

# The Changing Politics of Religious Knowledge in Asia: The Case of Indonesia

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## 1. Introduction: Knowledge and Power in the Profane World of Asian Politics

At the LSE Asia Forum conference on “The Politics of Knowledge” in Singapore in April 2008, economists, lawyers, sociologists, and other specialists spoke eloquently about the complex issues arising out of the ‘Information Economy’, the dramatic expansion of education, and the deepening technological challenges facing Asia and the rest of the world in this era of rapid climate change. As for myself, a political scientist and Southeast Asia specialist by training, I spoke of something rather different, something often overlooked in discussions of Knowledge and Power.

In the profane world of politics, ‘Knowledge is Power’ seems like something of an empty slogan, at least if we consider recent and ongoing trends in much of Asia. Indeed, for all the spread of information via the internet and the expansion of education in Asia over the past decade, little seems to have changed in terms of the broad structures of political power in the region. Communist parties remain in power in Beijing, Hanoi, Pyongyang, and Vientiane (and arguably Phnom Penh as well). The LDP has weathered splits and challenges in Japan; UMNO is facing challenges in Malaysia, but the PAP remains firmly in the saddle in Singapore. For all the in-depth investigative reporting on corruption in India and Indonesia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Thailand, Asian democracies are still dominated by the politics of machinery and money. For all the ease with which images of state violence are transmitted around the globe, the generals are still in power in Burma (and, in considerable measure, in Pakistan).

Overall, the style of rule may have changed, but not the substance. For the vast majority of people in Asia, it appears, Knowledge does *not* bring Power, just greater – and, at times, more painful – knowledge of powerlessness. In Asia, the powerful may be more knowledgeable than ever before, with more PhDs among the region's presidents and prime ministers and with rapidly evolving government capacities for gathering knowledge – and thus exerting power – vis-à-vis the ever-changing societies across the continent. Today 'Expert' is better than 'Red' in the China of the trained engineer and Tsinghua University graduate Hu Jintao. Daddy (or Grandpa), as it were, still claims to know best. For most people in Asia most of the time, however, the old saw still applies: it's not what you know, it's whom you know.

Viewed against this backdrop, there is little to say about dramatic changes in the constellation of Knowledge and Power in Asia. But if the so-called Information Age has yet to produce dramatic change in the profane world of politics in Asia, the realm of sacral, spiritual power – religion – in the region, as in many other corners of the globe, is today in the throes of a Great Transformation. Established ecclesiastical hierarchies and church structures are in crisis, their hegemonies under threat. Even as political power has remained stubbornly fixed and concentrated in the same few hands in most Asian countries, the established structures of religious knowledge and authority have come to face new challenges and new rival claimants as well. New forms of religious participation and representation are in evidence in a much freer and more pluralistic field of spiritual activity. What the profane world seems to be lacking in political dynamism, diversity, and creativity, the religious world appears to have in abundance. It is no exaggeration to speak of tectonic shifts in the politics of religious knowledge, or, to borrow a term from the profane world of politics, the democratization of religion.

## 2. The Democratization of Religion: Sacred Knowledge and Power in Flux

This pattern of religious democratization is evident in at least three ways. First of all, economic, social, and political change has reduced some of the formal and informal restrictions upon religious life in parts of Communist Asia.<sup>1</sup> In China and Vietnam, in particular, market expansion, economic growth, and the opening of electoral competition for local (i.e. village-level) government posts over the past two decades have all spurred a tremendous religious boom. Local officials and businessmen keen on establishing themselves as good patrons have donated vast sums to build and support temples and pagodas in villages across the Communist heartland. Scholars working in Chinese provinces as diverse as Shaanxi in the north and Fujian in the south have reported that hundreds of thousands of new or newly renovated temples have sprung up in these provinces, with most villages sporting a plurality of sites of worship.<sup>2</sup> These temples “sponsor and ‘stage’ a wide range of folk cultural activities such as performances by folk dance troupes, music bands and storytellers, folk opera, ‘offering presentation’ processions, animal sacrifices, and temple festivals.”<sup>3</sup> Scholars working in Vietnam have likewise described a similar trend:

Most homes display a profusion of religious imagery and ritual altars. Temples and Buddhist pagodas are near to overflowing on the first and fifteenth of each lunar month, and are even more crowded at Tet, the Vietnamese New Year celebration. Altars are piled high with offerings; interiors are thick with incense. On the roads one can see devotees returning from offering prayers; they carry ornate rods of smoking incense, flowers, fruit, and other blessings from the gods who watch over their existence. Festivals to honor the spirits of the country’s celebrated historical personages attract enormous crowds.

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<sup>1</sup> Pitman B. Potter, “Belief in Control: Regulation of Religion in China,” *China Quarterly* 174 (2003), pp. 317-337.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Adam Yuet Chan, *Miraculous Response: Doing Popular Religion in China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), pp. 2-3; and Kenneth Dean, “Local Communal religion in Contemporary South-east China,” *China Quarterly* 174 (2003), p. 341.

<sup>3</sup> Chan, *Miraculous Response*, p. 2.

Ceremonies honouring tutelary deities in village communal houses have undergone a revival after years of restrictions, and expenditure at religious festivals, fairs, and feasts is increasing dramatically. Vast amounts of time and money are being invested in the construction and restoration of religious edifices, from temples, Buddhist pagodas, and Catholic churches down to the lowly shrines to wandering ghosts. Sales of Taiwanese mass-produced images of Ong Dia (the earth god), Than Tai (the god of wealth), and Quan Am (the goddess of mercy) are booming, and all manner of entrepreneurs are selling religious goods and services from paper offerings to the dead to mediumistic and divinatory services.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile, beyond the proliferation of spirit mediums and sites of worship in localities around China and Vietnam, trans-local forms of religious activity and association are likewise expanding. Some shrines in Vietnam are said to attract more than one million pilgrims each every year, with their counterparts throughout China no doubt drawing even more spectacular numbers. Buddhists, Catholics, and Protestants, as well as indigenous religious ‘cults’ like Vietnam’s Cao Dai and Hoa Hao continue to outgrow the narrow institutional niches to which they were confined before the onset of market reforms. At the height of its popularity before the crackdown of 1999, the *qigong* group Falun Gong was said to have claimed tens of millions of active participants in its breathing, meditation, and gymnastic exercises across China and beyond into the Chinese diaspora around the world.<sup>5</sup> Overall, then, in countries where official restrictions have long constrained religious practices and encapsulated religious institutions, the expanding exercise of effective religious freedoms over the past two decades has constituted a certain kind of ‘democratization of religion’, even in the face of repression and under the auspices of entrenched authoritarian rule in the world of profane politics.

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<sup>4</sup> Philip Taylor, *Goddess on the Rise: Pilgrimage and Popular Religion in Vietnam* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004), pp. 1-2.

<sup>5</sup> Vivienne Shue, “Global Imaginings, the State’s Quest for Hegemony, and the Pursuit of Phantom Freedom in China: From Heshang to Falun Gong,” in Catarina Kinnvall and Kristina Jonsson (eds.), *Globalization and Democratization in Asia: The Construction of Identity* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 210-229; James Tong, “An Organizational Analysis of the *Falun Gong*: Structure, Communications, Financing,” *China Quarterly* 171 (2002), pp. 636-660; and David A. Palmer, *Qigong Fever: Body, Science and Utopia in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

Secondly and simultaneously, the past two decades have also witnessed the proliferation of new sources of religious authority, new claimants to religious knowledge, new arbiters of what it means to know God, new interpreters of what it means to be a good Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, or Muslim. Thanks to urbanization and increasing access to communications technology, believers across Asia have a greater ease of access to diverse preachers and prophets, spirit mediums and religious scholars. In cities like Jakarta, Surabaya, and Makassar, a plethora of Sufi and Salafi groups today compete for audiences among millions of Indonesian Muslims,<sup>6</sup> and Islamic ‘pop’ stars like the famous *da’i* (preacher) Aa Gym reach out to hundreds of thousands if not millions through radio and television appearances, public speaking engagements, cassette, CD, and DVD recordings, and published interviews.<sup>7</sup> In Manila, Cebu, Iloilo, and Davao, El Shaddai and a welter of ‘charismatic’ Catholic and evangelical Protestant churches vie for the interest of Filipino Christians. Vincent ‘Bingbong’ Crisologo’s evangelical group The Loved Flock is said to reach 2 million Filipinos by television, while Ramon Orosa’s Body of Christ claims a television audience of 3 million, and El Shaddai claims 9-11 million adherents.<sup>8</sup> In Bangkok and beyond, popular monks and monasteries have achieved cult-like status among segments of Thailand’s Theravada Buddhist population.<sup>9</sup> Elsewhere in Asia, the sources of religious knowledge are likewise continuing to multiply.

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Laffan, “National Crisis and the Representation of Traditional Sufism in Indonesia: The Periodicals *Salafy* and *Sufi*,” and Julia Day Howell, “Modernity and Islamic Spirituality in Indonesia’s New Sufi Networks,” in Martin van Bruinessen and Julia Day Howell (eds.), *Sufism and the ‘Modern’ in Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), pp. 149-171, 217-240.

<sup>7</sup> Patrick Haenni, *L’islam de marché: L’autre révolution conservatrice* (Paris: Seuil, 2005), pp. 33-38.

<sup>8</sup> For such estimates, see: Paul Freston, *Evangelicals and Politics in Asia, Africa, and Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 73.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Peter A. Jackson, “The Enchanting Spirit of Thai Capitalism: The Cult of Luang Phor Khoo and the Post-Modernization of Thai Buddhism,” *South East Asia Research*, Volume 7, Number 1 (March 1999), pp. 5-60.

This pluralization of religious authority structures has had a number of important consequences. Most obviously, this trend has eroded the centralized monopolies of the Catholic Church in the Philippines and the *sangha* in Thailand, the privileged position of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, the two main Islamic associations in Indonesia, and likewise threatened countless other religious establishments across the diverse religious landscape of Asia. Asian Christians, Buddhists, and Muslims thus have come to enjoy increasing freedom of choice in terms of competing sources of religious knowledge they can rely upon, and rival interpretations, methods of interpretation, and modes of applications with regard to such religious knowledge. As one scholar of Hinduism in India noted: “Given the vast array of gurus in India’s teeming urban spiritual supermarket, each with his or her own distinctive message and style of relating to devotees, individuals on the lookout for a guru are forced to make active and careful choices from among the countless alternatives available for their ready sampling.”<sup>10</sup> The impact of this freedom of choice is evident not only in the emergence of new claimants to religious authority and the movement of adherents from old religious establishments to new ones (and movement of adherents among rivals among them), but also in the efforts of the old religious establishments to adapt to these competitive pressures. Thus Filipino bishops have agreed to recognize “Brother Mike” Velarde’s El Shaddai movement as still belonging to the Catholic Church, Thai *sangha* patriarchs have come to accommodate themselves to questionable teachings and practices by charismatic monks, and leaders of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah have learned to live with an increasingly diverse field of liberals and leftists, fundamentalists and feminists, Sufi mystics and *salafi* militants competing to interpret, inculcate, and through local experiments in

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<sup>10</sup> Maya Warrier, “Processes of Secularization in Contemporary India: Guru Faith in the Mata Amritanandamayi Mission,” *Modern Asian Studies*, Volume 37, Number 1 (February 2003), pp. 234.

*shari'a* law, implement various understandings of the Islamic faith. With new churches, temples, and mosques springing up left and right, and new preachers and prophets appearing if not on every street corner then on new radio frequencies, television channels, and internet sites, the threat and practice of religious 'exit' by the faithful thus exerts decidedly downward, democratizing pressures on the established ecclesiastical hierarchies of Asia.

Meanwhile, a third dimension of religious democratization is also evident in the widening forms of popular participation and the shifting patterns of clerical mediation in religious life in various parts of Asia. This pattern is perhaps most visibly evident in the emphasis on the Holy Spirit and on direct religious experience over formal doctrine found in evangelical Protestant groups and in the 'charismatic' Catholic group El Shaddai in the Philippine archipelago. El Shaddai runs wildly popular outdoor prayer meetings in parks and stadiums in Manila and other Philippine cities, even as charismatic Catholic groups convene for sing-along sessions in homes around the archipelago, and rival religious radio and television stations reach out to millions of the faithful on the airwaves. As one observer of El Shaddai's outdoor prayer meetings notes: "In contrast to the mainstream Filipino Catholic religious experience – where the priest and the church building itself mediate with God and the religious community – El Shaddai members, through experience that is largely mass mediated, feel they have a more intimate and immediate (that is, unmediated) relationship with God and their religious community."<sup>11</sup>

Such trends are also amply evident among Asians of other faiths in other settings. In Muslim countries across Asia, written sources of Islamic knowledge – in vernacular Bengali, Indonesian, Malay, and Urdu are ever more accessible to

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<sup>11</sup> Katharine L. Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles: El Shaddai and the Transformation of Popular Catholicism in the Philippines* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), p. 33.

individual interpretation and analysis. With urbanization, mass literacy, and increasing access to modern means of communication, independent study has increasingly come to supplement or substitute for lessons in the classroom and sermons in the mosque. In the words of Olivier Roy:

Fragmentary modern knowledge, acquired autodidactically, is integrated within a Quranic intellectual framework, developing, on the one hand, the image of a transcendent totality, the *tawhid* (the oneness of God, which extends to His Creation), in which all knowledge comes together, and, on the other hand, a terminology drawn from the Tradition, supported by the citation of verses, but often positioned as the equivalent of concepts issued from modern ideologies. The two bodies of knowledge (modern through brochures and manuals, Quranic by citation) in fact cover a ‘do-it-yourself’ creation, the juxtaposition of segments of knowledge into a whole whose logic cannot be reduced to the sum of its parts.<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, millions of Asian Muslims from Indonesia to Pakistan spend hours each week surfing the internet, visiting diverse Islamic web sites, chat rooms, and blogspots and consulting multiple *fatāwā* and online versions of Al-Qur’an.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, access to esoteric forms of Islamic mysticism is likewise broadening. In Indonesia, for example, beyond the established Sufi orders or *tarekat* (Arabic: *tariqa*, plural: *turuq*), “Sufism has been adapted to a variety of new institutional forms in urban settings. Some of them build out from classic institutions like the *pengajian* or *tarekat*, but modify them substantially; others utilize such international cultural forms as the ‘foundation,’ ‘institute,’ ‘seminar series,’ ‘intensive course,’ or ‘spiritual workshop.’”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 97-98.

<sup>13</sup> For early accounts of these trends, see: Gary R. Bunt, *Virtually Islamic: Computer-Mediated Communication and Cyber Islamic Environments* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000); and Gary R. Bunt, *Islam in the Digital Age: E-Jihad, Online Fatwas and Cyber Islamic Environments* (London: Pluto Press, 2003).

<sup>14</sup> Julia Day Howell, “Sufism and the Indonesian Islamic Revival,” *Journal of Asian Studies*, Volume 60, Number 3 (August 2001), pp. 718.



Parallel trends are reported by scholars of Hinduism in contemporary India. On the one hand, direct access to mass media has made for new forms of direct Hindu devotion. As one study of the impact of the mass media on Hinduism in India concluded: “television produces the effect of a free and unconditional viewing experience, and insinuates a sense of costless social intimacy: the presence of a stream of ongoing communication lends itself to viewers’ imaginative participation without necessarily enfolded them in networks of dependence.”<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, there is evidence of shifts in the role of gurus in “transmitting authoritative spiritual knowledge” among hundreds of millions of Indian Hindus.<sup>16</sup> Increasing numbers of Indian Hindus, it is reported, are attracted to high-profile modern guru organizations because of the “*personal freedom* to create for oneself a religious life conducive to one’s particular individual tastes and dispositions and the possibilities for “*self-authorship* of a highly personalized form of religious faith...personally constructed by the individual concerned to suit his specific inclinations and requirements. In constructing this personalized religion, the individual makes selections from a wide array of elements that he or she encounters in his/her religious environment.”<sup>17</sup>

Thus overall, for Asian believers no longer content to sit quietly on church pews, in *madrasa* classrooms or on the floors and steps of temples and ashrams listening to sermons or religious lessons, more active, unmediated forms of participation in religious life and more autodidactic forms of religious education are ever more readily available. It is not only that believers have greater choice from among an increasing plurality of sources of religious knowledge, but that they also

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<sup>15</sup> Arvind Rajagopal, *Politics After Television: Religious Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Indian Public* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 277.

<sup>16</sup> Lise McKean, *Divine Enterprise: Gurus and the Hindu Nationalist Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

<sup>17</sup> Warrior, “Processes of Secularization in Contemporary India,” pp. 231-232.

play a much more active, unmediated role in the process of acquiring religious knowledge themselves. As one scholar of popular religion in Vietnam concluded:

Some paths lead to Buddhist pagodas, Christian churches, and temples to protector spirits, where a person might enter into dealings with one or several of the images found there....As they negotiate this complex symbolic world, adepts consult with any manner of astrologers, geomancers, physiognomists, fortune-tellers, mediums, monks, sorcerers, and temple custodians. Their itineraries are not predetermined by any religious order and are virtually impossible for the state to regulate. Rather, people's belief and practices are influenced by family, neighbors, colleagues, business clients, fellow worshipers, religious entrepreneurs, and popular publications. Believers exchange stories about the potency of different spirits, hearing of miraculous events and learning new solutions to their problems from those encountered along their way.

*In this non-institutionalized fund of advice, interpretation, and creative usage, novel interpretations are constantly being made; a syncretic ferment is continually on the brew.*<sup>18</sup>

Overall, these three trends can be understood as liberating ones with regard to established patterns of control over religious knowledge throughout much of Asia over the past two decades. Today, more and more Asians enjoy greater freedom to acquire religious knowledge, greater access to diverse sources of religious knowledge, and greater capacity to acquire, accumulate, and actively enjoy and articulate religious knowledge themselves. If not quite a 'World Turned Upside Down', the religious landscape of Asia is one in which the steep hierarchies of authority are increasingly challenged and contested by rival sources and sites of religious knowledge, and in which greater freedom of choice, of exit, and of voice is ever more evident. In this sense, then, we can speak of the democratization of religion in Asia, a trend not paralleled in the realm of profane politics.

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<sup>18</sup> Philip Taylor, *Goddess on the Rise: Pilgrimage and Popular Religion in Vietnam* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), p. 3. Emphasis added.

### 3. Religious Knowledge, Power, and Violence: The Case of Indonesia

Viewed in this perspective, the various forms of religious violence observed in Asia in recent years – inter-religious pogroms in India and Indonesia, Islamist terrorism from Islamabad to Bali – can be understood in a new light. With the decay of old religious monopolies, the breakdown of old religious boundaries, and the unmooring of religious identities from old anchors, religious democratization has produced unsettling uncertainties. Uncertainties for millions of believers, and uncertainties for those long accustomed to speaking with enforceable authority about what makes a good Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, or Muslim and to claiming privileged or exclusive knowledge about Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, or Islam. In the face of such uncertainties, small wonder that a desperate minority sometimes turns to violence in the name of an embattled version of the faith.

Indeed, it is precisely the democratization of religion that has provided a backdrop to episodes of violence in the name of one or another faith in various parts of Asia over the past two decades. Such violence has sometimes taken the form of secular state crackdowns on unauthorized religious practices and organizations in countries like China and Vietnam, or official religious institutions' efforts to discipline and punish wayward members of their putative flocks, as seen at times in Malaysia, or counterinsurgency campaigns against movements arising from among religious minorities outgrowing established forms of institutional representation, encapsulation, and domestication, as in the southern Muslim provinces of Thailand and the Philippines. In addition, such violence has also at times assumed the form of violent inter-religious conflict, in contexts of both democratization in the profane

realm of politics and heightened uncertainty and flux with regard to the structures of religious authority and identity, as seen in India and Indonesia.

This pattern is evident in the case of the rising incidence of anti-Muslim violence in India over the past two decades with the breakdown of Congress one-party rule in the country.<sup>19</sup> On the one hand, as suggested above, this trend has reflected not increasing clarity and uniformity as to what it means to be a Hindu, but rather growing diversity and choice in terms of Hindu gurus and guru organizations.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, as scholars have argued, this trend has reflected not deepening solidarities among Hindus and deference to Hindu hierarchies of spiritual authority, but rather the spreading threat and practice of conflict among Hindus, with lower-caste mobilization in elections and otherwise threatening higher-caste domination like never before. These trends, scholars have argued, have encouraged politicians associated with Hindu ‘nationalist’ parties like the BJP to engage in inter-religious hate-mongering and scapegoating, and to encourage and enable collective violence against Muslims as a means of countering perceived threats to ‘Hindutva’ and firming up the structures of Hindu authority and identity.<sup>21</sup>

Meanwhile, the case of Indonesia offers a somewhat different example of the connection between democratization and inter-religious violence. Indonesia, after all, has witnessed a complex pattern of rising and then declining violence in the name of Islam in tandem with the process of transition from authoritarian rule over the past decade. This pattern first manifested itself first in the final years of the Suharto era

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<sup>19</sup> Ornit Shani, *Communalism, Caste and Hindu Nationalism: The Violence in Gujarat* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>20</sup> See also: Christopher J. Fuller, *The Camphor Flame: Popular Hinduism and Society in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

(1995-97) in a series of religious riots, in which crowds of Islamic students initiated attacks on ethnic-Chinese business establishments, non-Muslim houses of worship, and government buildings in the aftermath of incidents involving perceived slights or insults against Islam. With the fall of Suharto in May 1998, these riots faded from view and were replaced, as it were, by a series of inter-religious pogroms in 1999-2001, in which Christians and Muslims attacked neighbourhoods and villages across the religious divide in localities in the provinces of Maluku, North Maluku, and Central Sulawesi. Even as these pogroms began to peter out, other forms of violence in the name of religion emerged, now articulated in the idiom of *jihad*. Thus April 2000 saw the formation of a paramilitary group called Laskar Jihad and its deployment to defend Muslims and attack Christians in areas of inter-religious conflict, and Christmas Eve 2000 saw a series of terrorist bombings of Christian churches around the archipelago (in retribution for major atrocities against Muslim communities by armed Christian groups a year earlier). In October 2002, moreover, a series of explosions in Bali marked the onset of a globalized terrorist campaign in Indonesia, with foreigners targeted again in bombings in Jakarta in 2003 and 2004, and in Bali once again in 2005. Most recently, just as these annual detonations ceased, evidence of a return to the pattern of the mid-1990s came into view, with a wave of attacks by groups like the 'Front for the Defenders of Islam' (Front Pembela Islam) on Protestant churches and 'deviant' Ahmadiyya mosques in different parts of the country.<sup>22</sup>

This pattern of rising and declining violence in the name of Islam reflected shifts in the structures of religious authority in Indonesia and a set of uncertainties and anxieties regarding hierarchies and boundaries of control over the production of

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<sup>22</sup> For a broad overview of this shifting pattern of religious violence in Indonesia, see: John T. Sidel, *Riots, Pogroms, Jihad: Religious Violence in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

religious knowledge in the country amidst all the sea changes accompanying democratization. In Indonesia, after all, the 1990s had seen the rise to public prominence of new efforts to combine knowledge and power in the name of religion, most obviously in the case of Islam, during a period of transition from authoritarian rule in the country. The long years of the Suharto era had served to promote the dramatic expansion of Islamic education in Indonesia. The school networks associated with the 'traditionalist' Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and the 'modernist' Muhammadiyah expanded horizontally to attract more and more students, and vertically to include tertiary education, through their own separate sets of universities, and to feed into the fourteen branches of the State Islamic Institute (IAIN) as well as mainstream state universities, previously dominated by non-Muslims and Muslims with no religious education. By the 1990s, mainstream state universities throughout Indonesia saw a marked rise in the numbers of students with devout Muslim backgrounds and in the popularity of campus mosques, prayer and religious discussion groups, and Islamic student organizations.<sup>23</sup> As one observer noted: "Mosques are filled with worshipers, particularly young adults; *halaqah* and *pengajian* emerge in almost every university complex and neighbourhood; extra religious schooling (*diniyah*) in the afternoon is crowded with children and teens; the circulation of Islamic books has reached the highest point in Indonesian history; and female students and adults with head-coverings have become a regular phenomenon on campuses and public places."<sup>24</sup>

By this time, three decades of sustained economic growth, urbanization, and the extension of the tertiary educational sector had thus also begun to bring into the ranks of the educated urban middle class an unprecedented number of Muslims

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<sup>23</sup> On this trend, see, for example, "Islam Sebagai Baju Zirah di Kalangan Muda," *Tempo*, 13 Mei 1989, pp. 74-78.

<sup>24</sup> Asna Hasin, "Philosophical and Sociological Aspects of Da'wah: A Study of Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia" (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1998), pp. 318-319.

coming from backgrounds of Islamic piety and learning. This trend was evident in the prominence of devout, mostly modernist, Muslims in the business world, on university campuses, in the mass media, and, increasingly, in the armed forces, the bureaucracy, and other power centres within the state – preserves previously dominated by Christians and Muslims with little to no formal schooling in their faith.

The creation of ICMI, the All-Indonesian Association of Islamic Intellectuals, in 1990, worked to recognize and reinforce this trend. With Suharto's long-time close associate B.J. Habibie as its chairman, ICMI came to serve as an important network for recruitment into the political class and as a generously endowed source of patronage. Under its auspices, moreover, support for 'Muslim professionals' was fairly matched by promotion of 'professional Muslims', through ICMI backing for a diverse range of Islamic publishing, preaching, and associational activities. Embedded within the authoritarian state, and enjoying unprecedented and unparalleled opportunities for state promotion of 'Islam', ICMI gave great sustenance and hope to those Islamist activists concerned to overcome Indonesia's famous diversity of Islamic practices and organizations, and to promote a modernist, reified notion of Islam not contaminated or compromised by parochialism, syncretism, or the pluralism of educational traditions and associational life of the vast Indonesian archipelago. Thus the resignation of Suharto and the immediate assumption of the presidency by then vice-president Habibie in May 1998 represented the triumph of the 'Islamic Trend' in Indonesia.<sup>25</sup>

With the elections of June 1999, however, the fiction of a united Muslim population universally represented by ICMI dissipated with fragmentation and

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<sup>25</sup> On these trends, see: Robert W. Hefner, "Islam, State, And Civil Society: ICMI And The Struggle For The Indonesian Middle Class," *Indonesia* 56 (October 1993), pp. 1-35; and R. William Liddle, "The Islamic Turn in Indonesia: A Political Explanation," *Journal of Asian Studies*, Volume 55, Number 3 (August 1996), pp. 613-634.

factionalism among a welter of Islamic parties, and dissolved in the face of strong electoral showings by non-Islamist parties among Muslim and non-Muslim voters alike. Indeed, a clear plurality of the vote (34%) was won by Megawati Soekarnoputri's Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia – Perjuangan or PDI-P), a party known for its ecumenical, and 'syncretist' orientation, and sizeable non-Muslim constituencies and membership. More than one-third of the members of parliament elected on the PDI-P ticket were non-Muslims (mostly Protestants), and virtually none of its Muslim MPs claimed a background of Islamic education or associational activity.<sup>26</sup> By contrast, parties with avowedly Islamic agendas achieved less than 20% of the vote, while the Partai Amanat Nasional (National Mandate Party) led by the modernist Muslim association Muhammadiyah's chairman Amien Rais won 8% under an ostensibly ecumenical banner and with token non-Muslims in its ranks. The universalistic claims made under the sign of 'Islam' were fully revealed as partisan, particularistic, and rather poorly received even among the broad mass of the Muslim population. Thus October 1999 saw the replacement of Habibie as president by Abdurrahman Wahid, head of the National Awakening Party (PKB), long-time chairman of the 'traditionalist' Nahdlatul Ulama and persistent champion of inter-faith tolerance and cooperation; Wahid was subsequently succeeded in mid-2001 by the PDI-P's Megawati Soekarnoputri, who in turn fell in the 2004 elections to Indonesia's current president, the retired Army general Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono.

Overall, the years since the brief Habibie interlude of May 1998 – October 1999 have witnessed the unfolding of trends which attest to the diminution,

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<sup>26</sup> Of the 153 members of the PDI-P elected to the DPR in 1999, only 96 (63%) were registered as Muslims, with at least 36 Protestants (23%), 12 Catholics, and 7 Hindus among the remaining MPs. See: *Wajah Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Republik Indonesia Pemilihan Umum 1999* (Jakarta: Kompas, 2000), pp. 3-155.



demobilization, and domestication of Islamist forces in Indonesia. This shift is evident if one considers the failed efforts of Islamist parties in 1999-2002 to insert references to Islamic law into the Constitution, and the subsequent acquiescence of these parties in the reaffirmation of the ecumenical, if insistently monotheistic, principles of *Pancasila* for the parameters of social and political life in the country.<sup>27</sup> This shift is likewise apparent if one compares the prominence and power of modernist and puritanical strains in Indonesian Islam in 1998-99 with the subsequent political triumphs of traditionalist Muslim, ecumenical, and even Christian elements in political contests in Jakarta, and with broader societal trends.

Indeed, the past several years have seen the flourishing of diverse forms of religious expression and associational activity within the broad realm of Indonesian Islam, which is world famous for its diversity, its organizational pluralism, its syncretic tendencies, and its engagement with the secularizing forces of the capitalist market and the modern state. Journalists have tracked the rising popularity of Sufi brotherhoods and of diverse religious cults, both in Jakarta and other major cities, and in the rural hinterlands of the archipelago.<sup>28</sup> The past few years have also witnessed the rise of new charismatic *kyai* (religious scholars) who enjoy unprecedented popularity outside established Islamic associational hierarchies, thanks to the appeal of their mystical, Sufistic, and ‘supernatural’ approaches.<sup>29</sup> Meanwhile, unofficial religious groups which have long existed on the fringes of the permissible have begun to press for more official recognition of their de facto authority over sizeable flocks of

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<sup>27</sup> On this point, see: Nadirsyah Hosen, “Religion and the Indonesian Constitution: A Recent Debate,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Volume 36, Number 3 (October 2005), pp. 419-440.

<sup>28</sup> Julia Day Howell, “Sufism and the Indonesian Islamic Revival,” *Journal of Asian Studies*, Volume 60, Number 3 (2001), pp. 701-729. See also: “Berputar Menuju Sang Kekasih,” *Tempo*, 28 Mei 2006, pp. 54-55.

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, “Beribu Jalan Menyenangkan Tuhan Dan Umat,” *Tempo*, 5 November 2006, pp. 100-101, as well as the related articles on individual *kyai* on pages 103-109 of the same issue.

the faithful.<sup>30</sup> Scholars tracing these trends have written of the increasing “permeability in the boundaries of the nation’s official religions,” and the “emergence of an arena of unregulated ‘spiritual’ groups that now exists along the highly regulated, rigidly denominational religious market structured by the New Order Government (1996-1998).”<sup>31</sup> Overall, the existing hierarchies of Islamic worship and learning in Indonesia are today facing unprecedented difficulties in maintaining their authority over the diverse population of 200 million Muslims across the archipelago.

Meanwhile, the unfolding of political and social liberalization, democratization, and decentralization in the years since the fall of Suharto in 1998, as well as the economic recovery and growth experienced in the aftermath of the deep financial crisis of the same year, have drawn millions of Indonesians into forms of identity, activity, and association which compete with those offered by Islam. Thus recent years have seen the revival of ethnic and regional identities, the reemergence of *adat* (customary law) and aristocratic lineages in local politics, and a modest resurgence of labor activism, all at the expense of efforts to promote a streamlined, standardized, universalistic Islam. At the same time, against these centrifugal tendencies towards fragmentation along regional, ethnic, and class lines, the centripetal force of the revitalized Indonesian economy has continued to attract millions of Indonesian Muslims to patterns of consumption – of clothing, technology, and entertainment – that also work to pull them away from religious piety. Under conditions of unprecedented liberalization, the Indonesian entertainment industry – from movies to radio and television soap operas, romance novels to pop music – is

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<sup>30</sup> See, for example, “Kepahitan Pengikut Sanghyang Kersa,” *Tempo*, 20 Agustus 2006, pp. 44-45; and “Setelah Cap Pembangkang Dilekatkan,” *Tempo*, p. 46.

<sup>31</sup> Julia Day Howell, “Muslims, the New Age and Marginal Religions in Indonesia: Changing Meanings of Religious Pluralism,” *Social Compass*, Volume 52, Number 4 (2005), pp. 473-493, at p. 473.

highly vibrant today, as producer of domestic content and transmitter of global popular culture.

It is against this broad backdrop that the efforts of various Islamist politicians and parties in recent years to reassert their power in public life in Indonesia and their control over the production and circulation of religious knowledge in the country must be situated. The quasi-governmental Council of Indonesian Islamic Scholars (Majelis Ulama Indonesia or MUI), for example, has in recent years issued a series of controversial *fatwa* (Arabic: *fatāwā*) including one condemning “pluralism, secularism, and liberalism” and another denouncing as heretical the Ahmadiyah sect.<sup>32</sup> But these *fatwa* are neither legally binding nor representative of the elected government’s policies and preferences.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, the issuance of these *fatwa* has provoked considerable controversy in the Indonesian press, with prominent Islamic figures like former president and Nahdlatul Ulama chairman Abdurrahman Wahid condemning the edicts and calling for the abolition of the MUI.

These MUI *fatwa*, it is worth noting, reflect the increasing difficulties experienced by those trying to retain – or rather, to regain – a measure of control over the production and circulation of Islamic knowledge in Indonesia. After all, the MUI *fatwa* against “pluralism, secularism, and liberalism” was issued against the backdrop of a consolidated Indonesian democracy, in which pluralism is alive and well, not only in terms of political parties competing for public offices, but also in the realm of religious associational, educational, and devotional life. This *fatwa* was issued against

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<sup>32</sup> On the MUI and its various *fatwa* of recent years, see: John R. Bowen, *Islam, Law and Equality in Indonesia: An Anthropology of Public Reasoning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 59-63; and Moch. Nur Ichwan, “‘Ulamā’, State and Politics: Majelis Ulama Indonesia After Suharto,” *Islamic Law and Society*, Volume 12, Number 1 (2005), pp. 45-72. See also: “MUI to formulate edicts against ‘liberal thoughts’,” *Jakarta Post*, 27 July 2005; “Fatwa MUI Memicu Kontroversi; Ma’ruf Amin: MUI Siap Menanggapi,” *Kompas*, 30 Juli 2005.

<sup>33</sup> For an extensive treatment of the competing sources of *fatwa* in Indonesia, see: M.B. Hooker, *Indonesian: Islam: Social Change Through Contemporary Fatāwān* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2003).

the backdrop of a recovering Indonesian economy whose deepening integration into global markets has been accompanied by the increasing availability and consumption of images, products, and services whose origins are utterly secular in nature. This *fatwa* was issued against the backdrop of the ongoing liberalization of Indonesian society, in terms of the expansion of individual freedoms in all realms of social life. This *fatwa* was issued by a body lacking in official juridical authority or effective capacity for enforcement, a body forced to compete for Muslim hearts and minds with newly formed groups like the Liberal Islam Network (Jaringan Islam Liberal or JIL), whose activities and publications are generously funded by U.S.-based foundations.

Another example of efforts to reassert control over what it means to be a good Muslim in Indonesia lies in the realm of attempts to restrict the public visibility and freedom of women in the country. For example, the publication of a new Indonesian edition of Playboy magazine in April 2006 was met by vehement condemnation in the press – and angry protests in the streets – by various Islamist groups, even though the editors had decided not to include nude centerfolds or other photos of naked women as had originally been anticipated.<sup>34</sup> Early 2006 also saw the eruption of controversy over legislation proposed by Islamist parties ostensibly to restrict pornography in Indonesia, but introducing broad regulations on women's dress and behavior in public.<sup>35</sup> Alongside this controversy came well-publicized attacks by Islamist groups against a highly popular Indonesian dancer, whose allegedly sensual gyrations had earned her a considerable – live and video audience, and whose own cafes and nightclubs in Jakarta had attracted a growing clientele.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> “Playboy Indonesia: Modest Flesh Meets Muslim Faith,” *New York Times*, 24 July 2006, p. A4.

<sup>35</sup> “Undang-Undang Dengan Definisi Kabur,” *Tempo*, 12 Februari 2006, pp. 76-77.

<sup>36</sup> “Goyangan Tak Kunjung Reda,” *Tempo*, 14 Mei 2006, pp. 34-35; “Indonesian Dancer, Clerics Go Toe-to-Toe,” *Asia Times*, 21 June 2006.

These episodes revealed the difficulties faced by those trying to reassert control over understandings of Islam and of appropriately 'Islamic' notions of gender and sexuality. As many authors have noted, Islamist groups in diverse settings have long been preoccupied with the exercise of social control over women, treating them, in the words of the eminent Middle East specialist Charles Tripp, "as the terrain for the symbolic expression of a certain kind of Islamic identity, but also as key players in the defence against the intrusion of other belief systems."<sup>37</sup>

Echoing contemporary secular nationalist discourses, there is stress on the functional role of women in maintaining and reproducing a distinctively Islamic society, through the act of giving birth and educating children. The security of the domestic environment becomes the guarantee of a truly Islamic society, since it is the site for the production of the strong 'Islamic personality' who does battle with the world in the service of Islamic values. This places a heavy historical and sociological responsibility on women, making their comportment and actions a matter for general concern by the largely male cohort of concerned Muslim intellectuals.<sup>38</sup>

Indeed, in Indonesia the issue of Muslim women's attire had long been a focus of Islamist activists' attention and political agitation, most notably in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the government's long-standing prohibition on Islamic headscarves in state schools was overturned in favor of permissiveness and encouragement.<sup>39</sup>

This Islamist concern to restrict and regulate women's behavior and comportment in public life must be understood in the context of the increasing mobility of women in Indonesian society in recent decades.<sup>40</sup> Already in the Suharto

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<sup>37</sup> Charles Tripp, *Islam and the Moral Economy: The Challenge of Capitalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 168.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 168-169.

<sup>39</sup> On this issue, see: Suzanne Brenner, "Reconstructing Self and Society: Javanese Muslim Women and 'The Veil'," *American Ethnologist*, Volume 23, Number 4 (November 1996), pp. 673-697. For a flavour of public discussions at the time, see also: "Penerapan Jilbab Tunggu SK Dirjen," *Surabaya Post*, 18 Februari 1991; and "Aini, Arti, Nurul, dan Widy: Bersyukur Meski Harus Tergusur," *Surabaya Post*, 24 February 1991.

<sup>40</sup> Suzanne Brenner, "Islam and Gender Politics in Late New Order Indonesia," in Andrew C. Wilford and Kenneth M. George (eds.), *Spirited Politics: Religion and Public Life in Contemporary Southeast*

era, economic growth, industrialization, and urbanization had brought millions of Indonesian women out of the homes and villages of the country and into factory belts, supermarkets and department stores, and, in smaller numbers, universities, from which a range of urban professional opportunities were opened up to them.<sup>41</sup> With recovery from the economic crisis of 1997-98, these trends have resumed in the post-Suharto era. With every passing year, more Indonesian women are traveling farther from home, working in industrial and service jobs, joining the ranks of the civil service and the professional classes, and exercising more choice over their movements, the use of their labor power and their money, and their modes of communication and expression than ever before.<sup>42</sup> The creation of the Ministry for the Empowerment of Women represents the government's belated recognition of – and reaction to – these trends, even as the growing ranks and range of activities of women's organizations attached to Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama attest to the accommodating response of mainstream Islamic groups in Indonesia.<sup>43</sup>

Other trends have worked to undermine the conservative understandings of family life and sexuality assiduously promoted by the Suharto regime over the three decades of its reign.<sup>44</sup> Homosexuality is more visible in the public sphere than ever

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*Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 2005); and Nancy J. Smith-Hefner, "The New Muslim Romance: Changing Patterns of Courtship and Marriage Among Educated Javanese Youth," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Volume 36, Number 3 (October 2005), pp. 441-459.

<sup>41</sup> On these trends, see, for example, Diane L. Wolf, *Factory Daughters: Gender, Household Dynamics and rural Industrialization on Java* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); and Linda Rae Bennett, *Women, Islam and Modernity: Single Women, Sexuality and Reproductive Health in Contemporary Indonesia* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005).

<sup>42</sup> On these recent trends, see, for example, Susan Blackburn, "Women and the Nation," *Inside Indonesia*, April-June 2001; and Krishna Sen, "Film revolution? Women are now on both sides of the camera," *Inside Indonesia*, July – September 2005.

<sup>43</sup> Pieterella van Doorn-Harder, *Women Shaping Islam: Reading the Qur'an in Indonesia* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

<sup>44</sup> Julia I. Suryakusuma, "The State and Sexuality in New Order Indonesia," in Laurie Sears (ed.), *Fantasizing the Feminine in Indonesia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).

before, as perhaps best exemplified by the holding of a book launch for a novel about a lesbian love affair at a branch of the IAIN (Institut Agama Islam Negeri or State Islamic Institute) in late 2003.<sup>45</sup> As Dédé Oetomo, Indonesia's best known openly gay public figure, has noted, there is "a greatly increased public awareness of the variety of human sexualities... True, many misunderstandings remain, but they are eroding."<sup>46</sup> Small wonder that male Islamist activists – and other men anxious about the weakening hold of conservative patterns of familial authority and gender relations – in Indonesia have tried to reassert various forms of regulatory control over sexuality in public life.

These efforts to shore up certain notions of Islamic propriety and rectitude in Indonesia social life have in some measure been matched in the political realm, with the much ballyhooed rise to prominence of the Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS or Prosperous Justice Party). The party won more than 7% in the 2004 parliamentary elections, placing it above the established National Mandate Party (PAN) of former Muhammadiyah chairman Amien Rais and just behind current president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's Democratic Party (Partai Demokrat), with especially strong showings in Jakarta and other major Indonesian cities. Today, former PKS chairman Hidayat Nur Wahid serves as the head of the supra-parliamentary People's Consultative Assembly (Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat or MPR), the party is well represented in local assemblies, and PKS-backed candidates have fared well in recent elections for local executive posts as mayors, regents, and governors around the

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<sup>45</sup> See: Tom Boellstorff, "The Emergence of Political Homophobia in Indonesia: Masculinity and National Belonging," *Ethnos*, Volume 69, Number 4 (Decembe 2004), pp. 465-486; Tom Boellstorff, "Between Religion and Desire: Being Muslim and Gay in Indonesia," *American Anthropologist*, Volume 107, Number 4 (2005), pp. 575-585; and Tom Boellstorff, *The Gay Archipelago: Sexuality and Nation in Indonesia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>46</sup> Dédé Oetomo, "Gay Men in the Reformasi Era: Homophobic violence Could be a By-Product of the New Openness," *Inside Indonesia*, April-June 2001.

country. Some party activists and other political analysts predict even greater successes for the PKS in the 2009 national elections.<sup>47</sup>

Like many other political parties in the Muslim world identifying themselves in terms of the promotion of ‘Justice’, ‘Prosperity’, and ‘Welfare’, Indonesia’s PKS is a decidedly Islamist party in terms of its origins and orientation. Its leadership emerged out of a network of highly pious, puritanical, and politicized university students that evolved over the course of the Suharto era, linking discussion groups from various campus mosques in the country’s top universities as well as Indonesian Muslim students at universities in the Middle East and elsewhere in the world. Even as they pursued doctorates in various technical and scientific fields, these students were attracted to puritanical currents in Islamic thinking and to the organizational and mobilizational techniques developed by Hassan Al-Banna and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt since the 1930s.<sup>48</sup>

While this kind of backdrop to the party’s emergence and orientation may remind readers of similar – and often similarly named – Islamist parties and movements elsewhere in the Muslim world, whether in Pakistan or Turkey, Egypt or Morocco, the party’s actual *modus operandi* from election campaigning to parliamentary coalition-building is reminiscent of the broad pattern of cooptation, domestication, and transformation of such Islamist parties noted by many observers.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> For early English-language assessments, see: “Indonesian Islamist Party is Quietly Gaining Ground,” *International Herald Tribune*, 8 April 2004; and “An Islamic Leader Rises in Indonesian Politics,” *International Herald Tribune*, 21 October 2004.

<sup>48</sup> For background, see: Aay Muhamad Furkon, *Partai Keadilan Sejahtera: Ideologi dan Praksis Politik Kaum Muda Muslim Indonesia Kontemporer* (Jakarta: Teraju, 2004). Ali Said Damanik, *Fenomena Partai Keadilan: Transformasi 20 Tahun Gerakan Tarbiyah di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Teraju, 2000).

<sup>49</sup> For recent treatments of the impact of electoral engagement on Islamist political parties and movements, see: Vickie Langohr, “Of Islamists and Ballot Boxes: Rethinking the Relationship between Islamists and Electoral Politics,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Volume 33 (November 2001), pp. 591-610; Quintan Wiktorowicz, *The Management of Islamic Activism: Salafis, the Muslim*



The party's appeal among voters, after all, came not from its commitment to the Islamicization of Indonesian state and society, but from a reputation for relative incorruptibility and seriousness of purpose compared to the prevailing patterns of money and machine politics in the country. The nature of this appeal has been evident not only in the party's official name and policy pronouncements, but also in its campaign rallies, which have attracted thousands of clean-shaven men, and headscarf-less women, as the author observed first-hand in both Bandung and Jakarta in the weeks leading up to the 2004 parliamentary elections. After the 2004 elections and the inauguration of the administration of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, this emphasis in PKS public relations was evident in the resignation of Hidayat Nur Wahid from the party leadership prior to his elevation to speaker of the MPR, in the party's MPs' rejection of many of the perks of parliamentary office, and in the party's avowedly principled – rather than patronage-based – support for the new president's choice of cabinet ministers.<sup>50</sup>

For skeptics and alarmists, the public profile of the PKS is seen as a thin veneer behind which the 'fundamentalists' running the party have succeeded in luring unsuspecting voters into mistaken support for the party and in lulling other politicians into complacency as the party consolidates its gains and expands its influence. The party's public disavowal of further intentions to seek Islamist amendments to the Constitution, its inclusion of many women – and token non-Muslims – among its

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*Brotherhood, and State Power in Jordan* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001); R. Quinn Meacham, "From the Ashes of Virtue, a Promise of Light: The Transformation of Political Islam in Turkey," *Third World Quarterly*, Volume 25, Number 2 (2004), pp. 339-358; Janine A. Clark, "The Conditions of Islamist Moderation: Unpacking Cross-Ideological Cooperation in Jordan," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Volume 38 (2006), pp. 539-560; and Jillian Schwedler, *Faith in Moderation: Islamist Parties in Jordan and Yemen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, "Hidayat: PKS Tidak Akan Masuk Kabinet," *Tempo Interaktif*, 26 April 2004; "Usulkan 'Reshuffle' Tim Ekonomi, PKS Tetap Loyal kepada Pemerintah," *Pikiran Rakyat*, 28 November 2005; "PKS dan PAN dukung Boediono Masuk Kabinet," *Tempo Interaktif*, 2 Desember 2005.

internal governing bodies and parliamentary slates, and other such efforts to de-emphasize the party's Islamist origins and orientation are simply duplicitous.<sup>51</sup> Once the party expands its share of the electorate and its influence in parliament and the cabinet in the years to come, the PKS will 'show its true colors' and reveal itself for the extremist, intolerant, fundamentalist party it supposedly remains at heart.<sup>52</sup>

Yet what this interpretation of PKS ignores is the extent to which the party's participation within the parliamentary arena has transformed if not its leaders' conscious sense of commitment to long-term Islamist goals, then their unconscious understanding of the party's short- and medium-term interests *as well as its very identity*. For whatever the PKS leaders may confide amongst themselves, their continuing efforts to promote the party as the vehicle of – essentially secular – 'good governance' in Indonesian politics have reoriented the party's collective activities, its style and language of self-presentation, and its members' everyday practices in a not particularly Islamist direction. Meanwhile, as the party has engaged in behind-the-scenes informal horsetrading and coalition-building with machine politicians of various stripes over recent years, its effective commitment to various high-minded goals – whether 'good governance' or 'Islam' – has been compromised. Thus, like the Christian Democrats in Western Europe before World War I, and the Euro-Communists during the Cold War, the Islamists of today may well be duping themselves more than they are duping others, with parties like Indonesia's PKS effectively embodying gradual Islamist integration and accommodation, willy-nilly,

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<sup>51</sup> For recent Indonesian media coverage of the PKS' public profile, see, for example, "Partai Dakwah di Simpang Jalan," *Tempo*, 7 Agustus 2005; "Menakar Citra, Mendukung SBY," *Tempo*, 27 November 2005; and "Wawancara: Yang Tidak Suka Syariat Berlindung di Balik Pancasila," *Tempo*, 25 Juni 2006.

<sup>52</sup> "Indonesian Democracy's Enemy Within," *The Nation* (Bangkok), 5 December 2005.

with liberal democracy.<sup>53</sup> Compared to other Islamist parties in the Muslim world, moreover, the PKS seems to lack the kind of densely woven and deeply rooted local infrastructure so carefully nurtured by their counterparts in Egypt and Jordan, Turkey and Pakistan, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank over the years.

This weakness is readily apparent if one considers the broad realm of local politics in Indonesia, which in recent years has featured efforts by Islamic vigilante groups and initiatives to impose Islamic law on localities where they command influence. The impression imparted is one of widespread Islamist activism at the local level throughout Indonesia, with accumulating Islamist momentum ‘from below’ around the country under conditions of decentralization since the enactment of ‘regional autonomy’ legislation in 1999. For example, from its formation in mid-1998 during the brief Habibie interlude to this day, the Front for the Defenders of Islam (Front Pembela Islam or FPI) has won considerable media attention for its high-profile campaigns against gambling, prostitution, and alcohol in Jakarta and other cities, its occasional anti-U.S. protests, and its antics as an enforcer of Islamic morality.<sup>54</sup> The year 2005, moreover, saw a series of widely publicized attacks by FPI and other Islamist groups coalescing in an ‘anti-apostasy movement’ against churches in West Java accused of operating without licenses and of attempting to spread Christianity among the Muslim population.<sup>55</sup> Finally, by 2006, press coverage of local politics in Indonesia had begun to focus on the supposedly growing number of

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<sup>53</sup> For broader arguments along these lines, see: Olivier Roy, *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (London: Hurst & Company, 2004), pp. 72-83; Vali Nasr, “The Rise of ‘Muslim Democracy’,” *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 16, Number 2 (April 2005), pp. 13-27. See also: Stathis Kalyvas, *Religious Mobilization and Party Formation: Confessional Parties and the Christian Democratic Phenomenon* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

<sup>54</sup> For recent coverage, see, for example, “Aneka Ragam Laskar Jalanan,” *Gatra*, 15 Juni 2006; and “Laskar-Laskar Dalam Sorotan,” *Tempo*, 25 Juni 2006, pp. 26-28.

<sup>55</sup> See: “Pengurus PGI Temui Presiden SBY Minta Usut Tuntas Penutupan Paksa Gereja,” *Sinar Indonesia Baru*, 25 Agustus 2005; “Sebatang Salib yang Dikunci,” *Tempo*, 5 September 2005; “Police Investigate Church Closures, Vow to Take Action,” *Jakarta Post*, 13 September 2005.

regencies where local assemblies had imposed regulations in the name of Islamic law, banning gambling, prostitution, and alcohol, for example, or imposing restrictions on women's dress code and comportment in public.<sup>56</sup> In the province of South Sulawesi alone, at least six of 24 regencies were cited as localities where various forms of *shari'a* law were in place.<sup>57</sup> The case of a young woman detained for alleged 'prostitution' in the Jakarta suburb of Tangerang for being improperly clad while awaiting an evening bus home from work similarly attracted national and international publicity.<sup>58</sup>

Yet overall, the broad pattern of local politics in Indonesia is one in which both inter-religious violence and Islamist influence have largely subsided and been sublimated within the workings of the world's third largest consolidated democracy. Indeed, compared to the preceding decade, the most striking feature of local politics in Indonesia is the relative absence of violence – nothing like the anti-Chinese riots of 1995-97, the widespread mayhem of 1998, or the incidents of communal violence of 1999-2001 has occurred over the past several years.<sup>59</sup> Even in the Central Sulawesi regency of Poso or the provinces of Maluku and Maluku Utara, where inter-religious violence caused a few thousand deaths in 1999-2001, there has been virtually no resurgence of large-scale communal conflict. Indeed, the rising incidence of church

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<sup>56</sup> See, for example, "Soal Lama, Ketegangan Baru," *Tempo*, 20 Agustus 2006, pp. 62-65; "Setelah Cambukan 40 Kali," *Tempo*, 20 Agustus 2006, pp. 66-67.

<sup>57</sup> See, for example, "Gelora Syariah Mengepung Kota," *Gatra*, 6 Mei 2006, pp. 20-24; "Menguji Niat Baik Perda," *Gatra*, 6 Mei 2006, pp. 25-26; "Syariat Islam di Jalur Lambat," *Tempo*, 14 Mei 2006, pp. 26-28; "Akibat Menyontek Tetangga," *Tempo*, 14 Mei 2006, p. 32; "Pecut Bambu Dari Bulukumba," *Tempo*, 14 Mei 2006, p. 33. See also: *Islamic Law and Criminal Justice in Aceh* (Jakarta/Brussels: International Crisis Group, July 2006).

<sup>58</sup> See: "Jika Malam Selalu Mencemaskan," *Tempo*, 14 Mei 2006, pp. 30-31; and "Women caught in a more radical Indonesia," *New York Times*, 28 June 2006, p. 2.

<sup>59</sup> On the absence of violent conflict in multi-faith communities in various localities around the Indonesian archipelago, see, for example, "Ketika Batas Religi Meleleh," *Tempo*, 20 Agustus 2006, pp. 84-86; "Azan Magrib di Bali," *Tempo*, 20 Agustus 2006, pp. 88-89; "Hidup Rukun di Lembah Dumoga," *Tempo*, 20 Agustus 2006, pp. 90-91.

burnings documented by concerned Christian groups in the 1990s tapered off and virtually ceased since the turn of the twenty-first century. Overall, the pattern throughout Indonesia is one of accommodation between Muslims and non-Muslims in local politics, as evident in the success of the ecumenical parties Golkar and PDIP in the majority of local parliamentary elections and the prevalence of cross-cutting inter-religious coalitions in the elections for local executive posts.

To be sure, Islamic parties like PKS have come to enjoy considerable popularity and influence in certain localities around the country, regional assemblies dominated by Islamist parties have enacted local *shari'a* regulations in a number of localities, and groups like FPI exert more informal forms of influence and intimidation in the name of Islam. Yet the areas – and episodes – of Islamist activism are hardly representative of the broad trends in the vast majority of localities around the vast Indonesian archipelago, with its majority-Muslim population of 225 million people.

Moreover, insofar as the PKS and other Islamic forces have enjoyed some success in local politics in recent years, it is far from clear whether this trend should be viewed narrowly in terms of ‘Islamization’. After all, the basis of PKS local appeal – and the focus of its local campaign energies – has been the struggle against local corruption, as embodied in the realm of machine politics dominated by the two largest ecumenical parties, Golkar and PDIP.<sup>60</sup> In many provinces, moreover, alongside PKS and other Islamic parties, Islamic university student organizations and other Islamic associational networks have provided virtually the only effective counterweight in civil society to the vast patronage resources and regulatory powers of the state.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> J. Vernon Henderson and Ari Kuncoro, “Sick of Local Government Corruption? Vote Islamic,” *NBER Working Paper 12110* (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, March 2006).

At the same time, it seems clear that not all Islamist politics should be taken so seriously in ideological terms: groups like FPI (and their backers and collaborators) have used the threat of violence in the name of Islam for extortionary purposes, and local assemblies' enactment of so-called *shari'a* legislation has likewise served to expand the regulatory powers of the local state, the discretionary privileges of local politicians, and the rent-seeking opportunities of local enforcers. Even in South Sulawesi, where the spread of local *shari'a* regulations appears to be most advanced, knowledgeable observers report that Islamist parties and politicians remain involved in all manner of opportunistic horse-trading and collusion with their non-Islamist counterparts in Golkar and PDIP.<sup>62</sup> Overall, then, fitful – and largely failing – efforts to control the production and circulation of religious knowledge in Indonesia, as elsewhere in Asia, are drawn in diverse directions, with the fragmentation of religious authority and the diversification of religious practices and affiliations accompanying democratization, decentralization, liberalization of public life across the archipelago.

#### 4. Conclusions: Democratizing Religious Knowledge and Power in Asia

Over the course of the past several two decades, countless commentators have treated religious 'resurgence' or 'revival' as a threat to secularism and multi-faith tolerance, with violence in the name of religion first pathologized in terms of 'ethnic conflict' in the 1990s and as 'Islamist terrorism' since September 2001. But such episodes of violence should not blind us to the broadly emancipatory trends

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<sup>61</sup> Elizabeth Fuller Collins, "Islam and the Habits of Democracy: Islamic Organizations in Post-New Order South Sumatra," *Indonesia* 78 (October 2004), pp. 93-120.

<sup>62</sup> Hamdan Juhannis, "The Struggle for Formalist Islam in South Sulawesi: From Darul Islam (DI) to Komite Persiapan Penegakan Syariat Islam" (Ph.D. dissertation, Australian National University, 2006).

observable in religious life throughout much of the world, whose contours have been sketched, however cursorily, with regard to Asia, and in greater depth with regard to the case of Indonesia. Violence has always accompanied democratization in the profane world of politics, and it is unsurprising to find violence alongside what I have called democratization in the realm of religion. Such is the nature of contestation over claims to knowledge and claims to power when it is not fully subordinated to the rules of constitutional democracy.

As argued above, the past two decades have witnessed three broad trends in terms of patterns of control over the production, circulation, and consumption of religious knowledge throughout much of Asia. First of all, the past two decades have seen expanding enjoyment of religious freedoms in Asian contexts where restrictions on religious practice have long been in place, most notably in China and Vietnam. Second, the past two decades have also seen the increasing pluralization of sources of religious authority, sources of knowledge about various faiths and about what it means to be a good Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, or Muslim. Third and finally, the past two decades have witnessed a dramatic expansion in the nature and extent of active participation by Asian believers in the production and reproduction of religious knowledge. In these three senses, then, one can speak of the democratization of religion in Asia, even in the face of continuing authoritarianism and other obstacles to democratization in the realm of profane politics. In all of these senses, the democratization of Islam in Indonesia, the world's most populous majority-Muslim country, is thus well under way, episodes of religious violence notwithstanding.

Beyond these trends, insofar as democratization *has* proceeded in the profane world of politics, the impact on control over religious knowledge has lain in the direction of increasing contestation and popularization. The expanding realm of

electoral politics, by drawing in individuals and institutions in the religious field into competition for electoral offices, has created an alternative basis for the evaluation of claims to religious authority: the popular vote. Here one can see the undeniable, perhaps insurmountable, tension between religious authority and democracy. For the legitimacy of popular sovereignty and the divine commandments of the faith may well be, at some level, ultimately incommensurable and irreconcilable. As the avowedly atheist author Julian Barnes writes:

A common response in surveys of religious attitudes is to say something like, 'I don't go to church, but I have my own personal idea of God.' This kind of statement makes me in turn react like a philosopher. Sappy, I cry. You may have your own personal idea of God, but does God have His own personal idea of you? Because that's what matters. Whether He's an old man with a white beard sitting in the sky, or a life force, or a disinterested prime mover, or a clockmaker, or a woman, or a nebulous moral force, or Nothing At All, what counts is what He, She, It or Nothing thinks of you rather than you of them. The notion of redefining the deity into something that works for you is grotesque. It also doesn't matter whether God is just or benevolent or even observant – of which there seems to be startlingly little proof – only that He exists.<sup>63</sup>

There may be limits to the democratization of religion, but religions still have an important role to play in this-worldly struggles for freedom in Asia and beyond, even if, as the philosopher Charles Taylor has argued, we live in “a Secular Age.”<sup>64</sup> As events on the streets of Rangoon last fall have suggested, the processes of democratic change in the religious realm inevitably spill over into the profane world of politics, despite the assiduous efforts of those in power to master and manipulate religious institutions and symbols in the service of the status quo. In the decades ahead, new forms of religious knowledge will gradually help to create new forms of politics and new constellations of power in Asia as elsewhere in the world.

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<sup>63</sup> Julian Barnes, *Nothing to be Frightened of* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2008), p. 45.

<sup>64</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).