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‘More Than Just Devotion’: The Conservative Turn Among Subcultural Muslim Youths in the Indonesian Underground Music Scene¹

Hikmawan Saefullah²

Department of International Relations, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences,
Universitas Padjadjaran, Indonesia
E-mail: hikmawan.saefullah@gmail.com

Abstract

Scholars of Indonesian politics and Islam use the phrase ‘conservative turn’ to explain the increasing religious influence in contemporary Indonesia’s social, political, and cultural life. Although their literature provides insightful explanations about this trend, scholars fail to include subcultural Muslim youths in their analyses. The term ‘subcultural youths’ in this context refers to a diffuse network of young people that share distinctive identities, ideas, and cultural practices associated with underground music subcultures (such as punk, hardcore, hip-hop, metal, and ska) as a way to deal with a sense of marginalisation and/or to oppose mainstream society. In Indonesia in the 1990s, these youths were mostly secular, pluralist, and politically progressive and leftist. Their community welcomed all people from any social background, and religion was considered a personal matter. The social, political, and economic conditions following the fall of the New Order regime (1966-1998) changed the nature of this community. Some of its participants shifted ideologically and organisationally to Islamic conservatism and right-wing Islamism, marked by their support of and involvement in various movements such as the Islamic underground movement and the *hijrah* movement. This paper attempts to fill a gap within the existing literature on the conservative turn of subcultural youths in Indonesia by introducing the most recent subcultural theory as an analytical framework that can be used to explain the ideological and organisational shift. Studying the conservative turn of subcultural Muslim youths from a perspective that emphasises critical political economy allows this paper to present new insights against conventional wisdom and purely culturalist readings of the conservative turn in Indonesia.

Keywords: Punk Subculture, Hijrah, Political Economy, Conservative Turn, Muslim Subculture, Resistance

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Introduction

Scholars of Indonesian politics and Islam use the phrase ‘conservative turn’ to explain the increasing religious influence in contemporary Indonesia’s social, political and cultural life.³ They do not, however, explain that the phenomenon has also influenced the country’s art and music communities, especially youth subcultures associated with the underground music scenes. Indonesian metalheads, punk rockers, and rappers were once known for embracing secular, liberal, progressive, and leftist ideas in the 1990s. However, many turned away from these ideas and embraced Islamic conservatism and right-wing Islamism following the fall of the autocratic New Order regime in 1998 and the subsequent *Reformasi* period.

One key example of this is how musicians associated with the Islamic underground movement, such as *Komunitas Salam Satu Jari* (One Finger Underground Movement or OFUM), are among those that were drawn to this conservative trend. For example, OFUM musicians echoed a *fatwa* from *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (Indonesian *Ulama* Council or MUI) against Ahmadiyya, LGBTIQ, secularism, pluralism, and liberal Islam. On 9 March 2012, OFUM joined an anti-liberal Islam mass protest organised by *Forum Umat Islam* (Islamic *Ummah* Forum or FUI) along with other right-wing Islamic groups such as the *Front Pembela Islam* (Islamic Defenders’ Front or FPI) at the Hotel Indonesia Roundabout in Central Jakarta.⁴ The right-wing Islamic groups believe that widespread anti-FPI sentiment was a part of a conspiracy from *Jaringan Islam Liberal* (Liberal Islam Network or JIL) to undermine Islam by pushing its more liberal interpretation of the religion. They also believe that JIL and its liberal teachings were the products of *ghazwul fikri* or the ‘invasions of the minds’ created by the West as a conspiracy to destroy Islam altogether.⁵ After the anti-Liberal Islam mobilisation, OFUM musicians joined

³ The conservative turn in Indonesia was marked by the increasing conservative or ‘fundamentalist’ interpretation and articulation of Islam, also religious violence toward minority groups such as Christians, Ahmadis, Shi’ites, and people associated with LGBTIQ. See for example Fealy 2006; van Bruinessen 2011 & 2013; Hamayotsu 2014 & 2018; Rakhmani 2016; Chaplin 2018; Hamid 2018; Mietzner & Muhtadi 2018; Kayane 2018; Sebastian & Nubowo 2019; Lanti, Ebih, & Dermawan 2019; Bagir & Fachrudin 2020.

⁴ The mobilisation was called ‘The Alert Call for Indonesian Ummah Without Liberal Islam’ (*Apel Siaga Umat Islam Indonesia Tanpa Liberal*). After the mobilisation, the OFUM musicians visited FPI’s leader Habib Rizieq Shihab at Petamburan, Jakarta. Habib Rizieq said that he supports OFUM’s mission to spread Islam through music. See Suara-Islam. 2012. “Habib Rizieq Minta Ombat Nasution dkk Islamisasi Musik Indonesia.” *Suara-Islam.com*, 4 May 2012, <http://www.suaraislam.com/read/index/4499/HabibRizieqMintaOmbatNasutiondkkIslamisasiMusikIndonesia>.

⁵ See Fealy 2006; van Bruinessen 2015; Saefullah 2020.

alliance with conservative Muslim groups such as *Indonesia Tanpa JIL* (Indonesia Without the Liberal Islam Network or ITJ) to contain JIL's influence from reaching young Muslims.⁶ Other musicians, such as those who were part of the underground collective *Ghuraba Militant Tawhid* (Underground Tauhid or UGT), whose founders once sympathised with leftist activism but became disillusioned, also share the idea of *ghazwul fikri* and supported the anti-JIL movement. Furthermore, both OFUM and UGT share a sectarian view not only against Ahmadiyya and JIL but also Shia, which they consider as deviating from the true form of Islam.

I was curious to understand why Indonesian musicians who were once known for upholding secular, pluralist, progressive, and leftist ideas were being drawn to Islamic conservatism and right-wing Islamism. The existing literature on the 'conservative turn' in Indonesian Islam provided insightful explanations about the country's move towards religious conservatism by looking at the key religious institutions, figures, and their connections to the Middle East, but they failed to include subcultural youths in their analyses. My curiosity around this issue and the absence of research analysing subcultural youths inspired me to undertake a PhD on this very topic.

To do so, I use a sociological approach known as the contemporary subcultural theory to explain the ideological change or shift of underground music scene participants who moved towards Islamic conservatism and right-wing Islamism. The theory, which refines previous versions of subcultural theory, allows me to link the existing social structure and material conditions that drove the subcultural participants' choice to shift their ideology. The subcultural theory also emphasises the use of ethnography as a methodology, allowing me to spend an extended period of time with research participants for data collection through participant observation.

My research confirms subcultural theorists' argument that the participation of youths in subcultures reflects an individual and collective attempt to resolve their social and economic problems that have disempowered and marginalised them in their everyday lives.⁷ It stresses that the ideological shift to Islamic conservatism and right-wing Islamism reflects the most recent transformation of youth resistance in response to the post-authoritarian social, political, and economic conditions. Islam and Islamism specifically became the most viable ideological alternatives for underground subcultural youths due to the absence of a coherent leftist movement as a result of the state's continuous suppression and repression

⁶ See Ardhianto 2016.

⁷ Cohen [1972] 1997; Brake 1985.

of the political left since the mid-1960s. The conservative turn amongst Indonesian subcultural youths also reflects the broader trend of the rise of the political right around the world, including in South Asia, Middle East, and Europe. The aim of this research is to show how my application of contemporary subcultural theory is instrumental to explaining the ideological shift of subcultural Muslim youths from their previously progressive, liberal, and leftist beliefs to Islamic conservatism and right-wing Islamism in the contemporary Indonesian underground music scene. The paper will begin by briefly discussing the concept of subculture and summarising the existing debate on the use of subcultural theory in contemporary studies of youth and youth cultures. After that, it explains briefly about underground subcultures, the context of their emergence in Indonesia, and how they can evolve into or encourage their followers to engage with social movements. At the end, this paper concludes that subcultural theory offers a useful theoretical framework to explain the state of contemporary Muslim politics in post-authoritarian Indonesia.

Subculture and Subcultural Theory

The concept of subculture has been used in the field of sociology to explain a distinctive culture practised by a certain social group within a society. After American anthropologist Alfred Kroeber used it initially as a geographical term to divide California into ‘subculture areas’, Vivian Palmer used it as a cultural term to define subcultural groups as the ‘smaller patches of culture’.⁸ Similarly, Milton Gordon defined it as a ‘sub-division of a national culture’.⁹ The uses of this concept imply that subculture features a distinctive form of culture to ones embraced or practised by dominant society or larger social groups. As John Clarke et al. suggest, a subculture “must exhibit a distinctive enough shape and structure to make them identifiably different from their ‘parent culture’”.¹⁰ However, having distinctive features is not sufficient to describe what subculture actually means. I share the definition of subculture suggested by contemporary subcultural theorist Ross Haenfler. He defines subculture as a “relatively *diffuse* social network having a *shared identity, distinctive meanings* around certain ideas, practices, and objects, and a sense of *marginalisation* from or *resistance* to a perceived ‘conventional’ society” [emphasis added].¹¹ Subculture constitutes a network of people that has no formal leadership, membership, organisational structure, or formal rules.¹²

⁸ Blackman 2014; Palmer 1928.

⁹ Gordon 1947, 40.

¹⁰ Clarke et al. [1976] 2003, 13-14.

¹¹ Haenfler 2014, 16-17.

¹² Haenfler 2014.

Subcultural participants interact and connect with one another on regular basis and usually share a common perception that they hold different ideas (e.g., values, beliefs, philosophies), cultural practices (rituals, leisure), and objects or artefacts (e.g., stickers, tattoos, outfits, skateboards).¹³

Scholars have attempted to explain subculture from different perspectives for decades. I will give a brief summary of these perspectives, including the existing debates, in the following paragraphs. After that I conclude that a refined subcultural theory can also be used to explain political phenomena, such as the conservative turn amongst subcultural Muslim youths in the contemporary Indonesian underground music scene. I maintain the subcultural theory's emphasis on class, social structure, collectivism, and the notion of resistance, but also take on post-subculturalists' theoretical and methodological concerns. My research shows that social divisions, material inequalities, capitalist development, industrialisation, oppressive social structures, and the post-9/11 political environment, which define Indonesia's post-authoritarian era, have affected the lives of many underground subcultural youths and driven their motivation to embrace Islamic conservatism and right-wing Islamism in order to create social change.

Scholars associated with the Chicago School, which rose to prominence in the 1920s, viewed subcultures within the context of crime and deviance.¹⁴ These scholars were the earliest to develop the concept of subculture in order to explain deviant behaviours amongst people living in urban centres. They suggested that youth participation in gangs, crimes, and deviance is not the result of their personal, moral, and psychological defects but rather a reflection of the broader socio-economic issues generated by industrialisation and urbanisation.¹⁵ The Chicago School pioneered the use of ethnography in conducting sociological research particularly to understand and explain deviant behaviours of research participants.¹⁶ A similar approach was taken scholars associated with strain theories, which also understood subcultures within the context of crime, deviance, and delinquency. Strain theorists further argued that youth participation in subcultures was driven by the social pressures and material goals placed on young people by society. Merton asserts that the material goals set by society are often too high, whilst social structure "defines, regulates, and controls the acceptable modes

¹³ Haenfler 2014; Saefullah 2022.

¹⁴ Blackman 2014.

¹⁵ Haenfler 2014.

¹⁶ Blackman 2014; see works by Park [1915] 1997; Thomas & Znaniecki 1918; Anderson 1923; Cressey [1932] 2008.

of achieving these goals".¹⁷ Some youths use illegitimate means such as thievery, selling drugs, and drug addiction, as well as sex work, to either obtain the culturally defined goals (e.g., wealth, good education and career, and power and influence) or as a coping mechanism to manage the stress and frustration resulting from not being able to achieve said goals.¹⁸ Merton believes that the desires that caused stress and frustration are socially constructed, where society defines the idea of 'good life' even though not all people have the means to achieve it.¹⁹ As a result, people come to the state of 'anomie', which eventually forces them to reject both the legitimate goals and the legitimate means to achieve those goals constructed by the society, replacing them with new goals and means created by themselves.²⁰

Albert Cohen adds that this stress and frustration mostly affects working-class individuals as they seek to achieve the broader goal of attaining middle-class status.²¹ To deal with stress and frustration, working-class individuals may turn towards delinquent subcultures.²² In other words, Cohen considers delinquent subcultures as a solution for working-class individuals who were struggling over their social status and frustration.²³ In their studies of subcultures, both Chicago School scholars and strain theorists emphasise that material conditions and class matter for participants. They both also share a problematic understanding of subculture in which they locate it within the discourses of crime, deviance, and delinquent behaviours, which has led to the understanding of subcultures as social problems and criminal groupings.²⁴

The scholars of University of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), referred to as the Birmingham School and which rose to popularity in the 1970s and early 1980s, offer an alternative approach to subculture. They developed an understanding of subcultural theory that moves beyond the discourses of crime and deviance. Influenced by Karl Marx's class analysis, Claude Levi-Strauss' bricolage, and Antonio Gramsci's cultural hegemony, the Birmingham School understand subcultures such as punks, metalheads, rude boys, and skinheads as working-class phenomena and forms of symbolic resistance to

¹⁷ Merton 1938, 38.

¹⁸ Agnew & Brezina 2010, 96-97.

¹⁹ Crutchfield 1992, 97.

²⁰ Merton 1938, 39-40; Saefullah 2022, 43-44.

²¹ Cohen 1955, cited in Agnew & Brezina 2010, 97.

²² Agnew & Brezina 2010, 98.

²³ Jensen 2018; see Cohen 1955; Saefullah 2022.

²⁴ Haenfler 2014; Saefullah 2002.

dominant society and culture.²⁵ The scholars maintain that subcultural groups that are predominantly working-class respond to their socio-economic problems and status barriers by pursuing what the dominant society considers as deviant behaviours.²⁶ Phil Cohen thus argues that subcultures are collective solutions to the problems experienced collectively by working-class youths and an avenue to express and resolve ‘magically’ the contradictions in their parent culture.²⁷ Brake shares Cohen’s argument and says:

My argument is that subcultures arise as attempts to resolve collectively experienced problems arising from contradictions in the social structure, and that they generate a form of collective identity from which an individual identity can be achieved outside that ascribed by class, education and occupation.²⁸

The Birmingham School locates subcultures within the power relations between the dominant class and the working class. It suggests that the dominant class tends to subordinate the working class through cultural domination in order to maintain the marginalised status of working-class people and the privileged position of the dominant class. This assumption is derived from Marx’s and Engels’ idea in their book *The German Ideology*, which suggests that cultural domination enables the imposition of the ideology of the ruling class (the ruling ideas) upon the working class.²⁹ Debord referred to this dominant culture as the ‘spectacle’, which manifests in news, propaganda, advertising, and entertainment and “represents the dominant *model* of life”: a deceptive virtual manifestation that “serves as a total justification of the conditions and goals of the existing [capitalist] system”.³⁰ The spectacle is responsible for the degradation of the quality of human life and is partly responsible for bringing people into a state of what Durkheim and Merton refer to

²⁵ I use the term ‘Birmingham School’ here to help me to identify and differentiate the main theoretical position of the scholars from the University of Birmingham’s CCCS (e.g., Cohen [1972] 1997; Hall & Jefferson [1976] 2003; Hebdige [1979] 2002) with other theoretical strands (e.g., Chicago School, strain theories, and post-subculture). I am aware that even some of Birmingham’s scholars did not refer to their intellectual affiliation as a ‘school’ since its scholars had diverse views and often an overlapping and contradictory sets of concerns (Blundell, Shepherd, & Taylor 1993; Blackman 2005).

²⁶ Haenfler 2003, 15.

²⁷ Cohen [1972] 1997, 94.

²⁸ Brake 1985, vii.

²⁹ Marx states that “the class which has the means of production at its disposal, consequently also controls the means of mental production, so that the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are on the whole subject to it” (Marx & Engels [1846], 1988, 67). See Clarke [1976] 2003, 12; Marx & Engels [1846]1988, 67-71.

³⁰ Debord [1967] 2014.

as anomie.³¹ Real-life experience has become less valuable as people turn towards and are attracted to material possessions and appearances.³² It is this spectacle that inspires subcultural participants to maintain their authenticity as a means to detach themselves from the manufactured desires of capitalism.³³ Subcultures are thus more than just forms of deviance: they are also symbolic forms of resistance.

According to Hebdige, subcultural resistance begins with styles and signs, “a struggle or possession of the sign which extends to even the most mundane areas of everyday life”.³⁴ Borrowed from Levi-Strauss’ concept of bricolage, subcultures appropriate existing symbols and give them new meaning.³⁵ Hebdige argues that the style components of subcultures are more than just commodities: they are “pregnant with significance” and can be used to interrupt and confront the ‘silent majority’ with the truth about the wearers’ subordinate or marginal position in society.³⁶ These subcultures form the values, rituals, and territorial spaces that distinguish subculture members from the dominant culture that they oppose.³⁷

The Birmingham School contributed significantly to an understanding of subculture that moves beyond crime, deviance, and delinquency. However, its approach also received several criticisms. Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber, whose work is included in the Birmingham School’s seminal work *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain*, criticised the Birmingham School’s literature that excluded girls and female participation in subcultures and failed to include sex and gender in their analysis, sustaining the existing issues of sexism, misogyny, and masculinism in subcultures.³⁸ Scholars that are associated with post-subculture theory also criticised the Birmingham School for excluding

³¹ Debord [1967] 2014.

³² Debord, [1967] 2014.

³³ Although Guy Debord was not a part of the Birmingham School, his ideas align with it, including its central argument regarding the dominant culture and its subordination of working-class groups through cultural domination.

³⁴ Hebdige [1979] 2002, 17-18.

³⁵ Hebdige [1979] 2002, 102-103; Jensen 2018, 408.

³⁶ Hebdige [1979] 2002, 18 & 107.

³⁷ Clarke et al. [1976] 2003, 13-14; Hebdige argued that subculture’s symbolic forms of resistance is prone to incorporation by the dominant class or corporate institutions through the continual process of “recuperation”. The process of recuperation involves a conversion of subcultural signs (e.g. dress/style, music) into mass-produced objects (commodification) and the labelling and redefinition of subculture’s revolutionary ideas and behaviour by the dominant class’s apparatuses such as the police and the media. Recuperation is used in Situationist International’s terminology, which means recovery: “the activity of society as it attempts to obtain possession of that which negates it”. See Chasse et al. 1969; Hebdige [1979] 2002.

³⁸ See McRobbie & Garber [1976] 2003; Saefullah 2022, 56.

non-white participants in their analyses, thus neglecting issues of racism in subcultures.³⁹ Furthermore, they argue that political resistance in subcultures has become irrelevant in the current context and has been replaced by youth's desires for consumerism and leisure.⁴⁰ They argue that contemporary youth cultural preferences are more driven by their desire to have fun than politics or resistance.⁴¹ Furthermore, they suggest that the Birmingham School's theorisation of youth (sub)cultures lacked in ethnographic inquiries, consequently failing to capture the voices and real experiences of participants in their everyday lives.⁴² Post-subcultural scholars suggest that contemporary youth cultures and subcultures are not exclusively working-class youth phenomena as many adults and people of all classes also participate in subcultures.⁴³ Having said this, post-subcultural scholars suggest that subcultural theory is out-to-date and that the concept of subculture should thus be dismissed.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, subcultural theory continued to be used by the next generation of sociologists and other scholars of subcultures. These scholars assert that subcultural theory remained relevant particularly in contexts where poverty, unemployment, material inequalities, and precarity were experienced by youths on a daily basis.⁴⁵ Thus, Blackman suggests that the criticisms made by post-subcultural scholars are problematic for dismissing class and social structures in the analysis of contemporary youth cultures.⁴⁶ Post-subculturalist emphasis on the individual and pleasure, Blackman further argues, "fails to recognise the structures and institutions that seek to impose on the young" and appears to be "silent on the material marginality of youth" in the face of global capitalism.⁴⁷ The defenders of subcultural theory thus maintain the legacy of the Birmingham School approach that integrates class and social structures into analysis which consequently exposes the cultural lives and identities of the economically disadvantaged youths and their reaction to the structures that disempowered them.⁴⁸

³⁹ Works that are categorised as 'Post-subculture' include Wienzierl & Muggleton 2003, 3-4; see also Bennett 1999; Muggleton 2000; Bennett & Kahn-Harris 2004. See also other critics of CCCS Subcultural theory in Gilroy 1993; Huq 2006.

⁴⁰ Haenfler 2014.

⁴¹ Bennett & Kahn-Harris 2004, 7-8.

⁴² Thornton 1995; Muggleton 2000; Williams 2009 & 2011; see also Donaghey 2016.

⁴³ See for example works on ageing punks: Bennett 2006; Davis 2006 & 2012

⁴⁴ Chaney 2004; Weinzerl & Muggleton 2003; Saefullah 2022, 51-52).

⁴⁵ See MacDonald et al. 2001; Blackman 2005; Shildrick & MacDonald 2006; Dhoest et al. 2015.

⁴⁶ Blackman 2005, 8-9.

⁴⁷ Blackman 2005, 10-16; Saefullah 2022, 59.

⁴⁸ Saefullah 2022, 60.

Other scholars have taken the middle ground in response to the debate between critics and proponents of subcultural theory. Instead of dismissing one approach over another, these scholars have refined the methodological and theoretical limitations of the Birmingham School while also including the post-subculturalists' criticism. These scholars include demographic changes and life transitions as other factors that alter the relationship between participants and their association with certain subcultures.⁴⁹ Subcultures are thus viewed as heterogeneous, always in a constant state of flux, and continue to change over time and space. Likewise, the neo-Birminghamian approach maintains the middle ground and focuses on the interplay of class, gender, race, ethnicity, age, and locality, and how these elements can form an overall social structure and complex identities.⁵⁰ Subsequently, the neo-Birminghamian approach emphasises the collective creative agency of subcultural participants and their oppositional response to a shared situation that marginalises them. The neo-Birminghamian approach also reinvigorates the political aspect as well as the notion of resistance in young people's subcultural practices.⁵¹

In addition to this, Haenfler adds that the political aspect of subcultures can also be found in their functions as free spaces, submerged networks, and abeyance structures, "in which dissident ideas and practices can ferment, sub-culturists become potential constituencies ripe for mobilisation".⁵² According to Brockett, free space can be understood as a "space sheltered from the prying eyes of opponents and authorities" where people can meet, exchange ideas, freely express themselves, and even discuss plans of action to organise resistance without being monitored by or experiencing intervention authorities or dominant groups.⁵³ The subculture's free spaces also allow the formation of submerged networks where a political act that calls for social change does not require a formal organisational structure or open declaration.⁵⁴ Submerged networks create change without having to engage in mass mobilisation or confrontation with state authorities or corporations but advocate for change by promoting alternative values and

⁴⁹ See for instance Hodkinson 2016; See also works by Bennett 2006; Davis 2006 & 2012; Hodkinson 2011 & 2013; Haenfler 2012; Bennett & Hodkinson 2012; Saefullah 2022.

⁵⁰ Jensen 2018, cited in Saefullah 2022, 62.

⁵¹ See the Neo-Birminghamian School's works on youths and attraction to Jihadism/Jihadist culture and radical Islamism: Larsen & Jensen 2019, Jensen, Larsen, & Sandberg 2021, and Jensen & Larsen 2019.

⁵² Haenfler 2014, 55.

⁵³ Brockett 2015, 366.

⁵⁴ Chin & Mittelman 2000, 36; Saefullah 2022, 100.

lifestyles.⁵⁵ According to Haenfler, subcultures can function as abeyance structures or sets of networks that provide resources and tactics to sustain a social movement or keep a movement alive “through an unfavourable political climate, ensuring movement continuity even when the situation seems bleak”.⁵⁶ Abeyance structures build up a challenges to authorities in unfavourable political and cultural environments and create continuity from one stage of mobilisation to a subsequent stage of mobilisation.⁵⁷ The abeyance structures of subcultures can thus function as collective action reservoirs where “pools of like-minded people not regularly politically active who may be mobilised for a particular protest action or political campaign”.⁵⁸ In addition, subcultural participants tend to be resistant to hegemonic, dominant, and mainstream ideas, norms, and cultures, and thus embrace alternative ideas, cultural practices, and use objects or artefacts to oppose or differentiate themselves from the dominant groups.⁵⁹

Based on the summary above, it is clear that the concept of subculture is too important to be dismissed in the analysis of youth culture and that the most recent subcultural theory offers a useful approach to explain youth subcultural practices in contemporary Muslim politics. As noted earlier, my use of subcultural theory is extended to explain a political phenomenon where youth engagement with subculture can develop into political activism and that particular socio-economic conditions can transform their ideological and organisational leanings. In order to capture the voices of subcultural participants in dealing with their everyday socio-economic challenges and their relationship with certain ideological narratives, I

⁵⁵ Chin & Mittelman 2000, 36; An example of the submerged networks in underground subcultures is straight edge. Straight edge youths adhere to and promote a positive lifestyle, that is to live a healthy lifestyle by exempting themselves from smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, drug addiction, and illicit sex conducts (see Haenfler 2004 & 2006; Kuhn 2010; Martin-Iverson 2017). Straight edge movement and lifestyle were initially promoted by musicians and bands like Ian MacKaye (vocalist of American hardcore punk band Minor Threat and founder of Dischord records), The Vibrators, Modern Lovers, Youth of Today, and Gorilla Biscuits.

⁵⁶ Haenfler 2014, 54.

⁵⁷ Taylor 1989; Taylor & Crossley 2013; cited in Saefullah 2022.

⁵⁸ Haenfler 2014, 53.

⁵⁹ Saefullah 2022; In the context of resistance, Williams and Haenfler assert that opposition or resistance should be understood based on its context and is always “multilayered” (Williams 2011; Haenfler 2014). It can be understood from both individual and collective *meanings*, articulated through both personal and collective *methods*, and carried out on multiple levels (e.g., micro, meso, and macro levels) and in various *sites* of resistance.

employ ethnographic research methods through participant observation in different research settings in Indonesia.⁶⁰

Applying Subcultural Theory and Ethnographic Research Methods in Studying the Contemporary Indonesian Underground Music Scene

While the existing literature traces the roots of this conservative turn to transnational Islamist ideas imported from the Middle East, my application of subcultural theory also pays attention to the link between participants' ideological shifts and the existing social structures, class, and material conditions in Indonesia. I first examined the social structure of Indonesian society and the social, political, and economic conditions during the New Order period (1966-1998) and post-New Order *reformasi* era (post-1998). The examination of these two periods helped me to understand the deeper context of the formation of underground's subcultural formations over the two eras, particularly the socio-political and economic conditions that contributed to participants' ideological and organisational shifts.

The context of the first transformation

In 2011 when international mainstream media outlets such as BBC covered a story of the repression of 65 punks by the Sharia Police in Banda Aceh,⁶¹ many people in the West thought that Indonesia was governed by Islamic Sharia law due to its status as the world's largest Muslim country. Many tourists who visit Indonesia for the first time are surprised by the fact that Indonesia is actually a secular country. Interestingly, Indonesia is also considered as having one of the world's largest underground music scenes.⁶² Since the 1990s, underground subcultures have spread across the archipelago, enabling the formation of underground music scenes that are interconnected with one another through continuous exchange and circulation of texts, goods, and messages associated with the subcultures.⁶³ As

⁶⁰ The use of ethnography or participant observation is the preferred research method and the legacy of the Chicago School. The method helps researchers to study the lived experiences of and give voice to the subcultural participants in their everyday life; See Williams 2011; Haenfler 2014; Saefullah 2022.

⁶¹ See Vaswani 2011.

⁶² Indonesia as one of the world's largest punk/underground scene also mentioned in Wallach 2008; Wilson 2013; Dunn 2016.

⁶³ The original English term 'underground' had been used by musicians and fans associated with the subculture since the 1970s. The Indonesian popular music magazine *Aktuil* introduced the term to Indonesian audience which refers to wild and extreme rock music played by local rock bands like AKA band and Bentoel. There were attempts by local musicians, journalists, and observers to popularise the Indonesian translation of the term '*bawah tanah*', but the English term remained more popular. The widespread production and consumption of underground music/subcultures fostered the

Baulch has studied, the growth of underground subcultures owes to the Indonesian state's media deregulation policy of the late 1980s, which allowed private media companies such as Hai magazine and MTV to promote subcultures to the general youth population of all classes.⁶⁴ The subcultures were overwhelmingly music-based, consisting of sub-genres that can be subsumed into what is known as 'underground rock music' but in fact covering punk rock, hardcore, goth rock, black metal, death metal, grindcore, metal, grunge, rap, oi!, emo, and ska. The dissemination of these subcultures also owes to the informal networks which made the underground music subgenres more accessible for working-class youths.⁶⁵

The popularity of underground subcultures amongst Indonesian youths rose within the context of several major socio-political and economic crises that swept the country during the end of the New Order era in the late 1990s. Underground subcultural spaces allowed young people to form and experiment with alternative identities different to the identities created by the state or by dominant society. It also offered them access to freedom of expression without being interfered with by the government, the dominant society, and commercial or profit-making interests.⁶⁶ Driven by their longing for cultural autonomy and creativity, these youths created underground spaces by making use of any space available to them, including replacing the function of formal spaces that were created for commercial and profit-making. Underground spaces used both private and public domains for gathering, such as house basements, garages, backyards, bars, restaurants, cafes, and sports centres. In Indonesia, underground spaces also extends to include alleyways (*gang* or *jalan kecil*), public parks, gardens, secluded nature areas such as forests and secret beaches, and even military barracks and airbases. The creation of these spaces was important for Indonesian youths who lived under Suharto's military dictatorship (1966-1998) when criticism and freedom of expression was highly restricted.⁶⁷ As Sen and Hill assert, this meant that foreign musical

formation of underground music scenes or a community and infrastructure that supports the production and distribution of underground music that are now widespread across Indonesia.

⁶⁴ Baulch 2007.

⁶⁵ Baulch 2007; Sen & Hill 2007; Pickles 2007; Wallach 2008 & 2014; Dunn 2016; Wallach called it an "indie way" ('independent way'), the term that was also used by local underground participants in referring to the dissemination of underground rock materials through street stalls (*japak*), DIY concerts/shows, distros, and 'word-of-mouth promotion' (*promosi dari mulut-ke-mulut*). See Wallach 2002 & 2014.

⁶⁶ This is important particularly when formal spaces are generally created for commercial use and profit-making. See Debies-Carl 2014.

⁶⁷ Bodden 2005; Wallach 2005; Sen & Hill 2007; Baulch 2007; Martin-Iverson 2011; Dunn 2016.

performances and texts were “important sites for signifying opposition to the New Order’s discourse of order and stability”.⁶⁸

In the 1990s, underground subcultures provided Indonesian youths with a new form of social cohesion where they could blur their class differences in their everyday social relations.⁶⁹ Underground subcultures were important avenues for these youths to express their frustration over their socio-economic hardships and give critical responses to the New Order’s authoritarianism.⁷⁰ These music-based subcultures also transformed many Indonesian youths from the passive consumers of media into active media producers through the application of punk/underground’s do-it-yourself (DIY) ethos. The ethos emphasises self-sufficiency and independence (*kemandirian*) in all aspects of life, particularly in the realms of cultural production.⁷¹ The ethos allowed the birth of indie businesses which gave many local youths, who mostly lived in precarious working conditions and lacked access to the wider economy, the ability to survive financially.⁷² Furthermore, the adoption of the DIY ethos nurtured a radical opposition to capitalism which manifested in the underground scene’s participants’ rejection of corporate sponsorship and media coverage of their subcultural activities.

Unlike in the 1970s, the consumption of underground music in the 1990s inspired young consumers to engage in a radical social movement that challenged the authoritarian state.⁷³ Some punks and metalheads took part in the student led *Reformasi* movement that eventually toppled General Suharto’s military dictatorship that had sustained the New Order’s developmentalist era for over thirty years since the late 1960s. The participants were nurtured by anti-establishment ideas ranged from anarchism to marxism, which they learned from sources such as song lyrics, poems, books, and fanzines, and through informal discussions in hang out places.⁷⁴ The predominance of leftist ideologies and activism in the 1990s underground music scene shaped an image that the scene was inherently leftist despite many of its participants claiming to be apolitical or not wanting to be associated with political activism. Nevertheless, the leftist

⁶⁸ Sen & Hill 2007, 165; See also Heryanto 2008.

⁶⁹ Pickles 2000; Wallach 2008; Saefullah 2022.

⁷⁰ Bodden 2005, 7.

⁷¹ Davies 2005; Martin-Iverson 2011.

⁷² Underground’s DIY or indie businesses flourished in the late 1990s and early 2000s despite the 1997/8 Asian economic crisis.

⁷³ See Wallach 2005; Pickles 2001 & 2007; Dunn 2016; Saefullah 2022.

⁷⁴ The leftist ideas were disseminated amongst underground youths that later created an image that Indonesian underground subcultures of the 1990s, notably punk, were inherently leftist despite many subcultural youths claimed to be apolitical.

predominance within the scene declined significantly not long after the fall of the New Order in 1998. It was followed by the emergence of an Islamist-based underground movement and the conversions of some underground youths, including those who once claimed to be progressive and leftist, to Islamic conservatism and right-wing Islamism.

The context of the second transformation

During the 1990s, Indonesian underground music scene was relatively secular. Religion was considered to be a personal matter. However, this has changed around the beginning of the *Reformasi* period (1998 into the early 2000s), when the country's broader turn towards religious conservatism began to influence underground youths.⁷⁵ Many individuals who were once known as and claimed to be secular, progressive, and leftist, began to shift ideologically and organisationally to Islamic conservatism and right-wing Islamism. Some underground youths created new underground movements that used Islam and right-wing Islamist political ideology as their new ideological basis for resistance.⁷⁶ The so-called the 'Islamic underground movement' rose to popularity in the early 2000s, with its musicians and activists attempting to make underground music scenes becomes 'Islamic' and recruit participants to join their cause.⁷⁷ A decade later, the *hijrah* movement – in which individuals abandon their previous lifestyles and move towards a more Islamic lifestyle – also rose to popularity amongst underground scene participants, marked by the increasing numbers of indie, punk, and metal musicians converting to Salafism, even denouncing the consumption and production of music due to its prohibition in Salafi Islam.⁷⁸

As subcultural theory emphasises the use of a methodology that pays attention to the lived experiences of participants in their everyday life,⁷⁹ I employed

⁷⁵ Whilst conservative and hardline Islamist groups and narratives were often said by many observers to prevail as a result of the absence of strong political leader such as General Suharto, they were actually rooted in Suharto's use of Islamic religion as a means to maintain his political status-quo. See Liddle 1996.

⁷⁶ Saefullah 2020.

⁷⁷ See Brys 2012; Saefullah 2020.

⁷⁸ The term *hijrah* is originally Arabic, which means 'emigration'. The term has been adapted into Indonesian (*hijrah* or *berpindah*) which also refers to the same meaning. The use of the term by hijrah movement activists connotes a religious meaning since it was inspired by the story of the emigration of Prophet Muhammad to Madinah in his attempt to avoid the persecution of Muslims by the Quraish tribe elites in Mecca in 622 AD. The hijrah movement activists used the term to describe an act of total repentance from committing sins and return to the path of Allah (Islam).

⁷⁹ Haenfler 2014, 13-14.

ethnographic research methods to deeply understand and document participants' beliefs, values, and cultural practices. The methods required me to be "living with a group of people for extended periods, often over the course of a year or more, in order to document and interpret their distinctive way of life, and the beliefs and values integral to it".⁸⁰ These methods are important as they allowed me to acquire a deeper understanding of the identities of the subcultural participants, the socio-economic contexts of their cultural practices and rituals, and the extent to which these contexts affect participants' relationships with their subcultures. In this study, participants are perceived as subjects and not 'objects of study', as both researchers and participants are equally important in the whole process of research.⁸¹

Between 2015 and 2018, I carried out fieldwork in three different cities: Bandung (the capital city of West Java), Jakarta (Indonesia's capital), and Surabaya (the capital of East Java). These three cities have a reputation for having vibrant underground movements and *hijrah* movements. I engaged with various subcultural participants, particularly those who were known to be part of the local underground community, including individuals who were previously secular, liberal, and leftist but had turned to Islamic conservatism and right-wing Islamism through the process of *hijrah*.⁸² In the three cities, I conducted research activities, including interviews (*wawancara*), conversations (*ngobrol/berbincang*), hanging out (*nongkrong*), and participating in religious events and rituals in various Islamic learning groups (*majelis taklim*). I also carried out data collection through informal, semi-formal, and formal discussions with the research participants and attending various music events for participant observation. Overall, I interviewed more than 80 participants, both male and female, mostly aged in their 20s, 30s, and 40s, with some participants who were much older. I also conducted observations and interacted with my participants through social media (Facebook, WhatsApp, Path, Twitter, and Instagram) as another method of data collection. I wrote fieldnotes to record primary data from the field as it is central in all forms of ethnographic studies.⁸³ Every time I finished an observation, interview, and conversation, I recorded my findings in 'jottings' or 'rough notes' upon which I later expanded for

⁸⁰ Hammersley & Atkinson 2007, 1-3.

⁸¹ Saefullah 2022, 21.

⁸² The number of the participants was over 80 and consists of both male and female participants. The number of the former was predominant than the latter due to the smaller number of female participants in the Indonesian underground music scene.

⁸³ DeWalt & DeWalt 2001; Hammersley & Atkinson 2007.

analysis.⁸⁴ This primary research was supplemented with secondary research including reviews of scholarly literature, news articles, reports, blogs, and DIY books, fanzines, and webzines.

My first research site was Bandung, the capital city of West Java. Bandung is also my hometown. I grew up in this cosmopolitan city and have spent most of my life there. Bandung not only reminded me of my childhood with my family, but also my first engagement with the underground music scene and how I became involved in the scene while also being an activist in a Muslim student organisation. During my stay in Bandung for four months, I hung out, interviewed, and had conversations with local underground musicians and fans, artists, entrepreneurs, event organisers (EOs), radio announcers, music journalists, *hijrah* participants, clerics (*ustadz*), Sufi practitioners, academics, and former and current left activists and sympathizers. It was not because that I had an emotional bond with the city that I chose this city for my fieldwork, but rather because of my curiosity about the events that define the conservative turn amongst local underground scene participants. Both the popular *hijrah* movement and the Islamic underground movement had, in fact, started their activism in this city.

One that came to my memory was the first Islamic underground movement called the Liberation Youth (LY), which was linked informally to the transnational and recently-banned Islamist organization Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI). I wrote a fieldnote that illustrated my memory of this collective:

I remember one of my work colleagues who once said to me that he was recruited by the HTI-linked Liberation Youth. He said that he was initially recruited by the collective with a few other students in front of our university campus gate during our first year studying in university. There, he said he was introduced to the transnational Islamist ideas that promote the Islamic caliphate as an alternative political system to the secular democracy. He said that the activists who recruited him were 'Islamist but had a rock n roll appearance'.⁸⁵

In relation to this, Sean-Martin Iverson, an Australian anthropologist who conducted research on the Indonesian underground movement in the early 2000s, said to me that during his fieldwork that:

...there were some Islamists tried to convert local underground youths but failed to do so. At the time, no one in the underground music scene would buy

⁸⁴ Pelto 2013, 105.

⁸⁵ Field Note, 21 December 2015.

Islamist ideas as their political thinking. However, this changed recently as Islamism has now become very popular in the underground scene.⁸⁶

LY was very likely the group that came to underground hang outs and attempted to convert people to its Islamist cause. Based on my research, LY is a collective that was formed by few underground youths who claimed to be former leftist punks but shifted to Islamism after becoming disillusioned with the ideology and resistant to leftist ideas and all types of secular ideology.⁸⁷ Divan Semesta (pseudonym), a former anarchist punk behind the formation of LY, said that his shift to Islam and Islamism began when he joined a short-term Islamic boarding school (*pesantren kilat*) when he was studying at university in Bandung.⁸⁸ Divan shared his experience on how learning about Islam has changed him:

This is when my understanding [about the world] gradually begins to change. When we came out of the *pesantren* environment, especially when we had to return to Bandung, we felt that the world had been turned upside down. Everything was like being in hell. Everything went awry. Every time you look something that is bad, you can't control yourself but to comment. Our transformation has become the subject of reproach and ridicule. There were even people who were betting how long will I last with this religious transformation [...] 2 weeks, 1 and 2 months. The worse thing was that no one betting that I would last for 1 year.⁸⁹

Pengkhianat Yang Telah Musnah (pseudonym), another figure behind the formation of LY, expressed a similar experience:

There was a significant lesson to learn from such an experience. I became aware that my knowledge of Islam needed to be deepened because if I don't do that, how can I explain it to my own family? Since then, I promised myself to leave my old bad habits. At the same time, I also decided to get out of the band and the underground scene that have raised me in the past.

Now it has been around 3 years since I learned about Islam. There's a deep longing to keep in touch with my friends in the scene like in the old times

⁸⁶ Field Note, 21 December 2015.

⁸⁷ LY emerged and was active in the early years after *Reformasi*, but it was no longer the case by the time I start my fieldwork.

⁸⁸ Divan's article on the experience of his identity and ideological change to Islam and Islamism has been removed but re-blogged by other people on the internet. See the remaining article on this blog <http://dahagailmu-inang.blogspot.com/2011/08/anak-punk-merindukan-surga-kisah-hijrah.html>.

⁸⁹ Semesta & Pengkhianat Yang Telah Musnah n.d.

because my bond with them was strong. Because of that, I'm trying to help my friends who are still in the underground scene to become aware [of Islam]. It was done by making an Islamic sub-culture or may be called counter-culture which is physically similar to the underground scene but very different in terms of its core ideas.⁹⁰

Despite their statement that LY was not part of any political party, LY's association with HTI was very strong, evident in their propaganda speech, writings, and symbols, as well as the fact that some of its members had direct and indirect affiliations with HTI's formal organization, *Gema Pembebasan*.⁹¹ Ayik Heriyansyah, a former HTI activist in Bangka Belitung, says that one of the key strategies of HTI's recruitment of young people was through the formation of '*organisasi mantel*' ('cover organizations') like LY.⁹²

In my analysis, the formation of Islamic underground movements such as LY occurred during Indonesia's political transition to the post-authoritarian era where the post-Suharto government allowed the development of conservative Islamist ideas and organisations that were previously banned by Suharto. Meanwhile, the new government continued to suppress pro-democracy activism, particularly those who had associations with the democratic-socialist political party *Partai Rakyat Demokratik* (People's Democratic Party or PRD). Many underground youths who were involved in or sympathized with this leftist organisation later went into hiding due to the fear of the state's repressive crackdown and the arrest of leftist activists. However, not all of those who left did so because of the fear of being associated with the left, but rather because they had become disillusioned with the decline of the left and/or PRD.⁹³ As a result, some decided to leave the scene and end their involvement with the political left and sought for another platform for resistance. For some, this would be right-wing Islamism.

The practice of identity, ideological, and organisational change of the early Islamic underground movement resembles the *hijrah* practice that was also very popular in Bandung. On the first day of my fieldwork in the capital city of West Java, I met my old friends from the local underground scene. They told me that *hijrah* was

⁹⁰ Semesta & Pengkhianat Yang Telah Musnah n.d.

⁹¹ Saefullah 2020, 30-31.

⁹² Saefullah 2020, 30-31; Nevertheless, most of HTI-linked collectives were no longer exist or active when I began my fieldwork in Bandung.

⁹³ Some 'activist punks' who joined and collaborated with PRD in the late 1990s formed an anarchist collective called the Anti-Fascist Front (FAF). However, their involvement and collaboration with PRD soon came to an end after having conflicts internally and ideologically with PRD. See Putra 2022; Saefullah 2022.

becoming a trend in our scene and had influenced many musicians to convert to Salafism and oppose the production and consumption of music. This religious trend created tensions amongst musicians, particularly when those who undertook *hijrah* called on other musicians to ban music because they considered it to be *haram* in Islam.⁹⁴ My friends added that the religious trend made them feeling uneasy, particularly because many musicians who turned religious became judgmental of others, as if they were considered ‘immoral’.⁹⁵

I was sceptical of the simplistic proposition that the *hijrah* phenomenon reflected a sign of an increasing ‘radicalism’ amongst Indonesian youths. I paid more attention to what was emphasised by subcultural theory: the social, political, and economic conditions that was driving participants to perform *hijrah* or shift ideologically to Islamic conservatism. This included understanding participants’ class status, the social structures where they lived, and their material conditions. In order to do that, I carried out participant observation and engaged with participants in a variety of social and research settings.

I attended sermons organized by *Shift: Gerakan Pemuda Hijrah* (Shift: The Hijrah Youth Movement), the most popular *hijrah* movement in Bandung. I joined its sermons regularly, often two to three times a week at their headquarters of Masjid Al-Lathiif. Attending the routine sermons allowed me to meet my friends who had performed *hijrah* and joined *hijrah* organisations. I paid attention to how their religious programs were organised and promoted, as well as trying to comprehend the type of religious teachings and why so many participants were attracted to the programs.⁹⁶ Shift employed creative and persuasive approaches in their *dakwah* (sermons/lectures) to attract urban middle-class youths to become a part of their religious cause. The key figures behind the success of this *hijrah* movement were two: a punk fan and professional skater named Fani Krismandar (known as ‘Inong’) and a young preacher who graduated from Cairo’s Al-Azhar University called Ustadz Hanan Attaki.

⁹⁴ One of the tensions was Aldonny aka ‘Themfuck’ (former vocalist of punk band Jeruji) who recently did *hijrah* had a quarrel with Aries Tanto aka ‘Eben Burgerkill’ (guitarist of metal band Burgerkill) through Facebook. Eben made a Facebook post about the hypocrisy of those who practised *hijrah* and voicing music as *haram* or forbidden in Islam but still selling merchandise in music festivals. Whilst the post received many likes from his followers, Eben’s post was responded reactionarily by Themfuck who was a mutual friend with him (Field Notes, 29 December 2015).

⁹⁵ Field Notes, 29 December 2015.

⁹⁶ Shift: Gerakan Pemuda Hijrah was said to be the second most active *hijrah* movement in Indonesia after the Strangers Al-Ghuroba. It has been known as a movement that converts and recruits subcultural youths to do *hijrah* or to leave the old life which they considered ‘sinful’ secular life.

In an interview, Inong said to me that the reason to do *hijrah* was because he was tired of being *baong* (Sundanese for ‘being bad’) and found excitement and spiritual satisfaction in ‘doing good’ such as learning religion. As Inong said, “I don’t know what everyone really feels when they did *hijrah* but for me personally, I feel more peaceful (*tenang*), more certain (*lebih jelas*), and no longer that I have lost direction (*ge-je/gak jelas*).⁹⁷

Shift’s members included, but was not limited to, skaters, surfers, musicians, athletes, entrepreneurs, motorbike gangsters, and school and university students. My observation showed that these participants were the segments of young people that had been overlooked by Indonesia’s mainstream Islamic organisations, Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah. Shift used a creative strategy to market its *dakwah* to these youths. One of them was to re-brand their *dakwah* in a way so that it looks cool,⁹⁸ modern, fun, and youthful. The application of this strategy can be seen from Shift’s logo, the physical appearance of their preachers (*ustadz*), the language used in their sermons, and the design of their event’s flyers, which are very attractive for modern, urban youths. Nevertheless, Shift maintained conservative Islamic teachings and was explicitly sectarian in their *dakwah*, supporting campaigns against LGBTIQ people, Shi’a, liberal Islam, and Ahmadiyah.

Whilst attending Shift’s *kajian* (religious study groups), I also attended other *kajian* organized by *Komunitas Musisi Mengaji* (Musicians’ Islamic Study Community or KOMUJI). Unlike Shift, KOMUJI members were pluralist, anti-sectarian, and welcomed everyone who wanted to learn about Islam and read the Qur’an without having to stop playing music. According to Wa Gagan, a sound engineer of several Indonesian punk and metal bands and former member of *Front Anti Fasis* (Anti-Fascist Front or FAF) who joined KOMUJI since 2011, the organisation was not formed intentionally to compete with the emerging *hijrah* groups such as Shift but to offer young people an alternative platform for learning about Islam, as well as to use music as a tool for *dakwah*.⁹⁹ In contrast to Salafi *hijrah* groups who called for the banning of music as *haram*, KOMUJI believed that music could facilitate musicians to call others to do good.¹⁰⁰ Nurfitri Djatmika (‘Upit’), the

⁹⁷ Interview with Fani Krismandar. 21 May 2016. Bandung.

⁹⁸ See Akmaliah 2020.

⁹⁹ Even some of KOMUJI members were followers of Salafism. As Wa Gagan said, “KOMUJI members welcome everyone, Sunni, Shia, or even Salafis who oppose music” (Conversation with Wa Gagan. 7 February 2016. Bandung).

¹⁰⁰ KOMUJI’s approach to Islamic *dakwah* is originated from the key members’ affiliation with a Sufi order particularly the Tijani Sufi order or *Tariqah At-Tijaniyyah*, while also grew up in the mainstream Islamic traditions such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Muhammadiyah. See Saefullah 2022, 268.

co-founder of KOMUJI and former drummer of female punk bands Boys Are Toys and Harapan Jaya, said that KOMUJI was needed to defend the positive image of Islam in the midst of increasing intolerance. As she explained to me, “[People] will be united by the same energy... those who believe in the ‘angry version of Islam’ will be united with others who believe the angry version of Islam. Likewise, those who believe in the ‘friendly Islam’ will be united with those who believe in the ‘friendly Islam’.” (“‘Islam marah’ akan dipertemukan dengan ‘Islam marah’, dan ‘Islam ramah’ akan dipertemukan dengan ‘Islam ramah’”).¹⁰¹ In this case, she found that KOMUJI became a hub for many people who shared a belief that Islam should be friendly (*ramah*) in its *dakwah*.

The Islamic underground movement and *hijrah* practice were also thriving in Jakarta. The One Finger Underground Movement (OFUM) rose to prominence in this city with a significant following from underground musicians and fans from the whole Greater Jakarta region, including Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, and Bekasi. OFUM’s key founders and musicians included Muhammad Hariadi ‘Ombat’ Nasution, the vocalist of grindcore band Tengkorak who previously sympathised with the leftist cause but became disillusioned. Ombat was also concerned with the nihilistic aspects of underground subcultures that thrived in their scene, such as the consumption of illicit drugs, alcoholism, and sex outside marriage. Ombat was politically aware of the post-9/11 world politics, particularly the United States’ war on terrorism, and how this affected the livelihood of Muslims including in Indonesia. OFUM musicians adopted the Islamist perspective of *ghazwul fikri* or the ‘invasions of the minds’ to identify the roots of the decline of morality amongst Indonesian Muslim youths. Ombat and other OFUM musicians believed that the source of this moral decline came from the liberal interpretation of Islam that corrupted the true understanding of Islam.¹⁰² Similar to OFUM was an Islamic punk collective named Punk Muslim, a street punk collective based in Jakarta. Its members lived in the slum areas of the capital city, and struggled with poverty and unemployment and were regularly rejected by the mainstream society for both their subcultural identity and economic status. Punk Muslim was a safe-haven for street kids: it provided young street kids with life skill trainings and religious learning. After

¹⁰¹ Interview with Nurfitri Djatmika aka Upit. 16 October 2017. WhatsApp.

¹⁰² The interview and conversations with the participants associated with OFUM was however, very limited as the collective was in significant decline when I started my fieldwork in Jakarta in 2016. During their last performance at the Jakcloth Festival in May 2016, Tengkorak, one of the key OFUM bands, was about to be disbanded by its vocalist and OFUM founder Ombat (see Saefullah 2017, 273-274 for his speech about this). Samir Thalib, Tengkorak’s guitarist, said to me in an interview that the band never perform again since then (Thalib, interview, 25 June 2018).

several years in existence, Punk Muslim had gained a significant following from members across Greater Jakarta as well as Bandung and Surabaya, and had even extended its members to those who came from the middle-class.¹⁰³

Jakarta was also known for a Salafi *hijrah* group called the Strangers Al Ghuroba. The Strangers – who preferred to be called a *majelis taklim*, or Islamic study group – rose to popularity between 2014 and 2017 after successfully converting and recruiting several high-profile indie and underground rock musicians to Salafism and calling for the prohibition of music as *haram*. These musicians include Alfi Chaniago (ex-Upstairs), Reda Samudra (ex-Speaker First), Andri Lemes (ex-Rumah Sakit), Fani (ex-Innocenti), the former vocalist of OFUM's band Purgatory, and Madmor.¹⁰⁴ The Strangers were known for their professional skills in using social media and visual communication design in spreading Salafist *dakwah* to young people. The Jakarta-based *hijrah* group also influenced art and music communities in Bandung, eventually resulting in the establishment of its Bandung 'branch', *Jejak Sahabat* (the [Prophet's] 'Companions' Trail').

My application of contemporary subcultural theory and ethnographic fieldwork in Indonesia constructs my argument about the conservative turn amongst subcultural Muslim youths in contemporary Indonesian underground music scenes. My findings suggest that the ideological shift of some subcultural youths towards Islamic conservatism and right-wing Islamism reflect the most recent transformation of youth resistance in response to the post-authoritarian social, political, and economic conditions that disempowered and marginalised them. These conditions are both external and internal to the underground music scene. The external factors including the post-Suharto's political stagnancy, state's suppression of the left and co-optation of left activists, the domestication of underground subcultures by capitalist institutions, material inequalities, and the lack of economic opportunities for the participants.

These external factors refer to the oppressive social structures and the incorporation of underground subcultures by the corporate culture industry. Most participants who lived during the *Reformasi* transition period shared the feeling of

¹⁰³ I visited Surabaya to meet the members of an Islamic punk collective Punk Muslim Surabaya and its founder Aditya Abdurrahman aka 'Aik' who was previously co-founding an Islamic underground collective 'Underground Tauhid'. During my fieldwork there, I had the opportunity to join Punk Muslim Surabaya's *punkajian* (a play on the words 'punk' and '*kajian*'), conduct interviews, and make conversations with the members about why Islam and Islamism became their ideological preference for activism. Before his *hijrah* and forming Underground Tauhid and Punk Muslim Surabaya, Aik was an anarchist and well-known amongst local punk scenes as someone who was very active in propagandizing anarchism through his DIY fanzines and newsletters including *Sub-Chaos*.

¹⁰⁴ Saefullah 2022, 265.

disillusionment and demoralisation by the post-authoritarian political environment. They realised that there was, in fact, no significant change after the fall of Suharto: those who sat in power after *Reformasi* were actually the same oligarchs who once supported Suharto's dictatorship. Now they controlled Indonesia's post-authoritarian democratic institutions.¹⁰⁵ The participants' scepticism and pessimism towards the post-Suharto government and its political reform can be traced back to the beginning of *Reformasi*, as recorded by *Tigabelas Zine* in its interviews with punk rock and hardcore musicians. The disillusionment also began when left activists within the underground scene realised that their struggle to end authoritarianism and capitalism had not ended with the fall of Suharto. As human rights' groups and activists have reported, post-Suharto leaders continued the suppression and repression of pro-democracy activists, particularly those associated with the left.¹⁰⁶ Throughout the post-authoritarian years (1998-present), there have been consistent crackdowns on and shutdowns of leftist events and activist activities by the state as well as by right-wing nationalist and Islamist groups. Former left sympathizer and underground rapper Thufail Al Ghifari, for instance, said that his disillusionment with the left was due to the leftists' inability to protect their cadres at the grassroots level, such as the underground music scene.¹⁰⁷ Influenced by transnational Islamist ideas such as *ghazwul fikri*, Thufail joined the One Finger Underground Movement and later formed *Ghuraba Militant Tauhid* (Underground Tauhid) with Aik. The oppressive nature of the Indonesian government towards the left, which can be traced back to the mid-1960s, initially as a response to the growing popularity of communism, contributed to the decline of leftist ideas and movement that was once popular in the 1990s underground music scene.¹⁰⁸

My data also shows that many underground youths, particularly leftist punks, became disillusioned due to the co-optation of underground subcultures by the commercial culture industry. The commodification and commercialisation of underground subcultures by private media companies, corporate record labels, and tobacco companies began in Indonesia in the late 1990s and continues today. Punk, hardcore, ska, and metal bands signed contracts with major record labels such as Sony Music Indonesia, BMG Indonesia, and Warner Music Indonesia, and due to

¹⁰⁵ Robison & Hadiz 2004; A similar case also happened in Thailand and Philippines where democratic institutions and discourses were hijacked by anti-democratic forces. See Heryanto & Hadiz 2005.

¹⁰⁶ See Human Rights Watch 2003.

¹⁰⁷ See *Republika*, 16 March 2006; also cited in Saefullah 2017.

¹⁰⁸ There was also a growing distrust amongst anarchist punks who were associated with FAF towards their ally PRD. The former viewed the latter as undemocratic and ideologically incompatible.

expensive production costs for music events, many underground youths become dependent on garnering event sponsorship from corporations, particularly tobacco companies. The conversion of the underground's subcultural capital into commodities and the commercialisation of underground subcultures themselves confirms Hebdige's view that subcultural resistance is prone to incorporation by the dominant class and/or corporate institutions.¹⁰⁹ Not only does the incorporation of underground subcultures weaken their capacity to pose a threat towards or provide resistance against dominant groups and corporate institutions, it also contributes to the problem of material inequality amongst subcultural youths.

According to a 2017 report from Oxfam, Indonesia has been dealing with serious inequality for several decades. The country's four richest men have more wealth than the poorest 100 million Indonesians, equivalent to about 40 per cent of the total Indonesian population; this has seen Indonesia be ranked as "the sixth [worst] country of greatest wealth inequality in the world".¹¹⁰ Underground youths, who mostly come from lower-middle class backgrounds, are amongst those who suffer most from this material inequality, struggling with low income and frequent unemployment and forced to rely on their family or friends to survive. To overcome these financial challenges, many underground youths became reliant on their income from working in music events, either as performers or event organisers. Corporations frequently offer sponsorship deals worth billions to organise various rock music events, which gives opportunities to many underground musicians, crews, and event organisers. However, this corporate-scene collaboration does not provide equal opportunities nor access to material resources. Event organisers and well-known musicians with a large following are usually the ones who enjoy most of the material benefits, while small bands and musicians often struggle to be invited or, once invited, to be paid fairly. This is an ongoing problem in Indonesia, even today.

Other factors also contributed to the ideological and organizational shifts of underground youths towards Islamic conservatism and right-wing Islamism. This includes internal conditions such as disillusionment and demoralisation as a result of underground scene's polarisation and fragmentation, the existence of social hierarchies within the scene, nihilistic behaviours (e.g., drug addiction, alcoholism, and casual sex), the absence of key scene figures, and the scene's stagnancy. These

¹⁰⁹ Hebdige [1979] 2002, 94.

¹¹⁰ Oxfam 2017; In contrast, the rich, politico-business oligarchs have become more powerful and control most of the nation's economic resources and political institutions. See Aditjondro 1998; Robison & Hadiz 2004; Hadiz & Robison 2013.

conditions have encouraged subcultural youths to change their attitudes and commitments towards their subculture and even reconsider their participation in it, along with the values, norms, and philosophies attached. Some leave their subcultures completely, while others limit their participation or experiment with new ideas by forming a new movement or collective that can address their feelings of disillusionment and demoralisation.

Groups associated with the *hijrah* movement such as *Strangers Al Ghuroba* and *Shift: Gerakan Pemuda Hijrah* generally shared the same position with MUI regarding social and cultural minorities. The number of *hijrah* movements has increased significantly since the 2010s, as they successfully marketed their movement through *dakwah* targeting urban Muslim youths, including those affiliated with underground subcultures. The Strangers, for example, gained significant attention amongst underground scene participants across Indonesia for their campaign against music, successfully influenced many indie and underground rock musicians to join its religious congregations. Whilst I was doing fieldwork in Jakarta in mid-2016, almost all underground participants I encountered, particularly punks and skinheads, felt that they were losing many of their friends to *hijrah*. Similarly, the Bandung-based Shift gained significant popularity for re-branding its *dakwah* to be interesting for and friendly towards subcultural youths. Shift has been incredibly successful in recruiting secular, urban Muslim youths to Islamic piety. Despite participants' claims that their *hijrah* or change of lifestyle and ideological change was influenced mainly by 'divine guidance' (*hidayah*), my research findings show that there were underlying socio-economic factors that influenced their decision to (re-)embrace Islam and Islamist ideologies. I found that many of the individuals who performed *hijrah* had previously experienced a feeling of anomie, ultimately causing them to break away from their old values, principles, and moral standards and seek new ones that are more capable of addressing their anxiety and frustration over their social and economic status. On the other hand, participants who performed *hijrah* but were previously active in the leftist movement often attempt to maintain their activism but now within an Islamist political framework rather than a leftist one.

Conclusion

In conclusion, subcultural theory and its emphasis on ethnographic research methods is useful to explain the conservative turn amongst subcultural youths in the contemporary Indonesian underground music scene. My application of subcultural theory in my PhD research confirms subcultural theorists' arguments that the participation of youths in subcultures reflects an individual and collective

attempt to resolve social and economic problems that had disempowered and marginalised them in their everyday lives. Furthermore, the shift reflects the most recent transformation of subcultural youth resistance against the demoralising socio-economic conditions in Indonesia. In the absence of coherent leftist activism due to ongoing state suppression and repression, Islamic conservatism and right-wing Islamism became the most viable ideological foundations of resistance for these youths. They turned to Islam and Islamism to express their dissent, including participating in or establishing new ideological and organisational platforms to maintain their resistance to hegemonic cultures and authorities and to provide solutions to address the demoralising effects generated by the above conditions.

There are some careful considerations that should be made when one employs ethnographic research methods. Suspicions of academic inquiries by outsiders are common, especially in tight-knit communities and scenes, meaning researchers must gain the trust of their study participants before proceeding with their research. Scholars stress this issue when they study subcultural participants such as Indonesian punks and suggest that the participants fear that academic inquiries would harm them.¹¹¹ Thus, researchers fail to understand the real-life experiences and problems faced by subcultural participants. Instead of including participants' own voices in their research works, some researchers may reduce participants' voices in the name of 'objectivity'.¹¹² Furthermore, academic works may place the subcultural participants in vulnerable positions, particularly when participants live in a social environment that continuously rejects their subcultural identity. The persecution of 65 Acehese punks in December 2011, cited at the beginning of this article, is an example of this vulnerability.¹¹³ Thus, researchers who want to employ ethnographic research methods must prevent any attempt to appropriate, misrepresent, and domesticate subcultural participants in their academic work.¹¹⁴ This consideration also applies when researchers engage with other participants who share similar concerns with the research outputs.

¹¹¹ Donaghey 2016; Tammiala 2016; Martin-Iverson in Donaghey 2017; Jauhola & Bolong 2017.

¹¹² Saefullah 2022, 15-16.

¹¹³ A good example of how academics' research work on subculture fosters further distrust amongst punk subcultural participants. Syam and Hasan's (2013) study on the punk community in Banda Aceh fails to understand the socio-economic problems and lived-experiences of Acehese youths and why they turn to punk as a means to survive. Instead, the two researchers echoed the government's suppression and repression of punks as to nurture the aspiration of the mainstream society that the development of punk community in Banda Aceh should be prevented. See Moore 2012; Dunn 2016; Jauhola & Bolong 2017.

¹¹⁴ Donaghey 2016, 293.

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