

**Centering the Islamic periphery through Palestine and America:
Symbolic geographies and global social imaginaries
in Indonesian charity concerts**

By

Silvia Ilonka Wolf

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Supervisor: Prof. Daniel Monterescu

Second reader: Prof. Prem Kumar Rajaram

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Abstract

It has been widely observed that Islamic revivalism in Indonesia, and in the Malay world in general, has led to the growing ubiquity of Muslim identities in public life. These processes have inspired the rise of various Islamic-themed genres in popular culture and in cultural performances. In this thesis I focus on one such manifestation, i.e. Indonesian charity concerts, as a recent social and cultural phenomenon. To unpack the local aims that the events fulfil I trace the various forces, agents, and interests which have contributed to the emergence of charity concerts as a regular pattern in contemporary Indonesian public life. I also explore Islam-inspired notions in relation to the events, such as jihad, *dakwah*, and the idea of virtue, and I question how these notions fit into the social imaginaries that are projected in the charity concerts. In combining hermeneutics with ethnographic fieldwork in order to provide a ‘thick description’, I examine how Palestine and America, as two non-Indonesian, symbolic geographies, have become incorporated into local narratives drawing on global social imaginaries that are projected and performed in the concerts. How are these symbolic geographies instrumental in the global social imaginary of the *ummah* as well as in the imaginary of the Indonesian nation and its role within the wider (Muslim) world? I argue that the religious significance of Jerusalem and its current occupied status have ignited a form of vicarious nationalism among Indonesian Muslims, whereby Palestine is appropriated as a sacred space of belonging that demands Muslims’ allegiance to it as well as to its Palestinian inhabitants, who are regarded as fellow members of the *ummah* in dire need of rescue. America, on the other hand, represents not only a geographical area where Islamophobia skyrockets but also a modern global power and a gateway for the Muslim world (in particular Indonesia) to establish good ties with the West and contribute to world peace. Analyzed relationally, these events embody a form of globally oriented *dakwah* which projects an image of Indonesia as a model Muslim nation ready to peacefully ‘conquer’ the world with its emphasis on Islam *rahmatan lil alamin*, the Islam that brings mercy to all mankind.

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Glossary

<i>Allahu Akbar</i>	God is Great
<i>Amin</i>	Amen
APP	Aliansi Pessel Peduli (Pessel Cares Alliance)
<i>Bupati</i>	governor
<i>Dakwah</i> (Arabic: da'wa)	missionary movement; message
<i>Hajj</i>	the annual pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, one of Islam's five pillars
<i>Hijab</i>	head scarf
<i>Hijrah</i>	migration, the Prophet Muhammad's journey from Mecca to Medina. Figurative meaning in Indonesia: transformation to pious lifestyle
<i>Imam</i>	religious leader, usually worship leader of a mosque
<i>Infaq</i>	disbursement, spending money on charity
<i>Jihad</i>	struggle, holy war
<i>Jihad fi sabilillah</i>	struggle in the path of God
<i>Kabupaten</i>	regency
<i>Kiblat</i> (Arabic: qibla)	direction in which Muslims are requested to pray
<i>Mujahid</i>	fighter, someone who is engaged in jihad
<i>Nasyid</i>	a genre in Islamic-themed music, originating from the Arabic <i>anasheed</i> (hymn)
<i>Nasyid haroki</i>	militant type of nasyid rooted in Islamic underground activism
<i>Pesantren</i>	Indonesian Islamic boarding school
Pessel	Pesisir Selatan, region in West-Sumatra

<i>Rahmatan lil- 'alamin</i>	Mercy to all mankind
<i>Ulama</i>	religious scholar(s)
<i>Ummah</i>	the Muslim community
<i>Umroh</i> (Arabic: umrah)	pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, can be taken all year round

Introduction

It is April 2018 and a charity concert is taking place in Makassar, South Sulawesi, to collect funding for the establishment of an Indonesian Islamic boarding school in America. Hundreds of men, women and children, separated by gender in different rows, are sitting on the floor while waving Indonesian flags and occasionally shouting “Allahu Akbar!” The entire evening they have been entertained with performances of various kinds, like theatre, Qur’an recitations and religious chores by local artists and student groups.

When by the end of the evening the famous Indonesian singer of ‘religious songs’ Opick enters the stage he receives a loud applause and acclamations. After a mutual greeting of “Assalamu alaikum wa rahmatulahi wa barakatu”, Opick welcomes the audience by praising the Makassarese as pious Muslims and enthusiastic people. “Especially with regard to religious affairs, you guys are number one!”, he say. He tells the crowd that he has just arrived from Lebanon where he visited a refugee camp and that he has made a long journey all the way to Makassar because there were supposedly “virtuous” (sholeh, sholehah) people waiting there for him. The audience responds to his praises by exclaiming in unison “Amin!” Then Opick comments on the reason of their collective gathering, i.e. the building of a pesantren in America, and remarks what a beautiful day it is because they have come together in order to build their house in heaven.¹ The prominent artist calls out loud: “Those of you who want to go to heaven raise your hands!” And hundreds of hands go up into the air, followed by another collective “Amin!”

¹ He referred here to a hadith which says that “whoever builds a house of God, God will built him or her a house in heaven.

Scenarios such as the above are not a rare occasion in contemporary Indonesia; in the past few years hundreds of charity concerts have taken place throughout the country, from Sumatra in the West to Kalimantan in the East. Moreover, the events tend to attract huge masses and manage to collect high amounts of financial donations for humanitarian and other causes. Most of the concerts are dedicated to providing humanitarian aid for Palestinians. Other concerts are for Syrian refugees or for the persecuted Rohingya population. In addition, there are different types of Islamic-themed charity projects such as the “*pesantren* in America” described above.

With this thesis I inquire into Indonesian charity concerts as a relatively new social and cultural phenomenon. The first chapter unpacks the various forces, agents, and interests which have contributed to the emergence of such events as a regular pattern in contemporary Indonesian public life. The second chapter examines what global social imaginaries are performed in the charity events and *how* they are performed. In particular, the study focuses on how “Palestine” and “America” function as symbolic geographies in these global social imaginaries. In addition, I explore various Islam-inspired notions in relation to the events, such as jihad, *dakwah*, and the idea of virtue, and I question how these notions fit into the social imaginaries that are projected in the charity concerts. Ultimately, I aim to examine what various goals the charity concerts fulfil and how they relate to a recent trend in Indonesian society to reprofile the Indonesian nation as a leading Muslim country.

Theoretical framework

This thesis builds on previous studies of how in recent decades Islam has become an influential identity marker and framework of reference in Indonesia and in Southeast Asia at large. Islamic revivalism has inspired the growing ubiquity of Muslim identities in public life, which has been adopted by charities, politicians and celebrities alike. As Andrew Weintraub has pointed out, “popular culture and Islam have become mutually constitutive as sites for defining Muslim

lives in the Malay world”.² This explains why in contemporary Indonesia pop stars easily draw on Islamic identities in promoting humanitarian issues associated with Islam, such as the Palestinian liberation struggle.

Most scholars who study Islamic popular culture in Indonesia have defined it as a predominantly urban middle class phenomenon. My research challenges that perception, being based on fieldwork partially conducted in a rural and peripheral region described as “backward” and “poor” by locals. This thesis also aims to fill another research gap by shedding light on how Islamic-themed popular culture has merged with humanitarianism and civil society in Indonesia. This contrasts with the majority of studies on Islamic popular culture in Southeast Asia, which usually emphasize its interaction with capitalism and commercialization.

My analysis on the use of ‘Palestine’ in Indonesian charity concerts is complementary to Dominik Muller’s work on the appropriation of the Palestinian liberation struggle in Malaysian politics, in which he argues that Palestine-themed imagery has become a symbolic resource for the Islamist opposition party PAS as part of its strategy to discredit the government party UMNO, by identifying PAS with Hamas and UMNO with Fatah, using “a holier than thou”³ discourse. Likewise, Hilman Latief has shown that in Indonesia, too, debates regarding Palestine have become increasingly influenced by religious rhetoric and symbols, which center around the sacred status of Jerusalem and draw on notions of global *ummah*, Muslim solidarity and brotherhood.

² Andrew N. Weintraub, *Islam and popular culture in Indonesia and Malaysia* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011), 1.

³ Dominik Muller, “When ‘PAS is HAMAS’ and ‘UMNO acts like Israel’: localized appropriations of the Palestine conflict in Malaysia.” In: *Graffiti, converts and vigilantes: Islam outside the mainstream in maritime Southeast Asia*, pp. 77 - 106 (Ed. Petru, T.). Caesarpress, Wien (2015)

The idea of global Muslim community, *ummah*, is thus widely present in Indonesian Islamic civil society. This concept also features in the global social imaginaries that are performed in charity concerts. By examining the concerts based on the social imaginaries framework I draw on Charles Taylor's work. Taylor defines social imaginary as "the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations."⁴ I argue that Indonesian charity concerts are quintessential sites for the projection of social imaginaries, because these events engage in the creation and dissemination of "images, stories, and legends", elements that are instrumental in the construction of social imaginaries as Taylor has postulated.

James Piscatori mentions the crucial role of popular culture in the social imaginary of the *ummah*. He perceives the *ummah* in contemporary Muslim discourses as an ambiguous, aspirational, and largely unarticulated concept and argues that "it's usage is variable and its meanings unclear".⁵ My analysis of Indonesian charity concerts illustrate how a local variant of the *ummah* as a global social imaginary is constructed in and through an aspect of the Indonesian public sphere, i.e. charity concerts. It is not a coincidence that the majority of charity concerts are dedicated to Palestine, because Jerusalem as a sacred space endows the cause with significant religious legitimation that unites the *ummah* in a common struggle. It is the power of symbolic geography that enables the issue, in Marshall Sahlins' term, to be amplified from micro to macro.⁶

⁴ Charles Taylor, 2008, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, Brantford, Ont.: W. Ross MacDonald School Resource Services Library, 23, Cited in Seung Soo Kim, "Imagining Religion and Modernity in Post-Colonial Korea: Neo-Liberal Brand Culture and Digital Space" (2016). *College of Media, Communication, and Information*, PhD diss., 28.

⁵ James Piscatori, "In search of the ummah: the social imaginary and its discontents, SOAS University of London. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9AIA5bIXVxo>

⁶ or "transvalued", in Stanley Tambiah's.

The geographic imagination has always played an important role in the imagination of the *ummah* as well as in religious authority within the Muslim world. As Jerome Monnet argues, the human experience of the world is inherently spatial because “the known and imagined world that human activity converts into an empire of signs is, among other things, geographical”.⁷ The Muslim world is often imagined in terms of center and periphery, whereby the Middle East (especially Arab countries) represents the ‘center’ and all non-Middle Eastern and especially non-Arab regions that are inhabited by Muslim populations are regarded as peripheral. Mona Abaza points out that Southeast Asian Muslims are “generically perceived as recipients or followers rather than innovators in religious sciences”⁸ but that the dichotomous discourses which tend to distinguish between the “orthodox” center and the “syncretistic” periphery of the Muslim world obscure the often more complex realities.

Martin van Bruinessen and Hilman Latief see the increase in charitable activities for Palestine by Indonesian organizations as a sign of a growing confidence of Indonesian Muslims and their aspirations to (re)gain a leading role in the Muslim world.⁹¹⁰ Delphine Alles has observed the same trend in Indonesian foreign policy and civil society, in which an increased orientation toward the outside world indicates a new agenda of promoting the “Indonesian brand of Islam”

⁷ Monnet, <https://journals.openedition.org/cybergeog/24747?lang=en>, accessed 1 June, 2018.

⁸ Mona Abaza, "More on the Shifting Worlds of Islam. The Middle East and Southeast Asia: A Troubled Relationship?," *The Muslim World* 97, no. 3 (2007), 421, doi:10.1111/j.1478-1913.2007.00189.x.

⁹ Martin van Bruinessen, ‘Indonesian Muslims and Their Place in the Larger World of Islam’, Paper presented at the 29th Indonesia Update conference, Australian National University, Canberra, September 30 – October 2, 2011, 21.

¹⁰ It can be seen as part of a more general and recent trend among Southeast Asian Muslim countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia to transform their peripheral image and assign themselves a greater role as prominent Muslim nations. The emergence of new communication technologies has also contributed to Southeast Asian Muslims’ increased visibility in the Muslim world. Peter Mandaville mentions “the Internet’s impact on ‘center-periphery’ relations in the Muslim world” as worthy of investigation, since Malaysia has made significant investments in information and networking technologies and Indonesia has also started to consider using the Internet for enhancing Indonesian Islam’s influence. See: ¹⁰ Peter Mandaville, *Transnational Muslim politics: reimagining the umma* (London: Routledge, 2001), 166.

beyond the country's own borders.¹¹ She argues that the new national identity narrative presents Indonesia as 'a potential moderator within the "Muslim world" and, most importantly, between Islam and the West'.¹² Through my case studies in this thesis I aim to show how such a global social imaginary of Indonesia as a leading and mediating Muslim country is projected in Indonesian charity concerts.

Methodology

This thesis is for a large part based on ethnographic fieldwork I have conducted in April 2018 in the Indonesian province of West-Sumatra and in Makassar, the capital city of South-Sulawesi. I spent the largest part of my fieldwork in West-Sumatra's region Pesisir Selatan and its coastal town Painan. There I immersed myself in the local community of volunteers who regularly participate in the activities of the in 2017-founded humanitarian NGO Aliansi Pessel Peduli (APP), the organization that on the local level co-organized a charity concert for Palestine.

While I stayed in Pesisir Selatan, besides attending the concert on 31 March, being taken on tours by the volunteers and visiting their family's homes, I conducted fourteen interviews. Four of those interviews were with volunteers who were involved in organizing the concert in Painan, one with APP's chairman who is simultaneously the wife of the local governor¹³, one with a local government employee in charge of the *dakwah* department, one with the artist Melly Goeslaw, four with concert attendants in Painan, and another three interviews with

¹¹ Delphine Alles, *Transnational Islamic Actors and Indonesia's Foreign policy: Transcending the State*. S.l.: ROUTLEDGE, 2018, 74.

¹² Ibid, 60-61.

¹³ APP is chaired by Lisda Rawdha, the governor's wife, more popularly known as Ibu Lisda (Mrs. Lisda). This shows that there is a relationship between the organization of the charity concert and local politics.

students in Padang who attended the charity concert for Palestine that took place at the Universitas Negeri Padang¹⁴ on 1 April. On 21 April the third concert that I attended took place in Makassar, where I conducted two more interviews: one with the director of Qupro, the organization based in Jakarta that organizes the concerts on a national level, and the other with Shamsi Ali, a Muslim intellectual and imam who is the initiator of the “first *pesantren* in America” project.

In addition to the ethnographic fieldwork, over the past six months I have watched numerous videos on YouTube that report about Indonesian charity concerts. I have compared those recordings with the three concerts that I myself attended, which has enabled me to recognize certain patterns and a common structure that the concerts share. I also apply the method of hermeneutics by studying the ‘texts’, i.e. performances, speeches, and lyrics of songs, in relation to its larger context, i.e. Indonesian civil society, charity organizations, politics and the public sphere, which results in a ‘thick description’ of the events. Scholars have pointed out that alternating “from text to context and back again”¹⁵ helps the researcher to understand ‘how “the parts receive meaning from the whole, and the whole receives sense from the parts”’.¹⁶ Since charity concerts are not isolated events, I believe that this method serves my research aim to shed light on Indonesian charity concerts as part of larger social, political, and cultural developments in the country and beyond.

The choices I made regarding methodology have been crucial in the development of this research. Establishing connections with the local community in Painan gave me access to inside information and other research-related benefits.¹⁷ Besides, having carried out the fieldwork in

¹⁴ Padang State University (UNP)

¹⁵ Daniel M. Goldstein, “Hermeneutics and Ethnography: An Interpretation of Two Texts.” <https://journals.uair.arizona.edu/index.php/arizanthro/article/view/18254>.

¹⁶ Plantinga 1980, cited in Goldstein.

¹⁷ For instance, one of the volunteers offered to give me a ride in the night after the concert of 31 March so that I could attend the other concert that took place in Padang the next morning.

Indonesia's outer islands and provinces has significantly impacted my research. Most studies about Islamic-themed popular culture in Indonesia are characterized by being Java- or Jakarta-centered and have been conducted in predominantly urban settings. Through my locally-grounded research I am able to offer an account of how Indonesian charity concerts, which are the result of a synergy between popular culture and civil society, as well as between local, national, and international forces, have caught the interest of a local community in a rural Indonesian context.

Chapter 1. From celebrities to charities: how international relief aid, moral education, and entertainment came together

*All aspects in this world are spread faster via art and culture.*¹⁸

Melly Goeslaw (singer, songwriter and ‘charity ambassador’)

Charity concerts in Indonesia are not random, nor sporadic events. From January until May 2018 alone at least 67 charity concerts took place in the country, of which the majority were dedicated to providing humanitarian aid to Palestinians. Charity concerts have become common events which bring together different social groups that operate on a local, national, and even international level. This chapter aims to trace the genealogy of Indonesian charity concerts and to explain what forces and developments in society have led to the emergence of these events as a regular, established phenomenon. Who are the agents involved in the concerts, how are they situated in contemporary Indonesian society and what interests and motives inspire them to be engaged in the concerts? Identifying these aspects will enable me to understand the larger contexts that the charity events are a part of and, in turn, it will help to set the backdrop for a ‘thick description’ of the concerts in the second chapter.

1.1 *Nasyid* bands and *dakwah*: a genealogy of Indonesian charity concerts

The emergence of Indonesian charity concerts should be seen in the context of Islamic revivalism, which consequently gave rise to the Islamization of the public sphere, an increased interest in Islam as an identity and the development of mass-mediated Islamic-themed popular culture. Many genres within Islamic-themed popular culture have their origins in student activism which emerged in Indonesian universities in the 1980s and the 1990s, also referred to as ‘campus Islam’. Indonesian *nasyid* is one of the genres that owes its popularity to those early

¹⁸ “Semua aspek apapun di dunia ini lebih cepat terpublish dengan baik melalui seni dan budaya”, interview with Melly Goeslaw on 1 April 2018.

activist networks of Muslim students and intellectuals. Therefore, the interrelations between Islamic pop culture and civil society, in particular Islamic activist, humanitarian and solidarity groups, can be explained by these historical contingencies.

The development of *nasyid* in Indonesia and in Muslim Southeast Asia more generally should also be seen in the context of transnational flows and influences. Bart Barendregt has pointed out that Southeast Asian *nasyid* was inspired by *nasyid* from the Middle East, especially by Palestinian religious nationalist songs that arose as a result of the first Intifada.¹⁹ Transnational and transregional flows from the Middle East to Southeast Asia can primarily be attributed to the large numbers of Southeast Asian students who stayed for a period of time in Middle Eastern Islamic centers of learning and who brought ideas and cultural trends back home.²⁰ *Nasyid* music in the 1980s had an activist flavor and purpose, both in the Middle East and in Southeast Asia. Musicians did not sing solely about God and the Prophet; they also used their music and other cultural ways of expression to criticize their corrupt societies and political regimes.²¹

In Indonesia political Islam was suppressed under the authoritarian Suharto regime, but on a social and cultural level Islam was encouraged and even invested in, as the government allocated “institutional resources for Islamic education and *dakwah*”.²² During the New Order regime youth activist groups were formed at university campuses who started to employ cultural tools for *dakwah* purposes, such as Islamic teen literature, magazines and *nasyid*

¹⁹ Bart Barendregt, “Pop, Politics and Piety: *Nasyid* Boy Band Music in Muslim Southeast Asia.” In *Islam and Popular Culture in Indonesia and Malaysia*, 236, edited by Andrew Weintraub, 235 – 251. London: Routledge, 2011, 236.

²⁰ Barendregt adds that the commercialization of *nasyid* in Malaysia was also caused by militant Iranian music cassettes that gained popularity after being sold outside Malaysian mosques. *Nasyid* trends in Malaysia and Indonesia are closely connected and the famous Malaysian *nasyid* “boyband” Raihan has strongly inspired Indonesian *nasyid*.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Stefan Danerek, “Tjerita dan novel. Literary discourse in post New Order Indonesia”, PhD. diss. University of Lund, 2006. Quoted in Monika Arnez “*Dakwah* by the Pen”, *Indonesia and the Malay World* 37:107 (2009): 46,. accessed 27 September, 2016, doi:10.1080/13639810902743040. 46.

music.²³ This period in history has arguably been crucial to how not only Islamic popular culture but also Islamic civil society has developed into its current manifestations. Hilman Latief argues that the suppression of Islam by the Suharto regime led to “the escalation of ‘social Islam’ or ‘Islamic social activism’”, which he defines as “religiously-inspired, morally-driven, and perhaps politically-oriented Islamic outreach activism, whose task it is to make Islam more grounded in- and socially more beneficial for the community”.²⁴

Latief adds that the emergence of a globally-oriented Islamic solidarity movement in Indonesia also seems to have been spurred by transnational implications of the Soviet war in Afghanistan in the 1980s, as a considerable amount²⁵ of Indonesian Muslims were drawn to the battle ground where they fought as *mujahidin*.²⁶ This connection is also contended by Delphine Alles, who suggests that “shared experience and memories of jihad veterans” have been crucial in shaping the current dominant narrative which centers around the global *ummah*. The influence of this transnational experience of Indonesian fighters is reflected in some contemporary Indonesian nasyid genres, in particular the subgenre called *nasyid haroki*, named after the underground Islamist movements in the Suharto-period known as *harekat*.²⁷ Favoring a puritan and activist style (as opposed to a lot of the more mainstream nasyid genres that have developed in Southeast Asia in the past decades and that have taken over elements from Western pop music), nasyid haroki is usually accompanied by few instruments, using only “march-like drum

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Latief, 79.

²⁵ The number of Indonesian mujahidin having fought in Afghanistan is not known. It has been estimated by Al Chaidar that between 1983 and 1989 around 30.000 Indonesians joined the struggle there against the Soviet invasion. However, Martin van Bruinessen deems that number too large.

²⁶ Ibid, 275.

²⁷ Haroki is derived from the Arabic word *harekat*, meaning ‘movement’ and has its roots in the Islamic social movements that arose in the 1980s or ‘campus Islam’. See: Barendregt, 249.

beats and shouting choirs”.²⁸ The most known groups within this subgenre, and those that have performed in charity concerts are Izzatul Islam, Shoutul Harokah, and ar-Ruhul Jadid.²⁹

While mainstream nasyid musicians tend to sing about their worship of God and the Prophet or about religious duties like prayer and fasting, nasyid haroki groups prefer to chant about jihad, martyrdom, the resurrection of the global ummah and “the battle of the mujahidin”.³⁰ A number of their songs are dedicated to the Palestinian liberation struggle and the Al-Aqsa mosque, of which the most famous song is Shoutul Harokah’s *Palestina Tercinta* (Beloved Palestine).³¹ Nasyid haroki groups have been instrumental in the rise of Indonesian charity concerts as they exist today because the genealogy of the events can be traced to these networks and to their musical activities and performances, particularly the activities and performances of the group Izzatul Islam.

A key person in the emergence of such events is Ali Amril, the former manager of Izzatul Islam and the current director of the company Qupro Indonesia, a business that specializes in event organizing and the primary company in charge of most of the charity concerts today. In my interview with Amril he traces the charity concerts to the year 2004, when he began touring around the country to perform with Izzatul Islam. In 2011 Amril joined the non-profit Islamic solidarity organization Komite Nasional untuk Rakyat Palestina (KNRP), where he became the International Programs Director. There he developed the concept of the charity events, which

²⁸ Ibid, 249.

²⁹ Bart Barendregt has observed a trend among recent nasyid in Indonesia and Malaysia which seems to point to a Southeast Asian Muslim identity and global aspirations. He writes that “the new transnationality of nasyid is reflected in pan-Southeast Asian song contests” and that “it shows the awareness of a new cultural geography of the Muslim world in which in many aspects (Muslim entertainment, the use of ICT’s and new media, and more generally progressive Muslim thinking), Southeast Asia seems to have become a role model for its Muslim compatriots around the world and the ummah at large.” Barendregt, 243.

³⁰ Barendregt, 249.

³¹ This is Shoutul Harokah’s song and video clip *Palestina Tercinta*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IUKX2Vp3-cY>

by now take place on a regular basis. Under Amril's leadership KNRP set up large-scale annual charity concert programs, the *Konser 7 Kota* and *Konser 40 Kota*. In 2015 Amril took a more commercial direction by founding the company PT. Qupro Manajemen Indonesia (Qupro).³² Whereas Qupro has recently become the main organizer of the charity concerts, KNRP now focuses on another large-scale project which revolves around Palestinian sheikhs who are touring in Indonesia.³³

In my conversation with Amril after the charity concert in Makassar he summarized the purpose of the charity concerts from the perspective of his organization in three main points: the primary aim being "humanitarian education", the secondary aim charity, and as the third he mentioned entertainment. He identified the charity concerts as a suitable tool for educating the Indonesian masses and for getting them involved in humanitarian causes because such events appeal to many people. He argued that other types of religious communal activities such as those that take place in the mosque, the *musholla*, or in a village-setting manage to attract only a certain segment of society. Events that incorporate art, culture and entertainment, however, are capable of attracting a broader audience, according to the event organizer. In Amril's words "all segments of the society will attend it".

³² Interview with Ali Amril on 21 April 2018 and email correspondence with Fika Atika (Qupro) in May 2018.

³³ Ibid.



The nasyid group Izzatul Islam at one of their performances for Palestine.

1.2 The *hijrah* of Indonesian pop stars: how mainstream artists became charitable activists

The reason why so many people are drawn to the charity concerts seems to partially lie in the wish to see their idols perform. Indeed, the involvement of celebrities in Indonesian humanitarian projects has impacted the charity scene. This development originates again in Islamic revivalism and the blending of *dakwah* with cultural tools. After the fall of Suharto in 1998 a liberalization of the media took place and Islamic genres became commercialized.³⁴ Out of this transformation and due to the increased popularity of Islam as an identity, particularly among youth, new Islamic-themed genres emerged. Much of the contemporary Indonesian Islamic-themed music has blended with mainstream pop music and with the mainstream world of celebrities.³⁵ One contemporary manifestation of that development is the choice of many Indonesian artists to start living a pious lifestyle and adopt a more religious identity. This type of transformation has recently been coined in the contemporary Indonesian popular culture

³⁴ Hariyadi, "Islamic Popular Culture and the New Identity of Indonesian Muslim Youths," paper presented at the *18th Biennial Conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia*, Adelaide, July 5 – 8, 2010

³⁵ See: Weintraub, Andrew N. *Islam and popular culture in Indonesia and Malaysia*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011.

scene as making one's *hijrah*.³⁶ Among the many Indonesian celebrities who at some point in their careers embarked on their *hijrah*, two famous artists have recently become highly associated with charity concerts: the legendary singer and song writer Melly Goeslaw and Opick, a widely popular singer of religious pop music with Sufi influences.³⁷ Both musicians started their careers as mainstream musicians before Islamic-themed popular culture had become a huge hype.

Up until Melly's dramatic identity transformation she was never known for modesty in dress and appearance, nor for a pious Islamic identity and lifestyle. Her musical career began in the 1990s as lead singer of the pop band *Potret*. Inspired by the world-famous Icelandic singer Bjork, she used to impress her fans with eccentric costumes and "wild hair colors". Nowadays Melly is still acknowledged as having her own unique style, but one that is much more modest; her hair is covered by a *hijab* and the contours of her body are hidden with long gowns. Melly's increased identification and association with Islam started when she wrote the soundtrack of the first and highly successful Indonesian Islamic-themed romantic blockbuster film *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (Verses of Love), which was released in 2008. In the years to come she would write soundtracks for films of the same genre, such as *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* (When Love Glorifies God), *Cinta Suci Zahrana* (Zahrana's Sacred Love), and *Di Bawah Lindungan Ka'bah* (Under the Protection of the Ka'bah), songs which all became hits. She felt that she was guided by God to gradually come across projects that led her on the path of Islam. After Melly's second *umroh* in 2014 she decided to wear the *hijab* permanently.³⁸

³⁶ Literally: migration (Arabic), referring to the journey from Mecca to Medina made by the Prophet Muhammad, which marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar. The phenomenon of *hijrah* among Indonesian celebrities has become somewhat of a hype and receives a lot of media attention. There are for instance several television shows that are dedicated to telling the story of the *hijrah* of famous artists.

³⁷ Melly was the central star in the charity concerts that I attended in West-Sumatra, which took place in Painan on 31 March 2018 and in Padang on 1 April 2018. At another concert that I attended in Makassar she performed with Opick.

³⁸ Interview with Melly on 1 April 2018.

Two years earlier, in 2012 Melly started her involvement in charitable activities. Opick, who gained fame as a rock star but transformed his style into Sufi-inspired Islamic-themed music categorized as *pop religi*,³⁹ began with charity around the same time.⁴⁰ Nowadays the artists devote most of their free time to charitable projects,⁴¹ in particular for Palestinians and other refugees and war victims in the Middle East. Their charity campaigns receive a huge amount of media attention, to the extent that the pop stars have already been turned into icons representing the Palestinian cause, being called “charity ambassadors” (*duta kemanusiaan*) or “charity ambassadors for Palestine in Indonesia”. In December 2017 Melly and Opick both joined the company Qupro and the organization *Sahabat Palestina Memanggil* (Friends of Palestine are Calling) on a humanitarian mission to a refugee camp in Kilis⁴², Southeastern Turkey, to see with their own eyes that the donations that are given during the concerts find their way to those who need it.⁴³ In April 2018 Opick went on another humanitarian mission, this time to a refugee camp in Lebanon.

In the interview I conducted with Melly she said that she regards it as her duty to use her musical talents, her voice and her fame, all “granted to her by God”, for humanitarian purposes. She believes that all aspects in this world, in particular political and charitable goals, can be more easily achieved by the use of art and culture. Moreover, the involvement of a public figure can facilitate such goals even further according to her, because through a public figure the issue

³⁹ Opick’s songs and music videos are mostly Sufi-inspired. Some of his songs are directed at children, but in general his music attracts listeners of all ages.

⁴⁰ <https://www.biografiku.com/biografi-opick-penyanyi-religi-indonesia/>

⁴¹ In my interview with her Melly said that she sacrifices spending time with her family because in the weekends she is usually busy with charity.

⁴² The refugee camp in Kilis is in reality populated by Syrians. However, Melly and the Indonesian media describe the camp as a “Palestinian refugee camp near the Syrian border”, although they acknowledge that “part of the camp’s inhabitants” are Syrians.

⁴³ An interesting side note is that the refugee camp in Kilis is predominantly inhabited by Syrian refugees, but the Indonesian media and the artists mostly refer to them as Palestinians. Sometimes it is written that the camp inhabitants are a mix of Palestinian and Syrian refugees. The emphasis on Palestinians, which contradicts reality in this case, suggests that “Palestine” serves as a framework in Indonesia that is easy to attract attention and that stands for crises and war victims in the Middle East in general.

is likely to get attention.⁴⁴ What drives her charitable work is a deep concern for humanitarian issues, the desire to educate the masses about these issues and to contribute to a better world. She sees the Palestinian cause not as a matter of religion but as a humanitarian problem first and foremost.⁴⁵ My informants who attended the concerts in Painan and Padang all expressed their admiration for Melly. Besides appreciating her as a high-class artist, they also praised Melly's genuine drive to contribute to humanitarian causes, which motivates her to perform without making any money out of it.



Melly Goeslaw and Opick during one of their charity concerts for Palestine.

⁴⁴ Interview with Melly on 1 April 2018 in Padang. For Melly the Palestinian issue should be regarded as a humanitarian problem, not as a religious one. As She hopes that Indonesian citizens learn from the charity concerts that they are lucky to live in a now free country with plenty of social capital while Palestinians, on the other hand, have not gained their independence yet and are experiencing severe crisis and lack of support. She regrets it that some Indonesians frame the Palestinian cause as a purely Islamic cause, because in reality the Palestinian population consists of non-Muslims, as well. In the interview Melly also mentioned the historical relations between Indonesia and Palestine, the Palestinians being “among the first nations to acknowledge Indonesian independence”.

⁴⁵ In my interview with Melly she also mentioned that there are not just Muslims in Palestine; that there are also non-Muslims such as Christians and that they equally deserve and receive their support and humanitarian aid. She also tried to communicate this message to the audience in Painan by saying on stage: “This is not about religion, it is about humanitarianism.” However, at other moments during the concert she nevertheless resorted to religious notions such as “supporting one’s fellow Muslims”.



Melly and Opick on their humanitarian mission.

1.3 From Indonesia to Gaza: humanitarian organizations involved in charity concerts

In the context of the charity concerts, artists like Melly, Opick, and nasyid groups work with a number of Indonesian humanitarian organizations that operate on an international level while cooperating with locally and domestic associations in Indonesia. These internationally-oriented organizations receive the funds that are raised during charity events. Subsequently, they conduct humanitarian missions to Gaza and refugee camps in the Middle East, where the funds are turned into concrete aid such as food and medicines. There they sometimes work with organizations from other countries, like the Turkish humanitarian association Hayat Yolu.⁴⁶ Currently the most active and visible organizations in relation to charity concerts are Sahabat Palestina Memanggil and Aksi Cepat Tanggap (Quick Response Action, ACT). SPM and ACT can be categorized as humanitarian and Islamic solidarity groups at the same time. The Islamic solidarity group KNRP, previously the main organizer of charity concerts, has also been on

⁴⁶ Hayat Yolu is known as a mediator between international aid organizations and local beneficiaries. Interview with Melly Goeslaw on 1 April 2018.

humanitarian missions in the Middle East, as has the company Qupro. While on these missions the different organizations cooperate and work together intensively.⁴⁷

On its website SPM presents itself as a humanitarian organization that revolves around the Al-Aqsa mosque and humanitarian issues in Palestine. The organization attempts to raise funds and influence public opinion by organizing social activities, speeches, seminars and art events, in particular charity concerts.⁴⁸ At the concert in Painan on 1 April a representative of the organization announced their upcoming plan to build a bread factory in Palestine. In addition, SPM addresses humanitarian problems in other locations as well; it has for example launched charity projects and events for Syrian and Rohingya refugees.⁴⁹

ACT's scope of activities is also broad, ranging from quick response in urgent crisis situations, post-disaster actions, strengthening and supporting society and setting up Islamic spiritual programs such as *zakat*⁵⁰ and *wakaf*⁵¹. Since the year 2012 ACT has expanded its activities to an international level, being active in twenty two countries as of 2018. This expansion is part of their mission and goal to become a professional, global humanitarian organization that contributes to a better world.⁵² These humanitarian organizations who serve as the gateway through which the funds collected in charity concerts reach the actual destinations, are a quintessential example of Hilman Latief's observation that Indonesian Islamic charities have adopted "a new role" and are now "players in relief missions in the international arena".⁵³ He relates this to a broader development in Indonesian civil society: the expansion in scope of

⁴⁷ In December 2017 Melly and Opick joined a humanitarian mission to refugee camps in Southeastern Turkey near the Syrian border (Kilis) and in Lebanon with SPM and Qupro. Previously, Melly worked a lot with KNRP. Strong ties are maintained between all of these different organizations and the artists.

⁴⁸ <http://www.knrp.org/profil-knrp/sejarah-knrp>, accessed 11 April 2018.

⁴⁹ <http://sahabatpalestinamemanggil.org/sejara-spm/>, accessed 11 April 2018.

⁵⁰ Almsgiving, one of the five pillars in Islam.

⁵¹ Wakaf is a kind of charitable endowment in Islam.

⁵² <https://act.id/>

⁵³ Latief, 296.

many charities, who are combining their work of combating local poverty issues with addressing issues that concern the global Muslim community.^{54 55}



Indonesian humanitarian workers and the artists (Opick and Melly) posing with Palestinian girls.

1.4 ‘Humanitarian education’: cultivating a virtuous society through entertainment

Charity concerts are representative of this pattern of cooperation on different levels identified by Latief. To understand why charity concerts have become so common and widespread in Indonesia in recent years, the local agents and their interests need to be taken into consideration as well. Local initiatives are likely to be driven by different interests than merely humanitarian aid abroad. The fieldwork I did in Pesisir Selatan suggests that local motives partially overlap with the aims of domestic organizations that organize the concerts on a broader scale, in particular the company Qupro. Like Qupro’s director, local volunteers in Painan identified as the charity concerts’ primary goal “humanitarian education” (*edukasi kemanusiaan*). In my

⁵⁴ Ibid, 297.

⁵⁵ In December 2017 the Indonesian activist and “vlogger” in Gaza, Muhammad Husein, appeared on Hamas television channel Al-Aqsa TV and was interviewed about interviewed about the mass demonstration in Jakarta: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dVol2DOIEow>

interview with the secretary of the local organization in Pesisir Selatan Aliansi Pessel Peduli (APP), he attributed 40% of the charity concerts' purpose to humanitarian education, 30% to the collection of funds for charity and another 30% to entertainment. In their explanation of what humanitarian education entails my informants emphasized that it does not necessarily mean educating the people *about* those humanitarian crises abroad; rather, the aim is to make people adopt an attitude of caring about and for others. The logic behind is that if they care about "brothers and sisters far away", they are also likely to care about their own neighbors.

The charity concerts themselves and the way they are structured also reflects the overarching goal to cultivate virtue and virtuous action among audiences. Speakers and performers on the stage repeatedly invite concert attendants to contribute to the cause. To encourage people to commit virtuous actions, they rely primarily on religious notions. For instance, during a charity concert for Palestine that took place on 16 December 2017 Opick invited his audience to donate by saying: "Who wants to give money to God?" At the charity concert where I did fieldwork in Painan on 31 March 2018 the *Bupati*⁵⁶ initiated the event by expressing his wishes that the people of Pesisir Selatan would be very generous that night. He said: "God will reward us. Pesisir will be free from natural disasters. Because we help our brothers and sisters."⁵⁷ The idea of the local population being rewarded by God for their charitable activities is frequently expressed at charity concerts. For instance, at a concert in Surabaya in December 2017 Opick told the audience:

"If we would not help Palestine and the Rohingya, God would send other servants (of God) to help them all. However, if suddenly today it is *us* who are facilitated to help our brothers and sisters in Palestine, then of course God will want the best for all of us. Takbir!"⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Governor, an important local politician who is also indirectly involved with the local humanitarian organization who helped organize the concert because his wife is the chairman of that organization.

⁵⁷ "Allah akan dibalas. Pesisir akan bebas dari bencana alam. Membantu saudara kita."

⁵⁸ "Kalau seandainya kita tidak membantu Palestina, tidak membantu Rohingya, Allah akan kirim hamba-hamba yang lain untuk menolong mereka semuanya. Tetapi kalau tiba-tiba hari ini kita yang

Secular notions are also used to encourage people to be virtuous, especially by resorting to discourses of universal humanitarianism and anti-imperialism. At the charity concert at the Universitas Negeri Padang (State University Padang, UNP) which took place on a April 2018, a speaker on the stage addressed the young audience which mostly consisted of students, by stressing the importance of caring about others, “also about those who are far away”.⁵⁹ He added that the Indonesian nation is highly educated and that, therefore, Indonesians should care about what is happening to other nations. He linked this attitude of caring directly to education by suggesting that: “If Indonesian youth do not care, it means the education has failed.”⁶⁰ Audiences in Painan and in Padang responded enthusiastically to speakers’ and performers’ calls to show that they care. At the charity concert on 31 March in Painan a total amount of 875.947.600 Indonesian rupiah⁶¹ was donated for the Palestinian cause by the local population. The local humanitarian organization Aliansi Pessel Peduli (APP) that helped organize the concert in the provincial city Painan (Pesisir Selatan region) was established exactly for the reasons mentioned above by those on the stage: to instill in people an attitude of care and to thereby contribute to a better, more prosperous and developed society⁶² in Pesisir Selatan as well as an increased social capital that the population can benefit from. The association is the result of a joint initiative by local volunteers, students from the region who study in Padang and Lisda Rawdha⁶³, the wife of the *Bupati* (governor) of Pesisir Selatan. They came together in October 2017 by the name of *Aksi Solidaritas Rohingya* (Action of Solderarity for the Rohingya), named after their first activity: a charity concert for Rohingya refugees. The event,

dimudahkan membantu saudara-saudara kita di Palestina, tentu Allah menghendaki kebaikan yang banyak untuk kita semua. Takbir!”

⁵⁹ “Yang jauh pun kita harus peduli.”

⁶⁰ “Kalau anak muda Indonesia tidak kepedulian, artinya gagal pendidikan.”

⁶¹ That equals more than 53.000 euro.

⁶² And in addition probably also a God-fearing society that fulfils its religious obligations so that God protects and rewards the population.

⁶³ More popularly and locally known as *Ibu Lisda* (Mrs. Lisda).

for which they had invited the famous singer Elma Theana to perform, managed to bring up a total amount of 207 million Rupiah.⁶⁴

Through such events local volunteers in Pesisir Selatan also hope to promote the region on a national level. Whenever a famous Indonesian artist visits Pesisir Selatan for a charitable event, the celebrity is taken on a tour to witness the region's natural resources and beaches.⁶⁵ In my interviews with volunteers they expressed the expectation that through the dissemination of (positive) information about Pesisir Selatan in the media and online, the region will attract tourists and other types of investment from all over Indonesia. That way the *kabupaten* can transform itself from a "backward and neglected" region into a prestigious and prosperous one. APP's secretary, added however that at the moment Pesisir Selatan is associated only with nature and that they want their region to be known also for religious and social issues. He believes that charity concerts with famous artists generate good publicity so that the entire country will know that in Pesisir Selatan they help their Muslim brothers in need.⁶⁶

APP's secretary summarized what they do through the concerts in the following words: "We invite the society in a global way through their idols so that they can do something good." Inviting nation-wide popular artists is thus also employed as a tool to attract the masses to the charity events and thereby enhance the event's impact as well as to maximize the amount of financial donations destined for humanitarian aid. Hence, it can be said that by the appeal of popular culture and humanitarian issues that are of concern to the population⁶⁷ the charity

⁶⁴ The local volunteers cooperated with ACT to deliver the money to Rohingya victims of war and persecution in Myanmar.

⁶⁵ Elma Theana also expressed in the media that she hopes to make Pesisir Selatan more known among Indonesians by participating in the event.

⁶⁶ "Kita mengajak masyarakat secara global melalui sang idolanya untuk melakukan sesuatu yang baik", interview with APP's secretary on 4 April 2018.

⁶⁷ As a reason to choose Palestine for the charity concert in Painan local volunteers mentioned that the population of Pesisir Selatan consists almost entirely of Muslims and that this makes Palestine a relevant cause for the locals. In addition, "Ibu Lisda" mentioned that Palestine circulates a lot in the media and is currently an important topic in the world that is widely spoken about. Ali Amril, too,

concerts fulfil these various interests by local agents, i.e. moral education, promotion of its region, and charity, all at once.



Poster that announces the charity concert in Painan.

1.5 Global *dakwah*: how charity concerts attract agents beyond the Muslim world

The above description of the primary agents involved in Indonesian charity concerts seems to suggest that the concerts are focused on humanitarian and relief aid only, particularly in conflict areas in the Muslim world. While the far majority of the concerts are indeed dedicated to such issues, some concerts are organized to promote and fund Islam-related projects that on first sight may seem by non-Indonesian observers not to fit into a humanitarian framework. This stems from the fact that the notion of humanitarianism (*kemanusiaan*) in Indonesian Islamic or Islam-inspired civil society is understood broadly and, as Latief indicates, includes a variety of Islamic notions such as *sedekah* (benevolence), *ta'awun* (mutual help / solidarity), and *jihad fi sabilillah* (struggle in the path of God). *Jihad fi sabilillah* can point to a variety of charitable and activist goals, such as contributing to social welfare but also engaging in Islamic

said that almost all charity concerts organized by Qupro are dedicated to Palestine because it is the most important topic of concern to the Muslim world at the moment.

proselytization, known as *dakwah*. Since many of these goals are overlapping in Indonesian Muslim organizations, distinctions between these notions have become blurred.⁶⁸

This blurring and overlap can be witnessed in charity concerts, as well, because the overarching concept and structure is equipped to not only accommodate causes for humanitarian aid at home or abroad, but also *dakwah* projects. An example of such a project based on my field work,⁶⁹ is a series of concerts named ‘Satu Hati’ (One Heart) that intend to collect funds to enable the realization of an Indonesian Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) in the United States. It is also an example of how Indonesian charity concerts have attracted a transnational agent based in the West.⁷⁰

The *pesantren* project is an initiative by Nusantara Foundation, a non-profit organization which was established in 2009 in Washington DC. Its aim is to “share the richness of Indonesian culture in the international community”.⁷¹ Its president and spokesperson is Shamsi Ali, an Indonesian Islamic scholar who has received Islamic education in Pakistan and who has lived in the United States since 1996. There he has worked as an imam, first for a small Indonesian community mosque and later as deputy imam of New York’s largest mosque, the Islamic Cultural Center of New York. In the Indonesian public sphere Shamsi Ali is known for being committed to interfaith dialogue and, besides Nusantara Foundation, he is engaged in several interfaith organizations and projects.

Imam Shamsi Ali, as he is usually referred to, was present himself at the charity concert in Makassar to explain to the audience why his project to build the first *pesantren* in America deserves their financial support. As the first reason he mentioned that founding a *pesantren* in

⁶⁸ Latief, 15.

⁶⁹ I attended one of these concerts in Makassar on 21 April 2018.

⁷⁰ Whereas previously Indonesian Muslims were primarily oriented toward the Middle East, in recent decades Western countries have become increasingly popular as study destinations and locations for *dakwah*.⁷⁰

⁷¹ <http://www.nusantarafoundation.org/new/who-we-are>

the United States will make Indonesia more known as the world's biggest Muslim country. The intention is to counter the false assumption held by many people in the West that Islam is an Arab or Middle Eastern religion as well as the widely spread perception that Islam is an intolerant religion and a threat to world peace. One consequence of this misunderstanding about Islam is a high degree of Islamophobia among the American population. The best way to respond to this problem, according to Shamsi Ali, is by offering the right education, exemplified in the *pesantren*. Nusantara Foundation also sees the project as a test case for America with regard to tolerance, freedom of religion, human rights, and justice for all. In case the founding of the school is prevented by the American authorities despite fulfilment of the official requirements, it means that America violates the very values it has been proud of for so long.

Another reason mentioned by Shamsi Ali is that Indonesia or Indonesian culture is relatively unknown in America compared to other Southeast Asian countries. Whereas Thailand is already famous there for its cuisine, Indonesia can now become known for its unique Islamic education system as well as for its cultural diversity. For example, each building of the school will represent a different region in Indonesia and will be built according to the traditional architecture. The imam also emphasized that Indonesia has a rich history and used to be among the centers of Islamic knowledge in the region and that there were even Indonesian *ulama* who became famous in the Muslim world and who contributed to the body of Islamic knowledge.

With the establishment of the *pesantren* it is hoped by the initiators of the project that Indonesian scholars of Islam will make a come-back in the international world. Lastly, Shamsi Ali and his colleagues from Nusantara Foundation hope that the existence of the *pesantren* will contribute to a better relationship between the United States and the Muslim world, in particular Indonesia. They also believe that any positive action undertaken in the 'land of uncle Sam' will have a global impact, America being the most powerful and dominant nation in the

contemporary world. My field observations suggest that the *pasantren* project managed to attract a degree of publicity and attendants comparable to concerts for Palestine.⁷² The staged performances and other structural elements during the events were also similar and evoked similar responses among the audience.⁷³

In this chapter I have explored the dimension of popular culture as well as civil society in relation to Indonesian charity concerts, as well as the interrelations between them. The analysis shows that the events involve a variety of agents, i.e. local and domestic organizations, nasyid bands, the more mainstream ‘charity ambassadors’ artists, the organizations that operate in the field of international relief, and sometimes even Indonesian transnational agents based in the ‘West’. Looking at these local, national, and international or global agents helps explain the emergence of Indonesian charity concerts by pointing to the socio-political and cultural conditions that preceded and facilitated the events as a regular phenomenon. The concerts seem to fulfil a variety of goals and interests, as diverse as promoting the local region where the concert takes place (in the case of Pesisir Selatan), morally educating the masses and raising funds for relief missions in conflict areas, particularly those that concern the global *ummah*.

⁷² Although I cannot back that suggestion up with quantitative data.

⁷³ For instance Qur’an recitations, nasyid performances by local groups, the performance of Islamic-themed theatre by local groups, shouting religious slogans such as *Allahu Akbar*, singing along enthusiastically with the songs performed by Melly and Opick, and waving plastic Indonesian flags handed out by the organizers.

Chapter 2. Centering the nation through symbolic geographies

Maimunah asked the Prophet: “Oh Prophet, give me a fatwa about Jerusalem.” The Prophet said: “It’s the land where they gather and spread (humanity). So come and pray there. Because praying there is equal to praying 1000 times elsewhere.” Maimunah said again: “What if I can’t.” “Then give olive oil in order to provide it with lighting. Whomever gives that is as if he or she has visited it.” (Hr. Ibnu Majah)⁷⁴

The above hadith attests to Jerusalem’s sacredness and its religious symbolism in Islam. It invites Muslims from all over the world to pledge allegiance to the Al-Aqsa mosque and establish an emotional and divine connection with it. The Israeli occupation of this sacred Islamic space has caused the issue of ‘Palestine’ to become a highly appealing, even urgent, topic in the Indonesian public sphere. In this chapter I examine how Palestine and America, as two non-Indonesian, symbolic geographies, have become incorporated into local narratives drawing on global social imaginaries that are projected and performed in Indonesian charity concerts. I question how these symbolic geographies feature in the concerts and how they are instrumental in the global social imaginary of the *ummah* as well as the imaginary of the Indonesian nation and its role within the global *ummah*.

What do these spaces represent in the narratives that are performed in the concerts and beyond? How is a sense of belonging to these social imaginaries and a subsequent sense of (religious or virtuous) duty in relation to them, instilled in audiences? How do the symbolic spaces function with regard to encouraging virtuous action and almsgiving among concert attendants? I will unpack the meanings that are attributed to Palestine as an *axis mundi* and then show through examples from the charity concerts and popular culture beyond the concerts how a semiotic

⁷⁴ Maimunah bertanya kepada Nabi “Ya Rasulullah, berikan fatwa kepadaku tentang Baitul Maqdis.” Nabi Berkata, “Tempat dikumpulkannya dan disembarkannya (manusia). Maka datangilah dan sholat di dalamnya. Kerana sholat di dalamnya seperti shalat 1000 rakaat di selainnya”. Maimunah berkata lagi, “Bagaimana jika aku tidak bisa”. “Maka berikanlah zaitun (minyak) untuk penerangannya. Barang siapa yang memberikannya maka seolah ia telah mendatannya.”

and religious triangle of jihad and *dakwah* is constructed through the appropriation of “Palestine” by Indonesian civil society and (popular) cultural agents. Then I will turn to the case of the “first *pesantren* in America” project and analyze how the United States and the meanings attributed to it as a symbolic geography fit into the global imaginary of Indonesian *dakwah*.

2.1 Symbolic geographies: Palestine as an *axis mundi* that unites the global *ummah*

Monnet posits that “all places have a symbolic dimension”, but that not all places have this to an equal extent. The symbolism of a place is socially constructed and helps to form group identity. For a place to be symbolically-charged, symbols must be assigned to it that are widely shared and that are communicated efficiently. It thus requires a certain number of people to recognize the place as symbolic.⁷⁵ The same applies to those symbolic spaces that are considered sacred; their sacredness is socially constructed through shared meaning and practices. Sacred spaces have an extra dimension compared to other symbolic spaces, as they are believed to be infused with divine presence.⁷⁶ Mircea Eliade referred to this phenomenon as *hierophany*.⁷⁷ He pointed to a common tendency among religious people “to seek out places in which the sacred exists as a substantive presence - places called world centers or *axis mundi*”.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Jérôme Monnet, « The symbolism of place: a geography of relationships between space, power and identity », *Cybergeog : European Journal of Geography* [Online], Political, Cultural and Cognitive Geography, document 562, Online since 30 October 2011, connection on 30 May 2018. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/cybergeog/24747> ; DOI : 10.4000/cybergeog.24747

⁷⁶ Jeanne Halgren Kilde, "Approaching Religious Space: An Overview of Theories, Methods, and Challenges in Religious Studies," *Religion and Theology* 20, no. 3-4 (2014): , doi:10.1163/15743012-12341258.

⁷⁷ Manifestation of the sacred.

⁷⁸ Kilde, 185.

Victor Turner's work on ritual represents another stream of thought regarding sacred space. Turner argued that religious believers show their allegiance to sacred geographies by organizing rituals around them, which "creates experiences of spiritual and social connection".⁷⁹ Adopting a Turnerian approach to Indonesian charity concerts it could be said that concert organizers, performers and attendants alike engage in a ritual around Islam's third holiest site, Jerusalem, and that the events serve to improve Indonesian Muslims' relationship with God as well as to foster the Islamic community, both at home and abroad.

The far majority of Indonesian charity concerts are dedicated to humanitarian aid for Palestinians in Gaza and in refugee camps. To understand why Palestine has become such an important topic in Indonesian civil society and in Islamic-themed popular culture it must be understood as a symbolic and sacred geography. From the perspective of many Muslims Palestine is not purely a humanitarian issue but also a religious one,⁸⁰ precisely because Jerusalem is regarded as an *axis mundi*.

The sacred status of Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa in Islam stems from several reasons. First, having served as the first *kiblat*, the direction in which Muslims were required to pray in the early days of Islam, endows the cause with huge religious significance, thus providing spiritual and historical iconicity. Second, Jerusalem is recorded in the Qur'an as the site from which the Prophet Muhammad made his *mi`raj* or spiritual night journey to the heavens. Third, like in Christianity Jerusalem is associated with the expected return of the Prophet Isa (Jesus) and the final Judgment Day.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Jeanne Halgren Kilde, "Approaching Religious Space: An Overview of Theories, Methods, and Challenges in Religious Studies." *Religion and Theology* 20, no. 3-4 (2014): 183-201, 186.

⁸⁰ Despite the fact that some agents involved in the concerts, for instance the musician Melly Goeslaw, emphasized that it is not about religion.

⁸¹ Seyyed Hosein Nasr "The Spiritual Significance of Jerusalem – The Islamic Vision." *Islamic Quarterly*, Jan. 1, 1998, 42: 4, 236.

The Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem as a religious icon has a central symbolic place in the charity events. In the rhetorical speeches on the stage in addition to music performances speakers often argue that Al-Aqsa belongs to *all* Muslims and that as Muslims, they therefore have the right to defend it. According to Hilman Latief the Al-Aqsa mosque “seems to have become a symbol” in Indonesian charitable activities “that ‘unites’ Indonesian Muslims in support of Palestinians by any means necessary”.^{82 83}

The incorporation of “Palestine” into other Muslim populations’ narratives is thus unequivocally related to its status as a sacred geography. Stanley Tambiah was among the first scholars to theorize such cultural phenomena which can be described as the “dynamic transformation of micro-events into major issues, and vice versa”⁸⁴ with his terms of ‘focalization’ and ‘transvaluation’. He argued that these processes are two-fold: the local conflicts are taken out of their original context (focalization) and, as this happens, the issues get distorted, become more abstract, and get aggravated into “larger collective issues” (transvaluation).⁸⁵

Marshall Sahlins has further expanded Tambiah’s theory and refers to the same phenomenon as “structural amplification”.⁸⁶ He points out that structural and historical iconicity are crucial requirements for these processes to take place. In Sahlins’ words “there needs to be a good old story, one with sufficient structural and historical iconicity to evoke a widespread political

⁸² Hilman Latief, “Islamic Charities and Social Activism: Welfare, Dakwah and Politics in Indonesia,” PhD diss., Utrecht University, 2012, 265.

⁸³ This video shows a mass demonstration that took place in in December 2017, briefly after the United States had declared Jerusalem as Israel’s capital city. The video begins with a performance of the song *Palestina Tercinta*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=byQIS7Dokic>

⁸⁴ Cited in Mariza Peirano, “People and Ideas Travel Together: Tambiah’s Approach to Ritual and Cosmology in Brazil”, in F. Aulino, M. Goheen & S. Tambiah (eds.) *Radical Egalitarianism. Local Realities, Global Relations*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2013, 9. Original source: Tambiah, Stanley. 1996. *Leveling crowds. Ethnonationlist conflicts and collective violence in South Asia*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Marshall Sahlins, “Structural work: how microhistories become macrohistories and vice versa,” *Anthropological Theory* 5, no. 1 (2005): 5 – 30.

response”. Small-scale disputes become aggravated due to structural forces that synthesize microhistories with macrohistories dialogically.⁸⁷ As a result, collective identities are projected unto local relationships and collective relationships acquire local identities.⁸⁸

2.3 Caring about Palestine: sacred space, the *ummah* and vicarious nationalism

The appropriation of Palestine into local Indonesian narratives reveal a form of “vicarious nationalism”⁸⁹, in which Indonesian Muslims are not merely sympathetic or supportive of Palestinians, but in which they regard the Palestinian struggle as their own. Such an identification with Palestine could emerge because the land represents an Islamic *axis mundi*. Palestine as a sacred geography evokes a religious obligation on part of Indonesian Muslims to support the liberation of this sacred space and to be in solidarity with its oppressed population.

Charity concerts are quintessential sites that illustrate how vicarious nationalism among Indonesians manifests in cultural events, how it is cultivated on the stage and what this implies for the people who identify with it. The sacred status of Jerusalem and the Al-Aqsa mosque invite Muslims to perform virtuous deeds in relation to the sacred space. Hence, it matches the overarching goal of Indonesian charity concerts which is to cultivate virtue among citizens. At the concerts those attendants who respond to the performers’ call to donate a significant amount are invited to the stage, upon which the artist hangs a famous and iconic shawl on their neck

⁸⁷ Ibid, 6.

⁸⁸ Moreover, Palestine has become the axis through which all other conflicts in the Middle East are connoted. For instance, the videos with graphic images that are projected on the screen also include images from the war in Syria. When Melly Goeslaw joined the Indonesian humanitarian mission to refugee camps in Southeastern Turkey, Syria, and Lebanon, this mission was represented in the media and by the artist herself as helping primarily Palestinian refugees, even though the refugee camp in Turkey (Kilis) hosts almost all Syrians.

⁸⁹ I thank Prof. Daniel Monterescu for his invention of this term and for allowing me to use it as applied to my research.

which features the Palestinian flag on one end and the Indonesian flag on the other end, signifying Indonesian support for Palestine. The most generous givers however, receive a sizeable, framed print on which Al-Aqsa is depicted.

The belief that a good Muslim should take care of the holy land and its mosque is supported by reference to Islamic sources. This appears for instance on the invitation for the charity concert in Painan on 31 March 2018, which was sent to its inhabitants by post mail. The leaflet presents the hadith that this chapter begins with, in which a person named Maimunah asked the Prophet about Jerusalem. The religious merit that Muslims get by pledging allegiance to Al-Aqsa explains why Jerusalem has become an important pilgrimage site for Muslims from all over the world. Indonesians too, have combined their *umroh* or *haji* in Mecca and Medina with a visit to Jerusalem.⁹⁰

Besides galvanizing the audience to express reverence to Al-Aqsa,⁹¹ the attendants are also encouraged to empathize with Palestinians in various ways. One of those ways is through a short film on a large screen which depict graphic images of victimized and injured people in Gaza, especially women and children. The images are present on the background for much of the event, but there is also a special time reserved in which concert attendants only get to watch and listen to the film (usually this happens right before the collection of donations). While watching those scenes people in the audience are clearly impacted on an emotional level, as many of the previous joyous expressions on people's faces turn sad.

⁹⁰ Lisda Hendrajoni, APP's chairman and initiator of the charity concert for Palestine in Painan, has done so herself and recalled in my interview with her how uncomfortable she felt seeing the Israeli soldiers guarding Al-Aqsa when she wanted only to pray there. It was a huge contrast with the free atmosphere she experienced in Mecca and Medina during the same trip.

⁹¹ By shouting slogans such as *Allahu Akbar* and *Al-Aqsa, Al-Aqsa! Merdeka, Merdeka!* (Al-Aqsa, Al-Aqsa! Free, Free!"

This emotional impact is clearly one of the aims of charity concerts; Youtube videos that promote or report the charity concerts online include scenes which zoom in on people's sad faces and show how some of the concert attendants cannot hold their tears and cry. The performers on the stage, whether musicians or other speakers, also repeatedly remind the audience of the suffering of Palestinian war victims. They often add that Indonesians should be grateful to live in a free country where war is absent, but that Palestinians are not that lucky and therefore need their empathy and (financial) support. They also encourage people to donate by resorting to the notion of Islamic solidarity, brotherhood, and the *ummah*.

On 31 March in Painan, for instance, Melly told the audience: "Pay it all for your fellow Muslims."⁹² Staged rounds of donation, by which givers appeared on the stage and were granted a reward, happened interchangeably with the performance of songs. At moments when no one in the audience responded to the call for a particular suggested amount of donation⁹³, Melly used entertainment in order to inspire the people's enthusiasm and generosity by singing an extra song.⁹⁴ Or, as I have witnessed at the concerts in Painan and in Padang, the mc lets the audience shout slogans such as *Allahu Akbar* or *Palestina Merdeka!* (Palestina Free!) to energize them and entice them to contribute. In Painan volunteers walked among the audience to collect *infaq* while the mc was shouting: "Who wants to help Palestine?"⁹⁵ The audience responded with an enthusiastic "Me!"⁹⁶ In the meantime graphic images of war victims were displayed on the large screen, accompanied by the mc narrating what hardships Palestinian children are going through and urging "Indonesian youth" to show that they care.

⁹² "Bayar semua untuk sesama Muslim."

⁹³ These amounts can range from 500.000 rupiah (around 25 euro) until hundred million rupiah (around 6000 euro).

⁹⁴ In Painan Melly told the audience: "Maybe I should sing another song first, and then you guys will be enthusiastic to donate,"

⁹⁵ "Siapa mau membantu Palestina?!"

⁹⁶ "Saya!"

When talking about their motivations to attend the concert almost all eight concert attendants whom I interviewed in Painan mentioned both the humanitarian aspect of the cause as well the obligation to help one's Muslim brothers and sisters. Malika, who not only attended the concert in Painan but also volunteered to walk around the audience and collect *infaq*, said:

I volunteered in the APP event because I am Muslim, so automatically those in Palestine are my relatives because they are Muslims. My relatives there are colonized by Israel as we have seen a lot from the stories and videos. There our relatives from the Muslim ummah are in trouble. We as the Muslim ummah, we have to help. Even though we are not helping directly, but through our own money we can help with the power of our contributions.⁹⁷

Most of the concert attendants I spoke with closely follow the latest news about Palestine on social media, in particular the social media accounts of the Indonesian humanitarian organizations that are active for Palestine. A concert attendant in Padang (a twenty one year old female student of English Literature) said that Palestine already feels like her own country and that she considers becoming a humanitarian volunteer in Gaza. In addition to drawing on Muslim solidarity, brotherhood and the *ummah* as a global social imaginary, some informants noted that the al-Aqsa mosque belongs to the entire Muslim community, not only to Palestinians, and that the occupation of the holy land should thus be a concern of all Muslims including Indonesians. The vicarious nationalism and sense of belonging to Palestine is thus not only propagated by performers but also shared by audiences.

⁹⁷ "Saya sukarela dalam acara app karena saya adalah orang Islam, otomatis keluarga yang ada di Palestina itu orang Islam. Keluarga di sana terjadi penjajahan dari Israel banyak kita lihat dari cerita2 dan video2nya . Kalau di sana keluarga kita umat islam sedang kesusahan. Kita sebagai umat islam .. kita kan membantu. Walau kita tidak membantu langsung lewat uang pribadi kita bisa membantu dengan tenaga kita sumbangan." Interview with Malika on 6 April 2018.



Doing the *takbir* (*Allahu Akbar*) on stage at the concert in Painan.⁹⁸

2.3 ‘Pop jihad’: Palestine-themed lyrical narratives in charity concerts

The relationship between amplification and vicarious nationalism is also reflected in the staged performances at charity concerts, especially those by nasyid bands. While not all Indonesian concerts for Palestine feature nasyid haroki groups or songs about Palestine,⁹⁹ there is a number of Palestine-themed songs that are frequently performed during the events. The lyrics of these songs indicate how Palestine as a sacred geography mediates the call for support and how it evokes vicarious nationalism. The most known of such songs is *Palestina Tercinta*, originally produced by Shoutul Harokah but equally often performed by Izzatul Islam and other nasyid bands. The song has also been used for flash mobs by youth groups. Other songs that are dedicated to Palestine are *Gaza*, *Al-Aqsha Memanggil* (Al-Aqsa is calling), *Panggilan Suci*¹⁰⁰ (Sacred Calling), and *Negeri yang Terluka* (The Wounded Land) by Izzatul Islam and *Khaibar*

⁹⁸ Source: <http://www.jurnalsumbar.com/2018/04/konser-amal-melly-goeslaw-rp875-juta-dari-pesisir-selatan-untuk-muslim-palestina/>

⁹⁹ Most songs sang my Melly Goeslaw are not even Islamic-themed but about romance.

¹⁰⁰ Abu Muhammad NA. “Izzatul Islam Panggilan Suci”. YouTube video, 8:56. Posted [January 2017]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FJSKgu4cR44&t=416s>, accessed March 26, 2018.

Ya Yahud (Khaibar¹⁰¹ oh Jew), *Kisah Palestina* (Story of Palestine), *Islami Ya Quds*, *Aqsha Biladi* (My Country Aqsa) and *Merah Saga* (Red Epic) by Shoutul Harokah.

The idea of sacred geography is at the core in the lyrics of these songs. The main theme is a divine calling coming from the holy land of Palestine, Al-Quds (Jerusalem), and the Al-Aqsa mosque. In this imaginative and performative musical realm these spaces are calling Muslims to defend and liberate them, thereby sacrificing oneself for the Muslim world or for Islam itself. Palestine is described as *negeri yang tercinta* (the beloved land), *tempat suci umat Islam*, *kiblat yang pertama* (the sacred place of the Muslim *ummah*, the first kiblat), *negeri anbiya* (country of prophets) and *bumi suci para nabi* (the holy soil of the prophets), referring to the religio-historical significance of the place and what the place means for the global *ummah*.

Reflecting the themes of jihad and martyrdom, Palestine is also referred to as *tanah jihad kita* (the land of our jihad), *tanah para syuhada* (the land of the martyrs) and *negeri mujahiddin sejati* (the land of the real mujahids). In *Panggilan Suci* Palestine is glorified as “a blessed and wise land, so that it is not supposed to be tainted”.¹⁰² The call for jihad is discursively linked to the sacred space, as exemplified in the following lines from the song *Palestina Tercinta*:

Oh Lord, allow us
To commit jihad in your Palestine
Oh God, include us
To be noted as your martyrs¹⁰³ [My translation]

The lyrics of Palestine-themed songs reflect how Al-Aqsa functions as a magnifier of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in that it creates a sense of ownership of and identification with the holy land. In addition to the performance of Palestine-themed jihad songs at the charity concerts, performers and speakers on the stage also invite the audience to shout slogans which

¹⁰¹ Khaibar refers to a battle that the early Muslim community had with Jews.

¹⁰² “Palestina negeri berkah bestari, sehasta tak pantas ternodai.”

¹⁰³ “Ya Robbi, izinkanlah kami, berjihad di Palestinamu. Ya Allah, masukkanlah kami, tercatat sebagai syuhadamu.”

testify to their sense of belonging to and ownership of the sacred space. For example at the concert on 1 April in Padang the mc would repeatedly call to the audience: *Al-Aqsha milik siapa?* (To whom does Al-Aqsa belong, to which the crowd replied: *milik kita semua!* (it belongs to all of us!). Youtube videos show that in other charity concerts slogans such as the following were shouted:

Mc: One word for Palestine!
 Audience: Jihad!
 Mc: Two words for Palestine!
 Audience: Jihad fi sabilillah!
 Mc: Three words for Palestine!
 Audience: Jihad fi sabilillah, Allahu Akbar!¹⁰⁴ [My translation]

Besides references to the sacred geography itself, the populations involved in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict also feature symbolically in the songs. The lyrical narratives represent the conflict as a struggle between Islam and Judaism, between Muslims and Jews. Sahlins notes that the binary opposition of friend/enemy is a common feature in the structural magnification of differences.¹⁰⁵ The narrative reflected in the nasyid has become part of a broader narrative in Indonesia of a Jewish conspiracy to destroy Islam worldwide.¹⁰⁶ The religious framing of the conflict thus structures the originally local identities into universal, religious ones. This appears for instance in the following phrases from *Al-Aqsha Memanggil*:

Rescue the glorious Al-Quds
 From the evil grip
 Destroy the Jews
 Destroy! Destroy!¹⁰⁷ [My translation]

Secure your sacred step
 Free your Muslim world

¹⁰⁴ “Satu kata untuk Palestina! Jihad! Dua kata untuk Palestina! Jihad fi sabilillah! Tiga kata untuk Palestina! Jihad fi sabilillah, Allahu akbar!”

¹⁰⁵ Sahlins, 25.

¹⁰⁶ Latief, 272.

¹⁰⁷ Selamatkan Al Quds yang mulia, Dari cengkraman durjana, Hancurkan Yahudi, Hancurkan! Hancurkan!

Victory or martyr
That is your direction/course¹⁰⁸ [My translation]

But Palestinians are not just regarded as (regular) Muslims in need of support and solidarity. Their struggle and loss of lives in the war has inspired a pervasive imagery of Palestinians that feature in Indonesian popular culture and performances in which their symbolic status has been raised to that of ‘martyrs’.¹⁰⁹ This is indicated for instance in the lyrics of *Merah Saga*:

Everyone becomes a witness
Of the steps of your courage
We also become a witness
Of your fortitude

When the Jews are slaughtering you
Red is pouring on your homeland
Fragrancing the scent of the puddle of your blood
Freeing the Palestinian soil of jihad¹¹⁰ [My translation]

From my observations in the field,¹¹¹ in addition to watching visual recordings of charity concerts on Youtube, audiences tend to respond enthusiastically to nasyid haroki songs. They generally show their enthusiasm by waving the Palestine-Indonesia flags¹¹² in the air, singing along with the songs, moving their arms and fists in tandem with the beat of the music, and by shouting *Allahu Akbar* when the musicians invite them to pronounce the *takbir*.¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ Pastikan langkah sucimu, bebaskan dunia Islammu, Menang atau syahid, Itu yang kau tuju.
<http://liriknasyid.com/index.php/lirik/detail/2588/izzatul-islam-al-aqsha-memanggil.html>

¹⁰⁹ A similar imagery is found in Indonesian popular fiction about Palestine.

¹¹⁰ Semua menjadi saksi, Atas langkah keberanianmu, Kita juga menjadi saksi, Atas keteguhanmu. Ketika Yahudi-Yahudi membantaimu, Merah berkesimbah di tanah airmu, Mewangi harum genangan darahmu, Membebaskan bumi jihad Palestina.

<http://liriknasyid.com/index.php/lirik/detail/1100/shoutul-harokah-merah-saga.html>

¹¹¹ At the concert in Padang on 1 April 2018 a local student nasyid group performed Shoutul Harokah’s jihad song *Merah Saga*. The audience reacted enthusiastically, as to their performance of the popular international hit *Kun Anta* by the Jordanian singer Humood Alkhuder.

¹¹² Such flags, with on one side the Palestinian flag and on the other side the Indonesian flag, are always handed out to the audience during charity concerts for Palestine, as a symbol for Indonesia’s solidarity with Palestine. At the charity concert for the *pesantren* project flags were handed out that depicted only the Indonesian flag on both sides.

¹¹³ Takbir is the praising of God by saying Allahu Akbar (God is Great).

In the militant lyrics of nasyid haroki songs the notions of jihad and martyrdom are discursively and symbolically tied together.¹¹⁴ When these various representations of Palestine in the charity concerts are analyzed relationally, it indicates that in Indonesian Islamic-themed popular culture and among humanitarian groups, of which the charity concerts are one manifestation, “Palestine” is employed as a symbolic geography. The way the Palestinian issue is represented points to the construction of a semiotic and religious triangle of jihad and *dakwah*¹¹⁵, in which the themes of “Palestine”, martyrdom, bloody struggle, the sacred space of Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa symbolize the notions of jihad and *dakwah*, in its broadest meanings.¹¹⁶ Thus, the militant lyrics and symbols do not necessarily imply that Indonesian nasyid performers and audiences in actuality want to join an armed, bloody war to defend the *ummah*.

Rather, what it really stands for (the referent in this semiotic triangle) are injustices against Muslims worldwide and humanitarian crises on the one hand and simultaneously the panacea: solidarity, humanitarian aid, charity, God-fearing piety and virtue, and thereby contributing to a better, peaceful world that is free from colonialism and that is characterized by a religious moral order with religious subjects who are obedient to God.¹¹⁷ All these notions are captured in the overarching *jihad fi sabilillah* as it is generally understood in contemporary Indonesia in the contexts of charity concerts, civil society, pop culture, and the public sphere. The coming together of this type of jihad and popular culture in contemporary Indonesian charity concerts

¹¹⁴ The staging of the Indonesian martial arts called *pencak silat* sometimes accompanies these music performances and is another symbol for jihad. In the music videos of these songs images of martial arts and fighters are also frequently used.

¹¹⁵ I thank Prof. Daniel Monterescu for this.

¹¹⁶ In a concert that took place in Surabaya: “This is jihad through our wealth”. (Ini jihad mal/harta kita). See video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OZg9OJHX7cQ>

¹¹⁷ This is why *dakwah* is an important part of it. Latief writes that the lack of religiosity among (Muslim) populations can also be perceived as poverty in the Indonesian Islamic civil society context, although being poor spiritually. Such populations are then in need of *dakwah* so that they can become virtuous religious subjects, which is also understood as an aspect of social welfare.

has created a new synergy and phenomenon in Muslim public life which I refer to as ‘pop jihad’.



The audience at a charity concert for Palestine.

2.4 “One of the first nations that acknowledged Indonesia’s independence”: national and historical narratives of Indonesia-Palestine solidarity

In Indonesian charity concerts Palestine is not only incorporated into narratives about the global *ummah* but also interwoven with Indonesian history and the nation. Indonesia’s colonial history and its subsequent independence are part of a narrative about Indonesia-Palestine relations, which is also employed to encourage audiences to donate. Speakers on the stage sometime resort to this secular and historical narrative¹¹⁸, which reminds audiences that Palestine was among the first nations to acknowledge Indonesian independence in 1945 and that therefore, Indonesians are obliged to support the independence of Palestine, the “only nation in today’s world that is still colonized”.¹¹⁹

My interviews with concert attendants in Painan seems to suggest that the historical narrative also resonates with audiences, because several informants mentioned it as a reason why they

¹¹⁸ Which is also frequently used beyond the charity events in all realms of Indonesian public life where Palestine is discussed, from foreign policy to civil society and journalism

¹¹⁹ Interview with Qupro director Ali Amril.

deem Palestine an important cause to support.¹²⁰ One informant said that as the biggest Muslim nation, Indonesia must help Palestine. In the broader world of Indonesian charities beyond the concerts, too, national narratives about Indonesia feature widely. In their postings on social media organizations involved in organizing the concerts such as KNRP, SPM and ACT sometimes express a desire for Indonesia to acquire an image in the international world as a country that contributes to world peace.¹²¹

This is for instance visible in postings characterized by pride about the Indonesian nation's help and achievements for Palestine. Palestinian people's acknowledgement and appreciation of this aid are displayed in various ways, for instance in video recordings in which they express their gratitude to Indonesia. Some postings describe or depict national Indonesian symbols that are present on Palestinian soil. For example, on 1 April 2018 KNRP posted on Instagram and Facebook:

There is the Indonesian flag, Red and White, at the location PawaiMudikAkbarPalestin in East Gaza Strip. This is proof of their love to the Indonesian citizens who always support and pray for the struggle of the Palestinian citizens.¹²²

Another example is the following statement by ACT on its facebook page:

ACT is convinced that praying for oppressed people due to humanitarian crises becomes a rescue fortress for Indonesia. Indonesian humanitarian actions are so visible because they are consciously built to educate the world and for a good image of Indonesia in the world's eyes. Until whenever, in the work of ACT, we will always involve Red and White, and Indonesian representatives anywhere. Because we are Indonesia, and Indonesia is the soul of ACT's humanitarian work.¹²³

¹²⁰ Although it was less frequently mentioned than Islamic brotherhood and humanitarianism.

¹²¹ At the charity concert in Padang a speaker on the stage also said that Indonesia, in particular the Indonesian government, has to come forward in international politics to liberate Palestine.

¹²² "Ada bendera Indonesia, Merah Putih, pada lokasi #PawaiMudikAkbarPalestina di Timur Jalur Gaza. Ini adalah bukti cintanya mereka kepada rakyat Indonesia yang senantiasa mendukung dan mendoakan perjuangan rakyat Palestina", [my translation]

https://www.facebook.com/knrpbungo/?ref=br_rs, Accessed 11 April 2018.

¹²³ ACT yakin, doa manusia teraniaya karena krisis kemanusiaan menjadi benteng penyelamat Indonesia. Aksi-aksi kemanusiaan Indonesia kian terlihat karena secara sadar dirancang untuk

The various references by these charity organizations to Indonesia as a nation and Indonesia's obligation to support Palestine illustrate that the nation, like the global *ummah*, is a powerful framework of belonging and collective identity. It also indicates that neither pure altruism, nor religious identity and affiliation sufficiently explain humanitarian activism by Indonesian organizations. These charitable activities also entail a desire to promote the image of Indonesia in the world and can thus be seen as a form of soft power.¹²⁴

2.5 Introducing Islam *Rahmatan lil alamin*: America as a geo-political gateway

*Whoever builds a house of God, even if it is only as big as the wing of a bird, God will build him/her a house in heaven.*¹²⁵ (hadith, source)

When Opick addressed his audience at the charity concert in Makassar for Nusantara Foundation's project of building a *pesantren* in New York he uttered the famous hadith above. By reference to this Islamic source, he divinely legitimated Shamsi Ali's *pesantren* project and enticed concert attendants to empty their pockets and contribute to the first Indonesian 'house of God' in the United States of America, a faraway country where most Indonesians will never set foot. As the hadith shows, Muslims are encouraged to build mosques and Islamic schools. But what would be so special and meritorious about building one in America?

mengedukasi dunia dan demi kesan baik Indonesia di mata dunia. Sampai kapan pun, kerja ACT, ya Merah Putih, dan perwakilan Indonesia di mana pun, selalu kami libatkan. Karena kami Indonesia, dan Indonesia ruh kerja kemanusiaan ACT. <https://www.facebook.com/notes/aksi-cepat-tanggap/makna-pertemuan-act-dan-kemenlu-ri/10156389893276177/>., accessed 11 April 2018.

¹²⁴ Delphine Alles also describes religion in this context as exerting "a transnational form of soft power" See: Alles, *Transnational Islamic Actors and Indonesia's Foreign policy: Transcending the State*, 97.

¹²⁵ "Barangsiapa yang membangun rumah Allah walaupun sebesar sarang burung maka Allah akan bangunkan rumah di surga."

Unlike Palestine, America is not considered as an Islamic sacred space. Neither does it get as much attention in the Indonesian world of charity and pop culture as Palestine does. Contrary to the holy soil of Jerusalem, the United States as a geographical space in the context of Indonesian charity and popular culture is ambiguous and multifaceted. In charity concerts America is sometimes depicted as an enemy of the Muslim world, due to its neo-imperialist approach to the Middle East and its unequivocal support of Israel. For instance the nasyid band Ar-ruhul Jadid has performed their song *Ironi Negri Paman Sam* (the Irony of the Land of Uncle Sam) in charity concerts for Palestine. In this song America is described as a hypocrite country with double standards and as the “terrorist center of the world”.¹²⁶ Latief writes that after 9/11 anti-Americanism has dominated Islamic groups in Indonesia. The Majelis Ulama Indonesia (Council of Indonesian Muslim Scholars, MUI) even issued a fatwa in which the global Muslim *ummah* was urged to unite in a *jihad fi sabilillah* against America.¹²⁷

But the series of ‘Satu Hati’ concerts that collect funds to realize the first *pesantren* in America, initiated by Shamsi Ali’s Nusantara Foundation, show a different attitude toward “the land of uncle Sam”. In the social imaginary projected in these concerts, America represents a geopolitical entry point or gateway through which Indonesia can raise its status as an important Muslim nation. This departs from the idea that the West and the Muslim world are currently at odds with one another and that this troubled relationship needs repair.

Islam being discussed in relation to ‘the West’ is not a rarity in Indonesia. In the Indonesian public sphere, discussions about global Islam are often characterized by reference to the categories of ‘moderate Islam’ and ‘radical Islam’, which are understood as binary oppositions. These debates sometimes happen with reference to a global context, in particular referring to the relationship between the West and Indonesia or the Muslim world in general. This discourse

¹²⁶ <http://liriklagumelayubaru.blogspot.com/2013/06/ironi-negri-paman-sam-1-ar-ruhul-jadid.html>

¹²⁷ Latief, 275.

has also been reflected in Indonesia's foreign policy, particularly under the presidents Megawati and Yudhoyono.

Ahmad Rizky Mardhatillah Umar finds that US governmentality after 9/11, which aimed to differentiate between 'Good Muslim' and 'Bad Muslim', made Indonesian leaders promote something they called 'Moderate Islam'. Thus, he asserts, "the discourse of 'Moderate Islam' is a political category that aimed to reprofile Indonesian Muslims under a particular mode of subjectivity".¹²⁸ But as appears from Shamsi Ali's Nusantara Foundation and *pesantren* project which Satu Hati concerts aim to finance, Indonesian agents are also actively involved in propagating such a discourse and use it for their own agenda. The discourse of Indonesian Islam as "tolerant" has been employed for different purposes by a variety of actors. Alles has identified an even more recent national narrative in Indonesian foreign policy and in civil society which aims to "brand" Indonesian Islam and promote it in other parts of the Muslim world.¹²⁹ Debates in the public sphere, government policies and recent transnational orientations by important Indonesian civil society organizations¹³⁰ testify to an agenda which aims to present Indonesia as a (potential) leading Muslim nation that contributes to world peace by acting as a mediator in the Muslim world as well as between 'Islam' and 'the West'.

The "first *pesantren* in America project" employs this global discourse of Islam as a problem and Islamophobia in the West as a subsequent problem. Within this discourse Nusantara Foundation sees a way to proliferate Indonesia as a moderate, tolerant, and exemplar Muslim nation and to correct the negative perception of Islam that is widespread, especially in the West. The promotional video of the project that was screened at the concert in Makassar depicts

¹²⁸ Ahmad Rizky Mardhatillah Umar, "Unmasking Moderate Islam: Governmentality and Discourse of Islam in Indonesia's Foreign Policy," paper presented at *1st International Conference on Southeast Asian Islam*, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta, August 10-11, 2014.

¹²⁹ Alles, *Transnational Islamic Actors and Indonesia's Foreign Policy: Transcending the State*.

¹³⁰ Like NU and Muhammadiyah.

scenes from American public life which illustrate the recent problems faced by the country, such as terrorism, white supremacism, and – most of all – Islamophobia which is caused by the misunderstanding most Americans have about Islam. The video makes the promise that the planned *pesantren* will counter that misunderstanding, as the school is not only an educational hub for Muslims but also a place to teach non-Muslims about Islam.¹³¹

In addition to the binary oppositions of ‘moderate’ versus ‘radical’ Islam, another popular concept that is used in the Indonesian public sphere and also by Shamsi Ali in the promotion of his project is Islam *rahmatan lil-alam*. This Arabic term literally means ‘mercy for the entire world’ and is understood as the version of Islam that contributes to peace among all human communities. In my interview with Shamsi Ali he explained Islam *rahmatan lil-alam* as being characterized by the Islam with a smiling face that embraces democracy and human rights, in particular women’s rights and minority rights.

Rahmatan lil-alam is often seen as an aspect of Indonesian Islam or Islam Nusantara (Archipelagic Islam).¹³² Indonesian Muslim intellectuals who promote the idea of Islam Nusantara tend to embrace diversity within Islam and emphasize the impact of local culture on religion. The late Abdurrahman Wahid, Indonesia’s former president and leader of Nadhlatul Ulama¹³³, for example commented on the term by saying: “The overlap between religion and culture will continue to occur continuously as a process that will enrich life and make it barren”.¹³⁴ Some Indonesian Muslim scholars have argued that Islam Nusantara has the

¹³¹ Itvusa. tv, “Nusantara Foundation Presentation 2018.” YouTube video, 11:11, Posted [January 2018], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bc0-6BvIbfU&t=524s>, accessed May 12, 2018.

¹³² The term ‘Islam Nusantara’ is actually multifarious and can signify different things. It can point to the way Islam is practiced in and around the Southeast Asian archipelago (Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, Southern Philippines and Southern Thailand) or it can signify how Islam has blended with local culture in Southeast Asia. In many Indonesian public debates it connotes ‘Indonesian Islam’ more specifically, rather than ‘Southeast Asian’.

¹³³ The biggest Muslim organization in Indonesia and in the world (believed to have over 90 million members) which represents the “traditionalist” Indonesian Islam.

¹³⁴ Sahal, 2015: 33, cited in Luqman Nurhusam and Mualimul Huda

potential to realize Islam as *rahmatan lil 'alamin* and that it should be promoted on a wider and even global scale.¹³⁵ In its promotional video Nusantara Foundation states as its “ultimate goal” ‘introducing Islam as “Rahmatan lil-alamin” to the global world today.’¹³⁶

The global orientation that is shared by some Indonesian Muslim scholars is also visible in the promotion of Nusantara Foundation’s *pesantren* project. It is seen as a necessity in today’s world. At the charity concert Shamsi Ali urged his listeners in the Makassarese audience that “we have to create a global network, otherwise we will stay behind.” On the stage in Makassar Shamsi Ali rhetorically told the audience that while Indonesia is the biggest Muslim country in the world, the countries that appear in international *dakwah* are always Middle Eastern countries. Bemoaning that Indonesia is usually absent in these contexts, Shamsi Ali reminded the concert attendants that in previous times their country had famous Muslim scholars (*ulama*) who were working in Mecca. Nowadays such Indonesian achievements are nowhere visible in the global world of *dakwah* and Islam, according to the imam, and it is time to restore those past glories.

The promise of America’s first *pesantren* project is that Indonesia’s current role in the Muslim world will be changed from a peripheral to a central one. Martin van Bruinessen points out that religious authority always implies an “unequal relationship” and that “Indonesians were almost always on the receiving end of the relationship”.¹³⁷ For centuries Indonesian Muslims have sought religious knowledge by studying in Islamic centers of learning all over the Muslim world, especially in the Middle East. But never in history has an Indonesian Islamic school caught the attention of Muslim students from elsewhere.¹³⁸ Building a *pesantren* in the world’s

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Itvusa. tv, “Nusantara Foundation Presentation 2018.

¹³⁷ Van Bruinessen, 7.

¹³⁸ Except to some extent of students from other Southeast Asian countries. If foreign Muslims visited an Indonesian *pesantren* it was usually to teach. See: Van Bruinessen. 6.

most powerful country and promoting the image of Indonesia – and “Indonesian Islam” – through it would open up an opportunity to grant Indonesia a greater role as a Muslim country.

On the stage Shamsi Ali explained the intended *pesantren* in America as being a gift from Indonesia to the world or “the contribution of Indonesia as the world’s biggest Muslim nation”. He emphasized this as the reason why the US-based Nusantara Foundation looks for funding in Indonesia and not elsewhere; so that when the *pesantren* has been built he can tell the outside world that the school is genuinely an Indonesian product. This way the school will be a source of pride for Indonesians according to the imam.¹³⁹ In conclusion he told the audience that with the *pesantren* he wants to say to Americans and the world that “This is Islam, but this is also Indonesia.”¹⁴⁰

America is thus imagined in the ‘Satu Hati’ concerts as an opportunity to (re)“center” the Indonesian nation, now still considered by most people in and beyond the West as an Islamic periphery. America represents not only a geographical area where Islamophobia skyrockets but also a modern global power and an entry point or gateway for the Muslim world (in particular Indonesia) to establish good ties with the West and contribute to world peace. In these charity concerts America serves as a symbolic geography that mediates the promotion of Indonesia as the biggest Muslim country and a nation that contributes to an improved relationship between Islam and the West.

This chapter has shown, through the case studies of charity concerts for Palestine and concerts for the first *pesantren* in America, how symbolic geographies serve to mediate local aims and

¹³⁹ And also a source of pride more locally; during the concert in Makassar on 21 April the imam responded to local identity by saying how nice it will be if, once the *pesantren* is built, he can say that it was partially funded by Makassarese.

¹⁴⁰ “Ini Islam, tapi juga ini Indonesia”.

identities in Indonesian charitable, popular cultural events. In concerts for Palestine Jerusalem and the Al-Aqsa mosque represent the *axis mundi* which amplify the Israeli-Palestinian conflict into a struggle of the entire Muslim world. This results in a vicarious nationalism which makes concert attendants strongly identify with the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and the occupation of ‘their’ sacred space.

When analyzed relationally, the case studies also indicate an employment of symbolic geographies to construct a social imaginary of Indonesia as a central Muslim nation of global importance. While charitable activities for Palestine helps boost the image of Indonesia as a nation that throughout history supports an independent Palestine on behalf of the global *ummah*, contributing to the establishment of a *pesantren* in America, a space which in this imaginary represents an entry point and gateway, projects an aspired shift of Indonesia from a peripheral to a central status. The research thus shows that etic discourses about Islam are also employed and negotiated by agents in the Muslim world to promote cultural narratives that seek to have global impact.



Imam Shamsi Ali.

Translation of the quote:
 “He does not only have a biographic story, but also a struggle to improve the identity of Islam in the West.” – Anies Baswedan, Ph.D. Initiator of Indonesia Teaches Movement.¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ As of October 2017 Anies Baswedan is also the governor of Jakarta.

Coknclusion

*Oh mankind, indeed, we have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. (Qur'an, 49: 13).*¹⁴²

The above verse from the Qur'an, which points to a cosmopolitanism that celebrates diversity and encourages Muslim nations to interact with other nations, features frequently in the Indonesian public sphere; from Muslim intellectuals to civil society and popular culture. Nusantara Foundation also uses it in their promotion video, emphasizing the importance of dialogue between Muslims and people of other faiths, especially in 'the West'. This outward, even global, orientation is reflected in the Indonesian charity concerts that I studied in this thesis, which aim to collect funding for humanitarian aid in Palestine¹⁴³ or, in the case of the 'Satu Hati' concerts, to fund a *dakwah* project that is carried out in the United States of America.

I have shown that the emergence of Indonesian charity concerts is the outcome of a dialectic process that originates in the Islamic revival and that it has been instigated by different forces and agents in society that operate on the local, national, and international level, as well as in different public realms like charity, politics¹⁴⁴, and popular culture. Furthermore, I have argued that the charity concerts function as quintessential sites for the creation and promotion of global social imaginaries, in particular imaginaries that relate to the *ummah* and the Indonesian nation's role in it and in the world at large.

¹⁴²Itvusa. tv, "Nusantara Foundation Presentation 2018.

¹⁴³ Or elsewhere in the Middle East or Muslim world.

¹⁴⁴ In the case of Pesisir Selatan, the establishment and activities of APP are related to the profiling of the local government (*kabupaten*).

The “ambiguous” and “largely unarticulated”¹⁴⁵ idea of *ummah* lends itself well for the projection of various imaginaries which may reflect global aspirations and aspirational politics of its diverse nations.¹⁴⁶ As argued by Alles in relation to Indonesia’s recent outward orientation:

“(...) religion in general, and Islam in particular, is a factor of global projection. (...) It prescribes a model of regulation for interpersonal and political affairs, within the community on the one hand, and between the community and the rest of the world on the other hand.”¹⁴⁷

The social imaginaries performed in Indonesian charity concerts thus also raise questions about relationships between the various Muslim nations and Muslim geographical entities¹⁴⁸, speculated by Piscatori as “micro-*ummah*’s”¹⁴⁹, vis-à-vis the larger *ummah*.

The pervasiveness of Palestine in Indonesian charity concerts and beyond, as for instance in jihad songs by nasyid haroki groups, indicates that a pressing issue from outside Indonesia has been ‘imported’ and has inspired the rise of new forms of art, popular culture and entertainment in the country. Moreover, it shows how the religious significance of Jerusalem and its current occupied status have ignited a form of vicarious nationalism among Indonesian Muslims, whereby Palestine is appropriated as a sacred space of belonging that demands Muslims’ allegiance to it as well as to its Palestinian inhabitants, who are regarded as fellow members of the *ummah* in dire need of rescue. This sense of obligation toward Palestine is reinforced by national and historical narratives about Indonesia-Palestine relations.

¹⁴⁵ James Piscatori, “In search of the ummah: the social imaginary and its discontents, SOAS University of London. <https://www.youtukbe.com/watch?v=9AIA5bIXVxo>

¹⁴⁶ It confirms Clifford Geertz’ theory of religion as providing a “model of” and a “model for” reality. See: C. Geertz, 1966, Religion as a cultural system. In *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books (Reprinted in Lambek 2002: 61-82).

¹⁴⁷ Alles, *Transnational Islamic Actors and Indonesia’s Foreign Policy: Transcending the State*, 155.

¹⁴⁸ Such as Muslim Southeast Asia or the Malay world. But also different Islamic sects and orientations within one nation, for instance.

¹⁴⁹ Piscatori, “In search of the ummah: the social imaginary and its discontents.”

The symbolism of the outside geographies involved in the concerts, i.e. Palestine as an Islamic *axis mundi*, and America as a geo-political gateway that should be of concern to contemporary (Indonesian) Muslims, plays a significant role in how these imaginaries are constructed and performed. Simultaneously, the Indonesian nation is (re)profiled through these imagined geographies, as moving from being an Islamic periphery to becoming a central and leading Muslim nation, an aspiration which in itself points to a geographical imagination of the (Muslim) world.

This offers potential new perspectives with regard to scholarship on imaginative geographies.¹⁵⁰ As a case of how the ‘periphery’ appropriates the ‘center’, this thesis illustrates that imaginative geography is not confined to being a colonial tool in order to subjugate ‘Others’ but that postcolonial and ‘peripheral’ nations can also act as agents using imaginative geography to (re)position themselves vis-à-vis the center, in this case, the Islamic center.¹⁵¹ Both aspects, i.e. Indonesia’s postcoloniality and its long held status as ‘Islamic periphery’ are important in this regard. As a postcolonial nation Indonesia aspires to gain more influence globally, through establishing a good relationship with the ‘West’, as the “*pesantren* in America” project shows. On the other hand, it attempts to gain a leading role within the Muslim world itself, as reflected by the transnational orientation and assertiveness of contemporary Indonesian charity organizations.¹⁵²

In charity concerts for Palestine this aspirational politics is rather implicit¹⁵³ and cannot be seen separately from the larger context in which the involved organizations operate and express

¹⁵⁰ See: Mohamed Hamoud Kassim Al-Mahfedi, Edward Said’s “Imaginative Geography” and Geopolitical Mapping: Knowledge/Power Constellation and Landscaping Palestine, *The Criterion: An International Journal in English* ISSN (0976-8165).

¹⁵¹ I thank Prof. Daniel Monterescu for this insight.

¹⁵² In addition to the government’s foreign policy and larger civil society.

¹⁵³ In the concerts for Palestine these larger politics only come to the fore during performances that resort to national narratives such as referring to Indonesia-Palestine relations and Indonesia as a virtuous nation (or more local narratives, i.e. the population of Pesisir Selatan as virtuous and eager to help Muslim brothers and sisters).

themselves. However, aside from the larger politics that Indonesian humanitarian organizations engage in, the charity concerts largely fulfil locally-grounded aims. As a phenomenon of ‘pop jihad’ which accommodates not only people’s need for entertainment but also religious duties such as *infaq* and *dakwah*¹⁵⁴, the concerts serve to develop Indonesian Muslims’ virtue and thereby, their relationship to God. When ‘reading’ the concerts contextually and taking into consideration all the different interests involved, the events can thus be understood as a ‘performance’ performed on different levels: for the locals, for the outside¹⁵⁵, global world, and ultimately, for God.

¹⁵⁴ All included in the overarching concept of *jihad fi sabilillah*.

¹⁵⁵ From a local perspective the ‘outside world’ also implies Indonesia in a national context.

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