

## Islamic Leftist and Ecological Resistance in the Nahdliyyin Front for Resource Sovereignty

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### Abstract

This study aims to understand the emergence of leftist Islamic thought as articulated by the FNKSDA (Nahdliyyin Front for Natural Resource Sovereignty). The primary focus is to examine the material and historical conditions that enabled the development of this thought. This research employs a qualitative document analysis as its method. In doing so, the researcher drew data from official FNKSDA documents, articles authored by FNKSDA activists, and relevant academic journals accessible to the researcher. I interpreted the collected data using a thematic approach guided by the Historic Materialism framework formulated by Michael Lowy. Based on the analysis results, the study finds that the material and historical conditions confronted by FNKSDA have significantly shaped its formulation of leftist Islamic thought. The formation of FNKSDA's thought is shaped by three particular conditions: the political-economic landscape of post-Reformasi Indonesia, the internal dynamics of the Nahdlatul Ulama organization, and the broader development of Islamic thought in Indonesia in the post-Reformasi era. The researcher contends that this study offers a valuable contribution to the broader scholarship on Islamic political thought in Indonesia.

### Keywords

FNKSDA; Islamic Thought; Islamic Left

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

*Front Nahdliyyin untuk Kedaulatan Sumber Daya Alam* (FNKSDA), or Nahdliyyin Front for Natural Resource Sovereignty, is a cultural organization affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). FNKSDA was established as a direct response to Indonesia's political and economic conditions, particularly the rampant environmental destruction resulting from extractive economic practices. In addressing these issues, FNKSDA articulates a relatively novel intellectual position—an attempt to synthesize two often-opposed traditions: Islam and socialism. This synthesis is explicitly declared on FNKSDA's official platform, where it states that the organization's guiding pillars and ideological compass are *Socialism* and *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah (Aswaja)* (FNKSDA, n.d.). Within this framework, FNKSDA can be identified as a group that embodies an Islamic Leftist position—an effort to construct an alternative interpretation of Islamic teachings by integrating them with the critical social theory



tradition rooted in socialism.

The ideological position adopted by FNKSDA stands in stark contrast to that of other Islamic groups in post-Reformasi Indonesia. According to Hadiz (2011) Islamic groups frequently voice criticism against the political and economic dominance of certain elites; however, they are not inherently anti-capitalist in character. Even radical Islamic factions have exhibited tendencies to form alliances with bourgeois interests. In contrast to the groups identified by Hadiz, FNKSDA firmly rejects capitalism and explicitly embraces the tradition of critical social science that underpins anti-capitalist resistance—namely, scientific socialism. Several scholars have undertaken investigations into this distinctive intellectual stance. Asworo and Akbar (2019) Explored FNKSDA's synthesis of Islamic and Marxist thought. They explained how FNKSDA offers an alternative interpretation of Islamic teachings. A double movement does it. First, integrating Marxist analysis as a complementary lens to examine ecological crises. Second, Islamic language is employed to localize and translate Marxist ideas into daily religious discourse.

Meanwhile, Ubaidillah (2018) characterizes FNKSDA as a new expression of Islamic Leftism. This designation follows an analysis of two elements: first, the presence of progressive Islamic characteristics within FNKSDA's ideological framework; and second, the movement's methods of grassroots advocacy on issues related to natural resource sovereignty in Indonesia. While both studies contribute significantly to our understanding of FNKSDA's ideological configuration, they fall short in addressing the intellectual origin of the movement. This discussion is crucial for two reasons. First, understanding the conditions that give rise to specific thoughts can encourage further experimentation, potentially leading to the emergence of new, more relevant, and contextually grounded ideas. Second, engaging with the material conditions surrounding the development of such thought can help us avoid becoming trapped in overly idealist debates—those that focus solely on the theoretical compatibility of Islam and Marxism, while overlooking the fundamental impetus for their convergence: the pressing dislocations within society that demand resolution.

Based on these arguments, the author advances some questions. How did FNKSDA's thought come into being? What material-historical conditions in Indonesia made it possible for such a synthesis of ideas to emerge? More specifically, what were the socio-economic conditions faced by NU and its followers that facilitated the development of such a discourse? Moreover, more broadly, how have historical-material realities shaped Islamic thought in Indonesia in ways that eventually gave rise to FNKSDA's ideological stance? To address these questions, the author employs the analytical framework of historical materialism as utilized by Michael Löwy (1996) in his examination of the emergence of liberation theology in Latin America. This approach emphasizes that material conditions are foundational in shaping social consciousness. Religion, as part of the ideological superstructure, is shaped by these material conditions but is not entirely determined by the economic base. Instead, it possesses a degree of relative autonomy that enables it to function as a potential force for liberation, rather than solely as an instrument of the ruling class to oppress the marginalized. Religion and its interpretation are understood within this framework as sites of ideological struggle.

The strength of this analysis lies not only in recognizing religion as an entity with relative autonomy but also in identifying the conditions under which such autonomy can produce transformative power. In this regard, Löwy highlights both internal and external factors that facilitated the rise of liberation theology in Latin America. Internally, the Church experienced a growing openness toward the study of modern social sciences and philosophy. Externally, the influx of multinational corporations into Latin America exacerbated social tensions and deepened economic inequality.

As this article will demonstrate, there are notable parallels between the emergence of FNKSDA's thought and the development of liberation theology in Latin America. While the author does not claim that FNKSDA represents a direct Indonesian counterpart to liberation theology, it is clear that similar conditions surrounded the formation of both. Drawing on this perspective, the author demonstrates that the emergence of FNKSDA's Islamic Left thought is profoundly shaped by the historical material conditions surrounding its development. Moreover, FNKSDA's Islamic Leftist discourse constitutes a form of counter-hegemonic ideology, aimed explicitly at critiquing dominant Islamic discourses that are seen to reinforce bourgeois class power over the ummah. In this regard, its critique is directed toward both Islamic liberalism and Islamic conservatism.

The novelty offered in this article lies in its materialist reading of the emergence of FNKSDA's thought. This article argues that FNKSDA's intellectual formation is deeply embedded in the material-historical context surrounding its emergence. The findings presented in this article contribute to ongoing debates concerning the relationship between religion and Marxism. The synthesis of Islam and Marxism discussed here is particularly significant given that it emerges within the Indonesian context. This nation not only has the world's largest Muslim population but also bears a complex and fraught history concerning communism and religion. A rigorous inquiry into this issue has the potential to enhance our understanding of the dynamic and multifaceted relationship between religion and Marxist thought.

This article is structured into several sections. It begins with an explanation of the research methodology employed. The subsequent discussion is divided into three main parts. First, an analysis of the political-economic conditions surrounding the establishment of FNKSDA. Second, an examination of the internal dynamics within Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), particularly the tension between its structural and cultural elements. Third, an exploration of how FNKSDA's Islamic Leftist thought relates to the broader trajectory of Islamic intellectual developments in post-Reformasi Indonesia. Together, these sections aim to identify the enabling conditions that have made possible the emergence of Islamic Leftist experimentation within the FNKSDA framework.

## **2. METHODS**

This study employs Qualitative Document Analysis (QDA) and draws on the historical materialism framework developed by Michael Lowy to inform its approach. The approach aims to provide an in-depth portrayal of the historical material conditions that have shaped the emergence of leftist Islamic thought, as formulated by FNKSDA. In line with Löwy's analytical framework, this study will examine the material transformations occurring both internally and externally within Nahdlatul Ulama. These changes serve as key factors that allowed for the emergence of relative autonomy within the organization. For analytical clarity, these internal and external transformations will be categorized into three distinct dimensions. First, a description of Indonesia's post-Reformasi political-economic context; second, the historical material conditions faced by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in the post-Reformasi era; and third, the broader socio-economic realities confronting the Indonesian Muslim community as a whole.

The operationalization of qualitative document analysis in this study was carried out through several stages. First, the author collected various forms of secondary data from multiple sources, including academic journals, official documents issued by FNKSDA, and writings produced by FNKSDA activists. In selecting relevant documents from academic journals and official FNKSDA

publications, the author applied a single criterion: the relevance of the data to the research questions posed in this study.

Meanwhile, to determine the relevance of writings by FNKSDA activists, the author employed three specific criteria: (a) the significance of the activist’s role within FNKSDA; (b) whether the activist had published publicly accessible writings; and (c) the extent to which the content of the writings directly addressed the research questions formulated in this article. Based on these criteria, the author selected writings from three FNKSDA activists who were deemed to meet these conditions, namely, Roy Murtadho, Muhammad Al Fayyadl, and Roychan Fajar. Roy Murtadho is one of the founding members of FNKSDA and served as the fourth Chair of the FNKSDA National Committee. He has actively contributed his ideas on Left Islam or Progressive Islam through various publications on platforms such as *Indoprogress.com* and *Islambergerak.com*. Meanwhile, Muhammad Al Fayyadl served as the third Chair of the FNKSDA National Committee and has written extensively on the themes of Left Islam and Progressive Islam, which have also been published through *Indoprogress.com* and *Islambergerak.com*. Lastly, Roychan Fajar formerly held the position of Chair of the FNKSDA Regional Committee in Sumenep before later serving as a cadre development officer within the FNKSDA National Committee. He is also the author of a book titled *Towards a Materialist Aswaja*, which offers an alternative interpretation of *Ahlussunnah wal Jama’ah* (Aswaja) enriched with the theoretical tradition of Scientific Socialism. In this initial stage, the author collected a total of 60 documents, the details of which are presented in the following table.

**Table 1. 1.** The detailed list of secondary documents collected by the author

Sources	Academic Writing	FNKSDA’s Official Document	Organization Report	FNKSDA’s Activist Writing		
				Roychan Fajar	Roy Murtadho	M. Al Fayyadl
Quantities	27	2	2	1	14	16

Following the secondary data collection, the author selected the documents based on the previously outlined criteria. Through this selection process, the author obtained a set of condensed data. The details of the selected articles, along with the corresponding data extracted from them, are presented as follows:

**Table 1.2.** The list of selected documents includes the data acquired from the documents.

Source	Title	Author	Acquired Data Aligned With Research Question
Academic Writing	The myth of pluralism: Nahdlatul Ulama and the politics of religious tolerance in Indonesia.	Marcus Mietzner & Burhanuddin Muhtadi	NU’s pragmatism in advancing the narrative of religious tolerance.
	The political decline of traditional Ulama in Indonesia: The state, Umma, and Nahdlatul Ulama	Robin Bush & Greg Fealy	The reason for State Patronage over the structural NU.
	Jokowi’s management of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU): a new order approach?	A Dewayanti N Saat	NU’s pragmatic nature in building relationships with the state.
	Populisme Islam di Indonesia dan Timur Tengah	Vedi R Hadiz	The economic and political configuration that shaped the Islamic thought and movement

	Kiri Islam, Jaringan Intelektual dan Partai Politik	Ken Miichi	landscape. The role of the NU-affiliated NGO in introducing the idea of the Islamic Left.
	Indonesian Political Islam: Capitalist Development and the Legacies of the Cold War	Vedi R. Hadiz	The Impact of Capitalist Development and the Cold War on Islamic Thought and Movement in Indonesia.
	Islam in Indonesia: The Contest for Society, Ideas and Values.	Carool Kersten	The role of the NU-affiliated NGO in nurturing NU-based activists.
	Nahdlatul Ulama and the politics trap	Greg Fealy	The reason for State Patronage over the structural NU.
	Kehampaan Hak: Masyarakat vs Perusahaan Sawit di Indonesia.	Berenschot, W., Dhiaulhaq, A., Afrizal, & Hospes, O	The effect of extractive capitalism on society
	Gerakan Lingkungan Kaum Muda NU: Studi Tentang Pemikiran dan Aksi Gerakan Sosial Front Nahdliyyin Untuk Kedaulatan Sumber Daya Alam/FNKSDA	A. Murtadho	-The history of FNKSDA -The relation between NU and FNKSDA -The interpretation of FNKSDA's ideology
Organization Report	Dekade Krisis Agraria: Warisan Nawacita dan Masa Depan Reforma Agraria Pasca Perubahan Politik 2024	Konsorsium Pembaruan Agraria	Data on agrarian-based conflicts from 2004 to 2023 in Indonesia
	Keluar Dari Ekonomi Ekstraktif, Menuju Hijau dan Inklusif.	INDEF	-The logic of the alliance between the state and the market to implement extractive capitalism - Indonesia's dependence on the extractive sector.
FNKSDA's Official Document	Indonesia Deforestation Rates & Statistics	Global Forest Watch	Data on forest destruction from 2001 to 2013
	TENTANG KAMI - FNKSDA.	FNKSDA	Ideological stance of FNKSDA
	Resolusi Jihad II	FNKSDA	Ideological stance of FNKSDA
	AD-ART FNKSDA hasil munas Jember 2022	FNKSDA	Ideological stance of FNKSDA
FNKSDA Activist's Writing	Menegakkan Islam Yang Damai dan Berpihak : Perlunya Merekonstruksi Teologi Progresif	Roy Murtadho	-Roy Murtadho's criticism of liberal and radical Islam groups
	Perlunya Merumuskan Agenda Aksi Islam Progresif	Roy Murtadho	-Roy Murtadho's criticism of liberal and radical Islam groups - The need to construct an alternative Islamic thought and

Mengapa Islam Progresif?	Muhammad Al Fayyadl	agenda. -Al Fayyadl's criticism of liberal and radical Islam groups - The argument for the materialist interpretation of Islam
Apa Itu Islam Progresif?	Muhammad Al Fayyadl	-Al Fayyadl's criticism of liberal and radical Islam groups - The explanation of the Islamic Progressive idea, which FNKSDA adopted
Menuju Aswaja Materialis	Roychan Fadjar	-Roychan Fadjar's criticism of structural NU -The need to construct an alternative Islamic thought and agenda.

After obtaining the condensed data, the author conducted an interpretive analysis of the material. This interpretation is conducted thematically, following the model developed by Naeem, Ozuem, and Howell. This thematic interpretation follows the model developed by Naeem, Ozuem, and Howell. According to this approach, six key stages are required (Naeem et al., 2023). First, the author familiarized themselves with the data and selected statements relevant to the research focus. Second, keywords were extracted from these statements. Third, the author conducted data coding. Fourth, emergent themes were developed. Fifth, a process of conceptualization was undertaken by interpreting the identified keywords, codes, and themes. Sixth, a conceptual model was constructed to generate a comprehensive interpretation. The details of the process are listed in the table and diagrams below:

**Table 1.3.** The process of interpreting data by thematic analysis from step 1 to step 4.

Step 1	Step 2: Defining Keyword	Step 3: Coding	Step 4: Generating Themes	
Collecting Secondary Data	Getting Familiar With Data and Selecting Quotation	The Destruction of Nature Extractive Capitalism State-Market Alliance against Society Disappointment toward Structural NU The pragmatic nature of Structural NU State patronage over Structural NU Academic openness in Cultural NU The role of NU-affiliated NGOs for the FNKSDA's establishment The absence of the Left Movement in Indonesia	Natural Resource Exploitation Triadic Relation of State-Market-Society Critics Toward Structural NU The Reason for Structural NU Absence in Natural Sovereignty Struggle The Progressivity of Cultural NU General Context of Islam in Indonesia Post	Economic-Political Context in FNKSDA's Establishment Self-Critique Within NU The Dynamics of Islamic Thought In Indonesia Post-

Cold War Effect and The Rise of Liberal and Radical Critics Toward Liberal Group	Reformasi Era	Reformasi Era
Critics Toward Radical Groups	The Critique Towards Mainstream Islamic Teaching In Indonesia Post Reformasi	

Figure 1. 1. Fifth step in thematic analysis

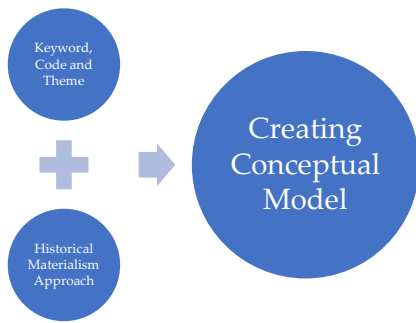
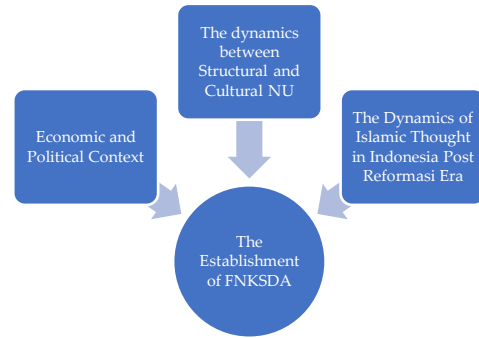


Figure 1. 2. Sixth step in thematic analysis



In addition, to ensure the validity of the collected data, the author employed source triangulation. This was done by cross-examining condensed secondary data to verify consistency and credibility. To illustrate this process, the author includes a table summarizing the coding procedure conducted using *NVivo 12* software. The table provides information on the number of coding references and the number of items coded. "Coding reference" refers to segments of information marked by the author as relevant data, while "item coded" indicates the documents from which these relevant data segments were derived.

Through this table, readers may observe that each code generated by the author consists, at minimum, of two excerpts sourced from two different documents. This implies that every interpretation developed in the analysis is grounded in validated data – validated, at the very least, by one additional source. A greater number of coding references and items coded indicates a higher degree of validation for the resulting interpretations.

Table 1.4. The summary of Hierarchy Charts to visualize how the writer cross-examined the data.

Codes	Number of coding references	Aggregate number of coding references	Number of items coded	Aggregate number of items coded
Nodes \ \Material and Historic Condition of FNKSDA Establishment \ Critique Towards Mainstream Islam Teaching \ The Context of Radicals and Liberal Emergence	5	5	3	3
Nodes \ \Material and Historic Condition of FNKSDA Establishment \ Critique Towards Mainstream Islam Teaching \ The Libera;	8	8	6	6
Nodes \ \Material and Historic Condition of FNKSDA Establishment \ Critique Towards Mainstream Islam Teaching \ The Radicals	4	4	4	4

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Nodes \ \Material and Historic Condition of FNKSDA Establishment \ Self Critique Within Nahdlatul Ulama \ The Absence of Nahdlatul Ulama in Natural Sovereignty's Struggle	4	15	3	7
Nodes \ \Material and Historic Condition of FNKSDA Establishment \ Self Critique Within Nahdlatul Ulama \ The Absence of Nahdlatul Ulama in Natural Sovereignty's Struggle \ NU Dependence's on State Resources	4	4	3	3
Nodes \ \Material and Historic Condition of FNKSDA Establishment \ Self Critique Within Nahdlatul Ulama \ The Absence of Nahdlatul Ulama in Natural Sovereignty's Struggle \ Pragmatic Nature of Nahdlatul Ulama as Organization	7	7	3	3
Nodes \ \Material and Historic Condition of FNKSDA Establishment \ Self Critique Within Nahdlatul Ulama \ The Progressiveness of Cultural NU	4	4	4	4
Nodes \ \Material and Historic Condition of FNKSDA Establishment \ The Political-Economic Context in the Formation of FNKSDA	1	5	1	3
Nodes \ \Material and Historic Condition of FNKSDA Establishment \ The Political-Economic Context in the Formation of FNKSDA \ Extractive Capitalism and Nature's Destruction	3	3	2	2
Nodes \ \Material and Historic Condition of FNKSDA Establishment \ The Political-Economic Context in the Formation of FNKSDA \ Relation Between State and The Borguese Class	2	2	2	2

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### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. The Political-Economic Context in the Formation of FNKSDA

To understand the political-economic conditions that prompted the formation of FNKSDA, the author begins by citing an official statement published on FNKSDA's website.

*The pervasive and expansive reach of capitalism across all regions of Indonesia today has engendered crises across multiple dimensions of life: poverty, the unequal control of agrarian resources, socio-ecological degradation, crises in social reproduction, gender injustice, and more. These crises are increasingly laid bare—often in stark, unfiltered forms—through television screens, newspapers, and digital media. At times, they are even romanticized or commodified for entertainment purposes and profit extraction. Concurrently, we are witnessing the growing consolidation of the capitalist class, whose interests are fortified through strategic and often lethal collaborations with the state and its apparatuses. This alliance has left the people with no viable recourse but to resist, with dignity and determination. It is precisely within such historical and material conditions that the emergence of popular movements oriented toward dismantling capitalism becomes both necessary and inevitable. It is in this context that the Front Nahdliyyin untuk Kedaulatan Sumber Daya Alam (FNKSDA), or the Nahdliyyin Front for Natural Resource Sovereignty, was established (FNKSDA, n.d.).*



According to this statement, two key points underscore the urgency behind the establishment of FNKSDA. First, the expansive growth of capitalism in Indonesia has led to widespread environmental degradation across communities. Second, a strategic alliance exists between political elites and business actors, aimed at advancing capitalist interests in the country. These conditions collectively underscore the imperative for the formation of FNKSDA. Regarding the first point, it is essential to note that the dominant mode of capitalism at the time of FNKSDA's founding was primarily characterized by extractive capitalism. The turn toward extractive industries is also inextricably linked to Indonesia's economic structure, which remains heavily reliant on extractive sectors. In 2013, extractive commodities constituted 44.28% of Indonesia's total export value (Central Statistics Agency, 2014). This extractive paradigm yields at least two significant consequences for society. First, there is a significant environmental degradation, evidenced by rising deforestation and an increase in ecological disasters. Global Forest Watch, compiling forest cover loss in Indonesia from 2001 to 2024. According to this data, Indonesia lost 16.68 million hectares of forest cover between 2001 and 2013, equivalent to 1.3 times the size of Java Island (Global Forest Watch, 2025).

Although deforestation rates began to decline after 2014, as the data above shows, their long-term consequences remain palpable. For instance, in 2021 alone, Indonesia experienced 5,421 natural disasters, predominantly floods and landslides, both of which are closely linked to the loss of green cover (Asworo & Akbar, 2019). Second, a sharp increase in agrarian conflicts—particularly those involving communities versus state and corporate interests. The Consortium for Agrarian Reform (KPA) documented agrarian conflicts in Indonesia from 2005 to 2023. According to this data, from 2005 to 2014, there were 1,520 documented agrarian conflicts involving approximately 5.7 million hectares of land, affecting 9,771,103 households (Konsorsium Pembaruan Agraria, 2023). These conflicts are primarily the result of shrinking communal living spaces, driven by state-facilitated land dispossession in the name of investment and economic development.

This destructive situation is made possible because the state builds an alliance with the corporations. Their alliance is based on mutually beneficial relations. The state pursues high economic growth to sustain its policy agenda, which necessitates investment from corporations (Martawardaya et al., 2021). Simultaneously, corporations rely on state authorization and infrastructure to expand their capital. At a deeper level, this arrangement reflects the convergence of pragmatic interests between politicians and business elites: politicians depend on financial backing to sustain their political campaigns, while business actors leverage personal connections to secure privileged access to economic opportunities (Berenschot et al., 2023). This context highlights the urgency of addressing the threats posed by the extractive industry, which served as the impetus for FNKSDA's founders to establish the organization. Together, these conditions point to the external environment that enabled the rise of FNKSDA. Similar to the context in which Latin American liberation theology emerged, FNKSDA's formation was shaped by the penetration of capital that precipitated a multidimensional crisis, one whose burden is disproportionately borne by the people.

Notably, the founders observed that in many cases, it was the Nahdliyyin community that bore the consequences of these conflicts. (A. Murtadho, 2019). Alarmingly, in the view of FNKSDA's initiators, NU's leadership remained indifferent to these struggles. This was particularly evident in the structural inaction of the NU Central Board (PBNU), which failed to mobilize its network to defend its members affected by extractive industries (Ubaidillah, 2018). As a result, the need for an organization committed to environmental and agrarian advocacy on behalf of Nahdliyyin constituents became increasingly imperative.

Grounded in this backdrop, FNKSDA officially declared its formation on December 8, 2013, at the Tebu Ireng Islamic Boarding School. At this inaugural event, FNKSDA issued what came to be known as *Resolusi Jihad II* (Second Jihad Resolution). This resolution put forth three primary demands: first, that the Government of the Republic of Indonesia cease all extractive capitalist practices that threaten the sovereignty of the Republic and its religion; second, that the NU Central Board issue a *fatwa* legitimizing *fi-sabilillah* (sacred struggle) to reclaim control over natural resources from capitalism in defense of national sovereignty; and third, that all Nahdliyyin and Indonesian citizens be called upon to defend the homeland from extractive capitalism through nationalization of natural resources.

The resolution holds both symbolic and substantive significance. Substantively, it articulates FNKSDA's core ideological positions: rejection of the capitalist-extractive resource mode of economy, framing the struggle against it within a nationalistic discourse, and affirming FNKSDA's Nahdliyyin identity by urging NU members and leaders to participate in the resistance against extractive capitalism. The symbolic force of the resolution is amplified through its language and setting. The declaration at Tebu Ireng, a pesantren founded by K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari, the founder of NU and proponent of the original *Resolusi Jihad* against colonialism. In this light, *Resolusi Jihad II* represents a historical continuation. In the first *Resolusi Jihad*, the enemy was colonialism. In this *Resolusi Jihad*, the enemy is extractive capitalism. This founding moment illustrates FNKSDA's ideological orientation and programmatic intent. Ideologically, FNKSDA firmly rejects extractive capitalism, a stance elaborated in its organizational documents, which assert that the root of the ecological crisis lies in the pervasive spread of capitalism into all spheres of life. Based on this position, capitalism must be dismantled. FNKSDA's proposed path of resistance is grounded in the concept of progressive Aswaja (*Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah*), which envisions a socialist-oriented transformation rooted in the universal values of the Qur'an and Hadith. It is within this ideological framework that FNKSDA's notion of Islamic leftism is situated.

### 3.2. Self-Critique Within Nahdlatul Ulama

As previously outlined, one of the key factors behind the emergence of FNKSDA was the structural leadership of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) being unresponsive to environmental and agrarian conflict issues. In this section, a deeper inquiry is made into the underlying reasons for such inaction. Beyond that, the author argues that FNKSDA's adoption of leftist thought should not be regarded as ahistorical within the broader context of NU's internal dynamics. The potential for embracing leftist frameworks was, in fact, historically embedded in NU through cultural movements that paved the way for such ideological orientation. This section, therefore, will examine NU's dynamics from both structural and cultural perspectives. As the largest Muslim organization in Indonesia, NU has undergone extensive internal transformations. This is facilitated by the organization's relatively decentralized nature, which complicates any monolithic understanding of NU. The internal plurality of thought and position necessitates a nuanced interpretation of its development. Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that the structural leadership of NU has played a central role, particularly in the post-Reformasi era.

This structural prominence is inseparable from the broader political-economic configuration of the post-Reformasi period, marked by the increasing influence of modernization and neoliberal economic practices on Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), NU's traditional stronghold. Bush and Fealy (2014) point out that *pesantren*, due to their agrarian economic base, are economically vulnerable. Unable to sustain themselves solely through traditional agrarian means, these institutions increasingly seek

alternative funding sources to ensure their survival and offer quality education at affordable costs. One such source is the state budget, which can be accessed through NU's structural patronage networks.

The financial dependency has brought NU structurally closer to the state. Securing influential positions within the Ministry of Religious Affairs enables NU to protect and expand these patronage networks. It is thus unsurprising that post-Reformasi Indonesia has frequently seen individuals with NU backgrounds appointed as Ministers of Religious Affairs. Conversely, dissatisfaction arises when these positions are not granted to NU affiliates, as was evident when President Joko Widodo appointed Fachrul Razi as Minister of Religious Affairs (Saat & Dewayanti, 2020). This reliance on state patronage restricts NU's structural leadership from adopting oppositional stances, even in cases where government policies harm NU's grassroots constituencies. This dynamic is evident in multiple agrarian conflicts involving NU communities, such as the protracted land dispute in Urut Sewu, Kebumen. Despite repeated appeals from affected residents, NU failed to provide official statements or structural support (A. Murtadho, 2019). This silence stands in stark contrast to NU's vocal advocacy on issues of religious tolerance and pluralism. NU has positioned itself at the forefront of defending religious harmony, particularly in the face of puritanical and Salafi influences perceived as incompatible with Indonesia's socio-religious context. For NU, Islam in the Indonesian archipelago has developed in a distinctly different cultural and historical trajectory than in the Arab world. This conviction underpins NU's recurrent conflicts with other Islamic groups in the name of *Islam Nusantara*.

NU's responsiveness to religious tolerance issues is not purely ideological. On the one hand, it aligns with NU's historical orientation and is exemplified by figures such as Abdurrahman Wahid, who is celebrated as Indonesia's leading advocate of pluralism. On the other hand, scholars such as Fealy (2003) have noted NU's historically pragmatic political behavior. During the Reformasi era, the discourse of tolerance has increasingly functioned as a political instrument rather than a normative goal. Fealy (2018) suggests that NU's anti-intolerance campaigns have served to protect its political position and marginalize rivals. By confronting puritanical groups, particularly during the Jokowi administration, NU reinforced its alliance with the state, which in turn felt threatened by such oppositional movements advanced by puritanical groups. Mietzner and Muhtadi (2020) add that NU represents a convergence point of various interests, with pluralism discourse functioning as a tool for electoral mobilization in the 2019 elections. Such political positioning has created a dilemma for NU youth. While NU aggressively confronts religious intolerance, it appears complicit in socio-economic exploitation. This contradiction has informed FNKSDA's ideological orientation. Roychan Fajar describes NU as being in a state of crisis—overly focused on doctrinal correctness and inter-religious tolerance, yet blind to the structural economic injustices faced by its members due to the absence of a materialist framework capable of analyzing political economy (Fajar, 2021).

Roy Murtadho echoes this critique, lamenting NU's lack of materialist imagination in addressing environmental destruction and the loss of communal living space. He argues that *Islam Nusantara* must also account for material realities, particularly control over land and natural resources, without which the traditions that sustain NU will deteriorate (A. Murtadho, 2019). A sharper critique comes from Muhammad Al-Fayyadl, who contends that NU's brand of Islamic moderation fosters a false peace. He argues that NU's discourse of moderation facilitates a state-market coalition that pacifies and subjugates the ummah. This subjugation is maintained through state disciplinary mechanisms and philanthropic structures that entrench dependency on corporate and banking institutions (Muhammad Al-Fayyadl, 2016).

From these critiques, it becomes clear that FNKSDA activists primarily object to the absence of

political-economic analysis in NU's discourse. Combined with its proximity to state power, this renders NU structurally tolerant of both state- and corporate-led exploitation. To fill this analytical vacuum, FNKSDA activists adopt materialist analysis, commonly used within leftist circles. This adoption, however, is not ahistorical. FNKSDA, despite its cultural affiliation with NU, inherits a legacy of internal intellectual resistance. Since the 1980s, a cultural-intellectual movement has emerged within NU as an alternative to its structural leadership, one that can be characterized as leftist Islamic thought. This movement was institutionalized through the establishment of *LKiS* (Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought), founded by NU intellectuals of the time (Miichi, 2001).

LKiS played a vital role in fostering a generation of Muslim intellectuals, both generally and within NU specifically. It served two main functions: first, as a research institution and intellectual hub for young scholars, many of whom pursued careers at LKiS after completing higher education (Kersten, 2015); and second, as a publisher of translated and original works on Islamic thought, including texts by progressive Muslim thinkers. Notably, works by Hassan Hanafi and Ali Shariati—published by LKiS—had a profound influence on the development of Islamic leftist thought in Indonesia. The influence of LKiS on FNKSDA was not merely indirect. The idea of forming FNKSDA was directly initiated during a discussion held at the LKiS Foundation's *Pendopo Hijau* in Yogyakarta on July 4, 2013. The discussion, titled "Nahdliyyin Dialogue on Natural Resource Governance and Conflict," laid the groundwork for the organization's formation (A. Murtadho, 2019). Besides LKiS, another NU cultural entity that influences the emergence of FNKSDA is Jaringan Gusdurian. The evidence is the involvement of a director in Jaringan Gusdurian, Heru Prasetya, in the formation of FNKSDA.

From this analysis, it becomes evident that NU is not a monolithic entity. On one hand, its structural leadership exhibits indifference toward environmental justice and social equity. On the other hand, a cultural current within NU maintains an acute awareness of such issues. FNKSDA's emergence is therefore best understood as a dialectical product of NU's internal dynamics—a divergence between its cultural and structural factions. FNKSDA's embrace of materialist analysis is rooted in two critical factors: the failure of NU's structural leadership to engage with political-economic injustices due to the absence of a theoretical foundation, and the intellectual inheritance of NU's cultural wing—particularly through the influence of LKiS—which provided the conditions for alternative, leftist analyses to emerge from within the tradition itself.

### **3.3. Dynamics of Islamic Thoughts in Indonesia and The Birth of FNKSDA**

In addition to being shaped by the internal dynamics of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the intellectual orientation of FNKSDA has also been significantly influenced by broader ideological currents within the Indonesian Muslim community. These ideological developments, in turn, have been deeply conditioned by the political-economic context and the specific historical situations confronting Indonesian Muslims. Consequently, any meaningful analysis of the emergence of FNKSDA's discourse necessitates an examination of the broader political economy of Indonesian Islam and its impact on the intellectual landscape of the Muslim ummah. FNKSDA's thought must thus be positioned within this evolving constellation.

According to Hadiz (2011) The intellectual and political trajectory of Islamic movements in Indonesia has been shaped by two major forces: the Cold War and the global expansion of capitalism. The Cold War generated a distinct conjuncture for the development of Islamic politics in Indonesia. The systematic elimination of the political left created a vacuum in which Islamic groups emerged as the primary channel for articulating popular discontent under the New Order regime. Concurrently, the

rapid capitalist development in Indonesia, particularly following the oil boom of the 1970s, facilitated the emergence of an educated Muslim middle class. These two dynamics collectively enabled Islamic groups to occupy a more prominent role in the political landscape during the New Order era.

The role of Islamic groups in mediating public grievances manifested along two principal trajectories. The first took a more radical orientation, embracing violent resistance as a means of expressing political discontent. The second took a more moderate form, advocating for development and democratic reform as a critique of the New Order. This bifurcation in political articulation can be attributed to differing relationships between each group and the state. The first group experienced severe repression under the New Order, resulting in hardened political and ideological positions borne out of marginalization and despair (Hadiz, 2018). This faction viewed political progress as achievable only through struggles conducted outside the state apparatus. In contrast, the second group—comprising largely middle-class Muslims who benefited from the state's economic growth and limited accommodation policies—articulated a more conciliatory stance, aligned with developmentalist and democratic ideals.

Despite their differences, Hadiz also observes a significant ideological convergence between these groups, particularly regarding their relationship to capitalism. While both frequently voiced populist critiques of New Order economic policies, these critiques did not necessarily constitute a rejection of capitalism as a system (Hadiz, 2011). This stance can be traced to the historical composition of Islamic political actors in Indonesia, who have long been drawn from segments of the petite bourgeoisie. Consequently, their economic critiques were often moral, focusing on issues of domination and inequality, rather than offering a systemic critique of capitalism itself.

The evolution of Islamic groups during the New Order thus shaped the broader political conjuncture for Islam in Indonesia. As Islamic identity became a primary medium for public dissent, debates between these ideological camps dominated the public discourse. This ideological contestation was further intensified by the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks in the United States, which triggered renewed debate over "authentic" interpretations of Islam. These debates were facilitated by the post-New Order opening of information flows and the collapse of authoritarian repression.

The result was a significant transformation of Indonesia's public sphere, in which expressions of religiosity became increasingly visible. Scholars note that Indonesian society has become more overtly religious, with Islamic markers more frequently displayed in public attire and popular culture. Entertainment programs began incorporating Islamic themes and moral narratives, reflecting a shift in societal values (Hadiz, 2018).

However, the growing Islamization of public life has obscured a critical blind spot shared by both ideological camps: the socio-economic condition of the Muslim populace. Despite rising public religiosity, socio-economic disparities have continued to widen, even as official poverty rates have declined. Moreover, the neoliberal economic paradigm implemented in Indonesia has exacerbated grassroots socio-economic vulnerabilities. Agrarian conflicts—particularly those involving land dispossession under the guise of development and investment—have become increasingly prevalent.

FNKSDA and its alternative intellectual project emerged precisely within this context. Rooted in the material struggles experienced by local communities, FNKSDA's critique is grounded in the lived realities of economic injustice. This orientation is evident in the organization's official website, which explicitly articulates its foundational commitment to addressing real-world material conditions through a progressive, justice-oriented Islamic framework. This statement clearly illustrates that FNKSDA emerged as a response grounded in a series of critical observations regarding the material conditions

faced by society. The movement's point of departure is a critique of capitalism as a system that perpetuates social crises. At the same time, the increasingly entrenched relationship between the state and capital is viewed as a central issue that necessitates a counter-movement rooted in grassroots resistance.

FNKSDA's analytical orientation—grounded in political economy—also shapes its position vis-à-vis other Islamic groups in Indonesia. Its first major critique is directed toward the Liberal Islamic movement, often perceived as the most progressive stream within Indonesian Islam. Muhammad Al-Fayyadl articulates this critique explicitly in his work, identifying two principal shortcomings of Islamic liberalism in Indonesia. First, it is framed as an elitist project, disconnected from grassroots realities. Second, it is criticized for overemphasizing ideological reform while neglecting structural factors such as economic and cultural conditions. For Fayyadl, these failures render Islamic liberalism not a solution but rather part of the problem itself (Muhammad Al-Fayyadl, 2016).

According to Fayyadl, Islamic liberalism becomes problematic in its attempts to secularize political life in Indonesia. The issue does not lie in the ideas themselves, but in their implementation and the resulting impact. He argues that liberal efforts are often elitist, resonating mainly through media without meaningful social engagement or grassroots activism. As a result, such secularizing efforts inadvertently provoke sectarian tensions through conflicting religious articulations. Moreover, due to its overly ideological lens and inability to account for economic and social contradictions, Islamic liberalism is implicated as complicit in the broader systemic crisis.

Fayyadl also extends his critique to scholars like Martin van Bruinessen, who, in his political mapping of Islamic groups in Indonesia, fails to consider the role of class interests. Fayyadl contends that Bruinessen prematurely labels liberal Islam as “progressive,” even though its responsiveness to discourses such as feminism, democracy, and human rights does not necessarily translate into tangible social transformation. For example, liberal Islamic interpretations of feminism fail to acknowledge the economic exploitation of women as underpaid laborers. Hence, Islamic liberalism, in Fayyadl's analysis, serves only the interests of its class and cannot be considered genuinely progressive (Al Fayyadl, 2015a)

A parallel critique is offered by Roy Murtadho, who critiques the pluralist camp, characterized by a theology of openness and universal values, as insufficient for addressing the real challenges faced by the Muslim community (R. Murtadho, 2017). He uses the metaphor of an open and welcoming village that, while inclusive, is defenseless against criminal acts such as robbery. This analogy highlights the inability of pluralist theology, grounded in idealism, to grasp the material realities of society, particularly in the absence of political-economic analysis capable of exposing unjust relations of production. Consequently, such theological frameworks are only relevant insofar as they sustain religious diversity, without attending to the socio-economic inequalities that persist at the heart of society.

In another essay, Murtadho also critiques the liberal Islamic conception of *rahmatan lil-alamin* (Islam as a mercy to all creation), arguing that the interpretation advanced by liberal groups is ultimately hollow. Their preoccupation with portraying Islam as a tolerant and peaceful religion, according to Murtadho, reduces *rahmatan lil-alamin* to a discourse of pluralism and multiculturalism (R. Murtadho, 2017). This reduction, he argues, blinds liberal groups to more urgent structural issues—namely, exploitation, dispossession, and oppression perpetuated by the capitalist system. As such, liberal Islam often inadvertently aligns itself with market-friendly ideologies and neoliberal capitalism. For Murtadho, this absurdity stems from liberal Islam's failure to apply a materialist perspective focused on political economy.

Criticism is also leveled against groups typically labeled as "radical." Fayyadl provocatively asserts that these groups do not even merit the term "radical," which he reserves for those who embrace a deep, rooted religiosity that ought to align with the struggles of the oppressed (*mustadh'afin*). Instead, he describes many so-called radical groups as "religious fascists" due to their authoritarian, punitive tendencies (Al Fayyadl, 2015b). Roy Murtadho echoes this sentiment, suggesting that the radical Islamic camp is even more problematic than liberal Islam. Using two evaluative criteria—openness and emancipatory potential—he argues that liberal Islam fails by fixating on openness without achieving liberation, while radical groups fail on both counts. At their worst, radical groups arrogate divine authority to themselves, engaging in persecution, making unilateral judgments, and asserting self-righteous claims to truth (Murtadho, 2017b).

In a more theoretical critique, Murtadho contends that both camps are intellectually unequipped to address contemporary political-economic realities. (R. Murtadho, 2018). Both interpret the world primarily through the lens of Islamic identity about the West, albeit in opposing ways. Liberal groups do not see the West as a threat, while radical groups construct it as a hostile force. In either case, both perspectives neglect the deeper political-economic structures, particularly capitalism, which entrenches systemic injustice and must be critically addressed by the Muslim community. From this exposition, it becomes evident that FNKSDA's intellectual trajectory and its position within the landscape of Islamic thought in Indonesia are historically grounded. It emerged amidst fierce debates between liberal and radical camps during the Reformasi era, two factions vying to interpret Islam but ultimately failing to respond adequately to the concrete challenges facing the Muslim community. These debates, although ideologically rich, lack materialist analysis capable of revealing the root causes of structural poverty, inequality, and systemic injustice.

FNKSDA, therefore, adopts a divergent position. Rather than engaging in abstract ideological polemics, FNKSDA aims to construct a religious discourse rooted in materialist critique. It aspires to go beyond inclusivity toward genuine liberation for the Muslim ummah. This is pursued through a methodological framework informed by critical social theory and political economy to expose and dismantle the structures of oppression that continue to shape the lived realities of Muslim communities.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

As stated at the outset, this article aims to examine the socio-historical context that has shaped the thought of FNKSDA. This study demonstrates that FNKSDA's intellectual formation is influenced by three interrelated and evolving contexts within Indonesia. First, the political-economic reality that demands critical attention from the Muslim community, namely, the proliferation of extractive economic practices that not only devastate the environment but also dispossess communities of their living spaces. These material conditions constitute a primary impetus for the development of FNKSDA's critique. Second, the internal dynamics within Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). The inaction of NU's structural leadership in response to environmental and agrarian issues has created a vacuum that FNKSDA seeks to address. Simultaneously, the presence of NU's cultural wing, whose intellectual initiatives paved the way for the emergence of Islamic leftist thought, has provided the ideological groundwork for FNKSDA to adopt a framework that synthesizes Islam with socialist thought. Third, FNKSDA's emphasis on political-economic analysis emerges in part as a response to the absence of this approach in the dominant Islamic intellectual currents today: Islamic liberalism and Islamic conservatism. Neither of these approaches adequately addresses the structural causes of social inequality. This intellectual gap has propelled FNKSDA to move beyond these paradigms by integrating

political-economic analysis from socialist traditions into its framework.

It is important to acknowledge that this study does not comprehensively capture the full spectrum of FNKSDA's internal and external dynamics. In particular, the relationship between FNKSDA and the Central Board of Nahdlatul Ulama (PBNU) remains underexamined, as does a comparative analysis between FNKSDA's construction of Islamic Leftist thought and other existing formulations of Islamic Leftism. These dimensions represent significant areas for future research that may help address the limitations identified in this study.

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