

NOVEMBER 16, 2023

START: 4 PM

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ISA REGIONAL GUEST LECTURE

THE 'ISLAMIC ALTERNATIVE' AND THE NEWS DAILY

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In contemporary public spheres, how do religious movements claim a space in the distribution and analysis of news media, processes that are central to the texture of publicity and collective awareness? Research on media and religion reveals a tension between the notion of the 'Islamic alternative' and the market-orientation of the news daily. While the Islamic alternative implies reportage and analysis shaped by Islamic ethics that might contest the moral groundings of the 'secular public', news dailies invariably rely for success on advertising revenue. This financial imperative pushes the daily towards the centre of cultural and economic activity (away from religious particularity).

Anthropologist Julian Millie, and his co-researchers Hawe Setiawan and Darpan, examined this problem in West Java, a region where 98% of the population self-identify as Muslim.

The premier news daily of Indonesia's West Java Province is *The Thoughts of the People*. This news organ does not assert Islamic agendas in contemporary public issues, and does not appear as a vehicle for the Islamic alternative. Nevertheless, it has become a legacy news organ in this markedly Islamic public sphere. The authors' task was to establish the basis for this acceptance.

The *Thoughts of the People* provides information, representations and encouragement in connection with readers' participation in publicly authoritative routines of embodied Islamic worship and ritual. The Islamic alternative is not oriented to public deliberation, but to embodied routines of worship: it serves a readership interested in performance of routine obligations at the level of practice, rather than ideology or creed.



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