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Political Islam and agrarian question: Critique of political economy and critical agrarian approaches (Insights from sharecroppers and agricultural laborers in rural Java)

Islam politik dan pertanyaan agraria: Kritik ekonomi politik dan pendekatan agraria kritis (Wawasan dari petani penggarap dan buruh tani di pedesaan Jawa)

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between capitalism, agrarian transformation, and the development of political Islam in rural Indonesia, focusing on Bulak Village, West Java. It is grounded in debates concerning the relevance of rural areas as the basis for Islamic social movements in the context of global capitalism. The study seeks to answer how agrarian transformation influences class dynamics and the formation of populist Islam-based movements in rural areas. Using a qualitative approach that integrates interviews, observations, and literature reviews, the study reveals that class differentiation driven by agrarian changes—from the Green Revolution era to the dominance of Chinese entrepreneurs in the 1990s—has created significant inequality in access to agrarian means of production. The *ulama* (Islamic scholars) and *haji* (pilgrims) classes leveraged these changes to maintain their socio-economic dominance, while sharecroppers and agricultural laborers were the most adversely affected. This situation led to the formation of populist alliances based on religious narratives opposing the capital expansion of "outsiders," particularly Chinese entrepreneurs. However, aspirations within these alliances were fragmented along class lines, with sharecroppers and laborers exhibiting a more critical alternative awareness of capitalist relations compared to the *ulama* and *haji*. The study concludes that while Islamic populism is often regarded as an urban phenomenon, experiences in Bulak indicate that rural Islamic movements remain significant. Although these movements do not wholly reject capitalism, they reveal the potential for resistance grounded in diverse class-based awareness, especially from lower classes, against exploitative capitalist relations.

***Keywords*:** agrarian question, capitalism, political Islam, rural

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji hubungan antara kapitalisme, transformasi agraria, dan perkembangan Islam politik di pedesaan Indonesia, dengan fokus pada Desa Bulak, Jawa Barat. Penelitian ini berlandaskan pada perdebatan mengenai relevansi pedesaan sebagai basis bagi gerakan sosial Islam dalam konteks kapitalisme global. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk menjawab bagaimana transformasi agraria memengaruhi dinamika kelas dan pembentukan gerakan populis berbasis Islam di pedesaan. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif yang mengintegrasikan wawancara, observasi, dan telaah pustaka, penelitian ini mengungkap bahwa diferensiasi kelas yang dipicu oleh perubahan agraria—mulai dari era Revolusi Hijau hingga dominasi pengusaha Tionghoa pada tahun 1990-an—telah menciptakan ketimpangan signifikan dalam akses terhadap sarana produksi agraria. Kelas ulama dan haji

memanfaatkan perubahan ini untuk mempertahankan dominasi sosial-ekonomi mereka, sementara petani penggarap dan buruh tani menjadi kelompok yang paling dirugikan. Situasi ini memicu pembentukan aliansi populis yang berbasis pada narasi keagamaan sebagai bentuk perlawanan terhadap ekspansi modal "pihak luar," khususnya pengusaha Tionghoa. Namun, aspirasi dalam aliansi tersebut terfragmentasi berdasarkan garis kelas, di mana petani penggarap dan buruh tani menunjukkan kesadaran alternatif yang lebih kritis terhadap relasi kapitalis dibandingkan dengan ulama dan haji. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa meskipun populisme Islam sering dianggap sebagai fenomena perkotaan, pengalaman di Desa Bulak menunjukkan bahwa gerakan Islam pedesaan tetap signifikan. Meskipun gerakan ini tidak sepenuhnya menolak kapitalisme, ia mengungkapkan potensi perlawanan yang berakar pada kesadaran kelas yang beragam, khususnya dari kelas bawah, terhadap relasi kapitalis yang eksploitatif.

Kata kunci: *pertanyaan agraria, kapitalisme, Islam politik, pedesaan*

Introduction

In recent years, the political economy approach has increasingly colored studies of Islam in Indonesia. Initiated by the democratization process following the New Order in Indonesia and the 9/11 events in America (Esack, 2003; Mudhoffir, 2018), this approach gained momentum with the emergence of the latest form of political Islam, namely "Islamic populism". One manifestation of Islamic populism was the *Aksi Bela Islam* (Action to Defend Islam/ADI) in 2016, where hundreds of thousands of Muslims from across Indonesia demanded the criminal prosecution of former Jakarta Governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok) for allegedly "blaspheming" the Qur'an, specifically *Surah Al-Maidah* verse 51.

The political economy approach emerged as a response to the dominance of culturalist approaches in studies of political Islam. In explaining the proliferation of terrorism with Islamic nuances post-9/11, culturalist approaches often argued that such actions stem from Islamic teachings inherently incompatible with Western democratic values (Robison, 2014). According to this perspective, the development of political Islam globally is due to the failure of Muslims to separate religion from politics (Kumar, 2012). In Indonesia, this approach found its resonance. During the democratization period after the New Order, social scientists also used culturalist assumptions, arguing that the rise of political Islam was partly due to actors hostile to Western values, free markets, democracy, and lacking exposure to discourses of tolerance and religious pluralism (Hadiz, 2008; Mudhoffir, 2016).

The political economy approach provides a more structural alternative explanation by contextualizing broader economic and political developments in understanding political Islam. The development of political Islam is seen as the result of a "struggle for access to material and political resources" involving various social forces (Alamsyah & Hadiz, 2017; Hadiz, 2008, 2011, 2016; Hadiz & Robison, 2012; Hadiz & Teik, 2011; Mudhoffir, 2016, 2018, 2020; Robison, 2014; Teik et al., 2014). Specifically, this approach interprets the economic and political environment as a "capitalist system." Therefore, to understand the development of political Islam, it is essential to grasp the dynamics of capitalism in Indonesia.

The evolution of contemporary capitalism as the arena for the growth of political Islam has given rise to unique forms of political Islam distinct from earlier ones. Early 20th-century political Islam was rooted in the concerns of indigenous urban merchants and rural local elites over the Western colonial order (Hadiz, 2016). With systematic political programs and ideologies, political Islam during this period evoked anti-colonialism and sought to establish an Islamic state. In contrast, 21st-century Islamic populism arises from the anxieties of urban social classes—educated Muslim middle classes, urban poor, and minority bourgeoisie—over global and national political-economic orders threatening their social and political mobility as well as their livelihood access in metropolitan centers. Through the religious concept of the *"ummah"*, these classes form "cross-class alliances" by drawing demarcation lines between those deemed "insiders" and "outsiders", justified through moral narratives and the pursuit of national power via constitutional democracy. According to this approach, the rural social base of political Islam is no longer significant for addressing economic and political anxieties as neoliberal capitalism has induced massive proletarianization and urbanization. Consequently, urban educated

middle classes, urban poor, and a minority urban bourgeoisie are considered the most likely actors to channel such anxieties.

The political economy approach is indeed relevant in understanding the development of political Islam. Its relevance lies in answering questions like why, in this era of globalization and democratization—with increased access to knowledge through the internet—religious expressions, expected to be more rational, plural, and tolerant, instead have become highly conservative and sectarian, sometimes manifesting in extreme forms such as terrorism and rebellion? This question cannot be answered by approaches that base their analyses solely on ideational aspects without linking them to material conditions like capitalism. However, the view that urban life is the center of 21st-century political Islam development seems exaggerated. Many ADI participants in 2016 came from rural areas (Henaldi, 2016; Suryarandika, 2016). Additionally, studies by Adawiah et al. (2022); Bazzi et al. (2018); Pamungkas (2018); and Savitri & Adriyanti (2018) show that rural West Java remains an essential site for the development of political Islam, with various variants, in Indonesia. The shift in the social base from rural to urban areas and its relation to rural transformations thus requires further exploration.

The view of the social base shift of political Islam from rural to urban areas above aligns with the analysis of the critical agricultural approach, which sees that rural social classes are no longer significant in responding to the development of capitalism. This approach argues that the process of "primitive accumulation", as the separation of producers from their land and the transformation of these producers into a working-class while converting land into capital as prerequisites for the emergence of capital, is already completed. Being completed means that economic activities in the whole world have been integrated into the global capitalist system. This has led to "deagrarianization", fragmenting rural social classes to such an extent that class-based social movements in rural areas, regardless of their political aspirations, are deemed no longer significant. This view argues that the "agrarian question"—the question of the dynamics of primitive accumulation in rural areas—is no longer relevant and even considered to be "dead" (Bernstein & Byres, 2001; Bernstein, 2002, 2010). Views that still see the importance of the agrarian question regarding agrarian resource control are labeled as "agrarian populism" (Moyo et al., 2012). The "agrarian question of capital" has been replaced by the "agrarian question of labor", which focuses on how the composition and class relations are negotiated within capitalist production and reproduction relations (Bernstein, 2004).

On the other hand, there is an approach that considers the agrarian question still relevant. This approach states that capitalism continues to require primitive accumulation as its prerequisite (Moyo et al., 2012, 2013). As a social relation, capitalism is understood as a system regulating human relations—and humans with nature—based on production, consumption, distribution, and commodity exchange principles with wealth accumulation and exploitation. As a result, capitalism always presupposes the separation of most of the human population from its means of production, turning that population into a working class and transforming the means of production into capital, resulting in the creation of surplus value for wealth accumulation (Marx, 1992).

Over time, capitalism has always faced crises marked by economic stagnation and political instability. Through the dispossession of producers from their production means and the exploitation of workers, capitalism continually responds to these crises by expanding and deepening primitive accumulation. Capitalism's development around the world depends on primitive accumulation, as Marx stated as a prerequisite for its emergence as a "historical process" that has ended (De Angelis, 2001; Hall, 2012; Moyo et al., 2012; Patnaik & Moyo, 2011).

In Indonesia, the moment of ongoing primitive accumulation occurred massively in rural areas. This moment began when Dutch colonialism entered the archipelago (preceded by the Portuguese), forcibly seizing lands and their resources and transforming indigenous people into laborers to produce surplus value for the Dutch (Alatas, 1977; Breman, 1989, 2015). In the mid-1960s, the ongoing primitive accumulation continued, marked by the mass killings of rural populations "affiliated" with communist forces (Farid, 2005), before the introduction of the "Green Revolution" as a "food regime" project to sustain global food supply (Husken & White, 1989). This ultimately displaced many farmers from access to means of production in rural areas (Kusno, 2010; Pincus, 1996).

The ongoing primitive accumulation, however, is not without resistance. Although it aims to separate producers from their means of production and often achieves that goal, the process has encountered resistance from the producers. In the mid-1960s, one notable resistance came in the form of *"Aksi Sepihak"* (Unilateral Actions) carried out by *Barisan Tani Indonesia* (Indonesian Peasant Movement). This union seized lands from landlords deemed representatives of Western neocolonialism and imperialism (White, 2016). Such actions also continued after the fall of the New Order, with many poor farmers in rural Java reclaiming lands previously seized by the state and foreign companies (Lucas & Warren, 2003), even demanding the implementation of agrarian reform (Afiff et al., 2013).

Hall (2012) once stated that primitive accumulation in Southeast Asia has unique characteristics distinct from that in Europe. In Southeast Asia, characterized by smallholders, these farmers often welcomed primitive accumulation with open arms. However, Hall overlooked the involvement of major actors such as multinational corporations and the state in dispossessing farmers from their means of production, as has occurred since the Dutch colonial era, continued during the mid-1960s, and persisted into the post-New Order era. As a result of the post-New Order era, farmer activists have continued to oppose state-perpetrated criminalization, even under the guise of "national development" (Wicaksono, 2023).

In rural Indonesia, farmers have historically resisted capitalism in many ways, including through religious practices (Kartodirdjo, 1966; Kurasawa, 1983). After two decades of the New Order's collapse, we have witnessed Islamic-based social movements emerging in rural areas to respond to capitalism's development, as seen in rural Java (Adawiah et al., 2022; Millah, 2021; Millah et al., 2020; Syaifullah et al., 2022). Besides employing populist narratives, these movements are deeply intertwined with the dynamics of agricultural production resource control.

This article seeks to challenge the notion that Islamic populism has shifted to urban areas and that rural are no longer significant spaces for Islamic social movements capable of channeling their adherents' aspirations. By understanding capitalism as a social relation that continually necessitates primitive accumulation, this article aims to position the dynamics between the life and death of the agrarian question within the concrete experiences of Islamic movements in rural Java. By situating Islamic movements within the agrarian question, this article contributes to the literature on political Islam and agrarian studies. Initially, it aims to demonstrate the importance of rural areas in nurturing potential resistance to capitalism. Furthermore, it argues that debates within agrarian studies concerning the relevance of the "agrarian question" must take into account the concrete experiences of Islamic movements that continue to develop in response to global capitalism's integration. According to these arguments, this article focuses specifically on explaining Islamic movements in rural areas through the lens of the agrarian question while also demonstrating its relevance to the subject.

Method

This article is based on field studies conducted in Bulak Village, West Java, during 2020–2021 and extended in early 2022. The village was chosen because it represents a significant base of support for ADI. Besides being an ADI supporter base, the village was also selected because most of its villagers rely on the agricultural sector (horticulture farming) for their livelihoods. However, many also combine it with non-agricultural sectors. This article employs a qualitative approach to capture the meanings and experiences of individuals (Creswell, 2007) concerning the agrarian changes they experience, the land and labor they control, and Islam as a social force. The article starts by situating Marx's conception of production, labor, and class with field data, then reflects the data onto Marx's conceptual framework (Mezzadri, 2021).

The article uses various types of data, including interviews, observations, and literature reviews. Literature reviews, in particular, are utilized to provide an analytical comparison between the political economy approach and the critical agrarian approach in understanding the development of political Islam in Indonesia. Specifically, the article draws on the works of political Islam studies conducted by Vedi R. Hadiz (Hadiz, 2008, 2011, 2014, 2016; Alamsyah & Hadiz, 2017) and Henry Bernstein (Bernstein, 2002, 2004, 2010). Key informants include seven individuals, comprising ulama who are

also landlords, haji who are capitalist farmers, and smallholders and agricultural laborers, most of whom are disciples of the ulama.

The data collected from 2020 to 2021 revolve around how the development of capitalism, reflected in the history of agrarian changes and has shaped class formations in rural areas, sparked Islamic-based movements, and how these movements adopt populist strategies to mobilize the masses (Weyland, 2017). Meanwhile, the data collected in early 2022 include information on how the proponents of Islamic movements in these rural areas view agrarian production resources—land and labor—as the basis for their movements. The data were analyzed in three stages using the "spiral of analysis" approach (Creswell, 2007). This was carried out because the qualitative analysis is "simultaneous", involving reconstruction and revision. The first stage consists of transcribing data into written descriptions; the second stage involves categorizing data (coding) into several themes; the third stage consists of presenting the data in tables and discussions.

Results and Discussion

Political Islam in rural areas: Between political economy and critical agrarian approaches

Several key themes form the focus of analysis within the political economy approach in explaining the development of political Islam in Indonesia. These key themes include (a) the development of capitalism, (b) proletarianization, and (c) the formation of cross-class alliances through the narrative of the "ummah." Exploration of these key themes leads the political economy approach to conclude that political Islam in its latest form, Islamic populism, has shifted to urban areas, rendering rural areas no longer significant as a space for the growth of Islamic movements. The development of capitalism and proletarianization are two themes that, in this section, will become parallel features of analysis with the critical agrarian approach.

The political economy approach differentiates 21st-century political Islam in Indonesia from that of the early 20th century. As discussed earlier in this article, early 20th-century political Islam was dominated by indigenous merchants in urban areas and local elites in rural areas. These groups expressed anxiety over the Western colonial order threatening their economic access.

> "As Western colonialism brought in new forms of production, trade networks and even political authority, the social position of the traditional urban and rural petty bourgeoisie had become increasingly precarious across much of the Muslim world" (Hadiz, 2016).

According to Hadiz, the political aspirations of early 20th-century political Islam were defensive, aimed at preventing the loss of their constituents. These defensive aspirations were strongly influenced by anti-colonial and Pan-Islamist sentiments emerging in many parts of the world. Locally, these aspirations were also shaped by the reality that specific segments of society gained greater socio-economic access under the Western colonial order, particularly the Chinese minority. Early 20th-century political Islam aspired to establish an Islamic state, influenced by both these sentiments and Marxist teachings about "sinful capitalism" as well.

In the 21st century, political Islam has taken on a new form, dominated by educated Muslim middle classes, minority bourgeoisie, and urban poor in metropolitan areas. What is called "Islamic populism" is, for this approach, the latest form of urban-based political Islam. It is considered urban-based because the political aspirations of these three classes stem from the economic and political developments in urban areas. For educated Muslim middle classes, social mobility is the main issue. Despite holding educational qualifications, their "material living conditions are quite precarious", leaving them feeling that, instead of advancing their careers, they are at risk of plunging into poverty. For the Muslim bourgeoisie, their aspirations are rooted in their marginalization within the national political constellation, which the secular and ethnic Chinese bourgeoisie has dominated. Meanwhile, among the urban poor, their inability to survive urban harshness is the primary driver for joining cross-class alliances under the "ummah" narratives.

In another work, Hadiz (2014) states that these cross-class political aspirations differ from their predecessors in the early 20th century. While the latter was influenced by anti-colonial and Pan-Islamist sentiments and aimed to establish an Islamic state, 21st-century political Islam inherits the spirit of anti-

neoliberal capitalism but does not aim to establish an Islamic state, let alone launch a global revolution to dismantle capitalism. Instead, this new political Islam seeks to seize national political power and enact a form of "desecularization" of national policies and regulations through the framework of institutional democracy. Neoliberal capitalism, although criticized by the proponents of Islamic populism, is accepted as long as it aligns with the interests of the ummah.

> "In other words, the New Islamic Populism envisions a kind of state led by the righteous that would facilitate markets that operate in ways favorable to the ummah. But this does not necessarily require the establishment of an overtly Islamic state. However, such a call is often made by those least positioned to make headway through the formal mechanisms of politics."

Neoliberal capitalism, although criticized by proponents of Islamic populism, is nonetheless accepted as long as it aligns with the interests of the ummah. This is evident in the political imagination of ADI supporters, for instance, who, despite opposing "secularism, liberalism, and capitalism", also endorse a state based on market capitalism (Rakhmani & Hadiz, 2022; Yasih & Hadiz, 2023).

The shift in the social base from old to new political Islam is a consequence of the development of neoliberal capitalism. Thus, as noted earlier, the development of 21st-century political Islam must be situated within the broader context of capitalism's evolution in Indonesia (Hadiz & Robison, 2012). However, the political economy approach often associates capitalism's development more with the legacy of Cold War conflicts that permeated into domestic disputes and the repressive modernization project of the New Order.

> "[T]he question of how the outcomes of the Cold War and closely related conflicts about the distribution of the fruit of modernization helped to set the stage for the new Islamic populism" (Hadiz, 2016).

The Cold War conflict between the Western and Eastern Blocs was a critical moment for the political economy approach in explaining capitalism's development in Indonesia. This conflict impacted the national development scheme and institutional changes within the state in managing the balance of political power domestically. The suppression of communist forces was a key factor in this transformation. The elimination of communist forces allowed Islam to emerge as the only vehicle providing an outlet for the lower classes to express social dissatisfaction.

> "The outcomes of Cold War-era social conflicts essentially helped to create the environment allowing 'Islamist organizations' to present 'themselves as the principal alternative to traditional nationalist, socialist and liberal organizations.' This was so especially once the social contradictions associated with capitalist development had intensified … in the era of neoliberal globalization."

In Bulak itself, Islam has long been the only significant social force. While the political escalation leading to the removal of national communist forces occurred elsewhere, in Bulak, there was no significant trace of communist presence. During the research period, no signs of communism were found in this village, which also holds for much of West Java. At most, there were minor political tensions, as observed by Safitri (2018) in Indramayu. There was strong support for Masyumi in Bulak, where ulama held prominent positions.

> "There was no such thing as PKI. There is only one in the tea plantation owned by the Dutch. The workers there were labeled PKI. It was called *'tulis tonggong'* [written on the back]. So, like it or not, everyone just went along with it. Even if they didn't register, they were still listed as PKI. They just worked there. There were women picking tea, like nowadays. Women and men alike worked there and were written down as PKI by the plantation manager" (AA, agricultural laborer and informal worker, 90 years old).

National development during the New Order fully adhered to Western frameworks following the collapse of anti-imperialism political projects under Sukarno and the communist forces during the Guided Democracy era. High inflation after the fall of the Old Order and the influx of Western donor funds for national economic recovery made political stability a primary requirement. Islam, as the sole channel for social aspirations, also had to be tamed (Aspinall & Fealy, 2017). With the influx of Western donor funds, coupled with the "oil boom" of the 1970s and 1980s, the implementation of the "Green

Revolution", and subsequent "export-led industrialization" policies, the New Order succeeded in boosting national economic growth (Husken & White, 1989; Robison, 1986). Industrialization, along with the Green Revolution, eventually led to the formation of an industrial working class in urban areas and pushed displaced rural populations to the metropolitan region of Jakarta (Kusno, 2010). This process coincided with the "depoliticization" of Islam as a socio-political force while providing cultural spaces, such as education and social organizations (Hefner, 2011).

New Order development, despite accelerating national economic growth, also created sharp social inequalities. These disparities involved racial dimensions, as Chinese businessmen—who had benefited significantly from the perceived "unjust" colonial order since the Dutch era—continued to reap the lion's share of profits during the New Order era. These Chinese businessmen became one of the key forces within what is termed a "predatory politico-business oligarchy" (Hadiz & Robison, 2012, 2013).

The era of industrialization, urbanization, racial-based social inequality, political repression, and the opening of educational access to Muslims contributed to the emergence of Islam as a channel for political expression in urban areas. The educated Muslim middle class, industrial working class, and lumpenproletariat class developed rapidly in urban settings. These classes emerged from capitalism's development during the New Order, "becoming resonated places with sermons opposing social injustices arising from their harsh encounters with urban realities" (Hadiz, 2016). This process, in general, became the foundation for the development of Islamic populism, which persisted beyond the fall of the New Order, including its more extreme constituents like Darul Islam (DI) (Alamsyah & Hadiz, 2017).

Despite its structural analyses, Hadiz and others provide limited explanations about capitalism's development beyond portraying it as an "arena of struggle among various social forces for material and political resources" (Hadiz, 2016). Questions regarding how rural populations transformed from farmers into various categories of workers and how agricultural production resources transformed into capital, alienating previous owners, are not subjects of analysis within the political economy approach. The shift of populations from rural to urban areas is only briefly explained as a result of the elimination of communist forces in the mid-1960s and the state-led modernization development project stemming from the Cold War, without linking these elements as part of ongoing primitive accumulation to create a labor supply and raw materials for capital accumulation (Farid, 2005). This approach, which places heavy emphasis on institutional political changes in the state and their relationship with Islamic populism, thus resembles the "old social movement" approach (Buehler, 2017; Syaifullah et al., 2022).

On the other hand, a critical agrarian approach emerges to address the significance of separating farmers from their means of production and their transformation in the development of capitalism. While the political economy approach focuses more on changes in state political institutions, the critical agrarian approach emphasizes the transformation of production relations underpinning these political changes. However, despite their different focuses, both approaches reach the same conclusion about the shift of social movements from rural to urban areas.

According to the critical agrarian approach, capitalism develops by commodifying land, labor, labor products, and the reproduction of labor. The agrarian question, as a key subject in this approach, initially highlights how this commodification process began. Henry Bernstein is one of the influential proponents of this approach. For him, the agrarian question concerns how "industrial capitalism" or "industrialization" erodes subsistence farming, integrates these practices into the global capital circuit, creates "class differentiation", and how peasant resistance emerges and develops in response to this erosion and integration (Bernstein & Byres, 2001).

One of the critical battlegrounds between capital and producers is "agrarian reform." The expansion of capital to dispossess peasants from their means of production faced resistance from the latter through land reclaiming. This primarily occurred in the early 20th century up to the 1960s in post-colonial societies. However, it is essential to note that agrarian reform did not occur uniformly across all regions. Some countries implemented agrarian reform as a strategy to encourage capital expansion and tame revolutionary peasant elements. Land was distributed to peasants, along with inputs and agricultural credit, to promote the intensification of rural production through a state-centric developmentalism

approach (state-led development). This type of agrarian reform is called "agrarian reform from above" (Bernstein, 2010).

In Indonesia, agrarian reform politics can be divided into two phases. The first phase occurred in the early 1960s, while the second phase began in the 1970s. Aksi Sepihak marked the first phase mentioned earlier. After the New Order replaced the Old Order regime, agrarian reform proceeded from above using a market-oriented approach (market-based agrarian reform) (Ghimire, 2001). In Bulak, *Aksi Sepihak* was absent, owing to the strong influence of Islam—through the Masyumi party—and the weak support for the PKI. In this village, class struggles over land did not occur.

In the 1980s, the development of capitalism entered a phase of globalization, replacing the era of developmentalism. Capital accumulation was no longer state-led but spearheaded by multinational corporations. In this new era, agrarian reform was no longer driven by peasant resistance to commodification but by agricultural policy frameworks that aimed to encourage commodification itself (Bernstein, 2002). According to Bernstein, this era marked the completion of integrating agrarian practices into the global capital circuit. Practices and discourses of agrarian reform during this period were primarily aimed at securing farmers' access to the production, consumption, and exchange circuits of the global capitalist system.

The shift in the nature of agrarian reform under globalized capitalism also brought changes to the issues faced by capital on one side and peasants on the other. In earlier periods, capital's primary issue was how to integrate farmers and production resources into the global capitalist circuit. In the globalization era, capital confronts issues related to labor and production resource concentration and overproduction. For peasants, their main concern has shifted from resisting capitalism to matters of income stability, job access, and daily reproduction.

> "The development of industrial capitalism, and the economic and political forms of its internationalization, generated new pressures on agrarian classes of pre-capitalist provenance as it brought them within its circuit of production, exchange and consumption" (Bernstein, 2002).

The new pressures brought about by globalization since the 1980s caused peasant fragmentation into various new classes. The previously feudalistic class formations among peasants, after this era, differentiated according to their ability to secure production and reproduction bases under commodity relations on a global scale. In rural areas, these developments altered class dynamics related to class location and relations among farmers (Bernstein, 2010).

> "Class differentiation of peasants … can proceed via the increasing 'entry' or reproduction costs of petty commodity enterprise, resulting in the dispossession/proletarianization of weaker producers/poor peasants without any necessary formation of classes of rich peasants or capitalist farmers" (Bernstein, 2000).

Two further consequences arise from the development of contemporary capitalism in the globalization era. The first consequence relates to the shifting agrarian question in explaining the socio-economic developments in rural areas. According to Bernstein, the "classic" agrarian question—that is, the agrarian question concerning "capital"—is no longer relevant. Why? This question focuses on the dynamics of primitive accumulation, where capital forces drive the commodification of labor and production resources into the global capital accumulation circuit against anti-capital forces (mainly feudal and leftist forces). Meanwhile, in the globalization era, where primitive accumulation has been completed, the main issue faced by rural classes revolves around income stability and, consequently, their daily reproduction access. Therefore, the agrarian question about capital must be replaced with the "agrarian question about labor", which focuses more on securing rural classes' access to their daily reproduction needs.

> "The tendency of 'globalization' to fragment labor in a sense indicated led to the question whether there might be a (new) agrarian question of labor now detached from that of capital, rooted in crises of employment, and manifested in struggles over, and for, land to secure some part of its reproduction needs" (Bernstein, 2004).

The second consequence concerns peasant movements specifically and agrarian movements in rural areas more broadly. As noted in the above quote, the composition of rural classes, increasingly

fragmented into various class categories, requires a shift from the old analysis toward one that examines how peasant movements secure access to production and reproduction for each class under negotiation in global commodity production relations. This analytical shift has produced a variety of research focused on class dynamics in agrarian change across different regions (Habibi, 2021, 2023; Oya, 2004; Singh & Kumar, 2024; Zhang, 2015). Agrarian struggles led by peasants, according to this approach, must be placed within the context of class fragmentation and changing class composition. This framework often neglects attention to peasant movements resisting capitalist relations, which continue to emerge, especially in developing countries (Moyo et al., 2012; Moyo & Yeros, 2005).

The analytical shift in agrarian movements in rural areas inevitably affects the interpretation of religious movements that arise and develop in rural areas as a response to global capitalism. Referring to Bernstein's critical agrarian approach, rural religious movements—in this case, Islamic movements—must also be situated within this class fragmentation. The class fragmentation that has emerged since the era of globalized capital poses challenges for agrarian movements, including Islamic movements, in building collective action to counter the expansion of capital.

During the era of globalized capital, class fragmentation and its consequences for the agrarian question and agrarian movements are parallel to the political economy approach to Indonesian political Islam. While Hadiz argues that the social base of political Islam has shifted since the New Order implemented modernization and industrialization, Bernstein complements this view by providing an analysis of changes in agricultural resource ownership within the context of overproduction and capital concentration. Rural classes, once active participants in implementing agrarian reform against global capitalism, now find themselves squeezed into a "reproduction crisis", leading most peasants to differentiate and attempt to secure access to their reproduction. If Hadiz argues that state-led industrialization during the New Order caused rural migration to urban areas and the formation of new classes (educated Muslim middle classes and lumpenproletariat classes), Bernstein adds that class fragmentation under globalized capital has pushed most dispossessed farmers into informal economic sectors in urban areas.

> "While it is impossible to generalize about the impact of uneven and diverse forms of globalization on (differentiated) peasantries, it is likely that in this current phase of imperialism, most poor peasants confront an increasing simple reproduction 'squeeze.' Together with the landless rural proletariat, they form part of an expanding reserve army of labor in the countryside and the cities and towns of large areas of the imperialist periphery, given the prevalence of rural-urban links, which include, for many members of poor peasant households, regular migration in search of wage employment as 'footloose labor'" (Bernstein, 2000).

Table 1. Parallel analyses of the political economy and critical agrarian approaches

Approach	Capitalism	Proletarianization	Social base	Social Movement
Political Economy Approach	Cold War, modernization, state repression	Urbanization of rural workers	Formation of urban classes	Rural areas are no longer significant for social movements, replaced by urban populist alliances.
Critical Agrarian Approach	Commodification of land and labor reproduction	Rural class fragmentation and migration to urban informal sectors	Differentiation of rural classes connected to urban informal sectors	Rural areas are no longer significant for social movements due to fragmented rural classes

For the political economy approach, state political changes are central to analyzing capitalism's development. Meanwhile, the critical agrarian approach focuses on the dynamics of agricultural resource control. Capitalism's growth, according to both, is heavily influenced by globalization, which drives urbanization and the formation of urban classes (in the political economy approach) and social differentiation and fragmentation in rural areas (in the critical agrarian approach). Despite their differing premises, both conclude that rural social movements are no longer significant in the context of the

expansion of global capitalism (Bernstein's term) or neoliberal capitalism (Hadiz's term). Although Bernstein, through his critical agrarian approach, does not explicitly discuss Islamic movements, his conclusions about the agrarian question and class fragmentation align with Hadiz's political economy analysis, which concludes that 21st-century political Islam is an urban phenomenon under neoliberalism.

Despite this alignment, the concrete experiences of Islamic movements in rural Java tell a different story. Although these movements cannot be classified as wholly anti-capitalist, certain ideological elements related to the control and use of agricultural production resources contradict capitalist principles. These elements form the basis for the emergence and growth of Islamic movements in rural Java in the 21st century. This experience refers to an Islamic movement in a West Java village and similar movements found elsewhere. Both experiences will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

The development of political Islam in Bulak: A portrait of agrarian change

Islam as a political force in Bulak has emerged as a result of the historical development of capital relations from the Dutch colonial era to the post-New Order period. As written by Syaifullah et al. (2022), two critical moments in the development of capitalism underpin the growth of political Islam in Bulak: the Green Revolution, which began in the early 1970s, and the dominance of Chinese businessmen since the 1990s. These moments have been detailed extensively in their work. In this section, these two significant moments are briefly revisited as a prelude to discussing the relationship between political Islam and the agrarian question.

The Green Revolution, as explained by Patel (2012), was the result of a political project by capitalism, represented by imperialist states, to counter communist forces (the "Red Revolution") in post-colonial countries. This countermeasure also served, according to Bernstein (2002), to integrate the agricultural practices of these regions into the global capital circuit. In Indonesia, as in other post-colonial countries, the Green Revolution involved the eradication of communist forces in rural areas, and the introduction of agricultural modernization managed centrally by the state.

In Bulak, agricultural modernization was most evident in the cultivation of cloves and melons. These two commodities, in turn, accelerated class-based social differentiation. As a village that has embraced Islam as a social force since the Dutch colonial era, marked by anti-colonial resistance by ulama and haji (Syaifullah et al., 2022), the modern cultivation of cloves and melons also involved significant roles for ulama and haji. Many of them became cultural brokers (Horikhosi, 1976), conveying the importance of the Green Revolution project from the state to the villagers through sermons and religious gatherings in their assemblies.

Their roles as political leaders and cultural brokers allowed the ulama and haji to occupy the highest social class in the modern agricultural development of cloves and melons from the 1970s to the 1990s. The ulama became the "landlord" class, following Bernstein's (2010) categorization. Their longstanding social status since colonial times enabled the ulama and haji to assume positions as village heads and farmer group leaders, granting them privileged access to agricultural practices such as irrigation channels and cheap agricultural credit.

> "Of course, we follow the *kyai* [religious teacher]. We are taught to respect them because they guide us toward salvation in this world and the afterlife. If there are problems here, it's the *kyai* who helps the villagers. So, as much as possible, we repay their kindness; that's the way it is" (U, sharecropper, 69 years old).

Meanwhile, the haji became "capitalist farmers", employing wage relations with their agricultural laborers. The strength of the haji was supported not only by symbolic capital but also by alliances with the ulama through marriage. These marriages provided the haji access to facilities like irrigation and cheap agricultural credit.

> "It's common here (marriages between ulama and haji families). KA married HM's daughter. I attended the wedding. There are many like him … HA's grandchildren also married KH's grandchildren, the big *kyai* here" (AM, agricultural laborer, 69 years old).

Entering the 1990s, the national price of clove commodities dropped drastically. This decline was caused by Soeharto's cronies monopolizing the distribution and marketing of cloves through *Koperasi Unit*

Desa (Village Unit Cooperatives) (Syaifullah et al., 2022). The clove price, which initially reached IDR 6,500 per kilogram, fell to IDR 1,500 to IDR 2,000 per kilogram. This caused many clove cultivation businesses in Bulak to collapse. Although the ulama and haji experienced production declines, the clove monopoly's effects were most severely felt by those occupying social classes, such as sharecroppers, smallholders, and agricultural laborers. Many who had initially enjoyed the prosperity from cloves had to accept the sudden collapse of their businesses in the 1990s. Many became trapped in debt. For the ulama and haji, although they were somewhat affected, they were the class capable of surviving and even exploiting the collapse of the sharecroppers' clove businesses. Many of them provided loans and, in return, obtained lands and "unpaid labor" from the debtors, most of whom were their *santri* (students). Despite this, the *santri* still felt that the ulama and haji were their saviors.

> "Fortunately, KA helped me. Even though the wages are small, if it weren't for him, I might not have been able to pay off my debts. So it's still good that someone gives me work." (U, sharecropper, 69 years old)

Unlike cloves, the villagers' melon business suffered due to the arrival of Chinese businessmen from outside the village. Unequal economic capital, knowledge, and business networks allowed Chinese businessmen to dominate melon farming practices in Bulak quickly. Although the causes were different, the effect of melons on the villagers was the same as that brought by cloves. Sharecroppers, smallholders, and agricultural laborers were the most affected. Many had to close their businesses because they could not compete with the Chinese businessmen. M, an agricultural laborer (44 years old), regarded the Chinese businessmen as *"haram jadah"*, meaning infidels committing wrongdoing against the Muslim villagers in Bulak, including his father, who had once been in the melon business. Meanwhile, the ulama and haji, although their businesses were disrupted, still had safety nets from debts owed to them, land mortgages, and unpaid labor from sharecroppers, smallholders, and agricultural laborers. Similar to the clove situation, in the context of melons, the ulama and haji were even able to take advantage of this situation for their benefit.

Table 2. Characteristics of social classes in Bulak

Ownership of Property	Land Tenure Relations	Labor Relations	Control over Production Output	Non-Agricultural Employment	Cultural Position	Class
Own land 1.5–5 ha.	Rent out to *santri* through money and profit-sharing	Hire laborers with profit-sharing	Sell all production output	Owners of pesantren and a village assembly	Ulama	Landlords
Own land 1.5–4 ha.	Rent out land for cash	Hire laborers with daily wages	Sell all production output	Employer	Haji	Capitalist farmers
Own and rent land 0.1–0.5 ha.	Rent and rent out land for cash	Hire and rent out labor with wages/profit-sharing	Sell almost all production output	Informal workers	*Santri* and ulama	Smallholders
Rent land 0.5–1 ha.	Rent land for cash	Hire and rent out labor with wages/profit-sharing	Sell almost all production output	Informal workers, lower-level village officials	*Santri* and ulama	Sharecroppers
Do not own/rent land	-	Work as laborers for daily wages/profit-sharing	Keep most and sell the rest of the production output	Informal workers	Santri	Agricultural laborers

Source: (Compiled from observations and interviews)

The losses most felt by the ulama and haji occurred when Chinese businessmen began expanding their business and political influence in Bulak. Chinese businessmen who, in the 1990s, only intended to engage in the melon business, in the early 2000s, expanded their commodity business into teak plantations and the property sector by building inns, villas, and resorts. To strengthen their businesses, Chinese businessmen began to engage in village political contests. Since the 2000s, teak plantations and

lodging buildings began to increase. The magnificent villas and resorts owned by Chinese businessmen even caused the dominance of old lodging businesses to decline due to a loss in capital and marketing competition.

Based on Table 2 above, the population in Bulak is differentiated into several class categories. When clove and melon commodities were introduced, this differentiation became more visible. They are distinguished in terms of control over land resources, labor relations, distribution of production outputs, and reproductive relationships. These class distinctions often involve ideological and religious aspects as a result of the long history of Islamic dominance in Bulak. This also determines the adaptive and recovery capacities of each class when facing crises. Classes such as the haji and ulama, although they suffered losses when clove prices dropped, and melon farming shifted to Chinese businesses, still maintained safety nets and even accumulated wealth from the classes below them.

In a particular moment of village head elections, the Chinese businessmen managed to secure victory—albeit informally—for the candidate they supported. This victory was also supported by some ulama who were previously opposed to the dominant power of the existing ulama and haji (Syaifullah et al., 2022). Through this victory, Chinese businessmen could expand their business scope. The impact of this process was the dominance of land control and access to village infrastructure, narrowing the business expansion of the ulama and haji, limiting land tenancy access for smallholders and sharecroppers, and reducing job opportunities for local agricultural laborers because Chinese businessmen preferred to bring in labor from outside the village. Even some ulama who had initially supported the village head backed by Chinese businessmen eventually felt economic losses as they were ultimately "abandoned" by the Chinese businessmen. Realizing this, the political alliance between some ulama and the Chinese businessmen soon ended, and these ulama joined in opposing the Chinese businessmen.

The populist alliance formed in Bulak was heavily influenced by the class differentiation that had developed over time and was sharpened during the clove melon periods, and the arrival of Chinese businessmen. This alliance, which will be elaborated further in the following section, reflects the diverse aspirations of each class. This finding confirms Bernstein's assertion about the contours of social movements in the era of global capitalism that has rolled since the 1980s. Social movements are highly fragmented. However, the populist alliance in Bulak has its uniqueness and does not entirely align with Bernstein's thesis.

Agrarian change, crisis, and *jihad*: Differentiated populist views

The social differentiation that has developed significantly since the 1970s and was sharpened by the arrival of Chinese businessmen became the backdrop for the development of political Islam in Bulak. The ulama and haji, representing the landlord and capitalist farmer classes, also felt threatened by this arrival. Access to land, which had previously boosted the economies of smallholders and sharecroppers, eventually narrowed after the clove and melon cultivation eras ended. Laborers imported by Chinese businessmen outcompeted agricultural laborers from the village. This situation led most of the villagers to form a "populist alliance" (Weyland, 2017) against the Chinese businessmen and to organize themselves in Jakarta to participate in the ADI in 2016 (Syaifullah et al., 2022).

After ADI, the form of populist resistance of Bulak villagers against Chinese businessmen can be seen in efforts to close a resort business named *R & C*. For the villagers, *R & C* symbolized, on the one hand, the economic and political dominance of Chinese businessmen and, on the other hand, the defeat of village villagers, including agricultural laborers, sharecroppers, smallholders, landlords, and capitalist farmers. Along with the growth of villas and resorts, the Chinese businessmen who owned them often held "parties" with loud music and fireworks, including at *R & C*. Such activities were considered disruptive to the religious practices of the village community in their assemblies and pesantren. One issue that spurred the villagers' action to close *R & C* was the consumption of alcoholic drinks during these parties, which particularly angered the ulama.

> "That *R & C* owner is outrageous! Building here and there as he pleases. He doesn't respect ulama like me. Disturbing the order here! By holding such parties, he's disturbing the community. This village is known for its strong Islam! The presence of people like him [*R & C* owner], I suspect, is trying to destroy us Muslims here." (KA, landlord-ulama, 65 years old)

This populist alliance is anchored in diverse aspirations. The ulama and haji felt threatened in political contests and business competition in the agricultural sector by the Chinese businessmen. Smallholders and sharecroppers found it difficult to access land tenancy due to the dominance of land control by Chinese businessmen. Meanwhile, agricultural laborers in Bulak felt marginalized from job opportunities because Chinese businessmen often employed laborers from outside the village. So, although they formed a populist alliance, their aspirations differed, determined by their respective class positions.

The social fact of the Muslim villagers being displaced from business competition, losing land, job opportunities, and the introduction of "foreign" cultures through parties at the resorts could be translated into political facts. The populists could interpret the arrival of Chinese businessmen with their economic and political expansion as a threat to the social life of a village that practices Islam in their everyday lives. Anti-Chinese sentiment was strong in various conversations among villagers who felt marginalized. The ulama became actors capable of activating such identity politics by linking it to the changes in agrarian production resource control occurring in Bulak. This capability of the ulama is a product of the long history of Islam as a social force in this village, as previously mentioned.

> "In this village, the *kyai* doesn't just teach religion. The *kyai* also takes care of agricultural matters, marriages, inheritance, and so on. There's a saying, *'ngepork cai memeh ceret'* [close the water before the kettle overflows], meaning that we must solve problems before they get bigger." (KA, landlord-ulama, 65 years old)

The ulama could utilize Islam as a cultural pool to build what Hadiz (2016) called a "chain of equivalences", which are issues that bind various classes into a narrative of resistance. This chain of equivalence is called the *"ummah",* which binds the Muslim community of Bulak into the category of "the people", the oppressed, and "insiders," differentiating themselves from their oppressors, namely the Chinese businessmen as "outsiders." This narrative was evident when they attempted to close down *R & C* owned by one of the Chinese businessmen.

One of the sources underpinning the *ummah* narrative as a unifying factor is the ulama's interpretation of *"jihad."* For the ulama in Bulak, *jihad* is interpreted as an active action to fight against "tyranny" threatening the social life of the *ummah*. *"Isy kariman aw mut syahidan"*, which means "live nobly or die as a martyr", is a religious concept used by the ulama in forming the populist alliance.

> "*Isy kariman aw mut syahidan!* We must uphold a noble life. That's what it means. If we can, then die as martyrs. It means we must keep fighting against tyranny. So, who is tyrannical? Those Chinese people. They blatantly destroy the Muslim life here. Look at their businesses—ugh, they really don't respect the people here, the life here!" (KA, landlord-ulama, 65 years old)

The call for *jihad* against the Chinese businessmen is also linked to the historical story (*tarikh*) of Prophet Muhammad. According to KA, one of the prophetic missions in spreading Islam in the Arabian Peninsula was carried out through resistance against the imbalance in the structure of agrarian production resource control. HI, another landlord-ulama, shared this view. Islam as a religion was propagated by the Prophet not only based on matters of faith but also on establishing socio-economic justice.

> "*Ad-dinul Islam* [Islam as a religion] was established by the Prophet Muhammad not just concerning *tawhid* [monotheism] alone. *Tawhid* is indeed primary, but we must not forget that within *tawhid* there is justice. Surah Al-Hashr verse seven, the Prophet conveyed, 'wealth should not circulate only among the rich among you', but must be fair. 'Be just; that is nearer to righteousness.' Sometimes we forget these dimensions in the story of the Prophet's propagation of Islam. Upholding *tawhid* means believing in Allah, which also means implementing His teachings, foremost of which is justice among fellow humans in many aspects. So, if a few people control wealth, it's not permissible. Especially if those who control it are, pardon me, not Muslims; we must oppose that. I mean, we must correct it." (HI, landlord-ulama, 56 years old)

One form of wealth, for the ulama of Bulak, is access to land. Land is considered a fundamental element that has shaped the social life in Bulak for decades. Most of the village population relies on land as a

means to meet their daily needs. For HI, "humans were created from a lump of the soil", so if the Muslim villagers of Bulak no longer own the land, they will experience a kind of "alienation" from their physical origin.

> "The land has given us life. From the soil we were born, and to the soil, we shall return. Imagine if we no longer own the land; what kind of life will we lead? Now, the land is controlled by Chinese people. It means our life is also controlled." (KA, landlord-ulama, 65 years old)

It is important to note that anti-Chinese sentiment, as seen in the interviews above, became a key element in forming the populist alliance of classes in Bulak. With this sentiment, the line between insiders and outsiders became clear. When this dividing line was established, the populist coalition could not only form but also, following Hadiz (2016), "suspend" class contradictions among the villagers.

On the other hand, the function of anti-Chinese sentiment as a suspending mechanism is related to the nature of the aspirations of the landlord and haji classes in this populist alliance. By associating Chinese businessmen as representatives of foreign forces, the ulama and haji consider that the capitalist system is not inherently bad as long as the means of production are controlled by insiders from the populist alliance. This view can be seen from KA and HI's statements during a conversation when they compared the social situation during the New Order and after the arrival of Chinese businessmen in Bulak. For KA, the New Order era was a time when building businesses and daily necessities were easy. "Money was small, but you could buy everything, unlike nowadays", he said. Meanwhile, HI considered that the era after the New Order was a "more advanced" era but had neglected Islamic values, especially with the arrival of Chinese businessmen.

> "Development in Bulak is already good ... We see many public facilities ... Village-owned enterprises (*Badan Usaha Milik Desa/BUMDes*) are also being promoted. God willing, it will be achieved. However, one thing to remember is that although development is good, it should not leave out the Islamic dimension within it. We must remember that Islam is paramount, especially in Bulak. Take *R & C*, for example. The development is good, but don't forget the Islamic symbols shouldn't be eliminated!" (HI, landlord-ulama, 56 years old)

KA and HI's views above can be interpreted that the development of capitalism in Bulak, notably accelerated during the Green Revolution era, was not problematic as long as it benefited the *ummah*. Benefiting the *ummah* means that Bulak villagers, who are predominantly Muslim, and especially the ulama and haji, must gain access to economic and political resources as they had during the New Order and before the arrival of Chinese businessmen. Their statements reflect a "romantic" view where social order—based on class—once existed in the past, and they consider such order ideal for the life of Bulak villagers. During the New Order, although some lands changed ownership to newcomers from the outside, as long as the new owners were Muslims, the social and economic activities arising from that land were not considered problematic because these people were deemed not to harm the villagers. This is evident from HB (70 years old), an entrepreneur from Jakarta who gradually bought villagers' land and created "housing plots." However, instead of being seen as a threat, HB's arrival in Bulak was accepted by the local villagers.

This also means that the populist alliance formed in Bulak confirms Bernstein's exposition regarding the "agrarian question of labor" in the era of global capitalism. Social movements in rural areas during the globalized capitalism, even if they appear in religious expressions, according to Bernstein, are not aimed at opposing capitalist relations but at securing "a portion of the reproduction needs of certain classes" as a result of social fragmentation and differentiation in rural areas. However, when examining the aspirations of lower classes, especially sharecroppers and agricultural laborers, Bernstein's theoretical exposition is not entirely accurate. For sharecroppers and agricultural laborers, the populist narrative is not simply injected by the ulama and accepted *apriori*, even though the latter hold leadership positions.

For sharecroppers and agricultural laborers, most of whom are *santri* of ulama like KA and HI, following the words of the ulama is indeed a path to salvation both in this world and the afterlife. Living in a village that holds Islam as a symbol underlying their social actions for decades makes them aware of the importance of following the teachings that come from the mouths of the ulama. However, the clove monopoly and debt entanglement in the 1990s made them consider that the New Order, contrary to what the ulama and haji imagined, also played a role in their ruinous stories.

> "My generation is a generation that got unlucky because we didn't get to enjoy the 'green gold' [melons] and cloves because my father already ruined them. All because of Tommy [Soeharto] and the Chinese people." (M, agricultural laborer, 44 years old)

M is an agricultural laborer who had to bear the debt burden inherited by his father, a former sharecropper who was ruined when clove prices plummeted. Similar to M, U also has a somewhat similar view. As a sharecropper, U once enjoyed the good life from clove and melon cultivation. However, that time was short-lived. When the clove and melon monopolies hit the village, U also suffered significant losses. He not only became indebted but also had to sell his house and work without pay to repay the debt to the creditors, namely the ulama and haji.

The life stories of U and M, although representing two different social classes, form the basis for a somewhat similar populist aspiration. Their views on *jihad* differ from those of the ulama and haji. For both of them, the clove monopoly by Soeharto's cronies and the melon monopoly by Chinese businessmen are two similar things—they both negatively impact their economic conditions. This is different from the experiences of the ulama and haji, who not only managed to survive but also exploited the situation for their benefit with the debts they extended.

Sharecroppers and agricultural laborers like U and M indeed regard the ulama as their spiritual and political leaders in Bulak. However, this leadership is not taken for granted. While the ulama and haji act as leaders of the populist alliance, sharecroppers and agricultural laborers also possess their subjective awareness. In addition to viewing Soeharto's cronies' clove monopoly as just as detrimental as the melon monopoly by Chinese businessmen, sharecroppers and agricultural laborers also cast a skeptical eye on certain ulama who had briefly allied with Chinese businessmen in political contests in Bulak. Competition among the ulama for the position of village head had existed since the New Order came to power. Such competition was acceptable to sharecroppers and agricultural laborers. However, it became unusual when some ulama were willing to ally with Chinese businessmen, whom they considered outsiders. This partnership reflected the saying *"ngeprok cai"* without *"memeh ceret"*, meaning creating various problems without considering the negative impacts that might arise in the future, such as, for instance, divisions within the *ummah*.

The experiences of the clove monopoly and the temporary alliance between some ulama and Chinese businessmen became the basis for the views of sharecroppers and agricultural laborers within the populist coalition. Unlike the ulama and haji, sharecroppers and agricultural laborers quietly imagine a time when they could reap the benefits of the economic activities they engage in, especially in the agricultural activities they have been involved in for so long. They hope, albeit silently, that the populist alliance they are part of can lead to social changes that create a sense of security in meeting their needs. While they agree with the romanticized ideas of the ulama about the New Order era, they do not want the clove monopoly period to happen again. They indeed acknowledge the social order under the New Order, with its safety and social stability during that time. Still, the clove monopoly remains a tragic moment for them, tarnishing the positive image of the romanticized ideas of the ulama. The clove monopoly by Soeharto's cronies and the melon monopoly by Chinese businessmen both had negative impacts. Sharecroppers and agricultural laborers were the most adversely affected, and they are well aware of this.

> "*Sarua keneh* [It's the same]! Tommy is no different from the Chinese people. Both gave me problems. Who knows who else will come in the future? What we want is for farmers like us to live in peace, without the constant panic of losing land, piling up debt, and feeling the pain in our heads and hearts." (AM, agricultural laborer, 69 years old)

The perspectives of sharecroppers and agricultural laborers illustrate that there are alternative interpretations of agrarian change that are not exclusively held or monopolized by the ulama and haji. Their subjective awareness of the harms caused by the clove monopoly, the melon monopoly, and the temporary political alliance between Chinese businessmen and some ulama in Bulak demonstrates the diverse aspirations within the narrative of the *ummah*. The vision of a socio-economic agricultural condition that offers 'peace,' rather than 'constant panic,' positions sharecroppers and agricultural laborers as actors who, unlike the social classes above them, have the potential to transcend the populist *jihad* narrative as understood by the ulama and haji.

The development of capitalism in the era of globalization has indeed created class differentiation and fragmented social movements in rural areas, such that, as Bernstein states, they become trapped in securing class reproduction within capital relations in a negotiated way. However, in Bulak, as shown through the interviews above, there are certain social classes, namely sharecroppers and agricultural laborers, who hold aspirations different from landlords and capitalist farmers, even though they are part of the same populist alliance. Their subjective awareness, shaped by their experiences of the clove monopoly and the temporary political alliance between some ulama and Chinese businessmen, provides them with a vision of the importance of breaking free from capital relations, which always create 'panic' for classes like sharecroppers and agricultural laborers. While this awareness may be limited, compelling them to join the populist alliance, their concrete experiences, distinct from the social classes above them, position them as a class with what can be described as 'alternative' consciousness within capital relations.

Conclusion

This study shows that agrarian transformations driven by global capitalism, from the Green Revolution to the dominance of Chinese businessmen, have intensified social class differentiation in rural West Java and spurred the emergence of religiously-based populist Islamic movements. The classes of ulama and haji leveraged their status to maintain economic dominance. At the same time, sharecroppers and agricultural laborers became the groups most affected by the loss of access to land and work due to monopolies and capitalist exploitation. The loss of local political dominance and access to agrarian resources led to the formation of populist alliances. However, aspirations within these alliances are fragmented, with ulama and haji tending to support capitalism that benefits them, while sharecroppers and agricultural laborers exhibit a critical awareness of capitalist exploitation. The devastating experiences of sharecroppers and agricultural laborers under the clove monopoly by Soeharto's cronies and the melon monopoly by Chinese businessmen have led them to view exploitation, regardless of racial identity, as a shared cause of their suffering.

These concrete experiences carry several consequences. First, the findings challenge the assumption that rural areas have lost their relevance as a base for Islamic movements while simultaneously uncovering elements of class-conscious resistance against exploitative capitalism. Hadiz's exposition, which positions urban life as the center of Islamic populism, must be reconsidered. On the other hand, the agrarian question, contrary to Bernstein's assertion, remains highly relevant in explaining the emergence and development of social movements in rural areas that, albeit to a certain extent, have the potential to challenge capitalism. The concrete experiences of Bulak villagers pave the way for future research that can demonstrate the continued relevance of the agrarian question in rural development amid the pressures of global capitalism, albeit with certain limitations.

Statement of originality and plagiarism-free

We inform that this article is original article and free of plagiarism

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