

Is Islamofascism even a thing? The case of the Indonesian Islamic Defenders' Front (FPI)

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ABSTRACT—Although a term with roots going back to 1933, “Islamofascism” did not gain wide-spread use until the beginning of the 21st century. In the West the term has often been associated with conservative and far right-wing politics, giving it Islamophobic overtones. However, in Indonesia and other Muslim majority countries at times it can emerge in public discussion and debates as a rhetorical weapon of liberal intellectuals when discussing conservative and far right-wing “Islamist” organizations—although in Indonesia the more common term is “religious fascist.” This paper examines theories of fascism built up in “Fascist Studies” (the so-called “New Consensus”), as well as those of non-Stalinist Marxists and *longue durée* approaches to the history of fascism and the far right to see what light they might shed on the character of the Indonesian Islamic Defenders' Front (*Front Pembela Islam*, FPI). It concludes that while “Islamofascism” might be an interesting and productive stepping-off point, and while there are some parallels that can be drawn between FPI politics and ideology and those of fascism and far right politics as identified in this literature, the term “Islamofascist” is nevertheless problematic. This is both because of its Islamophobic overtones and because the politics and ideology of the FPI are still coalescing as the organization emerges on the national stage.

KEYWORDS: Fascism, Islamic Defenders' Front (FPI), Indonesia, ideology, Islamofascist

Introduction

“Islamic fascism” or “Islamofascism” is a term that goes back to the 1930s but did not gain widespread use until the beginning of the 21st century (Zuckermann 2012; Goerlach 2011). Since that time, it has been associated with Islamophobia and continues to make regular appearances in a variety of right-wing and far right-wing fora that criticize Islam *tout court*.

A notorious example of this, late in the Bush presidency (2007-2009), was the series of events across dozens of US campuses organized by the prominent conservative writer David Horowitz under the title “Islamofascism Awareness Week.” While, like President George W. Bush, Horowitz drew an official line between “good” moderate Islam and “extreme” Islam, publicity for the Awareness Week in sympathetic media such as Fox News regularly used generic images of Muslims taking part in normal ritual practices (e.g., taking part in mass prayers on Friday), thereby clearly blurring the line between mainstream Islam and far right-wing Islamic radicalism. Not only this, but material that was explicitly Islamophobic appeared around the event, such as flyers under the banner “Hate Muslims? So do we!” A wide variety of far right-wing tropes circulate on the Internet comparing or equating Islam to fascism (Jaschik 2007; the leaflet is reproduced in Michel 2017; An example from Fox News is available at <https://youtu.be/4bh6-3v3hss>).

This close association with Islamophobia in itself is reason enough to be wary of using the term. But there are also purely scholarly reasons. Fascism has been the subject of much intellectual and academic consideration since it first emerged with that name in Italy immediately following World War 1. Since the late 1980s and 1990s a whole academic discipline has grown up around “Fascism Studies,” with a “New Consensus” emerging as the predominant broad interpretation of fascism’s place in history.

Writing in the field’s leading journal, *Fascism*, perhaps the foremost theorist of this New Consensus, Roger Griffin, has argued that “Islamism cannot be fused with fascism ... it cannot be synthesised with fascism any more than oil can be mixed with water” (Griffin 2013, full quote below). His reasoning derives from the general definition of fascism often used by New Consensus theorists, as formulated by Griffin himself: “Fascism is a genus of political ideology

whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultranationalism” (Griffin 1993, 26; see also *ibid.* 32-33 and Griffin 1995).

The theories of academics often have little effect on public discourse and the fact that prominent theorists such as Griffin view “Islamic fascism” or “Islamofascism” as an impossibility has not stopped a variety of writers from describing some “Islamist” groups (another fraught term) as “Islamofascist,” just plain “fascist,” or “religious fascist.” All of these labels have been applied to the Islamic Defenders’ Front (*Front Pembela Islam*, FPI) in Indonesia.

In Indonesian the most common of these terms is actually “religious fascism” (*fasisme keagamaan*). Nevertheless, “Islamofascist” has been used on occasions by the likes of Muslim feminist writer Julia Suryakusuma (Suryakusuma 2008) the author of *Julia’s Jihad* (2013). In Indonesian public discourse “religion” (*agama*) is often used in contexts where the only religion that could be the referent is Islam. For example, in a *Tempo* survey discussed below, respondents were asked “Do you agree with the FPI taking the law into their own hands to punish those who insult religion?” The only religion that could be the referent here is Islam (Tempo 2017).

This all raises the question: could there be something to what writers such as Suryakusuma—perhaps closer to the “frontline”—are doing when they use such terms? Could “Islamofascism” be “a thing”? Even if we may want to use another term less associated with Islamophobia, could there be forms of Indonesian fascism based on a strongly Islamic rhetoric and world view?

This paper seeks to investigate the politics and ideology of the FPI from the point of view of a variety of theories of fascism and the far right. As part of this process, we will build on the insights of three different but interrelated approaches to the study of fascism: firstly, the New Consensus writers mentioned above; then a variety of non-Stalinist Marxist accounts; and then, finally, “*longue durée*” perspectives on fascism and the history of far right-wing politics.

Some endeavors have been made—mostly more journalistic or popular in nature—to explore the relationship of the Arab world/Middle East to Italian and German fascism but these works tends to draw broad brush pictures across entire societies, regions and religions (i.e., Islam), in particular, considering “Islamism” to be somewhat

monolithic. Not only this, these works most often ignore key areas of scholarly literature. A prominent recent example of this is Abdel-Samad (2016), who makes no significant reference to the extensive New Consensus, Marxist or *longue durée* literature on fascism/far right history. This is the case even when this literature might support some of his claims—for instance when Stanley Payne (2004, 352-353) seems to provide some support for Abdel-Samad's positions on the history of the Arab world and its links to fascism. This is quite possibly because even though Payne over-estimates the extent of sympathy for fascism in the Arab world (see Gershoni et al. 2010, especially their conclusion, which looks at the literature on the issue of fascism and anti-fascism across the non-Maghreb Arab world), he still perhaps qualifies his claims somewhat by referring to fascist links with specific individuals and organizations. Another example (also originally published in German) is Küntzel (2007), which is explicitly critiqued in Gershoni (2010, 279-81).

In the context of this existing literature and the way it can dovetail (or be dovetailed) with Islamophobia, it is worth making explicit a number of issues that will *not* be a concern in this paper, which is an exploratory case study. The first is that this paper is not seeking to draw links between Islam *per se* and fascism. Neither is it seeking to draw a necessary link between “Islamism” and fascism (unlike Abdel-Samad), nor is it seeking to make claims or comparisons about other organizations or other countries or similar organizations in countries other than Indonesia (even if such comparisons may be justified and worth exploring). Finally, it does not seek to make any claim (or rather, explore any claim) that the relationship between the FPI and fascism is historical or conscious (although further research may uncover such links).

What is being investigated is the validity and efficacy of using “fascism” as a label for an organization like the FPI. In one sense, this is asking if there can be a contemporary Indonesian variant of fascism, whose adherents hold Islam as being central to their world view (*Weltanschauung*) and rhetoric, and if the FPI could be an expression of that political phenomenon.

A number of Islamic fundamentalist organizations have drawn the label “religious fascist.” Other than the FPI, the organization that has probably attracted the most similar attention is the recently banned *Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia* (Arabic: “Party of Liberation”) (Nugroho

2017). But unlike the HTI, which seeks to establish a supra-national Caliphate, the FPI is more nationalist in its focus and concerns. Not only this, the FPI has played a more prominent role in national politics, over a longer period (even if the HTI was established earlier). This has been particularly noticeable in the last twelve months during which time the FPI has been prominent in a number of campaigns on the national stage and has been able to maintain and extend its reach, despite significant opposition. The HTI, in the meantime, has been banned (although the long term outcome of this ban remains unclear).

Beyond this, the FPI stands out as the most prominent candidate for study as a possible meeting point for fundamentalist Islamic and fascist politics because of its role in conspicuous “fascist” street-level politics, such as vigilante actions and violent counter-demonstrations. For these reasons, amongst others, the FPI was chosen over the HTI as the most promising object of study,

In the first part of this paper a brief history of the organization is offered, the details of which allow an understanding of why it has attracted the fascist label: its flirtation with militarism, its projection of enemies, both within and without, and its association with far right political figures. With this background in mind we then look a little deeper into the idea of “fascism” and what it might mean in a more general context, especially what various theories of fascism are considered to be core and critical characteristics of such a political category. Finally, we come to the central concern of this paper of whether FPI might be considered fascist in the light of the fraught relationship between religion and fascist politics and ideology.

A short history of the FPI

After almost two decades of notoriety, it is perhaps surprising that there is a relative paucity of scholarly material on the FPI’s history and in particular on its ideology. What there is, in relative abundance, are accounts of the organization’s human rights abuses and media coverage of their interventions in local, provincial and national politics.

This means we have no significant scholarly sources endeavoring to provide a systematic picture of the way the organization’s ideas and practices have developed (e.g., through a book-length account), although Jahroni (2008) has produced a short booklet covering the

background to the formation of the front and its initial actions.

Another issue for anyone seeking to understand the development of the FPI's organization and ideas is the relative lack of Internet presence or rather the lack of documents online: manifestoes, policy documents, accounts of conferences and other online text-based sources. For the account below, I will be relying on what scholarly material is available alongside mass media reporting of various events and statements associated with the FPI and social media, including a significant number of video recordings of speeches, available on platforms such as YouTube and Facebook, in which key leader Rizieq Shihab and other FPI leaders expound the organization's position on a variety of issues.

The FPI was founded on the emotive date of August 17, 1998, just months after the resignation of President Suharto—who had ruled Indonesia as a military dictator since the mid-1960s (Wilson 2005). It is significant that the date chosen was emotive for *nationalist*, rather than religious, reasons: it was the 53rd anniversary of the proclamation of Indonesian independence.

It was established with support from elements of both the police and the military, in part to form a counterweight to the student radicalism that had played a role in ousting Suharto and which still very powerful remaining elements of the regime felt might continue to threaten their interests (Wilson 2005; Pausacker 2012). From its beginnings it was associated with *premanisme* (gangsterism), and its most prominent actions, especially in this early period, were undertaken by its paramilitary wing, *Laskar Pembela Islam* (Islamic Defenders' Militia, LPI). These initial forays included an attack on student activists at the Catholic Atmajaya University on the pretext of stopping “left wing and Christian students who are paid by American Jews” (Wilson 2005). This was followed shortly thereafter with involvement in a clash with Ambonese Christian security guards in central Jakarta. In the aftermath, fourteen people were left dead and “an indelible image was left in the public's mind of white robed and turbaned young men angrily wielding machetes and swords in the name of Islam” (Wilson 2005; see also Gunawan and Patria 2000; Lindsey 2001; Wilson 2010).

Apparently these initial forays were part of moves to build the organization as a political militia to support the United Development Party (PPP, *Partai Persatuan Pembangunan*), one of a number small to medium sized Islamic parties. After this plan failed to materialize,

the FPI turned towards an “anti-vice” focus: attacking (“sweeping”) “sinful” locations like bars, nightclubs and areas of prostitution (Wilson 2005; Pausacker 2012; ICG 2001).

Initially the “war on terror” provided the organization with opportunities to expand to a broader base and move beyond “sweeping” and the perception that the organization was simply a collection of “thugs in robes” (*preman berjubah*). In October, 2001, for example, the FPI was able to mobilize 10,000 members and supporters at a rally outside the National Parliament building.

However, in the aftermath of the Bali Bombings of October 2002, the Indonesian government clamped down on far right-wing Islamist organizations and Rizieq himself was arrested on charges of inciting unrest when the FPI attacked a pool hall and a nightclub in Glodok, Jakarta. The outcome of his trial was very lenient—the prosecution reduced its requested sentence from seven years jail to seven months as Rizieq “merely intended to improve the morality of Indonesian society” and, in the end, Rizieq was simply restricted to house arrest—the conditions of which he broke in order to conduct a “humanitarian mission” to Iraq, being again arrested on his return and jailed for seven months (Wilson 2005).

Around the time of his imprisonment and release in late 2003, Rizieq and the FPI began a restructure of the organization. A national congress was held to “reconsolidate” the leadership and to “refocus its mission and formulate strategies for cleaning up its rank-and-file membership.” Rizieq admitted that the organization “had grown too fast” and “uncontrollable and undesirable elements” had made their way into the organization. Membership criteria were tightened and endeavours were made to tighten central control of militia activity (Wilson 2005)

Thus the eventual fall-out of Rizieq’s imprisonment was that:

FPI responded by tightening its ranks, centralising control over its component units and upgrading the discipline and training of its recruits, moving it from an unruly bunch of thugs in religious garb to a far more disciplined and ideologically motivated paramilitary force. (Wilson 2005)

However, while it continued to take part in organizing a variety of demonstrations and other relatively peaceful actions, it was still best

known for its physical attacks on its targets. Victims of the front's actions during this period included the Ahmadiyah Islamic sect (which is considered heretic), Syi'ah Muslims, the Liberal Muslim Network (*Jaringan Islam Liberal*, JIL), Christians, LGBT events and activists, left-wing protests, and demonstrations for religious tolerance. Amongst other actions, the FPI also notably took an active part in the campaign to support an anti-pornography bill (2005-2008) (Pausacker 2012; Franklin 2009; Widjaja 2012; Liang 2010).

Between 2005 and 2007 (that is, towards the beginning of the Yudhoyono presidency), the *Lembaga Survei Indonesia* (LSI, Indonesian Survey Institute) conducted polls on FPI support, finding support for the front oscillating between 13 and 20 per cent—a significant level of support for a far right-wing organization (Lembaga Survei Indonesia 2007; Pausacker 2012). By the time of the 2014 elections, the FPI was a well-established organization, with a national profile, and hundreds of thousands of members, as well as having branches in over twenty provinces. Especially in Java, the organization had roots reaching down into small regional towns, as well as in the larger cities. By the end of the period of Yudhoyono's presidency, the FPI was not exactly mainstream, but had become a significant player in national politics (Rosadi 2013).

In the 2014 presidential campaign, the FPI aligned itself with former Suharto era general Prabowo Subianto—alongside many other Muslim political organizations and all of the major Muslim political parties, with the notable exception of the PKB (*Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa*, the National Awakening Party, the party most closely associated with the world's largest Muslim organization, the *Nahdlatul Ulama*). During this period they were part of a broad “black propaganda” campaign against presidential candidate Joko Widodo (“Jokowi”) that cast aspersions on his credentials as a Muslim candidate, made accusations that he was linked to the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI)—which had been bloodily crushed in 1965-66—or that he was permissive towards the supposed re-emergence of communism, amongst other things (Roosa 2006; Roosa et al. 2004; Miller forthcoming).

At the same time, the Front also opposed the replacement of Jokowi as governor of the province of Jakarta by his deputy, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (better known as “Ahok”), a Christian of Chinese descent, on the basis of his religion and, less explicitly, his ethnicity. Two years

later, when Ahok was running in the subsequent gubernatorial election, they revived this campaign, arguing that a non-Muslim could not be the leader of a Muslim majority community, such as that of Jakarta (Putera 2014; Mudhoffir et al. 2017).

Alongside other right-wing Islamic groups, the FPI had limited, but still notable, success with this line of attack but their campaign really took off after Ahok was recorded suggesting to voters in the “Thousand Islands” regency that they were being deceived by some groups using a verse of the *Quran* (*Al Maidah* 51), the key verse cited by the FPI and a number of other groups.¹ This was taken as constituting *penistaan agama* (blasphemy) and in late 2016 the FPI was able to lead massive demonstrations to have Ahok charged under anti-blasphemy laws. These laws were enacted in 1965 but rarely used until the period of the Yudhoyono presidency, during which time it was used to convict more than a hundred people (McBeth 2016). Under pressure from these demonstrations, Ahok was arrested, charged, and finally convicted of blasphemy, in the meantime having also lost the gubernatorial election in spite of starting out as favorite (Lindsey 2017; Bayuni 2017).

The anti-Ahok campaign, which also built upon grassroots unrest about slum clearances and other developments in Jakarta, such as reclamation schemes, has clearly been the FPI’s greatest success to this point, and in retrospect may mark its transition from relative minor player to being a force in its own right.

By June, 2017, a poll by the respected *Tempo* news magazine showed that 41 per cent of 2,265 respondents agreed with the FPI taking the law into its own hands to punish people who “have insulted religion.” This is an incredible result, showing a surprisingly high level of mainstream support for the FPI. If the figures from the survey are representative, and given around one in eight Indonesians is not Muslim, it suggests that the majority of the Muslim population that opposes the FPI’s actions is not large (roughly 53 to 47 per cent) (Tempo 2017).

While organizational aspects of the FPI discussed above might reflect affinities with what is popularly construed as fascist forms of behavior—vigilantism, gangsterism, violence and such like—to move

1 In English, the verse reads: “O you who believe! Do not take the Jews and the Christians as allies; some of them are allies of one another. Whoever of you allies himself with them is one of them. God does not guide wrongdoing people.”

beyond such surface impressions requires analyzing the FPI against some general characteristics of fascist ideas and political practice. To do that we now turn towards scholarly considerations on fascism in general.

Approaches to the concept of fascism

“Fascism” is a term that still has significant political currency. It is still regularly used across the political spectrum but its use is almost universally derogatory. As Griffin (2013) argues:

... the term ‘fascism’ continues to be bandied about by those clearly more interested in its seemingly inexhaustible polemical force than in anything resembling historical or political fact. As a result, casual passers-by and groups of the curious are being exhorted to believe by quacks, snake-charmers and firebrand prophets that those prepared to ask the state to impose measures to save the planet’s biosphere are ‘eco-fascists’, that those advocating food or life-styles which do not induce obesity or heart attacks are ‘health fascists’, or that measures to impose economic sanity in the Eurozone are ‘economic fascism’.

Certainly, those applying the term “fascist” to organizations such as the FPI are opponents of those organizations but it would be wrong to assume that the term is simply being used pejoratively. Even as such it has a particular political meaning—basically an accusation of authoritarianism and intolerance. In the case of the FPI, I would argue that the accusation carries a historical warning: these people are dangerous in a similar way to the Nazis in Germany or the Fascists in Italy, their politics are based on prejudice and they will destroy Indonesian democracy. Such accusations are therefore clearly seeking to draw real historical parallels.

Whether drawing this parallel can be justified is part of the object of this essay. Beyond this is the question of whether or not organizations such as the FPI can be fitted into broad currents of modern political history, i.e., analyses that move beyond seeing the FPI simply as an “Islamic fundamentalist” organization or simply the result of political manipulation (a common response in Indonesia, given the organization’s often close relationship with the military and the police, as well as other powerful surviving elements of the Suharto regime).

With a clear penchant for physical confrontation and strong strains of racism and religious intolerance, as well as strident anti-communism and anti-liberalism, it comes as no surprise that critics have referred to it as “fascist.” But the question remains whether or not the label is justified or if our understanding of the FPI is at all enhanced by investigating such a question. In this section I will outline three key approaches to theories of fascism (and the far right) that might help us to understand the issues at hand.

But first, it is important to address a key issue that becomes clear from a longer version of the quotation from Griffin (2013) above:

Islamism cannot be fused with fascism, since even its global project for a new dispensation of humanity under Allah is a politicized form of religion, and especially in ‘Salafi jihadism’, great efforts are made to justify it through textual references to Islamic scripture. It is thus a form of political religion with deep roots in the history and theology of Islam, and not a ‘modern ideology’... As such it cannot be synthesised with fascism any more than oil can be mixed with water.

The passage addresses a key issue for this article: to what extent can religion (in our specific case, Islam) and fascism be mixed, and is it possible for a fascist politics to emerge with a primarily religious rhetoric and culture? If we put aside the problematic reference to “Salafi jihadism,” Griffin’s argument seems to follow this logic:

1. “Islamism” is internationalist (as opposed to fascism’s “ultra-nationalism”);
2. “Islamism” is a form of politicized religion. As such it places enormous weight on the importance of pre-modern religious texts. It is therefore not a “modern” form of politics, unlike fascism, which arose as a response to the rise of industrial capitalism in the late 19th century;
3. Because of its essentially pre-modern ideology and its internationalism, it cannot be considered a form of fascism.

The issue of nationalism versus internationalism is one that will be taken up below but it is also worth noting that from the beginning of the modern national liberation movement in Indonesia, orga-

nized Islam was a key constituent. Indeed the first modern mass anti-colonial movement was *Sarekat Islam* (The Islamic Union), and the two most enduring organizations in national political and social life, *Muhammadiyah* (est. 1912) and the *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU, Renaissance of Islamic Teachers, est. 1926) are both modern Islamic organizations—incidentally the two largest such organizations in the world, with a current combined membership of over 70 million—and have a specifically Indonesian focus that lacks the supra-national aspirations of organizations such as HTI.

If extensive religious elements in a movement exclude it from the fascist label, as Griffin seems to be saying, what of Christianity (which, after all, does share many affinities and mythological elements with Islam)? There is a whole sub-field of the study of European fascism that precisely focuses on forms of fascism that lay emphasis on the centrality of Christianity—so-called “Clerical Fascisms” (Feldman 2008; Bijman 2009, which includes a bibliographic essay with references to thirteen European countries).

Finally, it should be noted that this argument is *purely* ideological, an issue that we will return to below. While Griffin has given us reason to believe that there may be serious ideological tensions involved in a political marriage of a kind of “Islamism” and fascism, he does not give us enough pause to believe that such a fusion is completely impossible: to follow the logic of Griffin is to conclude that it is not worth investigating organizations such as the FPI from the perspective of theories of fascism.

The scholarly literature on fascism is voluminous and it is not the object of this paper to survey it, even if such a thing were possible in such a short piece. A wide variety of intellectual tendencies have, at various times, sought to analyze fascism. This paper will focus on three key currents—the “New Consensus,” which became prominent late last century, more recent “*longue durée*” approaches to fascism and the far right and non-Stalinist Marxist analyses of fascism.

Each of these currents of thought provides particular contributions to the analysis of this paper: the “New Consensus,” being the dominant force in fascism studies, provides a high level of historical detail, especially in areas such as ideology; the *longue durée* approach situates fascism in a broader historical framework, with clearer antecedents and descendants; and the Marxist approaches tie fascism closely

to developments in socio-political relations and insist on the need to analyze fascist ideology in the context of social and political practice.²

New Consensus scholars have contributed much to our knowledge of fascism, especially of the development of broad fascist ideology and the history of the ideas and intellectuals associated with fascism. Without going into the details of the various accounts of fascism that have been produced by writers using New Consensus approaches, most have identified a variety of characteristics rooted in a reaction against the European enlightenment in a response to what Griffin (2007) calls a “sense-making crisis” caused by the alienating and atomizing effects of the development of industrial capitalist society from the late 19th century.³

For the purposes of this essay, I will be using some of the work of New Consensus theorists to construct a “shopping list” of some of the key characteristics of fascism to help us analyze the FPI. Such an approach might be seen as a form of a Weberian search for a fascist “ideal type.” However, the approach here is not concerned to construct a checklist where all boxes must be ticked for the ideas of a political current to be “officially” classified as fascist (the so-called “fascist minimum”) but rather to establish a set of key concerns (a “constellation” of ideas) that have most often been the focus of “classical” fascist politics. These help establish the boundaries of what constitutes fascism. In this way the approach shares something with morphological approaches to the analysis of ideologies (Freeden 2013) in that it recognizes that whatever fascism might be, it varies across both space and time, with different variants emphasizing different issues, strategies and tactics. In addition, it takes from writers such as Renton (1999) a recognition that ideologies are not expressed, prac-

2 The use of the label “consensus” is aspirational in the sense that a significant number of dissidents have contributed to the field, and continue to do so. Key works in the New Consensus current include Eatwell (1997), Griffin (1993; 1995), Paxton (2005), Passmore (2002), Sternhell (1986; 1994), and Payne (2004). Examples of dissident works include Renton (1999) and Landa (2010). Kitchen (1976) provides a good overview of theories of fascism before the beginnings of “Fascism Studies.”

3 It should be noted that this formulation was partly a response to criticisms of his classic formula outlined above: i.e., fascism as “a genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism” (Griffin 1993, 26). For an overview of sources, see Eatwell (2013). His articles (Eatwell 1996; 2009) are also good introductions to the debates amongst “Fascism Studies” scholars.

ticed or developed in a vacuum—political ideologies are part of environments of political practice and can only (at least, “in the end”) be understood in the context of that practice. In this, the approach differs from New Consensus writers such as Eatwell (2013), who has, for example, argued that “fascism is best defined as an ideology.”

Writers in the non-Stalinist Marxist tradition, such as Renton, argue that the New Consensus focus on ideology and intellectuals and their endeavors to establish a “fascist minimum,” produce an understanding of fascism that is unnecessarily static, while also drawing a strong picture of relative identity between fascism and left-wing politics (i.e., to take fascist rhetoric at face value and see fascism as a form of socialism)—despite the fact that in both “classic” forms of fascism (i.e., Italy and Germany) the left was the first target of fascist repression and the key source of opposition to fascism.

There is also a tendency to discount links between the politics of the center, i.e., of classical liberalism and fascism, in spite of the fact, for example, that the largest part of electoral support for the Nazis in Germany came from voters deserting mainstream liberal parties (Gluckstein 2012) and that even in terms of ideology Landa (2010) has been able to find a significant overlap between liberalism and fascism, especially in terms of economic ideology (“economic liberalism” as opposed to “political liberalism”).

Non-Stalinist Marxist approaches have sought to locate fascism within particular forms of social and political practice and the particular nexuses of social relations. Independent Marxists have also sought to find deeper roots for fascism in 19th century politics, in particular finding in Marx’s writings on Bonapartism in France a rich source on the precedents of inter-war European fascism. This connecting of the revolutions of 1848-49 and their outcomes to the rise of inter-war fascism is shared with *longue durée* theorists, who put aside the search for a “fascist minimum” in order to search for analytical categories that can describe a broader category of “far right” (including fascist) politics over a long period stretching from 1848-49 to the present time. 1848-49 is selected because it is seen as being the last major wave of bourgeois revolution in Europe and the settlements that followed essentially established industrial capitalism in Europe as the only possible model for social development. As such, it is seen as being the beginning of the current era of global capitalist dominance and

being the period in which much of the shape of modern politics was forged. Far right politics is thus seen as a response to the dawning of mass industrial capitalism and the on-going fall-out from the development of modern working class politics, which (amongst other things) tended to exacerbate tensions between “political” liberalism (the liberalism of rights, equality and solidarity) and “economic” liberalism (the liberalism of capitalist property and modern market economics). Essentially the far right is seen as being defined by an antagonism towards political liberalism and the rise of modern working class politics. Fascism is seen within this broader context as a form of mass-based and action-focused politics and ideas that saw itself as providing an antidote to the degeneration and disorientation created by the combination of modern mass capitalism (“modernity”) and political liberalism (Renton, 1999; Marx 1994; Saull et al. 2015).

In composing a list of the broad characteristics of fascism and the far right below, I have started with some New Consensus norms and then adjusted them according to Marxist and *longue durée* ideas. Essentially I am taking some ideas from the New Consensus approach, using Marxist ideas to give them a clearer social and political context and then using *longue durée* approaches to endeavor to produce a clearer idea of fascism and the far right’s place in broader historical developments.

A fascism “shopping list”

New Consensus theorists, such as Griffin (2009) and Eatwell (2013), have rooted the rise of fascist ideology in an anti-Enlightenment response to the alienation and atomization of the cosmopolitan industrial capitalist civilization that emerged in the second half of the 19th century. This situation was seen as creating conditions where societies had become “rootless,” weak and decadent. Nevertheless, emerging fascist thinkers celebrated some elements of the new civilization, especially technologies and the power of industrial production. But they sought to suppress elements they saw as negative (e.g., cosmopolitanism, socialism, “parasitic” forms of capital such as finance capital, etc.) in favor of these positive products of the new economy in order to build a new society—this is the essential meaning of their conception of fascism as a “third way” between capitalism and socialism.

The anti-capitalist element found expression in anti-liberalism

and anti-socialism, the latter two political ideologies seen as creating a weak, cosmopolitan and decadent culture. In the face of this, fascists proposed generally conservative cultural solutions, often a return to religion (or the creation of a new religion), traditional gender roles for women ("*Kirche, Küche, und Kinder*": Church, Kitchen, and Children) and hostility to homosexuality and non-hetero-normative sexual behavior.

Beyond this, fascists looked to corporatist solutions that played down internal conflicts and externalized (often racialized) enemies; class conflict was downplayed and presented as the result of "external" enemies, both within and without (e.g., the work of Slavic Bolsheviks and Jewish communists). This externalization also often developed into a penchant for conspiracy theories. Fascist corporatist solutions were by nature strongly nationalistic and by extension imperialist and militaristic.

Because of their cultural conservatism, because of their virulent anti-socialism, because of their imperialist and militaristic politics and because they were ultimately only critical of capitalism, rather than outright opponents, fascists and the far right have often had close, if sometimes fraught, relationships with elements of the state and the ruling class (e.g., police, military, senior figures in government and industry).

Associated with its militarism, fascism is also often associated with valorization of action and violence—which can be tolerated to a greater or lesser extent by state authorities as a result of the above-mentioned relatively close relationships between fascist organizations and the police, military and/or other state institutions.

While fascists and the far right have generally held themselves to be populists in the sense that they are critical of a "liberal elite," they have most often been elitists themselves in that they have believed that solutions require strong hierarchies and Great Leaders. Nevertheless, a mark of their politics after 1848-49, compared to reactionary politicians before that time, was that they saw a need for modern politics to have a mass character and in the 20th century they built mass parties.

Marxists have generally also seen fascist politics as symptoms of the capitalist crisis—in two senses: a political/economic crisis that sees a population lose confidence in key elements of dominant ideology and crisis and division within the ruling elite as to how to handle the

situation. For Marxists, of particular importance in terms of building the mass base for fascism is a desperate set of middle layers fighting to maintain their relative economic independence in the face of proletarianization and impoverishment (and to a lesser extent a significant layer of de-classed unemployed workers, as well as some conservative/non-union workers).

Finally, *longue durée* theorists identify the development of fascist and far right wing politics with problems of the combined and uneven development of international capitalism, often in countries that must or have had to “catch up” with leading economic powers.

From this brief summary we can compile a list of key features, within which an indication of FPI’s position is provided. Table 1 is then followed by a more discursive survey of FPI in relation to fascist characteristics. It should be noted that the table focuses on ideological elements, omitting the important issue of social location (although it does include elements of political practice). In addition, it does not include another key contextual element—the issue of the role of political and economic crises in the development of fascism.

In the case of social location, while we have some indications of the social background of FPI members, it is not enough to draw clear conclusions. In the case of the nature of the relationship between fascist movements and political and economic crises, this is more of a factor affecting the relative success of such a movement, rather than one defining the basic nature of the movement.

Some basics of FPI politics and ideology

Ideologically, the FPI shares a number of features with other Islamist organizations (such as the recently banned *Hizbut Tabrir Indonesia*, HTI) that hold on to literalist interpretations of the Quran. But in terms of characteristics that can be compared to organizations outside the Islamic world, the FPI shows a number of features that are clearly consistent with broad trends amongst fascist/far right organizations and are listed above. To expand on the relevance of the “shopping list” characteristics of fascist ideas above, this section outlines key elements of FPI politics and ideology.

Table 1. Presence of the characteristics of fascist thought in the FPI

| <i>Anti-capitalism</i> | <i>Social conservatism</i> | <i>Nationalism and xenophobia</i> | <i>Right-wing populism</i> |
|---|---|--|--|
| Anti-liberalism (political liberalism) | Pro-Hierarchy (“Great Leader” politics) | Pro-imperialism | Critical of the “liberal elite” |
| STRONG | STRONG | NO | STRONG |
| Anti-cosmopolitanism | Religious (common, but not compulsory) | Militarism/militancy | Mass character of politics |
| STRONG | STRONG | MEDIUM | STRONG |
| Anti-“parasitic” capitalism (but pro-technology, industry and small business) | Conservative gender roles Anti-LGBT | Corporatism | Valorization of action/violence |
| MODERATE | STRONG | N/A | STRONG |
| | | Externalization of enemies (racism and xenophobia; conspiracy theories) | Anti-socialism/communism (the political left should be physically crushed) |
| | | STRONG | STRONG |
| OVERVIEW OF FPI | | | |
| Anti-cosmopolitan; anti-liberal; sometimes anti-capitalist | Strongly socially conservative | Externalization of enemies (e.g., communists and the Chinese; anti- Western); Conspiracy theories; links to military | Mobilizes against perceived enemies. |

Firstly, there is the idea that FPI leaders such as Rizieq himself identify as key to their role: that is the concept of “*amar ma’ruf nahi mungkar*” (encourage the good, forbid the bad), which comes from *Surah Ali Imran* (Ayat 104): “Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting all that is good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong” (Franklin 2009). The FPI as that band of people has a varied membership. Rank and file members of the Front were initially “drawn mainly from the poor urban youth in districts of Jakarta, such as Tanah Abang and Depok” (Wilson 2005), although this base has also included youth from rural areas. Unemployed and underemployed young men seem to be the main constituent (Pausacker 2012; ICG 2001). “*Amar ma’ruf nahi mungkar*” serves as a self-justification for the FPI’s often violent interventions, especially their anti-vice activities, such as attacks on bars and nightclubs. We might note that the use of violent tactics by the FPI serves some notion of rebirth but this is not so much national rebirth as a return to the putative purity of religious order.

The FPI’s relationship to militarism extends to a complex relationship with the government and the martial arms of the state (the police and the military). At times, the relationship is friendly, as shown for instance in the recent military training of the FPI’s paramilitary wing the LPI members by the army. It also benefits from a “disinterested” stance taken towards FPI actions, as in the often slow response of police to FPI/LPI attacks, or a lack of willingness to prosecute FPI/LPI members. At still other times, however, there has been open conflict. Most commonly, however, the military and police have shown sympathy for FPI positions (Wilson 2005; 2010).

Likewise, the FPI has often had relationships of sympathy—at least for a time—with a variety of members of the political elite: for example, in its early years with President Habibie, General (and later Hanura Party leader) Wiranto, vice-president Hamzah Haz, and PAN leader Amien Rais, and more recently with Gerindra leader, Prabowo Subianto, amongst many others (Wilson 2005; 2010; Pausacker 2012).

Typical of far right organizations, the FPI has an attitude to capitalism that is critical, although this criticism is typically not fundamental—a key problem with capitalism is not the nature of its basic social relations but rather the fact that it is controlled by non-Muslims, both locally and globally (On the HTI, see Nugroho 2017; For exam-

ples of Rizieq's anti-capitalism see Shihab 2016 and Nusantaranews 2016). Its critique also extends to features of modern capitalism, including liberalism and secularism,

While against liberalism and secularism, the FPI is more ambivalent about democracy—although this may simply be a case of political expedience, since FPI leaders at some times posture over being supportive of at least some principles of parliamentary democracy but at others argue that democracy is un-Islamic (or, interestingly, un-Indonesian) (e.g., BBC Indonesia 2017).

Regarding xenophobia and conspiracy theories, the FPI excels. It views threats and the sources of social problems as emanating from: liberals and secularists; communists and leftists; China and Chinese (both Indonesians of Chinese descent or ethnic Chinese from the PRC and Taiwan); Christians (both local and international), the West or Jews. As enemy threats the FPI often conflates them. These ideological targets can often be inter-related in FPI thought: liberalism can be related to any of communism, secularism, cosmopolitanism; communism to anti-Chinese or anti-Jewish racism. Communism in particular is seen as an ever-present, “spectral” threat. All can be presented as being part of more or less wild conspiracies (Shihab 2016; Nusantaranews 2016; Nahimunkar.com 2017).

Recalling Griffin's exclusion of Islam from fascist ideology, we can note that for the FPI the most troublesome area of ideology, in terms of fascist thought, is nationalism or its relationship to existing official nationalism in the form of Pancasila. This is because the FPI presents itself as both properly Muslim in a fundamentalist tradition (for example supporting the idea of the implementation of *syariah* law based on strongly literalist readings of the Quran) *and* nationalist. The fact that the FPI's relationship to nationalist ideology is problematic has been noted by opponents as a weak area of FPI politics that can be targeted. *Pancasila*, the state philosophy based on five principles (*sila*), presents a number of problems for the FPI (and other right-wing Muslims). For example, it is not clearly and unequivocally monotheistic (despite a common translation of the first *sila* being “One supreme God,” which makes it sound more monotheistic than it actually is).⁴

⁴ In Indonesian the first *sila* is *Ketuhanan yang maha esa*. *Ketuhanan* is a little more complex than simply “God,” perhaps something like “Divinity” or “Godhead” (the

In addition, the third *sila* (which was the first in Sukarno's initial rendering of the *Pancasila*) valorizes national unity over all other issues (including religious differences). This is made even more problematic when combined with the state motto: *Bhinneka tunggal ika* ("Unity in diversity"). And then there is the figure of Sukarno himself, as the creator of *Pancasila* and the most revered national liberation leader—someone who explicitly and repeatedly championed pluralism as an integral and essential part of Indonesian nationalism. In this context, it is easy to see how difficult it might be to assimilate an "Islamist" outlook into nationalist ideology.

Nevertheless, the FPI continues to endeavor to do so, with Rizieq proclaiming that "For me Pancasila is final" during a recent dispute with a daughter of Indonesia's first president, Sukarno. Rizieq has not sought to remove *Pancasila*, only to argue for an interpretation that is more strongly monotheistic and privileges Islam as he understands it. He has, however, sought to denigrate Sukarno's role as the creator of *Pancasila* (see Erdianto 2016; Lazuardi 2017a; 2017b). If we can note that religion and far right nationalism can co-exist, in the FPI's case it has yet to successfully deal with its problematic relationship with Indonesian nationalism.

The FPI: Incipient Islamic fundamentalist fascism?

It is hard to accept Roger Griffin's assertion that the "Islamist" politics of an organization like the FPI can no more "mix" an Islamic fundamentalist politics with a contemporary form of fascism "than oil can mix with water." Nevertheless, he does identify a key point of tension: the development of an Islamic fundamentalist "ultranationalism" in the face of fundamentalist Islam's strong tendency towards internationalism, something that the FPI is also grappling with.

We began this discussion asking whether the FPI might be understood as a fascist organization, while noting that the term "Islamofas-

ke-+-an simulfix makes abstract nouns). "*Yang*" means "which/that is," and "*maha esa*" means "ultimately/supremely one/a unity." So this *sila* could just as easily be translated as "a godhead that is ultimately a unity"—a translation that is a little more convoluted but also more easily integrated with Hinduism. Sukarno was reaching for a formulation of a state philosophy that would bring Indonesians of different religions and philosophical leanings together (Legge 2008, ch. 8).

cist” carries Islamophobic undertones that are too strong to ignore. Going through our “shopping list,” it was relatively easy to find a whole series of characteristics of the FPI that are normally associated with fascism. Fascist affinity might be extended if we were also to note the FPI’s collaboration with non-“Islamist” groups, such as Prabowo Subianto’s Gerindra, which likewise sails close to the fascist wind. Even so, it is probably too early to be definitive on how to characterize the FPI in terms of its fascist character. Nevertheless, some possibilities clearly do exist.

Most Indonesian detractors of the FPI prefer the term “religious fascist” and “religious fascism.” This has the benefit of allowing us to link the politics and ideology of the FPI to other historical phenomena, above all “Clerical Fascism.” But in doing that we are returning to our repudiation of Griffin’s oil and water argument, for there is clearly something worth exploring in the assertion that the FPI is indeed an Indonesian form of Islamic fundamentalist fascism. But it also appears to be the case that the FPI’s “fascism” is still incipient, still in the process of coalescing, especially in terms of the way that the organization develops its own brand of Islamic fundamentalist nationalism.

If we only take a New Consensus approach that focuses on fascism as a particular kind of political ideology and which demands a relatively high level of consistency of ideas, especially around the idea of “national rebirth,” clearly the ideology and politics of the FPI does not qualify as fascism, no matter how critical we may be of the organization’s violence and intolerance. But if we view FPI ideology as something more organic, where even some core elements may be contradictory, incomplete or in the process of forming (i.e., if we take a more “morphological” approach) and we are more concerned to place this ideology in a context of political practice and social location (i.e., take the criticisms of the independent Marxist and *longue durée* theorists on board), the FPI, with its violent and activist opposition to political liberalism (as a broad historical category that includes various forms of socialism), we might see the FPI as fascist.

The truth lies probably somewhere between these two positions: studying the politics and ideology of the FPI does suggest the possibility of the emergence of an Indonesian Islamic fundamentalist fascism but this process is incomplete. Perhaps the FPI is “proto-Islamofascist” or “proto-religious fascist.”

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