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MUSLIM YOUTH BETWEEN PRAGMATISM, ISLAMIC CONCERN, AND SOCIAL PIETY: The Case of the Da'wah Movement in Solo, Indonesia

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Abstract: During the last couple of years, Gen Z youths born between 1997 and 2010 have been actively involved in various social communities promoting a particular understanding of Islam, such as volunteers, frontline activists, or organizers. This article explores their socio-religious activism in Solo and their understanding of Islam. It delves into religious and social piety in their *da'wah* (proselytization). We found out that the majority of this generation does not understand the meaning of moderate Islam properly. However, their perspectives and attitudes do not oppose differences. Most of them obtain their religious sources from social media and the Internet. Only a few of them, due to their lack of knowledge of Islamic teachings and limited encounters with non-Muslims, have a hateful attitude towards people of other religions. Meanwhile, they have an excessive defense of Islam. This study confirms Pattana Kitiarsa's idea that religion has been commodified as a spiritual market where Muslims can select products symbolically associated with Islam.

Keywords: Islamic concern, social piety, da'wah movement, Muslim youth, Gen Z, Solo
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Introduction

IN THE CONTEXT of social piety, Islam represents a sacred canopy that nourishes communal ties and piety for urban modernist Muslims.[1] The main form of social piety incorporates religious teachings with secular cultural elements to demonstrate their

[1] Peter Berger, *A Far Glory: The Quest of Faith in an Age of Credulity* (New York: Doubleday, 1992).

relevance to modern life.[2] In addition to piety, an Islamic element that is now also clearly visible is *da'wah*. In Indonesia, in particular, its most visible example is the Muslim call for fellow Muslims to become more religious, in which Islam is transformed into part of political expressions, economic activities, and sociocultural practices.[3] However, social piety and *da'wah* activities articulated in the public sphere do not necessarily make Islam a positive force in Indonesia.

This trend happens frequently in the urban context. These urban Muslim groups often display intolerant and radical attitudes in propagating their perspectives on Islam (such as the Islamic populist idea that Muslims should hold public office and that Islamic law should be implemented throughout Indonesia) and antagonizing Muslims and non-Muslims who do not share their views.[4] In some cases, the activities of certain institutions are even suspected of being linked to radicalism and terrorism, such as the activities of the Lembaga Amil Zakat Abdurrohman Bin Auf (LAZ-ABA, Abdurrohman Bin Auf Amil Zakat Institution), which distributed thousands of charity boxes in various minimarkets across Indonesia that were allegedly used for Jamaah Islamiyah terrorist activities, or organizations such as the Islamic Defenders Front that are often involved in activities of radicalism, mass violence, and intolerance.[5]

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[2] Julia Day Howell, "'Calling' and 'Training': Role Innovation and Religious De-Differentation in Indonesian Islam," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 28, no. 3 (2013): 401–19.

[3] Noorhaidi Hasan, "The Making of Public Islam: Piety, Agency, and Commodification on the Landscape of the Indonesian Public Sphere," *Contemporary Islam* 3, no. 3 (2009): 229–50.

[4] Yanwar Pribadi, "Pop and 'True' Islam in Urban Pengajian: The Making of Religious Authority," in *The New Santri: Challenges to Traditional Religious Authority in Indonesia*, ed. Norshahril Saat and Ahmad Najib Burhani (Singapore: ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, 2020), 213–38.

[5] Jajang Jahroni, "Defending the Majesty of Islam: Indonesia's Front Pembela Islam (FPI) 1998-2003," *Studia Islamika* 11, no. 2 (2004): 197–256; Gabriel Facal, "Islamic Defenders Front Militia (Front Pembela Islam) and Its Impact on Growing Religious Intolerance in Indonesia," *TraNS: Trans Regional and National Studies of Southeast Asia* 8, no. 1 (2020): 7–20.

Many Gen Z youths are involved in various institutions or communities that are not in line with Islamic and national values, multiple institutions and communities that do not support inclusive religious values or oppose Pancasila (the official, foundational philosophical theory of Indonesia) principles, be it as volunteers, frontline activists, or event organizers. This is somewhat worrying because these Muslim youths, especially those with higher education, such as university students, are the next generation of the nation who should develop noble socio-religious values that reflect tolerant, pluralist, and moderate behavior. Therefore, this study is critical because we will investigate Gen Z's socio-religious activism in charity organizations and off-campus *da'wah* associations. We will examine their activities in national charity organizations and *da'wah* associations such as Dompet Dhuafa, Lazis Muhammadiyah, Laznas Daarut Tauhid Peduli, Aksi Cepat Tanggap (ACT), and NU CARE-Lazisnu, as well as local-regional institutions such as Sahabat Yatim, Solo Peduli, UPZIS, and LAZ Sukoharjo in Solo.

In the context of a wider Muslim world, we are aware that urban Muslims are often preoccupied with searching for their worlds that tend to be religious and that provide them with moral order and spiritual protection. In the words of Peter Berger,[6] Such worlds are referred to as sacred canopies. For urban Muslims, Islam symbolizes the various sacred canopies that nourish social ties and piety and apply morally sacred injunctions to cosmological, worldly, and everyday activities. We are now finally getting used to seeing how religious Muslim societies seek to negotiate with the secular elements of worldly life. Furthermore, developing forms of piety with a social character seems to align with individual freedom and democracy and detached from traditional religious moorings. Islam presents itself in a sophisticated and fresh way, making it an attractive option for urban culture. A personalized sense of Islam has emerged from

[6] Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Social Theory of Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 1967).

this context and allows one to demonstrate one's religious identity. Such an Islamic model provides a challenge and an opportunity to rethink the established boundaries between private and public spaces.[7]

After the 1998 socio-political reform, Indonesia has witnessed the growth of middle-class Muslim groups, and they, in turn, have contributed to the rise of Islamic commercialism and consumerism. Services and goods production using Islamic labels have mushroomed due to high demand, resulting in the image of Indonesia as one of the Muslim countries with intense forms of Islamic commodification. At the same time, Indonesia has also witnessed the rise of new Islamic groups that demonstrate strengthened social piety. Both social piety and religious commodification are evident characteristics of pop Islamic culture, the fusion of Islamic faith with pop culture.

In addition, James Bourk Hoesterey points out that consuming products considered Islamic has become increasingly important as urban middle-class groups constantly search for meaning and express their piety.[8] Hoesterey indicates that the pop Islam phenomenon in Indonesia includes products such as Islamic-themed novels and movies and Islamic fashion. There are also public influencers such as Muslim sexologists, celebrity preachers, and spiritual coaches. Meanwhile, Ariel Heryanto argues that the current development of pop Islamic culture in Indonesia is an extension of the success of political Islam in the post-New Order era.[9] In addition, the development of pop Islam has been facilitated by new communication technologies, such as radio, television, print media, and the Internet. The impact of media industrialization on religious expression in Indonesia is substantial. There is an intersection between commercial activity

[7] Hasan, "The Making of Public Islam: Piety, Agency, and Commodification on the Landscape of the Indonesian Public Sphere."

[8] James B. Hoesterey, "Prophetic Cosmopolitanism: Islam, Pop Psychology, and Civic Virtue in Indonesia," *City & Society* 24, no. 1 (2012): 38–61.

[9] Ariel Heryanto, "Upgraded Piety and Pleasure: In The New Middle Class and Islam in Indonesian Popular Culture," in *Islam and Popular Culture in Indonesia and Malaysia*, ed. Andrew N. Weintraub (London: Routledge, 2011), 61.

and Islamic expression in narratives that use Islamic teachings to address social problems experienced by urban middle-class Muslims. Today in Indonesia, Muslims have contributed to the increasing consumption of religious goods: services, cosmetics, beauty treatments, clothing, spiritual travel, and food. In the post-New Order era, the religious market influenced society and created a considerable impact and high demand. In short, the essential socio-political changes after 1998 have contributed to the growth of the Muslim middle class, social piety, and the commodification of Islam.

This article focuses on the socio-religious activism of Gen Z youths in Solo. Specifically, this study explored the aspects of social piety and *da'wah* contained in the activism. In this study, university students represented these youths, while their activism was carried out in out-of-campus socio-religious institutions, such as Islamic charity organizations and *da'wah* communities. Solo was chosen because it is characterized as a microcosm of Indonesia that can summarize the broader development of Islam even though it has a smaller scope. The study focused on students who act as volunteers, frontline activists, or organizers in these institutions. Students were chosen because they are the young generation that is the driving force in determining the direction of inclusive religious values in Indonesia.

This article is based on field research with a qualitative design involving ethnographic techniques in data search. This research belongs to the sociology-anthropology of religion because it understands sociocultural symptoms and religious developments in specific communities. This design could provide a richer and deeper picture, especially to explain how and why Gen Z students can build connectivity with Islamic activities outside the campus. This design also allowed researchers to be more flexible in exploring data, documents, and in-depth interviews about the object of research. The data were obtained from sources of social and religious activists in Solo by snowballing. In this technique, the first step was to determine informants who met the criteria. Then, the informant appointed several people who deserved to be the next. This continued until the required number of informants

was considered sufficient. This article answers how the socio-religious activism of Gen Z youths in Solo, what social piety and *da'wah* forms these Muslim youths do, and the relationship between their socio-religious activism and religious piety.

We found that the informants might not understand what inclusive religious values mean. However, their perspectives and attitudes show that they can accept differences. Most of them get their religious resources from social media and the Internet. Only a few of them, due to their lack of knowledge of Islamic teachings and limited encounters with non-Muslims, have a hateful attitude toward people of other religions or an excessive defense of Islam. Such views do not affect the way they dress. Some wear the veil and long hijab, but that does not mean they have an exclusive way of thinking. In Solo, students' involvement in socio-religious movements is influenced by three factors, namely pragmatic interests, the urge to do more for Islam and the Islamic organizations they join, and the interest to hone their existence more broadly to help others who are in need.

A Glimpse of *Da'wah* Activism and Piety

Piety, unlike other religious traditions, for example, within the tradition of Christian Puritanism in Britain, refers to an inner spiritual state. The Arabic term *taqwā,* which can be translated as piety, indicates an inner orientation or disposition and a practical mode of behavior in Islamic teachings.[10] According to Saba Mahmood, three essential elements comprise the global Islamic revival: political groups and parties with state-forming goals, militant Islamists, and networks of socio-religious non-profit organizations providing charitable services and preaching. Mahmood refers to the latter element as the *da'wah* movement or piety movement.[11] A piety movement has a social character if it involves pious activities practiced jointly by diverse groups in society. Islamic charity organizations and dawah associations are

[10] Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 4.

[11] Mahmood, 3.

part of the global Islamic revival, and therefore, studying them in the Indonesian context is of substantial significance.

In the Indonesian context, Greg Fealy and Sally White show that everyday Islamic practices in Indonesia include individual expressions of piety, political, social, and legal expressions of Islam, and markets.[12] In discussing individual expressions of Islamic piety, a new way of expressing Islam tends to be more economically oriented as it relates to the meaning of the new Islamic tradition in terms of consumerism and technology.

Islam seems to have transformed into pop, chic, young, and cool among urban middle-class Muslims. In Indonesia, religiosity, which has been taking shape since the 1980s, gradually became an essential factor in the overt political stance against Suharto's rule and a proud symbol of religious identity politics after the collapse of the authoritarian regime. As Hoesterey and Clark argue, popular culture has become an essential arena in Indonesia, where Muslims construct notions of Islam and piety.[13] Elsewhere, the rise of pop Islam has provided Muslims with a vital platform to negotiate traditional gender roles, build social capital, and acquire the participatory skills necessary to bring civil society into their communities.

Pattana Kitiarsa points out that commodification helps redefine religion as a market commodity and exchange in spiritual markets that are increasingly expanded by the network connections of transnational religious organizations and markets.[14] The market for religious and spiritual renewal products has become diverse. On the one hand, many Muslims eagerly choose

[12] Greg Fealy and Sally White, eds., *Expressing Islam: Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2008).

[13] James B. Hoesterey and Marshall Clark, "Film Islami: Gender, Piety and Pop Culture in Post-Authoritarian Indonesia," *Asian Studies Review* 36, no. 2 (2012): 207–26. See also Lukis Alam et al., "The Rise of the Urban Piety Movement: Jamaah Maiyah as an Urban Spiritualism and Emerging Religiosity in the Public Sphere," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 10, no. 3 (September 30, 2022): 745–62, https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v10i3.711.

[14] Pattana Kitiarsa, "Introduction: Asia's Commodified Sacred Canopies," in *Religious Commodification in Asia: Marketing Gods*, ed. Pattana Kitiarsa (London and New York: Routledge, 2008).

products symbolically associated with Islam in their preference for non-religious goods. On the other hand, some of the most commercially successful piety promotion programs combine religious teachings and secular cultural elements to enhance their appeal and demonstrate their relevance to modern life.

As Rachel Rinaldo argues, new ideas about Islam revolve around piety.[15] While Indonesian Muslims, like other Muslims in many countries, are often more relaxed in their religious practices, these ideas emphasize that being a real Muslim means practicing religion through adherence to certain religious norms. Rinaldo argues that since the late 1980s, many Indonesian Muslims have practiced Islamic teachings more carefully, an essential process for becoming a good Muslim. Many of the new ideas about Muslim piety concern issues previously neglected, such as the issue of women. There are many calls for Muslim women to wear appropriate Muslim clothing and to behave modestly. However, such problems also seem to have become the focus of new religious movements, i.e., advocates of re-Islamization or advocates of Islamic populism and Islamism.

Daʿwa often refers to the principle of *al-amr bi al-maʾrūf wa al-nahy ʿan al-munkar*, an Arabic phrase containing the command to uphold the right path and forbid the wrong. The phrase is considered to have a very significant role in *daʿwah* activities. In general, while it can be directed at non-Muslims, today in the Muslim world, *daʿwah* is mainly directed at Muslims themselves, especially encouraging them to practice piety and worship. Such *daʿwah* activities include establishing mosques, charity organizations, and Islamic educational institutions and encouraging fellow Muslims to take on greater religious responsibilities. Many of today's *daʿwah* activities are increasingly closely linked to the ethos of contemporary Islamic revivalism, and people who undertake *daʿwah* activities are now often regarded as

[15] Rachel Rinaldo, "Muslim Women, Middle Class Habitus, and Modernity in Indonesia," *Contemporary Islam* 2, no. 1 (2008): 23–39, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-007-0035-6.

having the same level of authority previously reserved for the ulama.[16]

The new path of *da'wah* began to change when da'wah was democratiz*ed* in the early 20th century, which was marked by a more open *da'wah* dynamic. At that time, an opinion emerged that, at first, scholars only understood da'wah as an activity. However, reformist thinkers slowly began to claim that *da'wah* is the obligation of every Muslim, which in turn opened the way for every Muslim without a strong religious educational background to engage in intensive *da'wah* activities. This change is often referred to as the democratization of *da'wah*, which ultimately opens the way for Muslim women to be involved.[17]

In the Indonesian context, *da'wah* has become a rapidly growing activity in the contemporary Islamic landscape to maintain the position of traditional Islam. The purpose of *da'wah* in this context is to promote the traditionalist version of Sunni Islam and ward off puritanical-conservative groups. In this case, the emergence of traditionalist *da'wah* is a response to the expansion of global Islamic movements such as Salafi-Wahhabi and Hizbut Tahrir, whose organizations in Indonesia were disbanded by the government in 2017. Some traditionalist preachers and activists have worked together to emphasize the existence of Sunni Islam or Aswaja (*ahl sunna wa al-jamā'a*). They seek to highlight their significance while at the same time issuing anti-Wahhabism messages through various media.[18]

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[16] Yvonne Haddad, John Voll, and John Esposito, eds., *The Contemporary Islamic Revival: A Critical Survey and Bibliography* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991); Patrick Gaffney, "The Changing Voices of Islam: The Emergence of Professional Preachers in Contemporary Egypt," *Muslim World* 81, no. 1 (1991): 27–47.

[17] Euis Nurlaelawati, "Muslim Female Authorities in Indonesia: Conservatism and Legal Notion of Women Preachers on Familial Issues," in *The New Santri: Challenges to Traditional Religious Authority in Indonesia*, ed. Norshahril Saat and Ahmad Najib Burhani (Singapore: ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, 2020), 83–104.

[18] Syamsul Rijal, "Opposing Wahhabism: The Emergence of Ultra-Traditionalism in Contemporary Indonesia," in *The New Santri: Challenges to*

In the big map of the *da'wah* world in Indonesia, we can see many urban residents living in middle-class housing complexes that support the work of modern preachers, often called *ustadz*, and many residents in suburban as well as rural areas who favor the *da'wah* style of traditional preachers usually consisting of kyais. Meanwhile, most urban residents in non-middle-class housing complexes and urban settlements (*kampong*s in the middle of the city) have no particular preference in terms of worship and Islamic sects. These nebulous areas have become open terrain for active and aggressive preachers and their followers to 'convert' people with their mission of evangelicalism. This has created an awkward situation, as most people who do not have an adequate religious education background are now in an indecisive state where they often try to decide who and what to follow as they are generally in a constant search for the correct Islamic principles and practices.[19]

While various modern media are rapidly emerging and influencing people's daily lives, the impact of media industrialization on religious expressions such as *da'wah* is enormous. There is an intersection between consumerism and Islamic expression in narratives that use Islamic teachings to address social problems experienced by Muslims. This, in turn, projects an image of Indonesian Islam that obscures the political divisions that exist in society.[20] Piety is closely related to *da'wah* as both reflect the global Islamic revival in recent decades.

The emergence of popular preachers in the real and virtual worlds, such as Abdul Somad, Adi Hidayat, Khalid Basalamah, and Felix Siauw, not only signifies a change in the pattern of religious authority from a traditional pattern to one that is more indicative of public religiosity but also demonstrates the experimental use of new media as a successful proselytization

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Traditional Religious Authority in Indonesia, ed. Norshahril Saat and Ahmad Najib Burhani (Singapore: ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, 2020), 151–76.

[19] Yanwar Pribadi, "Komodifikasi Islam Dalam Ekonomi Pasar: Studi Tentang Muslim Perkotaan Di Banten," *Afkārunā* 15, no. 1 (2019): 82–112.

[20] Inaya Rakhmani, "The Commercialization of Da'wah: Understanding Indonesian Sinetron and Their Portrayal of Islam," *The International Communication Gazette* 76, no. 4–5 (2014): 340–59.

tool.[21] The use of new media also paved the way for opportunities for female Muslim religious intellectuals who were considered secular, such as Siti Musdah Mulia and Siti Ruhaini Dzuhayatin, to give voice to popular Islamic discourse that men previously dominated.[22] At the same time, female preachers such as Mamah Dedeh and Oki Setiana Dewi began to receive full attention when they used new media to preach.[23] These popular preachers, both male and female, emerged quickly when some Indonesian Muslims began to Islamize their attitudes and behaviors in their daily lives. This is in line with the liberalization of media ownership, which leads to freedom and a lack of control from the government. Furthermore, media owners also provide excellent opportunities for sponsors to gain massive profits by presenting programs that attract many people, such as *da'wah* programs and Islamic soap operas.[24]

Social media, such as Instagram, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, and WhatsApp, play a significant role in creating obedience to Islamic teachings and worship. Instagram, for example, provides opportunities for certain people and groups to upload posts and captions that greatly influence how young Indonesian Muslims worship, emphasize piety, and prioritize their life goals, both in this world and the hereafter. Eva F. Nisa cites Instagram as a key platform for young Muslim women to educate each other to become pious Muslims.[25] In her other work, Nisa looks at the use of social media in *da'wah*, focusing on the One Day One Juz (ODOZ) program that encourages Muslims to revive the

[21] Norshahril Saat and Ahmad Najib Burhani, eds., "Introduction," in *The New Santri: Challenges to Traditional Religious Authority in Indonesia* (Singapore: ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, 2020), 1–10.

[22] Nor Ismah, "Destabilising Male Domination: Building Community-Based Authority among Indonesian Female Ulama," *Asian Studies Review* 40, no. 4 (2016): 491–509.

[23] Nurlaelawati, "Muslim Female Authorities in Indonesia: Conservatism and Legal Notion of Women Preachers on Familial Issues."

[24] Nurlaelawati.

[25] Eva F. Nisa, "Creative and Lucrative Dawa: The Visual Culture of Instagram amongst Female Muslim Youth in Indonesia," *Asiascape: Digital Asia* 5, no. 1–2 (2018): 68–89, https://doi.org/10.1163/22142312-12340085.

spirit of reading the Qur'an through the WhatsApp application. She argues that ODOJ has brought a new color to the contemporary Islamic public sphere and contributed to understanding the transformation of the religious mediascape in Indonesia.[26]

In this context, we can see that there has been a fragmentation of Indonesian Muslims where traditionalists and puritan-conservative groups try to block each other's progress through their massive *da'wah* activities using various media, including print media (which is almost abandoned), electronic media (which is losing its existence), and social media (which is gaining significant influence). However, behind the fragmentation of the ummah, it turns out that the relationship between the two is very complex because there is a fluctuating interaction between local Islamic expressions and foreign influences, especially the Salafism-Wahhabism movement from Saudi Arabia and the Tarbiyah movement from Egypt. What we can observe is the strong influence of urban puritan-conservative Muslim groups as they control access to popular public spaces, such as the use of various media, as mentioned above.

These groups are more dynamic and tend to be able to adopt transnational Islamic ideas. At the same time, they are also more exclusive and strongly resist the influence of traditionalist Islamic expressions. In general, the competition between the two groups is apparent in their *da'wah* activities, namely activities that seek to invite people to Islam in their way.[27]

Islam in Solo after the *Reformasi* Era

The proliferation of Salafi-oriented sects in the post-Suharto era was one of the factors in the growth of Islamic activism in

[26] Eva F. Nisa, "Social Media and the Birth of an Islamic Social Movement: ODOJ (One Day One Juz) in Contemporary Indonesia," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 46, no. 134 (2018): 24–43.

[27] Pribadi, "Pop and 'True' Islam in Urban Pengajian: The Making of Religious Authority."

Surakarta.[28] However, it should be noted that this activism did not appear in a singular form because the Salafi groups also received intense challenges from the community. Several social *da'wah* institutions carry moderate ideologies. From here, fragmentation of religious authority emerges. In addition, these philanthropic *da'wah* institutions have close ties with several students, both active in campus *da'wah* institutions and those not. Apart from studying, these students spend their time actively in these organizations.

The revitalization of the Islamic movement has become a fertile ground for the growth of Islamic movements with various ideological orientations, both moderate ones such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Nahdlatul Wathon, Muhammadiyah, Al-Irsyad, and Persatuan Islam (Persis), as well as movements with Islamist characteristics.[29] The moderate character of the Islamic movement, in general, is more able to accept the principles of democracy as a prerequisite for a modern nation-state. In contrast, the Islamists continue to question this view critically. They reject government systems from outside Islamic teachings and human legal products. This rejection is based on the view that Islam has provided all the rules needed to organize life, including political issues.[30]

The development of various Islamist organizations is directly proportional to the presence of Islamist media. The term Islamist media refers to media with an Islamist ideology, whether Salafi, Tarbawi, Tahriri, or Jihādi. In addition, Islamist media develop a discourse on the need to correct and replace the existing government system with an Islamic caliphate, as well as the importance of upholding Islamic Sharia.[31] This ideological view leads to the idea that Islamic Sharia should be the primary choice, even the only choice, in managing the life of the state and country.

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[28] Dony Arung Triantoro, "Ekspresi Identitas Anak Muda Muslim Dan Dakwah Di Indonesia Pasca Orde Baru," *Idarotuna* 3, no. 1 (2020): 84–98.

[29] Zuly Qodir, *Gerakan Sosial Islam: Manifesto Kaum Beriman* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2009).

[30] Afadlal, *Islam Dan Radikalisme Di Indonesia* (Jakarta: LIPI Press, 2005).

[31] Ridwan al- Makassary et al., *Benih-Benih Islam Radikal Di Masjid: Studi Kasus Jakarta Dan Surakarta* (Jakarta: CSRC UIN Jakarta, 2010).

This Islamist media also actively displays various issues that show affirmation of systems and policies that are considered based on Islam.

Referring to research conducted by Anas Aijudin, in the context of Surakarta, Islamist media grew and played a significant role in the expansion of Islamic public ideas.[32] This Islamist media acts as an agent that articulates the interests of political Islam in the changing socio-political dynamics. This Islamist media style grows, develops, and networks in mosques, *pesantren*, educational institutions, campuses, religious gatherings, and religious organizations. Islamic identity is slowly constructed and gains social legitimacy, which can create social reality. Islamist media works to build opinions, exert pressure, oppose, and respond to the various interests of Muslims at large.

The return of Salafis to the religious social space does not occur among Jihadists, who are increasingly entering the realm of ideological and political contestation. Muhammad Wildan mapped the network of this boarding school with other Islamic boarding schools with the same ideological character, one of which is Daarusy Syahadah Islamic Boarding School (Boyolali).[33] This ideological network then develops through more formal cooperation such as educational networks, teacher exchanges, *santri* internships, and distribution of *pesantren* teachers. Wildan's study gets a reinforcing base by reading a study conducted by Solahudin.[34] This explains that the *jihād* ideology developed by Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, who is also the founder of the Al-Mukmin Ngruki Islamic Boarding School,

[32] Anas Aijudin, "Media Islamis Di Surakarta: Struktur Kesempatan Politik, Mobilisasi Sumber Daya, Dan Strategi Pembingkaian" (UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2019).

[33] Muhammad Wildan, "The Nature of Radical Islamic Groups in Solo," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 7, no. 1 (2013): 49–70. For a comparative perspective with other cities, see, for example, Khotimah Khotimah and Imron Rosidi, "Negotiating Piety and Radicalism: A Study Among Muslim Youth in Pekanbaru, Indonesia," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 8, no. 3 (September 30, 2020): 633–48, https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v8i3.377.

[34] Solahudin, *NII Sampai JI: Salafi Jihadisme Di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Komunitas Bambu, 2011).

succeeded in becoming an opposition movement to the government with high militancy through Jama'ah Islamiyah (JI).

Pragmatic Interests as an Underlying Factor

Gen Z's motivations for joining social activism and *the da'wah* movement are diverse. Based on interviews with Gen Z students, some rely on pragmatic reasons, namely motivation for scholarships. This happened, for example, to Alfina (a pseudonym), a student in the D3 Informatics System program at STMIK Sinar Nusantara. She is an activist in the Solo Peduli organization. Solo Peduli provides students with scholarships and dormitory accommodation to attract students to join. Solo Peduli is an Islamic philanthropy organization established on October 11, 1999. The organization was present to respond to the monetary crisis that occurred in Indonesia in 1998. The financial crisis caused economic deterioration, layoffs, unemployment, and an increasing poverty rate. In 2016, Solo Peduli was officially confirmed as Amil Zakat Institution on the scale of Central Java Province.[35] One of the founders of Solo Peduli is Erie Sudewo, the founder of Dompet Dhuafa.

Alfina's view on Islam can be deemed moderate. She argues that Islam should not be the state ideology because of the many recognized religions in Indonesia. If Islam becomes an ideology, it will have unfavorable implications for the harmony of social life. She argues that implementing Islamic law in Indonesia is necessary and challenging. She does not want to return to the past, where there was a proposal for Article 29 of the Indonesian Constitution to include the obligation to implement Sharia for the Muslim population.

Indeed, some socio-religious organizations have used scholarships to gather volunteers. They reveal that–scholarship is an important thing that all students want to gain. This strategy works. A UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta student, Agung Janus, also joined Darut Tauhid Peduli Solo because he received a scholarship from that organization. Agung is religiously affiliated

[35] https://solopeduli.com/tentang-kami.html

with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). His life experience of being an NU person does not limit his intention to know other models of Islam. As a young person, he wants to show his identity and that he can do more. He can influence others and lead organizations. He is aware of his abilities. He puts forward that contesting in NU-affiliated student organizations is tricky because there will be a lot of competition. Therefore, he took advantage of the opportunity by being active in the campus-based *da'wah* organization, UKMI, followed by students who are oriented towards the *tarbiya* movement and, politically, have a tendency towards the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS).

In addition to Agung, Avicena, a student at UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta, was also driven by a scholarship factor when deciding to join the Abata Movement organization in Solo. Avicena is a student who does not have a strong Islamic background. Ideologically, his religious understanding and practices more likely follow Muhammadiyah. Abata Movement in Solo is a branch of the central Abata Movement, whose office is located in Semarang. Abata Movement is an Islamic philanthropic organization whose activities are primarily in children's education. Its slogan is "Raising a Quranic Generation for the Country." Providing scholarships is one of Abata Movement's flagship programs.

This organization is run by young people whose average age is between 25 and 30 years. Female activists in Abata Movement generally wear extensive headscarves, popularly called *syar'i* headscarves, which cover the head to the chest. Syarief Husyein calls this hijab *jilboob*. The term *jilboob* is a combination of two words, namely *jil* (*jilbab*) and *boob* (breast). Users of this jilbab are called *jilboobers*. According to Husyein, *jilboobers* believe that they are trying to present God in their activities. In the Indonesian context, the relevance of *jilbab* is never separated from the political situation. *Jilboobers* introduce a new view of *jilbab* as not conservative but modern.[36] *Jilboob* is an expression of religious

[36] Syarief Husyein, "Antropologi Jilboob: Politik Identitas, Life Style, Dan Syari'ah," *In Right: Jurnal Agama Dan Hak Azazi Manusia*, 2015, 317–40.

piety combined with a physically attractive appearance, although it has a negative connotation according to the Indonesian public.[37]

The need for a fashionable hijab trend is increasing along with the development of globalization. From this process, its trademark was born by many people and is called identity politics. Berger and Huntington call such phenomena a form of global pop culture and popular religion. According to Noorhaidi Hasan,[38] confirming Asef Bayat,[39] this phenomenon is a form of post-Islamism, which attempts to present religious symbols in social, political, and economic relations. In this situation, the justification of permissible or impermissible related to this fashion model becomes blurred.

The youth's socio-religious aspirations indicate a high sense of pragmatism. When beneficial opportunities knock, they do not waste them, although they risk their 'innocent' position within their family or peer groups. Their pragmatism also shows their ability as individuals to place themselves in the eyes of their family or peer groups. All the above examples indicate that these youths are pragmatic individuals. However, their supposed pragmatic attitudes would not last very long if a strong sense of their identity did not sustain them. These youths are the young generations who also have reinforced their unique identity by actively getting involved in *the da'wah* movement that, in turn, will push their counter-culture vis-à-vis the older generation's culture, which is now still very influential in Indonesian society. In addition, their search for scholarship highlights their aspirations towards social mobility and networking for their future. These youths are agents of their own lives who can direct their own lives.

"I Want to Do More for Islam and Islamic Organization"

Gen Z's religious and social activism is driven by their commitment to serve in the Islamic community organizations they

[37] Pinta Karana, "Kontroversi Di Seputar 'Jilboob,'" *BBC News Indonesia*, August 15, 2014.

[38] Noorhaidi Hasan, "Piety, Politics, and Post-Islamism: Dhikr Akbar in Indonesia," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 50, no. 2 (2012): 369–90.

[39] Asef Bayat, "Post-Islamism at Large," in *Post-Islamism: The Changing Faces of Political Islam*, ed. Asef Bayat (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1–28.

join. For example, students with a spiritual orientation following the Muhammadiyah way are active in Muhammadiyah-based organizations, as are those active in NU. An exciting experience happened to Natana Christian, a student of Mechanical Engineering at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta. She chose to be active in Muhammadiyah's zakat organization, Lazis Muhammadiyah. Natana has an exciting experience to discuss. Little Natana is a Christian. She was born into a family with parents of different religions. Her father is a Christian, and her mother is a Muslim. From childhood until grade 5, she was Christian and became Muslim. Initially, she attended a Christian primary school, but when she entered grade 6, she moved to an Islamic primary school. Her father was a church activist, while her mother was active in Islamic religious activities in the village, such as Muslimat NU. Her father married her mother in an Islamic way using an Islamic identity on the ID card. This method is quite common for couples of different religions. One of them converts to their partner's religion to get married. The Marriage Law in Indonesia does not have clear rules regarding interfaith marriages.

Natana's experience is similar to that of Nina Anin Diawati, a student of Sharia Economic Law at UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta. She is active in UPZ LAZISNU in Gemolong, Sragen. This institution is local, only at the village level. This zakat institution is affiliated with NU. Nina is an NU activist in her village. UPZ LAZISNU works in the community by collecting small coins and leftovers from shopping. The money is collected in a coin box and then collected monthly by volunteers. Initially, Nina's mother carried out this activity by going from one house to another. Seeing her mother's experience, Nina was interested in directly getting involved. She decided to help UPZ LAZISNU to gain knowledge related to zakat management. In addition to daily coins, there is also an annual alms from this coin box, which is held during Ramadan. Nina feels pride when the collected coins are distributed to people experiencing poverty around her. For her, the experience of being an NU member significantly values her life. Since 2019, she has explored NU through IPPNU. Before joining IPPNU, Nina actively participated in activities organized

by NU branches at the village level, such as recitation of the Qur'an, *mujahadah,* and saint pilgrimage. She did that because she wanted to do more for Islam.

The above narratives have aligned with how global Islamic revival in the last several decades has fragmented the traditional forms of religious authority, generated new figures of public piety, and created new public spaces in which Islamic teachings are constituted and contested.[40] This has become an underlying reason why Muslims across the globe are attracted to worldwide religious issues. An advanced level of education and the rise of new communication media have also contributed to the emergence of a public sphere, whereby many people, including the youth, have an opinion on political and religious issues. It results in a challenge to authoritarianism, a fragmented religious and political authority, and an increasingly open discussion of topics related to the "common good" in Islam.[41] In our case, how these youths have attempted to do more for Islam indicates that the discussion on the "common good" in Islam is part of their concern for a better world.

Helping Other People: Social Piety?

Another experience shows that helping fellow Muslims firmly explains their choice to join philanthropic organizations. This notion is synonymous with all humans being members of the same community. As with their religious views, they tend to see Islam as a single entity that has the noble goal of providing mercy (compassion) for humanity. They have never been educated in a specialized Islamic educational institution, such as a *pesantren*, with a mainstream religious curriculum. They do not have teachers with a particular classification to study Islam. They get their religious lessons from social media like YouTube or Instagram. They often listen to video recordings of lectures from popular preachers, such as Adi Hidayat, Hanan Ataki, and Handy

[40] Hoesterey, "Prophetic Cosmopolitanism: Islam, Pop Psychology, and Civic Virtue in Indonesia."

[41] Armando Salvatore and Dale Eickelman, "Preface: Pubic Islam and the Common Good," in *Public Islam and the Common Good*, ed. Armando Salvatore and Dale Eickelman (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004), xi–xxv.

Bony. However, it is difficult to claim that they have a conservative ideology, such as defending the enforcement of Islamic Sharia in Indonesia. The choice of *da'wah* material is only placed as material to improve morality.

Alif Rahman is an Islamic Education study program student at UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta. He is active in the Baitul Mal Hidayatullah institution. Hidayatullah is an Islamic mass organization formed in East Kalimantan on February 5, 1973. This organization has branches spread throughout Indonesia. By joining Baitul Mal Hidayatullah, Alif has no motive except to hone his social spirit. He admitted that he had not been active in the organization for long. To be active in BM Hidayatullah, he had to go through several stages. First, he must be trained to hone his ability to communicate with the community and find donors. He was able to pass this stage well. After that, he officially joined BM Hidayatullah. He wanted to gain experience and improve his skills. In addition, he also hopes that his activity in BM Hidayatullah can provide new insights into zakat management.

Doing good, according to Alif, can be categorized as *jihād*. According to him, *jihād* is an act to defend the religion of Allah to gain His pleasure. But *jihād* can be done in many ways. *Jihād* can be in the form of thought or knowledge. *Jihād* of thought, for example, is carried out by creating Islamic content. The scientific *jihād* is carried out by making posts on social media. He said: "If we have videos about Islam, we just need to share them. These activities are all manifestations of *jihād*."

Apriska Trifiana Rusadi showed the most unique religious experience. Apriska joined an internal campus organization, the Islamic Student Activity Unit or UKMI Nurul Ilmi. UKMI is a campus organization affiliated with Islam with a style close to the Tarbiyah group. She is a student in the History of Islamic Civilization study program at UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta. In appearance, Apriska has worn the veil since the second semester. She had a bad experience with the veil. Apriska's friend, a UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta student, was persecuted and shunned by her friends. Apriska's decision to wear the veil was not easy since she received strong opposition from her mother. Her mother

asked about the religious foundation that ordered her to wear the veil and how it affected her social interactions. However, her first sister was very supportive because she had used the veil before. The second sister thought more broadly and tried to be wise. She let Apriska make her choice as long as she was willing to be responsible for the consequences of that choice. Her father also supported Apriska's decision even though he did not understand the position of the veil in Islam. With the veil, her father feels safer.

Out of all the interviewees in this study, it is perhaps Apriska who has the most ideological and highly selective view of Islam. For example, when she buys food, she has to ensure the seller is Muslim. If they are not Muslim, she chooses to cancel even if she only buys boiled noodles, let alone meat. She worries if the meat is slaughtered without mentioning the name of Allah. Even if the food has no halal label, she knows the owner is Muslim. When asked about Salafism, she argues that Salafism was a movement in the past that followed the path of the Prophet. The movement aims to restore and purify Islam's teachings, which, for him, is very important. Likewise, about *jihād*, she believes *jihād* is any effort made in the way of Allah by sacrificing everything owned for Allah. Apriska interprets piety only as a form of obedience to Allah's commands and avoiding all of Allah's prohibitions. Behind her fanatical attitude toward Islam, Apriska is a person with the character and interests of a typical teenager. Apriska likes listening to music of various genres, as well as watching Korean dramas. She also often goes out at night with her friends.

The youth in our discussion have shown that piety, especially communal piety, is one of the phenomena of modern human religiosity, which is a rapid process in both the West and the East.[42] According to Michael Dickhardt, the rapid modernization of many Asian societies has not diminished the role of religious practices and beliefs. On the contrary, modernization has encouraged the revitalization of various forms of religion and the

[42] Florian Pohl, "Islamic Education and Civil Society: Reflections on the Pesantren Tradition in Contemporary Indonesia," *Comparative Education Review* 50, no. 3 (2006): 389–409.

emergence of new forms of religiosity.[43] In short, acts of piety are more than just expressions of outward identity; they are the means that are necessary for developing a pious habitus. As a result, the quest for piety has subjected these youths to a contradictory set of identities and demands, the negotiations of which often require the search for justified grounds to balance religious and personal aspirations.[44]

Conclusion

This article looks at the socio-religious activism by Muslim youths and explores the aspects of religious and social piety within their *da'wah* activities. These youths are university students. Three factors influence students' involvement in socio-religious movements. The first is pragmatic interests, namely scholarship. Philanthropic da'wah organizations use the strategy of providing scholarships to recruit new members or volunteers. The second reason is Islamic concern. These students want to do more for Islam and the Islamic organizations they join. Their activities in organizations are a form of self-actualization that they do as a form of sacrifice. The third motivation is social piety. Most of these youths do *da'wah* activism to hone their existence more broadly to help others. They gain this spirit from association and interaction with religious discourse from various sources, primarily social media and the Internet.

They translate this socio-religious activism through activities in philanthropic organizations. They argue that the religious activities carried out must be tangible and have a real impact on society. They know the institution through various methods, including being introduced by friends, promoting scholarships, and explaining the work programs; regarding the relationship

[43] Michael Dickhardt, "Religion, Place and Modernity in Southeast and East Asia: Reflections on the Spatial Articulation of Religion with Modernity," in *Religion, Place and Modernity: Spatial Articulations in Southeast Asia and East Asia*, ed. Michael Dickhardt and Andrea Lauser (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016), 1–36.

[44] Joy Kooi-Chin Chin Tong and Bryan S. Turner, "Women, Piety and Practice: A Study of Women and Religious Practice in Malaysia," *Contemporary Islam* 2, no. 1 (March 2008): 41–59.

between Gen Z's socio-religious activism and moderate Islam and the extent to which the two influence each other, we found that by being actively involved in philanthropic institutions, for example, they can recognize differences and how to negotiate their interests with others.

Conceptually, they may not understand what moderate Islam means. However, their perspectives and attitudes show they do not resist differences. There are only a few of them who, because of their narrow understanding of Islam, have a hateful attitude towards followers of other religions or an excessive defense of Islam. Such views do not affect the way they dress. Some of them wear the veil and long hijab, but that does not mean they have an exclusive way of thinking. They also enjoy engaging in worldly activities, such as adventure, watching Korean drama movies, listening to Korean pop music, and chatting with their friends at the cafe. They do not feel it is enough to have individual piety between themselves and God. Instead, they are moved to develop social piety by participating in social-religious activism. This study confirms what Pattana Kitiarsa has pointed out: that religion has been commodified as a spiritual market where Muslims can select products symbolically associated with Islam.[45]

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[45] Kitiarsa, "Introduction: Asia's Commodified Sacred Canopies."

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