

*The RSIS Working Paper series presents papers in a preliminary form and serves to stimulate comment and discussion. The views expressed in this publication are entirely those of the author(s), and do not represent the official position of RSIS. This publication may be reproduced electronically or in print with prior written permission obtained from RSIS and due credit given to the author(s) and RSIS. Please email [RSISPublications@ntu.edu.sg](mailto:RSISPublications@ntu.edu.sg) for further editorial queries.*

---

**NO. 312**

**COMPARING THE GOVERNANCE OF ISLAM  
IN TURKEY AND INDONESIA  
DIYANET AND THE MINISTRY OF RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS**

**MARTIN VAN BRUINESSEN**

**S. RAJARATNAM SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES  
SINGAPORE**

**3 MAY 2018**

## **About the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies**

The S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) was officially inaugurated on 1 January 2007. Prior to this, it was known as the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (IDSS), which was established 10 years earlier, on 30 July 1996, by Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam, then Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence. Dr Tony Tan later became the elected seventh President of the Republic of Singapore. Like its predecessor, RSIS was established as an autonomous entity within Nanyang Technological University (NTU). RSIS' mission is to be a leading research and graduate teaching institution in strategic and international affairs in the Asia Pacific. To accomplish this mission, it will:

- Provide a rigorous professional graduate education with a strong practical emphasis
- Conduct policy-relevant research in defence, national security, international relations, strategic studies and diplomacy
- Foster a global network of like-minded professional schools

### **Graduate Programmes**

RSIS offers a challenging graduate education in international affairs, taught by an international faculty of leading thinkers and practitioners. The Master of Science degree programmes in Strategic Studies, International Relations, Asian Studies, and International Political Economy are distinguished by their focus on the Asia Pacific, the professional practice of international affairs, and the cultivation of academic depth. Thus far, students from 66 countries have successfully completed one of these programmes. In 2010, a Double Masters Programme with Warwick University was also launched, with students required to spend the first year at Warwick and the second year at RSIS.

A select Doctor of Philosophy programme caters to advanced students who are supervised by senior faculty members with matching interests.

### **Research**

Research takes place within RSIS' five components: the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (IDSS, 1996), the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR, 2004), the Centre of Excellence for National Security (CENS, 2006), the Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies (NTS Centre, 2008); and the Centre for Multilateralism Studies (CMS, 2011). Research is also conducted in the Studies in Inter-Religious Relations in Plural Societies (SRP, 2014) Programme, the National Security Studies Programme (NSSP, 2016), and the Science and Technology Studies Programme (STSP, 2017). Additionally, within the Office of the Executive Deputy Chairman, the Policy Studies group identifies new emerging trends of concern in the broad national security domain that may then be gradually incubated to form new policy-relevant RSIS research programmes. The focus of research in RSIS is on issues relating to the security and stability of the Asia Pacific region and their implications for Singapore and other countries in the region.

The School has four endowed professorships that bring distinguished scholars and practitioners to teach and to conduct research at the school. They are the S. Rajaratnam Professorship in Strategic Studies; the Ngee Ann Kongsi Professorship in International Relations; the NTUC Professorship in International Economic Relations; and the Peter Lim Professorship in Peace Studies.

### **International Collaboration**

Collaboration with other professional schools of international affairs to form a global network of excellence is a RSIS priority. RSIS maintains links with other like-minded schools so as to enrich its research and teaching activities as well as learn from the best practices of successful schools.

## Abstract

In spite of their overwhelmingly Muslim populations, Indonesia and Turkey are formally secular states though of different kind. However, both allocate a surprisingly high proportion of the state budget to the administration of Islam, considerably higher than most countries where Islam is the state religion. In Turkey during the years 1950-2000 and in Indonesia during the New Order period (1966-1998), the state invested heavily in the education of “enlightened” religious personnel and the dissemination of religious views that were compatible with the drive for modernisation and development. Turkey’s Directorate for Religious Affairs (Diyamet) controls a huge bureaucracy through which the state interacts with the pious conservative part of the population. Schools for the training of prayer leaders addressed the needs of the same segment of the population and were intended to facilitate the integration of these conservatives into the project of secular modernisation. However, these institutions had the unforeseen effect of enabling the social mobility of once marginalised conservatives, allowing them to gradually gain control of part of the state apparatus. Mutatis mutandis, very similar developments can be observed in Indonesia, where the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA) and the Council of Islamic Scholars (MUI) were expected to provide development-friendly religious guidance and prevent undesirable expressions of religiosity. After the fall of the Suharto regime, the MUI made itself independent of the government and instead became a vehicle through which various conservative religious groups strove to influence government policies, with various degrees of success.

\*\*\*\*\*

**Martin van Bruinessen** is Professor Emeritus of Comparative Studies of Modern Muslim Societies at Utrecht University. He is an anthropologist with a strong interest in politics, history and philology, and much of his work straddles the boundaries between these disciplines. He has conducted extensive fieldwork in Kurdistan (Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria) and in Indonesia and has taught on subjects ranging from Ottoman history and sociology of religion to theories of nationalism.

His involvement with Indonesia began with fieldwork in a poor urban *kampung* in Bandung (1983-84) and included stints as an advisor on research methods at LIPI (1986-90) and as a senior lecturer at the IAIN Sunan Kalijaga in Yogyakarta (1991-94). After his return to the Netherlands, van Bruinessen took part in founding the International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM) in 1998 and was one of its professors during 1999 through 2008. Since his formal retirement in 2011, he held visiting professorships in Indonesia as well as Turkey.

## Religious Institutions with a Budget Fit for an Army

It is at first sight surprising that the secular republics of Turkey and Indonesia have established huge bureaucracies for the administration of Islam, far larger and more pervasive than states that define themselves as Muslim or Islamic and formally recognise Islamic law. The budgets of their religious establishments have kept increasing over time and are of comparable magnitude with the military establishments of those countries. Religion, this seems to suggest, is to both states a matter of national security. Their main institutions for the administration of Islam are the Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*, usually abbreviated to *Diyanet*) in Turkey and the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) in Indonesia. Not only do they have vast administrative bureaucracies, they also deploy religious personnel; primarily mosque personnel (*imam*, *hatip*, and *va`iz*) in Turkey, and teaching personnel to Islamic schools (*madrrasah*) and universities in Indonesia.

Indonesia's MoRA ranks third among its most costly ministries. Its budget of IDR 62.2 trillion (EUR 3.85 billion) is 50 per cent higher than the Ministry of Education and Culture, and just below that of the national police force and more than half that of the Ministry of Defence.<sup>1</sup>

Figure 1: Indonesia's budget for security, education, and the administration of Islam

Institution	Budget Allocated for 2018
Ministry of Defence	IDR 105.7 trillion (EUR 6.5 billion)
Indonesian National Police	IDR 77.8 trillion (EUR 4.8 billion)
Ministry of Religious Affairs	IDR 62.2 trillion (EUR 3.85 billion)
Ministry of Education and Culture	IDR 40.1 trillion (EUR 2.55 billion)

In contrast to its Indonesian counterpart, Turkey's *Diyanet* budget does not include the cost of religious education at state schools, including the Imam Hatip schools, which are administered by the Ministry of National Education. For a fair comparison with Indonesia, the budget of the Imam Hatip schools should be added to that of *Diyanet*. It is therefore listed below (see Fig. 2) separately under the Education Ministry's total budget.<sup>2</sup> Turkey has allocated at least the equivalent of EUR 3.2 billion to the governance of Islam in 2018, and Indonesia EUR 3.85 billion.

<sup>1</sup> "10 Kementerian dan Lembaga dengan Anggaran Terbesar di 2018," *DetikFinance*, August 16, 2017, <https://finance.detik.com/berita-ekonomi-bisnis/3602510/10-kementerian-dan-lembaga-dengan-anggaran-terbesar-di-2018>.

<sup>2</sup> Data compiled from a variety of Turkish news sources: <http://gazetekarinca.com/2017/11/mebin-2018-butcesi-belli-oldu-egitime-ayrilan-kaynagin-yuzde-35i-din-ogretimi-icin/>; <http://www.sozcu.com.tr/2017/ekonomi/diyanet-butceyi-alt-ust-ediyor-2063795/>; <http://www.mebpersonel.com/meb/meb-in-2018-butcesi-belli-oldu-h217297.html>

Figure 2: Turkey's budget for security, education, and the administration of Islam

Institution	Budget Allocated for 2018
Ministry of National Defence	YTL 40.4 billion (EUR 8.7 billion)
General Directorate of Security	YTL 27.8 billion (EUR 6.0 billion)
National Intelligence Organization (MİT)	YTL 2 billion (EUR 0.5 billion)
Ministry of National Education	YTL 92.5 billion (EUR 19.8 billion)
Imam Hatip Schools <sup>3</sup>	YTL 6.4 billion (EUR 1.4 billion)
Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı	YTL 6.8 billion (EUR 1.8 billion)

It should be borne in mind that Indonesia's Muslim population is almost three times that of Turkey. In Indonesia, unlike Turkey, mosque personnel are not state employees, except for a small number of state mosques. They are usually supported by the mosque congregations and Muslim associations. Besides its share of the state budget, Indonesia's MoRA has yet other resources. It administers the Hajj, the annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca, and has in fact monopoly, charging fees far above the market price for such travel. It also administers *zakat* through its local-level offices, though here it has neither monopoly nor means of coercion. Bureaucrats of the ministry have often commented with regret on the potential resources represented by *zakat fitra*, of which only a minor fraction was ever realised. The ministry has been widely considered as Indonesia's "wetttest," meaning one with the greatest possibility of corruption.

For Turkey and the Turkish diaspora in Western Europe, Diyanet is also the main organiser of the Hajj and unilaterally establishes the prices.

It is striking that self-defined secular states invest so heavily in religious affairs and are moreover wary of competition from the private sector or civil society. Egypt and Pakistan, where Islam is the religion of the state and the Shariah is accepted as the chief source of legislation, have rather modest establishments. Egypt has the state *mufti's* office, *dar al-ifta'*, and the Azhar; Pakistan has the Council for Islamic Ideology and the Federal Shariat Court. However these apparatus do not stretch across the entire country like in Turkey and Indonesia.<sup>4</sup>

## Two Types of Secularism

The republics of Turkey and Indonesia represent two varieties of secularism. Neither of them have a state religion, although Islam has a special status in both. One cannot be a proper Turk without being Muslim despite the Constitution's declaration of "every citizen of Turkey is a Turk." And although Indonesia recognises six religions, Islam clearly dominates and MoRA is de facto the Ministry of

<sup>3</sup> The Imam-Hatip Schools' budget of YTL 6.4 billion is part of the Ministry of National Education's YTL 92.5 billion budget.

<sup>4</sup> Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, *Defining Islam for the Egyptian state: Muftis and fatwas of the Dar al-ifta'*, Leiden: Brill, 1997; Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *Islamic Leviathan: Islam and the making of state power*, Oxford etc.: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Islam. In both republics, there is a degree of separation of state and religion, but the modalities of the relations between state, society, and religion are quite different.

The Islamic resurgence that began in the 1970s and the increasing social and political activism visible in other religions have led to various attempts to revise the classical secularisation thesis (in which José Casanova's work stands out most) and a broader interest in the variety of patterns of secularity and secularism.<sup>5</sup> Secularism emerged in the Western world as a result of different historical trajectories. At least three different types may be distinguished:

- Separation of state and religion in order to protect religion from politics and to guarantee religious freedom. The US, which considers the Pilgrims who fled religious persecution in Europe as its founders, presents the most radical example of this type of secularism. Religion is highly present in the public sphere, and all religions have great freedom to play public roles. The state does not identify itself with any specific religion, although public ceremonies are pervaded with prayers and references to God – something Robert Bellah termed “civil religion”.<sup>6</sup>
- Separation of state and religion in order to protect the state and the political process from interference by religion. In its most radical form, this type of secularism (*laïcité*, ‘laicism’) is found in France, where revolutionaries had to conquer political space from domination by the powerful Catholic Church. Religion is largely banned from the public sphere; conspicuous symbols of religious identity are not allowed in state schools and other public institutions. Less radical forms of separation exist in the UK and in Scandinavian countries with established churches; and in countries like Germany, where the state provides certain facilities to the church.<sup>7</sup>
- Neutrality of the state towards religions (in the sense of keeping an equal distance between all religions). This variety of secularism typically emerges in multi-religious societies with long histories of inter-religious conflict. India is the most prominent example, where secularism is under permanent threat from Hindu fundamentalists. The Netherlands, where Protestants and Catholics have long fought each other, constitutes another case. Under the conditions of this type of secularism, rights and privileges available to the adherents of one religion are also available to other religions. Indonesia is a typical representative of this type of secular regime.

---

<sup>5</sup> José Casanova, *Public religions in the modern world*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994; Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan Van Antwerpen (eds), *Rethinking secularism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011; Talal Asad, *Formations of the secular: Christianity, Islam, modernity*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003.

<sup>6</sup> Robert N. Bellah, “Civil religion in America,” in: R. N. Bellah, *Beyond Belief*, New York: Harper & Row, 1970.

<sup>7</sup> Political theorist Alfred Stepan distinguishes various degrees of separation and speaks of the “separatist model” as in the US and France, the “established religion” model as in the UK, and the “positive accommodation” model of Germany, Switzerland and the Netherlands. In addition he gives extensive discussion of the “respect all, positive cooperation, principled distance” model that he finds in India, Senegal and Indonesia and which corresponds with our third type of neutrality of the state. Alfred Stepan, “The multiple secularisms of modern democratic and non-democratic regimes,” in: Calhoun et al., *Rethinking secularism*.

Turkey's *laiklik* resembles France's *laïcité* with the major difference being that protection of the state from religion goes well beyond separation to a pervasive effort by the state to define, shape, and control religion. Turkey was the first country in the Muslim world to completely abolish the Shariah, including the elements of family law that other modernising countries maintained. Most traditional Islamic institutions were also replaced with ones based on Western concepts.<sup>8</sup> The major exceptions are the *Mashikhat*, i.e., the office of the *shaykh al-islam*, and the Ministry of Shariah and the Pious Foundations (*Şeriat ve Evkaf Vekaleti*), which were replaced by an institution that has no Western equivalent. Diyanet is the major institution for state governance of religion, whose functioning and social reproduction depends on two other institutions for the education of religious personnel, namely the secondary-level Imam-Hatip schools, and the higher Islamic Studies Institutes and Faculties of Theology (*İlâhiyât*).

Prior to independence, Indonesia had been a colony of the Netherlands and had gone through three years of occupation by Japan during the war. Under Dutch rule a plural legal system prevailed, in which Muslims could have recourse to either Islamic or customary law, both of which had their law courts. The Dutch administration appointed Muslim scholars as advisers and had a bureau for the surveillance of Muslim affairs. There were independent Muslim associations, traditionalist, as well as reformist, which also had their own scholars who tended to be fiercely critical of the government-appointed *ulama*. Islam was a unifying factor in the independence struggle. The Japanese, who perceived Islam as a potential anti-colonial force, made efforts to politicise the independent *ulama* and merged the Muslim associations together under an umbrella organisation from which the post-independence Muslim political parties emerged.

Many Muslims then felt that independence should bring about the empowerment of Islam and wanted to symbolically enshrine the Shariah in the Preamble to the Constitution.<sup>9</sup> At that time, in 1945, Muslims constituted more than 90 per cent of the Indonesian population. However, a large proportion were “nominal” or “identity-card” Muslims, and less than half would vote for a Muslim party in the first free elections in 1955. Christians and Hindus, moreover, constituted majorities in significant parts of the country, and secular nationalists persuaded the Muslim nationalist activists to shelve all references to the Shariah in order not to alienate the non-Muslim population.

---

<sup>8</sup> Ahmet T. Kuru and Alfred Stepan, “Laïcité as an “ideal type” and a continuum. Comparing Turkey, France, and Senegal,” in Ahmet T. Kuru and Alfred Stepan (eds), *Democracy, Islam, and Secularism in Turkey*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.

<sup>9</sup> This reference to the Shariah, known as the *Jakarta Charter*, was to be inserted after the statement that the national ideology of Pancasila entails the belief in God. It continued that Muslim Indonesians would be obliged to practice the Shariah. At several critical points in Indonesian history there have been attempts to revive the Jakarta Charter, but each time this was rejected by a clear parliamentary majority. B. J. Boland, *The struggle of Islam in modern Indonesia*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971, passim; Mujiburrahman, *Feeling threatened: Muslim-Christian relations in Indonesia's New Order*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006; Nadirsyah Hosen, 'Religion and the Indonesian Constitution: a recent debate', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 36(3), 2005.

The large group of secular-minded nationalists explicitly referred to “the way of Turkey” as the best way of accommodating state and religion, or else a state with a general religious basis but no influence of religion on legislation. Muslim activists wanted an Islamic state, if only symbolically, but they could be persuaded to accept compromise. The principle of a state that respected all major religions was accepted during early negotiations between the various groups that took part in the independence struggle.<sup>10</sup> The state ideology of Pancasila does not mention Islam but speaks of the belief in “One God” as one of the five guiding principles of the nation. In most interpretations, this implies equal respect of the state towards, and mutual tolerance of the five (later six) officially recognised religions: Islam, Catholic and Protestant Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. While liberal Muslim spokespersons have insisted that Pancasila reflects Islamic values,<sup>11</sup> the idea of a Pancasila state has consistently been put forward as the irenic alternative to an Islamic state.<sup>12</sup> In his survey of secularisms, Alfred Stepan singled out Indonesia for its deliberate choice for religious pluralism, contrasting it with the lack of religious freedom and rejection of pluralism in Turkey.<sup>13</sup>

## The Institutions: Indonesia’s Ministry of Religious Affairs and Council of Ulama

It was a secular-dominated government that in 1946, while the struggle for Indonesia’s independence was still going on, established a Ministry of Religious Affairs as a gesture towards the committed Muslims. Its ministers and staff were drawn from Muslim organisations, but those in the top echelons had a Western-type education. The Ministry was, in a sense, the replacement of the Dutch and Japanese bureaus for the surveillance of Islam. The Ministry had small directorates for other religions too, whose directors and staff were adherents of those religions, but it was from the beginning very clearly the ministry for and of Muslims.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Boland, *The struggle of Islam in modern Indonesia*, p. 105 and passim.

<sup>11</sup> Fazlur Rahman, who was the chief teacher of Indonesia’s most prominent Muslim intellectual of the New Order period, Nurcholish Madjid, commented in a conference co-organised by the latter (Jakarta, 1985) that he considered Pancasila as “the Indonesian *tafsir* of Islam.”

<sup>12</sup> The formulation of Pancasila and its reference to God several times underwent revision. Belief in God was raised the first principle and its formulation changed to make it more explicitly monotheistic – obliging Hindus and Buddhists to reformulate their own belief systems in those terms. For debates on Pancasila see: Marcel Bonneff et al., *Pantjasila: trente années de débats politiques en Indonésie*, Paris: Maison des Sciences de l’Homme, 1980; Douglas E. Ramage, *Politics in Indonesia: democracy, Islam and the ideology of tolerance*, London: Routledge, 1995; Karel A. Steenbrink, “Muslim-Christian relations in the Pancasila state of Indonesia,” *The Muslim World* 88, 1998; François Raillon, “The return of Pancasila: secular vs. Islamic norms, another look at the struggle for state dominance in Indonesia,” in Michel Picard and Rémy Madinier (eds), *The politics of religion in Indonesia: syncretism, orthodoxy, and religious contention in Java and Bali*, Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2011.

<sup>13</sup> Stepan, “The multiple secularisms of modern democratic and non-democratic regimes.” See also Mirjam Künkler and Alfred Stepan (eds), *Democracy and Islam in Indonesia*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2013.

<sup>14</sup> On the early history of the Ministry, see: Karel A. Steenbrink, “Het Indonesische godsdienstministerie en de godsdiensten,” *Wereld en zending* 1(3), 1972; Boland, *The struggle of Islam in modern Indonesia*.

In due time, the Ministry came to control religious education in state schools, the Islamic courts (which administer marriage, divorce, and inheritance matters), *waqfs*, *zakat*, and the *Hajj*. In the first few decades of its existence, the Ministry was the main vehicle of governance through which committed Muslims attempted to impose their view of Islamic norms on the 90 per cent of the population who were at least nominally Muslim. In the view of many Muslim activists, the Ministry should have the task of improving the quality of Indonesia's Muslims and their religious practice. In the words of Saifuddin Zuhri (1962-1967), the last minister of the Sukarno period who supported the President's nationalist and anti-imperialist policies, the Ministry had a major task in nation-building, for religion was a crucial element of that process.<sup>15</sup>

The Ministry also became extremely important as an employer — it was the only government department where people who had no modern diplomas and only a religious education could find prestigious employment as civil servants.<sup>16</sup> At the national and local levels, competition between the major traditionalist and reformist associations for control of the Ministry was often fierce. The loudest criticism came not from secularists or minority groups, but from committed Muslims who felt unrepresented.<sup>17</sup>

Under the authoritarian rule of Suharto (1966-1998), the Ministry was used more consistently as the chief apparatus for the governance of Islam. Having destroyed the Communist Party and the left as a whole, Suharto and his generals were extremely wary of political Islam — the one remaining ideology with potential mass appeal. Suharto was himself a nominal Muslim, an adherent of syncretistic mystical-magical beliefs; his generals were either Christians or nominal Muslims like him, and in the first decades of his rule there was a pervasive distrust of organised Islam.

Suharto broke the Muslim associations' control over the Ministry and appointed a non-affiliated Western-educated scholar as his first minister of religion. The Ministry was given the task of shaping an Islam that was compatible with and supportive of the new regime's development policies, and it received a rapidly increasing budget to carry out its mission. The Ministry presided over the expansion of "modern" religious education in the form of state *madrastas* with a 70 per cent general — 30 per cent religious curriculum, as well as state Islamic universities (IAIN - State Institutes of Islamic Studies) that were meant to produce a class of enlightened religious bureaucrats and scholars. From the 1980s, the Ministry sent large numbers of graduates of these universities abroad for postgraduate studies, some to Middle Eastern countries, but the brightest of them to Europe, North America, Australia, or

---

<sup>15</sup> A.G. Muhaimin, "K.H. Saifuddin Zuhri: existensi agama dalam nation building," in Azyumardi Azra & Saiful Umam (eds), *Menteri-menteri agama RI. Biografi sosial-politik*, Jakarta: Badan Litbang Agama Departemen Agama, 1998.

<sup>16</sup> 'One of the most important informal functions of the ministry is (...) to provide jobs for deserving Moslems'. Clifford Geertz, *The religion of Java*, New York: The Free Press, 1960.

<sup>17</sup> 'In many places, the local offices of the Ministry are narrowly intertwined with local Muslim leaders and associations. In those places, there appears to be a real integration. Where this is not the case, and especially where the Ministry is perceived as the bulwark of one specific association and political party, the Ministry is by many not accepted as representing Islam.' Steenbrink, 'Het Indonesische godsdienstministerie'.

Japan where they mostly studied the humanities and social sciences of religion. Upon return, they were to fill the higher echelons of religious bureaucracy or join the IAINs as teaching staff.<sup>18</sup>

In 1975, Suharto established a national council of Islamic scholars — Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) — whose aim was to provide religious legitimisation to the government's development policies (for instance, the family planning program, which was quite controversial in Muslim circles). Members of the council were government-appointed and its composition reflected the spectrum of moderate mainstream Islam. The council became Indonesia's main fatwa-issuing body; at times, coercion was applied to ensure the fatwas corresponded with the government's needs.<sup>19</sup> The MUI had no monopoly over the issuing of fatwa. The large Muslim associations have their own bodies and procedures for answering religious questions, and even individual *ulama* may publish fatwas on issues of public concern. But the MUI's opinions carry weight because of government recognition, although not all of its fatwas have been in response to the government's needs. The MUI has distinguished itself also by the zealous investigation and condemnation of heretical or "deviant" sects and religious practices, and it has made efforts to persuade the government to take measures against such heresies.

Through the Ministry of Religion and the Ulama Council, the New Order government positioned itself as neutral between recognised religions but interventionist in Muslim affairs. The state defined what acceptable religion was and became heavily invested in promoting religious orthodoxy.

The Ministry has in each province, district and sub-district offices for religious affairs that conclude and register Muslim marriages, supervise religious education and preaching, and provide *zakat* and Hajj services. Until 2005, when they were placed under the Supreme Court, the religious courts were also administered and salaried by the Ministry.

## The Institutions: Turkey's Diyanet, Imam Hatip schools, Faculties of Theology

In 1924 when medreses and sharia courts were closed and the *Mashikhat* abolished, Diyanet was established to supervise religiosity. The old structure of provincial and district *muftis* remained and was brought under the *Diyanet İşleri Reisliği*. The choice of "Diyanet" rather than "Din" for the name of the new institution was significant as the former refers to all matters of religion outside the judicial

---

<sup>18</sup> Fuad Jabali and Jamhari (eds), *The Modernization of Islam in Indonesia: An Impact Study on the Cooperation between the IAIN and McGill University*, Montreal and Jakarta: Indonesia-Canada Islamic Higher Education Project, 2003; Yudi Latif, *Indonesian Muslim Intelligentsia and Power*, Singapore: ISEAS, 2008.

<sup>19</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, "Indonesia's ulama and politics: caught between legitimising the status quo and searching for alternatives," *Prisma, the Indonesian Indicator* no. 49, 1990; Martin van Bruinessen, 'Islamic state or state Islam? Fifty years of state-Islam relations in Indonesia' in Ingrid Wessel (ed.), *Indonesien am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Hamburg: Abera-Verlag, 1996; Moch. Nur Ichwan, 'Official reform of Islam: State Islam and the Ministry of Religious Affairs in contemporary Indonesia, 1966-2004', PhD thesis, Tilburg, Universiteit van Tilburg, 2006.

sphere.<sup>20</sup> The two major tasks entrusted by the new regime to Diyanet were to “purge religion of superstitious beliefs and practices” and to reconcile religion with the republican reforms and republican ideology.<sup>21</sup>

Mosque personnel (*imam*, *hatip*, and *va`iz*) of the major mosques continued to receive salaries from the state — the administration moved between Diyanet and the Directorate of Pious Foundations a few times before finally settling with the former. Diyanet had to supervise the content of the Friday sermon (*hutbe*) and other sermons (*va`az*), ensuring they reflect an interpretation of Islam that is compatible with modernity. In practice it was the *mufti*, who besides his primary task of answering religious questions, had to keep a close watch over the *hatip* and *vaiz*. Not only did he have to provide them with model sermons, he had to keep records of the sermons' content in his district. An American who visited the first *Iman Hatip Mektebi* in the late 1920s, warmed by the spirit of religious reform he perceived, said: “The director... had... an enthusiastic belief in the possibilities of reforming Islam to become a vital and inspiring force in the life of the new Turkey.”<sup>22</sup>

In spite of this enthusiasm, Diyanet was neither a dynamic nor influential institution prior to the multi-party period. In 1950, there were efforts to give it more muscle, partly due to draft legislation prepared since the late 1930s.<sup>23</sup> Voices called for loosening of the connection between the state and the religious institution in the name of secularism, but these remained ineffective.<sup>24</sup> The increased perception of Diyanet's importance was reflected in frequent political intervention — the first three Diyanet presidents held their positions for life, whereas most of the later appointees were removed before completion of their five-year term, some even within less than a year.<sup>25</sup>

There were also concerns about the dearth of well-trained Islamic scholars with the proper “progressive” and “secularist” mindset. Not wishing to leave that crucial need unattended, the state expanded the number and level of training institutes for *imam* and *hatip*, from which a minority of graduates can go on to higher education in the Faculty of Theology.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Explained clearly, with a summary of the debates on this issue, in Ismail Kara, 'Eine Behörde im Spannungsfeld von Religion und Staat: das "Präsidium für religiöse Angelegenheiten" in Günter Seufert and Jacques Waardenburg (eds), *Turkish Islam and Europe*, Istanbul-Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1999. (Kara published an updated version of this rich article as “Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı: devletle Müslümanlar arasında bir kurum,” in Yasin Aktay (ed.), *İslâmcılık [Modern Türkiye’de siyasi düşünce*, 6], Istanbul: İletişim, 2004.

<sup>21</sup> Kara, “Eine Behörde im Spannungsfeld von Religion und Staat.”

<sup>22</sup> Henry E. Allen, quoted in Gotthard Jäschke, “Der Islam in der neuen Türkei. Eine rechtsgeschichtliche Untersuchung,” *Die Welt des Islams* 10, 1965.

<sup>23</sup> Gotthard Jäschke, “Der Islam in der neuen Türkei. Eine rechtsgeschichtliche Untersuchung,” *Die Welt des Islams* 1, 1951; Gotthard Jäschke, “Neuordnung der geistlichen Verwaltung in der Türkei,” *Die Welt des Islams* 10, 1965.

<sup>24</sup> This wish for an independent religious institution is associated with the name of Ali Fuad Başgil, who made concrete proposals to make Diyanet financially and morally independent from the state. Jäschke, “Neuordnung der geistlichen Verwaltung in der Türkei.”

<sup>25</sup> Kara, “Eine Behörde im Spannungsfeld von Religion und Staat.” The major exception was Tayyar Altıkulaç, a nationalist appointed by Ecevit in 1977, who served the military regime very well and lasted eight years until he retired at his own request.

<sup>26</sup> Howard A. Reed, “Turkey's new Imam-hatip schools,” *Die Welt des Islams* 4(2-3), 1955; Gotthard Jäschke, “Vom Islam in der heutigen Türkei,” *Die Welt des Islams* 18, 1977, 1-18; Howard A. Reed, 'The faculty of

The Imam Hatip schools, whose numbers rapidly increased in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, were a response to two distinct but potentially contradictory demands. On one hand, Diyanet and the government at large needed mosque personnel with a progressive attitude and academic knowledge of Islam to replace the *hoca* who were still steeped in mystical-magical lore, and to raise the quality of its bureaucrats. Diyanet itself needed personnel with proper higher education in Islamic studies. On the other, large segments of the population resented the closure of the *medrese* and wanted a medrese-type rather than a purely secular education for their children. Many students attending Imam Hatip schools never intended to become just prayer leaders in a mosque, but had their eyes on other professional fields while cultivating piety. Since the 1970s, the admission of Imam Hatip graduates to higher education (and especially to police and military academies) has been a fiercely contested issue between the secularists and Islamists.

Besides formal education and sermons, the fatwa is another form of religious guidance that is more individualised and contextualised. The local-level *mufti* presumably answers religious questions orally, but for more serious questions there is a higher instance. Diyanet's *Din İşleri Yüksek Kurulu* answers questions and issues fatwas.<sup>27</sup> Unlike Indonesia, the government of Turkey has not requested specific fatwas from Diyanet to endorse policies. More recently, it has been theology professor Hayrettin Karaman rather than the President of Diyanet who provided Recep Tayyip Erdoğan with opinions justifying his policies during his time as Prime Minister and President.

A particular variety of fatwa is the instructions given by Diyanet and the Directorate of Pious Foundations to those visiting the re-opened saints' shrines, such as that at Eyüp. The signboards list all the magical-mystical practices that used to be performed there but are forbidden now.<sup>28</sup> Although most of the founders of the Republic were hardly strictly orthodox and conscientiously practising Muslims, the state has consistently endorsed the Hanafi Sunni mainstream view against all varieties of popular religiosity, Sufism, Alevism, and other forms of heterodoxy.

---

divinity at Ankara', *The Muslim World* 46, 1956, 295-312 and 47, 1957; Günter Seufert, 'The Faculties of Divinity in the current tug-of-war', *Les annales de l'autre islam* 6, 1999.

<sup>27</sup> Diyanet's fatwas have drawn little attention from scholars. The only study found was by Jak den Ekster, who in 1989 visited the Diyanet offices and could study the questions sent by migrants in Western Europe and the Yüksek Kurul's answers. Jak den Ekster, *Diyanet: een reis door de keuken van de officële Turkse islam*, Beverwijk: Centrum Buitenlanders Peregrinus, 1990. Unlike Indonesia's MUI, Diyanet does not publish its fatwas on its website; however, the site *İslam ve İnsan* ([www.insanveislam.org](http://www.insanveislam.org)) announced that it will soon launch a page with Diyanet fatwas (announcement dated 2016). While writing these pages, the daily newspaper *Hürriyet Daily News* reported on three Diyanet fatwas, concerning bitcoin ('not appropriate at this point in time'), men dyeing their hair black ('not appropriate') and working in places that sell alcoholic beverages ('not permissible'). <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkeys-top-religious-body-issues-fatwa-on-hair-dye-123368>.

<sup>28</sup> See description of the müftülük's intervention at Eyüp in: Martin van Bruinessen, "Religious practices in the Turco-Iranian world: continuity and change," in Mohammed-Reza Djilili, Alessandro Monsutti and Anna Neubauer (ed.), *Le monde turco-iranien en question*, Paris: Karthala, 2008. Online at [https://www.academia.edu/2529075/Religious\\_practices\\_in\\_the\\_Turco-Iranian\\_world\\_continuity\\_and\\_change](https://www.academia.edu/2529075/Religious_practices_in_the_Turco-Iranian_world_continuity_and_change).

This last example brings us to the role Diyanet and MoRA have played in the struggle against superstition, heresy, and deviant sects. In both cases, it went well beyond the issuing of fatwas against superstitions and heterodox beliefs and practices.

## The State as the Champion of Orthodoxy

When Indonesia gained independence, perhaps not more than half of its nominally Muslim population regularly practised the canonical obligations. Spirit beliefs and magical-mystical practices were common, and the *slametan* — a food offering and communal meal to propitiate spirits — was a widespread and popular ritual. Clifford Geertz' classical description of three styles of Javanese religion (as he encountered them in the mid-1950s) remains helpful.

The *santri* were the “orthodox” scripturalist Muslims, of whom the rural mass was oriented towards *pesantren* (traditional schools that teach classical Arabic texts on doctrine and prescriptions). The *abangan* were syncretists and had little knowledge of scriptural Islam. They viewed the world as one teeming with spirits and other invisible forces besides the one God of Islam, and had the *slametan* as their chief ritual. The *priyayi* were the traditional aristocracy who held sophisticated variants of *abangan* beliefs known as *kepercayaan* (beliefs) or *kebatinan* (esotericism), in which meditation and the metaphysical interpretation of *wayang* figured prominently.<sup>29</sup> Geertz's three patterns were not meant to denote distinct social groups, although his work has been received as if it did; he was aware that a person could take part in all three. Nonetheless, there were a large number of people who were primarily *abangan*.

Both Sukarno and Suharto personally adhered to *abangan* beliefs and practices. Suharto's generals, as mentioned, were either *abangan* or Christians and were suspicious of *santri*. It is therefore surprising to find that by the end of the Suharto era, there were very few *abangan* left. Even Suharto himself gradually shifted positions, with *santri* spiritual advisers eventually replacing his *abangan* teachers, and around 1990, allied politically with former *santri* opponents. The disappearance of the *abangan* was not due to a single cause and attempted explanations are inevitably complex, but besides economic development, urbanisation, and the spread of mass education, state policies were crucial in the process.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The religion of Java*, New York: The Free Press, 1960. Forty years later, Andrew Beatty replicated Geertz' research and reported his findings with a different emphasis. He found that participants in the same *slametan* ritual held vastly different interpretations of the meaning of the ritual and their own intentions in participating. Andrew Beatty, “Adam and Eve and Vishnu: syncretism in the Javanese *slametan*,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2, 1996; idem, *Varieties of Javanese religion: an anthropological account*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

<sup>30</sup> The most convincing attempt at an explanation is given in: Robert W. Hefner, “Where have all the *abangan* gone? Religionization and the decline of non-standard Islam in contemporary Indonesia,” in Michel Picard and Rémy Madinier (eds), *The politics of religion in Indonesia: syncretism, orthodoxy, and religious contention in Java and Bali*, Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2011. See also Robert W. Hefner, “Islamizing Java? Religion and politics in rural East Java,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 46, 1987.

The mass killings that accompanied Suharto's rise to power in 1965 and 1966 targeted alleged communists, most of whom were *abangan*. The new regime embarked on a massive programme of ideological indoctrination (*pembinaan*, meaning "building up") to turn the population into loyal and obedient subjects. The programme was carried out jointly by MoRA and the Ministry of the Interior, and it involved basic Islamic teaching. In all schools, religion became an obligatory subject taught two hours per week — and only the five recognised religions were taught. Efforts by the *kebatinan* movements to gain recognition as a sixth official religion failed. They were not banned but redefined as "cultural traditions" and excluded from mention in the religion curriculum.<sup>31</sup>

Non-state actors also played a major part in the conversion of *abangan* to *santri* Islam. Muslim associations sent preachers and missionaries to *abangan* districts, and organised Muslim rituals (readings of devotional texts about the Prophet, collective recitation of litanies, etc.) to replace *wayang* and other less Islamic celebrations. These were probably more effective than the activities sponsored by MoRA.

Around 1990 Suharto relinquished his last *abangan* allies, went on the Hajj, and embraced the emerging Muslim middle class. He allowed the establishment of an organisation of Muslim academics, opened an Islamic bank, and founded a pro-Islamic newspaper. Suharto eventually succeeded in turning reformist and even fundamentalist Muslims into his political allies (against Christians, *abangan*, and liberals). The 1990s were a period of rapidly increasing visibility of Islam. Showing oneself to be an observant Muslim became a wise career advice, and has remained so since.

Turning now to Turkey, Diyanet too has made great efforts to strengthen orthodoxy and get rid of all heterodoxy. If it was less successful than Indonesia, and Alevism has consolidated itself as an alternative form of Islam, it was not for lack of trying.

Diyanet's task was to rid Islam of two enemies of progress — *hurafat* (superstition) and *irtica* ("reaction", meaning all sorts of fundamentalism or Islamism). During the Cold War, communism was defined as the number one national enemy and Islam was regarded as the best antidote to communism. As in Indonesia during the early Suharto years, the elite might not be practising Muslims themselves but they believed it was better for the masses to be pious. A delicate balance had to be found and maintained between endorsing Islam and fighting Islamism. Special care was therefore given to the promotion of an "enlightened" Islam compatible with the national ideology.

The Suharto regime initially opted for a more liberal version of "enlightened Islam" than Turkey was to do. The chief Muslim legitimiser of the secular New Order, Nurcholish Madjid, studied in the US under Fazlur Rahman and was a staunch defender of religious pluralism. The Ministry sent promising graduates to study in the West and stimulated the humanities and social sciences-based study of

---

<sup>31</sup> Paul Stange, "Legitimate" mysticism in Indonesia," *Review of Indonesian and Malayan Affairs* 20, 1986.

Islam at the IAINs. In Turkey, the Faculty of Theology in Ankara followed a similar course and became the country's main centre for hermeneutics of Islam, where in the 80s and 90s the influence of Fazlur Rahman (as well as Hasan Hanafi and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd) was strong.<sup>32</sup> The state ultimately opted for a more conservative and nationalist ideology. The "Turkish-Islamic synthesis" developed by right-wing intellectuals in the 1970s was adopted as the state ideology by the military regime after the 1980 coup d'etat, and made an obligatory part of the school curriculum.<sup>33</sup>

Diyanet was given an important role in the formulation and propagation of the Turkish-Islamic synthesis, which its president, Tayyar Altıkulaç, carried out with apparent enthusiasm. Under his presidency (1978-86), Diyanet was perhaps more successful in implementing state policies than under his predecessors. This was the period of expansion into Western Europe, where many opponents of the regime had found a safe haven and had started organising. With its army of *din müşavirleri* in the consulates and embassies and imams in the Diyanet-controlled mosques, Diyanet began acting as the long arm of the Turkish regime. Most of the local mosque committees that did not belong to the *Süleymancı* or *Milli Görüş* networks were brought under Diyanet. There were frequent reports that the *din müşavirleri* were in fact intelligence officers and were developing the mosques into a spy network.

The post-1980 offensive to impose the Turkish-Islamic version of orthodoxy through school education and mosque construction led to a strong reaction among Alevi communities, and may be the primary cause of the Alevi resurgence. Alevism had been praised by sections of the Kemalist elite as a specifically Turkish version of Islam without Shariah and a useful ally against *irtica*. However, de facto discrimination and suspicion of Alevis as potentially subversive continued for most of the Republican period. Diyanet officials often criticised Alevism; its president, Akseki, had in 1949 been at the heart of a controversy when he wrote the foreword to a book arguing that Alevism was outside the boundaries of Islam.<sup>34</sup> Professors of theology had, in a missionary spirit, written books and articles arguing that "true" Alevism was compatible with orthodox Islam, but unfortunately many Alevis' beliefs and practices deviated from this version.<sup>35</sup> Although quantitative data is lacking, there are strong indications that large numbers of Alevis gradually adopted Sunni practices after migration to urban centres, and attempted to hide their Alevi background to get rid of the stigma of this identity. The post-1980 efforts to speed up this process backfired, however. The Sunni Islamic textbooks and the newly constructed mosques in Alevi villages served as useful icons in the mobilisation of Alevi dissent.

---

<sup>32</sup> For a critical overview of the 'Ankara school' of Islamic theology, see Yasin Aktay, "The historicist dispute in Turkish-Islamic theology" in Sinasi Gunduz and Cafer S. Yaran (eds), *Change and essence: dialectical relations between change and continuity in the Turkish intellectual tradition*, Washington DC: The Council for Values and Philosophy, 2005.

<sup>33</sup> Sam Kaplan, "Din-u devlet all over again? The politics of military secularism and religious militarism in Turkey following the 1980 coup," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34, 2002; Étienne Copeaux, "La nation turque est musulmane': histoire, islam, nationalisme en Turquie", *Les annales de l'autre islam* 6, 1999; Gökhan Çetinsaya, "Rethinking nationalism and Islam: some preliminary notes on the roots of "Turkish-Islamic synthesis" in modern Turkish political thought," *The Muslim World* 89, 1999.

<sup>34</sup> Kara, "Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı," n.33.

<sup>35</sup> This included such men as Esad Coşan and İbrahim Ağâh Çubukçu.

Unlike Indonesia's *abangan* and *kebatinan*, Turkey's Alevi did not fade away. Rather than becoming assimilated into the national Hanafi Sunni consensus, Alevism to some extent was consolidated as an alternative version of Islam, not supported by the state.<sup>36</sup> One section of the broader Alevi movement, represented by the CEM Vakfı, has made efforts to persuade Diyanet and the government to recognise Alevi Islam as of equal standing with Sunni Islam. However, neither the pre-Justice and Development Party (AKP) secular government coalitions nor the AKP governments have shown any willingness to revise their commitment to Sunni orthodoxy.

Diyanet also was to struggle against “undesirable” forms of Sunni Islam, notably the Sufi orders and similar congregations (of which the Nurcu movements were the most prominent), all considered as expressions of *irtica*. Its efforts to combat these milder deviations from the official orthodoxy proved even less successful than it was in assimilating the Alevi. Members of these congregations in fact found positions within Diyanet from which they could protect these congregations and could even further their influence. There have been repeated waves of purges of the Diyanet organisation to weed out those undesirables.

## Muslim Civil Society and the State

Turkey and Indonesia differ considerably in the degree to which they allow an independent civil society. Indonesia boasts the largest Muslim associations in the world, with tens of millions of members, and had, in several periods of its history, large Muslim political parties. Until 1973, the traditionalist association Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) was in fact a political party; the largest reformist association, Muhammadiyah, constituted an important component of the other major Muslim party, Masyumi.

In the elections of 1955, these parties received 18.5 and 21 per cent of the vote respectively. Masyumi was banned in 1960 because some of its leaders took part in an armed rebellion against the government. NU remained firmly allied with Sukarno along with the Communist party under the revolutionary banner of NASAKOM (Nationalism, Religion, and Communism). There had previously been competition between NU and Muhammadiyah for control of MoRA, but by now the ministry was a bastion of NU.

Suharto's policy of depoliticising Islam and society in general, after his rise to power in 1966, included attempts to replace political fervour with support for his programme of economic development instead. The Ministry was “de-NU-ised” and placed under non-political technocrat ministers. The top Masyumi leaders were not allowed back into politics and the organisation was refashioned into Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia (DDII - Indonesian Council for Islamic Predication) — a vehicle for religious

---

<sup>36</sup> The comparison is developed further in the author's unpublished lecture “Muslims, Minorities and Modernity: The restructuring of heterodoxy in the Middle East and Southeast Asia,” available online at <http://www.let.uu.nl/~martin.vanbruinessen/personal/publications/Oratie%20korte%20versie.htm>.

predication (*da`wa*). Others were allowed by the regime to establish a successor party, but it never gained much credibility and remained small.

In 1973 all Muslim parties were obliged to merge into a single, closely monitored party under a compliant leadership; the Christian and nationalist parties had to merge into another; while a military-dominated corporatist body, Golkar, was made into the all-powerful government party. A decade later, all associations and parties were forced to renounce all ideological foundations other than Pancasila and even Muslim associations were not allowed to be based on Islam.<sup>37</sup> Managing to persuade NU and Muhammadiyah to accept those policies was considered to be one of the greatest successes of Munawir Syadzali, the Minister of Religious Affairs at that time.

In the final decade of the Suharto regime, the state strongly endorsed new *santri* Muslim activities, including a new association for the educated Muslim middle class and bureaucracy. Some analysts perceived this as the flourishing of civil society, but on closer inspection it was clear that associations were more tightly controlled by the state than before.<sup>38</sup> It is only in the post-Suharto period that a reversal of the process could be seen, and civil society organisations were struggling to regain control of powers that had been monopolised by the state — including the power to define what orthodoxy is.

Turkey never had strong Muslim associations like Indonesia has. The closest parallel are of the Sufi orders (*tarikat*) and similar groups based on specific religious teachings and practices. All *tarikat* were banned by law in 1925 but several subsisted underground or in different forms. When Nur groups, which were essentially reading circles focusing on the spiritual writings of Said Nursi, emerged in the 1950s, they were included in the ban of *tarikat*. In the multiparty period, these *cemaat* (anachronistic term following post-1980 usage) had some influence on politics because of the vote potential that they represented. Members of various *cemaat* even reached influential positions within Diyanet, and rivalry between the various *cemaat* changed the internal dynamics of Diyanet between 1950 and 1980. Ismail Kara gave a few interesting examples, which also indicated the power of some of these *cemaat*: a Diyanet president (Erdem) was fired for refusing to publish an anti-Nurcu pamphlet written by his deputy, who himself belonged to a *tarikat*. Erdem responded with a pamphlet against the *tarikat* concerned, published in the name of Diyanet.<sup>39</sup>

The strongest of these *cemaat* during the 1960s and 1970s was probably the Süleymancı group, a deeply conservative branch of the Naqshbandiyya *tarikat* that had strong connections with the Justice Party. The Süleymancı established a wide-ranging network of Qur'an courses that was more successful than those organised under the auspices of Diyanet, presumably because conservative Muslims had little confidence in state-sponsored interpretations of Islam. The Süleymancı was also the first to establish mosques in Western Europe and thereby gained an influence well beyond their

---

<sup>37</sup> Bruinessen, "Islamic state or state Islam?"

<sup>38</sup> Robert W. Hefner, "Islam, state, and civil society: ICMI and the struggle for the Indonesian middle class," *Indonesia* 56, 1993; Bruinessen, "Islamic state or state Islam?"

<sup>39</sup> Kara, "Eine Behörde im Spannungsfeld von Religion und Staat"

numbers in the Turkish diaspora.<sup>40</sup> Diyanet in those years only sent imams to Europe during Ramazan, the month of highest participation in collective worship, but was not very successful in imposing its authority. There were cases of fights breaking out in mosques between the supporters of *cemaat* and Diyanet imams over who could lead the *tarawih* prayers; one time, even a firearm was drawn. Such events must have been among the reasons for the concerted effort to impose state authority on the Turkish diaspora through Diyanet after the 1980 military coup.

Necmettin Erbakan's National Salvation Party (MSP) and its various later incarnations were important vehicles through which conservative Muslim civil society managed to get a grip on government policies. The MSP took part in several government coalitions during the 1970s and had considerable influence on Diyanet during that decade, eventually losing it in the course of the purges carried out in the wake of the 1980 coup.

Even more important were the MSP's (and its successor parties') efforts to empower the Imam Hatip schools and the segments of society that closely identified themselves with them. The number of Imam Hatip schools not only kept expanding, but pro-Islamic politicians fought successfully for the right of Imam Hatip graduates to continue their education in non-religious professional or academic universities. This was a crucial contribution to the emergence of a pious and well-educated middle class ready to challenge their secularist peers.

In the wake of yet another military clamp-down on the resurgent Islamic movement and measures to prevent Imam Hatip graduates from infiltrating the state apparatus — the “soft coup” of 28 February 1997 — the Imam Hatip community was well-organised and well-heeled enough to send hundreds of students, many of them headscarf-wearing females, abroad for university education that was not accessible to them in Turkey.<sup>41</sup> The spectacular rise and success of the AKP in the new millennium rightly serve as an illustration of the successful social mobility of the Imam Hatip community. Erdoğan himself and many co-founders of the party were graduates (and even former classmates) of the Istanbul Imam Hatip school.

## The Limits of Control

The history of Imam Hatip schools shows that social engineering has its limits and may backfire. Designed to produce “enlightened” religious functionaries and foster an understanding of Islam that was hostile to communism and socialism and compatible with the Kemalist Republican project, they

---

<sup>40</sup> Altan Gökalp, “Les fruits de l'arbre plutôt que ses racines: le Suleymanisme” in Marc Gaborieau, Alexandre Popovic and Thierry Zarcone (ed.), *Naqshbandis. Cheminements et situation actuelle d'un ordre mystique musulman*, Istanbul / Paris: Editions ISIS, 1990; Martin van Bruinessen, “Islam en politiek,” in Martin van Bruinessen, et al., *Turkije in crisis: Een sociale, politieke en economische analyse*, Bussum/Antwerpen: Het Wereldvenster, 1982.

<sup>41</sup> İsmail Çağlar, *From symbolic exile to physical exile: Turkey's Imam Hatip schools, the emergence of a conservative counter-elite, and its knowledge migration to Europe*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013.

became the Trojan horse through which previously marginalised, conservative religious groups could conquer parts of the state apparatus. The conditions that made this possible were those of the multiparty system and coalition governments that had to please major sections of the electorate. Military interventions only served to slow down, not to stop this process. Moreover, the decision of the post-1980 military regime to adopt the Turkish-Islamic synthesis as an ideological weapon against the left as well as against “radical” Islam further empowered religious conservatives.

The Gülen movement, which was one of the *cemaat* that the military regime wished to wipe out, made its major advances precisely in those years. Unlike the Imam Hatip community, it renounced public expressions of Islamic identity and ordered its followers to adopt a secularist habitus and prepare for what Maoists once called “the long march through the institutions.” The Gülen movement was extremely pro-state and Gülen’s ideas showed similarities with the Turkish-Islamic synthesis. The movement did not use the Imam Hatip schools, but rather, purely secular schools and exam-prep courses (*dershane*) as channels for entering state institutions. It is not clear to what extent it infiltrated Diyanet; its priorities were with other state organs. In Europe, followers of the movement would attend Friday prayer in Diyanet mosques, even while wary of being spied upon by Diyanet imams.

Milli Görüş, along with its more radical splinter, Cemalettin Kaplan’s caliphate movement, had been purged from Diyanet after 1980 and came to depend much on its organisation in Europe. While it eventually became one of the targets Diyanet attempted to weaken during the 1980s and 1990s, it was primarily a political organisation but built up a strong mosque network whose imams had Imam Hatip and Theology Faculty backgrounds. In Turkey, the Imam Hatip network incorporated a much broader spectrum of religious conservatives and not just those affiliated with Milli Görüş and the Islamic party. The network provided all mosque personnel as well as a large part of bureaucratic staff to Diyanet, and was a major factor in the electoral success of the AKP. Co-operation with the Gülen movement allowed the AKP elite to gradually expand control over organs of the state, against considerable resistance from the secularist establishment. By 2010, the AKP government, which presumably had more sympathisers among the Diyanet personnel than any previous government, gained full control of the institution and gradually turned it into an instrument of AKP policies. The government embarked upon the construction of numerous new mosques and Imam Hatip schools, raising Diyanet’s budget to unprecedented levels in the following years.<sup>42</sup>

It is ironic that the institutions through which the state exerted governance of Islam and intended to reform the mindset of its conservative Muslim subjects were gradually taken over by the latter and weaponised by them. This was especially evident during the 2016 failed military coup, when Diyanet used mosque loudspeakers throughout the country to call upon civilians to come out onto the streets in defence of Erdoğan and fight the soldiers taking part in the coup attempt.

---

<sup>42</sup> Ahmet Erdi Öztürk, “Turkey’s Diyanet under AKP rule: from protector to imposer of state ideology?” *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 16(4), 2016.

Something similar happened in Indonesia after the fall of the Suharto regime. Suharto's last decade during the 1990s saw a significant shift in the state's attitude towards strict Muslims, who came to replace *abangan* and Christians as most privileged for appointments and promotions. The transition from autocracy beginning in 1998 led to a period of unstable governments based on coalitions of a very broad range of political parties. Secular politicians, perceiving that they needed to win over Muslim constituencies, tended to make symbolic gestures serving the agenda of the most vocal but not necessarily the most representative Muslim groups. The longest-serving president after Suharto, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (2004-2014), allowed conservative, bigoted, and intolerant voices of the *umma* to gain discursive dominance and did little to protect minorities. This was especially apparent during his second term when the person he appointed to lead MoRA tyrannised religious minorities and further empowered the more conservative segments of the *umma* as well as non-violent Islamic radicals.<sup>43</sup>

The MUI, which for the most part had been the obedient legitimiser of Suharto's policies, re-invented itself as an independent civil society actor. Claiming a privileged position as the authoritative voice of Islam, it received only a modest amount of support from the government. The MUI soon found a more important source of finance in the lucrative business of *halal* labelling for the food and cosmetics industries, as well as for banks moving into shariah-compliant forms of banking. It organised national congresses at which it co-opted new members (i.e., these were no longer selected by the government, but neither by any representative body outside MUI itself). The new members were predominantly men affiliated with conservative and radical movement, and largely excluded liberals and progressives. This composition was reflected in the fatwas the MUI issued in the following years.

The council positioned itself firmly on the conservative side of the spectrum and adopted a militant attitude towards all it considered heterodox: mystical sects, the Ahmadiya minority and the *Shi`a*, liberal interpretations of Islam, and the very idea of religious pluralism. The MUI began to issue unsolicited advice to the government and lobbied to have its fatwas — including anti-minority fatwas — adopted as the basis of legislation.<sup>44</sup> The MUI allowed itself to become a vehicle for Islamist groups that wanted to change the current secular order. Thus it recently played a significant part in preventing the re-election of Jakarta's Christian governor and to having him jailed for blasphemy, thereby indirectly also attacking the incumbent president, Joko Widodo.<sup>45</sup> The latter was reported to

---

<sup>43</sup> Robin Bush, "Religious politics and minority rights during the Yudhoyono presidency," in Edward Aspinall, Marcus Mietzner and Dirk Tomsa (eds), *The Yudhoyono presidency: Indonesia's decade of stability and stagnation*, Singapore: ISEAS, 2015.

<sup>44</sup> Moch. Nur Ichwan, "Towards a Puritanical Moderate Islam: The Majelis Ulama Indonesia and the Politics of Religious Orthodoxy," in Martin van Bruinessen (ed.), *Contemporary Developments in Indonesian Islam: Explaining the "Conservative Turn"*, Singapore: Institute of South East Asian Studies, 2013.

<sup>45</sup> Bastiaan Scherpen, "Enjoining right, forbidding wrong: The MUI and Indonesian Islam," *Strategic Review*, July-September 2017, [http://www.sr-indonesia.com/in\\_the\\_journal/view/enjoining-right-forbidding-wrong-the-mui-and-indonesian-islam](http://www.sr-indonesia.com/in_the_journal/view/enjoining-right-forbidding-wrong-the-mui-and-indonesian-islam).

have sought legal means to bring the MUI again under government control but has so far failed to do so.<sup>46</sup>

## Conclusion

Both Diyanet and MoRA have had to operate in the field of tension between the state and the Muslim *umma*. Both are organs of the state, and surveillance of Muslim belief and action has been a core aspect of their task, but at least to some extent they also represent the *umma*. There have been periods when, under strong governments, they were led by men with a reformist, intellectual, and enlightened agenda, and the intellectual dimension of some of their projects is undeniable. Diyanet's Islamic Research Centre (İSAM) with its *İslam Ansiklopedisi* and the ambitious *hadith* project are achievements that tower well above what state institutions in any other Muslim country can boast. MoRA's Islamic universities have fostered an atmosphere of critical research and debate that is unusual in other Muslim countries (with the exception of Turkey). More often, however, Indonesia's MUI and Turkey's Diyanet have focused on the dissemination and imposition of state-defined orthodoxy, along with the elimination or marginalisation of undesirable interpretations of Islam.

Both have faced similar dilemmas; to carry out their tasks, they needed to recruit ever-increasing numbers of men and women to act as mosque functionaries, teachers, and bureaucrats. The states have had to establish special schools or theological faculties just to train them. These schools attracted students not from a cross-section of the countries' populations, but mainly from conservative, strictly Sunni, and somewhat marginalised segments of the population, making the institutions unrepresentative of the population as a whole.

In both countries, these schools provided channels for social mobility and served to integrate the communities around them in the social, economic, and political life of society. The phenomenon was most remarkable in Turkey: the Imam Hatip schools enabled the large group of conservative Muslims who felt that the country had been taken away from them by the pro-Western elites to claim their rightful share, and then more. Rather than imposing on them modern, enlightened, and progressive interpretations of Islam, the process enabled the conservative views and practices of the recruits to enter the state institutions and impose those as the new orthodoxy.

Indonesia's religious institution has been altogether more successful in assimilating heterodox groups than Turkey. Its *abangan* have, through a combination of economic and political incentives, gradually disappeared. In Turkey, Alevism has not only survived massive rural-to-urban migration, but has to some extent been consolidated as a distinct alternative variety of Islam — which to a large extent is due to the state's effort to impose a Sunni orthodoxy and the strong resistance this provoked.

---

<sup>46</sup> One initiative that was reported would take the authority to issue halal labelling away from the MUI and bring it under MoRA. This would considerably reduce the MUI's ability to act independently.

**RSIS Working Paper Series**

(from 2016 onwards)

- 312 Comparing the Governance of Islam in Turkey and Indonesia: Diyanet and the Ministry of Religious Affairs (2018)  
*Martin Van Bruinessen*
- 311 Indonesian Muslims in a Globalising World: Westernisation, Arabisation and Indigenising Responses (2018)  
*Martin Van Bruinessen*
- 310 Theocracy vs Constitutionalism in Japan: Constitutional Amendment and the Return of Pre-war Shinto Nationalism (2018)  
*Naoko Kumada*
- 309 Cyber Deterrence in Singapore: Frameworks and Recommendations (2018)  
*Eugene EG Tan*
- 308 Trade Policy Options for ASEAN Countries and Their Regional Dialogue Partners: "Preference Ordering" Using CGE Analysis (2018)  
*Xianbai Ji, Pradumna B. Rana, Wai-Mun Chia, and Chang Tai Li*
- 307 The South China Sea: Beijing's Challenge to ASEAN and UNCLOS and the Necessity of a New Multi-tiered Approach (2017)  
*Christopher Roberts*
- 306 China's Belt and Road Initiative: The Evolution of Chinese Private Security Companies (2017)  
*Alessandro Arduino*
- 305 Engaging Religion with Pragmatism: The Singapore State's Management of Social Issues and Religious Tensions in the 1980s (2017)  
*Mohammad Alami Musa*
- 304 Incident Prevention and Mitigation in the Asia Pacific Littorals: Framing, Expanding, and Adding to CUES (2017)  
*Graham Ong-Webb, Collin Koh, Bernard Miranda*
- 303 A Political Economy Analysis of the Southeast Asian Haze and Some Solutions (2017)  
*Prakash Chander*
- 302 Waiting for Disruption?! Undersea Autonomy and the Challenging Nature of Naval Innovation (2017)  
*Heiko Borchert, Tim Kraemer and Daniel Mahon*
- 301 The French Counter-radicalisation Strategy (2016)  
*Romain Quivoij*
- 300 Analysing Transformative Leadership in Indonesia (2016)  
*Alexander R. Arifianto*
- 

Visit the RSIS website at [www.rsis.edu.sg/?p=48639](http://www.rsis.edu.sg/?p=48639)

to access the full list of past RSIS Working Papers.