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Advances in Southeast Asian Studies (formerly, Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies)

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PURPOSE

The purpose of SEAS is, among other things, to promote Southeast Asian studies and the education of emerging scholars, as well as the significance and discussion of the Southeast Asian region in Austria and beyond.

DISCLOSURE

SEAS is the full owner of ASEAS. Contributions identified by name contain the views of the respective author(s) and not necessarily those of the editors.

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In ASEAS 17(1), we feature a thematically open collection of contributions covering such diverse aspects as philanthropy in Indonesia, issues in the context of Papua's special autonomy, digital intimacies in Indonesia, press freedom in the Philippines, and health and safety challenges in Southeast Asia's gig economy food delivery sector. Additionally, this issue marks a new phase for the journal with adjusted publication timelines, now releasing issues in March/April and September/October, while maintaining our Online First feature.

MANAGING EDITORS
Alexander Trupp & Dayana Lengauer

COVER PHOTO
Kosita Butratana, 2024 (Malaysia, Sunway City, food delivery rider)

LAYOUT
Karl Valent

Contents

Editorial: Researching Digital Platforms and Dynamics of Civic Space

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ASEAS 17(1) marks a new phase for *Advances in Southeast Asian Studies* with adjusted publication timelines, now releasing issues in March/April and September/October, while maintaining our Online First feature. We are pleased to announce that ASEAS is now indexed in Scopus across seven social science categories: Cultural Studies; Law; Anthropology; Sociology and Political Science; Communication; Geography, Planning and Development; and Development[1], reflecting our commitment to enhancing the visibility and impact of diverse social science scholarship focused on Southeast Asia. ASEAS continues to uphold open access principles, further ensuring that it remains freely accessible to all. Another positive appearance is that recently ASEAS has been ranked Q1 in the field of cultural studies in the Scimago Journal Ranking[2]. Although we agree that such rankings cannot fully reflect the labor invested in the existence of a journal, neither is a journal's impact factor a ticket for the quality of research published, we see this 'grade' as a minor recognition of the extraordinary effort our editors, reviewers, and authors put into the continuation of this largely voluntary project.

In this issue, we feature a thematically open collection of contributions covering such diverse aspects as philanthropy in Indonesia, issues in the context of Papua's special autonomy, digital intimacies in Indonesia, press freedom in the Philippines, and health and safety challenges in Southeast Asia's gig economy food delivery sector.

By delving into the evolving landscape of philanthropy in Indonesia, Bhirawa Anoraga in this issue (2024) examines the impacts of charitable crowdfunding on the social justice trajectory of Islamic philanthropy. His examination adds a new perspective to the work of Amelia Fauzia (2017), who published an article on a similar issue in ASEAS's special issue on philanthropy in 2017. In short, Anoraga finds that the trend of crowdfunding has amplified the inclusive space in Indonesian philanthropy where Muslim NGOs actively provide social services

1 https://www.scopus.com/sourceid/21101141528

2 https://www.scimagojr.com/journalsearch.php?q=21101141528&tip=sid&clean=0

and enact collaborations with non-Muslims – a space that was significantly smaller a decade ago (Fauzia, 2017). The author further shows how platforms like *Kitabisa* have transformed inclusivity and governance within Indonesian philanthropy, while also highlighting challenges related to sustainability and accountability.

Turning to issues of identity and autonomy, Rosita Dewi (2024, this issue) investigates the complex dynamics between Papua and Indonesia after two decades of special autonomy. Despite legislative efforts, incidents of racism and violence persist, underscoring unresolved tensions and a paradoxical lack of recognition that fuels calls for independence. A number of authors who have published in previous ASEAS issues (e.g., Hennings, 2016) have pointed out the role of large-scale land deals and investment projects in the degradation of Papua's conflict. This article contributes to the necessary political discourse on Papua's status, by outlining central discrepancies in the understanding and handling of autonomy as well as key issues of the provinces' political struggle. This contribution is important and timely as tensions between the Indonesian government, Papuan activists, and pro-independence organizations are expected to rise, as retired army general and ex-Minister of Defense Prabowo Subianto – with questionable human rights records – has been elected president of Indonesia this year. Activists fear the detrimental effect of further land deals and investment projects accompanied by intense military presence on any reconciliation efforts or long-term peace prospects in the region.

In the realm of digital intimacies, Noviani and colleagues (2024, this issue) explore the construction of social capital among dating app users in Indonesia. Their study demonstrates how these platforms facilitate networked individualism and provide avenues for accumulating social capital, particularly significant for marginalized LGBT groups seeking acceptance and belonging. Despite these avenues, the authors convey that dating apps do not necessarily pose a challenge to Indonesia's heteronormative social system, but rather reproduce dominant sexual practices. Moreover, in Indonesia, as well as in other Southeast Asian countries, digital spheres are harshly controlled. This puts this study in line with preceding ASEAS publications discussing online surveillance in Southeast Asia's authoritarian and post-authoritarian contexts (e.g., Pinkaew Laungaramsri, 2016).

Bagalawis and associates (2024, this issue) shed light on the challenges faced by journalists in the Philippines during the COVID-19 pandemic under the Duterte administration. Their work highlights the persistent threats to press freedom, with targeted attacks and legal constraints impacting the media's role as government watchdogs. This study brings further evidence into the militance of new authoritarian trends that have come to characterize the region (Einzenberger & Schaffar, 2018).

Beyond these current research articles, Daniels' (2024) research workshop article in this issue explores health and safety challenges in Southeast Asia's gig economy food delivery sector. By examining the practices of platforms like *GrabFood* and *Foodpanda*, he demonstrates the need for genuine worker-centric safety measures amidst the rise of algorithmic management and precarious employment. Lastly, we present a book review of *The Candidate's Dilemma: Anti-corruptionism and Money Politics in Indonesian Election Campaigns* by Herdi Sahrasad, offering insights into money politics in Indonesian election campaigns.

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DISCLOSURE

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

A Decade of Charitable Crowdfunding and Its Impacts on the Social Justice Trajectory of Islamic Philanthropy in Indonesia

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This article aims to investigate the development of charitable crowdfunding and its impacts on Islamic philanthropy and its social justice trajectory in Indonesia. As the largest Muslim country in the world, Indonesia has thrived and undergone some legal and programmatic revolutions to promote social justice through Islamic philanthropy. However, this study demonstrates that the rapid growth of charitable crowdfunding in the last decade has some impacts on the social justice trajectory of Islamic philanthropy, particularly in the areas of inclusivity, sustainability, and governance. This study draws from the case of Kitabisa, the largest crowdfunding platform in Indonesia, by conducting interviews with the founders and users and observing their online interactions on the platform and social media. This study also collects data on Muslim philanthropic Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that actively used Kitabisa to raise funds, with special attention to Aksi Cepat Tanggap (ACT), one of Indonesia's largest Muslim philanthropic NGOs. This study found that the trend of crowdfunding has amplified the inclusive space in Indonesian philanthropy where Muslim NGOs actively provide social services and enact collaborations with non-Muslims. However, through crowdfunding, Muslim NGOs have become more accommodating toward short-term social programs or 'charity'. The crowdfunding trend has also raised accountability and transparency issues in Indonesian philanthropy. This study argues that the broader involvement of grassroots actors, either individuals or informal communities, through crowdfunding explains its impacts on Indonesian Islamic philanthropy's trajectory for social justice.

Keywords: Charity; Crowdfunding; Indonesia; Islamic Philanthropy; Social justice

INTRODUCTION

This study explores the impacts of crowdfunding on Islamic philanthropy's progress for social justice in the Indonesian context. Crowdfunding commonly refers to online fundraising, usually facilitated through a specific website or platform that serves as an intermediary connecting funders and fundraisers. This study focuses on a type of crowdfunding that collects donations for charitable

campaigns. Donation-based crowdfunding has been growing worldwide, particularly since 2010 following the development of social media and Web 2.0, which have enabled mass engagement online.

The growth of donation-based crowdfunding has attracted the interest of scholars. However, most studies on charitable crowdfunding have focused mostly on the mechanism of crowdfunding itself, particularly on how to effectively mobilize online donations and what motivates people to donate through crowdfunding (Salido-Andres et al., 2021). The existing studies also skew more toward the cases in the Western contexts. Against the previous studies on crowdfunding, this study aims to examine the broader impacts of crowdfunding on philanthropy. As urged by Salido-Andres et al. (2021, p. 299), "the outcomes of donation-crowdfunding for . . . society in general constitute the . . . gap that future lines of research should aim to balance." Also, "for future initiatives, other countries of Southeast Asia should be included, and more attention given to technological giving practices through electronic platforms and crowdfunding among other topics" (Sciortino, 2017a, p. 134). The case of crowdfunding in Southeast Asia, particularly in Indonesia, will elucidate how technology intertwines with religions, local traditions, and bottom-up charitable initiatives.

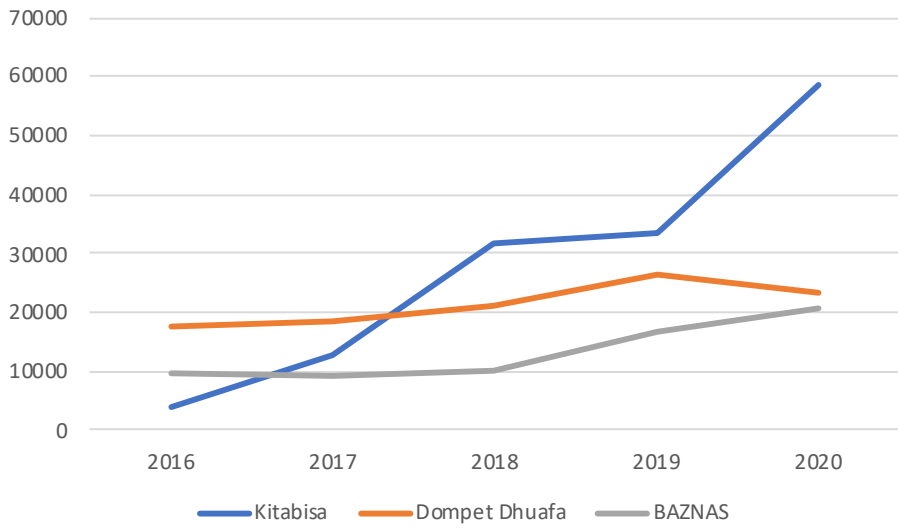
This study argues that the trend of donation-based crowdfunding has resurfaced the debate between the concepts of 'philanthropy' and 'charity.' The global practices of philanthropy could encompass:

> Both giving and doing and includes both the traditional and non-traditional, the formal and informal, the religious and the secular. It recognizes that, across the planet, diverse kinds of philanthropic practice emerge out of a particular set of factors: cultural, social, religious, economic, political, legal and more. All are valuable, and all are 'philanthropy'. (Harvey, 2011)

While the concept could cover diverse practices of giving, scholars also often use the term 'philanthropy' specifically to denote a more strategic, sustainable, and institutionalized approach to giving. This concept contrasts with 'charity', which describes the impulsive, short-term, and sporadic solutions to address societal problems (Eikenberry, 2006; Layton, 2016). The Internet and crowdfunding in particular have broadened the participation of various actors, either organizations or individuals, to engage and influence each other in charitable activities. I will further argue that their online and offline interactions have led to more dynamism in the implementation of the two giving paradigms.

This study draws from the case of Indonesia where donation-based crowdfunding has been booming in the last decade. I will focus on Kitabisa, the largest crowdfunding platform in the country, which has grown at a rapid rate, even exceeding established philanthropy organizations in Indonesia as shown by the graph below. Given its size and rapid growth, Kitabisa serves as an appropriate case to represent the trend of charitable crowdfunding in Indonesia.

The crowdfunding trend in Indonesia is inseparable from the vibrant philanthropy sector and the rapid Internet adoption particularly found among urban middle-class youth. The country has been sitting at the top position of the Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) World Giving Index since 2018 (CAF, 2021). As a Muslim-majority



Graph 1. Donation Collection of Kitabisa, Dompet Dhuafa, and BAZNAS. *In thousand USD*. (BAZNAS, 2016, 2018, 2020; Dompet Dhuafa, 2016, 2018, 2020; Kitabisa, 2017, 2018a, 2020; own compilation).

country, the practices of *zakat* (Islamic almsgiving) and *sedekah* (Islamic charities) are part of Indonesian Muslims' everyday religious practices (Benthall, 2022). It is estimated that the size of *zakat* alone could reach USD 16 billion annually (Badan Amil Zakat Nasional/the National Zakat Collection Agency [BAZNAS], 2023).

While other religious and secular philanthropy organizations also exist in Indonesia, Muslim philanthropy organizations have a relative upper hand in their sustainability and public engagement. As Amelia Fauzia observes, "faith-based philanthropy is making a significant contribution to developing the field of philanthropy . . . [and is] growing much faster than secular philanthropy" (Hartnell, 2020, p. 20). The issue with the latter commonly lies in organizational sustainability, given its frequent reliance on grants from other organizations, while Muslim philanthropy organizations could mobilize *zakat* or *sedekah* from the populous Muslim communities (Sakai, 2012). Other religious organizations, such as Christian or Buddhist philanthropic groups, often face challenges in openly expressing their activities in public due to the frequent tension between Muslims and non-Muslims. The latter have often been accused of proselytizing through charitable activities. These conditions have made Muslim organizations prominent actors in the Indonesian philanthropic landscape.

Furthermore, in the last three decades, Islamic philanthropy in Indonesia has undergone an institutional transformation with the emergence of professional Muslim NGOs, which arguably hold the potential to foster social justice philanthropy (Abubakar & Bamualim, 2016). These organizations mobilize Islamic charitable funds and create social programs to tackle various issues in the areas of education, health, and disaster relief. Against the vibrant development of Islamic philanthropy in Indonesia, this study discusses a decade of donation-based crowdfunding and its impacts on Islamic philanthropy and its trajectory for social justice.

In analyzing crowdfunding's impacts, this study pays attention to the aspects of governance and programs of Muslim NGOs, especially their inclusivity and sustainability. These are perceived to be the key areas of reform that determine the social justice progress of Islamic philanthropy in Indonesia (Fauzia, 2017). This study also investigates further the factor(s) behind crowdfunding's impacts, which this study argues lie in the participatory nature of crowdfunding.

This study approaches crowdfunding practices not only from their technological dimension but also as practices "that move within digital contexts . . . across the gap between online and offline" (Boellstorff, 2020, p. 56). Therefore, besides analyzing the narrative and interactions on their online campaigns or netnography (Kozinets, 2015), this study also conducted 50 interviews with the founders and users of Kitabisa, which consist of donors and campaign initiators. This study pays special attention to Muslim philanthropic NGOs who actively use Kitabisa such as Dompet Dhuafa, Rumah Zakat, Lazismu, and Aksi Cepat Tanggap (ACT). In the discussion section, however, this study mainly focuses on Kitabisa's impacts on ACT due to the following reasons. First, ACT was one of the largest Muslim philanthropic NGOs in Indonesia.[1] Second, while claiming to be impartial in their services, ACT strongly advocated global Muslim solidarity or *umma* through its Humanitarian Solidarity of the Global Muslims program (Zuhri, 2014). Hence, its crowdfunding campaigns were dominated by aid services for Muslims, particularly in areas of conflict such as Palestine and Myanmar. Third, the organization was frozen by the government in 2022 for misusing donations and misleading campaigns. Thus, the case of ACT, while it might not represent Indonesian Islamic philanthropy in general, is expected to demonstrate a certain level of impact of crowdfunding on Muslim NGOs' trajectory for social justice.

The structure of this study is outlined as follows. Following this introduction, this study discusses the development of Islamic philanthropy in Indonesia, which has been shaped by the forces of modernization, Islamization, and digitalization. The third section traces the development of crowdfunding by presenting the case of Kitabisa, which demonstrates the potential to support social justice philanthropy in Indonesia. The next three sections explore the impacts of crowdfunding on Indonesian Muslim NGOs in the areas of inclusivity, sustainability, and governance. In conclusion, this study highlights how the broader engagement of grassroots actors through crowdfunding contributes to shaping the trajectory of social justice within Islamic philanthropy in Indonesia.

ISLAMIC PHILANTHROPY IN INDONESIA: MODERNIZATION, ISLAMIZATION, AND DIGITALIZATION

Islamic philanthropy through the practices of *zakat* and *sedekah* has a long history of coloring Indonesian society (Fauzia, 2013). While Indonesian Muslims commonly perform Islamic charity by paying their *zakat* through local Muslim leaders or through direct giving to the poor, in the 1990s, *zakat* management organizations were created

1 In 2020, ACT's annual donation collection reached USD 29.6 million (ACT, 2020), while BAZNAS collected USD 19.5 million (BAZNAS, 2021) and Dompet Dhuafa USD 24.7 million (Dompet Dhuafa, 2021).

by some reformist Muslims (Retsikas, 2014). They attempted to professionally manage *zakat* funds in a philanthropic manner, strategically addressing the root causes of poverty rather than as short-term giving. These Muslims were the educated middle-class who emerged in the New Order period following successful education and economic development programs (Hefner, 2000).

The mushrooming of the organizations in the 1990s played a vital role in popularizing discourses on philanthropization and social justice philanthropy (Fauzia, 2017). Philanthropization emphasizes the distinction between philanthropy and charity. The former entails a sustainable approach to address the root causes of societal issues, in contrast to the perceived short-term nature of charity. On the other hand, social justice philanthropy highlights a rights-based approach to philanthropy, by broadening opportunities for marginal groups in society (Fauzia et al., 2022). Within the philanthropy debate, Indonesian Muslim NGOs represent institutionalized philanthropy, often argued to be more sustainable, effective, and progressive than grassroots charities in addressing social problems (Fauzia, 2017). In practice, these organizations emphasize social entrepreneurship and adopt the 'teaching to fish rather than giving a fish' approach, by establishing (Islamic) microfinance institutions, a concept popularized by the Nobel Prize winner Muhammad Yunus (Sakai, 2014).

Despite undergoing modernization, the trend of Islamization remains strong in Indonesian philanthropy. To some extent, this trend has affected Muslim NGOs' inclusivity towards non-Muslims. It has been observed that following the end of the New Order period, Indonesian Muslims have become increasingly committed to implementing Islam in both their private and public spheres (Fealy & White, 2008). This growing piety has served as the main support for Muslim NGOs, particularly amid the slowing of foreign funding, as Indonesia has transitioned to a middle-income country (Sakai, 2012).

Nevertheless, the force of Islamization, to some extent, has also been accompanied by overt conservatism and the sentiment of the Muslim community or *umma* (van Bruinessen, 2013). While charitable practices among the broader Indonesians[2], including the two largest Indonesian Muslim mass organizations, Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, have shown inclusivity (Fauzia, 2013), the trend of conservatism has, to some extent, limited the engagement and services provided by Muslim NGOs to non-Muslims (Fauzia, 2017; Latief, 2016; Sakai & Isbah, 2014). Therefore, this trend has posed challenges to the development of social justice philanthropy in Indonesia.

Another recent force influencing philanthropy in Indonesia is digitalization. The adoption of the Internet has grown substantially among Indonesians and they have been known for their active online expressions (Jurriëns & Tapsell, 2017).[3] Indonesian NGOs have swiftly adopted new media to support their communication, particularly in resource mobilization (Nugroho, 2012). Yet, arguably the biggest potential of the Internet is its convivial character, especially, with the growing popularity of social media and interactive platforms that facilitate immediate and accelerated engagement among actors from diverse geographical locations (Lim, 2013; Kailani & Slama, 2020).

2 Indonesian Muslims in general (77%) are willing to donate to non-Muslims (Fauzia, 2017).

3 Indonesia ranked 11th for the country with the most time spent on the Internet with an average of 07:42, which is about an hour more than the worldwide average (06:37) (We Are Social, 2023).

The trend of crowdfunding is growing in this context. Thus, individuals or informal communities have gained more capacity to mobilize funds comparable to the more established philanthropic organizations through crowdfunding. As also observed in Western contexts, "[through crowdfunding,] grassroots activists, who are often seen as part of a 'powerless public' . . . [have] been able to take up the functions that traditionally belong to resource-rich organizations" (Doan & Toledano, 2018, p. 44). I will argue that the growing visibility of grassroots actors through crowdfunding has played a role in shaping the social justice trajectory of Islamic philanthropy in Indonesia, as explored in the following sections.

CROWDFUNDING DEVELOPMENT IN INDONESIA: THE CASE OF KITABISA

The history of online fundraising in Indonesia can be traced back to several online campaigns like the Coin for Prita movement in 2009, and the emergence of early crowdfunding platforms like wujudkan.com. This trend grew rapidly with the emergence of Kitabisa, which has become the largest crowdfunding platform in Indonesia. Kitabisa estimates that it facilitates 4,000 campaigns every month through its platform (Kitabisa, 2022), serving over six million users in total. The background behind the establishment of Kitabisa reveals its potential to foster social justice, particularly by emphasizing inclusivity and the sustainability of programs through its platform.

Kitabisa was founded by Alfatih Timur (Timmy) and Vikra Ijas, after they completed their bachelor's degree in business management. Initially, Timmy's inspiration came from encountering crowdfunding websites like Kickstarter and Gofundme, which inspired him to create a similar platform in Indonesia. With seed funding from Rhenald Kasali, Timmy's former lecturer, they launched a crowdfunding platform called Kitabisa in 2013. Under Kasali's Rumah Perubahan, a training center for young social entrepreneurs, they expected the platform to be alternative funding for youth to tackle various issues through social businesses. Thus, the discourse on social entrepreneurship[4] was reflected during the establishment of Kitabisa.

Besides the discourse on social entrepreneurship, Kitabisa also has another ideological dimension that shapes its vision. While Muslim NGOs have been significantly influenced by the wave of Islamization during their emergence in the late New Order and early Reformasi era, Kitabisa's notable discourse centers around *gotong-royong* (mutual assistance), which underscores the unity of Indonesians in helping each other (Bowen, 1986). This discourse gained prominence in response to the heated political campaigns leading up to the 2014 presidential election, which exploited ethnoreligious sentiments. Hoaxes and hate speech were massively spread on social media (Lim, 2017). Thus, the Kitabisa team, consisting of members from various religious backgrounds[5] aimed to counter the inter-faith tension through the spirit of *gotong-royong* within crowdfunding with a vision of 'connecting good people.'

4 Timmy views Kitabisa as a social enterprise that strives for both profit and social impacts. To sustain the organization, Kitabisa charges 5% from the collected donations.

5 While Timmy and Vikra are Muslims, Rhenald Kasali, the advisor of Kitabisa, is a Catholic. Kitabisa also employed several non-Muslims to fill important positions in the organization. This inter-faith background of the Kitabisa team arguably shaped Kitabisa's tendency to uphold the inclusive discourse of *gotong-royong*.

Timmy explained that Kitabisa aims to promote 'good people' who are 'doers, altruistic, and tolerant.' These attributes highlight his aspiration to foster religiously inclusive mutual assistance through crowdfunding, with the aim of countering hoaxes and hate speech on social media. Although the force of Islamization in Indonesia remains strong, Kitabisa's case resonates with several other youth communities in the Indonesian neoliberal Reformasi era and other Muslim countries characterized by the rhetoric of 'nostalgic nationalism' and optimism in addressing social issues (Anoraga & Sakai, 2013; Gellert, 2015; Jung et al., 2014).

Thus, with the intertwined discourses of *gotong-royong* and social entrepreneurship, the creation of Kitabisa appears to hold the potential to support social justice philanthropy that is religiously inclusive in Indonesia. However, it is important to note that the main determinant in crowdfunding extends beyond the platform itself to the 'crowd' comprising donors and campaigners. The following sections delve into how the broader actors have dynamically influenced Kitabisa's vision and Islamic philanthropy's practices in general, particularly in the aspects of inclusivity, sustainability, and governance.

ON INCLUSIVITY

In terms of inclusivity, the crowdfunding trend arguably has two impacts on Islamic philanthropy and Indonesian charitable practices in general. First, Kitabisa has maintained an inclusive space where both non-Muslims and Muslims can showcase their social services amid the growing polarization in Indonesian society (Lim, 2017). Furthermore, Kitabisa has leveraged the visibility of inter-faith giving on social media, boosting its potential for virality. Second, theologically, *zakat* in Indonesia can only be given exclusively to fellow Muslims (Fauzia, 2017). Crowdfunding has emerged as a viable alternative funding for Muslim NGOs, as reflected in the case of ACT below, allowing them to engage more flexibly in campaigns related to non-Muslims.

Kitabisa's role as an inclusive platform for non-Muslims is evident in the case of Anto, a Chinese Christian who initiated a crowdfunding campaign for a Christian orphanage called Let's Help Orphanage and Age Care of Berkat Kasih Immanuel in Jakarta (interview with Anto, Jakarta, 9 July 2017). Before initiating the crowdfunding campaign, Anto conducted research on various crowdfunding platforms available in Indonesia. He decided to use Kitabisa because according to him, "Kitabisa is the best one . . . Kitabisa is the most trusted platform because it is used to manage hundreds of thousands of Rupiah [in crowdfunding]." With the assistance of Kitabisa, his campaign, which initially aimed to collect USD 3,600, successfully reached a total of USD 15,800 by the end of the campaign period (Surya, 2016). Anto mentioned that he did not personally know the donors, and the donors themselves indicated that they became aware of the campaign "from the Internet" after Kitabisa promoted the campaign through its social media channels.

Anto's choice of Kitabisa was not only pragmatic but also motivated by Kitabisa's support for non-Muslims:

> I know that this Alfatih (referring to Timmy) is a Muslim . . . [however], despite this being a campaign to help non-Muslims, they were willing to help us. We

> understood that they also receive a percentage of the collected donations, so the more we collect, the more they earn, and I understand that part. But it is quite rare to find people who are willing to help . . . it was intended to support a [Christian] orphanage, which means they were assisting the religion of non-Muslims. They went to great lengths to help us. (interview with Anto, Jakarta, 9 July 2017)

Anto's statement implies the struggle of non-Muslims when seeking support for their social projects from the broader public. As noted by Minako Sakai (2012), non-Muslims in Indonesia have often been accused of attempting to convert Muslims through their charitable activities; therefore, non-Muslims often are anxious about openly delivering their social services. However, Kitabisa has emerged as an inclusive space for non-Muslims to promote their social campaigns. Beyond facilitating campaigns, Kitabisa actively encourages and promotes inter-faith giving or *gotong-royong* through crowdfunding.

In one of his public speeches, Timmy displayed a slide featuring a picture of the victims of the church bombing in Samarinda in 2017 to highlight the inter-faith practices within crowdfunding. He remarked:

> Here is a picture of our little sister who has passed away (because of the bombing). It became a national issue and triggered our collective action. The fundraiser was Adjie Silarus. Adjie Silarus is a Buddhist. And at that time, the executor was ACT, a Muslim philanthropic NGO. We view it as an inter-faith, inter-ethnic humanitarian movement. And we, in Kitabisa, often witness that those who donate do not know the religious or ethnic background of the beneficiaries, but they donate for humanity. (participatory observation in the Millennials Berkarya's workshop 'Talking Social' by Kitabisa and Semen Indonesia on 18 October 2017)[6]

While determining the exact number of inter-faith campaigns in Kitabisa can be challenging, since not all participants openly state their religious backgrounds, the spirit of inclusive giving is clearly displayed in campaigns responding to inter-faith conflicts and natural disasters. Indeed, whenever inter-faith violence and natural disasters occur, Indonesians frequently turn to Kitabisa to express solidarity with the affected victims, as shown in the table below.

The campaigns above demonstrate how crowdfunding has preserved an inclusive space, especially allowing non-Muslims to voice their campaigns while Muslims can exhibit their solidarity by contributing donations amid the heightening inter-faith tension in Indonesia. Among the manifestations of inter-faith solidarity through crowdfunding, Muslim NGOs have taken part by collaborating with non-Muslims in fundraising or providing services to non-Muslims. This was evident in the case of ACT, which played a role in channeling donations to the victims of the Samarinda church bombing. On various occasions, ACT also joined forces with non-Muslim social media influencers, such as Jonathan Christie, an Indonesian Christian badminton athlete, to fundraise for victims of the Lombok earthquake in 2018.

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6 This workshop is also accessible online at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4FhxpZjAjo0

No	Campaign	Year	Information	Campaigner	Collected Donation
1	Let's Build the Tolikara Mosque Papua	2015	Christian riots burnt a mosque in Papua	Pandji Pragiwaksono (a comedian)	22,2[1]
2	Public aid for the victims of the Thamrin Bomb	2016	Muslim terrorists attacked public areas in Jakarta	Dompet Dhuafa (a Muslim NGO)	13,5[2]
3	Let's Build Vihara Tanjung Balai	2016	Muslim riots burnt a vihara in TanjungBalai, North Sumatra	Adjie Silarus (a book writer on yoga and meditation)	2,3[3]
4	Public Donation for Samarinda Church Bombing	2016	A church in Samarinda was bombed by a Muslim terrorist	Adjie Silarus (a book writer on yoga and meditation) and ACT	16,7[4]
5	Aid to the families of the five police victims of the Depok terror	2018	Riots by Muslim terrorist prisoners in a detention center in Jakarta	GP Ansor	9,9[5]
6	Donation for the Victims of Surabaya Bombing #kamitidaktakut	2018	Three churches were bombed by a Muslim family	Alissa Wahid (a religious pluralism activist)	14,3[6]
7	YouTubers for Surabaya Victims #kamitidaktakut	2018	Three churches were bombed by a Muslim family	Indonesian YouTubers	9[7]
8	Sympathy for the Victims of Surabaya Bombing	2018	Three churches were bombed by a Muslim family	Boston University Alumni Association Indonesia	4,5[8]

Table 1. Crowdfunding Campaigns on Kitabisa to Respond to Religious Violence in Indonesia. *In thousand USD*. ([1]Pragiwaksono, 2015; [2]Dompet Dhuafa, 2016; [3]Silarus, 2016a; [4]Silarus, 2016b; [5]Resolute, 2018; [6]Wahid, 2018; [7]Skinny Indonesian, 2018; [8]BUAAI, 2018; own compilation).

As Amelia Fauzia (2017) argues, modernization and professionalization have prompted Muslim NGOs to recognize the importance of non-discriminatory philanthropy. However, inclusive philanthropy was challenging to practice, especially among Muslim NGOs whose primary source of income is *zakat* funds, which theologically restrict the beneficiaries to Muslims (Sakai & Isbah, 2014). The case of ACT, nevertheless, illustrates that the emergence of crowdfunding has offered an alternative income for the organization to engage in wide-ranging programs and collaborate with various actors including non-Muslims. According to Rini Maryani, the former Vice President of ACT, the organization was impressed with how crowdfunding could quickly collect donations through social media (interview with Maryani, Jakarta, 12 September 2017). Following the 2020 pandemic, online donations in Indonesia surged by approximately 72%, while *zakat* collection, which typically constitutes a significant portion of Muslim NGOs' income, remained stagnated or even experienced a decline (BAZNAS, 2023; Gopay & Kopernik, 2020; Piliyanti et al., 2022). Maryani further emphasized that following the escalating trend of online donations, every time viral incidents happened, such as disasters, ACT would cooperate with Kitabisa and individual influencers, either Muslims or non-Muslims, for fundraising.

The new flexible source of income through crowdfunding holds the potential to bolster the advancement of inclusive philanthropy in Indonesia. As observed by

Petersen (2015) in the cases of transnational Muslim NGOs, some have become more committed to the discourse of humanity following funding from the World Bank and other international donor agencies. Similarly, in Indonesia, donations garnered through crowdfunding could be harnessed to support Muslim NGOs' engagement with non-Muslims, as in the case of ACT. This becomes particularly significant due to the theological limitations on the use of *zaka*t and the declining funding from international donors to the Southeast Asia region (Fealy & Ricci, 2019; Sakai, 2012; Sciortino, 2017b). Despite its potential to support inclusive philanthropy, the utilization of crowdfunding by Muslim NGOs may come with challenges, especially for developing sustainable programs, which will be discussed below.

ON SUSTAINABILITY

Despite the trend of crowdfunding reflecting inclusive giving on social media, this advancement arguably comes at the cost of long-term and sustainable philanthropy, which has been progressing in Indonesia. Two factors explain the shift from the philanthropic mindset of Kitabisa and Muslim NGOs towards 'charity' through crowdfunding. Firstly, crowdfunding predominantly relies on individual (retail) donations, and most Indonesian donors have not been fully aware of the importance of social justice philanthropy (Fauzia et al., 2022). While they have engaged in inter-faith giving, this inclusivity arguably is not driven by a conscious awareness of human rights, which is a basic tenet of social justice philanthropy. Instead, it often stems from impulsive and emotionally driven motivations[7]. Secondly, crowdfunding platform providers like Kitabisa and Muslim NGOs felt the need to conform to the impulsive inclination of individual donors to mobilize funds from the broader public effectively. Hence, to some extent, they have accommodated short-term and specific programs in their crowdfunding campaigns. Some organizations have even exploited donors' emotions to advance overtly sectarian campaigns, which contradicts the progress made in promoting inter-faith giving.

Initially, Timmy had expected Kitabisa as a platform primarily for social entrepreneurs aiming to address social issues through sustainable businesses. However, this plan did not materialize as expected, as only a few people were willing to donate to such campaigns. Therefore, Kitabisa shifted its focus towards accommodating short-term emotional campaigns on the platform. Since then, medical campaigns have dominated Kitabisa. Despite the Indonesian government's implementation of universal health insurance, its effectiveness has been hampered by inadequate facilities and limited coverage (Yuda et al., 2020). This condition has pushed Indonesian citizens to turn to community-based support and now crowdfunding when they cannot cover their medical expenses (Sumarto, 2020). Furthermore, donors are often easily touched by the pictures of sick beneficiaries,[8] which explains why medical campaigns

7 The phenomenon of impulsive giving through crowdfunding has also been found in other countries such as in the US, which has led to some ethical debates on this kind of giving (Snyder et al., 2016).

8 Fundraisers through crowdfunding commonly portray the pictures of the beneficiaries in their campaigns. Often they are unaware of the ethical considerations of showing these photos as their main objective is to elicit donors' sympathy and impulsive giving (interview with Kitabisa's individual campaigners; see also Snyder et al. (2016) in the cases of medical crowdfunding campaigns in the US).

constitute the biggest portion of donations on Kitabisa.[9] As a platform, Kitabisa also advises its campaigners to portray personal stories and photos that could elicit sympathy from potential donors (Kitabisa, 2016).

One of the donors that I interviewed was Widya (28 years old), a Muslim woman who was self-employed. Every time she received income, she felt obliged to spend a certain portion of her income for *zakat* through Kitabisa (interview with Widya, Depok, 22 November 2017). She chose Kitabisa to pay her *zakat* because of Kitabisa's simplicity and its diversity of social programs. At the time of our interview, Widya had made donations to 13 campaigns on Kitabisa. Among these campaigns, one was initiated by a friend and focused on education, two were for Muslim NGOs, four were related to disaster relief, and six were medical campaigns. Widya said that she did not have certain requirements for selecting a particular social program. She usually scrolled through the campaigns available on Kitabisa's website and chose the ones that piqued her interest. In general, Widya did not differentiate between projects initiated by individuals or NGOs, as she trusted that Kitabisa had screened and verified the credibility of these projects. Furthermore, she did not limit her selection based on the religion of the beneficiaries. She mainly just selected those that aroused her sympathy, which led her to support numerous health-related campaigns, particularly those featuring images of individuals in need.

One of the programs that she donated to is a campaign initiated by Ely Goro Leba from East Nusa Tenggara to aid Ory, a child about five years old afflicted with a disfiguring tumor. The campaign included a photo displaying a substantial tumor protruding from the back of the child's head, giving the appearance of having two heads. Widya told me that she wanted to donate instantly after she looked at his photo while browsing the campaigns on Kitabisa. She said: "When I searched for a campaign in Kitabisa, I found his campaign. His tumor was so big . . . he was still too small too . . . I felt sorry for him, if I was in his position, it must be so tough."

Like most of the population in East Nusa Tenggara, Ely Goro Leba and Ory are Christians. When I asked Widya about her thoughts regarding Ory's religion, she said: "I did not have that thought, it was just because I saw his condition [that I donated]." In other words, the reason Widya donated to Ory's campaign is her sympathy, rather than her conscious intention to practice inter-faith. In the end, Ory's campaign collected USD 6,700, which enabled him to receive treatment at a hospital in Jakarta.

The cases of Widya and my other informants who donated to health-related campaigns illustrate the interplay of various motivations among crowdfunding donors (Kasri & Indriani, 2021; Neumayr & Handy, 2019). According to Vikra, the founder and chief marketing officer of Kitabisa, his data has revealed three main motivations that drive Kitabisa's donors to donate: religion, personal networking, and sympathy (interview with Vikra, Jakarta, 17 October 2017). For religious motivation, Vikra found that almost half of Kitabisa's donors donate around the end of a month when they fulfill their *zakat* obligations after receiving their salaries. Besides religious motivation, Vikra also found that approximately 70% of the initial donations to Kitabisa's campaigns come from the personal networks of the campaigners. Furthermore, his

9 The rank of Kitabisa's most donated campaigns based on its types is medical campaigns (35%); humanitarian (17%); disaster relief (11%); social activities (10%); and other non-classified campaigns (27%) (Kitabisa, 2022).

data indicate that Kitabisa's donors donate because of their sympathy for the beneficiaries, especially in the cases of medical and disaster relief campaigns. In fact, this motivation ranked first (57%) as the main driver for donors, and religious motivation came second (38%) (Gopay & Kopernik, 2020). According to Erica Bornstein (2009), sympathy is the common characteristic of individual giving that she calls the "impulse of philanthropy." The impulse of philanthropy, as Bornstein (2009) states, is "the selfless giving away of wealth that arouses strong emotions and brings people to tears" (p. 630). Therefore, this type of giving often transcends faith boundaries, as in the case of Widya who donated to help a Christian child. Impulsive giving recently has been fostered by the development of crowdfunding, which enables donors to immediately provide aid to alleviate one's suffering. Bornstein (2009) contrasts this impulsive and immediate form of giving with the rational and bureaucratic approach typically seen in modern philanthropy organizations.

Indeed, in the early popularity of crowdfunding, Indonesian Muslim NGOs, with whom I conducted interviews, disagreed with the short-term campaigns on Kitabisa. They hoped that these individuals and community fundraisers could collaborate with established philanthropy organizations to create more sustainable and impactful social campaigns. Thus, some of these Muslim NGOs launched their own crowdfunding platforms similar to Kitabisa. These platforms not only featured the organizations' programs but also other fundraisers' initiatives, while encouraging the latter to implement a more sustainable approach. For instance, Dompet Dhuafa created BawaBerkah, Lazismu launched AksiBersama, Rumah Zakat initiated SharingHappiness, and ACT established IndonesiaDermawan. However, these platforms encountered a similar issue faced by Kitabisa on the difficulty of raising online donations unless facilitating campaigns that touch donors' emotions. In the end, some of them, such as BawaBerkah and AksiBersama, closed the platforms, while some others began to incorporate short-term campaigns to sustain like Kitabisa. ACT with its IndonesiaDermawan, for instance, frequently promoted campaigns on disaster relief, food services, and medical programs that were 'charity' or short-term in nature through pictures (mainly children and elders) and sorrowful narratives (Indonesia Dermawan, 2022).

The popularity of impulsive and emotional campaigns in crowdfunding implies a regression in the trajectory of social justice philanthropy in Indonesia. This downturn has been exacerbated by the emergence of overtly sectarian campaigns that paint antagonism between Muslims and non-Muslims, such as campaigns for Muslim Rohingya, Uyghur, and Palestine. These campaigns have successfully mobilized donations, particularly from the Indonesian Muslim community, by portraying the deprivation of fellow Muslims, such as a Muslim child covered in blood due to non-Muslim oppression (Sciortino, 2017b). While the campaigns aim to address humanitarian conflicts overseas, they also have negative repercussions on Muslim and non-Muslim relations in Indonesia (Fauzia, 2017). Thus, while crowdfunding has made inter-faith engagement more visible, it has also facilitated short-term giving and sectarian campaigns. One of the main causes is the impulsive and emotional motivation that drives Indonesian donors to donate. Also, for crowdfunding platforms and campaigners to be successful in fundraising, they need to facilitate short-term campaigns and accommodate donors' impulsive inclinations, even though the programs might contradict the idea of social justice.

ON GOVERNANCE

Another issue that surrounds the trend of crowdfunding in Indonesia is the issue of governance and accountability. The recent scandal of ACT for misusing public donations has questioned the professionality and transparency of registered philanthropy organizations that were often assumed to be more trustworthy than charitable activities run by informal grassroots communities. The scandal went viral after Tempo, an Indonesian news media company, published full coverage about the excessive use of public donations for ACT's higher-ups' personal matters (Nurita, 2022). The government then suspended ACT's license in 2022, effectively freezing the organization's operations. Prior to the scandal, ACT had actively used Kitabisa and various social media for its fundraising efforts. Therefore, the issue of ACT, to some extent, has brought public scrutiny to the accountability processes within crowdfunding.

Before the ACT scandal, transparency issues in crowdfunding, particularly through Kitabisa, were already a matter of public concern due to the case of Budi Nur Iksan, also known as Cak Budi. Cak Budi was a micro-celebrity on Instagram with more than 220,000 followers raised by sharing his daily charitable activities through social media. His posts included visiting poor people in rural areas and delivering money or food to them. Cak Budi edited the posts with emotional narratives, sorrowful songs, and touchy videography. He encouraged his followers to donate to poor people through his bank account.

In 2017, an Instagram user shared a post that reported Cak Budi misusing donations amounting to USD 40,000 to buy a luxury car and smartphones (BBC, 2017). During this period, Cak Budi was also running a campaign on Kitabisa, leading to accusations that Kitabisa was somehow involved in his scandal. The platform responded by explaining that the donations collected through Kitabisa's bank account were safe given Cak Budi had not withdrawn the funds. Furthermore, Kitabisa claimed that it had a rigorous reporting mechanism, which required campaign initiators to report on how the funds were utilized and encouraged them to upload receipts related to the giving. These reports were published on each campaign's page and were sent to donors via emails. Before accepting any campaigns, Kitabisa conducted document checks and interviews with campaign initiators to verify their identities and proposed programs. The platform also provided a reporting feature on campaign pages to flag any suspicious activities. As Kitabisa is a registered charity foundation (*yayasan*), any fundraising conducted by individuals or informal communities also has a legal basis under the Kitabisa Foundation, which is required by the fundraising law. Therefore, Timmy told me that the scandal of Cak Budi actually had strengthened Kitabisa's position as Kitabisa enabled anyone, particularly individuals and informal communities, to do fundraising in a legal and transparent way through its accountability standards.

However, the ACT scandal showed a loophole in the system despite it being a legal organization that was audited by public accountants and issued financial reports annually. In relation to its crowdfunding activities, Tempo reported that ACT only delivered a portion of the collected donations to the intended beneficiaries (Nurita, 2022). The organization was also accused of lacking transparency in reporting its advertising expenses and of using misleading marketing campaigns. For instance,

one of ACT's controversial campaigns was the campaign to build 'the first mosque in Sydney.' The tagline was deemed deceptive since there were already numerous Muslim houses of worship in the area. Thus, it was considered just a marketing gimmick to evoke Indonesian Muslims' sentiment to ease Muslim diasporas' struggle in a non-Muslim country.

Furthermore, after the campaign collected USD 200,000, Tempo reported that ACT only channeled USD 153,000 to the Muslim community in Sydney to build the house of worship (Nurita, 2022). The difference was deemed significant, accounting for 23% of the total donations. According to the Donation Collection Practices Regulation No 29 of 1980, the accepted deduction for the operational costs of a philanthropy organization is limited to 10% (Donation Collection Practices Regulation, 1980). ACT argued that the deduction was used to cover the fees for Kitabisa and social media advertising. Kitabisa deducted 5% from the total donations for campaigns, except those for *zakat* and disaster response. This deduction is informed on Kitabisa's website. However, the fee for social media advertising is not always straightforward, as it depends on various factors such as advertisement coverage, campaign duration, and donation target. Theoretically, the more a campaigner spends in social media advertising, the more donations they can potentially mobilize. However, issues can arise when donors are not well-informed, let alone involved in determining the appropriate amount to be spent on advertising. Furthermore, the existing legal framework has not kept pace with the contemporary trend of crowdfunding.

Updating the fundraising law is a substantial task to address the loophole in the accountability of philanthropic activities in Indonesia. The existing Fundraising Law No. 9 of 1961 has been strict in regulating fundraising activities, requiring fundraisers to obtain permission for fundraising and limiting their operational scope to specific geographic areas (Fundraising Law, 1961). However, the rapid growth of online fundraising has made it possible for individuals and organizations to collect funds regardless of geographical barriers. Therefore, the law requires an urgent revision, particularly in the monitoring clause, given the more massive philanthropic practices facilitated by social media.

From the perspective of the donors whom I interviewed, most of them appreciated the updates they received via email after making donations through Kitabisa. As also observed in other countries (Zhou & Ye, 2018), my informants believed that this reporting mechanism was what made Kitabisa trustworthy. Therefore, they were confident to donate to campaigners that they did not know personally.

However, despite appreciating the updates, my informants rarely checked in detail how their donations were spent by the campaigners and how much the beneficiaries ultimately received. As discussed earlier, their primary motive for giving was to perform religious deeds. Muslim donors, as traditionally practiced, tend to forgo their donations to ensure that their deeds would be accepted by God (Fauzia, 2013). Furthermore, they commonly donated less than USD 10 (Gopay & Kopernik, 2020), which they considered too small to closely monitor. Thus, there is a chance that campaigners might misuse donations despite the accountability mechanisms set up by Kitabisa.

The passivity among donors partly explains the loophole in the transparency of philanthropic practices that could affect the trajectory of social justice philanthropy

in Indonesia. As reported by BAZNAS, in general, there was a drop in donations collected by Islamic philanthropy organizations following the ACT scandal (Tanjung, 2022). Numerous comments on social media posts regarding ACT indicated that Indonesian netizens preferred to donate to needy people that they knew personally rather than to Muslim NGOs. These comments suggest a declining trust in institutionalized philanthropy, which had been seen as a key driver of social justice philanthropy in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

In the last two decades, scholars have noted the development of philanthropization and social justice discourses among Muslim philanthropic NGOs in Indonesia, which stresses their potential to bring about social change and address the root cause of societal problems. This article argues that the decade of the emergence of donation-based crowdfunding in Indonesia has brought some notable transformations to Islamic philanthropy, particularly its trajectory to social justice. I have further argued that its disruptive power lies in the convivial character of crowdfunding, which has enabled grassroots fundraisers and donors to collectively decide on the types of social programs to support and the beneficiaries to assist through crowdfunding.

By drawing from the cases of Kitabisa and ACT, in summary, the impacts of crowdfunding on Indonesian Islamic philanthropy are notable in three key areas: inclusivity, sustainability, and governance. Firstly, in terms of inclusivity, Kitabisa has become an open platform where non-Muslim-related campaigns feel welcome to publicly showcase their programs. Through crowdfunding, non-Muslim initiatives can attain heightened visibility and even achieve virality on social media. Furthermore, crowdfunding has become an alternative funding for Muslim NGOs including ACT to expand its campaigns not limited to Muslim partners or Muslim beneficiaries. An example of this is ACT's crowdfunding campaign in response to the 2017 Samarinda church bombing where the organization collaborated with a Buddhist youth to help Christian victims. Secondly, in terms of sustainability, diverging from the discourse on philanthropization, Kitabisa and Muslim NGOs have shown greater openness to short-term social projects such as medical campaigns. These campaigns often receive substantial donations from donors who sympathize with the photos and narratives of the beneficiaries. Additionally, certain campaigns have also invoked religious sentiments, as often promoted by ACT, which counterbalance the organization's inclusive engagement with non-Muslims. Finally, the trend of crowdfunding has also raised the issue of governance among Indonesian Muslim NGOs. A notable case is the 2022 controversy involving ACT, which faced allegations of misusing donations and misleading donors in its crowdfunding campaigns.

I have argued that these impacts reflect the general orientation of grassroots donors and fundraisers in Indonesia that exhibit both inclusivity and impulsiveness in their charitable practices. As illustrated by the case of Widya, Indonesian Muslims demonstrate a willingness to assist non-Muslims while also expressing solidarity with fellow Muslims worldwide, reflecting the multi-faceted Indonesian Muslim citizenship (Latief, 2016). This equivocal stance also renders the state's ideology in which the latter stresses citizens' strong adherence to their religions while upholding

Indonesian unity in diversity (Menchik, 2016). Another decisive factor is the impulse of philanthropy (Bornstein, 2009), which motivates Indonesians to engage in charitable activities. This impulsive giving explains the popularity of short-term social projects and the lack of donors' attention toward accountability and transparency in their giving. Consequently, Muslim philanthropic NGOs recognize the need to accommodate donors' impulsive giving to attract donations through crowdfunding.

The social justice trajectory of Islamic philanthropy in Indonesia, thus, has been increasingly dependent on individual donors and campaigners who wield growing influence through crowdfunding. Ensuring the progress of social justice philanthropy entails a shift in the broader Indonesian mindset to value human rights, prioritize long-term solutions for societal problems, and be more critical in their giving. Advocacy works to cultivate the mindset of social justice are necessary, particularly through education. The government should consider updating existing laws to accommodate the growing engagement of citizens in charitable crowdfunding while ensuring effective monitoring mechanisms for their donations.

In the meantime, a practical solution could involve crowdfunding platforms like Kitabisa to gradually encourage the campaigns on their platforms to be more supportive of social justice philanthropy. Kitabisa has been relatively successful in facilitating inter-faith campaigns amidst the growing inter-faith tensions in Indonesia through the narrative of *gotong-royong*. This success suggests that the platform could potentially play a role in encouraging long-term and more sustainable initiatives among its campaigners. Furthermore, Kitabisa has realized its platform's predominance of short-term medical campaigns. Hence, the platform has made some efforts such as creating a health insurance subsidiary called KitaJaga in 2022 to provide a more sustainable solution for the complex health issues in Indonesia. It remains to be seen how this approach could reduce the domination of short-term medical campaigns on the platform. To conclude, with the emergence of Kitabisa and its individual/communal donors and campaigners, the trajectory of social justice within Islamic philanthropy in Indonesia is not solely shaped by elite professionals within Muslim NGOs. It now encompasses the active involvement of ordinary citizens at the grassroots level.

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DISCLOSURE

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The Paradox of Papuan Recognition After Two Decades of Special Autonomy: Racism, Violence, and Self-Determination

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Indonesia's relationship with Papua, its poorest and easternmost region, is still colored by racism. Despite 20 years of special autonomy law (OTSUS) and efforts to improve relations and the status of indigenous Papuans, a shocking incident of large-scale racism in Surabaya in 2019 brought back memories of anti-Papuan discrimination, which OTSUS has failed to solve. The incident triggered horizontal conflict sharpened by an identity contest between Papuans and non-Papuans, reverberating to the present day. Why do Papuans still face conflict after two decades of OTSUS? This paper argues that OTSUS, originally designed to provide legal and cultural recognition to Papuans and their rights within the state, paradoxically failed to guarantee Papuan recognition. This lack of recognition supports increasing calls for independence among Papuan activists and other pro-independence organizations. Hence, this situation complicates efforts to reduce violence undertaken not only by state security personnel but also by members of the Free Papua Movement.

Keywords: Racism; Recognition; Self-Determination; Special Autonomy; Violence

INTRODUCTION

"It is wrong to be born a Papuan" (interview with TA, 7 October 2019; PY, 2 November 2019; LI, 2 November 2019)[1] is an ironic statement that I consistently heard as the region approached two decades of special autonomy (*Otonomi Khusus*, or OTSUS) in 2020. It illustrates the deep wounds left by policies of discrimination and marginalization that the Indonesian government implemented after Papua was officially integrated into Indonesia in 1969 through the Act of Free Choice (*Penentuan Pendapat Rakyat*)[2]. The stark instance of anti-Papuan

1 All interviews were conducted confidentially. All informants agreed to participate in this study. To maintain confidentiality, only the initials of the informants are given.

2 In West Irian, there was a dissonance on how to implement the act of free choice. Some Papuan wanted to implement the principle of 'one man one vote'. However, the Indonesian government

racism in Surabaya in 2019 was like rubbing salt into the wounds. The discrimination and marginalization faced by Papuans have become one of Papua's primary sources of conflict, alongside development failure, human rights violations, and different perceptions regarding integration, history, and the political status of Papua (Widjojo et al., 2009).

Papua and Papua Barat are the easternmost provinces of Indonesia; the region is known as Papua and is referred to as such throughout this article. Indonesia declared independence in 1945, but the sovereignty transfer from the Dutch occurred only after the Roundtable Conference in The Hague in 1949. At this conference, the status of Papua had yet to be decided. The New York Agreement of 1962 became the final negotiation between the Dutch and Indonesia. This agreement mandated the Dutch to hand over the Papuan administration to the United Nations Temporary Executive Authority (UNTEA), then gradually transfer it to the Indonesian government by 1 May 1963. This agreement disappointed Papuans, who expected Papuan independence and later formed the Papuan Freedom Organization (*Organisasi Papua Merdeka,* OPM). Even though the administration of Papua had been transferred to the Indonesian government, the agreement mandated that a referendum decide on Papua's status. Therefore, the Indonesian government conducted the Act of Free Choice in 1969. Through this vote, Papua officially became part of Indonesia's sovereignty. The referendum's result brought even more disappointment to Papuans who disagreed with the Papuan integration into Indonesia. This condition triggered conflict, which was responded to by military operations. Since then, Papua has had a long history of internal conflict with the Indonesian government, and numerous Papuan groups have continued to seek Papuan self-determination and independence. A period of open discussion and protest known as the Papuan Spring (1998–2002) created momentum for many such groups. In response to their demand, the Indonesian government developed the special autonomy law for Papua, or OTSUS Law No. 21/2001.

The Indonesian government passed OTSUS on 21 November 2001. Although the idea of giving broader autonomy to Papua was to recognize Papuan rights and reduce discrimination against and marginalization of Papuans, this law has failed to address the source of discrimination and marginalization. From a governmental perspective, Papuan recognition is no longer a problem. Indicators used by the central government to measure the success of recognition are based on the number of elite politicians in local government. All the critical positions in Papua, such as governor and head of local government, have been occupied by Papuans. Even the Cenderawasih regional military commander (*Panglima Komando Daerah Militer*, Pangdam) and Papua's regional police chief (*Kepala Polisi Daerah*, Kapolda) are Papuan. Therefore, according to the central government, Papuans can make their own decisions for Papua. The central government assumed that the problem of discrimination and marginalization

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opted for deliberative consensus on the pretext of unfavorable geographical characteristics and the general political situation of the area. This decision disappointed Papuans and gave rise to a movement of resistance. Eventually, 1,026 Papuan were chosen as representatives and were quarantined for two months before they voted in the act of free choice in August 1969. Pro-Papuan-independence activists believe that the representatives have been intimidated by the Indonesian military during the quarantine to vote for integration.

ended in Papua with the granting of OTSUS as a form of legal recognition. This assumption prompts the following questions: Why does the demand for Papuan self-determination continue in Papua after Papua has been granted OTSUS? To what extent has OTSUS recognized Papuan rights?

These questions must be considered when evaluating OTSUS, since this law aims to provide Papuans self-determination rights. However, many evaluations of OTSUS are more concerned with problems of governance, budgeting, and infrastructure development. Central government evaluations, for example, merely focus on the allocation of autonomy funds – 2% of national general allocation funds – which ended in December 2022[3]. A comprehensive evaluation of OTSUS, primarily related to Papuan recognition issues, has yet to be conducted.

Two decades after the passing of OTSUS, Papuans are still victims of racist incidents, including the case of August 2019 in East Java that reached international attention. Development, as a governmental priority within the OTSUS framework, often causes other forms of marginalization and reproduces violence in Papua. An example is the massive investment in exploiting natural resources that caused many Papuans to lose customary rights and lands.

This article analyses the paradox of Papuan recognition in the context of OTSUS. It argues that OTSUS has failed to guarantee Papuan recognition, because the law has been only partially implemented, and what recognition has been given to Papuans has been 'corrupted'. This argument is founded on data that has been collected through observations and interviews with local and central government representatives, Papuans, and NGOs in Papua and Jakarta between 2019 and 2021. This study also benefited from data that the researcher collected throughout her extended fieldwork in Papua since 2005. The paper's argument is presented as follows: First, the article discusses, in theory, the aim of granting autonomy to allow internal self-determination instead of external self-determination. Second, the article explains Papuans' dissatisfaction with the recognition mandated by OTSUS by addressing the different indicators applied to measure it. The paradoxical relation between OTSUS and Papuan recognition manifests in the case of racism in 2019 and in the reproduction of violence, which are analyzed in the third and fourth sections, respectively. The last section scrutinizes President Joko Widodo's (Jokowi) commitment to solving the conflict in Papua through OTSUS during his second presidential term (2019-2024).

OTSUS FOR PAPUA: AUTONOMY, RECOGNITION, AND SELF-DETERMINATION

The utility of autonomy as an alternative to conflict resolution and a mechanism to overcome the demand for self-determination is debatable. State actors usually interpret self-determination as secession or independence: In secession, a region

3 The parliament passed the OTSUS revision, Law No. 2/2021, on 15 July 2021. The parliament revised 18 articles of Law No. 21/2001. Revisions included continuing the OTSUS fund for Papua (2.25% from the national general allocation budget) in 2022. The extension of OTSUS for Papua was followed by a division of Papua province into four provinces (Papua, Papua Tengah, Papua Pegunungan, and Papua Selatan Province) and Papua Barat Province into two provinces (Papua Barat and Papua Barat Daya Province) at the end of 2022. Currently, Papua consists of six provinces. It caused a conflict escalation, especially in the highland areas that became new autonomous provinces (Papua Tengah and Papua Pegunungan).

aims to gain broad recognition by separating itself from the host state; in independence, a region aims to gain broad recognition as a sovereign state (Bertrand, 2007; Hannum, 1996; Hipold, 2017; Weller & Wolf, 2005). This kind of self-determination is often addressed as external self-determination. Most host states are reluctant to grant external self-determination; therefore, autonomy as a form of internal self-determination is considered an alternative (Hipold, 2017; Weller & Wolf, 2005). According to Weller and Wolf (2005, p. 1), "autonomy is rightly or wrongly associated with self-determination struggle".

Autonomy is often seen as a win–win solution for the issue of separatism. Autonomy is higher than the protection of indigenous or ethnic minority rights but lower than an independent state; it becomes an alternative that the government offers to the separatist group in question. As separatist movements typically grow out of dissatisfaction, powerlessness, and marginalization, combined with repression, autonomy defuses conflict only if the decision is based on mutual respect and all parties pursue the common goal of conflict resolution (Hannum, 1990, 1996).

Autonomy is used to guarantee a minority group's systematic participation and involvement on an equal footing with the majority population through positive discrimination (Hipold, 2017, p. 328). Autonomy, once granted, can contribute to a group obtaining legal recognition under national law, which is expected to guarantee that a person/group will be able to enjoy the same rights as all other members of society (Honneth, 2003; van den Brink & Owen, 2007, p. 13).

However, legal recognition can become a 'corrupted' recognition when the dominant party/majority group maintains the will to dominate. Such corrupted recognition can be assessed through deviations in the implementation of the recognition policy (Monahan, 2006, p. 393). It can be observed in the government's attempts to reduce the agreed scope of autonomy, or even to withdraw provisions of autonomy. When this happens, the demand for secession or external self-determination increases (Hipold, 2017).

In Indonesia, military action has become central in Papua since 1963, and numerous military operations have been conducted to secure the region's integration. Prolonged military operations, especially during Suharto's authoritarian regime, have brought human rights violations against Papuans. This security approach was and continues to pose a 'nightmare' to Papuans. The central government's approach towards Papua changed after the fall of Suharto's regime in 1998. During Indonesia's post-Suharto democratic transformation (1998-2002), Papuan demands for independence grew louder, particularly after holding the Second Papuan Congress[4] in 2000 (Dewi, 2017a). The Indonesian government, however, did not grant Papua independence, opting instead for OTSUS to theoretically reduce independence demands. The government believed that OTSUS and the enshrining of Papuan rights through

4 The Papuan Presidium Council (*Presidium Dewan Papua*, PDP) held the Second Papuan Congress from 29 May to 4 June 2000. The name of the Second Papuan Congress referred to the First Papuan Congress, conducted by the Papua Council (*Nieu Guinea Raad*, NGR) on 1 December 1961. This congress tried to convince Papuans that Papua had declared independence on 1 December 1961. 2,700 participants who represented all Papuan regions attended. The second congress elected Theys Eluay as chairman of the PDP and inaugurated him as Papua's leader. This event successfully mobilized Papuans to support the PDP's declaration of independence (Dewi, 2017a).

recognition and autonomy would improve the relationship between Papua and Jakarta and become a comprehensive solution to the region's conflicts.

OTSUS endeavored to engage affirmative policies towards Papuans to provide them with more opportunities to participate in Papua's politics and economy. Positive discrimination is crucial for Papuans, given the long periods of political, economic, and social domination by non-Papuans, ensued by transmigration and other Indonesianisation policies[5], for example. It aims to preserve the Papuan population and prevent its ousting by non-Papuan population (Elmslie & Webb-Gannon, 2013, pp. 142-166). Papuans have long felt dominated and threatened by the increasing number of transmigrants, especially from Java, Sulawesi, and Maluku, and their increasing political and economic influence. This resulted in a sense of inferiority imposed on them, re-enforced by economic and political marginalization (Dewi, 2017a).

Papua's OTSUS was the result of political negotiation towards conflict resolution. It mandated the recognition of Papuan rights as an *adat* (customary) community through the formation of the Papuan People's Assembly (*Majelis Rakyat Papua,* MRP) to provide cultural representation. Local political parties would be allowed, and local symbols would be recognized. Furthermore, the law also allowed the formation of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to solve past human rights violations and bridge the different interpretations of Papua's political status. However, the conflict has continued throughout the two decades of special autonomy. Reasons therefore are, among others, the MRP's delayed formation, the division of Papua into two provinces in 2003 without the consultation of the MRP or the local government[6], the TRC's unrealized formation, and the 'hijacking' of Papuan organizations and representation.

DEFINING RECOGNITION: THE GAP BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND PAPUAN PERCEPTIONS

As explained, OTSUS can be interpreted as internal self-determination to gain (legal) recognition. However, after two decades, there is still a wide gap between the law's implementation and what was and is expected by Papuans (Dewi, 2017b).

The central government of Indonesia claims that Papua has been fully recognized through the implementation of special autonomy. The existence of the MRP, including *adat*, religious, and women representatives (McGibbon, 2004), is one of several

5 Indonesianisation was a nation-building policy for maintaining the integration of Papua into Indonesia through military and non-military approaches. On the pretext of equitable development, the Indonesian government intensified transmigration programs. A massive transmigration program introduced during the Suharto era (in the 1970s) gradually changed the proportion of the population in Papua: In 1971, the population of non-Papuan migrants in Papua was around 5%; the migrant population increased to 35% of the population by 2000; by 2010, Papuans formed only 49% of the population; and by 2020, the proportion of Papuan to non-Papuan was estimated at 25% Papuan versus 75% migrant (Elmslie & Webb-Gannon, 2013, pp. 142-166; Dewi, 2017a, pp. 11-12).

6 The division of Papua into two provinces generated resistance from many parties, such as the government of Papua Province, Papuan activists, and the DAP. The National Defense Institute and the Ministry of Home Affairs believed that dividing Papua into several provinces was the best way to weaken separatism and national disunity (see Dewi, 2017a).

indicators used by the government to claim that it has fully recognized Papuans. The MRP was formed to protect the basic rights of Papuans based on *adat* values and would represent an important step towards institutionalizing the recognition of Papuans.

Besides the formation of the MRP, Papuans have occupied the positions of governor and vice governor in the two provinces of Papua and Papua Barat, following strict criteria defined by the MRP.[7] The position of district heads in Papua has been dominated by Papuans as well. Papuans have gradually become an essential part of the bureaucracy in Papua, a process defined as Papuanization. A Papuan also occupies the position of the regional police chief in Papua Province.[8] Even the Cenderawasih regional military commander, Herman Asaribab, became the first Papuan to hold this position.[9] These positions serve as indicators for the central government to measure the success of recognition in Papua.

Furthermore, OTSUS funds, which had reached 2% of the national general allocation fund by 2019 and were planned to be increased, are also a form of recognition in the perception of the central government. Policy development based on seven customary regions[10] in Papua is also part of the government's claim to Papuan recognition. Indonesia's current President Jokowi added in a press release on 3 September 2019 that the central government had only taken IDR 16 trillion (USD 1.1 billion) from Freeport[11], but the government had returned IDR 92 trillion (USD 6.5 billion) to Papua through OTSUS funds. Accordingly, the central government had 'given' more to Papua than it has 'taken' from the region (Suwarjono, 2019).

However, Papuans' perception regarding Papuan recognition differs from that of the central government. A wide-held opinion is that the government is "releasing the head, but holding the tail" (*melepas kepala, tapi masih pegang ekor*) in implementing OTSUS (personal communication with JW, 23 October 2015; DM, 11 July 2019; SM, 1 August 2019; YW, 1 August 2019; AS, 1 August 2019; ANS, 2 August 2019).

7 The MRP provided a detailed definition of (native) Papuan or *Orang Asli Papua* (OAP). The candidate must be someone who was born of a native Papuan father and mother, or a native Papuan father, and someone who has an *adat* background (see Dewi, 2022).

8 Paulus Waterpauw was appointed regional police chief of Papua Province in September 2019. He was re-appointed after the chaotic anti-racism protests that same year, which caused additional riots. After the riot in Wamena (the capital of Jayawijaya district), 33 people were killed, and many non-Papuans had to flee from Papua. As a Papuan, he was expected to stabilize the situation and assure the riot victims' safety.

9 He was appointed on 30 August 2019. Similar to Waterpauw, his appointment was related to the anti-racism protest that sharpened the segregation between Papuan and non-Papuan in Papua. As a Papuan, he was expected to reduce the wave of anti-racism protests in Papua through a cultural approach. After the situation returned to normal, he was promoted to Deputy Chief of Staff of the Indonesian Army on 18 November 2020. He was the first Papuan to hold this high-rank position in the military.

10 Papua – Papua and Papua Barat Province – was divided into seven customary regions, five customary regions (Lapago, Mepago, Animha, Saireri, and Mamta) in Papua Province and two customary regions (Doberai and Bomberay) in Papua Barat Province.

11 Freeport was the first foreign company to sign an investment contract in Papua in 1967 before the Act of Free Choice was conducted in Papua in 1969. It was signed a week after Suharto issued Law No. 1/1967 about foreign investment. Later, this company became the backbone of economic development in Papua and Indonesia. During the Suharto regime, Freeport became the most significant taxpayer and the largest employer in the province, and it supported more than 50% of the province's gross domestic product (Leith, 2003). Until now, foreign investment in the Mimika district is the biggest in Papua due to Freeport and mining resources (Dewi, 2017a, p. 140).

The formation of the MRP, in 2004, was delayed for more than three years, even though OTSUS mandated that the MRP had to be formed within a year after the enactment. The central government was very 'careful' in drafting the government regulation for the MRP formation to ensure the limits of its authority. The central government feared that the MRP would become a 'super body' against the central government or that the MRP could mobilize Papuan solidarity to secession, which indicated the government's distrust and suspicion towards Papua. Eventually, it only became a cultural institution, not a political one, which considerably weakened its authority (McGibbon, 2006).

Moreover, the division of Papua (*pemekaran)* into two provinces – Papua and Papua Barat Provinces – in 2003 was considered a betrayal to Papuan autonomy. Papuans argued that the central government deliberated to deteriorate Papuan solidarity. *Pemekaran* would undermine Papuan nationalism by creating different and new identities (Chauvel, 2019; International Crisis Group, 2003). The division of Papua into more provinces is still part of the central government's agenda to maintain national integration. The Minister of Home Affairs, Tito Karnavian (former chief of the Indonesian National Police), together with the Coordinating Minister of Politics, Legal, and Security, Mahfud MD, announced that the central government would divide Papua into at least five provinces, which resulted in protests on 11 September 2020. This announcement was related to the central government's plan to revise several parts of OTSUS No. 21/2001, especially those related to funds and provincial division.

As an important element of recognition, Papuan representation is still problematic in Papua. The Papuan Customary Council (*Dewan Adat Papua,* DAP), formed in 2002 as an *adat* organization, is not formally recognized by the government, although DAP incorporates Papuan grass-root aspirations and *adat* structures. The forerunner of DAP was the Customary Deliberative Council, or LMA (*Lembaga Musyawarah Adat*), formed in 1996 and led by Theys H. Eluay.[12] DAP attempted to register as an *adat* community organization at the Office of National Unity and Politics to obtain legal recognition, but the application has never been approved because DAP has been suspected of supporting the Papua pro-independence movement. Furthermore, the role of DAP, as an *adat* institution recognized by the *adat* community, has been "hijacked" by an *adat* organization, also abbreviated LMA[13] (*Lembaga Masyarakat Adat Papua*, Community Customary Council) and initiated by the government in 2010. It largely served to justify the implementation of government policies in Papua (Dewi, 2017b). For example, instead of consulting the MRP in the revision of OTSUS, the central government actively involved the LMA.

The situation became worse after the latest local elections in December 2020. In Merauke district, several candidates supported by national parties, such as the

12 Theys Eluay was the *adat* leader of Sentani district. He was a former member of Golkar, which had close relations with the Indonesian Army during Suharto's era. After the fall of the New Order regime, demands for Papuan independence intensified under Theys' leadership. He was murdered by special command forces (*Komando Pasukan Khusus*) on 10 November 2001 because he was active in advocating the independence of Papua through the PDP.

13 The same abbreviation between the LMA (*Lembaga Musyawarah Adat*), formed in 1996 and chaired by Theys Eluay, and the LMA (*Lembaga Masyarakat Adat*), formed in 2010 and chaired by Lenis Kogoya, deliberately caused confusion. The central government used the politics of dualism to weaken the DAP.

Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (*Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan*, PDIP), the People's Conscience Party (*Hati Nurani Rakyat*, Hanura), and the United Development Party (*Partai Persatuan Pembangunan*, PPP), to run the elections were non-Papuans. To gain more support from the *adat* community, one non-Papuan candidate was 'crowned' an *anak adat* (customary heir) by the LMA.[14] This raised the polemic of *adat* representatives and ignited the anger of the Marind tribe as a major *adat* community in Merauke. It caused friction among the *adat* communities in the district. They argued that this case would undermine the opportunity for a Papuan, a true *anak adat,* to become a leader in Papua.

The representation of Papuans in the Regional People Representative Council (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah*, DPRD) is still limited, indicating Papuans' limited political access – a concern voiced by the DAP. Non-Papuans continue to dominate the elected members of DPRD in the Merauke district. In the General Elections of 2019, Papuans only obtained three seats out of 30. This condition also concerns other districts in Papua (see Figure 1).

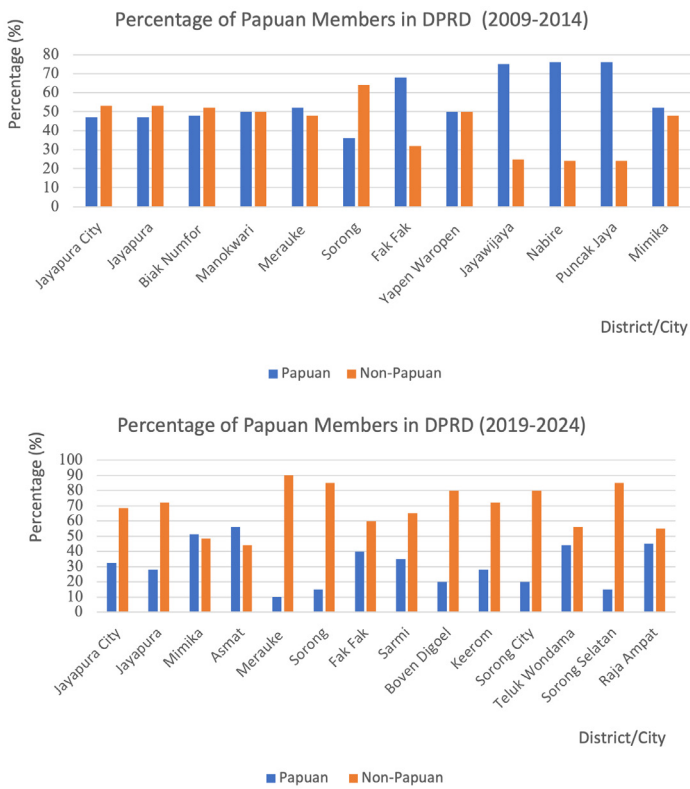

Figure 1. Papuan members of DPRD in Papua. (Dewi, 2022; HumasDPRP, 6 November 2019; Musa'ad, 2013; Republika, 20 November 2019).

14 Buying the status of anak adat has become a trend for non-Papuan candidates in running elections since Papuan autonomy. The current debate is not only limited to the distinguishment between Papuans and non-Papuans, but extends to the question of authenticity in Papuan representation (see, Dewi, 2022)

The restriction of Papuan local parties' formation is one factor contributing to the current situation. To accommodate the formation of local parties, DPRD drafted a local legislation (*peraturan daerah*), but the Ministry of Home Affairs did not approve it. These difficulties in gaining access to national parties to run in the General Elections have reduced the number of Papuans in the DPRD in several districts/cities of Papua.[15] Papuans have questioned why Aceh could form local political parties under the Aceh OTSUS, but Papua could not.[16] There is also an argument that forming local political parties could channel the conflict by replacing bullets with ballots.

Historically, Papua had 12 local parties that joined the General Election of members of the New Guinea Council in 1961. These local parties were banned after Papua's integration into the Indonesian Republic (Singh, 2008). In 2014, the Unity Papua Party or *Partai Papua Bersatu* (PPB) was formed to participate in the General Elections of 2019. However, Papuans and the central government had a different interpretation of OTSUS Article 28. The central government insisted that Article 28 only stated that Papuan could form political parties ("*penduduk Papua dapat membentuk partai politik*"), but did not specify the formation of local parties in Papua. Therefore, in 2015, PPB was frozen by the Ministry of Legal and Human Rights on the pretext that there was no regulation on forming local parties in Papua. The party filed a judicial review at the Constitutional Court on 29 May 2019, but the Constitutional Court rejected it. This has led to the conclusion that the central government is not interested in fully implementing OTSUS or reconciling the relationship between Papua and Jakarta.

The fact that the central government has not yet formed the TRC supports Papuan opinion that the government is not serious enough to solve the conflict in Papua. The TRC forms the core of OTSUS regarding Papuan reconciliation. The law mandated that reconciliation would be an alternative solution for human rights violations in the past as well as for clarifying the pros and cons of Papuan integration into the frame of Indonesian sovereignty. Through reconciliation, the law has been expected to reduce the narration of *memoria passionis* as the bitter collective memories of human rights violations since Papuan integration. It is important to address this issue since the demand for a referendum or external self-determination is almost always related to the narration of human rights violations in Papua.

The central government, especially the military, hesitates to form the TRC body. With this reconciliation mechanism, the central government is anxious that it would have to acknowledge and apologize for the past 'mistreatment' of Papua. Therefore, with the withdrawal of the national TRC law No. 27/2004 by the Constitutional Court in 2006, the government argues that there is no basic law for forming the

15 Papua's OTSUS mandated seats for Papuan-appointed members (1/4 of total members) in the Papuan People Regional Representative Council (DPRP). There are 14 Papuan-appointed members out of 68 DPRP members in Papua Province and 11 Papuan-appointed members out of 56 DPRP members in Papua Barat Province. Until March 2024, these numbers have stayed the same. After the division of Papua into six provinces, the new General Elections might alter this distribution. This mechanism was used only at the provincial level. However, after the enactment of the revised OTSUS No. 2/2021, there will be appointed members (1/4 of DPRD's total members) at the district/city level.

16 Aceh is a province in Indonesia that has also asked for secession from the Indonesian Republic. It had suffered prolonged conflict with the Indonesian government and was a military operation area (*Daerah Operasi Militer*, DOM) from 1989 to 1998. Like Papua, the central government granted OTSUS to Aceh to reduce independence demands. In Aceh, OTSUS allowed the formation of local parties.

TRC in Papua, even though OTSUS has mandated it. This argument, however, is still debatable. Human rights activists argue that the Papuan TRC can be formed because Papuan autonomy law has a *lex-specialist* nature; therefore, no other law is needed as a basis for the establishment of the Papuan TRC. While the commission has not yet been established, the news of military deployment in Papua continues. It sharpens the image that the central government is not serious about solving the conflict or stopping the military approach towards Papua.

Other recognition-related issues pertain to land rights. For example, the existence of *adat* land has been legally recognized by OTSUS. However, many Papuan *adat* communities still lose their *adat* land due to large scale investment (Dewi, 2016; Hadiprayitno, 2015; Ito et al., 2014; Lamonge, 2012; Savitri & Price, 2016). Even *adat* leaders have been used as local brokers to persuade, or sometimes even to 'represent' their community (Dewi, 2016; Savitri & Price, 2016). The national transmigration program to Papua continues, even though Papuans have asked to discontinue this program to control the number of non-Papuans in Papua. Since its launch, this program has spurred competition over resources and lands between Papuans and non-Papuans. The proportion of the Papuan population has become less than that of non-Papuans arguably because of this program (Elmslie & Webb-Gannon, 2013; Widjojo et al., 2009; Widyatmoko & Dewi, 2019). This demographic shift is a sensitive issue because it is closely related to the experience of discrimination and marginalization as a source of conflict, especially during the new order period.

The OTSUS funds, which have always been the 'pride' of the central government as an indicator of successful Papuan recognition, have a different meaning for Papuans (based on my interviews and collected data in several villages in Papua). Many informants regarded the OTSUS fund as a form of compensation for human rights violations during military operations in Papua and as a means to keep Papua part of Indonesian sovereignty. This fund as a return for Papuan natural resources' exploitation is another perception among the Papuan community. Therefore, they assumed they could have direct access to this fund (interview with LM, 8 January 2014; JB, 15 August 2014; MK, 20 August 2014; SL, 2 November 2014; AS, 1 August 2019; LI, 2 November 2019).

The perception gap between the central government and Papuans regarding the definition of recognition shows that the relationship between them is still dominated by distrust. The central government has fixed its criteria for justifying its claim that Papua has been recognized. Papuans, on the other hand, have different indicators assessing that the central government has failed to recognize their rights. The racism incident in August 2019 further 'drained' Papuans' trust in the Indonesian government.

THE INCIDENT OF RACISM AGAINST PAPUAN DURING THE OTSUS PERIOD

The voices questioning Papuan recognition under the mandate of OTSUS became louder after the incident of racism against Papuan students that occurred on 16 August 2019 in Surabaya, East Java. It was followed by riots that spread quickly across Papua. Many human rights activists accused the Indonesian government of 'discrimination' in handling the case. The suspect who persecuted and racially abused Papuan students in Surabaya was only charged with a light sentence compared to Papuans who were

charged with treason (*makar*) due to their massive demonstration in Papua following the incident. For example, Buchtar Tabuni, the leader of West Papua National Committee (*Komite Nasional Papua Barat*, KNPB) was charged with 17 years, even though he did not attend the demonstration that caused riots in Jayapura on 29 August 2019 (see Table 1).

No	Name	Affiliation	Charged	Verdict
Demonstration in Jakarta (Trial in Jakarta)[a]				
1.	Surya Anta Ginting	Spokesperson of FRI-WP	17 months	9 months
2.	Ambrosius Mulai	Student Activist	17 months	9 months
3.	Dano Anes Tabuni	Student Activist	17 months	9 months
4.	Charles Kossay	Student Activist	17 months	9 months
5.	Ariana Lokbere	Student Activist	17 months	9 months
6.	Isay Wenda	Student Activist	10 months	8 months
Papua Riots (Trial in Balikpapan, East Kalimantan)[b]				
1	Buchtar Tabuni	Vice-Chairman of ULMWP (former chairman of KNPB and NPWP founder)	17 years	11 months
2	Agus Kossay	Chairman of KNPB	15 years	11 months
3	Stevanus Itlay	Chairman of KNPB Mimika Branch	15 years	11 months
4	Ferry Gombo	Former of Student Executive Council Chairman of Cenderawasih University	10 years	10 months
5	Alexander Gobay	Chairman of Student Executive Council of USTJ	5 years	10 months
6	Irwanus Uropmabin	Student activist of USTJ	10 years	10 months
7	Hengky Hilapok	Student activist of USTJ	5 years	10 months

Table 1. Activist and Papuan treason suspects in the demonstration against Papuan racism. *KNPB is the pro-Papua independence movement established in 2008. NPWP is the National Parliament of West Papua that also supported the Papua independence movement and is affiliated with the ULMWP (United Liberation Movement of West Papua), led by Benny Wenda*. (Santoso & Aranditio, 24 April 2020; The court verdict read by judges on 17 June 2020).

The law enforcement process after the incident gave rise to the Papuan Lives Matter movement, which was inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement in the USA. This movement protested against the arrest of several Papuans alleged to be the masterminds behind the anti-racism unrest. The intense campaign of Papuan Lives Matter, especially on social media, influenced the trial results for seven Papuan political prisoners. The judge found them guilty, but the decisions were not as harsh as the prosecutors demanded; the defendants were only sentenced to 10/11 months in prison.

The movement gained momentum in the discourse on revising Papua's OTSUS at the end of its fund allocation in 2021. Seventeen organizations declared their rejection of the government's plan to revise OTSUS.[17] This declaration further exposed the failure of OTSUS to respect and recognize Papuan rights and led to political mobilization campaigning for a referendum. This incident was not the first time OTSUS has been rejected. Waves of objection arose in 2001 because of the Papuan independence

17 Those organizations were KNPB, AMP, Gempar-P, Garda-P, Sonamappa, FIM-WP, WPNA, FNMPP, SPMPB, MAI, APAP, LEPEMAWI Timika, AMAN Sorong, BABEOSERBIKAR, ULMWP, Green Papua, and Papua Customary Council (DAP) Bomberay Region.

movement's increasing demand for independence. The leader of PDP, Theys Eluay, demanded Papuan independence, and his resistance towards the implementation of OTSUS was believed to be the reason behind his murder on 10 November 2001. In 2005, the DAP symbolically returned OTSUS to the government because it failed to protect the rights of Papuans. DAP objected to the elected members of the MRP inaugurated by the Ministry of Home Affairs in October 2005 because of an unsatisfactory selection process. Several candidates who were elected by Papuans and considered pro-Papuan independence were not summoned. Resistance also came from the central government's side under President Megawati Sukarnoputri (2001-2004), who was unwilling to grant OTSUS. She feared that OTSUS would be used to enhance the Papuan independence movement.[18] Besides the limitation of the MRP's authority under government regulation No. 54/2004, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (2004-2014) also enacted government regulation No. 77/2007 that restricted the use of the head of the Victoria-Crowned Pigeons (*Burung Mambruk*) or the raising of the Morning Star flag (*Bendera Bintang Kejora*) as Papuan local symbols, as proposed by the MRP (Dewi, 2017a).

THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE AND THE DETERIORATION OF PAPUAN RECOGNITION

After riots broke out in several areas in Papua following the racism incident, the central government decided to deploy security personnel – the Indonesian National Military (*Tentara Nasional Indonesia*, TNI), and the Indonesian National Police (*Polisi Republik Indonesia*, Polri) – to stabilize the situation. This security approach is not new, as a series of military operations have been conducted in the name of securing national integration after Papua was integrated into Indonesia. Several cases of human rights violations have been investigated since then.

Ironically, the circle of violence has grown wider after two decades of Papuan special autonomy. Violence is perpetrated not only by the TNI and Polri, but also by the West Papua National Liberation Army (WPNLA). Continuous retaliatory acts of violence have impacted the community. WPNLA infiltration in the villages has become a justification for sweeping arrests by TNI/Polri. Several WPNLA members have allegedly become *adat* key persons, and therefore, TNI/Polri consider it legal to conduct their operations in the villages (Supriatma, 2013; Wangge & Webb-Gannon, 2020). A similar narrative has been offered by the spokesperson of the WPNLA concerning a shooting incident involving Istaka Karya workers at the Trans-Papua Highway construction site in Nduga in 2018. The WPNLA spokesperson stated that these workers were not civilians but military personnel (Mambor & Dianti, 2018); but whether the workers were military personnel or civilians is still contested (Chauvel, 2019; Wangge & Webb-Gannon, 2020).

18 President Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) (1999-2001) initiated the discussion of OTSUS for Papua. During the discussions of the drafts, he was impeached and replaced by the then Vice President Megawati Sukarnoputri. The Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), her government party, was against the Papuan's draft version of OTSUS. The team from Papua forced the central government to withdraw the government version of OTSUS by giving it the choice of withdrawing the draft or giving independence to Papua. After the draft was finalized on 20 October 2001, Megawati initiated several policies inconsistent with the core idea of the law, such as the acceleration of *pemekaran* and the delaying of the formation of the MRP (Dewi, 2017a).

This incident initiated a conflict in Nduga, which caused a massive exodus of the community. Approximately 44,821 residents from 123 villages of 11 sub-districts were forced to leave their houses (Wangge & Webb-Gannon, 2020). The government deployed military personnel to secure Nduga as a 'troubled region'. In 2020, the Vice Minister of Public Works and Housing directly asked the chief of staff of the Indonesian Army (*Kepala Staf Angkatan Darat,* KASAD), General Andika Perkasa, who is believed to have been involved in the conspiracy behind Theys Eluay's murder, to help secure the Trans-Papua Highway construction. Since then, TNI combat troops have been deployed to secure vital national assets (Wicaksono, 2020).

In 2018, the WPNLA declared an open war to challenge TNI/Polri in Tembagapura, the highland area of the Mimika district in Central Papua. This armed conflict has caused repetitive violence, which has threatened the civilian community and led to another wave of internally displaced population from several villages near the mining areas of Freeport, such as Banti, Untikini, Longsoran, Batu Besar, and Kimbely (Media Indonesia, 2020). The involvement of military personnel in securing the Freeport mining areas is, however, problematic. Although internal security in Papua has come under the authority of Polri, the involvement of TNI is still significant, especially its involvement in military operations other than war.[19] The existence of a joint regional defense command (*Komando Gabungan Wilayah Pertahanan*) based in Timika, the capital city of Mimika district,[20] adds complexity to the conflict. After the launch of the Presidential Instruction No. 9/2020, investment in Papua increased. The opening of mining and plantation areas further escalated the armed conflict, such as in the gold mining area of Wabu Blok in Sugapa, Intan Jaya district, where civilians have become victims since February 2020 (Costa, 2022; Kogoya, 2023; Walhi, 2021).

The killing of Pastor Yeremia Zanambani in Hitadipa, Intan Jaya district, on 19 September 2020, added to the conflict. The TNI alleged that the perpetrators of the shooting were members of the WPNLA, but the WPNLA denied this accusation. In another version of the story, local religious leaders suspected that TNI personnel were responsible for the incident. This incident has been the third killing of a pastor since 2004. The firefight between TNI and WPNLA and the shooting of Pastor Yeremia led to the speculation that this war was to 'clear out' the gold-rich area of Sugapa to be followed by an investment in the area, where Aneka Tambang Company has a holding. This event is said to be similar to Nduga, where a pastor was killed in 2018 to maintain limited access (interview with RT, 2 October 2020). As reported by a Papuan NGO (*Aliansi Demokrasi untuk Papua*, ALDP) in 2022, the number of cases

19 The internal security in Papua became the authority of Polri after the police and military separated through the military reform in 2002. However, as regulated in the TNI Law No. 34/2004, military operations other than war created a space for TNI's involvement in Papua as a security issue. TNI can conduct counterinsurgency in Papua. It is also involved in border, troubled regions, and national vital assets security operations. No other region in Indonesia has become the subject of multiple military operations as Papua. Operations are undertaken not only by the existing army in Papua, often called organic troops, but also by outside forces known as BKO (*Bawah Kendali Operasi*, Under Operational Control), or non-organic troops, to help the organic troops (see Supriatma, 2013; Syailendra, 2016).

20 This Kogabwilhan was formed together with two other Kogabwilhan – Kogabwilhan I in Tanjung Pinang, Riau, and Kogabwilhan II in Balikpapan, East Kalimantan – by TNI Commander Chief Hadi Tjahjono in 2019.

of violence in Papua is still high. There were 63 cases in 2021 and 53 cases in 2022 associated with the armed conflict. Of the 53 cases in 2022, 43 occurred in the highland areas (Figure 2).

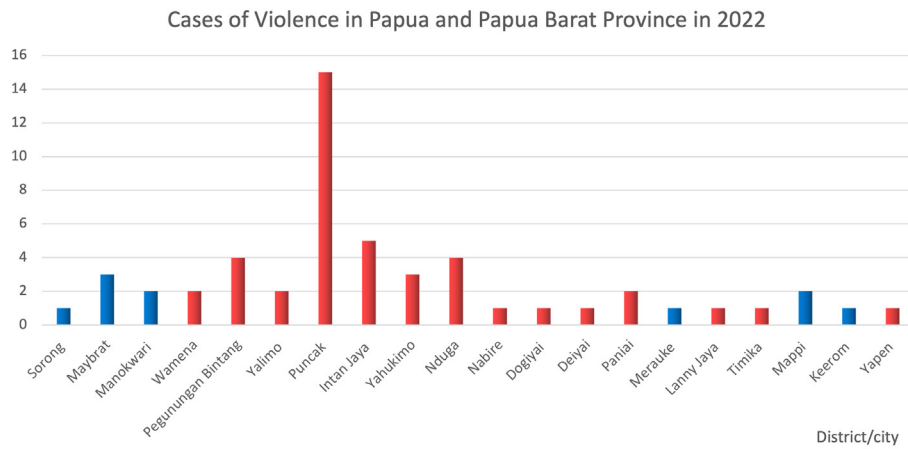

Figure 2. Cases of violence in Papua based on district/city. *The red color indicates a district/city in the highland areas*. (ALDP, 5 February 2023).

The continuation of TNI/Polri personnel deployment in Papua has caused anxiety among Papuans. They are worried that this situation will end in massive violence and human rights violations. The past events in Nduga, Mimika, and Intan Jaya support their argument. On 7 September 2020, former army general and back then Minister of Defense, Prabowo Subianto, agreed to recruit 1,000 non-commissioned officers through an OTSUS mechanism called Bintara OTSUS to increase the number of military personnel, especially Papuans, in the new regional military command (*Komando Daerah Militer*, KODAM) of Kasuari, Papua Barat (Antara Papua, 2020). On the one hand, this was interpreted as an affirmation policy for Papuans. On the other hand, human rights activists became concerned that this policy intensified the government's security approach and continued to increase the number of TNI/Polri in Papua. Repeated violence has created a space for the independence movement to voice its demand for external self-determination even more loudly.

QUESTIONING JOKOWI'S COMMITMENT TO PAPUA AFTER TWO DECADES OF OTSUS

The current conditions in Papua have made several parties question the implementation of OTSUS as an instrument for conflict resolution or Papuan recognition. The security approach, which the implementation of OTSUS should have replaced, is still well in place. Where is Papuan recognition if this approach is the government's main policy towards Papuan?

This question has been directed at former President Jokowi (2014-2024). Many activists had placed their hopes in him when he became elected as president in 2014. He seemed to promise to bring peace to Papua. His determination to win Papuan

hearts was symbolized by visiting Papua several times. Jokowi visited Papua nine times during his first term, more than any previous president had. He visited several districts in Papua, including Asmat, Nduga, Wamena, and Merauke, to directly meet the Papuan community. His visit to Nduga had an important message against its status as a 'troubled region'. Jokowi promised to replace the security approach with a welfare approach by improving access to education, health services, and infrastructures (Sebastian & Syailendra, 2015; Wangge, 2014). He also expressed a desire to resume the long-stalled Jakarta-Papua dialogue. In 2017, Jokowi appointed Pater Neles Tebay, Wiranto, and Teten Masduki[21] as key persons in the initiation of a sectoral dialogue. He moreover released several Papuan political prisoners, including Filep Karma[22], to show his commitment to solving the conflict in Papua.

Jokowi also promised to solve the problem of human rights violations in Papua. He instructed former Coordinating Minister of Political, Legal, and Security Affairs (2015-2016) and retired army general, Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan, to form an integrated team (*tim terpadu)* to work from 25 April to 25 October 2016 on the investigation of alleged human rights abuses in Papua. Of the 22 cases investigated, the team concluded that only three cases constituted human rights violations. After Wiranto replaced Luhut on 27 July 2016 as Coordinating Minister of Political, Legal, and Security Affairs, he continued the investigation of those cases. Eventually, the investigation team concluded that only one of the three cases could be classified as a severe human rights violation. However, this process was not continued until the end of Wiranto's office, and the case has remained unresolved until today.

Jokowi's approach towards cases of human rights violations in Papua and his appointment of General Andika as KASAD in 2018 disappointed Papuans as well as human rights activists.[23] The conflict in Nduga and prevailing racism added to the problem of human rights violations towards the end of his first presidential term. Shortly after the anti-racism unrest in Papua in 2019, Jokowi invited 61 Papuans to join a 'dialogue'. However, DAP strongly criticized this move because the 61 invited Papuans had no background in the Papuan conflict; they were not essential figures. Moreover, how Jokowi dealt with the unrest in Papua, including the internet ban during anti-racism protests from 19 August until 9 September 2019,[24] augmented Papuans' grievances.

21 Neles Tebay was the leader of Papua Peace Network. He actively advocated peace dialogue between Papua and the Indonesian government. Wiranto was the Coordinating Minister of Political, Legal, and Security Affairs (2016-2019) and leader of the Hanura political party (2006-2016). Teten Masduki was the Chief of the Presidential Staff Office (2015-2018). He was appointed Minister for Cooperatives and Small and Medium Enterprises in 2019.

22 Filep Karma is a prominent figure in the West Papua freedom movement.

23 Andika Perkasa is a son-in-law of Hendropriyono, former chief of the National Intelligence Agency. There was a controversy regarding his fast promotions, until he was appointed as KASAD in 2018.

24 After the racism protests, the central government limited access to the internet in Papua, starting from 19 August 2019. This action was followed by blocking the internet in 29 districts/cities in Papua Province and 13 districts/cities in Papua Barat Province from 21 August 2019 until 4 September 2019. Then, the central government decided to continue its strategy in 4 districts/cities in Papua (the district of Jayapura, Mimika, Jayawijaya, and the city of Jayapura) and Sorong city and Manokwari district in Papua Barat Province until 9 September 2019. Eventually, the central government was brought to court, and the court decided that it had violated Article 40 (2a and 2b) of the Electronic Information and Transaction Law No. 11/2008 (BBC, 2020).

Violence continued to recur in Papua after Jokowi became re-elected as president for a second term (2019-2024). The shooting of Pastor Yeremia in 2020 made human rights activists again question Jokowi's commitment to solving human rights violations in Papua. Even though Jokowi instructed the formation of a joint fact-finding team (*Tim Gabungan Pencari Fakta*, TGPF) on 1 October 2020 to prevent conflict escalation in Papua, Papuan human rights activists, academics, and churches expressed their doubt over this team. They argued that the appointment of TGPF members was elitist and exclusive. The lack of capacity to understand the Papuan conflict became another argument. The previous Coordinating Ministers of Political, Legal, and Security Affairs had failed to take concrete action against serious human rights violations in Papua raised their skepticism over TGPF as well.

Jokowi's approach towards Papua during his second presidential term reaped more criticism than during his first term, mainly due to his planned revision of OTSUS in 2021. Policy inconsistencies occurring until the present have created deep-seated distrust between Jakarta and Papua. Jokowi's President Instruction (*Instruksi Presiden,* Inpres) No. 9/2020 mentioned a new framework for Papua, which aimed at accelerating development in Papua. It would apply dialogue to accommodate Papuan society, culture, and custom (*adat*) towards Papuan development. However, a careful reading of the Inpres reveals that it is heavily weighed on how to attract and debottleneck investment in Papua. Investment in Papua has been closely related to misrecognition, marginalization, *adat* land grabs, and the (re)production of violence, as experienced by the Papuan community in the Freeport Mining Project, the Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate (MIFEE) Project, the Intan Jaya Mining Project, and others.

CONCLUSION

Granting special autonomy to Papua in 2001 aimed at reducing Papuans' demand for independence from Indonesian sovereignty. It was treated as a 'remedy' to Papuans' demand for external self-determination by granting them internal self-determination through OTSUS. Its principles include Papuan recognition and the protection of Papuan rights. The racism case of 2019 once again revealed the irony and paradox of OTSUS. As evidence shows, the implementation of OTSUS has not worked as expected. There is a broad perception gap between the central government and Papuans in measuring Papuan recognition. Furthermore, the problem of human rights violations in Papua still needs to be solved. However, pro-Papuan-independence organizations have continually utilized this issue to articulate their calls for independence. The TRC, as mandated by OTSUS to solve past cases of human rights violations, has not been formed yet. Moreover, the continuation and escalation of violence, which has caused a humanitarian crisis, made Papuans doubt the existence of Papuan special autonomy at all. Political access has become an empty rhetoric after the Constitutional Court decision to restrict the formation of Papuan local parties.

In February 2021, the central government proposed to revise OTSUS without the active involvement of the MRP. As representatives of Papua, the MRP rejected the revision draft, arguing that the central government had failed to include the MRP as a formal representation mandated by OTSUS. Besides, the draft did not address the main problems of OTSUS during its implementation period. It only focused on the

extension of funds and the acceleration of *pemekaran*. Hence, Papuans continue to question whether OTSUS still aims at Papuan protection and recognition. This condition has incited further conflict in Papua.

Although the revision draft was opposed by the MRP and by 17 Papuan organizations, the revision process continued, and the parliament finally passed the OTSUS revision, Law No. 2/2021, on 15 July 2021. It revised 18 articles. These revisions included the continuation of OTSUS fund for Papua (2.25% from the national general allocation budget), the abolition of the article on local party formation in Papua, following the decision of the Constitutional Court on 26 October 2020, and the acceleration of the division of Papua and Papua Barat Province. The revision of OTSUS and the acceleration of *pemekaran* of Papua and Papua Barat Province into six provinces caused further disappointment because Papuan participation and the MRP, as a representation of Papuans, have been further limited. This situation has given rise to more pessimism regarding whether OTSUS would be able to protect Papuan rights and to fears against attempts at re-centralization as indicated by the central government.

In theory, the idea of autonomy is to grant internal self-determination to a marginalized, powerless, or minority community through legal recognition. Internal self-determination entails the right of people to choose their political, economic, social, and cultural systems by respecting territorial integrity. In the case of Papua, political decision-making processes often do not involve Papuans actively. This exclusion is a misrecognition that provokes Papuan disappointment with the central government. The central government would need to regain the trust of the Papuan community by fully implementing OTSUS. Dialogue could open communication between Papua and the Indonesian government and promote trust between the two parties. However, what is needed is a wider Papuan involvement and participation in policy decision-making to realize the promise of Papuan internal self-determination through OTSUS.

In 2024, Prabowo Subianto, Jokowi's previous Defense Minister, was elected president and Papuan human rights activists are already sceptic that he is able to reduce violence in Papua. A look into Prabowo's vision and mission document shows that there is no specific discussion on how to solve the conflict. During the presidential debate on human rights issues in Papua, Prabowo mentioned that the government had to protect Papuan. He argued that separatism and international intervention have caused problems in Papua. Therefore, law enforcement, strengthening the existence of TNI/Polri, and economic development are his solution to the conflict in Papua. This approach has become a major concern of human rights activists. They fear that this tactic, especially the strength of TNI/Polri in Papua, will only continue the cycle of violence. Prabowo's involvement in human rights violations in Timor-Leste during Suharto's authoritarian regime supports their perspective.

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DISCLOSURE

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Digital Intimacies and the Construction of Social Capital in a Heteronormative Society: A Study of Dating App Users in Indonesia

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Dating apps are digital platforms that mediate meaningful relationships and facilitate digital intimacies. This study examines the construction of social capital by dating app users in Indonesia. Using Pierre Bourdieu's and Robert D. Putnam's concepts of social capital as well as the virtual ethnography method, this study focuses on how heterosexual and homosexual users of dating apps in heteronormative Indonesia manage to build digital intimacies and accumulate social capital. This study shows that dating app users in Indonesia assemble social capital through networked individualism and automated connectivity. The results demonstrate that dating app users exploit digital intimacies as resources to expand their networks, which enables them to gain certain benefits. Additionally, homosexual users build digital intimacies to gain a sense of acceptance and belonging in digital space. They show more efforts towards being inclusive and active in accumulating and exchanging social capital than their heterosexual counterparts.

Keywords: Dating Apps; Digital Intimacies; Heteronormativity; Homosexual User; Social Capital

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of digital platforms mediating interactions between people has offered new opportunities amidst the weakening of social and personal ties (Baym, 2015). Deborah Chambers (2006), in her study of new social bonds in contemporary Western society, asserts that the development of communication and information technologies, such as the internet, email, and mobile telephone devices, has instigated new ways of experiencing relationships and a sense of belonging. Communication technologies allow the construction of social networks that transcend various spatial and temporal constraints. Social connections and personal closeness with family, friends, neighbors, and couples

in an intimate relationship are increasingly mediated via and through online dating applications (or dating apps). The global outbreak of COVID-19 has become a showcase of how communication technologies, including digital platforms, have enabled people worldwide to keep connected (Vargo et al., 2021). Further triggered by the pandemic, intimacy has undergone a notable transformation due to social distancing policies and reduced physical mobility. Traditional face-to-face intimate relationships increasingly transition towards so-called virtual or digital intimacies (McGlotten, 2013; Thorpe et al., 2023).

The popularity of digital intimacies is marked by the increasing number of online dating app users, which has surged since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Data from businessofapps.com shows that online dating app users worldwide reached 323.9 million in 2021 (Rizaty, 2022). In Indonesia, online dating apps also gained high popularity during the early days of the pandemic. The subscription costs of Indonesian users for dating apps throughout 2020 reached USD 11.94 million. This number decreased slightly in 2021 when the total costs spent by Indonesian users on dating apps reached USD 10.93 million (IDR 157.24 billion) (Mahdi, 2022). These data show that the utilization of virtual platforms for dating has emerged as a viable alternative for fostering intimacies and sociality.

During the pandemic, people turned to dating apps primarily seeking affective connections, including both sexual relationships (Banerjee & Rao, 2021) and friendships, to overcome loneliness resulting from decreased physical contact (Asti, 2021). Moreover, some cases show that dating apps are also used to build transactional relationships to gain economic or commercial benefits (Andhika, 2022). Others show that digital intimacies offer transformative relationships, especially for individuals who occupy non-dominant positions regarding gender, race, sexuality, and other social differences. For example, gay and lesbian subjects, as part of non-dominant subjects in a heteronormative societal structure, have found greater flexibility in establishing and performing intimacies in virtual spaces. Digital platforms provide homosexual individuals with avenues to oppose or negotiate social expectations and pressures that frequently restrict their activities and expressions in offline spaces (Chambers, 2006; McGlotten, 2013). In Indonesia, where public expression of sexuality by gays and lesbians, as sexual minorities, is constrained, dating apps serve as important channels for expanding their connections within the gay communities (Listiorini & Davis, 2017). However, since the heteronormative Indonesian government considers homosexuality a threat to the perceived moral fabric of society, it has banned gay networking websites and dating apps, such as Grindr, Blued, and BoyAhoy (Greenhalgh, 2021; Solomon, 2016). This limits the choices of Indonesian gays and lesbians since they are unable to access the banned dating apps unless they utilize a VPN service.[1] Consequently, since 2016, Indonesian gays and lesbians have come to use perceived heterosexual dating apps to get connected to gay/lesbian communities, such as Tinder. Based on a survey by Rakuten Insight in September 2020, Tinder is the most popular dating app in Indonesia (Asti, 2021).

1 Before the state formally banned LGBTIQ-affiliated apps and websites in 2016, gay dating apps were available and accessible in Indonesia.

Dobson et al. (2018) argue that intimate relationships mediated by digital platforms are resources for social capital accumulation. By building digital intimacies, individuals can broaden their network of relationships. At some point, social capital can be exchanged and converted into other forms of capital. Consequently, digital intimacies established via and through online dating apps are potential sources of social capital, which can be exchanged and mobilized to gain advantages. One of the striking examples is the case of a Tinder male user from Singapore who deliberately built intimate relationships with female matches on Tinder. Once rapport, leveraging his role as an insurance marketing agent, he proceeded to promote and sell life insurance programs (Hestianingsih, 2022). In this sense, he deliberately used dating apps to broaden his relationships for commercial purposes.

Following this background, this study aims to scrutinize how online dating app users in Indonesia use digital intimacies as tools for cultivating social capital that is subsequently exchanged and mobilized to serve specific interests. Based on the idea that digital intimacies promise transformative relationships, particularly among marginalized groups, the study aims to examine differences between heterosexual and homosexual users of dating apps in heteronormative Indonesia in building digital intimacies and accumulating social capital. This study draws on the concept of social capital from Robert D. Putnam (2020) to examine the manifestation of togetherness and connection between individuals via and through dating apps. Additionally, it incorporates Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) concept of social capital to examine how social capital, built through digital intimacies, is converted and exchanged by heterosexual and homosexual users of dating apps to gain certain benefits.

DIGITAL INTIMACIES AND TRANSFORMATIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Digital intimacies are often defined as forms of intimacy that are present in the virtual or mediated realms. According to Shaka McGlotten (2013, p. 1), cyberspace has rendered intimacies virtual by building a connection with another party and a sense of belonging through communication technologies. Similarly, mediated intimacies refer to the intimacies and personal connectivity built and facilitated through digital platforms (Attwood et al., 2017; Chambers, 2013). Various digital platforms, mainly social media platforms, have played a significant role in facilitating intimate relationships but also in rendering intimacy public. In this sense, digital platforms make forms of intimacy, previously considered personal and private, accessible to many people (Baym, 2015). Affective closeness and connectivity between users can be built and publicly shown through social media.

Constitutive of digital intimacies, relationships can be built through the exchanges of messages and information, both verbally and visually. Virtual spaces also allow for identity games, wherein individuals can present Do-It-Yourself (DIY) biographies and polish or select self-narratives they want to display. Interactions tend to be temporary, short-lived, and quickly lost (Chambers, 2006), causing increasingly fluid, fluctuating, and flexible social bonds. Notwithstanding, as our observations show, digital intimacies are a stepping stone towards more established and stable relationships offline.

The concept of intimacy itself is not limited to relationships based on romantic love or sexual desire, as in dating. Francine Klagsburn asserts that intimacy refers to

the individuals' ability to open up or reveal information about themselves to others, as well as to the need to be listened to by others (in Shumway, 2003, pp. 140-141). Individuals need intimacy to avoid and eliminate unpleasant feelings, such as loneliness. Accordingly, intimacy can develop through friendships, family relations, as well as through romantic and sexual relationships with partners.

In digital intimacies, virtual spaces underpinned by digital media platforms enable the articulation of transformative relationships. In their study of virtual intimacies, McGlotten (2013, p. 2) assert that when intimacy has gone virtual through various communication technologies, virtual spaces promise unlimited pleasure and freedom from various restrictions and social pressures that prevail in society. Those virtual spaces provide a kind of liberation for a subject to explore, express, and experiment with intimacy. McGlotten's example highlights how gay men utilize virtual spaces to envision and create relationships and a sense of belonging that may diverge from the dominant notions in society. Digital platforms allow sociocultural meanings of intimacy to be contested (Dobson et al., 2018). Such platforms provide a liminal space where possibilities and boundaries become intertwined and private and public matters twisted. Moreover, in such virtual spaces gender and sexual relations are fluid, not necessarily corresponding to perceived ideal sets dominating in society.

SOCIAL CAPITAL

The concept of social capital has been employed to examine the challenges and opportunities of both individuals and groups in diverse social and economic settings (Kim & Yoon, 2021; Sunanta, 2022; Trupp, 2015). Digital intimacies established via and through online dating apps are potential sources for constructing social capital that can be exchanged and mobilized to gain profit. Pierre Bourdieu (1986) outlines four forms of capital. In addition to social capital, he presents economic, cultural, and symbolic capital. These forms of capital are essential factors in defining an individual's class position within society. According to Bourdieu (1986, p. 21), social capital is an aggregate of resources related to an individual's social networks and group membership. The volume of social capital an actor owns depends on the network of connections the actor can have and mobilize (Anthias, 2007) and the volume of other forms of capital he or she possesses. Bourdieu's idea of social capital emphasizes the collective and individual strategies in building permanent networks of relations that allow the accumulation of other forms of capital. Moreover, he highlights the presence of conflicts and competing interests among actors, detailing how they leverage and mobilize their various forms of capital to navigate and prevail in a social arena.

Bourdieu's conceptualization of social capital differs from Putnam's approach. In his book *Bowling Alone, Revised and Updated: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Putnam (2020) refers to the networks, norms, and trust that facilitate cooperation and collaboration within communities. He argues that a decline in social capital, evidenced by reduced participation in civic activities, has detrimental effects on societal well-being and civic engagement. Hence, social capital includes both individual and collective aspects (Portes, 2000). The individual aspect refers to how individuals build connections that benefit their interests. The collective aspect is related to how communities develop and maintain social capital as a collective asset.

Norms of reciprocity and trust are inherent in these social networks. In this context, Putnam distinguishes between bonding and bridging social capital. Bonding social capital is related to inward-looking relationships within groups of similar interest or status, which can reinforce the exclusivity of homogeneous identities and groups. Meanwhile, bridging social capital is a form of outward-looking social capital that tends to embrace and bridge differences between heterogeneous groups and individuals. While bonding social capital is considered valuable for strengthening reciprocity and mobilizing social solidarity within a particular group of people, bridging social capital is beneficial for building connections with outsiders and external stakeholders, serving an essential function in the diffusion of information. Crucially, Putnam's concept of social capital does not consider conflict and power relations between individuals, as underlined in Bourdieu's concept.

RESEARCH METHOD

This qualitative study uses a virtual ethnographic method based on Hine (2000). In an increasingly complex and mediated society, the virtual ethnographic approach seeks to explore empirical phenomena in virtual spaces where face-to-face relationships are no longer needed (Hine, 2000). The data were obtained through in-depth virtual interviews and by tracing virtual spaces where informants established their digital intimacies. Tracing the virtual spaces allowed us to collect and document data on the online environment of dating apps and social networking sites used by the research participants to form and develop digital connections and intimacies. We used the collected data to examine and map the connections established within these virtual settings. These connections encompass interpersonal links between individuals engaging in online interactions and technological links between users and digital platforms facilitating their interactions. Informants in this study were recruited through online invitations on social media platforms.

We collected data from June to November 2022 by inviting individuals of any gender orientation who were active users of dating apps for at least two years. We chose informants aged between 20 and 30 because they are the primary target audience of various dating apps (Asti, 2021; Rizaty, 2022). Additionally, in heteronormative Indonesia, there are significant social pressures and expectations surrounding formal intimate relationships, particularly regarding marriage. These pressures notably impact individuals under the age of 30, regardless of gender (Noviani, 2009; Swandari, 2011). Consequently, we expected users aged between 20 and 30 to be active users of dating apps in response to these societal pressures.

The final interview data derives from eight informants who self-identified as men and women, representing heterosexual and homosexual orientations. Among these eight informants, there were two heterosexual men (P and I), two heterosexual women (A and R), three gay men (B, S, and F), and one lesbian (V). The data were organized based on three primary aspects: (1) the specific dating apps utilized by participants; (2) the reasons for their usage; and (3) the personal experiential narratives shared by the participants as they interacted with these apps. Subsequently, the data were analyzed by identifying the established connections, outlining the development of connections enabled by dating apps, and exploring the shift towards social

networking sites outside the realm of dating apps. The data analysis was conducted by using the frameworks of social capital put forth by Pierre Bourdieu and Robert D. Putnam, as outlined in the previous section.

DIGITAL SOCIAL CAPITAL IN AUTOMATED CONNECTIVITIES

Our analysis shows that both heterosexual and homosexual users of dating apps in Indonesia acknowledge that these platforms have facilitated connections. They have aided in the establishment of digital intimacies. Participants express that their main expectation on dating apps is cultivating and broadening like-minded friendship networks. While they view romantic or sexual intimacy as a welcomed addition, they do not discount the potential of finding a long-term romantic partner. Consequently, they try to build as many dyadic relationships as possible. Informant P, a heterosexual man, and informant B, a gay man, advocate the strategy of 'spreading the net' to actively accumulate social capital via online dating apps, as P explained:

> I just spread the net like clicking here and there until I find a match. Well, for me, the important thing is to match first; find as many as you can … not everything we click on will result in a match. The important thing is we can match first. (P, 1 October 2022)

Similarly, B shared:

> On Tinder, when it comes to matches, there are many. If I intensely tap in a day, I can go through 50 to 100 [profiles]. In a single day, if I just focus on playing Tinder, continuously tapping, it turns out that many people choose me, you know. It's crazy. They are abundant. (B, 28 September 2022)

An individual can be positioned as a match if they match the preferences set by a user. Like informants P and B, when entering a dating app, they will provide data about themselves, including visual data in profile photos, written personal biographies, and desired match preferences, such as height, age, educational background, and gender. P and B can then browse through other users' profiles and indicate interest by tapping, swiping, or sliding right. However, not all who are right-swiped can automatically become a match. The application's algorithmic system will process the user-inputted data to detect those whose profiles match the preferences of P and B. The app's algorithmic system eventually claims those who are compatible as matches. In other words, the mediality of the dating app assists P and B in filtering out who can be called a 'match.'

The strategy of 'spreading the net' is also implemented by using multiple dating apps simultaneously with the hope of obtaining more matches. The homosexual informants in this study, B and S, for instance, state to use four dating apps, all of which are active. By doing so, they have more opportunities to seek chat buddies and even friends who do not necessarily share the same sexual orientation as them. According to S, each app has different user segments and rules, allowing him to get a more varied network of friends. The experiences of our research participants

underscore the way users of dating apps build connections with one another, thereby establishing a foundation for their digital social capital. Digital capital has been defined by Ragnedda (2018) as the transformation of digital resources into social resources which individuals can benefit from. The connectivity between online users is pivotal for fostering digital social capital and arises not from organic interpersonal relationships but is a product of technological inscriptions and algorithmic systems. José van Dijck (2013, p. 12) terms such connectivity "automated connectivity", facilitated by digital platforms perpetuated through the engineering and manipulation of these platforms' technologies.

In dating apps, connectivity between users and matches is a product of the work of the app's algorithmic system through datafication. The connection between one user and another is possible because of the database and information inputted by each user in their profiles. User-related information, including the preferences of the desired partner or match, is detected and encoded by the automated system, allowing the users to automatically receive a list of matches deemed suitable by the system based on their preferences. Furthermore, the decision for a relationship to continue or discontinue is not an autonomous choice of the users but is rather regulated, directed, and designed by the application. The Bumble dating app, for instance, 'forces' users to respond to a chat immediately within 24 hours. If, within 24 hours, an incoming conversation is not immediately responded to, the match will automatically disappear as the user is deemed uninterested in opening or continuing a relationship with that match. On the other hand, according to the informants, the Coffee Meets Bagel app also 'forces' users to exchange telephone numbers or social media accounts only within seven days. Informant R, for instance, explained:

> Seems like the app gives better treatment to those who pay for premium features. If we stick with the free version, we're stuck with just a few slides and limited choices. It's as if we're collecting points, and that's how the bagels are involved. So, we need to purchase bagels in order to secure someone we're fond of. We must exchange phone numbers before the seven-day countdown ends, or else you'll lose touch with them. (R, 28 September 2022)

Digital social capital built through automated connectivity is not based on interpersonal ties and mutual acquaintances that are institutionalized through group membership, as stated by Bourdieu (1986), or collectively constructed resources, as suggested by Putnam (2020). The character of social capital in the digital space is slightly different because it is built upon automated connectivity that facilitates individuals to initiate and maintain contacts. Moreover, digital social capital is not necessarily built on networks of collective interaction. In the context of dating apps, an individual's effort to access and engage on a dating app marks their membership in a virtual dating community. However, a strong bond between members is not part of the virtual community characteristics. As Barry Wellman (2001, p. 238) asserts, digital connectivity relies on networked individualism, which refers to person-to-person relations that are spread out and have looser ties. In digital intimacies, relationships and connectivity between users are also established via networked individualism, which revolves around unique individuals who are connected because of their shared

social and emotional needs. For instance, the need to cope with loneliness during the COVID-19 pandemic has motivated dating app users to connect virtually with other people, as informant P shared:

> I installed dating apps for the first time when the pandemic hit. With all the quarantine and social distancing in place, not being able to hang out with friends and working from home really got me down. Things were tough, especially in the early days of the pandemic, and I felt pretty lonely. That's when I thought, why not install some games and dating apps? Chatting with my matches on those apps became my daily dose of connection and helped me shake off the loneliness. (P, 1 October 2022)

The participants in this study acknowledge their pursuit of relationships with numerous individuals to ease their loneliness. However, such relationships tend to be superficial and short-lived. The network of individualized and discrete person-to-person relationships they maintain lacks a strong bond and sense of belonging as a community.

KNOWLEDGE ACCUMULATION AND BENEFICIAL ENGAGEMENT

Social capital enables individuals to access diverse sources of information and knowledge. In some cases, individuals must use economic resources to further develop their social capital. Such situations are experienced, for instance, by informants P and F, who subscribe to paid dating apps with premium or VIP features. By subscribing to a VIP membership, P and F can actively search for profiles aligning with their preferences and obtain information about their matches on dating apps. Furthermore, it enables them to identify individuals who express interest in them. Social information seeking, according to Ellison et al. (2011), refers to individuals' efforts to gather information about newly connected parties, as cited in Rui et al., 2015, p. 502. This information can then be utilized to enhance interactions with these individuals. Research participants P and F exemplify this behavior, as they extract valuable information from their selected matches to facilitate interactive communication. Information-seeking efforts may also be utilized to develop stronger relationships, reduce uncertainty, and support the formation of bridging and bonding social capital (Rui et al., 2015, p. 500). The four homosexual participants in this study actively engage in forming multiple close connections through dating apps to gain insights into the gay community. Furthermore, participants F and B actively seek to broaden their understanding of the various experiences of gay individuals in a heteronormative society by familiarizing themselves with and exploring various gay dating apps. They claim to be able to map the diverse characters of gay individuals, connect with them, acquire extensive knowledge, such as sexual relations or role switching, and commonly used terms in gay interactions. Participant F shared how he explored gay dating apps:

> When I initially came out as gay, I decided to give Grindr a try in the hope of connecting with others who are as queer as I am. While using the app, I encountered several users who held a fat-phobic view. So, I switched to GROWLr,

> where I found that physical appearances weren't always prioritized in interactions. I observed that GROWLr serves as a welcoming space for individuals of larger sizes … It's a space for Bears and Chasers. By using the app, I gained valuable insights into the diverse personalities and attitudes present within the gay community. (F, 4 November 2022)

The accumulation of knowledge obtained from social information helps to expand their social interactions and engage in activities that are beneficial to them. For example, research participant S became more flexible and confident in initiating communication and fostering intimacy on dating apps. On the virtual platforms, he can more easily connect and engage with both homosexual and heterosexual individuals, resulting in a diverse range of friends that offer various rewards and benefits. Participant S also actively maintains ties with his friends on virtual platforms through regular chats, both on dating apps and social media accounts he has shared with them. While these networks of digital intimacy do not directly benefit him economically, they have proven to be advantageous in other ways. For instance, through his network of friends on dating apps, he receives much help with various tasks, such as completing job-related assignments or receiving guidance for research projects.

Participant B also gained numerous non-commercial benefits from his friendships on dating apps. For example, he received access to free dental care from a friend of his dating app match who knew someone who happened to be a dentist. This way, social capital is mobilized to connect to an actor outside of participant B's usual network; social capital functions as a resource that helps individuals to get active support that is not easily obtainable by others.

On multiple occasions, participant B received assistance in finding jobs from another match with whom he has developed an intimate relationship on dating apps. The benefits obtained by B are the result of mobilizing social capital by nurturing his virtual social relationships. Bourdieu (1986, p. 21) emphasized that social capital needs to be cultivated and must be maintained and strengthened. Informant B possesses cultural capital in the form of excellent communication skills, which enables him to mobilize social capital. He shared how some of the matches he met on dating apps state:

> How come you are so friendly in the initial encounter? You are different from others, who are so arrogant. I'm impressed with you. (B, 28 September 2022)

Participant R, who is an employee in a human resources department, yields a different experience. Several matches on dating apps approach informant R to seek job opportunities, a situation arising from her job title disclosed in her app bio. These matches explicitly inquire about job vacancies and, in some cases, even submit their CVs to her. She suspects that many people choose her as a match because they seek job opportunities. They are interested in relating to R primarily because they read her professional data on dating apps. These connections approach R with the intention of leveraging her position, seeking to convert the social relationship into economic capital by securing employment opportunities. In response to this approach, R showed understanding of her matches' circumstances and did not reject any papers handed

to her. However, R acknowledged that her reaction was just a display of empathy, and she never took the time to go through those papers.

In the context of social relationships mediated by digital technology, Andreas Wittel (2001) states that the connection between individuals no longer relies on the shared narratives and life experiences acquired during a particular time. Instead, it is based on virtual data and information exchange. In the digital era, everyone can create a Do-It-Yourself (DIY) biography, upload it, and share it on social media accounts, including dating apps. The users' self-perception is shaped by the extent to which they disclose and reveal information about themselves. As mentioned earlier, users are connected and defined as matches based on data read by the platform's algorithmic system. Whether or not one can get many matches depends significantly on the data uploaded to each account.

Another example is informant A, who invites suitable matches to become friends on Instagram. After establishing a good connection with individuals she met on dating apps, A takes their relationship further by engaging with them on Instagram. Then, she and her friends mutually follow each other's Instagram profiles. By doing so, A and her matches increase the number of followers of their respective Instagram accounts. In addition, informant A occasionally uses her Instagram account to market and sell products. The increasing number of followers on her Instagram account means an enlargement of the target market she addresses through promotions posted on her account. According to van Dijck (2013, p. 13), social media followers are often a marker of one's connectivity and sociability on social media. Van Dijck asserts that connectivity tends to be quantified and interpreted using the logic of the popularity principle: The more contacts you own and make, the more valuable you become because more people think you are well-known and, hence, want to connect with you. Followers, in other words, can be a resource that builds digital social capital, which can be profitable and converted into economic capital. Although informant A claims that the increase in followers on her Instagram account is insignificant, she does not deny that the more followers she has, the more opportunities there are to sell products on her account. Like informant A, informant I doubts that he can significantly increase the number of followers by moving his intimate relationships from dating apps to Instagram. He admits that his follower count has not significantly skyrocketed, but at least he can gain more audience to access and view the content he uploads on his Instagram account. Informant I's job as a content creator is to promote clients' products by creating content that includes reviews of the promoted products. He concedes that some of his clients are his existing followers or those who can access his posts on Instagram. By moving his connections from dating apps to Instagram, Informant I has expanded his client base, potentially attracting more individuals seeking his product review services. To sum up, the increase in followers indirectly brings economic benefits to I and A.

SENSE OF ACCEPTANCE AND BELONGING IN THE DIGITAL SPACE

The mobilization and distribution of social capital tend to be uneven and reproduce social inequalities (Bourdieu, 1986). There are clear differences in the activeness of informants in this study in building social capital on dating apps. Data suggests that homosexual participants tend to show more effort in being active and open to

relationships established through dating apps compared to heterosexual informants. The four homosexual informants in this study express a desire for a safe space where their identity is respected and recognized. Negotiating their homosexuality within a heteronormative society like Indonesia presents unique challenges. They experience social pressures and intimidation from authorities at the state level and members of society in everyday life. Informant F, for example, attempts to find a safe space through dating apps. He feels a sense of acceptance of the fact that he is gay. By accessing gay apps such as GROWLr, F feels he has a channel to express his experiences as a gay man and can be honest about his sexuality. The experience F refers to is not solely about sexuality; it encompasses interactions with other gay individuals, sharing insights on sexual health, and identifying with communities that share his sexual orientation. However, the fact that gay identity is still not accepted in Indonesian society compels F to consistently suppress his perceived non-conforming sexual orientation in the face of the prevailing heteronormative social system.

Similarly, V admits that as a lesbian, she feels pressure to remain silent about her sexual identity. She decides to hold back from disclosing and sharing her sexual identity. Even when she decides to use dating apps to get connected with other lesbians nearby, she chooses to use her alter ego to hide her real personal information. She argues:

> I'm not the type of person who wants to display myself on social media. So, on dating apps, I don't upload my photos either. If using a photo of me, I will choose the one in which my face is blurred. (V, 22 September 2022)

Despite restricting online self-disclosure, V admits that dating apps enable her to connect and gain information about the gay and lesbian communities in her vicinity. It is important to note that since 2016, the Indonesian Ministry of Communication and Information Technology has been blocking LGBT networking apps, including gay dating apps, out of fear of promoting gay lifestyle and sexual deviancy (Dina, 2018; Solomon, 2016). Homosexual informants in this study admit that the homophobic government policy not merely stigmatizes sexual minorities like them but also disregards their rights to freedom of speech and communication. Despite the bans, many continue to access gay dating apps like GROWLr, Grindr, Blued, or Her by using a VPN server to keep connected with gay communities, alongside using the perceived heterosexual dating apps, like Tinder or Bumble.

In their study, McGlotten (2013, p. 4) state that virtual space allows what he calls a "queer space", where social rules regarding normalized sexual relations, especially those defined by heteronormative ideals, can be suspended. This notion also resonates with the expectations and aspirations of homosexual participants in this study. Within the virtual space, homosexual dating app users of this study can define their sexual preferences and experience sexual relationships. Despite the existence of safe offline settings that can be defined as "queer spaces", these environments are often perceived as "closets" lacking the liberating atmosphere sought by queer individuals (Wijaya, 2021, p. 175).

Drawing on Putnam's (2020) conceptualization of social capital, the actions of homosexual participants demonstrate an effort to build bonding social capital among fellow homosexual subjects through dating app platforms. According to Putnam,

bonding social capital pertains to inward-looking relationships that foster strong connections within a relatively homogeneous group. Bonding social capital can encourage a sense of intimacy and group exclusivity. All four homosexual informants in this study use dating apps specifically designed for homosexual users. They feel that accessing those dating apps enables them to connect directly, as the precise user segmentation facilitates the development of intimate relationships with fellow homosexuals as their in-group. Bonding social capital can be essential in building solidarity between individuals and groups that tend to be homogeneous. James Coleman (1988, as cited in Lambert, 2016, p. 2561) also asserts that social capital, cultivated through relationships and connections with many parties, can yield benefits, especially for marginalized groups. By owning, mobilizing, and converting social capital, marginalized groups can collectively overcome the various limitations they face in their social environment.

However, informant B admits that homosexual subjects are not inherently homogeneous and cohesive in interactions within the setting of dating apps. There are fragmentations and power relations that occur among homosexual users themselves. Participant B gave an example in gay relationships where femininized males are commonly labeled as *ngondek* [an Indonesian slang term used to describe men who exhibit feminine characteristics or behavior]. Within the homosexual social layer, *ngondek* men tend to experience role discrimination. According to B, *ngondek* men are positioned as "Bottom" in sexual relations, leading to their perception as passive and, therefore, subordinated and marginalized. This stereotype often makes B reluctant to continue relationships on dating apps, especially when his match suddenly asks him whether he is a Top or a Bottom person. For him, such a question does not have a clear function in building interactions and intimate relationships, as they inherently imply hierarchical classification. Informant F shared the same experience. He contends that he is not ashamed to admit that he is not a masculine man. As a result of his confession, his matches often left him, as he explains:

> I once said [to his matches] that if my friend said that I am *ngondek*, I don't mind, I'm okay with it. But then, they stopped talking to me. There are also those who say, 'Oh, you suck, I think we should stop, I don't like people who are too fab'. (F, 4 November 2022)

The explanations of informants B and F show that even within homosexual relations, there is a reproduction of dominant heteronormative assumptions, where the femininized party is deemed deserving of marginalization and discrimination, similar to the position of women in a patriarchal framework. Thus, efforts to gain a sense of acceptance do not necessarily proceed smoothly, even though they are in the same circle of sexual identity.

Homosexual informants in this study also show efforts to build bridging social capital, which is oriented outwardly rather than inwardly, aimed at bridging differences and fostering social ties that tend to be weak. The actions of homosexual participants S, B, and V, for example, who try to initiate relationships with heterosexual users, demonstrate their efforts to be more inclusive and build relationships with users of different sexual orientations. For them, the primary goal is to establish connections and relationships with individuals who are compatible personally.

After all, their approach to relationships is not solely focused on establishing sexual intimacy. Hence, their experience differs from heterosexual informants. While the latter display endeavors to build bonding social capital, they do not actively work to foster social solidarity with their fellow heterosexual subjects. Furthermore, none of the four heterosexual informants attempted to access homosexual dating apps. They only install common dating apps, like Tinder, Tantan, or Bumble. The four heterosexual informants also show a clear line of demarcation that they only want to build heterosexual relationships through dating apps, even though only for friendships. Informant I openly acknowledged blocking the match upon learning that the individual was transgender, whom he unilaterally labeled as *shemale*:

> I once had a match with a shemale, and as soon as I found out that she was a shemale, I immediately blocked her. There are a lot of shemales on Tinder, on Bumble too. She didn't say on her profile that she was a shemale. She only admitted to it later. If only I knew she was a shemale, I wouldn't tap. (I, 28 September 2022)

Informant I promptly restricted access to relationships with individuals outside the binary system of the heteronormative society. When he was asked about the possibility of merely being friends with gays in the digital space, Informant I still refused to do so. The fact that the existence of non-heteronormative subjects is not recognized by dominant parties in heteronormative Indonesia can also be retrieved from the usage of the word shemale in referring to transgender subjects. This term is pejorative with an offensive connotation used to describe transgender subjects and is frequently used in the sex work industry to name trans-women (Espineira, 2016; Vartabedian, 2017). Informant I said that this term was often used by his circle of friends in referring to transgender subjects. It seems he does not acknowledge that the term is derogative and demeans transgender subjects. It should be noted that the use of shemale, as done by informant I, is still found in several academic works in Indonesia (Fatayati, 2014; Sicaya et al., 2022; Usman, 2023). In their works, academics seem to position the term shemale as a refinement of the word *banci* [Indonesian derogatory term to transgender, which comes from the Javanese *bandule cilik* [small penis]], even though the term shemale is basically as offensive and derogative as *banci*. The act of labeling transgender individuals reflects the prevalent disregard for non-heteronormative subjects in Indonesia. The heterosexual informants in this study build social capital within the boundaries of heteronormativity. In Putnam's terms, they bond but do not bridge. While heterosexual participants may endeavor to establish relationships with individuals who hold different political viewpoints and visions but still adhere to heteronormative norms, they opt to shut the door on intimate relationships with non-heterosexual individuals, even if only in terms of friendship.

CONCLUSION

Digital technologies have become part of everyday life in Southeast Asia (Lengauer, 2016). As this research shows, online dating apps in Indonesia serve not only as facilitators but also as arbiters of interactions and connectivity within the realm of intimate relationships. The interactions and accrual of digital social capital by users

of dating apps are also linked to the automated systems embedded within these apps (Ragnedda, 2018; van Dijck, 2013). These platforms shape the dynamics of social interaction, influencing how users navigate and cultivate relationships. Users build relationships through networked individualism and automated connectivity where intimate relationships are not necessarily collective efforts but based on personal interests and similarities (Wellman, 2001). Through digital intimacies, users are building bonding and bridging social capital (Putnam, 2000). This is primarily the case of dating app users identifying as homosexual. For them, the accumulation of social capital, both bonding and bridging, is pursued to gain a sense of acceptance and belonging in digital realms and within society. Dating apps allow homosexual users to build deeper bonds within their own group and encourage solidarity among fellow homosexual users in a heteronormative society like Indonesia. Homosexual users tend to build inclusive relationships and strive to bridge differences with both homosexual and heterosexual users. On the other hand, heterosexual users, as part of a heteronormative society, tend to be exclusive by closing themselves off from the possibility of relationships with non-heterosexual subjects. They do not actively strive to accumulate inward-oriented bonding social capital with fellow heterosexual people to gain a stronger sense of acceptance and solidarity. In contrast, non-heterosexual people show a more pronounced desire to cultivate connections both within the homosexual community and with heterosexual people with the aim of achieving a heightened sense of acceptance within society in general. Bridging social capital allows dating app users to mobilize and exchange their digital connections to accumulate knowledge and information actively and creatively, leading to other benefits, such as health care and assistance in job-related assignments. This also shows how digital social capital can be converted into other resources and benefits (Bourdieu, 1986; Ragnedda, 2018).

As our research shows, gender identities and sexual orientations are more complex than the homogenizing terms "homosexual" and "heterosexual" suggest. Therefore, future research can examine digital intimacies among dating app users, considering a broader range of gender identities and sexual orientations that we have not covered in this study. Digital intimacies are influenced by technological inscriptions and algorithms capable of transforming how intimacies are articulated and experienced; therefore, future studies may explore the mediality and platform mechanisms of budding dating apps and their potential in constructing and directing the articulation of gender relationships and digital intimacies.

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Press Freedom in the Time of COVID-19: The Philippine Experience Under the Duterte Administration

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The media plays an important role in disseminating vital information and being 'watchdogs' of government misconduct. Press freedom is constitutionally guaranteed in the Philippines, but the space for journalists and media companies continues to shrink. This is because constant attempts have been made to suppress and silence them through the government's targeted attacks, which can be characterized into three categories: classifying media as allies and enemies, the weaponization of laws, and personal and institutional attacks. The emergence of COVID-19 made press freedom even more challenging due to the threat of infection and government-imposed restrictions and measures. This research deployed interviews with multiple journalists and a review of secondary data. The study shows that state interference, challenges in fulfilling journalistic roles, and the obstruction of the free flow of information during the pandemic resulted in three levels of fear among journalists: fear of losing one's network, fear of losing credibility, and fear of personal safety.

Keywords: Autocratization; COVID-19 Pandemic; Media Studies; Philippine Democracy; Press Freedom

INTRODUCTION

Press freedom is frequently associated with media's independence in disseminating various views and information. Moreover, press freedom provides opportunities for individuals to exchange ideas and information (Tran et al., 2011). This characterization aligns with the right to freedom of opinion and expression as detailed in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948). Nonetheless, there is no universally acknowledged definition of press freedom. The literature also lacks consensus on the parameters of press freedom and people's right to privacy and security (Tambini, 2021). For Betz (2017), the media space has the capability to strengthen governance, make public institutions more open and responsible, and empower individuals to exercise their other human rights. Thus, a free space enables the media to fulfill its role in a democratic society freely.

In Southeast Asia, research shows a decline in press freedom and a rise in authoritarianism (Einzenberger & Schaffar, 2018), which has been further triggered by the COVID-19 restrictions (Rüland, 2021). The deterioration of press freedom amid the pandemic presents a multifaceted problem for journalists, impacting their professional roles and the broader journalistic community. Professionally, these constraints on press freedom hinder journalists' capacity to effectively fulfill their responsibilities as conduits of information. This limitation compromises their ability to disseminate diverse perspectives, hold authorities accountable, and contribute to an informed public discourse – a cornerstone of democratic societies (Coronel, 2010; Lievrouw, 2009; Norris, 2006). On a communal level, the decline of press freedom challenges the cohesiveness and shared ideals within the journalistic community. The fear and insecurity stemming from these restrictions foster an environment conducive to self-censorship and a decline in professionalism. Consequently, journalism becomes superficial, news articles become more passive and milder, and there is a weakening of the media's watchdog role (White, 2007). The restrictions, thus, impede collaborative efforts necessary to safeguard journalistic integrity and preserve the vital role of the media in a democratic society.

According to the 2020 World Press Freedom Index (WPFI), all Southeast Asian countries, except Timor-Leste and Malaysia, belong to the bottom half of the 180 nations surveyed (Reporters Without Borders, 2020). While many nations in the region improved modestly, like Thailand and Indonesia, other Southeast Asian countries, such as the Philippines and Malaysia, slipped further in the rankings. Rüland (2021) contends that COVID-19-related restrictions mainly caused the decline in media freedom. He emphasized that several administrations have exploited the health crisis to justify attacking and persecuting critical voices, such as journalists and media organizations by weaponizing laws on fake news, misinformation, cybercrime, criminal defamation, and hate speech (Human Rights Watch, 2021; Rüland, 2021).

While the Philippines is regarded as possessing the freest press in Asia, it is no exception regarding declining press freedom (Arao, 2021). The country is considered one of the most dangerous countries for journalists, especially during the term of President Rodrigo Duterte (2016-2022) (Popioco, 2021). The Philippines continually dropped in the WPFI ranking from 127th in 2017 to 147th in 2022. It was rated as 'mostly free' in 2017 due to limited censorship. Still, scores fell eventually because of the emergence of "opinion shapers" that promote pro-government propaganda, as well as targeted attacks on journalists and activists (Freedom House, 2017). Although labeled a democratic state, the Duterte administration created a hostile environment for reporters and journalists alike.

Upon Duterte's assumption to duty in 2016, over 100 attacks and threats were made against journalists and media according to Freedom for Media, Freedom for All Network (Talabong, 2019). In addition, a report by Reporters Without Borders (2021) states that President Duterte's favorite targets are sources of government resistance from media outlets. He particularly targets media and journalists who have critically written and reported on his administration's drug war (Carnerero, 2019). This targeted approach has manifested in various ways, which indicates a clear effort to suppress dissenting voices and limit the scrutiny placed on the government's activities. For instance, ABS-CBN, the Philippines' biggest media and news network, is

noted for critically reporting contentious issues linked to the Duterte administration such as the drug war, corruption, and the country's pivot to China (Hecita, 2020). Consequently, President Duterte, on multiple occasions, publicly threatened the network regarding its potential closure and seizure of assets.

It is important to note that there was already a decline in press freedom and democracy in the Philippines before the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Bethke and Wolff (2020), various countries were already moving to a "closing" or "shrinking civic space" (p. 365) when the COVID-19 pandemic struck. Similarly, Bernadas and Ilagan (2020) used the term "shrinking space" to refer to the declining press freedom in the country. This pre-existing decline in press freedom and democracy was only exacerbated when the COVID-19 pandemic engrossed the country since March of 2020. The pandemic aggravated existing issues, with the administration utilizing the crisis to further tighten control over information and limit dissenting voices.

As the country suffered from the pandemic's blow, more restrictive measures were implemented, including laws that may be used against journalists in the future. In an interview, Maria Ressa calls this the weaponization and manipulation of laws (Santos, 2019). Ressa, the CEO of Rappler, a top local online media organization, was also a notable target. Accordingly, she was convicted in June 2020 of cyber-libel and has been in and out of prison (Herr, 2020). Furthermore, President Duterte's threats against the ABS-CBN proved true when Congress refused to renew the network's franchise at the height of the pandemic. He reiterated that the non-renewal of the franchise was part of his denunciation of 'powerful private corporations' and 'oligarchs' (Hecita, 2020). This development comes after President Duterte expressed his resentment toward ABS-CBN for intentionally not airing his political ads during the campaign period preceding the 2016 national elections (Hecita, 2020). Reporters Without Borders (2021) named President Duterte as one of the 37 global leaders who are predators of press freedom. The Palace simply responded that this was not based on facts and was "absolutely bereft of merit" (Elemia, 2021).

Indeed, it is evident that Philippine journalists worked in a hostile environment that extremely complicated the requirements of their occupation. With COVID-19 restrictions and new laws that may be used to suppress and silence them, there is a need to examine how such factors contributed to the 'shrinking space' of media in the country under the Duterte administration, and how it impacted journalists and media from their own viewpoints.

MEDIA, JOURNALISM, AND DEMOCRACY

Media is a means to communicate news and information to the public. It, therefore, ensures government transparency by delivering information to its citizens. McNair et al. (2017) claim that media platforms serve as a medium of expression to exercise political opinions and criticize the abuse of power by public officials and elites. Hence, the media and its ability to bridge the government with the public is an important aspect of the survival of a democratic society (Oztuc & Pierre, 2021).

Democracy is not a monolithic concept because it encompasses several models. What constitutes a well-functioning media within one model of democracy may not align with the criteria of another (Stromback, 2005). There are four models of

democracy that are often discussed in contemporary literature: procedural democracy, competitive democracy, deliberative democracy, and participatory democracy. Normative expectations vary across different models of democracy, influencing the roles and responsibilities assigned to media.

According to Stromback's (2005) analysis of these four models of democracy, procedural democracy expects the media to provide accurate and unbiased information, serve as a watchdog on government actions, and facilitate informed public debate. Competitive democracy then mandates the media to cover political campaigns objectively, hold political leaders accountable, and provide platforms for diverse political viewpoints. Deliberative democracy, meanwhile, requires the media to facilitate informed public deliberation, present diverse viewpoints, and promote civil discourse on important societal issues. Participatory democracy tasks the media with amplifying voices from diverse communities, covering grassroots movements, and highlighting citizen-led initiatives for social change. In each model, the media play similar roles with subtle differences in promoting democratic values, fostering civic engagement, and ensuring accountability and transparency in governance. These normative expectations shape the functioning of democracy and guide the behavior of its key actors within each model.

The Philippines has been classified as a procedural democracy (Oktaviani et al., 2018; Resos & Albela, 2023). While there are regular elections and formal democratic institutions in place, issues related to corruption, political dynasties, and limited citizen participation in governance have been observed (Oktaviani et al., 2018). Nonetheless, it is crucial to note that categorizing countries into specific democratic models can vary based on different perspectives and criteria and that democracy is a complex concept (Bühlmann et al., 2012). All these models demand that media and journalism provide the public with factual information and news (Stromback, 2005). Furthermore, these models, except for participatory democracy, demand that the media act as a check on people in positions of authority to prevent abuse of power (Coronel, 2010). The media thus serves as watchdogs of the government and public officials, highlighting policy lapses, negligence, corruption, and corporate scandals (Norris, 2006).

For their part, journalists navigate their responsibilities within democratic frameworks guided by various role orientations. The four main journalistic role orientations are monitorial, collaborative, interventionist, and accommodative (Zamith, 2022). The first role portrays journalists as watchdogs through monitoring government actions and societal trends to inform the public. The second role focuses on the journalists' engagement with various stakeholders and sources to provide comprehensive coverage and foster dialogue. The penultimate role delves into the journalists' active intervention in issues by advocating for change and addressing societal injustices. The last role requires journalists to adapt to societal norms and interests, balancing serving the public interest and meeting audience demands (Zamith, 2022). Their professional ethos demands accuracy, objectivity, fairness, and accountability to the public.

In contexts where press freedom is challenged, journalists often assume the role of watchdogs, challenging authority and exposing wrongdoing (Galtung & Ruge, 1965). It is important to note that journalists cannot be neutral observers (McCarthy & Dolfsma, 2014). Instead, they should fulfill a significant role in promoting and

preserving human rights and freedom to achieve democratic governance that facilitates press freedom and a media environment free from the threat of impunity (Arao, 2016). This makes journalists reliable sources of information, portraying them as ethically devoted to relevant truth-telling in the public interest and for the public's benefit.

Ngoa (2011) describes a functional democracy as one that meets three basic requirements: an awareness of the public, freedom of involvement in the process of making decisions, and government accountability. He asserts that the media has played a pivotal role in a functioning democracy by exercising freedom of expression, association, and mobility, and managing the 'space' between the state and its citizens. Media must, therefore, be free and independent (Habermas, 2006; Norris, 2006; Solis, 2018). Moreover, institutional arrangements of functional democracy create an environment that supports journalists in fulfilling their duties. This includes enjoying constitutional and legal safeguards, access to state-held information, and mechanisms for scrutinizing the government (Coronel, 2010).

Media, journalism, and democracy share a relationship akin to a social contract (Locke, 1988; Stromback, 2005). Media and journalism rely on democracy to preserve the freedom of speech, information, and the independence of media from the state. In the same manner, democracy requires a system for the flow of information and a watchdog that is independent of the state (Stromback, 2005). Thus, when a media cannot freely obtain and disseminate information or fulfill its watchdog function, a state fails to foster democracy in the broadest sense. Nevertheless, the co-dependent relationship between media and democracy can only be achieved if media actors are rational, logical, not controlled by political party ideas, and treat information sources impartially en route to disseminating relevant information (Ismaeli, 2015).

As independent and free media ensures the progress of democracy and effective governance, Coronel (2010) finds that it can indirectly contribute to human development through poverty alleviation. Moreover, studies found a link between press freedom and corruption (Flavin & Montgomery, 2020; Norris & Odugbemi, 2010). They indicate that countries with above-average press freedom are more likely to have lower corruption indicators. For Norris and Odugbemi (2010), nations with strong rankings have a diverse media landscape and a thriving media industry that fosters transparency and promotes good governance. Conversely, countries with lower index scores in press freedom show lower controls on corruption. A free press is, therefore, instrumental in maintaining good governance, reducing corruption, alleviating poverty, and potentially empowering citizens to demand more accountability from their government officials.

SHRINKING SPACE OF PRESS FREEDOM AMID THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented significant challenges to press freedom around the world. As governments grapple with managing public health crises and addressing societal concerns, there has been a notable trend of shrinking space for press freedom. According to Bernadas and Ilagan (2020), an indication of the "shrinking space for media freedom" (p. 132) is seen through laws passed during the pandemic to restrict freedom of speech under the guise of combating misinformation

or maintaining public order. For instance, the *Bayanihan to Heal as One Act* (Republic Act (RA) No. 11469) granted President Rodrigo Duterte the emergency authority to quickly respond to COVID-19 within three months by reallocating the national budget and by enabling the President to temporarily direct the operations of public utilities and other necessary facilities as required by public interest (Official Gazette of the Philippine Government, 2020). However, this law was criticized by the media and human rights groups because of its clause that penalizes false or fake news that may be readily used and utilized by people in power against individuals, including journalists (Joaquin & Biana, 2020). Similarly, the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020 (RA No. 11479) deems critical reporting or anything against the government as an act of terrorism, making it dangerous for journalists to do their jobs (Puente, 2020). Correspondingly, the Cybercrime Prevention Act (RA No. 10175) was received with strong criticism due to its risk to press freedom, online expression, and online privacy (Robie & Abcede, 2015).

Moreover, the weaponization of laws predominantly targeted journalists. For instance, Maria Ressa, Rappler's CEO, has been hounded by many libel cases and sued multiple times using existing laws (Carnerero, 2019). Journalists were faced with another indication of the "shrinking space for media freedom" through the government's decision to shut down ABS-CBN, the biggest media network (Bernadas & Ilagan, 2020, p. 132). The shutdown is detrimental to the press as the network reached far-flung provinces in the country. The government's actions towards media and journalists are an indication of the continuous threats of the administration to silence critics and an indication of the media environment in the Philippines. Hence, it became difficult for journalists to fulfill their roles. Solis (2018) sees the inability of media to freely propagate information as a threat to democracy. On the other hand, the government denies that the attacks on ABS-CBN and Rappler will severely affect press freedom and media by asserting that these are isolated cases (Arao, 2021).

Stanig (2015) posits that these attacks on the press serve two purposes: to silence critical journalists directly and to induce self-censorship of other journalists who plan on becoming critical of the government. Censorship is considered one of the most direct constraints to press freedom (Papadopoulou & Maniou, 2021). As Graber (2015) explains, self-censorship hinders journalism as journalists would choose to remain silent due to fear of severe punishment for publishing critical and sensitive stories. Thus, the administration's numerous misdoings may remain unknown to the public. In addition, Graber (2015) points out that there is increased risk and danger for media outlets and journalists who choose to publish articles on corruption, drug wars, and crimes.

Moreover, President Rodrigo Duterte had placed the Philippines' weak democratic institutions in peril as the democratically elected leader 'bloodied' democracy during his seat in power (Thompson, 2016). These are manifested in the numerous human rights violations done during his administration, such as the crackdown on drugs and the targeting of media to silence them through intimidation, harassment, red-tagging, and legal persecution (Puente, 2020). Additionally, Tapsell (2021) reiterated that President Rodrigo Duterte had created a strategic relationship with the media – utilizing his 'divide and rule' strategy over the Philippine media. More specifically, President Duterte would separate them into two categories: first, placing media

outlets with a good relationship with him and those who self-censor as 'friends'; and second, positioning oppositional and critical media and journalists as 'enemies'. This strategy of dividing and ruling the press has eroded the media landscape in the Philippines. Reporting critically on the government is seen as choosing to become 'rivals' and targets of the administration (Tapsell, 2021). This places journalists and media on a fork road, deciding whether they want to appease the government and be allies or dare to be critical and become rivals.

Evidently, journalists' struggles as watchdogs and preserving press freedom are not new occurrences. Instead, COVID-19 exacerbated the already shrinking space of media in the Philippines. The administration used its emergency powers to control the narrative surrounding the pandemic, often at the expense of independent journalism and transparency. Bethke and Wolff (2020) argue that the political and militarized response to the COVID-19 pandemic will not necessarily result in an immediate and long-term constraint of civic space but will worsen existing conflicts and controversies.

THE RISE OF DISINFORMATION IN THE PHILIPPINES

Disinformation and misinformation are often interchanged as they pose similar meanings. However, their difference lies in intent. Ireton and Posetti (2018) define disinformation as inaccurate information designed to attack a specific person or entity, whereas misinformation is false information not intended to harm anyone. Rubin (2019) identifies three interconnected causal elements for the development of disinformation in digital news: first, fake news; second, a lack of media literacy skills that makes readers vulnerable to being mis-/disinformed; and third, a lack of regulation in social media networks that amplify and facilitate the spread of various disinformation. These three and their interactions are essential drivers of disinformation/misinformation, particularly in the digital world.

Notably, the spread of disinformation proliferated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Jamil and Appiah-Adjei (2020) argue that the pandemic amplified a 'disinfodemic' characterized by widespread misguided information. They suggest that it is driven by government agencies pressuring journalists to cover the COVID-19 pandemic in certain ways. In addition journalists struggle to address the infodemic and disinfodemic amidst job insecurity. The mis/disinfodemic thus added to journalists' fear of health risks, economic struggle, and logistical concerns brought by the lockdown measures. As COVID-19 cases surged and various pandemic-related issues emerged, the volume of information share expanded dramatically as all social media platforms sought efficiency, coverage, and depth (Zhao, 2020). While mainstream media outlets generally strive to provide accurate information, social media platforms have enabled the proliferation of unverified content and sensationalized narratives. Social media significantly influences the "genres, speed, curation, and dissemination patterns of communication in new and often problematic ways" (McKay & Tenove, 2021, p. 3). Exploiting the vulnerabilities inherent in online platforms, disinformation peddlers take advantage of algorithmic curation, echo chambers, and political bots.

Studies have shown that during an emergency, individuals tend to rely on established news outlets for their information rather than newer, less conventional sources.

This is attributed to the high level of trust and credibility associated with traditional media (Hornmoen & Backholm, 2018). However, it must be noted that different social contexts also influence an individual's media consumption. For example, Filipinos have exhibited a declining interest and trust in established news outlets over the years due to widespread criticism of the news media from various sources, specifically politicians and activists. Furthermore, unlike the global trend, where many respondents prefer to read the news (57%) than watch it (30%), Filipinos deviated from this pattern: 52% of Filipinos prefer watching the news over reading it (36%) (Newman et al., 2023). This would imply that Filipinos utilize television as their main source of information. However, data show that the percentage of Filipinos using television as their primary news source has declined from 66% in 2020 to 52% in 2023 (Newman et al., 2023). Interestingly, 72% of Filipinos view Facebook as their leading news source, with TikTok steadily gaining a higher share of news-related videos (Newman et al., 2023).

This suggests a unique media consumption behavior among Filipinos as they prioritize news-related videos on social media platforms as their primary source of information. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the heightened need for information dissemination, this period became fertile ground for the emergence of disinfodemics as it provided an unparalleled environment for the propagation of internet misinformation, disinformation, and abuse (Ferrara et al., 2020).

While both misinformation and disinformation are harmful to society, disinformation poses a greater challenge to media as it is created to deceive and distort the truth. In the Philippines, Ong and Cabañes (2018) discovered that a client-like relationship between political elites and fake social media account operations fuels the prevalence of disinformation and troll armies. This networked disinformation can be described as an "organized production of political deception that distributes responsibilities to diverse and loosely interconnected groups of hierarchized digital workers" (Ong & Cabañes, 2018, p. 15), who are tasked to generate "illusions of engagement" (p. 37) by spreading script-based fake news. Disinformation becomes more of an individual effort but is now being powered by machinery to destroy the opposition or enemy. Sombatpoonsiri (2018) argues that cyberbullying, exhibited through disinformation campaigns, is used by both the state and regime allies to crush criticism and resistance. In Russia, state-sponsored accounts spread disinformation through direct attacks against individuals and communities on divisive topics to manipulate online conversations (Zannettou et al., 2020).

In a democratic country like the Philippines, dealing with disinformation is a two-edged sword. On one hand, the fight against disinformation threatens democratic ideals such as the right to freedom of expression (Figueira & Oliveira, 2017). On the other, disinformation undermines broader factors of the quality of democracy by eroding public trust in democratic institutions, hindering people's right to access and share information, meddling with elections, and fueling digital conflict and persecution (Colomina et al., 2021; Gianan, 2020; Nuñez, 2020). Information manipulation undermines the efficiency of elections and restricts citizens' ability to exercise their fundamental rights (Colomina et al., 2021). In addition, disinformation tactics can successfully target media credibility to substitute it with government agenda (Christensen & Holthaus, 2021). The manipulation of information creates a vicious cycle in which the government promotes its political agenda, shutting down

the participation of independent groups and ordinary citizens. Christensen and Holthaus (2021) argue that the danger of disinformation to democracy lies more in restricting access to various types of information, which may counterintuitively restrict the flow of free data. Consequently, this may perpetuate information asymmetry and power imbalance, thus further challenging democracies.

Interestingly, Bradshaw and Howard (2018) found that democracies have the greatest capacity for disinformation campaigns through political bots, while authoritarian regimes have a marginally lower capacity for disinformation campaigns since they mostly rely on blunt techniques such as the use of trolls, harassment, and attacks on journalists. The study of Al-Rawi (2021) in Saudi Arabia reveals that trolls use disinformation campaigns to undermine journalists' legitimacy and their role in defending freedom of expression and human rights in the Arab world. Conversely, Glasius and Michaelsen (2018) contend that disinformation campaigns are more pervasive and maintained in authoritarian states than in democracies. In both cases, deceiving the public and utilizing power seem to be the main objectives of promoting propaganda effectively.

Although both pose serious dangers, disinformation becomes more difficult to combat as it may be powered by machineries and used to destroy critics. Widespread disinformation makes it difficult for journalists and media networks to establish their legitimacy amongst the public. Furthermore, the spread of disinformation resulted in actions that undermined press freedom as it affected journalists' rights to freedom of speech and expression. Hence, it is evident that these pose additional challenges for journalists to fulfill their roles in disseminating accurate information in a democratic setting.

METHODOLOGY

The authors deployed purposive sampling to interview eight participants who fit the following criteria: (i) journalists from various media networks; (ii) journalists who have worked for at least two years or have worked during and prior to the COVID-19 pandemic; and (iii) journalists who have done fieldwork during the pandemic. The semi-structured interviews were conducted via Zoom from November 2021 to January 2022 due to the COVID-19 mobility restrictions. Aliases are used to protect the identity of research participants. The list below contains background information on all respondents:

1. George - has been a journalist since 2017. He previously worked in a radio station and works in the Digital News Department of a big news and entertainment network. He focuses on politics, foreign affairs, and stories related to the pandemic.

2. Pamela – has been a journalist/reporter since 2012. She also worked in a regional news network. Her reports focused on Southeast Asian financial issues covering mostly asset management and business. During the Duterte presidency, she reported for a local news network covering human rights, corruption, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. James – has been a journalist/reporter since 2019 for a large media network. He started as a social media producer and was later transferred to the writing department where he focuses on writing about the COVID-19 Pandemic, environment journalism, and general news.

4. Ronald – has been a journalist/reporter since 2017. He has worked for two local newspapers. Currently, he is writing for a different newspaper and focuses on Southern Manila, local government units of Muntinlupa, Pasay, Paranaque, and Las Pinas, Bureau of Corrections, Department of Tourism, Metro Manila Development Authority, Armed Forces of the Philippines, and Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology.

5. Joshua – has been a journalist/reporter since 2008. He is currently the News Section Head of a local newspaper. Since 2013, he has been a news editor further covering the Senate, the southern Philippines peace process, indigenous peoples' issues, and development-induced displacement. Currently, he holds a high position in the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines.

6. Mary – has been a journalist/reporter since 2017. She is currently working for a local newspaper where she has been covering the Drug War, Sandigan Bayan Ombudsman, health, education, transportation and mobilities, and special reports on social justice issues.

7. Marjorie – has been working as a journalist since 2013. She previously worked in a non-profit online news organization where she became a political reporter for one year and then five years as a business reporter. She moved to an international news network in the Philippines and is now working as a news correspondent.

8. Alicia – has been a journalist since 2019. She currently works for a large news and entertainment network covering lifestyle, sports, and general news.

The recorded interviews were transcribed and systematically analyzed to identify recurring themes and patterns concerning the experiences of journalists during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through an iterative process of data coding and categorization, key themes were then developed and refined, and organized into a coherent narrative, as elaborated in the succeeding sections.

STATE INTERFERENCE IN PHILIPPINE MEDIA

The traditional notion holds that state intervention in the media is detrimental. Siebert (1963) argues that the press is an instrument to pursue an effective check and balance of the government and that the media would unable to do its job properly if there was government intervention. Similarly, in both Arao's (2016) and Carnerero's (2019) studies, the media has an essential role in preserving democracy. While the pandemic has shown that certain forms of state intervention in the media

may be necessary to uphold regulatory standards, promote public broadcasting, and ensure public safety, it is still vital to simultaneously safeguard press freedom and democratic principles (Glunt & Kogan, 2019; Hornmoen, & Backholm, 2018). Striking a balance between government oversight and journalistic autonomy is crucial to maintaining a vibrant and pluralistic media landscape that serves the interests of society. Nevertheless, results from these interviews reveal government attempts to control the media through its targeted attacks during the COVID-19 pandemic. We classified these targeted attacks on the media into three categories: classifying media as allies and enemies, the government's weaponization of laws, and personal and institutional attacks.

Classifying Media as Allies and Enemies

The classification of media as allies and enemies, according to Tapsell (2021), is Duterte's strategy to destroy the country's media environment. Establishing this binary categorization of media can have profound implications for freedom of expression, the press, and the public's right to access information. In democratic societies, a free and independent media serves as a critical check on government power by holding officials accountable, exposing wrongdoing, and informing citizens about matters of public interest (Siebert, 1963). Conversely, the principles of democracy are undermined when governments seek to control or manipulate the media by categorizing outlets based on their perceived loyalty or opposition.

In our interview, Joshua describes the "government media ally" as "media that carries the government narrative". Moving away from this notion will automatically categorize one as under the influence of "propagandists (and) rebels". Interviewee Pamela also mentions the same issue referring to a "partnership" She stated, that "the partnership [with the government] isn't always equal because, well, they expect us to report favorably". James also mentions in his interview that being too critical in stories and the way they write allows them to be labeled as "enemies".

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the dynamics between the government and the media in the Philippines have become increasingly contentious. The government abused power and justified its attacks on the media by concealing them as pandemic responses. For instance, George shares that journalists from their media network were stopped at the checkpoint and were asked, "Are you an enemy?". This scrutiny and intimidation prove that imposed COVID-19 restrictions or the government's response to the pandemic is being used as an excuse to restrict the media and justify their actions in attempting to silence them. This pattern of targeting journalists under the guise of pandemic response reflects a broader strategy characterized by what Tapsell (2021) describes as divide and rule, which categorizes the media as either allies or enemies. By creating a binary categorization, the Duterte administration gains a tool to justify its crackdown on critical voices within the media sphere.

All the respondents highlight the problematic situation of press freedom during COVID-19, seeing that it worsened Philippine press freedom. James describes the status of press freedom as currently "dark". Similarly, Marjorie states that press freedom in the country is "under constant growing threat" with the pandemic being used as a tool for suppression. James and Alicia further strengthened this sentiment by

highlighting the closure of the most extensive news network, ABS-CBN, as the most significant attack against press freedom in the Philippines during COVID-19.

Although the government classifies the media as either allies or enemies, journalists seem to have a different perspective on their "partnership" with the government and the media. Pamela states that media classification as allies and enemies "is more on how the government sees (the) media, versus how the media sees the government". James clarifies that journalists should neither be allies nor enemies of the state, but rather, people who fulfill their role to inform and connect the public and the government.

Weaponization of Laws Against Press Freedom

Another theme that journalists highlight is the government's weaponization of laws against press freedom. There are several ways in which laws are weaponized against the press. One is by introducing or enforcing restrictive legislation to curb independent journalism. Governments may enact vague or overly broad laws that criminalize dissent and suppress critical reporting under the pretext of combating misinformation. Such laws may include provisions that criminalize the dissemination of 'false' information related to the pandemic, restrict access to official data and information, or impose harsh penalties on journalists and media outlets for reporting on government failures or shortcomings in handling the crisis.

The weaponization of law against press freedom also encompasses the malicious interpretation of existing laws that threaten journalists and media networks. It is worth mentioning that tax evasion charges are also used to intimidate media networks. Mary points this out, as she explains why she considers attacks on press freedom to be "state-sponsored". In addition, George and Joshua also mention the cyber libel law as a weapon against journalists. Joshua shares that his colleagues were also charged with libel cases. According to Morgenbesser (2020) and Curato and Fossati (2020), the weaponization of laws is an authoritarian practice used by contemporary authoritarians. Similarly, Varol (2015, p. 1673) labels the use of laws to clamp down on critics, even in democratic countries as "stealth authoritarianism".

Both the Bayanihan to Heal as One Act (RA No. 11469) and the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020 (RA No. 11479) were implemented during the pandemic, highlighting Duterte's weaponization of laws towards press freedom (Puente, 2020). However, the interviews indicate that the respondents did not directly experience its effects. It is important to recognize that the immediate impacts of the Anti-Terrorism Act might not be fully apparent to many journalists at present given that the law is still relatively new and in its initial phases of implementation. However, journalists fear that the said law has the potential to be used against them and their sources, and as a threat to press freedom. In Joshua's words, the Anti-Terrorism Act is "something to be worried about and it is something that we think would be used against, not only on journalist(s), but freedom of expression in general so it's something we need to watch".

In comparison, Ethiopia's anti-terror law passed in 2009, was like that of the Philippines: It indicted actions that could directly or indirectly encourage terrorist motifs. It also gave police enforcement the authority and right to arrest suspected individuals without an existing warrant for up to 48 hours. Since 2010, this law has

resulted in 60 journalists leaving the country, with at least another 19 languishing in prison (Human Rights Watch, 2015). If left unchecked, the Anti-terrorism Act could potentially be wielded as a tool to target critical journalists in the Philippines, echoing similar concerns seen in Ethiopia. As Puente (2020) puts it, the Anti-Terrorism Act (RA No. 11479) sees critical reporting against the government as an act of terrorism, making this law a threat to the safety of journalists.

Personal and Institutional Attacks

Personal and institutional attacks on the media can take various forms. At the personal level, journalists and media professionals may face direct threats to their safety, well-being, and professional reputation. At the institutional level, attacks on the media involve the use of state resources, regulatory mechanisms, and legal frameworks to suppress independent journalism. Marjorie highlights that: "This time around, the threat is personal and more institutional." This has been so common, especially during the pandemic, that Marjorie refers to this as a "trend".

It is also worth noting how she highlights that being a journalist was not controversial from 2013-2015. Her experience demonstrates how the Duterte administration contributed to the shrinking space of media and how it is much felt on an institutional and personal level for journalists.

The interviews also reveal that these attacks manifest as trolls and cyberattacks, where red-tagging, identifying media as biased, associating with a political party and spreading misinformation and disinformation to target journalists and their media networks are evident. Cabañes and Cornelio (2017) describe two types of trolls: (1) paid professional trolls that hide behind fake social media accounts, and (2) individuals who propagate the orchestrated messages laid out by the professional trolls. They call both part of the 'troll army' that initiates and spreads "deception, provocation, and futile conversations" (Cabañes & Cornelio, 2017, p. 3). Phillips (2015) underscored that internet trolls are molded through their constant interactions with like-minded parties on both online and offline platforms. In addition, several studies have investigated the attempts by Duterte and his followers to pressure critical journalists. These include the administration's strategic application of disinformation campaigns (Ong & Tapsell, 2020), online harassment against women journalists (Tandoc et al., 2023), and tapping of media influencers and personalities such as Mocha Uson and R. J. Nieto, the individual behind the pro-Duterte blog Thinking Pinoy, to attack and discredit journalists (Posetti et al., 2021; Robles, 2019;). As noted by Escartin (2015), trolls were directed to "post online comments or content that tend to be disruptive, aggressive or inflammatory, in order to provoke a reaction from an audience" (p. 169).

In a similar way, Mary and Marjorie see the emergence of fake news or disinformation machinery as personal and institutional attacks. This is because they silence dissenting voices and propagate views that might lead to widespread confusion and distrust among the press media. George states: "We started getting these cyberattacks on our website and also our personal emails." The prevalence of these online threats during the pandemic can be explained by the inevitable rise of social media due to social distancing norms and statewide lockdowns during COVID-19 (Khanday et al., 2021). Joshua notes that government officials attack the press in their

speeches and statements. He highlights that the continued attacks on journalists and major media companies such as the Philippine Daily Inquirer, ABS-CBN, and Rappler illustrate the current situation of press freedom in the country. This also has significant effects on the public's perception of the media. The correlation between low levels of trust in news and media criticism is evident, with some of the highest reported levels of media criticism observed in countries characterized by high levels of distrust (Newman et al., 2023).

AN ENVIRONMENT OF FEAR: JOURNALISTS' RESPONSES

State interference, the difficulty of journalists in fulfilling their roles, and obstruction of the free flow of information during the pandemic resulted in three levels of fear: (1) fear of losing one's network, (2) fear of losing credibility, and (3) fear for safety. Collectively, these factors worsened the shrinking space of media during the pandemic.

Fear of Losing One's Network

Journalists were afraid to write critically against the government after the closure of the biggest network, ABS-CBN. Its shutdown sent waves of fear toward smaller networks creating a chilling effect. It sends a message that if these networks become too critical of the government or if they release articles that scrutinize the administration, then the latter has the power to cease its operations. In Mary's own words: "It's a deliberate attempt to send a chilling effect that anyone or any news outlet that would go against our policy or would go against political stands will suffer the same fate."

This eventually created an atmosphere wherein Philippine journalists were afraid to voice their criticisms against the administration. This chilling effect created a culture of impunity where journalists are afraid to voice out criticisms against the administration because they fear that they might share the same fate experienced by the biggest network. Their fears may also stem from apprehensions about adequately fulfilling their roles and professional duties (Zamith, 2022). With a diminished network, journalists may struggle to gather diverse sources of information and monitor various aspects of society and the government, potentially hindering their ability to fulfill their monitorial role. Additionally, they may be less inclined to challenge official narratives or investigate sensitive topics, falling short in their interventionist role.

Arao (2016) explains that the absence of press freedom creates this so-called culture of impunity. He likewise suggested that this has caused negative effects on journalism since the public is denied access to essential information that could reform public opinion. Some networks, along with their journalists, thus opted to scale down on writing, due to fear of a possible network shutdown. Mary states that they had to shift their editorial plans in a way that would not trigger the government, which became an effective way for the government to stop targeting them. She explains that: "We have to be less aggressive on how we attack the government."

In other studies, scaling down is labeled self-censorship (Graber, 2015; Stanig, 2015;). Balod and Hameleers (2021) reported similar findings as the Filipino journalists they interviewed also described experiencing this chilling effect. These journalists had to soften the tone of their articles, steer away from controversial topics, and/or question

their editorial judgment, resulting in less critical stories. Meanwhile, Mary admits that their network would self-censor due to the decision of editors and media owners. She believes that the stories they put out are still factual, but less critical.

Notably, our findings suggest that journalists adjust their tone and are required to gently 'balance' their coverage to avoid writing too critically about the administration. With self-censorship taking place among journalists, the purpose of the attacks on journalists in accordance with Stanig (2015) has been fulfilled. This proved to be true in Mary's experience: "We just have to be less aggressive, and that worked because the administration left us alone." Pushing back in writing or self-censorship became an effective way for journalists to stop the administration from attacking them and their network. However, Ronald sees that this change of tone loses the quality of "real and hard-hitting journalism". As Arao (2016) points out, journalists cannot be mere observers since they are crucial in promoting and protecting human rights, and that freedom is crucial for a democratic environment. By pushing back, changing tone, and being less critical of the government and its actions, journalists and media fail to fulfill their most important role: being watchdogs.

Notwithstanding the abovementioned examples, some journalists responded differently to the fear of losing one's network. In isolated cases, journalists who lost their network during the pandemic could overcome this fear and write more critically about the government. James evidences this in expressing how their writings became 'stronger' after the closure of their network. He explained that: "We have nothing to lose at this point, right? What else can they close?" George also expressed that although ABS-CBN journalists are still afraid, "you can't really let fear get the best of you". While some journalists overcame this fear and write critically, some regret not being able to do the same. Mary says: "We could have been more courageous in our reporting."

Fear of Losing Credibility

Balod and Hameleers (2021) state that journalists establish credibility by providing accurate and fair information to their audiences. As personal and institutional attacks endanger media credibility through trolls and cyberattacks, journalists and their media organizations face the dangers of disinformation. Marjorie points out that "the misinformation and disinformation has triggered great mistrust towards media in general". As a result, the credibility of journalists is questioned by the public as misinformation and disinformation steer the judgment of the masses. Marjorie adds: "For me, I find it hard to understand why all of a sudden what we write is not credible." This is also in line with the studies of Al-Rawi (2021) and Christensen and Holthaus (2021) that perceive disinformation techniques as a weapon to target journalists' credibility. Accordingly, the effects of personal and institutional attacks on the media are more critical for journalists and independent media alike as these negatively impact the press's credibility to fulfill its duty in a democratic country.

Correspondingly, journalists attempt to dissolve the doubt by countering these false narratives. However, no matter how truthful their writings were, the emergence of these attacks only led to confusion and loss of public trust in the media. Mary explains further:

> In the end, you would have to rely on public discernment and what they want to believe. However, this is troubling because what if the audience has cognitive dissonance and would just believe what they want to? So even if you publish numerous truthful reports, they still won't believe in you.

In this vein, there is a deliberate attempt to erode press credibility and promote government propaganda through the weaponization of the internet. Ultimately, these challenges may have adverse consequences on the journalists' obligations and responsibilities and their roles as media practitioners. This is in line with the research conducted by Ireton and Posetti (2018), which found that disinformation resulted in a decline in public trust in news organizations and media. The accusation of spreading disinformation or fake news toward journalists resulted in crackdowns through cyberattacks and trolls directly attacking journalists and their media institutions (Ireton & Posetti, 2018).

Without credibility, journalists' reports may be dismissed or questioned, making it challenging to fulfill their monitorial and interventionist roles. Furthermore, they may become more cautious in their reporting and avoid controversial topics or critical inquiries to dispel further damage to their credibility. The loss of credibility can weaken the journalists' ability to fulfill their roles effectively, eroding trust in their reporting and limiting their impact on public discourse and accountability.

Fear for Safety

Journalists developed a fear for their safety due to health risks and attacks on journalists. They began to fear for their safety as they were hounded with personal threats and attacks by trolls. George shares his experience:

> Of course, we started getting these messages from – well, of course, we think they're trolls or supporters of the administration, but we also had this … we started getting these cyberattacks on our website and personal emails. So, like we really felt that there are targets on our backs.

Moreover, the threat of the virus posed risks for journalists as they were constantly exposed to it amid information-gathering. Marjorie shares: "I fear for my physical safety since of course, I didn't really want to get COVID. No one does." As Bernadas and Ilagan (2020) put it, journalists are not merely reporters or observers of the situation; they are also in danger of becoming infected.

Aside from their fear of becoming infected, they also fear the attacks on journalists. This terrifying and hazardous atmosphere, produced by bullying, online harassment, and online threats, can jeopardize journalists' ability to perform their jobs since these threats obstruct crucial reporting and the watchdog role (Balod & Hameleers, 2021). When journalists feel unsafe, they may hesitate to investigate and report on sensitive or controversial issues, leading to self-censorship.

These three fears stifle the journalists from doing their primary duty. Their fear of network loss, credibility, and safety concerns impacts individual journalists and has far-reaching implications on press freedom. Journalists become more cautious and

risk-averse in their reporting, avoiding controversial topics or critical analysis to mitigate potential threats. This self-policing restricts the free flow of information and stifles public discourse, thus constraining press freedom and democracy. Balod and Hameleers (2021) underscored that the role of journalists as watchdogs is at constant risk because they cannot perform independently from the government and cannot effectively scrutinize the administration's behavior. The cases above illustrate that journalists consciously prioritize their role of informing. However, they are inhibited from performing their watchdog function due to the constant fear of the government and its retributions.

AFTER DUTERTE: THE MARCOS JR. ADMINISTRATION

With the conclusion of Duterte's presidency in June 2022, journalists and media companies received positive news as the 2023 World Press Freedom Index (WPFI) reflected the country's improved performance as it ranked 132nd out of 180 countries, which is 15 slots higher than its 2022 position (Cabico, 2023). This ended a five-year slump in terms of ranking. The 2023 WPFI also described the Philippine media as "extremely vibrant despite the government's targeted attacks and constant harassment, since 2016, of journalists and media outlets that are too critical". Although there was fear surrounding the ascension to power of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. due to his late father's dictatorial rule, the report observed that there were fewer media attacks and that the current leadership is exercising a "more consensual" policy towards the press (Ombay, 2023).

Notwithstanding this encouraging development, the 2023 State of Press Freedom in the Philippines report still found that media workers, mainly in Metro Manila, were subjected to a total of 75 attacks and threats from 30 June 2022, to 30 April 2023 (De Jesus, 2023). Of the total figure, 40 cases of intimidation focused on red-tagging and surveillance activities. In comparison, ten libel and cyber libel cases involved two arrests and one conviction. Other incidents included harassment, coverage restrictions and censorship, online threats, cyber-attacks, and physical assaults. What is alarming is that 41 cases involved state agents as alleged perpetrators of the attacks, with 23 individuals working for the national government, followed by 12 members of the police force, and six from local governments. The remaining alleged perpetrators are private citizens (ten cases), unidentified sources (eight cases), online trolls (eight cases), pro-government media (five cases), and other parties (three cases) (De Jesus, 2023).

Thus, as noble and vital as it is, upholding press freedom in the country is undoubtedly an arduous task given the state-sponsored targeted attacks, weaponization of laws, and proliferation of disinformation and online trolls. The shutdown of ABS-CBN likewise resulted in a chilling effect that compounded the fear and challenges the already constrained journalists faced. To effectively halt the country's democratic backsliding, the Marcos Jr. administration must prioritize the preservation of press freedom, mitigate attacks and threats against journalists, and ensure that journalists can effectively perform their watchdog role. An otherwise scenario may merit either a 'Duterte extension' label or worse, a Marcos 2.0 suppression.

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DISCLOSURE

The contents of this paper were extracted from the undergraduate thesis of Ms. Bagalawis and Ms. Villanueva that was submitted to the Department of International Studies of De La Salle University – Manila. Mr. Katigbak served as the thesis adviser of both authors.

Navigating Precarity: Health and Safety Challenges in Southeast Asia's Gig Economy Food Delivery Sector

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▸ Daniels, G. (2024). Navigating precarity: Health and safety challenges in Southeast Asia's gig economy food delivery sector. *Advances in Southeast Asian Studies, 17*(1), 85-95.

This article examines the health and safety challenges of food delivery couriers in Southeast Asia within the gig economy, focusing on the roles of third-party platforms, like GrabFood, Foodpanda, and GoFood. It critically assesses how these platforms navigate courier safety amidst algorithmic management and precarious employment, employing a framework to evaluate corporate commitment, operational practices, and worker support. The study scrutinizes public corporate reports to reveal the gap between companies' safety claims and actual practices, advocating for more genuinely worker-centric safety measures. By highlighting discrepancies in the operationalization of health and safety standards, the research contributes to discussions on gig economy labor conditions, emphasizing the need for platforms to prioritize worker welfare alongside operational efficiency. This work calls for a shift towards sustainable models that do not compromise courier health and safety, filling a gap in the literature on the real-world impacts of algorithmic management and precarious work.

Keywords: Algorithmic Management; Corporate Accountability; Courier Safety; Gig Economy; Food Delivery

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INTRODUCTION

The advent of the digital economy has heralded significant transformations across the globe, with Southeast Asia emerging as an important arena for these changes, particularly within the gig economy's food delivery sector (Tech Collective, 2019). This region's food delivery market has experienced remarkable growth, propelled by advancements in technology and evolving consumer behaviors (Lau & Ng, 2019; Momentum Works, 2024). The proliferation of major third-party food delivery platforms such as GrabFood, Foodpanda, and GoFood has been instrumental in this evolution, resonating with an increasing consumer shift towards online ordering. This trend has been notably accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic's influence on dining preferences towards home delivery and takeout options (Poon & Tung, 2024).

However, alongside these developments, the rapid expansion of food delivery via app ordering has unearthed a range of challenges concerning the gig economy's impact on employment dynamics, particularly regarding working conditions (He et al., 2023; Perkiö et al., 2023). The integration of working conditions with algorithmic management systems within the food delivery industry underscores a critical facet of the app ecosystem, where platforms utilize algorithms to manage and allocate tasks to couriers (Lata et al., 2023). While these systems offer potential benefits in terms of efficiency and cost reduction, they also pose significant challenges to worker autonomy, safety, and satisfaction (Jarrahi et al., 2020; Shapiro, 2018; Wood et al., 2019).

Against this backdrop, this Research Workshop focuses on examining the primary health and safety challenges faced by food delivery couriers in Southeast Asia, with the aim of unveiling how platform companies are addressing these challenges. It draws upon key works in the field, such as those by Perkiö et al. (2023), which scrutinize workers' psychosocial and physical well-being in technologically mediated employment. It is rooted in the broader academic discourse on gig economy employment dynamics (Veen et al., 2019), algorithmic management (Wood et al., 2019), and their ramifications on worker health and safety. By focusing on this inquiry, this study contributes to addressing a gap in the existing literature, which has extensively discussed the impact of algorithmic management on worker autonomy, accountability, and satisfaction, but has paid insufficient attention to the specific health and safety implications for workers in the gig economy. Specifically, this research asks: How are the health and safety risks facing food delivery couriers in Southeast Asia being addressed by major platforms within the context of the gig economy?

The significance of examining these issues within the Southeast Asian context is underscored by the region's unique socio-economic landscape and its rapid adoption of digital platforms. The e-Conomy SEA 2023 report by Google, Temasek, and Bain & Company (2023) highlights the significant growth of the digital economy in Southeast Asia as a major socio-economic driver for the region.[1] Furthermore, while gig work varies globally, it can include highly skilled freelancers, including web developers, designers, and copywriters, with relatively high pay, greater freedom, flexibility, and control over their workload. In Southeast Asia, gig work tends to be more labor-intensive, with a significant portion stemming from on-demand ride-sharing or food delivery services (Tech Collective, 2019).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Health and Safety Challenges of Food Delivery Couriers in the Gig Economy

Food delivery couriers in Southeast Asia navigate a complex landscape marked by algorithmic management, precarious employment conditions, and various environmental hazards. The algorithmic management practices, which include task allocation, work pacing, and performance evaluation, often exacerbate the intensity

1 Since 2016, Google and Temasek have spearheaded the e-Conomy SEA project, analyzing digital trends in six Southeast Asian countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam). Bain & Company joined as a primary research partner in 2019, with their latest findings published in late 2023.

of work, leading to prolonged hours, reduced rest periods, and a heightened risk of accidents (Rani & Furrer, 2021; Shapiro, 2018; Wood et al., 2019). This system prioritizes efficiency and adherence to tight deadlines, placing immense physical and psychological stress on workers, manifesting in musculoskeletal disorders, chronic fatigue, anxiety, and burnout (Ahmad et al., 2023; Mbare, 2023; Wu et al., 2022).

The precarious nature of gig work further aggravates these health and safety issues. Job insecurity and the absence of traditional employment benefits limit couriers' willingness to report safety concerns or take necessary health-related breaks (Chan, 2021; Defossez, 2022; Gregory, 2021). This scenario is compounded by environmental hazards such as traffic congestion, extreme weather conditions, and the potential for theft or assault, which significantly increase the physical risks to couriers (Binghay et al., 2022; Christie & Ward, 2019; He et al., 2023; Ibrahim et al., 2018; Zong et al., 2024). Moreover, the gig economy's demand-driven nature imposes significant psychosocial stressors on workers. For instance, the constant surveillance and performance metrics contribute to psychological distress (Perkiö et al., 2023). Essentially, the health and safety challenges faced by food delivery couriers in the gig economy encompass the impacts of algorithmic management, the precariousness of gig employment, environmental hazards, and considerable physical and psychosocial stress.

Framework for Evaluating Corporate Health and Safety Initiatives

Consequently, this Research Workshop draws upon a targeted framework to evaluate how major food delivery platforms address these health and safety challenges. Within this framework, consideration is given to corporate commitment in terms of the extent to which platforms publicly commit to health and safety standards, including the specificity of their policies; operational practices by way of how corporate practices are responsive to the unique challenges of gig work; and worker support systems identified by the availability and accessibility of health-related resources and support for couriers, such as insurance.

The framework for evaluating corporate health and safety initiatives leverages a broad theoretical and empirical base encompassing occupational health and safety, gig economy employment dynamics, and the principles of corporate responsibility towards worker welfare. This framework is informed by studies on the implications of algorithmic management for worker autonomy and safety (Wood et al., 2019) and by research addressing health and safety challenges unique to gig economy workers (He et al., 2023; Shapiro, 2018). By synthesizing insights from these areas, this framework aims to provide a more complete view of how major food delivery platforms address – or do not address – the health and safety concerns of couriers in Southeast Asia. This approach acknowledges the complex interplay between corporate practices, gig work's inherent characteristics, and the overarching need for supportive worker policies and systems, ensuring a comprehensive evaluation of platforms' efforts towards safeguarding courier welfare.

Employing this analytical lens, grounded in the nuances of the gig economy and informed by works on occupational safety for food delivery workers (Perkiö et al., 2023), this Research Workshop aims to dissect and critically assess the health and safety measures articulated and operationalized by Southeast Asia's leading food

delivery platforms. The goal is to scrutinize the efficacy and authenticity of these measures, providing insights into how well these corporations are fulfilling their responsibility towards courier health and safety.

METHODOLOGY

This Research Workshop adopts an interpretive approach to scrutinize the explicit and implicit narratives surrounding courier welfare within Southeast Asia's food delivery sector through the critical analysis (Bowen, 2009) of publicly available corporate reports, sustainability disclosures, and other relevant documents from the three leading companies in the region: Grab, Delivery Hero (operating as Foodpanda in Southeast Asia), and GoTo.[2] These documents are crucial for understanding the companies' commitments and actual practices concerning health and safety, reflecting their corporate ethos and responsiveness to the health and safety challenges their couriers face. This method leverages a critical reading strategy to differentiate between mere rhetoric and tangible actions, drawing upon the principles of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2013).

This choice of sources, while instrumental in revealing the companies' prioritization of courier welfare, introduces certain limitations. Firstly, the reliance on corporate disclosures as primary data sources poses a potential bias toward portraying positive initiatives and outcomes, as companies are inclined to present themselves favorably. This inherent bias may lead to overrepresenting successful safety measures and underreporting failures or shortcomings in addressing courier health and safety risks. To mitigate this bias, this analysis employs a critical reading framework to identify and assess the depth and genuineness of the platforms' commitments to courier welfare beyond surface-level claims. This process involves examining the specificity of safety protocols.

However, another limitation of this methodology is the potential lack of access to internal company data and direct insights from courier experiences, which could offer a more detailed understanding of the health and safety conditions on the ground. While this study focuses on corporate disclosures to highlight significant health and safety issues, it recognizes the value of future research incorporating primary data from couriers, including qualitative interviews and surveys, to capture the lived experiences and challenges of gig work in the food delivery sector.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Transparency and Data Reporting

Before assessing the transparency of Southeast Asian platform companies vis-à-vis road safety for food delivery couriers, it is worthwhile to examine the current data

2 These platforms were selected due to their dominant positions in Southeast Asia's food delivery market. Grab holds a significant portion, approximately 50%, of the market across Southeast Asia. At the same time, Food Panda, under the umbrella of Germany's Delivery Hero, plays a crucial role across several Southeast Asian countries. GoTo, on the other hand, is the foremost service in Indonesia, underscoring the varied landscape of food delivery services across the region (Momentum Works, 2024).

availability. Beyond Southeast Asia, there is a widespread issue in identifying and addressing the unique hazards food delivery couriers encounter. The International Labour Organization (ILO) collates labor statistics across various sectors, yet a conspicuous data void persists regarding the safety of food delivery workers (ILO, 2024). The picture is no better if we look at individual nations known for generally extensive labor market data.

In Southeast Asia, official and publicly available data is similarly sparse. However, in Malaysia, the Transport Minister, responding to a question in the Dewan Negara (Malaysian Parliament), interestingly disclosed that between 2018 and May 2022, 112 food delivery riders were killed in road accidents, offering a rare insight into the occupational hazards faced by couriers in the region (Ibrahim et al., 2023; Zulkifli, 2023). Singapore also provides some insight, indicating, albeit through very low numbers, that a significant portion of vehicular-related fatalities involved delivery riders in 2021.[3] A subsequent survey highlighted the high rate of accidents requiring medical intervention among this workforce (Ministry of Manpower, 2021a; Kok, 2022). However, these instances of data sharing are exceptions rather than the norm. Indeed, the general lack of detailed incident data not only complicates the identification and mitigation of risks but also highlights a broader concern regarding the precarious nature of gig work on the safety and welfare of couriers (Lee et al., 2015; Veen et al., 2019; Wood et al., 2019).

Corporate Transparency in Southeast Asia's Food Delivery Industry

Table 1 highlights the distinct strategies employed by Southeast Asia's foremost food delivery platforms – Delivery Hero, Grab, and GoTo – in addressing courier safety and welfare. Delivery Hero's approach, as detailed in its annual reports, offers a general overview of safety initiatives but stops short of providing specific information on courier incidents, such as fatalities and injuries. The company acknowledges the existence of a "rider safety team" dedicated to promoting courier health and safety (Delivery Hero, 2023, p. 59). Yet, it does not furnish concrete data allowing for a comprehensive assessment and improvement of courier safety. This lack of specificity creates a gap between the company's safety discourse and the detailed information necessary for effectively evaluating and enhancing courier welfare.

Grab[4] claims that 99.99% of its rides and deliveries are completed without any safety incidents (Grab, 2023b, p. 9), a figure sourced from a narrow definition of incidents. According to Note 7 in Grab's ESG Report 2022, incidents are categorized as

3 "Of the six vehicular-related fatalities, four were work-related traffic accidents (WRTAs) involving delivery or dispatch riders. Of these, three were due to the negligence of other road users" (Ministry of Manpower, 2021a). However, this information is not available in the official report by the Singapore Ministry of Manpower (2021b), and there is no mention of delivery riders in the subsequent annual reports by the Ministry of Manpower (2022). Interestingly, in the same year, a Food and Courier Delivery Workgroup was formed "comprising tripartite partners including the WSH Council, the National Delivery Champions Association and companies such as GrabFood and Singpost" to tackle "the rising number" of work-related traffic accidents (WRTAs) (Ministry of Manpower, 2021a).

4 Grab and GoTo incorporate both e-hailing (car sharing) and p-hailing (delivery) services within their operational frameworks. Nonetheless, the safety data provided by these companies fail to offer a distinct breakdown between the experiences of drivers and riders.

	Delivery Hero (DH)	GoTo	Grab
Corporate Commitment	**Fair Pay Initiative** – An undisclosed comparison of pay rates. **Global Rider Safety Performance Dashboard** – Delivery Hero claims to strive for transparency in rider safety through a dashboard, yet no data is publicly accessible. **Fatal Accidents Questionnaire** – Launched in 2022 to understand and mitigate fatal accidents in Delivery Hero's operations, yet no findings have been shared.	**Policy Strengthening and Direction** – GoTo's Annual Report (GoTo, 2023b) lacks explicit references to courier well-being, including health and safety aspects. However, their Sustainability Reports highlight efforts to improve safety policies, provide well-being training for drivers, and develop incident response infrastructure, primarily through the Driver Care Unit (DCU). It remains ambiguous if these initiatives encompass GoTo couriers.	**Almost Incident-free** – Grab asserts that 99.99% of rides and deliveries occur without safety incidents (Grab, 2023b, p. 9). However, this statistic is derived from a narrowly defined scope: Note 7 in Grab's ESG Report 2022 states that incidents are "Defined as all reported and validated road safety incidents caused by driver-partners or passengers across our mobility and delivery businesses in 2022, including road accidents, harassments and crimes (Grab, 2023b, p. 73)
Operational Practices	**Decentralized Safety Management** – Delivery Hero delegates safety management to local offices to ensure compliance and adherence to local laws/regulations. **Rider Safety Team** – Headed by a Safety Principal, this team is said to aim for enhanced health and safety, focusing on understanding rider injuries and fatalities, though findings are not disclosed. **Safety Training –** scant details except passing references to localized training materials for riders tailored to local risks and regulations.	**Training Programs** – References to training on safe driving (riding?) and first aid are made sporadically. **Health and Safety Initiatives** – Risk assessments are conducted to identify hazards related to drivers' work conditions, habits, and health.	**Safety training and initiatives** – Mandatory safety training is required for all new driver-partners, with claims of multiple initiatives to lower road accidents, though details are sparse. **Comprehensive Safety Management Framework** – Grab emphasizes its commitment to partner safety through unspecified safety features and protocols alongside a vague safety management framework to ensure secure journeys.
Worker Support Systems	**Insurance Coverage –** No mention of insurance coverage in their Annual Report (2023), but a basic insurance program with courier-paid premium top-ups is highlighted in their online magazine (Foodpanda Malaysia, 2023).	**Insurance Coverage** – Basic insurance with 'subsidized' premiums.	**Insurance Coverage** – Grab offers its partners free work-related accident insurance, though the coverage details are limited, with options for partners to enhance their insurance at an additional cost.
Sources	Delivery Hero, 2023; Foodpanda Malaysia, 2023	GoTo, 2021; GoTo, 2022; GoTo, 2023a; GoTo, 2023b	Grab, 2023a; Grab, 2023b

Table 1. Health and safety strategies in Southeast Asian food delivery**.**

"reported and validated road safety incidents caused by driver-partners or passengers", encompassing road accidents, harassment, and crimes (Grab, 2023b, p. 73). The specificity of Grab's definition prompts scrutiny regarding the exhaustiveness of their safety reporting. This definition likely omits a range of incidents, including vehicle issues, environmental hazards, incidents caused by third parties, or poor road surfaces, leading to potentially underreported safety concerns. The lack of clarity around what constitutes an incident and how they are validated raises transparency issues, undermining trust in Grab's safety claims and complicating the evaluation of its safety initiatives.

Conversely, GoTo provides some level of transparency regarding courier fatalities and injuries, although the data's trajectory does not follow a clear pattern, ranging from 136 fatalities in 2019 to 51 in 2022. There is an unexplained but highly significant drop in reported injuries from 1,470 in 2019 to eight in 2022 (GoTo, 2021; GoTo, 2022; GoTo, 2023). However, the initial data collection on injuries was conducted through an "on-the-ground ambulance team in Indonesia," focusing on "high-consequence cases" (GoTo, 2021, p. 29), which might have introduced biases and inaccuracies. More recent reports (GoTo, 2022; GoTo, 2023) show no methodological account for the numbers. Indeed, this lack of clarity concerning the methodology for the most recent figures underscores the necessity for improved and transparent data collection methods to fully capture the safety risks faced by couriers.

The varied reporting methodologies among these platforms underscore a prevalent issue in the gig economy: the struggle to reconcile corporate safety pledges with tangible operational actions. The prevalent use of algorithmic management for assigning tasks and evaluating performance often places a higher value on operational efficiency than on courier welfare, leading to a disparity between public safety commitments and the conditions couriers face. Furthermore, the inherently precarious employment conditions within the gig economy amplify couriers' susceptibility to safety hazards, emphasizing the importance of developing more transparent and thorough reporting frameworks to advocate effectively for safer working environments (Veen et al., 2019; Wood et al., 2019).

Commitment, Operations, and Support

Reflecting on the concerns regarding algorithmic management and its implications for courier health and safety, Delivery Hero's narrative around initiatives such as the Fair Pay Initiative and the Global Rider Safety Performance Dashboard indicates a corporate acknowledgment of these challenges. However, the absence of detailed, publicly accessible data limits the potential for transparent evaluation, echoing the theoretical critique of gig work's opaque operational practices (Rani & Furrer, 2021; Shapiro, 2018). Similarly, while indicative of a structured approach to safety, Grab's Comprehensive Safety Management Framework remains vague on the specifics of implementation, underscoring the theoretical perspective on the need for explicit corporate commitments to health and safety standards (Wood et al., 2019).

Despite its potential for localized responsiveness, the decentralized safety management of Delivery Hero may inadvertently reflect the precarious nature of gig employment, leading to inconsistencies in health and safety standards. Grab's and

GoTo's safety training initiatives, while commendable, lack detailed outcome reporting, mirroring the theoretical insights into the physical and psychological stresses imposed by algorithmic management without sufficient transparency and accountability (Ahmad et al., 2023; Wu et al., 2022).

The current state of worker support systems across these platforms underscores a critical theoretical concern: the precarious nature of gig work exacerbates health and safety risks, with minimal baseline support placing additional burdens on couriers (Chan, 2021). Delivery Hero's insurance programs require courier-paid premium top-ups. At the same time, GoTo's and Grab's limited coverage, necessitating additional purchases by couriers, reflects this precariousness and the associated challenges in ensuring comprehensive support for couriers' well-being (Mbare, 2023).

While there are complexities, disparities between corporate commitments to courier health and safety and the realities of operational practices and worker support systems cannot be ignored. A more integrated approach that aligns courier-centered policies and procedures with theoretical insights into gig work's health and safety challenges is required, which necessitates greater transparency, consistency in safety standards, and more robust support systems to mitigate the risks faced by food delivery couriers. Such an approach addresses both the physical dangers and the psychosocial stressors characteristic of this mode of employment.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This Research Workshop has examined the health and safety challenges confronting food delivery couriers in Southeast Asia within the context of the digital economy's rapid expansion and the gig economy's evolving dynamics. By focusing on the intersection of algorithmic management, precarious employment, and the tangible health and safety experiences of couriers, this study contributes to the existing body of literature on gig economy labor conditions (Binghay et al., 2022; Christie & Ward, 2019; He et al., 2023; Ibrahim et al., 2018; Zong et al., 2024), particularly highlighting areas previously underexplored or inadequately addressed; namely, the health and safety challenges posed by algorithmic management and the significant gap between stated corporate safety commitments and the practical implementation of safety measures. The corporate safety reporting practices and the operationalization of health and safety measures by major food delivery platforms - GrabFood, Foodpanda, and GoFood - reveal a complex landscape of stated commitments versus actual practices. These findings not only validate concerns raised within the gig economy discourse about the potential misalignments between platform efficiencies and worker welfare (Jarrahi et al., 2020; Shapiro, 2018; Wood et al., 2019), but also provide specific insights into how these discrepancies manifest in the context of Southeast Asia's food delivery sector. This study fills a gap in the literature by empirically grounding theoretical discussions on algorithmic management and precarious work in the real-world operational practices of food delivery platforms.

Moreover, by highlighting the inadequacies in current safety and accountability mechanisms, this work underscores the need for platforms to adopt more comprehensive and genuinely worker-centric approaches to health and safety. This is particularly relevant given the growing recognition of the gig economy's role in the future of work

and the need for sustainable models that prioritize worker welfare alongside operational efficiency.[5] Future research directions should incorporate qualitative studies that explore couriers' lived experiences and perspectives, providing a deeper understanding of the nuances of gig work and its impact on individual well-being.

This Research Workshop provided insights into the health and safety challenges facing food delivery couriers in Southeast Asia, underpinned by the gig economy's operational dynamics. As digital platforms continue to grow and evolve, the well-being of gig workers must remain at the forefront of corporate, policy, and academic agendas. Achieving a sustainable and equitable gig economy requires concerted efforts to ensure that technological progress does not come at the expense of worker health and safety.

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5 While there are yet to be universally successful, sustainable models to reference in the gig economy, this sector is characterised by swift changes and a variety of regulatory landscapes. There are NGOs (Graham, 2020) and labor groups, as well as regulatory measures such as Spain's Rider's Law (Waeyaert et al., 2022) and the European Union's proposed new Platform Work Directive (European Trade Union Confederation, 2024) that that are advancing a more worker-centric health and safety agenda within the food delivery gig economy.

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DISCLOSURE

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Book Review: Kramer, E. A. (2022). The Candidate's Dilemma. Anticorruptionism and Money Politics in Indonesian Election Campaigns.

Cornell University Press. ISBN: 9781501764035. 200 pages

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Despite the fact that Indonesia has seen a substantial shift away from authoritarian control and a democratic reform process over the past 20 years, the issues of money politics and corruption still persist. In 1998, Indonesia entered into a process of democratization and political reform, professionalizing the military and courts, and ensuring free and fair elections every five years, following the end of 32 years of New Order authoritarian control. A decade later, Indonesia emerged as the most extensive Muslim democracy globally, serving as a model for a prosperous democratic shift in Asia. However, since the New Order, corruption remains a persistent issue in this nation (Hadiz, 2005). Substantial political changes have been implemented in Indonesia to guarantee robust anti-corruption laws and agencies, law enforcement, as well as checks and balances. To guarantee competitive elections, Indonesia has also changed its political structure. But this competitive political system also means that elections are expensive for candidates, which brings up another widespread issue, this is, money politics, or the doling out of substantial sums of money to voters in advance of elections through a variety of tactics. Former Vice President Mohamad Hatta asserted that corruption has been deeply ingrained in Indonesia since the 1970s (Lubis, 1982; Materay, 2022). After the New Order collapsed, it became clear that corrupt officials were given sanctuary. Apart from the ascent of populism and the rise of religious identity politics, there is ample documentation of the presence of money politics, political corruption, and vote buying in Indonesian elections (Juwono, 2018; Winters, 2011). Numerous studies have examined the mechanisms of money in politics, their clientelist roots, and their efficacy as a vote-buying tactic (Aspinall & Sukmajati, 2016; Indrayana, 2017; Hadiz, 2012; Hidayat, 2009; Mukti & Rodiyah, 2020).

In her book, Elisabeth Kramer examines how candidates in Indonesia's 2014 legislative elections navigated the tension between the public demand for clean politics and the entrenched practices of vote buying and patronage. The author

uses Erving Goffman's (1959, 1970) theory of dramaturgy and strategic interaction to analyze how the candidates presented themselves to different audiences and managed their impressions. Goffman's theory of dramaturgy compares social interactions to theatrical performances, where actors play different roles and use various props, costumes, and scripts to create impressions on their audiences. Goffman's theory of strategic interaction focuses on how actors use information, communication, and deception to achieve their goals in situations of uncertainty and conflict. This theory is aptly applied to politics, as politicians are also actors who perform for different audiences, such as voters, party members, donors, media, civil society, etc. Politicians also face uncertainty and conflict in their political environment, such as competition, regulation, accountability, etc.

Using detailed ethnographic data from three different campaigns, Kramer discusses how three candidates, who all see themselves as anti-corruption politicians, faced a dilemma when they came across the deeply rooted customs and procedures of vote-buying and money politics. The author explains how they handled this dilemma and the pressure to participate in Indonesia's pervasive practice of using money in order to buy votes. Kramer shows how institutional contexts, campaign norms, key issues, resources available, and the candidate's own identity and ideals all contribute to the candidate's particular experience on the campaign trail.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the historical and institutional background of Indonesia's electoral system, party system, and campaign regulations. The author shows how the transition to democracy, decentralization, and direct elections have increased the competitiveness and costliness of elections, creating incentives for candidates to engage in money politics. She also discusses how civil society and media have raised awareness and pressure on corruption issues, creating opportunities for candidates to adopt an anti-corruption discourse.

In the second chapter, Kramer examines how candidates define and frame corruption and anti-corruption in their campaigns. She finds that candidates use various strategies to justify, rationalize, or deny their involvement in money politics, such as claiming that it is a form of social obligation, service delivery, or empowerment. She also finds that some candidates use anti-corruption as a rhetorical tool to differentiate themselves from their competitors, appeal to certain voters, or deflect criticism.

In Chapter 3, Kramer presents a case study of a candidate who refused to engage in money politics and ran a clean campaign based on his personal integrity and professional reputation. She analyzes how he managed his front-stage and back-stage performances, how he dealt with the challenges and risks of his strategy, and how he achieved a surprising victory. Finally, Kramer shows how he used Goffman's concepts of impression management and face work to maintain his consistency and credibility.

Chapter 4 presents a case study of a candidate who initially adopted an anti-corruption stance but later succumbed to the pressure of money politics. Kramer analyzes here how he changed his front-stage and back-stage performances, how he rationalized his decision, and how he faced the consequences of his strategy. Also here, the author shows how the candidate used what Goffman conceptualized as impression management and face work to justify his actions.

Chapter 5 deals with a case study of a candidate who had a long political career and a pragmatic approach to money politics. Kramer analyzes how the candidate

balanced his front-stage and back-stage performances, how he used money politics as a strategic tool to mobilize support, and how he maintained his credibility and legitimacy. As in the previous chapters, the author shows how the candidate used Goffman's concepts of impression management and face work to adapt to different situations and audiences.

In Chapter 6, Kramer compares and contrasts the three case studies and draws general conclusions about the factors that shape the candidates' campaign behavior and outcomes. She argues that candidates' strategies are influenced by their personal characteristics, party affiliation, constituency characteristics, campaign resources, voter preferences, media exposure, civil society activism, and enforcement mechanisms. She also discusses the implications of money politics and anti-corruptionism for Indonesia's democracy.

In the conclusion, Kramer summarizes the main findings and contributions of her book. She argues that the candidates' dilemma reflects broader tensions and contradictions in Indonesia's political system, where democratic institutions coexist with patronage networks, where corruption is pervasive but also contested, and where voters are both cynical and hopeful. She also suggests directions for future research on money politics and anti-corruption in Indonesia.

In her three accounts of Indonesian anti-corruption politicians in the 2014 election, Kramer eloquently clarifies the political predicaments that confront all Indonesian politicians. The conundrum arises when a candidate actively uses anti-corruption rhetoric in front of the altar of electoral politics, but at the same time contends in an expensive campaign marked by money politics. Kramer points out that during the 2014 campaign, two of the three candidates chose to distribute large amounts of money and other incentives, while only one candidate remained true to his pledge to not buy votes. In the first chapter, Kramer categorizes several strategies a candidate may employ to decide whether to utilize vote-buying or not. According to Kramer, the main forces behind this classification are "the candidates' personal commitment to rejecting money politics and the perceived benefits of an anti-corruption identity" (pp. 15-16). Vote buying is more likely to happen if a candidate has a low degree of perceived benefits from running as an anti-corruption candidate and a low level of personal commitment to opposing money politics or vote buying. Candidates who lack dedication but believe that being clean and campaigning against corruption is helpful can employ vote buying in their campaigns. Kramer found that the percentage of vote buying in Indonesia increased from 10% in 2009 to 33% in 2014. By pointing out that just one of the three candidates truly fulfilled the description of being against corruption, Kramer highlights the strong incentive to participate in vote buying.

The overall objective of Kramer's book is to promote qualitative and ethnographic research methods in the research fields of money politics and political corruption. Kramer asserts that "in the fight against quantitative gatekeeping, … political ethnography has much to offer in the study of politics, power relations, and decision-making and can make a meaningful contribution to efforts to understand the world of politics" (pp. 17-18). Kramer's work deftly illustrates political ethnography's advantages, as it succinctly and thoroughly outlines the conflict between idealism and pragmatism, which resulted in disparate election outcomes for each candidate.

The fundamental idea of Kramer's book is that corruption in Indonesia is not an unsolvable issue that needs to be addressed immediately. This is also the author's starting point in the case studies. Kramer argues that, by presenting themselves as an anti-corruption candidate and rejecting transactional politics, candidates may be able to draw in voters. Kramer uses the Prosperous Justice Party (*Partai Keadilan Sejahtera*, PKS) and the Democratic Party (*Partai Demokrat*, PD) as examples. Both parties ran on anti-corruption platforms to win elections, but once their leaders were found involved in significant scandals, the parties imploded and lost support.

The book's best feature, I conclude, is the author's ability to capture the nuances and contradictions between anti-corruption rhetoric, the attraction of money politics, and election campaigns. This book shows how, while having similar institutional constraints and voter pragmatism, the three candidates under consideration were able to develop unique solutions and results. This book is a great resource for anyone with even a passing interest in the study of clientelist comparative politics or Indonesian politics.

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