

Media of Religious Morality in Indonesia

For News from Australia and the Pacific, we ask contributors to reflect on their own research and the broader academic field in Australia and the Pacific, of which it is a part. Our contributions aim to give a select overview of Asia-related studies in Australia and beyond, and to highlight exciting intellectual debates on and with Asia. In the current edition, we focus on the theme of “Media of Religious Morality in Indonesia.”

In the current edition, we focus on the theme of “Media of Religious Morality in Indonesia.” Our authors demonstrate how mediated forms of religious morality shape fundamental aspects of people’s everyday lives, working conditions, education, national identity, gender, and sexuality. The information, communication, and entertainment media they discuss range from books (Millie) and films (Wejak and Winarnita) to apps (Yasih and Hadiz), and social media (Husein). Some of these media also function as platforms to reflect on and

criticise the far-reaching social and political role and impact of religious morality in contemporary Indonesia.

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Technologies of Learning and Islamic Authority

Julian Millie

Over the last two decades, the uptake of media and communications technologies into religious practice has been a striking phenomenon in Indonesian Islamic society. It is commonly connected with the emergence of a Muslim middle class.¹ Islamic banking and financial products, social media, Islamic fashions, Islamic television drama, preachers with styles aimed at middle-class sensibilities, extended pilgrimage tours are markers of increased prosperity amongst the Muslim community. They also correspond to emerging loci of authority in the Muslim community. After all, new communications and media technologies involve the arrival of new forms of authority, and the weakening of others.

Communications technologies have effects more broadly than class division alone. They are also highly influential in one of the most significant divisions in Indonesian Muslim society, namely the one that differentiates traditional from modernist Muslims. A fascinating example of the relevance of technology to this ongoing divide is the ‘yellow books’ (*kitab kuning*), which are the texts used in the learning practices of traditional Islamic schools (*pesantren*).² This learning technology is certainly not new, but it has recently acquired an expanded political meaning. In 2019, the Indonesian parliament passed the ‘Pesantren Law of 2019.’ This is the latest in a string of reforms,

Fig. 1: Students of the ‘yellow books’ internalise scholarly lineages when they study a text side by side with a commentary on it by a related scholar. (Photo by Julian Millie)



Fig. 2: Posters such as this one, photographed by the author in a pesantren, inform students about genealogies of teachers and scholars. (Photo by Julian Millie)

commencing in the 1970s, through which the Indonesian government has sought to bring the country’s traditional Islamic schools – pesantren – within the orbit of state-provided education. The pesantren environment is a very hierarchical one, presided over by the figure known as *kyai* (equivalent to school principal), who is qualified to lead the community by virtue of qualities such as scholarly achievement, family lineage, and charisma. The Pesantren Law of 2019 formally affirms the *kyai* and pesantren as official components of the national education system. For the first time, the ‘yellow books’ are formally stipulated (in sub-article 1(2)) as a defining feature of pesantren education. The books are distinctive due to the yellow paper on which they are printed. Their true uniqueness, however, lies in the way they express and affirm the traditional hierarchy of the pesantren world. There is a close fit between the ‘yellow books’ and the hierarchical pedagogical styles of the pesantren.³ Many *kyai* are known for their mastery of specific works, and advanced students often plan their study programs around the reputations of individual *kyai* who are renowned as teachers of specific works. Such students

participate in learning practices that are heavily determined by the pesantren hierarchy: the *kyai* progresses through the book, translating and interpreting while the students take notes and listen. On finalisation, the student receives a qualification that ties their achievement to the name and reputation of the *kyai*. The completion of the book enables the student to become a new link in the teacher’s genealogy. The physical form of these books is shaped by this pedagogical context: the language is almost always Arabic, the mastery of which is a basic competency of the *kyai*. The books are written by scholars revered in lineages that are commemorated in the pesantren, space is sometimes provided under each line of text for annotations that are added during the face-to-face learning practices, and commentaries by other noted scholars are published in the spaces around the primary text. Based on these features, the yellow books are learning technologies that preserve the hierarchies and genealogies that define the pesantren world. Other groups in Indonesia’s Muslim community have moved past this media technology. Modernist Islamic educators

have adopted pedagogical styles from secular models that have enormous authority in Indonesia, and use the same classroom styles and textbook formats as are used in the non-religious educational system. They have largely abandoned this book technology, along with the hierarchies that it reflects.

Yet, for a numerically significant segment of Indonesia's population, the 'yellow books' must be preserved in Islamic education. Teachers in the *pesantren* watched on throughout the early and mid-twentieth century as modernists took up new learning technologies, ones that seemed more appropriate for evolving social and political conditions, but refused to 'downtake' the yellow books, realising their important role in preserving the distinctiveness of this religious segment.

That is why the statutory definition is so important. By defining the *pesantren* as an institution where the 'yellow books' are taught, the government is formally bringing the hierarchy of the *pesantren* environment closer to the centre of public life in the Republic.

This definition was opposed by modernists before the passing of the bill.⁴ They queried, amongst other things, the way the bill constructs within the national education system a particular educational space specifically around the pedagogical traditions of a single segment. Behind this concern is a conviction that the national education system ought to be available universally for all Indonesians on equal terms.

As is often the case with Islam and public life in Indonesia, practical politics is part of the conversation. The current government has obtained crucial electoral support from the populations in which the 'yellow books' are authoritative learning technologies. The success of the current President, Joko Widodo and his party relied upon voters in these communities, especially in Java. The formal recognition of the *pesantren* and *kyai*, along with the financial largesse that might flow in its wake, are regarded by many as sweeteners for its voting constituency.

Although they do not feature in the media studies conversation about religion and emergent class, the 'yellow books' are a striking example of the connection between technologies of mediation and religious authority. What is under focus here is not the uptake of new technology by a Muslim segment, but a refusal to 'downtake' a specific mediating technology. The technology is essential to the preservation of a nationally significant Islamic culture. On the broader public stage, however, its affirmation within the national educational repertoire might turn out to be a fragmenting move.

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- 2 A standard account of *pesantren* culture is Van Bruinessen, M. (1995). *Kitab kuning pesantren dan tarekat: tradisi-tradisi Islam di Indonesia*. Bandung: Mizan.
- 3 Links between pedagogical styles and the *pesantren* hierarchy are explored in Nurtawab, E. (2019). 'The Decline of Traditional Learning Methods in Changing Indonesia: Trends of Bandongan-Kitāb Readings in Pesantrens'. *Studia Islamika*, 26(3), 511-541.
- 4 Azzahra, Nadia Fairuza (2019). *Effects of the Pesantren Law on Indonesia's Education System – A Projection*. Center for Indonesian Policy Studies: Jakarta.

Being Religious and Nationalist in Contemporary Indonesia: Soegijapranata's Ethos

Justin Wejak

In 1940, Albertus Soegijapranata (1896–1963) was the first Indigenous Indonesian clergyman appointed by the Vatican to be a bishop in the East Indies. His episcopal position ended in 1963, the year of his passing. No one in his extended family ever imagined then that the Muslim converted-Catholic Soegija would one day become a priest, then a bishop, and ultimately an archbishop. Educated in a Dutch system first in the East Indies, then in the Netherlands, and with strong Indigenous roots in Java, Soegija became an uncompromised advocate for universal humanity and nationalism. His deep sense of humanity and his religiously diverse background enabled him to interact with people beyond his Catholic circle.

As Indonesia is preparing for the 2024 general elections, renewed concerns about the intersections between religious identity and nationalism are widely under discussion. With this in mind, Soegija's motto – "100 percent Catholic, 100 percent Indonesian"¹ – can be a source of inspiration for reflection on the theme of nationalism. The motto demonstrates his strong nationalist feeling centred on the message that to be Catholic is to be fully Indonesian. Such a maxim suggests that, even though Christianity was still closely associated with Western colonialism in the mid-twentieth century, the two identities – being Catholic and being Indonesian – are complementary, not contradictory. Christianity was then perceived as a colonial product and, therefore, suspected simplistically as an agent of colonialism.

To deconstruct this perception, Soegija, as reflected in his motto, tried to appeal to all Indigenous Catholics in the archipelago to show love of, and commitment to the country. The same motivation saw him actively involved in the national aspirations to bring about prosperity and social justice to the Muslim-majority nation. This partly explains why the Church has enhanced its ministry in education and healthcare post-independence. Education, in particular, is widely recognised as the key to Indonesia's future, as it equips the people of Indonesia with the necessary knowledge, skills, and confidence. Soegija had an important role to play in this trajectory. Nationalism is a project; it is a project of the present for the future, as so well explained for Indonesia by Benedict Anderson, whose account remains formative for studies of contemporary Indonesia.²

A glimpse of Soegija's life and feeling of nationalism can be seen through the feature film – titled *Soegija* – produced in 2012 by Garin Nugroho.³ This historical drama showcases Soegija's reflections on universal humanity that inspired his pursuit of

nationalism.⁴ It tells stories about the struggle for humanity during Indonesia's independence war (1940–1949), through the main figure of Soegija himself. In the film, Soegija is portrayed as a simple man, down-to-earth, and very close to the people. Even though he did not go to war to defend his newly independent nation, he was very involved in organising food for the needy during war time, and he opened the church doors to refugees for their safety. The film also portrays Soegija as a person able to conduct silent diplomacy, including quietly sending a letter to the Vatican demanding recognition for Indonesian sovereignty and independence declared in 1945.⁵ For him, as depicted in the film, war dehumanises individuals and destroys civilisation. *Soegija* is a film about humanity, rather than about religion or Catholicism. Soegija is shown noting in his diary that humanity is the basis for nationalism and religion. Nationalities, languages, way of life, traditions, and modernity all belong to a common home of humanity.

According to the film director Nugroho, without the film, Soegija's reflective notes about humanity could have been lost, and his contribution to ongoing reflections on universal humanity and Indonesian nationalism could have been dismissed. After all, unlike Indonesia's first president, Soekarno (1945–1967) and Lieutenant General Soedirman (1944–1950), for example, Soegija was not a politically popular figure, given that he was merely a bishop of a numerically small religious minority in Semarang. Even though the film is fictional in style, it has a strong emphasis on the unity of Indonesia as a matter of importance above personal interests. The film conveys the idea of self-sacrifice for the sake of that unity and humanity. Like Soegija's motto, the film can be seen as a way to deconstruct the persistent view that Christians in Indonesia are less nationalist than their Muslim counterparts.

In fact, this majority-minority dichotomy was politically exploited during the gubernatorial election in Jakarta in 2017, where Ahok, now called BTP (Basuki Tjahaja Purnama), lost the election mainly because of his double-minority identity – as a Christian, and an ethnic-Chinese.⁶ Ahok's political competitor, Anies Rasyid Baswedan, was able to successfully play the 'identity politics' card. He was associated with a massive fear campaign exploiting religious symbols, such as heaven and hell, to convince Muslim voters to vote for him.⁷

In October 2022, Anies, who completed his term in office as the governor of Jakarta, was declared a potential candidate for presidency in the next general elections scheduled for February 2024. The declaration seemed to create a deep sense of angst among nationalists. There is fear that Indonesia's current secular nationalism may become more religious (Islamic) under Anies. While there was no sign of discrimination against the minority religions in Jakarta during Anies' time in office, people unfortunately remain worried that the religious nationalism movement will gain momentum if he becomes Indonesia's next president.⁸ He may pave the way for religious radicalism to gain more influence and popularity.

The country's ideology of *Pancasila* and the Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia may be put under threat. Specifically, as articulated in the Jakarta Charter, the first principle of *Pancasila* is "Belief in God with obligation to carry out Islamic Law for its adherents."⁹ This may be revisited, potentially even accepted, to replace the current, more inclusive version of the first principle as given in the Preamble of the 1945 Constitution: "Belief in the one and only God." Such a prescriptive change to the first

principle would conceivably trigger more separatist movements in places of non-Muslim majority, such as Papua. Moreover, the introduction of Islamic Law in Aceh in 1999 could be seen as a manifestation of the full implications of the Jakarta Charter.¹⁰ This has provided a still-extant window of opportunity for potential implementation of Sharia Law elsewhere in Indonesia associated with a vast Muslim majority. Clearly, then, the rights of religious minorities and those with more secular adherences and lifestyles could be severely limited, as already evidenced in Aceh.¹¹

Indeed, Soegija's motto – "100 percent Catholic, 100 percent Indonesian" – remains an important reminder of the potential pitfalls of the politicisation of religion and ethnicity. The politicisation of identity can dehumanise individuals, and weaken the principle of common sense and rationality in democracy. Soegija's ethos is worth revisiting for its renewed relevance in the lead-up to the 2024 general elections.

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Fig. 1: Photograph of Albertus Soegijapranata (1946) (Courtesy Wikimedia Commons)

Keeping Gender and Sexuality Issues in Indonesia's Public Discourse

Monika Winarnita

As part of the 'Contemporary Film as a Platform for Democracy in Indonesia' 2022 series at the University of Melbourne Australia, I was asked to give a talk on 'Gender and Sexuality' for the screening of the film *YUNI* directed by Kamila Andini in 2021. While preparing for the talk, I read the film review by *Variety* magazine describing it as a coming-of-age tale of a 16-year-old girl who is not prepared to follow tradition and become a teenage bride.¹ I cringed at the orientalist undertone and questioned what tradition the review was referring to, since it gave the impression that there is not a 'variety' but only a singular tradition. Therefore, at the screening I proceeded to tell the audience that it is said that there are 1,340 recognised ethnic groups in Indonesia. Not only is there more than one singular tradition, but tradition is also often syncretised with one or more of the six recognised religions (Islam, Catholic, Christian Protestant, Buddhist, Hindu, and Confucius or *Kong Hu Cu*), as well as varied localised expression and practices.

The film *Yuni* is set in a community of mixed ethnic and religious backgrounds, in a peri-urban area of West Java near the border with Central Java. Java is one of the most heavily populated islands. Forty percent of Indonesia's population is also of Javanese descent and about ninety percent are Muslim. Nevertheless, to contextualise the mixed community in the film, it is important to understand the variety of gender and sexuality norms present in Indonesia as well as the aspect of syncretised tradition and religion. Some of these issues are explored in studies by the following female anthropologists: Christine Helliwell on the Christian *Gerai Dayak* who stress sameness between genders;² Sharyn Graham Davies on *Muslim Bugis* who recognise five genders;³ Lyn Parker on the Muslim Matrilineal *Minangkabaus* and the valued role of young women;⁴ and Hildred Geertz on the Javanese who are known for their syncretic animistic belief of *kejawen*.⁵ These Javanese individuals also practice a bilateral descent kinship system (equally recognising the mother's and father's sides). Identified Javanese gender norms associate men as having more reason or *akal* to overcome passion or *nafsu* which is associated with women.

The story of *Yuni* also focuses on the intersection of Islam with daily life and gender norms. The main premise of *Yuni*'s story is the pressure she faces to be married straight after completing high school (presumably as a virgin or *perawan*) and the associated local belief that rejecting two marriage proposals brings the risk of never getting married at all. However, the proposals she received are not appealing to her; the second man wants her to become his second wife. A Muslim man can have up to four wives if he can prove that he is able to provide for them equally. This is stated in the Islamic *akad nikah* or religious ceremony which consists of the groom entering into an agreement with his bride's *Wali* or male guardian, usually her father, as a woman may not give herself independently in marriage. Nevertheless, the agreement ensures that her rights are covered in the case of divorce due to neglect or the inability of the husband to materially provide for his wife. A marriage ceremony often consists of two facets: the religious and the traditional. The Javanese part of the wedding ceremony includes a demonstration of subservience where the groom breaks an egg with his feet and the bride proceeds to wash them, which symbolises that she would serve her

husband who is the head of the household. Thus, deference and subservience are ideal forms of femininity as expressed in the combination of religious and traditional marriage practice found in both West and Central Java.

In the film, *Yuni* faces similar ideals of femininity for young woman, which existed at both the local and national level. Specifically, she is expected to obtain the valued, biologically deterministic role (*kodrat*) of being an *ibu*, a term for mother and wife. At the national level, this is symbolised through a state-sanctioned women's organisation called *Darma Wanita* that began during the Javanese president Suharto's New Order era (1968-1998). Indonesian women's roles are enshrined in the motto *Panca Darma Wanita*: "To be a wife first, then a mother, an educator, the guardian of her children's morals and a citizen last."⁶

Nevertheless, Indonesian women have used the *Ibu* identity strategically under the banner The Voice of Concerned Mothers or *Suara Ibu Peduli* (SIP) to demonstrate in 1998 against the high inflation of domestic goods caused by the corruption, collusion, and nepotism of the New Order authoritarian regime. This was an act of political motherhood that I called Strategic *Ibuisim*.⁷ Furthermore, post 1998 or during the *Reformasi* era, the women involved in SIP organised a conference to deconstruct '*Ibu*' and the New Order ideals of femininity.

Fast forward 20 years, gender and sexuality issues in the film *Yuni* have been a concern of a coalition of gender rights groups which includes members visibly showing their religious identity, such as Muslim women wearing headscarfs and Catholic nuns wearing their religious garb. Between 2017 and 2019, during International Women's Day, the gender rights groups along with LGBTIQ activists demonstrated annually in a street march. Their main demand was for the Indonesian parliament to ratify the 2016 draft law for the elimination of sexual violence (*RUU PKS*) a bill that also focusses on the issue of domestic violence. In addition, organisations present at the march such as SAPA or friends of Women and Children also demanded that the constitutional court amend the 1974 Law on Marriage to raise the legal age to 18.⁸

The result of these campaigns by gender rights organisations was that, after 6 years of deliberation, on 12 April 2022, the Indonesian Parliament passed the bill on sexual violence. The main opposition came from conservative religious parties such as the Prosperous Justice Party (*Partai Keadilan Sejahtera* or *PKS*), linked to the proselytizing Muslim Brotherhood movement in Egypt, who problematise the wording 'sexual relations' fearing it extends outside religious sanctioned marriage. Although the new bill on sexual violence has a limited scope, and it was watered down from the original 2016 draft, it has included forced marriage as illegal. However, a new Criminal Code Bill (*Kitab Undang Undang Hukum*

Pidana or *KUHP*), pushed by conservative religious parties, has been ratified by the parliament on December 6, 2022. Among other things, it will punish sex outside of marriage with a year imprisonment, which covers pre-marital, cohabitation, and same sex relations.⁹ Street demonstrations by gender rights coalition on International Women's Day and university students against the *KUHP*'s curtailing of civil liberties including 'indecent' will also be illegal under this new criminal code.¹⁰

Earlier, on September 18, 2019, Indonesia did amend the marriage act and increased the age of legal marriage from 16 to 19 years old for both women and men with parental consent, and to 21 years old without parental consent. However, Ariane Utomo,¹¹ in a review of the book 'Marrying Young' argued that 'informal marriage' still exists and it will take more than a law to control this.¹² Specifically, the common practice of *pernikahan siri* (or informal religious marriage), seen as a solution to unplanned pregnancies and because premarital sex and cohabitation is now illegal (*KUHP*).

What is important to note is that under Indonesia's current marriage law (1974 Law ratified in 2019), both parties must hold the same religion, or one party must convert, requiring a ceremony conducted by a religious figure such as in a Church, a Hindu, or Buddhist temple who provides the registered certificate for the Civil Registry Office. If you are Muslim, the religious ceremony must be performed by an Imam at the Office of Religious Affairs who will provide the legal certification and registration. The book 'Marrying Young' however provides local cases across Indonesia discussing the variety of gender and sexuality norms related to how unregistered religious marriage is understood and practiced.

Another everyday practice of religion confronting young women that is addressed in the movie is the scene at the beginning whereby the Islamic student club had prohibited a rock concert because it feared such activities lead to sinful acts such as drug use, sex, and violence. This means that *Yuni* can no longer sing with her band. I wonder if Kamila Andini, the director of the movie, has included this scene knowing that three religiously devout hijabi-wearing 14-year-old girls who went to an Islamic Boarding School in a rural area of West Java in 2017 deliberately tried to break gendered and religious stereotypes with their viral funk-metal-rock band called the Voice of Baceprot.¹³ Making global headlines, the band has about two million online views for their songs 'School Revolution,' 'God (please) allow me to play music,' and 'Not Public Property.' The last one is aimed at raising awareness against violations of women's rights with sales of their single recording donated to help victims of sexual violence and abuse in Indonesia. In recent media interviews, these young female hijabi musicians also talked about the backlash they faced, such as religious figures telling them to stop

performing the devil's music, but they also insist that religion and music can go hand in hand.¹⁴

The changing ideas on sexuality and religious morality is what *Yuni*'s director, Kamila Andini tries to address. Namely, she focuses on structural issues such as patriarchy, misogyny and ideals of femininity, as well as female agency in the face of societal pressure to marry young, or what Anissa Beta calls 'constructing Indonesian girlhood on film'.¹⁵ The movie does so, she explained, using multiple elements: sound, the use of textures, and the colour purple. Purple is associated with passion or *nafsu*, and it is a gendered ascription to Javanese women. I ended the talk with what the director Kamila Andini has stated in her film festival interviews:¹⁶ that she hoped that *Yuni*, based on a true story, is relatable and will keep the conversation going on gender and sexuality issues as part of public discourse, not only in the predominantly Muslim yet diverse country of Indonesia, but also internationally, so that depictions of this country in the media, which are often still orientalist, can change.

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Fig. 1: Detail of online poster for Monika Winarnita's 'Gender & Sexuality in Indonesia' public lecture for the film *Yuni* at the University of Melbourne, November 2022 (source: <https://events.unimelb.edu.au/arts/event/25010-yuni-gender-and-sexuality-in-indonesia>)

How Neoliberalism and Islamism Shape the Precarity of Gig Workers

Diatyka Widya Permata Yasih and Vedi Hadiz

Neoliberal economic restructuring has created fertile ground for precarious labour markets,¹ while promoting the marketisation of basic social services throughout the developed and developing worlds.² In Muslim majority countries, including Indonesia, the resultant rampant inequalities have provided the setting for mobilisations of the precarious urban poor under Islamic banners against perceived oppression or marginalisation of the *ummah* (community of believers). However, such narratives based on a religious lexicon have not always produced a collective will to resist the neoliberal agenda effectively.³

We argue instead that there has been a coupling of Islamism and neoliberalism in Indonesia in a way that conditions consent to, and compliance with neoliberal precepts. Clues are provided, for instance, in the way private enterprises,⁴ and faith-based organisations,⁵ have referred to Islamic values to promote productivity among middle-class Muslim workers.

Little, however, has been said about the precariat and neoliberalism in Muslim-majority societies. This article, therefore, delves into the influence of Islamist appeals on responses to growing precarity in Indonesia. The study on which it derives was undertaken during the Covid-19 pandemic (from April 2021 to October 2022), employing semi-structured interviews with twenty-five precarious gig workers who make a living as app-based motorcycle taxi (*online ojek*) drivers in Jabodetabek (Jakarta-Bogor-Depok-Tangerang-Bekasi).⁶

Our focus is on the way the urban precariat forges a kind of common sense to cope with socio-economic marginalisation based on available cultural resources.⁷ Building on Italian philosopher Gramsci, we address common sense as a set of ideas that have arisen from the material conditions of precarious labour and life,

but also shaped by distinct social and historical trajectories. As is well known, in Indonesia, this has involved past conflicts that make lexicons associated with state-dominated or linked nationalist and Islamist traditions more easily to the public than those having to do with liberalism, social democracy, or communism.

Micro-entrepreneurialism and collective organisation

Perceiving themselves as 'micro-entrepreneurs,' *online ojek* drivers accept that their well-being is primarily their own responsibility, thereby absolving the state and employers of significant liability. The self-perception is sustained by the classification of workers as "partners" rather than employees of gig economy firms, while the digitally-mediated work process in the gig economy also sustains the illusion that they have freedom over their labour. The idea that drivers can only rely on themselves – compatible with neoliberal individualism – is also reinforced by life experiences of moving in and out of precarious work in a context where secure long-term employment and welfarism have never been the norm.

For Gramsci, the reproduction of common sense takes place through everyday practices that lead to intuitive thinking.⁸ Among the *online ojek* drivers we interviewed, this results in a kind of practical knowledge that is reproduced in self-help organisations typically referred to by their members as "communities."

It is through such communities that *online ojek* drivers practice a kind of collective solidarity by way of mutual assistance in the event of accidents and provision of information to help individuals navigate the street, as well as digitally-mediated labour controls. However, the communities indirectly tend to reinforce neoliberal individualism

by reiterating the notion that members are primarily responsible for their own well-being and can expect little from the state or firms.

Significantly, religious activities are also typically organised by these communities. Through *pengajian* (religious meetings involving Quranic recitation and sermons), solidarity between drivers as members of a common *ummah* ("community") is strengthened, while simultaneously reinforcing the importance of personal morality in navigating work and life. Resilience is a major theme discussed in religious gatherings, enabling the interface between hard work and religious demands for individuals to persevere through all tests placed on believers by the Almighty. In this way, *online ojek* drivers' organisations provide a setting for the blending of Islamic moral precepts and neoliberal individualism.

It is true that some communities have sometimes enabled the collective organisation of *online ojek* drivers to demand improved working conditions. They have clearly enhanced *online ojek* drivers' awareness of shared grievances relating to labour practices, such as unfair dismissals. Nevertheless, they have achieved little in instilling the idea among drivers that they are workers, whose labour rights should be protected, with most members persistent in perceiving themselves as micro-entrepreneurs.

Morality and political sensibilities

Neoliberal-derived notions of entrepreneurialism have affected how *online ojek* drivers navigate their way through life and work, leading to the normalisation of their own precarity. Although a minority of drivers, especially those associated with Indonesia's union movement, insist that they should be legally considered as employees with formal labour rights, they are a clear minority.

Moreover, some that are linked to unions are hesitant to confront the state and employers. They tend to appeal to combinations of statist-nationalist or Islamist-derived paternalism, which expect governments, and those economically strong, to take care of the weak.

As a result, while drivers' communities can be helpful to individuals, they do little to forge

robust strategies of resistance. They also embody the persistence of features of New Order ideology in democratised Indonesia – namely, hostility towards political liberalism as well as communism – as both enjoy some form of conflictual system of labour relations.¹⁰

At the same time, a kind of morality-based solidarity, mainly developed through socio-religious and mutual assistance activities, permeates through everyday life. Though drivers see such activities as apolitical, they open the door to *ummah*-based political mobilisations by competing elites. We have seen this in recent Indonesian history when such mobilisations have been required (usually during election time).

Some of these communities could potentially provide avenues for precarious urban workers to establish connections with Islamic party and organisational activists. This would explain the presence of many of the urban precariat in such events as the infamous Islamist mobilisations against the then-governor of Jakarta, known as Ahok, in 2016-2017.¹¹

Workers in Indonesia often suffer from precarious working and living conditions. Because labour movements have been largely ineffective, workers have lacked social and political representation, even in the present democratic era.¹² Against such a background, urban precarious workers often resort to religious narratives to articulate their grievances, make sense of their social positions, and to navigate through life and work more generally. While this takes place at the level of everyday life, there are possible links with certain newer dynamics in contemporary Indonesian politics, especially the tendency for identity-based political mobilisations.

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Fig. 1: An ojek online driver. (Courtesy Afif Ramdhasuma on Unsplash)

Faith-based Polarisation and the Use of Social Media in Indonesia

Fatimah Husein

Indonesia is home to hundreds of diverse ethnicities, faiths, and religions. The relations between these ethnic and religious communities are generally harmonious. However, it has become clearer in recent years that working for social justice has become more difficult with the existence and the growth of religious polarisation. This becomes more apparent during political moments like elections¹ and, in many cases, lasts for much longer afterwards. It is strengthened by some research² that connects the backsliding of democracy with the emergence of polarisation that challenges pluralism and tolerance.

Several studies conducted by the Center for the Study of Islam and Society of State Islamic University Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta³ and the Maarif Institute⁴ also reveal that young people in Indonesia are an easy target for the spread of intolerant and radical ideas in environments of educational institutions. This data is strengthened by a study conducted in 2018 by the CisForm of State Islamic University Sunan Kalijaga at eighteen Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia.⁵ This study found a significant percentage of Islamism among students of the Islamic Education department (*Pendidikan Agama Islam*).⁶ From around 600 Islamic Education departments spread across various colleges of Islamic studies, this department has contributed a considerable number of Islam teachers for public schools.

In another study conducted by the Center for Religious and Cross-cultural Studies (CRCS), Gadjah Mada University,⁷ we analysed the spread of intolerant ideologies in the Indonesian Muslim community, and described efforts to counter them by religious and ethnic communities.⁸ Our research studied four different Islamist groups to identify relevant trends, namely: (1) Aksi Bela Islam 212 ("Defend Islam Action on 2nd December") and post-212 groups, (2) Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, (3) Salafist movements using exclusivist housing, and (4) the Salafist piety movement as opposed to Muslim *laskar* ("paramilitarism"). Due to the limited space, I will only discuss the second group and its use of social media in spreading their ideologies.

Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (The Party of Liberation)/HTI) is an international pan-

Islamic political organisation whose goal is to unite Islam and politics under *al-Khilafah al-Islamiyyah* ("the Islamic caliphate system"), which encourages faith-based polarisation. In July 2017, the Indonesian government disbanded *Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia* as a social organisation. HTI, however, still continued to operate after this dissolution. Seeing as their leaders are still free to carry on with their operations, they have adopted different methods of operation.

Without officially associating their activities with HTI, they remain active both offline and online. Their offline strategy includes conducting *halaqoh* ("closed study circles") with more general Islamic names such as *Ngaji*, *Cinta Qur'an*. This has made it possible for individuals to participate in a variety of groups and to connect to online Islamic networks that are free from state restrictions, such as *Indonesia Tanpa Pacaran* ("Indonesia without Dating"), *Yuk Ngaji* ("Let's read the Qur'an"), and *Jaringan Pengusaha Rindu Syariah* ("Networks of Muslimpreneurs").

Their use of social media platforms has been successful and has found acceptance among many of the *hijrah* (spiritual migration) communities, utilising certain youthful expressions such as *NgeFast*, *NgeSlow*, and *Xkwavers*⁹ as vocational and motivational training platforms to introduce their ideology. Committed participants through these "light" religious sessions, will then be recruited to join "heavier" sessions on HTI's ideology. One tagline of *NgeFast*, for example, reads:

Kamu punya komunitas
(you have a community)
Kami punya program hijrah
(we have hijrah program)
Kita cocok deh kayaknya
(I think we complement each other)¹⁰

Therefore, HTI continues to promote its ideas and actively seeks out new members behind closed doors. By capitalizing on the political opposition to the Jokowi administration and the notion that HTI is a victim of "Jokowi's anti-Islamic agenda," this organisation has been able to develop new bases of support in society.¹¹

The above phenomenon seems to mirror some critics who state that the Indonesian

civil society movement and the notion of Indonesian pluralism are a myth! Mietzner and Muhtadi's research is a notable example where they question the tolerance and cultural plurality of the followers of the biggest mass Muslim organisation of *Nahdlatul Ulama*. They argued that NU followers are by and large as intolerant toward religious minorities as the overall Muslim population in Indonesia, and in certain instances, they exhibit even greater intolerance.¹²

I do not agree with the argument that Indonesian tolerance is a myth. I realise that there are problems related to religious pluralism, but I argue that the Indonesian civil society movement is real as people on the ground are working and consolidating their efforts for interfaith tolerance, dialogue initiatives, and peace building movements. It is important to acknowledge that the increase of fragmented society and the spread of Islamism does not proceed in a linear direction. Various civil society organisations, indigenous communities, young religious leaders, and some inclusive religious organisations have made an effort to counter this radicalist tendency, including through the use of social media. These efforts, including those by youth and women, may not solve the problems, but are important actions that need to be acknowledged.

This dynamic response towards Islamism at local levels, however, does not seem to be apparent in the public discourse, and thus, tends to neglect arenas of contestation behind the main stage. By acknowledging various efforts toward social justice within current Indonesian socio-religious development, we will be able to value and expand the arenas of contestation behind the main stage, areas which have demonstrated genuine challenges to the expansion of Islamist movements' mobility.

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- Islamism here is defined as "the use of Islam as a supremacist ideology in which all aspects of governance and social life should be based on a particular version of Islam."
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- The term *Ngefast* and *Ngeslow* refer to a training program run by The Fast Training focusing on an intensive understanding of Islam and on being Muslims. The program is conducted in a relaxed way and targets young Muslims. Whereas *Xkwavers* (ex-Korean wavers) are those who had been formerly addicted to Korean pop cultures. The *Xkwavers* program targets this group to learn about Islam and to channel their enthusiasm to the religion.
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- HTI media such as *Media Umat*, *Muslimah Media Center*, *Khilafah channel* consider government's counter-radical policy as against Islam. See "Jubir HTI: Rezim Jokowi Mengidap Sekularisme Radikal" <https://mediaumat.news/jubir-hti-rezim-jokowi-mengidap-sekularisme-radikal> retrieved on April 14, 2020.
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Fig. 1: An online Islamic training program targeting former K-Pop fans (source: <https://rufindhi.wordpress.com/2021/05/23/kelas-ngeslow-buka-batch-2-video>)

