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**INTERNET AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE IN THE INDONESIAN
ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOLS (*PONDOK PESANTREN*):
POWER, PIETY, AND THE POPULAR**

1 volume

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the internet and public sphere in *Pondok Pesantren*, which are the Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia, in relation to the keywords of power, piety, and the popular. The three keywords are utilised to understand the articulation of power that affects the values of piety and the identity of the popular within the institutions. This thesis further elaborates the keywords through the internet policy that aims to maintain the offline religious life amidst the increasing interest of students to be well-connected in the digital environment. My thesis has found the inherent ambiguity and inconsistency in the implementation of internet policy and the aspiration of students in facing the pressure of the increasingly digitalised Indonesian public sphere. The rurality of *Pondok Pesantren* is key because it challenges the focus on the middle-class Muslim that could easily adapt to the digital environment and the misconception against the less-affluent Muslim communities that are prone to religious fundamentalism. Through interview and observation, this thesis has found that people in *Pondok Pesantren* are neither well-adapted to the digital environment nor hesitant to accept the existence of modernity that is represented by the internet. Within this context, the focus on young people in Indonesia is important because they have been exposed to various degrees of digitalisation amidst the persistent problem of the digital divide. It has been challenging for the national government to provide internet access in rural areas of the Indonesian archipelago, while systematically aiming to strengthen national identity. The three decades of development during the Suharto era has created an enormous inequality between urban and rural areas, between the middle-class and the less-affluent communities. The inequality has been critical in understanding the current trend of Islamic revival that has been driven eminently by the religious movement of the middle-class in the urban setting, with their economic privilege and extensive internet access. Furthermore, modernisation and Islamisation in contemporary Indonesia have challenged to rethinking about democracy, the public sphere, and entertainment. Indonesian democracy has always been different from the Habermasian public sphere because it involves identity politics as its main trajectory. At the same time, the

field of entertainment has become the battlefield between different ideologies, particularly secular nationalism and political Islam. In this regard, this thesis has explored the possibility of students in *Pondok Pesantren* navigating the conflicting ideologies in the Indonesian public sphere, particularly after graduating from the institutions. This thesis has found that students are facing a difficult trajectory in their future mobility from local to national to the global level of the public sphere.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

It is increasingly evident that the Eurocentrism in Habermas' theory of the public sphere (1984, 1987, 1999) fails to grasp the complexity of non-Western societies. Habermas imagined that the public sphere is similar in every corner of the world (Hargittai, 2011). In reality, the diversity of the public sphere has been increased, particularly with the emergence of the internet and the subsequent problem of disconnection. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU), for instance, notes that in 2019 only 47% of the population in developing countries are well-connected to the internet, compared to 87% of the people in developed countries (ITU, 2019). Considering the issue of the digital divide, Miller and Slater (2000) contended that 'the Internet is not a monolithic or placeless "cyberspace"; rather, it is numerous new technologies, used by diverse people, in diverse real-world locations' (Miller & Slater, 2000, p. 1). Seeing from the perspective of media ecology, the concepts of 'environments, media, human beings, and interactions' are critical in specifying 'what we can do and what we cannot' (Scolari, 2012, p. 205). With such complexity in mind, it is critical to situate the internet's technical capacity within society's social, cultural, and political aspects.

As the context of this research, Indonesia provides an important example of how the social, cultural and political aspects of the internet can create a distinctive public sphere. Geographically, Indonesia's spatial contours provide an extreme challenge for the national government to cover the whole archipelago with a reliable internet connection.¹ Simultaneously, the cultural diversity and socio-economic gap also widen the digital divide between people in the urban and rural areas, between the middle-class and the less-affluent communities (Nugroho et al., 2012; Sujarwoto & Tampubolon, 2016; Tehusjarana, 2020). The Indonesian political system also provides the necessary background to understand the tension

¹ Purbo (2017) has noted that 85% of Indonesian population relies on mobile phone for internet connection and that 'providing wireless mobile phone coverage in rural areas is difficult because of the necessity to design systems that can overcome physical obstacles such as mountainous terrain' (p. 75).

between modernity and religiosity in the public sphere. Constitutionally, Indonesia is a secular country (Anderson, 2016; Ricklefs, 2008a; Vickers, 2013), yet religion plays a pivotal role in understanding its social, cultural, and political landscape, particularly in the post-Suharto era (Baswedan, 2004; Fealy, 2008; Fuad, 2020; Ricklefs, 2008b; Sakai, 2008). While Sukarno and Suharto systematically positioned religion in the periphery, the religious movement of the middle-class in the post-Suharto era has put religion in a more centralised position in the public sphere. At the same time, the secular-nationalist movement has idealised multiculturalism and multi-religiosity as the basis of the nation-state. The conflict of interest between religious and secular agendas is particularly compelling with the increasing importance of Islamic revival and internet penetration in big Indonesian cities such as Jakarta, Bandung, and Yogyakarta (Beta, 2014, 2018).

More recently, the impact of the religious revival has been visible through the new establishment of worship places in secular public spaces such as shopping malls and public offices (van Wichelen, 2007). More middle-class women are increasingly interested in wearing Islamic clothing such as the *hijab* (veil for Muslim women) (Beta, 2014, 2019). For the Muslim men, the personal identity has been more subtle, most visibly through breeding the beard in their faces as a *sunnah Nabi* (the traditions of prophet Muhammad) (Nilan, 2017), as well as religious manhood and polygamy (van Wichelen, 2007). Within the media sphere, there is a dramatic shift from cultural expression in the 1990s and 2000s. During the 1990s, it was common to see women with Western-style clothing in Indonesian films and television soap operas. Recently, the pious image has become more visible across film and television productions. Many Western cultural products have experienced a tighter practice of censorship, particularly on the depiction of women bodies.² In terms of digital life, the Anti-Pornography Bill marked the rising importance of political Islam on the internet (Anderson & Kahin, 2010). The Bill is an attempt to mainstream the Islamic values on the internet and

² The practice of censorship in Indonesia has been rampant and random at the same time. In 2019, for instance, the Indonesian Broadcasting Body (KPI) lifted the censorship against the popular cartoon of *SpongeBob SquarePants* due to 'violent and sexual situations' (*Vice Indonesia*, 19 September 2019).

strengthening the visibility of Islam in the public sphere. Against the rising power of religious revival, the liberal and secular society rejected this controversial bill through an online petition and street marches, stressing the danger of objectification of women's bodies in the name of anti-pornography law.

Furthermore, there is a critical connection between the Islamisation of the public sphere and the increasing visibility of Islam in media. The shift of lifestyle of prominent celebrities could become the main parameter to understand the current trend of *hijrah* (personal movement from secular to religious self). In the early phase of trendy *hijrah*, the spiritual journey of Inneke Koesharawati was a popular narrative in mainstream Indonesian media. Her dramatic shift from the prominent semi-porn actress to the entire religious self has inspired many celebrities to follow the same spiritual journey. At the same time, her spiritual endeavour could also become the signifier of the increasing moral panic, most notably the Anti-Pornography Bill. While in the 1980s and 1990s, it was customary for Inneke to showcase her body (van Wichelen, 2007), in the 2000s, more public policy has been produced to limit the visibility of women's bodies in the public sphere (Heryanto, 2014b), including in media and digital platforms. With the increasing visibility of Islam, pornography and women's bodies have extended beyond the personal problem and become a political issue that necessitates a state intervention (Beta, 2018, 2019; Rakhmani, 2019).

However, amidst the increasing trend of religious revival and the national government's difficulties to control the internet, non-Muslim or non-religious media moguls tend to dominate the ownership of the digital infrastructure (Tapsell, 2017). The Indonesian online market is also growing significantly with numerous digital start-ups that mainly rely on capital injection from American investors (OECD, 2014; PwC, 2016). This growing online market fits the demography of the Indonesian population that is dominated by young people and a productive generation. In such increasing scenes of the creative industry and digital economy, religious actors aim to increase their online religious propagation (Hosen, 2008; Nisa, 2018a, 2018b) and cultural production (see Beta, 2014, 2018, 2019; Fealy, 2008). Nowadays, Indonesian social media are full of religious

sermons and promotional messages of Islamic fashion products that target young people and religious middle class. The tension between religious and secular agenda has become more prominent in both aspects of cultural production and political contestation.

Within such a complex public sphere, the conception of *hijrah* necessitates an innovation to enhance middle-class religiosity. Reflecting on my personal experience 20 years ago, being religious tended to be identical with the less-affluent society in the rural setting and was not a personal journey that the middle-class was eager to pursue. For people in a rural location, being pious has become a long tradition and daily struggle. Yet, their affordance is continuously creating different positions in facing the pressure from the politics and the market. While the middle-class celebrates their contemporary religious identity through online platforms, the religious people in a less-affluent society are continuously struggling with their existence. While the religious self should compete and adapt to the secular reality in the Indonesian capital city, the long tradition of the religious environment in a rural context deserves further analysis in the light of increasingly connected spheres of life through networked technology and communication.

Long before Islam became more visible in the public sphere, the internal debate between modernist and traditionalist Muslims was prevalent. Two mass organisations, namely *Nahdlatul Ulama* (hereafter *NU*) and *Muhammadiyah* represented Indonesia's two different religious traditions. While *NU* aimed to integrate Islam with the local practice in the archipelago, *Muhammadiyah* preferred to maintain the purity of Islam in modern life. Consequently, the two organisations tend to have different trajectories in managing the Islamic community. While *Muhammadiyah* has a firm root among urban Muslims through modern hospitals, schools and universities, *NU* has been more prominent among *Kiai* (leader of *Pondok Pesantren*), rural Muslims and the network of the Islamic boarding school (*Pondok Pesantren*).

Nevertheless, both organisations have been more dominant in their social, rather than political and cultural movements. The current trend of Islamic revival has successfully cultivated two agendas that have been less dominant in the religious platforms of *NU* and *Muhammadiyah*, namely cultural and political Islam. As the religious revival mainly takes place in big cities, *Muhammadiyah* and modernist Muslims might be in a better place due to its firm root in the urban setting of Indonesia. However, for the traditionalist Muslim and *NU*, the current trend of political and cultural Islam possesses a higher degree of uncertainty. Shaped by these contemporary challenges, this thesis focuses on the community of *Pondok Pesantren* in facing the pressure of political and cultural Islam that is shaped eminently by the internet and digital technology.

In painting this picture of the contemporary Indonesian public sphere, I position my research as defined by what I have determined as three essential and intertwined concepts: power, piety, and the popular. In terms of power, the Indonesian public sphere is a battlefield between the power of the market and national politics. The intersections and contradictions between the two influential agendas are a strong background to understand the complexity of the Indonesian public sphere. Furthermore, the long struggle of Islamic values to dominate the public sphere could lead to either religious commodification on the internet or religious conservatism against the internet. Here, the interests in politics and the market should be positioned as overlapping with the concept of piety. By piety, I am referring to a religious movement that aims to answer the challenges of modernisation and globalisation. In a more practical sense, piety could also become a bridge between power and the popular. Through the popular, we can learn how young people adapt to the pressure of the market and politics and how they react to the increasing visibility of Islam in the Indonesian public sphere.

More specifically, this thesis aims to answer the following overarching question: *What are the characteristics of the digitalised public sphere in Indonesia? If Pondok Pesantren operates as a public sphere within that nation, then how have new internet-enabled articulations of power, piety, and the popular been used to*

educate young people? This question can be sub-divided into the constituent parts that are the key foci of my approach:

- Regarding the issue of power, how is power articulated between different actors inside and stakeholders outside *Pondok Pesantren*? To what extent are the power dynamics in and around *Pondok Pesantren* reflecting the complexities of the public sphere in the Islamic context of Indonesia?
- In relation to piety, how do *Pondok Pesantren* maintain and negotiate the religious values vis-à-vis potential secularisation of uses of the internet by young people and educators? To what extent does the religious manifestation in *Pondok Pesantren* contribute to an emerging discourse of the Islamic public sphere in Indonesia?
- In analysing the popular, how do students of *Pondok Pesantren* maintain and negotiate their internet use with religious values and the internet policy in *Pondok Pesantren*? To what extent does the complexity of student life in *Pondok Pesantren* contribute to the discourse of young people and the internet in Indonesia?

At a local level, the concepts of power, piety, and the popular have been integral in daily life within the *Pondok Pesantren* environment. On an institutional level, *Pondok Pesantren* represents the power of piety in shaping the life of the popular. The power of *Kiai* has been influential in institutionalising the internet policy in *Pondok Pesantren* against the political economy of the internet at the national and global levels. At the same time, internet policy also reflects the religious agenda and religious values within the predominantly offline environment. However, the power of the *Kiai* and the religious internet policy is not always a good fit for the young student population that is increasingly interested in participating in the digital environment. The conflict of interest is particularly compelling with the position of *Pondok Pesantren* in shaping the policy against the popular culture that is increasingly digitalised and inherently secular.

In the national education system, *Pondok Pesantren* is a non-formal education due to its different curriculum and pedagogy. To adapt to the national education, the majority of *Pondok Pesantren* have established formal day schools with national curriculum and examination. Religious training in *Pondok Pesantren* typically starts at year seven of formal education. In a combined system between *Pondok Pesantren* and national education, the length of education could be as short as three years, following the years of schooling in Junior and Senior High Schools that separated every three years. In the minority of *Pondok Pesantren* that has no formal educational institution, the flexibility of education enables students to study for as long as 20 years. Within such conditions, the student demography could span from the age of 12 years to 32 years old. It is also common for *Pondok Pesantren* to educate male and female students. With such young demography and internet penetration in Indonesia, it is critical to study internet penetration within an inherently different kind of public sphere. *Pondok Pesantren* provides a micro-level case study in which power, piety, and the popular are interrelated within a confined space. The institution also offers current research an opportunity to explore more deeply how these three discourses intersect and impact young Indonesian Muslims.

As a former *santri* (student of the *Pondok Pesantren*), I am fascinated to study this topic because of my difficulties in navigating the Indonesian public sphere soon after graduating from the institution. My interest has increased since I found out that researchers from a Western background dominate many vital works about *Pondok Pesantren* (Bruinessen, 1990, 1994; Nilan, 2009; Pohl, 2006). Only a few research projects about *Pondok Pesantren* are undertaken by Indonesian scholars, with some of them are former students of *Pondok Pesantren* (Fananie, 1997; Isbah, 2012; Rahardjo, 1986; Sirry, 2010; Srimulyani, 2014). However, none of them emerged from cultural and media policy studies and precisely analysed the internet and the emergence of a public sphere in *Pondok Pesantren* as a negotiation between different aspects of social life.³

³ Alongside the religious education I encountered in the *Pondok Pesantren*, I was fortunate to be offered a secular education, particularly in media and communication studies, both in Indonesia

While the mainstream research on Indonesian Muslims tends to focus on the religious movement of the middle-class, my study aims to craft the anxiety and religious approach of the Muslim communities from a different background. As my experience suggests, it was difficult for a Muslim from non-middle-class background to navigate the complexity of the Indonesian public sphere in which technology, religious aspiration, and ambition in the secular world shape daily activities. Based on my experience studying in both religious and secular education, this research will combine my critical approach to both the Western theories of the public sphere and the reality of the public sphere in Indonesia and *Pondok Pesantren* as the focus of this thesis. My double experience is critical to understand the diversity of ideas within the distinctive intellectual world. As Tavory and Timmermans (2009) argued, ‘by estranging the seemingly obvious interactions seen in the field, the unexpected ways in which narratives are constructed, and “cased” in the field come to the fore’ (p. 253). It is also important to note that the digital life in *Pondok Pesantren* has been changing dramatically and is strikingly different from my experience as a student in the *Pondok Pesantren* circa 2000-2006. This thesis consists of case studies of two *Pondok Pesantren* in Tasikmalaya that well known as the city of *santri* in West Java, Indonesia, during the period 2018-2019.

As a qualitative study, this research aims ‘to explore empirically how the media generate meaning’ and conducted in its ‘naturalistic contexts’ (Jensen, 2002b, p. 236). The case study method, in particular, is useful in the ‘search for explanatory laws’ and ‘experiential understanding’ of a research subject (Stake, 2000, p. 24). The strength of a case study is its ‘superior access to personal meanings’ that take place ‘in a rich context’ (Platt, 2007, p. 101). Donmoyer (2000) noted that a case study has three advantages; accessibility, seeing through the researcher’s eyes and decreased defensiveness (pp. 61-65). Case study research enables people to go to places that are inaccessible to the general public, experience the different world through the researcher’s perspective, and, therefore, increase their

and in the UK. My experience of migrating from religious to secular education, and my in-depth exposure to media theories, inspired me to a research interest on the Internet and public sphere in the *Pondok Pesantren*.

curiosity and passion for learning more (Donmoyer, 2000, pp. 61-65). The uniqueness of each case will enrich the diversity of perspectives within the field of media studies of religious education, the public sphere and more importantly of Indonesia's developing media ecology in which power, piety and the popular overlap each other.

In the case study, the context plays a pivotal role as 'it is difficult to imagine the human activity that is context-free' (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 31). Historically, the case study method originated from the Chicago School's approach to grounded theory (Robrecht, 2016; Wilson, 2012). In grounded theory, the researcher can do the process of data collection and the construction of new ideas simultaneously. Within this research tradition, data and theoretical conceptualisations build the theory, not from prior knowledge or the available grand narratives. In grounded theory inquiry, 'the narrative is not simply imposed by the theorist but originates in the many ways in which the social world is experienced and acted upon by members' (Tavory & Timmermans, 2009, p. 252). The Chicago School emphasised 'on agency, the assumption that process was more important than structure (the latter being created by humans engaging in the process), the stress on subjective and intersubjective understandings, and its focus on the intimate relationship between language, meaning, and action' (Wilson, 2012, p. 581). Research within the grounded theory tradition entails a process of 'inductive and deductive reasoning until sufficient data have been reviewed to arrive at a dense theoretical explanation' (Robrecht, 2016, p. 175). Such research tradition necessitates microscopic and non-generalisable approaches as well as rigorous construction of research methods. A detailed explanation of the case study will be explored in the methodology chapter. In the meantime, I aim to elaborate on the structure of the thesis.

This thesis consists of ten chapters. The *first* chapter is the introduction that contains a brief description of this research, research questions, and a brief explanation of the research methodology of this research. This chapter aims to introduce the reader to the background and organisation of this research, particularly to people who are not familiar with Indonesia and *Pondok Pesantren*.

In the *second* chapter, the focus will shift to the issue of the transformation of the public sphere. It covers the origin of the theory of the public sphere and how Habermas popularised his idea into academia. After a focus on Habermas, the chapter will explain the problems and limitations of Habermas theory as expressed by his critics and opponents. It also covers the challenges of the public sphere in the mediated and digitalised era. The particular emphasis of the critics is the absence of religion in the public sphere, and how the Islamic revival in the internet era challenges the Habermasian conception of secularism. These critics lead to the importance of power, piety, and the popular in understanding the public sphere.

The *third* chapter is Power in the Indonesian Public Sphere. This chapter will begin with the mediatisation and the development of nationalism. The struggle of the postcolonial nation during the emerging phase of mediatisation is an important background to understand the Indonesian public sphere. At the state level, the management of public discourse necessitates prioritising the message of nationalism above anything else. Nevertheless, the current trend of digitalisation possesses an existential threat to the ongoing tension of nationalism. Seeing from the contemporary perspective, we could see the successful and unsuccessful case of emerging nationalism in the internet age. These theoretical backgrounds will be helpful to understand the postcolonial struggle in Indonesia that necessitates a systematic control of the public sphere, as shown during the three decades of the Suharto era. Following the fall of Suharto, we witness the struggle of Indonesia to survive in the emerging pressure of digitalisation and marketisation.

In the *fourth* chapter, Piety in the Indonesian Public Sphere, the analysis will focus on religion and religious practice in the public sphere. This chapter will begin with the problem of the Habermasian public sphere, particularly in responding to the increasing trend of religious revival. Before the religious revival, nationalism in the mediated era has idealised secularism as the foundation of modern society. However, the current trend of religious revival on the internet has created an emerging pressure for secular modernity. In the context of Indonesia, the long tension between religion and secularism could provide an important scene to understand the complexity of the public sphere. While political Islam fails to

achieve its important goals, religious commodification has found its best momentum in the emerging digital market in Indonesia. The *fifth* chapter is regarding Popular in the Public Sphere. It will contain the analysis of people facing the pressure from state and market by developing the popular culture. The focus on popular culture also put the general population in an uneasy tension between secularism and religious revival, in which the internet emerges as the central platform. In the context of Indonesia, the notion of *bapakism* is essential to understand the role of popular culture in facing the pressure from market and state, as well as within the ongoing tension of secularism and religious revival.

After explaining the keywords in various levels of society, the subsequent chapters will focus on the power, piety, and the popular in the context of *Pondok Pesantren*. The *sixth* chapter, the Methodology, will explain the rationale for choosing *Pondok Pesantren* as the focus of this research. The chapter will also cover the practicality of the case study as a research method in this project, the technique of data analysis, the reflection from fieldwork, and research limitations. In a more practical sense, the methodology chapter is a bridge between theoretical and empirical chapters. In contrast with the previous chapters that are mainly based on secondary data, analysis of primary data will form the empirical chapters. The *seventh* chapter, Power in the Public Sphere of *Pondok Pesantren*, will contain the study of the power articulation of *Kiai* through the internet policy in the institution. The internet policy locates in its relations with the background of global networks of the internet and the current trend of digital life at the national level. This chapter will focus on the mutual shaping between the public sphere at the local, national, and global levels.

The *eighth* chapter will focus on the issue of Piety in the Public Sphere of *Pondok Pesantren*. It will contain the particular importance of offline religious life in the institution. In contrast to the tension between secular and religious agendas in the Indonesian public sphere, the exclusive and spiritual aspects of the institution have created a different kind of public sphere. While Muslims in the Indonesian public sphere has been migrating online, the preference to remains offline is quite prevalent in the institutional level of *Pondok Pesantren*. In the *ninth* chapter, the

Popular in the Public Sphere of *Pondok Pesantren*, the focus will shift into the individual and personal aspects of *santri*. It will contain issues that pertain to the uses of the internet by students, as well as their identity and aspiration in the internet era. The *tenth* chapter is a conclusion that includes the analysis of the future of *Pondok Pesantren*. It will focus on the challenges and opportunities of the internet for *Pondok Pesantren*, overlapping agendas in various levels of the public sphere, and overlapping agendas of power, piety, and the popular. The pandemic of COVID-19 could also provide an essential source of reflection in understanding the position of *Pondok Pesantren* in the national and global public sphere.

CHAPTER 2

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Jürgen Habermas introduced the concept of the public sphere through his seminal work on *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1999). This book was a detailed explanation of the historical and philosophical aspects of the public sphere through the analysis of the bourgeois class in the Enlightenment era of European society (Habermas, 1999). His interest in the public sphere stands on 'its potential as a foundation for a critique of society based on democratic principles' (Holub, 1991, p. 3). According to Wihl, the public sphere is 'a gradual process of enlightenment, rational debate, and greater social justice' (2013, p. 43). Meanwhile, Born defined the public sphere as a forum in which contending viewpoints come together and, through processes of rational and critical deliberation and debate, scrutinise the workings of public and private powers, forging a consensual public opinion' (2013, p. 119). In similar tones, Dean (2003) defined the public sphere as the 'space within which people deliberate over matters of common concern, matters that are contested and about which it seems necessary to reach a consensus' (p. 95). The initial version of the public sphere requires critical and reflective thinking, a sceptical approach to public problems, as well as negotiation and modification of public rules and regulations (Tully, 2013). In the era when the aristocrats dominated power, the public sphere in café and salons provided an intellectual alternative.

Villa (1992) described the public sphere as 'a specifically political space distinct from the state and the economy, an institutionally bounded discursive arena that is home to citizen debate, deliberation, agreement, and action' (p. 712). The public sphere in Habermas' understanding is a place where the private bourgeoisie discussed public issues (Holub, 1991). In that sense, the public was defined as 'the ordinary man without rank and without the particularity of a special power to command' (Habermas, 1999, p. 6). The ordinary status of its member enabled the public sphere to be functioned as 'the site of political legitimation, the locus of discussion and debate over matters of common concern' (Dean, 2003, p. 109).

Habermas himself described the public sphere 'as a network for communicating information and points of view' where the flow of communication is 'filtered and synthesised in such a way that they coalesce into bundles of topically specified *public* opinions' (Habermas, 2001, p. 360). However, the specific nature of the topics has created difficulties to achieve a consensus in the public sphere as it also contains 'the fundamental antagonisms dividing social and political life' (Dean, 2003, p. 109). For that reason, the public sphere required a condition of 'a mature pluralism of forms of life, subcultures, and world-views' (Habermas, 2001, p. 368). The mature pluralism enabled the public sphere to become a discursive place that was independent of the impacts of politics and the market.

By focusing on ideas, the public sphere was created to escape from the powerful notion of market and politics (Habermas, 1999). Rationality in the Habermasian public sphere generated a communicative action 'where people put forward moral and political claims and defend them based on rationality alone' (Gunaratne, 2006, p. 118). Communicative action is a necessary element for democracy as it involves thoughtful interaction between various interests of citizens and addresses the necessity of the common good (Rogers, 2016, p. 6). The democratic mechanism in the public sphere also necessitates the voluntary agency as the social solidarity in the public sphere should be positioned as a rational choice, rather than the necessity of the social pressure (Calhoun, 2002, p. 148).

However, this idealised public sphere was heavily criticised because of the absence of women and people from underrepresented backgrounds. By focusing merely on the representation of ideas, the original version of the public sphere neglected the fact that some ideas were entirely incomprehensible by the general population. With the invention of printed media, ideas could reach a wider audience. Yet another challenge escalated, particularly on the impacts of the state intervention and market concentration in the mediated public sphere. Habermas himself pointed out that 'in complex societies', the public sphere acted as 'an intermediary structure between the political system, on the one hand, and the private sectors of the lifeworld and functional systems, on the other' (Habermas, 2001, p. 373).

At a state level, the mediated public sphere came hand in hand with the representative system of modern politics. Hannah Arendt (1957) saw that the representative system created 'an essentially passive, depoliticised citizen body' by eradicating the political participation and redirecting 'political or public energies to the pursuit of private or social goals' (Villa, 1992, p. 718). Such a condition is a severe threat to the public sphere as it creates an inauthentic version of both public and private spheres (Villa, 1992). Habermas himself explained that the public sphere contains the communication structures that 'linked with the private life spheres in a way that gives the civil-social periphery, in contrast to the political centre, the advantage of greater sensitivity in detecting and identifying new problem situations' (Habermas, 2001, p. 381).

In the mediated society, the transformation of the political system created a complicated public sphere as it provides both state and citizens with a unique position (Hadiz, 2001; Heryanto & Hadiz, 2005). On the one hand, mass media is critical in shaping the public consciousness as a source of political coercion by the established regimes and institutions (Bennett, 2000; Lukes, 1974). On the other hand, the state also plays a critical role in the intervention of media regulation that can minimise the power abuse of media ownership and market concentration that undermine public pluralism (Richeri, 2014). With such overlapped roles, the mediated public sphere has created, in Murdock's (2014) words, dual communication systems. The system mainly consists of a dominant commercial sector' and 'a less well-resourced public sector providing a range of public cultural goods and services' (Murdock, 2014, p. 16).

Nevertheless, government and state actors need 'to ensure that the public interest was not entirely subordinated to the private interests of media owners and advertisers' and to avoid 'the market's perceived failure to deliver the full range of cultural rights' (Murdock, 2014, p. 16). Within the mediated environment, communication has become a central activity of the state (Wilson, 2013, p. 23). One of the most distinctive factors of the modern public sphere is its ability to define interest groups based on purpose, not merely an emotional bonding of membership (Graham, 2013). The mediated public sphere also necessitates the

importance of public opinion that replaces the significance of political consensus of the elitist bourgeois in the classical version of the public sphere (Habermas, 1999). The power of public opinion is particularly challenging in the internet era. While the mediated public sphere tended to be more accessible by the well-educated adult, the internet is potentially increasing the political participation of people from various socio-economic backgrounds (Bakker & deVreese, 2011; Fuchs, 2014). Political participation in the internet era changes the power of mainstream mass media and the domination of the state in shaping public opinion.

In the context of Indonesia, the formation of the modern nation happened subsequently with the constant transformation of the public sphere. As the founding father of Indonesia, Sukarno established a systematic initiative in developing the public discourse through radio and newspaper, particularly after the official proclamation of independence on 17 August 1945. During his presidency, the capability of Sukarno to control and utilise mass media was effective in the early formation of national identity. After the fall of Sukarno in 1966, television has become the main medium to develop a strong image of Suharto as a father of national development (*bapak pembangunan bangsa*). However, the chronic practice of corruption and the financial crisis in 1998 ended the three decades of the Suharto era. Some analysts believe that the early development of the internet was critical in establishing a network of student activism across Indonesian universities and organising the mass movement to topple Suharto.

For Couldry (2012), the digitalisation of society seems able to fulfil the promise of openness in the original version of the public sphere. In principle, the internet has created a space for citizens to discuss and express their opinion on different platforms (Steiner & Roberts, 2011). However, public participation relies heavily on the ability of citizens to absorb and filter a lucrative amount of information (Bakker & deVreese, 2011). The ability of citizens in political participation also depends on the internet policy from the government. In some countries, such as Germany, Singapore, and South Korea, the internet policy has enabled citizens to be productive, economically and politically, and created a fully-digitalised society

(Baru, 2009; Bozkurt, 2014; Choi et al., 2011; Lim, 2007; Lin, 2013; Singh & Klingenberg, 2012; Yue, 2006). Other societies have a range of social and political challenges in facing the authority that implements protective and restrictive internet policy (Barnett, 1999; George, 2005; Shin et al., 2013). With such a diverse context, it is important to note that there is no single model of internet policy that could be implemented in all levels of society (Curran & Park, 2000). It is increasingly evident that the transformative potential of the internet depends on the contextual aspects of society.

Habermas himself declared that the contemporary public sphere had created 'a cosmopolitan matrix of communication' (Habermas, 2001, p. 514). However, the optimism within the cosmopolitan matrix of the digital public sphere needs to be reassessed carefully. From the Arab Spring experience, Ess (2018) noted that technology alone was not sufficient to create a sustainable social and political change. The fragile democratic infrastructure in the region led to political chaos that opened an opportunity for other dictators to lead (Roberts et al., 2016). In a more stable political system, the capability of the internet in creating political disruption is also challenged by the blurring distinction between the private and public sphere (boyd, 2011; Splichal, 2018). It is increasingly evident that political participation in the democratic society tends to occur in the bubble of like-minded people with a similar political preference (Batorski & Grzywińska, 2018; Splichal, 2018). Speaking about the bubble of social media, Fuchs (2014) warned that the 'pluralistic publics without unity' will lead to a social struggle that merely focuses on 'reformist identity politics without challenging the whole' (p. 82).

In this regard, Dean (2003) noted that the public sphere in the digital age has several critical problems. The *first* problem is related to the consensus as to the goal of the discursive process in the public sphere. In neo-democratic networks of the digital age, the discursive process tends to focus on 'contestation instead of consensus' (Dean, 2003, p. 109). The *second* challenge is related to the degree of its inclusiveness. The digital public sphere is criticised for being dominated by the 'bourgeois computer holders' (Papacharissi, 2002, p. 21) that comprises of 'young, white, American men' and 'excluding women, ethnic and racial minorities, and the

working class' (Dean, 2003, p. 98). The opportunities and capabilities to communicate on the internet 'have been determined primarily by economic resources and national government policies' (Melody, 2011, p. 59).

At the individual level, the *third* problem of the digital public sphere is the anonymity of its participant. The increasingly digitalised public sphere provides a different space to the original version of the public sphere that required a face-to-face discussion (Bohman, 2004). Bohman also identifies that the nature of the public sphere is 'space "in-between" the formal political institutions and civil society' (2004, p. 137). Such a characteristic is absent in cyberspace, as it is located in an unorganised space of the individuals. For Bohman, the internet has the potential to be a part of the public sphere if agents of change utilise it for democratic and reflexive activities (2004, p. 140).

Regarding this matter, Jenkins, in *Convergence Culture* (2008) demonstrated how YouTube, as one of the most popular platforms on the internet, also became the revolutionary medium for political discussion. He also further explained the concept of digital democracy on YouTube that involves the three levels of public participation, namely 'production, selection, and distribution' (Jenkins, 2008, p. 275).⁴ These three problems should also be situated within the geographical and spatial notions of the public sphere.

In this regard, Volkmer (2003) analysed how the internet could potentially undermine the political and cultural values of citizens through an individualised practice of media consumption. Consequently, 'the national public sphere is transformed by a new dialectical relationship between supra- and sub-national political contexts' (Volkmer, 2003, p. 15). At the same time, the new architecture of the public sphere requires elements of societies at all levels to be flexible and well-adapted to the rapid changes. In another book, Volkmer summarised two specific problems of applying Habermas original version of the public sphere in the digital age. The two problems are related to the distinction of a public/private

⁴ The contemporary phenomena of Brexit and Donald Trump have created a sense of criticism in the ability of the internet to sustain real democracy. For Murdock (2018), Brexit and Donald Trump phenomena are the proof of 'the destruction of deliberative democracy' in the internet.

sphere that became so blurred and the trans-border media practice in the 21st century that is different to a national public sphere in the Habermasian model (Volkmer, 2014, p. 6). Furthermore, Volkmer intensified her approach on a global public sphere through her statement:

Today, interdependence is intensified, 'dense' and, most importantly, is no longer governed by the national or even transnational media agenda but layers of interdependence are carefully selected from a subjective universe of options, governed by deliberately chosen 'loyalties' and 'alliances' (Volkmer, 2014, p. 3).

In the case of Indonesia, Hafez (2012) recognised three main challenges of the global public sphere for the nation-state, namely system connectivity, system change, and system interdependence. In terms of system connectivity, the geography of Indonesia as an archipelago possesses the inherent challenge to connect people across the country through a strong and reliable internet infrastructure. At the same time, the gap between the rich and the poor is increasing due to the high price of broadband.

Another critical element is the culture of innovation in Indonesia that possess a considerable challenge for system change. In Indonesia, the socio-economic gap has created a significant gap in the quality of education between elite schools and the more affordable school with a low level of standard of pedagogy. While the middle and higher classes in big cities can afford all required skills and capital in the digital era, the remaining people still struggle in getting the very basic of daily needs. These two challenges lead to the issue of system interdependence, between physical infrastructure and the internet policy that could allow innovative culture in Indonesia to flourish.

The interdependence between physical infrastructure and the internet policy has shown how the discursive nature of the public sphere in the internet era is increasingly inseparable from the elements of national politics. Habermas himself argued that in a digitalised public sphere, 'national public spheres are still culturally isolated from one another' as they have geographical contexts 'in which

political questions become significant only against the background of each nation's own history' (Habermas, 2001, p. 507). In the context of Indonesia, the internet policy in Indonesia is either contra-productive or too friendly to the market operation, undermining the sense of citizenship among the new generation of Indonesian people (Nugroho et al., 2012; Tapsell, 2015b, 2017).

Interestingly, the paradox of connectivity is not an exclusive problem in Indonesia. At a global level, geographical factors remain powerful in the concept of the global digital divide. The lack of Internet infrastructure and digital literacy has become a significant barrier for developing countries to compete with developed countries. While the growing amount of internet penetration has continuously minimised the first problem, the latter remains unresolved as it related to the mentality of people, the quality of education, linguistic and cultural competence, and the knowledge system in the Global South (Graham, 2014; Hafez, 2012; Sassen, 2012). At the same time, the geographical factor is also helpful to understand the shift of internet users from English-speaking countries to other regions with more diverse languages.⁵ The importance of geographical factors has proven that 'social connections in online settings may depend on offline contact' (Parks, 2011, p. 120).

Currently, the vast variety of media production and consumption created a multiplicity of the public sphere in the context of 'local, regional, national, transnational, global, and glocal, official and unofficial, publics and counter-publics, and Western and non-Western' (Tully, 2013, p. 170). Regarding this matter, Thorburn and Jenkins (2004) refused the idea that the new media will replace the existence of older media and created what Bruce Sterling defined as 'dead media'.⁶ Papacharissi (2011) also noted that media convergence enabled a

⁵ The most prominent trend is the growing number of internet users in China (Bolsover, et. Al., 2014). Despite its controversial and sophisticated Great Wall, and the fact that more than half of its population remains offline, China is predicted to be the next 'centre of gravity' of the internet. However, the geographical and linguistic challenges in the Chinese digital public sphere have proven that 'the Internet is not an amorphous, spaceless, and placeless cloud' (Graham, 2014).

⁶ For Thorburn and Jenkins (2004), the compatibility between new and older media will create a new media sphere that convergent both new and older media. They gave an example of how film and book industries convergence each other, by bringing the stories on printed media into the

complex connection between different social spheres that force individuals to construct the contextual aspect of 'identity performance' (p. 317). The specific address of identity performance potentially disrupts the boundaries between public discourse and personal identity.

In the early emergence of the mobile phone, Gordon (2002) found how the connective capacity of the device enabled an individual to consume the materials from popular culture and involve in discursive activities in the public sphere at the same time. Some critical features of participation through the mobile phone includes electronic games, online radio and television, music, digital camera, internet browser, message service, and email (Gordon, 2002). These features on mobile phones enabled citizens to conduct various tasks in the public sphere, ranging from personal entertainment to political discussion to overthrow the authoritarian regime (Jenkins, 2004). Its small size enabled an individual to access the internet more flexibly and to conduct a shifting personal identity. The notion of shifting identity is particularly relevant in analysing the Muslim community in the era of media convergence, particularly on their strategies in dealing with the secular public sphere.

From the above discussion and debate, from the Habermasian origin to the critics in and of the internet age, we can see a tendency to neglect the importance of religion in the public sphere. Habermas himself declared that his idealised public sphere is a product of the Reformation that removed the existence of divine authority from the public space and put religion merely as a private matter (Habermas, 1999, p. 11). Yet throughout its history, we could see the religious importance in the public sphere, particularly in the era of mediatisation.⁷The religious importance in the public sphere is particularly relevant in the case of

screen and elevates the commercial values of the printed book to a higher level (Thorburn & Jenkins, 2004).

⁷ The invention of printing machine shifted the circulation of the Bible from a small group of priests to general population of Christian peasant. We also could see the impact of Protestant work ethics as the foundational values of modern capitalism that has been interrelated with the invention and development of the internet. In the internet era, the issue of religion in the public sphere comes hand in hand with the integration of immigrant from religious countries in the Western secular nations and the increasing trend of religious revival in various countries across the globe.

Indonesia. As a country with the most significant Muslim population in the world, the secular-nationalist movement has created an inherent tension at both institutional and individual levels.

This thesis will focus on the issues of Islam in the Indonesian public sphere through a microscopic approach of *Pondok Pesantren*. From the beginning of its establishment as a modern nation, Indonesia faced tension between religious and secular agendas. As Indonesia was progressing into a modern nation, the secular nationalist wanted to emphasise multiculturalism and multi-religious background as the important elements of the public sphere. However, the ambition of Muslim leaders to dominate the public sphere remains prevalent, mainly motivated by the fact the majority of the Indonesian population are Muslim. In the mediated era, the public sphere was dominated by the secular agenda, as the major media owners were coming from a non-Muslim and non-religious background. The current trend of Islamic revival in the urban setting intensifies the conflict of interests between their neo-conservative values and the secular nature of the internet (Barendregt, 2011; Fealy, 2008; Hoesterey, 2008; Hosen, 2008; Jurriëns, 2011, 2017; Sutton, 2011). The issues of media convergence and Islamic revival are particularly crucial in understanding the contemporary young Muslim population as we will discuss in the next section.

ISLAM, INTERNET AND INDONESIA

Two works are critical in understanding the increasing visibility of Islam in the contemporary public sphere, particularly on the challenges and opportunities of Muslim youth in the internet era. The *first* book is written by Nilan (2017) entitled *Muslim Youth in the Diaspora: Challenging Extremism through Popular Culture*. This research was a response to the stigma that young people in the Muslim community are identical to terrorism, extremism, and religious fundamentalism. Through the book, Nilan also criticised the fact that very often, young people are absent in the analysis of the public sphere. However, as young people tend to be more adaptive in digital life, compare to adult and mature people, the digital

public sphere is more dominated by young people as the 'digital experts' (Nilan, 2017, p. 6). In analysing the youth culture in the Muslim community, she introduces the term 'Muslim cool' (p. 21) and 'Muslim hipsters' (p. 86) to describe the 'neo-theo-tribal configuration by selective consumption and inclusive online engagement' (p. 21). However, the engagement of young people in a popular culture created double challenges for them.

Within the Muslim community, the popular culture is deemed prohibited in Islam 'because it distracts from pious practice and might encourage immoral behaviour' (p. 85). The moral panic in the religious community necessitates that the young people 'need for supervision, instruction and protection' (Nilan, 2017, p. 86). At the same time, as they live in a secular world of Western society, they are also required to be more adaptive to the rapid change in the digital era. However, their religious identity has become a significant barrier to get an ideal place in the secular world (Nilan, 2017). Muslims in *Pondok Pesantren* might have a different media and digital environment with Muslims in the diaspora. Yet the limitation of internet access in *Pondok Pesantren* reflects the stigma of the internet as distracting to their religious activities.

Furthermore, Muslim communities often imagined that they are bounded within a single conception of the global *umma*. Despite different backgrounds and the daily struggle, to some extent, Muslim communities share a similar aspiration to preserve religious values amidst the ongoing tension of digitalisation and secularisation. Reflecting on her experience, Nilan contends that:

Studying the popular culture of Muslim youth in the diaspora is important for understanding the seemingly oppositional relationship between the suggested neo-liberal (primarily secular), successful, individualised self of Western late modernity, and the collectively constituted 'good' Muslim subject. These framings of self are not in fact antithetical, as I have shown, although there is a prevalent discourse on both sides that they are at odds. It is from this antagonistically imagined set of relations that different iterations of counter-narrative emerge (Nilan, 2017, p. 179).

While Nilan's perceived popular culture as a method to assimilate Muslim communities in the ongoing tension with secularism, my thesis takes a different direction. I contend that 'the seemingly oppositional relationship' is still relevant in understanding media and the digital environment in *Pondok Pesantren*. While the focus on digital consumption among the Muslim diaspora has shown a cosmopolitan spirit of Islam, the tension between offline and online religious life in *Pondok Pesantren* creates a different set of imagination and identity. While Nilan's studies promoted 'faith as chosen and negotiated, rather than faith as enforced' (Nilan, 2017, p. 173), the limitation of internet access in *Pondok Pesantren* reflects a tendency to promote faith as enforced and negotiated at the same time.

Nilan also notified that the term 'Muslim cool' is brought from the original work of Herding (2013a), *Inventing the Muslim Cool: Islamic Youth Culture in Western Europe*. This *second* book about the Muslim youth is an ethnographic work of young Muslims in Germany, France, and the UK. In a similar tone to Nilan, Herding also criticised the absence of a *concept* of youth in Islam' (Herding, 2013a, p. 29). She also urged the importance of 'the sociology of youth religion' as a contribution to a framework 'of young people's religious belonging as an active choice, strong commitment, and also as identity construction' (Herding, 2013a, p. 38). She introduced the concept of 'Muslim cool' as a form of hybridity 'that allows cultural fusions to be looked at in terms of local practices of combining (parts of) cultures and in terms of global cultural flows' (Herding, 2013a, p. 44). The flows of global cultural products constitute the experience and expectation of Muslim youth in the current era of media convergence.

In her article, Herding (2013b) pointed out two different aspects of the digital public sphere among Muslim youth in Europe. The first aspect is regarding the cultural hybridity of different values, particularly Islamic and Western values, that they encounter in their daily life. The second aspect is their consciousness as global citizens of both the Islamic *umma* and the secular worlds. Her research suggests that the mediated discourse among Muslim youth is mainly related to the local challenges as a Muslim in Western society rather than as a part of the global *umma*

(Herding, 2013b). As the internet is well integrated into its offline context, Herding argued that 'new Islamic information technology products would be trans-cultural or multicultural in many ways'(Herding, 2013b, p. 561). Such conditions led to a process of 'refashioning Islam for a new media age' (Herding, 2013b, p. 557). In this regard, it is interesting to analyse how young people in *Pondok Pesantren* create a different narrative of 'refashioning Islam' and pursue a different practice of religious hybridity.

In the context of the Indonesian public sphere, the pressure of market and neoliberalism necessitates a similar approach of cosmopolitanism and religious commodification as happens in Nilan and Herding projects. However, as van Wichelen (2007) reflects from her research, the media representation in Indonesia often focuses on 'urban consumerism and urban Islamism while making invisible the production of rural or regional Muslim bodies' (p. 105). In the rural location of *Pondok Pesantren*, geography and socio-economic class create a different behaviour against market and neoliberalism. While Nilan and Herding's books speak eminently about the integrative and cosmopolitan approach towards market and neoliberalism, *Pondok Pesantren* systematically restricts access towards the digital market and protects students from the threat of secularism and neoliberalism. Furthermore, from her experience researching about Muslim in Indonesia, van Wichelen argues that:

Two modes of 'Muslimness' can be distinguished: while the one normalises its stigmatised identity by commodifying 'Muslimness' in order to promote sameness, the other reinforces the same stigmatisation by politicising 'Muslimness' in order to promote difference (van Wichelen, 2007, pp. 93-94).

While van Wichelen distinguishes between promoting sameness and difference, religious education in *Pondok Pesantren* situates between these two contrasting trajectories. This thesis is particularly interested to understand the complexity of religious life in the local community of *Pondok Pesantren* in facing the policy and practices of internet use. In a physical sense, religious education might be a

considerable distance from the public sphere on a national level. However, this thesis argues that space does not minimise the pressure of modernity at the national level, particularly as the graduates of *Pondok Pesantren* will compete in the national market after completing their education in *Pondok Pesantren*. On the surface, there is a collective attitude to maintain the offline religious life as a 'different' approach to religious life at the national level. However, on a more personal level of the individual student, there is a 'sameness' ambition to be as competitive as the Muslim middle-class at the national level. These complexities reflect a tension of the personal aspiration of students and the institutional arrangement in *Pondok Pesantren*.

Speaking about the current trend of religious revival, Habermas himself has critically examined the history of the secular public sphere and the rising religious public sphere in contemporary society. He noted that his original version of the public sphere laid its foundation on a secular society that uses 'human reason forms', instead of 'religious legitimation', as 'the basis of justification' (Habermas, 2006b, p. 4). In such conditions, 'the state operate with strict impartiality vis-à-vis religious communities' (Habermas, 2006b, p. 6). This principle is particularly important because, for religious citizens, religion is not 'about *something other* than their social and political existence' (Habermas, 2006b, p. 8). At the same time, the religious person is also required to respect the secular values of the liberal state and create 'a theo-ethical equilibrium' between their religious values and the secular state (Habermas, 2006b, p. 8). As the majority of the modern nation-state is established with secularism in mind, it is critical to situate the tension of personal identity within the larger scale of power articulation as we will discuss in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3

POWER IN THE INDONESIAN PUBLIC SPHERE

INTRODUCTION

Before going through the micro context in *Pondok Pesantren*, this chapter will focus on the 'Indonesian public sphere' (hereafter the IPS). During the three decades of the Suharto presidency, grand narratives such as nationalism, modernisation, and national development have become the vehicle to intensify the mechanism of control of the general population by the government. Furthermore, the domination of media ownership by his family and close allies has enabled a systematic control towards public discourse. Nevertheless, the economic crisis and the development of information technology ended the three decades of the authoritarian regime in 1998. By the early 2000s, the IPS underwent a transition from being heavily controlled by political interest to more reliance on a market mechanism. With the background of societal transformation, this chapter aims to see how *Pondok Pesantren* is positioned at the crossroads or nexus of the current transformation in the 'Indonesian public sphere.'

The IPS provides an important concept, practice and context for analysing the power articulations in the public sphere, that have mostly been articulated within Western contexts and histories. By drawing together a literature review that addresses the specificity of Indonesian media and communications, this chapter will guide the reader through distinctive aspects of the IPS. In the Western public sphere, media and technology are the core foundation of the public sphere due to their ability in shaping public opinion and discussion (Garnham, 1999; Habermas, 1999, 2006a; Lim, 2004). However, in the context of Indonesia, the powerful impact of media and communication is enacted due to its capability in establishing and maintaining national identity across the Indonesian archipelago (Anderson, 2006; Sen & Hill, 2007). As a different regime has different challenges and

approaches, this chapter will organise the power articulation in Sukarno, Suharto, and post-Suharto era.

MEDIATISATION, DIGITALISATION AND THE STRUCTURE OF NATION-STATE

In Habermasian idea, the structural transformation of the public sphere came hand in hand with the early development of capitalism. The increasing pressure from the market and citizens positioned state in the difficult trajectories. On the one hand, the wide reach of media consumption enables the state to maintain its national identity throughout its population. On the other hand, mediatisation of the public sphere also enabled private actors to transform the discursive capacity of citizens for commercial interests. Here lies the fundamental conflict of interests between the attempts of unifying national identity and the ongoing diversification of identity through the marketisation of the public sphere. For the state, the shift of citizens' preference towards the market created an inherent dilemma as freedom of citizens and market competition were guaranteed (Habermas, 1999, p. 80).

The free market also possessed the fundamental problems for individual rationality, as the economic goals have become the new critical determinants in the public sphere. State intervention was critical, not only to regulate the potential inequality in the market operation but also to protect individual rationality. On a more personal level, state intervention was necessary to minimise the anxiety and uncertainty in the free market mechanism in the public sphere. Habermas contends that 'under conditions of imperfect competition and dependent prices, social power became concentrated in private hands' (Habermas, 1999, p. 144).

Facing the increasing competition in the market, the emphasis on public affairs was critical to seek a balance of different agendas from different actors in the public sphere (Castells, 2008). Pluralism in the public sphere created a space in which various interest groups are competing for their existence and consolidating political identity (Rogers, 2016, p. 37). It is within the democratic mechanism in

the public sphere that citizens find themselves in a constant conflicting position with each other. In a similar tone with Habermas, Dewey argued:

There is too much public, a public too diffused and scattered and too intricate in composition. And there are too many publics, for conjoint actions which have indirect, serious and enduring consequences are multitudinous beyond comparison, and each one of them crosses the others and generates its own group of persons especially affected with little to hold these different public together in an integrated whole (Dewey, 2016, p. 166).

With the increasing diversity of citizens, pluralism was not only beneficial for but also threatening to the stability of the public sphere. Habermas himself warned that the political participation of citizens could create conflict as it also entails the matter of 'economic antagonism' (Habermas, 1999, p. 146). It was not easy for the ruling class to determine which interests should be prioritised in 'maintaining the equilibrium of the system which could no longer be secured by way of the free market' (Habermas, 1999, p. 146). Yet it also became the necessity of the public sphere to accommodate the different views and experiences of its participants (Calhoun, 2002). On one hand, the government was influential in defining the political communities, 'by drawing and enforcing boundaries, by sponsoring shared educational institutions, and by encouraging domestic and restricting foreign markets' (Calhoun, 1993, p. 270). On the other hand, the state also distinguishes itself from the general population and creates a significant distance between the state apparatus and the public sphere.

These tensions have become increasingly escalated in the mediated public sphere. Public opinion, which was previously independent of the interests of the market, now became the target for business operations. Media in the public sphere was critical 'in enabling communication across distance' and knitting 'spatially dispersed interlocutors into a public' (Fraser, 2007, p. 10). There was a gradual shift from the public sphere as a discursive space for citizens to the public sphere

as a potential space for marketing communicative products. Now, ideas and opinions have been potentially controlled by private interests.

While the original version of the public sphere intended to be independent of market and politics, the mediated public sphere creates a difficulty to determine between these two powerful forces. Market and politics are increasingly interrelated and overlapped. It is increasingly prevalent in the mediated public sphere to see the blurred distinctions between the interests of the market and politics. Furthermore, the significant impact of mediatisation decreases the capability of citizens to shape public discourse. As they are increasingly struggling to fulfil their basic needs, it is challenging to maintain the internal escalation between their discursive capacity and their necessity to adapt to the current terrain of mediatisation. It is right within that internal conflict of the individual that the interest of the market dominates the public sphere.

To the extent that social reproduction still depends on consumption decisions and the exercise of political power on voting decisions made by private citizens there exists an interest in influencing them – in the case of the former, with the aim of increasing sales; in the case of the latter, of increasing formally this or that party's share of voters or, informally, to give greater weight to the pressure of specific organisations (Habermas, 1999, p. 176).

The escalated tension between state and market is particularly relevant to the fact that information has been fundamental in the formation of national identity. In this regard, Giddens contends that the 'gathering, storage, and control of information' were necessary for building the pre-modern society. The spatiality and the flow of information were critical preconditions in building a strong nation-state as 'a bordered power-container' (Giddens, 2002, p. 120). Nation-state necessitates the systematic operation of ideology within a spatial narrative of the public sphere. Giddens explained the combined function of these notions as follows:

A 'nation', as I use the term here, only exists when a state has a unified administrative reach over the territory over which its sovereignty is claimed. The development of a plurality of nations is basic to the centralization and administrative expansion of state domination internally, since the fixing of borders depends upon the reflexive ordering of a state system (Giddens, 2002, p. 119).

In the early phase of mediated communication, the potential of print media has been central in developing the modern nation-state. Printing media, as Giddens contends, 'vastly expands not only the capabilities of reflexive monitoring of the state but the distancing of communication from oral contexts' and 'reaching mass audiences' (Giddens, 2002, pp. 210-211). The capability of printed communication necessitated a reinterpretation of 'the nature and scope of discursive articulation of information available in the "public" domain' (Giddens, 2002, p. 211). Giddens also emphasised how the industrialized states relied heavily on 'the diffusion of common modes of thought and belief throughout the whole population' (Giddens, 2002, p. 214) as the means of coordination of ideological parameters of the nation-state. Seeing from a Foucauldian perspective, an individual has never fully acquired their freedom but is a subject of a constant fabrication from one system of surveillance to another.

Our society is one not of spectacle, but of surveillance; under the surface of images, one invests bodies in depth; behind the great abstraction of exchange, there continues the meticulous, concrete training of useful forces; the circuits of communication are the supports of an accumulation and a centralization of knowledge; the play of signs defines the anchorages of power; it is not that the beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated in it, according to a whole technique of forces and bodies (Foucault, 1991, p. 217).

Therefore, mediatisation of the public sphere has been central in the process of 'routinization of social activity in the time-space settings of the created

environment' that aimed to maintain the 'ontological security, particularly where there is a perceived threat from outside the state' (Giddens, 2002, p. 218). However, when the threat of national identity comes from the market, the state increasingly faced difficult circumstances. On the one hand, market integration is necessary to fulfil the basic needs of citizens and to enhance the visibility of the state in the global order. On the other hand, the market also provides citizens with the symbolic capacity and cultural consumption that could threaten the stability of the state. With the extensive process of mediatisation, state and private actors are competing for each other to dominate the symbolic capacity of citizens.

In this regard, the current structure of the internet has challenged the freedom of expression as the backbone of democracy and the public sphere. On the one hand, it provides an extensive opportunity for individuals to express their opinion. Once the individual accesses the internet, they could participate in myriad democratic opportunities. On the other hand, internet access is a subject of scrutiny from various regulatory bodies. The variety of interpretations of the pitfalls and the potential of the internet produces various systems and regulations, ranging from the very democratic to the strictly authoritarian information system. At the same time, socio-economic inequality has also become the main barrier to minimising the persistent issue of the global digital divide. Decades of global development have created significant unequal internet access between the Global North and the Global South, between the rich and the poor households. The macro and micro levels of inequality have made it increasingly complicated to create a democratic internet infrastructure that is available for all global citizens.

Within the current trend of democratic recession, the impact of surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2015, 2019) also comes to the fore. The pendulum swing between economic and political interests behind the internet infrastructure has made it difficult to differentiate which actors have been more dominant in the contemporary democratic battle in the public sphere. On the one hand, an individual has been positioned as an agent of change and as an active actor of the discursive process in the public sphere. On the other hand, the reality of the public sphere is far from its idealised version as the individual is constantly positioned

under surveillance capitalism. Global populism that produces a threat to the well-established democracies, as represented by Brexit in the UK and Trumpism in the US, necessitates a constant reinterpretation of the threat of surveillance capitalism to modern democracy. Even in a democratic society that is seemingly free from surveillance and restraint, the intersection between political power and the power of the market has made it difficult to determine which actors are more threatening to modern democracy.

In the context of *Pondok Pesantren*, surveillance capitalism is challenged by religious surveillance. Theoretically, these two surveillance systems were not equally powerful. Surveillance capitalism has extensive power and resources in shaping people's minds, including people within *Pondok Pesantren*. However, to some extent, religious surveillance has an effective capability, particularly within a *Pondok Pesantren* that has no formal schooling system such as in Miftahul Huda. As we will elaborate in the empirical chapters, the absence of a formal schooling system has minimised the requirement to provide internet access. Students could be disciplined according to the religious norms and the tight schedule of religious education. In contrast, in a *Pesantren* that has a formal schooling system such as Cipasung, the requirement to provide internet access in formal schools and the mindset of the student to be as competitive as students in other schools, has created huge pressure for the religious surveillance in shaping students' minds.

Therefore, the above debate and discussion about the public sphere are deemed unsatisfactory in understanding the non-Western context of the public sphere. Speaking about the impact of colonialism in the Indian subcontinent, Chakrabarty (2008) argued that the Western colonial powers imposed the nation-state as the desired political institution in the postcolonial contexts. In other words, 'European thought is at once indispensable and inadequate in helping the non-Western nations to think through the experiences of political modernity' (Gunaratne, 2006, p. 111). The focus on national unity could threaten 'the plurality that was crucial to the idea of democratic self-government through the public sphere of civil society' (Calhoun, 1993, p. 276). However, as a modern product 'of shared political, cultural, and social participation,' we also could witness the 'continuing

power of nationalism as a discursive formation and the work – sometimes positive – that nationalist solidarities continue to do in the world’ (Calhoun, 2002, p. 150).

The internal struggle of the postcolonial nation could explain the fundamental differences between the public sphere in Western and non-Western contexts. In Western society, the gradual process of modernisation has enabled the development of an idea as the core element of the public sphere. In a non-Western context, the long history of colonialism and the imbalanced position within the global order had erased the internal capacity in building a discursive function in the public sphere. The sudden process of mediatisation came hand in hand with the early development of the postcolonial nation. In contrast to the separation between ideas and identity in Western society, in a non-Western context, ideas and identity were developed subsequently in the increasingly mediated public sphere.

It is through the leap towards mediatisation that the fundamental problem of the public sphere is rooted in the non-Western context of society. While the Habermasian public sphere appreciated the diversity and the strength of opinion, the postcolonial struggle in non-Western countries necessitates a prioritization towards the unification of national identity. In the process of mediatisation, the discursive capacity of the public sphere was challenged not only by the formation of national identity but also by the struggle to defend politics from the systematic development of the market. The state was not only struggling to manage the tendency of domination by the market but also competing with the market in managing public discourse. For Giddens, the struggle to manage public discourse reflects the basic tenet of power articulation in the public sphere:

This phenomenon represents what I call the *dialectic of control* in social systems, something that connects back directly to the theme of human agency with which I opened this discussion. To be an agent is to be able to make a difference to the world, and to be able to make a difference is to have power (where power means transformative capacity) (Giddens, 2002, p. 11).

Here Giddens opened an important consideration to put the mechanism of control as the main narrative in understanding social systems. For Giddens, no matter how sophisticated the system has been established by the power holder, there is always a significant barrier for the authority to control the whole territory. Giddens rejected the perception that national authority possesses unlimited access to the resources of power. For Habermas, mediatization in the public sphere is a worrying theme as it opens the opportunity for the dominant market interest to shape the public sphere. His worry is increasingly prevalent in the digitalised version of the public sphere.

As the domination of the market was quite heavy in the mediated public sphere, particularly in the post-industrial era, the state apparatus also established its systematic operation to regain control in the digital public sphere. For Calhoun (1998), it is important to situate the internet within 'a continuing series of transformations in communication and transportation capacities' and 'the differences between the ways in which people are commonly linked on the electronic web and the organization of face-to-face relationships' (Calhoun, 1998, p. 380). The enhancing power structure on the internet (Calhoun, 1998) should be combined with the capacity of individuals 'to shape the debate in the public sphere' (Castells, 2008, pp. 86-87). In analysing the potential of the internet to become the fuel for the democratic public sphere, Calhoun (1998) argues that democracy runs behind capitalism.

The emerging trend of digitalisation of the public sphere possesses two critical consequences. With the extensive digitalisation, there is an increasing power shift from national politics to the city as the powerhouse in the political structure. Combined with the spirit of globalization, cities are increasingly interconnected into the global order. The success story of Silicon Valley has inspired other cities to follow the same structure of entrepreneurial development in the information society. Following the success story of Silicon Valley, various governments in Asia also strongly encouraged the development of smart cities and digital corporations as the strategic sectors for national development. In contrast to the market-driven

Silicon Valley, digital cities in Asia are predominantly established as state-driven initiatives.

At the same time, citizens are also increasingly exposed to the issues about global communities, as the digital infrastructure has enabled citizens to transcend national boundaries. It is within this shift of agency that we could witness the critical narrative in establishing the public sphere. Citizens in the digital era are not only bounded into the national boundary but also belonged to global communities. While mediatisation has created profound impacts on the existence of the nation-state, digitalisation necessitates the nation-state to innovate its political strategies. It is increasingly prevalent that the national government tends to choose a shortcut in managing the pressure of digitalization. Despite the constant criticism, the internet shutdown has become the main method of government to limit public participation. The state nowadays has become the key player to limit the capacity of citizens in fulfilling their discursive needs in the public sphere.

MEDIATISATION AND THE BIRTH OF INDONESIA (1945 – 1966)

In *Media, Culture and Politics in Indonesia*, Sen and Hill (2007) noted that in the context of Indonesia, 'culture and politics are overtly intertwined as much in academic studies of politics as in government policy documents' (p. 11). The tension between culture and politics is particularly relevant in discussing the role of media in the Indonesian public sphere. For Tapsell (2017), the classical notion of McLuhan that the 'medium is the message' (1964) is particularly relevant to the case of Indonesia, within which media technology has played such a crucial role in developing national consciousness. In his opinion, 'each time a new medium enters Indonesian society, it has a profound impact on the way society works' (Tapsell, 2017, p. 2).

However, Sen (2003) noted that there is a sustaining gap between 'a mass-based democracy and the democratic ideals of the intelligentsia' in Indonesian history

(p. 576). The printed media in the 1940s were particularly important in developing a written language of the imagined community and 'set the stage for the modern nation' (Anderson, 2006, p. 46). In Haryanto's (2014b) words, Indonesia is 'the result of a competitive mix of visions generated from a cosmopolitan-minded people pursuing a local version of hybrid modernity' (p. 2).⁸ Nevertheless, focus on the development of national identity, instead of heavy investment in education,⁹ has created the fundamental problems of the discursive capacity of the Indonesian public sphere.

The history of postcolonial Indonesia deliberates the critical notion of mediatisation in the public sphere. Before the official proclamation of Indonesian independence, the discursive capacity of its citizens was developed significantly, as shown through the spirit of the Youth Pledge that was declared on 28 October 1928. The pledge itself emphasised the Indonesian language as the discursive tool in the public sphere (Foulcher, 2000). However, the discursive capacity suddenly disappeared with the increasing initiative of the nationalist movement. On the one hand, the national government systematically use national media for the sake of national unity. Yet their capability has been tested by the geographic and populational challenges. The internal challenges necessitate involvement from private actors in building a national identity.

On the other hand, the direct involvement of private actors has created an oligarchic practice. In contrast to the idealised public sphere that separates politics and the market, as well as state and citizens, the involvement of private actors necessitates a close relationship between politics and the market in shaping the

⁸ The history of advertising in Brazil could explain the challenges of imposing the values of American modernity. In the perception of an American advertising agency, Brazil is a backward nation and should adapt to 'a rational, liberal, modernizing project that would benefit all the nations of the world' (Woodard, 2002). Facing a pressure from the upper rich Brazilian and its inherent socio-economic gap, the advertising agency, instead, decided to adapt its predominantly white men ideas into a more hybrid practice of modernity.

⁹ While participation in education increases in the three decades of Suharto, the gap between well-established schools and less-affluent institutions also staggering. Newhouse and Beegle (2006), found that 'public school students have exit scores that are 0.17 to 0.3 standard deviations higher than their privately schooled peers' (p. 530). The staggering gap is problematic due to the fact that almost 60% of Indonesian schools are private institutions (Muttaqin, et. al., 2020).

discourse of citizens. These tendencies could be traced back to the early era of nationalism during the Sukarno presidency.

As the President of the newly born republic, Sukarno utilised *Radio Republic Indonesia (RRI)* extensively for building a national identity (Sen, 2003). Sen and Hill (2007) noted that 'the RRI was the state's primary and most centralised medium for mobilising public opinion' (p. 82). By imposing the ultra-nationalist ideology,¹⁰ Sukarno strictly controlled the Indonesian newspapers, such as *Kompas* and *Indonesia Raya*, particularly in the era of Guided Democracy from 1959 until the end of his era in 1965 (Kakiailatu, 2007).¹¹

During his presidency, he banned all Western music, calling it a *ngak ngik ngok* music, a term that described it as a redundant thing in building a national identity (Farram, 2007b). He was very aware of the possibility of cultural imperialism and urged young people, through his oration, to avoid any Western cultural products (Sen & Hill, 2007, p. 166). In facing the restriction during the early 1960s, some student radio stations, most notably *Radio Ampera*, showed political resistance by airing music from prohibited Western bands such as The Rolling Stones and the Beatles (Sen, 2003). The ultra-nationalism and anti-cultural imperialism shaped public discourse during the Sukarno presidency.

At the same time, the tension between Islam, nationalism, and communism escalated. In June 1945, two months before the official declaration of Indonesian independence on 17 August 1945, some leaders from the Muslim community proposed the idea that Indonesia should become an Islamic country (Elson, 2009; Ricklefs, 2008b). Sukarno rejected the idea and declared that Indonesia was 'not for one person, not for one group, the group of nationalists, or the group of the

¹⁰ His most popular slogan is *Amerika kita seterika, Inggris kita linggis* (let's burn the American, let's crush the British) that was popular during the British intervention in the establishment of Malaysia (Budianta, 2000). Sukarno perceived Indonesia as a powerhouse in Southeast Asia and insisted to unite the Malay nations under one umbrella of Indonesian nationalism (Warner, 1963).

¹¹ The 1965 massacre is an important vantage point in understanding the ideological battle and the position of the mass population in the Indonesian public sphere (Wieringa, 2014). There is no official statistics about the number of the victims, yet the event is notably 'one of the largest massacre in modern history' (Heryanto, 2014a). It is also important to note that the anti-communist narrative is still relevant in the contemporary Indonesia.

rich, but all for all' (Elson, 2009, p. 111). Indonesia was proclaimed not as an Islamic nation, but as a semi-religious nation with just 'Belief in One God' as the first principle (Elson, 2009).

Nevertheless, the ultranationalist ideology and his interest in communism became a boomerang for his presidency. On 30 September 1965, General Suharto utilised this condition to execute a coup against Sukarno through the anti-communist movement. Zurbuchen (2002) described it as an 'incident' when the 'then-President Sukarno was marginalized and stripped of power, as popular antipathy toward the left, especially toward the huge Indonesian Communist Party (*PKI, Partai Komunis Indonesia*), was roused and manipulated by the military' (p. 565). In the next phase of the Indonesian public sphere, Suharto proffered utilised anti-communist propaganda as a strategy to strengthen nationalism and culturally manipulate Islamism at the same time.

Within the two decades of his presidency, Sukarno already created an internal tension and ideological battle between Islam, nationalism, and communism. In some critical literature about the 1965 mass killing, it is evident how nationalist and Islamist actors were working together to overthrow Sukarno and became the key actors of mass killing. It is interesting to see the political shifts of the nationalist and Islamist. Soon after their collective works against the communist, Muslim communities were marginalized significantly in both political contestation and cultural production during the New Order era. The period of Sukarno presidency mapped out the difficult relationship between various ideologies in the public sphere.

Furthermore, the focus of Sukarno on winning the ideological battle, without significant economic consideration, put national identity in a fragile situation. Soon after the coup, Suharto as the new president put economic development as the top priority. The national development strategy necessitates the dominant role of nationalist and secular bureaucrats, mainly through the development ideas of the American-educated economists, well-known as Berkeley Mafia (Hill & Wie, 2008). These economists were the core actors of the three decades of Suharto

developmentalism that aims to put Indonesia in the top position of the global order (Dowling & Yap, 2008). By uplifting the top-down approach and Western-oriented economy, we could see how the three decades of the Suharto presidency shaped the power articulation in the Indonesian public sphere.

SUHARTO AND THE MANAGEMENT OF THE MEDIATED PUBLIC SPHERE (1966 – 1998)

As the new leader that came to power after the coup in 1966, Suharto realised immediately that his administration should focus on strengthening national identity through systematic control of media platforms. In controlling the radio, he utilised three main approaches; licensing, restricting political content, and localisation (Sen, 2003). The localisation strategy was particularly critical in that he differentiated radio into two different categories: the RRI (Radio Republik Indonesia) with its political content and national scope, and private radio with its local and cultural approach (Sen, 2003, p. 579). The leadership of Tutut Suharto, his eldest daughter, in the Indonesian Private Commercial Radio Broadcasters Association (*Persatuan Radio Siaran Swasta Niaga Indonesia/PRSSNI*) strengthened a sense of control from the Suharto regime through his close family and alliances (Sen & Hill, 2007, p. 87).

The printed media experienced stricter control under the Suharto regime, particularly due to its intelligent readership. Although printed media had a smaller number of readers compared to radio and television, it was ‘the press which largely determines what is news, in Indonesia and elsewhere in the world’ (Sen & Hill, 2007, p. 51). The circulation of political pamphlets and zines among a close circle of Indonesian universities became an important factor in understanding the persistent activism among Indonesian intellectuals. Outside the small circle of student activists, any newspapers and magazines should have had publishing permits (*Surat Izin Usaha Penerbitan Pers/SIUPP*) (Kakialatu, 2007; Sen & Hill, 2007).

In contrast to Sukarno, who supported communist printed media, Suharto banned all communist printed press. His government was also renowned for criminalizing, jailing or even killing journalists (Sen & Hill, 2007). At the same time, Suharto encouraged the development of commercial printed media, mostly owned by his close families and conglomerates (Sen & Hill, 2007; Tapsell, 2017). His close allies enjoyed a privilege in establishing media businesses that were suitable with his agenda to maintain political stability and economic development.

In the Suharto era, television also played a pivotal role in strengthening national identity. The television of the Republic of Indonesia (TVRI) was a critical medium in teaching the Indonesian language and delivering the message of national development (Sen & Hill, 2007). The presidential speeches and news of Suharto opening new projects of toll roads, harbours, and airports were the compulsory daily programmes of TVRI (Jurriëns, 2017; Vatikiotis, 1993). The propaganda film of *The Betrayal of the Indonesian Communist Party on 30 September 1965 (Pengkhianatan G-30S/PKI)* was broadcasted on 30 September every year to strengthen the anti-communist spirit in Indonesian society (Heryanto, 2014b; Sen & Hill, 2007). In the early 1990s, private television stations mushroomed, mainly owned by his close allies of families and conglomerates (Hollander et al., 2009; Sudibyo & Patria, 2013; Winters, 1996). In contrast to nationalist television programmes, the private television stations broadcast many foreign programmes, ranging from music to soap operas (Heryanto, 2014b).

However, his open policy towards the market and private actors created tensions among Indonesian bureaucrats in responding to the new stream of globalisation. While Berkeley Mafia continuously promoted Western-oriented economic development, military leaders who were predominantly Javanese started to raise a concern about the impact of Westernization in the local culture (Budianta, 2000). Sen and Hill (2007) noted that 'in the last decade of Suharto's rule, the Army and other security departments sought barricades against global influences, while the economic ministries saw many aspects of globalisation as new openings for growth and development' (p. 203). Following the economic crisis in 1998, the government also promoted the protection of national culture, signalling the crisis

of the cultural identity at the same time (Budianta, 2000). The dualism of governance was further complicated by the arrival of the Internet in the late 1990s that weakened the control mechanism of the government.

In the beginning, the internet was established as a pilot project of technological development in three prestigious campuses in Indonesia; the University of Indonesia, Bandung Institute of Technology, and Gadjah Mada University (Hill & Sen, 1997, 2000; Lim, 2003, 2004). However, unlike other media with a clear political agenda, the Suharto regime failed to establish the mechanism of control towards the internet (Sen & Hill, 2007). Instead, Lim (2004) argues that the early development of the internet in Indonesia opened the 'formation of new political communities outside of the state and corporate economy' (p. 2). Lim particularly emphasised the revolutionary role of the internet in bypassing state control and creating 'a renewed public sphere for civil society in Indonesia' (Lim, 2004, p. 5). In another piece of work, Lim (2003) also stressed the role of the internet in the circulation of sensitive issues regarding the list of Suharto's wealth and created the networks of student activism out of state control (Lim, 2003). In such conditions, 'Indonesian authorities had no geared-up plans for controlling or censoring the internet and were quite naïve about its political potential' (Lim, 2003, p. 282).

The combination of intellectual roots and weak governmental policy became an opportunity for Indonesian activists, at home and abroad, to build a political network (Hill & Sen, 1997; Lim, 2003; Sen, 2003). The establishment of the internet in several Indonesian campuses and its utilisation as a medium of resistance by student activists (Sen & Hill, 2007) is proof of the internet as a medium for the empowered minority (Tapsell, 2017). However, the limited circulation of political discourse among intellectuals at elite campuses reflects the early criticism of the public sphere that neglected people from the non-bourgeois background. Regardless of its political potential, the early history of the internet in Indonesia suggests that it is difficult to imagine that the internet will create equal opportunities for the majority Indonesian population.

In another significant area of the national identity, it is worth noting that Muslim media struggled to get an influential position in the Indonesian public sphere. Some Muslim-based media, most notably *Republika*, *Media Dakwah*, and *Ummat*, were established in the early 1990s as an alternative to the mainstream media that were mainly owned by Chinese-ethnic owners with the Christian or Catholic backgrounds (Hefner, 1997). This socio-religious factor is critical due to the difficult relationship between Muslim and Christian communities in Indonesia (Arifianto, 2009). The domination of Chinese and Christian conglomerates in the Indonesian media industry (Hefner, 1997) also created a suspicion against the Chinese-Christian communities, particularly due to the issues of *Kristenisasi* and *Islamisasi* that targeted the followers of both religions to convert to the opposite religion (Arifianto, 2009). As some converts to Christianity are former members of the PKI, Suharto also strategically used this issue to strengthen anti-communist sentiment among Muslim communities.

To minimise the political impact of Muslim communities, Suharto banned any political activism and developed the cultural approach of Islam. Suharto regime often sentenced and jailed Islamic political activists, including *Kiai* who were critical of his authoritarian system (Heryanto, 2014b). His policy of 'the Normalization of Campus Life (*Normalisasi Kehidupan Kampus*) in 1978' limited Muslim activism in secular campuses and 'stimulated growing numbers of students to turn toward Islamic *da'wa* activities' (Hasan, 2009, p. 232). Upon his return from a pilgrimage to Mecca, Suharto appeared to be more Islamic, compared to his syncretic Javanese identity in the past (Heryanto, 2011). Suharto himself tended to accommodate the middle-class Muslim technocrats through the establishment of the Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals (*Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia/ICMI*) (Hasan, 2009). Suharto also selected many Muslim intellectuals as ministers in his cabinet and high-level staff in both civil and military authorities (Vatikiotis, 1993), as a strategy to tackle the issue of his close relationship with Chinese ethnic and non-Muslim conglomerates (Winters, 1996, 2013). These strategies increased the confidence of the Muslim middle-class and the presence of religious values in big Indonesian cities.

Nevertheless, the Asian economic crisis in 1998 opened Pandora's box of enormous inequality and systematic corruption by the government. The financial crisis was the main reason for losing optimism and trust in the national government. Student activism became the primary vehicle of toppling the three decades of Suharto presidency. With the emerging trend of media convergence, both nationalist and Islamist activists could utilise various platforms to achieve their political goals. In the post-Suharto era, the government has increasingly lost its capability to control the public sphere. The shift towards market mechanism has become the main feature in understanding the public sphere in post-Suharto Indonesia.

DIGITALISATION, MARKETISATION, AND THE INDONESIAN STRUGGLE (1998 – NOW)

The previous sections have shown the constant repositioning of the conflicting positions in the public sphere. At the beginning of postcolonial Indonesia, we could see how nationalism and communism dominated the position against capitalism and Islamism. The dominant position of nationalism and communism was established through the extensive utilisation of radio and newspapers. In contrast, during the three decades of the Suharto presidency, capitalism and nationalism have become the main narrative against communism and Islamism. By the time the internet began to surge in the public sphere, these contrasting ideologies began to collide. Nowadays, the digital economy is attractive for nationalist, capitalist, and Islamist actors altogether. These three streams of ideologies have been more dominant than secular-nationalist in shaping the public sphere.

To understand the restructuring of the public sphere, we should understand the power shift from the state to the market. In the post-Suharto era, the trend toward media convergence and the weak media policy from the government (Nugroho, 2008; Nugroho et al., 2012) led to a more powerful impact of oligarchs and conglomerates (Robison & Hadiz, 2004; Tapsell, 2015a; Winters, 2013). Lim (2003) noted that soon after the fall of Suharto, the new government failed to address a

clear political agenda to tackle the global challenge of the internet. Tapsell (2017) argued that the commercial power of multinational corporations came hand-in-hand with a mutual interest of local conglomerates and oligarchs in establishing multi-platform media corporations. The internet itself, in Lim's opinion, has been dominated by its commercial roles, leaving civil society and the public sphere behind (Lim, 2003). Kitley (2008) described the contemporary Indonesian public sphere as 'a media-saturated public sphere historically conditioned by a sudden expansion and deregulation of the media' (p. 88).

In his article, Tapsell (2015b) mentions that the rising power of the media oligarchs in Indonesia has two direct consequences. *Firstly*, the flow of information in the convergence era tends to be 'concentrated, controlled, and cartelised' (p. 183). *Secondly*, as the majority of conglomerates and oligarchs have an implicit or explicit political interest, the journalistic practice in the mainstream media platforms are extremely partisan (Gazali, 2014). Facing pressure from the public and private actors, the government tends to be reluctant to provide sufficient policy and infrastructure needed in the convergence era (Armando, 2014; Tapsell, 2015b). Tapsell (2017) argues that 'the Indonesian case is well suited to probing the way in which digital media impact power relations' as they 'become a central space for contestation between media owners and ordinary citizens' (p. xi). With the absence of a strong media policy, private actors have been increasingly more prominent in shaping public discourse.

Tapsell (2017) further describes the Indonesian public sphere as a condition with a 'convergent media' and a 'divergent power' (p. 155). The big names in the Indonesian media such as Aburizal Bakrie, Surya Paloh, Jacob Oetama, Harry Tanoesodibjo, Dahlan Iskan, James Riady, and Chairul Tanjung own various corporations, from all media platforms to hospitality to university, create an oligopolistic practice in the market-driven business environment of Indonesia (Heryanto, 2014b; Tapsell, 2017). They also become more politically significant as they have a greater political interest, directly or indirectly. This condition happened amidst weak media regulation from the government that enabled the utilisation of various media platforms for private political interests (Heryanto,

2014b). Some of them also have supported the popular political figures, including the current Indonesian President Joko Widodo, creating a moral dilemma in developing internet and media policy (Armando, 2014; Hollander et al., 2009; Sudibyo & Patria, 2013). It is increasingly prevalent that, in the post-Suharto era, various media platforms have become more politically loud compared to the media in the Suharto era.

During the Suharto era, state-sponsored media ownership was aimed to disperse the power of Suharto with his close allies. There was a mutual benefit, as Suharto needed media to shape the nationalist discourse in the public sphere and the media owners also required protection from Suharto to maintain the status quo. Hence, state and market were well-managed under one umbrella of political power. In the post-Suharto era, the weak position of the government has created a more powerful position of oligarchy. In the 2019 general election, for instance, both presidential candidates were supported by a group of prominent conglomerates. Soon after being re-elected, Jokowi gives the oligarchs and their families various critical positions in his administration. The difficult position of Jokowi in the front of oligarchy could be traced back to his first candidature in 2014:

But while Jokowi enjoyed unprecedented levels of personal popularity, he failed to formulate a clear political strategy or vision for the next phase of Indonesia's democratization. When asked by journalists, Jokowi stated strong support for Indonesia's existing democratic framework, promising to make it more effective. But he often expressed surprise at being posed this question, pointing to his terms in Solo and Jakarta as evidence of his belief in openness, transparency, and democratic fairness (Mietzner, 2014, p. 116).

The unpreparedness of Jokowi to manage the democratisation in Indonesia has opened an opportunity for the oligarchy to control the public sphere. The popularity of Jokowi as the mayor of Solo attracted the powerful oligarchs such as Prabowo Subianto and Hashim Djojohadikusumo to send Jokowi in the

gubernatorial election in Jakarta. After winning the gubernatorial election, Jokowi did not complete his terms as a governor and battling with Prabowo in the 2014 general election. During the election, a group of the oligarchy backed his position against Prabowo. The final result of the 2019 general election is even more compelling, as Jokowi won against Prabowo for the second time, yet chose Prabowo as the Ministry of Defence. It is increasingly evident that Jokowi could not resist the temptation to create a more beneficial position for the oligarchy rather than the interest of the general population.

In the reverse direction, it is also increasingly normal for celebrities and media personalities to be involved in politics without the necessary capabilities of public service. Within the realm of mediated and digitalised public sphere, their popularity has been effective to garner public attention. In Indonesia, the power of media has shifted the function of the public sphere merely as a space to develop personal popularity and to accumulate public attention. The dominant agenda of the conglomerates have widened the gap between the rich and the poor and deteriorated the capability of citizens to flourish amidst the increasingly digitalised public sphere (Mietzner, 2014). Within such an imbalanced structure, media moguls in Indonesia have affected 'the provision of information, opinion and the articulation of reality as assessable by the public' (Tapsell, 2015b, p. 183).

Outside the power of oligarchs and conglomerates, political Islam is another important determinant in understanding the contemporary Indonesian public sphere. The case of *Playboy Indonesia* revealed the conflict of interest between the growing trend of commercialisation and the deregulation of Indonesian media alongside the rising power of political Islam (Kitley, 2008).¹² There is a growing concern among the leaders of Islamic organizations in Indonesia that 'since *reformasi* [reform], press freedom has run out of control, and the government has gone soft on pornography' (Kitley, 2008, p. 96). As the government failed to

¹² In its original version, Playboy magazine often depicted female in a fully naked picture (Bogaert, et. al, 1993). Adapting to the context of Indonesia in 2006, the magazine published pictures of women with lingerie. The criminalization of the magazine in Indonesia covered all elements of the corporation, from the Chief Editor, to the journalists, to the model in the first edition of magazine (Kitley, 2008). It also signalled the conservative-turn in the Indonesian public sphere, particularly the emergence of Anti-Pornography Bill, soon after the first publication of Playboy Indonesia.

establish an idealised Islamic public sphere, community action is required in the era of freedom of expression (Allen, 2007; Kitley, 2008). In this case, the Indonesian government seemed to have lost its control over the power over the stream of democratization, media conglomeration, and the rising prominence of political Islam (Allen, 2007; Brenner, 2011).

According to Brenner (2011), 'the Anti-Pornography Bill was a conservative response to the sudden deregulation and opening up of the mass media that took place during the period of *Reformasi*' (p. 486). The *reformasi* era leads to the 'open elections in the political arena, deregulation and expansion of the mass media, far greater freedom of speech and protest, decentralisation of government, and insistent calls for improved government transparency and accountability' (p. 478). However, in such a liberal and democratic public sphere, the conservative Muslims idealized the public sphere 'as a didactic, performative space where the rule of Islamic law regulates social interaction' (Kitley, 2008, p. 103). Such conditions were supported by the global dynamics of religious conservatism and 'the loosening of the state's suppression of political Islam' in the *Reformasi* era (Brenner, 2011, p. 484). For Allen (2007), the Anti-Pornography Bill challenged the cultural values in various regions and the multicultural value in Indonesia (Allen, 2007). The increasing prominence of private morality has proven a tendency that the pursuit and enjoyment of pleasure through media content 'is never separated from more serious moral and social concerns' (Heryanto, 2014b, p. 20).

As Islam has become more visible in the public sphere, the big Indonesian cities have become visually more Islamic (Heryanto, 2014b). Some big corporations also hold religious sermons (*pengajian*) and Islamic motivational training (Fealy, 2008; Rudnycky, 2010). In national television, religious sermons come hand in hand with more religious celebrities who celebrate the personal movements to the more Islamic lifestyle (*hijrah*) (Barendregt, 2011; Hoesterey, 2008; Howell, 2008; Rakhmani, 2019; S.K., 2011). On social media, most notably Instagram, celebrities actively advertise their Muslim clothing line, halal cosmetics and pilgrimage packages to Mecca (Beta, 2014, 2019; Nisa, 2018a, 2018b). With their purchasing power, the Muslim middle-class has made religious teaching 'to be more

impressive and, at the same time, modern, progressive, and inclusive' (Hasan, 2009, p. 242). These trends are slightly different from the religious life in *Pondok Pesantren* that has become the main field of this research project.

CONCLUSION

The Indonesian case is a contrasting environment with the Habermasian public sphere. The powerful actors from state, oligarchs, and political Islam are fighting each other and utilising various forms of power and capital. During the three decades of the Suharto era, the grand narrative of nationalism and national development was effective in upholding the strength of national government. However, his inability to manage the Asian financial crisis in 1998, the deepening internal inequality, and the increasing capacity of global communication have created turmoil to his political power. In the post-Suharto era, the proliferation of information technology has shifted the dominant power into the market mechanism and weakened the domination of the state in the Indonesian public sphere. At the same time, the Islamic revival and the increasing presence of political Islam also provide a different arrangement in the public sphere.

While the state wants to maintain the nationalist narrative in the public sphere, the middle-class are increasingly ambitious to add the Islamic nuance within the ongoing political contestation and cultural production. As Heryanto (2014b) argued, there is an increasing sentiment that Islam should be positioned in equal status with the ongoing modernisation and digitalisation of the public sphere. In this battle, the distance between *Pondok Pesantren* and the Indonesian public sphere provides challenges and opportunities in creating an alternative version of the Islamic public sphere. Yet, such an optimistic vision should be interrogated further, particularly with the increasing state-level initiative in mainstreaming the religious values of *Pondok Pesantren*. Before going straight to the microscopic mechanism of *Pondok Pesantren*, the next chapter will focus on how the Islamic agenda has established the idealised Islamic public sphere in Indonesia.

CHAPTER 4

PIETY IN THE INDONESIAN PUBLIC SPHERE

INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, we have discussed how the strength of political Islam has been minimised during the Sukarno and Suharto eras (1945-1998). Suharto established cultural Islam as a systematic way to control the imagined Islamic public sphere in Indonesia. However, in the last two decades of the post-Suharto era, the impact of Islamic revival has been evident in both cultural and political realms. The long struggle of Islam in Indonesia neither confirms the Habermasian thesis of a secular public sphere nor reject the importance of religion in the public sphere. On the one hand, the national government consistently attempts to promote nationalism and secularism as the basis for the nation-state. On the other hand, the complex history of pre-colonial and postcolonial Indonesia necessitates a different arrangement of the religious interest in the public sphere.

This chapter aims to understand the implication of tension between secularism and Islamism in the Indonesian public sphere. Indonesia is an interesting case as, compared to other Muslim-majority countries, it represents a different form of the nation-state. While neighbouring countries of Malaysia and Brunei imposed a special privilege towards the Muslim-majority population, Indonesia has minimised the centrality of Islam in the Indonesian public sphere, particularly due to the abolition of the Jakarta Charter. In the Jakarta Charter, the Indonesian Muslim population had a special privilege and obligation to follow Islamic law. However, the dominant secular-nationalist agenda removed such special privileges to maintain Indonesia as a multicultural and multifaith nation (Elson, 2009). Furthermore, the three decades of the New Order has set an ideological parameter that mainstreaming cultural, rather than, political Islam. During the three decades of the New Order, the mainstream Indonesian media also actively

promoted the Western-secular lifestyle. Hence, both cultural and political Islam was fundamentally positioned in the periphery throughout the New Order era.

This chapter will begin with the Habermasian idea and its connection to nationalism, secularism, and mediatisation. Subsequently, this chapter will also seek how the Islamic revival in the digital age challenges the prevailing nationalism and secularism in the pre-internet era of the public sphere. The subsequent sections will elaborate on the struggle of Islam in Indonesia and how the internet provides challenges and opportunities to mainstream Islam in the Indonesian public sphere. By providing conceptual and contextual aspects, this chapter aims to position *Pondok Pesantren* amidst the challenging circumstances of modernisation and the Islamic revival in the Indonesian public sphere.

MEDIA, SECULARISM AND THE FORMATION OF NATION-STATE

If we follow the Habermasian logic, it is evident that the public sphere should be secular. The secular status of the public sphere enables individuals to express their interests freely without any constraints from religious authority. In Habermas perspective, 'the assumption of a common human reason forms the basis of justification for a secular state that no longer depends on religious legitimation' (Habermas, 2006b, p. 4). Considering the potential conflict of interests between religious and secular citizens, Habermas argues that 'the institutional precondition for guaranteeing equal freedom of religion for all is that state remains neutral towards competing world views' (Habermas, 2006b, p. 9). However, the protection from the state comes with the condition that the religious citizens should accept secularism as the basis of societal rule:

In the liberal view, the state guarantees citizens freedom of religion only on the condition that religious communities, each from the perspective of its own doctrinal tradition, accept not only the separation of church and state, but also the restrictive definition of the public use of reason (Habermas, 2006b, p. 6).

In facing the struggle between the secular state and religious citizens, Habermas introduced a conception of theo-equilibrium to imagine how secularism and religiosity could be put in a balanced position (Billingham, 2017). In this conception, 'religiously-grounded moral beliefs that lack any secular rationale, so are not within theo-ethical equilibrium, should be doubted' (Billingham, 2017, p. 676). Bingham further emphasises that 'abiding by that duty is itself a way to conform one's political actions to one's religious beliefs' (Billingham, 2017, p. 679). In managing the balance between these two conflicting agendas, Habermas imagined that both religious and secular citizens could learn together and try to understand the similarities and differences between these conflicting ideologies:

. . . the liberal state faces the problem that religious and secular citizens can only acquire these attitudes through complementary learning processes, while it remains a moot point whether these are 'learning processes' at all, and ones which the state cannot influence by its own means of law and politics anyway (Habermas, 2006b, p. 4).

The maturity of citizens in Habermas imagination could resolve the potential conflict between secularism and religion. However, the emphasis on rationalism overlooks identity politics as an essential narrative in both religion and secularism. As the critics of Habermas argued, his version of public sphere lack of sensitivity of the various social class and neglects the existence of women in the public sphere. The Eurocentrism of the Habermasian approach also overlooks the necessity of religion in non-secular and non-European contexts (Gunaratne, 2006). In fact, in non-European contexts, religions have become an important element of the contemporary public sphere, particularly with the emerging trend of global religious revival.

Émile Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* could become a starting point to understand the primary function of religion in social life. Rather than seeing religion as an illogical matter, Durkheim contends that 'religious forces are therefore human forces, moral forces' (Durkheim, 2008, pp. 533-534). In contrast to Habermasian understanding, Durkheim's cultural approach positioned religion

in its complex position against the physical and material world. While Habermas perceived religion as a barrier to logical thought, Durkheim found the exquisite capabilities of the religious self to interpret and to integrate into social reality. Against the background of the secular society, Durkheim argued that individualism in the public sphere could lead to a misunderstanding of 'the fundamental conditions of religious life' (Durkheim, 2008, pp. 542-543). For Durkheim, understanding religious life requires openness towards the cultural issues beyond the philosophical foundation in the public sphere:

Thus there is something eternal in religion which is destined to survive all the particular symbols in which religious thought has successively enveloped itself. There can be no society which does not feel the need of upholding and reaffirming at regular intervals the collective sentiments and the collective ideas which make its unity and its personality (Durkheim, 2008, p. 545).

Durkheim's cultural approach is particularly helpful to understand the role of religion in the industrial era. With the increasing practice of production and consumption, the distinction between sacred and profane might be blurred as people increasingly involved their religious sentiment within the process of economic production. The history of capitalism provides an important understanding of the role of the Protestant ethic in diversifying the human condition. The invention of the printed machine was also helpful in the process of mass mediatization of the Bible within the Catholic Church. These examples have shown how religion is no longer seen merely as a source of the idea, but also as a source of action that creates products that pertain to modern capitalism.

At the same time, the logic of industrialized society has perennial consequences to the Habermasian model that put religious and secular citizens in harmony. As citizens are competing in the process of production and consumption, there is a tendency that both secular and religious citizens are willing to dominate both politics and the market. However, as secularism has become the main agenda in modern civilization, there is an increasing trend that religious agenda fails to

compete in the public sphere. The domination of politics and market by secular agenda, in turn, creates an inherent crisis and alienation among religious citizens.

It is increasingly prevalent that, in the mediated era, religious citizens could be easily driven by the power of secular media. The increasing commercial logic of media has enabled the media owner to propose the market interest above anything else. Driven by the logic of the market, media has departed from its mission to enlighten and to provide a space of engagement for the whole community (Hjarvard, 2013). At the same time, as a modern state also developed by the logic of secularism, media provides a new avenue in extending secularism to the whole population. Control over media content necessitates religious dogma to be positioned entirely in the peripheral position.

The centrality of religious issues in the public sphere is particularly relevant in the era of mediatisation. Hjarvard argues that mediatisation 'entails a dual process by which the media have developed into a semi-independent societal institution at the same time as they have integrated into the workings of other institutions and become an indispensable part of "doing family", "doing politics", "doing school", and so on' (Hjarvard, 2016, p. 9). Speaking about the central role of media, Couldry contends that media 'refers to institutions and infrastructures that make and distribute particular contents' and becoming 'those contents themselves' (Couldry, 2012, p. 2). Within the process of mediatisation, secular institutions have extended their capability in dominating the religious citizens. In Hjarvard's perspective, the mediatisation of religion 'may be considered part of a gradual process of secularization in late modern society: it is the historical process by which media have adopted many of the social forms that were previously performed by religious institutions' (Hjarvard, 2013). On the surface, it seems obvious that religious and secular agendas could sit together harmoniously. However, there is systematic domination by secular forces to uphold its mainstream agenda against the religious citizens.

The tendency has been more prevalent with the increasing trend of religious revival on the internet. As Hjarvard argues, 'the global spread of the internet may

not only foster globalization but also bring a greater degree of individualization and segmentation' (Hjarvard, 2013). For Hjarvard, 'the media enable a continuous dynamic of dis-embedding social interaction from local and traditional contexts and re-embedding social interaction into larger and more modern settings' (Hjarvard, 2016, p. 9). Yet, Hjarvad also contends that 'the presence of religion in various media reflects a much more multi-faceted development in which religion is evoked, contested, and subject to transformation' (p. 15). Here, social media has helped a systematic shift of religious interest from the control of the secular state to the commercial operation within the secular market. Mediatization of society has created a tendency where the market operation is more friendly to the religious citizens compared to the systematic operation of secularism in the political realms.

The friendliness of the market towards religious citizens deserves further investigation. By entering the realm of media, religious leaders could multiply their impact in the secular public sphere. Yet the increasing religious sentiment and the fast pace circulation of the religious message have created serious issues, ranging from disinformation (Alimardani & Elswah, 2020) to religious fundamentalism on the internet. The threat of religious sentiment of the internet could confirm Habermas's concern on the irrelevant position of religion in the contemporary public sphere. The concern is particularly challenging in understanding the conflicting position between the increasingly religious citizens and the systematic maintenance of the secular state by the government.

From the perspective of the market, it is also evident that the production and consumption of religious content have led to a massive practice of religious commodification. Amplified by social media, banal religion now has become a norm of religious practice. Asceticism, as the main foundation of religious life, is now systematically threatened by individual enjoyment in the religious market. By positioning the religious self against the dominant market, we also could see a systematic control of secularism, as represented by the market, in manipulating the interest of religious citizens. The case of Indonesia could provide an important example of the tension between the secular state, market, and religious citizens.

In contrast to other Muslim-majority countries, nationalism in Indonesia put secularism and religious pluralism as the mainstream ideology. However, at the grassroots level, religious interest has never been completely disappeared from the public sphere. State-sponsored secularism and nationalism have always been challenged by the religious interests of citizens, most evidently in the contemporary Indonesian public sphere.

NATIONALISM, SECULARISM, AND THE STRUGGLE OF ISLAM IN INDONESIA

In *Imagined Communities*, Anderson (2016) imagined that people are giving up their religious and local identities for the sake of a larger form of identity, namely nationalism (Xidias, 2017). Yet, the Indonesian case has shown how the religious force has survived in the public sphere. With the increasing visibility of Islam in contemporary Indonesia, there is no sign that Indonesian Muslim communities will put their religious preference below the spirit of nationalism. Rinaldo (2010) contends that the current trend of Islamic revival in the era of neoliberalism has created the concept of a 'new public piety' (p. 422). Within the failed structure of neoliberalism and ongoing democratisation, public piety has made religion into a public issue of morality, rather than a private domain of spirituality (Rinaldo, 2008b). We could be traced back to the ambiguous position of Islam through the postcolonial struggle of Indonesia as a modern nation.

Before the proclamation of Indonesia as an independent nation on 17 August 1945, some Muslim leaders proposed the idea that Indonesia should be an Islamic state, particularly considering the majority of the Indonesian population were Muslim (Taylor, 2003). The proposal was popular as the Jakarta Charter, where the first of five principles contained the enforcement for Muslim people to adhere to Islamic law (Elson, 2009). The five principles included the doctrine of 'monotheism, humanitarianism, national unity, representative democracy by consensus, and social justice' (Rinaldo, 2011, p. 543). The five principles emphasised the fact that 'Indonesia has neither a secular nor an Islamic state' but with a philosophical

foundation that respected a 'belief in a singular God, as well as ideas of social justice and harmony' (Rinaldo, 2008b, p. 26).

Sukarno made this decision to accommodate the tension between nationalist and Islamist activists. Nevertheless, it still created a huge disappointment among Muslim leaders in Indonesia that perceived it as a setback from a more central position during the short period of Japanese colonial rule.¹³ To ease the tension, the nationalist government established the Ministry of Religious Affairs that was also responsible for managing religious education in the newly established republic (Isbah, 2012).¹⁴ The escalation between Sukarno and Muslim leaders reached a new level after he decided to allow the establishment of the Indonesian Communist Party (Zurbuchen, 2002). In the 1960s, Indonesian politics was heavily affected by the three blocs, namely 'the nationalists, the communists, and political Islam' (Beatty, 2009). Later, as we have discussed in the previous chapter, this decision opened an opportunity for General Suharto to overthrow him and gain a new position as the Indonesian president from 1965 to 1998.

Throughout the New Order era, the application of the five principles has never been easy, particularly in the tension with the majority Muslim population. While the state-sponsored system rejected the domination of Muslim majority in the public sphere, the inherent feeling as a majority and the removal of Jakarta Charter has always been the main reason of Muslim leaders to regain the control in the public sphere. Following this scenario, religious activism also mushroomed in

¹³ Prior to the independence, the Japanese colonial government established the Office of Religious Affairs (Shimubu) that aimed to cater the interest of Muslim leaders. With the establishment of the official body, 'Muslim leaders received a heightened sense of their own importance under the Japanese, although that never translated into a sense that Muslim figures would be permitted a significant political role' (Elson, 2009).

¹⁴ On 1 June 1945, Sukarno delivered speech about *Pancasila* 'which unambiguously based Indonesia on nationalism rather than Islam' (Elson, 2009). However, in the official meeting of drafting Indonesian constitution on 22 June 1945, Kahar Muzakir and Wahid Hasyim insisted to add the statement 'with the obligation for its adherents to carry out Islamic law' in the preamble. It took many meetings and deadlocks between June and August 1945. On the morning of 18 August 1945, Hatta held a meeting with Muslim leaders and emphasised 'of the urgent need, for the sake of national unity, to accede to the demand to remove the seven words and, as well, to tone down other parts of the draft that appeared to privilege Islam' (Elson, 2009).

Indonesia, akin to Islamic movements in the Middle East, but with different results and historical trajectories.

Internally, Muslims in Indonesia has also been divided into various categories; modernist and traditionalist (Rinaldo, 2011), urban and rural, literal and liberal Muslim. While modernist, urban, and literal Muslims continuously attempt to maintain the spirit of religious purification in modern institutions, the rest categories of Indonesian Muslims are often associated with the syncretic religious practices with local customs and traditions (Hoesterey, 2016; Rinaldo, 2011). In terms of academic background, many contemporary Muslims studied either at Islamic universities in the Middle East or secular universities in Indonesia or Western countries, predominantly in science and engineering subjects. Interestingly, while studying at secular universities, they maintained the spirit of Islamic revival through Islamic study groups (Brenner, 1996; Rinaldo, 2008a, 2008b, 2011). This new generation of Muslim modernists represented a new trend of Islamic political actors who 'have access to modern education, to urban life, and politics and public visibility but refuse assimilation to the values of secularism and modernist elites' (Göle, 1997, p. 70).

In contrast, the spirit of Islam in the traditionalist group aimed 'to reconcile Islam with human rights, democracy, and pluralism' (Rinaldo, 2011, p. 545). Some prominent traditionalist Muslims studied Islamic studies in Western universities and were inspired by some Muslim reformist and liberal intellectuals such as Abdulkarim Soroush, Fazlur Rahman, and Mohammed Arkoun (Ali, 2005; Van Doorn-Harder, 2006). The training within the Western tradition of social science and humanities has produced the Indonesian Islamic intelligentsia with a liberal outlook, such as Nurcholish Madjid, Abdurrahman Wahid, and Ulil-Abshar Abdalla. Interestingly, a new generation of traditionalist Muslims also studied at Islamic universities in the Middle East. However, their religious approach tends to be more moderate compared to modernist Muslims who have studied at similar Islamic universities (Saat, 2017). In relation to my research, it is important to note that the Islamic scholars from *Pondok Pesantren* background have dominated the stream of traditionalist Muslim intellectuals in Indonesia.

However, the intellectual pursuit of the traditionalist Muslim in the past was developed in an era where internet connection was still limited. Before the 2000s, *Pondok Pesantren* was hardly challenged by information technology and could focus entirely on religious education. The shift of education from religious and secular context, from local to national to the global scene, happened entirely through offline interaction. Without significant disruption from the internet, *Pondok Pesantren* could strengthen the Islamic foundation of students before they embarked on further studies in either Islamic or secular universities in Indonesia and abroad. However, with the emergence of the internet, students could easily interact with the global and secular outlook while hardly finish their education in *Pondok Pesantren*. Hence, as will be shown in the empirical chapters, there is a radical shift from the openness to the global outlook to the more exclusive aspiration to preserve the religious tradition in *Pondok Pesantren*.

Following this argument, some scholars (Brenner, 1996; Jones & Mas, 2011; Rinaldo, 2008b, 2011) have documented the 'departure' from a traditionalist to a modernist approach from the case of the early trend of *hijab* in Java. Before the Islamic revival, the Islamic practice in Java was popular for its syncretic practices with Javanese tradition (Brenner, 1996; Ricklefs, 2008b). But the trend of Islamic revival and religious purification rejected that syncretic practices towards a more pure form of Islam (Rinaldo, 2008b, 2011). For Brenner (1996), the religious purification in Java is a point of departure from a localised Islamic practice and Western secular lifestyle to a more comprehensive religious identity of the global *umma*. Jones and Mas (2011) have argued that the Islamic conception of *umma* is appealing due to its ability to transcend national borders and overcome the colonial history that marginalised religion and its followers. In another article, Jones (2007) noted that the concept of *umma* provides 'an alternative, global imagined community, one in which individual faith could transform national life' (p. 217). The conception of *umma* blurred a distinction between the different layers of society, from global to national to the individual level.

At the same time, the relationship between the personal and the universal bounds the individuals within the global *umma*. In contrast to the Habermasian public

sphere that conceives individuality, the conception of *umma* relies heavily upon communality. The conception of *umma* blurred the distinction between the personal and the universal, between local, national global contexts of society. Personal piety in the conception of *umma* conceives 'the public face of Islam, or its socio-political engagement with the world' (Anderson, 2003, p. 895). Individual piety is a foundation for the universal development of *umma* and, vice versa, the strength of *umma* is closely related to the individual commitment to upholding the values of piety in everyday life. As Rakhmani (2019) explores through the veiling trend of middle-class Indonesian women, the conception of *umma* necessitates that the personal has always been political.

The intersection between the personal and political aspects of piety is particularly relevant in the era of the mediated public sphere, where the religious media figures 'detached from traditional modes of production' and 'become messages in a world of messages' (Anderson, 2003, p. 888). For Anderson, the emergence of Islamic preachers in various media platforms 'blurs boundaries between public and private discourse and fosters new habits of production and consumption tied to media and particularly to new media' (Anderson, 2003, p. 887). The internet is particularly an important point as it provides 'an intermediate sphere between more private worlds and those of public rituals' (Anderson, 2003, p. 901). In this regard, Rinaldo (2011) has shown how the minimum control of Islamic materials during the Suharto era and the liberalisation of the media sector in the post-Suharto era has helped the mushrooming of Islamic materials and media in the Indonesian public sphere.

The cultural approach of Suharto has enabled the new generation of Muslims to enter the mainstream public sphere. While the political contestation is extremely complicated, the cultural approach opened more opportunities for the modernists and revivalists to introduce the new spirit of Islam through various cultural products. Coincidentally, the liberalisation of the media sector in the post-Suharto era came hand in hand with the rapid growth of information technology (Heryanto, 2014a; Sen & Hill, 2007). These trends overlapped with the increasing public piety among the Indonesian Muslim middle-class with their purchasing

power and digital literacy (Heryanto, 2011; Rinaldo, 2011). In post-Suharto Indonesia, cultural and commercial fields have become the main arena for the revivalists to thrive in the public sphere.

To understand the emerging trend of Islam in Indonesia, Göle's (2002) identification of the two phases of Islamization is relevant. The first phase began with the Iranian Islamic revolution in the 1980s to 1990s with the 'mass mobilizations, Islamic militancy, a quest for an Islamic collective identity, and the implementation of a political and religious rule' as its core characteristics (Göle, 2002, p. 174). The second phase was the process of normalisation of Islamic identity in the public sphere (Göle, 1997). During this process, 'actors of Islam blend into modern urban spaces, use global communication networks, engage in public debates, follow consumption patterns, learn market rules, enter into secular time, get acquainted with values of individuation, professionalism, and consumerism, and reflect upon their new practices' (Göle, 2002, p. 174). Göle (2002) reflected these processes as a transformation of Islamic movements 'from a radical political stance to a more social and cultural orientation' (p. 174). These streams of Islamization are relevant to understand the shift of the Islamic movement in Indonesia, from political resistance to religious commodification.

Islamic revival in Indonesia was influenced by 'the Iranian revolution in 1979, the influx of Islamic literature from the Middle East, and the new veiling of women at universities in urban centres' (van Wichelen, 2007, p. 95). For Heryanto (2014b), Indonesia in the 2000s and Iran in the 1990s have similarities and differences. Similar to Iran, Indonesia also 'experienced the disorienting effects of a major ideological shift from extended immersion in heavy Americanization, which included daily exposure to American lifestyles and popular culture, to demands for adherence to religious puritanism' (Heryanto, 2014a, p. 33). However, in contrast to Iran, Indonesia has never been ruled by a totalitarian Islamic government. The cultural turn tends to be more successful in positioning Islam in the public sphere (Beta, 2014, 2019; Rakhmani, 2019). Following the boom of the Indonesian economy in the 1980s and 1990s, a new generation of Muslim middle-class translated the spirit of Islamic revival through their purchasing power and financial

capabilities and transformed the way of consuming Islam through modernised platforms.

Rather than being seen as 'backward' or 'extremist', Islam was now represented by key figures that symbolized technological progress, modernity and cosmopolitanism. This new attitude resulted in the flourishing of a Muslim cultural politics which at that time, namely in the 1990s, only extended to the upper middle classes of urban centres in Indonesia. This was most visible in the Islamization of popular music or lifestyle cultures where Islam was increasingly associated with modern beauty and wealth (van Wichelen, 2007, pp. 95-96).

In her article, Jones (2010) mentions 'the Islamic lifestyle (*gaya hidup Islami*)' and 'the Islamic market segment (*segmen pasar Islami*)' that covered almost all varieties of consumer goods and services 'from high to low consumer culture' (Jones, 2010, p. 617). Interestingly, in the early trend of the *hijab* in Indonesia, Muslim women had to fight against the authority of the government that banned the *hijab* in public places and institutions as well as the authority of their parents who deemed *hijab* as a sign of Islamic extremism (Brenner, 1996). Eleven years later, Jones (2007) found that the *hijab* has become a normal appearance in the Indonesian public sphere, and become a sign of a rise in Islamic piety and a rise in consumerism' (p. 211). She emphasised that the Islamic life in Indonesia has shifted 'from explicitly *anti-fashion* frugal and moral critiques of an older generation to more commodified and explicitly *fashionable* expressions' (Jones, 2007, p. 213). The departure from frugality to the fashionable expression could become a sign of centrality of Islam in the market rather than in the political realm.

The contemporary trend has increased the function of the *hijab* as a fashion icon. An analysis of the *Hijabers* Community in Jakarta by Beta (2014) has shown that the fashionable expression has transformed into a network structure of Muslim women with a similar interest in Islamic fashion. The community held various events, including religious studies, beauty classes, charitable events, fashion shows, and book launching (Beta, 2014, p. 380). At the same time, their presence

in blogs and social media platforms is proof of how the Islamic values are being translated into the spirit and medium of modernity, creating a new image of 'beautiful yet pious Muslims' (Beta, 2014, p. 386). The emergence of Islamic fashion in the Indonesian public sphere has been enabled, particularly through the emergence of the internet and digital technology.

INTERNET AND THE ISLAMIC REVIVAL IN INDONESIA

While political Islam has consistently failed to gain its momentum in the public sphere, the current Islamic revival in Indonesia tends to blur the distinction between culture and politics. For Heryanto, 'the necessity of viewing the debate as part of dialectics between how religious piety has found manifestations in the specific history of Indonesia's industrial capitalism, and how capitalist logic responds to the growing market for Islamic revitalization and lifestyle' (Heryanto, 2014b, p. 25). By utilising the term of post-Islamism, Heryanto initializes the mixed strategies in the process of 'Islamization of modernity' and 'modernization of Islam' (Heryanto, 2011, 2014b). Speaking about middle-class Muslims in Indonesia, Nilan contends that 'the ideal of middle-class Muslim life represents an important element in claims for a moderate Islam and is an important counter-narrative to Islamist ideas of stark asceticism and personal self-sacrifice' (Nilan, 2017, p. 95). In a similar tone, though the issue of polygamy and women's bodies, van Wichelen deliberately explains the attempt of mainstreaming polygamy as follows:

The consumerist discourse of the veiled female body and the masculinist discourse of the polygamous male body seems to be a continuation of populist politicking where the stereotype of modernity (consumption) is packaged in the stereotype of anti-modernity wrap (veil and polygamy). These representations normalize the act of veiling and polygamy by linking their respective practice to modern consumer culture . . . the personal choice to the veil for the woman, or the choice to practice polygamy for the man, does not have to collide with modernity or with the legacy of New

Order Indonesia that is depoliticized, consumerist and developmentalist (van Wichelen, 2007, p. 105).

Here van Wichelen rejects the distinction between politics and market in the current Islamic revival in Indonesia. In her opinion, the fundamental question about Islam in Indonesia should focus on the interconnection between politics and the market; to understand that the marketization of Islam is a consequence of the incapability of public engagement of the political Islam. The constant stigma of radicalism and fundamentalism, and the systematic positioning of Islam as a cultural, rather than political, force necessitate a different set of strategies. Speaking about democratisation in the post-Suharto Indonesia, van Wichelen contends that:

Rather than suggesting a transition to democracy, the normalization of the veil and polygamy in a consumerist discourse actually re-affirms New Order power structures through a perpetuation of its modernist and consumerist ideology. By incorporating unproblematic 'Muslimness' into the political realm, it adheres to the principle of 'sameness' as a unifying principle for the imagination of the nation (van Wichelen, 2007, p. 105).

The above statement conveys that it is difficult to confirm the Habermasian thesis of religion as a source of conflict if we only see Indonesian Islam through the perspective of urban and middle-class Muslims. The middle-class has a certain capacity and privilege to embark on a peaceful transition and assimilation in the ongoing democratisation and digitalisation in Indonesia. In a Habermasian sense, their capacity in masking and transforming the new face of Islam has challenged 'the strict separations between private religion and public secularism' (van Wichelen, 2007, p. 106). Hence, the public sphere model that separates religion and secularism is not sufficient to understand the contemporary Indonesian public sphere.

Considering the tension between the private and the public, it is not surprising that in contemporary society 'religion is very much active, and is itself a living and vibrant part of modernity' (Morley, 2007, p. 159). Speaking about mediated

religious life as a research agenda, Morley insists that media scholars should avoid 'the deeply misleading binary division' that 'the rational, secular, fast-changing, technological world of "modernity" is opposed to the ritualistic, static, irrational world of "traditional society"' (2007, p. 293). Across religious communities, there is a growing number of digital platforms that allow people to keep their religious commitments, such as the reminder application of five prayer times in mobile phones for Muslim communities (Morley, 2007). The invention of religious applications for mobile phones is proof of the adaptation of modernity and technology into the inherent discipline of religious life:

Discipline depends upon the calculative division of time as well as space. The monastery, after all, was one of the first places in which the day was temporally regulated in a precise and ordered fashion. The religious orders were the masters of the methodical control of time, and their influence, diffuse or more direct, was felt everywhere (Giddens, 2007, p. 147).

Similarly, Brenner (2011) emphasised how private moralities have become a public issue in the context of Indonesia, while Hoesterey (2016) called this trend a matter of 'personal piety and national morality' (p. 134). Hoesterey emphasised the role of Aa Gym, a popular Islamic preacher in Indonesia, in promoting his morality issue to the national level. On 18 August 2004, Aa Gym led a mass protest and stressed the then Indonesian president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, on the danger of pornography (Hoesterey, 2015, 2016). In response, Yudhoyono agreed with Aa Gym in considering pornography as 'very dangerous, a big threat to our nation, for future generations' (Hoesterey, 2016, p. 139). In this case, Aa Gym 'invoked the psycho-political language of moral crisis and shamelessness to endow the state with a political effect of shame' (Hoesterey, 2015, p. 150). For Rinaldo, the contemporary *dakwah* movement in Indonesia provides an interesting example of the debates about the definition of private and public spheres (Rinaldo, 2010, p. 423). It challenges the original concept of the Habermasian public sphere that separates ideas and identity, as well as secularism and religiosity.

In terms of youth identity, Heryanto also emphasised the challenge of young people and popular culture in Indonesia that 'they have to reconcile what may appear to be a dissonant juxtaposition of opposites: religious piety with a strict commitment to self-discipline and adherence to decorum on the one hand, and a global celebration of consumerist and worldly pleasure on the other' (Heryanto, 2014b, p. 172). In a similar tone, Rakhmani (2019) also found how the increasing halal consumerism in Indonesia 'panders to existing social insecurities among middle-class Muslims' (p. 294). It is also important to note that some Islamic-based media, particularly printed media, has declined in the post-Suharto era. The majority of them are either unable to adapt to the era of convergence or bought by secular conglomerates and lost their religious agenda (Tapsell, 2017). Considering this condition, it is more understandable that the utilisation of popular culture for the sake of religious agenda is also a political strategy in the middle of the inability of Islamic mass media to adapt to the convergence era.

Furthermore, Hoesterey (2012) considered the emerging Muslim market in Indonesia as a strategy of 'Muslim cosmopolitanism'. In this regard, Urry (1995), Beck (2000) and Tomlinson (1999) conceptualised several preconditions for cosmopolitanism, including mobility, consumption capacity, curiosity, willingness to take a risk, capability in cultural mapping, semiotic skill, and openness to the differences. Within such imagination, 'cosmopolitanism is premised on the awareness that the enunciation of the self hinges indispensably on the presence of other' (Choi, 2002, p. 449). For the Indonesian Muslim middle-class, cosmopolitanism could be achieved through extensive travelling, education, and media exposure. Nevertheless, the attachment to the conception of *umma* has created a different style of cosmopolitanism. In the era of modernization and globalization, this strategy is required to 'bypass questions of identity' (Hoesterey, 2012, p. 42). There is an open space for the Muslim middle-class to explore and combine different types of identities within a single individual Muslim.

Hoesterey's study of the Islamic psychological training and self-help businesses in Indonesia has reflected the spirit of cosmopolitanism through the utilisation of big names in the Western scientific world, such as Harvard and California universities,

and combining it with the prophetic and entrepreneurial experience of Muhammad (Hoesterey, 2012, pp. 53-54). He also found the strategy of Aa Gym, a popular Islamic preacher in Indonesia, who utilised extensively the experience of Muhammad, not only as a prophet but also as a successful trader and entrepreneur (Hoesterey, 2012). In a similar tone, Beta's (2018) doctoral thesis examined how the spirit of cosmopolitanism was reflected in the emergence of women Muslim entrepreneurs. The core actors have had not only a strong religious commitment but also possesses material power to enhance their entrepreneurial profile (Beta, 2018). The strategies of Muslim cosmopolitanism are also reflected in the realm of 'sociable piety' to describe the internal relationship between different members of Muslim organizations as well as the external relationship between Muslim and non-Muslim communities in Salatiga, West Java (Chao, 2014). Despite its contextual differences, both strategies reflected the importance of Indonesia in analysing the trend of religious commodification in the Islamic communities.

Jones (2010) has emphasised that religious commodification in Indonesia had a primary position in the analysis of Islamic capitalism due to its huge market as a country with the biggest Muslim population in the world. The Indonesian Islamic market has shown that 'consumerism is not always contrary to religious pursuits' (Hoesterey & Clark, 2012, p. 211). There is an increasing demand 'for more and more goods and services to come under the classification of acceptable and proscribed (between *halal* and *haram*' (Turner, 2008, pp. 3-4). In Indonesia, the halal certificate has become the prerequisite for the middle-class to consume a wide range of products, from food to fashion to the halal refrigerator.¹⁵ The availability of Islamic goods and services has become the solution to blend 'two otherwise morally distinct spheres, appearance and substance, vanity and virtue' (Jones, 2010, p. 632). Nisa (2018b), for instance, found how WhatsApp could become a new platform for young Indonesians to achieve their religious target

¹⁵ Halal refrigerator has become the important case in understanding the emerging trend of middle-class Muslim. Traditionally, halal certificate was only required for food beverages. Nowadays, consumer also aims to get religious clarity in non-consumable products, such as refrigerator.

amidst the busy schedule of studying at universities and working through corporate jobs. The online platform became a medium for the group of Indonesians to finish one chapter of the Qur'an each day. On Instagram, the verbal and visual language of the platform has enabled the core actors of Islamic proselytization to spread religious messages to the contemporary audience (Nisa, 2018a).

In the field of Indonesian cinema, Hoesterey and Clark (2012) demonstrated the emergence of a new image of 'Muslim masculinity' as another practice of Muslim cosmopolitanism. In popular movies, Muslim men were depicted as a figure that responsibility to protect Muslim women and preserve their religious values amidst the stream of globalization and Westernization. They analysed the character of 'good guy' in two popular Islamic movies in Indonesia, namely *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*/the Verses of Love (Bramantyo, 2008) and *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban*/Woman Wearing a Turban (Bramantyo, 2009). The two box office movies showed an ideal characteristic of modern Muslim men who 'reconciles masculinity with compassion, piety with prosperity, and knowledge with wisdom' (Hoesterey & Clark, 2012, p. 221). However, Heryanto (2014a) found that the two movies had a different approach to the image of Muslim women. While *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* portrayed a pious and passive woman who accepted the polygamous marriage, the main character of the woman in *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* rejected the practice of polygamy and utilised the anti-polygamy issue as the main plot of the movie (Heryanto, 2014a).

The ideal imagery of Muslim men reflects the masculine value of imperial British men that 'were expected to be strong, authoritative, decisive, disciplined and resourceful' (Beynon, 2002, p. 30). In a more religious sense, the British imperial masculinity also 'attained a Christ-like stature in terms of "moral manhood", patriotism and bravery-unto-death (Beynon, 2002, p. 31). These two narratives of masculinity might come from different times and places. Yet both imperial British and contemporary Indonesian Muslim masculinities appeared as the sign of insecurity of the decline of an internal civilization and the threat from the external enemy. The genre of Islamic movies in Indonesia 'is especially remarkable in its

capacity to articulate forms of aspirational piety that resonate with the anxieties, desires and frustrations of middle-class Muslims in Indonesia' (Hoesterey & Clark, 2012, p. 208). These desires and frustrations have become a huge business opportunity in the emerging Muslim market in Indonesia.

However, the notion of Muslim masculinity deserves close attention to the unequal position of men and women in the market of piety. While for Muslim women, the emerging market provides an abundant opportunity for production and consumption, Muslim men have been burdened by the fact that they could become the ideal breadwinner in the increasingly modern and Islamic world. Despite the participation of Muslim women as an entrepreneur, with the increasing conservatism among the middle-class, Muslim men are still regarded as the main leader of the family. In this process, the entrepreneurial venture of Muslim women is still regarded as complementary to the economy of the family. For Muslim women to become an entrepreneur, they need permission from their husband (Beta, 2018). For the Muslim men, to seek a balance between modernity and religiosity possesses a considerable challenge in fulfilling the double expectations from the sacred and the profane.

It is also important to note that the feminist approach in various research about Muslim engagement in the market tends to be dominated by the issue of middle-class Muslim women. Research on the religious market (Beta, 2014, 2019; Nisa, 2018a, 2018b) tends to focus entirely on the position and consumption of Muslim women in the public sphere. Their purchasing power and educational background enabled them to be actively involved in the public sphere. There is also an inherent gender bias in analysing the issue of the market of piety in the Indonesian public sphere. In politics, the more 'masculine' issues such as religious activism and the narrative of strong Muslim women have been dominant. In contrast, the market of piety necessitates more 'feminine' approaches in cultural products and the feminine tone of the public sphere. The female domination in the religious market should raise criticism against the feminist approach in understanding the market of piety in Indonesia.

Beyond that category, it is critically important to understand how people with less technological affordance and purchasing power, both men and women, participate in the public sphere. This thesis aims to fill that kind of research gap. Through this thesis, I argue that the feminist tradition in religious studies should not focus entirely on middle-class Muslim women. In the Indonesian case, Muslim women had the privilege to gain access to education and technology that enable them to be socially and financially mobile in the public sphere. Instead, the affordance and religious interpretation of people in a vulnerable position, men and women, is also important to take into consideration. As research on women issues tends to portray the Islamic public sphere as a gender-friendly space, we also need to analyse to what extent that it is also friendly to the larger scale of the vulnerable population beyond middle-class Muslim women. This thesis is an attempt to understand the struggle of the pious individual, without the privilege of the middle-class, in navigating the increasingly digitalised public sphere.

CONCLUSION

This chapter suggests that the middle-class has extensive privilege in masking their religious interest in line with the current democratisation and digitalisation in the Indonesian public sphere. By utilising their privilege extensively, they could assimilate smoothly and masking their political interest under the disguise of religious commodification. Their access to digital platforms, high quality of education, and extensive career opportunities have enabled a systematic development of sociable piety. However, the focus on the middle-class often ignored the struggle of men and women outside the middle-class category. People in the rural area and within the less-affluent communities might have no access to the prerequisites to become a modern Muslim as has been imagined in the realm of Indonesian social media.

In the last part of this chapter, there is a strong sense that being a feminist scholar necessitates the focus on Muslim women. However, through this thesis, I contend that to become a real feminist is to extend the analysis beyond a privileged

population. This thesis focuses on the struggle of the less-affluent community amidst the increasing visibility of Islam in the Indonesian public sphere. In line with digitalisation, the less-connected environment in the rural setting tends to separate the offline religious life from the online platform of entertainment. The sharp distinction between sacred and mundane life is a contrasting arena with the blurred distinction between online and offline, religious and secular, in the Indonesian public sphere. The less-connected environment also has a considerable impact on the current realm of democratisation. With less exposure to the political issues on the internet, the Muslim population in a rural area tend to follow the political preference of their religious leader. While middle-class Muslims are increasingly individualised, Muslim in the rural area relies heavily on the communalism and the imagined *umma*.

Another significant impact of politics and the market has been fallen into the realm of popular culture. Originally, popular culture is a scene where an individual could express freely without restraint from politics and the market. However, as this chapter suggests, in the Indonesian public sphere, the market and politics have become important determinants in forging personal identity. With such important determinants, it is impossible to detach individual expression and popular culture from the impacts of the market and politics. While this chapter speaks exclusively about religious citizens from a middle-class background, the impact of politics and the market is quite prevalent to the secular citizens from less-affluent communities. In the next chapter, we will discuss in more detail how the dominant aspects of politics and market also affect the popular culture, that normally independent of these two powerful forces.

CHAPTER 5

THE POPULAR IN THE INDONESIAN PUBLIC SPHERE

INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapters, we have seen the conflicting issues between state-sponsored secularism and the counter-narrative of religious movement in the Indonesian public sphere. For the general population, the ongoing tension between secularism and religiosity necessitates creative forms of public participation. As Hermes (2006b) has argued, public participation requires individuals to have a space that provides extensive opportunities for the popular to form the cultural identity. During the three decades of the New Order in Indonesia, the systematic coordination between military, political and economic actors have made possible a centralistic nationalist discourse. The domination of oligarchs and conglomerates in the capital city of Jakarta (Tapsell, 2015a, 2015b, 2017) has forced the general population to establish a creative practice in articulating their political participation. However, after the fall of Suharto in 1998, the dynamics of the general population is too complicated to control through a centralised discourse in the public sphere. Therefore, popular culture has become a critical theme in understanding the Indonesian public sphere.

At the same time, the evolution and expansion of information technology have challenged the management of popular culture in post-Suharto Indonesia. With a less controlled and more convergent media environment, the post-Suharto era provides a new arena for a more central role of popular culture, both for political and entertainment purposes (Heryanto, 2008, 2011, 2014a). At the state level, there is also a dramatic shift of cultural policy, from protectionism and the maintenance of national identity to more respect towards internal diversity and the commercialisation of local culture in the global market. Hence, there is a constant repositioning of perceiving popular culture, from a threat to national identity to a lucrative commodity in the cultural industry.

In the context of Indonesia, the development of the internet has enabled young people to participate in politics and markets more actively. Currently, Indonesian popular culture has been increasingly commercialised and politicised at the same time. With the double function of popular culture, its commercialisation should raise scrutiny regarding the capability of the popular culture in creating an alternative narrative to the dominant discourse. While Indonesia has always been a battleground between secular-nationalist and religious-Islamist, the citizens' understanding of these dominant issues have never been uniform. In the context of Indonesia, secular citizens have always been critical against the increasing religious commodification, and religious citizens have always been vocal against the pitfalls of secular modernity. The dynamics between these two conflicting agendas have become an important background in understanding popular culture in the Indonesian public sphere.

POPULAR CULTURE, THE INTERNET, AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE

There is an inherent misunderstanding of the role of popular culture in shaping public discourse, leading to a minimum level of studies of popular culture in the public sphere (Heryanto, 2008). Popular culture has been central in strengthening cultural citizenship (Hermes, 2006b) and representing the interest of the general population in the formation of social solidarity (Garnham, 1999; Habermas, 1999; Moen, 2018; Warner, 1999; Wetters, 2008) (Calhoun, 2002). Hermes (2006a) emphasises that studying cultural citizenship is a combination of 'understanding public opinion and the building of shared identities among audiences' (p. 303). For Couldry (2004), the study of cultural citizenship is a research agenda that went 'beyond any arbitrary division between consumption and citizenship, the economy and politics, precisely to allow into view new practices which search for public connection across that divide' (p. 29). Within cultural citizenship, the idea is no longer sufficient due to the central position of identity formation in the public sphere.

At the same time, the everyday consumption of the popular also possesses an important narrative in discussing power, politics, and ideas. By emphasising the cultural aspect of the public sphere, Hermes contends that 'we should neither overestimate the public sphere of political science nor underestimate the realm of popular entertainment' (Hermes, 2006a, p. 302). Popular culture aims to mainstream the narrative that 'politics is not something belonging to the (informed) elite, that you need to qualify for – but is about who we are, and what we, all of us, want to make of the world we live in' (Hermes, 2006b, p. 40). Rather than aiming to reach consensus, popular culture has enabled an articulation of both top-down and bottom-up power mechanisms. Fiske contends that 'a text that is to be made into popular culture must, then, contain both the forces of domination and the opportunities to speak against them, the opportunities to oppose or evade them from subordinated, but not disempowered, positions' (Fiske, 2010, p. 21). The basic principle of popular culture is that 'the dominant cannot control the meanings that the people may construct, the social allegiances they may form' (Fiske, 2010, p. 37). In understanding Fiske's approach to popular culture, Glynn et al. contend that:

First, history, whether considered at the level of the individual or that of social structures, should be understood as neither inert nor bearing deterministically on the present; rather, it *presents* resources and opportunities to forms of creative agency capable of drawing upon them in distinctive and unpredictable ways (Glynn et al., 2010, p. 40).

With its dialogical capacity, 'popular culture is not consumption, it is culture – the active process of generating and circulating meanings and pleasures within a social system: culture, however industrialised, can never be adequately described in terms of buying and selling of commodities' (Fiske, 2010, p. 19). Here, individual consumption in everyday life is positioned as a central foundation, rather than the second element of the public sphere. Fiske emphasises that 'every act of consumption is an act of cultural production, for consumption is always the production of meaning' (Fiske, 2010, p. 28). Fiske further describes popular culture as 'the culture of the subordinate who resent their subordination, who refuse to

consent to their positions or to contribute to a consensus that maintains it' (Fiske, 2010, p. 197). Hence, understanding popular culture necessitates a repositioning of the individual as a central actor of commercial consumption and cultural production.

Furthermore, the shifting political capacity has challenged the dominant narrative that has been inherent in the process of identity formation. In the classical public sphere, Finlayson (1998) contends that 'the process of internalisation of authority in the formation of the ego' results in 'the standardisation of individuals' (p. 151). However, popular culture has provided a space and opportunity for ordinary people to share their ideas and discourses not only in the public sphere but also from a private space at home (Dean, 2003; Habermas, 1999). Speaking about the centrality of popular culture, Hermes (2006) concluded that 'if popular culture has the power to make people bond and feel they belong, we are, in effect, considering popular culture as a public sphere, in which democracy is at work' (p. 37). In this regard, Fiske maintains his opinion that, despite the industrial development and mass production, popular culture still provides an extensive opportunity for individuals to uphold their agency:

Popular culture is made by the people, not produced by the culture industry. All the culture industries can do is produce a repertoire of texts or cultural resources for the various formations of the people to use or reject in the ongoing process of producing their popular culture (Fiske, 2010, p. 19).

In the dominant industrial perspective, the elite holds a large proportion of shareholders of cultural production. However, in the process of cultural consumption, there is no guarantee that the dominant narrative will prevail, as an individual also constantly reproduces a dynamic cultural value through their everyday consumption. Everyday life has produced 'a culture that meshed art and recreation, engagement and entertainment, seriousness and laughter, etc. in a collage that went contrary to any kind of past culture' (Danesi, 2019, p. 5). The constant reproduction of norms and values could lead to a dramatic condition that

is inherently different from the idealised narrative from the elite. By focusing on the reproduction of culture in everyday life, 'high and low distinctions are irrelevant and that there is flow back and forth between these levels' (Danesi, 2019, p. 14). In this regard, Fiske contends that:

The culture of everyday life is best described through metaphors of struggle or antagonism: strategies opposed by tactics, the bourgeoisie by the proletariat; hegemony by resistance, ideology countered or evaded; top-down power opposed by bottom-up power, social discipline faced with disorder. These antagonisms, these clashes of social interests . . . are motivated primarily by pleasure: the pleasure of producing one's own meanings of social experience and the pleasure of avoiding the social discipline of the power-bloc (Fiske, 2010, p. 39).

Here Fiske emphasises the importance of everyday life as a matter of creativity, rather than merely a way to reject the dominant narrative in the public sphere. For Fiske, citizens face different reality in their daily life that does not necessarily reflect a dominant narrative. Taste in popular culture could become a determinant between the oppressor and the oppressed, between the privileged community with their discourse and the general population that is constantly struggling to defend their existence. Bourdieu's *Distinction* (2010) is important in understanding how classifying the social class based on their taste is an unfair treatment of social inequality. While the bourgeois actively determines ideas as a source of power, the same emphasis does not apply to the less-affluent communities. Hence, for Fiske, the emphasis on popular culture is critical in sharing a similar degree of attention to people from a different social class.

While the distinction between social class is prevalent, the resistance against dominant discourse is not always clearly visible. Popular culture has always been interested in 'the relationships between macro-and micro-politics, and between radical and progressive thought and action' (Fiske, 2010, p. 189). Given the versatility of popular culture, 'the politics of popular culture has often been misunderstood and its progressiveness unrecognised by theories that fail to take

account of the differences and the relationships between the radical and the progressive, and between the micropolitics of everyday life and the micropolitics of organised action' (Fiske, 2010, p. 191). In reality, 'it is inadequate to conceptualise subordinate groups simply in terms of their victimisation at the structural level and to downplay their power in coping with their subordination at the level of everyday practices' (Fiske, 2010). Instead, it is important to understand 'the relationships among the interior, the micropolitical, and the macropolitical' (Fiske, 2010, pp. 136-137) within the structure of the popular culture.

Fiske's interest in micro-politics and progressive, not macro-politics and radical, necessitates testing the hidden political objective through popular culture. The general population is perceived as capable of generating their cultural element that should not be overlooked by the elitist and dominant perspective. This perceived understanding of the popular is increasingly evident within the realm of the internet. The current development of global internet infrastructure necessitates 'a new mode of criticism' to analyse 'the current global village, where ideas flow bi-directionally, in parallel, and through multi-mediated interactive texts' (Danesi, 2019, p. 17). With the constant reproduction of popular culture on the internet, 'innovation did not mean revolution, it meant creative continuity' (Danesi, 2019, p. 26). It is through creative continuity that popular culture has been increasingly central in the era of the internet.

In relation to the internet, the digitalisation of popular culture has enlarged a top-down mechanism of power articulation and the bottom-up capacity of citizens at the same time. Here, the market mechanism of popular culture provides both challenges and opportunities for government and citizens in forging their political relationship. As the distinction between politics and the market has been blurred, individuals need to fulfil their interests, not only as a customer but also as a citizen (Hermes, 2006b). Consequently, individuals have considerable freedom, as well as constraints, in accessing cultural materials on various digital platforms. The blurred distinction between public and audience, between culture and citizenship (Couldry, 2004; Jensen, 2002a; Livingstone, 2005) necessitates a different understanding of the popular culture on the internet.

For Livingstone (2005), the increasingly digitalised world has formed 'audiences and publics, along with communities, nations, markets and crowds' (p. 17) from a similar composition of people. The process of digitalisation also 'submerged national and cultural sentiments' (Jensen, 2002a, p. 174) and reconfigured the relationships 'between popular knowledges, digital technologies, visibility in a hypermediated culture' (Glynn et al., 2010, p. 46). The blurred boundaries between citizens and consumers, as well as the boundaries between states, have challenged the elite that aims to control public discourse and popular culture. There is a continuing process of power shift from bourgeois to the common population, as the ideas and identity of the general population also as important the dominant ideas of the bourgeois. In this regard, Hermes (2006b) argued:

It is time to turn around our ideal of the public sphere, and recognise that it should be open to many forms of literacy and to more claims than truth, and more styles than rational behaviour (Hermes, 2006b, p. 40).

Historically, the internet was a critical symbol of the power of the popular. In its early history, the hope around the internet potential for democracy was prevalent. The internet is praised as the primary sign of democratisation around the globe. From the optimist perspective, the boundless nature of the internet has opened opportunities for citizens participation. Social media, in particular, possesses the 'ability to pass information within and beyond a country' and 'provides a new tool in the fight to fuel and shape change (Flinders, 2012, p. 25). For Ligaga, 'because of its global presence, fluid nature, and multiuser characteristics, the Internet has grown into a space that makes it possible to imagine and create new narratives reflective of the desires and social lives of its users' (Ligaga, 2012, pp. 4-5). However, as the internet has been increasingly global and market-oriented, the issue of the national border has been coming to the fore. Nowadays, state regulation has been imposed to limit public participation as well as to intervene in the dominant market operation in the public sphere.

It is also increasingly prevalent that populism and fake news have been detrimental to public participation. Populism could lower the expectation on the

capability of the popular in forging a strong political narrative and become a threat to the popular in which the dominant actors cultivate cultural identity to fulfil their own goals. Combined with fake news, populism has become the grim reality of contemporary politics that could potentially undermine the primary objective of the popular. These threats of democracy reflect a pessimist narrative in which ‘the online multi-mediated world in which various viewpoints and perspectives are voiced does not seem to apply to political discourse’ (Flinders, 2012, p. 25). For the pessimist, the internet has become an extension of the dominant interest in shaping the life of the general population.

At the same time, the increasing marketisation of the public sphere also necessitates citizens to find a creative way that masks their political participation within a market-friendly environment. In facing the pressure of modernity, ‘new definitions of good citizenship are negotiated in an attempt to account for growing discontent with the (perceived) elitism of celebrity actors and passivity of citizens’ (Tatarchevskiy, 2011, p. 302). Speaking about the political meme on the internet, Danesi contends that it is ‘leading to a cognitive shift in how people view art, language, and history itself, through bits and bytes of content that resist coalescence into stable cultural forms’ (Danesi, 2020, pp. 13-14). Political meme on the internet has proven that ‘as pop culture is evolving, one thing seems to be constant – it is still a culture produce by and for the people’ (Danesi, 2020, p. 16). The increasing presence of political memes on the internet has proven that popular culture has continuously challenged the dominant narrative in the public sphere in a creative way.

Citizens are also increasingly creative in facing the dominant narrative in the public sphere. In discussing the influence of Japanese popular culture in Chinese politics, Saito (2017) argues that ‘while it is undeniable that states have a certain degree of influence over cultural production and consumption within their borders, the extent of this influence may easily be overstated’ (p. 138). For the Chinese government, Japanese manga is not suitable for the idea of communism. However, the ban against Japanese cultural products by the Chinese government has created a piracy practice as a symbol of resistance. Chinese citizens also developed

the Green Dam Girl's meme as a medium of the critic. Saito concludes that 'despite mechanisms for regulation, savvy internet users are adept at getting around controls, or using *memes* and technology to undermine controls' (p. 146). In a different context, the emergence of a Muslim punk band named Taqwacore has blurred the distinction between secularism and religiosity in popular culture (Murthy, 2010). The marrying concept between Islam and punk was positioned against the challenge of Islamophobia that affected the life of the Pakistani community in post-9/11 America.

These two examples have proven how the distinction between cultural and political realms has been blurred. The contemporary consumer of popular culture envisions a broad political spectrum that challenges the well-established institutions. In this regard, the Korean Wave is another important example of the power shift that merged the government's cultural policy and the major private capital in the creative industry. The collaboration between various stakeholders has challenged the dominant impact of American popular culture in the well-established discourse of cultural imperialism. Interestingly, in the past years, there is also been an increasing contribution of fans of Korean Pop in various political issues around the globe, from Donald Trump in the US to the Anti-Omnibus Law in Indonesia. While well-established institutions are constantly challenging popular participation on the internet, citizens have always been finding an innovative way to express their political interests.

However, in understanding the political significance of popular culture in the Indonesian public sphere, we need to examine the various attitude of government from a different era against popular culture. For Sukarno, popular culture was a threat to emerging nationalism due to its potential to weakening the spirit of young Indonesian. In contrast, Suharto utilised popular culture to depoliticise young people and the general population. Suharto insisted on controlling the development plan under his leadership centrally. Yet at the grassroots level, popular culture has become the main tool for the Indonesian artists to express their criticism against Suharto. The end of the New Order era marked a significant change as the dominant discourse in the public sphere has been constantly re-

examined. University student demonstrations provided a striking arena of the battle between the mass population and the dominant elite that had been characterised by projection towards global life through national leadership (Hadiz, 2001; Heryanto & Hadiz, 2005; Winters, 2013).

At the same time, the internal digital divide between urban rich and urban poor as well as between urban and rural populations (Nugroho, 2008; Nugroho et al., 2012; Sujarwoto & Tampubolon, 2016) has challenged the digitalisation of popular culture in Indonesia. A study by Sujarwoto and Tampubolon (2016) suggests that 'a deepening internet divide appears across socio-economic groups; a widening of the internet divide across urban-rural, city-countryside, and remote island-mainland island areas' (p. 612). A recent report by the *Jakarta Post* also shows that within the capital city of Jakarta the poor millennial has been struggling to fulfil their basic needs and still far away from the critical mass of the internet (Tehusjarana, 2020). Calhoun's criticisms resonate with the real condition of the Indonesian cities in which the development strategies 'make cities grow in size but lose their public spaces' (Calhoun, 1998, p. 389). Within the increasingly digitalised public sphere, Couldry (2006) also emphasised that 'the space of civic culture is stratified, constrained and shaped as much by disconnections as connections' (p. 334). While the above discussion focuses on the opportunity of popular culture, in the context of Indonesia, we should also aim to understand the prolonged limitation of individual agency to the development of popular culture.

POPULAR CULTURE AND INDONESIAN NATIONALISM

The notion of cultural citizenship is relevant to understanding the relationship between popular culture and Indonesian nationalism. Before the official Proclamation of Indonesian independence in 1945, the 1928's Youth Oath (*Sumpah Pemuda*) laid a foundation for the future of Indonesia as a modern nation. The oath became the first manifestation of the active participation of the popular in the public sphere. According to the oath, regardless of the complex socio-cultural diversity, being Indonesian possesses a collective commitment to

sharing a single nation, homeland, and language. Beyond the Youth Oath, another crucial aspect of the establishment of Indonesia is the Proclamation of Indonesian Independence on 17 August 1945 (Taylor, 2003). The Proclamation declared Indonesia as a newly independent nation and strengthened the sense of nationalism among people with diverse cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds (Farram, 2007a). With such Proclamation in hand, Indonesia is no longer considered the imagined communities (Anderson, 2016). It is a physical and political community with a lucrative national resource, a border and territory, and an early structure of the state with its governmental apparatus.

Central to nationalist struggle was the Indonesian language that was functioned as a platform to express the cosmopolitanism of the postcolonial nation. As a language, Indonesian blends together the linguistic elements of Malay with other foreign languages that shaped Indonesian history, such as Portuguese, Spanish, English, Dutch, and Arabic (Anderson, 2016; Errington, 1986). The practice of borrowing from non-hierarchical Malay and global languages, instead of from local languages, expressed the cosmopolitan and global outlook of Indonesian identity (Errington, 1986; Foulcher, 2000). Yet, in the political discourse of the state level, Indonesian identity continuously represents inherent insecurity. The protectionism of national culture against global influence has been evident in the early phase of Indonesia as a modern nation.

At the early phase of the Indonesian establishment, the printed media, most notably the daily newspaper *Harian Rakjat*, actively promoted the spirit of national unity and identity by circulating messages from president Sukarno (Foulcher, 2000). Sukarno was also a great orator who utilised radio extensively to spread optimistic messages in the newly established nation (Lindsay, 1997; Sen, 2003). As a charismatic leader, he could easily grasp the attention of the whole population to have a unitary vision of Indonesia as a modern nation (Willner, 1984; Willner & Willner, 1965). Sukarno cultivated a growing anti-Western sentiment particularly through his popular slogan; *Inggris kita linggis, Amerika kita setrika* (let's crush the British, let's burn America) (Budianta, 2000). He also banned all Western music that was deemed inappropriate with the spirit of nationalism in the newly

established Indonesia (Farram, 2007a). Sukarno consistently developed 'crypto colonialism, "disguised" imperialism, and perceived foreign "interference"' as a method to 'serve the function of maintaining internal cohesion' (Willner & Willner, 1965, p. 67). During the period of Sukarno's presidency, 'the authority of the state would be directed at combating the pernicious effects of Western popular culture' (Foulcher, 2000, p. 392). There is an underlying mechanism to suppress the impact of popular culture on the general population in the newly established nation.

The short period of Sukarno presidency already embedded popular culture through a political narrative. Sukarno systematically built a national identity in an ambiguous combination of confidence and anxiety. Externally, Sukarno imagined Indonesia as a leader of Asian and African nations and the neighbouring Southeast Asia nations. Internally, his lack of political calculation has threatened his ambitious plan. Soon after the failure of marrying nationalism, communism, and Islam, he lost his popularity among the general population. The economic and political turmoil opened an opportunity for General Suharto to conduct a political coup in the name of the anti-communist movement. Realising the pitfalls of Sukarno's leadership, Suharto pursued a different style of nationalism.

In contrast to the anti-imperialism narrative of Sukarno, Suharto aimed to bridge the need for foreign investment and the ambitious plan of national development. As a result, he treated popular culture as a way to depoliticise the Indonesian youth and to strengthen the cosmopolitan image of Indonesia in the global forum (Foulcher, 2000). His ambitious development plan necessitates internal stability as well as a global and cosmopolitan outlook.

For the internal process of cultural production, cultural diversities were important commodities in providing a rich image of Indonesian cultural heritages (Hitchcock, 1998). Suharto was systematically mainstreaming the motto of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (unity in diversity) and simplifying the Indonesian archipelago through the slogan of *dari Sabang sampai Merauke* (from Sabang to Merauke). Yet, in the name of state corporatism, Suharto also promoted the spirit of 'discipline, stability, and development' that was necessary for building Indonesia with a global

outlook (Foulcher, 2000, p. 394). Suharto focused internally to build national pride, particularly among the Indonesian youth who had been depicted as the important forces for state developmentalism (Budianta, 2000). As his developmental strategy required constant political stability, Suharto systematically weakened the political consciousness of young people through the prohibition of student activism on campus (Heryanto, 2011; Rinaldo, 2008b; Winters, 1996). As the youth had been directed entirely for state developmentalism, the potential of cultural citizenship has been undermined ever since.

The development strategy of Suharto is popular among Indonesian scholars through the notion of *bapakism* or father-ism (Jackson, 1978; Robison, 1981). As a charismatic leader, Suharto has become 'the visible embodiment of the nation come into being' (Willner & Willner, 1965, p. 86). He was mainstreaming Javanese philosophy that 'compels people to mask their real sentiments, practice conformity, and pretend to positions that they do not hold' (Pye, 1999, p. 768). By positioning himself as a father, Suharto institutionalised 'the psychological need for dependence, and a passivity which produces an attachment to hierarchical, personalised leader-follower groups (*bapakism*), an obsession with form rather than substance, and the implications of the Javanese view of the nature of power' (Robison, 1981, p. 7). The perception that the Indonesian population is children who act as passive recipients of the hard-working father has been influential in the overall structure of Indonesian society. Jackson (1978) described the Javanese philosophy in the macrostructure of Indonesian society as follows:

Because of God-given high status and wealth, the patron must lead, educated, and care for the material and spiritual needs of a large group of clients. Great satisfaction and psychological security are derived from the act of giving deference and respect to persons of higher rank in the social hierarchy and from receiving deference from those who below (Jackson, 1978, pp. 35-36).

To maintain control against his *anak buah*, Suharto strictly managed all public discourses that were deemed inappropriate according to his version of Indonesian

identity, from the national level to the domestic level of family (Clark, 2008; Shiraishi, 1997). Suharto systematically utilised American popular culture and hedonism to depoliticise the Indonesian youth. Considering the dynamics of popular culture amidst the tight control from the government, Heryanto (2008, 2011, 2014a) argues that the study of popular culture in Indonesia should not underestimate its social and political dimensions. In the case of Indonesia, popular culture was not only significant due to its production and consumption practices, but also due to its ideological parameters in building the nation-state (Heryanto, 2008, p. 4). The emphasis on stability and the imagination of Indonesia as a big, warm and intimate family (Shiraishi, 1997) created a common commitment to uphold and obey to the higher level of the hierarchy. In *Young Heroes: the Indonesian Family in Politics*, Shiraishi (1997) observed how respecting hierarchy had been taught since the first day of elementary school:

Learning is reconfirming; learning is repeating and copying; and learning is joining in the authorised and authoritative voice. The excitement of discovery, the excitement sparked by unexpected questions that inevitably arise from time to time in the classroom despite the teacher's efforts to avoid them, is quickly extinguished by being ignored as noise that lacks power to disturb the teacher's discourse. This process effectively implies that there is no such thing as unknown (Shiraishi, 1997, p. 141).

The experience on the first day at school represents the ambiguous position of popular culture during the three decades of the Suharto era. On one hand, Suharto utilised the American popular culture in Indonesian television to depoliticise the Indonesian youth. It is also important to note that his economic policy was fuelled by the development strategy of American-trained scholars, known as the Berkeley Mafia. On the other hand, the schooling system in Indonesia is not designed to embrace the creativity and individual autonomy that have been inherent within American values. In the perception of Indonesian authority, individual autonomy is the predicament for political and social stability that is critically needed for national development. The repeating sentence from the teacher on the first day of school shows a reciprocal practice in building a structure of harmony and

obedience. As students progressing into more and more levels of schooling years, they are expected to be more obedient to the overall structure of national development. The different outlook of Indonesian culture at school and American culture in Indonesian television has often created tension inside Indonesian youth. For school and governmental authorities, the resistance to obey the rule and hierarchy were simply labelled as *kenakalan remaja* (youth rebel). They systematically neglected the fact that Indonesian youth during the Suharto era were positioned in a contrasting realm between Indonesian communalism and American individualism.

Interestingly, in the realm of Indonesian youth culture, the mainstream youth slang predominantly has Betawinese cultural expressions and cosmopolitan Jakarta dialects rather than Javanese linguistic hierarchy (Errington, 1986; Hanan, 2008). In the case of the popular movie of *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta?/What's Up with Love?*, released in 2002 and directed by Mira Lesmana and Riri Riza, the protagonist of the school janitor 'who is obviously from the poorer classes, speaks Indonesian with a Javanese accent' (Hanan, 2008, p. 66). In the realm of national popular culture, the Javanese word of *mbak* (elder sister) is often referred to as the domestic maid. The Javanese image on Indonesian popular culture tends to be associated with the notion of *ndeso* (a narrow outlook of life in a rural village). There is an inherent expression in Indonesian popular culture that being a modern Indonesian necessitates a departure from the Javanese hierarchy towards a more cosmopolitan, egalitarian, and global outlook.

Furthermore, in facing the challenge of Westernisation and Islamisation, the popular expression tends to prefer either the Anglicized or the Arabized version. As Hollywood movies and fast-food chains have become a symbol of the modernisation of Indonesian cities, parents from middle-class backgrounds are eager to name their children with Western names, such as Elizabeth and David. It is also a common practice of Indonesian youth in Jakarta to mix Indonesian and English in their daily conversation. In the past two decades, the Islamic revival also creates a new stream of cultural expression in which the Arabized forms of language has been mixed with the Indonesian language. Nowadays, more babies

are born with Arabic names such as Gaza, Aisha, and Muhammad rather than Javanese names such as Joko, Bambang, and Prabowo. Indonesian children nowadays tend to have a middle name rather than just a single name such as Sukarno and Suharto. Central to the two streams was the creation of 'International Islamic Schools' in various big cities in which the acquisition of English and Arabic languages has become a mixed way to be a successful Muslim in the increasingly globalised world. Middle-class Muslims nowadays have been creatively merging their popular expression, not with Javanese hierarchical language, but with the more globalised outlook in the stream of Westernisation and Islamisation.

In between these two challenging streams, it is not surprising that, in the last period of his government, Suharto witnessed the declining national pride among the Indonesian people. His three decades of *bapakism* created political stability and stagnation at the same time (Pye, 1999). Amidst economic and political crises, there was a sense of national inferiority and the increasing ambition from the government 'to defend the nation from global or external powers' (Budianta, 2000, p. 112). Suharto and his government tackled this identity crisis by creating a national campaign of the year of Arts and Culture in 1998 to promote high national culture against the icons of global popular culture such as Michael Jackson (Budianta, 2000). Learning from the case of French, the distinction between high and popular culture has also created a demarcation between various social classes (Bourdieu, 2010). Against the backdrop of the socio-economic gap, the French government also encouraged communities from various backgrounds to preserve their own culture and tradition. However, many critics argue that such a policy failed to nurture a common cultural taste that is necessarily needed to create a cohesive and inclusive public sphere (Looseley, 2004).

In the context of Indonesia, the domination of Javanese culture in the national public sphere has made a similar situation. The cultural campaign contains important elements of Javanese culture and shows a dominant and superior position of high Javanese values against the culture of the general population. It fails to tackle the root of social and political problems during the three decades of Suharto presidency. By the end of the New Order era, the political stability and

respect to the hierarchy were undermined by external turmoil of economic crisis and the internal challenge of deep mistrust from the Indonesian population (Robison, 2010; Vatikiotis, 1993; Winters, 1996, 2013). The end of the Suharto era in Indonesia reminds the statement from Castells (2008) that 'without an effective civil society capable of structuring and channelling citizen debates over diverse ideas and conflicting interests, the state drifts away from its subjects' (p. 78). His three decades of oppression ended in May 1998 with his historical speech of resignation.

The resignation of Suharto created not only a political calamity but also a challenge to redefine the domination of Javanese culture in the public sphere. The departure from three decades of an authoritarian regime to the new stream of democratisation has given a new hope on the development of civil society and citizenship in the Indonesian public sphere. Nevertheless, the challenge of cultural citizenship has become getting more difficult as the Indonesian population need to redefine themselves between the pendulum swing of Westernisation and Islamisation. It is within these two streams of the cultural movement that the development of popular culture has shaped the face of the internet in Indonesia. The post-Suharto Indonesia provides an important scene of digitalisation, individualisation, and Islamisation of the popular culture.

INTERNET, POPULAR CULTURE, AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

The challenges and opportunities in the last decade of the Suharto era reflect a criticism for the ability of the internet to act as a social agency (Couldry & Hepp, 2017). The establishment of the internet in various elite universities in Indonesia provided a new space for discussion and debate after a long period of depoliticization of student organisations in elite Indonesian campuses (Hill & Sen, 1997; Lim, 2003, 2004; Rinaldo, 2008b). However, the government has unclear determination in establishing the reliable internet policy, particularly in facing the persistent problem of digital literacy (Jurriëns, 2011, 2017) and geographical challenges of connecting the archipelago (Hill & Sen, 2000). These challenges

opened lucrative opportunities for Indonesian oligarchs to maximise their commercial profits by building technical infrastructures merely for business purposes (Hadiz, 2001; Tapsell, 2015b, 2017; Winters, 2013). In such conditions, the Indonesian people are required to reposition themselves in facing the pressure from the market and politics.

For the government and policymakers in Indonesia, the internet has always been a symbol of Western domination. With the increasing spirit of Islamic revival in the public sphere, a rampant practice of censorship is necessarily needed to protect the national identity. At the same time, Suharto tended to promote American popular culture to minimise political Islam, the post-Suharto Indonesia witnesses an opposite way. The increasing presence of Islamic revival produces a narrative that positions Islam as protection to Indonesian nationalism. At the same time, the government itself constantly promotes the internet as a new way to achieve the developmental goals in the information age. Hence, nationalism in post-Suharto Indonesia lies within the ambiguity between Islamic revival and the need for foreign investment in the increasingly digitalised market.

Speaking about the market, the production of biopic films of Indonesian heroes in the last decades has shown a shift of political ideology in serving market-oriented goals. Previously, the production of heroic movies was predominantly driven by state-level interests and far from the aesthetic standard of film production. Nowadays, biopics have been funded entirely by private capital, predominantly driven by the public curiosity of Indonesian history. The biopics represent Islamic figures such as *Kiai* Haji Ahmad Dachlan in *Sang Pencerah*, the Catholic priest of *Soegija*, the feminist hero of *Kartini*, and the nationalist hero of Tjokroaminoto in *Guru Bangsa*. Most importantly was the production of semi-biopic *Bumi Manusia*, adapted from Pramoedya Ananta Toer's novel with a similar title. During the three decades of the Suharto presidency, the novelist was jailed several times, and the novel was banned for public circulation. The protagonist Minke was enacted by Iqbaal Ramadhan, a popular actor who successfully gained fame through *Dilan 1991*. The pressure of market mechanism and the changing ideological parameter

at the state level have enabled the production and consumption of *Bumi Manusia* as a popular movie, not merely a banned novel from high culture and literature.

These movies have shown the trend to commercialise nationalist agenda in a new package. Outside the biopic theme, several popular films in the post-Suharto era promote Indonesian nationalism through the theme of sport, the struggle of local youth in achieving a big dream, and the redefinition of nationalism among urban youth. In contrast to the collectivist nationalism in the Sukarno and Suharto eras, these popular films focus on the individual endeavour in achieving the 'Indonesian dream'. Here, the American value of individualism that was central in popular culture during the Suharto era has been redefined according to the new values of developmentalism in the post-Suharto era. These films are in line with the ongoing process of mainstreaming entrepreneurial values to the Indonesian youth. Currently, the Indonesian start-up has become the fuel of development that relies heavily on participation from the young people, as an entrepreneur and consumer at the same time.

While in the past, there was a clear boundary between Western and Indonesian values, nowadays, these barriers have been blurred. Commercialisation and marketisation have become the main agenda of the national government, most evidently by appointing Nadiem Makarim, a former CEO of prominent Indonesian start-up of GoJek, as the Minister of Education and Culture. President Jokowi also appointed young entrepreneurs as his Special Staff of Millennial (*Staf Khusus Millennial*), to promote a spirit of entrepreneurship among Indonesian youth. Here, popular image and popular culture have been influential in building a new form of developmentalism that emphasises individual achievement for the public good.

At the state level, the national government is also seeking a new way to commercialise Indonesian cultural values. Learning from the successful case of South Korea, the Indonesian government established the Creative Economy Agency (*Badan Ekonomi Kreatif/Bekraf*) that sought to commercialise Indonesian cultural products through fashion, film, animation, and design. The UNESCO's

recognition of Indonesian batik as an intangible heritage also possesses a high degree of nationalist agenda, particularly due to legal claims with the neighbouring country of Malaysia. The tension with Malaysia also escalated through other cultural forms, such as cuisine, dance, and martial arts. Following UNESCO's recognition on 2 October 2009, the Indonesian government decided to mark the date as National Batik Day (*Hari Batik Nasional*) which is commemorated annually. On that day, Indonesian youth proudly post their picture wearing batik on Instagram. The international recognition and commercialisation have shifted the position of batik from Javanese high culture to a commodity of popular culture.

Nevertheless, at the state level, the inherent ambiguity against popular culture remains persistent, as shown in the battle of Netflix in Indonesia. The government has constantly been urging the Indonesian population on the unsuitability of some series on Netflix to the local culture. It is arguably challenging for the Indonesian Censorship Body (*Badan Sensor Film*) to control movies in the online streaming service. In the sense of political economy, the streaming service also undermines the sustainability of the media industry in Indonesia that is owned by conglomerates who have a close relationship with the government. At the same time, the appointment of Nadiem Makarim, a prominent start-up tycoon, as the Minister of Education and Culture has signalled the eagerness of the government to promote the culture of innovation in the Indonesian education system. The appointment of a start-up tycoon as the Minister of Education has created tension with another minister. In contrast to the Minister of Informatics who bans Netflix, the Ivy League-educated Minister of Education has signed a contract to broadcast some Netflix series as educational materials through the state-owned television channel of TVRI. The case of Netflix in Indonesia represents a prolonged battle between a global outlook and the aspiration to protect national interests.

The young Minister of Education and Culture also represents the new generation of young Indonesian entrepreneurs. Within the contemporary public sphere, the optimistic young generation has been depicted as a well-educated, religious, nationalist, and family-oriented public figure (Gellert, 2015). The emergence of young entrepreneurs in contemporary Indonesia deserves a close examination of

its socio-historical aspects, particularly how the idea of individual autonomy appears amidst the long history of *bapakism*. We should examine whether they are the epitome of new hope in the Indonesian democracy or merely an extension of the well-privileged middle class from the New Order era. We also need to revisit the idealised idea of the popular image of Indonesian youth, whether the aspiration of becoming well-educated, entrepreneurial, and nationalist youth is accessible for all layers of society. These young and ambitious entrepreneurs should be reflected amidst the persistent socio-economic inequality, the gap of access to high-quality education, and the digital divide.

While Jokowi is a symbol of hope in which the new generation of national leaders could overcome the institutional barrier of a political dynasty, his current performance has shown his struggle in facing the powerful elite and conglomerates in Jakarta. The challenge of Jokowi in managing national leadership has shown how the popular has a less considerable impact within the structure of the Indonesian public sphere. His inconsistent and ambiguous leadership was also followed by the imprisonment of Ahok, the governor of Jakarta, in the case of blasphemy. Ahok's blasphemy case has become another proof of how the popular charisma of emerging leaders fails to accentuate the pressure of rigid architecture of Indonesian politics. The expressive and transparent approach of Ahok was not suitable for the Indonesian values that predominantly represent the Javanese order of hierarchy. The rise and fall of Ahok is a predicament of the grim reality of the potential importance of the popular in Indonesia. Indonesia, with its well-established structure of elite, has always been fragile and insecure in facing the social dynamics and the emerging power of the popular.

Furthermore, the inequality of internet access and the gap of high quality of education is also detrimental in facing the current wave of populism. During the campaign period of the 2019 General Election, hoaxes and fake news have become a symbolic threat to the ongoing democratisation. Hoax and fake news came from the opponents and supporters of the two candidates, forging a sharp division between the supporter of Jokowi and Prabowo. Black campaign and money politics have become a rampant practice in the emerging democracy. These

threats of democracy have proven the fragile structure of popular politics against the well-established oligarchy. Amidst the absence of systematic digital literacy, populism has changed the internet from an important discursive space to a fertile field for hoax and fake news. In the second term of the Jokowi presidency, the Indonesian population also witnesses the emergence of non-popular legislation, such as the Omnibus Law, that has been detrimental to the protection of human rights as well as environmental sustainability.

Within such difficult circumstances, once again, Indonesian people have been forced to find a creative way to express their disappointment and anger. Following the official announcement of the controversial Omnibus Law, the Indonesian Twitter scene is full of memes and images that express anger and resentment towards the lack of awareness of the national government on the ongoing COVID crisis. Following the online protest, mass demonstrations were also held in various big cities, predominantly driven by student activism, signalling the emergence of political consciousness among Indonesian youth. It is evident that Indonesian young people nowadays are not only commercially active on social media but also politically conscious about their position in the public sphere. Amidst the systematic constraint, there is hope remains in maintaining the power of the popular in the Indonesian public sphere.

CONCLUSION

Through this chapter, we have discussed the impact of the imbalanced structure of power in the emerging democratisation, digitalisation, and Islamisation of the Indonesian public sphere. The tension between these agendas has created a conflicting narrative in the identity and aspiration of citizens. For the middle-class, their privileged position has enabled them to become the critical actors of democratisation, digitalisation, and Islamisation of the public sphere. However, these contradictory elements have been challenging for the general population as they have a lack of access to the privileged position of the middle-class. For the general population, both secularism and religious revival are daunting subjects

that are only accessible by the middle class and their extensive privilege. Hence, popular culture that is necessarily democratic is still stratified and inegalitarian in the Indonesian public sphere.

Most fundamentally, the political narrative of the popular culture has been evident since the early beginning of Indonesia as a modern nation. During the three decades of Suharto presidency, the existence of American popular culture has been exploited significantly, particularly in depoliticising Indonesian youth. His developmental strategy combined the global ambition and internal domination of Javanese culture. In the last decade of his presidency, it was arguably difficult for Suharto to seek a balance between individualism and criticism of the popular and the maintenance of Javanese values amidst the increasingly diverse citizens and popular opinions.

In post-Suharto Indonesia, state developmentalism has been established with market mechanism as its main determinant. The success story of Korean cultural policy has inspired the Indonesian government to follow a similar path, but with different results and directions. The result is the emerging individualism that also seeking to support state developmentalism. Here individualism is perceived not only to achieve a personal goal but also to support the developmental agenda at the national level. Considering the inherent complexity of Indonesia, de-Westernizing is the only reliable method to understand different and conflicting narratives in the public sphere. The following methodology chapter will explore further de-Westernization in understanding the context of *Pondok Pesantren* as a focal point of this research.

CHAPTER 6

METHODOLOGY

DE-WESTERNISING THE CASE STUDY APPROACH

In understanding the complexity of the Indonesian public sphere, this thesis employs the de-Westernising approach of a case study. It emphasises how the notion of the public sphere should be investigated in line with the significance of the internet, particularly related to technological affordance, popular culture, and religious interpretation of the internet. Speaking about the contextuality of the internet, Dahlgren (2005) contends that the internet pluralized and extended the public sphere in various ways. It is important to understand the impact of the internet in each unique context because meaning and message are produced in 'the circumstances in which the internet is used (offline) and the social spaces that emerge through its use (online)' (Hine, 2000, p. 39). Reflecting on her fieldwork on Facebook users in Mardin, a small Turkish town, Costa (2018) argues that 'Facebook users tend to communicate to imagined audiences that already exist in the offline world' (p. 3642).

In the context of Indonesia, the 'tactical potential' (Jurriëns, 2017, p. 86) of the internet is an important factor in understanding the public sphere in the post-Suharto era. This thesis aims to investigate the emergence of the Indonesian public sphere that has been shaped extensively by the political economy of the internet, the Islamic revival, and popular culture. However, in understanding the context of *Pondok Pesantren*, religious revival and popular culture should be positioned exactly within the issue of technological affordance. In contrast to the religious revival that blends with technological affordance, the religious life in *Pondok Pesantren* mainly takes place in an offline setting.

The methodology of this research consists of three main elements that are inspired by the research strategy of Herding (2013a) in analysing Muslim youth

culture in Europe.¹⁶ The *first* element is gathering artefacts, including pamphlets, brochures and online materials that could describe the important events in *Pondok Pesantren*. In this thesis, the campaign of *Kiai* through Facebook and WhatsApp have become the critical online artefacts in understanding the intersection between power, piety, and the popular. The *second* element is an observation of the public sphere in *Pondok Pesantren*. For observation purposes, the daily agenda will be drawn for various daily activities in *Pondok Pesantren*. The *third* element is an interview with *Kiai*, *pengurus*¹⁷ and the *santri*. In the later part of this chapter, the three elements of data gathering will be explained in detail, but for now, we need to explain the de-Westernising approach in my research methodology is related to the concepts of power, piety, and the popular.

Fundamentally, this research utilises three languages, namely Sundanese, Indonesian and English. In the context of Indonesia, the hierarchy of languages, from local to national to global level, determines the flow and the nuance of a conversation. Within the hierarchy, there is a degree of elitism that requires sensitivity in speaking to people at a particular level of society. Therefore, to create a natural conversation, it is advisable to use Sundanese rather than the Indonesian language. Within the Sundanese language itself, there is also a certain level of the hierarchy that differentiates the spoken language to the elder people and the people with a similar or younger age. The social status between the interviewer and the interviewee also determines linguistic practice during the fieldwork. It is also normal to mix between Indonesian and Sundanese languages in daily conversation, particularly among Indonesian youth. However, formal Indonesian

¹⁶ In *Inventing the Muslim Cool: Islamic Youth Culture in Western Europe*, Herding (2013b) undertook an ethnography of Muslim artist and young people in various cities in Germany, France, and the UK. Based on digital and non-digital artefacts, observation, and interview she found out that the Muslim youth subculture has a hybrid characteristic between Islamic values, global popular culture, and a 'strong affiliation with the European home country' (Herding, 2013b). She also suggested the further study 'on a hybrid mix of elements from global and local, religious and political, as well as from youth cultural spheres' (Herding, 2013b)

¹⁷ In the organizational structure of *Pondok Pesantren*, *pengurus* is functioned as the intermediary actors between *kiai* and *santri*. Age, level of study and the gender-segregated environment of *Pondok Pesantren* affect the organizational structure of *pengurus*. As all rooms and dormitories are managed in single-sex scheme, *pengurus* in male rooms and dormitories will be male, and vice versa. However, in the central level of organization, almost all *pengurus* are male and they are responsible to manage both male and female students of the whole institution.

is the main language of the research materials that are available in the official publications.

Interestingly, two campaigns of *Kiai* through social media use Sundanese and Indonesian language. While *Kiai* Haji Abdul Aziz Affandi from Miftahul Huda utilises a Sundanese song in his YouTube campaign, *Kiai* Haji Bunyamin Ruhiyat from Cipasung uses formal Indonesian through a digital letter that circulated through WhatsApp. The different styles and language necessitate a different strategy in managing power and the popular. While the utilisation of Sundanese aims to reach the popular voters, formal Indonesian reflects a formal authority of *Kiai* in urging the voters to follow his political preference.

Yet, the writing process necessitates a translation from Sundanese and Indonesian into the English language. The shift between different languages has a significant impact on accessing the personal meaning of a research subject. Yin (2011) has warned the potential conflict of interest between 'participants' indigenous meanings of real-world events' (*emic*) and the perspective of the researcher for 'the same set of real-world events' (*etic*) (p. 11). However, from his experience doing fieldwork of Javanese and Balinese societies in Indonesia, Geertz (1993a) urged the researcher not to imagine himself as someone else. Instead, a thick description of a society could be produced through 'searching out and analysing the symbolic forms – words, images, institutions, behaviours – in terms of which, in each place, people represented themselves and to one another' (Geertz, 1993a, p. 58). Thus, the goal of the interpretive study is 'to acknowledge that multiple interpretations may exist and to be sure that as much as possible is done to prevent a researcher from inadvertently imposing her or his own (*etic*) interpretation onto a participant's (*emic*) interpretation' (Yin, 2011, p. 12). In this research, the potential conflict of interest between *emic* and *etic* has created both challenges and opportunities.

In the practice of de-Westernizing, the researcher is constantly evolving from his background as a Sundanese and Indonesian with his professional background as a researcher of a British university. On the one hand, the personal background has

enabled the researcher to use national and local languages and to identify the research context naturally. The similarity between researcher and participants have also benefited from reflecting the imbalance structure of power between local, national, and global public sphere. On the other hand, the responsibility as a researcher of a British university necessitates a practice of translation and a constant swing of identity between these different backgrounds. The shifting experience between secular British environment, mixed religious and secular environment in Indonesia and the predominantly religious life in *Pondok Pesantren* also opens an opportunity to translate the idea of power, piety, and the popular through local, national, and global perspectives.

Before conducting the case study, I also have reflected on the accessibility to the institutions. One of the important factors regarding access to the research site is the status of the field as a public or private space (Lofland et al., 2006). To some extent, the status of *Pondok Pesantren* is public and private at the same time. As an educational institution, it is a public place where its educational missions are targeted at a wider level of the Indonesian Muslim population. At the same time, it is also a private space where boundaries between inside and outside the institution are demarcated, most visibly through a physical gate. The underlying understanding of religion as a public, rather than a private, issue has been significant in the research practice—the sensitivity towards the gender-segregated environment and the religious practice was also vital during the fieldwork. For instance, it is important to hold interviews with female participants in the public space to avoid a misconception of mixed interaction between the opposite sexes. It is also advisable to pause research activities during communal prayer five times a day.

Furthermore, the internet itself, as the focus of this research, also tends to be positioned as a public rather than a private issue. For Kozinets (2010), ‘online social interaction is a unique public-private hybrid that offers participants the allure of stepping into the global spotlight before and “audience” from the ostensibly secure confines of their own home’ (p. 71). The accessibility to the online and offline contexts of this research is the main consideration of the ethical issues of

this research. The most significant ethical concern is regarding the protection of the identity of research participants. In this thesis, only *Kiai* are presented through their real names, due to their powerful position in the institutions. For other participants, their pseudonym has been utilised throughout the thesis, considering internet access is a sensitive issue. The different positions between the participants reflect an inherent power articulation within the institutions.

Certainly, the Western perspective on the individual right to access information should be reassessed critically in the context of *Pondok Pesantren*. Students are voluntarily admitting to the institution and committed to upholding institutional values above individual interests. They also could easily drop out of their education if they feel unfit to the strict regulation within the institution. The tuition fee is affordable for students from the lower socio-economic class, but technological affordance has become a central issue throughout the fieldwork. The digitalisation and individualisation of religious life that is familiar in Islamic revival in the urban context is a strange concept to apply in the context of *Pondok Pesantren*. Through the keywords of power, piety and the popular in *Pondok Pesantren*, we could assess how religion and the internet have become public issues that require public scrutiny and regulation. As the Indonesian public sphere is a contested space between religion and secularism, the dominant religious manifestation in *Pondok Pesantren* is an important scene in de-Westernizing theories of the internet and the public sphere.

RATIONALE OF CASE STUDY

This research is based on the qualitative method of the case study in two *Pondok Pesantren* in Tasikmalaya, West Java, Indonesia. There are several rationales to choose the two *Pondok Pesantren* in Tasikmalaya as the subject of this research. *Firstly*, Tasikmalaya is well-known as a city of *santri (kota santri)*¹⁸ due to the high

¹⁸ The title of *Kota Santri* has a consequence for its 'designs and attributes in public spaces' where '(Islamic) religiosity is involved in all aspects of social life – including politics and governance' (Octastefani & Samadhi, 2018).

number of *Pondok Pesantren* and the population of *santri* within the city. Data from the Central Bureau of Statistics in West Java (*Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Jawa Barat*) has stated that in 2016 there were 833 *Pondok Pesantren*, 5,888 *Kiai*, and 93,986 *santri* in Tasikmalaya (BPS, 2017; BPS., 2017), higher than any other cities in Indonesia. *Secondly*, the reputation of Tasikmalaya as a city of *santri* is unique due to its geographical distance to the big cities such as Bandung and Jakarta. The city of Bandung is significant as the centre of popular culture and creative industries in Indonesia¹⁹ and the nearest metropolitan city to Tasikmalaya. In contrast to other *Pondok Pesantren* that are identified with rural students, the geographical position of Tasikmalaya attracts students from urban and rural areas of the region.²⁰

Thirdly, the two *Pondok Pesantren* represent different characteristics of history and pedagogy. *Pondok Pesantren* Cipasung is one of the biggest *Pondok Pesantren* in Tasikmalaya. At a national level, Cipasung is also prominent due to the involvement of its *Kiai* in the national leadership of *Nahdlatul Ulama*, the biggest Islamic organization in Indonesia.²¹ Cipasung combines religious education in *Pondok Pesantren* with formal educational institutions, from kindergarten to the institutes of higher education. Meanwhile, *Pondok Pesantren* Miftahul Huda has a reputation for its core teaching of *Kitab Kuning*.²² The absence of formal school in Miftahul Huda necessitates a different educational strategy. The unique

¹⁹ The creative industries in Bandung operate through 15 sub-sectors, such as handcrafted goods, fashion, publishing, architecture, performing arts, media and film. In 2007, the sectors contributed to 14.4% (USD 400 million) of the economic growth and was predicted to grow more rapidly in the future (Sarosa, et. Al., 2017). In 2015, Bandung also joined as a member of UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UNESCO, 2015)..

²⁰ According to the Central Bureau of Statistics in West Java (*Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Jawa Barat*), in 2017 there are 758,100 *santri* in West Java Province and 93,986 *santri* in Tasikmalaya. The number reflects the importance of the province and the city in the discourse of *santri* in national level.

²¹ In 1992, the late *Kiai* Haji Ilyas Ruhiyat, then a leader of *Pondok Pesantren Cipasung*, was elected as a *rais aam* (the ultimate leader) of *Nahdlatul Ulama*, the biggest Islamic organization in Indonesia. *Pondok Pesantren Cipasung* also hosted the XXIX *Muktamar* (general meeting) of *Nahdlatul Ulama* in 1994 (Yahya, 2006).

²² *Kitab kuning*, or the yellow book, is the primary teaching material in traditional *Pondok Pesantren*. Bruinessen (1990) traced the terminology of *kitab kuning* 'after the tinted paper of books brought from the Middle East in the early twentieth century' (p. 227). The primary teaching material in traditional *Pondok Pesantren* is contrast to *buku putih*, the Romanized Islamic books and printed in white paper, that became the primary teaching material in more modernized *Pondok Pesantren* (Bruinessen, 1990).

characteristics of the institutions represent the nature of *Pondok Pesantren* as a micro educational institution system without a national standard. Compared to state-sponsored educational institutions in Indonesia, *Pondok Pesantren* has a long history as an educational movement at the grassroots level of society with *Kiai* as the main leader of the movement.

These factors have significant impacts on understanding the concept of power, piety, and the popular. In understanding power, *Pondok Pesantren* that has established formal schools such as Cipasung tend to have a more complicated internet policy, as schools under the national curriculum need to provide internet access for students. In contrast, exclusive *Pondok Pesantren* such as Miftahul Huda has a less complicated strategy of restricting internet access for students due to the absence of conflict of interest with the national curriculum. However, as empirical chapters will further elaborate, students in Cipasung often imagined religious life in Miftahul Huda as an idealised Islamic public sphere. This perception has been fundamental in understanding the keyword of piety, in which religious life predominantly happens in an offline setting. In terms of the popular, while the consumption of popular culture is prohibited, students in both institutions share an identical perception to utilise popular culture for religious purposes. Hence, the educational system and technological affordance have created various similarities and differences in understanding life within the *Pondok Pesantren* environment. In this regard, a case study is the most suitable method to grasp the complexity and the unique characteristic of each *Pondok Pesantren* in this research.

Eisenhardt (1989) defined a case study as ‘a research strategy which focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings’ (p. 534). The case study deals with the questions of ‘how and ‘why’ through ‘a great deal of intricate study, looking at the subject from many and varied angles’ (Thomas & Myers, 2015, p. 7). In the context of *Pondok Pesantren*, the long history of religious manifestation should be situated in the current digitalised and the trend of religious revival in the Indonesian public sphere. Meanwhile, Yin (2014) has described a case study as ‘an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”) in depth and within its real-world context, especially

when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be evident' (p. 16). The multiple case study method in this research is chosen to predict either a similar or different conclusion (Platt, 1992; Yin, 2012, 2014). The case study method, in particular, is useful in the 'search for explanatory laws' and 'experiential understanding' of a research subject (Stake, 2000, p. 24). Furthermore, the case study fits with the issue of the internet in *Pondok Pesantren* as it could grasp a wide array of innovative practices, policies, and changes (Yin, 2012, p. 188), which can only be unearthed through observation in real-time and real locations.

A case study method requires the researcher to undertake 'theory development before the conduct of any data collection' (Yin, 2014, p. 37). In the case study, the subject of study is analysed through the lens of the object of study that consists of 'the analytical frame or theory through which the subject is viewed and which the subject explicates' (Thomas & Myers, 2015, p. 3). Theory development is critical in the case study as the result of this kind of research will be either 'corroborating, modifying, rejecting or otherwise advancing theoretical concepts' that are already available in the case study design or 'new concepts that arose upon completion of the case study' (Yin, 2014, p. 41). In the process of theory development, Yin (2011) noted that the literature review should be based on a selective, not a comprehensive, approach (p. 62). Research design in the case study is a logical, not a logistical, blueprint that connects research questions, fieldwork data, and strategies for data analysis (Yin, 2011). The strength of a case study is its 'superior access to personal meanings' that take place 'in a rich context' (Platt, 2007, p. 101). Donmoyer (2000) noted that a case study has three advantages; accessibility, seeing through the researcher's eyes and decreased defensiveness (pp. 61-65). The accessibility of the fieldwork site should become a critical consideration in conducting observation and interviews as fundamental factors of the case study method.

OBSERVATION

Observation is critical in the case study as it opens the possibility to understand the research subject within its natural setting. In the anthropological tradition, observation involves the participation of the researcher in the daily activities of the research subject through mutual engagement, thus named 'participant observation' (Miller et al., 2016, p. 28). In the initial process of participant observation, building trust between the researcher and the research subject should become the main priority. To build trust between the researcher and the research subject, McCurdy and Uldam (2014) suggested disclosing the research status at the early stage of the observation. The disclosure of research status is useful to build mutual trust and to maintain the objective position between the researcher and the research subject. Alongside the interpretation of observation notes, the relationship with the research subject is another important factor that determines the result of the observation (McCurdy & Uldam, 2014). At the first stage, the researcher should focus on his role as a participant, instead of his role as an observer (Hickson III, 1973). In the further stage of the observation, the researcher should be able to balance his role as a participant and his role as an observer (Hickson III, 1973). These strategies are important to maximize the benefit of observation in qualitative research.

The benefit of observation is the data will be 'participant-centric rather than location or media platform-centric' (Holmes & Bloxham, 2009, p. 247). For Anleu et al. (2016) 'direct experience of the setting, seeing and hearing events as they unfold, provides an immersed and multifaceted form of data collection' (p. 376). Yin (2014) has emphasised that observation in a case study enables the researcher to examine the occurrence of a particular behaviour of the research subject in a particular context of the fieldwork. The fluidity and flexibility of the observation design will enable the researcher to capture the case from its natural and internal perspective (Yin, 2014). In anthropological tradition, observation is a foundation of thick description that enables the researcher to grasp the complexity of tradition in the research context. For Geertz (1993b), the analysis of culture is 'not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of

meaning' (p. 5). Geertz furtherly elaborated the function of observation in the ethnographic research as follows:

The important thing about the anthropologist's findings is their complex specificness, their circumstantiality. It is with the kind of material produced by long-term, mainly (though not exclusively) qualitative, highly participative, and almost fine-comb field study in confined contexts that the mega-concepts with which contemporary social science is afflicted – legitimacy, modernization, integration, conflict, charisma, structure, . . . meaning – can be given the sort of sensible actuality that makes it possible to think not only realistically and concretely *about* them, but, what is more important, creatively and imaginatively *with* them (Geertz, 1993b, p. 23).

The importance of combining the internal aspect of the research subject is critical in my research as it aims to bridge the gap between the understanding of the public sphere in a secular setting to the public sphere in an exclusively religious environment. Several suggestions have been made to increase the validity of the observation result. Eisenhardt (1989) suggested conducting multiple observations for a single case and report it through notes with a stream of consciousness style. Yin (2011) emphasised the importance of capturing the feeling and the condition of the fieldwork site on the notes, such as the weather and temperature of the site. In conducting an observation, it is advisable that the researcher 'must pay careful attention to consistent and meticulous documentation' (Lofland et al., 2006, p.81). Through a reflective approach, the researcher should record his observations 'regarding subtexts, pretexts, contingencies, conditions and personal emotions' (Kozinets, 2010, p. 114). For the technical purpose, this research follows observational techniques from Lofland et al. (2016) that include direct experience, social action, talk, archival records, and physical traces of social action (pp. 85-90). These five techniques have been acquired through the combination of participant observation and in-depth interviews with the core actors of the institution. Denzin (1989) also divided the notes of observation into five categories: biographical, historical, situational, relational, and interactional. These five categories have been helpful for the researcher during the fieldwork in *Pondok Pesantren*.

Participant observation in this research is aimed to analyse the public sphere in *Pondok Pesantren* in its offline setting and its relationship with online activities. The important places to analyse the public sphere in *Pondok Pesantren* are a house of *Kiai*, dormitories, a mosque, a classroom, an auditorium, a student canteen, and the office of *pengurus*. Dormitories and student canteen are important places to capture the discursive nature of the public sphere at the student level. Meanwhile, the office of *pengurus* is an important scene to analyse the discursive nature of the public sphere at the level of policymakers. Normally, the meeting of *pengurus* is held in the office on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis. Several events of public gathering have become the focus of observation. Daily, the events include compulsory mass prayers and religious studies. Weekly, the public gathering on Thursday night is an important scene to analyse the power relationship between *Kiai*, *pengurus*, and *santri*. During the weekly gathering, *Kiai* gives a sermon to strengthen the religious spirit of *santri*. In the weekly gathering, *pengurus* also gives some important announcements, such as the new regulation around various issues, the list of students who violate the current regulation, and the punishment for the students.

My fieldwork in October 2018 – January 2019 falls into the celebration of National *Santri* Day on 22 October 2018 and the campaign period of the 2019 General Election. The national events have become an important setting to understand how the power articulation between people in *Pondok Pesantren* and the Indonesian public sphere. During the celebration of National *Santri* Day, it is evident how the government's effort of mainstreaming religious life in *Pondok Pesantren* has affected the relationship between the elite in *Pondok Pesantren* and the national level. Subsequently, the campaign period of the 2019 General Election has shown a direct involvement of *Kiai* in promoting Jokowi to win the presidential position for the second time. The support from *Pondok Pesantren* communities was vital for Jokowi who decided to choose Ma'ruf Amien, a senior *Kiai*, as his running mate.

In line with the political event, I witnessed the offline campaign of Ma'ruf Amien in Miftahul Huda. He particularly emphasised the critical position of *Kiai* and *santri*

in national leadership. On a similar day, he also held the campaign in Cipasung. These two institutions have been central for acquiring voters from a traditional Muslim background in West Java. In response to the campaign, a few weeks later, leaders of Cipasung and Miftahul Huda launched their online campaign as the complementary element of their offline campaign, which I add in the empirical chapter of piety. These important events have been central in understanding the dynamic relationship between the elite in *Pondok Pesantren* and the national level amidst the increasingly digitalised and Islamised public sphere.

INTERVIEW

This research applies the purposive sampling approach to recruit the participants. In purposive sampling, the specific study units are chosen based on their relevance and the richness of data that is required in the research (Yin, 2011, p. 88). The purposive sampling is combined with the theoretical sampling in which the sample is chosen based on the theoretical framework of the research (Eisenhardt, 1989). Based on the power hierarchy in *Pondok Pesantren*, the interview participants have been chosen from the categories of *Kiai*, *pengurus*, and *santri*. Normally, one *kiai* hold the highest position of hierarchy in *Pondok Pesantren*, but there is also a variation of the governmental structure of the institution where more than one *kiai* manage the *Pondok Pesantren*. In Miftahul Huda, *Kiai Haji Abdul Aziz Affandi* is central for the internal management while *Kiai Haji Asep Maoshul Affandi* is more responsible with external relations.

The interview also involved *pengurus* as a team who is responsible for implementing the internet policy and for grasping the complex implementation of internet policy in the religious context of *Pondok Pesantren*. Some *pengurus* also has a responsibility to manage the institutional Instagram account of *Pondok Pesantren*. The interview also involved mature *santri*, from 18 years old and above, with a balanced combination of male and female students. Initially, I designed the interview participants to consist of one *Kiai*, three *pengurus*, and six *santri* from each *Pondok Pesantren*. Thus, a total sample from two *Pondok Pesantren* would

be 20 persons. However, the number of interviewees during my fieldwork exceed my initial expectation. In total, I managed to gather data from 35 interviewees from two *Pondok Pesantren*.

Name	Gender	Age	Position	Location
<i>Kiai</i> Haji Abdul Aziz Affandi	Male	58 years	The ultimate leader	Miftahul Huda
<i>Kiai</i> Haji Asep Maoshul Affandi	Male	61 years	Senior <i>Kiai</i>	Miftahul Huda
Ridwan (pseudonym)	Male	28 years	The administrator of <i>Ma'had Aly</i>	Miftahul Huda
<i>Kiai</i> Haji Dendi Yuda	Male	46 years	Junior <i>Kiai</i>	Cipasang
Ali (pseudonym)	Male	30 years	Student leader	Miftahul Huda
Reza (pseudonym)	Male	28 years	Public relations office	Miftahul Huda
<i>Kiai</i> Haji Abdul Chobir	Male	58 years	Senior <i>Kiai</i>	Cipasang
<i>Kiai</i> Haji Bunyamin Ruhiyat	Male	70 years	The ultimate leader	Cipasang
Faris (pseudonym)	Male	21 years	Student	Cipasang
Khadija (pseudonym)	Female	19 years	Student	Miftahul Huda
Fatima (pseudonym)	Female	18 years	Student	Miftahul Huda
Haris (pseudonym)	Male	22 years	Student/security officer	Cipasang
Raisa (pseudonym)	Female	20 years	Student	Cipasang
Syarif (pseudonym)	Male	23 years	Student	Miftahul Huda
Miftah (pseudonym)	Male	22 years	Student	Miftahul Huda

Dani (pseudonym)	Male	32 years	Secretariat officer	Cipasung
Farhan (pseudonym)	Male	31 years	Secretariat officer	Cipasung
Idris (pseudonym)	Male	35 years	Secretariat officer	Cipasung
Firman (pseudonym)	Male	22 years	Student	Cipasung
Fahmina (pseudonym)	Female	21 years	Student	Miftahul Huda
Rumaysa (pseudonym)	Female	20 years	Student	Miftahul Huda
Dalila (pseudonym)	Female	19 years	Student	Miftahul Huda
Rizqiya (pseudonym)	Female	22 years	Student	Cipasung
Rashida (pseudonym)	Female	20 years	Student	Cipasung
Zubaida (pseudonym)	Female	19 years	Student	Miftahul Huda
Emir (pseudonym)	Male	20 years	Student	Cipasung
Humaira (pseudonym)	Female	20 years	Student	Cipasung
Syaiful (pseudonym)	Male	22 years	Student	Cipasung
Yahya (pseudonym)	Male	20 years	Student	Miftahul Huda
Ibrahim (pseudonym)	Male	18 years	Student	Miftahul Huda
Rayhan (pseudonym)	Male	19 years	Student	Cipasung
Zakaria (pseudonym)	Male	23 years	Student	Cipasung

Raudah (pseudonym)	Female	22 years	Student	Cipasung
Zakiah (pseudonym)	Female	18 years	Student	Miftahul Huda
Masyita (pseudonym)	Female	21 years	Student	Miftahul Huda

Table 1 – List of Interview Participants

The interview design and procedure were adapted to the hierarchical structure of *Pondok Pesantren*. In recruiting the participants, the student leader in Miftahul Huda and secretariat officers in Cipasung were the critical gatekeepers. I submitted the official application for the fieldwork through these gatekeepers who then forwarded the application to the ultimate leader (senior *Kiai*) in each institution. After getting the official approval from the ultimate leader, the gatekeepers contacted me and assigned a young *Kiai* who could host me during the fieldwork. The gatekeepers also assigned other actors, such as administrators, *pengurus*, and students who could be involved in the interview. They also arranged meetings with young and senior *Kiais* that were critical during the fieldwork. Due to the hierarchical structure, arranging meetings with *Kiais* was more difficult than arranging meetings with other actors. A meeting with a student, for instance, could be arranged, conducted, and completed in a day. In contrast, a schedule of meeting with *Kiai* could take a few weeks for arrangement, and only be held in one hour. All follow-up meetings with *Kiais* were cancelled due to their tight schedule following the campaign period of the 2019 General Election.

The interview conducts and questions also follow the hierarchical structure of *Pondok Pesantren*. In interviewing senior *Kiais* in Cipasung and Miftahul Huda, there was a strong tendency of one-way communication in which they dominated the conversation. Very often the researcher was just sitting down and hearing the explanation from *Kiai* based on his interpretation of the formal information and application that I submitted before the fieldwork. There was almost no room for intervention and follow-up questions. The treatment of the researcher as an

alumnus of *Pondok Pesantren* was quite impactful to the tone and the conversation during the interview.

However, a different situation applied when interviewing younger *Kiais* in Cipasung. As the younger *Kiais* also had university degrees, they had a more coherent understanding of the conduct of research. They allowed the researcher to formally ask the research questions. With them, I elaborated the key features of the institution, such as the educational philosophy, history of the institution, and the challenges of the internet to the public sphere. The emphasis on the rationale and the challenges of the internet policy also dominated the interview with them. Unfortunately, all young *Kiais* in Mifathul Huda declined the interview and insisted that the critical questions should be raised directly to senior *Kiais* and the ultimate leader of the institution. In contrast, the senior *Kiai* in Cipasung assigned younger *Kiais* as they were considered more competent to discuss a contemporary issue such as the internet. Below are the interview questions with young *Kiais*:

- Could you please explain the brief history of the *Pondok Pesantren*?
- Based on the brief history, what is the underlying philosophy of education in the *Pondok Pesantren*?
- Based on the brief history, how the internet is positioned *inside* the *Pondok Pesantren*?
- What are the key challenges and opportunities of the internet for *Pondok Pesantren*?
- Any other comments and questions?

With administrators and *pengurus*, the questions were more technical, such as the number of students in *Pondok Pesantren*, the curriculum, the implementation and the challenges of internet policy in the institution. As the age of administrators, officers, and *pengurus* was quite similar to the researcher, the conversational tone tended to be more relaxed. The tone and the interaction with them helped discuss the key arguments in this thesis. For instance, the aspiration of 'Google for

Pesantren' appeared during the natural conversation with the officers. Below are the interview questions with administrators, officers, and *pengurus*:

- Tell me about yourself. How long you have been working in this position?
- Have you ever heard the history of the *Pondok Pesantren*? What are your key takeaways from the history?
- Based on the historical trajectories of the *Pondok Pesantren*, do you think that the internet fits with the educational philosophy of the institution?
- Do you think students need internet access during their education in *Pondok Pesantren*?
- What are the key challenges of the internet policy in the *Pondok Pesantren*?
- What is your aspiration about the future of the internet in the *Pondok Pesantren*?
- Any other comments and questions?

Another key informant during the fieldwork was students. The key challenges of interviewing students are their gender and age gap with the researcher. While *Kiais*, administrator, officer, and *pengurus* are all male, it was quite challenging to grasp the opinion from female students with almost ten years of age gap with the researcher. It was also impossible to recruit female research assistants as it was not included in the research funding from my scholarship body. Hence, the conversational tone with female students tended to be more rigid and less flexible. They also asked me to interview in public places to avoid the misperception of interaction with the opposite sex. With the male students, the age difference was still a challenge to create a natural conversation. It was quite challenging to grasp the opinion and the experience of students regarding their offline and online life in *Pondok Pesantren*. Below is the list of questions for students:

- Tell me about yourself. How long you have been studying in the *Pondok Pesantren*?

- What is your motivation to study in the *Pondok Pesantren*? Have you achieved your educational goal?
- Are you satisfied with the educational facilities here? Any opinion about the improvement of facilities?
- What is your opinion about the availability of the internet in *Pondok Pesantren*? Do you think that the internet fits with the religious values of the *Pondok Pesantren*?
- Do you use the internet regularly? What kind of content do you usually access?
- Are you interested in politics? Have you accessed political content on the internet?
- What is your opinion about Islam and democracy? How do you position yourself within the democratic and Islamic discourses on the internet?
- How do you imagine the internet for the future of the *Pondok Pesantren*?
- Any other comments and questions?

In doing a qualitative interview, Yin (2011) provided some important guidelines. *Firstly*, the interviewer should be aware of the unstructured relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee. The conversation is built based on 'a mental framework of study questions' that are adaptable to the characteristic of the participant as well as the setting and context of the interview (p. 134). *Secondly*, the conversational model in the qualitative interview leads to the individualised and diverse social relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee. The diversity of social relations in the conversation is rooted in the fact that both parties have various social and personal backgrounds (Yin, 2011, p. 134). *Thirdly*, to build a close social relationship, the questions in qualitative research should be designed in open-ended rather than the close-ended mode. The open-ended questions are effective to build a natural flow of conversation between the two parties. *Fourthly*, the interviewer should speak at a modest level of conversation.

At the same time, the interviewer also needs to stay neutral and non-directive. *Finally*, although the conversation is designed to be as natural as possible, the interviewer still needs to maintain interview rapport based on an interview protocol. Based on the interview rapport and protocol, the interviewer can analyse the flow of conversation while interviewing at the same time.

During the interview, the conversation was recorded and written simultaneously. The recording process utilised the Evernote app on the mobile phone of the researcher. The researcher also created interview notes to highlight some important points during the conversation. However, during the transcription process, the researcher should be aware of the potential technical problems, such as 'speech elisions, incomplete sentences, overlapping speech, a lack of clear-cut endings in speech, poor audiotape quality, and background noises' (McLellan et al., 2003, p. 66). The interview transcript combines the recorded conversation and interview notes from the researcher. It is also important to use a similar template of transcription to ensure that all transcript has a similar appearance and structure (McLellan et al., 2003). In the context of this research, the challenge also comes from the fact that almost all interview has been held in Sundanese and Indonesian languages. The transcript was written in an original language and completed by its English translation of each conversation. Some Sundanese and Indonesian words that difficult to be translated into English will be written in its original version and completed by an explanation of its meaning on the footnote.

RESEARCH REFLEXIVITY

Initially, I designed the digital research to connect the online and offline life of students. However, after a few days of fieldwork, I realised that the internet is a sensitive issue in the institution. To reveal social media accounts of students, for instance, possessed a huge risk for their existence as social media was heavily restricted in the institutions. On the other hand, the institutional social media accounts of *Pondok Pesantren* were managed predominantly for promotional and public relations purposes. Hence, despite ethically unproblematic to analyse the

institutional social media accounts, the dynamics of the public sphere was not represented in the institutional social media accounts. Instead, I found an interesting case of campaign materials of *Kiai* that is publicly available on WhatsApp and YouTube. The materials represented the dynamics of the internet and the public sphere in which the internet was restricted to the students yet cultivated heavily by the religious leaders for political purposes. It was the tension between the internal and external factors, between the local, national, and global infrastructure that was represented in the campaign materials. At the same time, as it was circulated by the ultimate leaders through public platforms, it is ethically sound to utilise these contents as research materials. The analysis of the campaign materials will be presented in the empirical chapter of 'Piety in the Public Sphere of *Pondok Pesantren*'.

Furthermore, my positionality as the insider and outsider of *Pondok Pesantren* was beneficial and hindering the fieldwork at the same time. To some extent, my status as an alumnus of *Pondok Pesantren* was advantageous in accessing the secluded environment. My background has enabled me to adapt smoothly to the religious tradition inside the institution. By donning *peci*, *baju koko* and *sarung*, I was easily identifiable as a part of the religious institution. Furthermore, my proficiency in the local language of Sundanese and Indonesian language has enabled me to grasp the nuance of local conversations. It also enabled me to explore and observe the institution and the surrounding environment.

At the same time, my background also quite challenging in managing my objectivity as a researcher. I started my fieldwork in a stage of my PhD that was challenging in emotional, financial, and intellectual senses. My exhaustion and loneliness as a PhD student affected my emotional feeling during the fieldwork. I constantly compared my memories as a student of *Pondok Pesantren* and the current challenges as a PhD student. As a Muslim, conducting the compulsory prayers collectively also gave me a content feeling that had been absent during my studies in the UK. To some extent, there was a strong feeling that I wanted to stay in *Pondok Pesantren* and quit my PhD.

Inside *Pondok Pesantren*, my identification as an alumnus of *Pondok Pesantren* was also stronger than my identity as a PhD researcher. This condition was beneficial to speak naturally to key actors in my research, particularly *Kiai*, *pengurus*, and *santri*. However, in speaking to *Kiai*, the entitlement as an alumnus of *Pondok Pesantren* tended to strengthen his authoritative tone. The institutional treatment of me as an internal, rather than external actor, has made it difficult to arrange a meeting with *Kiai*. During the campaign periods of the 2019 General Election, he tended to prioritise the schedule of meetings for external guests such as government officials, legislative members, and the representatives of presidential candidates. The challenges during my fieldwork reminded me of the ‘halfies anthropologist’ as explained by Abu-Lughod in her ethnographic research:

What feminist ethnography can contribute to anthropology is an unsettling of the boundaries that have been central to its identity as a discipline of the self studying others. These boundaries are being unsettled from another quarter too – the native quarter. I’m referring to the rise of indigenous anthropologists and especially “halfies” – people between cultures, the West of their upbringing, one parent, or training, and the culture of their origin, their family’s origin, their other parent’s, or some part of their identity, in which they do fieldwork. The practice of these anthropologists who know that their selves are multiple also break down boundaries of self and other, subject and object in productive ways. Their agony is not how to communicate across a divide but how to theorize the experience that moving back and forth between the many worlds they inhabit is a movement within one complex and historically and politically determined world (Abu-Lughod, 1990a, p. 26).

The same agony ‘to theorize the experience that moving back and forth’ has become the main challenge of writing this thesis. Upon my return to the UK, the struggle to maintain my objectivity remained persistent. My initial version of empirical chapters was too positive and less critical to the reality of *Pondok Pesantren*. My supervisor then asked me to rewrite and reinterpret the data manually, to strengthen my objectivity to the research subjects. After few months

of rewriting, I finally could find a way to utilise my subjectivity as a supportive factor to my objectivity as a researcher. For example, my knowledge of the local language has enabled me to translate it into English in a succinct manner and to provide a footnote in case the translation was hardly achievable. My understanding of the local conditions also opens an extensive opportunity to connect the gap between local, national, and global conditions of the internet and the public sphere. When a secretariat officer in Cipasung mentioned the need for 'Google for *Pesantren*', for instance, I could grasp the original structure of Google, the reality of *Pondok Pesantren*, and the complexity of meeting such a specialized demand of technology. Furthermore, the utilisation of keywords of power, piety, and popular also enabled me to weave together the complexity of the imagined Islamic public sphere in the increasingly digitalised world. My research experience has shown that 'we are always part of what we study and we always stand in definite relations to it' (Abu-Lughod, 1990a, p. 27).

CHAPTER 7

POWER IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE OF PONDOK PESANTREN: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF *KIAI*

INTRODUCTION

The ethnographic study of Geertz (1960) provided a good explanation of the inherent tension between the reality of the rural peasant and the political contestation of modern Indonesia. For the peasant in rural Indonesia, the ambitious architecture of modern Indonesia created an ambivalent position to modernity and the uncertainty of the future. In Geertz studies, *Kiai* as cultural brokers became important actors in connecting the realm of modernity at the national level and the simplicity of traditional life in the rural villages of Indonesia. The double function of *Kiai* for worldly and sacred affairs became his strength in the stream of modernisation in Indonesia. However, as secular nationalism and the Islamic revival have been illuminated through neoliberalism and digitalisation, *Kiai* has been struggling to defend his position as a cultural broker in contemporary Indonesia.

The issues of modernisation and Islamisation in the Indonesian public sphere (Jackson & Parker, 2008; Lukens-Bull, 2000, 2005; Pohl, 2006) have challenged the position of *Kiai* in the national public sphere as well as his impacts within local communities. Within the stream of Islamisation, *Kiai* has been challenged by the dilemma to fully participate in the political contestation at the local and national levels. More recently, as the stream of Islamisation has also taken place in an online and urban setting (Fealy, 2008; Heryanto, 2011; Hoesterey, 2008), *Kiai* has also struggled to maintain his relevance in the realm of the urban Indonesian Muslim community. Against the stream of modernisation, the struggle of *Pondok Pesantren* in the colonial and postcolonial eras has created a challenging path in facing secular modernity. By focusing on the internet policy of *Pondok Pesantren*,

this chapter argues that *Kiai* has been ambiguous in responding to the pressure of modernity.

This chapter will see how the tension to adapt to secular modernity through two important points. Firstly, the schooling system has required *Pondok Pesantren* that normally classified as a traditional Islamic institution to provide a teacher for secular subjects such as Mathematics, Computer Science, and English Language. For the majority of *Pondok Pesantren*, the adaptation to the national curriculum is the only option to maintain the relevance of the institution amidst the pressure of secular modernity. However, some *Pondok Pesantren* still resists the national curriculum and maintain an exclusively religious education. The two *Pondok Pesantren* in this research represents these two different streams of education. Secondly, these two different streams of education affect the management of internet policy in the institutions. With the requirement to provide computer and internet facilities for various secular subjects, *Pondok Pesantren* with a formal schooling system tends to have a more complicated internet policy compared to the institution without formal schooling systems. The following sections will elaborate on these complexities in Cipasung and Miftahul Huda as the focus of this research.

INTERNET, ISLAM, AND MODERNITY

In national politics, there is a sharp distinction between urban and rural Muslims, between the modernist and traditionalist. The distinction is well-represented by the existence of *Muhammadiyah* and *NU*. While *Muhammadiyah* aims to assimilate the Islamic agenda within the streams of modernisation and urbanisation, *NU* tends to strengthen its position among rural and traditional Muslims. In the post-Suharto era, the modernist Muslim tends to have a better capacity to pursue a political movement at the national level (Baswedan, 2004; Fuad, 2020). The traditionalist, on the other hand, was divided between the smaller size of the United Development Party (*PPP*) and the National Awakening Party (*PKB*) that was founded by the elite of *NU* (Bush, 2009). Leaders of *Pondok*

Pesantren are generally affiliated with the traditionalist political parties that consistently fail to hone their establishment in various general elections in post-Suharto Indonesia (Baswedan, 2004; Bush, 2009).

Following the challenges and opportunities in the post-Suharto era, many *Pondok Pesantren* sends the member of *Kiai* families to compete in the general election. In the context of my research, Cipasung and Miftahul Huda have been influential in the general election in the last decade. From Cipasung, Neng Madinah Ruhiyat and Acep Adang Ruhiyat were successful in securing their position in the provincial and national levels of the House of Representatives. In Miftahul Huda, Uu Ruzhanul Ulum was a former Regent of Tasikmalaya for two periods and subsequently becoming the Vice Governor of West Java. Another prominent figure from Miftahul Huda is *Kiai* Haji Asep Maoshul Affandy who becomes a member of the National House of Representatives. During my fieldwork in Miftahul Huda, *Kiai* Haji Asep Maoshul Affandy was running his campaign for the second period, and I had an opportunity to have a brief interview with him. Describing the complexity of the Indonesian public sphere, he argued:

The Western countries created problems for Muslim countries through religious organisations that slowly destroy the unity of our nation by creating internal conflicts. *NU*, *Muhammadiyah*, and all religious organisations tend to feel that they are the owner of a single truth. There is no cross-check mechanism between them. Cross-check mechanism is essential for the betterment of *umma*.²³

The comment addressed the internal battle between the traditionalist and the modernist within the Islamic communities. In his opinion, the internal struggle was designed by Western countries to destroy the unity of Muslim communities in Indonesia. In fact, the internal battle of Muslim communities is a product of a long history of Islamic civilization in Indonesia:

²³ *Kiai* Haji Asep Maosul Affandi, a senior *kiai* of *Pondok Pesantren* Miftahul Huda and a member of House of Representatives Republic of Indonesia (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Republik Indonesia*), personal communication, 1 November 2018.

The emergence of modern Islamic groups such as Muhammadiyah and NU has made manifest the conflict among Muslims at the grass-root level. This conflict was intensified when political competition between the Islamic *aliran* (streams) reached their peak during the liberal democracy period (Turmudi, 2006, p. 182).

Furthermore, among traditionalist Muslims in *Pondok Pesantren*, there is a further division as evidenced through the response to the national schooling system. Before Indonesian independence, religious education in *Pondok Pesantren* 'was beyond the state's control in many ways' (Isbah, 2012, p. 87). While the leaders of *Pondok Pesantren* were influenced by the educational reform in the Middle East (Isbah, 2012), the Dutch colonial government proposed a secular and Western-based educational system as the dominant system of education in Indonesia. As colonial-led education became the main vehicle of the nationalist movement, the distance between *Pondok Pesantren* and the national public sphere began to be drawn. At the national level, the promotion of Western-based education dominated the national discourse of postcolonial Indonesia. Soon after the official declaration of Indonesian independence, the Muslim community lost its privilege in maintaining the Islamic law that was represented through the Jakarta Charter. The newly established government gave a concession through the establishment of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in which *Kiai* Haji Hasyim Asy'ari became the first minister. The ministry held a small proportion of Islamic education affairs, in tandem with the dominant agenda of the Ministry of Education.

The two institutions in this research represent two different responses to the pressure of establishing a formal schooling system with the national curriculum. Institutionally, Miftahul Huda could be categorised as a 'traditional' *Pondok Pesantren* in the sense that the institution teaches *Kitab Kuning*²⁴ as a major

²⁴ *Kitab kuning* (literally means yellow book) is a set of classical Islamic books that are printed on yellow paper with the Arabic language. The topics of the books cover all disciplines from the Islamic jurisprudence to Arabic grammar and literature (van Bruinessen, 1990).

religious instruction.²⁵ Every day, students spend educational activities from morning until evening to study the various level of *Kitab Kuning*.

While the majority of *Pondok Pesantren* are already opening formal schools, Miftahul Huda is one of a few exceptions. Its focus on religious learning, combined with practical skills such as agriculture and fisheries, are fitted with the requirement of leadership in rural Indonesia. However, the current internet policy in Miftahul Huda reflects a tension between the initiative to preserve religious tradition and the realm of modernity at the national level. The following statement from *Kiai* Haji Abdul Aziz Affandi, the supreme leader of Miftahul Huda, has shown a conflicting position regarding technology and modernity:

Imagine [the result of] collaboration between *Pondok Pesantren* and technology! Unfortunately, many *Kiai* tends to have negative thinking [*suudzan*]; they think the internet is only for pornography. [In fact] a lot of things can be done with technology. The only and main problem is that we don't have money to build [the infrastructure], [it is] really expensive! Thus, in the meantime, we focus on developing a moral infrastructure that [in my opinion] is as important as technical infrastructure.²⁶

The emphasis on the relevance of religion in the modern era is interesting if we further investigate the fact that the majority of religious learning in Miftahul Huda remains offline. Within the institution, there is no single *santri* who is allowed to bring a mobile phone or access the internet freely. The only available device is computers within the library, without internet access and with the direct scrutiny of senior *santri*. The library itself is intended as a research space for students of *Ma'had Aly* (the Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies). Recently, graduates of *Ma'had Aly* in Miftahul Huda are granted a degree equal to an undergraduate

²⁵ Starting from the 1960s, many traditional *Pondok Pesantren* underwent a significant change by adding formal educational institutions that follow a national standard of education (Dhofier, 1980). Only a few *Pesantren* that only teaches *kitab kuning* without adding formal educational institutions. Two institutions in this research represent the differences. Cipasung has formal institutions from kindergarten to higher education, while Miftahul Huda only teaches *kitab kuning*.

²⁶ *Kiai* Haji Abdul Aziz Affandi, the ultimate leader of *Pondok Pesantren* Miftahul Huda, personal communication, 8 November 2018.

degree in a higher education institution. In the final year, students need to prepare an undergraduate research project under the supervision of *Kiai*. The administrator of *Ma'had Aly* explained the supervision method as follows:

We assign one student with one supervisor, normally a young member of the *Kiai* family. They normally work together in the house of the supervisor, using the laptop of the supervisor and the internet connection available at the house of the supervisor. The student is instructed to bring a USB stick in every supervision, so they could transfer their work and finish it with the available computer in the library.²⁷

The supervision system for students in *Ma'had Aly* reflects important elements of the internet policy in Miftahul Huda. Firstly, internet access and technological devices are the privileges of *Kiai* and the member of his family. In this regard, the principle of information as a human right that has been familiar in Western academics is a strange concept in the context of *Pondok Pesantren*. Secondly, with direct control of the *Kiai* family, supervision has a double function; to supervise the student project and to surveillance the research content and student mind at the same time. It is also important to note that, within such a hierarchical system, using internet access from *Kiai* home and borrowing a *Kiai* laptop possesses an inherent relationship between patron and client. Here, the emphasis of strengthening 'moral infrastructure' before technical infrastructure as has been promoted by *Kiai* Haji Abdul Aziz Affandi is relevant. Hence, the goal of the research project is not to fulfil the curiosity of students through an independent research project, but to strengthen the surveillance and bonding between students and *Kiai*.

In a practical sense, the library, as the research centre, is only functioned as a working station for students to write down the materials from supervision with *Kiai*. Without internet access, students have no opportunity to explore individual ideas on the research project. Instead, research is projected to transfer religious

²⁷ Ridwan, pseudonym of the administrator of *Ma'had Aly*, personal communication, 3 November 2018.

knowledge from *Kiai* to the student. In this regard, *Kiai* has maintained his position as a single source of knowledge in *Pondok Pesantren*. The research project in Miftahul Huda is directed to establish a similar religious interpretation between student and supervisor.

At the end of my observation in the central library, the administrator admitted the poor quality of academic writing. He also asked me to assess the quality of the undergraduate thesis that is already available in a hardbound copy. There are clear signs of a lack of high-quality supervision and independent process of research in the printed thesis. For instance, the writing process should be conducted in the formal Indonesian language. However, as the medium of teaching is predominantly in the Sundanese language, the misspelling and misuse of Indonesian words are evident. The error within the basic technique of referencing is also evident throughout the thesis. In many theses, students did not refer to any source of information nor conducting a basic literature review. The source of literature is predominantly dominated by the words of *Kiai* and the direct reference from *Kitab Kuning*.

Without the need to provide the secular subject, the pressure to provide internet access in Miftahul Huda has been minimal. Externally, the national government could not impose *Pondok Pesantren* without a schooling system to establish an internet connection as it is not critical for religious education. Internally, without the need to hone secular subjects, students in Miftahul Huda also tend to take the absence of internet connection for granted. By focusing exclusively on religious subjects, resentment and misunderstanding against secular subjects are prevalent. The misperception against secular subjects was prevalent during the interview with *Kiai* Haji Asep Maosul Affandi:

So, you are studying communication at a Western university? I heard that the Jews controlled the stream of information as to their strategy. So, it's

good that you learn in the West, so you could learn their communication strategies in disrupting Muslim countries.²⁸

The lack of understanding of the secular subject is prevalent during the conversation. By emphasising my position as a communication scholar in the Western university, he hoped that I could strengthen my background as a *santri* and become someone that akin to an espionage agent. Interestingly, he also shared a common misperception in the Muslim community in Indonesia that put Judaism and Western civilisation in a similar category. He referred to Judaism due to the background of Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook. While Zuckerberg's background and the impact of Facebook have become common knowledge, it is problematic to think that Judaism is responsible for a matter of controlling the information system. Modern Western civilisation could develop its communication system and innovative culture based on secular values, not based on Judaism or other religious matters. The comment from *Kiai* Haji Asep Maosul Affandi reflects Turmudi's research (2006) on how *Kiai* started to lose his capacity in facing the pressure of secular knowledge.

The change may also be caused by the fact that many 'ulama cannot meet all the needs of people because of their limited secular knowledge – most of their knowledge is religious. Therefore people now turn to other functionaries, such as village heads, when they face problems relating to developments in their villages and their worldly lives (Turmudi, 2006, p. 7).

It is the pressure to understand secular knowledge that stressed the majority of *Pondok Pesantren* to establish a schooling system. As of 2010, only a few *Pondok Pesantren* could survive without a formal schooling system such as Miftahul Huda. The majority of *Pondok Pesantren* nowadays have established a formal schooling system in line with its religious instruction, such as in Cipasung. Nevertheless, the combination of *Pondok Pesantren* and the formal schooling system has created a fundamental impact on student life.

²⁸ *Kiai* Haji Asep Maosul Affandi, personal communication, 1 November 2018.

In Cipasung, the daily activities begin as early as 4 am for the mass *subuh* prayer. Students then spend time for religious learning until 6 am, before breakfast and preparation of formal school that begins at 7 am until 1 pm. In school, students learn a wide variety of secular subjects, ranging from Anthropology, Indonesian Literature, to Computer Science. Teachers for secular subjects normally commute from various places outside *Pondok Pesantren* and the formal school is held under the auspices of either the Ministry of Education and Culture or the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Schools are required to provide a reliable infrastructure of information technology, such as a computer laboratory and an internet connection, to prepare students for modern-day Indonesia. Students will be back to their dormitory in *Pondok Pesantren* at 1 pm and do the *zuhr* prayer individually. They have time to have lunch and take a nap until *asr* prayer at 3 pm. After the prayer, they will have religious learning until 5 pm and have a short time for a break until *maghrib* prayer at 6 pm. After the prayer, they will have religious learning until *isya* prayer at 8 pm. Subsequently, they will have time for dinner, doing school homework, and preparing for sleeping. All students are conditioned to take a rest at 10 pm at the latest.

The 'secular lapse' during the formal schooling time has a direct consequence for students' life in Cipasung. In the morning, students are transferred from black and white Muslim clothing, female headscarf and male *peci*, with sarong and sandal, to the uniform of students in national schools, with blue/grey pants/trousers, as well as shoes and bag. The visibility of uniform, from religious students to modern education at school, necessitates students to bridge between the religious and secular subjects. At the institutional level, *Pondok Pesantren* as the main umbrella of the educational establishment should prepare all necessary infrastructure to support the studies of secular subjects, most importantly, the internet. The existence of the formal schooling system necessitates the adaptation of the local religious environment to the national and global dynamics of secular subjects. Hence, maintaining students' minds and controlling internet access is more complicated in a combined institution of Cipasung rather than in an exclusive *Pondok Pesantren* such as Miftahul Huda.

In a technical sense, research by Gunaratne et al. (2015) has shown that the minimum availability of basic infrastructure such as electricity has hindered the development of internet infrastructure in the rural areas of Indonesia. As the majority of *Pondok Pesantren* are located in rural areas, the technical challenges to provide internet infrastructure are quite pervasive. Amidst the absence of clear internet development at the national level, the not-for-profit nature of education in *Pondok Pesantren* has challenged the financial capability of *Pondok Pesantren* to establish its internet infrastructure. Regarding this issue, *Kiai Haji Dendi Yudha* shared a concern about the problem of internet connection in Cipasung:

In the beginning, we planned to provide [an] internet connection in all dormitories of Cipasung. [But] we realised that not all dormitories have the financial capability [to do so]. Throughout its history, Cipasung has never been anti-modernity. We always seek a formula to embrace a spirit of modernity that [is] relevant with *Pondok Pesantren* tradition . . . In the case of the internet, we have a similar [principle]. We realised that [the internet] is a necessity in this era. Yet we also realise that we have our limitations.²⁹

Considering the long history and a strong network of alumni, Cipasung might be able to overcome the financial barrier of developing the infrastructure through alumni donation and partnership with the government. It is a common practice for *Pondok Pesantren* to conduct a fundraising campaign for developing a new building such as a dormitory, classroom, and mosque. However, in the case of the internet infrastructure, there is no further initiative to overcome the institutional limitation. In the interview with student administrators, it is evident that the internet has been positioned as a non-necessary subject for education. The burden for the internet infrastructure is due to the perception that it could disrupt the daily activities of students. Akin to Miftahul Huda, such perception has made it difficult for Cipasung to adapt to the current stream of modernisation and to utilise the internet for educational purposes.

²⁹ Personal communication with *Kiai Haji Dendi Yuda*, a young *kiai* and a lecturer in Arabic Language and Literature at Cipasung Institute of Islamic Studies (*Institut Agama Islam Cipasung*), 10 January 2019.

The struggle of *Pondok Pesantren* in adapting to modernity could be traced back to the setback of *Nahdlatul Ulama* as a social and political organisation of *Kiai*.³⁰ After the continuous failure in the General Election, beginning in the 1970s, *Kiai* returned to *Pondok Pesantren* as the main field of contribution for the national development (Bush, 2009). While *santrinisasi* began to appear in the Indonesian public sphere in the 1970s (van Wichelen, 2007), the original *santri* in *Pondok Pesantren* struggled to defend their existence. The *santrinisasi* or the Islamic turn in the 1970s predominantly began as a political movement of Muslim activists in secular campuses. Whilst they share a similar religious identity with *santri* in *Pondok Pesantren*, their socio-cultural background has always been different. Most importantly, prominent secular campuses in Indonesia hold a competitive entrance examination that very often inaccessible for students with poor schooling system in *Pondok Pesantren*.

For Muslim students in secular campuses, the rigid and prolonged religious instruction in *Pondok Pesantren* is not suitable with the practical and pragmatic approach of life in big cities. To serve their religious interests, Muslim activists began to promote *Pesantren Kilat* (instantaneous *Pesantren*) as a shortcut for religious learning, normally held during university holidays or the month of Ramadhan. Facing the inherent competition with middle-class Muslims, *Kiai* established various strategies to maintain his social position within modern Indonesia through the intellectual transmission within the member of the *Kiai* family and endogamous marriage between *Kiai* families (Dhofier, 1980). *Kiai* also held a position in reforming the curriculum and educational practices of *Pondok Pesantren* that made it suitable for the requirement for the modern day of Indonesia (Dhofier, 1980). Hence, the 1970s marked a different path of religious life between Muslim communities in *Pondok Pesantren* and the big Indonesian

³⁰ The main concern of the return of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) as a social and cultural organization was a political degradation during the New Order era. Many *kiai* within the organization realized that the political involvement hindered them to critically assess the political misconduct of the Suharto government. By taking a distance from national politics, NU will be able to restore its dignity amidst political degradation at the national level (Bush, 2009).

cities, in which the conflicting agenda between modernity and tradition has become the main issue.

The commitment of *Kiai* in Cipasung to seek a balance between modernity and tradition resonates with the primary principle of *NU*, the most prominent Islamic organisation in Indonesia in which Cipasung has become one of the main backbones of the organisation. The organisation has a motto of *al-muhafadzah 'alal qadimissalih wal akhdu bil jadidil aslah* (maintaining a good tradition and seeking a better innovation). This motto implies that all members of the organisation should open and adapt to all innovations available in the contemporary world. However, the slogan itself puts the maintenance of tradition in the first position, signalling a constant struggle to take a balance between tradition and modernity. Regardless of its openness to modernity, the tendency of anti-modernity remains strong in Cipasung. The narrative of the internet history in Cipasung could reflect the imbalance position in weighting between tradition and modernity.

At the beginning of internet development in Cipasung, there was a controversial [practice] of selling a blog domain that happened at night, which was conflicting with the ideal schedule of students here. [Following this controversy], an idea to completely ban the internet was aroused. However, we were rethinking [the idea] and we decided that the idea was not in line with the spirit of learning in Cipasung.³¹

The incident of blog domain sale at night reveals an inherent tension and the potential disruption of the internet to the disciplined and physical nature of *Pondok Pesantren*. Within the physical environment, students have been conditioned to focus solely on their religious learning and academic activities in formal school. At night, the activities are shut down so the students could take a rest and return to the daily activities with full stamina in the early morning. The individualised nature of the internet has made it difficult for *Pondok Pesantren* to

³¹ *Kiai Haji Dendi Yuda*, personal communication, 10 January 2019.

maintain a disciplined body and a tight schedule of daily activities. Here lies the foundation to understand the gap between the collective tradition of *Pondok Pesantren* and the individualised practice of internet consumption.

However, compared to the older practice of media consumption, limiting the internet possess a significant challenge to *Pondok Pesantren*. Television consumption, for instance, could be done in a collective way such as in a family room or a public place. During my studies in *Pondok Pesantren* in 2000-2006, it was common for students to access the television in the library or waiting room of the central office of *Pondok Pesantren*. Television was also available in the canteen that I could watch important news while eating my dinner before going back to the dormitory for sleeping. In Miftahul Huda, the collective practice of watching television is still happening, particularly among male students. The student leader³² and public relations officer,³³ for instance, revealed that *Kiai* often held *nonton bareng* (watching together) football matches in the central quad of Miftahul Huda. During the World Cup season, the activity of watching together could be held all month until the final.

The practice of watching the World Cup collectively reveals two critical principles of internet policy in *Pondok Pesantren*. Firstly, the subjectivity of *Kiai* is the primary source of the policy. In the case of the internet, the subjective narrative of the threat of pornography has become the main reason for the internet restriction in *Pondok Pesantren*. As the supreme leader of *Pondok Pesantren*, the perception of *Kiai* against particular interests will affect the whole architecture of internet policy. The stigma that the internet is prone to pornography has made it difficult for *Kiai* to reflect the positive impacts of the internet on students' life. Another threat is regarding the time disruption and the collective nature of *Pondok Pesantren*. Watching the World Cup in the main quad is supportive of the communal nature of *Pondok Pesantren* and less disruptive to the tight schedule of students. The communal activity could be started and ended collectively for a

³² Ali (30 years), personal communication, 15 November 2018.

³³ Reza (28 years), a pseudonym of a public relations officer in Miftahul Huda, personal communication, 13 November 2018.

particular time. In contrast, accessing the internet requires individual agency and the personal capability of time management.

Here the ambiguous position of *Kiai* as the cultural brokers are evident. On the one hand, they aim to maintain boundaries between modernist and traditionalist Muslims. The prolonged tradition of religious education in *Pondok Pesantren* is different from the more practical approach of religious learning among modernist and urban Muslims. The lack of understanding of secular subjects and the challenges of modernity are represented by the maintenance of offline religious life. To some extent, they feel that such a religious approach is superior in providing students with a comprehensive religious understanding. While at the national level Islamisation is deeply intertwined and integrated with modernisation, the maintenance of offline religious community necessitates the clear distinction between Islam and modernity.

However, the privileges of *Kiai* and the member of his family reflect a contrasting position to the distinction. The ownership of luxury materials such as mobile phones, cars, and the modern house reflects an inherent acceptance of modernity. It is normal for the member of *Kiai* families in Cipasung and Miftahul Huda to access mobile phones and to go to the city centre with the luxury car, while internet access and physical mobility of students are restricted. With such privileges, the member of *Kiai* families also enjoys social mobility akin to the modernist and urban Muslims, evident through their ambition to compete and win in the various level of General Election. Their financial power, combined with their charisma as the descendant of prominent *Kiai*, has enabled them to bring their religious agenda from rural areas to political contestation at the national level. Through the cherry-picking approach towards the issues of modernity and tradition, they can maintain their cultural root at the local level while expanding their power to the national level. Rather than minimising inequality and promoting social mobility, the internet policy in *Pondok Pesantren* tends to sustain internal inequality and hinder the social mobility of students.

As the next section will elaborate, the implementation of internet policy has caused a serious problem of adapting the core values of *Pondok Pesantren* to the modern spirit of students. Contemporary *santri* come from a more diverse background and are more used to the media and digital practice, compared to *santri* in the previous decades. Before starting their education in *Pondok Pesantren*, they have been exposed to the individualised lifestyle, including those Muslim influencers on social media that represent the urban lifestyle rather than a simple vision of life such as in *Pondok Pesantren*. More importantly, the implication of the internet policy could lead to the critical analysis of the power articulation and its impacts on the individual agency that are necessarily needed in the era of the internet. The next section will focus on the complex implementation of internet policy and its implications on students' behaviour towards the internet.

IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPLICATION OF INTERNET POLICY

The implementation of internet policy in *Pondok Pesantren* reflects the underlying anxiety and misunderstanding in facing the pressure of the increasingly digitalised Indonesian public sphere. Yet for *pengurus* and *santri*, the mandate from *Kiai* possesses a high degree of obedience. Consequently, the tension between outward and inward-looking, between the attempts to become a modern institution and the spirit of anti-Westernisation, has created uncertainty and ambiguity in the implementation of internet policy. While the leaders have shown active political participation at the regional and national levels, they systematically minimise the direct involvement of students on the internet.

The internet policy in *Pondok Pesantren* also represents the combined philosophy of freedom and control. Within this philosophy, students have the freedom to choose from a variety of alternatives, yet the availability of the options should follow specific rules and regulations. The limitation of information reflects the Foucauldian perspective of criminal justice in which 'a corpus of knowledge, techniques, "scientific" discourses is formed and becomes entangled with the

practice of the power to punish' (Foucault, 1991, p. 23). At the same time, internet policy also represents a curatorial system of a museum. Students were able to access digital content as long as it is relevant to the educational policy of *Pondok Pesantren*. The internet functioned as a window to see the external world and to fulfil students with a sense of optimism to conquer the world. Within the curatorial system, the institution aims to provide a space for sanity and reflection, instead of a space of understanding the constant struggle in the outside world. Another *Kiai* from Cipasung explained this policy in detail:

The students in elementary and secondary schools [are] only allowed to access their mobile phones once a week. Typically, students in the final year of secondary school have more urgent needs [for the internet] as the application to top universities in Indonesia are held through various online platforms. At the level of a dormitory, Wi-Fi access is managed by the manager [a member of the *Kiai* family]. In schools, the policy is fully adapted to each institution, and it would be more challenging to control the internet in schools than in dormitories. A sanction will be lifted to students who access content that [are] not suitable with the values of *Pondok Pesantren*, such as pornography. For *santri* at the higher education level, access to the internet and mobile phones has been expanded due to their needs in executing various tasks in college. Mobile phones and laptops are a necessity for *santri* at the higher education level. In principle, Cipasung does not ban the internet. We also don't have a centralistic internet policy. It is proportional, depends on individual and institutional needs.³⁴

The hybrid educational system in Cipasung, between *Pondok Pesantren* and national education, enables its graduates to apply to various secular and religious universities in Indonesia. As the application process is going online, it is no longer possible for final year students to be wholly disconnected from the internet. At this point, the constant gratification of internet access should raise scrutiny on the

³⁴ Personal communication with *Kiai Haji Abdul Chobir*, a senior *kiai* and the director of Cipasung College of Engineering (*Sekolah Tinggi Teknologi Cipasung*), 13 January 2019.

capability of Cipasung in managing the individual needs of students. Giving internet access instantly and merely for the university application will overlook the abundant potentials of the internet throughout their education in *Pondok Pesantren*. However, as the selection process is competitive,³⁵ the potential of students to get accepted at top universities and the survival capability in the top universities should be questioned.

As my personal experience in transitioning between *Pondok Pesantren* and a secular university suggests, the collectivist attitude and the offline approach within *Pondok Pesantren* do not always fit with the demand for education in the top Indonesian universities. In the universities, students are expected to have their laptops, live in a single room of student accommodation, and conduct the university tasks independently. The inherent gap of attitude between individualism in universities and collectivism in *Pondok Pesantren* remains absent in conducting a comprehensive internet policy. As the Indonesian public sphere increasingly relies on individual agency, the collectivist attitude of *Pondok Pesantren* should come under scrutiny.

Regarding the tension between collectivism and individualism, it is important to note that the conversation regarding the internet in the institutions is mainly dominated by the issue of the mobile phone, the most individualised practice of accessing the internet. A particular emphasis has been placed regarding the small size, individual ownership, and portability of mobile phones that enable students to access the internet everywhere and anywhere. Compared to accessing the internet through a computer in the library and public places, it is more difficult to control internet access through mobile phones. In Miftahul Huda, the possession of a mobile phone reflects a degree of social hierarchy within the institution. The mobile phone is restricted for all students from junior to senior level of education. The only exception is for senior students who sit in the student organization; they

³⁵ My experience attending the top university in Indonesia in 2006-2010 could become a source of reflection. After getting a place at a top university and becoming the only graduate from my *Pondok Pesantren* who attended the university, the struggle to adapt to the digital environment affected the performance in my first year at the university.

can access the mobile phone to assist in their organizational tasks. However, the mobile phone is only limited to the analogue Nokia mobile phone that is only functioned for messages and phone, not android or Apple iPhone. For junior students who are not occupied in the managerial position of the student organization, all access to a mobile phone is completely restricted. Thus, students who have access to a mobile phone has a higher level of power and seniority compared to students without a mobile phone.

However, on some occasions, I observed *santri* who kept busy with mobile phones when their parents paid a monthly visit to Miftahul Huda. The meeting point was the canteen near the main gate of Miftahul Huda. Almost all parent possesses a smartphone, with different brand and specification. On some occasions, I witnessed a big family open their lunch from home, for six members of the family to eat together in the canteen. The lunch consisted of beef satay, stir fry vegetable, and rice, complete with fruit and cake as a dessert. As they forgot to bring a drink from home, *santri* of the family bought six bottles of soft drink from the canteen. After finishing the meal, the *santri* asked permission from her father to use his iPhone for entertainment. She occasionally took a selfie and asked permission from her father to upload her picture on her Instagram account. On another occasion, a father paid a visit and only brought two packs of rice with egg to share with his daughter. He got his drink from home and did not order anything from the canteen. After finishing the meal, his daughter borrowed his mobile phone, the old version of Huawei, a cheap mobile phone in the Indonesian market in 2018. Unlike the first student whose father has an iPhone, this student did not take any selfies and immediately returned the phone to her father just after a few minutes.

Amidst such a restrictive environment, member of the *Kiai* family has the freedom to access smartphone without age restriction. Within the *Kiai* family that hosted me, the children were often found occupied with YouTube videos on the mobile phone of her mother. On one occasion, the five-year-old child was upset because the internet quota on the mobile phone was running low. Her mother then asked immediately a *santri* who worked in her home to buy an internet quota in the nearby store, around one kilometre outside Miftahul Huda, using the motorcycle

of her husband. On another occasion, the mother was upset because her ten-year-old son was occupied by the mobile phone and abandoned his elementary religious learning. The incident showed anxiety and fear of the mother, who is a member of the *Kiai* family and senior teaching staff, on the potential disruption of mobile phone for religious activities of his eldest and only son who is projected to become the next *Kiai*. Meanwhile, for her youngest daughter, the mobile phone could become a medium of entertainment, to keep the daughter occupied and entertained while the mother busy with her teaching schedule at home.

At the highest level of the hierarchy, *Kiai* Haji Abdul Aziz Affandi in Miftahul Huda has the most up to date version of the Samsung Galaxy Note. When I interviewed him, he was busy developing a new building within a male dormitory complex. After explaining my background, he suddenly remembered that he has a relative who was also living in the UK. Then he gave me his mobile phone and asked me to search for the name of his relative on his Facebook account. As he was occupied with the development project, he asked me to hold his mobile phone throughout the interview. At the end of the interview, he asked me to put my mobile number on his phone and called my phone as a matter of exchanging the mobile numbers. By asking me to do multiple tasks, it seems evident that in his perspective, I was positioned as a *santri* and his assistance, rather than as a researcher from a Western university. The interview was also held before the monthly assembly of senior alumni that was predominantly filled with a religious sermon from *Kiai* Haji Abdul Aziz Affandi. It is visible that the senior alumni are older than the *Kiai*. Yet, upon their arrival in the development project, they were eager to kiss the muddy hand of *Kiai*; an act of seeking a blessing (*barakah*).

Here lies a manifestation of power that is strongly represented through the possession of the mobile phone. The gadget and its internet access are subject to a hierarchy of students, socio-economic background of the family, and the privilege of *Kiai* and his family. The longer the time student living in *Pondok Pesantren*, the better the opportunity for students to access the internet. In contrast to the concept of 'internet for all', the hierarchy of the student body necessitates a different interpretation of internet access. Internet and mobile

phone have always been associated with age and seniority as a prerequisite for responsible digital behaviour.

These rationales have become the background of limited internet access in private space and led to a craving for internet access as having been shown during parent's visit in the canteen. The practice of borrowing parent's mobile phone has shown that regardless of maintenance of communal values, students are normal Indonesian youth who need to update their social media account. Parents are also associated with the perception of a responsible adult. Hence the permission and close supervision from a parent could guarantee the responsible digital behaviour of students. In contrast, member of *Kiai* families has the extensive privilege of internet access, regardless of their age and level of education. Here lies the problem of the inequality that could hinder the spirit of equality in Miftahul Huda, as shown through the practice of a unified standard of students' monthly spending.³⁶

Meanwhile, in Cipasung, students could access their mobile phones on a particular day, to ensure that there is no direct contact between the opposite sexes through mobile phones. Male students have an opportunity to access on Thursday and female students on Monday. *Kiai* Haji Bunyamin Ruhiyat, the senior *Kiai* in Cipasung, described this schedule as a bonus for students who are suggested to observe non-compulsory fasting (*shaum sunnah*) on Monday and Thursday.³⁷ So, while they should observe 'fasting of the mobile phone' on other days, they could break their 'fasting' on the day of non-compulsory fasting. There lies a contradiction between the initiative of *Kiai* in Cipasung to be more open to the internet with the concept of digital fasting. While the internet policy is depicted as accommodating to the students need, the idea of digital fasting implies that the internet is a non-necessary need for students in *Pondok Pesantren*.

³⁶ According to the education administrator, all students, regardless of their socio-economic background, should spend maximum IDR 500,000 (£26.5) per month. Parents transfer the monthly spending to the bank account of the administration office, and the administrator will allocate the money to individual student in a weekly basis.

³⁷ Personal communication with *Kiai Haji* Bunyamin Ruhiyat, a senior *kiai* and the supreme leader of *Pondok Pesantren* Cipasung, 29 December 2018.

More importantly, the philosophy of fasting in Islam means that Muslims should avoid the temporary enjoyment of everyday life for the sake of more spiritual achievement in the hereafter. The idea of digital fasting suggests that the internet possesses some harmful elements of mundane life that should be minimised to get endless enjoyment in the afterlife. Digital fasting is also proof that there is a significant gap in understanding the internet between senior *Kiai* and younger *Kiai* in Cipasung. While younger *Kiai* projected the accommodative approach, the senior *Kiai* has preferred the fasting philosophy as a basis of internet policy.

Nevertheless, during my observation on Thursday, I saw two male students playing an online game through their mobile phones while eating their lunch in a local chicken noodle store. On Monday, a group of female students was seen ordering an online cab in front of the main gate. Twenty minutes later, the online taxi came to pick them up and go to their preferred destination. They also have an opportunity to access the internet from computer facilities at school. The accessibility of the internet at schools has shown a collectivist behaviour and the preference to put the internet access in a public space rather than in the private domain of students. These contradictions between digital fasting and the reality of the social world imply that students could not be separated from the mundane world. They might be able to preserve an exclusive identity as a *santri* during the days of digital fasting. However, once they are well-connected on Monday and Thursday, they automatically have become an integral part of the global digital lifestyle.

Another interesting element is the interest in fact-checking and anti-hoax activities as essential elements in building a healthy public sphere. While *Kiai* in Miftahul Huda focused entirely on the concern about pornography, concern about the hoax in Cipasung showed a different emphasis on the negative impacts of the internet from different *Kiai*. *Kiai* Haji Dendi from Cipasung admitted that 'hoaxes in social media is dangerous for students thought and perspective'.³⁸ In the weekly general assembly, *Kiai* and teachers would normally address some critical issues that

³⁸ *Kiai Haji Dendi Yuda*, personal communication, 10 January 2019.

happen during the week, including fake news and hoaxes that have become a hot debate at that time. The educators want to ensure that all students have a civic responsibility, particularly in managing and absorbing information across various digital platforms. The forum itself is held within the auditorium of *Pondok Pesantren* in which the senior *Kiai* speaks in front of a large audience, predominantly the *santri*. The utilisation of public assembly to tackle hoaxes is another proof of how the internet is positioned as a public issue rather than a personal medium. Interestingly, there is no further routine and small forum that specifically deal with the issues of digital literacy.

A month before my fieldwork, Cipasung collaborated with Nahdlatul Ulama, the largest Muslim organisation in Indonesia, and held anti-hoax training for senior students. However, such activity has not been continued in the following months. The absence of continuous training is a shame given the fact that some students have already gained the crucial principles for digital literacy. Faris, for instance, argues that clarification (*tabayyun*) is an essential element in Islamic ethics in which all Muslims are expected to receive and deliver messages as accurately as possible.³⁹ Another student says that fake news is not only harmful to the values of modern society; it is also unsuitable within the core principles of Islam that respect sincerity and honesty.

Given the various interpretation at the policy level, students in the institutions also had diverse perspectives regarding the internet policy of *Pondok Pesantren*. For Khadija⁴⁰, the internet helped her to widen her view of the world. Yet, she urged that 'internet policy is needed to help us navigate between positive and negative impacts of the internet'. Fatima⁴¹ argued that the restriction of internet access had helped her 'to focus on religious studies instead of surfing on non-sense content

³⁹ Faris (21 years), a pseudonym of a male student in Cipasung, personal communication, 30 December 2018.

⁴⁰ Khadija (19 years), a pseudonym of a female student in Miftahul Huda, personal communication, 7 November 2018.

⁴¹ Fatima (18 years), a pseudonym of a female student in Miftahul Huda, personal communication, 8 November 2018.

on the internet'. It is interesting to see how Fatima differentiates between religious studies and non-sense content on the internet.

In contrast to the Western tradition that emphasises the individual agency on the internet, Fatima's perception reflects how the individual agency should be adapted to the institutional values of *Pondok Pesantren*. The distinction between academic life in *Pondok Pesantren* and the non-sense activities on the internet also challenge the current trend of utilising the internet for educational purposes. Rather than blending entertainment and education through edutainment practice on the internet, Fatima prefers to differentiate between these two purposes. The predictability of her perception shows that the norms of *Pondok Pesantren* have been successfully attached to the personal perception of students. It is also important to note that Fatima is a student from Miftahul Huda, yet her perspective reflects the digital fasting philosophy of the internet in Cipasung.

Similar to Fatima, Haris⁴² stressed that internet policy is particularly needed to filter content based on the age of internet users. He also favoured the restricted environment of the internet as he preferred direct and interpersonal communication rather than mediated communication through the internet. For Haris, the liberal internet environment has been deteriorating the meaning of interpersonal communication that 'people only busy with their gadget and ignoring their real environment'.⁴³ The emphasis on the liberal threat of the internet from a student in Cipasung reflects an anti-Western tendency from *Kiai* in Miftahul Huda.

It is interesting to see, albeit mixed educational environment in Cipasung and a geographical distance from Miftahul Huda, a *santri* in Cipasung could share a similar anti-Western sentiment akin to a *Kiai* in Miftahul Huda. Raisa, another student in Cipasung, also revealed some possible negatives on the free internet environment, such as intimate online chatting with students from the opposite sex

⁴² Haris (22 years), a pseudonym of a male student and a security officer in Cipasung, personal communication, 5 January 2019.

⁴³ Haris (22 years), personal communication, 25 December 2018

and 'the easier way to violate *Pondok Pesantren* regulation'.⁴⁴ At the same time, she also explores the possibility to use the internet for Islamic propagation. The interest of Raisa towards Islamic propagation and her concern regarding 'free internet environment' that akin to anti-Western sentiment in Miftahul Huda, shows how *santri* and *Kiai* from different institutions could share a commonality of perception in the name of preserving the *umma*.

Meanwhile, Faris⁴⁵ explored the possible evolution of *Pondok Pesantren* by utilising the internet for educational purposes. However, he also emphasises the importance to analyse internal and external factors in developing the internet policy in *Pondok Pesantren*. Faris also praises the internet as 'a sophisticated system that provides many solutions for various problems in our society'. Regarding the internet policy, Syarif proposed the idea to consider various dimensions, including time, place and goals. He emphasised that 'as a placeless medium, putting the internet in the right time and right place with the right goals will minimise its negative impacts'.⁴⁶ Following the argument, Miftah⁴⁷ suggested that *Pondok Pesantren* should provide a space of internet access for senior students and a separate schedule of internet access between male and female students. These arguments show how the spatial element of *Pondok Pesantren* is imagined as a powerful force to control the spaceless nature of the internet. The physical visibility of the internet within educational facilities such as the computer laboratory and the library will condition students to get a maximum educational benefit and minimise the negative impact of accessing the internet personally within a private space.

In the current debate about the right of children to get internet access (boyd, 2015; Livingstone, 2004; Livingstone & Sefton-Green, 2016), the case of *Pondok Pesantren* could provide a middle way in exploring the challenges and

⁴⁴ Raisa (20 years), a pseudonym of a female student in Cipasung, personal communication, 7 January 2019.

⁴⁵ Faris (21 years), personal communication, 30 December 2018.

⁴⁶ Syarif (23 years), a pseudonym of a male student in Miftahul Huda, personal communication, 20 November 2018.

⁴⁷ Miftah (22 years), a pseudonym of a male student in Miftahul Huda, personal communication, 11 November 2018.

opportunities of the internet for education. The focus on the negative impacts of the internet has increased the difficulties of the institution to adapt to the digital environment. A *Kiai* in Miftahul Huda reflects his aspiration to keep the young mind of students from the disruptive impacts of the internet:

Amidst such a chaotic digital environment, *Pondok Pesantren* must maintain the purity of student minds.⁴⁸

For the *Kiai*, the increasingly digitalised Indonesian public sphere possesses the inherent threat to the stability of the public sphere of *Pondok Pesantren*. As a *Kiai* who is also a legislator in the National Assembly (DPR), *Kiai Haji Asep Maosul Affandi* had first-hand experience in the difficulties of managing the Indonesian public sphere. Such protective measurement reflects the anxiety that such complexity of the Indonesian public sphere will also happen in the public sphere of *Pondok Pesantren*. As stated above, the minimum understanding of secular subjects has lowered the capacity of *Kiai* to navigate the complex arrangement of the Indonesian public sphere. Despite the flaws of secular knowledge and public policy, their understanding of the internet and the public sphere has become a strong rationale in developing the current internet policy in *Pondok Pesantren*.

At the same time, the stream of modernisation among the Muslim middle class also created a conflict of interest regarding the relevance of *Kiai* for the new generation of pious Muslims. Compared to Muslims in *Pondok Pesantren*, the Muslim middle class are more familiar with the competitive admission to the top universities, more digital-savvy and inclined with a career in various strategic sectors. Therefore, their religious awareness should be adapted to their busy schedule of working in big Indonesian cities – the rigid and long period of religious instruction in *Pondok Pesantren* is certainly unfit with their urban lifestyle.

In the last decade, Indonesia has witnessed a growing number of urban preachers with higher popularity compared to *Kiai* in *Pondok Pesantren*, mainly due to their capabilities to increase their religious presence through various digital platforms.

⁴⁸ *Kiai Haji Asep Maosul Affandi*, personal communication, 1 November 2018.

Some of the new preachers had no prior experience of religious learning akin to the religious competencies of *Kiai* in *Pondok Pesantren*. Hence, in the perception of *Kiai*, protecting students minds from such narrow religious understanding is necessary to ensure that students have profound religious capacities akin to *Kiai* in *Pondok Pesantren*. The next empirical chapter of piety will further elaborate on the gap between urban Muslims and Muslims in *Pondok Pesantren*.

What is interesting from the case of *Pondok Pesantren* is the absence of resistance amidst such a tight-controlled public sphere. From a Foucauldian perspective, the absence of resistance is a sign of a high level of control in which the disappearance of an instrument of governance has made a new mechanism of discipline (Foucault, 1991). Moral panic and the concern over pornography, as discussed above, has created a sensibility that the internet is a matter of crime, and accessing the internet deserves a punishment. Yet, in facing such difficulties, no single student in my research was capable of articulating clearly about their perspective of the internet policy and their aspiration for internet access. In his study, Lukens-Bull (2005) has noticed the hesitation from his participants in criticising the *Kiai*. A similar tendency happened during my fieldwork. Any interview question that possibly criticises the life of *Kiai* will be either unanswered or answered with hesitation. For the community of *Pondok Pesantren*, criticising *Kiai* will lead to an unfruitful life as they are going distant from his blessing (*barakah*). The issue of resistance will be discussed in more detail in the empirical chapter of the popular.

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this chapter, I have elaborated on how *Kiai* struggled to maintain his double role as a cultural broker and as a political actor at the same time. Throughout the New Order era, the systematic oppression of Suharto has limited the capacity of Muslim leaders to become prominent political actors at the national and regional levels. The decision of *Nahdlatul Ulama* in the 1980s to back to its social and cultural movements signalled the difficulties of *Kiai* in managing

his political capabilities in the Indonesian public sphere (Bush, 2009). However, in the last period of his presidency, Suharto himself preferred to be more culturally friendly with Muslim communities, particularly by making a pilgrimage to Mecca and introduced himself as Haji Muhammad Suharto. The fall of the New Order in 1998 has opened a new avenue for Muslim communities to be more actively participate in both realms of political contestation and cultural production. Currently, *Kiai* in *Pondok Pesantren* also fully participate in national politics by sending the member of his family in both executive and legislative opportunities of the General Election.

Meanwhile, the realm of religious commodification and political contestation at the national level has always been dominated by the Muslim middle class from an urban background. For the Muslim middle class, modernisation and Islamisation could be pursued together with their busy schedule in maintaining a career in various fields. However, the critical distance between *Pondok Pesantren* and the national public sphere has made it difficult for leaders in the institutions to understand and navigate the complexity of the Indonesian public sphere. The critical distance has created ambiguous strategies to navigate the realms of cultural production and political contestation at the national level. The gap between internal and external factors has created uncertainty for the future of students upon graduating from *Pondok Pesantren* and fully integrate into the Indonesian public sphere.

In terms of political contestation, the last decade has seen a comeback of political actors from *Pondok Pesantren* background in both executive and legislative positions through various levels of general elections. Utilising their strong network in local communities, they have been successful in winning the election. However, during their political career, there are no seemingly different trajectories between the spirit of civil Islam (Hefner, 2000) that has been attached to *Pondok Pesantren* and the more pragmatic political approach of Muslim activists from the middle-class background. In the last decade, some political actors from *Pondok Pesantren* background also fall into various corruption cases and raise a question regarding their 'moral infrastructure' amidst the corruptive tendency of Indonesian politics.

Their credentials as a member of *Pondok Pesantren* might be useful in winning the election but not strong enough to fight against the complex and corrupt condition of the Indonesian public sphere.

In terms of the pressure from cultural production, the institutions might have a critical element of control that created a significant distance between students and market capitalism. However, students of *Pondok Pesantren* could not separate themselves from the pressure and tension of the market once they graduate from the institutions. The protective measurement from the leaders and the lack of digital literacy initiatives have weakened their capability to navigate independently the increasingly digitalised Indonesian public sphere. It is difficult to imagine that students could compete for entrance at top universities and in the increasingly competitive job market without the capability of independent learning and digital skills. Even in thinking about their aspiration to become local leaders, understanding market mechanisms is also essential to prepare better strategies of activism and to enhance the capability of local communities amidst the socio-economic gap between urban and rural communities. As digital access has started to permeate in small villages and rural areas, digital skills are also critical for students who aspire to become local leaders.

Weighting between maintaining tradition and adapting to modernity, it is obvious that *Pondok Pesantren* prefers to keep the tradition with a twist of modernity. Internet policy that emphasises institutional purposes, not the individual needs of students, reflects a long tradition of collectivism in *Pondok Pesantren*. However, as we have elaborated above, the ongoing modernisation in the Indonesian public sphere necessitates the critical aspects of individual agency and perceives individuals merely as a factor of production in market capitalism. While the Muslim middle-class has fully integrated into the market capitalism, the critical distance of *Pondok Pesantren* has created an ambiguous position of students in the competitive market. The next chapter will focus on this issue and how the offline religious life in *Pondok Pesantren* reinforces a tension in understanding the online religious life in the increasingly digitalised Indonesian public sphere.

CHAPTER 8

PIETY IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE OF *PONDOK PESANTREN*: IMAGINING THE DIGITAL ISLAMIC SCHOOLS

INTRODUCTION

Research on the internet and the Islamic public sphere, in Indonesia and elsewhere in the Islamic world, tend to focus on the online presence of the Islamic community. On the one hand, the focus on middle-class Muslims has created a bias in which the community seems quickly adapt to the digital public sphere. On the other hand, research on the less privileged Muslim communities tends to associate Islam with terrorism and religious fundamentalism. Little is known about the complexity of the Islamic public sphere in the process of migrating online. In fact, in the context of *Pondok Pesantren*, offline religious life is more dominant than the online version due to socio-economic factors and a strong attachment to the charisma of *Kiai*. By attending religious education in the institution, students feel that *Kiai* has provided emotional needs to survive in modern Indonesia.

As the sanctuary for the religious community, the offline setting of *Pondok Pesantren* reflects the necessity of humans to have a place that is familiar, friendly, and flourishing (Zuboff, 2019). With the familiar feeling, the instrument of control, as explained in the previous chapter, is appreciated, rather than criticised by the population of *Pondok Pesantren*. Instead of feeling restricted, they are feeling secure within the confinement of the offline religious environment. In an urban setting, the absence of religious authority such as *Kiai* creates a gap in fulfilling the spiritual and emotional needs of the Muslim middle class. Muslims in urban environments utilise online religious platforms in meeting their emotional and spiritual needs amidst the pressure of professional life and urban lifestyle (Fealy, 2008; Heryanto, 2011).

Throughout its history, the minimum level of state-sponsored piety (Rudnyckyj, 2010) has created a critical distance between *Pondok Pesantren* and national

leadership (Hefner, 2000). The current climate of mainstreaming *Pondok Pesantren* and its close attachment to national politics could be opposing the idea of civil Islam (Hefner, 2000). During my fieldwork that falls into the campaign period of the 2019 General Election, I could witness the disappearance of a sense of criticism from religious leaders towards the inequality and injustice in national politics. By observing the local politics of *Pondok Pesantren* amidst democratisation in Indonesia (Aspinall, 2014), we could see the erosion of the idea of civil Islam (Hefner, 2019) in the Indonesian public sphere.

In the market, the limited online presence of students has created a significant distance between individuals and surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2019). The institutions do not attempt to commodify religion amidst the growing trend of the pious middle class. However, the tendency of *Pondok Pesantren* to avoid the practice of religious commodification seems idealistic yet fragile at the same time. Students might be able to survive with a pure tradition of *Pondok Pesantren* during their studies. Once they become alumni, it is completely impossible to separate themselves from the struggle of the market mechanism that has become an important element of the Indonesian public sphere. By elucidating public piety, politics of piety and the market of piety, this chapter aims to analyse the strategies of *Pondok Pesantren* to maintain the religious values vis-a-vis potential secularisation on the internet. The stark comparison between individualism at the national level and collectivism in *Pondok Pesantren* will shed light on the fact that the majority of *Pondok Pesantren* life remains offline.

INTERNET AND PUBLIC PIETY IN *PONDOK PESANTREN*

As Islam has no official religious structure akin to the papacy in Catholicism, the position of religious leaders such as *Kiai* and his *baraka* (blessing) play a pivotal role in understanding the religious structure in a microscopic lens of the Indonesian society. In the past, while the religious consciousness among the middle class had been minimum, there is no need for *Kiai* to participate in the realm of urban lifestyle. However, within the contemporary Islamic revival, the

emergence of microcelebrity and preachers on social media has challenged the authority of *Kiai* in the lens of emerging urban Muslims. It also further exacerbates the inherent tension between urban and rural Muslims.

For the middle class, the requirement to pursue religious studies to *Kiai* in *Pondok Pesantren* does not fit with their busy schedule and urban lifestyle. For the follower of *Kiai*, the microcelebrity and preacher is incomparable to the *Kiai* who has a long history of serving the *umma*, proven by the number of *santri* and the long establishment of *Pondok Pesantren*. *Kiai* also pursued a long period of religious studies, came from elite religious communities and possessed the spiritual power of *baraka*. Within such a realm, the physical presence of *Pondok Pesantren* is often regarded as an ideal version of a religious manifestation.

Yet the physical presence of *Pondok Pesantren* could signal an inferior position of the institution amidst the increasingly competitive and individualised public sphere. In Miftahul Huda, important buildings such as dormitory, mosque, classroom, and offices are developed voluntarily by students and maintained through public charity. Without professional consultation in architecture and planning, the buildings are far from the standard of modern buildings and scattered randomly across the complex. During rainy days, water leaks could be found in the classroom, student dormitories, mosques, and the administration office. Male dormitories are located close to the cemetery of *Kiai* families. On rainy days, as students step into their room, the wet mud from the cemetery could easily leave a muddy footprint throughout the dormitory. In the backyard of female dormitories, wet clothing that has fallen from female rooms are left behind, created a dump of unused and dirty clothing throughout the backyard. In the dry season, senior students should transport water from the nearby river with a truck, predominantly for ablution, shower, and washing students' clothes. The water is yellowish, and during the dry season, scabies has become the public health crisis in the institution.

In contrast, *Kiai* houses have a better appearance and architecture. They are scattered around the outer ring of the complex, functioning as a space for

controlling students' mobilisation. The only exception is the house of *Kiai* Haji Abdul Aziz Affandy that is located close to the central mosque and the central quad of Miftahul Huda, signalling the centrality of his leadership. In the house of *Kiai* that hosted me, three bedrooms are available. One is the main bedroom, the second one is the children's bedroom, and a guest bedroom that I occupied during the fieldwork. The *Kiai* has one son, the eldest, and three daughters. As the son is close to puberty, the *Kiai* has built a new bedroom close to the veranda with the assistance of seven male students. In the backyard of his house, there is a pavilion that functions as a welcoming space for the guest and is occasionally converted into a classroom. The *Kiai* is a heavy smoker. Therefore' the outdoor space is perfect for welcoming guests and teaching students. Smoking has become the general habit of senior students and the member of *Kiai* families, a symbol of powerful and privileged males in the institution.

Another visualised privilege appears in the house of Uu Ruzhanul Ulum, the grandson of the founder of Miftahul Huda who is currently serving as a vice-governor of West Java. The house is larger than the house of the supreme leader, and surrounded by a high fence, signalling a security standard of a government official. However, from the back gate of the house, we could peek at a collection of luxury cars and motorcycles. As the vice-governor is working and living in the nearby city of Bandung, the big empty house is often utilised as a classroom. In the morning and afternoon, we could hear students chanting and repeating a religious song, from the house of one of the most powerful people in West Java.

It is interesting to note that amidst such unequal physical appearance, there is no protest or objection from students regarding the poor quality of the dormitory and classroom. By understanding the social relationship between *santri* and *Kiai*, we could assess the rationale of maintaining offline religious life without significant protest or objection from students. If we use the Western perspective on the right of information, we could see a systematic abandonment of the human right of students. Yet for students, the absence of internet connection and the obedience to *Kiai* have become the alternative sources of happiness. The reality of life within *Pondok Pesantren* is even strikingly different from the Indonesian public sphere,

where the boundaries between discipline and entertainment, religion and secularism, between religiosity and marketization have been blurred.

Moreover, *Pondok Pesantren* was established as a grassroots initiative in facing the challenge of religious manifestation in the local community. The trust of the religious commitment of *Kiai* produced an endowment mechanism that enabled *Kiai* to become a social and economic actor in building the local Islamic community. At the same time, the common perception of *Kiai* as an agent of God has created a sacred statue of the actor and the physical compound of the institution. Consequently, *Pondok Pesantren* has been closely connected to the dynamics of the local community and distant from the overall structure of mundane life at the same time. Such a mechanism of endowment and the spiritual position of *Kiai* as a connector to God could be found in the history of Miftahul Huda, as shown in the textbook:

Intentionally, Hj. Mardhiyah invited *Uwa Ajengan* because she had a nearby land Cisalam in Manonjaya and she wanted to deed some of her rice fields, approximately 1400 square meters. However, *Uwa Ajengan* declined the offer because it's less than his expectation. He was joking and saying: 'It's too small; I want to establish a big *Pesantren*.' Hj. Mardhiyah decided to reconsider her offer and asked *Uwa Ajengan* to come the next day. *Uwa Ajengan* came next day, Hj. Mardhiyah then doubles her deed, and the rest of her land should be bought with a price of IDR 350 per 14 square meters, by credit. *Uwa Ajengan* accepted the deed and bought the rest of the land by credit, and praise to Allah, one year later, the land was fully paid. Above the land, we could see *Pesantren* Miftahul Huda today (Fattah, 2010, pp. 9-10).

The practice of giving the land for religious endowment has inspired a spirit to sacrifice the individual interest for the betterment of the whole society. As a spiritual leader, *Kiai* has a critical role in providing all aspects that is necessary to make people feeling at home. These non-transactional and spiritual mechanisms are essential in creating a sense of safety and security among the community.

Consequently, people in *Pondok Pesantren* feel that there is a moral obligation to pay respect to *Kiai* due to his commitment and contribution to education. The public relations officer in Miftahul Huda, for instance, shared his personal experience that the *Kiai* is not only fulfilling his needs for religious education but also providing a candidate to become his wife.

The commitment from *Kiai* and the sense of obligation from students are two distinctive aspects of public piety in *Pondok Pesantren* that differentiate it from public piety at the national level. By providing all the emotional needs of students, *Kiai* could maintain the position of *Pondok Pesantren* as a religious sanctuary. In return, students should be able to give all commitment to following religious surveillance in *Pondok Pesantren*. Therefore, religious sanctuary and religious surveillance are managed simultaneously. The religious surveillance of *Pondok Pesantren* controls personal choice, not by accumulating power and capital (Zuboff, 2019), but by preserving the religious values of the institution. In Miftahul Huda, religious surveillance has been manifested through comprehensive religious education.

In the junior and elementary levels (*ibtida* and *tsanawi*), the focus of education is the defence of knowledge and the development of character. We want to ensure that all students could remember their source of knowledge. Within the development of character, we focus on compulsory and non-compulsory rituals, such as *tahajud*, *dhuha*, *shalat Sunnah*, *shaum Sunnah*, and the movement to cleaning the classroom together.⁴⁹

By combining religious knowledge and religious practice, the institution aims to integrate the mind and soul of the spiritual self. At the level of *Ma'had Aly* (Advanced Studies), the curriculum has shifted to the empirical studies of Islam. To achieve a critical level of education, students need to combine their understanding of classical texts and their awareness of the real problems of society. The cross-approach between traditional and contemporary resources

⁴⁹ Ali (30 years), a pseudonym of a student leader in Miftahul Huda, personal communication, 15 November 2018.

enables students to produce relevant solutions for the ongoing issues of modern society.

As shown in the previous chapter, the absence of formal education in Miftahul Huda has minimised the pressure to provide internet access for its students. The goal of education in Miftahul Huda, as the public relations officer reveals, is a Muslim who could bring a religious sentiment logically. By maintaining its offline environment, Miftahul Huda can strengthen its comprehensive religious education without the pressure to get online. The condition in Miftahul Huda reflects the notion of imagined communities (Anderson, 2016) in which all components of the communities should be able to sacrifice themselves for the sake of the unity of the community. In the case of *Pondok Pesantren*, the sacrifice is evident in the individual willingness to withdraw from the online community for the sake of their participation among the offline religious community.

However, a tension between religious surveillance in *Pondok Pesantren* and the adaptation to national education happens in Cipasung, in which *Pondok Pesantren* should adapt to the requirement of formal schooling systems. Within the realm of *Pondok Pesantren*, as the umbrella of Cipasung Educational Foundation, the institution perceives that technology and religious life could be complementary to each other:

In my first role as a secretariat officer, *Kiai* sent me to computer training in the city centre [of Tasikmalaya]. It was the early era of computers, and *Kiai* asked me to hone my computer skills for the management of *Pondok Pesantren*. I don't see any conflict between my obedience to *Kiai* and our need for technology. They could be complementary [to each other].⁵⁰

The emphasis on obedience to *Kiai* should be put as an entryway to understand the technological approach in *Pondok Pesantren*. Such focus differentiates the technological approach in *Pondok Pesantren* to the understanding of technology at the national level in which the individual has more freedom to use technology

⁵⁰ Dani (32 years), a pseudonym of a secretariat officer in Cipasung, personal communication, 9 January 2019.

for individual purposes. In *Pondok Pesantren*, obedience to *Kiai* and respect towards the collective conception of *umma* are essential for preparing the next generation of Muslim leaders in Indonesia.

Our core mission is that *santri mampu membina umat* (*santri* could lead and develop the *umma*). [However,] with various educational institutions in Cipasung, we don't expect that all *santri* could become a *Kiai*. Some of them will become a politician, a medical doctor, an artist. But a politician with a sense of *Kiai*.⁵¹

The goals of education in Cipasung to prepare a politician, a medical doctor and an artist 'with a sense of *Kiai*' entail a combined system of education in which the religious surveillance should be competing with surveillance capitalism. In reality, it is increasingly complicated to maintain pure religious surveillance amidst the pressure to prepare students in various professions in the secular world. To achieve these goals, Cipasung has envisioned an adaptive internet policy.

In Cipasung, the formal educational system consists of various schools from kindergarten to the higher education level. At the higher education level, various religious and secular subjects are available, such as Islamic Education, Arabic Language and Literature, Economics, and Information Engineering. At the higher education level, students are allowed to bring a personal laptop and mobile phone. Internet access is also available throughout the campuses of higher educational institutions. For students in elementary and high schools, internet access is only available in the computer laboratory. However, as some students in the schools are not living in *Pondok Pesantren*, it is possible that students who live in *Pondok Pesantren* accessing the internet through the mobile phone of the non-resident students. Therefore, a concern arises on the safety of students in accessing the internet in school.

It is safe in *Pondok Pesantren*. But during school time, it is the responsibility of the school. Sometimes students take a chance to access the internet at

⁵¹ Farhan (31 years), a pseudonym of a secretariat officer in Cipasung, personal communication, 9 January 2019.

school, which is out of our control. A few years ago, before the mobile phone was allowed, the internet café mushroomed in every corner. That's why we finally allowed a mobile phone, to minimise students going to internet café. It is easier to control the mobile phone in the dormitory.⁵²

It is interesting to see a demarcation between the safe environment in *Pondok Pesantren* and unsafe conditions in schools, albeit the fact that *Pondok Pesantren* and schools are under the same educational foundation (*Yayasan Pesantren Cipasung*). Within the *Pondok Pesantren* environment, students could be conditioned entirely offline. However, during school time, it is challenging to keep students from the online environment, as students who live in *Pondok Pesantren* are mixed with non-resident students. At the same time, the current national curriculum in elementary and high schools also necessitates online platforms for education. Regardless of its combined system, the statement implies that Cipasung considers *Pondok Pesantren* as the core element of education. As the national curriculum increasingly necessitates the availability of online platforms, there is still a preference to maintain religious surveillance in an offline setting, as happens in the case of Miftahul Huda.

Furthermore, *Cipasung* still perceives a potential disruption of a disciplined schedule of learning for its students due to the availability of the internet. In *Pondok Pesantren*, students have been taught to put education as the main priority of their daily life. Yet, the availability of the internet could disrupt the regular schedule of students and their educational achievement:

When we had a more liberal policy of the internet, many students were struggling to go to sleep and wake up on time. We have a regulation that all students should go to sleep by 10 pm. Some of them fall asleep at 3 am, while our educational activities began as early as 4 am. Then some parents protested [the liberal policy] and argued that without limitation [of the

⁵² Idris (35 years), a pseudonym of a secretariat officer in Cipasung, personal communication, 9 January 2019.

internet] there would be no difference between studying in Cipasung and studying at home. So, what's the point of studying in *Pesantren*?⁵³

The narrative of 'liberal policy' implies that there is an inherent difference between internet policy inside and outside *Pondok Pesantren*. By positioning the individual against the institutional, it seems evident that the daily schedule of students is attached to the values of collectivism of *Pondok Pesantren*. It is also interesting to see that parents also protested the 'liberal policy' and comparing the educational system in *Pondok Pesantren* to the study environment at home. By deciding to educate their children in *Pondok Pesantren*, parents expect students to be attached to the religious climate, not to the liberal educational environment at home.

Furthermore, the narrative of 'liberal policy' implies that there is constant pressure to adjust to the current trend of digitalisation in a global society. Cipasung itself has tried a 'liberal policy' in managing the internet. However, its experience in giving online access to its students has proven that the internet could be disruptive to the religious life within the institution. Thus, they decided to apply the restriction of the internet to regain control of student life. Amidst its openness to the national system of education, a moral panic about the internet is still prevalent in Cipasung.

We are aware that the internet also possesses some negative impacts. We could not deny the danger of pornography and the effect of internet addiction on children and adolescents. Currently, our population is also *terjangkit* by fake news.⁵⁴

In the Indonesian language, *terjangkit* is a term for an infectious disease that requires quarantine and medication. By utilising the word of *terjangkit*, it is imagined that the internet is a source of illness that could be spread rapidly. The notion of *terjangkit* implies that *Pondok Pesantren* should conduct a preventive mechanism and quarantine from the digital disease. Digital disease has come in

⁵³ Idris (35 years), personal communication, 9 January 2019.

⁵⁴ Dani (32 years), personal communication, 9 January 2019.

various forms, such as fake news, pornography, and internet addiction. In terms of internet addiction, a student shared his concern on its universal threat:

I think the negative impact of the internet is not only applicable within the *Pesantren* environment. For example, the problem of internet addiction [has raised a concern] that without the internet one might feel weak, particularly for children. Sometimes I wonder, why everything should be done online? Why don't we interact socially, instead?⁵⁵

This comment implies that the internet could become a powerful resource for children as contemporary society is strongly attached to the internet. However, instead of utilising its powerful potentials, the emphasis on internet addiction has produced an internet policy that aims to provide more interaction in an offline setting. The distinction between virtual and social interaction also suggests that social interaction in an offline context is deemed safer as it contains no possibility of addiction. In sum, the perception towards the internet and the public sphere in *Pondok Pesantren* could be described as follows:

<i>Pondok Pesantren</i>	The Internet
Religious	Secular
Offline	Online
Collectivism	Individualism

The boundary between religious and secular values, between offline and online settings, collectivism and individualism have created a distinction between religious life in *Pondok Pesantren* and the Indonesian public sphere. While Muslims at the national level has been utilised various digital platforms, such practice is still less preferable in the context of *Pondok Pesantren*. The leaders in *Pondok Pesantren* still perceive collectivism that is built based on a strong leadership of *Kiai* as the idealised version of religious life. In preserving the core

⁵⁵ Farhan (31 years), personal communication, 9 January 2019.

elements of the *umma*, people in *Pondok Pesantren* still perceive that religious practice is better to take in an offline setting.

In contrast, religious life in the national setting has permeated through various online platforms. The practice of one day, one *juz*, for example, has created an individualised practice of Qur'an recitation through the WhatsApp platform (Nisa, 2018a). Members of the group could control the achievement of each other through the digital application. Each member could remind each other immediately of the importance of finishing their daily goal. The individual has an opportunity to achieve his/her intention and to remind each other at the same time. By utilising technology for a religious purpose, Muslims in an urban setting has been adaptive to the notion of individualism that 'shifts all responsibility for success or failure to a mythical, atomised, isolated individual doomed to a life of perpetual competition and disconnected from relationships, community, and society' (Zuboff, 2019, p. 33). Within the realm of individualism, the urban middle class could pursue a career according to their skills and ambitions, while maintaining their religious life at the same time.

Thus, there are two different conceptions of public piety in *Pondok Pesantren* and the national setting of Indonesia. In the national setting of Indonesia, the religious self has more fluid boundaries between their religious manifestation and their career in the secular sector. By positioning the religious self within the secular public sphere, Muslims at the national level should compromise their religious commitment with pressure from secular agents around them. In *Pondok Pesantren*, religious manifestation has been operated mainly in an offline environment. The preference of having offline religious life is affected by the presence of *Kiai*, the physical compound of the institution, and the status as a boarding school that operates 24 hours. The condition of *Pondok Pesantren* is the opposite of concern of losing religious authority in the internet era:

Although the internet is in many ways a blessing to religious institutions that use it to their advantage, it can also be an official religion's worst nightmare. Like the printing press, power has shifted through the

development of a tool of mass communication. Doctrines and teachings that were once centralised and controlled can now be openly challenged, contradicted, or ignored through a medium that is accessed by a hundred of millions of people every day (Helland, 2004, p. 30).

There is, indeed, moral panic and concern regarding the shift of religious authority in *Pondok Pesantren*. Nevertheless, the institution has been effective in utilising the moral panic as an institutional, rather than individual, matter. The institutionalisation of moral entity has become an important background to the fact that the majority of religious life in *Pondok Pesantren* remains offline. In the next section, this chapter will explore the strategies of the religious authority of *Pondok Pesantren* in navigating the increasingly digitalised politics in the Indonesian public sphere. By positioning the collectivism of the institution amidst the individual realm of national politics, we could see how the strength of collectivism has its consequence. Most notably, the exploitation of the collective value of *Pondok Pesantren* by the political elite at the national level.

INTERNET AND POLITICS OF PIETY IN PONDOK PESANTREN

As discussed briefly in the previous chapter, navigating the national politics of Indonesia is a challenging task for the *Pondok Pesantren* community. Indonesian politics is full of conflicting interests between various political ideologies as well as rampant practices of corruption and nepotism. Some scholars have analysed that the remnant of the New Order is still prevalent in contemporary Indonesian politics (Hadiz & Robison, 2012, 2017; Winters, 2013). Within such a realm, political Islam in Indonesia tends to create a floating *umma*, in which the majority Muslim population has increasingly lost their political significance (Hadiz, 2019; Rakhmani, 2019). Hadiz (2019) argues that Islamic political parties and large organisations such as *NU* and *Muhammadiyah* tend to have inconsistencies in their political stance. The absence of a clear political agenda amidst the oligarchic and chaotic political order has made political Islam less visible and less impactful,

amidst the number of Muslim voters in Indonesia. The politics of piety of *Pondok Pesantren* is situated within such a complicated realm of national politics.

Referring to C. Wright Mills' *Sociological Imagination* (2000), Rakhmani (2019) contends that 'the personal is political' (p. 295). This statement implies that technological innovation that has been familiar among middle-class Muslims has enabled them to be personally pious and politically active at the same time. For Rakhmani, religious consumption of middle-class Muslims is not only projected to fulfil personal desire but also fuelled by the political ambition to establish a more Islamic public sphere. Regarding the internet and social media, the consumptive practice and religious-political agenda have been enabled significantly by the availability of personal devices and social media platforms (Nisa, 2018a, 2018b).

The more connected to the digital platforms, the more consumptive and religiously conscious, the higher ambition of the middle-class to establish the idealised Islamic public sphere. However, in the context of *Pondok Pesantren*, the absence of personal access towards digital technology has hindered the capability of students to express their religious and political interests individually. The Islamic public sphere itself has been institutionalised systematically in *Pondok Pesantren*; hence the political interest of individuals should be aligned to the institutional matters. Instead of 'the personal is political', the reality of *Pondok Pesantren* suggests that 'the institutional is political'.

Against the background, two *Pondok Pesantren* in my research represents two different masses and tradition. Cipasung has been primarily identified as the backbone of *NU* while Miftahul Huda shows inconsistencies in its political affiliation. The establishment of formal schools in Cipasung represents a group of *Pondok Pesantren* that support eminently the idea of nationalism and modern democracy. For institutions such as Miftahul Huda, the rejection of the national system of education has shown various degrees of resistance against the modern architecture of Indonesia. Nevertheless, in the 2019 General Election, both institutions have shown a similar pattern of political Islam in supporting Jokowi as

the presidential candidate. Cipasung and Miftahul Huda also sent the member of *Kiai* families to compete in various levels of the General Election.

The 2019 General Election in Indonesia has provided an essential scene of understanding the politics of piety in *Pondok Pesantren*. Although the dominant aspects of religious life in the institution remain offline, some political campaign of *Kiai* has shown the ambition to extend his political agenda through online platforms. As argued above, the perception that the internet is a secular force remains strong within the institution. Yet *Kiai* is often imagined as a holy person and a cultural broker who could connect the general population to secular issues such as the General Election. Therefore, the online presence of *Kiai* has created an unprecedented political impact in the local communities.

By putting online campaign, *Kiai* was efficiently directing students and alumni to follow his political preference. The charisma of *Kiai* and the sense of collectivism among the people of *Pondok Pesantren* made it impossible for people in *Pondok Pesantren* to ignore the political campaign of *Kiai*. Inside *Pondok Pesantren*, the absence or the minimum access to the internet has made *Kiai* the major reference in determining political action. In politics, it is safe to say that the collectivism of *Pondok Pesantren* is exploited for the sake of political practice.

By mobilizing religious symbols, new political elites from a *santri* background with links to prominent ulama and their *pesantren* were in effect renegotiating the boundaries of political power, economic arrangements and group identities. Interestingly, when a multiplicity of actors has the opportunity to interpret the symbols, each in accordance with their own interests, the Islamists' attempt to dominate the symbolic interpretation and thereby transform the country's secular democracy into an Islamic state has increasingly lost ground. Religious symbols have irrefutably been distanced from their religious moorings and from narrow, Islamist understandings, in favour of pragmatic political purposes (Hasan, 2014, pp. 190-191).

For students in *Pondok Pesantren*, the online campaign has direct consequences in terms of their pious practice on the internet. While the attachment to *Kiai* is predominantly built through offline interaction, the online presence of *Kiai* in social media platforms led to confusion on the existence of religious authority. The emphasis on the institutional, rather than individual, has made it difficult for students to express their political preference as disobedience to *Kiai* could lead to an unblest life (*hidup yang tidak berkah*). Yet in assessing the political campaign of *Kiai*, the distinction between institutional and the individual has been blurred. *Kiai* could utilise the institutional power extensively to fulfil his interest. Following the political preference of *Kiai* requires students to reassess their position as a citizen and a follower of *Kiai*.

Furthermore, *Pondok Pesantren* communities tend to differentiate themselves from Muslim communities in an urban setting, particularly through comprehensive religious training in an offline setting. Yet the online campaign has forced the institution to utilise a method that is less familiar to the offline communities. The contradiction between the desired image and the strategy to follow the online pressure has positioned the institutions in a complex situation.

The emphasis on collectivism is shown clearly on the online campaign of *Harejo* (*Haji Azid Rekan Jokowi/Haji Azid the Friend of Jokowi*) from the leader of Miftahul Huda. In Sundanese, a local language in West Java, *Harejo* also means 'greenery'. Green is a colour that has been identified as a symbol of Islam in Indonesian politics. Although the campaign did not mention the institutional name of Miftahul Huda, a digital campaign of *Harejo* on YouTube addressed the importance of the *Pondok Pesantren* community to choose Jokowi in the general election:

Akang-Akang, Euceu-Euceu [Brother and Sister, everyone is *Harejo*]

sadayana Harejo

Haji Azid Rekan Jokowi! [Haji Azid Friend of Jokowi!]

Maenya moal Harejo? [Are you sure you won't vote *Harejo*?]

Akang-Akang, Euceu-Euceu [Brother and Sister]

Ceu Haji, Kang Haji,

[Auntie and Uncle, everyone is Harejo]

Sadayana Harejo

Rumasa kuring mah bodo

[I am aware that I am foolish]

Rumasa kuring mah kurang gaul

[I am aware that I am not cool]

Masalah politik mah moal ngemut,

[In politics, I will not think, I will follow]

bade tumut

Sakitu

[That's all]

There are some crucial emphases within the song. First, its chosen language in Sundanese signalled that this song is addressed to the voters in West Java province. From the experience of the election at the provincial level, the network of alumni of Miftahul Huda was effective in supporting the victory of Ridwan Kamil and Uu Ruzhanul Ulum. Uu himself was the grandson of the founder of Miftahul Huda and the former regent of Tasikmalaya. Thus, the decision of Ridwan Kamil to choose Uu was a sign of the importance of the voters from *Pondok Pesantren* and rural backgrounds for winning the election.

A similar decision was taken by Jokowi when he chose Ma'ruf Amien as his running mate. Compared to Uu, Ma'ruf Amien had a higher level of network as he was the former chairman of the Indonesian Ulama Council (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia/MUI*) and the member of *syuriah*, a supreme governing council, of *Nahdlatul Ulama*. The trend to put *Pondok Pesantren* as an essential political consideration has increased amidst the heated competition with the Muslim middle class in an urban setting. During the general election, at both the provincial level of West Java and the national level, voters from urban backgrounds favoured different candidates.

Secondly, the emphasis on collectivism is also prevalent in the song. By utilising a popular method of the campaign, Haji Azid aimed to catch all potential voters of various ages, gender, and socio-economic background. The recording contained a real voice of Haji Azid, signalled his taste in utilising the popular medium of music for the sake of politics of piety. Nevertheless, a particular emphasis has been

addressed to *Ajengan* (the terminology of *Kiai* in Sundanese language) and *santri*. Thirdly, the stress that 'in politics, I don't think, I will follow' reveals the political stance of *Pondok Pesantren*. Despite its political participation, the institution did not put political agenda as something that should be thought deeply. Instead, the political decision is to follow the leader, i.e. Haji Azid himself.

In Cipasung, an official announcement from *Kiai* has circulated on WhatsApp groups before the general election on 17 April 2019. The decision was made on 11 April 2019 and contained three essential messages. Firstly, to support and keep a conducive and safe situation of the general election. The 2019 General Election was signalled by the tension between the supporters of Jokowi and Prabowo, particularly on social media platforms. Within this landscape, the first message appeared as a diplomatic strategy to ease the tension. Secondly, to support the fellow alumni of Cipasung who competed as a legislative candidate (*calon legislatif/caleg*). In the last decade, the political involvement of a member of *Pondok Pesantren* relied heavily on the support of the alumni network. Within this landscape, the third message openly announced the political decision of *Kiai* in Cipasung to support Jokowi in the 2019 General Election. It seems evident that the first message is conflicting with other messages, particularly the third message. By openly declaring its support towards Jokowi, Cipasung was fully participating in the escalated tension between the supporters of Jokowi and Prabowo.

The online campaign of *Kiai* seems contradictory with the above tendency to put offline religious life as a top priority. By cultivating the potential voters, *Kiai* potentially disregards the independent nature of the institution amidst the pressure of national politics. With the absence of individual agency, the campaign of *Kiai* is prone to a practice of mass mobilisation and the utilisation of his charisma merely for political purposes. The unequal position between *Kiai* and *santri* have made it possible for students to vote according to the preference of *Kiai*.

In the last general election, a decision of Jokowi to choose Ma'ruf Amien, a senior *Kiai*, as his vice-president also blurred a distinction between his position as a *Kiai* and a politician. In his campaign at Miftahul Huda, Ma'ruf Amien classified *santri*

in a special category of Indonesian Muslims. In his opinion, *Pondok Pesantren* is a partner of the government in preserving the tolerant Islam in the multicultural country of Indonesia. His decision to become Jokowi's running mate was based on his responsibility to lead *umma* through a mechanism of national politics. During the campaign, he also held a ceremony of finishing of *Safinatunnajah* (a popular *Kitab Kuning*) who is written by his direct ancestor, Syekh Nawawi Al-Bantani. Ma'ruf Amien combines his position as a *Kiai*, as a descendant of influential ulama in Indonesian history, and as a future leader in national politics.

The offline campaign of Ma'ruf Amien and the online campaign of *Kiai* from Cipasung and Mifthaul Huda has blurred the distinction between the online and offline life in *Pondok Pesantren*. The perception that the internet is a medium of digital illness is not relevant in discussing the political potential of the internet. While public perception of the internet in *Pondok Pesantren* is predominantly negative, the political campaign of senior *Kiai* from Miftahul Huda and Cipasung have shown a positive attitude towards the internet. Nevertheless, such an inconsistent approach is still successful in shaping the political preference of students in *Pondok Pesantren*. For a public relations officer in Miftahul Huda, the political socialisation of *Kiai* was adequate to determine his political preference.

I had an opportunity to discuss this with a student from the University of Indonesia. I told him that I choose number 1 because I know the candidate, I could assess the benefit of choosing the candidate, not merely because of religious sentiment.⁵⁶

The public relations officer is a senior student who has completed 12 years of education in Miftahul Huda. However, in discussing his political preference, it is evident that he follows the preference of *Kiai*. There is a proud expression of himself in promoting the political agenda of *Kiai* to his families in Bekasi, an industrial city near the capital city of Jakarta. In supporting Uu as the vice governor of West Java, he tirelessly came door to door to ensure that his relatives could

⁵⁶ Reza (28 years), personal communication, 13 November 2018.

follow the instruction of *Kiai* to win the election at the provincial level, even though Bekasi is an urban basis of Justice and Prosperous Party (PKS) who promoted another gubernatorial candidate. He also believes that following and promoting the political preference of *Kiai* is the right way to get *barakah* (blessing) from *Kiai* and to have a meaningful and happy life.

For a long time, *Pondok Pesantren* has become the main backbone of Indonesian civil Islam (Hefner, 2000). The role as a backbone of civil Islam is achieved 'by keeping their distance from state power and emphasising autonomous self-organisation' (Hefner, 2000, p. 35). The last General Election was a testament to how the adherence to conservative ideas (Rakhmani, 2019) has become the main signal of an Islamic-based political identity in contemporary Indonesia. Mobilising the collective attitude of *Pondok Pesantren* is prone to fall into the exploitative nature of oligarchy and the conservative trend in the current Islamic politics in Indonesia (Hadiz & Robison, 2017). In the next section, the focus will be directed to the market of piety as an inseparable element of political Islam (Rakhmani, 2019). The focus on the market operation in *Pondok Pesantren* could reflect or contrast to the major trend in the national market of Indonesia.

INTERNET AND MARKET OF PIETY IN *PONDOK PESANTREN*

While the politics of piety has shown direct participation in national politics, the marketplace of *Pondok Pesantren* remains exclusive. The main reason for this condition is the non-transactional attitude of education in the institution. Education in *Pondok Pesantren* is based on a grass root level initiative, aiming to leverage the quality of life among the peasant population. The tuition fee remains lower compared to other educational institutions, particularly to the growing trend of Islamic schools in the urban setting of Indonesia. As a grass-roots initiative, the private foundation of *Kiai* has played a pivotal role in sustaining religious education in *Pondok Pesantren*. The non-transactional spirit of education has created a significant distance between the institution and the national market in general. A public relations officer in Miftahul Huda shared his experience.

I remember that a few years ago, there was a case when a new student could not afford the fee of education here. His parent came to *Kiai*. Then, *Kiai* immediately offered him a free education for his entire years in Miftahul Huda, [with the condition that] he has a strong motivation to pursue religious education. It is proof of how *Kiai* has a maximum level of care for us, no matter how poor our family is at home.⁵⁷

Following the unique character of the market, Miftahul Huda put a stringent policy regarding the spending of an individual student. Parents transfer the monthly expenditure to the educational administrator of the institution. The administrator is responsible for ensuring that all students, regardless of the socio-economic background of their families, have an equal status during their education in *Pondok Pesantren*. Every day, students consume a similar kind of food that has been distributed to each dormitory room. Such practice embraces the spirit of collectivism amidst the individualised trend of the market. The management of personal spending is deemed necessary to ensure that students could focus on their education, rather than on consumptive practice in the market.

In Cipasung, students have the personal autonomy of spending their money during their studies. Individual independence enables them to navigate the market, primarily in an offline setting. Upon entering the gate of the institution, the visitor could see various stores that sell numerous commodities, ranging from stationery to local foods. The combined system of education has created a more complicated need for students compared to students in Miftahul Huda. For mature students, the possession of smartphones also enables them to do online transactions. In contrast to the generalised system in Miftahul Huda, market practice in Cipasung has created a more diversified practice of consumption. Nevertheless, the consumption practice in the institution is still limited compared to the pattern of consumption at the national level.

For people in the national urban setting, the utilisation of the internet has become an essential element in navigating religious commodification. The internet is a

⁵⁷ Reza (28 years), personal communication, 13 November 2018.

medium to navigate the confronting religious interests and the reality of the Indonesian market that is heavily captured by capitalism and neoliberalism (Robison & Hadiz, 2004). Within the structure, spiritual economies emerged (Rudnyckyj, 2010) as a religious sanctuary amidst the pressure of capitalism and neoliberalism. The product of spiritual economies is a tech-savvy, Western-educated, and religiously devoted persona. Within such an image, there is a combined vision between preserving the religious agenda and managing the personal contribution to the market.

The value of individual agency has enabled the religious self to have a competitive advantage within the structure of capitalism and neoliberalism. As the trend of Islamic turn emerges, a new generation of devoted Muslims also formed. They were previously educated in a secular tradition, within a structure of casual Muslim families, and turned to be devoted Muslims. The technical capacities to utilise the internet is critical to achieving a successful career and devotion to Islamic values at the same time. Such stream of religious self is in the opposite position with the religious training in *Pondok Pesantren* that is dominated primarily by religious agenda.

To understand the competitive potential of *Pondok Pesantren*, the first element to analyse lies in its strategy of time management. Personal time management is aligned with the idea of productivity as a supportive attitude towards the goals of corporations. Within the capitalistic structure, a productive individual is rewarded due to the capability to push the individual desire for the sake of corporate goals. In contrast, religious productivity in *Pondok Pesantren* requires students to do compulsory religious activities above anything else. The activities are not only aiming for spiritual purpose but also to a realisation of the precariousness of time in the mundane world.

We should remember the message of the founder of Cipasung; Cipasung is a place for people who are passionate about religious education. There is

no place for students who like to *leha-leha*; student who tends to *leha-leha* will not gain any benefit from their education in Cipasung.⁵⁸

In the Indonesian language, *leha-leha* is a word that describes leisure activities during a holiday, such as enjoying a sunny day at the beach. The terminology of *leha-leha* implies a condition where someone has no clear objective to spend his time. Meanwhile, the daily schedule of *Pondok Pesantren* requires all students to spend their time effectively. The separation of time and space, between leisure and academic purposes, indicates that institutional time management is critical to ensure that all students could gain the benefit of education in Cipasung. While *leha-leha* in a corporate office is deemed against the idea of productivity, *leha-leha* in *Pondok Pesantren* is translated as disobedience of the individual to adhere to the institutional rules of religious activities.

The perception of *leha-leha* affects the institutional attitude towards the internet. In neoliberal capitalism, individual time on the internet could be attached to the idea of productivity. An individual has plenty of opportunities to explore various skills and to produce important achievements through the internet. In *Pondok Pesantren*, *leha-leha* is translated as any non-religious activity, including the amount of time on the internet. There is a strong perception that spending time on the internet would be harmful to the personal growth of students to become responsible and pious citizens. It is interesting that a student Cipasung, where the internet is more accessible than in Miftahul Huda, thought that it is better to study in *Pondok Pesantren* without internet access at all.

Sometimes I feel that it is better to study in *Pesantren* that has no internet access at all; it tends to be more disciplined. Here [in Cipasung] I feel that time management is more complicated.⁵⁹

Within the structure of modern capitalism, it is impossible to imagine an individual could enjoy such a disciplined and restricted internet environment. The internet is an inherent aspect of pursuing an individualised life of modern capitalism.

⁵⁸ Idris (35 years), personal communication, 9 January 2019.

⁵⁹ Raisa (20 years), personal communication, 7 January 2019.

However, for students of *Pondok Pesantren*, a discipline and tight schedule is a consequence of their decision to study in the institution. In Miftahul Huda, where internet access is strictly limited, the awareness of time management also emerges:

I am aware that here I am expected to be disciplined. I should adhere to the timetable for learning, for eating, for other activities. If students spend too much time on the internet, they may fail to prioritise their religious studies. I believe that everything should be positioned at a right time and with the right purpose.⁶⁰

The time dimension, again, is quite critical in understanding the piety in *Pondok Pesantren*. Despite a different system of education, students in Cipasung and Miftahul Huda have an identical opinion regarding the meaning of time as a basis for achieving educational goals. A match between the policy and the perception of students reveals a collective attitude of the *Pondok Pesantren* population. Another student even argues that the internet is quite disruptive to the schedule of compulsory prayer, five times a day:

If we jump [to the internet], we tend to forget ourselves, forget the limit of time. We wouldn't want to skip meals, why would we skip *sholat*?⁶¹

In Islam, the time allocation is divided between the profane and sacred dimensions. The statement indicates that the need to do *sholat* (prayer) is more important than eating. In her opinion, the limited internet access in *Pondok Pesantren* is beneficial as she could focus on her duties in an offline setting, such as prayer and eating. By prioritizing *sholat*, she also aimed to put the religious interest above anything else. Another student also shared a positive attitude regarding the limitation of the internet:

⁶⁰ Syarif (23 years), personal communication, 20 November 2018.

⁶¹ Fatima (18 years), personal communication, 8 November 2018.

Our limitation [of internet access] is positive. It doesn't mean that we have less understanding and knowledge about things outside [*Pondok Pesantren*], but [we have to] keep the focus on the religious things here.⁶²

In her perspective, the demarcation between inside and outside, between the religious and the secular, is quite clear. The internet and all things outside provide a wide array of options for non-religious things. Nevertheless, her main priority is religious education inside *Pondok Pesantren*. Again, a priority to the religious duty implies a collective spirit of students, staff, and *Kiai* in maintaining the position of *Pondok Pesantren* as a religious institution against the potential secularisation of the internet.

The realisation that the internet has created a complex impact in *Pondok Pesantren* led to an aspiration for the development of 'Google for *Pesantren*'. A secretariat officer in Cipasung realised that the internet is a necessity for students. Yet, the complexity and the religious nature of the institution require 'a different kind of the internet'. He argued that it is increasingly critical to find a balance between the adaptive capability of *Pondok Pesantren* and the anticipation of its negative impacts on student goals and the religious values of the institution.

The current architecture of the internet is aimed to serve the population at the global level of society. Thus, its content and feature are quite general and global. While Google for education and Google for children are already available, why we could not demand 'Google for *Pesantren*?' It is unfair if the adaptability should be put only to *Pondok Pesantren*; it should be a two-way process. Not only *Pondok Pesantren* should be adaptive to the current development of the internet, but the internet itself also should be adaptive to the local values and the complexity of *Pondok Pesantren*.⁶³

It is unclear how 'Google for *Pesantren*' might look. Nevertheless, a collective religious life in the institution has generated the general conception of 'internet

⁶² Khadija (19 years), personal communication, 7 November 2018.

⁶³ Dani (32 years), personal communication, 9 January 2019.

for *Pondok Pesantren*'. For instance, a student at Cipasung gave an example of how religious education has made her digital life more responsible.

As an internet user, I was coming from a non-*Pesantren* background, and I used the internet for anything that I wanted. Now, I tend to use the internet to deepen my understanding of religion. But, yeah, sometimes I still receive positive and negative news from the outside.⁶⁴

The transition of the student has shown an impact of education in *Pondok Pesantren* towards the internet use of students. It is also interesting to see a student who has an interest to study religion from the internet while pursuing an education in *Pondok Pesantren* at the same time. Normally, studying religion online is an alternative for people who could not attend formal religious education. By attending religious education in *Pondok Pesantren*, students tend to choose direct religious instruction from *Kiai*.

As a student in *Pesantren*, I don't like to study religion from the internet, as we should be selective. That's why I prefer to study directly from *Kiai* here, reading *Kitab Kuning* together with my friends.⁶⁵

From the various narratives on the internet, it seems evident that people in *Pondok Pesantren* demand a different practice of consumption and internet practice. The offline setting of studying religion in *Pondok Pesantren* is a luxury item for people in an urban setting who need to juggle between their responsibility in the market and their aspiration to become religious selves. For people in *Pondok Pesantren*, the authority of *Kiai* and the institutional time management provides plenty of opportunities to focus on the religious agenda. However, such religious practice is prone to 'a sense of one's place in an imagined *ummah* that is problematically self-exclusionary' (Rakhmani, 2019, p. 294). The demand for 'Google for *Pesantren*', for instance, has shown the spirit of self-exclusionary amidst the increasingly digitalised market.

⁶⁴ Raisa (20 years), personal communication, 7 January 2019.

⁶⁵ Faris (21 years), personal communication, 30 December 2018.

Furthermore, the self-exclusionary tendency is inconsistent with the policy of *Pondok Pesantren* that provide internet access for mature students in their final years within the institution. Two arguments have been made regarding the policy. *Firstly*, as students almost finish their education in *Pondok Pesantren*, they need to start navigating life outside the institution. Internet could provide a window to see reality outside *Pondok Pesantren* and to prepare strategies after graduating from *Pondok Pesantren*. However, the strategy is less comprehensive in practice. With the absence of digital literacy at an institutional level, the prospect of the individual in navigating the market remains unclear. The *second*, argument is a perception that mature students tend to be wiser in utilising the internet.

We don't share internet access with everyone. We only provide access for *Ma'had Aly* students who already have the foundation of knowledge. All students have understood that internet access is only available for senior students. [Even the senior students] still need supervision from a student leader, to ensure that they use it properly.⁶⁶

In Miftahul Huda, as we have discussed in the previous chapter, the curriculum of *Ma'had Aly* requires students to conduct a research project on the contemporary issue of society. The research project is supervised by the lecturers, who also act as young *Kiai* in Miftahul Huda. Interestingly, the lecturer also provides internet access for students to use in his home during supervision time. The supervision, in this regard, has a double function; to ensure that students have significant progress in the research project and to ensure that the utilisation of internet access is relevant to the values of *Pondok Pesantren*. In Cipasung, the perception is quite identical.

There is a dispensation for students in undergraduate and postgraduate levels of education, and they could bring a mobile phone [anytime] due to different needs. [University] students are also getting familiar with educational tools such as Mendeley and Google Scholar. Thus, in principle,

⁶⁶ Ali (30 years), personal communication, 15 November 2018.

the limitation has been adapted with the [individual] needs and level of education.⁶⁷

By positioning mature students as a distinctive category for internet access, there is a realisation that students need to face reality at the national level of Indonesia. Upon graduation, students are no longer able to pursue their life inside a sanctuary of *Pondok Pesantren*. By the time they become alumni, they should navigate various strategies of survival in the national setting of Indonesia. Nevertheless, sudden internet access without a systematic strategy of digital literacy will lead to a problematic stance in the professional and personal life of alumni of the institution. It is impossible to maintain such a collective attitude of internet consumption within the individualised market in Indonesia. As they will embark on a journey towards neoliberal Indonesia, digital literacy is critically needed to ensure that their religious understanding could enrich the Indonesian public sphere.

CONCLUSION

Through this chapter, I argue that public piety in *Pondok Pesantren* has many distinctive elements, most importantly, its ability to convey the collectivist attitude of Islam amidst the pressure of individualised lifestyle on the internet. The individual and the communal, the online and the offline, the secular and the religious have made two distinctive public spheres, in *Pondok Pesantren* and the national level of Indonesia. However, the political approach of its leaders into national politics is problematic as they cultivate a collectivist attitude in navigating the national politics of Indonesia. The oligarchic practice of Indonesian politics should lead to critical scrutiny in the political participation of *Pondok Pesantren* leaders amidst the absence of individual political preference. Only by taking a distance from national politics, *Pondok Pesantren* will be able to cultivate a long tradition of civil Islam that is essential in the ongoing democratisation in Indonesia.

⁶⁷ Idris (35 years), personal communication, 9 January 2019.

In terms of the market of piety, the collectivist attitude of the institution is only reliable during a minimum interaction of its students with the market. By taking a distance from the trend of religious commodification, and by minimising internet access, the institution could build a robust architecture of religious education. However, the pressure of the internet is no longer neglectable effectively. The case of Cipasung, in which the national system of education overlaps with the religious tradition of *Pondok Pesantren*, has shown various degrees of fragility. Preparing students to become Muslim leaders in a heavily digitalised market requires a constant reinterpretation of religion, particularly related to the internet issue. In Miftahul Huda, the absence of internet access should raise a question on the ability of its alumnus to lead local communities amidst the increasingly digitalised Indonesian villages.

Furthermore, regardless of the different educational systems, students in Cipasung and Miftahul Huda have shared various similar points of aspiration and anxiety. Most fundamentally, they are young people who are also eager to exist in and utilise extensively various digital platforms. Even in the exclusive institution such as Miftahul Huda, students began to express their existence in social media, particularly through the mobile phone of their parents during a monthly visit to *Pondok Pesantren*. Without significant training in digital skills, students are less equipped with the necessary elements to thrive in the increasingly digitalised and individualised Indonesian public sphere. The following chapter will elaborate further on the absence of digital literacy, particularly about the conception of the popular in the public sphere of *Pondok Pesantren*.

CHAPTER 9

THE POPULAR IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE OF *PONDOK PESANTREN*: THE END OF POPULAR CULTURE

INTRODUCTION

The previous chapters on power and piety in the public sphere of *Pondok Pesantren* have shown how the political economy of *Kiai* and the preference to maintain its offline religious life have shaped its public sphere. The internet policy in *Pondok Pesantren* provides an alternative to the surveillance capitalism in which religious surveillance has become the main foundation of determining social identity. This chapter attempts to ask a critical question on the impact of minimum access to popular culture on the identity and aspiration of students. The minimum access to popular culture is a direct consequence of strict internet policy and the aspiration to maintain offline religious life. While resistance and creative political expression have become the main theme in the Indonesian public sphere, the minimum access to popular culture in *Pondok Pesantren* could minimise the resistance and creative political expression.

In this chapter, I further elaborate my argument that the attachment towards the charismatic leader is effective in creating stability *within* the institution but problematic in facing the challenges *outside* the institutions. The requirements towards individual capability and individual agency have been evident amidst the contemporary structure of the Indonesian public sphere. As the domination of the middle class and the socio-economic gap have been persistent, we should critically assess the possibility of students in *Pondok Pesantren* thriving in the national public sphere. While the Indonesian public sphere is increasingly dynamic, the control over ideas in *Pondok Pesantren* has created identity and aspiration that is stagnant from age to age. As students will become future citizens, they need to be equipped with the necessary tools to navigate the increasingly digitalised Indonesian public sphere.

Concerning its internet policy, the minimum access towards the internet has created a considerable distance between their religious life and the daily struggle of contemporary society. For instance, during their studies in *Pondok Pesantren*, students might be immune to hoaxes and fake news. But their immunity has been developed through protective measures rather than a structural adjustment to the individual needs on the internet. By putting digital disconnection as their main theme of life, they tend to take a distance from the pressure of the market yet having a closed position with the realm of national politics. While both market and politics have become the daily struggle of the popular in the Indonesian public sphere, the distance of students in *Pondok Pesantren* should lead to scrutiny on the capability of students in navigating life in the digital future.

SANTRI AND THE HEGEMONY OF CULTURE

In the theoretical chapter of the popular, we have seen the top-down mechanism of cultural production and the bottom-up mechanism of cultural reproduction. These dynamics have created tension between the elite and the popular, between the acquisition of cultural capital and the resistance of citizens. In the context of *Pondok Pesantren*, *Kiai* might not control the financial capital, as shown in the practice of cultural production. But as a cultural broker, he has been effective in maintaining the supremacy of culture in *Pondok Pesantren*. The absence of individual internet access also minimised the individual capacity and creativity in facing the domination of culture. Instead, what we have seen in the context of *Pondok Pesantren* is a unified cultural system that is effective to put institutional values above individual interests.

In this regard, it is important to remind the unequal position between *Kiai* and *santri*. While *Kiai* is a religious elite, *santri* normally comes from middle and lower socio-economic backgrounds. They also have a lower religious understanding compared to *Kiai* and his family. The unequal position between *santri* and *Kiai* in both the sacred and mundane world have minimised resistance from students. Almost all policy that subjects to approval from *Kiai* is approved unanimously by

santri. If we refer to the theoretical chapter on the popular, the unequal structure of *Kiai* and *santri* is mimicking *bapakism* that was popular during the three decades of Suharto presidency. The absence of public scrutiny and the inherent trust in the leadership of *Kiai* has made it impossible to imagine that the structural transformation of the public sphere will happen in *Pondok Pesantren*.

In post-Suharto Indonesia, for instance, the government constantly create imagery as a friendly actor towards the millennial, particularly by exploiting the digital strategies. Popular culture, as we have discussed in the theoretical chapter of the popular, has become an important medium for the government to approach the contemporary Indonesian youth. The popular image of young start-up tycoon as an education minister and presidential staff of millennials also become the daily consumption of Indonesian social media. However, in the case of *Pondok Pesantren*, the minimum access to popular culture has minimised the exposure to the culture of individualism as happens in the Indonesian public sphere. Instead, students tend to describe studying in *Pondok Pesantren* as an extension of family culture:

In my family, studying religion is a necessity. My family [members] graduated from *Pondok Pesantren*, [hence going to *Pondok Pesantren*] is a family culture. I think, in general, Indonesian culture [necessitates that] Muslim people should conduct religious studies.⁶⁸

The emphasis on religious studies as an Indonesian Muslim culture provides an alternative to the Indonesian popular culture. Here lies the initial division between reality and the reinterpretation of popular culture according to students in *Pondok Pesantren*. Family and *Pondok Pesantren* have significantly fortified religious culture from the impact of popular culture, as shown in the parental concern of liberal internet policy in the empirical chapter on power. In that case, the parent has an underlying concern about the impact of the internet on the mindset of students. Parents feel that the offline environment of *Pondok Pesantren* is the best

⁶⁸ Firman (22 years), a pseudonym of a male student in Cipasung, personal communication, 6 January 2019.

method to minimise the impact of Westernisation and secularisation through the circulation of popular culture on the internet. Another student expressed his experience in his first arrival within *Pondok Pesantren*.

It is not only my personal goal [to study in *Pesantren*]. It is also supported by my family and the pressure from society. [We can't deny] the fact that religious scholars have been increasingly rare, so we need a new generation [of religious scholars].⁶⁹

The preference to follow family tradition and societal pressure are contrastingly different from the individualised nature of the popular culture. Her statement implies that the popular in the context of *Pondok Pesantren* should follow the aspiration of religious bourgeois rather than following her dream as depicted by the popular image of the contemporary Indonesian youth. Here the popular has been conditioned to follow a similar pattern of education and religious background from the early phase of life within the family environment. In his early research about *Pondok Pesantren*, Geertz (1960) described the religious tradition as follows:

A santri's stay in a pesantren is thus but a part of the general process of his becoming a pious Moslem. When he is five or six, his mother will tell him Islamic stories from the Koran. When he is seven or eight his father will take him to mosque and teach him to pray. At nine or ten he may spend his evenings with a group of children learning to chant the Koran at the home of a pesantren-trained peasant, perhaps sleeping there. And at twelve or fifteen he will go, often some distance, to a pesantren himself. He may stay a month, or ten years (Geertz, 1960, p. 235).

Geertz's description depicted a gradual process of socialization on the importance of *Pondok Pesantren* education. The 'family culture' in the statement of a student above involves years of introduction and socialization of becoming a religious self. There is also a gradual transfer of knowledge, from informal religious education at

⁶⁹ Fahmina (21 years), a pseudonym of a female student in Miftahul Huda, personal communication, 6 December 2018.

home to religious learning with teachers nearby home to the physical presence of education in *Pondok Pesantren*. The presence of a religious teacher close to home, who is also a graduate of *Pondok Pesantren*, creates familiarity and an imagined position about the nature of religious education in *Pondok Pesantren*. By absorbing the religious knowledge, and admiring the religious teacher, there is an inherent aspiration in children's minds that they will follow a similar path of learning in *Pondok Pesantren*.

[I motivated to] deepen my understanding towards religious knowledge, [and to] deliver the religious understanding to the communities beyond Indonesia. [Hopefully] I could make my parents proud [of me].⁷⁰

Here religious self has become the main manifestation of study in *Pondok Pesantren*. There is also an inherent ambition to extend the religious understanding to the whole community. It is also interesting to see how such tradition could survive through a long period, from the early period of Indonesian independence in Geertz's research to my fieldwork in 2018. Amidst the increasingly digitalised and individualised public sphere, it is surprising that the limitation of internet access, which might cause boredom for students from a middle-class background, has become an interesting subject for students in *Pondok Pesantren*. Offline religious activities, such as attending religious sermons and conducting compulsory prayer collectively, have become an alternative of enjoyment to the individualised popular culture:

The world of *Pesantren* is interesting. I just imagined the sense of togetherness, solidarity, caring, and sharing.⁷¹

For her, the collectivist attitude in *Pondok Pesantren* is far more important than the availability of the internet connection. The acceptance towards the minimum access to the internet is the main reason why popular culture is not thriving in *Pondok Pesantren*. Instead of aspiring for a more individualised lifestyle, she

⁷⁰ Rumaysa (20 years), a pseudonym of a female student in Miftahul Huda, personal communication, 1 December 2018.

⁷¹ Fahmina (21 years), personal communication, 6 December 2018.

prefers to be embedded in the narrative of togetherness, solidarity, caring and sharing. By forging a relationship with other students, she could be more confident in navigating the Indonesian public sphere. What has been interesting in the student experiences is the fact that they enjoy their education very much, albeit limited to the external world. Two students in Miftahul Huda shared their experience of studying in *Pondok Pesantren*.

Because [at the beginning] we didn't know anything [and now] we know many things, such as good deeds to our fellows, to the elderly, and the younger people.⁷²

It is interesting to see in the first comment how the student positioned herself as someone who did not know anything about religion, despite in many cases students in *Pondok Pesantren* have prior experience studying religion at home. The comment suggests that there is an increasing complexity of the student body in *Pondok Pesantren*. In the past, only students from religious families were interested in studying in *Pondok Pesantren*. Currently, the dramatic modernization and the increasing religious consciousness in the Indonesian public sphere have increased the aspiration of families from non-*Pesantren* backgrounds to send their children for religious studies. The condition could be challenging for the formation of the popular.

In Cipasung, a security officer⁷³ referred students from the non-*Pondok Pesantren* family as a 'contraflow' for the religious establishment.⁷⁴ The arrival of students from an urban background, combined with the challenges of the national education system, has made the management of the popular more complicated in Cipasung than in Miftahul Huda. Students from urban backgrounds tend to have more exposure to popular culture and expect continuous access to the internet in *Pondok Pesantren*. By choosing to study in Cipasung that offers formal schools

⁷² Dalila (19 years), a pseudonym of a female student in Miftahul Huda, personal communication, 6 December 2018.

⁷³ In *Pondok Pesantren*, security officer is a position within student organization. The officer is a senior student and elected annually.

⁷⁴ Haris (22 years), personal communication, 25 December 2018

with the national curriculum, they aspire to become a religious and cosmopolitan person at the same time.

Cipasung has established the vision of *nyantri*, *nyeni*, *nyakola* as a middle way to accommodate 'the contraflow' of *santri* from an urban background. *Nyantri* is representing the pious identity, the main element of life within *Pondok Pesantren*. *Nyeni* or artistic requires crossing between boundaries, particularly between the religious education and secular subjects on the national schooling system. *Nyakola*, or well-educated, represents the ambition to elevate their social class through modern education. While the institutional barrier for the popular remains prevalent, the slogan of *nyantri*, *nyeni*, *nyakola* suggests that the contemporary *santri* is no longer satisfied just with the label of *santri*. They also wanted to become an artistic and well-educated person at the same time. For instance, one student in Cipasung reflects on her interest in travelling:

Here we are not only busy with religious studies, but we also like travelling.⁷⁵

In the realm of social media, travelling has become a significant theme of popular culture. Indonesian movies nowadays have put travelling as its major theme, exploring exotic places and the hidden culinary world. When I asked how she got the idea of travelling, she admitted that, as a university student, she has managed her personal Instagram account and followed many accounts with a travelling theme. She also has watched *Trinity*, *The Nekat Traveller* (Mantovani, 2017) with her friends at a cinema in Tasikmalaya city centre. It is also important to note that students at the university level in Cipasung have considerable freedom to bring her laptop and mobile phone. A stratified internet policy for students in different levels of education has created a more complicated and diversified students experience in the institution.

The morning scene in Cipasung, when students are preparing to go to school, could become a signifier of its complex system of education. Students are transferred

⁷⁵ Rizqiya (22 years), a pseudonym of a female student in Cipasung, personal communication, 6 January 2019.

from *santri* uniform of sarong, white top, white headscarf for female student and black *peci*⁷⁶ for a male student, to a uniform of the modern school. Bag and shoes have become the significant signifier of the hidden interest of popular culture of students. Some male and female students wear Converse and Vans sneakers and bags, the popular items of the American lifestyle. The male pants of school uniforms have been designed variously, some of them follow the skinny style akin to rock and roll icon, others follow the pattern of skateboarding style.

Yet, there is a significant barrier to performing through school uniforms for female students. As they are wearing *hijab* and long skirts, they put various pins with contemporary popular icons, such as the deceased British boyband of One Direction and the happening Korean-Pop icon of Blackpink. At the university level, the absence of school uniforms has enabled a more flexible cultural expression. Unlike stereotype religious students, jeans and sneakers have become the popular fashion item, for male and female students, to attend classes in Cipasung Islamic College (IAC). The visibility of uniforms and various secular subjects at school and universities reminded an observation of Turmudi more than a decade ago:

The idea of *nyantri* or *mesantren*, that is learning at the *pesantren*, has changed. People used to come to the *pesantren* to be educated in Islamic subjects. They did not consider whether or not their knowledge would be competitive in job market. Their principal aim was to obtain the knowledge needed to uphold Islam. Such motivation is rarely found among contemporary *santri*. Parents send their children to the *pesantren* for more pragmatic considerations. Students study at the *pesantren* because of the wishes of their parents, who hope their children can obtain some Islamic knowledge in addition to secular knowledge, their main objective. The parents prefer their children to be well versed in more secular disciplines, rather than to be knowledgeable in Islam. At the same time, they hope the

⁷⁶ *Peci* is a religious and national symbol that has been worn by Indonesian president since Sukarno era.

children will be socialised in Islamic norms and values so that they are not too secularised (Turmudi, 2006, pp. 32-33).

Cipasung has facilitated the needs of contemporary students by providing secular subjects at school, such as Mathematics, English, and Sociology. They also offer vocational education at the high school level, in automotive engineering and office administration, for students who are not interested to pursue university-level of education. At the university level, the subjects have been more specialised, not only religious subjects such as Arabic and Islamic Education, but also secular subjects that are well-sought in the job market such as Accounting, Management, and Industrial Engineering. In understanding this mixed educational practice, Halstead contends that:

It is not impossible that, through creative interaction with philosophers such as these, Muslims may find new ways, more accessible to western thought, of expressing what they perceive to be the fundamental, unchanging principles and essential values of Islam. (Halstead, 2004, p. 527)

These innovative ways to understand student identity are important as they represent the attempts to be socially and culturally relevant amidst the stream of modernisation that has been dominated by Western thought and innovation. However, it is impossible to navigate life in contemporary Indonesia, as well as the digital future, without integrating their religious interests into the digital realm. Without the internet, students are only able to strengthen their identity as a *santri* but have no opportunity to pursue their aspiration of becoming *nyeni* and *nyakola*. With limited access to the internet, the aspiration of becoming an eccentric *santri* has been minimised as it limits many possible outcomes of creativity through various digital platforms. The instruments of power and religious manifestation tend to focus solely on the quest of becoming *santri*.

Despite its seemingly open environment, in nature, Cipasung is still a *Pondok Pesantren* with its limitation. It is the busy schedule of education and the constant interaction between religious and secular subjects at school that enable the

symbolic mechanism of popular culture to appear in Cipasung. Yet, the significant challenges of the internet are still becoming a concern of students who are keen to maintain their religious interest above anything else. Other students explore the challenges and opportunities that come with the arrival of the internet:

With the availability of the internet, our knowledge has been broadened. In the past, we only focused on one source; through the internet, we could gather information from multiple resources.⁷⁷

As we have discussed above, studying in *Pondok Pesantren* is a part of family culture and tradition, and an important endeavour to make their parents proud of them. On the larger scale of purpose, studying in *Pondok Pesantren* is also an initiative to strengthen a religious tradition in Indonesia and to produce a new generation of Islamic scholars. With the availability of the internet and secular subjects at school, they face an uneasy arrangement between their willingness to fulfil expectations from family and the aspiration to follow the most up-to-date lifestyle on the internet. The struggle of *santri* in defining their identity and aspiration reflects the encounter between local, national, and global outlook, in both the secular and religious world.

A different case has been applied in Miftahul Huda. Compared to the instrumental nature of national education in Cipasung, the emphasis on religion and spirituality have created a less complicated experience for students in Miftahul Huda. The absence of a formal schooling system has enabled students to focus entirely on religious education. Hence, it is not surprising that a student in Miftahul Huda described *Pondok Pesantren* as a complete university, despite many limitations in its infrastructure. A public relations officer, who himself originated from the city of Bekasi, described the adaptation of students from big cities in Miftahul Huda:

No, there is no case of students from urban backgrounds feel lonely here. They completely integrated with the nature of religious education here. Very often, the complaint is due to the lack of water, etc., but there is no

⁷⁷ Rashida (20 years), a pseudonym of a female student in Cipasung, personal communication, 9 January 2019.

complaint that they miss the shopping mall or any urban lifestyle in big cities.⁷⁸

While in Cipasung 'the contraflow' has become the challenge to the well-established religious narrative, in Miftahul Huda, the absence of formal school has made 'the contraflow' non-existent. In Cipasung, trendy bags and sneakers accentuate the popular image of fashion icons on social media. But in Miftahul Huda, the absence of formal school also necessitates the absence of interest in popular culture. The visual scene of popular culture before the school session in Cipasung is not happening in Miftahul Huda. Students in Miftahul Huda would voluntarily withdraw from all appetites of popular culture and dedicate their lives entirely to religious studies. They pursued an exclusively religious education, not as a matter of setback to the traditional life, but to maintain the core element of religious education. The pure religious education in Miftahul Huda reflects the basic tenet of human beings in Islam:

Briefly, the goodness of human beings on an Islamic view lies in their willingness: (a) to accept the obligations of divine stewardship; (b) to seek to take on the divine attributes such as *hikma* (wisdom) and *'adl* (justice) which have been clarified through divine revelation; (c) to strive for the balanced growth of the integrated personality, made up of the heart, the spirit, the intellect, the feelings and the bodily senses; (d) to develop their potential to become *insan kamil* (the perfect human being); (e) to allow the whole of their lives to be governed by Islamic principles, so that whatever they do, however mundane, becomes an act of worship (Halstead, 2004, p. 523).

Indeed, there is a considerable difference between Islamic and secular education. Within the realm of Islamic education, the student is not conditioned to achieve educational attainment merely, but also to possess the divine attributes through divine revelation. Within such a conception, the materiality of popular culture could be conflicting with the personal strive to become the perfect human being

⁷⁸ Reza (28 years), personal communication, 13 November 2018.

(*insan kamil*). While popular culture promotes individual consumption as an act of resistance, the combined elements of ‘the heart, the spirit, the intellect, the feelings and the bodily senses’ necessitate a different form of resistance. The departure from the material spirit of the mundane world is deemed as the highest level of ‘an act of worship’.

While in Cipasung, there is an inherent ambiguity between institutional fortification and the individual interest, in Miftahul Huda the exclusive religious education possesses a different interpretation towards popular culture. Instead of utilising popular culture icons for individual interest such as during the morning scene in Cipasung, students in Miftahul Huda are more interested in utilising popular culture merely for religious purposes. For instance, performing arts were developed systematically through a top-down mechanism, under the same umbrella of public relations office. Here, performing arts is not directed as a matter of popular expression, but as a part of the institutional mission of public relations. The performers very often travel from event to event outside *Pondok Pesantren* to give an insight into life inside Miftahul Huda. The excitement and creative expression of students were cultivated as a matter of institutional goals. Students often imagined that music and media could be utilised for religious propagation through the Islamic popular culture:

Yes, it is okay to utilise music for *dakwah*. Although music is *haram* [prohibited in Islam], if it is utilised for Islamic purposes, it could be *mubah* [permissible].⁷⁹

Here, the fortified religious values have enabled a constant manifestation of religious interest into the individual self. In contrast to the entertainment narrative of popular culture, music should be directed towards Islamic goals. Miftahul Huda also manages its radio that receives a significant amount of income from advertising practice. The client who put its advert on the radio ranging from culinary business to stationery and bookstore to a store that sells building materials. However, the main content of radio is the daily sermon from *Kiai*,

⁷⁹ Rumaysa (20 years), personal communication, 1 December 2018.

particularly directed to the alumni across West Java. Here, the income from the advertising is not utilised to expand the business but to serve the main role of religious propagation in the institution.

Yet, as the scene of borrowing parents' mobile phones in the previous chapter has suggested, at the individual level, there is no immunity against the quest for individual enjoyment. The absence of formal school has made the impact of the internet, and popular culture in Miftahul Huda less visible than in Cipasung. However, as the borrowing parents' mobile phone has suggested, students in Miftahul Huda have started to find individual enjoyment and escape from the institutional barrier. Parents might be restrictive to the presentation of popular culture at home, but they were less aware of the migration of popular culture into the mobile phone. It is signalling the increasingly common interest to have individualised access to the internet among students in Miftahul Huda.

In principle, gadgets and mobile phones should always be attached to the institutional arrangement. In Miftahul Huda, the gadget is only available through the practice of borrowings, such as borrowing a mobile phone from a parent and a laptop from *Kiai*. Here the practice of borrowing divides between academic and entertainment purposes, that borrowing laptop from *Kiai* is purely academic and parent's mobile phone is an entertainment practice. Yet in both practices, the control from the senior person is still prevalent and the individual interest of students should always be adapted to the interest of the owner of the gadget.

In the following section, we will elaborate on the impact of institutional arrangement on the citizenship element of popular culture. The attachment towards institutionalism has made a common perception that popular culture is only aimed for entertainment purposes. Instead, as the theoretical chapter has shown, there is a continuity between entertainment and politics, between individual and global affairs, between the sacred and mundane worlds. In the context of *Pondok Pesantren*, the division between the online and offline world has made a rigid boundary amidst the constant reposition and redefinition of these conflicting themes in the Indonesian public sphere. The issue of resistance

that has been central in discussing the citizenship function of the popular culture has been absent in *Pondok Pesantren*.

SANTRI AND THE STRUGGLE FOR CITIZENSHIP

While the basic political element of popular culture lies around resistance, lack of access to popular culture could minimise resistance. In Cipasung, for instance, we could witness a *santri* wearing a t-shirt with the picture of Che Guevara, yet he soon kisses the hand of *Kiai* when they suddenly meet in front of the gate of *Pondok Pesantren*. When the *Kiai* asks who is the person in the picture, *santri* was hesitant to answer and instead of covering the picture with a big *Kitab Kuning* that he carries on. The incident reminds us of the difficulty to maintain the spirit of resistance while the institutional arrangement is too strong to resist. Instead of perceiving popular culture as a medium of resistance, the student tends to play safe and utilise it merely as a medium of entertainment. The clear division between politics and entertainment has been reflected in the following statement:

I tend to be moody on the internet, very often I just looking for entertainment, I am not too much interested in politics.⁸⁰

Furthermore, the emphasis on being moody on the internet is identical to the tendency of the depiction of young people in popular culture (Shary et al., 2014). While mood and mental health have become an important narrative in mainstream popular culture, the image of *Pondok Pesantren* as an enlightening institution has created an image of education that combines mind and soul. Nevertheless, as the comment above has suggested, the student also has a concern for her mood and seeking entertainment through the internet. Hence, the popular culture of the internet is not regarded as a medium for examining political

⁸⁰ Rashida (20 years), personal communication, 9 January 2019.

power but merely a platform for entertainment purposes. Another student emphasises the same approach towards the internet and popular culture:

I am not interested in politics, because I am still underage [laughing]. I am more interested in social media; it is more interesting to seek entertainment.⁸¹

What is interesting here is how the internet has been consistently negated its political function in the public sphere. The citizenship value that has been attached to the popular culture on the internet has been systematically neglected from the individual's digital consumption. Here, everyday consumption is inherently institutional, not to fulfil the individual function in the political realm.

I am not interested too much in entertainment [on the internet], because [here in *Pesantren*] there are many interesting things. I prefer political content, but we should know the source of the content.⁸²

The individual tendency to utilise the internet and popular culture for entertainment purposes is identical with the individual capacity during the three decades of the Suharto presidency. As happened during the New Order era, the depoliticization of individuals through popular culture is also evident in *Pondok Pesantren*. By systematically neglecting the right of the individual to gain access to information, the internet is often seen as an exotic material that is still far away from its political functions. Instead, as students spend most of their time on religious education, they tend to spend the limited time of internet access merely for entertainment. Only a few exceptions in which the student is keen to explore his political potential on the internet:

Outside studying, I like politics. As a student, we could analyse the situation and condition before directly involves in society; we should absorb the wisdom. We [are expected to] have role there, guiding to the good deed

⁸¹ Zubaida (19 years), a pseudonym of a female student in Miftahul Huda, personal communication, 20 November 2018.

⁸² Rizqiya (22 years), personal communication, 6 January 2019.

with good manner, and preventing from the bad thing [also] with a good manner.⁸³

In contrast to some students who utilise the internet for entertainment purposes, the student prefers to use the internet as a tool to navigate political issues. In the case of Cipasung, the motto of *nyeni* and *nyakola* is potentially encouraging the student to utilise artistic expression and popular culture for leadership purposes. Another student also encourages a similar point of view:

The roles of *santri* are twofold, religion and the state. Sometimes many people don't understand politics; they tend to [be trapped in] a pendulum swing. [Hence] *santri* need to understand politics because we will become a reference for society.⁸⁴

These comments show how politics plays an important role in the future of the Islamic community in Indonesia. It is interesting to see how a student aspires to guide his local community to navigate the complex realm of Indonesian politics. Here, the potential to utilise popular culture for political leadership appears. However, the attachment to the political preference of *Kiai* and the absence of comprehensive political training will hinder the functions of citizenship of the students. Furthermore, the resilience of citizens in facing political inequality and global challenges is also fruitful in discussing the primary functions of popular culture. The individual agency is critical considering their future to embark on leadership positions in society:

I realised that [my] family and [people in my] village have not yet achieved a comprehensive religious understanding. I need to correct [them].⁸⁵

The religious agency in *Pondok Pesantren* reflects the importance to update the capacity of students in line with contemporary and global challenges. There is no doubt that the institution could not exist without the capability of *santri* to lead

⁸³ Emir (20 years), a pseudonym of a male student in Cipasung, personal communication, 5 January 2019.

⁸⁴ Emir (20 years), personal communication, 5 January 2019.

⁸⁵ Rashida (20 years), personal communication, 9 January 2019.

the local communities and strengthen the network of *Pondok Pesantren* throughout the country. This condition reflects the observation from Geertz in the 1960s:

At eighteen or twenty, the restlessness ceases, and the student returns home to settle down among his fellow peasants, the majority of whom are much less concerned with Islam than he; men who don't go to the mosque, who don't perform the prayers, and who have never set foot inside a *pesantren*. Unless he changes his beliefs, he will all his life be known to them as a *santri*, they to him as *abangans* (Geertz, 1960, p. 235).

What is compelling from the narrative is the consistency of students to put religious interests as their main priority. In contemporary Indonesia, the stream of Islamisation might potentially minimise the gap between the secular and religious self. But for *santri*, there is an inherent feeling that they are exclusively more religious than people outside *Pondok Pesantren*. Unfortunately, the priority to create a religious agency of students has neglected any functions of citizenship. Students in Cipasung might have been exposed to many aspirations through various subjects within the institution. Nevertheless, their ultimate goal is still to become religious agents. Hence, the various secular subjects at school and universities do not function to cultivate the sense of agency, but merely to fulfil the requirement of the national curriculum. Interestingly, despite such peculiarity, a student also appreciates the value of democracy:

Some people argue that democracy is not the best system, but for the current condition, it remains the best [system]. [Democracy appreciates] the diversity [and] the willingness to express the opinion in a wider level of the public sphere.⁸⁶

The student has shown how diversity and freedom of expression could become the foundation of an ideal public sphere. In popular culture, diversity and freedom of expression have guaranteed the capacity of the individual to thrive. His

⁸⁶ Firman (22 years), personal communication, 6 January 2019.

understanding reflects the spirit of resilience and resistance in popular culture that provides the individual with the opportunity to express their opinion freely. Popular culture necessitates the individual to be creative in facing structural inequality in the public sphere. Nevertheless, in the context of *Pondok Pesantren*, rather than appreciating individual expression, the communal value implies that the overall democratic process in *Pondok Pesantren* should aim to reach a consensus.

Democracy possesses the capability to unite various perspectives into a unitary goal.⁸⁷

The emphasis on consensus reflects the democratic system in Indonesia and *Pondok Pesantren* as well. Within the national level, three decades of New Order has created a common willingness to conform with the need for consensus, as shown by the value of *bapakism*. However, *bapakism* in the Indonesian public sphere has been challenged by democratisation in the post-Suharto era. In contrast, the power articulation and religious manifestation have made the willingness to accept *bapakism* remains strong in *Pondok Pesantren*. The internet policy, the complexity of its implementation, and the reluctance of students to criticize such arrangement have made it clear that the consensus has been prioritised in the democratic understanding of *Pondok Pesantren*.

During the fieldwork, I observed an important process of reaching a consensus during the weekly debate in Miftahul Huda. In one weekly debate, the topic was regarding the utilisation of *shahadat* as a flag.⁸⁸ Two groups of students were formed, one as pro the utilisation and the other as a contra to the idea. Each group was presenting important ideas, bringing the important classical kinds of literature regarding Islamic theology, and conducting research on the contemporary debate in the Indonesian public sphere. The most compelling arguments from the pro and the contra are their perception on the issue of the Islamic state. For the pro, the establishment of an Islamic state is a precondition of the totality and

⁸⁷ Rashida (20 years), personal communication, 9 January 2019.

⁸⁸ *Shahadat* is an official declaration of becoming a Muslim; it acknowledges that there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the last prophet on earth.

comprehensiveness of the application of Islamic principles in the public sphere. In contrast, the contra argued that Islamic principles should be conducted on the individual level. It is the individual who has the responsibility to uphold the Islamic principles and becomes the foundation of the strong, just, and Islamic society.

Another important point is that how the event was managed professionally is akin to the presidential debate on Indonesian television. The voice tone of the master of ceremony copies standards of television news anchors and copying the popular practice on television has made the forum more fascinating. Yet the male and female audience were separated by a huge gap in the middle of the auditorium. In the front row, right in the middle of the gap, sit the member of the *Kiai* family and the special guests, including me as the observer. The debate itself was held for almost three hours; the auditorium was noisy with the voices from participants and supporters. However, after three hours of debate, suddenly the auditorium was completely quiet as the member of the *Kiai* family gave his closing statement. He corrected all the arguments from both pro and contra positions.

The event reflects some important points on citizenship and popular culture. Firstly, the arrangement within the auditorium reflects a willingness to follow the pattern of the national debate on television. Most compellingly, the master of ceremony presented himself in a manner akin to the television news anchor. Despite its strict control of individual expression, it is evident that they are also exposed to the popular image and ideas in mainstream mass media. Secondly, the capability of students in connecting the arguments from various classical and contemporary resources is the potential to increase the citizenship capacity in the Indonesian public sphere. Thirdly, regardless of its potential, the sudden quiet environment when the member of the *Kiai* family gave his speech has shown how consensus has become an important understanding in the public sphere of *Pondok Pesantren*. This condition reflects communal value during the three decades of the New Order era:

The nature of Indonesian social capital is also revealed in the customs of *gotong-rojong* and *musjawarah*, community mutual assistance and

discussion leading to consensus, respectively. In principle, decisions should be made by consensus after extensive deliberations, but in practice, although the younger participants call for bold actions, and the middle-aged add their cautious wisdom, in the end, the senior figure usually declares what the “consensus” is, whether or not anybody ever articulated it. Since the power of consensus, like all power, involves invisible forces, only a leader with almost magical ability can discern where it lies and assert it authoritatively (Pye, 1999, p. 774).

During the three decades of the Suharto era, individual and popular expression have been neglected in the name of maintaining public consensus. However, the dramatic shift in the post-Suharto era has challenged the notion of civility and mutual assistance in the Indonesian public sphere. The current climate of the competitive and individual agency has opened more opportunities to reimagine the position of the popular in the public sphere. As we have discussed in the theoretical chapter of the popular, the popular depiction of *Bumi Manusia* from a banned novel during the Suharto era could be a good example of how the shift from consensus to marketization has created a different emphasis on individual expression, consumption, and popular culture.

However, in the context of *Pondok Pesantren*, there is a constant struggle to maintain consensus and social stability within the institution. The sudden quiet at the end of the debate reflects such a sense of maintaining consensus in *Pondok Pesantren*. It also represents the management of popular culture in *Pondok Pesantren* that regardless of the noise from their creative and cultural expression, *santri* should keep silent when *Kiai* and members of his families give an important instruction. The opportunity of the people in expressing their interest should be continuously adapted to the institutional arrangement in *Pondok Pesantren*. The management of popular culture in *Pondok Pesantren* reflects the struggle of the public as described by Warner (2002) in his article:

What would the world look like if all ways of being public were more like applying for a driver’s license or subscribing to a professional group – if,

that is, formally organized mediations replaced the self-organized public as the image of belonging and common activity? Such is the image of totalitarianism: non-kin society organized by bureaucracy and the law. Everyone's position, function, and capacity for action are specified for her by the administration (Warner, 2002, p. 52).

It might be true that the leadership of *Kiai* and its internet policy has enabled students to be free from the pressure of modern capitalism. But it is important to note that their freedom is temporary. Once they graduated from *Pondok Pesantren* and directly participate in the Indonesian public sphere, the pressure of modern capitalism is real. For the graduates of *Pondok Pesantren*, the possibility to thrive has been questioned as the popular culture has been constantly denied. There is no worse scenario than entering the broken system of modern capitalism and the pressure of oligarchy without the necessary tools to survive. If *Pondok Pesantren* is truly aiming to prepare future leaders, they should act as a connector between the popular inside and outside *Pondok Pesantren*. Instead, there is a growing tendency that the elite in *Pondok Pesantren* support the ambition of the elite at the national level and neglect the primary function to enlarge access for the popular.

THE CULTURAL CITIZENSHIP IN *PONDOK PESANTREN*: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

There is a constant contradictory between outward and inward-looking, between the ambition to thrive in the Indonesian public sphere and the intention to maintain religious tradition in *Pondok Pesantren*. Institutionally, *Pondok Pesantren* tends to create uniformity in personal identity. The charisma of *Kiai* and the internet policy have been effective in controlling the fluidity of identity and aspiration of students. However, at the individual level, students are constantly struggling to maintain a balance between the opportunities that have been available on the internet and the religious values in *Pondok Pesantren*. In this regard, popular culture could become a significant signifier of the tension between

secularism and religiosity. Parental control that normally becomes a subject of resistance in popular culture has become the main motivation to study in *Pondok Pesantren* as has been expressed by a student in Cipasung:

In my case, it was the motivation from my parents that studying in college should be done in conjunction with [religious studies in] *Pesantren*.⁸⁹

As a student at the higher education level, it is evident that getting a university degree has been increasingly important for the future of *santri*. As we have discussed above, Cipasung has been accommodative to the dramatic change of student body by providing wide-range university majors. In the above statement, the student even puts religious education in *Pondok Pesantren* as complementary to university level education. This opinion reflects a major shift of religious aspiration of students in which they want to hone the non-religious subject and keeping the religious values at the same time. What is interesting from the perspective is also the fact that such a complementary approach comes in an environment that prioritises religious learning above anything else and still systematically limits the internet connection.

Here lies the challenges and opportunities for cultural citizenship in *Pondok Pesantren*. *Santri* might have a global outlook and an aspiration akin to the Muslim middle-class, yet they still feel that the less-connected environment is more suitable for the religious manifestation in *Pondok Pesantren*. This contradictory thinking has resulted from the power articulation and the religious life in *Pondok Pesantren* that mainly promotes the offline environment. In catering to their global outlook, the internet might be central for individual goals, yet they are reluctant to express their aspiration for more connectivity in *Pondok Pesantren*.

Even in Cipasung, where the internet and popular culture have been more accessible, *santri* still face a significant barrier to express their identity and aspiration akin to *santri* in Miftahul Huda. *Santri* may feel that the internet policy is not sufficient, yet they are reluctant to express their criticism because they feel

⁸⁹ Humaira (20 years), a pseudonym of a female student in Cipasung, personal communication, 7 January 2019.

worried about losing *barakah* (blessing) and causing *kualat* (bad karma). The division between popular culture inside and outside *Pondok Pesantren* might be inconsistent and unclear. Yet there is an image to divide it as follows:

<i>Pondok Pesantren</i>	Popular Culture
Religious	Secular
Top-down	Bottom-up
Uniformity	Diversity
Education	Entertainment
Collective Struggle	Individual Enjoyment
Obedience	Resistance

This chapter suggests a significant contribution to the issue of the identity of Muslim youth in the internet era. While the middle-class Muslims in the Indonesian public sphere has been firmly attached to the contemporary popular culture, students within *Pondok Pesantren* still need to adequately adapt their interest in the internet to the religious environment and the institutional internet policy. In the Indonesian public sphere, for instance, young people could become a pious Muslim and a fan of Korean pop at the same time. However, in the context of *Pondok Pesantren*, students are constantly struggling to choose between the institutional arrangement of religious life and personal desire to consume and produce popular culture. The ambiguity of personal identity is problematic as their aspiration to be capable of leading the *umma* necessitates a capability to be well-adapted to the global challenges and opportunities.

Because, as described in the gate of Cipasung, *santri* should be able to lead the *umma*.⁹⁰

The inscription of the motto *santri mampu membina ummat* (*santri* should be able to lead the *umma*) in the front gate of Cipasung necessitates students to prioritise

⁹⁰ Humaira (20 years), personal communication, 7 January 2019.

religious leadership above anything else. As the first point that students intercept upon the arrival in Cipasung, it is undeniable that the motto has a profound impact on student identity and aspiration. Yet some students have thought about the different arrangements in leading the *umma*.

[I am thinking about] leading the *umma* with a corporation. It [also] could be good to maintain communication and information when we see the world.⁹¹

Connecting the *umma* with the concept of modern economic and corporations necessitates the capability of students in understanding the structure of modern society. In the last decade, entrepreneurship has become a popular theme in Indonesia due to the significant increase in local start-ups. Creativity and resilience that are fundamental in popular culture now have become the main spirit in the field of entrepreneurship. The concepts of modern economic and corporations also reflect the spirit of religious commodification that has been evident in the life of the Muslim middle-class (Rudnyckyj, 2010).

Here, we could witness other competing elements of identity between pursuing the inherent features of tradition in *Pondok Pesantren* and the aspiration to absorb modernity akin to the popular image of the Muslim middle-class in the Indonesian public sphere. At the same time, there is also an aspiration to connect with global information and communication order. These worldly affairs in conducting the leadership show that the presence of *santri* in the institution and their absence from the Indonesian public sphere are just temporary. Geertz (1960) explained this temporary nature as follows:

A pesantren is only superficially like a monastery, for the *santris* are not monks; they have made no vows. They come to the *pesantren* when they wish, and they leave it when they wish. While there they are expected to lead at least a reasonable facsimile of the holy life, but they are not expected to dedicate themselves to it permanently. They are not men of

⁹¹ Emir (20 years), personal communication, 5 January 2019.

extraordinary powerful religious needs who have decided to cut themselves off forever from secular existence and to devote themselves to the service and adoration of God (Geertz, 1960, pp. 234-235).

The superficial monastery in Geertz analysis has been more prevalent during my fieldwork. At the top-down level, there is an inherent perception that popular culture is predominantly secular that is harmful to the religious value in *Pondok Pesantren*. However, in the bottom-up level of students, there is a sign that they also shared a similar aspiration and anxiety in facing the digital future akin to young people in the urban setting. It is quite normal to see students eager to connect between their experience inside *Pondok Pesantren* and the real condition outside the institution. However, with such limitations and regulation in hand, they struggle to manage their values and the collective institutional values in *Pondok Pesantren*. This contradictory thing is evident in the aspiration of the student to connect the modern aspirations with religious instruction in *Pondok Pesantren*:

In *Pesantren*, we are not only studying religious things; we are also being taught the [meaning of] life. The organisation in the dormitory, for instance, taught us the position to lead and to be led.⁹²

The flexible spirit to lead and to be led is inherently identical to the process of production and reproduction of popular culture. What is seemingly a simple student life is perceived as a solution to resolve the complex problem of contemporary society. In her opinion, the student-led management of the dormitory is an important skill to ensure that she could lead society in a larger context. While the spirit of popular culture existed, the constant restriction and limitation have hindered the popular potential to thrive. What is missing from her perspective is the fact that society is far more complicated than the small scale and restrictive environment of *Pondok Pesantren*. Outside the institution, people come from a more diverse socio-economic background. This complexity and diversity necessitate people in the Indonesian public sphere to prepare strategies

⁹² Humaira (20 years), personal communication, 7 January 2019.

for individual needs rather than to attach to communalism and collective values. Despite all potential for popular culture to thrive, the leadership of *Kiai* is still regarded as the main element of life within *Pondok Pesantren*.

Here we have *Kiai*. However, we have pointed to considerate, [we believe that] *Kiai* has a better argument.⁹³

The positive attitude regarding the position of *Kiai* reflects the hesitation of students to express their uneasy feeling of the current restriction openly. In contrast to the emerging democracy in the Indonesian public sphere that necessitates creative expression of resistance and resentment, respect to the religious leader remains important in understanding the public sphere of *Pondok Pesantren*. There are only a few students who are eager to share their concerns on the value of democracy in *Pondok Pesantren*.

We may have the general election, but we fully comply with the final decision from the instructor or *Kiai*. Although the result from the people (laugh) or *santri* like this (different).⁹⁴

The good thing about democracy is that it allows individuals to express their anger and resentment without significant constraint. Popular culture, in this regard, has become an important element of a democratic society. It is the extensive opportunity for the individual to express their disappointment that enables popular culture to thrive creatively. In *Pondok Pesantren*, there various democratic mechanism is available such as direct participation in the general election. Yet the final decision should come from *Kiai*. As the comment suggests, the tension between democratic and non-democratic elements has been. The unequal position between *Kiai* and *santri* that we have discussed above has become the main barrier for popular culture to thrive. Another student reflects this complexity more diplomatically.

⁹³ Emir (20 years), personal communication, 5 January 2019.

⁹⁴ Humaira (20 years), personal communication, 7 January 2019.

The application of democracy in *Pesantren* has been minimum. *Asatidz* (teacher council) and *Kiai* [really works], as our mindset, tend to be less comprehensive and requires a correction.⁹⁵

Here we could see the lack of confidence of the student in discussing the critical issue for himself and a constant contradiction in the statement. To some extent, the student realises that the lack of democratisation has been evident in *Pondok Pesantren*. There is a constant instrument of control from *asatidz* (plural form of *ustadz*/religious teacher) and *Kiai*. At the same time, he also thinks that control is required to ensure that the arguments of students could be corrected in a good manner. The contradictory elements in the comment show the gap between individual needs to express their interest and the institutional arrangement in the public sphere. Another student describes the complexity of democracy in *Pondok Pesantren* as follows:

[Political] system of *Pesantren* has been more than democracy; we have our democracy value. If we apply it to the state level, [the result] might be different, because here we respect the elderly and the senior scholars.⁹⁶

This comment describes a complete difference between the public sphere in *Pondok Pesantren* and other contexts of society. The emphasis on 'our own democracy' implies that student realises that there is a special feature in *Pondok Pesantren* that is incomparable to the national level. Hence, we should rethink the assumption of students that they could be able to build a society based on their experience studying in *Pondok Pesantren*. In speaking about the internet, the emphasis that *Pondok Pesantren* is a special place is also evident.

Internet is a necessity; we critically need it. But in *pesantren* we have a limitation. The internet policy has been helpful to keep us well-disciplined.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Syaiful (22 years), a pseudonym of a male student in Cipasung, personal communication, 6 January 2019.

⁹⁶ Firman (22 years), personal communication, 6 January 2019.

⁹⁷ Dalila (19 years), personal communication, 6 December 2018.

Internet is not the main thing in *Pondok Pesantren*; it is different from [what we need] on campus. In *pesantren*, it is just a personal need.⁹⁸

These two comments convey a complex relationship between students and technology. There is a persistent understanding that the internet is not a core element of education in *Pondok Pesantren*. The above comment resonates with the morning scene of transferring between *Pondok Pesantren* and formal school. There is a constant tension between inward and outward-looking, between the cosmopolitan vision and the emphasis to maintain the tradition of *Pondok Pesantren*. The comments suggest that the charisma of *Kiai* and the internet policy have been powerful in maintaining the current circumstances of student life. There is also an appreciation of the internet policy that could cater to their needs.

For university students, the internet has helped manage our tasks. We also need to keep updated with the current news, with the contemporary world. Once in a week limitation is good. We could refresh our minds so that we could catch with the current condition. But we should be able to differentiate between good and bad news. The young students have no such ability; that is why we need to monitor them.⁹⁹

As university students, their privileged access to the internet has led to an acceptance of the limitation rather than the realisation of the need for internet access for all students. Social solidarity that has become the main feature of popular culture has been absent in the context of *Pondok Pesantren*. The different treatment towards junior and senior *santri*, and the unequal structure between *Kiai* families and the general population, have made it difficult to realise a common problem in the institution. Instead of imagining the whole community as a single unit of the popular against the elite and middle class at the national level, the internal stratification and unequal level of privilege further divide the internal cohesion.

⁹⁸ Emir (20 years), personal communication, 5 January 2019.

⁹⁹ Humaira (20 years), personal communication, 7 January 2019.

Furthermore, there is a contradiction between the capability of students in assessing the sources of information and their ambition to become relevant leaders in contemporary Indonesia. For students to become relevant leaders, the understanding of the nature of the internet and the basic tenet of digital literacy is critically important. However, the attachment to the institution has created an awareness that the internet should be managed collectively. The origin of *Pondok Pesantren* as a religious institution has made it impossible to uphold individual purpose above the institutional goal. Students constantly emphasise the importance to focus on the physical learning facilities and perceive potential disruption on the internet.

Cipasung is allowing the internet. In the previous *Pondok Pesantren*, I even could not watch television. When I could not open the internet, I did not know the things outside *Pondok Pesantren*. [In the previous *Pondok Pesantren*] there was a computer laboratory, but the internet was blocked.¹⁰⁰

The above comment suggests the increasing importance of the internet has been evident as students want to see the external world more openly. Here we could see the inconsistency against collectivism of *Pondok Pesantren*. The student realises that she needs internet access by emphasising various media access as an important element for contemporary *santri*. Yet there is also a concern on the potential capability of the internet is changing the structure of society, particularly in the context of *Pondok Pesantren*.

The societal change of the internet [era] has been significant. Its positive and negative impacts exist either for [institution that] allow it or ban it. The main thing is we can't accept the information as a raw [material], that's why we need to strengthen our foundation. Our religious side should be well established because our religious foundation may have been weakened by the internet.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Rashida (20 years), personal communication, 9 January 2019.

¹⁰¹ Firman (22 years), personal communication, 6 January 2019.

The comment above reflects an anxious behaviour in thinking about the implication of the internet to the religious foundation. Here lies the important point about the impossibility of students to accept popular culture as an important instrument in the public sphere. By positioning the internet as a threat to the religious foundation, there is a strong tendency to avoid secular narratives on the internet, most importantly, the popular culture. If we reflect on the family purpose of educating the student in *Pondok Pesantren*, the constant constraint towards popular culture represents the interrelated concepts of religious parenting and religious authority. Students are situated between the authorities of parents, *Kiai*, as well as the pressure of the information technology.

In the national context, both parents and religious authorities are working strategically to ensure that children could gain a competitive advantage of information technology. However, in the context of *Pondok Pesantren*, a long tradition of digital disconnection has created a different response to modernity. Consequently, there is a constant ambiguous perception regarding the positive and negative impacts of the internet from students. A student in Cipasung, for instance, appreciate the current restriction as follows:

[The condition in Cipasung] is fundamentally different from *pesantren* that does not allow mobile phones. Here, the mobile phone has been far from the maximum utilisation; our memorisation and concentration have been disrupted. But we are more aware of the outside world.¹⁰²

Here student feels that the availability of the internet connection could be beneficial and disruptive at the same time. The student is appreciative of the fact she could understand more the outside environment. Yet she also thinks that there is a significant disruption of the internet in a *pesantren* that allows the internet. There is an inherent preference to maintain life within the offline setting of *Pondok Pesantren*. Individual enjoyment through popular culture is, once again,

¹⁰² Humaira (20 years), personal communication, 7 January 2019.

a sensitive issue in *Pondok Pesantren*. Another student aspires to use the internet for the sake of religious proliferation.

As a communication student, [I think] communication and *pesantren* are inseparable. If we know the media, we could spread the religious message through video etc.¹⁰³

There is a constant contradiction in thinking about *santri* as a citizen and as an audience. As an audience, they want to consume the internet merely as a medium of entertainment and far away from politics. At the same time, the above statement also shows that *santri* wanted to express their religious aspiration through various online platforms akin to their middle-class counterparts in the national public sphere. Her aspiration shows that in the realms of cultural production and political contestation, she does not want to become a passive audience. Instead, there is an inherent ambition to become an active producer in the realm of Indonesian popular culture. The distinctive capacity of an individual in *Pondok Pesantren* necessitates a different interpretation of the public sphere:

The public seems to be self-organized by discourse but requires pre-existing forms and channels of circulation. It appears to be open to indefinite strangers but selects participants by criteria of shared social space (though not necessarily territorial space), habitus, topical concerns, intergeneric references, and circulating intelligible forms (including idiolects or speech genres) (Warner, 2002, p. 75).

The above contradiction and the complexities in *Pondok Pesantren* are compelling reasons for how the selective mechanism in the public sphere could be operated systematically. *Pondok Pesantren* might look inclusive, by opening access to education for people from various socio-economic backgrounds. However, the emphasis on religiosity has created a mechanism of selection that makes it different from the social space outside the institution. Yet the pressure of modernity has created a tension within the individual level of the popular. The last

¹⁰³ Rizqiya (22 years), personal communication, 6 January 2019.

section of this chapter has shown the struggle of students in navigating the blurred boundaries between various identities. There is a constant struggle and inconsistency between connection and disconnection, between the attempts to maintain the religious values and the aspiration to be fully engaged in the increasingly digitalised Indonesian public sphere.

CONCLUSION

The previous chapters on power and piety in the public sphere of *Pondok Pesantren* have indicated the capability of instruments of control of the institution and the religious manifestation that takes place mainly in the offline setting. Nevertheless, the realisation of the power and piety in the level of the daily life of students have shown a different level of complexity. The instruments of control have generated a different set of the identity of young people amidst the constant battle of political contestation. This chapter suggests that the aspiration of students to involve in the online realm challenges the preference to have an offline religious life, particularly through the production and consumption of popular culture. In this chapter, such complexity and contradiction have been explored further to understand how the instrument of control and religious manifestation have created an ambiguous identity and aspiration of students.

This chapter asks the fundamental questions on how students in *Pondok Pesantren* perceive themselves and aspire to the future of Islam in Indonesia and the world. While the instrument of control and religious manifestation imagine *Pondok Pesantren* as the independent institution from the national public sphere, the struggle of political Islam in the last decade has positioned *Pondok Pesantren* either as a partner or as an opponent of the national government. The offline religious setting also created a sense of independence of cultural production in the national market, yet this chapter has shown the aspiration of students to consume and to produce in the digital market of Indonesia.

In the last decade, there was hope for independent institutions such as *Pondok Pesantren* to educate critical Muslim leaders within the democratisation process in Indonesia. However, the current trend of mass mobilisation in *Pondok Pesantren* has made it difficult to imagine the institution will be able to maintain its independence amidst the pressure of politics and the market. Within the narrative of the Muslim middle class, the individual ability in various digital skills has been enhancing their capability to embark on a new sort of Muslim identity. In contrast, within the context of *Pondok Pesantren*, the agency of the self is voluntarily involved within a collectivist attitude, in which they prioritise their attachment to the institution above anything else. The attitude is particularly evident through their treatment of the popular culture that is constantly positioned as a threat to the religious commitment of students.

CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSION AND CODA

This thesis has found that, without the privilege of being middle-class, the attempt to integrate religion and modernity has resulted in a different trajectory. It is not the total rejection of modernity as there is an inherent spirit to accept modernity as a necessity to adapt to contemporary society. The grand gate and architecture of the mosque, the utilisation of megaphones for calling prayer, and the collection of luxury cars of *Kiai* have suggested that the institutions also enjoy the products of modernity. The acceptance of these products normally resulted from the perception that they could employ the products of modernity entirely for religious purposes. Modern construction, megaphone, and cars have been fundamental to sustain religious values amidst the rapid change of modern society. However, for media, communication, and the internet, different terms and conditions have been applied.

Within *Pondok Pesantren*, the possession of gadgets and digital technology is a symbol of power. Only powerful people have access to mobile phones. In Miftahul Huda, senior *santri* who act as *pengurus* could utilise the analogue mobile phone to assist their duties. Meanwhile, *Kiai* and his family, regardless of their age and duties, could own the latest version of the mobile phone. In Cipasung, female and male students in junior and senior high schools have a different day of access in a week, while university students could bring mobile phones and laptops to finish their university tasks. The stratified access is predominantly driven by the perception that only mature people could utilise the internet wisely, while students from a younger age should strive to strengthen their moral infrastructure. The stratified internet access has created an internal digital divide in a seemingly egalitarian population. There is a sense of pride and privilege for people who have access to the internet and mobile phone, ignoring the need for internet access for students of all ages and backgrounds.

While media and the internet could also be utilised for religious propagation, the intersection of secular and religious messages within digital platforms is

unavoidable. These points of view remind us of Saba Mahmood (2001a, 2005) critics of modern secularism. The roots of secularism from private altars of Christianity are not always fit with the religious tradition of Islam that necessitates a constant embodiment of religion in both private and public lives (Hirschkind & Mahmood, 2002). The current religious revival in Indonesia resonates with her works on Muslim women activism in Egypt in which the religious community strive to maintain their values within the structure of the secular state (Mahmood, 2001a, 2005). For the middle-class Muslim in contemporary Indonesia, their familiarity and daily struggle within the urban modernity have made it easy to utilise secular technology for religious purposes. They could produce messages as attractive as secular advertising on the internet. Their purchasing power has made it possible to consume and produce high-quality and well-marketized products with an Islamic twist.

However, for *Pondok Pesantren* communities, lack of access to modern tools and minimum familiarity with the urban lifestyle has led to a different approach and strategy. Instead of assimilating to the modern lifestyle, they aim to continuously differentiate their religious life. At the institutional level, the power of *Kiai* in producing educational and digital policy has been prevalent. As a local elite, they have a considerable amount of cultural capital that enables them to become a cultural broker in modern Indonesia. Respect towards his leadership has sustained his power amidst the changing landscape of democratised, modernised, and digitalised Indonesian politics. My fieldwork in October 2018 – January 2019 was fruitful in understanding the local dynamics in facing the pressure of national politics. The decision of Jokowi to choose Ma'ruf Amien, a senior *Kiai*, as his running mate has fortified himself from the increasing presence of political Islam in big cities. By choosing a senior *Kiai* as a vice president, Jokowi garnered attention, support, and sympathy from *Kiai* who hold a powerful position in rural areas and formed a strong network across the archipelago. Indonesian politics has always been a battle of symbolic meaning and Jokowi has been successful in cultivating his symbol as a traditionalist Muslim amidst his decreasing reputation among the modernist and urban Muslim population.

It is also interesting to see that, while *Kiai* has attempted to preserve offline religious life, they could not resist the temptation to participate in an online campaign. It has proven that there is no single individual, no matter how powerful he is, could avoid the need to participate in digital platforms. The involvement of *Kiai* in the digital campaign also raises scrutiny regarding their position in the face of the elite at the national level. Are they serving as a cultural broker? Or merely becoming a connector to the interest of the national elite? These questions are particularly relevant to the fact that individual access to the internet is abandoned in the two *Pondok Pesantren*. If they aimed to serve students, they could provide the necessary tools to navigate the increasingly digitalised public sphere. In the meantime, the online campaign and the limited internet access for individuals could signal the tendency of *Kiai* to serve the interest of the elite at the national level, by garnering potential and loyal voters from the network of *Pondok Pesantren* communities.

In discussing religious ritual among Muslim women activists in Egyptian mosques, Mahmood concluded that 'embodied action does not simply represent a self but endows the self with various kinds of capabilities that form the background of moral and political judgement' (p. 845). Indeed, the spiritual needs of *santri* have been fulfilled thoroughly. Attending mass prayer five times a day and getting spiritual advice from *Kiai* was effective in avoiding the mental health crisis that has been evident in the modern and commercialised educational system. Students have been protected from the anxiety of increasing tuition fees, from the pressure to manage monthly spending and daily schedule. Even within a mixed environment such as Cipasung, the dominant religious education in *Pondok Pesantren* has created a more spiritual environment rather than a sophisticated infrastructure of the modern Islamic school. However, as we have discussed in the empirical chapter of piety, the sanctuary of *Pondok Pesantren* is temporary. Once students graduate, they need to embark and face the challenges of modern life that have been familiar to the middle-class Muslim in big cities. The inconsistency and fragility of digital disconnection are evident here. In this regard, Mahmood elaborated the diagnosis of power in such hierarchical society:

Thus any exploration of practices of freedom must consider, not only hierarchical structures of social relations, but also the architecture of the self, the interrelationship between its constituent elements that makes particular imaginary freedom possible. In other words, such an analysis requires thinking through the topography of a politics of freedom adequate to variable understandings of the self and its embodied powers. It invites conceptualization of freedom as a contextual, rather than universal, practice (Mahmood, 2001b, p. 845).

In the case of students in my research, once we departed from the institutional arrangement, we could grasp the individual ambition that is identical with the aspiration of middle-class Muslims in big cities. The modern vocabularies such as travelling, entrepreneurship, management, and business are also repeated multiple times by students. It is signalling that they are not only religious but also ambitious to compete in the modern market and modern profession. Even in exclusive contexts such as Miftahul Huda, students aspired to become as rich and powerful as *Kiai*, by embracing the norm of hardworking akin to the middle-class Muslim in big Indonesian cities. While they have a considerable distance from the modern lifestyle, the privilege of *Kiai* and his family could become a window of becoming rich, powerful, and religious at the same time. Furthermore, the window is even getting larger that every time their parents come, students could peek at the ongoing trend and manifestation of modern life through the mobile phone of their parents.

While Cipasung and Miftahul Huda pursue different educational strategies, students in both institutions often imagined the opposite version of *Pondok Pesantren* as the ideal public sphere. Despite more opportunities to be well-connected to the internet, students in Cipasung often expressed their willingness to enter the institution with more limited internet access such as in Miftahul Huda. While appreciating the availability of the internet for university students, they also perceive that the internet has threatened a fundamental foundation of religious life. Here, the attachment towards offline religious life has been evident. Students still perceive that being religious necessitates a departure from the mundane life.

Conversely, students in Miftahul Huda are often obsessed with modern subjects, such as Agriculture, Architecture, and Business Management that are only available in formal schooling systems such as in Cipasung. While proudly describing the institution as a complete university, it is evident that what they describe as the possession of skills in these subjects normally consists of self-taught practical skills, not a comprehensive structure of modern subjects in a modern university.

In contrast to the less mediated Bedouin life (Abu-Lughod, 1990b), students in my research have had a materialised image of living and working as a middle-class Muslim that affects their aspiration and ambition for their future life. While Abu-Lughod (2002) was sympathetic to the seclusion of Muslim women due to their inherent difference in religious values, my research has found that it is increasingly challenging to manage such different features of religious life within the increasingly digitalised world. In researching the dynamics of resistance among Bedouin women, Abu-Lughod (1990b) also found how young men and women had different trajectories regarding access to media. The reluctance of women to perform in a mediated form of resistance has automatically granted a chance for young men to dominate the mediated public sphere. Here, women have been positioned as a subject of surveillance (Abu-Lughod, 1990b, p. 49) in defending the existence of the tribe against the external challenge of modernisation. In my research, the institutional dynamics do not always represent gender division, but are more related to the senior-junior relationship, regardless of their gender. Women from *Kiai* families, for instance, enjoy more privileged positions than male students. The struggle of students in *Pondok Pesantren* reminds us of the struggle of young Bedouin in Abu-Lughod's research:

For young Bedouin women and men, it is a kind of double resistance to two conflicting sets of demands – the demands of their elders and the system of face to face kin-based authority they represent, on the one hand, and on the other demands of the national westernized and capitalist state in which, because of their cultural differences, lack of education, and lack of ties to the elite, they participate only marginally (Abu-Lughod, 1990b, p. 52).

The crossroad, ambiguity, and inconsistency of opinion have suggested that, currently, *Pondok Pesantren* has been positioned in an uneasy transition. Institutionally, they want to embrace a solid identity as a significant differential to the religious commodification in the national public sphere. However, as we have discussed above, *Kiai* himself could not resist the temptation of producing an online campaign and owns the most up to date mobile phone. He might be perceived as an elite by his *santri*, but it might be possible for the elite at the national level to perceive *Kiai* merely as a factor of winning the General Election. While *santri* might be safe under the auspices of *Kiai* during their education in *Pondok Pesantren*, their future upon graduation remains unclear, particularly in dealing with the increasingly digitalised public sphere. While Abu-Lughod and Mahmood appreciate the seclusion of Muslim communities, this thesis has proven it is difficult to imagine the seclusion within the increasingly integrated world.

It is the understanding of the diversity of the public sphere in the internet era that is critical in my thesis. Throughout this thesis, we have witnessed the evolution of the public sphere across different periods and different contexts of society. The Habermasian model that relies heavily on the power of ideas is not sufficient to understand the postcolonial struggle that necessitates the involvement of the power of identity and ideology. Habermasian approach that positions ideas as a source of harmony do not apply to a society with a fragile national identity and a prolonged battle to defend national existence against external threats. In the Indonesian case, it is evident that the idea was only powerful in the period of developing the common consciousness of the imagined communities (Anderson, 2006, 2016). Soon after the official proclamation, nationalism and identity, politics have become the main theme of national existence.

The struggle of identity politics is even more detrimental in understanding political Islam in the Indonesian public sphere. Throughout the postcolonial era, Indonesian Muslims do not enjoy privilege as a majority, unlike the Muslim population in the Middle East or the neighbouring countries of Malaysia and Brunei. The decision of Sukarno and nationalist founding fathers to abolish the Jakarta Charter (*Piagam Jakarta*) and establish the Five Principles (*Pancasila*) as

the official national ideology erased the privilege of the majority Muslim population. At the same time, several strategic sectors such as media and natural resources are controlled by secular nationalists or Christian and Catholic conglomerates. Without significant possession of economic and political resources, Indonesian Muslims have become the majority with a minority mentality.

Therefore, the current trend of Islamic revival should be seen within this integral narrative. The religious consciousness of middle-class Muslims, that previously had been Americanized by Suharto, once again necessitates the centrality of identity and ideology in understanding the Indonesian public sphere. As the middle-class Muslims are well-educated in secular subjects, it is prevalent that Western secularism is not as enlightening as Habermas' imagination. The inherent occidental rationalism in Habermasian idea is not sufficient to understand a society with a hidden religious ambition. Indonesians have always been seeking an alternative arrangement of modernity, either by rejecting it or assimilating through an innovative and creative way. Here, ideas and identity should not be positioned oppositely. Instead, they are complementary to each other.

Even the neutral conception of popular culture has always been related to the struggle of Indonesian identity. At the beginning of postcolonial Indonesia, popular culture was positioned as an antithesis of national sentiment. Sukarno, the first Indonesian president, perceived popular culture as a threat to nationalism, particularly during the confrontation with Malaysia that also involved British and American intervention. In contrast, Suharto utilised popular culture to depoliticise young people, particularly by promoting the American lifestyle and hedonism. By providing young people with enjoyment and entertainment, Suharto could maintain political stability and focus entirely on his ambitious development plan. However, the emerging digitalisation, Islamisation, and neoliberalism have challenged nationalism as the main ideology in the public sphere. The contemporary Indonesian popular culture should be able to cater for people with different perspectives and ways of life.

By utilising the keywords of power, piety, and the popular, this thesis has been interdisciplinary. Literature on Political Science and Philosophy has been beneficial in understanding the basic tenet of power. Specifically, this thesis owes to the studies of emerging nationalism and national identities such as Benedict Anderson's *the Imagined Communities* in testing the Habermasian public sphere and Foucauldian theories of power in the postcolonial context. Meanwhile, the keyword of piety has been benefited from the studies of Sociology and Anthropology. The feminist scholars on religion, such as Saba Mahmood and Lila Abu-Lughod, have been influential in putting a sensitivity towards the religious community. Meanwhile, John Fiske's cultural studies have been influential in understanding popular culture as the foundation of the popular in this research. This thesis was also influenced by scholars in Indonesian Muslim communities, such as Clifford Geertz, Ariel Heryanto, Robert Hefner, and Martin van Bruinessen. Their insights have been fruitful in my attempt to de-Westernize media and communication studies.

Nevertheless, the main field of this thesis is Media and Communication. My research attempts to bridge the theoretical division between Western and Eastern traditions of media studies. The effort is particularly critical in understanding the current debate of humans right to information versus those that aim for a more protective measurement. As I have elaborated throughout this thesis, the right to information could not be universal. It is the subject of attachment to the spatial and contextual boundaries. My thesis is particularly critical as it connects the pure democratic tradition in the West, the emerging Indonesian democracy, and the quasi-democratic institutions in *Pondok Pesantren*. It also connects the secular understanding of the internet in the West, quasi-secular Indonesia, and the religious environment in *Pondok Pesantren*. As we have discussed above, while the division remains exist, there is also a growing tendency of mobilisation of ideas between different trajectories and societal boundaries. For Abu-Lughod, it is more important to aspire for a more justifiable approach in facing such difficulties at the grassroots level of society:

A more productive approach, it seems to me, is to ask how we might contribute to making the world a more just place. A world not organized around strategic military and economic demands; a place where certain kinds of forces and values that we may still consider important could have an appeal and where there is the peace necessary for discussions, debates, and transformations to occur within communities. We need to ask ourselves what kinds of world conditions we could contribute to making such that popular desires will not be overdetermined by an overwhelming sense of helplessness in the face of forms of global injustice (Abu-Lughod, 2002, p. 789)

This thesis has shown how the universal model of the public sphere and internet policy is impossible to reach. Within the context of Indonesia, the internal digital divide has challenged the national strategy to connect the whole archipelago. The internet policy also persistently needs to adapt to the current Islamisation and marketisation of the public sphere. Individuals in the Indonesian public sphere have been increasingly religious, consumerist, and political at the same time. In the context of *Pondok Pesantren*, the variety of educational systems has enabled different *Pondok Pesantren* to have a different kind of public sphere. At the individual level, the complexity of aspiration necessitates the creativity to manage the public sphere. Yet, as we have shown thoroughly, the institutions have always been attempting to create an ideal model of the Islamic public sphere.

Methodologically, while utilising a case study and only spending four months on fieldwork, this thesis has been inspired by the ethnographic approach of thick description. This thesis has benefited from the conversation with different stakeholders with different positions and interests. For *Kiai*, the internet is simply an external threat that could be minimised by mainstreaming offline religious life. For *pengurus*, the implementation of internet policy has been complicated as they are not equipped with a comprehensive understanding of digital technology. Consequently, the attempts to seek a balance between tradition and modernity has been challenging. There is a dominant consciousness to maintain religious tradition above the interest of modernity and the aspiration of students.

The preference has a complicated impact on the life of students. As we have explored in the empirical chapter of the popular, they have been conscious about their position as religious students and anxious about their future upon graduating from the institutions. The strong attachment to the institutional arrangement and the collectivist attitude to *Kiai* has created uncertainty for their future. The shifting mechanism between collectivism and individualism necessitates individuals to be resilient and flexible at the same time. However, the institutional arrangement tends to be rigid and dependent on the religious authority in the institutions. The result is the individual that is trapped in a pendulum swing of different ideologies and interpretations.

However, as a case study, this research does not attempt to create a generalization. Instead, the strength of this thesis lies in its ability to convey a complex narrative within a seemingly simple environment. The intricacies between the global, national, and local public spheres have been explored thoroughly. There is a constant connection and disconnection between people and technology in different contexts and different periods of history. This thesis has been fruitful by personal experience of the researcher who studied in *Pondok Pesantren* and continued his education to secular universities in Indonesia and the UK. The transition between the religious and secular world, between local, national, and global public sphere has become the initial motivation to conduct this research. In conducting fieldwork and writing this thesis, the tension between subjectivity and objectivity has been prevalent. Despite the internal challenge, the researcher has managed to maintain his objectivity throughout the writing process.

Aside from academic contribution to the field of Media and Communication, this thesis is also beneficial for a wider audience. In the field of policymaking, this thesis contributes to the intersection between educational policy, religious policy, and internet policy. The detailed information of this research could become an important consideration to develop a comprehensive policy in the increasingly digitalised and complex world. By utilising a microscopic approach, this thesis provides a detailed consideration in the process of policymaking. For parents and

families, this thesis could signal the hidden aspiration of their children that is often misjudged by religious authority. For educators, this thesis could be utilised as a foundation for a more critical approach in teaching the internet. This thesis has suggested that the internet is bound to the contextual aspects of people who live and use it.

As this research focuses on a small context and population, it would be better to research with a bigger scale and better capacity of research method. This thesis has conveyed the fundamental picture of the diversity and complexity of the public sphere. By further exploration through a mixed-method, we could grasp a more diverse understanding of digital capacity and the digital divide that has been challenging our internet to these days. This thesis hopes to become the opener of a wider initiative of bridging the gap between different communities. Only by aiming into mutual understanding, the big projects such as de-Westernizing media studies could achieve their goals more coherently and fundamentally.

COVID-19 CODA

The management of COVID-19 in Indonesia and *Pondok Pesantren* could become a focal point to conclude this thesis. At the national level, authorities tend to have conflicting strategies between Suharto's authoritarian mechanism and a more democratic approach of post-Suharto Indonesia. The ambiguity is particularly affected by the fact that the pandemic comes in the post-Brexit and post-Trump crisis of Western democracy. In Asia, countries that have been successfully imposing public health strategies normally have a prolonged tradition of obedience to authority. Yet democratic countries such as Germany and New Zealand have also shown the capability of democratic leaders to cope with the snowball effects of the pandemic. Neither democracy nor an authoritarian regime could save the life of the general population. It is the strength of personal leadership and the commitment to the common good that could minimise the domino effects of the pandemic.

In an emerging democracy such as Indonesia, the pandemic has raised a question on the cost of public life to sustain the political system. The pandemic arrives exactly a year after a deep polarisation of the 2019 General Election. After being re-elected, Jokowi boosted his popularity through a bombastic development plan that has reminded Suharto's leadership style to boost economic development and maintain social and political stability. Yet the pandemic has shown that there is no shortcut to finish the home-works in a country as complex as Indonesia. Its emerging and fragile democracy have been tested multiple times, but without a scale as big as the pandemic. The Indonesian internet realm has been full of memes, mocking the incapability of authorities to regain public trust amidst once in a century global calamity. Jokowi's attempt to reinstate *bapakism* does not resonate with the needs and the challenges of people during the pandemic. Instead of responding to the real challenges, Jokowi started to shut down criticism; there is a growing practice of hacking the social media accounts of activists.

As schools are forced to shut down, the issue of the digital divide also escalated during the period of online learning. While middle-class students could easily connect with teachers from elite schools from home, less-connected families rely heavily on mobile access. The Ministry of Education and Culture has provided a subsidized mobile phone quota for all eligible students. Yet for most families, mobile phone is still a luxury item; children either have a bad quality of smartphone or do not have a mobile phone at all. The problem has prompted citizens' initiative in donating second-hand mobile phones to support online learning of the less-affluent students. The problem is still far from a happy ending; as schools are continuing to close, students in rural areas are still struggling to catch mobile phone signals, just to send messages to their teachers or submit the daily academic task.

For Muslim communities, the pandemic also prompts different responses. The government has urged mosques and Friday prayer to be temporarily shut down. However, some hoaxes and fake news circulated, saying that the enemy of Islam has designed the pandemic to weaken Muslim communities. The hoax has been validated because the market and shopping centre remain open, while Muslim

communities are required to spend a fasting month of Ramadhan and celebrate Eid from home. The inconsistent management of pandemics has escalated the tension between religion and secularism in the public sphere. In line with the dramatic response, the government allows mosques to open for Friday prayer with a strict health protocol and guidelines. Lately, when the conservative Muslim leader Habib Rizieq Shihab returned from his exile in Saudi Arabia, a mass gathering is unavoidable in Jakarta, which is the red zone of the pandemic in Indonesia. He also held a mass gathering in various places and celebrated the wedding of his daughter. Habib Rizieq himself was tested positive and apologized to the public for his uncaring attitude and sentiment during the pandemic.

Within *Pondok Pesantren* itself, the beginning of the academic year in September has started with a pre-pandemic approach. While other schools normalise online learning, the offline method remains preferable to religious institutions. Some parents and families have raised concerns about the possibility of spreading the virus within the crowded environment. The basic health protocol, such as washing hands and social distancing, is difficult to establish when access to clean water is limited and the dormitory room is occupied by ten to twenty students. It is also challenging to control the spread of the virus as many students come from the red zone, such as Jakarta and its surrounding cities. Nevertheless, the preference to remain offline is stronger than the calculation of health risk.

It is also interesting to see the narrative of lockdown within *Pondok Pesantren's* social media account. In their opinion, the institution has sustained the practice of lockdown from the pandemic of moral decay throughout its history. Through the narrative, the institutions aim to demarcate between inside and outside, between the healthy environment of *Pondok Pesantren* and the pandemic of the moral decay of modern society. While lockdown has led to a new normal, in their opinion lockdown has become the sustain norm of life in *Pondok Pesantren*. Only through the practice of lockdown and socially distancing from moral threat students will gain a healthy and happy life. They also believe that support from *Kiai* and continuous prayer to God will result in a happy ending. As students are fighting on

the right path, parents and families should not worry about the wellbeing and health condition of students.

The pandemic management in *Pondok Pesantren* has reminded us of the different scales of power between the local and national public sphere. After the political escalation during the 2019 General Election, in which leaders of *Pondok Pesantren* were actively involved, the pandemic has returned the communities to the internal divide between urban and rural communities, between the middle-class and the less-affluent communities. While *Kiais* have a powerful position inside *Pondok Pesantren*, they have fewer resources that are critical for pandemic management, such as social distancing and personal hygiene. At the same time, the emphasis on the cohesiveness of the offline religious community has created a centrality of power among the religious leaders and the member of their families. While they enjoyed a more privileged position, such as a large house that could support health precaution during the pandemic, students should live in a crowded dormitory room without sufficient access to clean water. The acceptance of students towards such an internal gap signals the internal tension between religious identity and the reality of pandemic that necessitates logical thinking.

Moreover, education in *Pondok Pesantren* is not only related to the transfer of knowledge but also a transfer of blessing from *Kiai* to *santri*. While in other contexts of education the transfer of knowledge could be conducted entirely through online platforms, the transfer of blessing is only possible to be done close to the religious leader such as *Kiai*. Hence, the preference to remains offline is not only related to the lack of technical infrastructure but also the maintenance of moral infrastructure as has been discussed in the empirical chapter. The prioritisation of offline education during the pandemic could determine what kind of public sphere that has been imagined by the institutions in the future. While the pandemic forces global communities to adapt, the preference to maintain offline religious life, once again, signals a different approach to modernity. By neglecting the risk of a pandemic, and focusing on positioning students near *Kiai*, *Pondok Pesantren* aims to continuously differentiate itself from the mainstream educational approach.

Here, once again, the power of the public sphere that is based on logic and ideas have been challenged by the power identity that aims to sustain offline religious life. While the middle-class has enjoyed the internet as a part of their discursive practices and daily activities, *Pondok Pesantren* still perceives it as a threat to the cohesiveness of the religious community. Rather than minimising inequality by providing digital literacy to students, the persistent approach to maintain offline religious life possesses an inherent challenge for the future of students. The negligence of the benefit of online learning has created a systematic ignorance of the risk of offline education during the pandemic. It is critically important for the religious leaders to reimagine the future of *Pondok Pesantren* during the pandemic, where the issues of body, technology, and education should be taken into main consideration. The pandemic requires strong, visionary, and bipartisan leadership.

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