The Quest for Hizbut Tahrir in Indonesia

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Abstract
This article describes the nature of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) in the post-Suharto era and its views on the resurrection of the global Islamic caliphate, its opposition to the notions of democracy and nation-state. In the aftermath of Suharto’s fall in 1998, HTI has seized the opportunity to promise the establishment of a fair society under a global Islamic caliphate. The rapid rise of HTI has, more so than most other Islamist groups, been accentuated by the growing public dissatisfaction with the post-Suharto or reformasi period. There is an increasing perception in larger society that political, economic, and law reforms introduced in the reformasi era has had no significant impact to improve people’s daily lives. This deteriorating condition under post-Suharto regimes has successfully justified the HTI’s claims that Indonesia needs a radical and comprehensive system, or what HTI coined as al-khalifah al-Islamiyyah (Islamic caliphate). Looking at HTI’s grand narrative of the global Islamic caliphate and its refutation of the ideas of democracy and nation-state, it is clear that HTI has taken a number of negative steps in the direction of democratic consolidation in Indonesia.

Keywords
Hizbut Tahrir, Indonesia, Post-Suharto, Islamic caliphate, nation-state, Umma (Islamic community)

Introduction
“The imperialists poisoned society (umma) with nationalism, patriotism, socialism, as they poisoned them with a narrow concept of regions and territory… [within this context] they were poisoned with the illusion that to establish Dawlah Islāmiya (Islamic state) is unattainable and to achieve unity within diverse Islamic states with their distinct culture, people, and language is unfeasible in spite of the fact that they are umma who are tied with Islamic aqīdah (belief) from which Islamic order (nizām al Islām) is derived” (An-Nabhani, 2002:1, quoted in Salim, 2004:209).

Despite the presence and activities of the Islamic politically radical group Hizbut Tahrir (HT) having drawn only minimal attention from scholars, HT is fast becoming a worldwide phenomenon in recent years (Fealy, 2005). Of the few studies on HT conducted in the last five years, most of them
approach the party by employing security analyses (Fealy, 2005). It is no wonder that some Western analysts who use a security approach to find out about HT, but are less knowledgeable about Islamic studies, tend to conclude that HT is a terrorist organisation ‘in the mould of al-Qaeda’ and recommend the dissolution of the party and a freeze on its assets (Ehrenfeld and Lapen, 2005). Zeyno Baran (2005:68–78), Director of International Security and Energy Programs at the Nixon Center, described HT as a ‘conveyor belt for terrorists’ and ‘Islam’s Bolsheviks’. She organised a limited conference dubbed “The Challenge of Hizb ut-Tahrir: Deciphering and Combating Radical Islamist Ideology” in September 2004 to bring together experts to eventually make recommendations to the West so that they do not deal with HT from the perspective of religious freedom.

Similarly, the Community Security Trust’s Whine (2005) believes that ‘members of HT continue to provide a manpower pool for terrorist recruitment’. Likewise, the Heritage Foundation’s Ariel Cohen (2003:5) labelled HT a ‘totalitarian’ organisation which ‘shares the goals of al-Qaeda and other global jihadi movements’. The Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies’ Rohan Gunaratna (2004:124–125), as argued elsewhere, demonstrates the existence of linkages between Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and local HT groups. Unfortunately, most of those accusers of HT have not provided evidence to support their claims adequately (Fealy, 2005).

Despite lack of evidence in supporting such accusations, particularly whether the linkages between Al-Qaeda, JI and HT are exist or not, Indonesia should be more careful of the rapid rise of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI). The resignation of Suharto in 1998 created a window of opportunity for mushrooming Islamic movements, such as Majelis Mujahiddin Indonesia (MMI) and Fron Pembela Islam (the Islamic Defenders’ Front, FPI), including HTI. Like other Islamist groups, HTI has exploited the open democratic space under post-Suharto regimes to develop and express its views. It now claims hundreds of thousands of active members (usually referred to as hizbiyyin) and sympathisers. The presence of the politically radical group HTI had drawn public attention since the international conference on al-khilafah al-Islamiyyah (Islamic caliphate) attended by hundreds of HTI members and sympathisers in Jakarta in 2000.

The public has come to know more about HTI’s agenda since 29 February 2004 when more than 50,000 of its members — the men in white, the women in headscarves — marched through the main streets of Jakarta, Surabaya, Makassar and other big cities to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the abolition of the caliphate system.1 HTI’s primary objective is to rebuild a

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1 The protesters yelled their condemnation to Kemal Attaturk who was accused of the responsibility for abolishing the Ottoman caliphate in the name of Turkish secularism.
global Islamic caliphate on the basis of *shari’a* (Islamic law). On 12 August 2007, HTI hosted an International Caliphate Conference attended by members of HT around the world. More than 100,000 people gathered in Jakarta for attending the conference. What made them remarkable was not their size, but their issue. Of the many Islamist political movements in Indonesia inspired by the influence of the Middle East, “HTI is the only [organisation] which is controlled by a foreign leadership, which draws its ideology strictly from a Middle Eastern source, and whose agenda is fundamentally transnational” (Fealy, 2005).

This essay will examine the nature of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) in the post-Suharto era and its ideological framework. It will then investigate how HTI has, more so than most other Islamist groups, benefitted from the collapse of the regime. There is an increasing perception in larger society that political, economic and legal reforms introduced in the reformation (reformasi) era have had no significant impact to improve people’s daily lives. This deteriorating condition under post-Suharto regimes has successfully justified the claims of HTI that Indonesia needs a radical and comprehensive system, or what HTI coined as *khilafah al-Islamiyyah* (an Islamic caliphate).

In order to understand the mission of HTI, it is necessary to look at its history, ideology and structure. This essay will begin with a brief description of the party. It will then look at HTI’s ideology to uncover how it responds contemporary issues, such as democracy, the nation-state and nationalism. Following this, it will give special attention to the notion of *umma* (the Islamic conception of political community), and the way it contradicts the idea of nation-state. The discussion of ‘imagined’ *umma*, as opposed to Benedict R. O. Anderson’s ‘imagined’ communities, will be developed. Additionally, the essay will highlight the importance of forming and framing Islamic identity given that this particular identity is contested among Muslims. Finally, the essay will contend that, based on the explanation of a thoroughly ideological framework of HTI, most notably its primary objective to rebuild the global caliphate and its rejection of the idea of nation-state and democracy, the party has become a hindrance to the development of democratic consolidation in the post-Suharto era.

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2 The term *shari’a* is often understood as Islamic law; however, according to Marshal (2005:1), the term ‘law’ is “too restrictive to give a sense of its full scope.” In many instances, the advocates of *shari’a* describe *shari’a* comprehensively, in which *shari’a* provides rules and guidelines for religious, political, economic and cultural matters.
Origins, Leadership and Membership of HTI

An examination of the complete history of the emergence of Hizbut Tahrir (HT), initially established in the Middle East, is beyond the scope of this essay. We can only sketch briefly that HT was founded by its ideologue, Taqiyyudin An-Nabhani in Jerusalem in 1952 (Taji-Farouki, 1996; ICG, 2003). It describes itself as a political party, but it is not involved in formal electoral politics. Since An-Nabhani was forced to live in exile in the 1950s, HT generated public support in Jordan, the West Bank and some in Beirut (ICG, 2003:3). The repression of Middle Eastern regimes against HT members led them to emigrate and set up new branches in Western countries, including Australia.

In this respect, Abdurrahman al-Baghdadi, Palestinian-born activist of HT who emigrated to Australia in the 1960s and Abdullah bin Nuh, the head of al-Ghazali Pesantren (Islamic boarding school) in Bogor, played a vital role in the dissemination of HT in Indonesia (Salim, 2004; Yusanto, pers. comm. 23 February 2005). Abdullah was an outstanding Islamic teacher and preacher who was disillusioned with existing Islamic organisations in Indonesia during the late 1970s. In his search for an alternative model of Islamic thinking and activism, Abdullah began to be attracted to HT ideas and ideology (Fealy, 2005). During his visits to Sydney, where his son was being educated, Abdullah met with an HT activist, Abdurrahman Al-Baghdadi. Interested in the talent and knowledge of the charismatic and young Al-Baghdadi, Abdullah invited him to come to Indonesia to spread HT ideology and An-Nabhani’s ideas to the pesantren’s students.

Since the arrival of Al-Baghdadi in 1982, Abdullah and Al-Baghdadi devised a more systematic education system to recruit more members outside the pesantren (Salim, 2004; Fealy, 2005). Not surprisingly then, the pesantren has become a centre of learning for the ideas of HT. Two methods of intensive training were introduced: halaqah (study circles) and daurah (training programmes). In early 1984, a number of Islamic student activists from a religious activity unit at the Bogor Agricultural Institute (Institut Pertanian Bogor, IPB), called the Student Association for Islamic Propagation (Badan Kerohanian Islam Mahasiswa, BKIM), joined the learning circles taught by Al-Baghdadi himself. These activists, led by Muhammad Al-Khaththath, subsequently created study groups called halaqah on their own campus to learn HT ideas and ideology.

In the early years of HTI’s emergence, Abdullah and Al-Baghdadi did not mention of HT in order to avoid the attention of the Suharto regime’s security services (Fealy, 2005). However, the key aspects of HT ideology, such as the
need for a universal Islamic state (caliphate) and the radical and comprehensive implementation of Islamic law, were widely disseminated. In short, like other groups, the party was maintained as a clandestine organisation due to Suharto’s repression of political Islam which put Islamist activists at a high political risk (Salim, 2004). At the same time, the scope and force of Islamic student activism on campus began to enter a new chapter in the wake of Suharto’s increasing political repression against student political activities. Al-Khatthath, Hafidz Abdurrahman, Ismail Yusanto, Zulia Ilmawati and Fahmi Amhar, regarded as Al-Baghdadi’s and Nuh’s most favoured early recruits, used official campus-sponsored religious bodies for recruitment and organisational purposes (Fealy, 2005). Incidentally, most of them were involved actively in the Campus Proselytisation Institute (LDK). Subsequently, LDK activists who were influenced by HT ideas built a broader network of inter-campus predication by establishing the Forum for Coordination of Campus Predication (FSLDK). Through this network, HT doctrines were then propagated outside Bogor and began to link up to LDK network in other campus groups, particularly in the larger state institutions, such as Yogyakarta’s Gadjah Mada University (UGM), Depok’s University of Indonesia (UI), and so on.

It is worth noting that LDK alone is hardly homogenous and within this Islamic student network there are a range of different opinions about strategies for establishing an Islamic state and the degree of acceptance toward ideas of democracy and nation-state. As will be explained in the next section, the core religious convictions of LDK were largely adopted from Ikhwan al-Muslimin doctrines, such as the idea that Islam is al-diin or a total, comprehensive and all-encompassing way of life with no separation between aqidah wa shariʾah (belief and law) and diin wa dawlah (religion and state). In this regard, there is no sharp contrast between the Ikhwan-inspired LDK activists and their HTI counterpart. Both Ikhwan and HT-influenced student activists also used ʿursah (family) or halaqah (religious study groups) serving as a pattern to manage and train its followers in a more systematic way.

What makes HTI very different from Ikhwan-influenced LDK activists is the ideological framework created by its founder, An-Nabhani. Unlike the mainstream LDK who believe that democracy can provide a way to form an Islamic state, HTI strongly opposes the idea of democracy and nation-state. For many young Muslims, this vision is a source of strength. They were attracted to HT doctrines by the argument that Islam is no longer a powerful force in world politics because Muslims have been divided by a nation-state imposed by the West. Also, some people were buying into HT ideas, such as its opposition to democracy and the call for a return to a comprehensive Islamic system, which provides the foundational basis for the reestablishment
of a transnational Islamic caliphate. They viewed that HT ideological framework and methods are much more radical, comprehensive and attractive than other Islamist groups.

In contrast to HTI, critics within Ikhwan-affiliated activists consider the goals and methods of HTI are unrealistic. Unlike HTI, their approach remains firmly grounded in political realism and thus they accept Indonesia as the nation-state and pursue its objectives through the democratic system. Unsurprisingly then, Ikhwan followers, called Tarbiyah, competed with HTI activists to recruit followers on university campuses. When LDK activists who were closely associated with Ikhwan formed the Muslim Student Action Union (Kesatuan Aksi Mahasiswa Muslim Indonesia, or KAMMI), HTI-affiliated activists voiced their rejection. When political control eased in the aftermath of Suharto’s fall in May 1998, KAMMI leaders established a new political party, the Justice Party or Partai Keadilan (now Partai Keadilan Sejahtera), while HT took a more radical position, rejecting democracy as un-Islamic.

In short, the collapse of Suharto in 1998 provided the public space for Indonesian Muslim activists to operate and expand. Like other newly Islamic groups, HTI seized the opportunity by emerging into public view. It began launching its pamphlets for public consumption that bore the attribution ‘Syabab Hizbut Tahrir’ (Hizbut Tahrir Youth) (Salim, 2004:v). The activities of HTI range from the publication and circulating of various forms of publication, such as books, 3 Bulletin al-Islam (Islamic bulletin), and al-Wa’ie magazine, to public seminars. After organising an international conference in Jakarta in 2000, Hizbut Tahrir activists formally declared the emergence of its centralised federal organisation, called Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia. As the only Islamic organisation that is fully controlled by a foreign leadership, HTI is inter-related and inter-connected with its counterparts elsewhere, including Hizbut Tahrir in Middle East, Western Europe, Central Asia and Pakistan.

Since 2000, HTI’s structure, membership, and scope of operations have steadily increased. In terms of structure, HTI follows the pattern used by the HT internationally (Fealy, 2005). HTI has a pyramidal organisational structure, with administrative organs at three distinct levels. The centralised leadership committee (Dewan Pimpinan Pusat, DPP) is at the apex, which coordinate all local branches from the Province-Level Executive Board (Dewan Pimpinan Wilayah, DPW) and the District-Level Executive Board (Dewan Pimpinan Cabang, DPC). The exact number and names of DPP, DPW and DPC are difficult to ascertain, but information in HTI publications identifies at least

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3 Most of its book publications are published by HTI’s affiliated publisher, Pustaka Thariqul Izzah, in Bogor.
ten personals. Until recently, HTI reached almost all provinces across Indonesia, except Papua. Branches require at least 50 members, 10 of whom must have sufficient knowledge of An-Nabhani’s doctrines to recruit and supervise the newer members.

Penetrating HTI’s membership is also difficult. Like its counterparts elsewhere in the world, HTI refuses to release information on the size of its membership (Salim, 2004). Judging by the size of HTI rallies in large cities across the country and its capacity to organise an international conference in 2007 that drew approximately 100,000 supporters, it is reasonable to assume a membership of at least several hundred thousand. The party is still largely campus-based, so the majority of HTI membership comprises tertiary students, particularly from the medical and natural sciences. Its current spokesperson, Ismail Yusanto, is a geological engineer graduated from one of Indonesia’s premier institutions, UGM. Some of them have advanced degrees from foreign universities. Fahmi Amhar, one of HTI’s leading figures, is a Ph.D. graduate from Vienna University of Technology in geomatic engineering. HTI has also found acceptance in urban areas. After graduating from university, HTI members move into professional careers and then try to recruit newer members in their workplaces and professional associations.

Realising that Indonesia, historically and traditionally, has been dominated by two large Islamic-based mass-organisations, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, HTI has tried to nibble at these organisations and their support base. Salim’s (2005) work found that almost all of HTI leaders have an NU background because most of them come from NU-based villages in East and Central Java. Muhammad Al-Khaththath, another of HTI’s leading figures, for instance, grew up in NU culture in Pasuruan; a similar case is with Ismail Yusanto (an NU pesantren graduate in Cilacap) and Hafidz Abdurrahman (raised in pesantren Darul Ulum, Widang). Even though many HTI activists grew up in an NU culture, they acquired their religious education primarily from campus dakwah groups (LDK) when they pursued tertiary education. Hence, LDK became a key institutional focus for the initial engagement of Muslim students from the traditionalist NU or the modernist Muhammadiyah background to embrace HTI ideas. Since then, those Muslim students were unwilling to identify with a particular group, such as the traditionalist or modernist Muslims. Instead, they were more likely to call themselves Muslims without applying an adjective, in an effort not to reproduce the modernist-traditionalist dichotomies, as well as a means of identifying with the wider Muslim community (umma).

Additionally, resulting from the selection during the 2005 Muhammadiyah Congress of Dien Syamsuddin, an authoritative conservative figure, to lead
Muhammadiyah, many HTI activists have joined the organisation (Wisnu, 2008). Although both conservative and liberal elements have long been a part of Muhammadiyah, since Syamsuddin began leading Muhammadiyah, moderate Islamic figures have had a hard time entering the organisation’s leadership structure. HTI leaders have also insinuated their way into the Indonesian Council of Ulama (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, MUI). Notable among these is Al-Khatthaththath who holds a key position in the Council.

### Ideological Framework

Like its counterparts elsewhere, HTI is distinguished from other Islamist movements in that its primary goal of the establishment of Islamic superiority, which includes the resurrection of a global caliphate, the rejection of nation-state, the case against secularism, democracy, globalisation and capitalism. In other words, HTI declares that “its aim is to resume the Islamic way of life and convey the Islamic call to the world” (Naumkin, 2005:128). For purposes of this essay, I will delineate three major arguments highly promoted by the party.

**Reestablishment of a Global Caliphate and Shari’a**

Among Islamist groups which share their belief in the concept of *khilafah*, HTI is the most vocal group and extensively propagates the necessity of restoring a single and universal *khilafah* (caliphate) for all Muslims in the world. In order to achieve that main aim, the party proposes a three-stage process for what they claim as an ‘Islamic peace revolution’ (An-Nabhani, 2001:33; Baran, 2004:8). The first is the ‘culturing stage’ or ‘ideological stage’ in which the activists of HTI educate a large section of Muslim society by various means. This phase is usually called *marhalah al-tathqif* in which HTI focuses on training and guardianship for its cadres. The second is the ‘interaction stage’ or *marhalah tafa’ul ma’a al-naas* in which the advocates of HTI infiltrate military, security offices, key political institutions and the like and then agitate them for revolution by confronting those who oppose it. Finally, when HTI reaches a momentum, the last stage is the actual revolution or *istislam al-hukmi* in which the existing regimes are toppled.4

The restoration of an Islamic caliphate, according to HTI’s spokesperson, Yusanto (pers. comm. 23 February 2005), is mandatory to every Muslim

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4 For an Indonesian account, the leadership of HTI published a book to specifically comment on these three methods, namely *Bagaimana Membangun Kembali Negara Khilafah* (published by Pustaka Thariqul Izzah, Bogor, 2004). This book was translated by Ramdhan Adi from Syabab Hizbut Tahrir (2004).
because of three arguments: (a) normative, (b) historical, and (c) factual. At the normative level, as stated by in the Holy Koran and Sunnah, HTI reveals “that to establish khilafah is compulsory for every Muslim [and] even is considered as the noblest religious duty” (Salim, 2004:212). Meanwhile, the historical arguments refer to events shortly after the death of the Prophet Mohammad which was followed by a group of caliphs, called Khulafa al-rasyidun (‘rightly-guided’ caliphs), to replace the Prophet. HTI also glorifies other Islamic caliphates, such as Umayyad, Abbasid, and Uthmaniya in Turkey (Salim, 2004:214). The factual level is primarily concerned with Muslims’ pain and misery largely referring to the Israeli occupation of Palestine, the US invasion in Iraq and Afghanistan, the suppression against Muslims in Southern Thailand, the Philippines, Kashmir, Somalia and so on (HTI, 2003:3). HTI repeatedly argues that the Palestine-Israel conflict is simply as a result of divided Muslim communities (Yusanto, pers. comm. 23 February 2005).

In order to understand the mechanism of the Islamic caliphate, it is necessary to look at the important relationship between shari’a and the Islamic state. According to HTI, an Islamic state is understood in the context of the implementation of shari’a (HTI, 2002a). There will be no Islamic state without shari’a (HTI, 2002a). Additionally, shari’a must be applied completely and immediately for any state to describe itself Islamic (HTI, 2002a). More importantly, even though an Islamic state and shari’a have been available, without the restoration of caliphate that would be useless. In the HTI’s point of view, dar al-Islam (the abode of Islam) — which is always contrasted with dar al-kufr (the land of unbelievers that is allowed to be attacked) — cannot be established unless a Muslim Caliph rises to lead the state according to shari’a (HTI, 2002b; Salim, 2004:30).

The Islamic State and God’s Sovereignty: A Case against Democracy

The descriptions of what an Islamic state would look like are outlined in a draft constitution produced by the Central Board of HT, a wide range of the party’s publications, and the spokesperson of HTI Ismail Yusanto. A caliph is elected by a Majelis al-Umma or Assembly, in turn elected by the people (ICG, 2003:4). Yusanto (pers. comm. 23 February 2005) admits that there are a few similarities between the HT’s system and democracy in that, by procedure, the people are actively involved in that process. Most of all, however, Yusanto asserts that the election of Majelis is based on the principle of God’s sovereignty. He said, “Democracy is characterised by a government of the people, by the people and for the people, while the representatives of the Majelis who are elected by the people are obliged to ensure the principle of shari’a sovereignty” (pers. comm. 23 February 2005). According to HTI, the
notion of democracy is absolutely human-made; therefore, it should be ranked below what Al-Mawdudi called the Supreme Law based on the Koran and Hadith. It has been argued that Islam is the antithesis of democracy, because democracy is not an authentically Islamic concept, and is therefore substantially at odds with Islamic ideology (HTI, 2002b:63–65).

Citing from a range of HTI’s references, Salim’s (2004) explanation on how HTI’s operational concept of its mechanism of power is descriptively accurate. Given that the sovereignty, or what Ismail Yusanto called *yamlik al-iradah* (the highest will), is embodied in *shari’a*, in effect, the process of decision-making in the *Majelis* not only entails *vox populi* or the voice of the majority; rather, it involves several steps of cautious considerations. Practically speaking, the decision in the *al-tashri’* or legislation process “cannot be predicated upon the principal of majority and minority; rather it should be grounded upon legal texts (the Koran and Sunnah), since the only legislator or law-giver (*musharri’t*) is Allah SWT [*Subhana Wa T a’la*], not the people who are created by Him” (Salim, 2004:206; HTI, 2002a:143–153). In this procedure, a caliph has a key role to play in what Salim (2004:206) called “an adapter and interpreter of certain given laws” and thereby does not need to consult the *Majelis* to reach a final conclusion.

Meanwhile, the decision-making process in such sectors that require technical solutions or need a range of expertise and professionalism, “is based solely on validity and precision, not voting which is based on the principle of popularity or majority” (Salim, 2004:206). In contrast, any decision that does not require expertise and professionalism, HTI asserts that the principle of majority prevails (Salim, 2004:206). Aside from that, political parties are allowed based on *shari’a* and within the framework of the Islamic state. It is worth noting that the Islamic state would not have diplomatic ties with — what HTI dubbed as — ‘imperialist’ countries, such as the US and Britain (HTI, 2002b:111–118). HTI regards international organisations, such as the United Nations, as the puppet of imperialist powers. Accordingly, the Islamic state, as imagined by HTI, would not join them.

The Case against the Nation-State and Nationalism

HT’s founder, An-Nabhani, states that the broad existence of patriotism and nationalism is one of major obstacles to the party’s attempt at the establishment of the Caliphate. It has been argued by the activists of HTI that any

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5 For clarity, Hadith is generally understood as traditions relating to the sayings and doings of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions (*shahabat*). For more information, refer to http://www.al-islam.or.id.
forms of nationalistic expressions regarded as tribal fanaticism (‘asabiya) clearly contradict the ideals of Islam (Yusanto, pers. comm. 23 February 2005). The term ‘asabiya has its root in the period of the Prophet Muhammad and that the Prophet was sent to unify Muslim communities from various cultural, racial, geographic and genetic backgrounds. Prior to the arrival of the Prophet, most Arab people were segregated by their own ethnic affiliation. According to HTI, nationalism is a manifestation of the pre-Islamic tribal fanaticism dressed in modern style and rhetoric (Salim, 2004:208).

Accordingly, people who believe in the notion of nationalism are accused of being ‘modern jahiliyyah’ and are similar to that age of ignorance or darkness that preceded the advent of Islamic revelation and are antithetical to Islamic politico-religious order (Piscatori, 1986:102). HTI, therefore, asserts that solidarity and brotherhood should not be linked to race, blood, clan, tribe, birth place, or language as crucial elements of a formation of nationalism. Instead, HTI believes that Islamic brotherhood is beyond racial and geographic boundaries and genetic ties.

Interestingly, HTI strongly believes in the existence of a Western conspiracy to undermine the unity of umma. According to HTI, a Western attempt to weaken the umma can be traced back to when Ernest Renan, a French philosopher, conceptualised nationalism that subsequently led to the emergence of a nation-state since the Ottoman Empire became a threat to Western countries (Salim, 2004:208). Shortly after the fall of the Ottoman caliphate in the early twentieth century, the idea of the nation-state was intensified in Muslim societies. Muslim societies became small nation-states in which the umma was no longer a foundational basis for the formation of political community. HTI asserts that the vulnerability of Islamic communities to Western colonialism a few centuries ago had much to do with the presence of nation-state (HTI, 2003:6−7).

The term umma derived from the Arabic word meaning ‘mother’ (Mandaville, 2001:71), is frequently used to underline the importance of Islamic solidarity among Muslims. It refers to the Islamic conception of political community. In modern discourse, the notion of umma is seen as a central normative concept which appeals for unity across the global Islamic community (Mandaville, 2001:71). In the Indonesian context, the term often appears as a politico-religious calling for unity among Indonesian Muslim factions and groups to increase their own political and economic significances. However,

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6 In the wake of the Suharto suppression against political Islam, the leaders of Islamic activists frequently used the phrase: “Indonesia’s umat was a majority with a minority mentality.” This phrase was repeated by Muslim political leaders to show the disunity of the umat, particularly in the political arena.
HTI does not only link the unity of umma to the Indonesian context, but also beyond the boundary of the archipelago.

This understanding of umma is not exclusively monopolised by HTI. The Pakistani Islamic scholar, Abu al-A’la al-Maududi, and the Muslim Brotherhood’s ideologue, Sayyid Qutb, were also accused of — borrowing from Piscatori’s words — being “non-conformist thinking” on the nation-state, as opposed to the conformist intellectuals (Piscatori, 1986:101-109). The conformists are divided into two categories: The first argues that nation-state is a fact of life. The second is distinguished from the first group by arguing that “the nation-state is more than an unfortunate fact of life; it is a natural institution and only to be expected in the order of things” (Piscatori, 1986:83). Regardless of the fact that many intellectuals and Islamic groups had previously voiced the importance of the umma instead of the nation-state, it is worth noting that HTI is the most vocal proponent of the idea.

“Imagined” Umma

Given that Muslim sentiment and loyalty to the umma has become a key concept of HTI, this section will explore the idea more comprehensively. As indicated, HTI believes that the concept of the nation-state is alien to Muslims and cannot be institutionalised in the Muslim community because it is antagonistic to the pervasive concept of umma. In order to understand the reasons behind the HTI’s support for the idea of umma, it would be helpful to apply Mandaville’s elaboration of the notion of the umma in two historical settings: the early years of Islam in Medina, and the colonial era of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Mandaville, 2001:69-79). It was under the Prophet Muhammad’s leadership in Medina that the umma was simply represented by a limited number of Muslims (al-Muhajirun and Anshor).

Following the death of the Prophet, the khulafa al-rasyidun (‘rightly-guided’ caliphs) began its phenomenal expansion of Islam. It was under the Islamic caliphates of Umayyad, Abbasid, and Uthmaniya, that Islam came to claim territories forming what Gellner (1981) called the “Koran belt” and which is divided into two main axes; the north-south axis from southern Russia to Tanzania and the east-west axis from Morocco to Indonesia. The notion of the umma then spread out following the incredible expansion of Islam. A distinctive characteristic of the umma is its division of the world into two domains, namely the dar al-Islam (the Islamic realm of peace) and dar al-harb (the realm of war). The dar al-Islam is under Islamic rule, while the dar al-harb is under infidel rule and is permitted to be attacked (HTI, 2002b:109-110). The dar
al-Islam recognises no permanent territorial frontier as Muslims may live in various societies and nations with different territories (HTI, 2002b).

In this regard, adopting the renowned American Indonesianist Benedict R. O. Anderson's (1993:7) definition of the nation, the notion of umma, according to HTI, is also “an imagined political community [that is] and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.” He says, “It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson, 1993:7). For HTI, the umma is imagined because the notion is not based on quotidian face-to-face interaction between its communities; instead, members hold in their minds the image of their religious affinity.

Even more so, HTI’s division of the world into dar al-Islam (the abode of Islam) and dar al-harb or al-kufr (the abode of unbelievers) reflects what may be called as Islamic territories, or in Gellner’s words, “the Koran belt.” These Islamic territories may be more complicated than Anderson’s definition of the nation that is imagined as limited. He states that, “The nation is imagined as limited because even the largest of them encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations” (Anderson, 1993:8). However, at least in the minds of HTI, the boundaries of an Islamic caliphate are not unlimited or infinite as we have imagined. Furthermore, as stated in HT’s literature, the non-conventional party would develop such international affairs and diplomatic relations if the caliphate can be restored.

However, Anderson also tried to explain the concept of nation based on sovereignty. He said that, “It is imagined as sovereign because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm” (Anderson, 1993:8). In this respect, HT’s conception of umma is unlikely, as it devotes the relationship based on a certain religion as opposed to Anderson’s idea of providing “the living pluralism of such religions, and the allomorphism between each faith’s ontological claims and territorial stretch, nations dream of being free, and, if under God, directly so” (Anderson, 1993:8). Finally, Anderson’s concept of ‘imagined’ representing as a community can also be suited with the umma. In practice, there has been huge disparity among the umma membership, but it is always conceived, borrowing Anderson’s words, as “a deep, horizontal comradeship” (Anderson, 1993:8). Like the nation, the umma which is further supported by religious propaganda, can make its membership die for such imaginings.
Framing Islamic Identity

HTI’s challenge to the viability of modern nation-states and democracy adopted by the state is best interpreted as an attempt to achieve its main goal, that is, the restoration of an Islamic caliphate. As indicated earlier, both the nation-state and democracy are perceived as un-Islamic. HTI uses the rhetoric of bringing society back to genuine Islamic identity (which the introduction of the notion of umma is a part of socialising an Islamic concept) so that Islamic interests can be secured. In order to better understand the power of religious identity relative to other ascriptive identities, such as ethnic and race, it is useful to cite the renowned Orientalist scholar Bernard Lewis (1998:6):

These are of three kinds. The first is blood, that is to say, in ascending order, the family, the clan, the tribe, developing into the ethnic nation. The second is by place . . . This may mean the village or neighbourhood, district or quarter, province or city . . . The third . . . is the religious community . . . For many, religion is the only loyalty that transcends local and immediate bonds. [Emphasis added]

The Islamic identity, in particular, is more powerful than other identities largely because it has daily rituals effectively remembering its followers who form its primary identity. In this regard, religious practices have a crucial role to play in providing the foundation of a transnational Islamic identity (Schwedler, 2001:3). Muslims everywhere are united at the very least in their belief in Allah, His messenger Muhammad, the sanctity of the Koran, and their practice of the Five Pillars of Islam. Muslims from all over the world, if possible, are required to go to Mecca, at least once in one’s lifetime symbolising the unity of Islam. Muslims, whatever their nationality, race, ethnic affiliation, and genetic ties, perform, or at least, acknowledge that they are required to do, prayer five times daily, payment for charitable purposes (zakat), fasting during the month of Ramadhan, and the like. These practices thereby lead to the emergence of a collective identity inspired by Islam which then transcends geographical boundaries (Schwedler, 2001).

Aware of the importance of Islamic identity, as explained above, the central leadership of HT takes advantage of the concept of umma embodied in the long history of Islam as a means of religious propaganda to appeal Muslims across the world. To solidify the relationship among Muslim countries which come from different nationalities and races, a religious identity should be strengthened. In addition, according to HTI, the Muslim world must be awakened from their long sleep to embrace their most primordial, ethno-religious and communal identity, that is Islam, in the face of superiority of the West and its pervading globalisation.
In practice, however, the Islamic identity has such kinds of contested meanings relying on discrete political, social, and economic contexts in which particular Islamic identities have been forged (Schwedler, 2001:6) For example, what Islamic identity means in Indonesia’s post-Suharto era is marked by the mushrooming of Islamic political parties differs from what it meant in the 1979 Iranian revolution, in Southern Thailand’s Muslim movement, and the like. Even each Islamic political party in Indonesia today has a wide range of meanings of what Islamic identity is. Schwedler (2001:8) says, “The issue is not if Islamic identity is important, but whose framing of Islamic identity resonates, and why.” Islamic identity in the hands of HTI’s proponents is obviously different compared to other Islamist groups.

In this regard, Salim’s (2004) work on HTI’s social movements is useful to uncover how the party has succeeded in gaining popular support by framing Islamic identity as forms of ‘resistance’ to the viability of nation-state and democracy adopted by the state. Interestingly, the leadership of HTI creatively uses multi-dimensional crises that have occurred since the collapse of Suharto in 1998 as a means of propaganda to justify their claims. It has been argued that the country’s political instability, moral decay, and economic injustice are caused by the system of liberal democratic capitalism that is being used by the regime (Salim, 2004:209–212). It can therefore be said that despite HTI’s fighting for the dissemination of transnational agenda, they do not fully ignore local-based contents derived from political, cultural and economic contexts. This is why HTI has reached remarkable success relative to its counterparts in Pakistan and Malaysia.

**Domestic Politics**

As indicated earlier, the rise of HT in Indonesia can be best explained by the collapse of Suharto’s New Order. The resignation of Suharto in 1998 provided a large space for various Islamist voices to be aired. In order to give a broader sense of the relation between the fall of Suharto and the rise of HTI, it is useful to briefly sketch Suharto’s New Order attitudes and approaches towards political Islam. As widely known, Suharto’s hostility towards political Islam became apparent shortly after he took power. Suharto’s New Order appeared to be reluctant to rehabilitate the largest of the pre-New Order Islamic political parties, Masyumi (for Majelis Syura Muslimin Indonesia), which was banned by the previous regime and whose primary objective was to establish an Islamic state. Instead, Suharto formed a new party, the Parmusi (Indonesian Muslims’ Party), to cater to Masyumi’s constituency (Ward, 1970).
Soon after the 1971 elections, Suharto’s next step towards further mass depolitisation consisted of a ‘reduction’ of the party system by which all Islamic parties, including Parmusi, were forced to merge into the United Development Party (PPP). In addition to this, in attempting to secure the ideological basis of the state, Suharto then required all mass-based organisations, including political parties, to adopt Pancasila as the underlying principles of their organisations, this was known as the policy of sole basis (asas tunggal). It then comes as no surprise that the major opposition to Suharto, who described the regime’s treatment of Islamic political activists as “kutjing kurap” (cats with ring-worm), came from those with a background in political Islam.

Given that Suharto’s repression of political Islam put Islamic political activists at a high political risk, many Islamic leaders encouraged the energies of the umma (Muslim community) to be directed towards cultural, spiritual, educational and social developments. Accordingly, in the late 1970s, in many prestigious secular universities, the strict proscription of explicit political Islam activities led Muslim students to revive their faith by establishing ‘campus dakwah’. The best examples of the spirit of dakwah among Muslim students were to be found in the formation of Islamic studies and discussion groups within campus mosques in many secular universities. At the height of Suharto’s suppression of political Islam, the mosque became what respected Muslim intellectual Jalaluddin Rakhmat describes as ‘a sanctuary for the expression of political dissatisfaction and frustration’ (cited by Schwarz, 1999:172). The recollections of economist Rizal Ramli (as quoted in Schwarz, 1999:172) support this notion:

When I was at ITB in the late 1970s all student political activity revolved around the student centre. But ever since the government imposed restrictions on campus politics, the student centre had been dead. All the activity is now funnelled to the mosque. Young people need an outlet for their political aspirations and they will find it where they can.

Campus dakwah then metamorphosed into a legalised version of student extracurricular activity, that is, it became the Lembaga Dakwah Kampus or Campus Proselytisation Institute (LDK). As indicated earlier, the LDK can generally be divided into two streams which apply different strategies to form Islamic ideals in the state. The first stream is identified with the activists of LDK who subsequently established KAMMI which played a key role in the

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7 For a detailed account of the social and cultural factors surrounding the establishment of ICMI, see Ramage (1995).
resignation of Suharto and the Prosperous Justice Party, formerly the Justice Party (Partai Keadilan or PK). This group is seen as an offshoot of the Ikhwan al-Muslimun (Muslim Brotherhood) which synthesises Islam and democracy.

The second is Hizbut Tahrir, regarded as more radical in substance, because of its rejection of the nation-state and democracy. The renewal of the caliphate as a government for all Muslims has been massively purported by the argument that Islam is no longer a powerful force on the world stage because Muslims have been divided by the nation-state system imposed by the West (Yusanto, pers. comm. 23 February 2005). It is worth pointing out that considering the two had such radical visions in the context of Suharto authoritarianism, their activities were mostly focused on moral guidance instead of political practices.

Long suppressed under authoritarian rule, the emergence of a democratic transition after the collapse of Suharto in 1998 has created a window of opportunity for the advocates of political Islam. In relation to social movement theories, the fall of Suharto was perceived as a political opportunity structure (POS). As theorised by McAdam et al. (1996:10), the POS have four fundamental dimensions: (a) the relative openness or closure of a political system; (b) the stability or instability of a broad set of elite alignments; (c) the presence or absence of elite allies; and (d) the state’s capacity or propensity for repression. The theory claims that the more the political system is opened, the more opportunities are available for the emergence of a movement. In turn, the more the political system is closed, the less opportunity there is for collective action. In short, the emergence of the post-Suharto regimes has given the freedom to HTI to reveal their organisation publicly, to mobilise popular support and to express their grievances (Salim, 2004).

Moreover, the fact that the early years of the reformasi era were marked by a number of political, economic and social instabilities has contributed to the rapid increase of HTI. This is partly because there has been a growing perception in larger society that the political and economic reforms introduced after 1998 have had no significant impact to improve their daily lives. It then exposed the vulnerability of the state to an explosion of Islamist movements, including HTI. Since the outbreak, the government was regarded as unable to convince the public that the current system is capable of providing public goods for all. The deterioration of economic life since the crisis jeopardised the nature of social gaps perceived as a source of resentment. As argued by Salim (2004:98), this social ramification then served as an entry point for the activists of HTI to voice the view that there has been evidence of the failure of secular positive law to bring socio-cultural, legal, and political improvements for Muslims.
Accordingly, HTI called for the revival of shari’ah (Islamic law) as the solution. It takes advantage of the multi-dimensional crises that occurred in Indonesia by formulating action frames to articulate its ideologies. HTI asserts that capitalism was a root cause of Indonesian people becoming increasingly frustrated with miserable socio-economic conditions (Salim, 2004; Yusanto, pers. comm. 23 February 2005). In short, HTI demands shari’ah as the best option to deal with the problems. Despite critics finding that the HTI’s solution is apparently normative, the party still campaigns for the issue under the slogan, “Selamatkan Indonesia dengan shari’ah dan khilafah” (“Save Indonesia with shari’ah and khilafah”) (Yusanto, 2003). Referring to An-Nabhani, the founder of HT, Yusanto (pers. comm. 23 February 2005) argues that dar al-Islam (the abode of Islam) — which is always confronted with dar al-kufr (the land of unbelievers whom it is permitted to attack) — cannot be established unless a Muslim caliph rises to lead the state according to shari’ah.

One should note that HTI is not the only radical Islamist organisation operating and rising in Indonesia’s post Suharto era by using the growing public dissatisfaction with the reformasi period. There are a number of Islamist movements that run the gamut from violent to peaceful, from ‘democratic’ to anti-democratic. Among new Islamist groups that use violence to achieve their goals are the FPI (Islamic Defenders’ Front) and Laskar Jihad (the Jihad Troops), to mention a few notorious groups. Although MMI (Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia) described itself as a non-violent organisation, the group does not repudiate the use of force.

However, virtually all Islamist groups are united by the idea that “Islam is the solution” (al-Islam huwa al-hal). The economic and social problems in the post-Suharto regimes as well as the ills of society are attributed to the departure from Islamic ideals, and, in turn, a return to Islamic sources is advocated. Although this frame is common among Islamist movements in Indonesia, there are crucial divergences over tactics and strategies. There is no clear agreement over what “Islam is the solution” means and how it provides an answer to deal with fundamental issues relating to social-political and economic problems that Indonesia faces. There are deep divisions among different streams of Islamist groups and political rivalries between their leaders (Collins, 2004). Jamaah Tabligh, for example, focuses on ‘pure dakwah’, dealing with the transformation of individual beliefs with Islamic values, but avoid engaging in politics. In contrast, HTI is heavily involved in political matters campaigning for Islam as the only solution for the current human-made system. Meanwhile, Ikhwani-inspired party, PKS which proclaims itself in its vision and mission statement as “a dakwah party that struggles for Islam as the solution in the life of the nation and the state” is willing to work within the existing political system.
Despite some differences, sometimes these various streams of Islamist groups in Indonesia cooperated or join together, at other times they have competed and opposed each other (Collins, 2004). All Islamist political parties and social movement groups were behind the campaign against the Ahmadiyah minority sect, which recognises a prophet in Islam after Muhammad — a belief defying the mainstream faith. They were also united in the opposition to the Indonesian version of “Playboy” magazine and their strong endorsement of the anti-pornography bill and the implementation of shari’ā-based laws in local governments. Almost all Islamist groups in Indonesia also paid greater attention to any international events which relate to anti-Israel and America sentiments.

Nonetheless, HTI has substantial differences in ideological frameworks and methods which become the major trait distinguishing the party from other Islamist groups in Indonesia. HTI shares a greater sense of Islamic unity and solidarity and views Muslims in different parts of the world within the framework of a global Muslim umma than do other Indonesian Islamist movements. HTI is the most vocal group on the caliphate and continually propagates the necessity of restoring this form of transnational Islamic government for all Muslims across the world. More so than most other Islamist groups, HTI frequently uses the rhetoric of returning society to genuine Islamic ideals and concepts by its persistent condemnation to Western (un-Islamic) system, i.e., democracy, secularism and capitalism. This vision has appealed to a younger generation of political Islam activists disillusioned with the promise of the secular nation-state, as well as the promise of the democratic post-Suharto regimes to bring law and order, political stability, prosperity and greater social and economic justice.

**The Challenge of Democracy and Nation-State**

In the light of democratic transition in Indonesia, the rapid growth of HTI can be seen as a hindrance to the development of a consolidated democracy. The rapid rise of HT in Indonesia is a wake-up call for the government. There are a number of reasons why the prevalence of HTI can be seen as being inimical to an attempt in bringing Indonesian democracy more consolidated and stable. First, HTI’s strong rejection to the idea of democracy adopted by the state can lead to the vulnerability of democracy which can thereby lead to the instability of democracy. Students of democracy assert that democracy will be consolidated or stable if a democracy, as a system of government, is accepted by a majority of people in a polity which identifies with three keywords:

Democracy is consolidated when under given political and economic conditions a particular system of institutions becomes the only game in town, when no one can imagine action outside the democratic institutions, when all the loser wants to do is to try again within the same institutions under which they have just lost. [emphasis added]

This essay has described at length that HTI strongly opposes the idea of democracy. Instead, the party introduces the superiority of Islam which they believe to be not only a religious construct, but also a political ideology. Indeed, HTI does not use violence in propagating its anti-democratic messages, but HTI has clearly benefited from the freedoms it is afforded by the post-Suharto’s democratic regimes. Additionally, HTI’s goal to re-establish a global Islamic caliphate can be alarming to the government.

Secondly, HTI is clearly unsuccessful in transforming political loyalty from the umma to the nation-state. Instead, the party revives the belief in the idea of umma. This has confirmed Huntington’s assertion that the umma and the nation-state are antithetical, because the latter requires the subordination of religious, tribal and other primordial loyalties to it (Huntington, 1997). Huntington revealed that, “…the small group and the great faith, the tribe and the umma, have been the principal foci of loyalty and commitment, and the nation-state has been less significant” (Huntington, 1997:174–175). Likewise, Kedourie (1994) makes virtually the same point concerning the idea of umma and its contradiction to the nation-state. For Huntington and Kedourie, loyalty to the nation-state is a precondition to the stability of the state which is an important factor for democratic consolidation. The umma is pervasive and so strong in the minds of HTI’s activists and potentially destabilises the nation-state building process, as it preaches supra-national Muslim solidarity (Mujani, 2003). As a result, HTI seems to foster the global jihad priority of fighting against, in Lim’s (2005) words, the ‘far enemy’ rather the relatively ‘near enemy’. We witness how the relatively far issues, such as the Israeli occupation of Palestine and the US invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, become the HTI’s most favoured issues. The party remains preoccupied with the relatively distant issues rather than grappling with local issues that correspond with national interest.

Thirdly, HTI’s refutation of the idea of a fixed territory of a nation has resulted in broader consequences. The two concepts of democracy and nation-state cannot inescapably be separated. The nation-state is a basic element of modern politics on which democracy is founded (Mujani, 2003). There will
be no democracy without the nation-state (Linz and Stepan, 1996). Fourthly, the way HTI reaches its primary objectives can also be alarming to the government. As indicated earlier, HTI has a three-stage ‘hearts and minds’ strategy that aims to bring about social change for what An-Nabhani (2001) claimed as a “peaceful” revolution. The first stage is that the HTI’s activists are to educate and socialise people about its ideology. The second stage is when its members are pushed to reach out to the rest of society and infiltrate the centres of power, particularly military, security and key government institutions. When the party has reached a momentum, they launch the last stage, that is, the overthrow of the government in peaceful ways. It is true that the leadership of HTI expects to undertake each stage peacefully, but it has not ruled out the use of violence (Baran, 2004). HTI officially describes itself as a non-violent movement, but it does not repudiate the use of violence to achieve its goal (Yusanto, pers. comm. 23 February 2005).

Conclusion

To sum up, like its counterparts elsewhere, HTI is committed to the re-establishment of the Islamic caliphate (al-khilafat al-Islamiyyah). HTI also argues that the notion of democracy is absolutely human-made and it is not an authentically Islamic concept. In addition, HTI also declares its opposition to the idea of nationalism. It is not simply because the notion contradicts Islamic norms, but it also contributes to worsening the ideals of HTI’s global Islamic caliphate. Restoring an Islamic caliphate requires a borderless-Muslim world, relying heavily upon the spirit of Islamic solidarity which transcends geographic and racial boundaries, genetic ties, and cultural background.

Most of all, the growing acceptance of HTI’s ideas has been accentuated by the widespread public dissatisfaction with the reformasi era. The multi-dimensional crises that have occurred in Indonesia since the collapse of Suharto have played a more important role in the rise of HTI. It argues that the deteriorating economic and social conditions under post-Suharto regimes are caused by the departure from Islamic ideals, and the dominance of perceived un-Islamic systems, such as secularism, democracy and capitalism, in the Indonesian government and bureaucracy, Western cultural influence and the absence of an Islamic global caliphate.

Ironically, as a vocal proponent of anti-democracy and nationalism sentiments, HTI takes advantage of post-Suharto democratic regimes in which religious freedom and freedom of expression are also awarded to a group which clearly aims to overthrow the regime of democracy. Looking at HTI’s grand
narrative of the global Islamic caliphate and its refutation of the notion of democracy and nation-state, it is clear that HTI has taken a number of negative steps in the direction of democratic consolidation in the country.

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