Incorporating Spirituality and Market: Islamic Sharia Business and Religious Life in Post-New Order Indonesia

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Dipublikasikan oleh: LabSosio, Pusat Kajian Sosiologi FISIP-UI

Diterima: September 2015; Disetujui: Maret 2016

Untuk mengutip artikel ini (ASA Style):
Incorporating Spirituality and Market: Islamic Sharia Business and Religious Life in Post-New Order Indonesia

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Abstract

This article examines the religious transformation of the Muslim middle class and its relationship with the growing sharia market in post-New Order Indonesia. It argues that in the Indonesian neo-liberal era, this spiritual revival considerably influenced the economic realm. The transformation of piety of the Indonesian middle class marked the emergence of new potential economic markets. It was responded to enthusiastically by markets producing selective products with a spiritual content. In its process, the role of spiritual lifestyle agents played a pivotal role in helping and shaping the new urban middle class who consume Islam to mark their Islamic identity. It was then that the energetic blending between Islamic piety and capitalism occurred in contemporary Indonesia. Islamic symbolic consumption becomes a new source of spiritualism as well as a source of religious identification. However, this article argues that this process tends to oversimplify Islam as a ‘material process’ rather than a ‘spiritual process’.

Keywords: Islam, sharia business, middle class, spiritualistic agent, commodification.
INTRODUCTION

The role of religion in contemporary Indonesia has inevitably shifted to be more exhaustive, due to Indonesian Muslims’ rising awareness of the need to display their religiosity in the public sphere. If we observe the cultural presence of Indonesian people in some big cities today, we will encounter the increasingly religious image of Indonesian people in public. While walking in the public sphere, we will notice many women wearing fashionable and modern hijabs, even at workplaces. In the bookstores, Islamic books are increasingly popular and many of them are national bestseller. In addition, on television the highest rating sinetrons (soap operas), reality shows or talk shows are those which contain and promote Islamic values and personality. Even, through my personal experience in Jakarta, such as traveling with public transportation, I found people who recited the Quran by using up-to-date gadgets even though they were standing huddled together. In the last decade, according to Jones (2010:91), urban Indonesian public culture has become visibly more Islamic in style.

The rising tide of Islamic militancy in Indonesia has changed dramatically in the reformasi era. Hasan (2009:231) observed that after the New Order collapsed, “Islam has increasingly moved to the center and become part of political expressions, legal transactions, economic activities as well as social and cultural practices”. Islam has a much greater presence in social, cultural and political life than it had before (Fealy 2008:15). The tap of religious freedom that opened wide was a trigger for the rapid development and deployment of Islamic ideas and its various social and cultural expressions within Indonesian society. New technology and new media have also helped the rapid spread of religious information and have made it easier for people to learn everything about Islam. These new socio-political landscapes have led to new forms of religious attitude and expression in Indonesia. Islam is penetrating far more deeply into people’s lives than ever before and Muslims are expressing their faith in a multitude of ways (Fealy 2008:16).

The widespread awareness among the middle class of Islamic knowledge has an impact on the disclosure of social expression: applying the Islamic teachings nowadays should not be limited to regular religious rituals, but must be comprehensive in everyday
life. In the neo-liberal economy, this spiritual revival considerably influences the economic realm. Globally, the relationship between Islam and capitalism is not a dichotomy, but complementary instead. Nasr (2010:11) has demonstrated that the energetic blending of Islamic piety and capitalist fervor is flourishing in many pockets around the Middle-Eastern regions. The same argument is also expressed by Kitiarsa (2008) who argues that the religious commodification (not only Islam) has occurred in contemporary East Asia and Southeast Asia. In Indonesia, Fealy (2008) has shown that Islamic expression is taking a commodified form, in which Muslims selectively ‘consume Islamic’ products from an expanding spiritual marketplace rather than following the settled patterns of behavior of their parents and grandparents. However, Lukens-Bull (2008); Jones (2010); Hasan (2011); Shirazi (2016) argue that many Islamic products are not authentically created to honor religious practice and sentiment but most of them are profit-driven.

The growth of the Islamic consumer sector, which is gradually paving a link between religiosity and consumption, is encouraging the market to produce selective products with spiritual content. Shirazi (2016) states that wide ranges of commodities today are being marketed as ‘Islamic’ or ‘halal’ to Muslim consumers in order to fulfill the demand of Muslim middle class with Islamic products. The size of the Islamic market that was previously segmented is now said to overspread the urban middle class who are slowly treading their spiritual route. Islamic sharia business then began to appear, seizing the market to welcome the cultural enthusiasm of the urban middle class for the spiritual lifestyle. In transforming Islam into symbolic commodity relevant to class based demands for lifestyle, modesty and enjoyment, the role of middle class entrepreneurs or ‘the spiritualistic agent’ is significant in helping to shape the piety of the urban middle class (Hasan 2011). In the hands of middle class entrepreneurs, according to Hasan (2011), the symbols of faith have thus become commoditized as markers of social status or identity. This article examines the religious transformation of the Muslim middle class and its relationship with the growing sharia market in post-New Order Indonesia. It further emphasizes the role of spiritualistic agents who are a significant influence in helping and shaping the Muslim middle class, particularly urban women, to ‘consume spiritualistic-lifestyle’.
RESEARCH METHOD

This study is based on qualitative research by using and exploring various secondary sources such as journal, book, magazine and online newspaper. The data about the rapid development of Islamic sharia business in post-New Order are mainly obtained from magazines and online newspapers. Those data are then analyzed by using a combination of historical analysis and sociological theory. Historical analysis is used to trace the origin and development of Islamic sharia business. Using historical analysis is important to show that the rising of sharia business in Indonesia is remarkably connected to the transformation of Indonesian society during past thirty years. In explaining the connection between the transformation of piety and the rise of Islamic sharia business, this article investigates the strategy of the Muslim entrepreneur in responding and predisposing the widespread awareness of Muslim middle class in expressing their religious identity. Various literatures are analyzed to explain the role of Muslim entrepreneur as spiritual agent in helping the transformation of the piety.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF ISLAMIC SOCIETY

Hefner (2000:58) argues that in the early years of the New Order, the relationship between the state and Islam was an ambivalent alliance. In the first years, Suharto and his military supporters explored the relationship between a diverse array of allies including Javanists, modernizers, and Muslims. With the rise of the New Order regime following the PKI’s failed coup in 1965, expectations were high for many leaders and activists of political Islam (Effendy 2003:44). They thought that Islam had become an important part of the coalition forces that had overthrown Sukarno and swept the Communist Party, so they anticipated the return of Islam in national political discourse. However, after the New Order strengthened its power by 1969, the regime’s policy toward Islam deviated from the Muslim expectations. Suharto’s New Order did not suppress the religion, but they did try to control and manage it (Sidel 2006). The logic of Suharto’s rule was not blind opposition to political Islam, “but a determination to centralize power and destroy all centers of civil autonomy and non-state authority” (Hefner 2000:95). Therefore, although there was
repression of Muslim political initiatives, the New Order continued to make significant allocations to Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and other Muslim organizations on matters of religion education and pembinaan (building up).

In spite of Suharto’s New Order’s adamant determination to marginalize the potential resources of Islamic political power, Islam had begun to procure a significant presence in the public spaces and debates in the society in the mid 1970 (Hasan 2009:231). According to Hefner (2000:123), “it was in the booming metropolitan regions of Indonesia, that the evidence of Islam’s social progress was most visible”. Universities were often considered to have been at the forefront of this new Islamic movement. In the 1950s and early 1960s Indonesia’s national universities had been bastion of secular nationalism and the santri community was the weaker of the factions in the student body. However, in the mid 1970s, the so-called “Campus Islam”, started with mosque-based dakwah (proselytization) activities, pioneered by youth activists of the Salman Mosque of the Institute of Technology Bandung (Hasan 2009:232). Under the leadership of Imaduddin Abdulrahim, a charismatic intellectual who had been appointed as the general secretary of Kuwait-based International Islamic Federation of Student Organization (IIFSO), the Salman group introduced the program of the Latihan Mujahid Dakwah (Training of Proselytization Mujahid) which was aimed at training new cadres among university students prepared to undertake dakwah actions (Husin 1988; Rosyad 2006). These activities have gained support from Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia (Indonesian Council for Islamic Propagation), a proselytization organization that served as the local representative of the Saudi Arabia-based Rabitat al-Alam al-Islami (the Muslim World League). This organization was responsible for the institutionalization of the kingdom’s influence on cultural and religious activities all over the Muslim world (Hasan 2009:232).

The Dewan Dakwah then increased the popularity of a variety of programs for the study of Islam organized by religious activity units, such as Mentoring Islam (Islamic Courses) and Studi Islam Terpadu (Integrated Study of Islam) (Hasan 2006:43). To accelerate the speed and the spread of its influence, Dewan Dakwah sponsored projects for building mosques and Islamic centers in areas around twelve different universities all over Indonesia, including the Universitas Indonesia in Jakarta, Andalas University in Padang, Gadjah Mada University in
Yogyakarta, and Diponegoro University in Semarang (Hasan 2006:43). In these mosques, the Islamic activities systematically organized by Lembaga Dakwah Kampus (Institutions for Campus Proselytization) often offered Islamic training programs and introduced the university students to the thinking of the main Islamist ideologues.

The new Islamic activism emerged in the wake of far-reaching changes in campus life (Smith-Hefner 2000:396). The implementation of restrictive government policy in 1978, namely the Normalization of Campus Policy-Campus Coordination Board suppressed university students and prevented them from playing an active role in politics. This resulted in Muslim and religious groups to flourish, as state control weighed less heavily on religious organizations than they did on secular political organizations. Suharto’s depoliticization of university campuses stimulated a growing number of students to turn toward Islamic dakwah activities. This growth reached its peak following the Iranian revolution one year later. The spirit and euphoria of revolution caused an Islamic revival marked by an increase in students’ observations of their Islamic obligations, in their wearing of the jilbab (hijab) and in the spread of Islamist books (Hasan 2006:45). The translation of the books by the Islamist theoreticians, such as those by Shi’ite ideologues, such as Khomeini, Mutahhari, and Ali Shariati, who discuss the revolutionary Islam, circulated widely among university students. This rising pious atmosphere undoubtedly provided a precondition for the growing influence of transnational Islamic movements, including the Ikhwanul Muslimin, Hizb al-Tahrir and Tablighi Jama’at in Indonesia.

The end of the 1980s marked the transformation of the New Order’s Islamic policy in Indonesia. Aware of the growing Islamic enthusiasm within society, Suharto introduced an Islamization strategy, focusing particularly on the accentuation of Islamic symbols in the public sphere and accommodating religious political power. The Directorate General of Elementary and Secondary Education, for instance, issued a new regulation on student uniforms, allowing female students to wear a veil while attending school. Prior to this policy, there was no long-skirt and veiled option for students (Smith-Hefner 2000:397). Women who were veiled in opposition to the state’s policy faced discrimination and insult from their fellow students. Moreover, they faced the possibility of expulsion from school (Brenner 1996). Interestingly, the use of a veil became a new identity.
marker of Muslim women since Siti Hardiyanti Rukmana, Suharto’s eldest daughter, began to demonstrate her pious image in public by wearing colorful, elegant veils, after her return from Mecca where she performed the hajj pilgrimage with her father in 1991 (Hasan 2009:235). Since then, the use of the hijab has not been something unusual for women in state institutions and schools.

Suharto himself, in the post 1980s period, shows some signs of greater ‘Islamic-ness’ (Azra 2006:95). In 1990, for instance, he performed prayers in the historic Bukhara mosque when he visited Samarkand, Uzbekistan. Bukhara is widely known by Muslim as the place of birth of Imam-Al Bukhari, one of the most respected hadith scholars in Islamic history. Thus, his visit there had special meaning for many Indonesian Muslims. However, the most momentous of all events marking Suharto’s new orientation to Islam was his performance of the hajj pilgrimage in 1991. According to Azra (2006:96), “Suharto’s pilgrimage aroused great deal of Muslim sentiment both in Indonesia and abroad; many of Indonesian Muslims believed that Suharto was (and is) one of them”. Suharto’s greater Islamic-ness was also established with his acceptance of his new first name given by King Fahd of Saudi Arabia ‘Muhammad’ (his complete name now being Haji Muhammad Suharto) and of his wife’s first name ‘Fatimah’ (her complete name now being Hajjah Siti Fatimah Hartinah Suharto) (Azra 2006:96). Since Suharto showed his greater Islamic-ness, cabinet members and high ranking officials have no longer hesitated to declare the Islamic greeting in the opening passage of their speech, as this greeting was becoming increasingly popular in society (Hasan 2009:235).

The most striking event of the new centrality of Islam in Indonesia was, probably, the establishment of The Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals’ Association (ICMI). Some scholars consider ICMI as just a vehicle of the New Order to manage and consolidate Islamic potential power for the regime’s purpose. Liddle (1996:615) argues that ICMI was an “instrument designed and used by Suharto for his own purpose”, and Hefner (2000:164) believes that ICMI “provided legitimacy for Suharto and served as a vehicle for Habibie’s ambitions”. Indeed, ICMI was a state-sponsored organization under the patronage of Suharto and Habibie. However, it cannot be denied that ICMI was also used by some Islamic activists as a vehicle for the ‘Islamization’ of the government and bureaucracy, as a means to
increase the proportion of Islamic ideas within the state (Aspinall 2005:57). Imaduddin Abdulrahim, an important figure behind the ICMI establishment, said, “ICMI gives ‘voice’ to Islam because before this organization created “we had no voice, now we do” (Ramage 1995:48).

For the Muslim middle class, ICMI became the symbol of the awakening of Muslim political capital (Hasbullah 2000:13). Since the 1980s, the growing middle class that emerged after the New Order successfully built its economy (with an average GDP growth 7.5% per annum), increasing income per capita from below US$420 to US$4,500. Before the establishment of ICMI, this middle class did not have enough bravery to indicate their Islamic preference, but after ICMI was established they seemed to have a spiritual energy to identify with Islam. ICMI became the symbol of a modern identity in which Muslims are no longer seen as ‘marginal’ and ‘backward’. Islam came to be represented as modern. In the 1990s, ICMI’s strength made it valid for a member of the elite to perform their religiosity; government officials and bureaucrats began to show off and contest their Islamic identities. The ‘santrinization of bureaucracy’ and the ‘bureaucratization of the santri’ became popular terms to describe the new Islam-state relationship (Hasbullah 2000:13).

The fall of Suharto’s regime in 1998 brought substantial political changes in relation to Islam. Many Muslim scholars such as Kuntowijoyo (1999) and Effendy (2003) address the political euphoria that occurred among Muslim politician elites in showing off in the national political arena. Howell (2005) points out the boundaries of Indonesian limited religious pluralism have been stretched in the reformasi period. The reformation period helped the bloom of religious freedom, as the state adopted new democratic policies that erased religious restraint, allowing its citizen to create organizations and to express their political ideas more freely. Yet, at the same time, this democratic atmosphere also benefited the revival of Islamic radicalism in Indonesia. Some radical Islamist paramilitaries (laskar) with ties to conservative Islamist boarding schools (pesantren) grew in cities and towns across the country (Hefner 2009:55). The local branches of some radical Islamic transnational organizations were also thriving and spread easily across the country. All of these groups seem to share the same concern that Islamic sharias hould have been
taken more seriously by the state and be adopted as Indonesian law (Effendy 2003:218).

Undoubtedly, the reformation period transformed the dynamics of Islam in Indonesia. In fact, it also shows the tendency of Muslims to become more spiritualistic. Some data addresses the fundamental transformation of religious life in Indonesia. First, based on the surveys from Smith-Hefner from Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta, the percentage of Muslim women on campus who veiled has risen to more than 60% in 2002. While she first lived in Yogyakarta during the late 1970s, less than 3% of the Muslim female students wore the veil on campus (Smith-Hefner 2007:390). Second, the growing interest in Islamic education shows a rapid development; between 1997 and 2007 the numbers of pesantren more than doubled, rising from 9,388 to 21,251 and 8,001 (37.2%) of them are salafiyah pesantren (Hefner 2009:69; Kemenag 2008). In addition, an interesting phenomenon within Islamic education is the emergence of a new Islamic school called Sekolah Islam Terpadu (SIT). In the beginning, in 1993, this school only amounted to five schools, all of which were elementary schools in Jakarta. Then, after the New Order fell, the number of schools multiplied rapidly; reaching 1,926 school units in 2013, consisting of 897 kindergartens, 723 elementary schools, 256 junior high schools, and 68 senior high schools (Republika 2014). The schools in this network are connected to the Islamic Prosperous Party (PKS), though the schools are locally financed and independent from the national PKS leadership. However, directors at most of these schools are informally tied to the PKS, and they encourage or require their staffs to affiliate with the PKS (Hefner 2009:76).

The rising consciousness of the middle class in becoming more spiritualistic was mainly encouraged by the easiness of getting information about Islam in this new technology and media era. The emergence of various Islamic newspapers and magazines and the most popular television programs that contain and discuss Islamic teachings supply in the demand of the middle class’ to know more about Islam. In addition, the appearance of a new breed of young, celebrity preachers engaged in the production of various religious programs on TV has significantly transformed the face of Islam in the Indonesian public sphere (Hasan 2009:241). The popularity of Islam has gradually created a new trend called “pop Islam”. Incorporated in this genre are *sastra Islami* (Islamic literature), *film Islami* (Islamic
film) and *sinetron Islami* (Islamic soap operas) (Hoesterey and Clark 2012:209). Islam is now more than a set of rituals, doctrines and beliefs; it is also a symbolic commodity relevant to the middle class demand for new lifestyle, modesty and enjoyment (Hasan 2009:241). Since religion has gradually entered middle-class life as a new symbol of identity, Islamic commodification has also increased dramatically. The growing interest of the middle class to ‘consume Islam’ has formed new market opportunities for some creative Islamic entrepreneurs responding to the enthusiasm for products that “breathe Islam” (Fealy 2008; Hoesterey 2008; Hasan 2009). The growth of the market demand for ‘Islamic products’ stimulated the emergence of Islamic sharia business.

**THE RISE OF SHARIA BUSINESS**

Hijab is the exact delineation of middle class lifestyle today. They veil, but the veil is often made by designers graduated from French fashion schools. They dress up, but 95.4 percent of them choose halal cosmetics. They select religious school for their children, but the school must be of an international standard. They also favor traveling, but prefer to use sharia hotels. It is the middle class who wants to style in a way that is halal. (Tempo 2014:53).

Aware of the intertwining of the emergence of the new pious middle class and the flourishing of Islamic commodification, *Tempo* magazine launched a special report entitled ‘Gaya Hidup Halal’ (Halal Lifestyle) about the dramatic rise of sharia business to embody the obedience ardor of the religious middle class. Interestingly, *Tempo* (2014:50) underlines that rather than being interested in speaking about Islamic values such as tolerance and anti-corruption, this new Muslim middle class is more interested in expressing their Islamic identity with ‘consuming spiritualistic products’. Certainly, the attitude of the new Muslim middle class is now more characterized by the representation of their socio-political atmosphere in which becoming Islamic is not only a matter of being political, but also a matter of cultural expression and representation. In fact, they are more comfortable enjoying Islam as a cultural symbol rather
than politically. And much of this religious expression is taking a commodified form, in which Muslims selectively consume Islamic products from an expanding spiritual marketplace (Fealy 2008:16).

The general terminology of Islamic sharia business can be interpreted as a series of business activities based on sharia law. In the running of these businesses, the dimension of tauhid (unity of God) is the basic principle of business; everything that exists in this world begins and ends with God. Sharia business has several characteristics that distinguish it from general business overall. First, it must be able to distinguish between what is halal and what is haram. Second, it should follow the sharia principle in the implementation of business. Third, entrepreneurs of sharia business should not forget that their business orientation is not only based on the mundane (duniawi) but also on the afterlife (akhirat), thus it is important for Islamic entrepreneurs to do zakat (wealth tax) and sedekah (alms) to the poor and needy. The most striking aspect of Islamic sharia business is its outward appearance; the business not only sells a quality of the product but also ‘the spiritual’ content of the product. Spiritual here means that the product should contain Islamic content and value. The spiritual content is very important to distinguish their products from other similar products on the market, as sharia business relies upon religious need and religious identity for its existence (Fealy 2008:16). This characteristic is very visible in businesses related to appearance and lifestyle such as fashion, cosmetics, salon and spa, and hotel.

Sharia business should ensure sharia compliance, this means businesses need guidance from Islamic scholars (ulama) who are experts in the relevant fields of Islamic law. In Indonesia, the National Sharia Council within the Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI) has played a pivotal role in certifying financial products and practices as halal or not, but most big companies also have their own sharia advisory boards to ensure the legality of all operations (Fealy 2008:18).

The rise of sharia business is a recent phenomenon in the Indonesian economy. However, the roots of its development can be traced and related to the emergence of Islamic economy. The pioneer of Islamic economy lies in the financial sector, namely banking and insurance. Indonesia’s first sharia bank, Bank Muamalat, was established in 1991 and it remained the only sharia bank until the establishment of Bank Syariah Mandiri in 1999 (Vernados 2012:146). Since the reformation
period, the sector has expanded rapidly, both in terms of the number of banks and the size of their assets. In 2005, there were only three full-fledged general sharia banks, but, in 2010, this increased to ten general sharia banks, and its total offices grew significantly from 301 in 2005 to 1,113 in 2010 (Pepinsky 2013:160). In mid 2007, the total assets of Islamic commercial banks were IDR29.9 trillion and their total funding IDR25.7 trillion (Juoro 2008:233). The ratio of sharia funds to conventional funds in 2005 was only 1.42 percent, but grew gradually to 2.55 percent in 2010 (Pepinsky 2013:160). According to Juoro (2008:233), “the main motivation for Muslims to deposit their savings with an Islamic bank is to comply with sharia law, especially with regard to the prohibition on interest”. In addition, he adds that “Islamic customers bank notice the dividend-sharing system as not only compatible with sharia law but also mutually beneficial to the bank and its customers” (Juoro 2008:233).

Islamic sharia insurance or takaful, is another significant and rapidly growing sector. Sharia insurance is a mutual effort to protect each other and provides mutual aid among a number of people through investment in assets that give a return to face certain risks through a contract based on sharia law. From 2002 to 2008, this sector’s expansion exceeds that of conventional insurance, as Department of Finance figures indicate that sharia life insurance has been growing at about 34 percent per year since 2002, compared with 25 percent for conventional insurance (Fealy 2008:20). This number continues to grow, as the average contribution of sharia insurance in Indonesia from 2007 to 2011 is said to be around 67.33 percent and the predicted growth in 2013 is around 30-40 percent (Sindo Weekly 2013). The total insurance premium has also been increasing quickly in the past five years, as in 2009 the total premium was only IDR2,410 billion but in 2012 it reached IDR6,450 billion or, in other words, it grew more than 80% during these three years (Swa 2014:31). According to the financial services authority data (OJK), the total assets of 45 sharia insurance companies were around IDR13,239 trillion in 2013 (Republika 2014).

Along with the growth of the Islamic financial sector, many other fields of commerce conducted on the basis of sharia principle have started to emerge. These include cosmetics, fashion industry, hotel, salon and spa, and tourism. Although these kinds of businesses are not new, they have been increasing rapidly in the past five years.
The growing number of Indonesian middle class influences their development, as the number of middle class people more than doubled between 1999 and 2010 according to the data of the World Bank. To determine who is middle class, the World Bank uses the absolute approach that defines the middle class based on their expenditure; individuals who earn (or spend) between certain upper and lower bounds are considered to be middle class (World Bank 2011:38). Thus, the World Bank classes people whose expenditure per day is between US$2 and US$20 in purchasing power parity terms as middle class. In 1999 only 25 percent (45 million) of the population could be categorized as middle class, but, in 2010, around 60 percent (130 million) of the population belonged to the middle class (World Bank 2011: 38-9). As more than 87 percent of Indonesian people are Muslim (according to BPS), the market share of Islam is a great opportunity for Muslim entrepreneurs to gain a profit.

The culture of the ‘new middle class’ is marked by an ongoing attempt to demarcate oneself from the lower strata of society (Gerke 2000:145). Classes emerge when people “due to common experiences feel and articulate their ‘aesthetic choice’ of their interest as between themselves” (Fischer 2008:53). Through rapid capitalist economic development, prestige and status became negotiable values, depending mainly on a person’s lifestyle and consumption pattern, and not on traditional values and hierarchy. Lifestyle became an increasingly important mode of expressing identities and of social integration in Indonesia, as it could not only be used for self-identification but also for establishing and maintaining membership of a collective identity (Gerke 2000:146). As Islamic identity became a new trend that linked with modernity, urban but at the same time still religious, the new Indonesian middle class became acutely aware of practicing middle-classness through Islam, consumption and legitimate taste (Fischer 2008:65). ‘Taste’ is an important example of how class fractions are determined; not only by possession of economic and social capital, but also by possession of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984:260).

FASHION INDUSTRY: THE NODAL OF SHARIA BUSINESS

In the sharia business, fashion is the most conspicuous segment of Islamic economy that relates to symbol, appearance, and pretension. For Muslim women, wearing a hijab is important as an act of
obedience to God, which is that according to the Quran; women must cover their *aurat* (body). During the New Order, the *hijab* was not popular due to the regime regulated ‘politics of veiling’ in state institutions and schools. Moreover, Islam had not yet become a comprehensive identity among Indonesian people. Deny Setiawan, the CEO of *Shafira Corporation*, the first Muslim fashion brand in Indonesia which entered the market in the early 1990s, shares a story that “at the moment, it is difficult to sell Islamic products, women who wear Islamic dress are still rare, and we have tried to provide options for women at that time to dress in an Islamic way” (Swa 2014:48). However, after the freedom of religion and expression was established in the post-New Order period, along with the increasing purchasing power of Indonesian society, the Islamic fashion brands like *Shafira* achieved great benefit and even created a market for urban women. With a growth minimum of 40 percent per annum between 2007 and 2014, Shafira is now the leading corporation in the Islamic fashion with 25 showrooms in 14 cities in Indonesia.

Islamic fashion is now in high demand. The level of consumption in this sector has reached IDR 17 billion in 2012 and is still growing as the popularity of the hijab continues to rise. The new Islamic fashion media played an important role; it directed at pious woman and promoting the idea of “spiritual beauty” (Jones 2010:92). Based on a survey of 1,000 respondents, household expenditure amounted to IDR 4-20 million, Swa provides data that claims 27 percent of Muslim women admit their source of information for buying a hijab is a magazine (Swa 2014:47). The best known of the Islamic fashion magazines are *Paras and Noor* that sell about 20,000 to 30,000 copies per edition (Fealy 2008:2). In each of their editions, these magazines show attractive images of pious women that are fashionable, modern yet still religious, which are in sharp contrast to the somber and severe styles favored in the Middle East. The publication of books about how to wear a fashionable hijab that are published by several artists and entrepreneurs (Zaskia Adya Mecca and Peggy Melati Sukma) also attract young women to consider wearing a *hijab*. Consuming such images makes the readers become more interested in wearing a *hijab* as it represents both piety and beauty. Through translating virtue into value and value into virtue via the image of pious femininity, according to Jones (2010), such magazines and books navigate the terrain of desire, faith and consumption. Thus, in fact, that kind of
pious image does not represent the new Islamic subjectivity, but rather the objectification of Islam through the commodification of religion.

The recent popularity of the hijab plays a pivotal role in the booming of sharia cosmetics and sharia salon and spas. The rising awareness of women wearing Islamic dress is a niche market that is captured by Muslim entrepreneurs to promote their sharia cosmetics. Then, the beauty industry that uses Islamic symbols and values began to arise in the media and public space. The advantage they offer is that they do not only sell quality and provide low prices, but they also ‘sell sharia’ values such as halal. They emphasize that their products do not contain alcohol and lard as some other cosmetic products on the market. The pioneer of such marketing is Wardah that claims its company is the first to produce sharia halal cosmetics.

According to the marketing director of Wardah, Salman Subakat, what distinguishes Wardah from other types of makeup is the fact that “since Wardah was born it already had DNA of halal cosmetic and intentionally bringing the goodness values of Islam” (Swa 2014:64). Nevertheless, he admits that in the early period of the reformasi, Wardah had difficulties penetrating the market, but when the euphoria of hijabers became a new phenomenon and Islamic fashion magazines sprang up, their sales increased drastically. Wardah then began using veiled female ambassadors to boost its sales, but they carefully chose Muslim artists suitable to represent the Islamic values of Wardah. Therefore, they selected artists who have inspirational stories, especially with regard to their transformation after studying Islam and deciding to wear a hijab, such as Inekke Koreshawati, Marissa Haque, Dewi Sandra, and Dian Pelangi (Swa 2014:64). This strategy, evidently, is very effective in boosting their sales. From their 6.5 hectare factory in Tangerang, Wardah generates an income of about IDR200 billion per month (Tempo 2014:59). As a consequence of its success, Wardah has attracted the attention of other non-sharia cosmetics to engage in this sector, as the market has potential and is growing. Recently, non-sharia cosmetics such as Viva and Sari Ayu began to have concerns over the halal certification of their product.

Another business that emerged and has been booming since the increased popularity of halal lifestyle is salon and spa. This business is quite new in Indonesia but began to emerge in several big cities in Javaisland. Since 2002, there are at least nine big sharia salons in Indonesia, such as Moz5, Zaza, D’Mutia, Rumah Sehat Cantik
Muslimah and Azzahra (Swa 2014:31). Their Islamic business identity is established through the logo of the salon, like Moz5 that places the slogan ‘salon muslimah’ in every logo of its salon. Moz5 practices sharia principles in its business; it uses sharia cosmetics, all of their employees are women (based on sharia law unmarried men and women should not be in contact), and the employees must utter Asmā Allah before taking care of the consumers (Swa 2014:61). Since emerging in 2002, Moz5 has expanded to East and Central Java and it also has reached Sumatera and Kalimantan islands; it has 27 branches with 300 employees throughout Indonesia. Sharia salons thrive in parallel with the emergence of upwardly mobile consumers, who seek models of behavior appropriate to their new-elevated status (Hasan 2011:137).

The ‘economic capital’ of the Muslim middle class provides a foundation for the emergence of ‘wisata syariah’ (sharia tourism) associated with demands for representative spaces that relate to Islamic values. On 30 October 2013, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono inaugurated a new direction for Indonesian tourism, named Pariwisata Syariah Indonesia (Indonesia Sharia Tourism). Sharia tourism is perceived as a new way to develop Indonesia’s tourism and uphold Islamic values. It should not only provides a touristic destination that symbolizes Islamic spirituality but the location should be complemented with halal restaurants, sharia hotels, and places where praying rooms are available (Fealy 2008:24). According to the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, this new concept of tourism will attract more Muslim tourists from Islamic countries. Based on the data of the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, 1,270,473 muslim tourists visited Indonesia in 2010, which were approximately 18 percent of the total 7,000,000 tourists. Globally, money spent by Muslim travellers in 2011 reached US$126 billion. Thus, it is not just a matter of religion, but also the potential economic market behind this policy.

AGENTS OF SPIRITUALISTIC-LIFESTYLE

Rudnyckyj (2010:73) conveys the political and economic crises of the late 1990s and early 2000s manifested itself in what Indonesians considered a deeper ‘moral crises’. The turmoil and uncertainty of social-life after the New Order existed because the state and its
subjects had preferred to establish ‘material development’ rather than ‘moral development’ (Rudnyckyj 2010:74). Since the early reformation period, the deeper spiritual life occurred but the wave of secular-modernization was stronger affecting the attitude of Indonesian citizens. Thus, Indonesian citizens had lost sight of spiritual fulfillment and emotional connections. The presence of popular religious leaders in public life, young energetic communicative, and charismatic ustad and kiai, such as Aa’ Gym, Arifin Ilham, and the late Jeffry Al-Buchori intervened in the drought of spiritual life of Indonesian society by bringing a ‘spiritual reform’, “a specific intervention to address the crisis precipitated by ‘blind faith’ in development” (Rudnyckyj 2010:74). These people are the agents of spirituality that have changed the face of Islam and the landscape of religious life in Indonesia during the reformasi.

In transforming and shaping the spiritual society, the role of agent is undoubtedly important. In sociological studies, most of the works tend to treat the agent as an individual actor (e.g. Bourdieu, Giddens) (Ritzer and Gindoff 1994:9). According to Bourdieu (1977:95), the agent is involved in a ‘field’ (a set of roles and relationships in the social domain, where various forms of capital such as prestige or financial resources are at stake) to develop perceptions, appreciations and beliefs about what to do and what not to do. The habitus informs agents on how to orient their actions to relate to the familiar, and to adapt to new, situations. Bourdieu rejects the idea of an actor with “the free and willful power to constitute” (Bourdieu 1977:73). The agent seems to be dominated by their habitus, by an internal structure (Ritzer and Gindoff 1994:10).

The presence of spiritual agents has established a good foundation for society to learn about Islamic teachings. They provided knowledge for the urban middle class, who felt a sort of spiritual void. The growing interest of the middle class in the current wave of urban dakwah activities has radiated into a large segment of diverse Indonesian Muslims, which means market opportunities for commercial products related to these activities (Hasan 2009:242). Thus, if the new dakwah agents are continuously challenged to develop innovative models for their religious sessions, the Islamic entrepreneurs were the agents of spiritual lifestyle that introduced a new direction of lifestyle for the Indonesian urban middle class. Dian Pelangi is an important figure in making and forming trends
in Islamic lifestyle. Pelangi is a young fashion designer and Muslim entrepreneur who started her hijab and Islamic dress business at the age of 17.

Dian Pelangi is always mentioned by the media as a young fashion designer pioneering and pushing the boundaries of Islamic fashion in Indonesia (Republika 2013; Jakarta Post 2013). She has experience with fashion since childhood. Her parents are woven cloth and songket merchant in Palembang. Dian graduated from Ecole Superieure des Arts et Techniques de La Mode in 2008 and continued studying Islam and Arabic language in Cairo, Egypt, to increase her understanding on how Islam suggests women wear Islamic dress. At the age of 17, she started her hijab business in Jakarta helping the family business. Her hijab design became well known after she promoted her design through her website, blog, and social media. The hijab sold by Dian soon attracted the attention of urban women, as the design is not traditional neither in model, pattern or color; rather it is very attractive, modern, stylish, and colorful. The hijab models are representations of the energetic and fashionable Muslim woman who still adheres to the sharia values. Dian’s success compiles the demand of middle class women for the presence of a religious lifestyle that represents them.

At the crossroads of an increasingly bourgeois Islamization and its separation from the Islamist matrix, a new form of religious configuration has been developing, which Haenni (2005) describes as ‘Islam de marché’ (Market Islam). Market Islam is characterized by enmity towards big institutions and big states and a preference for individual enterprise and initiative (Hoigilt 2011:42). Hefner (2010:1038) claims that Market Islam is ‘post-Islamic,’ in the sense that “it has let go of the great collective projects, it more in favor of personal objectives in which what is dominant is self-realization and the quest for individual well-being”. In the case of Indonesia, the afterlife of development has shifted “the trajectory from the modernization supported through state investment in the space of nation, to a market-based system that caters to private” (Rudynyckyj 2010:4). It illuminates the consequence of failed schemes for national modernization, in which the state is no longer the principal agent responsible for improving the lives of its citizens.

In contrast to the old bourgeoisie, “the new middle class no longer prioritizes the ascetic ethic of production and accumulation, but favors
a morality of consumption based on spending and enjoyment” (Hasan 2011:131). They live in a social world driven by a new economy that judges people by their capacity to consume, their standard of living and their lifestyle (Bourdieu 1984:310-311). The symbolic consumption is the new middle class’ cultural capital. Through such consumption they manifested a ‘class consciousness’ that was determined not by interest in political action but by identification with a class or group of people pursuing a particular lifestyle (Gerke 2000:146). The middle class consumption is based on the logic of ‘formal rationality’, which assures an individual pursues his or her individual happiness through objects expected to provide maximum satisfaction. The Indonesian spiritual marketplace is driven by personal choice, rather than by institutional or cultural loyalties or norms. The spiritual marketplace favors innovative religious or cultural entrepreneurs who are able to craft fresh appeals or develop market niches that address shifts in consumer taste and the desire for novel religious products (Fealy 2008:28).

Muslim entrepreneurs, like Dian Pelangi, know that the spiritual marketplace is rationale based, as religious consumption always seeks the new trends and is pluralist in nature. In order for their messages to have broad appeal they must avoid narrow or exclusivist imagery and language (Fealy 2008:28). Therefore, Dian prefers to take elements from trends in both Western and Islamic countries without forgetting the local fashion trend. The blend of Western and Eastern style perhaps is the power of her design, which distinguishes itself from the Muslim dresses that existed in Indonesia. Dian says that “as fashion designers, we can be idealistic, we want to use our own trademark and let our personality shine without regard of our customer’s tastes”. But she also emphasizes the notion of the rationale market “my trick as a fashion designer is to be able to do push-and-pull marketing, I have to push my character, my personality and the signature of Dian Pelangi, but I have to pull from the tastes of the people, what types of clothes they like and what is trending” (Jakarta Post 2013).

This religious and modern model has helped her to enter the Jakarta Fashion Week in 2009, the largest fashion event in Indonesia that does not represent Islamic symbols nor values. After presenting her design during that event, she made headlines and became a mogul in the Indonesian fashion industry. In 2010, she presented her work
in London and Abu Dhabi upon the invitation of the Ministry of Tourism. She has held fashion shows in Germany, Holland, Egypt, Australia, Kuwait, Jordan, Malaysia, and Singapore. At her peak, she was invited to show her collection at the International Fair of Muslim World at Le Bourget, Paris in 2013. Her expanding clientele includes Princess Basma Bin Talal of Jordan and Princess Nadja of Hanover, Germany.

The role of Dian Pelangi is important in influencing, transforming, and shaping the new spiritual lifestyle in Indonesia. She is not only making people comfortable with religious lifestyle by selling Islamic dress to urban women, but also by providing a cultural space for discussing Islamic fashion and Islamic discourse. In 2010, Dian, along with 30 urban women from various backgrounds and professions, established an organization called Hijabers Community in Jakarta. Hijabers Community is culturally oriented and committed to openness. In the beginning, this organization was only focus on preparing events related to Islamic fashion, but after it grew rapidly, they also began to discuss Islamic teaching and conducting *pengajian* (recitation) and *tausiyah* (public sermon) in modern public places. Many middle-class Muslims have little time for intellectualized discourse, but they are serious about improving their religious understanding and practicing their faith in devout ways. The emergence of Hijabers Community in several big cities in Java attracted the attention of urban women, as this organization incorporates Islamic lifestyle and discourse in a popular way. In responding to this phenomenon, it reveals that the rising neoliberal consumer capitalism, promising self-actualization through consuming and the simultaneous rise of Islamic identity have coalesced in the form of commodified identity exemplified by feminine piety (Jones 2010:111). This is the era of, what Bayat (2002:23) calls, post-Islamist piety; “an era marked and framed by the taste and style of the rich, in particular, affluent youth and women and sociologically underlies a Simmelian ‘fashion’”.

**CONCLUSION**

Islamic society has been transforming since the mid 1970s, but it has not significantly transformed the landscape of religious life in Indonesia. The shift has begun, however, since the New Order introduced a new strategy for accommodating Islam within the
political structure so that Suharto and his family showed their new pious image in the midst of the new wave of Islamic revival within the middle class. This new direction provided the opportunity for a large segment of diverse Muslims to become involved in public debates and, thus, express their political and religious identity (Hasan 2009:247). The collapse of the New Order, undoubtedly, was the peak of the emergence of fundamental changes in the religious life in Indonesia. Indonesia witnessed a wave of Islamic revival marked by the accentuation of religious symbols and dissemination of Islamic institutions as well as new lifestyles (Hasan 2009:247). Since religion has gradually entered middle class life as a new symbol of identity, Islam has become more than a set of rituals, doctrines, and beliefs. It is also a symbolic commodity relevant to the middle-class demand for new lifestyle, modesty, and enjoyment.

The growing interest of the Islamic middle class for the spiritual lifestyle has resulted in the appearance of Islamic sharia business, which in fact emerged in the late New Order, but was difficult to develop, as Islam had not yet become a universal identity in Indonesia. From the Islamic financial sector to the Islamic fashion sector, the sharia business blooms rapidly as a new trend of business and its expansion facilitates religious commodification related to the way religion is packaged and offered to a broader audience. Religious commodification entails ‘the religification of commodities’ and ‘the commoditization of religion’ (Lukens-Bull 2008:233). The role of spiritual lifestyle agents plays a pivotal role in creating, shaping, and helping the new urban middle class in consuming Islam to mark their Islamic identity. In the Islam de marché, the state is no longer seen as the principal agent for improving the lives of its citizens, but rather this role is taken up by individual enterprises and initiative which in the market-based system they more have a freedom as the market religious cultures trusts in private enterprises and piety.

Spiritually, the consumption of Islamic products “has helped make religion a defining element in the lives of an increasing number of people” (Fealy 2008:37). The sheer scale of the success of Islamic commodities does not pose a problem for many Indonesians, as they are buying these goods marketed as pious. The transformation of secular consumption into religious achievement promises the Islamic symbolic consumption becomes a new source of spiritualism as well as a source of religious identification. This process, however, simplifies
Islam as a ‘material process’ rather than a ‘spiritual process’. Thus, the public piety, to some extent, is merely *imej* (image) rather than a reflection of deeper material and spiritual transformation.

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INCORPORATING SPIRITUALITY AND MARKET

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