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Regime and representation: Islam in Indonesian television, 1962 to 1998

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Key words: Media representation, Islam, Indonesia, television

Abstract: This article traces the changes in the representation of Islam on Indonesian television before the rise of Islamic themes in the early 2000s. By understanding the televised manifestations of Islam relative to the ruling power within the television system, one can see that as long ago as the 1970s Islamic culture already enjoyed a privileged position in television content. Long before the more recent trend of 'Islamic commodification', state interest and business logic had gradually set precedents for how Islam is manifested in the commercial system today.

This article explores the representation of Islam in Indonesian television from the advent of television in 1962 to the end of the authoritarian rule in 1998. It traces the ways in which Islam was represented before the current proliferation of Islamic imagery which is motivated by commercial interests and feeds into the growing trend of Islamisation (Subijanto 2011; Rakhmani 2013). Since the late 1990s, 'various currents that reject modernist, liberal or progressive re-interpretations of Islamic teachings and adhere to established doctrines and social order' have entered the mainstream of Indonesian society generally, including sectors such as finance and law (van Bruinessen 2013:16, see also Fealy and White 2008). The purpose of this paper is to understand Islamic representations before 1998, which has been seen as the moment of the 'conservative turn' in Indonesian Islam (van Bruinessen 2011; 2013). It shows that, long before the commodification of Islam in Indonesian television, those in power treated Islamic culture as political commodity.

In 1962, Indonesia's first television station, the state-owned Television of the Republic of Indonesia (Televisi Republik Indonesia — TVRI), was established as a public broadcasting service (Kitley 2000; Sen and Hill 2000). For good reasons, canonical works on Indonesian television have been focused on revealing how the authoritarian New Order regime between 1965 and 1998 used television for a 'national culture project' (Kitley 2000:3; Sen and Hill 2000). The choice of cultural material which was included and excluded from television was, for decades, carefully designed to portray the nation in the interests of the state. In a country with roughly 6000 inhabited islands, 240 million citizens, 300 ethnic groups, 740 languages and dialects, and 6 religious groups acknowledged by the state,¹ such a strategy was perhaps necessary. Thus, for a great part of Indonesia's first thirty years of television, the medium was useful to construct images designed to tame cultural and religious tensions.

Televised representation of national identity, based on the country's motto *Bhinneka tunggal ika* (Many and varied, but one, or Unity in diversity), should ideally include every 'sub-national identity' that exists within its boundaries (Anderson 1999). Indonesian television content, however, regardless of the ruling regime or the economic system, has catered more attentively to the needs of the majority Muslim audience, compared with those of other religious groups. Likewise, scholars studying Islam in Indonesia have commented on the particular policies adopted by each administration to negotiate the place of Islam within the national identity (Liddle 1996; Hefner 1997; Hefner 2000; Azra 2006).

In this article, I describe the three stages in how Islam was represented in Indonesian television format and content as an extension of state ideology and commercial interest between 1962 and the fall of Suharto in 1998. The first section briefly explains the advent of Indonesia's first state-owned television station TVRI in 1962. It describes the conceptualisation of TVRI during the Guided Democracy period. The second section looks at how TVRI's programming strategy placed Islamic content during Indonesia's single state television system from 1965 to 1989. This strategy was significantly related to the New Order national integration programme

as can be seen in TVRI's then slogan 'TVRI weaves together our unity and the union' (*menjalin persatuan dan kesatuan*; Sen and Hill 2000:108). The third section discusses the ways in which commercial television stations represented Islam under authoritarian rule from 1989 to 1998). This section describes how commercial television stations began to reach out to the large Muslim audience by means of producing 'the least objectionable programme' (Klein and Morgensen 1979; Cantor 1971) and 'deep risk aversion' (Barkin 2004:5). Thus, the mainstreaming of Islam in Indonesian television can actually be traced back to the early days of the New Order, when precedents were set for how Islam is manifested in the more recent commercial system.

Early TVRI, 1962 to 1965

In the early decades of the Republic, nationalism was the dominant political philosophy, with President Sukarno its chief promoter. According to Pringle (2010:65) there were six key episodes in the Sukarno era that helped shape the future of political Islam in Indonesia. The first was the dispute over the formulation of the five principles of the state (*Pancasila*) in the Jakarta Charter, particularly the wording of *Tuhan* (God) instead of *Allah* (God in Islam). The second was the so-called Madiun Affair in 1948 which revealed the friction between devout and nominal Muslim elements in Indonesia. The third was the Islamic state or the Darul Islam rebellion from 1948 to 1962. The fourth was the Outer Islands rebellion in 1957 and 1958. The fifth was the attempted coup and communal killings of 1965 and 1966. The sixth, which remains an important indicator of political Islam's strength in the early days of the Republic, was the country's first election in 1955. During this period, the nation 'struggled' for an identity encompassing the general sentiment to break free from the colonial and any other dominating power (van Klinken 2009).

In its early years, Indonesia went through a period of liberal democracy, but it was during Sukarno's Guided Democracy that the country saw the first ideological contestation between Islam and communism. During the period of Guided Democracy, Sukarno attempted to equalise the three powers he thought constituted the nation: nationalism, religion, and communism (Hefner 2000; Ramage

1995). The failure of an ideal balance between the three powers, however, resulted in regional rebellions and eventually national chaos (Herbert 2007; Ricklefs 2001), particularly marked by the struggle of Muslim leaders and Islamic political parties to adopt sharia into the Indonesian Constitution (Baswedan 2004:670). The chaos that ensued inspired Sukarno to become more abrupt in his efforts to integrate Indonesia (Herbert 2007; Ricklefs 2001). Scholars suggest that he came to realise that Indonesia was culturally, religiously, and ethnically too diverse to be stabilised on the foundational idea of plurality. Sukarno's adoption of so-called Guided Democracy embodied this line of thought and led to the dissolution of the Constitutional Assembly in 1959.

This particular struggle between contending ideologies resulted in the forming of Lesbumi (the Institute for Indonesian Muslim Arts and Culture — Lembaga Seni Budaya Muslim Indonesia), the cultural wing of one of the largest Muslim organisations Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). The organisation was formed to counter the cultural organisation regarded as loosely aligned with the Indonesian Communist Party, Lekra (the Institute for People's Culture — Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat) which Lesbumi criticised as utilising art as a propaganda tool. The polarisation resulted in the Cultural Manifesto of 1963 that underlined the 'art for art' philosophy, to counter the 'art for ideology' philosophy of leftist aesthetics (Budianta 2007; Foulcher 1986).

It was during this period that the television system was established to serve the desire to unite a fragmented nation. While Lekra and Lesbumi used film to propagate ideology, Minister of Information Maladi, who also formerly headed the Football Association of Indonesia (Persatuan Sepakbola Seluruh Indonesia, PSSI), realised the value of having 'something in common' as a nation. Television, a medium symbolising modernity in more advanced countries such as the United States, accommodated this purpose. To achieve the objective of national unity, the first event to be broadcast through national television was the 1962 Asian Games. According to Kitley (2000:23), Maladi understood how television was well suited to the spectacle of sports and how television could assist, both at home

and abroad, in the symbolic definition and construction of an Indonesian identity. As Kitley (2000:21) explains:

Indonesia's first television broadcasts in August 1962, the seventeenth commemoration of the Declaration of Independence and the twelve-day coverage of the Asian Games, are televisual icons of the two conflicting tendencies. The two broadcasts image a tension in the development and use of television in Indonesia over the last thirty years. One event was outward-looking, populist, and self-confident and positioned Indonesia as a modern nation, active in regional affairs. The second revealed a more narrowly constrained, inward-looking tendency to hold 'the outside' at arm's length and construct a sense of identity predicated on assertions of a unique national culture and culture space.

This statement illustrates the problematic position of Indonesian television at the time, and which pertains until today. With its establishment, Maladi wanted to use television as a tool to 'enlighten the life of the people of Indonesia. It wasn't only a matter of knowledge — but other aspects of life as well. The idea of moving to embrace modern life was important' (Maladi, interviewed by Philip Kitley, as cited in Kitley 2000:25). TVRI was established with this intention. The televising of the Asian Games was 'national mythmaking' or the generating of a 'whole' through media images, since sport denies, and also reconciles, the fissures of gender, class, ethnicity, religion and public participation (Tomlinson and Young 2006).

Television as a tool for national unity, however, could not afford, both technically (that is in technology, funding or human resources) and ideologically (that is because of the tensions between Islam and communism), to cater to the social categories seen as part of the diversity of Indonesia. The main aim of establishing a national television was to create a 'common ground' or a neutral zone.

TVRI's representation of Indonesia on the international stage through the Asian Games broadcast complemented Sukarno's enthusiasm for 'symbol wielding' (Feith 1963 as cited in Kitley 2000:13) by televising high-profile overseas trips, speech making, ceremonies, rituals, and expenditure on the 'insignia of national prestige and power'

(Kitley 2000:35). Therefore, any televised representation of the nation aired on TVRI during this period had been secularised and stripped off of any religious and/or social fragmentation challenging the unity of the nation. Such ‘secularisation’ and ‘symbol wielding’ are fundamental traits for TVRI under New Order’s single state television system from 1965 to 1989.

The absence of religious representation in general and Islam in particular cannot be separated from the characteristics of the television system at its infancy. The system lacked the funding, human resources and the technology needed to produce religious programmes. Despite that, though, the state could have appealed to the majority of the nation’s Muslim viewers through inventing a national culture displaying Islamic symbols coexisting peacefully with the idea of nationhood. Lesbumi had attempted something of this kind (Chisaan 2008).

The absence of religious programs during the early stages of Indonesian television also suggests that the ideological tension that emerged through arts was not between nationalism, religion, and communism. Instead, the tension was between Islamic ideology and communism and, in the context of television, this was tamed by the medium providing a neutral zone in which national symbols were useful.

State television, 1965 to 1989²

Several factors contributed to how Islam was positioned during the New Order (Hefner 2000; Pringle 2010; Vickers 2005). Firstly, economic growth, nurtured by Suharto’s ‘Western-style economic rationality, expressed through a series of five-year plans’ (Pringle 2010:93), reduced the number of poor people by approximately three-quarters, although economic inequality, and corruption, also increased (Booth 2000:78). Secondly, economic development brought about social change and, aided by globalisation, ‘resulted in unprecedented intellectual ferment and an upsurge in Islamic observance already visible by the late 1970s’ (Pringle 2010:93). Thirdly, political restrictions which prevented the reformist Islamic leaders operating through political parties led such leaders to exercise their influence on

campuses. This both radicalised students and introduced pious Islam into popular culture (Hefner 2000: 123). These three factors also contributed to policy regarding TVRI's function and content during the early New Order period. An official statement from 1984 sets this out:

The mass media will be utilized to distribute information that promotes the political education of the people and the development [*pengembangan*] of Indonesian identity based on Pancasila. This recognizes the geography of Indonesia, which makes mass media essential for education and [the need to deliver] Pancasila education (P4) broadcasts using role play and other means that are appealing [*menarik*] but effective [*efektif*] primarily for school-age children and young people. Children's films such as *Si Unyil* and *Huma* will be continued and used to greater advantage to plant P4 values [*nilai-nilai P4*] in the young generation. In planting these values as early as possible, it is hoped that the young generation will grow into citizens with high levels of national tenacity (Republik Indonesia 1984 in Kitley 2000:115).

Television played an important role during the New Order in terms of the dissemination of information and construction of the national identity. As often in the developing world, television was seen as an effective tool to 'modernise' the identity of the audience. Its role during the New Order was to unite the nation as a 'mass', moving towards the objectives set by the government. This idea is not exclusive to Indonesia; many countries from the developing world have accepted the goal of modernisation and used media technologies in similar ways to promote the adoption of the 'modern' lifestyle — in the hope of creating a productive working class contributing to economic development (Kunczik 1985; Parsons 1982). Television content was produced within this framework, with Islam playing an important factor in inventing national culture.

In 1964, the first of the regional TVRI stations opened in the large cities of Yogyakarta, Semarang, Medan, Surabaya, Makassar, Manado, Batam, Palembang, Bali and Balikpapan. Although local stations were permitted to dedicate two to three hours a day for local content, what each regional station aired had to be in accordance the policies of TVRI central (Armando 2006). The Presidential Decree

Number 215 of 1963, article 4 states that TVRI is established to serve a public function in developing the nation, in terms of national mental/spiritual and physical development, and forming an Indonesian ‘Social Personality’ (Leo 1972). Programme scheduling in central TVRI was developed in accordance with this objective, aimed particularly at developing the mental/spiritual characteristics of the nation, for example by airing a programme called *Mimbar agama* (Religious platform).³ Although all religions acknowledged by the state received an allocation of time on television, the airtime for Islam was three times the amount given to other religions. This privilege was also apparent in the terms used within television programming.

Etymologically, the term *mimbar* is derived from Arabic (*minbar*) and refers to the pulpit from which a preacher speaks during Friday prayers. Like the similar term *kiblat*,⁴ it has been absorbed into Indonesian. The use of *mimbar* specifically targeted the Muslim majority audience in Indonesia, while at the same time applying more widely in a national context, as in *Mimbar agama Kristen*, *Mimbar agama Buddha*, *Mimbar agama Islam*, even *Mimbar pembangunan* ([National] development platform). The ‘naturalisation’ of the term *mimbar* from an Islamic context made it identifiable to Muslims and to those from other religious groups. For Muslims, however, this produced a sense of owning ‘national’ and secular culture. The *Mimbar agama* programmes were aired throughout the late 1980s. *Mimbar agama Islam* was aired on Thursday evenings, before the Islamic holy day of Friday, while *Mimbar agama Kristen* was aired on Sunday evenings, before the Christian holy day of Sunday. The block of *Mimbar agama Islam* was divided into drama programmes, *Pengajian Alquran* (Quranic recitation), *Mimbar Islam*, and *Irama qasidah* (Qasidah rhythm), respectively.

Mimbar agama Islam essentially followed the technique of Islamic preaching (*dakwah*; Hasan 2002). For the next couple of decades, TVRI generally implemented two main methods of *dakwah* (Alfandi 2010). First was the lecture method (*metode ceramah*) and the second is the insertion method (*metode sisipan*). The first usually involved a linear and more traditional approach to preaching where a male preacher (*dai*) gave a sermon to an invisible congregation. In this setting, there was no television audience, but the preacher referred to



Figure 1. Religious drama programmes on TVRI

Source: Leo 1972:188

the audiences at home. The talking head format was most commonly used by TVRI and was the core element of the *Mimbar agama Islam* block. This method is comparable to televangelism, where a minister speaks to an extended congregation via broadcast television.

The second method of preaching, which was most apparent in TVRI's religious drama shows, referred to sermons that were incorporated into the general format of television programmes. Examples of such incorporation were the insertion of Islamic values into music shows and traditional arts, and sometimes into drama and film. This method was subtler in delivering sermons, which were usually packaged as a drama programme. This method was less popular than the first, however, as it was more expensive to produce this type of programme. It was rarely produced by TVRI and, when it was, it was usually of poor quality.

Religious drama programmes

The images in figure 1 appear in a report on TVRI's programming between 1962 and 1972 under the heading 'From the Studio to the Audience', sub-heading 'Religious Shows'.⁵ The caption says 'Religious television programmes are aired regularly by TVRI. Among others

through television dramas: Islamic, Christian/Catholic/Protestant, Hindu, and Buddhist' (Leo 1972:188). The settings displayed in both images suggest a 'fantasy, story-telling' method best described as 'embedded narrative' (Kitley 2000:132). When dealing with highly sensitive topics of religion and moral guidance, Kitley (2000:132) observes that 'embedded narrative' is a 'practice that distances the discussion of religion as faith'.

The image on the left shows a set that includes Arab turbans and capes, usually worn in the desert, suggesting a separate time and place from the 'here and now' (Leo 1972). The image on the right, which is described as a 'Christian drama show', portrays Indonesian actors wearing a Roman military uniforms and Roman peasant clothes. The costumes alone suggest role-playing in a non-Indonesian historical context.

The Muslim and Christian attributes apparent in the pictures are similar to the case of *Si Unyil's* 'embedded narrative' for Pancasila values discussed above. Such incorporation of religious value into religious drama programmes 'is told more to reveal what religious traditions share than what makes them distinctively, doctrinally different. It is another instance of the practice of acknowledging cultural differences while erasing their specificity, which ... is an important process in the national culture project' (Kitley 2000:133).

Pengajian Alquran

Pengajian Alquran (Qur'anic recitation) was scheduled before the *Mimbar agama Islam* sermon and *Irama qasidab*. Islamic television programmes were designed firstly to create a reverent atmosphere by showing the reading of the Qur'an — in Arabic and sung in a kind of chanting melody — followed by its literal translation to appeal to devout Muslim audiences (Sy 1981). The show's then director, Rahgutomo, in an interview with *Monitor TVRI*, mentioned that only professionals, such as winners of the National Qur'anic Recitation Competition (Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an/MTQ) were selected to recite the Qur'an, but the translations were read by aspiring young adults.

Pengajian Alquran generated the same 'distancing' of a scholar reading the Qur'an with melody (*melantunkan*) which requires a specific



Figure 2. *Pengajian Alquran on TVRI*

Sources: Saleb 1981:10 and Sy 1981:10

skill in Arabic enunciation. This sense of the reader having ‘scholarship’ and ‘masterful skill’ created a distance from the audience both as Muslims and as Indonesians (Sy 1981). The reader was represented respectfully as one who understands divine scripture without showing any direct relation to real social issues. The distance was invented to generate a sense of reverence, to not question the ‘holy verses of Qur’an’.

The solemnity demonstrated through Qur’anic reading was followed by the more secular reading of its translation, using ‘normal’, attractive teenagers whose veils hung loosely over their head and whose arms were not covered (see figure 2). The translated verses read by young, female Muslims both brought the Qur’anic verses closer to more secular audiences and invited teenagers to be part of Islamic propagation (Sy 1981). The show’s director Rahgutomo, however, criticised the translation readers as only seeking their 15 minutes of fame, without truly comprehending what it is they were reading or perfecting their art.

Mimbar Islam

Mimbar Islam was the core of the scheduling block. Female and male Muslims congregated in the studio in separate groups, both facing the preacher (Chawasi 1980). The preacher then explained how the Qur’an provides answers for modern societal problems within the context of

Indonesia (Qur'anic verses were swiftly translated into Indonesian). The preacher read out letters sent from the viewing audience and answered questions on Islamic perspectives regarding various social and personal issues. There is similar to the distancing apparent in *Pengajian Alquran*, where the preacher is portrayed as a knowledgeable scholar whom the audience consult.

The preachers often had a mass following, such as the Muhammadiyah Chairman AR Fachmuddin who filled in as a *Mimbar Islam* preacher (Chawasi 1980). Fachmuddin's sermons, for instance, were followed by both the male and female studio audience. The Islamic teachings articulated in *Mimbar Islam* were related to modern Indonesian life through careful selection of topics in line with TVRI's slogan. Letters that Fachmuddin received through the TVRI Yogyakarta station come from various places in Indonesia. A letter from a viewer from Magelang in East Java praised the show as being as popular as Ketoprak Mataram (Javanese theatre). Television created a space in which Islamic teachings were shared between Indonesian audiences. While the effect of *Pengajian Alquran* was to extend the audiences' willingness to follow *Mimbar Islam's* interpretation of the Qur'an, the latter extended Islamic teachings to a greater Indonesian audience. The Islamic programming concluded with the *Irama qasidah* musical show, designed to 'neutralise' the seriousness of this series of religious programmes.

Irama qasidah

Former Minister for Women's Empowerment and Islamic scholar Tutty Alawiyah introduced *qasidah* (Persian poetry coupled with 'Indonesian' music) to TVRI. In a conventional *qasidah* show, musicians, singers, and instrumentalists played a mixture of Arabic and Malayan music, often citing Islamic teachings in the lyrics and thus containing religious messages or *dakwah*. The programme provided an important outlet for Indonesian popular Islamic music (Abramson and Kilpatrick 2006; Rasmussen 2001).

The 'distancing from difference' that is apparent in the concept of 'embedded narrative' is also apparent in the *qasidah* show aired after *Mimbar Islam*. *Qasidah* was seen as an entertaining way to



Figure 3. Three members of *Patria*, a qasidah group
Source: Hidayat and Nedi 1982

teach Arabic to young Indonesian Muslims (Hidayat and Nedi 1982). The singers were dressed with light veils and Javanese *kebaya* (blouse) instead of heavy veils and unrevealing, conservative clothing creating a sense of a friendly, lightweight, non-dogmatic manner of learning religion (preferably in harmony with nationalistic notions). The duality between the use of music, a ‘secular’ art, and the religious message in its teachings seem to neutralise each others’ extremes. On the one hand, the genre of *qasidah* music is less secular than rock and roll, for instance, and on the other hand it is less reverent than the reading of the Qur’an. During this period, TVRI also broadcast ‘secular’ artists who performed several Islamic songs or albums, such as Bimbo’s *Pop Qasidah* album, but who are mainly known for their Islamic-themed music. Another prominent *dangdut* (Indonesian populist music) artist who often appeared on TVRI is Rhoma Irama. In 1970s TVRI, music and Islam often accompanied each other. The *qasidah*, like Bimbo and Rhoma’s *dangdut*, is an art that is unthreatening for the pious and not dogmatic for the nominal.

The musical nature of *Irama qasidah* — although it still contained Islamic clothing and Arabic influence in the instruments and method of singing — gave the show a light or popular quality and

allowed a more diverse audience than that for the reading of the Qur'an. The presentation of music with an Islamic theme also reflects the stance of the Indonesian government which acknowledged an interpretation of Islam that embraces secular culture such as music. This is noteworthy since more conservative Muslims view music as encouraging sinful acts (Shiloah 2003). In other words, TVRI recognised Islamic culture as one that does not conflict with the larger national agenda of integration and unity.

The aim of TVRI in airing religious programmes was to provide an outlet for spiritual development that was consistent with the nation's idea of unity and integration, one that respects religious pluralism and discourages prejudice (*menjaubkan orang dari prasangka keliru*; Leo 1972:88–9). TVRI was to include all religions acknowledged by the country's law and to provide a space to realise a 'safe difference'. The quantity and duration of programmes aimed at the Muslim audience, however, exceeded those aimed at audiences of other religions. *Mimbar agama Kristen*, for instance, was aired for 15 minutes, while the whole Islamic block lasted for 40 minutes (Leo 1972). Christian programmes were only broadcast once a week; therefore the different denominations, such as Adventist, had to take turns with others, such as Catholicism. Although TVRI attempted to provide all religions with 'spiritually unifying' programmes, their scheduling demonstrated a greater effort in speaking to the more populous Muslim audience.

Commercial television under authoritarian rule, 1989 to 1998

Indonesia's television remained a state-controlled, single broadcasting system until the late 1980s with information heavily regulated and the state having absolute control in practice. Scholars generally agree that, although various factors created a more liberal, commercial broadcasting system, new media technologies (particularly satellite television and video cassette rentals) performed an important role in cultural globalisation (Kitley 2000; Sen and Hill 2000). These new forces challenged the New Order's tight control over information and its hegemony over the national cultural space. In the mid-1980s, the rising middle class promised a new audience market for business

people close to President Suharto (Armando 2006; Loven 2008). With exposure to foreign television programmes, the demand for quality programmes increased — a demand which TVRI could not afford to satisfy. The station needed alternative funding sources to finance its programmes, and this prompted the government to consider new strategies.

In 1981, advertising was introduced into the initially state-funded broadcasting system, and subsequently the industry was opened up for commercial broadcasting and competition (Kitley 2000:216). In 1987, the government legislated the establishment of pay TV service for Jakarta and its surrounding areas (Kitley 2000; Sen and Hill 2000). Access of Indonesian viewers to transnational sources was seen to influence the decision to allow commercial television in Indonesia (Sen and Hill 2000; Loven 2008). The government, particularly authorities of the Department of Information (Departemen Penerangan), noticed that Indonesian viewers were turning to alternative, foreign sources. Thus, the 1990 Ministerial Decree (Kepmen No. 111 Tahun 1990) authorised TVRI to appoint another party, private or public, to broadcast commercial television in Jakarta. After this decree, commercial television stations began to proliferate (see table 1).

Although the new arrangements permitted more competition between television stations, the regulation specified that television programmes should be in harmony with the 1945 Constitution and Pancasila, and should show sensitivity with potentially divisive issues (Sen and Hill 2000:119). Critics of the policy to privatise the television system argued that the establishment of commercial television involved many people close to President Suharto. Commercial television licences were only issued to business associates or members of the president's family (Sen and Hill 2000:112). Sudwikatmono, the owner of SCTV, was Suharto's cousin. Cipta Lamtoro Gung Persada, owner of TPI, was predominantly owned by Suharto's first daughter Siti Hardianti Indra Rukmana or Tutut. ANTEVE was partly owned by Bakrie Group which had close relations to the ruling Golkar Party (Sen and Hill 2000:112). RCTI was permitted to air terrestrially (without decoder) only after the owner, Peter Sondakh, formed a business relationship with Bambang Trihatmodjo, the president's son (Loven

<i>TV Station</i>	<i>Owner</i>
<i>Operating since</i>	<i>Target audience</i>
PT Rajawali Citra Televisi (RCTI) 24 August 1989 (restricted to Jakarta); 24 August 1993 (nationwide)	Bimantara Citra Group and Rajawali Wira Bhakti Utama Group Urban middle and upper class
PT Surya Citra Televisi (SCTV) 17 January 1990 (restricted to Surabaya); 24 August 1993 (nationwide)	Sudwikatmono Urban middle and upper class
PT Cipta Televisi Pendidikan Indonesia (TPI) 23 January 1991	Cipta Lamtoro Gung Persada Middle and lower class
PT Cakrawala Andalas Televisi (ANTEVE) 28 March 1993	Bakrie Group & Hasmuda Group Urban youth
PT Indosiar Visual Mandiri (INDOSIAR) 11 January 1995	Salim Group Urban middle and upper class

Table 1. Commercial television stations operating in Indonesia in 1998

Source: Loven 2008:45

2008:44). Such drastic changes to the ownership pattern of Indonesia's commercial broadcasting system in the 1990s influenced the content and formatting of television programmes. Commercial television's survival relies on the profitability of television programmes, based on their popularity as measured by ratings. RCTI adopted strategies used successfully by commercial television stations in other countries.⁶ The approach taken by TVRI throughout the preceding years was replaced by an 'international' style with no attempt to broadcast programmes of 'public interest', instead broadcasting 'marketable' programmes (Kitley 2000; Barkin 2004).

From their emergence in the 1990s, commercial television stations have played a more significant role than TVRI in shaping

public perceptions of Islam. While TVRI's absolute control over religious content in television restrained production creativity, commercial television producers of entertainment programmes avoided religious issues to the extent that characters had no identifiable religion or ethnic background (Barkin 2004:243). The survival of commercial television relies on profitability of television programmes based on its popularity, measured by ratings. And to do so, private, commercial television stations use strategies proven by commercial television stations in other countries, such as predictable scheduling.

With a selection of internationally successful, but cheap, programmes, private stations imagined their audience as a sophisticated elite with a materialistic lifestyle and an interest in world events. The broadcast US television programmes, however, received low ratings. This suggested that targeting an upper-middle class segment of audience does not necessarily identify with US, global culture. In fact, the audience in Surabaya was outraged when the Canadian programme *Wok with Yan* presented a segment that demonstrated a recipe including pork fat at the beginning of Ramadan 1991 (Kitley 2000:102). The main concern was that such protests, and those led by hardline Islamists (Wardhana 2002 as cited in Barkin 2004:246),⁷ would stir unrest in the larger Muslim population, which is the audience targeted by the commercial television stations. The potential risk of offending the large Muslim audience set precedents for avoiding anything that goes against 'conservative' Islam. This was the turning point at which the commercial interest of private television stations fed into the rising Islamism that had been advocated initially by small Muslim groups.

This led to the main difference between TVRI and the young commercial television stations. The latter feared appearing too secular or being perceived as disrespectful towards Islam, as is apparent in their responses to protests against foreign television programmes that conflicted with audience perceptions of Islam. Private stations took preventive measures by producing Islamic-themed television programmes, such as the evening call to prayers (*adzan magrib*) and sermons (*teledakwah*). This was a combination of corporate social responsibility (Barkin 2004:246) and public relations. All stations now announce the call of prayer five times a day and broadcast the complete

evening call to prayer (*adzan magrib*) every day. All stations feature a variety of Muslim prayer shows, usually early in the morning. These prayer shows are often accompanied by preachers, not unlike those aired by TVRI for decades. On one hand, in their ‘deep risk aversion’ (Barkin 2004), television stations have become complacent towards vocal Islamists. On the other, in continuing to produce the ‘least objectionable’ programmes (Klein and Morgensen 1979; Cantor 1971), television stations reproduce a version of Islamic practice that is based on risk-avoidance. This raises the question of whether or not programmes genuinely appeal to the largest audience.

Dakwah programmes

Traditionally, *dakwah* programmes, or *teledakwah*, were televised derivations of the *dakwah* method, featuring a Muslim cleric talking directly to the camera (as a ‘talking head’), or sometimes to an ‘interviewer’ as if to confirm the credibility of the cleric being someone revered enough to have authority on religious matters. In order to add to its visual appeal, the cleric often stands before a studio audience or in a mosque, talking with a generally sombre tone (Alfandi 2010; Barkin 2004; Howell 2008).

In 1997, TVRI’s *Mimbar agama Islam* was renamed and redesigned *Hikmah pagi* (Morning wisdom). The formatting became more attractive and dynamic in an apparent attempt to compete with commercial television’s packaging of Islamic-themed television



Figure 4. Dakwah programmes

Left: *Quraish Shibab* in *Kultum* (RCTI) Right: *Hikmah pagi* (TVRI)

programmes. The remodelled format now included more than one speaker in a talk show format, as well as interaction with the audience who could call to the studio line and ask direct questions to the preacher. There was even a Qur’anic recitation competition via telephone.

For commercial television stations, however, *dakwah* programmes received very poor ratings, with the stations claiming they broadcast them out of a sense of public service and moral responsibility (Astuti 2005; Barkin 2004). While some types of commercial programmes have been criticised by psychologists and educationists as impeding intellectual and psychological development, religious shows are seen to neutralise the negative effects of Indonesian television (Purnomo 1998:6). Barkin cites Tsing’s (2001) ‘economy of appearances’ and argues that commercial television

<i>Station</i>	<i>Programme</i>	<i>Day and time</i>
SCTV	<i>Di ambang fajar</i> (On the brink of sunrise)	Daily 5.00 to 5.30 a.m.
RCTI	<i>Hikmah fajar</i> (The wisdom of sunrise)	Daily 5.30 to 6.00 a.m.
	<i>Penyegaran rohani Islam</i> (Islamic spiritual revival)	Friday 8.00 to 8.30 a.m.
TPI	<i>Kuliab subuh</i> (Subuh lectures)	Daily 5.30 to 6.00 a.m.
	<i>IIS Islam</i> (Islam IIS)	Daily 11.30 a.m. to 12.00 noon
ANTEVE	<i>Mutiara subuh</i> (The pearl of <i>subuh</i>)	Daily 5.30 to 6.00 a.m.
INDOSIAR	<i>Fajar imani</i> (Spiritual sunrise)	Saturday & Sunday 5.30 to 6.00 a.m.
TVRI	<i>Hikmah pagi</i> (Morning wisdom)	Sunday 7.00 to 7.30 a.m.

Source: adapted from Purnomo, 1998

Table 2. Dakwah shows aired by Indonesian television stations in 1997

stations are attempting to reassure religious organisations by ‘performing’ a certain amount of religiosity and, by doing so, taking pre-emptive measures to bring outspoken conservatives into a negotiable relationship (Barkin 2004:245). Although the placement of the programmes coincided with Islamic rituals such as sunrise prayers (*subuh*) and on Fridays (the holy day), the *dakwah* programmes were carefully placed outside the prime time hours of 6.00 p.m. to 10.00 p.m.; while risks were averted, this was at minimal cost.

Despite their weak commercial appeal, ratings indicate that these shows do have a following and the preachers in such shows claim that those who get up to watch the shows are demonstrating their commitment to their *subuh* prayers (Astuti 2005; Barkin 2004; Purnomo 1998). The programmes provide a medium for Islamic preachers, scholars, and intellectuals to reach out to a devoted audience from geographical areas otherwise unreachable. The spread of Islamic preaching in Indonesia before the advent of television was based on locality and focused on local areas with preachers sometimes using local dialects (Chamin and Baidhawiy 2003; Liddle 1996). The presence of television has allowed these preachers to reach a national audience, creating new bonds and fraternity between Muslim audiences and potentially overriding the specificity of local culture, or perhaps introducing local culture to national contexts.

Islam in sinetron

The industry furthermore sought ways to make Islamic programmes profitable. In 1998, successful Indonesian television producer Raam Punjabi (originally from India and a self-proclaimed Hindu) came up with the idea of trying out an ‘Islamic’ *sinetron*. Having a television production background in India, he was skilled at producing quality entertainment television programmes. The unique trait of this *sinetron* was that instead of being shown weekly according to conventional scheduling, a new episode would be broadcast daily during the month of Ramadan — a whole year’s worth of shows was thus televised in four weeks and strategically aired just as the day’s fast-breaking meal was ending to catch the imagined Muslim family at just the right time, with just the right sort of show (Barkin 2004:255).



Figure 5. Still from *Doaku harapkanku* (*My hopes, my dreams*) 1998

One of the issues faced by Punjabi's production house, MultiVision Plus (MVP), was how the practice of Islam could be depicted in a *sinetron* while maintaining a popular appeal. Which kind of Islam could be shown? Should the characters wear a *jilbab* (head covering), for instance? The producers finally agreed to depict an Islam that was not physical, one that was distinct and non-confrontational so that 'even Christians would enjoy it' (Barkin 2004:257). In figure 5, for instance, the main actress, Krisdayanti, is not wearing a *jilbab* and kissing the back of her husband's hand. Such practice is symbolic of the subservience of a wife to her husband and is practised by pious Indonesian Muslims. The early development of Islamic *sinetron* seems to reflect TVRI's representation of diversity without focusing on its specificity. Thus universal values such as love and compassion overshadowed specific Islamic teachings and rituals, but were apparent enough for Muslims to identify with, such as the common practice of a wife kissing her husband's hand.

At the height of the economic and political crisis in 1998, Punjabi skilfully identified an audience and subsequently produced the first religiously themed *sinetron*. MVP's *Doaku harapkanku* (*My hopes, my dreams*) was aired during the month of Ramadan. This led to copycat programmes from every other commercial television station the

following year. The presentation of Islamic themes in *sinetron* ended the industry's long avoidance of popular television programmes with religious themes. In later years and the Ramadan *sinetron* became comfortably positioned during the prime time, the visual representation of Islamic teachings became more apparent. In figure 6, the female protagonist of *Di atas sajadah cinta* (I bow with love) (2006) wears a multicoloured modern *jilbab*, as was fashionable in the 2000s. It is also worth noting that the way in which it is tied around the neck is unique to Indonesian Muslims, particularly in large, cosmopolitan cities (Hefner 2007).

By 1998, commercial television stations had developed new ways of representing Islam in Indonesian television. The commercial logic, under which the industry worked, was the main factor in determining how programmes were conceptualised, which audience they targeted, and for what purpose. The Islamic cultural trends that developed in urban societies, particularly cities monitored by AGB Nielsen, was the main reference for television producers in deciding this (H Achmad, personal interview, 8 July 2011). Islamic themes in television programmes are common in Indonesia today. The mainstreaming of Islam that the country is experiencing today reflects the commercial interests of post-authoritarian society.



Figure 6. *Di atas sajadah cinta* (I bow with love) 2006

Conclusion

Across the last fifty years, there have been clear connections between the historical context of Islam within the political arrangements of the time and the system within which television operated. Islam has been useful for those controlling television to tap into the potential audience of Muslims.

TVRI's early airing of international sports events was initially seen as a reinforcement of national symbols, while the absence of religious representation during this period was related to the ideological contestation between nationalism, religion, and communism. The infant TVRI was designed to become a national unifier, in which nationalistic imagery was useful in taming the tension between Islamic ideology and communism.

After 1965, TVRI provided a single, state television system which was used to disseminate information aimed at developing Indonesian identity based on the country's fundamental principles (Pancasila). In this period, all religions acknowledged by the state received slots on TVRI. Islamic representations during this period were carefully arranged to support the New Order's national culture. Although Islamic teachings were accommodated by TVRI, it was within the context of a Muslim, national audience.

This accommodation gradually shifted from 1989 onwards when the single, state television system shifted into a commercial system and as competition between television stations ended TVRI's dominance over televised information and entertainment. Government policies that regulated the television system sided with the business interest of its owners. In this period, young, commercial television stations averted risk by not appearing too secular for their majority Muslim audience while remaining acceptable for a heterogeneous audience. Although not directly profitable through high ratings, private television stations aired shows with Islamic themes as a form of corporate social responsibility (Barkin 2004). The television stations and content providers interpreted the public protests against US-produced global shows that were insensitive towards Islam as market demand to produce programmes with Islamic themes.

By the end of the 1990s, Islamic representation started to appear in soap operas. Competition between television stations urged them to reconsider the market potential of Muslim audiences, which during this period was also interlinked with the rising political influences of Muslim intellectuals (Hefner 1997). It is true that the more recent trend of Islamic commodification occurred in relation to broader Islamic manifestations in personal piety; political, social and legal expressions of Islam; and the rising Islamic economy within the Indonesian context (Fealy and White 2008). Even before this, however, and the problematic ‘conservative Islamic turn’ in the 1990s (van Bruinessen 2013), Islamic representations had enjoyed a privileged position. Alongside, or perhaps together with, what van Bruinessen highlights as doctrinal changes, the mainstreaming of Islam in Indonesian television is also related to Islam’s value in providing political and/or economic commodities in the interest of those in power.

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Notes

1. Examples of religious groups not acknowledged by the state, despite its common practices in its particular area, are the Javanese Kejawen, Sundanese Wiwitan, Torajan Aluk To Dolo, and Dayak Kaharingan. No reliable statistics are available for the amount of followers, because some followers continue to practice their ‘old religion’ by marrying it with ‘new religion’ such as Hindu Kaharingan (Schiller 1996:409).
2. Some scholars argue that Suharto did not gain presidential status until 1967 (Vatikotis 1998; Walangitang 2003), but his move for power is generally accepted as marked from the ‘attempted coup’ (Pringle 2010:81).
3. In this section, I specifically refer to TVRI central’s programming.
4. *Kiblat*, the direction of prayer for Muslims, is also widely used to refer to a political affiliation and/or ideology. In a sentence such as, ‘*Politisi itu ber-kiblat kemana?*’ (What is the orientation of that politician?) the religious meaning of the word is replaced with a connotation of unquestioned devotion towards a certain cause.

5. The book is a report on TVRI's programming between 1962 and 1972, published by the Television Directorate under the Ministry of Information. This section is sourced from the decade report as well as *Monitor TVRI* magazines. The heading 'From the Studio to the Audience' reminds one of the expression 'From the People, For the People and to the People', which was a New Order slogan commonly repeated by TVRI.
6. Eastman and Ferguson (2009) gives a practical overview of the current strategies in global media programming.
7. Such protests and industry capitulation to hardline Islamists were still occurring in 2011. This is seen, for example, the response of the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) to the airing the pluralist film *Tanda tanya* (Question mark) and the submission of SCTV to this protest (Putri 2012).

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