

The moral panic about the socializing of young people in Minangkabau

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the discourse surrounding the perceived threat of *free seks* and *pergaulan bebas* (free socializing) to the moral health of young Minangkabau people, and in particular, young women, in West Sumatra. It uses the sociological frame of “moral panic” to examine contemporary discussions about globalization and the influence of “the West” in West Sumatra. The paper examines the way in which “the authorities” in West Sumatra (media, such as teen magazines and newspapers, academics, government and law, teachers, and community leaders) present the threat, and the way in which young people, who are the target of the moral panic onslaught, see themselves in relation to the threat. I argue that, unlike the original “folk devils” of the moral panics in Britain, young people in Minangkabau broadly give their consent to the authorities, displaying a striking commitment to social conservatism, local culture, and Islamic values.

KEYWORDS

Moral panic, West Sumatra, Minangkabau, Indonesia, youth, sexuality, free sex, free socializing.

The term “moral panic” was adopted by Cohen (1972) in his book, *Folk devils and moral panics; The creation of the Mods and Rockers*, to refer to the creation of a mass panic about deviant youth by the mass media in the United Kingdom in the late 1960s. In this paper, I discuss the way in which “the authorities” in West Sumatra and Indonesia (media, such as teen magazines and newspapers, academics, government and law, teachers, community leaders), present the threat and the way in which young people, who are the target of the moral panic onslaught, see the “crisis”, behave, and position themselves in relation to the perceived threat. I argue that unlike the “folk devils” of the moral panics in Britain, young people in Minangkabau broadly give their consent to the

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