

# K-POP FANDOM IN VEIL

## Religious Reception and Adaptation to Popular Culture

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**Abstract:** Indonesia is a rising center of K-pop fandom next to China and Japan. This study examines K-pop fandom in Indonesia by focusing on intercultural communication between two countries whose cultural and religious differences are extensive. An ethnographic study of young Muslims in Indonesia was conducted in order to examine the motivations and cultural practice of K-pop fans. Having the largest Muslim population in the world, Indonesia has young people who both practice religious piety sincerely, and enjoy Korean popular music passionately. Although these interests appear to be contradictory, the historical and social context of Indonesian Islam provides a clue about how they accept cultural diversity. K-pop fandom implies multiple meaning. Long term study of this ethnography using in-depth interviews and participatory observation is an attempt to find the inner meaning of K-pop fandom in Indonesia seemingly contradicting from religious piety that most young Indonesians maintain now. Cultural tastes of young Muslims imply social consciousness and vision of new cultural identity that they wish to promote. This case may enlighten a new alternative to the radicalization of Islam and an example of intercultural cooperation in global communication.

**Keywords:** Intercultural communication, religion and culture, youth culture, Korean wave, ethnography

### Introduction

Hallyu (Korean wave) in Indonesia draws new attention when Korean media has faced challenges both culturally and politically as anti-Hallyu movements emerge in diverse parts of Asia including Japan, Taiwan and China, and political disputes such as THAAD incident

between China and Korea give rise to conflicts between nations. Although Hallyu attracted large parts of Asian audiences to Korean TV dramas in the early 2000s, the popularity of Korean TV shows has started to decline within a decade. Korean cultural industry and public agents cooperate each other to set up a new strategy to revive Hallyu designating it Hallyu 2.0 in the late 2000s and now Hallyu 3.0 which aim for diversifying genre of entertainments and expanding regional areas of exporting Korean cultural products.<sup>1</sup> K-pop and diverse entertainments are the focus of the strategies and spreading Hallyu beyond East Asian countries is another point of it. Southeast Asia is a new area of interest in addition to Europe because the former has been always royal to Korean wave from the beginning until now. Particularly, Indonesia is considered as a new area of interests for Hallyu 3.0 because Indonesia has the 4<sup>th</sup> largest population in the world as well as contains strong fandom of Korean media. The questions, however, need to be explained on the pattern of how strong K-pop fandom is maintained despite the huge cultural and religious differences between Indonesia and Korea, and how media users constitute their cultural identities by consuming popular culture.

Intercultural communication between Islamic culture in Indonesia and seemingly the opposite such as Korean pop culture is the focus of the study. Islamic youth culture and their consumption of popular culture will be examined in order to look into daily practice of religion and cultural implication of it by conducting an ethnographic study of Indonesian teenagers who are fans of Korean media and Korean popular music (K pop).

Indonesia has one of the biggest K pop fandoms and the number is growing these days in spite of large discrepancy between two cultures. Indonesia is the world largest Muslim country whereas K-pop is the advent of commercialized cultural industry and Northern European version of Korean popular music with little Asian identities in it as many critiques pointed out.<sup>2</sup> Recently Music Bank, a TV program of Korean public broadcasting KBS, held in Jakarta as a series of world tours in two years, and 13,000 fans gathered all over

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<sup>1</sup> Sunny Yoon, "Taming the Primitive: Multiculturalism and the Anthropological Vision of South Korean Media," *Visual Anthropology*, 28, 5 (2015): pp. 422-437.

<sup>2</sup> U Siriyuvasak and H. Shin, "Asianizing K-pop," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 8, 1 (2007): pp. 99-136.

Indonesia.<sup>3</sup> Most of them were girls wearing hijabs but it is no barrier for the Muslim youngsters to cry out and dance with Korean idols.

The contemporary popularity of Korean media in Indonesia signifies many interesting points in intercultural or inter-religious communication. K pop is a specific version of Korean pop music which is westernized and industry-oriented music targeted for a global audience. There is a huge cultural and value gap between Islamic beliefs and global contents of K pop. Therefore, exactly how these values are reconciled with the fascination that many young Muslims have regarding the culture of K pop is an intriguing topic for the study of intercultural communication.

In order to scrutinize cultural practice of young Muslims who are strong believers in religion and at the same time passionate fans of Korean media and K pop, this study applied an ethnographic approach in Indonesia for 8 months in 2017. In-depth interviews and participatory observation for the field work of this ethnography were conducted.

### **A Historical Context of Indonesian Islam**

Although Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim country, it has a rather unique religious system different from the countries in the Middle East. First, Indonesia is not an Islamic State but allows freedom of religion. This freedom is due to Pancasila which has five constitutional principles supporting diversity and freedom to choose religion but allowing no room for atheism.<sup>4</sup> Every Indonesian has to choose a religion in their ID card. Since the beginning in the 13<sup>th</sup> century when Islam was integrated in Indonesia, Indonesian Islam has been complex and multicultural in character.<sup>5</sup> This complexity has developed through colonial history and resistance against Western influence and authoritarian regimes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Under authoritarian regimes of Sukarno and Suharto from the 40s and until the 90s, Islamic principles such as Jihad and Sharia are the fundamental

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<sup>3</sup> Mail Daily Sept. 4, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Douglas E. Ramage, *Politics in Indonesia: Democracy, Islam and the Ideology of Tolerance* (London: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> John L. Esposito, *Islam in Asia: Religion, Politics, and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

roles in politics and social life of the people.

However, Indonesian Jihad is different from what is often presumed as holy war and related to terrorism. Indonesian Jihad is rather moderating and oriented toward soft power focusing on modernization projects and social development. Two major Islamic organizations in Indonesia, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, influence Indonesian people's lives by managing schools, hospitals and social welfares as religious responsibility of Jihad.<sup>6</sup>

Many scholars argue that Indonesian Islam has become radicalized these days since Suharto stepped-down.<sup>7</sup> Suharto who banned democratic movements, but at the same time promoted diversity. Suharto regime prohibited Islamic rituals like wearing veils in the public sphere including media in order to maintain diversity in the public life. The new order was established after Suharto's resignation for the purpose of promoting democratization. In this process, Indonesian Islam became more radicalized, ironically. After Suharto, more and more Islamic organizations became involved in politics by establishing political parties, and minor Islamic organization including radicals also participate in politics and social activities.

Radicalization of Islam not only affects public life but also influences everyday lives of people in general. The most noticeable change of radicalization in Indonesia in everyday practice can be wearing veils. Now most Indonesian women wear hijab and express their religious piety like Muslims in other countries. However, commonly wearing hijab is rather a new phenomenon in Indonesia dating back to the late 90s. Veiling has not been allowed in the public sphere including media until this century when the new order was established after Suharto. Now female models wear veils in TV commercials and others which were totally banned in the last century. Veiling became a new trend among Indonesian women mostly in this century.

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<sup>6</sup> M. C. Ricklefs, *Islam in the Indonesian Social Context* (Clayton, Victoria: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1991); Alfian, *Muhammadiyah: The Political Behavior of a Muslim Modernist Organization Under Dutch Colonialism* (Yogyakarta, Indonesia: Gadjah Mada University Press, 1989).

<sup>7</sup> A Alamsyah and Hadize, "Three Islamist generations, one Islamic State," *Critical Asian Studies*, 49, 1 (2017): pp. 54-72; Taufiqur Rahman, "Contextualizing Jihad and mainstream Muslim identity in Indonesia," *Asian Journal of Communication* (forthcoming, 2017); J. Azumah, *Challenging Radical Islam* (New York: Research Library, 2015).

In this way, wearing *hijab* and *jilbab* is not simply a religious rituals and radicalization of religion, but also contains diverse meaning for people in general. For Indonesian women, *hijab* became a kind of trendy fashion and many researchers have warned of the commodification of Islam in this context.<sup>8</sup> Commodification of religion in the case of veiling and other religious customs may not be limited to Indonesia but the same happens in the Middle East and African countries. However, the Indonesian case shows a radical change in a short period of time because only a small number of women, usually feminist groups or intellectuals in universities, wore veils with specific intention for the purpose of activism until the 90s. Now majority women wear veils and it has become a fashion in Indonesia. Wearing veils imply complex meaning for Indonesian women; radicalization of Islam and resistance against Western influence, but at the same time capitalist commercialism and new life style prevailed by media are also involved in everyday practice of this religious ritual.

Since Stuart Hall initiated to see the diversity of meaning in media, many media scholars have adopted ethnography to examine the decoding process of media audience.<sup>9</sup> This research is a part of those efforts focusing on the complex process of reading media by having an ethnographic study, although the scope of the research expands to intercultural communication and to highlighting the cultural conflicts involved in religions. Changes and practices of Islamic culture in Indonesia have complex meaning for the people, and ethnography of K-pop fandom in this study can explain such complexity and fluidity of changes in real life.

Indonesia is one of the countries to draw ethnographers' attention most since Geertz's famous field study.<sup>10</sup> Recently, more ethnographic studies tend toward on examining popular culture and Muslims. One focus of study has been chic lit. Dewi examined this genre for young

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<sup>8</sup> Greg Fealy and Sally White, *Expressing Islam: Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008); J. Marie Mushaben, "Gender, hiphop and pop-islam," *Citizenship studies*, 12, 15 (2008): pp. 507-526.

<sup>9</sup> Stuart Hall, *Culture, Media, Language* (London: Routledge, 1980). See for instance L. Grossberg, "Another boring day in paradise: Rock 'n roll and the empowerment of everyday life," *Popular Music*, 4 (1984): pp. 225-258; S. Cohen, "Ethnography and Popular music studies," *Popular Music*, 12, 2 (1993): pp. 123-138.

<sup>10</sup> Geertz, *The interpretation of Cultures*.

Muslim women and formation of identity for these readers.<sup>11</sup> The best seller chic lit in Indonesia include *Jilbab Bitney Spears*, *Funny Islamic boarding school girls*. The titles of the literatures illustrate irony of Islamic culture in Indonesia and complexity of hybriding religion and popular culture, commercialism and resistance in young Muslim's subculture.

Another area of focus has been on popularity of idol that is a new trend of Indonesian culture.<sup>12</sup> In Islamic states, any kind of idols are prohibited including material and non-material idols such as idol singers and stars. The first order of *Jihad* of Islamic war is to destroy idols when they invade in other territories as we see destruction of world heritage by ISIS. Live idols are not the exception to this fundamental Islamic principle. However, recently Idol culture is spreading through media in Indonesia, and popularity of K-pop Idols has been led such phenomena of this new culture. Indonesia imported a format of TV program from Korea, and make program titled *Indonesian Idol* and bench mark Korean and Taiwan idols. Examples of such idols are AFI, KDI who are very famous throughout Indonesia while K pop fans condemn them calling them copycat of K pop idols.

Indonesian pop music, *Dangdut* has also been studied using ethnography. Weintraub finds Indonesian identity of the people at the bottom in *Dangdut* while mainstream media and popular culture are oriented toward upper middle class.<sup>13</sup> He sees lyrics of *Dangdut* representing resistance and democratic aspiration particularly those made post Suharto era in late 90s. Thus, popular culture hinges upon religion, fame and ordinariness as shown in chic lit, *Dangdut* and Idol culture in media represent the efforts of the people to find their cultural identity in everyday practice.

This study is another ethnographic attempt to examine identity formation by the people in their everyday practices. Particularly, it focuses on reception of K-pop by teenage Muslim in Indonesia who enjoy Korean popular culture despite the huge discrepancy from their religion and culture. This implies important cultural issues including not only industrial success and fad of pop culture but also public

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<sup>11</sup> Novita Dewi, "Formation of Youth Identity in Indonesian chick Lit," *K@ta*, 13, 1 (2011): pp. 134-146

<sup>12</sup> Penelope Coutas, "Fame, Fortune, Fantasi: Indonesian Idol and the New Celebrity," *Asian Journal of Communication*, 16, 4 (2006): pp. 371-392.

<sup>13</sup> A. Weintraub, "Dangdut Soul: Who are the people in Indonesian popular music," *Asian Journal of Communication*, 16, 4 (2006): pp. 411-431.

aspiration for social changes and resistance of it, As veiling implies a diverse meaning such as radicalization of Islam and resistance against westernization and globalization as well as efforts of forming cultural identity, so may do new adolescent culture of Indonesian Muslims affected by K pop and Korean media.

### **K-pop Fandom in Indonesia**

This study conducted ethnographic field work in Indonesia for eight months in 2017. For three months, face to face interviews and participatory observation were conducted, and for next five months online interviews using SNS and emails were continued. The subjects of this study were teenage Muslims in Indonesia and 25 people selected in one high school belong to Muhammadiyah and one K-pop fan club, the GOT7 fan club. The field study was conducted in Yogyakarta which is the center of cultural and education city including diverse regional and ethnic backgrounds. Because many people come to this city to have a good education, there is an advantage to meet people in diverse backgrounds. All the participants voluntarily take part in this study recommended by the teachers in the school and organizer of the fan club.

I had both group interviews and individual interviews for all the participants. There was one time group interview at the high school and another one with the GOT7 fan club. A short survey for both groups was conducted at the beginning of group interview. The group interview last for two hours. After the group interview, each participant scheduled for individual interviews for 3 times. Additionally, we had small group interview with 3-4 people for one time. Individual interviews and small group interview last for about an hour. An individual interview with about 10 people used , English which accompanied by translator for other 15 who speak Indonesian and for all the group interviews.

### ***Religious Piety and Reception of K-pop among Young Muslims in Indonesia***

One of the most striking facts that this research finds is the religious piety of young people in Indonesia. In any nation, young people tend to leave from religious institutions as a symbol of counterculture. In Europe and America, youth congregation in churches declined drastically and there are few young people in East

Asian Buddhism. Korea is no exception where young congregation in churches is decreasing year by year, although Korea has one of the strongest Christian populations in the world.<sup>14</sup>

In contrast, 90% of the Indonesian population is Islamic and so is the youth population. In this context, the popularity of K-pop among young people in Indonesia is rather surprising because K-pop shows western, capitalist commercial values in music and performance to such an extent that some even argue that K-pop is not Korean music.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, K-pop obviously represents quite different values from Islam. Some may see the reason why K-pop is popular in Indonesia because young Indonesians are not very religious but affiliated with it due to family and peer pressure.<sup>16</sup> However, in the interview, researcher found that young people are strong in faith and serious with religious activities.

For example, among interview subjects, all wear *hijab* or *jilbab* except two girls and all the students obey Islamic rules. It was striking to know that all these high teens get up 4, 5 in the morning and cleanse themselves for prayer. All the 25 participants say *sholat*, the five times pray a day, is the most important thing in their lives including those who do not wear a veil. Even the boys with rebellious attitudes during the interview agreed with this. Considering daily life-style of young people who use SNS and internet until late at night and particularly those who indulge in K-pop and listening and watching K-pop and media for over 10 hours a day, it is surprising to hear that these young people still get up at 5 am and pray with family every day. All of them obey Ramadhan and some of them have extra fasting on a weekly basis. Half of the students spend extra time for additional pray and study Quran and sing Islamic hymn every day in addition to normal *sholat* (prayer).

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<sup>14</sup> Sunny Yoon, "Tuning in Sacred: Youth Culture and Contemporary Christian Music," *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, 47, 2 (2016): pp. 315-342.

<sup>15</sup> Ubonrat Siriyuvasak and Shin Hyunjoon, "Asianizing K-pop: production, consumption and identification patterns among Thai youth," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 8, 1 (2007): pp. 109-136.

<sup>16</sup> D. French, et al., "Friendship and the religiosity of Indonesian Muslim," *Journal of Youth Adolescence*, 40 (2011): pp. 1623-1633



In the interview<sup>17</sup> three girls confessed that they sometimes skip pray and only do 2-3 times. But even them, they feel guilty about it and consider *sholat* to be important like the others.

“When I forgot about pray, I feel troubled and very heavy at heart. I want to be better, but hard to follow it all the time,” said 8.

8 confessed heavy guilty with religious duty. As for 11 who grew up in more liberal family background and were fond of Western culture, religious belief seems the same. Her father was educated in Australia. Even though she is more liberal than other students, she still feels guilty for not being religious and duty for Islamic Jihad. Also there are pressures on her from others.

“I am not very religious and lazy. Others say to me that I end up going to hell... ha ha. But I am lazy and tired. I frequently forgot about time to pray and do it 3-4 times a day... Religion gives me inspiration. I should be changed, pray hard and become a better person,” 11 stated.

In contrast, one of Got 7 fan club member, G4 shows high religious piety in her life experience. Her case is not exceptional, however, but rather average experience for Indonesian Muslim these days. In interviews, students state the most frequent lesson they hear from parents and teacher was “don’t forget pray time”, and the second most was “study hard”. Islamic rule is the number one priority for Indonesian young people. Religious orientation of young Muslim shows social values in Indonesia.

“I am religious. I started to reading Quran since 4 years old and wear hijab since 5 when I was kindergarten. Some did not wear hijab nor pray on time. But praying is the duty of all,” G4 told.

In this environment, some Muslim women who are not wearing veils still show strong religious faith for example, G2 and G6.

G2: “I sometimes wear veil, but not usually. I am not sufficient in religion. Wearing veil means a promise to God like a monk. I only pray five times without reading Quran every day. Wearing hijab

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<sup>17</sup> The researcher promised the interview subjects not to disclose their names, thus identify 18 students at Muhammadiyah II high school by calling from 1 to 18. For 7 students who are members of GOT 7 fan club, I count them from G 1 to G 7 in the citation.

means putting a wall and having no relation until marriage when I meet a boy. That is too much burden for me... I don't have pressure on wearing veil from mom or anyone else," G2 stated clearly.

Similarly, G6 said that "Mom told me that I should be good when I wear veil. I am not good enough. I only pray 5 times, read Quran and pray for ancestors. Sometimes I forget because I am still a high teen".

As the interviewees stated religious piety of Indonesian Muslims may sound too strong for foreign standard, but there are complex factors involved in religious belief. As discussed earlier, wearing a veil in the Indonesian context has not been only religious but also has cultural meaning. As society is modernized and liberalized, ironically, more and more women wear veils and the number is increasing now in Indonesia. They consider it as part of the activity of conserving cultural identity from global influence. Moreover, veiling became a trendy fashion for Muslim women. One of interviewee agreed that veiling is part of her fashion and mentioned wearing a veil was considered as "Arabian" and stiff in the prior generation of hers. It is a matter of interpretation on how to view religious piety and growing number of wearing a veil. It may mean radicalization of Islam in Indonesia, or liberalization of politics and religion, or both. The fact is that contradicting phenomena happen simultaneously in Indonesia.

In the same manner, popularity of Korean popular culture in Indonesia, particularly among young Muslims signifies multiple meaning. In the field research, the first reaction of interview participants was that there are few cultural similarities between Indonesia and Korea. They also confess that viewing Korean drama and K-pop performance is not a desirable thing to do from the Islamic perspective.

"I think there is only difference in culture between Indonesia and Korea... but I have never seen Korean stuff from religious perspective" 1 said.

As these students stated they found a big cultural difference between the two countries, yet accept these differences excusing that those are only entertainment and belong to other cultures. According to interviewees, clothing is the most different thing between the two countries. Since it is prohibited to show any part of the body for Muslim women, shorts and tank top that K pop idols are wearing can

make them embarrassed. Nevertheless, they accept the difference and enjoy it because it is for entertainment.

“I think there are huge difference in culture between Indonesia and Korea but it’s OK to watch exposing body and skinship because of different culture. Anyway it’s for entertainment,” 12 confessed.

“I think it’s OK to watch Korean things we should respect other cultures. I feel encouraged and good when I listen K pop,” 8 told to interviewer.

However, they show contradicting opinion on Western popular culture. Most of the participants, with the exception of three boys, do not care for American or European pop music by saying they look too vulgar. They criticized that Western pop singers express overly sexual and violent. These students also criticized Indonesian rock stars because they imitate Western singers. It sounds contradictory to accept Korean popular culture despite the cultural difference while declining Western culture because of it. Considering the fact that K-pop is Westernized version of Korean pop music that many Western musicians are involved in making music and choreography, and K-pop agencies follow the rules of American pop music, contradictory reactions of Indonesian adolescents to K-pop and Western music are more perplexing. This can be explained through a deeper understanding of the adolescent culture of Indonesians by using this ethnographic study.

### ***Emotional Devotion and Social Consciousness***

The first reason why Indonesian young people like K-pop idols and Korean actors was because Korean idols are handsome and pretty according to their interview statements. All the girls were fascinated by handsome Korean boy bands. Even girls in Islamic Boarding Schools those who were interviewed for post study react very girlishly when they described their favorite singers. These girls stated the same that they like those idols because they are handsome. This may sound superficial and immature to be attracted only by appearance, but I found a deeper meaning while having numerous meetings and conversation with them. First when they were asked what handsome means for them, they replied sharp nose, pale skin and red lips. They automatically compared Korean idols with Indonesian typical men with round nose, dark skin, and dark red lips.

“because they (Korean idols) are handsome. White skin, sharp nose and tidy. Indonesian boys do a lot of outdoor activities and have brown skin. They don’t care themselves and lazy. Most are lazy,” II said.

Similarly, 6 told “I like Exo. Their noses are different from Indonesian men and lips too. Exo have pink lips and sparking eyes... ha ha...”.

Their statements may sound almost racial stereotype, but it would be a hasty conclusion to call them racists. As mentioned earlier, these girls are not fond of white people who have more sharp nose and white skin. These girls dislike Western style which they see as vulgar. Even those who like American pop, did not like appearance of American singers.

6 told that “I don’t like American they look vulgar. Their piercings are so big and makeup is so strong”.

American singers try to look cool and macho,” 12 said.

G6 stated “Korean singers are cute and sexy, but Americans hot sexy. I see they are vulgar”.

As they stated, they are not stereotyped by racism, even though they prefer pale skin and sharp nose of Korean idols to Indonesian men. They mean more than appearance when they make evaluation of singers. Whenever they mentioned appearance of Korean idols, they always talk about personality and attitude.

12 “Korean men are kind. I found they are perfectionist when I watch drama and variety shows on TV. Even ordinary students (on TV drama) work hard for good grade and always do something which is different from Indonesian students”.

15 “I like their spirits. I am fan of BTS. They belong to small agency but work hard and accomplish success. Once I was injured, and was challenged by watching BTS, I took exam because I was encouraged by BTS’s efforts”.

1 “Korean idols are so energetic. They prepare everything perfect. That’s why they are loved by international fans”.

As the interview participants stated, they are fascinated by the personality and attitude of Korean idols not just appearance. They fascinated by Korean idols as ideal men not simply because of

handsome appearance but because of their own images of an ideal man. They often compare Korean singers with Indonesian singers who are not properly trained and become a star out of luck according to these interviewees' evaluation. From the perspective of Koreans or Western people, perfectionism may mean negative psychology, but Indonesian girls admire perfectionists and see them as ideal. They even envy the stressful life of Korean high school students who have a heavy burden of study and pressure from Korean parents. Koreans usually say "hell of high school days" due to this pressure but Indonesian youngsters envy these struggles and they would like to try the same.

Cultural preference of Indonesian youngsters contains social consciousness of their circumstances. In both group and individual interviews, all the participants except 3 boys point out the contemporary problem with Indonesian adolescents are related to violence. These girls complain about gangsters at school and violent bullying.

13 stated that "violence at school is the most serious problem. Some boys bring weapons to school and fight".

11 had similar opinion about the violence often occur in the school, "Boys in Islamic school fight over boys in another religious school. Last year, one person was killed in the fight".

"Gangsters are problem. In Korea, everyone is busy with studying," 6 said.

These young girls feel insecure because of violent environments even in schools. Ideal images of men and admire of Kpop idols are related to the condition of young Indonesians that they have to face in their everyday lives. As Hermes argues, identity formation in the audience's media consumption "is sociological rather than psychological process".<sup>18</sup> K-pop fandom among Indonesian young people illustrate the social consciousness of the audience beyond individual cultural taste and passive consumption of entertainment. In light of series of British cultural studies and Bourdieu's field theory that show implication of pressure on social stagnation and changes out of mass consumption of culture and media, K-pop fandom also signify competition between two types of power; hegemony and

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<sup>18</sup> Joke Hermes, "Media figures in identity construction," Pertti Alasuutari (ed.), *Rethinking the Media Audience* (London: Sage 1999), p. 71.

resistance. These two kinds of power illustrate how James Bond becomes a popular hero<sup>19</sup> on one hand, and Punk<sup>20</sup> and Hip pop<sup>21</sup> become models for consolidating subculture on the other hand. The consumption of popular culture is the process of constructing Habitus according to Bourdieu that facilitates social controls in one way or another. Fascination with K-pop and Korean idols among Indonesians represents social consciousness of fandom. These young people reside in a society where they feel insecure and no hope for the future. Their fascination with Korean pop culture illustrates their ideal and aspiration.

### ***Emulation of culture and motivations of building a community***

All the participants in this study state that there is no similarity between Korean and Indonesian culture. They point out that religious difference represented in fashion and love relations. Nonetheless, they imitate Korean pop culture in their everyday lives underneath.

“I imitate a lot Korean idols; hair styles, fashion and makeup. I set my hair with iron like Korean female idol and wear Hijab so that no one can see my hair. I bought Korean lip tint and wear it deep side of my lips. I also wear hot shorts in my room. Those are not allowed in the public space, but I do it in private for myself,” 12 told to interviewer.

“I listen K pop all the time. I learn drum and guitar and play by myself in my room,” G3 stated.

It is prohibited to imitate Korean appearance and performance from Islamic standard, but they use veil and private way to emulate Korean culture and Korean style. They create their own private space to resist social norms and religious rules. It may look mismatched for young girls to play drum heavily while wearing *hijab*, and to have fabulous hairstyle and shorts under *jilbab*. However, Indonesian young people emulate Korean customs and cultures in their lives. The imitation of Korean culture illustrates the aspirations and social motivations of Indonesian adolescents.

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<sup>19</sup> T. Bennett and Woollacott, *Bond and Beyond: the Political Career of a Popular Hero* (New York: Macmillan, 1987).

<sup>20</sup> Dick Hebdige, *Hiding in the light* (London: Comedia, 1988).

<sup>21</sup> L. Grossberg, *Dancing in spite of myself* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).

In interviews, the most frequently stated words were street and garbage next to comments on their favourite singers. It may sound odd that high school students mentioned garbage and street so much and make wonder why these words are important to them. The ethnographic study put a lot of time to understand the inner meaning of words in the fieldwork. As a matter of fact, that is the most time consuming work to do and why ethnographers spend years in the field. Conveying indigenous term needs time and listening skills as well as self-reflection in order not to impose exogenous meaning.<sup>22</sup> Clifford Geertz's ethnographic masterpiece on Bali represents how Balinese way of naming a person, calculating time, and practicing rituals are different from the European one.<sup>23</sup> Robert Levy's study of Tahitians shows a distinctive way of using the indigenous term and forming a sense of personhood and self in light of ethnographic representation of the indigenous culture.<sup>24</sup> In this regard, Indonesian adolescents should have inner meaning when they speak about garbage and street though they may sound strange at first.

“I like walking culture in Korea. Streets are clean and safe. Garbage in garbage can. You can walk anywhere in Korea. Here I cannot walk in the street. Very scary,” 15 said.

Clean street in Seoul seems a symbol of advancement and a new vision for the future to these youngsters. the researcher can concur with their feeling of using the words, street and garbage even though my experience is limited having three months stay in a city of Indonesia. If self-reflection of indigenous words is allowed for this ethnographer, the interviewer would say that their words are related to their despair and wish for outlets. In the course of interviews, they often express their disappointment with the social system and say “there is no hope for the future in Indonesia”. They aspire to go to Korea and live there believing it's another world from Indonesian reality as shown in drama and music video. This may sound a fantasy manipulated by media, but implies social consciousness of the young

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<sup>22</sup> R. Emerson, et. al., *Writing Ethnographic Field notes* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995).

<sup>23</sup> Geertz, *The interpretation of Cultures*.

<sup>24</sup> Robert Levy, *Tahitians: Mind and experience in the society islands* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973).

audience, criticism and drive for finding an alternative while being entertained by the media.

## Conclusion

One of the hottest debates in religious communication occurs from two competing views; one puts an emphasis on religion as doctrine and the other on religion as practice. It looks as though power of religion declines in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as we observe the declining number of churchgoers in the world. However, if one considers religion as a practice, it is not clear that the influence of religion has been weakened in the contemporary world. Davie surveyed in Northern Europe countries and found that 70% of population still practices Christianity despite churchgoers being only 2.6%.<sup>25</sup> This means that many people leave the church as a religious institution and doctrines, they still practice religious belief by using media mostly and other means of religious experiences. In this regard, many scholars in religious communication focus on mediatization in order to examine the practice of religion by people, in general, these days.<sup>26</sup>

In the Islamic world, however, religion has always accompanied practice. Unlike Western society that has accomplished separation between sacred and secular in history, Islam has never separated religious doctrine from religious practice, and religion is involved in everyday life of the people. This can cause problems and conflicts as we observed conflicts such as one from terror to debate on “burkini” in Europe for example.

However, religion as a practice may allow room for tolerance and cooperation by permitting intrinsic ways of individual faith and practising religion. Many Indonesian youngsters are faithful Muslims but at the same time passionate fans of K-pop. This ethnographic study found neither one of the two is hypocrisy or cover-up. Young Indonesians are both faithful obeys of religion and simultaneously zealous lovers of K pop. Considering the fact that even in Korea, K

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<sup>25</sup> G. Davie, *Religion in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>26</sup> N. Couldry, “Mediatization or mediation,” *New Media society*, 10, 3 (2008): pp. 373-391; S. Hjarvard, “The mediatization of religion: theorizing religion, media and social change,” *Culture and Religion*, 12, 2 (2011): pp. 119-135; G. Lynch, “What can we learn from the mediatization of religion debate?,” *Culture and Religion*, 12 2 (2011): pp. 203-210; J. Strömback, “Mediatization and perception of media’s political influence,” *Journalism Studies*, 12, 14 (2011): p. 423-439.



pop has disregarded once as a target of cultural imperialism having no Asian/Korean cultural identity in music, and being notorious for exploitative contracts between artists and agencies, and of exploitation of women and minorities in ages, it may look mismatched that faithful Muslim fascinated by K pop. From the point of view of Islamic values, K pop can be seen as a spreader of Western imperialism and capitalist decay.

On the contrary, young Indonesians use K pop in practice as a strategy for stimulating new vision for the future. Korean idols are model for them to have energy and diligence and to surmount despairing reality that they are facing in everyday life. More importantly, they coopted Islam and K pop together to attempt to emancipate them and lead to better life. Religion is not a barrier to this way for them. They wear *hijab* while emulating Korean pop culture but not to evade from social norms and religious doctrine. Wearing *hijab* contains multiple meanings for Indonesian women: not only expression of religious piety but also cultural identity as well as fashionable commercialism and social networking, which has not been spread until the 21<sup>st</sup> century widely. In the same token, *Hijab* is not barrier to enjoy popular culture at individuals' choice, in this case study K pop, but a flexible means to emulate their ideals and their favorite idols.

There is no doubt that radicalized Islam threatens much of the world these days. Indonesia is no exception to this trend, particularly after Suharto when liberalization and radicalization goes by together since the end of 90s. Yet, there is complexity happening in the trend of radicalization that cannot be diminished to religious doctrine or terrorism. In practice, religious faith and cultural entertainment may not be contradicting each other as it first seemed. Young Muslims in Indonesia who enjoy K pop are not contradicting themselves if one listen struggles in their lives and motivations for their life. Therefore, this ethnographic study illustrates a possible case of good intercultural communication and a model for flexible cultural and religious integration in global community.[]

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