



Hizb Ut-Tahrir's Adaptation Strategies against the State Repression in Indonesia: A Social Movement Perspective

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[Abstract]

Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) is an Islamic social movement that struggles to change the existing political system to the Islamic system. HT argues that all problems in the Muslim world are rooted in adopting secular thought and ideology and the separation between Islam and the state. Hence, HT works to persuade Muslims to abandon that way of life and only apply Islam as the country's only ideology and constitution. HT has spread this narrative since it started in 1953 in Jordan. With this ideological and political attitude, many countries consider HT a threat to their political and community life, suppressing this movement by arresting members and banning the group to reduce or end HT activities in these countries. The Indonesian government has also carried out this repressive policy to limit the influence of Indonesian HTI since 2017. This paper aims to discuss the strategy of Hizb ut-Tahrir to continue its political activities Indonesia after being dissolved by the Indonesian government in 2017. This article used content analysis method to interpret the data collected from interview and documents from Hizb ut-Tahrir. Responding to state

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repression, HTI sought other methods of action by changing the place of resistance or activities, and by changing its identity.

Keywords: Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia, Indonesia, State Repression, Social Movement.

I . Introduction

HTI, Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia, has existed in Indonesia for more than 20 years since 1980s, and enjoyed political freedom for more than ten years under Indonesian democracy, especially after the political reform in 1998. But, in 2017, the state decided to revoke the legal status of HTI due to rising radicalism in Indonesia and the rise of political mobilization of Islam after 2016 (Mietzner 2018).

HTI is part of the global Hizb ut-Tahrir founded in 1953 by Taqiuddin An-Nabahani. This group works to change the secular system in the Muslim world to be managed by Islamic law through the establishing of the Islamic state called khilafah (caliphate). This group has branches in more than 40 states around the world. However, in many states, this group is received negatively for its radicalism and fundamentalism (Aswar 2018). Generally, there are increasing studies on Hizb ut-Tahrir, such as the work of Tatiana V. Izluchenko, Denis N. Gergilev, and Andrei V. Bardakov (2020), which discussed Hizb ut-Tahrir's concept of political, social, administrative, and economic systems; the authors even argued that that HT's ideas are perceived as extremist, distorting religious norms, and are irrational, intolerant, and create anger against others (Izluchenko, Gergilev, and Bardakov 2020).

Another work is by Farhaan Wali (2017), who studied the process of HT's radicalization by recruiting people and building people's loyalty through the Halaqoh (private study group) process. The Halaqah process, according to Wali, is a way to convincing people of the need and obligation to establish the Khilafah state; it also asserts that HT is the only proper party working to establish Islam (Wali 2011).

Meanwhile, the use of social movement analysis on Hizb ut-Tahrir is still limited, as there are only a few scholars working on it such as Michael Karagiannis (2006) and Muhammad Nawab bin Mohamed Osman (2018). Karagiannis (2006) primarily studied Hizb ut-Tahrir in Central Asia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan structural-functional theory, resource mobilization theory, political opportunity theory, and framing theory (Karagiannis 2006). On the other hand, Osman (2018) analyzed HTI from three approaches of social movements: first, the theory of political opportunity structure, which explains the influence of Indonesia's political context on HTI activities; second, the resources mobilization theory which explains how HT recruits its members and mobilizes people to support its agenda; and third, is the ideological concept of HTI, which serves as a main force of the group's political activities (Osman 2018).

Another recent study was by Hasbi Aswar et al. (2020), where examined state policy was from the perspective of social movements, focusing on state policies toward Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia. The study described several strategies used by the state, such as stigmatization, intimidation, and special rulemaking to advocate the dissolution of the Hizb ut-Tahrir movement (Aswar, Bin Mohd Yusof, and Binti Abdul Hamid 2020).

This study aims to develop the research on Hizb ut-Tahrir using social movement analysis. Hence, this article discusses the state dissolution policy on Hizb ut-Tahrir and how the group adapts to that policy while pursuing its political programs. This article uses the qualitative method to analyze primary sources, among them Hizb ut-Tahrir documents, media reports, and interviews. State repression and its impact on social movement frame specific issues and expound on what faces this group should it be dissolved. Will it change the arena of resistance? Will it change the issue? Will it change the group's identity? More specific categories or themes will also be explored (Bengtsson 2016).

II. State Repression and Its Impact on Hizb ut-Tahrir

Repression is the general response of the state to all Islamic political

movements in many countries. The level of repression varies depending on the country's perception of the threat of a movement. In some places, the mechanism of repression is only through stigmatization or negative framing of the state and the media. In other places, Islamic movements face high repressive policies such as imprisonment, prosecution, or even death, as in the case of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Hamas in Palestine, FIS (Islamic Salvation Front) in Algeria, and Hizb ut-Tahrir in many Muslim countries.

State repression is the part of measures that narrow the political opportunity of a movement. According to Davenport (2005), "state repression means that actions were taken by authorities against individuals and/or groups within their territorial jurisdiction that either restrict the behavior and/or beliefs of citizens through the imposition of negative sanctions" (Honari 2017: 3).

This state's approach is deemed natural as a mechanism for the state to counter or eliminate domestic challenges; create specific political-economic arrangements and sustain domestic order or existing political-economic arrangement (Davenport 2010: 75). Actions may include any or a combination of the following: direct violence, public prosecutions and hearings, employment deprivation, surveillance and break-ins, Infiltration, the use of agent provocateurs, black propaganda or stigmatization, harassment and harassment arrests, extraordinary rules and laws, mass media manipulation, and mass media deprecation (Boykoff 2007).

State repression can have several impacts on social movement: First, it can end a movement's life or demobilize it. Second, it can provoke movement to increase its action, such as peaceful to violent action. Third, social movement can change its strategy to adapt amidst repressive state policies; it can be violent or nonviolent. Modes of resistance vary depending on modes of state repression (Davenport 2015).

There are some strategies that social movement can take to adapt to state repression: first, changing the arena of resistance such as using the internet or bringing the struggle in courts, or while in prison, underground, or exile; second, changing the issue or

demands to remain engaged with the public and continue resistance; and third, changing or duplicating the group's identity, hiding under the disguise of religious, social and recreational, or intellectual and cultural groups. The goal is to survive (Honari 2017; Johnston 2003; Zwerman and Steinhoff 2003).

Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) was founded by Sheikh Taqiuddin an-Nabahani (1909-1977). It was declared a political party in Jordan in 1953, a first step that led to its expansion in Arab countries. It reached to more than 40 countries globally, with millions of members (Malik 2004; Rodhi 2012).

As an Islamic political movement, HT intends to transform the modern and secular Muslim world to Islam. HT believes that the root cause of problems in the Muslim world today is its adoption the secular systems of democracy, liberalism, and human rights in social, economic, and political life. A return to Islamic law and ways is the answer to these problems. HT argues that the the Khilafah system is the only acceptable system, as inherited by the prophet Muhammad and his companions (Hizb ut-Tahrir 2005).

To transform the system, HT adheres to methods that do not follow other Islamists involved in the democratic process by establishing political parties, such as the Muslim Brotherhood; or in waging jihad or fighting against so-called enemies of Islam such as al-Qaeda. HT believes that to establish an Islamic state, one must follow the steps of the prophet when he succeeded in establishing the State of Medina, i.e., through intellectual and political activities, without the use of violence. HT has three methods to carry out political change. First is the culturing process; second, engaging people to win their hearts and minds and to convince them to turn their backs on the state and political system; and third, establishing a state that implements all Islamic sharia law (Hizb ut-Tahrir 1999: 34-35).

HT was brought to Indonesia in the 1980s by Abdurrahman al-Baghdadi. During the 1980s and 1990s, Hizb ut-Tahrir activists worked primarily in Indonesian universities through Islamic student organizations, which expanded the group to the wider Indonesian community. In 2000, HT began to publicly state its work and ideas

in Indonesia by holding the first International Khilafah Conference attended by about 2,000 people. HT tapped into mass media, demonstrations, and international conferences to introduce ideas of sharia and caliphate (Muhtadi 2009; Yusanto 2013). In 2004, HTI earned state recognition through a registration certification from the Indonesian Ministry of Home Affairs. In 2014, HTI obtained legal status from the Indonesian Ministry of Law and Human Rights. In addition, HTI figures were accepted as members of the Indonesian Ulema Council from 2005 to 2010 (Ilhamdi 2015; Munabari 2010; Office of Assistant to Deputy Cabinet Secretary for State Documents & Translation 2017).

In July 2017, the state revoked the legal status of HTI for several reasons: HTI was deemed not playing a positive role in national development; its programs were also considered conflicting with Indonesian ideology, Pancasila, and the 1945 NKRI Constitution; there were perceived to threaten security as well as endanger the integrity of the Republic of Indonesia.

After receiving demands from several Islamist groups, the state issued the policy to dissolve HTI. On July 19, 2017, the Indonesian Ministry of Law and Human Rights finally revoked the legal status of HTI based on an extraordinary law called *Perppu Ormas 2017* (government replacement law on social organizations). The policy changed the course of the history of HTI (Erdianto 2017).

According to Boykoff (2007), stigmatization affects or weakens individuals' sense of collective identity to take part in collective action; complicate recruitment; and create difficulties in soliciting public support. Meanwhile, HTI's dissolution by the state is an act of intimidation that distracts and discourages public participation (Boykoff 2007).

III. HIZB UT-TAHRIR'S ADAPTATION STRATEGIES

In responding to state repression, a social movement can choose some strategies to pursue its advocacies such as changing the arena of resistance. It may be by way of using the internet, or bringing the

struggle in courts, or even in prison, underground, or exile. It may also be changing the issue or demands to remain engaged with the public and continue its resistance to the state. It may also be changing or duplicating the group's identity, disguising its identity by using religious, social and recreational, or intellectual and cultural groups. In the following discussion, HTI changed its arena of resistance and its identity.

3.1. Changing the Arena of Resistance

HTI formally ceased activities after the state announced the revocation policy in July 2017. *Al-Islam* newsletters, *al-Wa'ie* magazine, the hizbut-tahrir.or.id, and the organization's YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter accounts ceased operations. All operations and protests were stopped (Durohman, F, and Rizal 2017). HTI adhered to state policy, instead of being reactionary. Behind the scenes, the members actively worked, even planning to question state policy.

HTI countered the narrative reiterating the following: first, HTI is a legal organization and has contributed to Indonesian life, building on the Islamic character of Muslims, and offering solutions to political and economic problems (Yusanto 2017b); second, *da'wa* HTI's activities follow Islamic teachings, including calls for an Islamic state that does not contradict Indonesian law; third, for more than 20 years, HTI has never created problems in Indonesia until deliberate provocations from other Islamic groups emerged (Yusanto 2017a).

After regrouping, HTI increased national and regional mobilization to oppose state policies and narratives through demonstrations, political declarations, and forums by Muslim students and preachers, including Ulama and Muslim lawyers. It also put up social media resistance by trending on Twitter the following hashtags: *HTILanjutkanPerjuangan*; *#7MeiHTIMenang*; *#HTILayakMenang*, *#UmatBersamaHTI*, *#IslamSelamatkanNegeri*, *#AllahBersamaHTI* (*#GodIsWithHTI*), *#HTISiapBanding* (*#HTIReadyToAppeal*), *#KhilafahAjaranIslam*, and *#AdvokatBelaHTI* (Cahya 2018; No Title 2017).

HTI soon revived its publications. *Al-Waie* was reopened, but under a new publisher, *Pusat Studi Politik and Dakwah Islam* (Center for Political Studies and Da'wa Islam). The editorial team and content remained. Meanwhile, *Al-Islam* was reformatted into *Bulletin Dakwah Kaffah* by *Lembaga Kajian Islam Kaffah* (Kaffah Islamic Studies Center). It disseminated the ideas of Hizb ut-Tahrir. The biweekly magazine *Media Umat* remained in circulation. These three outfits continued deconstructing the modern system to advocate the Islamic system.

HTI quietly expanded its platforms by frequently using YouTube. In videos were seen HTI executive members, such as current HTI leader Rokhmat S. Labib, spokesman Ismail Yusanto, Shiddiq al-Jawi, Hafidz Abdurrahman, among others. HTI maintained the Khilafah, Fokus Khilafah, and Khilafah News channels on YouTube. The internet has proven to be a blessing for this group up for an intellectual struggle (Seib and Janbek 2011).

HTI also attempted to seek legal remedies. It brought the case to the Constitutional Court and the Jakarta State Administrative Court (*PTUN*), but to no avail. The Constitutional Court denied the appeal because of the *Perppu*; meanwhile, *PTUN* ruled that the state had already taken appropriate steps of revocation (Nurhadi 2018; Pratiwi 2017). HTI also took the case to the high administrative court (*PT TUN-Pengadilan Tinggi Tata Usaha Negara*) but again failed. Finally, HTI brought the case back to the Supreme Court (*Mahkamah Agung*) but was also denied (Octaviyani 2019; Pttun-Jakarta 2018).

Even in a state of repression, HTI continued to argue that its being criminalized is unjust, and that the state cannot prove that its ideas are contrary to Indonesian law. It also maintained that even without legal status, HTI and its members were still guaranteed constitutional rights, and nothing can be done to prevent them from doing da'wa activities as an obligation to God (Yusanto 2019).

3.2. Changing the group's Identity

3.2.1 Mobilizing Traditional Scholars & Muslim Preachers

HTI's membership include scholars, intellectuals, students, and

entrepreneurs. Works for the Ulama were carried out through *Lajnah Khusus Ulama* (LKU, Special Committee for Ulama). The committee engages with Ulama and Muslim preachers in Islamic schools, forums, and mosques. Before HTI was disbanded in 2017, the committee routinely organized events such as *Mudzakarah Ulama*, *Daurah Ulama*, *Sarasehan Ulama Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jamaah*, *Halaqah Ulama*, *Dirosah Syar'iyah Khoshshoh (DSK)*, *Multaqo Ulama*, and *Liqo Syawwal Ulama*.

After the revocation, mobilization, and recruitment to Ulama went on, as documented in *shautululama.co*. Contents from *Shautul Ulama* were shared via Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and Telegram. The website reported on the agenda of "Hizb ut-Tahrir." Engagement with scholars, preachers, and Muslim figures continued through events such as *Multaqo Ulama Ahlu Sunnah Wal-Jamaah (Aswaja)*, *Forum Ulama Aswaja*, *Tarhib Ramadhan Bersama Ulama Aswaja*, *Tabligh Akbar*, *Majlis Taqarrub Ilallah*, *Liqo Syawwal Ulama*, *Aswaja Ulema Communication Forum*, and *Ijtima Ulama* (Shautul Ulama n.d.). Through these efforts, calls for the Khilafah aggressively spread. In 2019, *Multaqo Ulama Aswaja* was conducted about 109 times—once in May and June, 11 times in January, 17 times in April, 25 times in May, and 24 times in October (Shautululama 2019).

In spite of the revocation, HTI was still able to organize big events calling for the establishment of the *Khilafah*. It was able to persuade traditional scholars, most of which are members of the *Nahdlatul Ulama*, by using the term *ASWAJA (Ahl as-Sunnah Wa al-Jamaah)*. The organization was able to convey that it was not a strange movement with strange ideas; HTI is part of *Ahl as-Sunnah Wa al-Jamaah*, followed by millions of Indonesians. Through this, the organization gained broader support, not only from sympathizers but also from many Muslim scholars and *muballigh/preachers*.

3.1.2. Mobilizing Students through Cry for Freedom

HTI founded the university-based *Gema Pembebasan-GP* (Cry for Freedom) in 2001 to bring its advocacies to the academe. GP has stayed on even after the revocation and still conducts talks, seminars, and demonstrations to advance the idea of Hizb ut-Tahrir.

Recruitment continued even after the political space has been limited. At the Islamic University of Jakarta, GP actively held Dialog and Activist Training, and pursued recruitment under the name Liberation Training (*Training Pembebasan*) (Gema_uinjakarta n.d.). Like *Gema Pembebasan* in Yogyakarta, it responded to various national and international issues, and even commemorated the fall of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924 in 2019. It put up posters containing “*Tiada kemuliaan tanpa Islam, tak sempurna Islam tanpa syariah, tak akan tegak syariah tanpa daulah, daulah khilafah rasyidah*” (No glory without Islam, Islam is not perfect without sharia, there can be no sharia without *Daulah/State, Khilafah Rashidah*) (Gpyogyakarta 2019).

In May 2019, a rally was held in downtown Yogyakarta to call the government’s attention to respond to the political conditions in Indonesia and advocate for the need to adopt the sharia and *Khilafah*. The rally engaged other student movements and became a platform to spread HT ideas. Meanwhile, other *Gema Pembebasan* branches in Indonesia tapped into social media to expand outreach. In 2016, GP was active in 25 provinces in Indonesia (Gema Pembebasan n.d.; Gpyogyakarta 2019b).

Indeed, GP also faced suppression inside the campus. State repression compelled some parents to discourage their children who are GP members from participating. Some members were intimidated by school administrators. Pressure intensified in 2018, when anti-radicalism was at its highest.¹ Students reconsidered their strategy and moved activities outside campuses.²

3.1.3. Approaching Young People: Felix Siauw and Yuk Ngaji Community

Felix Siauw is a new and famous social media. He has 3.1 million followers on Twitter, 4.5 million followers on Instagram, and 609,000 subscribers on YouTube (Hew 2018). He is very down to earth, usually sporting casual wear—batik or t-shirt and trousers—which

¹ Member of Gema Pembebasan Yogyakarta. 2020. Interview by Hasbi Aswar, April 19, Yogyakarta, Phone Interview.

² Leader of Gema Pembebasan Makassar. 2020. Interview by Hasbi Aswar, June 5, Makassar. Phone Interview.

makes him engaging for young audiences. He converted to Islam after being engaged by HTI activists at university. They changed his initial perception about Islam's being crude, radical, and intolerant. Studying Islam with HTI deepened his understanding and strengthened his resolve about it stood for. In 2017 and 2018, he wrote several articles narrating his 16-year journey with HTI and condemning the revocation (Siauw 2017, 2018). He continues to be active despite the cancellation of several of his da'wa activities.

To optimize da'wa activities for young people, Siauw and his team formed in 2016 a community called *YukNgaji* (Let's learn Islam), which came with a battlecry "The Power of Ngaji." He was assisted by Husein Assadi, program production coordinator; Cahyo Ahmadiarsyad "Sutradalang," the main host of the event; Ihsanul Muttaqin, coordinator of social media agenda and activities; and Abietya Sakti Narendra, coordinator for publication design and documentation. The community sought to provide a venue for followers to engage offline. *YukNgaji* was launched in Jakarta, Bogor, Bandung, Surabaya, and Yogyakarta (Majalah Drise 2016). It expanded to 25 other Indonesian cities, and grew branches in Hong Kong and Istanbul. Around 27,000 in person participants and 15,800 online class participants benefited from the groups various activities (YukNgaji n.d.). *YukNgaji* has 505,000 followers on Instagram and 70,135 followers on Facebook. Attracting interest were some Indonesian actresses and actors who frequently join the Yuk Ngaji programs.

3.1.4. LBH Pelita Umat (Legal Aid)

HTI members also formed a LBH Pelita Umat, a legal aid desk in 2018. *Pelita* is an acronym of *Pembela Islam Terpercaya* (trusted Islamic defenders). It enjoys legal status from the Ministry of Law and Human Rights. In advocating for Kaffah Islam (total Islam) through nonviolent and wise da'wah, it defended Muslim figures, scholars, and activists suffering from prosecution (LBH Pelita Umat n.d.). Headed by Ahmad Khazinuddin, a former director of PKBH HTI (Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia Center for Legal Studies and Assistance), the group soon expanded into many cities in Indonesia. The legal desk periodically initiates public discussions to respond to Indonesian issues, in the form of the Islamic Lawyers Forum (ILF).

The forum invites pro-Khilafah activists and scholars.

3.1.5. Demonstrations and Marches

Hizb ut-Tahrir regularly held rallies, campaigns, or protests and mobilized its members and supporters. After the revocation, however, it mobilized movements under another name, for instance, the Alliance of Organizations & Muslims (AOMI) when it held a protest in front of the US Embassy on the Palestinian issue in December 2017. Protesters brought banners, flags, and symbols that carried advocated the Khilafah solution (Al-Wa'ie 2018). HTI also participated in the 212 Movement and its consequent mass actions, such as The Aksi 299 in October 2017, which rejected the 2017 Mass Organization and PKI revival. It also joined demonstrations for Rohingya refugees in front of the Myanmar Embassy in September 2017, and in other Indonesian cities (Al-Wa'ie 2018; Media Umat 2017).

In 2019, HTI commemorated the Islamic New Year 1441 H with a long march and rally. The event was celebrated in 50 cities and had the theme "*Hijrah Towards Kaffah Islam.*" The Jakarta leg was attended by thousands which gathered around state structures *Bundaran HI, Monas, and Patung Kuda*. Posters circulated containing a call to establish a Caliphate and implement the sharia.(Media Umat 2019). These were publicized in HTI's media *Al-Wa'ie* and *Media Umat*. Several figures associated with HTI spoke during the rallies.

IV. Conclusion

The experience of state repression is nothing new to HT. It has experienced all kinds of oppression. These never stopped HT to fight for what it stood for. In Indonesia, it continued to be steadfast. Amidst being stigmatized by the state for allegedly being radical and even using the force of law to dissolve it, it persevered in performing da'wa and advocating for the implementation of the sharia and the establishment of the Islamic state/*Khilafah*. HTI sought other methods of action by changing the place of resistance or activities, and by changing its identity.

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