Al-Attas, Islamization and Pancasila: The Impact of Attasian Thought on Political Islam in Indonesia

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Abstract

This article tracks the influence of specific ideas of the Malaysian Muslim philosopher Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas on Indonesian Islamic political thought. The primary focus of the article is to outline the impact that the adoption of specific concepts from Al-Attas have had on the trajectory of Indonesian Islamic thought and Islamist politics. In particular, it focuses on how the concepts of Islamization and de-Islamization of language has helped bring about a new discourse on the relationship between Islam, *Pancasila*, and the state. This discourse has been led by a number of Indonesian Islamic political thinkers who studied the thought of Al-Attas in Malaysia and who have subsequently returned to Indonesia, hybridising and spreading these new ideas, exerting a great deal of influence on the Islamist movement in Indonesia.

Keywords: Al-Attas, Islamic political thought, Pancasila, Malaysian Muslim philosopher, Islamism, Indonesia

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Introduction

In recent years, Indonesian Islamic thought has undergone a transformation away from the ascendancy of secular and liberal interpretations of Islam as embodied in thinkers such as Nurcholish Madjid, Abdurrahman Wahid, and groups such as the Liberal Islam Network (JIL), and towards a more conservative and politically engaged understanding of Islam. This has been labelled by Martin van Bruinessen as the 'Conservative Turn'.[2] This more assertive form of Islamic thought initially was focused on refuting what it labelled as the trifold problem of secularism, pluralism and liberalism, often deridingly abbreviated as *SiPiLis*. A number of the Islamist intellectuals involved in this pushback against liberal Islamic thought would later play a strong role in the Islamist '212' Movement protesting against the then incumbent Governor of Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (popularly known as Ahok), as a result of perceived blasphemous comments on the Qur'an during a campaign speech in 2016, and in the promotion of new interpretations of *Pancasila* which asserted its supposedly Islamic character and compatibility with Islamic law. This article investigates the origin of these ideas and their linkages back to the Malaysian Muslim philosopher Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas.

A modified Gramscian framework has been employed, incorporating Islamist ideology as the field of analysis in place of the economic class-based system originally utilised by Gramsci. The role of 'organic intellectuals' in their ability to shape responses of a counter-hegemonic movement is central to the theoretical framework employed in this article.[3] As per the Gramscian concept of 'organic intellectuals', several Islamist intellectuals have been analysed in their ability to work as thought leaders, finding new methods to implement their goals and to express what is fundamental and immutable about their ideology, while adapting what can be modified in accordance with present requirements.

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[2] Bruinessen 2013: p. 5
[3] Gramsci 1971: p. 3-4

The modification of a Gramscian framework to the context of ideology, and specifically Islamist ideology, builds upon the work of earlier analyses of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt by scholars such as Butko[4] and Kandil,[5] who discussed the role of Islamists in building a counter-hegemonic movement against a secular government. Indonesian Islamist thinkers who have adapted the thought of Al-Attas to the Indonesian context are identified as 'organic intellectuals' responding to the challenges of promoting Islamization in a largely secular political system.

The article's focus is on the influence of philosophical concepts from Al-Attas as a means of contributing to the existing scholarship which has noted the existence of a network of Attasian students,[6] expanding upon this literature to explain how and why the ideas of Al-Attas have been able to impact the trajectory of political Islam, rather than merely noting the existence of students of Attasian thought among Indonesian Islamists. The importance of this group's impact on Islamism in Indonesia can be seen in the significant figures, most notably Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, who have recently adopted accommodationist stances in relation to the Indonesian state and *Pancasila* and who have justified these stances using arguments seemingly adopted under the influence of these Attasian thinkers.

Al-Attas and Islamization

Al-Attas is a Malaysian Muslim philosopher whose primary focus in his writings is on Islam's response to concepts and philosophies that he views as foreign and antithetical to the Islamic tradition; these most notably include secularism. Al-Attas' core ideas can be found in his seminal works *Islam and Secularism, Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of*

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[4] Butko 2004

[5] Kandil 2011

[6] See for example: Aidulsyah 2020, who, while briefly mentioning the fact that many of these actors were students of the thought of Al-Attas, does not explain how or why these ideas would become influential or a source of critique against opponents of Islamization in Indonesia.

Islam, The Concept of Education in Islam, and the Malay language *Risalah Untuk Kaum Muslimin* (*Epistle to the Muslim People*). Al-Attas' main concern in his thought is to analyze why the Muslim *ummah* (community) has fallen from the heights of Islamic civilisation to today's 'weakness'. His most fundamental assertion is that the primary problem facing the Muslim world is that of thought and the subsequent infiltration into the Muslim *ummah* of foreign ideas and ideologies.[7]

Foremost in danger to the Muslim *ummah* for Al-Attas among these alien concepts is that of secularism and the secularization process. For Al-Attas, the Muslim world has been destroyed at a deep, intellectual level by the process of secularization, which has already engulfed Western civilisation and become the key defining aspect of its worldview. He defines the secularization process as comprising of the core components of the "disenchantment of nature, the desacralization of politics, and the de-consecration of values".[8] Al-Attas views all of these three aspects as being reflective of the specific experiences and trajectory of "Western Man and his culture and civilization". He posits this in reaction to the proponents of secularization theory, in particular Harvey Cox, who argue that secularization as a process has its roots not in Post-Enlightenment Europe, but rather in the Bible, even reaching as far back as the oldest books of the Old Testament.[9] Rather than a legitimate reading of revelation, according to Al-Attas, this understanding of secularization is a continuation of the Westernization of Christianity, a process which began in the move in the locus of Christianity from its origins in Jerusalem to the authority of Rome.[10] This radical 'misreading' of the Biblical tradition was

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[7] Al-Attas 1999
[8] Al-Attas 1978: p. 18
[9] Cox 2013
[10] Other authors contest this notion of a divide between 'religion' and 'secular' as oppositional categories, however this is outside the scope of this article. See for example, Asad 2003

one which would be completely alien to both the ancient Hebrews and early Christians.[11][12]

To counter this secularization of the Muslim mind, Al-Attas argues for the importance of a return to what he calls the 'Worldview of Islam'. The Islamic Worldview incorporates a belief in the religion of Islam and a commitment to all that necessarily flows from that belief. Al-Attas states that this terminology of a 'worldview', or *weltanschauung* in German, is indeed a borrowed term from the West; however, this does not mean that the Muslim scholars and thinkers of the past did not have a concept of the Islamic Worldview. Rather, this worldview was their lived reality. It did not need to have a label attached to it of an Islamic Worldview. Today, however, with the infiltration of foreign ideas arising from the effects of colonisation and subsequent cultural domination of the West, it is necessary to re-assert, elaborate, define, and defend this Islamic Worldview against the effects of foreign and un-Islamic concepts that contradict Islam.[13]

Islamization of Language

Another prominent feature of Al-Attas' thought is his concept of the 'Islamization of language'. As part of the process of conversion to Islam on a societal level, all of the major Muslim languages have been infused with the 'Islamic basic vocabulary'. The Arabic language is, for Al-Attas, *the* language of Islam. However, the Islamization of language as a component of conversion to Islam had its origins firstly in the new, more specific meanings that were assigned to Arabic words with the revelation of the Islamic sources. The Islamization of Arabic, then, consisted in the Qur'anic reorganization and reformation of the conceptual structures, semantic

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[11] Al-Attas 1978: pp. 20-25

[12] This understanding of secularization as an insidious project lies in contradiction to the well-known distinction made by Indonesian reformist intellectual Nurcholish Madjid who advocated for the reformation of Islamic thought through secularization, while avoiding secularism, which he defined as a closed-off ideology Madjid 2019: pp. 297-311

[13] Al-Attas 2001: pp. 1-5

fields, vocabulary, and basic vocabulary that once served the *Jahili*[14] vision of the world and of life and human existence. Al-Attas provides examples of such transformation of meaning in the term '*karim*'. In the pre-Islamic understanding of the Arabs, *karim* denoted a person of high lineage, accompanied by extravagant displays of generosity. With the coming of Islam, the term came to be centred around piety (*taqwa*), indicating that generosity was conducted with a consciousness of one's duty to Allah. A similar process occurred with the usage of the term for 'justice', *adalah*. To be just (*adl*) was specified by the revelation to consist of adherence to the Divine Law (*shariah*).[15]

These words, along with many other Arabic terms that have been specified by the revelation and then later by the Islamic tradition of scholarship, comprise the 'basic Islamic vocabulary', which is shared by Urdu, Farsi, Malay, Indonesian, and all other major languages of the Muslim world. This is a key component of the Islamic worldview as it provides Muslims from different cultures and backgrounds with a shared vision of the world and reality.

Whereas the Islamization of language provides Muslims with the Islamic Worldview, what Al-Attas terms the 'de-Islamization of language' has had a deleterious effect and caused intellectual confusion. While the Islamization of language involves the adaptation of terminology to reflect the Islamic worldview, de-Islamization of language is caused when words from the basic Islamic vocabulary are shifted from their intended Islamic meaning.

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[14] The term *Jahili,* derived from *jahiliyya,* literally ignorance, refers to the era and way of life of the pre-Islamic Arabs in this context. It is also frequently used by other authors to refer to any non-Islamic way of life more generally.
[15] Al-Attas 2001:p. 9

> "Words conveying meanings which focus upon fundamental truths peculiar to Islam, such as, among others, 'knowledge' (*ilm*), 'justice' (*'adl*), right action (*adab*), 'education' (*ta'dib*), have been tampered with, so that 'knowledge' becomes restricted to 'jurisprudence', or to that which is based only on restricted forms of reason and sense experience; 'justice' to mean unqualified equality, or mere procedure; 'right action' to mean hypocritical etiquette; and 'education' to mean the kind of training leading to ends derived from philosophic and secular rationalism."[16]

This de-Islamization of language then serves to sever the link between the Muslim who speaks in an Islamized language and the Islamic worldview. Al-Attas argues that this confusion of concepts facilitates the process of secularization and the entrance of alien ideologies and worldviews into the Muslim mind.

Islamization of Knowledge

Due to the 'loss of *adab*' and the intellectual confusion facing the Muslim mind, Al-Attas advocates for a process to respond to this, which he labels the 'Islamization of Knowledge'.[17] The Islamization of knowledge is a two-step process, which commences with a program of selective de-Westernization; a necessary process in the return to metaphysical worldview and epistemology of Islam.[18] As previously mentioned, for Al-

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[16] Al-Attas 2001: p. 31

[17] There is some contestation over the progenitor of the concept of Islamization of Knowledge. Ismail Faruqi of the International Institute of Islamic Thought is also strongly associated with the concept. Faruqi's alternative model is built upon a more conciliatory approach to 'foreign' aspects of knowledge. See also Al-Faruqi 1982

[18] Daud 2013: p. 18

Attas, the foremost problem facing the Muslim world today is not ignorance but rather confusion; the lack of understanding that the Muslims have adopted a worldview and understandings of what knowledge is foreign to the Islamic worldview. It is therefore necessary to identify and subsequently expunge these foreign understandings prior to this knowledge being Islamised.[19]

This process of de-Westernization commences at a fundamental level, to challenge what knowledge itself means. Al-Attas argues that what the West conceives of as knowledge is inherently flawed, as it focuses on the 'thing' being studied abstractly, without comprehending of this 'thing' in relation to its relationship with and without its study leading to happiness; a happiness which does not reflect a mere emotional sensation, but rather as one which incorporates happiness in the sense of improving one's relationship with God. The Islamization of knowledge therefore involves the replacement of this dichotomic approach to knowledge, and its replacement with an approach that views knowledge as true knowledge only when it leads back to the true meaning. The Islamization of knowledge consists of, subsequent to the isolation and expungement of elements arising from a foreign worldview, "Islamic elements and key concepts". It is this Islamization process that makes knowledge "true knowledge".[20]

Other Islamic thinkers have contested this notion of the Islamization of Knowledge. At the most fundamental level, Al-Attas' concept of the need for knowledge to be 'Islamized' was rejected by the Pakistani-American scholar Fazlur Rahman. Rahman contended that all knowledge was Islamic and that it was only when it was misused to commit evil acts, that it could be associated with being un-Islamic. Science provided the means for advancement of human life and was inherently Islamic and good according to this conceptualisation.[21] Others, such as

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[19] Al-Attas 1978: p. 33, p. 63
[20] Al-Attas 1978: pp. 133-163
[21] Rahman 1988

Ismail Al-Faruqi, have built alternative models of Islamization which provide for a greater degree of adoption of ideas external to the Islamic tradition.[22] Elsewhere in the Muslim world, a middle path between the open adoption of all knowledge and a rejection of elements arising from a non-Islamic worldview was advocated by Moroccan philosopher Taha Abdurrahman.[23]

Al-Attas' ideas have gained a significant following both within Malaysia and in other countries, notably in Western Islamic seminaries such as Zaytuna College, the first Muslim Liberal Arts college in the United States, where his *Prolegomena* is part of the standard curriculum. Most relevantly for the purposes of this article, Al-Attas' ideas spread to Malaysia's neighbour Indonesia through the arrival of a number of Indonesian Muslims to study at International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), who subsequently returned to their home country, bringing with them concepts that they would adapt and diffuse among other Indonesian Muslim intellectuals.

Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi

Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi was born into an eminent family of *ulama* in Ponorogo, East Java. His father, Imam Zarkasyi, was one of the three founders (*Trimurti Pendiri*) of Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, so from a young age, Zarkasyi received an intensive religious education. Upon completing his schooling at Gontor, Zarkasyi travelled abroad to Pakistan, as well as the University of Birmingham to further his Islamic education, completing a Master's Degree on the theological thought of the medieval Syrian Muslim scholar, Ibn Taymiyyah.[24] Following this, Zarkasyi was to commence a PhD in Malaysia at ISTAC. Zarkasyi arrived and was assisted in the formulation of PhD proposal by Al-Attas, but soon after, Al-Attas

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[22] Al-Faruqi 1982
[23] Hallaq 2019
[24] Zarkasyi 2022a

came into conflict with sectors of the Malaysian government and was removed from his post.

Despite this, Al-Attas had a major influence on the thinking of Zarkasyi. It was this meeting and his adoption of Attasian concepts that would lead Zarkasyi shortly after to found the Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought and Civilizations (INSISTS) as a discussion forum for Indonesian students studying in Malaysia, and which would later emerge into a larger scale think-tank that engaged with thought leaders and *ulama* in Indonesia upon their return. Of particular significance was Zarkasyi's adoption of the concept of the importance of the Islamic Worldview as a basis for the revival of Islamic civilisation.[25]

Zarkasyi, building upon the concept of the Islamic Worldview, has made many moves to counter the influence of ideologies that he believes lie in contradiction to that worldview. As is common with Zarkasyi's work, he commences his discussions of the Islamic Worldview by defining a problem before a solution is proposed. Two of his most well-known books are separated into this division of tearing down falsehood and reconstructing truth on the latter.

Zarkasyi draws an analogy with this method of work with the Islamic proclamation of faith. Zarkasyi has outlined that his works, such as *Misykat*,[26] function as the rejection of what is false – similar to the rejection of gods other than Allah (*la ilaha*) – while the affirmation of the alternative – except Allah (*illa Allah*) – constitutes the second part of the proclamation in works such as *Minhaj*.[27,28]

Of particular importance for Zarkasyi, as with many *ulama* in Indonesia, are the ideologies of secularism, liberalism, and pluralism. His response to these foreign ideological influences has taken various forms, from written works such as books, journal articles, newspaper columns; frequent presentations at conferences; his establishment of a higher

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[25] Ismunanto 2021: pp. 61-76

[26] Zarkasyi 2012

[27] Zarkasyi 2021b

[28] Zarkasyi 2022a

institute of learning in Universitas Darussalam Gontor (UNIDA Gontor); and the establishment of think tanks to spread and share knowledge among Islamist thinkers through INSISTS and later through *Majelis Intelektual dan Ulama Muda Indonesia* (MIUMI, the Council of Intellectuals and Young *Ulama* Indonesia). These linkages and establishment of political Islamist think tanks have worked as conduits for the spread of the ideas adopted from Al-Attas, adapted to the specific needs and potential benefit of Islamists in the Indonesian context and diffused to the broader Islamist community across the country.

In building rebuttals to these foreign ideologies, Zarkasyi relates them back to what he argues are the bases of the Western Worldview: modernism and postmodernism. Zarkasyi argues that the Western worldview is based on the initial arrival of modernism, which is comprised of the approaches of rationalism, empiricism, secularism, desacralization, a non-metaphysical basis, dichotomy (of knowledge), and pragmatism.[29] These values have then been built upon in the present era in which postmodernist thought dominates. The core ideas that emerge from the postmodern Western worldview are nihilism, relativism, anti-authority, pluralism, multiculturalism, equality, feminism, and liberalism.[30]

What distinguishes Zarkasyi's analysis as more reflective of Al-Attas' thought in comparison with other critiques is in its linking of the problematic nature of these ideologies with their origins in a 'foreign' worldview, one which lies outside the Islamic Worldview. Rather than focusing on more specific critiques of how liberalism, feminism, or equality may be expressed on a case-by-case basis, the critique is focused on the origins of these value systems and ideologies and attacks their philosophical underpinnings as lying in conflict with Islam. By focusing on the philosophical underpinnings of modernism and post-modernism and their origins in belief systems outside the Islamic worldview, Zarkasyi is

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[29] Zarkaysi 2007.
[30] Zarkasyi 2007: pp. 11-17

able to similar focus his attacks on proponents of secular and liberal thought in the Muslim world, and, in particular, in Indonesia.[31]

The justification of non-ideological interpretations of Islam that allowed for its separation from a role in politics in Indonesia was made possible by the spread of liberal interpretations particularly those supported by the then- Minister of Religious Affairs under the New Order regime, who encouraged *ulama* to travel to Western universities to study Islam rather than the traditional centres of knowledge in the Middle East.[32,33] Zarkasyi argues that these liberal interpretations in Indonesia that attack traditional understandings of Islamic law are built upon the concepts of pluralism, relativism, and desacralization of texts, all of which have their origins in the Orientalist approach to studying Islam.[34]

Zarkasyi's formula for change in order to bring about success for Islamic civilization is not limited to the realm of ideas; it also incorporates the importance of the inner dimensions of Islam. In a famous *hadith,* the Prophet Muhammad is reported to have outlined the different levels of Islam: *iman* (belief) and *ihsan* (beauty or excellence). Sunni *ulama* have largely understood this to refer to different stations upon which the Muslim can reach. The base of these is Islam, while the raised standard is to become a *mu'min* (believer or one with *iman*) and the highest station is to achieve *ihsan*, living one's entire life with such consciousness of God that is as if one can see Allah in front of them. The understanding here is that a major cause of the lack of success for the Muslim *ummah* in its aspirations is that its religious practise is lacking, and that it is stuck at the lower station of Islam, rather than the station of being a *mu'min*, the ones to whom the promise of victory is understood to have been made. This is indicative that, for Zarkasyi, his aspirations for an increased role for Islam are not about satisfying a more powerful worldly role for its own sake, or that the goal is majoritarianism, but rather on his spiritual commitments

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[31] Zarkasyi 2012: pp. 89-92, pp. 137-145
[32] Bachtiar 2011: p. 88
[33] Husaini 2009b: pp. 66-67
[34] Zarkasyi 2021a: pp. 317-323

and beliefs. In order to achieve success, it is not sufficient to focus purely on material or intellectual means; a spiritual commitment must also be undertaken and one's religious practise must also be improved.

This understanding of *iman* is linked to Zarkasyi's understanding of *Pancasila.* In contrast to some other Islamists, Zarkasyi labels *Pancasila* as a worldview. However, he maintains that it is a worldview which needs to borrow from religion to make it complete. *Pancasila* will only be safe and find its best expression in the hands of the Muslim *ummah*. The *mu'min* will not conduct unjust acts of violence, nor take a life without right. The *mu'min,* by adopting and embodying the injunctions of Islam, becomes for Zarkasyi the perfect *Pancasila*ist, a status which cannot be achieved by the atheist or communist, since they do not believe in the first *sila* of the *Pancasila*: that of *Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa*.[35] This analysis of *Pancasila* as creating a good citizen, but not necessarily an inherently good man, can be traced back to Attasian thought. Al-Attas notes that secular educational systems and institutions such as the university are established with the goal of building good citizens. It is entirely possible that they will be able to achieve this and build qualities of good citizenship among graduates of the schooling systems. However, for Al-Attas, it is not necessarily the case that this good citizen will be a good man. The inverse, however, is necessarily the case: the good man (understood as a pious Muslim of upright moral standing) is inherently a good citizen. It is therefore more effective to build institutions around the ideal of building good men, who will constitute both overall good moral characters as well as good citizens. As the concept of being *Pancasila*ist essentially means to be a good citizen of Indonesia;[36] and since to be *Pancasila*ist is to be the archetypal Indonesian, Zarkasyi's analysis that one can be a good citizen by following *Pancasila* alone, but can only reach the level of perfection through following Islam, which for him incorporates all the best values of *Pancasila*,

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[35] Zarkasyi 2017
[36] Al-Attas 1978

is analogous to, and likely influenced by, Al-Attas' concept of the good citizen/good man divide.

This is not limited to the first *sila* only. Zarkasyi relates each of the remaining four *sila* back to how they can be actualised in the best manner in the hands of the Muslims. The Muslim is taught to have knowledge of right and wrong and to possess good character. These attributes will lead one to be *adil* and act with *adab* as per the second *sila.* Similarly, specifics of the *syariah* are cited in order to show how *persatuan* (unity) in the third *sila* is exemplified in Islam through the importance of maintaining relations (*silaturrahmi*). The historical contribution of *ulama* in calling for the nation to unite to strive against colonization, as well as their willingness to compromise in order to avoid the secession of non-Muslims, is also cited as proof of how this has been put into practise. The precedence of consultation (*musyawarah*) as an Islamic means of solving problems is noted in relation to its presence in the Qur'an and in its expression in valuing the opinions of others, a commitment to the results of and gentleness during consultation constitute the Islamic expression of *Pancasila's* fourth *sila.* Finally, social justice is incorporated in the pillars of Islam. The ritual pillars possess a significant social dimension. The ritual prayers prevent the committing of evil acts, fasting restricts the animalistic desires, the compulsory charity (*zakat*) provides a solution to eight specific groups among the people, and the *hajj* that is accepted returns a person to the status of a newborn, free from sin.[37]

For *Pancasila* to flourish and achieve its comprehensive and foremost interpretation, it must remove the ambiguity in interpretation that has comprised so much of its historical role. Throughout the majority of Indonesian political life, *Pancasila* has been used as a negative idea, as a tool with which to discredit political opposition and as "an ideology of exclusion and containment".[38] If *Pancasila* is to become the *weltanschauung* of Indonesia, as Sukarno desired, then it must be

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[37] Zarkasyi 2017
[38] Porter 2002: p. 46

enriched by the Islamic interpretation, which for Zarkasyi is the most comprehensive and correct form of *Pancasila*.[39]

Pancasila is a formulation of a national ideology that is open to a variety of potential interpretations, reflecting its initial intention by Sukarno to act as a 'meeting point' (*titik temu*) between the different ethnicities and religions in Indonesia. For Zarkasyi, this has opened the door to *Pancasila* being interpreted differently by groups who do not share the core beliefs that underpin *Pancasila.* Most specifically, this relates to Leftist secularists in Indonesia, who he sees as attempting to downplay the role of *Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa* in *Pancasila* in order to secularise it.[40]

This debate surrounding the interpretation of *Pancasila* recently arose once again in the attempts of the Joko Widodo administration – led by *Partai Demokrasi Indonesia-Perjuangan*, PDI-P) – to introduce legislation to attempt to re-introduce an official guide on how *Pancasila* should be correctly interpreted. This formulation of a guide to *Pancasila* was not a re-establishment of the famous 'P4' guide from the New Order era. Rather, it was a guide that was far more reflective of the ideology of PDI-P and its Sukarnoist tendencies. Of particular controversy was the mention of Sukarno's speech, in which he stated that if *Pancasila* with its five principles was not desirable, then he could summarise it in three principles: socio-nationalism, socio-democracy, and *Ketuhanan*.

Furthermore, if these three principles were seen as not desirable, Sukarno stated that all of these principles could be summed up in one singular principle: *gotong-royong,* a term for the Indonesian/Javanese concept of mutual assistance.[41] This latter point was to become a key point around which opposition to the proposed legislation centred and can be viewed as the primary reason for its failure.[42] Similarly, Zarkasyi finds this

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[39] Precedents for this viewpoint on the perfection of *Pancasila* being completed through the usage of Islam can be found in the works of previous generations of Islamist thinkers. See for example Hamka 1951

[40] Zarkasyi 2023

[41] Soekarno 1945

[42] Fenton 2022

formulation highly problematic due to its removal of what he views as the most important aspect of *Pancasila*, its elevation of the oneness of God as the foremost principle upon which Indonesian life should be based.[43]

While Zarkasyi views this specific interpretation of *Pancasila* and its being pulled into a secular direction as highly problematic, he is not opposed to the concept of a program similar to P4 being established to ensure that *Pancasila* is interpreted in the correct manner. There are undoubtedly aspects of P4 that Zarkasyi would view as problematic in light of his other writings arguing against secularism and pluralism, such as the claim that religion is an affair between an individual and God.[44] However, P4 provided, according to Zarkasyi, for a hierarchical understanding of *Pancasila* in which the first principle of *Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa* stands over and above the remaining four *sila*, ensuring that they are interpreted in the light of that foremost first principle.[45]

Zarkasyi himself presents this model in a more expansive form in which he provides his Islamic justification and basis for *Pancasila.* He notes that by locating *Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa*, the absolute and uncompromising belief in the singularity of God, as the first and most important principle of *Pancasila,* it reflects and is built upon the Islamic form of monotheism (*tauhid*). He notes further that Islam is based upon both belief and action. He locates all the five principles of *Pancasila* as relating to the Qur'anic injunctions to believe (*aamanu*), and do righteous deeds (*'amilus saalihaat*). Specifically, he locates precise Qur'anic evidence by noting particular verses of the Qur'an that provide evidence for each *sila*, listing where each concept can be found in the primary Islamic sources.

Zarkasyi introduces into his understanding of *Pancasila* the idea, derived from Al-Attas' Islamization of language, that key 'technical terms' from the worldview of Islam are carried by *Pancasila*. Many of the terms,

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[43] Zarkasyi 2022c
[44] Indonesia 1978
[45] Zarkasyi 2022a

such as *adil, adab, musyawarah,* and *wakil* are from *Bahasa Islam*, he says, and therefore should rightly be understood conceptually according to their specific Islamic meanings and not according to in an 'abstract' dictionary meaning.[46] This derivation of the concept of Islamization of language and its application to *Pancasila* has also been taken up by another student of Al-Attas' ideas, Adian Husaini.

Adian Husaini

Adian Husaini was born in Bojonegoro, East Java, in 1965 and was educated in the *pesantren* system in his youth. After completing his undergraduate studies, Husaini moved to ISTAC to undertake his postgraduate studies. Husaini was to incorporate significant aspects of Al-Attas' thought into his own political thinking, adapting it to the Indonesian context and also incorporating significant components from influential Islamic 'modernist' figures in Indonesia, in particular Hamka and Mohammad Natsir, the long-time leader of *Masyumi* and later founder of *Dewan Da'wah Islamiyah Indonesia* (DDII, Indonesian Council of Islamic Propagation). Alongside his prolific writings – Husaini has released dozens of books, along with regular articles on historical and recent events in Indonesia related to Islam – Husaini is currently the Head of DDII.[47] He also maintains a strong connection with the Malaysian students of Al-Attas, including the figure generally regarded as Al-Attas' 'official' commentator, Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, with whom Husaini collaborated to write an account of his journey from the thought of the neo-modernist Muslim thinker Fazlur Rahman, to that of Al-Attas.[48]

Husaini presents perhaps the most important link between the adoption of Al-Attas' ideas and its implementation among Indonesian Islamists, having a profound impact on the trajectory of Islamic political thought in Indonesia. Husaini can be viewed as one of the Islamist thinkers

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[46] Zarkasyi 2002a
[47] Salim 2021: p. 387
[48] Husaini 2021

most responsible for a change of strategy and its spread among previously more confrontational Islamists; the move from a rejectionist approach to *Pancasila* on the part of many Islamists, to the adoption of the idea that the Islamization of Indonesia will be most successful and sustained by working within a framework that does not oppose or reject *Pancasila* or the Indonesian state as ideologies or institutions of *kufr* (disbelief).

A significant component of Husaini's justification for the Islamic acceptability of *Pancasila* lies in the role played by Muslim *ulama* in its composition. *Badan Penyelidik Usaha-Usaha Persiapan Kemerdekaan* (BPUPK, Investigating Committee for Preparatory Work for Independence) was established in April 1945 to determine the structure and ideology of the soon to be independent state of Indonesia. Nine influential figures were selected as part of the *Panitia Sembilan* (Nine Volunteers): Soekarno, Mohammad Hatta, Muhammad Yamin, Achmad Soebarjo Abikoesno Tjokrosoejoso, Abdul Kahar Muzakkir, Abdul Wahid Hasyim, Haji Agus Salim, and A.A. Maramis. The first four of these members represented the secular-nationalist faction; Tjokrosoejoso, Muzakkir and Hasyim represented the Islamist-nationalist and *ulama* faction; and Maramis represented the Christian population.

The *Panitia Sembilan* came to a consensus built upon a compromise, which was to become known as the Jakarta Charter. The form *Pancasila* took in the Jakarta Charter was identical to today's finalised form, with the exception of the first *sila,* the wording of which was slightly different. In place of the current form of *Ketuhanan **Yang Maha Esa*** (belief in one Almighty God*,* the *sila* was *Ketuhanan **dengan kewajiban menjalankan syariat Islam bagi pemeluk-pemeluknya*** (belief in one God, with the obligation to put into practise the Islamic *syariah* for its adherents). The additional wording of this *sila* came to be known as the '*tujuh kata*' (seven words). On the day following the declaration of independence, a congregation of non-Muslim representatives laid their objections to the 'seven words' and declared their intent to leave the nascent republic if the additional wording was not

removed.[49] As a compromise, these seven words were removed and replaced with the addition of *Yang Maha Esa* (the One Almighty God). This formulation was accepted by all members of the *Panitia Sembilan*, including the representatives of the Islamist-nationalists. Husaini references this acceptance to argue that since the *ulama* did not view this formulation as un-Islamic, then there is no reason for later Muslims to problematise or oppose it. Notably, *Pancasila* itself for Husaini is not in conflict with Islam and does not need to be problematised any longer.[50]

The above indicates an acceptability of *Pancasila* from an Islamic perspective. However, Husaini goes further in his conception of *Pancasila* and its relationship with Islam to argue that *Pancasila* itself is both a reflection of the Islamic worldview and that *Pancasila* at least permits the establishment of Islam, and itself can be used to justify the implementation of Islam at a state level. The use of language in *Pancasila* comprises the core of his argument.

The substitution of the seven words for *Yang Maha Esa* did not indicate for Husaini a loss for the Muslim *ummah* and its aspirations. Rather, the specification of the belief in One God indicates that this belief is not an abstract, non-specific, or religiously neutral belief in a god, as was desired by sections of secular nationalists and non-Muslim groups in Indonesia. The addition of *Yang Maha Esa* indicates a pure form of monotheism that is identical with the Islamic concept of *tauhid* (pure monotheism). By specifying that the *Ketuhanan* in *Pancasila* is the Islamic understanding of monotheism, the same goal sought out by the addition of the seven words is achieved and *Pancasila* remains as a formulation that calls for the implementation of Islam as part of the state's responsibilities.[51]

In support of the above, Husaini cites a number of Muslim *ulama* as antecedents who held a similar understanding. Along with the Islamist-

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[49] Noer 1978: p. 2
[50] Husaini 2022b
[51] Husaini 2009a: p. 171

nationalist thinkers who themselves were involved in the development of the final form of *Pancasila,* he quotes KH Achmad Siddiq, who was at the time the General Head of *Nahdlatul Ulama*:

> "The words, "*Yang Maha Esa*" in the first *sila* (*Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa*) constitute an equivalent to the seven words which were deleted from the first *sila* according to the original formulation. This change was able to be accepted with the understanding that the words "*Yang Maha Esa*" constitute a confirmation of the *sila Ketuhanan*, so that the formulation of "*Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa*" reflects an understanding of *tauhid* (pure monotheism[52]) according to the Islamic belief system (*surah al-ikhlas*[53]). If adherents of other religions were able to accept this, then we are thankful and make *doa* (supplication to God)."[54]

Whereas in the aspects relating to the discussion of the term *Yang Maha Esa* Husaini cites previous thinkers, the influence of Al-Attas' thought comes through in his use of the concepts of Islamization of language in interpreting how *Pancasila*'s other principles are to be viewed. Similarly to Zarkasyi, he makes note of the fact that despite the Muslims no longer have the important seven words in the *Pancasila*, they still have words from the Islamic vocabulary such *adil, adab, hikmah*, and *musyawarat.* The significance of terminology such as *adil* (just), *adab*

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[52] Included in author's original quote.
[53] Surah al-Ikhlas is the 112th chapter of the Qur'an and is a four-verse chapter discussing the uniqueness of Allah, along with a refutation of ascribing fatherhood or any familial relationships to Allah.
[54] Satyabudi 2004 Cited in: Husaini 2009a: p. 138

(right action or conduct) and *hikmah* (wisdom) in *Pancasila* relate back to Al-Attas' concept of Islamic language. The introduction of key words from the core Islamic vocabulary, reflecting the Islamic worldview, enter the languages of Muslim peoples and come to express specifically Islamic conceptualisations of these terms. This aspect of Al-Attas' thought provides Husaini with an innovative approach to *Pancasila,* one which allows him to argue for the idea that the intentions of the founding fathers was to reflect the Islamic worldview. This subsequently provides the groundwork with which Islamists can push for the Islamization of society and politics more broadly.

The usage of the concept of an Islamic language to explain the motives is not limited to their mere existence, but finds practical expression in Husaini's explanation of how the addition of these terms alter and specify the meanings of aspects of *Pancasila* to preclude it being interpreted in a manner that is either secular or religiously neutral. In his discussion of the terms *adil* and *adab,* Husaini notes in particular that these are uniquely Islamic terms, which were not found among the various cultures of what is today Indonesia before the arrival of Islam. Since these terms *adil* and *adab* are used in the formulation of *Pancasila* and not alternative wordings that could have been used to convey a non-specific, religiously neutral (such as *budi bakti*) or secular concepts of justice or right action, these terms in *Pancasila* must be understood according to Islam itself.[55]

In the process of *Pancasila*'s formulation, Soekarno's 1 June 1945 version included the second *sila* of *perikemanusiaan* (humanitarianism), an expression that is reflective of Soekarno's secular inclinations. Husaini argues that the Islamists among the *Panitia Sembilan* ensured that this principle could not be used to make *Pancasila* into a secular or religiously neutral ideology by modifying the wording to become *Kemanusiaan Yang Adil dan beradab* ('humanity which is *adil* and possessing *adab*'). This insertion of aspects of the language of Islam served to Islamize *Pancasila*

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[55] Husaini 2009a: p. 162

from its origin and ensure that the interpretation of *Pancasila* should be conducted in line with Islamic values.[56]

      Similarly, the remaining principles in *Pancasila* include the insertion of these key words from the vocabulary of Islam, which indicate the intentions of the formulators. The third principle of the 'Unity of Indonesia' was not viewed by Islamists involved in the debates as problematic, as all groups were striving for the establishment of the Indonesian state, regardless of their political ideology. The fourth principle of *Kerakyatan yang dipimpin oleh **hikmah** kebijkasanaan dalam per**musyawarat**an/perwakilan* (democracy/rule of the people led by wisdom in consensus built upon consultation among representatives) is specified, according to this argument, by the additions of *hikmah* (wisdom), a term used many times in the Qur'an, and *musyawarat,* derived from the Islamic concept of *syura*.[57] The final *sila,* calling for social justice for the people of Indonesia, similarly is indicative of the Islamic worldview in its adoption specifically of the term *keadilan* (justice), derived from the same root word as *adil*.[58]

      Just as this Islamization of language project and key terms used indicate that the formulation of *Pancasila* by the founding fathers was intended to be Islamic, Husaini looks to another concept from Al-Attas' thought to help explain why this original intention has been lost. The concept of de-Islamization of language refers to the emergence of an incongruence between the correct Islamic meaning of a term amongst the key terms in the language of Islam and how it is presently understood by the Muslims. In this regard, Husaini notes that terms such as *adil* and *adab* have been separated from their authentic meaning:

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[56] Husaini 2009a: pp. 213-228

[57] See for example Al-Qur'an 16:125: Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom (*hikmah*) and fair exhortation, and reason with them in the better way." and; Al-Quran 42:38: "And those who answer the call of their Lord and establish worship, and whose affairs are a matter of counsel (*shuraa*), and who spend of what We have bestowed on them."

[58] Husaini 2009a: pp. 213-228

> "The concept of *adil* is a concept which is specific to Islam, which according to the Muslims must be understood according to the perspective of the worldview of Islam. If the concept of *adil* is understood in the framework of the Western worldview, the meaning will be changed."

He then proceeds to provide examples of situations in which the concept of *adil* has been used to argue against Islamic values or prescriptions of Islamic law, indicating the de-Islamization of language. Examples cited in this regard include the transfer of the right to pardon a murderer away from the victim's family and to the state, despite the state having no right to do so in Islamic law. To link this back to *Pancasila,* Husaini states:

> "Due to this, if the term *adil* in the second *sila* – *Kemanusiaan yang adil dan beradab* – is separated from its meaning from the viewpoint of the worldview of Islam, it will also be separated from its true meaning, as was intended by the formulators of *Pancasila* themselves."[59]

For Husaini, then, *Pancasila* itself is not inherently problematic. Rather it is the misuse of *Pancasila* that is the issue. In addition to incorrect understandings of the terminology of *Pancasila* and what should be its correct interpretation, Husaini also is concerned with *Pancasila* being elevated to a status beyond its proper position. Rather than earlier historical attempts to impose a particular, secular-nationalist interpretation of *Pancasila* such as the P4 program and its enforcement

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[59] Husaini 2009a: pp. 215-216

through the *Asas Tunggal* legislation,[60] Husaini argues that for *Pancasila* to thrive, it must borrow from a more perfect source: Islam.[61]

This attitude towards *Pancasila*'s 'correct' understanding is built upon the concern that has historically been expressed by Islamists in Indonesia of the possibility of *Pancasila* becoming a civic religion or an alternative to religion. Examples of this include Prawiranegara's article 'Don't Let *Pancasila* Kill Islam,'[62] written at the time of the New Order attempts to implement *Asas Tunggal*, and Natsir's speeches at the *Konstituante* in explaining the threat of *Laa Diiniyah*, secularism or the absence of religion becoming the basis of the Indonesian state.[63] Husaini asks, somewhat sarcastically in order to illustrate his point: "What is the method to brush one's teeth according to *Pancasila*?"[64]

The purpose of asking this rhetorical question is to contrast what is held by Muslims to be a comprehensive way of life, a *din*, the religion of Islam, with a human project, that of *Pancasila.* The argument being made here is not that *Pancasila* is wrong or misguided due to not covering the minutiae of day-to-day life. Rather, the point is to outline that *Pancasila* is enriched, completed, and perfected when it is understood according to the Islamic Worldview. Islam is more perfect than *Pancasila* and other groups cannot use the justification of existence of *Pancasila* to deny Muslims the right to believe in the superiority of Islam. When *Pancasila* is altered from its original intent as a unifier of the nation and understood and used as a comprehensive ideology, it fails to achieve both purposes. *Pancasila* therefore does not lie in conflict with Islam; rather, if understood and implemented correctly in accordance with the Islamic Worldview, it can and should allow for the implementation of Islamic values and laws.[65]

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[60] Ramage 1995: pp. 35-38

[61] Husaini 2017

[62] Prawiranegara 2003

[63] Natsir 2022

[64] Husaini 2020b: pp. 20-23

[65] Husaini 2022b

The alternative of a rejectionist approach risks losing the gains won by the Muslim *ummah* in the increasing Islamization of society in Indonesia. Husaini notes that in recent decades, the adoption of the Islamic headscarf by Muslim women has increased dramatically, more Islamic educational institutions are being opened and thriving, the Islamic economic system is booming, and the influence of Islam in Indonesia has grown dramatically. If Muslims are to return to opposing the fundamental status and opposing the Indonesian state itself, they risk losing all of this progress like a ship that attacks its own foundation. The 'ship' of the Indonesian state is being steered into an Islamic direction and if instead the foundations are attacked, the ship may sink.[66]

This approach to *Pancasila* has, through its adoption by many Islamists who previously were strongly opposed to the Indonesian state, been hugely influential in changing the course of Indonesian Islamist thought. While historically he was the most well-known opponent of *Pancasila* as being in conflict with Islamic beliefs, Abu Bakar Ba'asyir has now adopted a near identical position on *Pancasila* and its relationship to Islam to that of Husaini. In a video released months after his release from prison in 2022, Ba'asyir outlines the reasoning behind his changed position on *Pancasila*:

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[66] Husaini 2022b

> "Why did the *ulama* agree to Indonesia being founded upon the basis of *Pancasila?* Because the foundation is *tauhid. Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa.* Previously for me, *Pancasila* was *syirik* (polytheism). That was me previously. However, after studying further, it is not possible that the *ulama* would agree to a state foundation of *syirik.* That is not possible. Because *ulama* must have sincere intentions."[67]

The change in strategy by Ba'asyir has not been limited just to verbal acknowledgements of an acceptance of *Pancasila*. It has also incorporated open acceptance of the legitimacy of the Indonesian state. In 2022, For the first time in its history, Ba'asyir's Pesantren Al-Mukmin Ngruki held an Indonesian Independence Day celebration on August 17. In attendance were numerous government officials, including various ministers from the Widodo government. The events commenced with the singing of *Indonesia Raya*, the national anthem, and included flag raising ceremonies, with the images of President Widodo and Vice President Ma'ruf Amin were positioned prominently beside an image of the *Garuda* in the backdrop behind speakers. All of these examples would have been unthinkable in previous years, as the refusal to salute the national flag and accept *Pancasila* were among the main reasons Ba'asyir and others from *Jamaah Islamiyah* were pressured to flee from Indonesia during the Soeharto regime.[68] It is pertinent to note here the shift in the symbolism of the Indonesian flag as noted by Bourchier, which was also expressed in the

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[67] Original wording: *Indonesia berdasarkan Pancasila itu mengapa disetujui ulama? Karena dasarnya tauhid. Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa. Dulunya saya, Pancasila itu syirik. Saya begitu dulu. Tapi setelah saya pelajari selanjutnya, ndak mungkin ulama menyetujui dasar negara syirik. Itu ndak mungkin. Karena ulama itu mesti niatnya ikhlas.* (https:// regional.kompas.com/ read/ 2022/ 08/ 07/ 095200978/ akui-pancasila-abu-bakar baasyir--karena-dasarnya-tauhid.-ketuhanan-yang) Accessed 31st August, 2022.
[68] Solahudin 2013: pp. 5-6, pp. 126-127

212 Islamist protests of 2016-17. The red and white of the flag had long been held up as a symbol of the secular nature of the state in opposition to the Islamists. Under the New Order, 'red and white' secular and 'green' Islamic factions had long existed in the military. Increasingly these divisions are being lost, and Islamists have adopted the symbols of the state as their own.[69]

Of particular note were the two keynote speakers at the event. The first of these was Hassan Abdullah Sahal, Head of the Pondok Pesantren Modern Gontor, while the main speaker was Adian Husaini. In his reflections on the event soon after, Husaini discusses that the issue Ba'asyir had with Pancasila, in a manner reminiscent of the concerns of Husaini, was its being pulled into a secular direction and misused. If Pancasila is understood in line with the original intentions of the founding fathers, those ulama who based Pancasila upon Islamic tauhid, this does not cause a problem for Ba'asyir. Husaini additionally outlined what the students at Ngruki describe as the "transformation" brought about by the change in viewpoint on Pancasila and how the removal of this confrontational approach to the state has allowed them to better focus on increasing their knowledge and becoming of better service to the people.[70]

This statement and change of approach by Ba'asyir is not an isolated one. It is reflective of the move of Indonesian Islamists who in the past were more rejectionist towards the state, away from a strategy of an openly confrontational relationship with Pancasila and the Indonesian state and towards an attempt to work **within** the state structures and that of Pancasila to Islamize how it is understood. This move in strategy demonstrates the influence that this new approach of modern Islamists to the state has been able to exert in diverting previously rejectionist figures away from violent extremism.

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[69] Bourchier 2019: p. 713
[70] https://member.adianhusaini.id/member/blog/detail/babak-baru-sejarah-pesantren-al-mukmin-ngruki Accessed 31st August, 2022

In light of the above, Husaini should not be viewed as an extremist figure in Indonesia. Rather, he has moved the trajectory of Islamist politics away from violent extremism. By opening a path through which Islamists are able to express and strive for their political aspirations, it prevents a deterioration into violent attacks against the state apparatus or upon civilian targets. It is a strategy that is also in line with earlier declarations of Sukarno during the Liberal Democracy Era in which he encouraged Islamists and proponents of other ideological viewpoints to struggle for their goals within the framework of *Pancasila* but for their own ideals.[71]

Conclusion

Recent years have witnessed the new approach of Indonesian Islamists in adopting a non-confrontational attitude towards *Pancasila* and the Indonesian state. This more accommodationist approach has been led by the adoption of aspects of the thought of Al-Attas, most importantly the concepts of Islamization of knowledge, Islamization of language, and an opposition to the philosophical underpinnings of secularism. Thought leaders such as Zarkasyi and Husaini have contributed positively towards building a more conciliatory discourse between political Islamists and mainstream nationalist thought within Indonesia that allows for ideological debates to occur free of violent extremism. This discourse has primarily been centred in the notion that *Pancasila* and the Indonesian state should no longer be problematised or opposed, but that the meanings of *Pancasila* can be enriched through adding what is best about *Pancasila* by practising Islamic values.

The thought of this group finds its origins in the theories of Al-Attas, and thinkers such as Zarkasyi and Husaini have adapted his philosophy to the Indonesian context to design a program of political change that is aimed at bringing about the revival of Islamic civilisation. These thinkers should not be viewed as merely copying concepts from Al-Attas and

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[71] Noer 1983.

pasting them into the Indonesian context. Rather, their grounding in Islamist movements and traditional centres of learning have provided them with the tools and analysis that allow them to benefit from Al-Attas' insights into the major problems facing the Muslim community and to provide a more substantive and far-reaching critique of secular ideals than had been constructed by earlier Indonesian Islamists.

The influence of Al-Attas' thought can be found in their analysis of Indonesian society and the influence of secularism, liberalism, and in the adoption of a linguistic analysis of *Pancasila* to find a reading of it that is not only tolerable to an Islamic worldview, but which provides a path in which *Pancasila* can be re-imagined as a tool to advance the cause of Islam. The adoption, adaptation, and diffusion of these ideas throughout the Islamist community in Indonesia has had a dramatic influence on the trajectory of Islamist thought and strategy in Indonesia. It has also opened doors for actors that were previously hostile to the state and potentially a security issue to be re-engaged with by the Indonesian state through peaceful means.

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