (elite and grassroots), or the ideological difference between the two levels is harder to demonstrate due to the circumstances. In many other cases of Muslim anticolonial revolutions, the Islamic ideology was not found at the elite level. In most of the Arab world, although Islamic modernism may have been a midwife to Arab nationalism, scholars herald nonsectarian local nationalisms


\(^{26}\) See an overview of texts that fuelled this narrative in Mualimbunsu Syam Muhammad, *Motivasi Perang Sabit di Nusantara: Kajian Kitab Ramalan Joyoboyo, Dalailul-Khairat, dan Hibayat Perang Sabit* (Jakarta: Media Madania, 2013).


\(^{30}\) R. Michael Feener, “New Networks and New Knowledge: Migrations, Communications and the Refiguration of the Muslim Community in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,” in *New Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 6, Robert W. Hefner, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 68.

\(^{31}\) Faisal Devji, *Muslim Zion: Pakistan as a Political Idea* (London: Hurst, 2013), argues convincingly about how peculiar this case was in modern history.
among the elite (not Islamic ideology) for ushering in independence,\textsuperscript{32} for example in Algeria.\textsuperscript{33} More recently, in the so-called Arab Spring of 2011, Islamic ideology was not articulated at the grassroots. Scholars of politics have recently theorized that “many of the revolutionaries active in the Arab Spring were motivated, at least in part, by a psychological attachment to religion,”\textsuperscript{34} drawing the connecting line between personal piety and participation in the initial protests,\textsuperscript{34} but Islam did not appear in their discourse or actions in the revolution. In Egypt, Islamic movements were early and important players in the overthrow of the ancien régime, but they did not frame their protest in explicitly Islamic ways – indeed, the Muslim Brotherhood told members not to chant Islamic slogans in Tahrir Square.\textsuperscript{35} Similarly, in Tunisia, Islamic groups were not very involved in the initial uprisings that overthrew the Ben Ali government.\textsuperscript{36} Religion was also late to become a factor in the Syrian uprising that devolved into a multifactional civil war.\textsuperscript{37} Unlike Indonesia, none of these cases of anticolonial revolution or contemporary revolt had Islamic revolutionary ideology emerging from both the grassroots and the elites.

Iran is distinct from Indonesia in other ways. Iran in 1979 is the case that has defined the category of “Islamic Revolution” in the modern era,\textsuperscript{38} but studies of Iran have failed to differentiate the levels at which Islamic ideology functioned. Scholars have noted that diverse sectors of society fueled the revolution with a range of ideologies – many of them not religious.\textsuperscript{39} (It is worth noting that Indonesia’s revolution had a


\textsuperscript{34} Michael Hoffman and Amaney Jamal, “Religion in the Arab Spring: Between Two Competing Narratives,” \textit{Journal of Politics} 76, 3 (July 2014): 605.


similar diversity of ideological components, although, unlike Iran, in Indonesia's case Islam did not come out on top.) When looking at the Islamic ideology in the Iranian revolution of 1979, though, studies have focused on the vision that Ayatollah Khomeini articulated for Islamic government: *vilayat-e faqih*, or guardianship of the Islamic jurist.\(^{40}\) This vision – centering on clerics, theologically intricate – must have differed from the ideology of Islamic participants at the grassroots level. However, because the revolution in Iran was not so prolonged as the Indonesian one was, or because the all-encompassing state discourse of the Islamic Republic has overshadowed and overwritten grassroots Islamic discourses, the divergence of Islamic ideology in the Iranian case has not received thorough attention.

The Indonesian Revolution, then, provides a case study in revolutionary ideology where Islam was used both at the grassroots and elite levels, but in divergent ways. Documenting how Islam functions as an ideology at each level and the contradictions between the two levels opens the possibility for better understanding of Islam as a political ideology in various contexts. The fact that the leaders and the masses deployed Islam differently does not make either version of revolutionary ideology less Islamic – on the contrary, Shahab Ahmed has noted that throughout history “Muslims made themselves Muslims, thought of themselves as Muslims, and lived as Muslims in quite contrary ways.”\(^{41}\) It should not be surprising that pious Indonesian Muslims saw the revolution in different ways as an Islamic struggle, and yet this point has not been argued before and also goes against the main currents of Indonesian historiography and popular memory of the revolution today.

**Revising the Historiography of Indonesia’s Revolution**

Mohammad Natsir, a leading Islamic politician in Indonesia for the first decades after independence, and a key figure in this book, attended an exhibit in Jakarta in 1972 about the Indonesian Revolution. He and his Muslim activist colleagues walking through the exhibit were aghast that the Islamic side of the revolution was nowhere to be found in the displays. One of them even ran back to his house quickly to pick up a
