

# Scriptural Nationalism in Print: Genre Partition and the Making of the Other in the Persatuan Islam's *Risalah* (2005–2025)

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**Abstract:** This article examines the role of scriptural interpretation in shaping modern nationalism by examining Persatuan Islam (Persis), a reformist Islamic organization in Indonesia. Drawing on an analysis of its print culture – particularly the magazine *Risalah* and the fatwas of Dewan Hisbah between 2005 and 2025 – the article introduces the concept of scriptural nationalism, defined as a form of national imagination in which scriptural reasoning provides the ethical grammar of citizenship. The study argues that Persis constructs nationalism not through institutional expansion or political mobilization alone, but through disciplined hermeneutic practices. These are sustained by a structured division of discursive labour: Dewan Hisbah consolidates doctrinal authority through juristic reasoning, while *Risalah* translates theological concepts into accessible discussions of national life. This genre partition enables Persis to maintain orthodoxy while engaging broader publics. The article further demonstrates that Persis constructs the “Other” through a layered framework: theologically as bounded exclusivism, socially as conditional coexistence, and politically as oppositional differentiation. This stratification allows the organization to reconcile doctrinal boundaries with civic participation. By foregrounding interpretation, this study contributes to broader debates in religious studies and nationalism theory. It suggests that nations can be constituted not only through institutions, identities, or narratives, but through recurring acts of scriptural interpretation. In doing so, it extends existing frameworks such as civil Islam and offers a new lens for understanding how religious traditions shape modern forms of political belonging.

**Keywords:** Scriptural Nationalism, Persis, *Risalah*, Religious Nationalism, Print Culture

The relationship between religion and nationalism remains a central concern in modern political thought. Classical theories of nationalism have emphasized shared language, print culture, and collective memory as the foundations of national consciousness. Benedict Anderson conceptualized the nation as an “imagined community” enabled by print-capitalism,<sup>1</sup> while John Hutchinson highlighted its moral dimension as a community bound by shared ethical commitments.<sup>2</sup> In the Southeast Asian context, scholars such as Joseph Chinyong Liow have demonstrated that Islamic movements do not simply oppose

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1. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso Books, 2006), 37–46.

2. John Hutchinson, *Nationalism and War* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 30–35; Krzysztof Jaskułowski, “Western (Civic) ‘versus’ Eastern (Ethnic) Nationalism. The Origins and Critique of the Dichotomy,” *Polish Sociological Review*, no. 171 (2010): 289–303, <https://doi.org/41275158>.

or adopt nationalism; rather, they reinterpret it through religious frameworks.<sup>3</sup> However, insufficient attention has been paid to how scriptural interpretation itself functions as a practice of nation-making.<sup>4</sup>

This article addresses that gap by analyzing Persatuan Islam (Persis), a reformist Islamic organization founded in 1923 in Bandung, Indonesia. Despite its relatively modest size, Persis has exerted significant intellectual influence on Islamic discourse in Indonesia. Rather than advocating for an Islamic state or retreating from public life, it engages with nationalism through a disciplined interpretation of the Quran and the Sunnah. In contemporary Indonesia, where Pancasila<sup>5</sup> structures a pluralist national framework, Persis articulates a vision of national belonging grounded in religious ethics.

I conceptualize this approach as scriptural nationalism – a form of national imagination in which scriptural interpretation provides the ethical grammar of citizenship. In contrast to ethnic or territorial nationalism, this framework frames the nation as a moral community shaped by shared commitments to divine guidance. Authority, in this model, is derived not from historical myths or sovereignty claims but from the continuous interpretation of revelation in response to contemporary challenges.

This formulation builds upon Robert W. Hefner’s notion of civil Islam, which highlights how Indonesian Islamic organizations contribute to democratic life through civic engagement, pluralism, and institutional development.<sup>6</sup> Hefner shows that groups such as Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama have fostered forms of Islam compatible with democracy through educational, charitable, and social institutions. These institutions mediate between religious values and modern citizenship.

This article views Persis as sharing this commitment to participating in a democratic national framework, but it does so through a distinct modality. Rather than prioritizing institutional expansion, it emphasizes hermeneutic rigour and textual authority. Its influence is exercised primarily through interpretive practices – fatwas, religious publications, and serialized debates – rather than through large-scale organizational infrastructures. In this sense, Persis represents a textualist variant of civil Islam, in which civic engagement is mediated through discourse rather than institutions.

Between 2005 and 2025, this dynamic is particularly visible in the relationship between Dewan Hisbah, Persis’s juristic body, and its magazine *Risalah*. Dewan Hisbah produces authoritative legal opinions that define doctrinal boundaries, while *Risalah* translates these positions into accessible discussions of national issues such as pluralism, morality, and social cohesion. Together, they constitute a discursive ecosystem in which scriptural reasoning informs public ethics.

This article addresses three interrelated questions: (1) How does Persis translate scriptural interpretation into a language of national belonging? (2) What institutional and discursive mechanisms enable this translation, particularly within its print culture? (3) What does this case reveal about the relationship between religious hermeneutics and modern nationalism?

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3. Joseph Chinyong Liow, *Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 1–14, 42–61, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316711811>.

4. See Krishna Sen and David T. Hill, *Media, Culture, and Politics in Indonesia* (Equinox Publishing, 2007); Yanuar Nugroho, Muhammad Fahmi Siregar, and Shita Laksmi, *Mapping Media Policy in Indonesia, Engaging Media, Empowering Society: Assessing Media Policy and Governance in Indonesia through the Lens of Citizens’ Rights* (Centre for Innovation Policy and Governance, 2012), <https://cipg.or.id/en/publication/media-policy-indonesia/>; Merlyna Lim, “Freedom to Hate: Social Media, Algorithmic Enclaves, and the Rise of Tribal Nationalism in Indonesia,” *Critical Asian Studies* 49, no. 3 (2017): 411–27, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14672715.2017.1341188>.

5. Pancasila is the official state philosophy of Indonesia, consisting of five interrelated principles that are viewed as essential to the nation’s identity: belief in God, a just and humane society, national unity, democracy, and social justice for all citizens.

6. Robert W. Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia* (Princeton University Press, 2000), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7szvv>.

I argue that Persis constructs a form of scriptural nationalism in which the nation is imagined through disciplined acts of scriptural interpretation. This process is sustained through a structured division of discursive labour: Dewan Hisbah consolidates internal orthodoxy, while *Risalah* translates theological concepts into civic discourse. This genre partition enables Persis to maintain doctrinal rigor while engaging broader publics. More broadly, the case demonstrates that nationalism can be constituted not only through institutions or shared narratives, but through recurring hermeneutic practices that render scripture a source of civic reasoning.

By foregrounding interpretation, this study expands existing theories of religion and nationalism. It suggests that the nation can be constituted not only through institutions or shared history, but through shared interpretive practices. If, as Anderson argues, nations are imagined through print, then in the case of Persis, they are sustained through the continuous production and circulation of scriptural interpretation. Scriptural nationalism thus complements the framework of civil Islam by highlighting the role of interpretive communities in shaping democratic religious citizenship.

While grounded in the Indonesian case, this study speaks to broader debates in religious studies concerning the relationship between scripture, authority, and political belonging. The concept of scriptural nationalism offers a framework for analyzing how religious communities translate sacred texts into civic discourse beyond Indonesia. Similar dynamics may be observed in other contexts where scriptural interpretation informs public ethics, constitutional reasoning, or national identity. By foregrounding hermeneutics as a mode of nation-making, this article contributes to comparative discussions on religion and nationalism across traditions.

The article reviews the literature on Persis in Indonesian Islamic studies. It also outlines a twenty-year history in which Persis evolves its practices – from *Soal Jawab*'s charismatic *ijtihad*<sup>7</sup> to the civic-moral voice of *Risalah*'s committee – while Dewan Hisbah enhances its technical authority and largely disregards the “Other.” It describes Persis’s scriptural institutionalism, covering everything from A. Hassan’s individual *ijtihad* to broader juristic activities, and examines how Persis constructs the concept of the Other. Lastly, it explores the development of Persis’s scriptural nationalism from theological, social, and political perspectives.

### **Persatuan Islam in Indonesian Islamic Studies: Reformism, Authority, and Scriptural Nationalism**

Persatuan Islam (Persis) has long occupied a central place in Indonesian Islamic studies as a reformist organization committed to scriptural purification, intellectual debate, and the reconfiguration of religious authority. It emerged within a broader current of Islamic modernism that sought to return to the Qur’an and Sunnah while challenging entrenched traditions and local religious practices. Over time, scholars have examined Persis through multiple analytical lenses, including theology, legal reasoning, political networks, and religious authority. When organized thematically, this body of scholarship reveals a complex portrait of Persis as a movement that operates simultaneously in the domains of doctrine, discourse, and power.

A dominant theme in the literature is the characterization of Persis as a scripturalist reform movement concerned with doctrinal purification. Scholars consistently emphasize its commitment to monotheism (*tawhīd*) and its critique of practices deemed superstition (*bid’ah*). Fauzan Saleh, for instance,

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7. The term “*ijtihad*” in Islam broadly refers to the process of independent reasoning.

highlights the movement's sustained effort to defend Islamic monotheism against what it regards as heretical accretions, noting that Persis "has made strenuous efforts to defend the true meaning of *tawhīd* against heresy, superstition and innovation."<sup>8</sup> This emphasis on purification situates Persis within a broader global current of Islamic reformism, while also distinguishing it within the Indonesian context as a particularly rigorous and uncompromising movement.

Martin van Bruinessen similarly portrays Persis as one of the most puritanical Islamic organizations in Indonesia. Compared to other reformist groups, its strict adherence to scriptural authority and its persistent critique of syncretic practices mark it as a distinctive voice within Indonesian Islam.<sup>9</sup> This puritanical orientation is not merely theological but also epistemological, shaping how Persis defines legitimate knowledge and authority in Islam.

Closely related to this reformist orientation is Persis's distinctive method of Islamic reasoning. Rather than relying on established jurisprudential traditions, Persis scholars emphasize direct engagement with foundational texts. M. B. Hooker observes that the organization developed a mode of legal reasoning grounded in the Qur'an and Sunnah, privileging textual evidence and rational argument over strict adherence to the classical *madhāhib*.<sup>10</sup> This approach reflects a broader modernist impulse to reinterpret Islamic law in light of contemporary conditions while maintaining fidelity to scriptural sources.

The intellectual foundations of this approach were significantly shaped by Ahmad Hassan, whose writings and polemics defined the early identity of Persis. Howard M. Federspiel notes that the activities and writings of Persis figures "gave the movement its identity and its particular outlook on matters of Islamic faith."<sup>11</sup> Through debates, publications, and fatwas, Persis cultivated a reputation for rigorous textual analysis and polemical engagement, positioning itself as a guardian of doctrinal correctness.

The emphasis on textual interpretation also places Persis within broader debates about religious authority in Indonesia. Scholars such as Syafiq Hasyim argue that contemporary Islamic authority is increasingly contested, with different actors advancing competing interpretations of religious texts. Within this landscape, Persis represents a puritanical approach that rejects blind adherence to established schools of law in favour of direct engagement with scripture. As Hasyim observes, Persis promotes "the reinterpretation of Islam based on a more puritanical approach... rejecting blind adherence to *madhāhib*."<sup>12</sup> This stance allows Persis to challenge traditional authorities while asserting its own interpretive legitimacy.

Beyond theology and authority, scholars have also examined Persis within the domain of Islamic politics. Remy Madinier highlights the organization's involvement in the Masyumi Party, showing how Persis contributed to the ideological formation of Islamic politics in the early years of Indonesian

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8. Fauzan Saleh, *Modern Trends in Islamic Theological Discourse in 20th Century Indonesia: A Critical Survey* (Brill, 2001), 6, <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047401131>.

9. Martin van Bruinessen, "Overview of Muslim Organizations, Associations and Movements in Indonesia," in *Contemporary Developments in Indonesian Islam: Explaining the "Conservative Turn,"* ed. Martin van Bruinessen (ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, 2013), 24–25.

10. M. B. Hooker, *Indonesian Islam: Social Change through Contemporary Fatāwā* (University of Hawaii Press, 2003), 82–85.

11. Howard Federspiel, *Islam and Ideology in the Emerging Indonesian State: The Persatuan Islam (Persis), 1923 to 1957* (Brill, 2001), 91, <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047400820>.

12. Syafiq Hasyim, "New Contestation in Interpreting Religious Texts: Fatwa, Tafsir, and Shariah," in *The New Santri: Challenges to Traditional Religious Authority in Indonesia*, ed. Ahmad Najib Burhani and Norshahril Saat (ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, 2020), 50.

independence.<sup>13</sup> Through these networks, Persis participated in debates about the role of Islam in the state, even if it did not function as a political party itself.

Chiara Formichi broadens this analysis by examining the links between Persis networks and the Darul Islam movement. She shows that some people connected to Persis were linked to Kartosuwiryo's effort to create an Islamic state, highlighting the complex links between reformist Islam and political rebellion after independence.<sup>14</sup> These findings challenge the view of Persis as a purely theological group, revealing its involvement in broader political currents. On the fringes of this discussion, studies of radicalization have pointed to the complex connection between Islamic education and extremist networks. A report by the Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC) details cases in Bandung where individuals tied to Islamic schools, including those associated with Persis, later engaged in extremist activities.<sup>15</sup> While these cases do not define the organization as a whole, they emphasize the need to examine local contexts and networks to understand the diverse paths of Islamic activism.

The relationship between Islam and nationalism further shapes scholarly interpretations of Persis. Jeremy Menchik's concept of "godly nationalism" offers a helpful lens for understanding how religious organizations contribute to shaping national identity. In this view, groups like Persis help set the boundaries of what is considered legitimate belief, thus forming the moral foundation of the nation.<sup>16</sup> Menchik also notes the change in Persis leaders' attitudes toward Christianity and Communism during the revolutionary war in the 1950s. While they became more accepting of Christians, referring to them as "Indonesian Christians" rather than "Christians in Indonesia," and forming alliances with them in parliament and government, Persis leaders hated the idea of Islamic Communism and opposed the presence of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI).<sup>17</sup> This perspective places Persis within larger debates about pluralism, tolerance, and exclusion in Indonesian society.

Despite this scholarship's breadth, a gap remains. Most studies view Persis as an organization – its theology, politics, or civil society role – and focus on institutions rather than discourse. While scholars recognize the importance of Persis writings, they rarely analyze these texts as structured discourses that shape meaning through genre, rhetoric, and narrative. This study shifts focus from organization to discourse, examining *Risalah* as a site where Persis articulates religious authority and defines the Muslim community. Federspiel notes the role of Persis writings in shaping identity,<sup>18</sup> but how these texts structure argumentation, invoke scriptural authority, and represent the "Other" remains underexplored. Analyzing *Risalah* from 2005 to 2025, this research highlights textual production in what I call "scriptural nationalism," showing how Persis actively produces orthodoxy through discursive practices that include or exclude, using the construction of the "Other" to assert authority.

This approach analyzes how textual forms shape religious authority, emphasizes the "Other" in orthodoxy, and links Islamic reformism with nationalism in scriptural discourse. It moves from institutional

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13. Remy Madinier, *Islam and Politics in Indonesia: The Masyumi Party between Democracy and Integralism*, trans. Jeremy Desmond (National University of Singapore Press, 2015), chap. 5, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1ntfxk>.

14. Chiara Formichi, *Islam and the Making of the Nation: Kartosuwiryo and Political Islam in 20th Century Indonesia* (Brill, 2012), chap. 4, <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004260467>.

15. *Extremists in Bandung: Darul Islam to ISIS - And Back Again?*, no. 42 (Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, 2018), <https://www.cseashawaii.org/2018/02/ipac-report-42-extremists-in-bandung-darul-islam-to-isis-and-back-again/>.

16. Jeremy Menchik, "Productive Intolerance: Godly Nationalism in Indonesia," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 56, no. 3 (2014): 591–621, Cambridge Core, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417514000267>.

17. Jeremy Menchik, *Islam and Democracy in Indonesia: Tolerance without Liberalism* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 95–97, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316344446>.

18. Federspiel, *Islam and Ideology*, 91.

to discursive analysis, integrating theology, politics, and authority studies with text analysis. Persis is a reformist group and meaning-maker, negotiating religion, authority, and nation in Indonesia's Islamic public sphere.

### **The Persatuan Islam's Scriptural Institutionalism: From Ahmad Hassan to Dewan Hisbah**

#### *Bandung Origins and an Ethic of Proof*

Persatuan Islam (Persis), meaning Islamic Union, originated in Bandung, West Java, in 1923, emerging from small merchant-led study circles into a reformist organization characterized by schools, print media, and a disciplined pedagogy centred on textual evidence. Founded by Haji Zamzam and Haji Muhammad Yunus, Persis pursued purification (*pemurnian*), aiming to align religious life with the Quran and Sunnah through mission (*da'wa*), education, and social engagement, while opposing practices categorized as myth (*takhayul*), heresy (*bid'ah*), and superstition (*khurafat*).<sup>19</sup>

Rooted mainly in Bandung, the movement built a largely Sundanese social base, giving it a unique sociolinguistic identity.<sup>20</sup> While Sundanese was the everyday language for many members, Persis also used Indonesian in its publications, allowing it to operate both locally and nationally.

A decisive transformation occurred in 1924 with the arrival of Ahmad Hassan, an Indian-born scholar raised in Singapore.<sup>21</sup> Under his influence, Persis evolved from informal study circles into a scripturalist movement grounded in disciplined argumentation. Hassan emphasized debate based on the Quran and Sunnah, promoted critical reasoning, and institutionalized print as a medium of instruction and persuasion. His establishment of *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) in Bandung and Bangil, alongside publications such as *Pembela Islam*, created a durable infrastructure for disseminating reformist ideas.<sup>22</sup>

Two complementary trajectories emerged from this formative period: Hassan's development of a method of reasoning and Mohammad Natsir's expansion of the movement into education and national politics.<sup>23</sup> Together, these trajectories transformed Persis into a structured organization whose intellectual authority rested on what may be called a "habit of proof" – a commitment to grounding religious claims in textual evidence and argumentation.

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19. Tiar Anwar Bachtiar, *Sejarah Pesantren Persis (Pembentukan Tradisi, Adaptasi Dan Perubahan)* (Persis Pers, 2023), 2–3; Rahmat Effendi, "Aktualisasi Dakwah Persatuan Islam Di Era Global," in *Menuju Satu Abad Persatuan Islam* (Persis Pers, 2020), 13; Articles 3 and 4, Paragraph 3 of "Qanun Asasi Dan Qanun Dakhili," Pimpinan Pusat Persis, 2015; Fajar Shiddiq, "Gerakan Dakwah Persis Di Tengah Arus Ideologi Global," *Majalah Risalah*, March 2023.

20. Tiar Anwar Bachtiar, "Dekade Sunda Dan Persis Refleksi Menjelang Muktamar Persis 2015," *Majalah Risalah*, October 2015.

21. For additional information on A. Hassan's life and his role in Persis, refer to Syafiq A. Mughni, *Hassan Bandung: Pemikir Islam Radikal*, 2nd ed. (PT. Bina Ilmu, 1994).

22. Salam Rusyad, "Dewan Hisbah Menyapa Santri Pesantren Persis Bangil," Persis TV Channel, March 17, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zCvOQU5GWn0>.

23. For further study on Muhammad Natsir's life and role in Persis, see Thohir Luth, M. Natsir, *Dakwah dan Pemikirannya*, (Jakarta: Gema Insani, 1999) and Lukman Hakiem, *Biografi Mohammad Natsir: Kepribadian, Pemikiran dan Perjuangan* (Jakarta: Pustaka Al-Kautsar, 2019).

*A. Hassan: Charisma as Method*

Ahmad Hassan stands as the central intellectual figure in the early Persis movement. His lectures, debates, and especially his *Soal–Jawab* (question-and-answer) writings exemplify a method that treats religion as publicly testable through evidence. Rather than presenting doctrine as fixed authority, Hassan trained readers to evaluate claims through citation, comparison, and reasoning.<sup>24</sup>

As noted by Amin Saefullah Muchtar and Syafiq A. Mughni, Hassan’s method rested on a hierarchy of sources: the Quran and hadith as primary authorities, with tools such as *ijmā’* (consensus) and *qiyās* (analogy) serving only as auxiliary supports. He distinguished between *ijtihad* (independent reasoning), reserved for qualified scholars, and *ittibā’* (informed following), while rejecting *taqlīd* (blind imitation) as unjustifiable on religious grounds.<sup>25</sup>

This epistemology had clear organizational implications. Persis refused adherence to any single *madhhab*, instead evaluating juristic positions in light of scriptural evidence.<sup>26</sup> In this way, Hassan’s method did not merely produce answers; it cultivated a community trained in argumentation. His extensive writings became a living archive that structured doctrinal reasoning within the movement.

This pedagogical model was extended by his son, Abdulqadir Hasan, through the *Kata-Berjawab* column in *Al-Muslimun*.<sup>27</sup> Over three decades (1954–1984), Abdulqadir issued hundreds of concise legal responses addressing theology, ritual practice, and social life.<sup>28</sup> These were later compiled into widely circulated volumes, ensuring continuity in method while adapting it to post-independence Indonesia.

The significance of this continuity lies in institutionalization: what began as charismatic authority was stabilized into a reproducible pedagogical form. The question-and-answer format trained readers not only to receive rulings, but to engage in reasoning – skills that later became central to Persis’s juristic institutions.

*Institutionalizing Scriptural Reasoning: From Majelis Ulama to Dewan Hisbah*

The shift from informal teaching methods to formal institutional authority occurred with the founding of the *Majelis Ulama* (the Ulama Council), which was officially established in 1956. Led by figures such as Isa Anshary, the council connected Persis’s central leadership with its *pesantren* networks and established standardized deliberation procedures.<sup>29</sup> The 1956 Bandung Congress formalized the Majelis Ulama, with members including Moenawwar Chalil, A. Hassan, Endang Abdurrahman, Muhammad Natsir, M. Isa Anshary, and Abdulqadir Hasan, highlighting its important intellectual and national role.<sup>30</sup> Chalil

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24. Salam Rusyad, a *Dewan Hisbah* member, tells students at Pesantren Persis Bangil that A. Hassan is “matahari pembaharuan” (the sun of [religious] renewal), emphasizing that his religious ideas are so influential within Persis that they are difficult to replace. He then encourages students to build on and expand A. Hassan’s religious ideas. See Rusyad, “Dewan Hisbah Menyapa.”

25. Amin Saefullah Muchtar, “Thuruqul Istinbath, Ijma & Qiyas Sebagai Dalil Hukum,” *Persis TV Channel*, YouTube video, March 17, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CqYHPUGoASk>; Syafiq A. Mughni, *Hassan Bandung: Pemikir Islam Radikal*, 28–29.

26. Muchtar, “Thuruqul Istinbath, Ijma.”

27. *Kata-Berjawab*, literally meaning “Answered Words,” is a Q&A column on religious matters in *Al-Muslimun* magazine.

28. Rusyad, “Dewan Hisbah Menyapa.”

29. Imam Sopyan, “Ulama Persis: Dari ‘Majelis Ulama’ Ke ‘Dewan Hisbah,’” *Majalah Risalah*, March 2021.

30. Dudung Abdurrahman, “Dinamika Kontemporer Persatuan Islam, PERSIS (1945-2015),” in *Gerakan-Gerakan Islam Indonesia Kontemporer* (Adab Press, 2020), 101; Rafid Abbas, *Ijtihad Persatuan Islam: Telaah Produk Ijtihad*

led the assembly, and A. Hassan was secretary.<sup>31</sup> Dudung Abdurrahman notes that the goal of establishing the *Majelis Ulama* was to create an independent legal body, thereby reducing reliance on A. Hassan's *fatwas*.<sup>32</sup> A. Hassan died two years after its founding at age seventy.

Crucially, the *Majelis Ulama* was not conceived as a merely advisory body. Its statutes embedded juristic authority within the organizational structure, granting it binding decision-making power, lifetime appointments, and even veto authority over organizational actions.<sup>33</sup> These provisions transformed the earlier "habit of proof" into a constitutional principle. Juristic conclusions were no longer individual opinions but organizational norms, institutionalizing scriptural reasoning as a governing mechanism.

In the 1960s, Persis made a significant change to the *Majelis Ulama* organization. According to the 1967 Eight Persis Congress and the 1968 Persis Organizational Constitution, the *Majelis Ulama* was reorganized as the *Dewan Hisbah* (Judicial Deliberative Council), and its role was shifted from enforcing Islamic rulings to overseeing morality. Additionally, Persis changed the term of office for the Hisbah Council from a lifetime to five years to match the term of the Persis central leadership.<sup>34</sup> While maintaining its commitment to scriptural reasoning, the new body emphasized moral oversight rather than direct institutional control. The removal of veto power marked a significant transformation, repositioning the council from an authoritative arbiter to a regulator of ethical conduct.

This period was also characterized by internal tensions, particularly between the central leadership and the juristic authority, which occasionally led to institutional fragmentation. Abbas details a dispute over *Dewan Hisbah*'s veto power between these entities, resulting in leadership stagnation within Persis. He notes that E. Abdurrahman headed the Central Board of Persis in Bandung, West Java, and managed its Q&A column in *Risalah*. Meanwhile, Abdulqadir led *Dewan Hisbah* from Bangil, East Java, and handled the Q&A column in *Al-Muslimun*, a publication of Pesantren Persis Bangil.<sup>35</sup> This disagreement led the two bodies to pursue separate paths. Abbas states that this conflict continued until both leaders passed away in 1983 and 1978, respectively.<sup>36</sup>

It was only in the 1980s, under Abdul Latief Muchtar's leadership, that *Dewan Hisbah* achieved full institutional consolidation, standardizing procedures and expanding its role in issuing and codifying *fatwas*.<sup>37</sup>

### *What the Council Does: Method, Oversight, and Pedagogy*

*Dewan Hisbah* articulates a method of legal deduction (*manhaj al-istinbāf*) that prioritizes the Quran and Sunnah while selectively employing classical juristic tools.<sup>38</sup> It accepts the consensus of the Companions but remains critical of later claims to consensus, and it applies analogy primarily in non-ritual

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*Persis Tahun 1996-2009* (Pustaka Pelajar, 2013), 18; Latief Awaludin, "Persis Sebuah Madzhab Fiqih Kontemporer," *Majalah Risalah*, April 2006.

31. Sopyan, "Ulama Persis."

32. Abdurrahman, "Dinamika Kontemporer Persatuan Islam," 101.

33. Sopyan, "Ulama Persis"; chapter V, articles 1–2 of "Qanun Asasi Dan Qanun Dakhili."

34. Sopyan, "Ulama Persis."

35. Abbas, *Ijtihad Persatuan Islam*, 19.

36. Abbas, *Ijtihad Persatuan Islam*, 19.

37. Abbas, *Ijtihad Persatuan Islam*, 19.

38. Abbas, *Ijtihad Persatuan Islam*, 15, 20; Anshoruddin Ramadhani, "Mazhab Persis," *Dakwah Persatuan Islam*, YouTube video, July 25, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=shared&v=0OfSGAQsrd0>.



domains. Secondary principles such as public interest (*maṣlahah*), custom (*‘urf*), and blocking harm (*sadd al-dharī‘ah*) are acknowledged but used cautiously.<sup>39</sup>

The council’s role extends beyond legal decision-making. Its rulings are incorporated into educational curricula, *pesantren* training, and organizational guidance, ensuring doctrinal reasoning reaches a broad audience. In practice, the *Dewan Hisbah*’s responsibilities closely align with Persis’s educational goals. As the authority for issuing *fatwas*, it often collaborates with Islamic boarding schools. Its rulings are recorded, compiled, and integrated into *pesantren* curricula and cadre training materials.<sup>40</sup> This results in a unique system in which jurisprudence, education, and governance are deeply interconnected: rulings are actively circulated rather than stored, helping to standardize ritual practices and instructing the community on evaluating proofs.

Institutionalization, therefore, does not replace charisma but channels it. The argumentative style pioneered by A. Hassan – rooted in debate (*munāzarah*) and proof – remains central, even as it is embedded within formal procedures. The result is what may be described as scriptural institutionalism: a system in which interpretive reasoning is both the source of authority and the mechanism of organizational cohesion.

Over time, Persis has transformed a century-long tradition of question-and-answer pedagogy into a durable institutional framework. By embedding hermeneutic practices within councils, curricula, and publications, it sustains unity without eliminating debate – turning scriptural reasoning into a living organizational constitution.

### **Persis and the Construction of the Other: Theological, Social, and Political Dimensions**

This section examines how Persis constructs the “Other” across three interconnected registers: theological classification, social interaction, and political opposition. Rather than a static boundary, the Other emerges through layered distinctions that combine doctrinal exclusivity, ethical restraint, and strategic differentiation.

#### *Theological Perspective: Orthodoxy and the Limits of Belonging*

This section examines how Persis establishes doctrinal boundaries that define inclusion and exclusion within its theological framework. Persis grounds its worldview in *tawḥīd* (divine unity) and the distinction between faith (*īmān*) and disbelief (*kufṛ*). This distinction is not merely doctrinal but constitutive: it defines the moral universe within which Muslims situate themselves in relation to others.

In *Soal–Jawab*, Ahmad Hassan offers a nuanced approach to defining the boundaries between Muslims and non-Muslims. He dismisses the idea that non-Muslims are ritually impure and highlights that there is no scriptural basis for labelling them *najis* (ritually impure).<sup>41</sup> This balanced view promotes social inclusion while maintaining theological integrity. Simultaneously, Hassan emphasizes a clear distinction: unbelief involves rejecting divine truth. He warns against careless *takfīr* (calling someone an unbeliever), limiting accusations of disbelief to cases in which fundamental principles – such as the Quran, the Prophet, or the core pillars of Islam – are explicitly denied. Wrongful *takfīr* is considered potentially harmful for the

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39. Muchtar, “Thuruqul Istinbath, Ijma.”

40. Dewan Hisbah Persatuan Islam, *Metodologi Istinbat Hukum* (Persis Pers, 2018), xxvii.

41. A. Hassan, *Soal Jawab Tentang Berbagai Masalah Agama* (CV Penerbit Diponegoro, 1968), 1–2:31.

accuser.<sup>42</sup> Additionally, Hassan forbids Muslims from praying for non-Muslims, citing QS 9:84 to underscore the difference between believers and non-believers.<sup>43</sup> Overall, these points define boundaries that are both clear and ethically cautious, balancing doctrinal clarity with careful regulation of community and religious practice.

Abdulqadir Hasan further systematizes this boundary by developing a typology of *kufir* that distinguishes between forms such as denial (*inkār*), hypocrisy (*nifāq*), defiance (*inād*), and stubbornness (*jumūd*).<sup>44</sup> He also refers to QS 5:5 and 7:147, emphasizing that those who deny Allah's signs and reject the Hereafter will encounter consequences. Allah will not reward their actions; rather, He will reward their falsehood regarding His signs and their disbelief in the Hereafter.<sup>45</sup> This classification introduces a gradational understanding of unbelief, linking theological deviation to varying degrees of epistemic and moral resistance.

Despite this doctrinal exclusivity, Persis maintains a distinction between theological status and social treatment. For instance, while affirming the category of *kāfir*, its scholars permit certain forms of interaction, such as marriage (in earlier formulations) and everyday engagement, grounded in scriptural allowances.<sup>46</sup> Additionally, they ban Muslims from being buried with non-Muslims in the same graveyard, reflecting social divisions and referencing early Islamic practices that separated burial sites.<sup>47</sup> This highlights the clear separation between Muslim and non-Muslim communities. As a result, a structured tension exists: the Other is doctrinally excluded but socially recognized.

Later Persis leaders, including Aceng Zakaria, Jeje Zaenuddin, Haris Muslim, and Umar Fanani, reinterpret this doctrine for their audience. Ustaz Aceng, in a 2006 *Risalah* article, categorized unbelievers into *dhimmi*, *mu'ahad*, *ḥarbī*, and *ahl al-Kitāb*,<sup>48</sup> each with distinct legal and moral relations.<sup>49</sup> Ustaz Jeje differentiates disbelief based on doctrine, warning against reckless *takfīr*,<sup>50</sup> while Ustaz Haris promotes respectful language and acknowledges equal rights in Indonesia.<sup>51</sup> Ustaz Umar, however, insists on using "kafir," citing QS 98:6.<sup>52</sup> These nuanced perspectives influence how Persis interacts with non-Muslims today.

At the institutional level, Dewan Hisbah extends this theology through collective rulings. They affirm that Allah hears the prayers of any oppressed person, including non-Muslims, citing *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and *Ṣaḥīḥ ibn Hibbān*, illustrating early moral universalism in Persis thought.<sup>53</sup> M. Rahmat Najieb, member of *Dewan Hisbah*, interprets QS 5:82–83, arguing that true Christians, like Najāshī, accepted Islam

42. Hassan, *Soal Jawab*, 1–2:392–94.

43. A. Hassan, *Soal Jawab Tentang Berbagai Masalah Agama* (CV Penerbit Diponegoro, 1972), 3–4:991.

44. Abdulqadir Hassan, *Kata Berjawab Soal Jawab Berbagai Masalah Agama* (Yayasan Al-Muslimun Bangil, 1991), 1–5:369.

45. Hassan, *Kata Berjawab*, 1–5:369.

46. Hassan, *Soal Jawab*, 1–2:263–64; Hassan, *Kata Berjawab*, 1–5:387–99 and 411–12.

47. Hassan, *Kata Berjawab*, 1–5:532.

48. Each group represented different legal and moral relationships: *dhimmi* (protected non-Muslims) were to be treated peacefully; *mu'ahad* (those under treaty) deserved protection; *Ahl al-Kitāb* (Jews and Christians) were recognized as connected through scripture; and *ḥarbī* (hostile unbelievers) actively fought Islam. This classification shaped later rulings on how Muslims interact with non-Muslims.

49. Aceng Zakaria, "Tegakkan Jihad Demi Tegaknya Islam," *Majalah Risalah*, February 2006.

50. Jeje Zaenudin, "Kriteria Kafir Dan Hukum Mengkafirkan," *Persis TV Channel*, YouTube video, December 15, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fKMZOmTHR20>.

51. Haris Muslim, "Kejelasan Kafir Kacamata Islam," *Persis TV Channel*, YouTube video, March 19, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DxVK0YiHlog>.

52. Umar Fanani, "Interview," March 18, 2021.

53. "Apakah Orang Kafir Dizalimi Doanya Akan Dijabah Allah SWT?," *Majalah Risalah*, April 2014.

upon hearing the Quran. He posits that sincere Christians eventually embrace Islam, and converts receive double rewards for faith in both their prophets and Muhammad.<sup>54</sup> The *Dewan Hisbah* also rules that non-Muslims may enter mosques (except Masjid al-Haram in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, per QS 9:28) if their intent is peaceful, referencing the Prophet's treatment of Thumamah ibn Uthāl.<sup>55</sup> However, interfaith marriage is forbidden, as Christians are considered idolaters (*mushrikūn*) for deifying Jesus, and both Islamic and Indonesian law prohibit such unions.<sup>56</sup>

Taken together, Persis's theological construction of the Other is best understood as bounded exclusivism: a framework that preserves doctrinal clarity while regulating the ethical implications of difference.

### *Social Perspective: Ethical Coexistence and Functional Differentiation*

At the social level, Persis translates theological distinctions into a pragmatic ethic of coexistence. The key organizing principle is the classical distinction between *ibādah* (ritual worship) and *mu'āmalah* (worldly interaction). While the former remains exclusively Islamic, the latter permits engagement across religious boundaries.

Ahmad Hassan's rulings clearly demonstrate this principle. He allows trade, professional services, and social interactions with non-Muslims, provided they do not involve religious compromise.<sup>57</sup> Even actions like greetings or medical procedures carried out by non-Muslims are considered acceptable within this framework.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, Abdulqadir Hasan applies this reasoning to enable business partnerships and employment with non-Muslims, provided Islamic obligations are fulfilled.<sup>59</sup> His approach – allowing cooperation in secular matters but forbidding involvement in religious rituals – encapsulates Persis's social logic.

Dewan Hisbah institutionalizes this approach through its rulings in *Risalah*. It permits receiving donations from non-Muslims for social welfare and highlights instances of interfaith cooperation, such as disaster relief efforts.<sup>60</sup> *Risalah* highlights Muslim organizations collaborating with non-Muslim partners in disaster relief. For example, Persis's Community Zakat Center (PZU) oversees donations for residents in West Papua, mostly Christian, affected by the Wasior floods.<sup>61</sup> The Edhi Foundation in Pakistan also receives donations from Muslims and non-Muslims worldwide.<sup>62</sup> These examples are not incidental but illustrative: they demonstrate that engagement with the Other is not only allowed but, under certain conditions, encouraged.

At the level of discourse, Persis adopts a model of conditional tolerance. Drawing on figures such as Mohammad Natsir, tolerance is framed not as relativism but as principled coexistence grounded in

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54. M. Rahmat Najieb, "Pahala Nasrani Yang Masuk Islam (Tafsir QS. Al-Maidah [5]: 84–86)," *Majalah Risalah*, March 2023.

55. "Non-Muslim Masuk Masjid," *Majalah Risalah*, December 2010.

56. Abu Luthfi, "Pemurtadan Melalui Perkawinan," *Majalah Risalah*, April 2006; M. Abdurrahman, "Pernikahan Beda Agama Wajib Ditolak," *Majalah Risalah*, October 2014.

57. Hassan, *Soal Jawab*, 3–4:1202–3.

58. Hassan, *Soal Jawab*, 3–4:1208–9, 1257–58.

59. Hassan, *Kata Berjawab*, 1–5:491, 580–81.

60. Siti Nurlaeli, "Menerima Hadiah Dari Non-Muslim," *Majalah Risalah*, April 2010; "Menerima Wakaf Dari Non-Muslim," *Majalah Risalah*, July 2013.

61. Dadan Wildan Annas, "Laporan Dari Wasior Papua Barat: Harmoni Kehidupan Keagamaan Di Daerah Bencana," *Majalah Risalah*, March 2011.

62. "Abdul Sattar Edhi Si Baik Hati Dari Pakistan," *Majalah Risalah*, February 2006.

Islamic ethics. This allows for cooperation with Christians and other religious groups while maintaining firm opposition to ideologies perceived as incompatible with monotheism, such as communism.<sup>63</sup> Likewise, *Risalah's* international coverage demonstrates Persis's commitment to religious ethics. The magazine reports peaceful Muslim coexistence with Christians and Hindus in Guyana, promoting religious tolerance post-9/11.<sup>64</sup> The Marawi conflict highlights Christian-Muslim cooperation, noting Muslim leader Norodin Alonto Lucman's rescue of seventy-one people.<sup>65</sup> *Risalah* underscores the importance of Muslims' social ethics in interfaith relations.

In this sense, the social Other is not an adversary but a partner in shared civic space – provided that boundaries of belief are respected. The result is a model of coexistence structured by differentiation rather than assimilation.

### *Political Perspective: Ideological Adversaries and Civilizational Threats*

At the political level, Persis constructs the Other more sharply, distinguishing between ideological rivals and persecuting powers. Here, theological categories are translated into geopolitical and ideological critique.

Communism occupies a central place in this framework. It is treated simultaneously as a theological negation – denial of God – and a political threat to both Islam and the Indonesian nation.<sup>66</sup> Menchik notes that Persis leaders Anshary and Natsir both strongly oppose communism: Anshary calls it Islam's "number one enemy," while Natsir argues it is incompatible with Indonesia's Islamic identity and the foundational values of Pancasila and democracy.<sup>67</sup>

This stance is not just rhetorical but institutional. In the 1950s, Persis was actively involved in the anti-communism movement both inside and outside parliament. *Risalah* notes that M. Rusjad Nurdin, a senior leader of Persis within the Masjumi party,<sup>68</sup> criticized communism for its "rejection of belief in God" in the Constituent Assembly, while Isa Anshary, who served as Persis Chairperson from 1950 to 1960, founded the *Front Anti Komunis* (Anti-Communist Front).<sup>69</sup> This coalition mobilized anti-communist groups from diverse religious backgrounds to unite in opposition to communism, fascism, and totalitarianism.<sup>70</sup> Today, Persis remains an "Anti-Communist Watchdog," alerting Indonesia to communist presence, such as the spread of the communist symbol, a red hammer and sickle, in Central Java. Persis and allies view the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) as the main threat to Islamic democracy and national morality.<sup>71</sup> *Risalah* expands its anti-communist stance globally, reporting on Muslim persecution under

63. Jeremy Menchik, "Toleransi Persis Terhadap Kristen Tahun 1950-An," *Majalah Risalah*, November 2023.

64. "Muslim Di Guyana," *Majalah Risalah*, May 2012.

65. "Di Marawi Warga Kristen Dilindungi Muslim," *Majalah Risalah*, July 2017.

66. Pepen Irfan Fauzan, "Konfrontasi Total Persis Terhadap PKI," *Majalah Risalah*, September 2020; This view aligns with Abdulqadir's classification of communists as *kafir inkar*, meaning they completely deny and reject belief in Allah. See Hassan, *Kata Berjawab*, 1–5:369.

67. Menchik, "Toleransi Persis Terhadap Kristen Tahun 1950-An."

68. The Masjumi Party was a prominent Islamic political party in Indonesia, active between 1945 and 1960. It promoted moderate, modernist Islam and supported a theistic democracy that integrated Islamic values with parliamentary democracy. For further details, see Madinier, *Islam and Politics in Indonesia*.

69. Fauzan, "Konfrontasi Total Persis Terhadap PKI."

70. Fauzan, "Konfrontasi Total Persis Terhadap PKI."

71. "Kaum Kiri Unjuk Gigi," *Majalah Risalah*, May 2006; M. Abdurrahman, "Neo-Komunis Di Balik Gugatan Identitas Agama Di KTP," *Majalah Risalah*, January 2014.

communist regimes in Poland, Russia, and China (including fasting bans in Xinjiang).<sup>72</sup> These reports reinforce Persis's belief that combating communism is both a defence of faith and a worldwide moral obligation to protect religious freedom.

Beyond communism, Persis criticizes secularism and liberalism as Western-driven threats to Islam, incompatible with Islamic orthodoxy.<sup>73</sup> These ideologies detach religion from public affairs, weakening Islam's all-encompassing nature.<sup>74</sup> Persis advocates an Islamic knowledge framework based on *wahy* (revelation), opposes Western materialist epistememes, and views Islam as a complete system for addressing spiritual, ethical, and social issues.<sup>75</sup> Key figures such as Ahmad Hassan and Mohammad Natsir, central to Persis's origins, promoted an Islamic political vision that opposed nationalist-secular leaders such as Soekarno (Indonesia's first president).<sup>76</sup> Their influence led to the establishment of Masyumi as an "Islamic political vehicle" to challenge secular politics.<sup>77</sup> Through its magazine *Risalah*, Persis describes the secular-liberal bloc – locally and internationally – as embodying Western hegemony and moral decay.<sup>78</sup> This stance sees the Other as a threat to Muslim revelation and community.

The critique intensifies in discussions of Zionism, where theological and political narratives converge. In *Risalah*, Zionism is portrayed not only as a distortion of Jewish religious tradition – misusing biblical promises for secular, nationalist, and colonial aims – but also as a form of Western imperialism that directly threatens Muslim communities around the world.<sup>79</sup> Using both scriptural references and historical events, such as the Balfour Declaration and violence like Sabra and Shatila (two sites of brutal massacres in Beirut), *Risalah* presents Zionism as morally corrupt and inherently hostile toward Muslims, using Quranic imagery to strengthen this spiritual critique.<sup>80</sup> The magazine traces the rise of Zionism through important historical milestones and argues that the creation of the state of Israel was driven by Western political influence and financial interests rather than divine prophecy.<sup>81</sup> In the end, Persis sees Zionism as the ultimate Other: an immoral, secular force that threatens the moral, spiritual, and political integrity of the worldwide Muslim community.

Importantly, this discourse does not simply identify enemies; it constructs a hierarchy of Others. While non-Muslims in everyday contexts may be treated with fairness and cooperation, ideological and geopolitical actors – communists, secularists, and Zionist forces – are framed as threats to the moral and political integrity of the Muslim community.

Overall, Persis constructs the Other through three registers: 1) theologically as bounded exclusivism, 2) socially as conditional coexistence, and 3) politically as oppositional differentiation. This

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72. "Islam Di Eropa Utara," *Majalah Risalah*, July 2008; "Masjid Qul Kian Makmur," *Majalah Risalah*, April 2010; "Muslim Xinjiang Dituduh Teroris," *Majalah Risalah*, September 2014.

73. Nashruddin Syarief, "Mengkritisi Dalih Pembeneran Sekularisme," *Majalah Risalah*, December 2010.

74. Teten Romly Qomaruddin, "Mulhidun Dan Dahriyyun: Akar Ideologi Kaum Anti Tuhan," *Majalah Risalah*, March 2021.

75. Tiar Anwar Bachtiar, "Liberalisasi Pesantren," *Majalah Risalah*, February 2007; Latief Awaludin, "Menyoal 'Liberalisasi Pesantren,'" *Majalah Risalah*, March 2007; "Sebuah Catatan Dari Seminar Internasional Hima Persis," *Majalah Risalah*, July 2010.

76. Pepen Irpan Fauzan, "Persatuan Islam, Natsir Dan Sumbangnya Terhadap Pancasila," *Majalah Risalah*, June 2021.

77. Fauzan, "Konfrontasi Total Persis Terhadap PKI."

78. Atip Latifulhayat, "Pemerintah Berhak Membatasi Freedom of Religion," *Majalah Risalah*, July 2008; Ihsan Setiadi Latief, "Waspada Drama Aktor Politik Kafir," *Majalah Risalah*, September 2016.

79. Tiar Anwar Bachtiar, "Sejarah Pendudukan Zionis," *Majalah Risalah*, August 2006.

80. Shiddiq Amien, "Sang Jagal Bernama Zionis," *Majalah Risalah*, August 2006; Shiddiq Amien, "Zionis Biadab!," *Majalah Risalah*, August 2006.

81. Tiar Anwar Bachtiar, "Klaim Palsu Zionis," *Majalah Risalah*, August 2006; Bachtiar, "Sejarah Pendudukan Zionis."

layered approach supports Persis’s scriptural nationalism by translating scripture into social and political ethics, embedding theological reasoning into the national imagination. It results in a spectrum of relational positions, from coexistence to opposition, shaped by scriptural interpretation.

### **Toward a Scriptural Nationalism: A Synthesis**

#### *Theological Foundations: Tawhīd, Unity, and the Moral Basis of the Nation*

Persis’s conception of nationalism is rooted in a Quranic worldview that integrates *tawhīd* (divine unity) with forms of social solidarity (*ukhuwwah*). Rather than treating nationalism as a secular construct, Persis interprets it through a theological lens in which national belonging is anchored in divine order.

This approach is evident in Abdullah Hehamahua’s interpretation of QS 49:13, which presents human diversity as divinely intended. He identifies three overlapping forms of solidarity – *ukhuwwah islāmiyyah* (religious), *wathaniyyah* (national), and *bashariyyah* (universal) – and aligns them with the principles of Pancasila. In this reading, Pancasila is not external to Islam but reflects its ethical structure. National unity (*Persatuan Indonesia*) and humanity (*Kemanusiaan*) are thus understood as extensions of a *tawhīd*-centered moral cosmology.<sup>82</sup>

A similar argument is developed by Nashrudin Syarief, who rejects the characterization of Pancasila as a secular compromise. For him, the first principle – *Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa* (belief in the One and Only God) – establishes a theological foundation for the state, ensuring that public life remains oriented toward divine values. Secularism and liberalism, by contrast, are viewed as epistemological frameworks that detach moral reasoning from revelation.<sup>83</sup> Persis, therefore, maintains a clear hierarchy in which revelation (*wahy*) guides political and ethical life, even as it operates within a pluralist national framework.<sup>84</sup>

Jeje Zaenuddin and Abdurrahman further refine this position by emphasizing that while Pancasila aligns with Islamic values, it is not itself a religion. This distinction is crucial: it allows Persis to affirm the legitimacy of the Indonesian state while maintaining Islam as the ultimate normative reference. The state is thus understood as a vehicle for moral realization rather than a neutral or secular entity.<sup>85</sup>

Taken together, these arguments produce what may be described as a theological integrationism: a framework in which nationalism is legitimate to the extent that it reflects divine principles. Scriptural nationalism, in this sense, emerges as a hermeneutic project that interprets the nation through the lens of revelation.

#### *Political Praxis: Scriptural Nationalism in Action*

If theology provides the foundation, Persis’s political engagement demonstrates how scriptural nationalism operates in practice. Historically, the organization has combined doctrinal commitment with pragmatic participation in the Indonesian state.

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82. Abdullah Hehamahua, “Pancasilais Sejati Adalah Umat Islam,” *Majalah Risalah*, April 2017.

83. Syarief, “Mengkritisi Dalih Pembeneran Sekularisme.”

84. Irpan Fauzan, “Persatuan Islam, Natsir Dan Sumbanganya Terhadap Pancasila.”

85. Jeje Zaenuddin, “Pemerintah Jangan Memusuhi Ormas Islam,” *Majalah Risalah*, June 2017; M. Abdurrahman, “NKRI Itu Transformasi Khilafah, Harga Mati,” *Majalah Risalah*, July 2017.

During the debates of the Constituent Assembly in the 1950s, Persis leaders supported the inclusion of the Jakarta Charter's formulation of Islamic obligation within the constitution. The removal of the "seven words" was interpreted by figures such as Shiddiq Amien as a political compromise that diminished Islam's normative role in governance.<sup>86</sup>

Yet this critique did not translate into revolutionary opposition. Persis rejected extra-constitutional movements such as Darul Islam, instead pursuing change through mission (*da'wa*), education, and political engagement.<sup>87</sup> This reflects what later figures describe as a *proporsional dan bijaksana* (proportionate and wise) approach: working within the state while seeking to shape its moral direction.<sup>88</sup> This stance is further articulated by Ihsan Setiadi Latief, who emphasizes that Islam, Pancasila, and Indonesian nationhood are not contradictory but mutually reinforcing.<sup>89</sup> For Persis, the task is not to replace the state but to deepen its moral foundation through Islamic understanding.

The same logic underpins Persis's opposition to communism. Communism is framed not only as a political ideology but as a theological negation of *tawhīd*, grounded in materialism and atheism.<sup>90</sup> From early anti-communist mobilization to contemporary discourse in *Risalah*, Persis consistently positions itself as a defender of both religious belief and national integrity.<sup>91</sup>

At the same time, Persis also resists forms of activism that threaten social cohesion or undermine Pancasila. Its critique of incidents such as the Monas conflict<sup>92</sup> reflects concern that religious confrontation may weaken national unity, particularly when linked to broader ideological struggles involving liberalism or sectarian division.<sup>93</sup>

### *Synthesis: Nation as a Moral Project*

Persis promotes a consistent vision across theological reflection and political practice: viewing the nation as a moral project rooted in revelation. National loyalty is justified not as an independent principle but as an extension of religious duty. This can be seen as a mature form of scriptural nationalism, based on three main features:

1. Theological Foundation: interpreting the nation through *tawhīd* and Quranic ethics.
2. Epistemic Hierarchy: giving priority to revelation over secular or ideological reasoning.
3. Pragmatic Approach: engaging with the state through education, discourse, and institutions rather than confrontation.

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86. Shiddiq Amien, "Salibis Gugat SKB," *Majalah Risalah*, October 2005.

87. Amien, "Salibis Gugat SKB."

88. Ihsan Setiadi Latief, "Penista Al-Quran Tidak Menghargai Kebhinekaan," *Majalah Risalah*, March 2017.

89. Latief, "Penista Al-Quran Tidak Menghargai Kebhinekaan."

90. "Kebangkitan PKI Ilusi Atau Bukti," *Majalah Risalah*, June 2016.

91. Pepen Irfan Fauzan, "Front Anti Komunis: Respon Persis Terhadap Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI)," *Majalah Risalah*, June 2016; M. Isa Anshary, "Komunisme Ideologi Kufur," *Majalah Risalah*, June 2016.

92. The National Monument (Monas) incident refers to the event when members of the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) attacked activists of freedom of faith and religion (AKKBB), who were going to commemorate the 63rd year of Pancasila. See the Jakarta Post's report for details: "Hard-Liners Ambush Monas Rally," *The Jakarta Post*, June 2, 2008, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2008/06/02/hardliners-ambush-monas-rally.html>.

93. Shiddiq Amien, "AKKBB Sang Provokator," *Majalah Risalah*, July 2008.

In this view, Pancasila is neither outright rejected nor fully secularized. Instead, it is reinterpreted as a moral covenant compatible with Islamic principles, enabling Persis to uphold national unity while maintaining doctrinal clarity.

Ultimately, Persis's approach shows that nationalism can be intertwined with religion and not merely a political ideology. Through scriptural nationalism, the nation becomes a space where divine guidance is continually interpreted and applied, linking theological reasoning with civic responsibility.

### Conclusion

This article has argued that Persatuan Islam (Persis) articulates a distinctive form of scriptural nationalism in which the nation is imagined and sustained through disciplined acts of scriptural interpretation. By analyzing Persis's print culture – particularly the relationship between *Risalah* and *Dewan Hisbah* – this study has demonstrated that nationalism, in this context, is not merely a political or institutional construct, but a hermeneutic project grounded in religious reasoning.

Three key findings emerge. First, Persis defines the nation as a moral community rooted in *tawhīd*, where belonging is validated by alignment with divine principles. Instead of opposing Pancasila or adopting secular nationalism, Persis reinterprets the state as a means to realize Islamic ethical values. This frames nationalism not as opposed to religion but as an extension of it.

Second, this project is sustained through a structured division of discursive labour. *Dewan Hisbah* consolidates doctrinal authority through juristic reasoning, while *Risalah* translates these theological positions into accessible civic discourse. This genre partition allows Persis to maintain internal orthodoxy while engaging broader publics, demonstrating how institutional differentiation enables both stability and outreach.

Third, Persis constructs the “Other” through a layered framework: theologically as bounded exclusivism, socially as conditional coexistence, and politically as oppositional differentiation. This stratified approach allows the organization to balance doctrinal clarity with pragmatic engagement, producing a spectrum of relationships rather than a singular antagonistic boundary.

Beyond Indonesia, this study contributes to broader debates in religious studies by foregrounding hermeneutics as a mode of nation-making. While existing theories emphasize institutions, identity, or political mobilization, the Persis case shows that recurring acts of interpretation – circulated through print and pedagogy – can function as a foundational mechanism of national imagination. In this sense, scriptural nationalism complements and extends frameworks such as civil Islam by highlighting the role of interpretive communities in shaping civic life.

Ultimately, Persis demonstrates that modern nationalism need not be secular nor theocratic. Instead, it can emerge as an ongoing interpretive process in which revelation is continuously translated into ethical, social, and political meaning. This insight invites comparative exploration of similar dynamics in other religious traditions, where scripture may likewise serve as a living foundation for imagining the nation.



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