

CHAPTER 7

Sound Wars

Piety, Civility, and the Battle for Indonesian Ears

David Henley

IN THE EARLY TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY, one sound dominates Indonesia's acoustic landscape as never before: the Islamic call to prayer, fiercely amplified by powerful loudspeakers, piercing the serenity of its villages and drowning even the cacophony of its cities. Even among a people tolerant of noise as of many other things, the zealous din of the mosques has long been perceived by many as a challenge to anyone who might contest the national trend toward assertive Muslim piety: dare to object, and face the righteous anger of the pious. Then, in 2012, vice president Boediono surprised many by doing just that: publicly asking Islamic leaders to turn down the volume. His successor, Jusuf Kalla, has followed suit, and the debate on religious noise has become both public and national. Has a turning point been reached in the battle for Indonesia's acoustic environment? This paper discusses the emerging debate, analysing arguments made on both sides as a prelude to situating the controversy in the broader context of the development of civil society and religious identity in Indonesia.

An Emerging National Issue, 2012–2015

On 27 April 2012, Indonesian vice president Boediono gave a speech at the opening of a plenary congress of the national Council of Indonesian Mosques (Dewan Masjid Indonesia, DMI), of which he was chairman.¹

1. The DMI is a non-governmental, but strongly state-linked, institution founded in 1972 to promote and supervise the development of Indonesia's mosques. It has branches in every province and district (*kabupaten*) in the country.

In the speech he touched on a range of traditional character' – for instance, by setting cleanliness of their premises. One particular was to make waves in the public domain.

The Council [...] might also discuss speakers by mosques. Now we all full is a sacred call upon the Islamic cor Nevertheless, there are perhaps of the sound of the *azan* touches our h softly in the distance, than when it is to our ears.²

Quickly picked up and circulated president's comments evoked decided agreement from some, who feared that B conflict, but cautious support from of who expressed relief that a public figure broached the taboo subject of excessiv with the English-language *Jakarta Post* Wahid Institute, an NGO dedicated to Islam, praised the vice president's brav called 'the elephant in the room'.³

Perhaps encouraged by Boediono same year (2012) a 75-year old man in a lawsuit against officials of a mosque before dawn during the fasting month Quran reading.⁴ Following a heart att advised him to get plenty of sleep. U.

2. From the text of the full speech reproduced on Wapres Boediono soal pengeras suara masjid, <http://www.detik.com/berita/1904162/ini-pidato-l-suara-masjid/1> (accessed 20 August 2015).

3. 'VP: "adzan" call generates mixed reactions', <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/mixed-reactions.html> (accessed 20 August 2015).

4. Hery H. Winarno, 'Gugat pengeras suara masjid', *Merdeka.com*, 16 February 2015, <http://www.merdeka.com/peristiwa/gugat-pengeras-suara-masjid> (accessed 21 February 2015).

health, Hasan had first approached the imam of the mosque, without result, and had subsequently appealed to the local consultative council of Islamic scholars (Majelis Permusyawaratan Ulama, MPU) to issue a *fatwa* (religious edict) disapproving of excessive loudspeaker use. But despite collecting 30 supporting signatures from like-minded neighbours, once again Hasan drew a blank, leading him to start legal action instead. Two months later, in February 2013, he was forced to abandon this avenue too, withdrawing his complaint after facing death threats from an angry mob and being reprimanded in public by the deputy mayor of the city for 'bringing shame on the people of Aceh'.⁵ From then on, nevertheless, the volume of the loudspeaker broadcasts in question was reportedly turned down to half of their former level, leading to claims that a 'rare victory' had been won against mosque noise.⁶

On 8 June 2015, Boediono's successor as vice president, Jusuf Kalla, brought the still simmering debate to a boil once more by proposing a ban on the broadcast via loudspeakers of pre-recorded readings from the Quran.⁷ The occasion was a speech by Kalla to the Fatwa Committee of the Indonesian Council of Islamic Scholars (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, MUI).⁸ In it Kalla complained, on a strikingly personal note, of being woken up at four o'clock in the morning at his home in Makassar (South Sulawesi) by recorded recitations broadcast at high volume by four different mosques. Such broadcasts, he declared bluntly, amounted to 'noise pollution' (*polusi suara*), and to disturb people's sleep with them

was sinful (*berdosa*).⁹ Kalla's appeal toward acoustic competition between comprehensible overlays of mut

As a first step toward regulation (*pemantau*) was formed, on Kalla's behalf (before him) of the DMI, to regulate the number of major cities.¹¹ A few days later he underlined his point by announcing in the view of some – that mosque noise was a violent local clash between C and D day in the remote district of Tol

Public

The MUI was at first divided between those who supported pre-recorded material, with some who opposed it. The vice chairman, liberal intellectual and traditionalist Islamic organization leader, ultimately supported it. Ultimately, however, the Court ruled against the matter, but also made a criticism of the noise study team 'unnecessary' had been 'triggered by non-M

5. 'Anak Sumatera', ketika 'pengeras suara masjid berakibat mudharat', *Sumatera Kita* blogspot, 23 January 2014. URL: <http://sumaterakita.blogspot.nl/2014/01/ketika-pengeras-suara-masjid-berakibat.html> (accessed 25 September 2015).
6. 'Indonesian wins rare victory against noisy mosque', *Jakarta Globe*, 26 February 2013. URL: <http://jakartaglobe.beritasatu.com/archive/indonesian-wins-rare-victory-against-noisy-mosque/> (accessed 21 August 2015).
7. Ya'cob Billiocta, 'JK larang kaset mengaji diputar di masjid, sebabkan polusi suara', *Merdeka.com*, 8 June 2015. URL: <http://www.merdeka.com/peristiwa/jk-larang-kaset-pengajian-diputar-di-masjid-sebabkan-polusi-suara.html> (accessed 31 August 2015).
8. The MUI is a national council which issues non-binding but authoritative religious edicts (*fatwa*) on issues of importance to the Muslim public. Founded as a parastatal organization in 1975 under the auspices of the Suharto regime, since democratization in 1998 it has followed a more autonomous path. The previously-mentioned DMI (Council of Indonesian Mosques) is one of many Muslim organizations represented in the MUI.

9. Noor Aspasia, 'JK: hentikan kaset mengaji di masjid', *CNN Indonesia*, 8 June 2015. URL: [al/20150608174500-20-58562-di-masjid/](http://www.cnn.com/2015/06/08/indonesia/20-58562-di-masjid/) (accessed 26 October 2015).
10. Rohmatin Bonasir, 'MUI telat mengaji', *BBC Indonesia*, 9 June 2015. URL: [berita_indonesia/2015/06/15062015](http://www.bbc.com/berita_indonesia/2015/06/150609_berita_indonesia_2015_06_15062015).
11. Icha Rastika, 'Jusuf Kalla bentuk tim pemantau kaset mengaji', *Merdeka.com*, 8 June 2015. URL: <http://www.merdeka.com/peristiwa/jusuf-kalla-bentuk-tim-pantau-kaset-mengaji/>.
12. Resty Armenia, 'JK: kerusuhan kaset mengaji di masjid', *CNN Indonesia*, 17 July 2015. URL: [20150717143914-20-66909/jl-speaker/](http://www.cnn.com/2015/07/17/indonesia/20-66909/jl-speaker/) (accessed 21 October 2015).
13. Rohmatin Bonasir, 'MUI telat mengaji', *BBC Indonesia*, 9 June 2015. URL: [berita_indonesia/2015/06/15062015](http://www.bbc.com/berita_indonesia/2015/06/15062015).

mam of the mosque, without the local consultative council (Majelis Ulama, MPU) to issue a fatwa on excessive loudspeaker use. But Kalla's critics from like-minded neighboring areas, including him, started legal action. In 2013, he was forced to abandon his position after facing death threats and being named in public by the deputy governor of Aceh.⁵ From then on, mosque broadcasts in question were reduced to their former level, leading to a decline in mosque noise.⁶

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mosque', *Jakarta Globe*, 26 February 2015. URL: <http://www.jakarta-globe.com/archive/indonesian-wins-rare-fatwa-1-august-2015>.

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was sinful (*berdosa*).⁹ Kalla said he particularly regretted the trend toward acoustic competition between nearby mosques, resulting in incomprehensible overlays of mutually interfering sound.¹⁰

As a first step toward regulation, on 22 June a 'monitoring team' (*tim pemantau*) was formed, on Kalla's initiative as chairman (like Boediono before him) of the DMI, to report on the mosque noise situation in a number of major cities.¹¹ A few weeks later, on 17 July, the vice president underlined his point by announcing at a press conference – prematurely, in the view of some – that mosque loudspeakers had been at the root of a violent local clash between Christians and Muslims earlier that same day in the remote district of Tolikara in Papua.¹²

Public Reaction, 2015

The MUI was at first divided by Kalla's proposal to ban the use of pre-recorded material, with some members opposed but others – including the vice chairman, liberal intellectual Masdar Farid Masudi, of the traditionalist Islamic organization Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) – in support.¹³ Ultimately, however, the Council not only refused to issue a *fatwa* on the matter, but also made a critical statement declaring Kalla's mosque noise study team 'unnecessary', asserting that the violence in Tolikara had been 'triggered by non-Muslim radicals, not by the Islamic com-

9. Noor Aspasia, 'JK: hentikan rekaman pengajian yang diputar di masjid', *CNN Indonesia*, 8 June 2015. URL: <http://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20150608174500-20-58562/jk-hentikan-rekaman-pengajian-yang-diputar-di-masjid/> (accessed 26 October 2015).
10. Rohmatin Bonasir, 'MUI telaah pengeras suara masjid dan pemutaran kaset mengaji', *BBC Indonesia*, 9 June 2015. URL: http://www.bbc.com/indonesia/berita_indonesia/2015/06/150609_indonesia_masjid_ngaji (accessed 21 October 2015).
11. Icha Rastika, 'Jusuf Kalla bentuk tim pantau suara kaset pengajian', *Kompas.com*, 22 June 2015. URL: <http://nasional.kompas.com/read/2015/06/22/17471671/Jusuf.Kalla.Bentuk.Tim.Pantau.Suara.Kaset.Pengajian> (accessed 4 November 2015).
12. Resty Armenia, 'JK: kerusuhan antaragama di Tolikara disebabkan speaker', *CNN Indonesia*, 17 July 2015. URL: <http://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20150717143914-20-66909/jk-kerusuhan-antaragama-di-tolikara-disebabkan-speaker/> (accessed 21 October 2015).
13. Rohmatin Bonasir, 'MUI telaah pengeras suara masjid dan pemutaran kaset mengaji', *BBC Indonesia*, 9 June 2015. URL: http://www.bbc.com/indonesia/berita_indonesia/2015/06/150609_indonesia_masjid_ngaji (accessed 21 October 2015).

munity', and arguing that 'what is needed is to build up public awareness of the need to live together in harmony, peace, and toleration – not to monitor mosque loudspeakers'.¹⁴ Increasingly inclined since the fall of the Suharto regime to act independently of government, the MUI had also been highly critical of Boediono's remarks on mosque loudspeaker volume in 2012.¹⁵

Among the leaders of other mainstream Islamic groups, reactions were more guarded. The regional secretary of the NU, Indonesia's largest single Muslim organization, in its home province of East Java said he agreed with Kalla that restraint was needed in the use of loudspeakers, particularly with the non-Muslim community in mind. 'Let us avoid presenting Islam', he commented, 'in ways that cause annoyance, such as playing cassette recordings excessively'. But at the same time he also 'regretted' Kalla's public pursuit of an outright ban on the use of such recordings, arguing that this should be a matter for local negotiation and discretion, depending on the composition and attitudes of individual communities.¹⁶ Syafiq Mughni, senior leader of Indonesia's second largest Muslim organization, Muhammadiyah, agreed that mosque loudspeakers create 'the potential for noise pollution', and that there was a need to protect members of the public, 'particularly those who are ill and in need of rest, and non-Muslims'. Nevertheless he too declared himself opposed to legislative intervention, arguing that the government should first try to resolve matters by means of 'moral exhortation'.¹⁷

Perhaps surprisingly, qualified support for Kalla's position also came from the more radical end of Indonesia's Islamic spectrum. A spokes-

14. 'MUI: Tim Pemantau Pengeras Suara Masjid tidak perlu', *Republika*, 26 July 2015. URL: <http://www.republika.co.id/berita/dunia-islam/islam-nusantara/15/07/26/ns1za9361-mui-tim-pemantau-pengeras-suara-masjid-tidak-perlu> (accessed 19 October 2015).
15. 'VP: "Adzan" call generates mixed reactions', *The Jakarta Post*, 28 April 2012. URL: <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2012/04/28/vp-adzan-call-generates-mixed-reactions.html> (accessed 20 August 2015).
16. Ahmad Muhammad, 'NU minta pengurus masjid tak berlebihan putar kaset pengajian', *Surabayanews.co.id*, 11 June 2015. URL: <http://surabayanews.co.id/2015/06/11/25011/nu-minta-pengurus-masjid-tak-berlebihan-putar-kaset-pengajian.html> (accessed 20 August 2015).
17. Ahmad Muhammad, 'Muhammadiyah dukung pembatasan speaker masjid', *Surabayanews.co.id*, 11 June 2015. URL: <http://surabayanews.co.id/2015/06/11/25017/muhammadiyah-dukung-pembatasan-speaker-masjid.html> (accessed 19 October 2015).

man for Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia committed to the pursuit of a leg remarked that although regulation too far, mosque officials must ind month Muslims have particular before rising early for their pre-da chairman of the puritan reformist Union, Persis), also expressed a to consider the interests of child people who must rise early to ea [*adab-adaban*]', he added, 'not a

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18. Utami Diah Kusumawati, 'Hiz bising', *CNN Indonesia*, 9 Jun nasional/20150609094100-20-? tidak-bising/ (accessed 20 Augu
19. Helmi M. Permana, 'Ketua U medianews.com, 10 June 2015 php?menu=bandung-raya&id= an-wapres-jk (accessed 20 Augus
20. Basuki Rahmat, 'Persekutuan C CNN Indonesia, 9 June 2015 al/20150609090001-20-58655 suara-pengajian/ (accessed 21 (

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<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2012/04/28/vp-adzan-call-generates-just-2015>.

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man for Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), a radical conservative group
committed to the pursuit of a legalistic religious and social orthodoxy,
remarked that although regulation by *fatwa* would in this case be going
too far, mosque officials must indeed remember that during the fasting
month Muslims have particular need of an undisturbed night's sleep
before rising early for their pre-dawn breakfast.¹⁸ Maman Abdurrahman,
chairman of the puritan reformist organization Persatuan Islam (Islamic
Union, Persis), also expressed agreement with Kalla, citing the need
to consider the interests of children, the infirm, and ordinary working
people who must rise early to earn a living. 'This is a matter of civility
[*adab-adaban*]', he added, 'not a matter of *halal* or *haram*'.¹⁹

Equally striking was the strongly contrasting reactions to Kalla's ini-
tiative from non-Muslim groups and organizations, which either main-
tained (at least in public) a studied silence, or weighed actively in on the
side of Kalla's critics. Within a day of the vice president's address to the
MUI, a spokesman for the Christian umbrella organization Alliance of
Indonesian Churches (PGI, Persekutuan Gereja Indonesia) had made
an announcement regretting Kalla's words and distancing the PGI from
any dissatisfaction over mosque noise, which he insisted was simply 'not
a problem' for Indonesian Christians.²⁰ The anxieties underlying this
ostensibly tolerant stance will be discussed below.

Further criticism of Kalla came from political bodies with religious
portfolios or affiliations. In parliament, the standing commission for
religious affairs (Komisi VIII DPR RI) described the vice president's
decision to create a mosque noise monitoring team as 'disproportionate'
(*terlalu berlebihan*), given that in an international perspective Indonesia

18. Utami Diah Kusumawati, 'Hizbut Tahrir setuju JK, mengaji mestinya tidak bising', *CNN Indonesia*, 9 June 2015. URL: <http://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20150609094100-20-58674/hizbut-tahrir-setuju-jk-mengaji-mestinya-tidak-bising/> (accessed 20 August 2015).

19. Helmi M. Permana, 'Ketua Umum PP amini pernyataan Wapres JK', *Galamedianews.com*, 10 June 2015. URL: <http://www.galamedianews.com/index.php?menu=bandung-raya&id=26918&judul=ketua-umum-pp-amini-pernyataan-wapres-jk> (accessed 20 August 2015).

20. Basuki Rahmat, 'Persekutuan Gereja beda sikap dengan JK soal suara pengajian', *CNN Indonesia*, 9 June 2015. URL: <http://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20150609090001-20-58655/persekutuan-gereja-beda-sikap-dengan-jk-soal-suara-pengajian/> (accessed 21 October 2015).

was already 'a model of religious freedom'.²¹ At the opposite end of the spectrum of political respectability, the violent Islamist vigilante group FPI (Front Pembela Islam, Front of the Defenders of Islam) declared that Quranic recitation, even when pre-recorded, is a source of divine merit (*pahala*), and that Kalla should have consulted fully with the MUI before (rather than after) making any personal pronouncement on the subject of loudspeakers and recordings. The vice president, added the FPI spokesman pointedly, 'is not an expert on religious matters'.²²

Direct and more aggressive language can be found in some of the individual comments posted in various electronic fora via which the public debate on the topic has been continued. 'Evil spirits [*jin kafir*] and the Devil are much disturbed by the sound of holy verses from the Quran', remarked one commentator on a news report dealing with Kalla's reaction to the Tolikara incident.²³ Others felt impelled – or empowered – to warn Kalla, a wealthy businessman as well as holder of the second highest office in the nation, to put aside his worldly pride and turn away from the temptations of wealth and power before death and his creator caught up with him. The fact that the vice president had dared to talk of Quranic verses as 'noise pollution' gave rise to particular indignation.

It is alarming to hear a Muslim declare himself disturbed by the holy verses of the Quran being recited, and even more so to hear him describe them as noise pollution, as if comparing them to billows of

21. 'Berlebihan, rencana pembentukan Tim Pemantau Pengeras Suara Masjid', *Republika*, 25 July 2015. URL: <http://www.republika.co.id/berita/dunia-islam/islam.nusantara/15/07/25/ns1brh301-berlebihan-rencana-pembentukan-tim-pemantau-pengeras-suara-masjid> (accessed 19 October 2015).
22. Mengiza, 'FPI: pendengar rekaman mengaji dapat pahala', CNN Indonesia, 9 June 2015. URL: <http://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20150609093435-20-58675/fpi-pendengar-rekaman-mengaji-dapat-pahala/> (accessed 20 August 2015).
23. Comment by 'Bakir' on: 'JK sebut penyebab peristiwa Tolikara adalah speaker masjid, Habib Rizieq: Dari intel bloon atau otak dengkul?', *Suara Islam*, 19 July 2015. URL: <http://www.suara-islam.com/read/index/14904/JK-Sebut-Penyebab-Peristiwa-Tolikara-adalah-Speaker-Masjid--Habib-Rizieq--Dari-Intel-Bloon-atau-Otak-Dengkul> (accessed 20 August 2015). The comment was probably meant literally as well as figuratively. In Christian Europe, by comparison, religious sounds such as that of church bells were regarded until quite recent times as having an intrinsic capacity to ward off evil (Corbin 1994:103–111).

smoke or dust. If you are truly a Muslim, beg God for forgiveness'.²⁴

In some cases, commentators on Kalla's views became the targets of vituperation from anyone being disturbed by the sound of the recording. 'To come from a tape', snapped one zealous commentator, 'is not the proper and improper way of posting on the proper and improper subject. Those who are disturbed are devils [*iblis*]'

Historical

The (potential) public sensitivity to the sound of the call to prayer was recognized by Indonesian government in the middle years of Suharto's authoritarian rule. A strict regulation was thought necessary to reduce tension between Muslim and non-Muslim. A Ministry of Religion ordinance (No. 12/1978 Islam Kep/D/101/78, 12 July 1978) regulated the use by mosques and prayer houses of loudspeakers. They may be used for internal and external loudspeakers but not be audible outside the mosque. The ordinance used: (1) if the interior of a mosque

24. Comment by 'Edonk Be Je EM' (Bakir) on: 'Suara mengaji dari kaset jadi polutan', *Merdeka.com*, 20 August 2015. URL: <http://www.merdeka.com/kaset-jadi-polemik-apa-tindakan-n>
25. Comment by 'Jack Parker' on: 'Suara mengaji jadi polutan', *Tribun Timur* (Makassar news.com/2015/06/16/soal-jk-l), 16 June 2015 (accessed 20 August 2015).
26. 'Lampiran instruksi Direktur Jendral Agama Islam No. 17/1978, tanggal: 17 Juli 1978, tentang: Pengeras suara di masjid, langgar', file/d/0B4lc74PFDHGHTUJLC (accessed 20 August 2015). See also: 'VP: "Adzan" call to prayer causes mixed reaction', *News.com*, 28 April 2012, URL: <http://www.news.com/2012/04/28/vp-adzan-call-generates-mixed-reaction-aturan-pengeras-suara-masjid-suara-masjid> (accessed 20 August 2015). URL: <http://news.com/2012/04/28/vp-adzan-call-generates-mixed-reaction-aturan-pengeras-suara-masjid-suara-masjid> (accessed 20 August 2015).

om.²¹ At the opposite end of the violent Islamist vigilante group (the Defenders of Islam) declared and recorded, is a source of divine inspiration consulted fully with the MUI personal pronouncement on the subject. The vice president, added the expert on religious matters.²²

Such a message can be found in some of the thousands of electronic fora via which the controversy continued. 'Evil spirits [*jinn kafir*] are attracted by the sound of holy verses from the Quran or on a news report dealing with the subject.²³ Others felt impelled – or provoked by a businessman as well as a holder of worldly pride, to put aside his worldly pride and wealth and power before death in the face of the fact that the vice president had been accused of 'pollution' gave rise to particular

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from Pemantau Pengeras Suara Masjid', www.republika.co.id/berita/dunia-islam/berlebihan-rencana-pembentukan-tim-ed-19-October-2015).

'Mengaji dapat pahala', CNN Indonesia, 9 June 2015. URL: <http://www.cnn.com/2015/06/09/indonesia/nasional/20150609093435-mengaji-dapat-pahala/> (accessed 20 August 2015).

'Sebab peristiwa Tolikara adalah speaker atau otak dengkul?', *Suara Islam*, 19 June 2015. URL: <http://www.suara-islam.com/read/index/14904/JK-Sebut-speaker-Masjid--Habib-Rizieq--Dari-Intel-19-Juni-2015> (accessed 20 August 2015). The comment was probably. In Christian Europe, by comparison, bells were regarded until quite recent times as evil (Corbin 1994:103–111).

smoke or dust. If you are truly a Muslim, *pak JK*, then you should simply beg God for forgiveness.²⁴

In some cases, commentators who posted messages supporting Kalla's views became the targets of vitriol themselves. 'I have never heard of anyone being disturbed by the sound of a mosque, even if it does only come from a tape', snapped one zealot in response to a politely argued posting on the proper and improper use of loudspeakers. 'The only ones who are disturbed are devils [*iblis*] like you.'²⁵

Historical Background

The (potential) public sensitivity of mosque noise has long been recognized by Indonesian governments. During the early and middle years of Suharto's authoritarian New Order regime (1965–1998), strict regulation was thought necessary in this area to avoid unwanted tension between Muslim and non-Muslim sections of urban society. A Ministry of Religion ordinance from 1978 (Instruksi Dirjen Bimas Islam Kep/D/101/78, 12 July 1978) lays out clear rules for loudspeaker use by mosques and prayer houses nationwide.²⁶ Separate speakers must be used for internal and external broadcasts, and internal speakers must not be audible outside the mosque. External loudspeakers may only be used: (1) if the interior of a mosque is full and a part of the congregation

24. Comment by 'Edonk Be Je EM' (Banjarmasin) on: Dieqy Hasbi Widhana, 'Dengar suara mengaji dari kaset jadi polemik, apa tindakan MUI?', *Merdeka.com*, 9 June 2015. URL: <http://www.merdeka.com/peristiwa/dengar-suara-mengaji-dari-kaset-jadi-polemik-apa-tindakan-mui.html> (accessed 20 August 2015).

25. Comment by 'Jack Parker' on: 'Soal JK larang pengajian kaset, ini penjelasan jubirnya', *Tribun Timur* (Makassar), 16 June 2015. URL: <http://makassar.tribunnews.com/2015/06/16/soal-jk-larang-pengajian-kaset-ini-penjelasan-jubirnya> (accessed 20 August 2015).

26. 'Lampiran instruksi Direktur Jenderal Bimbingan Masyarakat Islam, nomor: Kep/D/101/1978, tanggal: 17 juli 1978, tentang tuntunan penggunaan pengeras suara di masjid, langgar dan mushalla', URL: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B4lc74PFDHGHTU1OHVwTTdpcWM/edit> (accessed 17 October 2015). See also: 'VP: "Adzan" call generates mixed reactions', *The Jakarta Post*, 28 April 2012, URL: <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2012/04/28/vp-adzan-call-generates-mixed-reactions.html> (accessed 20 August 2015); 'Ternyata, aturan pengeras suara masjid sudah ada sejak 1978', *Okezone* (News/Jatim), 24 June 2015, URL: <http://news.okezone.com/read/2015/06/24/519/1170705/ternyata-aturan-pengeras-suara-masjid-sudah-ada-sejak-1978> (accessed 15 October 2015).

is left standing outside; (2) for recitation of the festive declaration of the faith (*takbiran*) at the feasts of Idul Fitri (lasting one night and one day, at the end of the fasting month) and Idul Adha (four successive days); (3) for the call to prayer (*adzan*) five times each day; and (4) for Quran readings lasting at most 15 minutes immediately preceding each dawn (*subuh*) call to prayer, and at most five minutes immediately preceding each of the other four *adzan*. No other readings, chants, prayers or sermons may be broadcast from external speakers at any time, even during the fasting month. It is interesting to note that the use of sound recordings is not prohibited, although for the *adzan* itself a recording may be used 'only if absolutely necessary' (p. 129).

Technically, this detailed regulation of 1978 is still in force today. Yet it long ago ceased to be consulted or implemented, and in June 2015, when Jusuf Kalla became the second vice president in three years to raise the mosque noise issue, neither he nor the secretary general of the Council of Indonesian Mosques was apparently aware of it at all.²⁷ Such legislative amnesia is not unusual in Indonesia, where institutions often have short memories and the importance of rules and regulations, as compared to the practical needs of government, tends to be limited. In this case, however, it also reflects deep changes which have taken place over the last 30 years in the spirit of Indonesian Islam, and in its relations with other religions and with the state.

In the 1970s Indonesian Islam, despite its commanding demographic position (then as now, close to 90 per cent of the population called itself Muslim), was in general culturally unassertive, politically weak, and to some extent distrusted by government. In the 1980s, influenced by parallel developments elsewhere in the Muslim world, it underwent a resurgence, Islamic awareness and observance intensifying markedly across the country. Beginning in 1990, this process received official sanction as the Suharto regime cautiously began to embrace the Islamic revival (Vatikiotis 1998: 131–137). If the visible signature of Islam's new assertiveness was the increasing popularity among women of the

jilbab or head covering, its audibility of religious noise.

Perhaps the best account of the present source of tension can be found in a (2009) eye-witness description of a remote East Javanese village during the twentieth century. In the nineteenth century this village, Bayu, had been a Javanese variety of Islamic practice. Geertz (1960), as *abangan*. In the twentieth century it had already received a major blow from adherents with communism. No longer a man who proclaimed that only a worthy of the name.

To broadcast this message as a source of listeners, was for the reformist movement it spoke to the spiritual well-being of the next. In Bayu as elsewhere, the aggressive orthodoxy' (Beatty 2009) murmurs of an older, mystical, disdained confrontation, and with confidence to contest puritan assertions of the holy Quran and other authorities at mosques and prayer-houses in the village. Islamists was asserted only temporarily, and the advance

In the cities, meanwhile, protest those of the economically crucial elements was no longer a priority. On the other hand, the ticians became much more concerned with the elements of the Muslim majority righteous noise. For self-identification way to the challenge – or provoke this noise was not easy without the puritans, and to call one's

Non-Muslims, of course, with their options. Only in areas where this, such as Bali, did non-Muslims

27. 'Sekjen DMI: baru tahu ada aturan speaker masjid', *Republika Online*, 23 juli 2015. URL: <http://www.republika.co.id/berita/dunia-islam/islam-nusantara/15/07/23/nrxqv3313-sekjen-dmi-baru-tahu-ada-aturan-speaker-masjid> (accessed 16 October 2015).

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jilbab or head covering, its audible signature was the unrestrained blare of religious noise.

Perhaps the best account of the role of these sounds as an incipient source of tension can be found in anthropologist Andrew Beatty's (2009) eye-witness description of the advance of orthodox Islam in a remote East Javanese village during the 1990s. In the mid-twentieth century this village, Bayu, had been dominated by the syncretic, tolerant Javanese variety of Islamic practice known in the literature, following Geertz (1960), as *abangan*. In the 1960s, the prestige of *abangan* Islam had already received a major blow due to the involvement of many of its adherents with communism. Now it was under attack by self-righteous men who proclaimed that only a rigorous, purified version of Islam was worthy of the name.

To broadcast this message as loudly as possible, even against the will of listeners, was for the reformists an inherently benevolent act, because it spoke to the spiritual well-being of all Muslims, both in this life and in the next. In Bayu as elsewhere, loudspeakers became 'the voice of aggressive orthodoxy' (Beatty 2009: 293), drowning out the dissenting murmurs of an older, mystical, relativistic tradition which had always disdained confrontation, and which now increasingly lacked the confidence to contest puritan assertions supposedly based directly on the holy Quran and other authoritative Arabic texts. Stones were thrown at mosques and prayer-houses in the night, and a miniature *coup d'état* by the village Islamists was averted; but the loudspeakers were silenced only temporarily, and the advance of orthodox Islam continued.

In the cities, meanwhile, protecting non-Muslim sensibilities – even those of the economically crucial ethnic Chinese business community – was no longer a priority. On the contrary, government officials and politicians became much more concerned not to offend the newly assertive elements of the Muslim majority by restricting their freedom to make righteous noise. For self-identifying Muslims, indeed, responding in any way to the challenge – or provocation, as many undoubtedly saw it – of this noise was not easy without appearing both to insult the convictions of the puritans, and to call one's own piety into doubt.

Non-Muslims, of course, were in most ways even more limited in their options. Only in areas where Muslims were in a very small minority, such as Bali, did non-Muslims dare to place serious restrictions on

loudspeaker use by mosques (Pedersen 2014: 185). However another, more widely feasible response, common among Christian church congregations and also found among Balinese Hindus, was to engage Muslims in a sort of acoustic arms race by making ever more religious noise themselves.²⁸

The intensified use of mosque loudspeakers has become almost emblematic of intrusive Islamic orthodoxy in Indonesia, engendering reactions throughout the archipelago. [...] The escalation in use of loudspeakers by Hindus is [...] noticeable here, blaring [...] through the night with manuscript readings for temple ceremonies, readings which until quite recently sounded richly only throughout their immediate environs in less powerfully broadcast cadences. (Pedersen 2014: 185–186.)

This 'beat them at their own game' response to Islamic noise has become very characteristic of predominantly Christian parts of eastern Indonesia, particularly in Sulawesi and the Moluccas. Here Protestant churches and their lay leaders have taken to using loudspeakers for the broadcast of devotional and evangelical music, typically in sugary, melodious forms, but at deafening volume, and often early in the morning. Church announcements are also to be heard, and sometimes also admonitions encouraging parents to ensure that their children devote the necessary time and attention to their homework – education, perhaps not coincidentally, being an arena in which eastern Indonesian Christians are concerned to maintain their historical lead over their Muslim neighbours. The acoustic war is largely undeclared; in public, church leaders usually deny that their own noise is a reply to that of Muslims. In private, however, they express their annoyance at the way Islam has attempted (as they see it) to dominate the public soundscape, and their determination to restore the only kind of justice they can by filling the air with yet more noise.

Arguments for the Status Quo

Many Indonesian Muslims have a reflexive tendency to regard any antipathy to sounds produced in God's name, especially recitations from

28. Ali Amin, 'Managing the holy noise pollution', *The Jakarta Post*, 2 October 2015. URL: <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2015/10/02/managing-holy-noise-pollution.html> (accessed 15 November 2015).

the Quran, as impious. At the risk might be said that the inescapable human habitat is thought to mirror itself, which is not something to be of the strongest negative reaction: be informed directly by this kind

In addition, however, opposition regulation – of religious noise a religious and secular, to support t already noted in passing, one such Quran are intrinsic sources of dis those who hear them. Kalla, in l this objection by expressing the least, could confer no such merit 'will be enjoyed by the Japanese, by Sony'.²⁹ But this view was cr mentary religious affairs commi. Quran reading were unaffected that in any case *pahala* was God debate and speculation.³⁰ The sophisticated, however, and did same topic among Islamic scho more than a century.³¹

Another religious argument of direct compulsion, every act

29. Noor Aspasia, 'JK: hentikan CNN Indonesia, 8 June 2015. [al/20150608174500-20-58562 di-masjid/](http://www.cnnindonesia.com/di-masjid/) (accessed 26 October 2015).

30. Basuki Rahmat N., 'Komisi ag mengaji', CNN Indonesia, 9 Juli nasional/20150609081358-20-suara-rekaman-mengaji/ (accessed 26 October 2015).

31. The question of reward for listing by Muslim scholars in Indonesia at the end of the nineteenth century recording was that it could not be from the Quran had been followed 195–197; Suryadi 2014: 72–3)

en 2014: 185). However another, among Christian church congregations in Balinese Hindu areas, was to engage with the noise by making ever more religious

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the response to Islamic noise has been predominantly in Christian parts of eastern Indonesia and the Moluccas. Here Protestant churches have taken to using loudspeakers for liturgical music, typically in sugary, melodic volume, and often early in the morning to be heard, and sometimes also to ensure that their children devote time to their homework – education, performance in which eastern Indonesian churches have their historical lead over their Muslim counterparts is largely undeclared; in public, the church's own noise is a reply to that of Muslims to express their annoyance at the way Muslims dominate the public soundscape, and the only kind of justice they can by

The Status Quo

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recitation', *The Jakarta Post*, 2 October 2015. <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2015/10/02/managing-holy-noise-015>.

the Quran, as impious. At the risk of over-interpreting the evidence, it might be said that the inescapable supremacy of religious noise in the human habitat is thought to mirror the inescapable power of God himself, which is not something to be resented or complained about. Some of the strongest negative reactions to criticism of mosque noise seem to be informed directly by this kind of sentiment.

In addition, however, opponents of moderation – and, especially, regulation – of religious noise also advance specific arguments, both religious and secular, to support their position. On the religious side, as already noted in passing, one such argument is that recitations from the Quran are intrinsic sources of divine merit (Indonesian: *pahala*) for all those who hear them. Kalla, in his statement to the MUI, pre-empted this objection by expressing the opinion that *pre-recorded* readings, at least, could confer no such merit. 'Any *pahala* to be had', he quipped, 'will be enjoyed by the Japanese, since the equipment is sure to be made by Sony.'²⁹ But this view was criticized by a spokesman for the parliamentary religious affairs commission, who opined that the benefits of a Quran reading were unaffected by whether it was live or recorded, and that in any case *pahala* was God's business and not amenable to human debate and speculation.³⁰ The discussion did not become doctrinally sophisticated, however, and did not connect with earlier debate on the same topic among Islamic scholars, which has a history stretching back more than a century.³¹

Another religious argument for volume over restraint is that short of direct compulsion, every action that might induce others to greater

29. Noor Aspasia, 'JK: hentikan rekaman pengajian yang diputar di masjid', CNN Indonesia, 8 June 2015. URL: <http://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20150608174500-20-58562/jk-hentikan-rekaman-pengajian-yang-diputar-di-masjid/> (accessed 26 October 2015).

30. Basuki Rahmat N., 'Komisi agama DPR kritik JK soal pahala suara rekaman mengaji', CNN Indonesia, 9 June 2015. URL: <http://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20150609081358-20-58649/komisi-agama-dpr-kritik-jk-soal-pahala-suara-rekaman-mengaji/> (accessed 15 November 2015).

31. The question of reward for listeners to recorded Quranic recitation was debated by Muslim scholars in Indonesia as soon as the first phonographs arrived there at the end of the nineteenth century. One argument advanced by opponents of recording was that it could not be guaranteed that the ritual rules governing recital from the Quran had been followed during the recording session (Kaptein 2014: 195–197; Suryadi 2014: 72–3).

piety and prayerfulness is in their own interests, whether they think so or not. It was in this vein that in the village of Bayu, by Beatty's account, one Islamic prayer leader defended a colleague's amplified night-time sermons.

"It is his duty to proclaim the message."

"Yes, but so loud?"

"As loud as it takes."

"What if the neighbourhood refuses?"

[...] "Then they are sinners and will pay in the afterlife. God counts up all the unpaid prayers and exacts a punishment. But at least the lax will get some benefit. They hear my sermon."

"You can't force people to pray."

"That's right. It was the Prophet Muhammad himself who said, *There is no compulsion in religion*. But you can force people to listen." (Beatty 2009: 277.)

By far the most common specifically cited argument for preserving the current situation of absolute freedom to make religious noise, however, is the danger to public harmony, order and safety that would allegedly be created by any attempt to limit that freedom. The remainder of the present section discusses the ironic, but pervasive, public fear of the consequences of offending the Islamic noise-makers themselves.

Not surprisingly, that fear has been strongest among non-Muslims. The Alliance of Indonesian Churches (PGI) alluded to it in its alarmed response to Jusuf Kalla's statement on mosque noise in June 2015.

For us the question of *azan* noise or amplified Quran recitations is not a problem, not a substantial issue. [...] It is precisely this announcement by JK that could be a trigger for unnecessary new problems. [...] On what basis would the Christian community wish to object? After all, up to now we have always been used to hearing the sounds from the mosques [...]. We have been able to live in this environment for so long, listening to those recitations and calls to prayer at set times [...]. It's not a problem, it doesn't disturb us [...].³²

32. Basuki Rahmat, 'Persekutuan Gereja beda sikap dengan JK soal suara pengajian', CNN Indonesia, 9 June 2015. URL: <http://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20150609090001-20-58655/persekutuan-gereja-beda-sikap-dengan-jk-soal-suara-pengajian/> (accessed 21 October 2015).

So great is the reluctance of the Islamic community that Christians have remained largely out of most of which has consequences for sensibilities and doctrine. But darkly to the social and political 2012 MUI chairman Amidan, and loud' calls to prayer had been Islam, and that any attempt to intervene now 'would be counterproductive debates in society'.³³ In 2015 Kalla's request for a restrictive issue' would 'become a source of formation of his 'monitoring' 'only generate suspicion in the the Ministry of Religion's 'so that the Ministry 'has to promulgate rules for loudspeaker use, in c

At first sight this rhetoric gives a hypocritical impression, particularly for those who must themselves be and behaviour of the Muslims specify whether or not the effect on the public at large are also the the lingering tendency of I

33. 'VP: "Adzan" call generates mixed reactions', <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2015/06/15/vp-adzan-call-generates-mixed-reactions.html> (accessed 21 October 2015).

34. Dieqy Hasbi Widhana, 'Detik-detik tindakan MUI?', Merdeka.com peristiwa/dengar-suara-menjadi-perlu', *Republika*, 26 July 2015. URL: <http://www.republika.co.id/berita/islam/islam-nusantara/150726-suara-masjid-tidak-perlu> (accessed 21 October 2015).

35. Heyder Affan, 'Sebagian masyarakat Indonesia', *UF* Indonesia, 26 June 2015. URL: http://www.uf.com/2015/06/150626_indonesia (accessed 21 October 2015).

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[http://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasion-
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 2015](http://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasion-

 ituan-gereja-beda-sikap-dengan-jk-soal-

 2015)).

So great is the reluctance to wake dangerous sleeping dogs in the
 Islamic community that Christians, Hindus and other religious minori-
 ties have remained largely outside the public debate on mosque noise,
 most of which has consequently been conducted on the basis of Islamic
 sensibilities and doctrine. But Muslim commentators, too, often refer
 darkly to the social and political dangers of disturbing the status quo. In
 2012 MUI chairman Amidan, responding to Boediono, said that 'fierce
 and loud' calls to prayer had become part of the 'signature' of Indonesian
 Islam, and that any attempt to introduce 'unsuitable rules' to curtail them
 now 'would be counterproductive, because it would trigger unnecessary
 debates in society'.³³ In 2015 the MUI was again militant, rejecting
 Kalla's request for a restrictive *fatwa* out of 'fear' that the 'noise pollution
 issue' would 'become a source of conflict in society', and opposing the
 formation of his 'monitoring team' on the grounds that this too would
 'only generate suspicion in the Muslim community'.³⁴ The director of
 the Ministry of Religion's 'social guidance' division, meanwhile, agreed
 that the Ministry 'has to proceed with caution' when 'socializing' any
 rules for loudspeaker use, in order 'not to cause too strong a reaction'.³⁵

At first sight this rhetoric of fear often makes a self-serving if not
 hypocritical impression, particularly when it comes from religious lead-
 ers who must themselves be judged partly responsible for the attitudes
 and behaviour of the Muslim community, and who seldom care to
 specify whether or not the explosive sensitivities they perceive among
 the public at large are also their own. Another factor, however, may be
 the lingering tendency of Indonesian Muslims, despite their demo-

33. 'VP: "Adzan" call generates mixed reactions', *The Jakarta Post*, 28 April 2012. URL: <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2012/04/28/vp-adzan-call-generates-mixed-reactions.html> (accessed 20 August 2015).

34. Dieqy Hasbi Widhana, 'Dengar suara mengaji dari kaset jadi polemik, apa tindakan MUI?', *Merdeka.com*, 9 June 2015. URL: <http://www.merdeka.com/peristiwa/dengar-suara-mengaji-dari-kaset-jadi-polemik-apa-tindakan-mui.html> (accessed 20 August 2015). 'MUI: Tim Pemantau Pengeras Suara Masjid tidak perlu', *Republika*, 26 July 2015. URL: <http://www.republika.co.id/berita/dunia-islam/islam-nusantara/15/07/26/ns1za9361-mui-tim-pemantau-pengeras-suara-masjid-tidak-perlu> (accessed 19 October 2015).

35. Heyder Affan, 'Sebagian masjid "tidak mematuhi" aturan pengeras suara', *BBC Indonesia*, 26 June 2015. URL: http://www.bbc.com/indonesia/berita_indonesia/2015/06/150626_indonesia_polemik_pengeras_suaramasjid (accessed 21 October 2015).

graphic strength, to perceive themselves as an underprivileged group, constantly threatened by established anti-Muslim forces and conspiracies. One is reminded here of sociologist W.F. Wertheim's well-known characterization of Muslims in Indonesia as a 'majority with minority mentality' (Wertheim 1980). Take Haji Ali Badri, a prominent Muslim leader in East Java, who declared himself in an interview to be suspicious that unspecified 'interests' hostile to Islam were behind Kalla's attack on Muslim noise.

In his [Badri's] view the use of loudspeakers by mosques is a means of propagating the faith that has become deeply rooted in the culture and society of Indonesia, where Islam is the majority religion. Given that Indonesia is a Muslim-majority country, the minorities should respect the culture of the majority and adapt themselves to it. 'Whose request is this?', asks Badri. 'Why is Islam always being criticized and interfered with?'³⁶

Even when no conspiracy theory is invoked, many Muslim intellectuals are strikingly reluctant to accept the authority of the state to regulate Islamic activities. An expert on Islamic law from the Sunan Ampel Islamic University in Surabaya, for instance, described the proposed legislation as an unwarranted interference by the state in 'the religious affairs of society', which he argued should be 'left entirely to local wisdom.'³⁷

Arguments for Change

The specific arguments advanced for change – that is, moderation or regulation of religious noise – fall into four broad categories: practical, doctrinal, political, and ethical. The *practical* considerations cited by proponents of change are diverse. Jusuf Kalla and others have emphasized the interference with people's work and productivity caused by sleeplessness due to nocturnal disturbance, as well as the simple unintelligibility of religious messages broadcast at distorting volume or simultaneously from

36. Guntur Nara Persada, 'Aturan penggunaan pengeras masjid sarat kepentingan', *Surabaya News*, 11 June 2015. URL: <http://surabayanews.co.id/2015/06/11/25007/aturan-penggunaan-pengeras-masjid-sarat-kepentingan.html> (accessed 17 October 2015).

37. Sahid H.M. as reported by Ahmad Muhammad in: 'Negara tidak boleh intervensi praktik keagamaan di masyarakat', *Surabaya News*, 11 June 2015. URL: <http://surabayanews.co.id/2015/06/11/25013/negara-tidak-boleh-intervensi-praktik-keagamaan-di-masyarakat.html> (accessed 19 October 2015).

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A perhaps more persuasive port for quiet, restrained prea found in Islamic scripture. 'I seminal remarks on the subje as well as humble our hearts, recent debate, the following : in this context.⁴¹

Al A'raf, 55: 'Call unto yo hearts.'

Al A'raf, 205: 'And beth awe, and without raising

38. It is perhaps worth noting b imposition deplored by Kall *positive* aesthetic value in certa 252–262).

39. Rohmatin Bonasir, 'MUI te mengaji', BBC Indonesia, 9 J berita_indonesia/2015/06/15/2015).

40. From the text of the full spc Wapres Boediono soal penge detik.com/berita/1904162/suara-masjid/1 (accessed 20

41. These three passages are citi masjid berakibat mudharat', <http://sumaterakita.blogspot.com/2015/06/berita-masjid-berakibat-mudharat.html> (accessed 25 September 2015). Asad (1984: 211, 235, 436).

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multiple, unsynchronized sources.³⁸ For the Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, as noted, a particular issue is that Muslims, particularly during the fasting month, need peace and quiet at night in order properly to perform the religious activities required of them during the day. Some critics of mosque noise have also ventured to observe that one of the original and most elementary functions of the call to prayer, that of informing the faithful when it is time for them to pray, has actually been rendered redundant by technological change. 'Today', as NU intellectual Masdar Farid Masudi remarked to a BBC reporter in June 2015, 'everybody has a gadget such as a hand phone that can be used to wake them up, whether with the sound of the *azan* or with another sound.'³⁹

A perhaps more persuasive argument, for many Muslims, is the support for quiet, restrained preaching – or at least, prayer – which can be found in Islamic scripture. 'The Quran itself', noted Boediono in his seminal remarks on the subject in 2012, 'teaches us to lower our voices, as well as humble our hearts, when we pray for God's guidance.'⁴⁰ In the recent debate, the following specific Quranic passages have been cited in this context.⁴¹

Al A'raf, 55: 'Call unto your Sustainer humbly, and in the secrecy of your hearts.'

Al A'raf, 205: 'And bethink thyself of thy Sustainer humbly and with awe, and without raising thy voice, at morn and at evening [...].'

38. It is perhaps worth noting here that the kind of sound distortion and superimposition deplored by Kalla in amplified Quranic recitations reportedly has *positive* aesthetic value in certain other Indonesian cultural contexts (Sutton 1996: 252–262).
39. Rohmatin Bonasir, 'MUI telaah pengeras suara masjid dan pemutaran kaset mengaji', BBC Indonesia, 9 June 2015. URL: http://www.bbc.com/indonesia/berita_indonesia/2015/06/150609_indonesia_masjid_ngaji (accessed 21 October 2015).
40. From the text of the full speech reproduced in *DetikNews* ('Ini pidato lengkap Wapres Boediono soal pengeras suara masjid'), 29 April 2012. URL: <http://news.detik.com/berita/1904162/ini-pidato-lengkap-wapres-boediono-soal-pengeras-suara-masjid/1> (accessed 20 August 2015).
41. These three passages are cited in full by 'Anak Sumatera', 'Ketika pengeras suara masjid berakibat mudharat', *Sumatera Kita* blogspot, 23 January 2014. URL: <http://sumaterakita.blogspot.nl/2014/01/ketika-pengeras-suara-masjid-berakibat.html> (accessed 25 September 2015). English translations by Muhammad Asad (1984: 211, 235, 436).

Al Isra', 110: 'And be not too loud in thy prayer nor speak it in too low a voice, but follow a way in-between [...].'

The 1978 ordinance officially regulating mosque noise justifies its stipulations with reference to (unspecified) passages in the Quran and *hadith* that, it argues, 'impel the Islamic community to find a wise balance between propagating the faith, and preserving good neighbourly relations'.⁴²

This last point, concerning wider community interests, brings us to the third type of argument for acoustic moderation: the *political* imperative not to cause, or exacerbate, social conflict. Central, as we have seen, to the anti-regulatory perspective, political considerations have also been important to proponents of moderation and regulation, especially in the past. Elsewhere in the text of the 1978 ordinance there is a passage that refers explicitly to inter-faith relations by noting that the specified rules apply in the first instance to 'large towns – that is, the national, provincial and regency capitals – where the population includes diverse religions and nationalities'. In rural settings, by contrast, the rules 'may be applied more flexibly, depending on the attitude and reaction of the community'.⁴³

Since 1978, as noted, the steadily rising influence, prestige, and assertiveness of orthodox Islam across the nation have pushed concerns with inter-communal harmony into the background and made politicians more wary, in general, of alienating the forces of Islamic revival than of offending minority sensibilities. Nevertheless, the danger of provoking inter-religious conflict has still figured in recent arguments in favour of restricting religious noise. Kalla raised it in relation to the violence between Christians and Muslims in Tolikara, and Boediono, in his 2012 address to the Council of Indonesian Mosques, implied a link between mosque noise and violent religious intolerance among Muslims themselves. Part of the context of the vice president's remarks on loudspeaker volume was an appeal 'to promote Islam as a religion of peace', coupled with a clear warning against portraying it in any other way.

42. 'Lampiran instruksi Direktur Jenderal Bimbingan Masyarakat Islam, nomor: Kep/D/101/1978, tanggal: 17 juli 1978, tentang tuntunan penggunaan pengeras suara di masjid, langgar dan mushalla', p. 124. URL: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B4lc74PFDHGHTUILOHVwTTdpcWM/edit> (accessed 17 October 2015).

43. 'Lampiran', as above, pp. 129–130.

All of us have an interest in the hands of those who would : sectarian fanaticism, hostile provocative preachings that Islam is a highly tolerant religion continually strive to safeguard our nation, so the government always act to preserve harm practiced in Indonesia [...]

Political, doctrinal, and practical reasons for Indonesian Muslim members of the public noisy mosques to the interests have also acknowledged that tension with the peaceful and usually claim they are concerned

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Those who feel disturbed because they know that if

44. Excerpt from the full speech : Wapres Boediono soal pengeras detik.com/berita/1904162/in-suara-masjid/1 (accessed 20 August 2015).

45. Arloren Antoni, 'Penggunaan T 18 July 2015. URL: <http://www.toa-masjid-yang-kurang-tepat-sa> August 2015).

All of us have an interest in preventing the mosque from falling into the hands of those who would spread non-Muslim ideas such as radicalism, sectarian fanaticism, hostility toward other religions and beliefs, and provocative preachings that can lead to acts of violence and terrorism. Islam is a highly tolerant religion. [...] Just as we Indonesians as a people continually strive to safeguard the unity and integrity of this diverse nation of ours, so the government expects that the Council [...] will always act to preserve harmonious relations between the different faiths practiced in Indonesia [...].⁴⁴

Political, doctrinal, and practical considerations have not been the only reasons for Indonesian Muslims to speak up in the last three years against the Islamization of the national soundscape. Ethics, in a broad humanitarian sense, have also played a role. In recent internet debates Muslim members of the public, besides regretting the damage caused by noisy mosques to the interests of children, old people, and the infirm, have also acknowledged that intrusive Islamic noise is intrinsically in tension with the peaceful and tolerant image which Indonesian Muslims usually claim they are concerned to project.

We want Islam to be called a religion of peace. But when our behaviour disturbs others, we show no concern, and simply carry on insisting that our faith is a peaceful one. When will we allow ourselves to realize that our actions are annoying to people around us?⁴⁵

That such self-knowledge is, however, still far from universal is clear from the personal insults to which, as we have seen, critics of Islamic noise have sometimes been subjected in electronic fora. Also telling is the candidly contemptuous response which the target of one such attack offered – from the safety of anonymity – to his equally anonymous detractor.

Those who feel disturbed [by mosque noise] never complain openly, because they know that if they do they will face discrimination and at-

44. Excerpt from the full speech as reproduced in *DetikNews* ('Ini pidato lengkap Wapres Boediono soal pengeras suara masjid'), 29 April 2012. URL: <http://news.detik.com/berita/1904162/ini-pidato-lengkap-wapres-boediono-soal-pengeras-suara-masjid/1> (accessed 20 August 2015).

45. Arloren Antoni, 'Penggunaan TOA masjid yang kurang tepat sasaran', *Kompasiana*, 18 July 2015. URL: http://www.kompasiana.com/arloren-antoni/penggunaan-toa-msjid-yang-kurang-tepat-sasaran_55a9b1c9537a61d517ac9645 (accessed 31 August 2015).

tempts to discredit them, as I am facing now. I made a statement, and you responded like this – you, as a Muslim who feels himself to be the best, rightest, purest, most wonderful, most virtuous person on the face of the earth, but who has no ethics or respect, and knows no social norms, or has never seriously studied them as part of his education. So amid modern, civilized society you are like a primitive, with no understanding of civilization. Yet it is all too clear that there are very many people like you, and that with your narrow minds you can easily cause trouble. For that reason it is better for me to comment here than out in the real world, being too fond of my own life and limbs to face people like you in person. I have a lot of things to do.⁴⁶

While some secular concepts, such as civilization and respect, occasionally play a role in the public debate, it is striking that rights and justice do not. Even the most vociferous opponents of religious noise never seem to suggest that they and others have the right to freedom from acoustic disturbance, or even that they *should* have such a right. This is a point to which I will return in my concluding remarks.

Timing of the Controversy

Why is it only in recent years that religious noise has become a major topic of public discussion in Indonesia? Although the 1978 mosque loudspeaker regulation shows that the issue's potential to cause discord has long been appreciated, it was not until Boediono raised the matter in 2012 that an open public debate of any significance began. One potential explanation might be that the noise itself has become critically louder or more continuous in the last few years. However that is not most people's casual recollection, and Beatty's ethnography confirms that mosque loudspeaker use has been a major source of quiet resentment in many quarters since at least the 1990s.

Another possibility is that the recent signals of discontent reflect an increasing desire among Indonesians for peace and quiet, or an increasing societal readiness to respect such a desire. In Western countries noise is routinely perceived as a form of pollution, and the acoustic environment as a public good that requires institutional protection from abuse (Freedman 2009; Keizer 2010; Prochnik 2010). This view has also taken root in some parts of Asia: in Singapore, for instance, strict noise

46. 'Alathea Corprline', responding to 'Jack Parker', as above.

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abatement regulations, affecting both religious and other sounds, have been enforced since the 1970s (Lee 1999: 89–90; Lee Kuan Yew 2000: 208–209). In Indonesia, however, the recent moves to restrict religious noise (or redefine loud religious sounds as noise) do not appear to be part of a wider official campaign against noise pollution in general, and neither is there any sign that members of the public are pressing for such a campaign.

Urban Indonesia is already very noisy even without amplified religious sound, and Indonesians display what often strikes outsiders as an amazing indifference to its permanent roar of traffic noise, its deafening pop music (often in public transport as well from shops), and its clamour of street vendors and others trying to make themselves heard above the din. Construction work, public events such as election rallies, and (in non-Muslim areas) howling dogs add variation to the general cacophony. While not all such sounds are actually enjoyed, there is a culturally-engrained tendency to tolerate and even appreciate an acoustic backdrop which contributes to an atmosphere that is *ramai*, 'lively'. Anthropologist Freek Colombijn, in a pioneering survey of the soundscape of Indonesian cities published in 2007, went so far as to conclude that city-dwellers simply never perceive noise as a problem.

'Indonesians – of different gender, class, and age groups – whom I asked what they thought of the noise usually had difficulty understanding the question. Noise is a subjective notion [...]. What I defined as noisy was not noise to my interlocutors. [...]. Noise is not merely tolerated as an inevitable fact of life, it really is not perceived as an issue at all. At least this is the impression I had in Medan, which is [...] the noisiest city in Indonesia.' (Colombijn 2007: 257, 268.)

By citing Colombijn's findings here I do not mean to deny that the ear-splitting loudspeaker broadcasts, especially at night, are not experienced as a real, practical problem by some Indonesians – including, no doubt, Jusuf Kalla. Nonetheless, more is clearly at stake here than noise itself. The sudden prominence of the issue in the public sphere after 2012 cannot be understood without also taking into account the political context, and in particular the current status of the long struggle between those political forces that would see Islam play a more encompassing role in Indonesian government and society, and those that would prefer to halt that trend.

It is useful to remember that the current debate was initiated not by NGOs, journalists or bloggers, but by two successive vice presidents. Insofar as Indonesian political life is structured by any one persistent ideological principle, it has always been the opposition between Islamizing ('green') and non-Islamizing ('yellow' or 'nationalist', and in the past also 'red' or 'socialist') views and organizations. Despite the advance of 'orthodox' Islam in society at large over the last three decades, and despite attempts by several strong Islamic parties to translate this into electoral gains and political change in the democratic era since 1998, the two most recent national governments, those of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Joko Widodo, have clearly stood on the nationalist side of Indonesia's great ideological divide. Under Widodo, indeed, Indonesia arguably has the closest thing to an *abangan* presidency that it has ever had, and it is no coincidence that 2015 saw the launch, with presidential support, of the controversial concept of Islam Nusantara – loosely translated, 'Islam with Indonesian characteristics' – as a formal alternative to the so-called Islam Arab or 'Arab Islam', which critics of the orthodox advance in society and politics see as the divisive driving force behind that trend.⁴⁷

This is a crucial part of the backdrop against which the interventions on Islamic noise by Boediono and Kalla, and the powerful sentiments they have evoked among the public, must be viewed. Beatty's characterization of amplified religious sound as 'the voice of aggressive orthodoxy' is as apt at national as it was at village level. 'In the battle of the megaphone', Beatty (2009: 276) also wrote, 'was Java's modern history'. With the beginnings of unashamed public resistance to intrusive Islamic noise, and with the formulation – however tentative – of an explicit national alternative to the uncompromising model of Islamic piety that would justify such intrusions in God's name, opponents of 'aggressive orthodoxy' have at last begun to take an open stand against it. Whether this will ultimately prove a historical turning point, or nothing more than an ill-fated rear-guard action, remains to be seen.

47. Heyder Affan, 'Polemik di balik istilah 'Islam Nusantara'', BBC Indonesia, 15 June 2015. URL: http://www.bbc.com/indonesia/berita_indonesia/2015/06/150614_indonesia_islam_nusantara (accessed 20 October 2015).

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Some International and Historical Parallels

Indonesia is not the only Southeast Asian country where the use of loudspeakers for religious purposes has led to political controversy. In Singapore in 1974, part of the Malay Muslim population came into conflict with the Singaporean state after the public call to prayer was targeted by the official noise abatement campaign. Mosques were instructed to direct their loudspeakers inward, toward an already assembled congregation, rather than outward toward an Islamic community that had, as a result of public housing and resettlement programmes, become increasingly dispersed among non-Muslims rather than concentrated in Malay *kampung*. Ultimately, the Muslim community in Singapore was apparently prevailed upon to rely on radio rather than sound waves as the primary way of bringing the call to prayer into the homes of the faithful (Lee 1999).

Comparable conflicts have also occurred elsewhere in Asia. In Pakistan, a Loudspeaker Ordinance of 1965 restricting broadcasts to a 'moderate tone' was strongly opposed in some religious (as well as political) quarters despite the fact that it specifically excluded 'the use of loudspeakers or sound amplifiers for the purpose of *azan*, prayers, or of Khutba delivered on Fridays'. By limiting the volume at which other religious speech could be delivered to the general public, opponents argued, the authorities were unjustly depriving people of the benefits of learning from such speech. In later years the amplified call to prayer became itself both a vehicle and an object of religious contestation within Pakistani Islam, as differences in the style of the broadcast *azan*, particularly the presence or absence of embellishments in addition to the basic text, were used to signal sectarian divisions (Khan 2011).

Another aspect of the Indonesian experience that finds parallels elsewhere in the world is the tendency of non-Muslims, in the absence of other practical means of resistance, to respond to Islamic noise with competitive imitation. In Damascus (Syria), in the years before the current civil war, Syrian Christians reacted in exactly this way to the increasing use of amplified sound – and, at night, green neon lighting – by the city's mosques.

For Christians and other religious minorities, the general atmosphere of an intensifying Islamic presence is seen and felt in these signs, and so Christians themselves rebuild their own sense of the city in a response

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that consists of an amplified sounding out of church bells or devotional hymns on particular feast days as well as the ornamentation of Christian churches with clear blue neon tubes or crosses adorned with blue lighting. (Bandak 2014: S248)

Nor are conflicts over religious noise restricted to developing countries. In 2004, a group of Christians in the small American town of Hamtramck, Michigan sparked a national debate on the limits to religious freedom in the USA by opposing a petition filed by a local mosque to broadcast the call to prayer over loudspeakers (Perkins 2015). In Bulgaria, the call to prayer has been a focal point of Christian-Muslim conflict in the post-communist era, with all major non-Muslim political parties opposing the use of loudspeakers by mosques (Kalkandjieva 2008: 427). Attempts by both Muslims and Christians to restrict each other's religious noise have a venerable historical pedigree. In the first century of Islam, regulations attributed to the caliph Umar II prohibited 'loud beating of the nākūs [wooden clapper]' and 'loud chanting during worship' by Christians in Muslim lands (Tritton 1930: 100). In 1311 the ecumenical Council of Vienne, summoned under Pope Clement V, officially banned the Muslim call to prayer in regions under Christian rule (Constable 2010).

Concluding Remarks

Because the sense of hearing cannot be turned off at will and ears, unlike eyes, cannot be averted from unwanted inputs, sound has a unique power to infiltrate people's consciousness and shape their thoughts and experience (Schafer 1994). Throughout history this has made control of the acoustic environment an important social and political issue, and it is hardly surprising that the use of ever more powerful amplification devices for the purposes of religious communication has generated sharp controversy, in Indonesia as elsewhere. The timing of the recent national controversy over religious noise in Indonesia, however, is in some respects puzzling. For decades the use of loudspeakers by Indonesian mosques has effectively been unbridled, yet it is only since 2012 that substantial public resistance to the volume and scheduling of the resulting noise has been evident.

Given Indonesia's successful democratization since 1998, the apparent strength of its civil society, and the liveliness of its electronic and other fora for public debate, at first glance it is tempting to analyse this

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development in terms of freedom of expression, cultural pluralism, and perhaps the development of a new civic sentiment favouring respect for individual privacy and choice with respect to the sonic environment. On closer inspection, however, there turns out to be little sign in the evolving debate of any discourse on civic rights and responsibilities. The persistent, fearful silence of most non-Muslims on the subject of Islamic noise, which consequently has been conducted very largely within the Muslim community and to a considerable extent on explicitly Islamic terms, also tells against any interpretation in terms of secular civility. Rather, the controversy is perhaps best understood as the latest episode in a long historical struggle over the identity and scope of Islam in Indonesia. The current political situation has empowered those Muslims who oppose the rising influence of an aggressively orthodox interpretation of Islamic piety that involves encompassing ambitions in all social and political spheres, and of which intrusive Islamic noise is perceived as a symbol.

By no means all orthodox leaders and organizations do in fact condone the unrestrained or unconditional use of loudspeakers for religious purposes, and many, perhaps most, are in principle in favour of voluntary restraint. They stop short, however, of supporting formal protection of Indonesian citizens from excessive Islamic noise (however defined), whether by secular law or by religious edict. There is reason to suspect, then, that the eventual outcome of the battle for Indonesian ears will still depend on the outcome of the broader contest between those who pursue a thoroughgoing, orthodox, and homogenous Islamization of Indonesian society, and those who favour a specifically Indonesian interpretation of Islamic piety, one which embraces tolerance and diversity both within and beyond the Muslim community.

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