

The Personal is Political: Gendered Morality in Indonesia's Halal Consumerism

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Abstract

Recent scholarship on the shift to the right in Asian democracies has predominantly been focused on political organisations, leaving social movements outside of them largely understudied. This article brings forth the link between the rise of right-wing politics in Indonesia—often associated with Islamic populist narratives—and the role of the market. It studies the way halal consumerism has helped shape the narrative of the ummah, an idea that was mobilised during the largest religiously-driven demonstration in the capital city Jakarta on 2 December 2016. By explicating the melding of Islamic piety and consumerism, this study illustrates how halal consumerism aid middle-class Muslims in navigating the neo-liberal social world they live in. The article uses survey data to explore the social status and religious views of participants in the mass rally, and delves deeper through interviews with urban, middle-class female Muslims who envision a cross-class ummah that defends Islam against an imagined oppressor. This paper discusses their role in social process related to politico-religious conservatism, specifically in defending the ideal marriage and family through market mechanisms. Through this analysis, I find that the combination of Islamic morality and neo-liberal values politicises the domestic and traditional role of the female Muslim; this has contributed to social changes that hinder democratic developments.

KEYWORDS: Neo-liberalism, Islamic politics, Muslim middle class, halal consumerism, gendered morality, Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

RECENT SCHOLARSHIP HAS RECOGNISED the rise of morally-conservative, right-wing politics in Asian democracies (Bobbio 2012; Chacko and Jayasuriya 2018; Chakravartty and Roy 2015; Hadiz 2016, 2018; Hadiz and Teik 2011; Jayasuriya 2018), most notably in India, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Since the late 2000s, the rising trend of Islamic conservatism and intolerance towards religious minorities in Indonesia—a post-authoritarian, Muslim majority country—has attracted global media and scholarly attention (The Economist 2017; van Bruinessen

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2013).² Indonesia, which has undergone processes of democratisation for two decades, has often been noted for its history of religious tolerance towards its religious minorities during the authoritarian New Order regime's rule. Since the end of the regime, there has been a growth of militant Islamist groups seen by some as a backlash against the political repression experienced for 32 years (Fealy 2004; van Bruinessen 2002).

Van Bruinessen (2013) and others have referred to this as a 'conservative turn' in Indonesia's Islam, which is problematically also evident in public institutions supposedly upholding democracy. Some notable changes are noteworthy. One is the nationwide decentralisation programme—expected to provide more power to local regions for self-governance—which has been used by local elites to introduce 'sharia' in its various manifestations into local bylaws (Buehler 2016), such as in Aceh and West Sumatra (Afrianty 2016) as well as West Java (Millie 2018). Another is the reinforcement of the traditional role of women in society, a prevailing discourse even after the women's rights movement. This is best described through Wieringa's (2015) study on the idea of the harmonious, happy Muslim family (*keluarga sakinah*), which elaborated on how the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection and international donor organisations have keenly advocated for the heteronormative, harmonious family in which the subordinate position of Muslim women could reduce domestic violence. Growing Islamic conservatism has also manifested among the growing number of urban, middle class, and well-educated Muslims enjoying a more secure socio-economic position (Heryanto 2011, 2014, who now demand various religiously justifiable products in their daily lives from film and television programmes to financial and retail products (Fealy and White 2008).

However, no other event has signified the rise of Islamic conservatism—particularly in how effectively it has assembled large sections of the heterogeneous Muslim population—as profoundly as the mass rallies against the former governor of Jakarta on 4 November and 2 December 2016. These rallies, called Action to Defend Islam (*Aksi Bela Islam*), were the largest religiously motivated demonstrations in the country's history, and successfully mobilised the masses to demand that the then-governor Basuki 'Ahok' Tjahaja Purnama be punished for blasphemy against Islam. The minority Christian Chinese governor was facing accusations of insulting the Quran for suggesting that politicians who invoked a Quranic verse telling Muslims not to elect a non-Muslim leader are liars. The narrative that Chinese-Indonesians are a privileged social group not belonging to the Malayan-Indonesian culture supposedly resonated with millions of Muslims participating in the mass demonstration (Setijadi 2017). They are

²Available at: <http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21721202-local-election-shows-how-unscrupulous-can-manipulate-religion-win-office-indonesia-has>.

seen to have more wealth than the ‘natives’ (*pribumi*), a notion that can be traced back to colonial times (Willmott 2009).

The animosity towards the Chinese-ness of Ahok was effectively roused by arguably marginal organisations that did not enjoy much legitimacy in either formal politics or the public arena. The first were vigilante organisations like the Islamic Defenders Front (*Front Pembela Islam*, FPI), which, in the past sixteen years, have been pandering to social and economic tensions for political legitimacy; the second was an ad hoc assembly claiming to defend the fatwa of Ahok’s blasphemy issued by the Indonesian Ulama Council (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia*, MUI), calling themselves the National Movement of Guardians of Fatwa of the Indonesian Ulama Council (*Gerakan Nasional Pengawal Fatwa MUI*, GNPf MUI). Notably, these organisations, previously on the fringes of mainstream Islamic debates, are now front and centre and able to mobilise larger sections of the Muslim lower and middle class.

Likewise, debates ensued about how and whether this can be considered a democratic regression. Wilson (2014) has argued that FPI and other vigilante organisations have been successful in capturing the poor and lower-middle class’ sentiments against the multiple evictions carried out by Ahok’s technocratic administration. On the other hand, Mietzner and Muhtadi (2017) have discussed, based on survey data, that despite satisfaction towards Ahok’s administration, voters believe that a governor should not be non-Muslim, let alone one guilty of blasphemy. This article agrees and expands on Hadiz and Rakhmani’s (2018) assertion that there is a link between primordial, religious sentiments and the disparaging effects of socio-economic inequality. Furthermore, this paper empirically explains how these developments are symptomatic of deeper rooted problems in Indonesia’s democracy.

Hadiz (2016) observed cross-class alliances between Muslims that evolved out of common socio-economic injustice in the Middle East and Indonesia, and emphasised the relationship between this grievance and the identified oppressor that is Ahok. I posit that FPI’s anti-Chinese and anti-Christian narrative can only resonate with many by means of mainstreaming through mass and social media, within which market mechanisms are crucial. Although global media and observers see these religiously driven mass rallies as signifying a rising intolerance and a conservative Islamic turn among the Indonesian middle class, I assert that such massive mobilisation of the middle class can be made possible only through a gradual process of Islamising public spaces and the marketplace.

In this paper, I would like to examine how the mundane and ordinary can contribute to the rise of religious conservatism. Although some important studies have linked the rise of right-wing politics around the world with everyday politics (Boyte 2004; McGuigan 1992; Wodak 2015), the understanding that these works propose is still underutilised in attempts to understand the role of consumption in shaping conservative religious practices. Therefore, in this

paper I explain how the previously fringe hard line narratives, those against secularism, pluralism, and liberalism (Wilson 2014), have been mainstreamed into public, democratic spaces through the banality of consumption. To achieve this, I study and describe 'halal consumerism', which I define as a socio-economic order that steadily promotes the ever-increasing purchasing of goods and services that aligns with the *fatwa* of a state-sanctioned Islamic authority. I posit that halal consumerism is the social response of Muslims to the neo-liberal reorganisation of production and consumption.

These social processes entail complex social dynamics that reveal the complementarity of economic activities and religious identities. Consuming halal products that are doctrinally and morally justifiable, and made available through market mechanisms, gradually construct a halal habitus, a sense of one's place in an imagined *ummah* that is problematically self-exclusionary. These involve consuming halal products that build life experience surrounding the cultural capital of being a Muslim. These comprise the architecture of halal corridors provided by sharia finance and banking, and the flow of halal retail products in the form of goods and services.

Furthermore, I narrow the focus to gendered morality in halal consumerism, specifically halal cosmetics, household products, and hijab fashionwear. I use this to bring gendered commodities to the forefront of the discussion about religious conservatism. I argue that gendered consumer products are a subject often overlooked as apolitical, domestic, and with passable consequences to the quality of democratic life. I argue through empirical analysis that in the case of the religious rally against Ahok, the role of the mother and wife, who runs the *sakinah* household, is instrumental in conservative developments. I find that gendered morality—and its intimate relationship with halal consumerism—has become part of the cultural resource pool that was mobilised during the anti-Ahok demonstration. This brings the discussion regarding the supposedly domestic and conventional role of Muslim women—who keep the family institution in tact in times of increased socio-economic insecurity—to the centre.

It is against this backdrop that I explore the consequences of halal consumerism on developments in Indonesian democracy. I accomplish this by elaborating on the rise of halal consumerism and how it panders to existing social insecurities among middle-class Muslims. I then delve into survey data about the participants of the mass rally against Ahok on 4 November and 2 December 2016 to understand their aspirations and anxieties, which were successfully aggravated during the rally. I further narrow the focus to female participants and continue examining this through in-depth interviews of ordinary urban, middle-class female Muslims. By closely examining the mundane social realities of urban, middle-class Muslim women who participated in the mass demonstrations, I argue that the appeal of these narratives is a defence mechanism in response to increasing social precarity due to neo-liberal expansion since the fall of the New Order. This defence mechanism emerged through the halal habitus,

which shields them against overwhelming social instability. I conclude with a discussion regarding the constructed narratives of gendered morality and halal consumerism. I show how ‘the personal is political’³ (Mills 1959), and how it can contribute to social processes of conservatisation in Indonesia’s democracy today.

NAVIGATING UNCERTAINTY WITH HALAL CONSUMERISM

Recent global examples—from neo-fascism to religious fundamentalism—show that our history today is signified by a range of social and political counter-movements against neo-liberal economic restructuring. To some, this is a sign that liberal economics was unsustainable in practice (Polanyi 2001). Scholars have argued that global neo-liberal capitalist logic has generated such a precarious social situation that, although manifested in different ways, it has fundamentally created a global class structure with deepening social inequalities (Layton 2010; Neilson 2015; Weems *et al.* 2004). This has caused existential anxieties. Kinnvall (2004) has argued that a combination of religion and nationalism can fuel a powerful reaction to uncertain social conditions and form a more likely identity construct to emerge in moments of social ruptures.

Simultaneously, none of these counter-movements can offer a model of re-embedding economic activities where governments play a central role. Some religious counter-movements seem to have harmonised self-protective reaction with a self-regulating market (Barker 2007; Rudnyckij 2009), giving rise to even more social contradictions. This is apparent in the dynamic expansion of Islamic banking under the neo-liberal economy, which has facilitated new ways for Muslims to adapt to market capitalism by participating in global consumerism (Kuran 2004; Tripp 2006). Indonesia is an important case to study to understand such developments. A democratising country with a majority (88 per cent) Muslim population, Indonesia has long been regarded as a paragon for moderate Islam with a rapidly expanding middle class. Southeast Asia’s Islam in general and Indonesia’s in particular had been called “Islam with a smiling face” (van Bruinessen 2011), suggesting the compatibility between Islam and democracy. Roughly since *Reformasi* (1998), this smiling face has been marred by militant Islamist violence. This included, among others, the Bali bombings in 2002, the Marriott Hotel bombing in 2003 and again in 2009 in Jakarta, and the persecution of the Ahmadiya minority that led to the banning of their activities by a Joint-Ministerial Decree in 2016. Simultaneously, the popularity of Islamic political parties yielded around 40 per cent of the votes in the 1999 and 2004 general elections, only to record significant losses in 2009 and 2014 with just around 25 per cent.

³‘The personal is political’ is the slogan of the 1960s feminist movement, which argued that individual experiences are intertwined with greater social and historical context, within which the female subject is rooted in gender inequality (see Hanisch, 1970; Mills 1959).

This indicates that mainstream politics continue to fail in responding to the aspirations of Muslim voters.

The majority of Muslim voters disenchanted by Islamic political parties and organisations are part of Indonesia's growing middle class, which grew from 25 per cent in 1999 to 45 per cent by 2010 (Oberman *et al.* 2012: 4). This number is projected to grow further to 62.8 per cent from a population of 267 million people by 2020 (Rastogi *et al.* 2013: 3). Since about the 1990s, large sections of the middle class have become more deeply integrated into global capitalism (Robison 2006), as signified by increased access to global retail products and services, and remarkable growth in private entities within sectors providing basic services in health, education, and housing, which were formerly state-run. This reorganisation is also supported by banking, commerce, and media markets in the form of advertising and television programmes promoting a global lifestyle that aligns well with local social needs.

Most of the Indonesian middle class today enjoy higher living standards and levels of consumption, and generally place more emphasis on leisure. They also deem education important to secure social positions and wealth, and desire legal certainty (Robison and Goodman 1996; van Klinken and Berenschot 2014). Like many other developing countries experiencing global capitalism, middle-class consumerism was the consequence of the gradual and consistent availability of global goods and services through retail distribution in Indonesian urban societies. The promotion of global brands through advertising was a staple for the expansion of the media industry (Rakhmani 2016). This has resulted in media content that paved the way for more effective advertising of consumer goods to middle-class consumers that, in turn, reproduced middle-class aspirations of which Muslims are a part.

It is important to note that the rise of halal consumerism—or the consumption of products that are justified by Islamic principles—occurred within this historical, socio-economic specificity. The expansion of the middle class in Indonesia would not have occurred as rapidly if it had not benefitted from the New Order's economic development (Robison and Goodman 1996). For those who ceased to trust secularist models of development, specifically after the fall of the New Order, Islamic teachings guide individuals who seek private social and economic governance. Islamism has grown to become a strong force informing middle-class consumer choice, modifying the face of the global marketplace (Izberk-Bilgin 2012). This has resulted in rising halal consumerism as Indonesian Muslims seek to assert their religious identities through their spending decisions. Islamic fashion, health services, tourism, housing compounds, and Islam-themed songs, books, films, and television programs are now common (Akmaliah 2014; Fealy and White 2008; Heryanto 2011; Kailani 2012; Rakhmani 2016).

The rising visibility of Islam in consumerism was arguably shaped by the founding of the Indonesia Ulama Council (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia*, MUI), which was established by the New Order government as a tool to manage

Muslim opinion (Hefner 2000). Today, it is recognised as a political vehicle for Muslim organisations to influence state policy (Lindsey 2012: 272). The MUI founded the National Sharia Arbitration Board (*Badan Arbitrase Syariah Nasional*, Basyarnas) in 1993, which was initially the Indonesian Islamic Arbitral Tribunal (*Badan Arbitrase Muamalat Indonesia*, Bamui). Under the MUI, these institutions regulate Islamic banking, finance, halal certification industries, and oversee the state administration of the *hajj* pilgrimage. Bamui, established in response to the increasing interest in Islamic banking, supported the activities of *Bank Muamalat Indonesia* (Lindsey 2012). Founded in 1992, it was the first public bank that implemented sharia principles.

A mere two decades later, there are 34 Sharia banks with a network spanning all 34 provinces (OJK 2018: 4)⁴, approximately 100 travel agencies licensed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs to organise the *umrah* pilgrimage (Kementerian Agama RI 2016)⁵, and 6055 companies owning 7764 halal certifications for 259,984 foods, medicines, and cosmetic products (LPPOM MUI 2017)⁶. The MUI's National Sharia Board (*Dewan Syariah Nasional MUI*, DSN MUI) also issues Sharia certificates for hospitals and businesses (e-money, hotels, restaurants, online trading, direct selling, travels, etc.; DSN MUI, 2018)⁷. From the various economic sectors benefitting from Sharia financing, the most significant are trade, restaurants, and hotels (OJK 2018: 102), central services in the halal consumer experience.

The rise of halal consumerism is a way for Muslims to adapt to modern capitalism (Rakhmani 2016). The proponents of 'Islamic economics' instruct Muslims to refrain from excessive consumption associated with Western capitalist consumer culture, providing guiding Islamic principles to engage in modern economic practices (Kuran 2004). Although the Muslim middle class now benefit from higher living standards, it comes with high exposure to the insecurities of the heavily Western, global economy. This results in degrees of emotional turmoil in relation to their capacity for upward mobility, giving them a sense of precarity brought about by urbanisation and industrialisation (Rakhmani 2016). Ensuring that the products they consume are religiously justifiable provides a sense of security in their day-to-day lives.

Halal consumerism gradually shapes a habitus or "schemata or structures of perception, conception and action" (Bourdieu 2002: 27) that protects the Muslim middle class against the threats of a rapidly changing, volatile world. This serves as a mental shield against contradictory social changes such as wealth and inequality. In the case of Indonesia, the neo-liberal breakdown of social solidarity (Layton 2010) was responded to by the atomised Muslim middle class with a

⁴Available at: <https://www.ojk.go.id/id/kanal/syariah/data-dan-statistik/statistik-perbankan-syariah/Documents/Pages/Statistik-Perbankan-Syariah-Januari-2018/SPS%20Januari%20-%202018.pdf>.

⁵Available at: <https://haji.kemenag.go.id/v3/basisdata/daftar-ppiu>.

⁶Available at: http://www.halalmui.org/mui14/index.php/main/go_to_section/59/1368/page/1.

⁷Available at: <https://dsnemui.or.id/produksertifikasi/>.

strong reaction in defence of the instruments they have used for private socio-economic governance, namely, the *halal habitus*. This habitus was formed through the production and consumption of *halal* products.

A survey conducted by Hadiz and Rakhmani (2017; 2018) of 600 people who took part in mass demonstrations against Ahok on 4 November (411) and 2 December 2016 (212) provide empirical evidence for this.⁸ Most demonstrators were in their 20s (60 per cent) and 30s (18 per cent), and have higher education (51 per cent) and secondary education (47 per cent). Despite having higher education and middle-class lifestyles, the largest proportion of participants hold clerical jobs or are students (see Figure 1). These data indicate that the demonstrators are disenchanted youths whose aspirations for upward social mobility have not been fulfilled by the social channels available to them.

Most rally participants also came from the middle-class bracket, with a monthly household spending of approximately IDR 4.5 to 7 million or USD 325 to 500 a month (43 per cent). Most live with their parents or in-laws (46 per cent) or in leased housing (22 per cent), while 53 per cent have dependents. Those who live in the province of Jakarta, South Tangerang, and Bekasi were born and raised in the same city for three generations; with 63 per cent not having any relatives outside the Greater Jakarta area. Most demonstrators (63 per cent) have education higher than their parents', while 30 per cent have an equal education level to that of their parents. This data paints a picture of young people with a family memory experiencing the gradual and extensive industrialisation and urbanisation of Jakarta, who believe that education is instrumental to securing social status through upward mobility. Their parents invested in their education, but survey results show that they are anxious in their own ability to secure education for their dependents in the next five years. Additionally, while they are not currently concerned about the stability of their monthly income and have no problem covering their leisure expenses, they are worried that they will not be able to save for the *hajj* pilgrimage. This indicates that their apprehension is strongly related to the future, more specifically their inability to reasonably plan their lives due to various uncontrollable social changes.

⁸The survey methodology was designed in collaboration with Alfindra Primaldhi (Universitas Indonesia). The author follows Critical Realism, specifically its relationship to Marxism. The population for this survey consists of people who participated in either the 4 November or 2 December 2016 mass rallies, or both. Only individuals aged 18 or older were selected to participate for ethical reasons. Since the true population estimate is unknown, a non-random sampling technique in the form of snowball sampling was used in this study. In this approach, the initial contacts were asked to recommend family, friends, and acquaintances who had also participated in either or both rallies. To maintain representativeness of areas, namely, West Jakarta, Central Jakarta, South Jakarta, East Jakarta, North Jakarta, Bekasi, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, and South Tangerang, a fixed number of respondents was allocated from each city. In total, 600 respondents participated, with 60 respondents from each city. The author would like to thank the perseverance of enumerators during fieldwork.

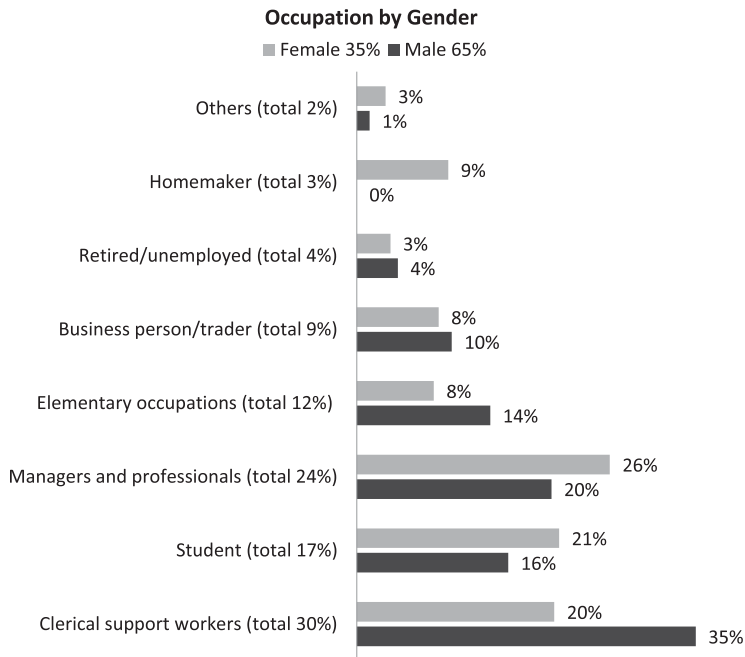


Figure 1. Occupation of Anti-Ahok Mass Demonstrators (primary data processed from Hadiz and Rakhmani 2018).

This suggests that the aspirations and anxieties of the Muslim middle class are related to failed promises of modernity. As in the case of Egypt, Algeria, Iraq, and Turkey, modernisation projects were led by Western-educated nationalists, not Islamists (Bromley 1994); Indonesia's was governed by US-trained economists during Suharto's reign. Likewise, the ruling elites selectively adopted Western ideals—including modernity—to support economic progress. Most of these projects in the Middle East failed, and the elites failed to sustain the promised economic growth. In Indonesia, in comparison, they did not fail. Until the 1997 Asian economic crisis, there was sustained economic growth for decades thanks to the authoritarian regime's nationalist development plans. After *Reformasi*, this economic growth was accompanied by increasing socio-economic inequality. In 2002, the richest 10 per cent of Indonesians consumed as much as the poorest 42 per cent, whereas in 2014 they consumed as much as the poorest 54 per cent (World Bank 2016: 37). Likewise, among the poorest 10 per cent of Indonesians, real per capita consumption grew just 12 per cent between 2002 and 2014, while for the richest 10 per cent the increase was 74 per cent (World Bank 2016: 37).

While these failed promises of modernity triggered animosity towards 'Westernisation' in the Middle East (Denoeux 2002), in Indonesia, alongside this resentment was the pleasure in veering 'foreignness' (Heryanto 2014). Similarly, the Muslim middle class harbours antipathy towards the 'other', in this case the ethnic Chinese, whom they perceive as having benefited more from economic

growth. In the case of anti-Ahok protests, as a continuation of colonial and New Order cultural memory, it emerged in the intense dislike towards the Chinese. This included suspicion towards Chinese capital behind Ahok's housing development programmes as well as a rejection of governance by a non-Muslim.

Legacies of authoritarian rule, notably in the form of administrative bureaucracies and cultural memory, have strengthened the charm of Islamism. Moral narratives regarding the oppressed *ummah* is appealing as it gives a sense of stability, providing a feeling of "home, stability, and continuity while individuals and groups are beset by experiences of loss, alienation, and helplessness" (Kinnvall 2004: 755). Islam assumes a renewed role for the disenfranchised middle-class Muslims as a defence mechanism to survive 'uncertainty' (Layton 2010) or the highly unstable and precarious neo-liberal social world, one that reproduces the halal habitus and gradually shapes halal consumerism.

The alienated Muslim middle class that participates in halal consumerism is indistinguishable from Hadiz's (this volume) 'floating *ummah*'. Hadiz problematises the floating *ummah* as a mass of followers without a developed sense of loyalty to any Muslim organisation or political project, differentiating it from the political design during the New Order era. I instead problematise the political effects of moralising the retail market by taking the case of gendered commodities. I further explicate the kinds of social conservatism it reproduces, and how it is vulnerable to manipulation during times of political crisis.

GENDERED MORALITY AND A CROSS-CLASS UMMAH

To understand the political effects of gendered halal consumerism, I would first like to explain the working construct of the harmonious family (*keluarga sakinah*). Wieringa (2015) traced this construct as being rooted in the New Order's notion of a prosperous family (*keluarga sejahtera*), a heteronormative family with two children as idealised by the National Family Planning Council's (*Badan Kependudukan dan Keluarga Berencana Nasional*, BKKBN) 'Two Kids Suffice' (*dua anak cukup*) national programme. Recent narratives regarding the ideal family echo this model, specifically arguing that maintaining a prosperous society via the *ummah* begins with the smallest unit, the family (Syarif 2007 in Wieringa 2015: 34). The harmonious family not only prevents the dissolution of the family unit and divorce but also holds society together. Furthermore, the notion of the good wife in both the prosperous and harmonious family places women in conservative gender roles. The organisation of these roles preserves the unity of the family. This narrative informs us of how women's modernity in Indonesia was built over time and characterised by domesticity and the sexual division of labour, indicating the workings of patriarchal capitalism.

The middle-class Muslim concept of the ideal wife surrounds the notion of the pious wife (*istri shalihah*), or one that maintains modesty and honour.

Although middle-class Muslim women are encouraged to pursue education, this triggers anxiety about women's morality in domestic and public spaces. Survey results confirm this: 89 per cent of participants think that female Muslims must wear the hijab, 67 per cent think that a wife does not have the right to divorce her husband, 75 per cent believe that a wife must obey her husband, 65 per cent do not believe that female Muslims should receive the same inheritance shares as males, and 67 per cent believe that a husband has the right to decide if his wife can work. This anxiety is responded to by increased control by men over the mobility of female Muslims, as well as by women over themselves, resulting in religious compliance through self-limiting social practices. In-depth interviews with female participants of the mass rally show that the women's political position follows that of their fathers and husbands. They noted how they felt safe during the demonstration during which men would surround them protectively. They also refrained from expressing their opinions with their husbands around and believe that their political choices must extend the struggles of their fathers and husbands.

Although this might seem as evidence of religion as an instrument of maintaining gender exploitation, and many studies have related this to traditional values, the role of the pious wife in maintaining the harmonious family is primarily a modern archetype. Seventy per cent think that polygyny is immoral, 64 per cent disagree that Muslim women should be employed full time and thus must stay at home to care for their children, 57 per cent believe that divorce is immoral, 68 per cent believe that family planning is a good programme, and 75 per cent believe that the number of children a couple has must be consensually decided by the husband and wife. These numbers reveal that the family construct imagined by the participants consist of the husband and wife and two children conceived with family planning, suggesting the modern, nuclear family. They think that family unity is important, in which the wife and mother is the primary caregiver and provides for the household. Significantly, there are some social mobility among women in financial investments and expenses.

“Many people say that ... Well, I am a woman. Women are the responsibility of their husbands, so the men are responsible for [purchasing] a house. But I have always wanted to have something on my own. I never think ‘Whatever ... I will be the responsibility of my husband, so why should I think of buying a house?’ No. I always think that I should own it, even if I don't use it, it could be an investment, it could be sold or given to a young sibling or parent. I'd like to do this with my own pay” (Interview with Fitri Khairunnisa [pseudonym] 24 March 2018)⁹.

⁹This and subsequent interviews were conducted as semi-structured interviews. This research used pseudonyms to protect participants' identities.

Khairunnisa (pseudonym) and other participants expressed fundamentally similar opinions that suggests that the way in which female middle-class Muslims generate and organise money is inextricably linked with their practice of “an alternative Islamic life politics and new social order” (Saktanber 2002: 257) that they aspire to fulfil. This makes halal consumerism an important aspect of gendered politics. As such, although the rally participants consider consuming halal products important, products that require financial planning, such as purchasing a home in sharia housing, halal electronic products, and placing their children in private Islamic schools, are less important than consumables, specifically halal medicine and cosmetics. This is related to the findings that the participants are anxious about their ability to plan for the future. Financial products require long-term planning, something that the participants simply cannot practice because of their precarious condition. Therefore, retail products that require low commitment and much less planning are favourable, as it does not pander to their apprehension towards the uncontrollable future. Consumption of halal retail products allows female middle-class Muslims to “embrace Islamised products as the antidote to immorality, injustice, and inequality that infidel brands represent in their minds” (Izberk-Bilgin 2012: 159).

“Lately I use HNI-HPAI [*Halal Network Indonesia, Herba Penawar Alwahida Indonesia*].¹⁰ I have a friend who is a member, a friend from teaching. And it turns out the elder people staying over use that too. So, they have many users, and they migrated from products made by infidels and so to Islamic products. They are Islamic products, and there are also many medicine like honey” (Interview with Tri Alia Kusumawati [pseudonym] 24 March 2018).

Tri and several other participants are loyal consumers of HNI-HPAI whose products range from body and face soap, toothpaste, and supplements. They feel that by consuming halal products, they are helping their fellow Muslims by strengthening social relationships (*ukhuwah*); thus, they are not partaking in transactional consumption they perceive to exist in ‘infidel’ or secular forms of trade. They deem that by consuming halal retail household products, they are following the Prophet’s Sunnah.¹¹

¹⁰According to their website, HPAI-HNI is one of the companies of the Indonesia Halal Network Business focusing on herbal products. HPAI was founded on 19 March 2012 with the objective of strengthening halal and quality products according to Hadith-based medical science (*thibun nabawi*), and to operationalise, progress, and actualise Islamic economics in Indonesia through entrepreneurship (HNI-HPAI, 2014). Available at: <http://hpaindonesia.net/id/profil-perusahaan/>

¹¹“Established custom, normative precedent, conduct, and cumulative tradition, typically based on Muhammad’s example. ... In the legal field, Sunnah complements and stands alongside the Quran, giving precision to its precepts” (Esposito 2003: 305).

“Back to Sunnah. I mean practice consuming what the Prophet consumed, like that. Also, because HPAI’s marketing usually involve PKS [Prosperous Justice Party/*Partai Keadilan Sejahtera*] so we consume those products. HPAI is a Malaysian product but it is now available in Indonesia. HPAI and others, well mothers are traders. Well, it uses MLM [Multi-Level Marketing]. MLM that involves stay-at-home Muslims as members; also, members for personal consumption, not for reselling. So not only selling. The *ustad* [Islamic teachers] also promote to the mothers, the mothers use them too. They use the products, and join, and help too” (Interview with Farhana Aqidah [pseudonym] 26 March 2018).

As Tri (pseudonym) and Farhana’s (pseudonym) comments illustrate, global brands are seen to have ‘infidel’ characteristics whereby the trade of goods is impersonal and does not strengthen social bonds between Muslims. This extends to the halal-haram dichotomy of labelling retail products that provide guidance for female middle-class Muslims to navigate and construct a safe, halal space. Furthermore, among these female consumers, the halal products they purchase reinforce their traditional roles as pious wives who uphold the harmonious family.

“Although I don’t follow any skincare regime, but I do care for it, such as going to the [skin] doctor. After all we must stay healthy. So, it is not for beauty, but myself as a Muslim. I need to think about my husband. I need to keep him happy, right? So, I go to the [skin] doctor, but not excessively. Go to the [skin] doctor to clean it from sebum, or something like that. It’s modest, not excessive, such as having to buy this and that. Night cream and morning cream is enough. I am comfortable enough” [Interview with Alida Bana Sitompul [pseudonym] 28 March 2018).

An avoidance of excess consumption is a narrative that resonates among several other female Muslims. Aside from consuming halal cosmetic products for the purpose of pleasing one’s husband, humble apparel that masks the shape of the female body also echoes the aspired modesty that they believe is the Prophet’s Sunnah. This is in line with some Islamic beliefs that claim moral superiority among Muslims who can avoid material pretention (*riya*).

“I enjoy [clothing] that comply with Sharia. What is recommended by religion, and that is more comfortable. Wide [clothing], ones that cover the chest, that is not sheer, not thin, thick. Clothing that is not tight-fitting and is not masculine [*menyerupai laki-laki*]” (Interview with Tri Alia Kusumawati [pseudonym] 24 March 2018).

“I like simple fashion. Simple but leaves an impression on people, make them want to follow our style. Praise Allah [*alhamdulillah*] so far [Islamic] fashion shows display apparels that do not reveal the shape of

the body. But not too big. ... Hijab fashion shows, it should present designs that are truly for female Muslims who are *hijabers*. So, if we participate in fashion shows with tight-fitting clothing, it propagates that tight clothing are Muslim clothing. What use is the many hijab designs if they reveal the shape of the body, that can be used by non-hijab women?" (Interview with Fitri Khairunnisa [pseudonym] 24 March, 2018).

Kusumawati (pseudonym) and Khairunnisa's (pseudonym) testimonies regarding the hijab also resonate with others. There is strong emphasis on covering the body, while simultaneously noting that it is part of Islamic propagation (*da'wah*) through fashion. It is notable that the participants' responses regarding hijab fashion are elaborate, as it involves an intersection between femininity, modesty, taste, social status, and distinction from non-Muslims (Gökariksel and Secor 2009; Saktanber 2002). Furthermore, hijab fashion has evolved in the past decade into an industry, signified by the participation of Indonesian Muslim designers in regional Islamic fashion festivals (Friedman 2014), Jakarta hosting the first Muslim Fashion Festival in 2016 (Jakarta Globe 2016)¹², and the formation of massive online hijab communities—often calling themselves *hijabers*—promoting micro-celebrities who propagate cosmopolitan, Muslim fashion (Baulch and Pramiyanti 2018; Beta 2014).

Here, a distinction of taste is apparent among the participants. Consumers of the hijab fashion industry strive to portray a cosmopolitan Islam that is not violent, distancing themselves from the violent imagery of Islam in the media. Significantly, the first Islamic fashion festival in the Asian region claims its official goal as "To build an updated visual and cultural reference from which Islam can be related to the modern world through the creative arena of fashion divorced from political, economic and social strife" (Friedman 2014). The self-proclaimed *hijabers* strive to reconcile modern, consumerist lifestyles with the religious doctrine of covering oneself, whereas participants who purchase their clothing through MLM do so primarily to build an *ukhuwah*, striving to realise a more just society with less social inequality. During the demonstrations, female participants from distinctively different social classes merged together as one *ummah*.

"I discovered that the Muslim *ummah* is vast, there are so many of us. We help each other. We take care of each other, and we are honest there [in the rallies]. Men and women; we banded together, whereas usually we are fragmented because of differing opinions—there, we are one. Also, secondly, they took care of the women. We were given some space, although it looks really packed, but we were given some distance. We were surrounded by *ikhwan* [brothers], in fact we were protected in a circle. As if saying don't approach the women. Like that. I felt protected.

¹²Available at: <http://jakartaglobe.id/features/first-ever-muslim-fashion-festival-jakarta/>.

There was no physical contact” (Interview with Aliyah [pseudonym] 24 March 2018).

“I myself am just an ordinary person. The people who are leaders are the ones who speak on the stage, isn’t that right? So, I am just like an ant to add to the number of the masses. That’s why the 212 graduates, their slogan is that we are Ibrahim’s ants. We are only tiny droplets, but we want to contribute. Maybe our contribution is insignificant, we only come there. We only sit there doing nothing. Chanting God is great [*takbir*]. But at least Allah takes note on who we defend” (Interview with Vani Putri Raisa [pseudonym] 29 March 2018).

The narrative of a unified, cross-class *ummah* is expressed here and elsewhere. Although in daily practices, these female Muslims are fragmented in social classes as exemplified in their hijab consumption, the ‘other’ or the ‘infidel’ they perceived in Ahok triggered an imagined solidarity where the symbolic consumption of Islam overrides the social fact that these products are not classless. The participants were preoccupied with solidarity that can be traced to the concept of unity in which Muslims should not tolerate any kind of fragmentation within the *ummah*. Simultaneously, it is not Islam per se that the participants are defending, but an abstraction of ideals. It is what Islam is standing in defence of, namely, the unity of the family against social threats.

“We make a consensus within our family, who do we want to defend? We don’t just do whatever we want. I am often confused, I don’t really know. So, I ask my parents, although I hear a lot on social media, things like this. So, I balance this, who I defend, who I elect, this and that. So, we find a consensus [within the family]. I think that is how we find harmony within the family as well” (Interview with Tri Alia Kusumawati [pseudonym] 24 March 2018).

It is apparent that the halal market has created a space for social mobility for female middle-class Muslims. The halal commodities are gendered, where retail products, particularly herbal medicine and cosmetics, are the most instrumental in their shaping of a halal habitus. The accessibility of more halal products, made available through Sharia and halal certification issued by MUI, creates illusive social bonds among Muslims of different classes. However, these, albeit temporary, social bonds would not have formed had it not been for the notion of the threatening ‘infidel’ in the global products they avoid. Problematically, this does not only separate middle-class Indonesian Muslims from the plural society they live in, but also prolongs conservative ideals of the pious wife and the harmonious family, one that places women in domestic and inferior roles in favour of the unity of the family. Furthermore, any attack on the integrity of the family is a personal threat against the tool used to maintain its unity,

namely, their religious beliefs. This, I argue, is what was successfully mobilised against Ahok, which I will further elaborate in the last section of the article.

The unity of the harmonious family in particular, and the *ummah* in general, is thought to be undermined by the upper-class, ethnic Chinese's economic and political privilege. Alif Sutama, a lecturer with Muhammadiyah roots who lives in Jakarta, shared an impression regarding the inequality between ethnic Chinese and the *ummah*. He was accompanying his wife during the Islamic fasting month of Ramadan to Omni International Hospital, located in the gated community of Alam Sutera founded by Chinese tycoon, Harjanto Tirtohadiguno. Upon seeking to do his pre-dawn meal (*sahur*), he was unable to find an available canteen and was told by the security guard to go to a local *kampung* (urban village). Finally finding an urban slum providing *sahur*, he expressed his disapproval of the gentrified area.

“Alam Sutera, it's like it's not in Indonesia. It's like it is in Singapore. There is no *adzan* [calling of prayer]. When I got there, I felt out of place. They have their own community, their own private government who manages the roads, the traffic. They think it is more effective than state government. They develop their own environment, their own school, their own way of thinking, that is segregation. If this group is not politically dominant, then there is no problem. But they dominate the economy, and now politics. They aren't respectful. That is the future challenge. If I express this publicly I will be called racist” (Personal interview with Alif Sutama [pseudonym] 2 November 2017).

Sutama and several other participants share common grievances regarding the social and economic circumstances that they perceive to privilege the ethnic Chinese. The difficulty of finding a canteen providing meals at 4:00 am was seen as a direct attack on middle-class Muslims' beliefs. This belief is largely accommodated in mainstream, public spaces via market structures, which are no less segregating than the upper-middle class enclave of Alam Sutera. However, class antagonism panders to the already existing historical memory that *pribumi* have toward the ethnic Chinese.

This habitus can and was politically mobilised during the anti-Ahok rally through political marketing via social media analysis. Here, the halal habitus as expressed online through conversations and congregations is analysed as potential for a political mass (F.P. 2014), which is also practised in developed democracies such as the United States (Sunstein 2017) and in Indonesia via the political campaign industry (Saraswati 2016). Corporations wishing to market their products, social organisations aiming to exercise influence, and political candidates seeking public support process these sentiments into desired outcomes.

Operations Manager of digital marketing company Awesometrics, Wahyu Saputra, claims that his company regularly compares the amount of conversations

on social media surrounding a keyword and furthermore measures its public relations value, engagement, and potential reach (F.P. 2014). The CEO of media monitoring company Katapedia, who was the consultant for candidates Anies Baswedan and Sandiaga Uno who ran against Ahok in the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial Elections, says that these sentiments have been managed well in favour of the opposing candidate Anies Baswedan during the 2017 gubernatorial Elections (Interview with Deddy Rachman 3 March 2018). These companies gather social media sentiments that lean negatively, neutrally, and positively towards each candidate, and organise creative writers to develop issues that align with these sentiments. Illustratively, the fear of consuming food that is not halal was effectively aggravated in December 2016, approaching the DKI Jakarta gubernatorial Elections, through hoax news regarding 'infidel' fast food restaurants that contain pork, namely, KFC, Domino's Pizza, and Pizza Hut (Swamedium 2017). The anxieties of middle-class Muslims, as exemplified through the halal habitus, is a cultural resource pool that is managed with political marketing mechanisms to maximise its advantage or minimise its risks in the reconfiguration of elite politics during elections.

CONCLUSION

Bringing these arguments together, I conclude that market structures of halal consumerism have contributed to the rise in religious conservatism in Indonesia's democracy. The case of Indonesia brings awareness regarding the politics of Islam as a response to neo-liberal precarity in a post-authoritarian country. This paper discussed the intersection between halal consumerism and gendered morality. More specifically, it explains the reinforcement of the traditional roles of women through market mechanisms and how it facilitates the politicisation of middle-class Muslim anxieties. It placed gendered consumption at the centre of the discussion of politico-religious conservatism, which is often overlooked as banal, domestic, and inconsequential to democratic developments. This paper argues that the personal is political.

I have argued on the basis of empirical facts that the moral narratives of the oppressed *ummah* are being reproduced through marketing channels of halal consumerism, particularly through retail products that can feel more easily controllable in purchasing compared to long-term financial products. The reason for this is that middle-class Muslim anxiety is rooted in their inability to plan for the future; thus, retail halal consumerism provides a means for Islam to serve as a tool to navigate daily uncertainties in the highly unstable, neo-liberal social order.

All things considered, Islamic politics in Indonesia cannot simply be placed on the conservative-to-liberal spectrum, as it would be reductive of the complexity and internal contradictions within the notion of the *ummah*. The increasing visibility of Islam in public arenas—as in the case of halal consumerism and its

political effects—is indicative of grievances toward the failures of deeper socio-economic structures. In the Indonesian case, it is not enough to only talk about democratic developments and citizen participation without considering the historical precedence of a lack of functioning public institutions that uphold democracy. Without this, succeeding social transformations, which here includes the highly customised marketing of global products and media technology, will essentially prolong and exacerbate the decades-long authoritarian social dynamics shaped during the New Order regime. Thus, new types of anxieties of the middle class will continue to be prone to manipulation during the reorganisation of political elites. Therefore, this paper emphasises the importance of a structural analysis grounded on personal politics. It supports ordinary people's ownership of the democratic agenda, specifically arguing against self-exclusionary practices that are harmful to individual and societal integrity.

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