

Tracing Digital Divides in Indonesian Islam: Ambivalences of Media and Class

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Abstract:

The article examines questions of the digital divide from a religious perspective. It asks about the consequences of unequal access to and limitations on uses of social media among Indonesian Muslims with regard to their Islamic practice and sociality. The article concentrates on two phenomena: Islamic preachers and their affective-cum-economic relationship with their followers who are often organized in Islamic study groups; and online Qur'an reading groups that are frequently part of this Islamic preacher economy. Both examples point to the ambivalences that are present in Indonesia concerning economic inequality, social belonging, the uses of new media as well as the meaning of the term class as such. The article considers how these ambivalences are coming to the fore in the context of the introduction of new media and how class boundaries are renegotiated and reintroduced in Islamic online realms. From the discussion of the two examples and the ambivalences that become apparent through them, the article concludes that mediated religiosity that demands a strong presence on social media platforms is largely a middle-class affair in Indonesia being articulated in ways that are partly reminiscent of offline class distinctions and their ambivalences.

Keywords:

Indonesia, Islam, Digital Divide, Ambivalence

This article starts its analysis with observations of unequal access to and limitations on uses of social media and the internet among Indonesian Muslims.¹ This phenomenon has generally been identified as the digital divide and allows for looking at the consequences that this divide has for how Islam is practiced and organized in Indonesia today. Despite continuing

investment in communications infrastructure and a growing number of Indonesians that are online, access remains unequal – mainly because of geographical location or economic constraints or both (Lim 2018). Economic hardship in particular is limiting access among lower-class Indonesians, who almost exclusively rely on their mobile phones to use the internet. As digital apps become increasingly data-intensive, and because phones require a prepaid purchase of a finite amount of data, the phrase “*pulsanya habis* [my phone credit has run out]” has become a familiar expression. It describes the unfortunate situation in which one cannot and may not be able to go online for days or weeks because one simply lacks the money to buy new credit. In light of the huge popularity of social media in Indonesia that have become the preferred tool for communicating religious messages among Islamic figures and ordinary Muslims alike (Slama 2017a), being able to use them is therefore also a question of capital ownership and thus of class differences, making them also zones of social distinction and hierarchy.

Tracing digital divides in Indonesian Islam, as this article attempts to do, thus urges us to investigate Islamic practices as they occur on or are facilitated by social media through a lens that is sensitive to socioeconomic inequalities and how they have evolved in the last decades in Indonesia since what scholars have called the digital divide has multiple dimensions and is certainly not limited to questions of access alone (Servon 2002; Ragnedda and Gladkova 2020). Considering these conditions, one is tempted to ask about the concrete ways in which the digital is dividing society and what effects this has on the religious life of Indonesian Muslims. Can we speak of a digital divide in Indonesian Islam? If yes, this must be something that has only recently come into being – along with the rise of the internet and social media – and raises the question of how an Islamic digital divide intersects with the broader socioeconomic divisions that characterize Indonesian society, and what new forms of community or exclusion this intersection produces. To answer these questions, I will consider the religious uses of social media in Islamic contexts in Indonesia in light of the fact that some Indonesian Muslims are frequently online, while others stay partly or entirely religiously offline. The article thus asks how particular features and uses of social media facilitate religious practices and how this relates to the different positions that Indonesian Muslims occupy in society.

Yet these more recent manifestations of social inequality that this article attempts to unearth are embedded in articulations of class tied to Indonesia's socioeconomic and political history that is characterized by the production of ambivalence with regard to both media uses and the question of class difference. Ambivalence refers here to widespread uncertainties about where to locate oneself and others in Indonesia's societal structure and how to identify and denote social inequality. It also comprises the uneasiness that Muslims can feel when addressing Islamic authorities online or when encounters between Muslims with different class backgrounds take place in digital realms. Such notions of ambivalence about class and socioreligious hierarchy are of particular relevance for this analysis because they appear in the context of people's engagement with social media platforms that themselves can become arenas where ambivalence is rearticulated or informs the religious practices of Indonesian Muslims. For example, ambivalence about the effects of online piety can correlate with or even amplify a certain murkiness around social distinctions. Ambivalences of class and media usage thus can be interconnected and fuel each other. At the same time, as the examples discussed in this article also suggest, ambivalence can quickly evolve in its dissolution being superseded by clarity when class boundaries are reaffirmed, especially in reinscribing lower-class character to poorer Muslims, which in turn can generate parallel ambivalences about how to deal with this social divide. The following section attempts to trace these dynamics of ambivalence in their historical and contemporary dimensions pointing to the digital divide's interconnections with Indonesian offline developments in Islam and beyond.

Divides, media, and ambivalence

Since the 1980s, when its continuing rise started, Indonesia's Muslim middle-class has attracted the attention of a great number of scholars.² This rise exhibits a combination of forms of Islamic piety with patterns of consumption and the display of urban lifestyles. These earlier entanglements between Islamic practices and assertions of class positions help us to understand how today new forms of Islamic practice did not neutralize class

differences in Indonesia but in many cases rather reinforced them. Particularly instructive in this regard is the emergence of gated communities or *kompleks perumahan* that are exclusively reserved for Muslims, that is, middle-class Muslims, who can afford to buy a house there. These Muslim gated communities, as Hew Wai Weng (2018a) has observed, are not only equipped with spare time facilities but also with mosques that are used for a variety of religious activities. While gated communities are essentially exclusive areas surrounded by fences and walls and guarded by security personnel, the existence of mosques inside them can generate ambivalence about the extent to which the area should be secluded from neighboring *kampung* (lower-class quarters). Hew (2018a, 208) observed debates among inhabitants of the Muslim gated communities as well as between them and their lower-class neighbors about who is allowed to use the mosque of the gated community, that is, if and when to “open the gate,” such as for the Friday prayer. Hew (2018a, 209) speaks of a “gentrification process” that “may exacerbate forms of inequality in which poor Muslims [...] may be marginalized, though not completely excluded.”³

With regard to the evolution of forms of class-based religiosity, one might additionally mention the uses of hotels and resorts for religious gatherings as well as elite and middle-class homes as sites where *majelis taklim* (Islamic study gatherings) and *pengajian* (recitations of the Qur’an) take place (Hasbullah 2000; Abaza 2004). Pilgrimages inside and outside Indonesia, notably the *haji* and *umroh*, are also increasingly divided by class, since middle- and upper-class Indonesians can book tours with specialized travel agencies that provide a range of services and extra comfort (Heryanto 1999). These inequalities are of course not completely new phenomena since social hierarchies have for long been reflected in religious practices in Southeast Asia. What is new is the scale on which current forms of distinction occur with ever more Indonesian Muslims having reached middle-class status and being able to “consume Islam” (Fealy 2008), as class – following Pierre Bourdieu (1986; 1991) – is always a combination of types of capital (economic, social, cultural) and religion can be added as another type to the equation. Economic capital, for example, thus can be converted into religious capital by Indonesian Muslims and vice versa, as

Islamic preachers also illustrate. As a result, the market for religious services is continuously growing catering to the needs of middle- and upper-class Indonesians.

At the same time, as Carla Jones (2012, 148) has argued, the Indonesian term for middle class, *kelas menengah*, is imbued with ambivalence. In the 1980s and 1990s, when the term *kelas menengah* increasingly became part of public discourse, it has often been associated with gendered forms of conspicuous consumption, which is partly still the case and makes Indonesians that, from a material point of view, would qualify as middle-class uncomfortable with fully identifying with the category. Jones (2012, 153) points out that consumption along with family and gender are central to “discourses of distinction” and “that social differences are conceived and constituted through these categories.” While middle-classness is associated with consumption that can be conceived as excessive and, when it is combined with the display of piety, even as sinful (Husein and Slama 2018), it is based on wealth that is often also of an ambivalent nature. Jones (2018) refers to widespread practices of corruption in Indonesia and the circulation of capital with dubious origins that makes people unsure whether someone has acquired his or her wealth by legal means. In other words, what makes the category of middle class so ambivalent is that it is not clear whether someone’s middle-class lifestyle is based on illicit activities or not (2018, 193).

Whereas Jones’ analysis of Indonesian middle-classness concentrates on gendered spheres of consumption and the public gaze on material arrangements of the domestic realm, for Emma Baulch (2020, 49) “popular music and the broader consumer culture it inhabited were as crucial as was the press to the making of middle-classness.” Baulch (2020) also goes further back in time to the 1970s where she locates the beginnings of the construction of a middle-class readership by pop music magazines. Crucial for her analysis is the distinction that these magazines make between *kampung* and *gedongan*, the former term referring to *kampung* (lower-class neighborhoods) and the music genres that are popular there, such as *dangdut* (a kind of Indonesian folk music of mixed origin), and the latter to

gedong (bigger buildings) where middle- and upper-class people live and work that listen to Western and Indonesian pop music. This example shows that – in contrast to the topic of wealth and its origins examined by Jones – middle-classness and social distinction as such seem to be constructed more unambiguously and smoothly with reference to cultural products such as music in Indonesia. This holds also true for new technologies and their uses that can quickly acquire an image of belonging to different segments of society. Baulch (2020, 167) observed, for example, that SMS, the short message service that became popular with the introduction of mobile phones, is a frequent topic in *dangdut* songs indicating its lower-class image as a technology that has long been surpassed by messaging apps, such as WhatsApp, Telegram, LINE, et cetera, that people usually have downloaded on their smartphones today. As we will see later in this article, however, certain media cannot only have a clear class image but can generate ambivalence and even anxiety due to their uses by people with different class backgrounds.

Our discussion of the ambivalences of the concept of class in Indonesia would be incomplete, however, without considering the country's political history, including its ideological contestations. After the destruction of the political left in the mid-1960s and the ban on any Marxist-inspired ways of seeing the social world during Suharto's New Order regime (1966–98; Farid 2005; McGregor 2016), social inequalities have often been addressed in a highly technocratic language – and continue to be perceived so until today, pointing to the persistent ideological legacy of the Suharto era (Aspinall and Fealy 2010). For example, apparent inequalities are called *kesenjangan sosial* (literally, social gap), reflecting the discourse on various “gaps” introduced by development agencies such as the World Bank (see also Jones 2012, 148). Technocratic language avoids terms like social class, making economic distinctions either unspeakable or at least seem ambiguous. Nevertheless, the word *class* as such has not completely vanished from public discourse. As outlined above, it actually reappeared from the late 1980s onwards, when the *kelas menengah* (the middle class) was discovered as an agent of economic advancement and later as a bearer of democratization and user of new communication technologies. These imaginaries were

closely linked with visions of Indonesian society that is able to reconcile science and technology with Islamic piety expressed in the twin concepts “*iptek*” and “*imtaq*,” standing for *ilmu dan teknologi* (science and technology, abbreviated *iptek*) and *imam dan taqwa* (faith and devotion, abbreviated *imtaq*; Amir 2009, 85). The idea that *iptek* and *imtaq* should be in harmony in a modernizing Indonesia informed an “Islamic techno nationalism” and visions of an “Islamic information society” (Barendregt 2009; 2012).

These concepts resonate with early optimistic imaginaries of the internet as a catalyst for social equality and inclusion that were based on the assumption that, if digital divides can be bridged and everybody has access to the online world, offline inequalities will ultimately disappear as well. In Indonesia, such hopes were particularly popular in the post-Suharto period in the early 2000s, when political and technological change coincided (Hill and Sen 2005). However, twenty years later, following and partly exceeding the global trend, Indonesia has not become more equal pointing to growing income disparity and concentration of wealth, despite the growth of the segment of society that is considered middle-class (Gibson 2017). This became particularly apparent during the coronavirus pandemic (SARS-CoV-2), for example, when Islamic organizations, such as *Nahdlatul Ulama*’s youth wing *Gerakan Pemuda Ansor*, started to offer public Wi-Fi points for school children who could not join distance learning from home because of the lack of internet access (see Asyathri 2020). This example of an Islamic organization’s response to the problem of unequal access to digital realms brings us back to the digital divide and its manifestations in Indonesia’s field of Islam.

The Islamic preacher economy and its digital divides

Social media are used by Indonesian Muslims in a variety of ways, often being integrated into religious environments that were already there before the growing popularity of online communication (Slama 2017a). Instructive examples are the spread of *majelis taklim* (Islamic study gatherings) across Indonesia, especially among urban middle-class Muslims, and the rise of

the *ustadz* (the Islamic preacher) as a central figure of Islamic authority in the last decades (Abaza 2004; Winn 2012; Millie 2017). These examples are closely linked since Islamic preachers often receive a considerable portion of their income from preaching at middle- and upper-class *majelis taklim*. At the same time television was – and still is – central for the production of celebrity *ustadz* that function as role models for the many more locally operating preachers (Hoesterey 2016). Today, the preachers, both celebrity and the more local type, are on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, LINE, Telegram, et cetera, trying to increase their following in sometimes creative ways (Hew 2018b; Nisa 2018a; Husein 2021). As I have argued elsewhere in more detail (Slama 2017b), using social media has become part and parcel of Indonesia's Islamic preacher economy. Especially middle- and upper-class Indonesians expect from “their” preachers to be available online and to give them advice concerning not only theological questions but also private issues and emotionally charged problems, such as having an unfaithful husband, a rebelling teenager child, et cetera.

In this regard, it is interesting to note that preachers of a modest origin or of an older age initially might not have owned a smartphone or a tablet. In such a case, it can happen that middle- and upper-class Muslims provide the *ustadz* with such a device. Ustadz Hasan is a good example in this regard who is a teacher of Islamic religion in a high school in South Jakarta receiving a modest salary. Additionally, he runs several *majelis taklim* and teaches adults private lessons, some of whom are Jakartan celebrities. When I met him, he proudly told me that his iPad was given to him by his followers. At the same time, he continues to preach at *majelis taklim* that are attended by lower-class Muslims in mosques in South Jakarta. Preaching among people from all walks of life, Ustadz Hasan distinguishes his followers in the following way:

Middle- to upper-class people use media. Middle- to lower-class people talk directly, *face-to-face* [English in original]. Middle- to lower-class people seldom use media. But those who are critical are those who have education. Lower-class people accept what you say.

They are not interactive. Communication is one way, whereas with middle- to upper-class people communication is usually two ways.⁴

This quote invites a more detailed analysis, especially the expressions: *kelas menengah ke bawah* and *kelas menengah ke atas*, which I have translated as “middle to lower class” and “middle to upper class.” This translation, however, tends to miss a crucial point that perhaps becomes clearer if one opts for a more literal translation, namely “middle class downwards” and “middle class upwards,” which highlights what these expressions actually do. They suggest a picture of an Indonesia as if it is inhabited mainly by middle-class people and some others who are located a bit below or a bit above this middle class.

Ustadz Hasan did not invent these terms, of course; he just used these popular expressions which indicate the ambivalence that informs the representation of class divisions in Indonesia – a mildly put reference to socioeconomic hierarchies that stands in the tradition of the discovery of the middle class under the developmentalist Suharto regime and its simultaneous denial of class divisions that I have briefly referred to above. Interestingly, this euphemistic language that leaves the impression that middle-classness is within the reach of everyone stands in stark contrast to the very clear division Ustadz Hasan’s account makes with regard to groups of Muslims and their media practices. In other words, what Ustadz Hasan is describing here is a divide in Indonesia’s Islamic preacher economy that reserves preachers’ online accessibility and the ability to engage in a dialogue with them for their well-to-do followers.

There are several reasons why lower-class Indonesians largely stay offline when it comes to the communication with preachers. The most obvious ones are economic constraints, to which I have alluded to in the introduction of this article, and social media illiteracy, although the latter phenomenon is rapidly declining in Indonesia. Another reason is connected to how lower-class Indonesians, especially those with a traditionalist Islamic background, perceive Islamic authority, especially to the question of how one should pay *hormat* (respect) to these authorities, involving a whole set of not

only linguistic but also bodily expressions that can only be adequately performed in offline life.⁵ Lower-class Indonesians, lacking the economic and cultural capital that middle-class Indonesians possess, might not be confident enough to break with offline etiquette by simply sending a message on WhatsApp, for example. They instead prefer to choose the offline way of meeting Islamic authorities where they can pay respect to the preachers in an appropriate way without potentially undermining hierarchies.

At the same time, the offline availability of preachers is an even scarcer resource than their online presence which means that lower-class Indonesians often have to wait long until they can convey their problems to the preacher and might have to come several times to the house of the preacher until he is at home and has time to receive them, whereas the same preacher might answer messages sent via social media by his middle-class followers that are also the main source of his income much more quickly. As has become clear from my interviews with middle-class Muslim women, they treat their relationships with religious authorities much as consumers, by demanding responses if not answers from their preachers on the same day or on the next day at the latest. In some instances, they expect preachers to pay attention to them almost in real time. The preachers, in turn, are not always happy about how they are approached online. They often find their followers being impolite when asking them direct questions on social media, especially if they demand a quick and comprehensive response from them (see Slama 2017b).

Although preachers like to complain about their middle-class followers, they tend to overcome their followers' online misbehavior with a good sense of humor. At the same time, their accounts – like the one of Ustadz Hasan – gives us an idea of what it means to engage in two-way communication and how much time they have to spend online. Ustadz Hasan's account also exemplifies what has changed in Indonesia's Islamic preacher economy with the introduction of social media. Although earlier forms of mediatized Islamic proselytization in Indonesia utilized images and sound to prevent boring their followers with dry monologues and to provide

sensuous and emotional experiences (Hoesterey 2008; 2016; Rudnycky 2010), what they had to offer was largely one-way communication as well. In contrast, the dialogic features of social media and messaging apps in particular enable more intellectually critical and emotionally intimate exchanges with Islamic authorities. According to Ustadz Hasan, these are experiences that are reserved for middle- and upper-class Muslims. Thus, when we seek to trace digital divides in Indonesian Islam, it is not sufficient to concentrate on the issue of access to the digital realm alone, but on how particular features and uses of social media facilitate the religious practices of one group of Muslims with a higher-class position more than the ones of others with a lower-class position.

Interestingly, the rigidity of socioeconomic divides and hence the lack of class mobility that is reflected in Ustadz Hasan's account with regard to his followers do not seem to apply to the preachers themselves. Whereas preachers like Ustadz Hasan, who comes from a modest background, can climb the social ladder through their preaching activities and their online presence, the followers are categorized as either belonging to the group that demands two-way communication, or they are not. The preachers can rise in tandem with the media they use, that is, if they can adapt their preaching and proselytization efforts to the dynamic popularity of different social media platforms and apps and if they are able to use the latter in ways that their middle- and upper-class followers appreciate. The Islamic sociality of social media affords their social mobility, whereas their followers remain divided with one side having self-consciously seized religious digital realms and the other struggling not only with economic restraints but also with the ambivalences that the encounter of traditionalist concepts of Islamic authority with new media can cause. As a result, middle- and upper-class Muslims have privileged access to preachers and the personal Islamic guidance that they provide as part of an affective economy in which time is a particularly scarce resource. Yet these patterns of exclusion in the Islamic preacher economy do not constitute the only examples for traces of a digital divide in Indonesian Islam, as the following account of an online Qur'an reading group indicates.

Qur'an reading groups and their digital divides

Reading the Qur'an is a central practice for Muslims that has been ritualized in manifold ways in the Islamic world, including in Indonesia where one finds a variety of this practice that ranges from local *pengajian* (Qur'an reading groups) and the above-mentioned *majelis taklim* study groups, of which Qur'an reading can be a central component, to public Qur'an reading contests that are supported by the state (Gade 2004; Doorn-Harder 2006). With the growing popularity of social media in Indonesia, Qur'an reading has taken yet another turn and has found new expressions in online fora. As analyzed by Eva Nisa (2018b), it has even given birth to an Islamic social movement called ODOJ, which stands for *One Day One Juz*, referring to the practice of reading one *juz* (chapter) of the Qur'an every day. ODOJ runs a website, Facebook and Twitter accounts, and boasts more than 100 thousand members (see ODOJ 2021). It uses messaging apps to organize Qur'an readers in groups of thirty people that all commit to reading the chapter of the Qur'an that is assigned to them, which means that the whole group reads the thirty chapters of the Qur'an every day and every member of the group will complete reading the Qur'an every month. Stressing discipline and commitment, the members of the groups oblige themselves to report to the group every evening whether they have managed to read their chapters or whether they have failed (see also Slama 2017a). Moreover, as Nisa (2008b, 32) has observed, the ODOJ movement has its roots in student activist circles with an urban middle-class background that are ideologically close to Indonesia's version of the *Muslim Brotherhood*, the so-called Tarbiyah movement that led to the establishment of the *Prosperous Justice Party* (PKS).

However, reading the Qur'an in groups in the ODOJ way, that is, reading one chapter every day and being connected through messaging apps, is not restricted to the ODOJ movement, but has become popular more widely in Indonesia since preachers have adopted the ODOJ method as well and started to organize groups among their followers (Slama 2017a). This also applies to Ustadz Husein, another preacher from Jakarta, who runs several WhatsApp and Telegram groups for his followers who practice ODOJ.

Every day he distributes lists on these apps that assign the chapters of the Qur'an to the group members. Ustadz Husein has introduced strict rules for his WhatsApp and Telegram groups that forbid sharing any information to the groups aside from whether one has read one's assigned chapter of the Qur'an or not. The groups are led by coordinators, mostly family members and friends of Ustadz Husein, that take care of organizational matters.

Since there are sometimes issues to discuss that do not necessarily have to occupy Ustadz Husein, the coordinators of the groups have formed their own Telegram group.⁶ In this group, in addition to discussions about technical and organizational issues, a lot of casual conversation and joking goes on as well. Yet sometimes issues of socioeconomic inequality also become a topic. For example, one day a group coordinator received a message from one of her group members with whom she had experienced gaps in communication. She proceeded by forwarding the following message to the group:

I'm happy that I can join the Qur'an reading group, but I cannot guarantee that I will always have phone credit to report. I hope you understand, I'm a widow raising three children. My income is sometimes not enough to purchase credit.⁷

This message was then hotly discussed in the group of the coordinators, especially the question of whether coordinators should respond by purchasing mobile phone credit for group members if the latter cannot afford to do so by themselves.⁸ At first glance, doing so would be a humane and religiously charitable act, as it would facilitate the piety of a group member. Indeed, at the beginning of the discussion, the group coordinator who forwarded the message was inclined to help out, but another group coordinator changed her mind by arguing that purchasing credit for group members would open the group up to potential fraud if the practice spread by word of mouth and people would then capitalize on their benevolence. Those who sometimes cannot purchase credit, he asserted, are "lower-class people." He used the word *orang kampung*, people from lower-class neighborhoods, who – he suggested – will tell their neighbors and friends and then people will join the

Qur'an reading groups just to get their mobile phone cards topped up. This argument seemed to have convinced most members of the group, and it was agreed that they would not pay for their group members' communication costs.

However, it would be wrong to conclude from this example that the coordinators and members of Ustadz Husein's Qur'an reading groups are not socially committed. Rather the contrary is the case, as their sense of piety often entails being engaged in social activities. Sometimes, their Telegram group itself becomes a charity. For example, when the house of a group member's neighbor burnt down, the member asked his friends in the group to join him to help his neighbor to rebuild the house; and after a short while, a considerable sum was raised. In such cases, members are expected to donate, which reflects broader changes in Indonesia's Islamic charity landscape that increasingly relies on online forms of organization and propagation in order to attract middle and upper-class donors. In fact, giving *sedekah* (voluntary donation, in addition to *zakat* – obligatory donation) has become part of the lifestyle of middle-class Muslims that appreciate the quick and transparent processing of their contributions enabled by the digitalization of Islamic charities (Kailani and Slama 2019).

These two examples invite comparison, given that in the first case of the widow lacking money for purchasing mobile phone credit the group members came to the conclusion that they should not donate, whereas in the second case it was not a problem at all. As contrasting these examples reveals, this was not a question of one's ability to help but of the class relationship between donors and receivers and how this relationship is conceptualized by middle-class Indonesians. Whereas the neighbor was a person close to one of the group members who then also handed over the money and reported in the group – by posting pictures, for example – about the progress that was achieved thanks to the donations, the widow was quickly associated with an anonymous mass of lower-class Indonesians, the *orang kampung*, who are suspected of utilizing the noble practice of Qur'an reading to get their mobile phone costs paid.

Whereas we have discussed how ambivalent notions of class and class differences can be in Indonesia, there are categories, like the *orang kampung*, that have a rather fixed meaning and can entail lasting social consequences, such as not receiving aid in the digital space of an online Qur'an reading group. By determining that members of the group have to report every day, which means that they have to be online every day and cannot afford a period of time where their mobile phones are not connected to the internet, these groups define their digital space as being reserved for only those Muslims who have the financial means to fully participate in Indonesian online realms. The example shows how economic inequality finds its expression in a digital divide that generates concrete, unambiguous manifestations of this divide in the field of Islam. Ambivalence, however, lies at the roots of this divide. What is central here is the ambivalence that the presence of lower-class Indonesians in particular digital spaces can arouse among middle-class Muslims, exemplified by the widow and her motives for her Qur'an reading that one might never really know. In other words, the middle-class organizers of the Qur'an reading groups, whose own access to piety rests on access to material and spiritual resources, can never be sure whether the desire of an *orang kampung* to access pious sociality is based on honest piety or economic need and expectations.

That this ambivalent perception of lower-class Indonesians held by middle-class Indonesians becomes apparent in a digital realm like these online Qur'an reading groups is not a coincidence. It is in these online spaces where class boundaries have to be renegotiated since digital divides in Indonesia are in most cases not defined by the complete exclusion of lower-class Indonesians from the digital, but by the partial or limited access to it. As we have seen, the widow owns a smartphone and was able to download messaging apps and open accounts on social media platforms, but she might not be able to use these applications every day. The use of the technology as such is thus not enough to mark class boundaries; rather it is the ways and intensity of usage that is crucial in this regard. Compared to this example, the case of the ill-fated Muslim that was befallen by a fire disaster is relatively uncomplicated. This is first of all an offline affair where the person that is in need of help is clearly identified as the neighbor

of one of the group coordinators who lives in a middle-class neighborhood in Jakarta. He is not an *orang kampung* and thus can also be trusted that he will use the donated money for its actual purpose. No class boundaries had to be reestablished here. The online aspect of this case is merely that the messaging app was used to raise money following the pattern of Islamic online charities in which middle-class Muslims like to engage. Thus, what the case of the Qur'an reading widow – contrasted with the one of the neighbor of the group coordinator – indicates is that particular online fora of Islamic practice and sociality can be defined as middle-class realms deemed distinct from the religious life of the lower classes.

Conclusion

By tracing digital divides in Indonesian Islam, I concentrated on two widespread and interconnected phenomena, that is, the proliferation of Islamic preachers and their affective-cum-economic relationships with their followers who are often organized in *majelis taklim* (Islamic study groups); and online Qur'an reading groups that are frequently (but not always) part of this Islamic preacher economy when preachers also run these groups for their (mainly) female followers. I should emphasize here that this article is an initial analysis of Indonesia's Islamic digital divides, and which arguably illuminates potential future questions as much as it answers them. Nevertheless, the examples provide fruitful ground for drawing first conclusions that will hopefully inspire further investigation. Based on more general observations about social inequality and the digital divide among Indonesian Muslims, the examples allowed us to work out how digital divides can expand into other kinds of divides, including unequal access to piety itself, that then manifest in Islamic practice and sociality. However, as the article also reveals, this is not a straightforward process, since social inequality based on uneven distribution of wealth is imbued with ambivalence in unique ways in Indonesia which continues to reverberate in Islamic digital realms. Considering this, in this concluding section, I revisit the two examples to elucidate out how social divides, digital divides, and their Islamic manifestations can be connected.

While the digital divide was initially conceptualized in terms of access to digital realms, the article's first ethnographic example that is organized around the account of an Islamic preacher's view of his diverse followers indicates that through social media, middle-class Muslims have found new ways to gain access to preachers (and vice versa). In this segment of society, Islamic consultation increasingly takes place online generating new temporalities of affective exchanges. Many preachers in contemporary Indonesia find themselves in a situation that requires them to meet the needs of their middle-class followers by being available online and by responding to messages swiftly if they want to be successful. The popular phrase among middle-class Muslims – “*saya punya ustadz* [I have a preacher]” – indexes this dynamic. Muslims who can claim to “have their preachers” enjoy the presumption of access, not just in person at religious events, but effectively on-call through their online availability and through the expectation that preachers serve and tend to their followers. By contrast, as Ustadz Hasan's comment suggests, this relationship does exist for lower-class Muslims, who are expected to simply receive religious authority, at the time and choosing of the preacher. Their diminished capacity to be online reduces their access to preachers as well as increases their discomfort in online religious communication, as Islamic digital realms can represent spaces of ambivalence due to economic and cultural constraints. They are arguably left behind because of their disadvantage in these new forms of Islamic online sociality.

Being left behind is a form of social exclusion, which brings me to the second example: the online Qur'an reading group and its approach to dealing with the digital divide. The latter becomes apparent through the person of the widow who cannot pay for her mobile phone costs, and thus cannot go regularly online, which means that she cannot participate in the online Qur'an reading group and other religious online activities. Moreover, she cannot participate in what members of these groups are also expected to do, namely donating to people in need. Her intention to join a group of regular social media users and charity donors, while she had to inform the latter that she might not be able to pay for her online costs, was quickly interpreted as a result of her identity as an *orang kampung*, rather than the sincere desire of a woman seeking to improve her religious practice, leading the group

members to decline her expression of need. Due to class-based assumptions about the sincerity of intent lower-class people and their media practices become here a source of ambivalence. The *orang kampung* appears in this example as the person who could undermine noble intentions of enhancing Islamic practice by claiming to seek piety while actually being guided by short-term material interests. In contrast to the ambivalence concerning the potentially dubious origin of the wealth of the middle- and upper-classes that we have discussed in the introduction following Jones (2012), what arouses strong feelings of ambivalence here is the apparent lack of money of the lower-classes for engaging in Islamic online sociality. The tense relationship between privation and piety, therefore, lies at the heart of what we can call an Islamic digital divide.

As these examples show, paying attention to socioeconomic inequalities and how they are perceived means looking at mechanisms of exclusion in Indonesia's Islamic online realms. It means looking at how the digital divide becomes an Islamic digital divide. It urges us to investigate how class distinctions are reconceptualized in Indonesia today with the introduction and spread of new online religiosities. Moreover, such an approach also provides insight into how forms of communication in Indonesia's field of Islam is associated with class distinction, with lower-class Muslims being located on the receiving end of one-way, mostly offline communication channels, whereas middle- and upper-class Muslims are deemed equal partners of two-way communication enabled by today's messaging apps. Raising one's voice and engaging in a dialogue is associated here with the realm of the digital that is in turn conceptualized as a loosely defined space of the middle and upper classes to which people who are categorized as "middle class downwards" or as inhabitants of the *kampung* are not meant to belong. Those being perceived as *kampungan* are thus not expected to participate in particular new online religiosities.

Despite the ambivalences that inform the construction of classes and social divides in Indonesia, such mechanisms of exclusion have clear effects, since they decide over the belonging to religious communities and the participation in religious practices. Interestingly, and not unlike the

gedongan–kampung distinction in the field of Indonesian popular music as analyzed by Baulch (2020), perceptions of class that rely on media uses generate rather unambiguous results and it becomes seemingly easy to tell who is allegedly qualified for playing a part in Islamic digital realms and who is not. Yet while this issue seems to be settled on the ideological level, *in praxi* things can be more complicated. New media generate new spaces in which class boundaries still have to be inscribed, and it is exactly at this point where the notion of ambivalence, understood as both an economic and affective condition, becomes important for our analysis again. In fact, the examples in this article have shown that media uses are imbued with ambivalence, whether it is ambivalence felt by lower-class Indonesians about how to relate to Islamic authorities online or the ambivalence that emerges among middle-class Muslims when they discuss lower-class Muslims' pious online practices. In the latter case, class distinctions spur debates about who should belong in these new digital spaces, such as whether one should financially support lower-class Muslims in order to be online, which is reminiscent of the discussions in Muslim gated communities on whether to open the doors for the Friday prayers to lower-class neighbors who live in the adjoining *kampung* (Hew 2018a). In both cases, however, the outcome of this encounter with ambivalences is that lower-class Muslims do not and are not expected to take part in these forms of online piety, which indicates how Islamic digital divides can come into being.

The examples discussed in this article thus suggest that the ambivalences generated by media practices and the new Islamic digital realms add to the long-standing ambivalences that characterize class relations in Indonesia, generating forms of exclusion that are novel and at the same time reminiscent of older forms of distinction. The article thus understands the digitization of religious life as part of a broader technology-driven transformation that builds on and seems to exacerbate prior social inequality in Indonesia. This investigation also points to the lived murkiness of class, of the circulation of wealth itself, and of class-related suspicion. However, when ambivalences of media and class meet in the field of Indonesian Islam, paradoxically but not surprisingly the consequences are less ambivalent than explicit in the concrete spaces of online Islamic sociality and practice. Similar to offline

spaces of urban Indonesia questions of belonging, hierarchy, and authority did not have to wait long until being discussed and answered. That is also why, in spite of the fact that online services, cost, and access are improving in Indonesia, the Islamic digital divides that this article has traced might endure or change alongside the broader transformation of digital platforms which tend to heighten, rather than flatten, social inequalities.

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Notes

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² For a literature overview see Jones (2018) and for a broader Southeast Asian perspective see Hefner (2010).

³ For the colonial predecessors of today's spatial segregation according to class in Indonesia see Colombijn (2013).

⁴ Ustadz Hasan, 2014, interview with author, August 10, Jakarta.

⁵ For discussions about how an Islamic leader can or should be respectfully approached on social media in the context of an Indonesian Sufi community that mainly consists of followers of *Nahdlatul Ulama*, Indonesia's major traditionalist Islamic organization, see Alatas (2017).

⁶ I am grateful to the preacher whom I call Ustadz Husein here who has allowed me to join one of his ODOJ groups as well as the group of the coordinators. Since these are closed groups, I refrain from using real names in this section.

⁷ *Telegram* group, March 10, 2015.

⁸ This is technically very easy in Indonesia where one can send data credit to other users if one has their phone numbers. No bank transfer of money is needed.