

# IDENTITY CONTESTED Cultural Resilience in the Midst of Islamization of Politics

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## IDENTITY CONTESTED

### Cultural Resilience in the Midst of Islamization of Politics

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#### Abstract

*Local-level leaders in contemporary Indonesia have involved in the country's turbulent politics. The regent of Purwakarta (2008-2018), Dedi Mulyadi, employed, for the most part, culture-based political preferences develop his territory. In doing so, he frequently encountered with various forms of Islamization of politics, hindering his strategies to reach his individual goals, to display his socio-political identity, and to socio-culturally empower cultural resilience. The regent appeared to challenge rampant Islamization of politics by "waging the war" against Islamist groups in the name of Sundanese indigenous culture. This paper seeks to explore recent developments of the relationships between Islam and local culture in Indonesia with the case study of Purwakarta in particular and West Java in general, and how a local-level leader was able to optimize his potentials to empower cultural resilience in the midst of Islamization of politics. This paper also investigates the complex landscape of these relationships in an effort to map out the various forces at play and shows that by investigating the interplay between religion, culture, and other entities, a key driver local level played pivotal roles in his ways of defining ethnic identity, creating authority, and empowering cultural resilience. [Terdapat beberapa pemimpin daerah terlibat dalam dinamika politik nasional dewasa ini. Dedi Mulyadi, Bupati Purwakarta periode 2008-2018, termasuk salah satunya yang membangun daerah dengan berbasis pada budaya lokal. Bersamaan dengan itu, ia sering berhadapan dengan sejumlah*

*gerakan Islam politik yang menghambat tujuannya dalam mempertahankan identitas sosio-politik dan memberdayakan ketahanan budaya lokal. Sang bupati tampil dengan identitas budaya lokal Sunda dalam rangka menghadapi tantangan Islamisasi politik dari kelompok-kelompok Islamis yang 'mengobarkan perang' kemana mana. Tulisan ini membahas perkembangan terkini hubungan antara Islam dan budaya lokal di Indonesia, dengan studi kasus di Purwakarta pada khususnya, dan Jawa Barat pada umumnya, serta bagaimana pemimpin daerah mampu memaksimalkan kemampuannya dalam mempertahankan budaya lokal di tengah arus Islamisasi politik. Tulisan ini juga menginvestigasi kompleksitas konteks hubungan-hubungan tersebut dalam usaha memetakan kekuatan yang bermain dan menunjukkan bahwa dengan menginvestigasi kaitan yang tumpang tindih antara agama, budaya, dan entitas-entitas lainnya, seorang penggerak di tingkat lokal memainkan peran penting dalam mendefinisikan identitas etnis, penciptaan otoritas, serta memberdayakan ketahanan budaya lokal.]*

**Keywords:** Identity politics; cultural resilience; Islamization of politics; Dedi Mulyadi; Purwakarta; Sundanese

#### A. Introduction

This paper aims to explore recent developments of the relationships between Islam and local culture in Indonesia, in the case of Purwakarta in particular and West Java in general, and how a local-level leader has been able to optimize his potentials to empower cultural resilience in the midst of Islamization of politics. It shows that the ongoing state-building processes, including decentralization and democratization, have allowed for the emergence of new seemingly-autonomous local leaders, such as Dedi Mulyadi, the regent of Purwakarta for the periods of 2008-2013 and 2013-2018. This paper seeks to answer the following questions: What roles have democratization and decentralization played in initiating local empowerment and maintaining patronage? What factors have shaped and characterized waves of Islamization of politics? What factors have guided the interaction between Islam and local culture? How have notions of Islamic symbols and cultural pride been used in order to convey messages in the encounters between Islam and local culture? To what extent have the strategies employed by Dedi Mulyadi affected

his individual goals, his identity, his representation of the people, and the socio-cultural empowerment he has promoted?

Since the collapse of the New Order in 1998, Indonesia has experienced rapid and fundamental developments of everyday relationships between Islam and politics. There has been an Islamization of politics expressed in, among other things, the adoption of local Islamic laws in the context of democratization; the rise of political Islam or Islamism, that is Islam as political ideology rather than religion or theology; and the growth of modern political Islamic fundamentalism that claims to (re)-create a true Islamic society.<sup>1</sup>

The Islamization of politics in Indonesia appears to have presented an enigma. On the one hand, despite the fluctuating results, the overall electoral support for Islamist parties has been in steady decline since 1998 when the country became a democracy.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, there has been an Islamization of politics as expressed in hundreds of *sharia* (or at least *sharia*-inspired) laws (Islamic laws) that have been adopted across the country since 1998. Moreover, on the one hand, the developments of Islam in law and politics seem to indicate that Indonesian Islam has become more rigidly conservative or radical. On the other hand, the driving of rapid Islamic commodification and the growth of urban middle-class Muslims have shaped a more resilient religious culture and thinking.<sup>3</sup>

After the 1998 political reformation, Indonesia has gone through unremitting socio-political transformations that have shaped and characterized local political culture in the context of decentralization and democratization. This post-New Order period has witnessed an increasing tendency in which people are able to voice their socio-political concerns. This is in stark contrast to the circumstances in the previous authoritarian period when the state incessantly attempted to break into and arrange all aspects of its citizens' lives. The power of the state rested upon its dominant control over the public and private realms. In a Muslim

<sup>1</sup> Yanwar Pribadi, *Islam, State and Society in Indonesia: Local Politics in Madura* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Greg Fealy, "Indonesia's Islamic parties in decline", *Inside Story* (11 May 2009), <https://insidestory.org.au/indonesias-islamic-parties-in-decline/>, accessed 27 Sep 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Pribadi, *Islam, State and Society in Indonesia*, p. 8.



society in which local traditions and customs are frequently identified with Islam, the roles of religious leaders to perceive, censor, and disseminate political perceptions are highly evident. During the New Order, when access to information was limited, *ulama* were the central sources of information, including political affairs, for commoners. Nowadays, the more democratic socio-political circumstances in the post-New Order have given more opportunities for other segments of society to do so.

Based on library research, particularly by looking at periodicals in the Internet, I employ historical and political science approaches in making analyses in this paper. This is a paper with a historical-political science perspective. While observing Dedi Mulyadi; his disputes with Islamist groups and other people; and the encounter between Islam and local culture in a chronological order, I also investigate democratization and decentralization processes in local politics; Islamization of politics; and local-level leaders' efforts to maintain their power and influence through political science perspective. With Purwakarta and West Java as the settings, it might be argued that despite the narrow geographical focus, this paper offers a broader insight of the entanglement between Islam, politics, and local cultures in other places in Indonesia.

The role of the Nahdlatul Ulama (the NU) and the Muhammadiyah as the two largest Muslim organizations in Indonesia was very crucial during the politics of *aliran* (literally stream) in 1950s. It was these mass organizations (*ormas*) which served to root political parties in society, channelling voter support to them. It is not easy, however, to trace how increased personal piety in post-New Order Indonesia has translated in the political arena. It seems that while Islam is frequently a political issue at both the national and regional levels, Islamic political parties have been unable to capitalize on these sentiments.<sup>4</sup> In a similar vein, ethnic-based sentiments have not been able to take advantage either. It began when national political leaders were reluctant to accommodate the idea of the establishment of ethnic-based political parties during the political upheavals of the early years of the Republic of Indonesia.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Jacqueline Hicks, "The Missing Link: Explaining the Political Mobilisation of Islam in Indonesia", *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, vol. 42, no. 1 (2012), pp. 40–5.

<sup>5</sup> Ben Hillman, "Ethnic Politics and Local Political Parties in Indonesia", *Asian Ethnicity*, vol. 13, no. 4 (2012), p. 420.

The aversion of the government to accommodate both religious and ethnic-based sentiments have not been without strong reasons. A comparison of election results (*Pemilu*) from 1955, 1999 and 2004 indicates that decades of authoritarian rule and ideological manipulation by Indonesia's first two presidents, Sukarno and Suharto, did little to change the nation's political culture and that the overlapping primordial loyalties of religion and ethnicity continue to dominate its politics. This in turn suggests that Indonesia remains vulnerable to ethnic and religious conflicts. The fact that political parties reflect primordial loyalties of ethnicity and religion rather than policy positions has the potential to hinder the consolidation of Indonesia's newly emerging democracy.<sup>6</sup> If we look at the situation at the regional level, in West Java, for instance, we may notice that when in 1952 the traditionalist NU broke away from the reformist Masyumi because of a conflict over the distribution of government positions, not all who remained in Masyumi were reformists. In fact, many traditionalists in West Java remained faithful to Masyumi and distanced themselves from (Javanese-dominated) NU.<sup>7</sup> These Masyumi followers in West Java have been the main supporters of the implementation of *sharia* or *sharia*-inspired local laws. As recorded by the Asia Foundation, between 2000 and 2009, 74 regencies and municipalities (*kabupaten* and *kota*) implemented *sharia*-based local laws. In 42 of the 74 districts, major nationalist parties gained more than 50 per cent of the vote. In 72 of the 74 districts, the nationalist parties together with two Islamic parties, PAN and PKB, gained more than 50 per cent of the vote. It is striking that despite their majority in local parliaments, the nationalist parties could not prevent, and even seemed to support, the passing of *sharia* by-laws. Of the 74 districts, 32 were in the traditional Golkar strongholds of West Java, West Sumatra and South Sulawesi.<sup>8</sup>

I would thus argue in this paper that local politics in many places

<sup>6</sup> Mark Woodward, "Indonesia's Religious Political Parties: Democratic Consolidation and Security in Post-New Order Indonesia", *Asian Security*, vol. 4, no. 1 (2008), p. 42.

<sup>7</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, "Genealogies of Islamic Radicalism in Post-Suharto Indonesia", *South East Asia Research*, vol. 10, no. 2 (2002), pp. 120–1.

<sup>8</sup> Sunny Tanuwidjaja, "Political Islam and Islamic Parties in Indonesia: Critically Assessing the Evidence of Islam's Political Decline", *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, vol. 32, no. 1 (2010), p. 41.

in Indonesia, including West Java, in the post-New Order is marked by recurrent processes in which Islam and local cultural elements coexist, flourish, interlace, and strive in complex, pragmatic, and mutually beneficial relationships. Many actors of local politics in West Java, groups of local leaders, have been engaged in the formation and transformation of political culture since the Sukarno era, particularly since the New Order. The actors are part of larger configurations of interdependent individuals within Sundanese society and Indonesian society at large. The socio-political formations of local politics in West Java have been exercised by local leaders, who each play their part. These local leaders have frequently employed and promoted Islamic symbols and cultural elements to reinforce their positions in society, and nowadays have also attempted to empower their citizens in accordance with the spirit of democratization and decentralization. In this paper we shall look at whether these circumstances hold true for the Purwakarta and West Java case.

#### **B. Democratization and Decentralization: a Reason to Initiate Local Empowerment and a Pretext for Maintaining Patronage**

After the Suharto administration collapsed, the relationships between the central government and religious leaders changed. For instance, alongside the rise of more independent religious leaders, the sole authority of the state, as well as its coercive force, began to disappear. Therefore, most religious leaders have had more freedom not to rely on the power and capital of the state. While the Suharto administration had positioned itself as an administration attempting to reform the previous rule (the Old Order) and to guide the state towards a 'rightful and democratic course', the post-Suharto era has set out more democratic and decentralized policies, allowing people's leaders in many regions to spread their influence.

Despite its short reign (May 1998-October 1999), the B.J. Habibie presidency was marked by significantly decentralized policies that included establishing two important laws, the Law No. 22/1999 that dealt with the devolution of political authority and No. 25/1999 that set out a new system of fiscal arrangements that favoured the regions through DPR (the national parliament), which set in motion a process of



administrative decentralization that came into effect on 1 January 2001.<sup>9</sup> An era of decentralization replaced the old centralized period that seemed to have neglected regional autonomy. In the opinion of international development agencies and NGOs, decentralization is thought to support good governance, especially at the local levels.<sup>10</sup>

I would suggest that local politics in Indonesia has long been a field in which local leaders obtain power. The ongoing state-building processes in the post-Suharto period has allowed for the emergence of new seemingly-autonomous local leaders. In decentralized Indonesia, key political dynamics occur at the local level.<sup>11</sup> There has come up an expectation in which as the state relinquishes its control, there arise social and political opportunities for civil society to organize and demand more transparent and accountable governance practices.<sup>12</sup>

Under the new circumstances due to the two new laws, the central government was required to cede authority to regional governments in all fields except foreign policy, defence and security, monetary policy, the legal system and religious affairs. The role of the provinces was confined to areas such as mediating disputes between districts, facilitating cross-district development and representing the central government within the region.<sup>13</sup> Regency heads during the New Order were formally elected by

<sup>9</sup> Van Klinken and Henk Schulte Nordholt, "Introduction", in *Renegotiating Boundaries: Local Politics in Post-Suharto Indonesia*, ed. by Gerry Van Klinken and Henk Schulte Nordholt (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2007), p. 12; Edward Aspinall and Greg Fealy, "Introduction: Decentralisation, Democratisation and the Rise of the Local", in *Local Power and Politics in Indonesia: Decentralisation & Democratisation*, ed. by Edward Aspinall and Greg Fealy (Singapore: ISEAS, 2003), p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Henk Schulte Nordholt, "Decentralisation in Indonesia: Less State, More Democracy?", in *Politicising Democracy: The New Local Politics of Democratisation*, ed. by John Harriss, Kristian Stokke, and Olle Törnquist (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> Vedi R. Hadiz, *Localising Power in Post-Authoritarian Indonesia: A Southeast Asia Perspective* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright (eds.), *Deepening Democracy: Institutional Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance* (London and New York: Verso, 2003).

<sup>13</sup> Aspinall and Fealy, "Introduction: Decentralisation, Democratisation and the Rise of the Local", pp. 3-4; Marcus Mietzner, "Indonesia's Direct Elections: Empowering the Electorate or Entrenching the New Order Oligarchy?", in *Soeharto's New Order and Its Legacy*, ed. by Edward Aspinall and Greg Fealy (Canberra: ANU Press,



the regency parliaments, while the decision was in reality made (*'direktu'* in common Indonesian rhetoric) by the central government. It was not uncommon for the regent to have a military background, or be a Dandim (military commander at the regency level), and not be a *putra daerah* (literally 'sons of the region'). When the Suharto administration collapsed and as ideas about decentralization emerged as a result of discontent about centralization policies, the Law No. 22/1999 on decentralization was established. This new law provided local parliaments with significant power to control the elections of the regent. This decentralization signified the start of *putra daerah* occupying strategic bureaucratic positions.<sup>14</sup>

The nature and role of regional elites in post-New Order, particularly in the fields of bureaucracy, economy, and identity politics have often been characterized as predatory figures nurtured under the New Order. Nankyung Choi suggests that despite the presence and persistence of old elite from the old regime, a process of elite diversification has taken hold at the grassroots level, as new type of local power seekers has emerged from diverse backgrounds. This new type of local power seekers pursues elected position by collecting support from their constituencies such as local communities, business constituencies, and a variety of civil society organizations.<sup>15</sup>

Democratization and decentralization are two processes continuously taking place and evolving in Indonesia. They have emerged as a result of discontent about centralization policies and as a result of the continual reformation process in the post-Suharto period. The two elements have perhaps been most relevant in the context of local politics.<sup>16</sup> However, the decentralization process in Indonesia is not synonymous with the process of democratization. Schulte Nordholt and Van Klinken argue that decentralization does not necessarily result in democratization, good governance and the strengthening of civil society

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2010), p. 176.

<sup>14</sup> Pribadi, *Islam, State and Society in Indonesia*, p. 156.

<sup>15</sup> Nankyung Choi, "Local Political Elites in Indonesia: 'Risers' and 'Holdovers'", Sojourn: *Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, vol. 29, no. 2 (2014), pp. 366–7.

<sup>16</sup> Aspinall and Fealy, "Introduction: Decentralisation, Democratisation and the Rise of the Local", p. 2.

at the regional level. Instead, the authors argue that what is prevalent is the decentralization of corruption, collusion, and political violence that once belonged to the centralized administration of the New Order, and is now transferred to the existing patrimonial patterns at the regional level.<sup>17</sup>

After the downfall of the New Order administration, Golkar began to lose its power and many of its regional functionaries, cadres, and influential supporters had to prepare themselves for the changing political circumstances. All the regulations that had allowed them to occupy strategic positions in the regional administration were replaced by more democratic ones. Government employees were no longer required to endorse Golkar. New political parties were established, and at the provincial and regency levels, regional head positions eventually became available to more candidates. It became essential for Golkar men and other old political actors as well as newcomers to present themselves as '*putra daerah*' who represented regional interests rather than the interests of the centre (Jakarta).<sup>18</sup> I would suggest that this common condition in post-New Order favoured Dedi Mulyadi when he frequently represented himself as a real '*putra daerah*' of Golkar. Moreover, according to Schulte Nordholt and Van Klinken, the salience of ethnic and religious identities is the most striking feature of provincial Indonesia after the downfall of the New Order. Ethnicity has become an ideology in a political struggle and, at the same time, it has also evoked a real depth of feeling.<sup>19</sup> As we can see, Dedi Mulyadi was known to frequently use and promote ethnic and religious identities during his tenure and when he competed for a vice governor post in West Java's 2018 gubernatorial elections.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Klinken and Schulte Nordholt, "Introduction", p. 18.

<sup>18</sup> Yanwar Priyadi, "Islam and Politics in Madura: Ulama and Other Local Leaders in Search of Influence (1990-2010)", Ph.D. Dissertation (Leiden: Leiden University, 2013), pp. 206–7.

<sup>19</sup> Klinken and Schulte Nordholt, "Introduction", p. 21.

<sup>20</sup> See for instance: Nanang Sutisna, "Bupati Purwakarta Larang Wakuncar di Atas Pukul 21.00", *Tempo.co*, <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/696810/bupati-purwakarta-larang-wakuncar-di-atas-pukul-21-00>, accessed 28 Sep 2018; Irwan Nugraha, "Dedi Mulyadi Akan Terapkan Pelajaran Kitab Kuning Bagi Pelajar di Jabar", *Kompas.com* (4 Apr 2018), <https://regional.kompas.com/read/2018/04/04/22294911/dedi-mulyadi-akan-terapkan-pelajaran-kitab-kuning-bagi-pelajar-di-jabar>, accessed 28 Sep 2018.

Since 1998 Indonesia has experienced a dramatic shift in political constellations. In the time since this transfer of power, the Indonesian nation has sought to formulate and implement wide-ranging reforms that aim to democratize and improve governance systems. One way of doing so has been the decentralization of the functions of the Indonesian government. Ironically, while the reformation process is still taking place, one 'pathological feature' of the previous administration, patronage, appears to have become a characteristic of the post-New Order era. Indeed, patronage has even become a more widespread feature of the political system along with the persistent general assumption that official positions will be used for purposes of personal or in-group benefits.<sup>21</sup>

This patronage pattern is not static because it has been affected by state-building processes and, by the same token, it has influenced these processes. At some point, patronage is inherited from the New Order, while its roots can be traced back to pre-colonial times. What we see here, then, is a 'changing continuity' that will help to explain the problems connected to decentralization and the establishment of regional autonomy.<sup>22</sup> It is not an easy task, however, to explain how and why democratization and decentralization processes influence and characterize Dedi Mulyadi's manoeuvres, particularly in relation with issues such as initiating local empowerment or maintaining patronage in the context of local politics. Dedi Mulyadi's encounters with Islamization of politics may prove that both issues are of importance, among other things, for his political goals in maintaining his populist approaches in order to further his political career more broadly.

### C. Waves of Islamization of Politics

Indonesia has been generally regarded as home to a moderate type of Islam, at least compared to the more militant and fundamental waves of Islamism that have commonly taken place in the Middle East. Nevertheless, it seems that in the last decades, there has been a significant

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<sup>21</sup> Jamie Mackie, "Patrimonialism: The New Order and Beyond", in *Soebarto's New Order and Its Legacy*, ed. by Edward Aspinall and Greg Fealy (Canberra: ANU Press, 2010), pp. 82–3.

<sup>22</sup> Nordholt, "Decentralisation in Indonesia: Less State, More Democracy?", pp. 30–1.



transformation in religious observation of Islam, as more Indonesian Muslims have become more aware and conscious about their perceptions and practices of their religion.

This circumstance is certainly not novel and unique to Indonesia as Muslims everywhere, both in Muslim-majority countries and elsewhere, have been gradually more aware of their global presence that individuals and groups in North America, Australia, Europe, and elsewhere have a heightened awareness of establishing part of a world community and use this consciousness to amplify their voice and political strength. This is what is called “Muslim politics”, a concept that involves the competition over both the interpretation of symbols and control of the institutions, formal and informal, that produce and sustain them. The interpretation of symbols is played out against the background of an underlying framework that, while subject to contextualized nuances, is common to Muslims throughout the world.<sup>23</sup>

Indonesia is an example of a state characterized by a plural and contested Muslim politics. In the last years of the New Order, a powerful movement for a democratic Muslim politics took shape. Muslim participants in overthrowing the Suharto presidency were highlighted by, among other things, devising religious arguments in support of pluralism, democracy, women’s rights and civil society. However, not so long after the downfall of the authoritarian regime, Indonesia was disturbed by outbreaks of fierce ethno-religious violence. The violence slowed the reform movement and put the Muslim community’s pluralist experiment in question. Nevertheless, these hindrances have proved that Muslim politics is not monolithic, and that there is more to its contemporary ferment than the bleak alternatives of secularist authoritarianism or extremist violence.<sup>24</sup>

Muslim participations in politics in Indonesia have long been encouraged by *ulama*’s teachings and practices. In the Indonesian archipelago during the nineteenth century when the implementation

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<sup>23</sup> Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, *Muslim Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 5.

<sup>24</sup> Robert W. Hefner, “Introduction: Modernity and the Remaking of Muslim Politics”, in *Remaking Muslim Politics: Pluralism, Contestation, Democratization*, ed. by Robert W. Hefner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 4.

of colonial power became effective, the emergence of religious leaders primarily appeared in the periphery and frequently acted against the local and Dutch authorities.<sup>25</sup> During the Sukarno administration, the role of Muslim leaders in Indonesian politics, as shown by Islamic organizations, indicates a series of struggles in formulating the Islamic system of state. For example, the NU managed to align itself with the deep-rooted traditions of the Indonesian people, especially in Java. Masyumi, on the other hand, blended its reform Islam with modernistic, more Western-oriented but also nationalistic and secular current ideas. The development of several Islamic parties was the result of Muslim factions failing to realize the unitary political agreement of a single party.

In recent times, decentralization allows for the emergence of a politically autonomous brand of *ulama*. The way they survive and continue to exercise their influence in society is not surprising. There are two rather different reasons for that. Firstly, it shows that they are highly capable of adjusting to the continuously changing political atmosphere of the Indonesian state. Secondly, they continue to be needed by society to safeguard and preserve its values and norms.<sup>26</sup>

Islam continues to serve as a crucial mobilizing ideology and social movement frame. However, Islam is not only a subject of political contention, but also its object. For instance, in the Middle East, while religious militants continue to deploy Islam as an ideological frame to push for exclusive moral and socio-political order, secular Muslims, human rights activists, and, especially, middle-class women have campaigned against a reading of Islam that underwrites patriarchy and justifies their subjugation.<sup>27</sup> I would maintain that in Indonesia, Islamization of politics has been outlined in the forms and aspects of the relationships between state and society; between conflicts and accommodations; and between piety and tradition. In fact, what we see is actually a circumstance in which Islamic powers in secular countries have presented a challenge for states around the world, including Indonesia, home to the largest

<sup>25</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, "Global and Local in Indonesian Islam", *Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 37, no. 2 (1999), p. 164.

<sup>26</sup> Pribadi, *Islam, State and Society in Indonesia*, p. 212.

<sup>27</sup> Asef Bayat, *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), pp. 7–8.

Muslim population as well as the third largest democracy in the world. As I have argued elsewhere, Islamization of politics through the elements of state-society relations, authoritarianism, and regionalism, appears highly significantly in the development and dynamics of Indonesia's fledgling democracy,<sup>28</sup> just as the case we see in Purwakarta and West Java below.

#### D. The Encounters between Islam and Local Culture: a Case from Purwakarta<sup>29</sup>

The regent of Purwakarta for the periods of 2008-2013 and 2013-2018, Dedi Mulyadi, is an obvious product of post-authoritarian *Era Reformasi* (the Reformation era/the post-New Order period). He began his political career as a member of local parliament (DPRD) in the period of 1999-2004. However, in 2003 he was elected as vice regent (*wakil bupati*) of Purwakarta together with Lily Hambali Hasan as the regent for the period of 2003-2008. In 2008 he won the first direct *pilkada* (*pemilihan kepala daerah* - elections in a province or regency/municipality to elect a governor or a regent/mayor) of the Purwakarta regency. His vice regent was Dudung B. Supardi. In the next period, he enjoyed a comfortable victory for the second time in the *pilkada*. This time Dadan Koswara acted as his deputy. Apparently, Dedi Mulyadi was known as an eccentric figure during his reign. He wanted to make Purwakarta as a place of cultural icon, and in order to realize his dream, he employed various unique cultural approaches and symbols of pre- or non-Islamic features, such as erecting statues of puppetry in many corners of the town and encasing trees in the town with patterned fabrics of black-and-white, similar to those in Bali. He was even further believed to claim that he married Nyi Roro Kidul<sup>30</sup> and provided a carriage for the Queen in a cultural festival in Purwakarta.

<sup>28</sup> Pribadi, *Islam, State and Society in Indonesia*, p. 2.

<sup>29</sup> Some materials in this section are taken from Yanwar Pribadi, "Budaya Lokal versus Islam: Perseteruan antara Bupati Purwakarta dan FPI dalam Kerangka Demokratisasi dan Desentralisasi", *Harmoni*, vol. 15, no. 3 (2016), pp. 75-86.

<sup>30</sup> A legendary Indonesian female deity, known as the Queen of the Southern Sea of Java (Indian Ocean) in Javanese and Sundanese mythology.



On 13 November 2015, Habib Rizieq<sup>31</sup>, along with a number of FPI (Front Pembela Islam/Islamic Defenders Front) leaders and followers, delivered a sermon in Purwakarta on the request of *Kiai* (*ulama*/religious leaders) Muhammad Syahid Joban, the leader of Majelis Dakwah Manhajus Sholihin (MS) and *Pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) Ibnu Sina in a *kehaul* (annual celebrations held on the anniversaries of the death of religious leaders) to commemorate *Kiai* Abdullah bin Awod Joban, the father of *Kiai* Muhammad Syahid Joban. The sermon turned to a polemic and became a dispute after it was filmed and uploaded to a global video-sharing website, You Tube by Asep Muhammad Nazar, a member of MS. In the video, Habib Rizieq mocked Dedi Mulyadi's predilection of Sundanese culture instead of Islamic values, particularly of Dedi Mulyadi's inclination to use a traditional Sundanese greeting, *sampurasun* (please pardon me) instead of *assalamualaikum* (a Muslim greeting in Arabic that means peace be upon you). Habib Rizieq altered *sampurasun* to '*campur racun*' (mixed poison).

Subsequently, the West Java Siliwangi Youth Wing (AMS/ Angkatan Muda Siliwangi), a mass organization devoted to the preservation of Sundanese culture, became angry. According to Denda Alamsyah, the Secretary General of AMS, a member of AMS Purwakarta accidentally attended the sermon and listened to Habib Rizieq's scornful words. One day after the preaching, the video was uploaded to YouTube and became viral. The AMS Purwakarta reported the alleged insult to the central board (DPP) of AMS in Bandung. Having learned about the video, the DPP AMS decided to report the insult to the police and demanded that Habib Rizieq be charged in accordance with the applicable laws. The DPP AMS claimed that Habib Rizieq had disdained the Sundanese because *sampurasun* as a traditional Sundanese greeting has great values and becomes a symbol of pride of the ethnic community. Habib Rizieq

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<sup>31</sup> Muhammad Rizieq Shihab, known as Habib Rizieq is the founder of the FPI. Both of his parents were Arab Indonesians of Hadhrami descents. Prior to his roles at FPI, Habib Rizieq was a school teacher, a member of Jamiat Kheir (one of a few early private institutions in Indonesia that is engaged in education, and is instrumental in the history of Indonesian struggle against Dutch colonialism), and a chairman of a number of majelis taklim (religious congregations). He was the head of the FPI from 1998 to 2003, and since 2003 he has become the Chairman of the board of Tanfidz (executive board). He has been elected as the Great Imam of FPI for life since 2013.

was reported by the DPP AMS to Polda Jawa Barat (West Java's provincial police command) on 24 November 2015. Following the report, the DPP AMS had a meeting with a number of Sundanese-community organizations (Aliansi Masyarakat Sunda Menggugat/AMSM), and they agreed that Habib Rizieq had to be charged in accordance with the applicable laws and that he had to confess his mistakes and apologize for his insulting words.<sup>32</sup>

Besides *sampurasun*, Habib Rizieq also attacked Dedi Mulyadi because of other reasons, namely, wider issues such as demoralization, acts of polytheism, and infidelity. Dedi Mulyadi was accused of turning the town to a Sunda Wiwitan or Hinduism area. Moreover, he was also blamed for preventing Purwakarta being a *sharia* town. Finally, he was indicted to denounce Islam as a foreign tradition coming from Saudi Arabia.<sup>33</sup>

Meanwhile, the AMS accused Habib Rizieq of insulting Sundanese culture, and at the same time Dedi Mulyadi and the mayor of Bandung for the period of 2013-2018, Ridwan Kamil demanded Habib Rizieq to apologize for his derogatory speech. Habib Rizieq responded the protest from the AMS and some segments of Sundanese society by asserting that Sundanese must clearly think through his words. He explained that *sampurasun* is an honoured greeting and contains respect towards people. He further mentioned that *sampurasun* could be used as long as it did not replace *assalamualaikum*. He criticized Dedi Mulyadi for attempting to replace *assalamualaikum* with *sampurasun*.<sup>34</sup> To this day, the dispute has reached no conclusion on the legal level because the authorities have not or may not take any action that is clear to both parties. Such a dispute that contains religious issues is certainly quite common in post-Suharto

<sup>32</sup> Oris Riswan, "Kronologi Plesetan Sampurasun hingga Pelaporan ke Polda Jabar", *Okezone.com*, <https://news.okezone.com/read/2015/11/26/525/1256154/kronologi-plesetan-sampurasun-hingga-pelaporan-ke-polda-jabar>, accessed 7 Jul 2016.

<sup>33</sup> Oris Riswan, "Ini Isi Ceramah Habib Rizieq saat Plesetkan Sampurasun", *Okezone News*, <https://news.okezone.com/read/2015/11/27/525/1257151/ini-isi-ceramah-habib-rizieq-saat-plesetkan-sampurasun?page=1>, accessed 8 Jul 2016.

<sup>34</sup> Caroline Damanik, "Diprotos karena 25 Pelesetkan 'Sampurasun', Ini Respons Rizieq Syihab", *Kompas.com*, <http://megapolitan.kompas.com/read/2015/11/26/08490071/Diprotos.karena.Pelesetkan.Sampurasun.Ini.Respons.Rizieq.Syihab>, accessed 7 Jul 2016.

Indonesia. One of the most notorious cases was the 'Ahok blasphemy' when the governor of Jakarta for the period of 2014-2017, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama or Ahok was accused for alleged blasphemy over public comments that Ahok had made in September 2016 that allegedly insulted the Al-Maidah 51 verse of the Quran.<sup>35</sup>

It seems that as a result of the continual reformation process in the post-Suharto period, the interaction between Islam and local culture has entered a new stage of relationship. As is the case in many developing societies, it seems quite obvious that the existence of traditional local leaders, such as religious leaders, in a decentralized era cannot be ignored due to their constant influence. The circumstances in the West Java province encourage interaction between important segments of society in which the *ulama* and the state officials form complex relationships in the struggle for influence; in which Islamic symbols, Islamic populism, popular Islamism, and patronage play significant parts. Moreover, despite different attitudes from the actors, their relationship is perhaps best described as pragmatic and mutually beneficial in nature. According to Hans Antlöv, the structure of local politics created by the New Order administration was based on intimate personal relations and on patronage.<sup>36</sup> In post-Suharto West Java, despite exceptions and changes, the circumstances have remained relatively similar.

The interaction between Islam and local culture in decentralized Indonesia has shaped and characterized identity politics of certain groups and paved their way to involve in defining their own religion. Moreover, the interaction between the two sides needs to be seen in the context of an increasingly fragmented Indonesia's democracy movement. The implications of this matter will serve as current understandings of decentralization, democratization, and emerging forms of citizenship in Indonesia, particularly at local levels.

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<sup>35</sup> See for instance Charlotte Setijadi, "Chinese Indonesians in the Eyes of the Pribumi Public", *ISEAS Perspective*, no. 73 (Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, 2017); Nursheila Muez, "Protesting Ahok: Flaking Indonesian Islam's Pluralistic Tradition", *RSIS Commentary*, no. CO16309 (Singapore: RSIS, 2016), <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/CO16309.pdf>, accessed 29 Sep 2018.

<sup>36</sup> Hans Antlöv, "Not Enough Politics! Power, Participation and the New Democratic Polity in Indonesia", in *Local Power and Politics in Indonesia: Decentralisation and Democratisation*, ed. by Edward Aspinall and Greg Fealy (Singapore: ISEAS, 2003), p. 196.



Generally, the interaction between Islam and local culture in Indonesia can be considered as an arena of contests, mainly between religious and cultural powers, in which the competing parties make extensive use of Islamic symbols in interactions with the people. Despite the fact that this may seem a manipulative practice, the use of Islamic symbols is actually considered necessary by the people, especially in West Java, as the Sundanese strongly identify with Islam. Therefore, I would maintain that in West Java, the *ulama* and state officials persistently strive for influence and have their own interests and their own means by which to maintain power, influence and social status, as we can see from the dispute in Purwakarta that involved religious leaders and regional heads. As I have revealed elsewhere, during the Suharto administration, collaboration between the *ulama* and the state apparatus appeared mainly in the socio-political realm. This minimized the political role of the *ulama*. Since the collapse of the Suharto administration, the *ulama* have been able to strengthen their visibility in the political constellation, and have come to possess important positions in various public domains. In this political sense, it is not uncommon for *ulama* to build alliances with the state officials in order to strengthen their power.<sup>37</sup>

The relationships between religious leaders and state officials in West Java have been complex. The struggle for influence within these elites is not only centred on opportunities for private material benefits, but also on political competition which is loosely organized, pragmatic, and often mutually beneficial in nature. Their continuous presence in the post-Suharto period reflects their constant influence over society, and their presence actually fits well within on-going state-building processes. The presence of local leaders is highly apparent in their struggle for influence, in connecting the local community with the outside world, and in defining the appropriate values and norms for the citizens. In the struggle for influence, Islamic symbols, wealth, and genealogy are extensively used to win the supports of the citizens, while patronage and personal relations become the prevalent pattern in relationships with the citizens.

In sum, the relationships between Islam and local politics in West Java should be understood as an aspect of centralization during

<sup>37</sup> Pribadi, "Islam and Politics in Madura", pp. 296–7.

the New Order and decentralization during the post-New Order. The transformation from one administration to another in West Java, however, should not be understood as an automatic shift from an authoritarian rule to a democratic one. The processes have been marked by many undemocratic changes, continuities, repetitions, and developments in Sundanese society.

The encounter between Habib Rizieq and Dedi Mulyadi is one of a few examples in the post-New Order that a struggle for influence between Islam and local culture is still a sensitive and key issue in Indonesia, including in West Java and Purwakarta. The case also shows how undemocratic changes and continuities are still prevalent in everyday life of democratizing Indonesia. It indicates that the creation of a strong and autonomous civil society is still hampered by the presence of an ineffective state system. The dispute also shows that identity politics is one of the key elements in the process of democratization in Indonesia. However, it also shows that the struggle could well be a counter-productive development in democratization and ongoing state building processes in Indonesia.

#### **E. Individual Goals in the Name of Empowerment**

Ethnic and religious struggles have been a clear sign of how Indonesia was strongly influenced by an authoritarian regime under Suharto. According to Harold Crouch, authoritarian regimes exercise substantial control over society. In addition, there is another significant way in which authoritarian regimes dominate society; that is to say, the development of political methods to maintain control. Despite the regimes' claims that the political institutions of authoritarian regimes permit the people to participate in the decision-making process, such pseudo-democratic characteristics typically administer the people in well-designed ways that reinforce the regimes.<sup>38</sup> As I have shown in this paper, what is obviously striking is that the fact that ethnic and religious struggles have been inherited from the New Order and have become one of the most essential features of the post-New Order politics. The roles

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<sup>38</sup> Harold Crouch, "Introduction", in *State and Civil Society in Indonesia*, ed. by Arief Budiman (Clayton, Victoria: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1990), pp. 115–6.

of local-level leaders in maintaining these struggles in order to reach their political goals have put a question whether decentralization have really led the country to democracy or to guide back to the previous regime.

Dedi Mulyadi's political aspirations in the post-Suharto period seem to indicate the pragmatism of state officials as power brokers. When beneficial opportunities knock, they do not waste them, although they do risk their respected position in society. Their pragmatism also shows the ability of state officials as individuals who are capable of placing themselves in the public eye. They tend to seek secure places within communities in order not to become trapped in the wrong political choice, so that when there is a political change (as was the case after the Suharto administration collapsed), they know how to voice their political aspirations or they know how the people will voice theirs. The use of socio-cultural elements by state officials is in fact frequently directed at protecting their privileged economic and political capitals.

Dedi Mulyadi's ideas about Sundanese culture have been shaped and characterized by concerns over what its fate will be, and what opportunities may lie ahead in the era of regional autonomy. His opponents also see their opportunities to use culture and religion to their advantage, although they frequently struggle against increasing grievances from the population who do not see Sundanese culture in a similar way to the people's leaders of other West Javanese cities. Meanwhile, local people are struggling to reinvent their lives and to accommodate a cultural and social existence that they have lived with through various periods of external domination and control. In Purwakarta, Dedi Mulyadi's dream to create a true Sundanese society has been hampered by mostly 'religious' obstacles. Here we are witnessing how his struggle goes on, and it appears to be a touchstone of the regional autonomy laws to see whether or not the community can discover a real autonomy that they are really looking for.

All the above examples seem to indicate that Dedi Mulyadi is a pragmatic individual. However, I would suggest that his supposed pragmatic attitudes would not last very long if they were not sustained by a strong sense of identity. Dedi Mulyadi has been pushing his counter-culture vis-à-vis the 'Islamic culture', which is very influential in Sundanese society, even at the lowest level. Nevertheless, as indicated



in the dispute against Habib Rizieq, *Kiai* Muhammad Syahid Joban, and other Islamic organizations, he would opt not to openly attack or denounce the 'Islamic culture' since its main supporters, religious mass-based leaders, are highly regarded by some segments of society, including by Purwakarta residents.

Although this sounds very pragmatic to outsiders, many citizens are never really bothered by the fact that many state officials have dual status. If we look at the situation during the New Order in which some West Java parliament members from the PPP were *kiai*, perhaps we may understand why having a dual status is not such a crucial issue. In fact, many people expected that these *kiai*-politicians would be able to better voice their concerns. Nevertheless, there has been a slight trend in the post-Suharto period for *kiai* who become politicians to be somewhat distrusted by the people when it comes to their pragmatism and political manoeuvring. This also holds true for 'culture man' cum politicians, such as Dedi Mulyadi.

Through promoting Sundanese culture as the ultimate identity, Dedi Mulyadi has arguably won the heart of many Sundanese anywhere in identifying their socio-cultural identity, particularly those who reject Islamization of politics disseminated by Islamist leaders, such as Habib Rizieq. His influence has widely spread beyond Purwakarta, not only to other places in West Java, but also to other places in Indonesia where revivalism of local culture is seen as a sign of people's representation.<sup>39</sup> This could happen, and is in line with Erb, Beni & Anggal's argument, because decentralization has encouraged people to transform the New Order emphasis on 'national culture' and 'national building, through various draconian means to create citizens out of the disparate populations of Indonesia to a redefining of culture from the point of view of the regions. This transformation appears to be a process by which local communities are empowered to rethink and re-imagine what

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<sup>39</sup> See for instance, Dedi Mulyadi Siap Bangun Kampung Sunda di Lombok Nusa Tenggara Barat - *Tribun Jabar*, <http://jabar.tribunnews.com/2018/08/30/dedi-mulyadi-siap-bangun-kampung-sunda-di-lombok-nusa-tenggara-barat>, accessed 29 Sep 2018; M. Ali Khumaini, "Dedi Mulyadi menggagas 'Sunda Jazz Festival Internasional'", *antaranews.com*, <https://www.antaranews.com/berita/703560/dedi-mulyadi-menggagas-sunda-jazz-festival-internasional>, accessed 29 Sep 2018.

culture and community means to them.<sup>40</sup> However, an essential question arises, is this a sort of socio-cultural empowerment promoted by the regent for the citizens?

To understand the situation, we must be aware of the importance of charisma, which is still prevalent in the post-Suharto period. Even though various local groups at the regency and provincial levels, such as NGOs, students' associations, and workers' unions, have sometimes taken matters into their own hands when it comes to land occupations, human rights, and corruption, ordinary people at the regency level have rarely experienced such a post-Suharto 'euphoria' from participation, and have reaped little rewards from being given more access to local governments. Their public participation is still limited to the regency level. Therefore, any people's leader who is able to win the support of the citizens, especially who possesses charisma, is likely to gain the most followers. That is actually what has been happening with Dedi Mulyadi.

Dedi Mulyadi's strategies of strengthening cultural identities to adapt to decentralization and democratization features of post-authoritarian Indonesia are key to maintaining his respected position and charisma in society and expanding his influence outside his territory. The ongoing processes of decentralization and democratization have indeed provided local leaders with a large space to create political manoeuvres that are mostly hidden in rethorics. Dedi Mulyadi has successfully played his roles as the guardian and supporter of 'real' Sundanese culture in the emerging Islamist culture. Therefore, Dedi Mulyadi has directly and indirectly employed strategies that affect his individual goals, his identity, his representation of his people, and his socio-cultural empowerment he has promoted. In turn, his strategies have significantly shaped and characterized the development and dynamics of Indonesia's fledgling democracy.

## F. Concluding Remarks

Democratization and decentralization have been understood by

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<sup>40</sup> Maribeth Erb, Romanus Beni, and Wilhelmus Yustinus Anggal, "Creating Cultural Identity in an Era of Regional Autonomy: Reinventing Manggarai?", in *Regionalism in Post-Suharto Indonesia*, ed. by Maribeth Erb, Priyambudi Sulistiyanto, and Carole Faucher (London; New York: Routledge Curzon, 2005), pp. 149–50.

many local leaders as tools to initiate local empowerment as well as to maintain patronage. Local leaders have responded in various ways to ideological and political developments, in part because in each area they relate to localized political situations. In present day Indonesia, religious life has not been integrated into the political state. However, it is clear that religious life has greatly increased and has become a way of life of many citizens. This situation has forced the supporters of 'cultural' life to extensively interact with increasing religious life in which notions of Islamic symbols and cultural pride been used in order to convey messages in the encounters between Islam and local culture.

Dedi Mulyadi has involved in the turbulent political arenas, and has helped shape the contours of the political situation beyond his territory. He employed socio-cultural-based policies to develop his regency, and faced various encounters with Islamization of politics hindering his strategies to reach his individual goals, to present his identity, to represent his people as well as to empower cultural resilience. The regent appeared to have empowered cultural resilience in the midst of Islamization of politics across Indonesia. Dedi Mulyadi has been a key driver in a local level who played pivotal roles in his way of defining ethnic hegemony, creating authority and empowering cultural resilience. It is quite obvious that the ongoing state-building processes, including decentralization and democratization, have provided local leaders with a large space to create political manoeuvres, and have allowed for the emergence of new seemingly-autonomous local leaders, such as Dedi Mulyadi. However, these political circumstances and struggles are obviously an arena of the elites, not a field of the citizens who often play their part only as spectators. In turn, the creation of a strong civil society is obviously still hampered by the presence of an ineffective state system, and that it is worried that Indonesia may still not experience thorough democratic consolidation in the near future.



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PAGE 1

PAGE 2

PAGE 3

PAGE 4

PAGE 5

PAGE 6

PAGE 7

PAGE 8

PAGE 9

PAGE 10

PAGE 11

PAGE 12

PAGE 13

PAGE 14

PAGE 15

PAGE 16

PAGE 17

PAGE 18

PAGE 19

PAGE 20

PAGE 21

PAGE 22

PAGE 23

PAGE 24

PAGE 25

PAGE 26