

Muslim Youth and the 9/11 Generation

Edited by Adeline Masquelier and Benjamin F. Soares



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Muslim Youth and the 9/11 Generation

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Our advanced seminar unfolded against the backdrop of the Arab Spring, whose successive waves of demonstrations and riots, orchestrated largely by Muslim youth, enriched and enlivened our discussions. We are grateful that some time has passed since those heady days and the rather distorting sense of euphoria among many who were discussing Muslim youth at the time. We thank the seminar participants for their essays, insights, and patience during the rewriting phase of the project.

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“Funky Teenagers Love God”

Islam and Youth Activism in Post-Suharto Indonesia

NOORHAIDI HASAN

In the twenty-first century, the identities young Muslims have been fashioning for themselves between global modernity and Islamic awareness have been moving in at least two different directions as far as political action is concerned. For some, the goal is the ideal of a global *umma*, and they have joined the struggle to implement Islamic forms of government or theocracies (see Ahnaf 2011; Hopkins 2008); others have directed their energies into supporting movements toward democracy and social justice (see Bayat and Herrera 2010; Gregg 2007). This is the case in Indonesia, where youths have engaged in various forms of political activism from radical street actions to electoral politics to Islamic popular culture. The wider community of Muslims is similarly divided, but the younger generation has often been the main actors, impatient to bring about social change and frequently the first to take up innovations. In the democracy movements of the Arab Spring, young people were at the forefront of the action (see Hawkins, this volume).

Many young Muslims are also interested in global modernity; indeed, they have been constantly bombarded by its symbols, ideas, and commodities. Global economic processes operate unevenly, however: the increase in mobility, inclusiveness, and market openness is matched by the development of new forms of exclusion and impoverishment. Amid the sometimes contradictory demands and promises of global modernity, young people are fashioning their identities and also claiming new cultural and economic spaces within their societies. By connecting people and places in new ways and yet, paradoxically, also creating wide divides, globalization has changed the way people relate to space and time, and it has also led to the steady erosion of existing social relationships (Appadurai 1995). One result is that the intrapersonal and interpersonal foundations of

identity consciousness and social interactions have been altered and detached from their communicative foundations. The unprecedented global flows of people, ideas, and cultures have spawned trends that develop in one country and then easily progress to another. However, these trends do not develop homogeneously. They are adapted, modified, and appropriated in the local context. The process of appropriation involves agency, which influences how trends develop in different locales while also helping consumers assert their participation in global modernity.

How the contradictions generated by globalization have been experienced by Muslim youth in Indonesia were exemplified to me when I met a group of schoolgirls (between fifteen and eighteen years old) from Kebumen at a bamboo restaurant in a paddy field. Kebumen is a provincial town in Central Java known for having pockets of communism. The form of Islam widely practiced in the town has historically been described as syncretistic, that is, it embraces other local religious traditions and mystical practices and is frequently referred to as *abangan* (Alexander 1987:16). What was striking to me was that the girls' school uniforms were modest Islamic-style clothing, complete with *jilbabs* (headscarves), while a few fiddled with their latest Sony Ericsson mobile telephones. They apparently wanted to be perceived both as devout Muslims and as modern girls who negotiated their place in society through their consumption of the latest in communications technology. They were not Islamists, they told me, but they sometimes joined religious discussions or other activities held by a division in the student government organization called Kerohanian Islam or Rohis. Attending these religious activities allowed them to extend their insight and knowledge of Islam, they told me.

The next day, as I walked past their school on the way home, I saw the jilbab-clad girls rushing headlong out of the narrow school gate, laughing and calling out to one another. Not far off, a huge banner, waving above the middle of the open road, demanded that the town of Kebumen be rid of all sorts of sinful and immoral acts. Farther down the road there was a poster of Rustriningsih, the popular, democratically elected female regent, wearing modest Islamic attire and a bright yellow jilbab. From her poster she seemed to address Kebumen's residents with "Islamic" symbols and messages, while helping to motivate them to participate in the country's modern development. This is some of the context within which youth have been negotiating the shifting ground of social, cultural, and political identities in Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim country. The context is religious, but it is also democratic.

This chapter addresses the question of how youth in Indonesia have been demonstrating that there is no inherent contradiction between Islam and global modernity. In this context it is intriguing to explore whether the ways in which they have increasingly accepted modernity have to do with changes in youths' boundaries as a result of modernization and globalization. As is the case in many other countries, Indonesia has seen a prolongation of youth and a corresponding postponement of the transition to adulthood. As young people, especially those with urban, middle-class backgrounds, remain enrolled longer in school (and as the average age at first marriage rises), they are now considered "youths" until they are in their late twenties (White and Naafs 2012). In response to this trend, Indonesia introduced a law in 2009 that defines youths as "Indonesian citizens who are entering an important period of growth and development and are aged between 16 (sixteen) and 30 (thirty) years" (Law 40/2009, article 1.1, www.hukumonline.com).

Having been trained in political science and Islamic studies, I focus on the shifting patterns of Muslim youths' political activism around the synchronization between Islamic and global values in a small town in Indonesia. In this chapter I look at the processes of cultural transaction that reflect how global cultures are assimilated in a locality, and I identify the ways in which youth actively navigate between the local and the global. I also explore the multiple modes of expression and attachment in their efforts to situate themselves in a changing social and cultural context. After providing some historical background to youths' key contributions in the making of Indonesia, I examine their responses to the remarkable growth of the public visibility of Islam in Indonesian society. I discuss youths' creativity in their activism by their adaptation and appropriation of Islam in local contexts and by their transformation of it into a symbolic commodity that is closely linked to globalization. Finally, I examine how Indonesian youths carve out a new sociocultural space and fashion their own modernity in order to construct individual identities via self-reflexivity, thus gaining control over themselves.

Islam and Youth Identity

Over the course of modern Indonesian history and at key historical junctures, youth have played significant and sometimes decisive roles in national politics and during times of political convulsions. For example, youth were central to the anticolonial struggle: the Sumpah Pemuda (Youth Pledge) taken at

a youth congress on October 28, 1928, is widely regarded as the moment of the birth of the Indonesian nation. Later, youths coerced Sukarno, the future first president of Indonesia, and Mohammad Hatta, the future first vice president of Indonesia, to declare the country's independence on August 17, 1945. Youth appeared to be persistent opponents of Suharto's New Order regime, which came to power in 1966. The repression youth experienced during the period of the New Order is evidence that the regime feared their political influence. Because of youth's growing influence in Indonesian politics, Suharto introduced legislation in an attempt to ensure the political passivity of students in 1978.¹ However, two decades later, a new generation of youth contributed in concrete ways to Suharto's downfall in May 1998, and following the collapse of his regime, they took to the streets to demand a far-reaching process of liberalization and democratization (Denny 2006; Haryono 2007).

Since before independence, the younger generations have also played an important role in Islamic activism in the country (see Wiktorowicz 2004:x-xi). After the fall of Suharto and with the increasing influence of Islam in the wider society, Muslim youth took on a greater public presence. While activism by Muslim youths has been rather diverse in nature, Islamic activism in post-Suharto Indonesia cannot be separated from the deepening impact of the so-called Islamic revival, whose slogan can be summed up as "Islam is the solution." The history of such Islamic activism in Indonesia can be traced to the initiatives of students at the Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB) in West Java. In the late 1970s those active in the Salman Mosque of the ITB pioneered the development of university-based Islamic study groups in Indonesia. Their main mentor was Muhammad Natsir (1908–1993), the founder of the Indonesian Council of Islamic Proselytising (Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia). This is a *da'wa* (lit., "call" in Arabic) organization, which was set up by Natsir and other former leaders of Indonesia's first Islamist party, Masyumi, in 1967 to deal with the political impasses that had blocked their ambition to engage in politics. The group supported the Jakarta Charter, which called for the application of sharia (Islamic law) in the state system. The activists promoted intensive courses about the basic tenets of Islam, which were often supplemented with courses in English, computer technology, and other vocational skills (Rosyad 2006). They established Islamic religious study groups (Unit Kerohanian Islam) where Islam was taught in combination with activism. The efflorescence of these groups was bolstered by the Iranian revolution of 1979. Soon thereafter, they sprang up on major university campuses in Indonesia.

Muslim youth played a pivotal role in intensifying outreach (da'wa) activities in mosques and other religious venues in the country. Under the auspices of various mosque-based youth associations, they expanded the function of the mosque so it was no longer simply a place to pray, but also became the center of a diverse set of socioreligious activities, including Qur'an learning sessions, seminars, workshops, discussions, religious festivals, and a variety of associations. Those participating in these activities were provided with updates about the latest issues around the Muslim world, especially conflicts in the Middle East. Feelings of dispossession and anti-Christian and anti-Zionist sentiments were also spread widely through these associations. As in the wider society, the younger generation in Indonesia has been divided as to how to bring about a just and fair society.

However, it is not only religious and moral idealism that drives youthful activism; there are also important socioeconomic factors. Youth have often borne the brunt of the problems experienced by society, and this can be seen in Indonesia, particularly in the high unemployment rate among the young (Vatikiotis 1998). In 1997 youth—aged fifteen to twenty-nine years—constituted 72.5 percent of the unemployed in Indonesia, setting a contemporary global record. Ten years later the percentage remained almost as high: youth still represented 70 percent of the unemployed. With 2 million new workers coming onto the labor market each year, the government has faced an uphill struggle to find them jobs. About 600,000 university graduates could not find employment in 1998–1999. At the same time over 60 percent of the labor force between the ages of fifteen and nineteen with a high school education was looking for work (Abdullah 2004; Hendri 2008). With so few employment opportunities, youths' ordinary optimism for the future can be overwhelmed by frustration with the difficult conditions they face. They do not receive any public support, and the opportunity for upward mobility is frequently blocked. For many youths the future looks bleak.

Unable to envisage a brighter future delivered by the Indonesian state, many young adults look to the ideal of a future moral, religious utopia. Joining the Rizieq Shihab-led Islam Defenders Front (Front Pembela Islam) and the quietist Salafi movement, which is squarely within the puritanical Salafi-Wahhabi tradition, for example, they believe that sharia must be applied and by force if necessary. On numerous occasions Muslim youth activists affiliated with such groups and movements raided cafés, discotheques, casinos, brothels, and other reputed dens of iniquity throughout the country, and some called for jihad in

the Moluccas and other Indonesian trouble spots, which have witnessed considerable tensions between Muslims and Christians and sometimes outright violence.

Other young activists in the pan-Islamic organization Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI; Party of Liberation) have taken up the language of rebellion against the ruling authorities. Asserting the superiority of Islam over any other system, they actively take to the streets to demand the implementation of sharia. Their discourse often has a millenarian character, which matches the dreams nurtured by many young people, especially those who have been sidelined by rapid economic and social change, of upward mobility and empowerment. Their struggle to claim space and negotiate their identity frequently forces identification with a broader system of values that “requires construction of a world enlivened with personal relevance in such a way that authentic ideals and defensive distortions become complexly interwoven” (Gregg 2007:23). The international “Islamic” system of references many young Islamists have chosen echoes the need to revive sharia and the *khilafa* (caliphate) system of political rule (on *khilafa islamiyya*, see, for example, Khashan 2000; Piscatori 2005). Sharia serves as a transcendental value system for many Muslims throughout the world. It is much broader than the local Indonesian context, and youths claim that this Islamic value system can be used to reconstruct a world perceived to be in despair and therefore transform it into a khilafa (interviews by author of HTI activists, including Arya, Reza, Andi, Wahyu, Dodi, and Dani, January and February 2007).

The discourses of sharia and khilafa have much to do with issues of authenticity. The distinctions young activists make are in the contrast between Islam as an authentic value system and what they perceive as a corrupting Western and frequently American culture that seems increasingly hegemonic in Indonesia and the world. For instance, symbols of authenticity include the clothes the Salafis wear; long, flowing Arab-style dresses; *congkang* (ankle-length) pants and unshaven beards; the banners fluttering in activists’ hands; and the pamphlets blaming imperialism, capitalism, and other aspects of US global domination.

The Salafi movement began to gain ground in Indonesia in the mid-1980s. Its efflorescence across the world was part of Saudi Arabia’s success in spreading its Wahhabi influence, thus reinforcing its prestigious position and legitimacy both as the center of the Muslim world and as the *khadim al-haramayn* (guardian of the two holy sanctuaries). Based on the doctrine of *al-wala wa’l-bara* (loyalty and disloyalty) the Salafis sought to cultivate solidarity (*ukhuwwa*) among

Muslims and draw a boundary against various elements of *bid'a* (unlawful innovation) and infidelity (Hasan 2006, 2007). This doctrine also requires Muslims to stand distinctly apart from the "anything goes" open society around them and organize themselves into small, tight-knit, exclusive communities (*jama'a*), though not necessarily under the oath of loyalty (*bay'a*). They address their friends not as "pals" or *bung* (buddy), but use the Arabic terms *akhi* and *ukhti* (brother and sister). Some Salafis have changed their Javanese names to Arabic names, and when they have children, they change their names in the Arab style of calling oneself after one's son, such as Abu Nida (the father of Nida) or Abu Umar (father of Umar). As I argue elsewhere (Hasan 2010), this exclusiveness appears to be part of their struggle to gain control over their social space through the creation of a cell system, to consolidate their identity and to achieve some sort of certainty about their future.

Beyond the political actions on the street, many youths have channeled their aspirations into electoral politics. For example, youths were instrumental in the establishment of the Prosperous Justice Party (Partai Keadilan Sejahtera, PKS) and in directing its political platform. Founders of the party, including Nur Mahmudi Ismail, Hidayat Nur Wahid, M. Anis Matta, Zulkifliemansyah, Rama Pratama, Andi Rahmat, and Fahry Hamzah, were noted activists who began to take leading roles in the Muslim Brotherhood-inspired *tarbiyah* (education) movement in the changing political atmosphere of the 1990s, and they were involved in the mass anti-Suharto movement under the banner of the Indonesian Muslim Student Action Union in 1998. They represented a new generation of Indonesian Islamists who adopted a participatory and pragmatic approach to politics. Beyond these circles, the PKS recruited young academics, businesspeople, and professionals sympathetic to the party's goal of bringing morality to Indonesia's political practices. The party's leadership recruitment process therefore did not rely on existing traditional political ties or on status quo political endorsements. It made strenuous efforts to find fresh young leaders who were not the offspring of the old elites. In this respect the rise of the PKS is a model of what can be accomplished in the open, democratic system Indonesia has been establishing. It represents an end to the elites' monopoly on politics by making the process more open to non-elites and more transparent.

Drawing its inspiration from the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, the PKS defines Islam primarily as a political ideology and endeavors to position it at the center of Indonesian politics. It also presents itself as the party of moral reform, and rather than seeking direct political power the PKS aims to show the

public what a government based on the moral principles of Islam would look like (Furqon 2004; Rahmat 2008). Conveying alternative political visions to a wider audience, it has been active in promoting good governance, resistance to corruption, and professionalism, which are deemed to be the prerequisites for ridding Indonesia of the scourges of corruption, an incompetent bureaucracy, poverty, and other fundamental problems. Its ability to package these issues was the key to the PKS's success in the 2004 parliamentary elections, when it captured 7.34 percent of the overall vote. The PKS then continued to expand its base of support by maximizing its political machine and participating in pragmatic political compromises, and successfully realized its ambition to triple its vote total in the 2009 parliamentary elections. Through various media campaigns, the PKS also has strengthened its image as a party open to all segments of Indonesian society.

Popular Islamic Youth Culture

The PKS's shift toward political openness and pragmatism occurred in tandem with the flourishing of popular Islamic youth culture, which reflects an intimacy with Islam and a familiarity with the hegemonic global culture. This is what I saw in Kebumen when the jilbab-clad senior schoolgirls were involved in an intense conversation about the meaning of being young and Muslim. The majority of the schoolgirls saw their youthfulness as an opportunity to carve out their own social and cultural spaces from which to negotiate with adults. By cultivating a particular consciousness about being young, they rejected the spatial ordering of the population, dictated by seniority. In an attempt to break down the boundaries erected to protect them from the complexity of social relations, they needed to demonstrate that they were no longer under the thumb of their parents. They wanted to get on with enjoying themselves, and they asserted that they were streetwise.

Under the mounting influence of Islamism, youths in Kebumen have sought to assert their identities by selecting certain elements from their cultural heritage. They opt for what they consider to be the authenticity of their own heritage by echoing Islamist discourse, which defines important social boundaries and brandishes critiques of the West. However, they cannot escape from globalization, and they even want to engage with it. To show their comfort with modernity, they like to consume many things emanating from the dominant culture, whose widespread influence dictates global trends and lifestyles. They

drink Coca-Cola, listen to pop music, and play with their mobile telephones. The trendy, colorful, sequined headscarves they wear seem to represent a point of compromise between Islamism and globalization: they are simultaneously modest and fashionable. The young women express their Indonesian and Muslim collectivity through the headscarves and their individuality through the electronic gadgets.

In her study of the popularity of trendy headscarves among university students in Yogyakarta, Nef-Saluz (2007, 2009) argues that veiling has become an important symbol of the interconnection between Islam, globalization, and consumer culture. This nexus is a significant factor in how young people express themselves and their identities in public spaces. The resulting culture in Indonesia is hybrid and reflexive in character, as its participants find ways to synthesize the local and the global. This environment is fertile ground for the growth of "Islamic" media, teenage literature, novels, fashion, cafés, music, movies, soap operas, cartoons—all the trappings and images one might associate with modern Western pop culture, but there tailored with a distinct Islamic identity for an audience that thinks of itself as both Islamic and modern (Hasan 2009; see Masquelier, this volume). The consumption of such products allows young people to be cool yet pious and to remain part of the wider social space of the umma, the global community of Muslims.

This collective Islamic identity transcends borders, sociopolitical spaces, and even countries or nationalities. Buying a copy of an Islamic magazine, such as *Sabili* (The Cause) or *Noor* (Light), is enough for one to feel or claim to be a part of the umma. Through the articles, opinion pieces, features, and photos that appear in such publications, youths interact across existing boundaries and create an imaginary social space based on their own imaginative projections. As Warner (2002) has pointed out, the idea of reflexivity is key to the definition of a public, a kind of social and theatrical space in which a performative culture is created through the imaginative projection of the participants. Knowing about conflict in Palestine, fashion shows in Istanbul, and youth activism in Kuala Lumpur, for instance, has been instrumental for Indonesian youths to get a sense of participation in either religious politics or Islamic performance. This sense of attachment to the global Muslim world in turn enables them to develop a new discourse of reflexive subjectivity and to frame their activism (see also Aishima and Marsden, both this volume).

In this context, youth play a pivotal role in negotiating between religious identities and global modernity. They are not only the loyal customers for

Islamic products, but they are also responsible for the growth of new business centers, which use Islamic symbols to attract consumers. In modern “Islamic” shopping malls that supply Islamic merchandise, such as JB in Kebumen, young Muslim entrepreneurs have taken advantage of the growing demand for Islamic products by opening stores that sell Muslim fashions and accessories. Developing various Islamic-type business enterprises of their own, youths facilitate the consumptive lifestyles of Indonesia’s growing new Muslim middle classes, which like to spend their newly acquired disposable incomes. There is a parallel development between youth activism, the emergence of a new middle class, and the growth of the market economy amenable to Islamic symbols to the extent that religion and global modernity have strengthened each other and reached a point of convergence, setting in motion changes in the landscape of Islam in Indonesia’s provincial towns (for a similar case, see Selby, this volume). Lukose (2009) has described how Indian youths have been incorporated into the aspirational logic of globalization by a growing consumerist culture. Liechty (2002) has similarly demonstrated how Nepalese youth have carved out social spaces for themselves through their unapologetic consumerism. Like their Indian and Nepalese counterparts, Indonesian youths have reconfigured middle-class identities through their selective appropriation of global commodities, and their consumption practices mark them as distinctly Muslim.

Islamist Youth Activism

In Kebumen and in other provincial towns in Indonesia, young Islamist activists, who encountered Islam on university campuses especially through study groups during the 1980s and 1990s, have been active in trying to spread Islam through proselytizing da’wa activities. Their mission is directed mostly at those they consider nominal Muslims. The new groups recognize that the younger generation will play a critical role in the future success of Islamic preaching (Nilan 2004). Thus, they place a strong emphasis on education and have established many schools and educational institutions to further their objectives.

One of the most influential da’wa proselytizing groups in Kebumen is the Al-Iman Foundation, which is under the umbrella of the Hidayatullah Foundation, an Islamist organization that publishes the *Hidayatullah* magazine.² In 1996 A. Yunus, a Hidayatullah *da’i* (preacher) from Surabaya in East Java, started his da’wa efforts in Kebumen by founding a *panti asuhan* (orphanage) and *pesantren* (Islamic educational institution). In 1998 Al-Iman founded the Integrated

Yaa Bunaya Kindergarten, which is based on a concept of early childhood education that is modern, fun, trendy, and yet still Islamic. Children play, worship and pray, and learn about the universe, construction, design, creation, mathematics, and languages. Members of the Al-Iman Foundation also offer themselves as *khatib* (mosque officials or preachers) in mosques that are in dire need of staff, and they organize *halaqas* (Islamic study circles) and *dauras* (workshops) in mosques located in central Kebumen, including the Kebumen Grand Mosque.

Initially, people in Kebumen regarded Al-Iman's preaching as odd since it was associated with the Hidayatullah Islamist movement and taught a puritan type of Islam, but eventually Al-Iman attracted an *ukhuwwa* (fraternity of believers). Most of the older religious leaders do not regard the differences in ideological and doctrinal beliefs between themselves and the new da'wa groups as obstacles to elevating the religious commitment of the people of Kebumen. In fact, traditionalists from Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Indonesia's largest Islamic organization, acknowledge the creativity of such groups, which present Islam in ways that appeal to those members of the Kebumen community whose beliefs are still considered too mixed with allegedly un-Islamic practices—and the Javanese mysticism of so-called nominal Muslims (*abangan*) in particular. Despite their accommodating stance toward innovation and local culture, NU leaders think that Islamic teachings should be implemented in daily life and thus the quality of Indonesians' religious belief would be improved.

Other activists started a movement called da'wa tarbiyah (lit., education call in Arabic) in Kebumen.³ "Tarbiyah" is the term in Arabic for education under a teacher who provides moral guidance. Again, their main target was the younger generation, especially high school students. In the early 2000s the activists started to systematically penetrate the Rohis units, which are responsible for religious activities in high schools. After graduating from the university, former students from these groups often returned to Kebumen and, alongside their professional jobs, helped to organize Rohis groups in the schools.

In 2007 up to fifty people, including several like-minded teachers, were involved in managing or running da'wa tarbiyah activities in the various schools in Kebumen. They provided Islamic books and novels and organized da'wa activities, such as *mabit* (overnight stays), *Jum'at* (Friday) study forums, *baksos* (volunteer social work), and *rihla* (religious excursions). The *rihla* also function as a forum for *silaturahmi* (friendship bonding) among the Rohis activists from various schools. During the month of Ramadan, Rohis activists hold a short course called "Pesantren Ramadan." In order to attract more

students to participate in da'wa, the Rohis also organize art performances, such as *rebana* and *nashid*. While rebana is a form of traditional Islamic music in which percussion predominates, nashid is a modern type of religious singing that praises God and the Prophet Muhammad, using styles that vary from pop music with drums and electric guitars to reggae.

On certain occasions these activists collaborate on events with Islamic training centers, such as the Emotional and Spiritual Quotient. This is a popular human resources training program in Indonesia developed by the entrepreneur Ary Ginanjar to enhance the piety and performance of Indonesian workers by combining modern techniques of motivational training, different forms of management knowledge, and Islamic concepts (Rudnyckyj 2010). The training events are usually attended by hundreds of participants from various high schools in Kebumen. In schools where Rohis are active, the official school governing council is now often co-opted under the Rohis, which then acts as the moral guardian for official student activities organized by the council (interview with Hamdan Subhi, January 2008). As a result of these da'wa activities, Islam has become more prominent in Kebumen's three top high schools; almost 90 percent of students are involved in da'wa groups and activities, and the majority of the female students wear the jilbab.

The key to the expansion of the new da'wa movement and the rapid growth of the Rohis among teenagers is the ability to recruit and mobilize dedicated student cadres. The adult educators (*murabbis*) are responsible for planning strategies to disseminate da'wa among students and approaching teachers to secure their support. The next step is selecting and training da'wa cadres from among the student body. The cadres are encouraged to become exemplary students in their schools: excellent in class, pious in character, and good mixers with leadership qualities.

The murabbis endeavor to inspire schoolchildren to love Islam by using easily understood, everyday language (interview with A. Yunus, head of the Al-Iman Foundation, October 2007). Students discuss the basic tenets of Islam—the Muslim profession of faith (*shahadat*), the meaning of Islam, prayer (*salat*), Islamic alms (*zakat*), and the pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*)—as well as romance, love, and other contemporary themes, including terrorism. Every attempt is made to present the material in ways that appeal to students: the use of comic illustrations and PowerPoint presentations; print media to study the Qur'an, the Sunna (the authoritative practice of the Prophet Muhammad), and the five pillars of Islam with titles such as *Funky Teenagers Love God* (Remaja Funky

Cinta Ilahi) and *Islam? Cool, Man!* (original in English); and a discussion of terrorism called *Islam = Terrorism? So What's Next Then!?* (Islam = Terorisme? So What Gitu Lhoo!?).

In one high school in Kebumen (SMA I), I observed how topics were talked about in ways that are accessible and meaningful to teenagers. Although some conspiracy theories were voiced in a discussion of previous terrorist attacks in Indonesia, students were reminded that the interpretations of jihad by prominent Islamists such as Imam Samudra and Amrozi, both of whom were convicted for the 2002 Bali bombings and executed in 2008, and others in Indonesia are incorrect. Furthermore, they lead to actions that are wrong and in direct violation of the essential message of Islam itself.

Popular da'wa writing is also encouraged, especially by the Forum Lingkar Pena (FLP, Pen Circle Forum), an Indonesian organization that encourages writing among Indonesian students and other young people, as well as some who join from overseas. The works published by the FLP often convey da'wa messages using Indonesian slang (*bahasa gaul*) and the cool and trendy idioms of youth, with titles like *Ta'aruf Keren!* (Socialization Is Cool!), *Pacaran Sorry Man!* (Dating, Sorry Man!), and *Let's Talk about Love* (original in English). The FLP has also published a series of Islamic comics in the Japanese mangastyle. One example is *Serial Si Nida*, which is about the problems faced by a young girl active in Rohis, who is smart, friendly, and attractive. Through this kind of alternative literature, young people are offered an alternative to Western ideas and lifestyles and presented with Islamic solutions. The FLP also organizes training programs for young writers in which youthful idioms and slang expressions are appropriated and modified, capitalizing on Indonesians' love of puns and wordplay (Kailani 2009). Thus the term PeDeKaTe, a reduction of the word *pendekatan* ("approaching" the opposite sex, with connotations of flirting), is used for one of the FLP's key training activities, with its meaning altered to *Pelatihan Dakwah dan Karya Tulis* (Training for Da'wa and Writing). Likewise with *Katakan Cinta* (Say I Love You), a reality TV show popular among youth, which features boys and girls desperately seeking love. The FLP appropriated the name, making it stand for *Kajian Agama dan Cerita Indah Apa Saja* (The Study of Islam and Beautiful Stories, Whatever).

The attraction of the da'wa activism of the Rohis and similar organizations lies in its ability to offer an opportunity for young people to actualize their potential in the initial phase of their transition to adulthood. This frequently has to do with their efforts to "territorialize," to claim a space within a complex

of interactive social relations. As Massey (1998:121) has put it, claiming space is part of the tendency of both individuals and social groups, which are constantly engaged in attempts to “tame the unutterable complexity of the spatial” by constructing an ordered geographical imagination through which to frame their world. It is a way of cutting across the vastness of social relations, which construct space, thus gaining some control. Claiming space is closely bound with the social production of identity and seems to be a strategy to protect and defend particular groups and interests or even to dominate and define others.

Channeling Activism through Advocacy Programs

It is important not to underestimate some of the potentially progressive features of Islam, many of which closely resemble liberation theology (Gregg 2007:317). Many young Muslims in Kebumen with *santri* (purist Muslim) backgrounds who completed their secondary education in pesantren disagree with the widespread Islamist discourse that connects current world political events with implementing the sharia and khilafat systems. They point out that the backwardness, poverty, and conflicts besetting the Muslim world today are not because sharia and khilafa were neglected but because Muslims have abandoned the ultimate goals of Islam, that is, to realize justice, prosperity, and the public good (*maslahat*). In their opinion, these ultimate goals of Islam can be revitalized by young Muslims involving themselves in public issues and cultivating advocacy programs. They have therefore become active in various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Kebumen.

In contrast to Islamist da'wa activists, the youths involved in NGOs are well-known for being accommodating of local culture and tradition. This position is typical of youths with NU (Nahdlatul Ulama) backgrounds. NU was established by traditional *ulama* in Java, called *kyais*, as a response to the establishment of Muhammadiyah by Ahmad Dahlan in Yogyakarta in 1912. Inspired by the ideas of Muslim reformers from Egypt, such as Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida, Muhammadiyah has actively championed a return to the Qur'an and Sunna and a detachment from various traditional practices deemed to be tainted with *bid'a*, *takhayyul* (superstitions), and *khurafa* (myths). The *kyais*—as central authorities in hundreds of pesantrens (the rural-based Islamic learning centers where students study Arabic and Islamic subjects using the *kitab kuning*)—responded to this by promoting “moderate” Islam and developing more tolerant attitudes toward non-Muslims (Barton and Fealy 1996; Van Bruinessen 1994). According

to the youths growing up in the NU tradition, Islam should be embedded locally and taken as an inspiration to engage in public issues and bring about change. I have also observed that NGO activism constitutes a mediating locus where young activists create a field for their identity in the heart of the public space.

In the early 1990s NGOs began to be established in Kebumen. Their aim was to empower the Muslim community at the grassroots. With the process of decentralization that began after the fall of Suharto in 1998, the number of NGOs expanded rapidly in Indonesia's major cities and provincial towns. Young people were the energy and driving force of these NGOs, including Rustriningsih, who later became a successful district head and subsequently the deputy governor of Central Java.

The NGOs have found it useful to work together to increase their effectiveness in demanding transparent and pro-poor development programs. As a member of Tanah Air, a local NGO, Rustriningsih and others formed the Komite Reformasi Daerah (Provincial Reformation Committee), which grew to become the Forum Masyarakat Kebumen (Kebumen Society Forum) after Rustriningsih became the district head in 2000. This group voiced community demands that national reforms should also bring changes to the management of the local government in Kebumen. This umbrella organization also helped to organize demonstrations and mobilize thousands of people to protest against the purchase of a Toyota Camry for the regent. These actions forced the Kebumen government to revise the budget and reallocate the funds to subsidize village communities (interview with Mustika Adji, January 2008).

NGO programs advocating pro-poor public policies won the full support of numerous influential Muslim clerics in Kebumen, including Wahib Machfudz, the chairperson of the Kebumen branch of NU's advisory council and an influential local businessman. In 2003 Machfudz encouraged the creation of the umbrella organization Formasi, based in one of the important pesantren in Kebumen, Darussa'adah. Many young leaders of the most important NGOs in Kebumen are members of Formasi's board. One of its most remarkable achievements in the face of opposition from local interest groups and political parties was the successful ratification of regional regulation (Perda) No. 53/2004 on the formal participation of civil society in public policy making (interviews with Yusuf Murtiono, Mustika Adji, and Agus Khanif, December 2007).

NU has also worked with the local NGO INDIPT (Institut Studi untuk Penguatan Masyarakat). At the urging of INDIPT, NU helped to appoint organizers in remote rural districts to map community problems. NU also supported a

workshop run by INDIPT on the theme “Islam and Public Policy on the Side of the Poor,” which was aimed at awakening the political conscience of NU members (Hidayat 2007). INDIPT then arranged a *bahth al-masail* (religious discussion), a term used by NU and easily understood by its members, to promote understanding of the principle of public policy in favor of the poor (interview with Ahmad Murtajib, January 2008).

Some young activists established an NGO known as Gampil (Gabungan Masyarakat Sipil, Alliance for Civil Society) to encourage local governments to introduce pro-poor programs. With the support of a Yogyakarta-based NGO, the Institute for Research and Empowerment, they used a tool called participatory budgeting and expenditure tracking (PBET) to help people get involved in planning the regional budget and called for the prioritizing of poverty reduction programs. In 2008 I observed a public hearing to review the regional budget plan in which Gampil, using the PBET techniques, criticized inefficiencies in the local government plan and called for budget reallocations for the poor through a health subsidy (Zamroni and Anwar 2008). The activists succeeded in convincing the government to review the budget plan and to pay special attention to programs touching directly on the needs of the poor.

The efforts by Kebumen NGOs to ensure good governance and bureaucratic reform and to offer training programs for the empowerment of civil society have been supported by various international funding organizations, such as Plan International. The Kebumen NGOs’ ability to sustain their operations has depended a lot on financial support from these organizations, and the number of NGOs and their activities are likely to decrease as these funds diminish (interview with Bornie Kurniawan, program coordinator of Gampil, Kebumen, January 2008). Their dependency on donors differentiates them from young Islamist activists, who are driven by their love for Islam and commitment to defend it. It seems that the young Islamists might be able to thrive with or without sufficient funds.

Through their various endeavors to empower society at the grassroots and to infuse local institutions with the Islamic values of democracy and transparency, young people’s NGOs have contributed to the reconstruction of the public space in provincial towns. They take action within the limits of the democratic system, action that is legitimate and lawful, while simultaneously advocating Islam as an inspiration for alternative social projects. The organizations serve as shelters where youth can construct themselves as subjects and emerge in the public space, and this in turn has offered them enriching experiences of intellectual and social engagement.

Conclusion

Perhaps one of the most important findings from this study concerns the way many Indonesian youths have never felt that holding firm to an Islamic identity means rejecting participation in modern society or a modern identity. Instead, despite Indonesia's uncertain future, its young Muslims have been seeking modernity not by embracing variants of secular humanism but by synthesizing Islam and global values. The struggle of Indonesian youths to claim their space and negotiate their identities has also frequently led them to the issue of the public good. They have been fashioning their identities by voicing some of the concerns and interests of the general public and speaking out for social change. Born into a social environment that has become more Islam-friendly but also in some cases where it is "funky" to be Muslim, most see Islam as a primary source for their vision of the future.

Some of these youths participate in da'wa activities in the belief that it is the one way to save society from being swept away by waves of secularization and Westernization. Others reject the route offered by Islamists, choosing instead to channel their desire to implement democratic ideals through NGOs. Many traditional Islamic leaders in Kebumen admire the techniques of the Islamists in spreading the precepts of Islam, but they mostly give their support to the efforts of NGO activists. The different visions held by youth of a future imbued with morality and prosperity and the differing support they receive from traditional religious figures are still in a state of flux. However, youth activism has already influenced the ongoing dialogue between Islam and democracy in Indonesia.

Youth are important transmitters of the Islamic revival's ideas, and they creatively translate those messages into lifestyles, fashion, art, music, novels, institutions, and organizations. The messages in turn influence multiple social and political fields and encourage a collective identity. The role of youths is crucial: they are both loyal consumers and commercial agents in expanding the latest trends in Islamic products to remote areas in the countryside. As illustrated at the beginning of this chapter, even schoolgirls in a small provincial town in Central Java and the funky teenagers targeted by activists seek to play both roles. They are at the forefront in transforming Islam into a symbolic commodity that is linked to tradition and culture as well as to upwardly mobile consumers' demands for lifestyle products, modesty, and enjoyment. While youth activism might be mostly about developing their own identities, youth have played a pivotal role in transmitting and disseminating modern democratic idioms and discourses through their grassroots advocacy and empowerment programs.

They are core forces in Indonesian civil society groups calling for corruption-free governance and democracy.

Studies of young people have often taken for granted the connection between “youth” and “activism” on the basis that youths are by definition agentive. This is particularly true of studies of Muslim reformist movements (see Last 1992). Whereas some scholars equate youthful agency with assertive expressions of independence and self-interest, others “locate a liberatory youth agency in the oppositional and the inventive” (Durham 2008:165). Durham (2008) notes, however, that youth are not inherently rebellious or creative. Although a critical discussion of agency is beyond the purview of this chapter, I am mindful that there are different kinds of agency. I have focused my attention on the emergence of youthful Indonesian activism in the context of intensified global flows. The ways in which the new generation of Indonesian youths have been active in democratizing Indonesia through their pivotal role in creatively negotiating between religious identities and global modernity make them rather different from their predecessors. In this respect, they exemplify how, as described by Karl Mannheim (1952) in his classic essay on generations, young people have “fresh” contacts with the values of their societies. I see in their activism a nuanced religious repertoire that they have blended with some of the global idioms of modernity. Despite the fact that their identification with tradition and Islam in particular remains widespread and strong, such identification does not force them to rely solely on Muslim authorities to understand and make sense of their religion. They seek in global modernity new ways to contextualize Islam that resonate with their local and national contexts as they develop new discourses of reflexive subjectivity.

Notes

1. The policy was called the Normalization of Campus Life / Campus Coordinating Body (NKK/BKK, Normalisasi Kehidupan Kampus / Badan Koordinasi Kampus).
2. The Hidayatullah Foundation is an umbrella organization of associated pesantren. It was established in Balikpapan in 1973.
3. The main umbrella organizations are the Ibnu Abbas Foundation (established in 1999), the Iqra Club, and the Muslimah Solidarity (Salimah).