Islamic Populism and The Ideology of the Front Islamic Defender (*Front Pembela Islam*) in Indonesia

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Abstract. Islamic populism as part of contemporary political dynamics in Indonesia is unlikely to ever subside even though Indonesia was hit by the Covid 19 outbreak. In the context of power contestation, many scholars have argued that Islamic populism in Indonesia plays a very important role in supporting the elite to mobilize the masses and gain support for their political legitimacy. However, there is limited study to explain the role of ideology the FPI as social agent of Islamic populism. The study exemplifies the role of ideology of the Front Islamic Defender reflecting in the idea of '*amar maruf nahi mungkar*' in current development of Islamic politics in Indonesia. By using a structural political economy approach, the author argues that although the formal organisation of the FPI has been dismantled by the Indonesian governement, yet the Islamic populism as a contested idea that has strong historical roots will continue to exist and develop if the contestation for power continues. As a political ideology that has a strong social and material basis, '*amaruf nahi mungkar*' will still exist and become the ideological basis that supports the legitimacy of political elites in the contest for power and resources.

Keywords: Elites, Ideology, Islamic Populism, Power Resources

1 Introduction

The Islamic Defender Front (*Front Pembela Islam*), popularly known as the FPI, has gained recognition from international observers and academics as a global phenomenon. The FPI's operations and ideology cut beyond national boundaries and resonate with similar Islamist movements around the world. The growing phenomenon of the emergence of global Islamic populism movements can also be found in the Maghreb, where Islamicists adapt populism in response to capitalist development. We still remember that by the end of the year of 2020, social media has been fully coloured by the popular news of the banning and dismantling of the notorious vigilante paramilitary muslim organisation, the Islamic Defender Front, popularly known to be the *Front Pembela Islam* (FPI) followed by the imprisonment of its leader, Habib Rizieq Shihab (HRS). Yet, the banning of the FPI along with the sentence of its leadership to jail is not simply understood as a way of the government to curb the perceived illegal, radical and unconstitutional mass organisation, to a larger extent, the dismantling of the FPI is not able to destroy the ideology of the FPI which is linked to the idea of Islamic populism that bolstered the idea of perceived marginal Islamic ''*ummah*'' experiencing socio-political and economic injustice. [1-3]

The FPI organisation and its leadership, Habib Rizieq Shihab are merely parts of the social agents of the 'ummah', but more importantly, although the organization of the FPI has been dismantled, yet it's ideology which attaches to the idea of '*amar maruf, nahi mungkar*' is still intact. This ideal has functioned as a political power resource to select who are 'included' and 'excluded' from the 'ummah'. On the one hand, since the FPI established in 1998, to claim for their relative socio-economic marginalisation, the idea of ''*amar maruf nahi mungkar*'' has been resonant not only to forge unity among the FPI itself, more generally the proponent of the Islamic 'ummah', but also to ally with the domestic capitalist elites which find cultural religious resources pool is useful for them in contestation over power and resources in contemporary Indonesian politics. [4-5] On the other hand, the ideology of '*ammar ma'ruf nahi mungkar*' also sends a massage about the idea of exclusion of the other political opponents who oppose or serve as a threat to the interests the Islamic community of the *'ummah'*. Hence, it is crucial to investigate the role of the FPI ideology in particular '*the ammar ma'ruf nahi mungkar*' in relation to the political constellation of the FPI.

Several studies on Islamic politics in Indonesia have linked the ideology of the FPI to the idea of Islamic radicalism, fundamentalism, and groups' intolerance [6-9]. Some others relate the ideology of the FPI associates with the enforcement of Islamic values and moral justification. Other scholars associate the ideology of the FPI as reflection of the social grievances toward victimization of muslim by the Indonesian state and the global economy. However, none of these studies relates the ideology of the FPI to the broader context of material interests. Even though some recent studies of the FPI have discussed the ideology of the FPI with the political interests of the imagine of Islamic 'ummah' in relations with the interests the political elites, yet this study poorly explain how ideology relates to broader context of political economy [10-13]. As the existence of the FPI has been political, FPI' ideology is not a vacuum entity, but it fuses into the interests of contested elites for their economic and political purposes.

The primary focuses of the study are both to explain how ideology of the FPI connects to broader elites' interests and how it is still useful as an element of Islamic populism which absorbs into the future elites' contest over power and resources. The FPI ideology is complex, contextual and reflects the social and material interests both the FPI itself and its political ally in relations to the contest over power and resources in contemporary Indonesian politics. It is argued that given the illiberal nature of the current government in responding to the perceived illegal and radical Islamic organisations, [13-16] the FPI' ideology of 'ammar ma'ruf nahi mungkar', is still relevant in channelling socio-economic and political grievances toward injustice and undemocratic government policies.

To understand how ideology of the FPI linked to the Islamic populism, the study uses structural political economy (SPE) approach. The structural political economy approach to Islamic populism understands the importance of the social and material bases of contemporary Islamic populism in Indonesia [17-19]. The imagery of the 'ummah' has become a context and power resources for groups over political and economic competitions. The structural political economy analysis entails a useful framework to analyse how the political of Islamic populism is geared toward contestation over power and resources by utilising the idea of marginal ''ummah'' against the social, political, and economic injustice resulted from perceived Indonesian illiberal democracy and entrench corrupt domestic oligarchic.[20-22] The idea of 'ummah' is vital for ideological justification of groups to claim for their economic and political marginalisation and crucial for tightening the glue together as group identity of marginal 'ummah' [23]. Broadly, this approach views the emergence of contemporary Islamic populism cannot be detached from the domestic capitalist development, growing inequalities, and contradiction of democracy in Indonesia [24-26].

Recent studies of Islamic Populism in contemporary Indonesian politics have been growing importance since the development of elite contest over power and resources pave the way to its ongoing existence particularly in the 2017 Governor Jakarta election, the 2019 Presidential elections, and to the present time. However, the study of Islamic politics cannot be detached from the studies of the FPI as a part of social agent of the Islamic populism in Indonesian political context. Scholars have argued the role of the FPI ideology is vital in expressing Islamic identity, justification for its role in enforcing Islamic morality and defending, protecting the 'ummah' from the immoral practices by upholding Islamic conduct of 'ammar ma'ruf nahi mungkar'. There is an attempt to tailor ideology of the FPI with the idea of nationalism and Islam to the elite interest in gathering vote from the 'ummah' by way of using the FPI as political vehicle [27]. However, these studies poorly explain how the ideology is linked with the broader competition over power and resources. Ideology is pivotal for the legitimation for the group's interests in expressing groups' marginality, social injustice and seeking alliance with the opportunist and pragmatist elites for political contest. Through expressions of meanings, symbols, imageries, and groups' conducts associated with 'Islamic ummah', ideology facilitates as power resources to express group socio, economic and political marginality, forge unity among the Islamic 'ummah' and to ally with domestic opportunist and pragmatist elites in their contestation over power and resources.

Based on literature review, to map the studies of the FPI and the Indonesian Islamic politics, the study classifies three different approaches on the FPI ideology and its roles in Indonesian politics. First is cultural study. The cultural oriented analyses focus on how ideology of the FPI linked to the idea of Islamic fundamentalism, radicalism, and groups intolerant in way which violence, terror and intimidations are used as legitimate actions to perform Islamic morality obligation of the group to protect and defend the 'ummah' from immoral conduct in society [28-30]. In performing its duties, the FPI strongly holds the Islamic obligation derived from the qur'anic verdict that order the 'ummah' to perform 'ammar ma'ruf nahi mungkar',[1] including the imposition of Islamic sharia law to the state, and the rejection of the idea of secularism, pluralism, and liberalism. Second is the social movement perspective. Other scholar took the stance of social movement perspective which argue that Ideology FPI links to social movement which echoed grievances, injustice, and social marginalization [31-35]. Third is the economic interest aspect. The other scholars attempt to link the FPI with political economic interests [36-39]. These studies of economic interests have linked to the contestation of power and resources yet did not elaborate

the ideology in terms of how the idea 'ummah' works, inparticular how the idea of '*amar maruf nahi mungkar*' operates and relates to contest over power resources.

As described in the beginning, it is stated that FPI ideology is closely linked to the idea of '*ummah*' which is understood as related to rhetoric and ideas of Islamic populism. However, the idea of the 'ummah' promoted by the FPI often provoked by its iconic leader, Habib Rizieq Shihab is not an empty thing, but it fuses with the broader interests reflecting ideological and material interests of the FPI-itself and broadly the Islamic community reflecting marginalization of economic and socio injustice and disappointment of the disaffected urban poor. Yet to a larger extent this marginalization is also linked to the broader interests of marginal political and economic elites who feel discontent with the current political and economic resource distribution.

Structural political economy analysis focuses on how the social and material bases of Islamic populism is pivotal as elements of pragmatic elite in their contest over power and resources. As stated by Robison – Hadiz, 'Our structural political economy approach…at its core is examination of the (shifting) social bases of populist politics and associated conflict over power and resources within specific historical contexts'. Hadiz and Robison define populism as a manifestation of a 'cross class politics' where specific interest may be dominant but reflects an articulation of 'a collective will' Besides, the approach also interrogates the underlying 'materiality of identity politics' which dictates who are 'included' and 'excluded' from 'the definition of the people'. Furthermore, the approach linked populism with the crisis of 'market economy and liberal democracy'. Hadiz suggests that though Islamic populism inherently filled with of a cross class alliance, but it has temporary, contradictory interests, asymmetrical and incoherency. Hadiz and Robison has shed the light characterizing Islamic populism in Indonesian context as inherently has a cross class alliance, reflecting socio economic marginal group and suffered organizational incoherent. As result Islamic populism absorbed into the logic of the state machine and linked into oligarchy and corruption. Yet as the absence of leftist challenge to market and liberal democracy, the absent of strong civil society, Islamic populism has been continuing to be important in the future particularly in channeling social economic injustice.

Linked to the structural political economy approach, we proposed the definition of ideology as described by Gambel [40] who examines ideology as 'any systematic set of practical or theoretical ideas which articulate the interests of a group'. Ideology can take both forms of power, direct and indirect [41]. As a direct form of power, ideology shapes the choices and actions of individuals in response to the context in which they find themselves. Ideology as indirect power helps to shape the structural context or setting in which the actions and choices of others take place. It does so by being the basis for categorizing different groups as worthy of certain roles and authority and or support. Ideology is through image. In line with Gambel, ideology according to Van Dijk is "a shared representation of social groups,...as the basis of a social group's self-image, ideologies organize its identity, actions, aims, norms and values, resources as well as its relations to other social groups." "Ideologies are the fundamental frameworks that members of social groups, organizations, or institutions use to organize the shared social cognitions [42] "The role of ideology is to serve as 'the interface' between the societal status and interests of social groups and the cognitive representations and processes that underpin discourse and behavior. Van Dijk presents a few traits of ideology. Firstly, ideologies serve to "structure and establish the social representations." Secondly, they serve as "the final foundation for the conversations and other social behaviors that members of social groups engage in as group members." "Speech or written communicative interaction, or discourse, is the primary means by which ideologies are expressed and acquired". Third, ideologies "help members plan and coordinate their joint actions as a component of the socio-cognitive interface between the discourses and other social practices of a group on the one hand, and its social structures (conditions, etc.) on the other". Van Dijk points out that „discourse is not always ideologically transparent, and discourse analysis does not always allow us to infer what people ideological belief are. This always depends on the definition of communicative situation by the participants that is on context". This analysis is useful to analyse the ideology of the FPI in the context of discourse embedded in ideology of '*ammar maruf nahi mungkar*' echoed by its leader Habib Rizieq Shihab [43].

FPI ideology contains complex interplay of material and social basis representing the idea of socio-economic marginalization, socio-economic injustice faced by the '*ummah*', unity of the Islamic '*ummah*'. This ideology also amplifies by its organizing capacity to ally with conservative elites seeking legitimation from Islamic idea of '*ummah*' promoted by the FPI for political and economic gains. In consequence this ideology of '*ummah*' based prone into elites interests and absorb into a broader project of the 'instrumental Islamic populism'. Hence, its ideology strongly entails interests of opportunistic and pragmatist elites in their contest over power and resources. This idea is appeal to forge unity of the '*ummah*' and build alliance with the contested elites.

2 Method

The study uses qualitative study by using content analysis in gathering and analyzing secondary information from existing resources, such as books, journals articles, reports, news databases, and other previously published regarding the Islamic Defenders Front and Contemporary Islamic Populism in Indonesia. The content analysis is

useful to map and analyse literature review and the approach that has not been explored by the other scholar who studies the ideology of the FPI in the context of contemporary Islamic populism.

3 Result and Discussion
3.1 The Birth of the FPI

Born in the situation of 1998 crisis, FPI emerge as Islamic organisation as respond to the social and political discontents in the context of *reformasi* characterised by social and political unrest, marginalisation of Islamic 'ummah' by long standing of Suharto' authoritarian regime. The idea of '*ammar maru nahi mungkar*', the FPI filed the vacuum. All these discontents' convergence with the idea of '*ummah*'. Wilson [44] ethnographic study on the FPI reflects the complex character of the FPI manifestation the concoction of intersection of class resentment, identity and contested urban space of Islamic vigilante' group. This resonant to tighten the glue among the urban poor as it provides space for everyday economic interests of the urban poor in a form of moral economic racketing or other economic means. Al Zastrow study on FPI proves that FPI plays a significant role not as a radical fundamentalist group, yet FPI emerged as a symbolic Islamic group that used Islam as a banner or dress to legitimate its political and economic interests. the symbolism of Islam manifested in physical appearances, rhetoric are useful means both to gain support from its followers and to ally with the pragmatist elites who find this Islamic cultural resource is beneficial to justify and legitimate their political needs. Yet, Al Zastrow does not explain how the political symbolism under the banner of Islam connect to a broader political interest of elite, how such mechanism is linked with larger elites' interests, in particular how ideology operates in relation to the larger context of political and economic interests in making the ally with the elites. What makes the coalition within the two (the elites and FPI) is they share mutual political economy interests, but it was not achieved automatically. The leadership of FPI seeking mutual economic interests while the elites need political legitimation through religious vehicles groups under the banner of 'ummah'. The fundamental glue to stick together their mutual interests is the idea of 'ummah'.

3.2 The Ideology '*Ammar Ma'ruf Nahi Mungkar*': Beyond Islamic Moral Verdict

The rise of the Islamic populism in contemporary Indonesian politics, cannot be detached from the role of the FPI as one of the largest vigilant muslim organisation. The FPI is just part social agent of Islamic populism but what is fundamental is not it's organisation but its ideological resource that connects to structural context that make its organising capacity to make alliance a cross social class bases including the urban poor, the urban middle classes, and the section of elite bourgeoisie as a respond of capital and democratic crisis in Indonesia. The FPI' ideology operates under the banner of religious calls in the forms of rhetoric, imageries, and symbols. Ideologically the idea of social justice proposed by the FPI is relevant for the Islamic populism to claim for their relative marginalisation and glue together. Thus, it is important to scrutiny how ideology of the FPI promotes by its leadership manifested in the Islamic rhetoric that bring together the convergence of the contradictory interests in one direction: in the name of '*ummah*' during the electoral politics. This ideology is still relevant to gain magnet from divers' groups ranging from the members of the FPI, the contra elites including, urban poor though the FPI in terms of organisation has been disbanded by the government .

The FPI significant roles not only in terms of how this organization actively support Islamic immorality by conducting the ideology of '*ammar ma'ruf nahi mungkar*'. Since the scope of '*amar maruf nahi mungkar*' ideology also including broad social, economic and political problems of the '*ummah*', FPI has involved in a wide arrange of political arenas such as supporting the campaign of muslim candidates and particularly successful in organising mass rally against those infidels who opposed the social, economic and political interests of the '*ummah*'.

In expressing its dissatisfaction to the socio-economic and political marginalisation, poverty and corruption affected morality of the Islamic ummah, the FPI has promoted the Islamic teaching derived from Quranic verdict as the obligation of the Islamic ummah which then formulated as its organisational principle of '*ammar ma'ruf nahi mungkar*'. The complex idea of '*ammar ma'ruf nahi mungkar*' has been long standing ideology of the FPI since its establishment in 1998 reform era and has multiple important messages. As way of building sense of identity (us versus them), '*amar maruf nahi mungkar*' builds sense of identity that is useful in building the social bonding among its members and broadly resonant to attract the unity of the Islamic ummah. This identity also entails FPI moral duty to defend and protect the 'ummah', from the negative impact of modernization in particular liberalism. The FPI boosters this ideology to gain support from the urban poor and to cooperate with its ally, the military elites, political parties, and candidates.

'*Amar ma'rûf nahi munkar*' is an Arabic sentence that we often hear and has become Indonesian. The origin is *al-amr bi al-ma'rûf wa alnahy 'an al-munkar*. *Amar* means demanding the provision of something, so the meaning includes orders, orders, calls, invitations, appeals and other things that demand something be done. Meanwhile, *al-ma'rûf* means something that is known to be good (virtue), namely all good deeds according to

Islamic sharî„ah and bring the perpetrator closer to Allah. So, the words *al-amr bi al-ma'rûf* have the meaning of demanding all virtues. Meanwhile, *nahy* means preventing the procurement of something, so the meaning includes; prohibit, distance, avoid, oppose, oppose, warn, reprimand, terminate and anything else that prevents something from being done. Meanwhile almunkar means something that is denied (*munka*r), namely all evil actions according to Islamic sharî„ah and distances the perpetrator from Allah. So, *al-nahy 'an al-munkar* is preventing all evil. The categories of *ma'rûf* and evil acts that FPI defines, apart from the religious field, include the social, economic, political, and cultural fields. [45]

The *'amar maruf nahi mungkar'* also crucial in building networks across Islamic organisations that have flourished since the 1998 reform era. This idea also has been attracted the opportunistic elite particularly the military elites to hire the FPI to face the student movement in 1998 reforms. This movement has been blocked by the FPI as this student to prevent the spread of the ideology of communism. Through the slogan '*amar maruf nahi mungkar'* FPI has been successful in overcoming this moral degradation of the 'ummah'. Yet in the operationalisation of this idea FPI has gained a lot of material benefits in the form of economic racketing which fortunately support everyday economic needs of the members in particular the urban poor. *'The amar maruf nahi mungkar'* idea so far has been nurtured the FPI organising capacity to form mutual coalition with conservative elites during electoral politics both local and national. FPI has been representing as a means for the conservative elite to challenge the existing social order in particular pluralist secular agenda of governance.

The vision and mission of the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) as explained in Habib Rizieq Syihab is "In accordance with the background of its founding, the FPI has a point of view which is the framework for organizational thinking (vision), that the enforcement of *'amar makruf nahi munkar'* is the only solution to keep away injustice and evil. Without enforcing the commandments of good and evil, it is impossible for injustice and evil to disappear from life. humanity in the world. FPI intends to uphold *'amar makruf nahi munkar'* in a *kaffah* manner in all sectors of life, with the aim of creating a Muslim community that lives in the spirit of thayyibah with the abundance of blessings and favor of *Allah 'Azza wajalla*. FPI's ideology is Islam *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah*, meaning that FPI fights by means of *amar makruf* and *nahi munkar* to fight for the Islamic system in Indonesia. constitutionally. This can be seen from the reasons FPI was founded, one of which is the obligation to protect and defend the honor and dignity of Islam and its people. Other evidence concerns FPI's vision and mission, its doctrine, and the objectives of FPI's founding. FPI continues to strive through *amar makruf* and renounce evil so that its ideology becomes a legal system in this Republic. *Amar makruf nahi-munkar* is not only considered important, but it can save the nation and state. Founder and Grand Imam of FPI Habib Rizieq Syihab explained that nahi (*An-Nahyu*) linguistically means to prohibit or prevent, distance, avoid, oppose, threaten, fight, warn, reprimand, and something that prevents something from being done. Meanwhile *munkar* or evil means vile things that are not approved by Allah swt. Munkar can also mean evil or immorality. *Nahi* can also mean telling us to leave a job that is ordered by someone higher up and us. Nahi munkar can be interpreted as prohibiting any deed, action or policy that is detrimental to humanity. [46]

To date although organisation of the FPI has been dismantled and its leadership has been brought in jail yet the idea of *'amar maruf nahi mungkar'* still useful to promote the call for ummah to oppose the 2021 regulation of alcoholic drinking. The ideology of '*amar maruf nahi munkar'* also send massages abut 'the otherness' or 'them' which linked to idea of the injustice, immoral practice of others who take secular, liberal mode of western ideology in the form of liberalisation that has brought to the degradation of moral of the 'ummah' in the form of the spread of alcoholic drinking, prostitution, gambling.

The idea of '*amar maruf nahi mungkar'* still relevant in the future contestation as its support the idea of marganilastion of the 'ummah' by the current Jokowi administration.

The FPI as vigilante group, Islamic radical militants' group, the political and moral broker, or the political vehicle of the contested elites. Facal states that the Indonesian reformasi and decentralization has pushed the FPI has experienced the ideological transformation from vigilante to political broker. However, given the absorption of the FPI into the political elite's contest, it is argued that given the embedded material interests. The FPI has been absorbed into the already existing predatory nature of the Indonesian politics.

Even though seem to be understood as a form of articulation antagonistic of the grievances of an ordinary people versus an oppressed elite, it is not enough to understand the rise of Islamic populism as just manifestation of the discontent of the common people versus elite. Islamic populism must be understood in relation to the larger context of structural political economy which is linked to the desired contest over power and resources. With its nature of an asymmetrical cross class coalition among groups, Islamic populism emerge literary as a particular respond of confluence of disgruntled marginal elite and some sections of Islamic community toward socio political injustice of the current government. This is a form of political magnet that can be used as a political tool of legitimation as it is viable to forge unity among Muslim society and appeal to the marginal elites to gain support to counter their opponents.

4   Conclusion

FPI ideology contains complex interplay of material and social basis representing the idea of socio-economic marginalization, socio-economic injustice faced by the 'ummah', unity of the Islamic 'ummah'. This ideology also amplifies by its organizing capacity to ally with conservative elites seeking legitimation from Islamic idea of ummah promoted by the FPI for political and economic gains. In consequence this ideology of ummah based prone into elite's interests and absorb into a broader project of the 'instrumental Islamic populism'. Hence, its ideology strongly entails the interests of opportunistic and pragmatist elites in their contest over power and resources. This idea is appeal/resonant to forge unity of the 'ummah' and build alliance with the contested elites.

The trajectory of the contemporary Islamic populism in Indonesia has been expressed by the idea of the ''ummah'' . FPI has been utilising this idea of 'ummah' to articulate the exclusion of 'the general ordinary people'. Its long-standing ideology of the 'ummah' bolstered by the FPI, has gained massive support from its supporters. Its social basis historically and contemporary made up of differs but complex asymmetric cross class alliance including the disgruntled poor urban youth, the piety bourgeois, middle class intellectual or even in relative coalition with the counter elite faction of domestic capitalist. Given its strong social and material bases of the FPI, its curtailment by the goverment, is not able to destroy its social fabric. What is happening is this section of Islamic populism is struggling for political support that is potential for the intra elite capitalist faction who find this imagine/idea of Islamic ''ummah'' is useful for further political contest, particularly in the next electoral presidential election in 2024.

It is the fact that some of the FPI members including the leader perceived their curtailments because of the exclusionary, injustice policy of the government. This policy is potential for gathering support from the 'ummah' in general and from the contested elite who feel they are also marginalised. Broadly he recent enactment of the extremist law is also seen as an effort to curb any radicalism that perceived to be a threat to the state.

Will the government efforts in curbing the threat of Islamic radicalism able to block the emergence of the Islamic populism? Thus, it is crucial to understand this continuing political agenda of Islamic populism amid the controversial issue of the disbandment of the FPI mass organisation. After the dismantling of its organisation, the members of the dismantled FPI struggling to find a place to gather and unify as 'a group' of marginal urban section of 'ordinary people'. Yet, as its part of social agent of Islamic populism, as argue in this paper, the ideology of the FPI is not dying.

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