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**Article (Published version)
(Refereed)**

Original citation:

Long, Nicholas J. (2017) *On the Islamic authority of the Indonesian state: responsibility, suspicion, and acts of compliance*. [Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute](#), 23 (4). pp. 709-726. ISSN 1359-0987

DOI: [10.1111/1467-9655.12698](https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9655.12698)

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Available in LSE Research Online: January 2018

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On the Islamic authority of the Indonesian state: responsibility, suspicion, and acts of compliance

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This article examines how the Indonesian state's efforts to style itself as an Islamic authority have influenced the behaviour of its Muslim citizens. I present cases in which Muslims in Indonesia's Riau Islands comply with Islamic state directives in order to transfer responsibility for their actions to the state, showing how such a mode of practice can support Islamic governmentality, bolster nationalism, and constrain civic activism. Interestingly, compliance may occur even when citizens harbour deep misgivings towards a directive, leading me to query whether suspicion is necessarily inimical to authority. I conclude that a pronouncement's Islamic authority hinges on how Muslims relate to their suspicions regarding it, and that, for Riau Islanders, suspicion's urgency has been tempered by cultural models of personhood, individual subjectivity, and the moral murk of post-Suharto Indonesia.

Fast forward

It was the Ramadan my informants would never forget.

Ayu had been cooking all Monday.¹ The daughter of two Javanese migrants to Tanjung Pinang, the capital of Indonesia's borderland Riau Islands province, Ayu was a cheerful lady who was relishing the chance to showcase her culinary skills. Pots full of rich beef stew nestled alongside bowls of fragrant chicken curry whilst piles of freshly boiled *ketupat* stood steaming nearby. These *ketupat* – soft dumplings made by boiling rice in small baskets woven out of palm leaves – represented hours of work. Every basket had been painstakingly created by Ayu, her 18-year-old daughter Wulan, and her husband Baqir.

It was Indonesia's final day of Ramadan, which meant the end to an exhausting month of fasting and the arrival of the long-awaited Idul Fitri holiday, known popularly as Lebaran (literally, 'widening') – the whole point of which, one housewife explained, was 'to eat as much as you like without worrying about any kind of restraint'. In a complex schedule of visits, Riau Islanders would drop in on the homes of family and friends, where they would be enjoined to sample the host's curries and *ketupat*, or, for

less intimate acquaintances, cookies and soft drinks, vast supplies of which had been prepared in advance. The delicious taste of fresh food was one of the greatest pleasures of the celebrations.

My hosts were not especially religious – Ayu had no appetite for adjudicating between different varieties of Islam, saying that she ‘went along with anything that’s good’, while Wulan claimed her mother was ‘the only one in the house who takes religion seriously’. Nevertheless, everyone had been fasting, Baqir was going regularly to the mosque, and they were all looking forward to Lebaran. Zaki, Ayu’s youngest child, had just completed his first ever full month of fasting and ran around the house chanting ‘It’s Lebaran tomorrow!’ whilst 12-year-old Sami entertained us with an impassioned pastiche of the Qur’anic reader on the radio. Then, boom! The sound of cannons announced that the fast could be broken. Sami gulped down a glass of water and beamed as he told me that ‘we don’t have to fast again for a whole year!’ Before long he was trying to impress Uncle Yus – Baqir’s older brother – with tales of girls and the stupidity of the neighbourhood imam.

Yet merriment subsided as the television began broadcasting live from the Ministry of Religion’s Jakarta headquarters. The Ministry was holding a meeting known as a *sidang isbat* to confirm that the month of Ramadan had indeed ended and that the new month of Syawal had begun. We initially paid little attention to the complex astronomical charts being shown on the screen. We fell silent, however, as the first cleric to speak, a representative of Indonesia’s largest Islamic organization, the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), recommended that Lebaran be postponed until Wednesday.

Schools of Islam diverge sharply on the question of how to determine an Islamic calendar. The NU uses the principle of *rukyatul hilal*, attributed to the Prophet, which stipulates that a new month begins when the new moon is sighted. But the criteria for lunar visibility are themselves contested, with groups setting different thresholds for the width of the lunar crescent, its brightness, and its height in the sky. In 2011 (1432H in the Islamic calendar) the NU considered the moon too low, not meeting their threshold of two degrees above the horizon. Two observation stations, in Central Java and East Jakarta, had reported the moon being higher, but the NU representative argued these anomalous sightings should be disregarded. ‘Ha!’ shouted Baqir at the television, ‘as if degrees would have mattered in the days of the Prophet! You either see the moon or you don’t!’ But the next three speakers all agreed with the NU: postpone until Wednesday.

A cleric dressed in white, with a long flowing beard, was next to take the floor. ‘He’s a bearded man (*orang jenggot*)’, commented Wulan dismissively, ‘He’ll be fanatical’. Yet when the speaker suggested the anomalous Javanese sightings should be upheld given that everyone had prepared for Tuesday celebrations, Wulan was the first to cheer him on: ‘He’s bearded, but he talks sense!’ The representative of modernist organization Muhammadiyah also attracted a cheer from the family for reiterating Baqir’s suggestion that a preoccupation with astronomical angles was anachronistic, and for endorsing a calculationist method (*hisab*) which placed Lebaran on the Tuesday. Every other speaker, however, agreed that Lebaran should be postponed.

Having sought input from the *sidang isbat*’s participants, it fell to Minister of Religion Suryadharma Ali to announce the final government edict (*keputusan*). Noting that ‘the majority of commentators had agreed’ that Lebaran should fall on the Wednesday and that Muhammadiyah, despite ‘asking for permission to celebrate on Tuesday’, still ‘respected and valued’ the former view, Suryadharma could ‘conclude very clearly’ that Syawal 1432H would not begin until Wednesday. The meeting participants chorused

their assent. Suryadharma struck his gavel to confirm the decision and then with a grimace (or was it a smirk?) turned his eyes from the camera.

In Tanjung Pinang, stunned silence gripped the room.

'Well, that proves our country is under the thumb of the NU'. Baqir was the first to break the quiet. He was certain this was about inter-organizational politics, not religion. Sami spoke next, pleading with his mother as she looked impassively at the screen. 'Ma, I don't want to fast again, Ma! Please, Ma! Let's join Muhammadiyah, Ma!' Wulan proposed a family vote. Uncle Yus suggested we celebrate early, as Ayu had already cooked.

At this Ayu gave a huge, terrible laugh. 'Everyone has cooked!' she said, her voice trembling with emotion. 'The Minister was smiling', she added quietly, 'he was laughing at us after he used that gavel!' She took a deep breath. 'Right', she announced, 'one more day of fasting. What else can we do? We have to follow the government'.

Authority, suspicion, and ethical infrastructure

I use this Ramadan scene, which was echoed in households across the town, as a starting-point from which to make contributions to three fields of anthropological debate.

The first concerns the basis of state authority. Ayu – like most Riau Islanders – disputed the compassion, political motivations, and theological soundness of Suryadharma's edict. Yet she '*had to follow the government*'. Why? What leads citizens to defer to state authority against their better judgement? Anthropologists have typically approached such puzzles via two lines of explanation, either emphasizing the state's capacity to punish and seeing compliance as motivated by citizens' fear (e.g. Hansen & Stepputat 2006), or emphasizing citizens' affective and psychic attachments to a state they know to be causing them harm (e.g. Navaro-Yashin 2002). Yet neither of these arguments quite rings true for the materials in hand. Fast-breaking is not illegal in Indonesia; we could have eaten with impunity. And it is hardly as if Riau Islanders *always* went along with state directives. Many habitually ignored them, citing inconvenience or their conviction that state personnel were incompetent or corrupt. So why should Suryadharma's edict – out of all state directives – prove so compelling? My answer is that the edict exemplified a distinctive modality of state power that arises when citizens envision the state and its personnel as Islamic authorities.

Theoretically, my approach follows scholars who have emphasized that the way the state is felt and thought about by citizens helps determine the authority it is able to wield (e.g. Aretxaga 2006; Rutherford 2012). Citizens, of course, can tuck between multiple ways of envisioning the state at any moment in time. Riau Islanders did not *always* envision the state as an Islamic authority, and nor was the state the only Islamic authority in their lives. Having identified this Islamic mode of state authority, however, I quickly began to appreciate just how pervasive it actually was. The realization opened up interpretative possibilities that would have been occluded had I solely used theoretical frameworks derived from studies of secular states to analyse my material.

My second contribution is to the anthropology of religious authority, Islamic authority in particular. As Foucault (2007: 168) has argued, religious authorities and their followers can be bound together by 'extremely complex and subtle relationships of responsibility'. He describes how, in the early Christian church, pastors and their congregations acted within an 'economy of merit and fault' characterized by a principle of 'exhaustive and instantaneous transfer': whenever a Christian behaved sinfully, fault accrued not only to them but also to their religious leader, the pastor

(2007: 167-73). Other religious and philosophical traditions, of course, may not share early Christianity's conceptions of 'merit' and 'fault' (Fürer-Haimendorf 1974); nor are they necessarily characterized by the same principles of transfer. Nevertheless, they have their own *ethical infrastructures* – a term I have developed as a heuristic for thinking through my material. It draws on the sense of 'infrastructure' as the underlying framework of a system and refers to, within any given tradition, the principles that determine what is generated, ethically speaking, and for whom, when actions take place in the world. Ethical infrastructures warrant close, comparative study by anthropologists because of their differential implications for social and political life. For example, relationships in which responsibility can be shared or transferred have profoundly different stakes to those in which participants are not ethically affected by each other's behaviour. They may thus unfold in a different manner. Foucault's (2007: 180-4) work demonstrates this well: early Christian relations were characterized by an intense, individualizing 'pastoral power', the principle of exhaustive and instantaneous transfer leading pastors to supervise all the activities of their flock in order to secure their own prospects of salvation (for further examples, see Laidlaw 2014: 179-212). Similarly, I argue that the ethical infrastructures of Indonesian Islam have a crucial bearing on how Riau Islanders relate to the state as an Islamic authority.

The extensive interdisciplinary literature on Islamic authority has to date focused primarily on the means by which various state and non-state actors establish their legitimacy and credibility within both national and global public spheres (see, e.g., Kloos & Künkler 2016; Metcalf 1984; Volpi & Turner 2007). Only a few anthropologists have commented on the ethical infrastructures undergirding relationships between Islamic authorities and their followers, typically doing so rather fleetingly (e.g. Buitelaar 1993: 88-91; Khosravi 2011: 24-6). The exception is Agrama (2012), who has made a truly pathbreaking contribution by articulating a theory of Islamic authority that places questions of ethical infrastructure at its very heart.

Having conducted fieldwork in two Egyptian state institutions that issue directives on family affairs such as inheritance and divorce, Agrama observed a curious discrepancy. Judgments citing Sharia texts in Egypt's personal status courts were viewed with great suspicion; litigants rarely obeyed them in the absence of coercion. The opposite was true of the fatwas (legal opinions) issued at Cairo's Al-Azhar Mosque, which also derived from the Sharia. Even when questioners did not get the decision they were hoping for, they generally followed the fatwa, confident it would help them become an ideal Muslim self.

For Agrama (2012: 184), the fatwa's authority hinges on 'the careful allocation of responsibility'. Imagine that following a fatwa leads somebody to commit sinful acts. If this happens because the questioner has misrepresented the facts of the situation, then full responsibility for the sin rests with them; the *mufti* is absolved of blame. The situation is reversed if the sin results from a jurisprudential error on the *mufti*'s part. Such a demarcation of responsibility – afforded by the ethical infrastructure of Egyptian Islam – means there is no reason for either party to worry whether the other has made an error or has lied, resulting in 'comparatively little suspicion . . . even in cases where [legal] manipulation seems evident' (2012: 34). *Muftis* and questioners thus forge 'strong bonds', and a 'measure of trust' secures the fatwa's authority (2012: 184). In the personal status courts, by contrast, a hyper-vigilance against abuses of power, characteristic of liberal legal thought, leads to suspicion that the Sharia itself may have been subject to manipulation by judges, stripping verdicts of their Islamic authority (2012: 126-59).

Agrama's insights into how pronouncements acquire or lose Islamic authority offers a valuable starting-point for investigating why Riau Islanders might comply with Islamic state edicts. The allocation of responsibility, as I will show, figures prominently in Indonesians' explanations of their actions. However, Agrama's analysis of the relationship between suspicion and authority warrants closer examination. He is correct to argue that a 'suspicious disposition' towards authority is not a natural, default state, but historically and culturally contingent (2012: 127). But he writes as if suspicion, once present, is inherently inimical to authority, and not just in the liberal space of the courts – his ethnography describes several questioners who feel 'unsure' about their fatwas, all of whom are driven by their suspicions to seek out a second fatwa (2012: 117). Perhaps Egyptians never do follow Islamic pronouncements if they harbour suspicions towards them. However, my Indonesian materials demonstrate clearly that even liberal suspicion need not undermine Islamic authority. Suryadharma's edict, for instance, was viewed with tremendous suspicion by many of my informants – and yet it still had 'authority' insofar as they acted upon it. Evidently, the Islamic authority of a pronouncement depends not just on whether it elicits suspicion, but also how subjects experience, make sense of, and respond to that suspicion. Yet it is on this issue that Agrama's work, focused as it is on the worlds of courts and fatwa councils rather than the worlds of questioners and litigants, reaches its limit.

To develop his arguments further, I turn to ethnographic data drawn from over thirty months of participant observation in Indonesia's Riau Islands. Doing so allows me to contribute to a final body of literature, concerning Indonesia's cultural politics of suspicion. Analyses of life during Suharto's authoritarian New Order regime, in power from 1966 to 1998, have shown that the secrecy surrounding the often corrupt and violent activities of state actors became a source of 'unending rumors'; stories of scandal, conspiracy, and counterfeiture were 'voraciously invented and consumed' (Steedly 2013: 264; see also Siegel 1998: 52-65). Indonesia's subsequent democratization sparked such a proliferation of competing political interests, and such journalistic commitment to exposing wrongdoings, that public suspicion skyrocketed even further (see, e.g., Bubandt 2014; Gibbins 2013; Strassler 2009). As my informants often lamented, politicians could not be trusted, but nor could the activists or journalists who questioned them, who might easily be in the service of rival elites. Everything had become 'murky' (*gelap*).

Yet although the existing literature successfully accounts for contemporary Indonesia's 'crisis of credibility' (Strassler 2009: 40), a lack of attention to the lived experience of suspicion has prevented Indonesianists from fully appreciating what is at stake in its proliferation. This is regrettable given that, as this article shows, suspicion can have significant but sometimes counterintuitive social and political ramifications. After a brief historical overview of the Indonesian state's claims to Islamic authority, I show how Riau Island Muslims' conceptions of personhood and consciousness interact with locally dominant conceptions of how responsibility can be allocated to generate a situation in which suspicion fails to diminish the state's Islamic authority and instead sustains it.

The Indonesian state as Islamic actor

Ever since Indonesia's independence, the relationship between Islam and state has been vexed. Although Muslim nationalists failed to make Indonesia constitutionally Islamic,² a Ministry of Religion was established in January 1946 at the behest of groups

who wanted to protect Islamic institutions from ‘non-Islamically oriented’ bureaucrats and politicians (Lev 1972: 44). The inaugural Minister, Muhammad Rasjidi, emphasized that the Ministry existed to guarantee citizens the freedom to practise their religions, *not* to intervene in ‘internal religious affairs’ (Mujiburrahman 2006: 125–7). The Ministry nevertheless had jurisdiction over Islamic courts, marriages, mosques, pilgrimages, Islamic educational institutions, and the national curriculum for religious education.

While many Muslims welcomed the Ministry as ‘a critical foothold pending further Islamization of Indonesia’, others had doubts – its position was anomalous in traditional doctrine and it appeared to legitimize a non-Islamic state (Lev 1972: 47). Controversy therefore broke out when, in 1952, the Ministry assumed authority over the appointment of *wali-hakim* (ritual guardians) for brides whose closest male kin were not available. Local religious officials condemned this as state interference in religious affairs. To counter such accusations, the Ministry convened a conference of *ulamas* (Islamic scholars) in 1953, where it was noted that appointing *wali-hakim* would ideally be the task of a caliph or sultan – i.e. an Islamic leader – or his nominated delegates. ‘Even though President Soekarno was not a sultan in the meaning of the Sjariah’, the conference declared, ‘he was clearly the ruler of Indonesia and could therefore delegate authority to appoint *wali-hakim* to the Minister of Religion’ (Lev 1972: 49). A 1954 conference then ‘stated definitively that the President, Cabinet, Parliament, and so forth constituted a Waliyul Amri Daruri bi Ssjaukah . . . the highest leadership of the Islamic community’ (1972: 50). Though some protested, the institutions of the state had been ratified as Islamic authorities.

Suharto’s authoritarian New Order regime came to power in 1966. It violently suppressed the political left and took measures to stifle the threat of Islam becoming a future wellspring of opposition, wresting control of the Ministry of Religion from organized Islam, subjecting quotidian Islamic practices to ever-increasing degrees of state regulation, and attempting to curtail the role of Islamic institutions in public life (Cammack 1997: 150–1). Not until the early 1990s, as Suharto’s military support began to dwindle, did the President develop a more collaborative relationship with the Muslim community, securing him much-needed backing, and offering devout Indonesians an opportunity to infuse state governance with Islamic ideals (Hefner 1997).

The rapprochement coincided with a new phase in the New Order’s control of Islam. Rather than seeking to repress Islamic institutions, state actors – chiefly the Supreme Court and the Ministry of Religion – now specified the very principles upon which Islamic institutions could operate. Perhaps the clearest example is the 1991 Compilation of Islamic Laws, a text that detailed the core principles to which judges should adhere in Sharia courts (Bowen 2003). Publishing the Compilation was theologically radical: political figures were intervening in matters – such as the interpretation of Islamic law – which had previously been outside their jurisdiction, thereby positioning themselves as authoritative interpreters of the religious tradition (Cammack 1997: 167). What on one level appears to be an ‘Islamization’ of governance was thus on another level a political subversion of Islamic epistemological principles (Moustafa 2014). And it was one that upheld the state’s legitimacy as an Islamic authority.

Challenges to that authority have resurfaced in the post-Suharto period, with liberal circles questioning the state’s involvement in Islamic affairs and the MUI (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, or Indonesian Ulama Council) asserting its independence from the state, of which it was once a self-styled defender (Assyaukanie 2008; Ichwan 2005). Nevertheless, public support for the Ministry of Religion remains strong (Assyaukanie 2008: 14).

Moreover, in recent years, the spectre of radical Islamism has prompted many Muslim intellectuals and politicians to declare on record that the President and state apparatus represent an *ulil amri*, or supreme Islamic authority. In 2014, the chair of the NU even announced to the organization's annual meeting that newly elected President Joko Widodo was 'the Indonesian people's caliph' (Antara News 2014). Similar views were widespread in Tanjung Pinang, where they were repeatedly disseminated in mosques and study groups; the idea of a government's Islamic authority seeming as self-evident to many informants as the nation-state system itself. What this means, then, is that state personnel were also seen as embedded in the ethical infrastructures of locally dominant Islamic traditions – with crucial implications for how my informants related to them.

Riau Islands Islam

In 2011, Tanjung Pinang was home to just under 200,000 residents, of whom 78 per cent identified as Muslim (BPS 2016). Like many parts of Indonesia, it has witnessed an explosion of Islamic public culture since the late 1980s (see Brenner 2011; Fealy & White 2008; Jones 2010). That is not to say that all, or even most, Riau Island Muslims support the specific forms of Islam promoted by Indonesia's Islamic movement. Membership of reformist organizations remains low,³ the Sharia has not been incorporated into municipal byelaws, and most of my informants, like Ayu, expressed reluctance to affiliate themselves with any Islamic organizations, saying they preferred simply 'to follow anything that's good'. Nevertheless, the growing attention given to Islam in politics, the media, and everyday life has rendered the religion an object of interest and concern for many Riau Islanders, who increasingly understand themselves as individualized Muslim subjects, their fates – in this world and the next – in their own hands (see also Mittermaier 2013; Peletz 2002).

It is difficult to give a 'typical account' of Riau Islands Islam. Although the region's autochthonous Malays have long been Muslim, its access to Singapore (and hence Singaporean currency) has attracted economic migrants from across Indonesia ever since Independence. Residents of Tanjung Pinang have thus often been exposed to quite different Islamic traditions from each other. There were, nevertheless, certain principles upon which they were broadly agreed. I outline these briefly here, not to either challenge or replicate the extensive work on Indonesian metaphysics conducted by other anthropologists (e.g. Peletz 1996; Retsikas 2012; Simon 2014), but to indicate how Riau Island Muslims' understanding of themselves, and of the world, led them to engage with Islamic authorities, and their own suspicion, in distinctive ways.

Sinning, moral perception, and responsibility

The little sins that we commit unawares: getting cross, acting spitefully, speaking ill of somebody.
They all add up.

Malay schoolteacher

Riau Island Muslims frequently remarked that they were *takut dosa* – scared of sinning, or of having sinned. They had good reason to be. Misdeeds during one's lifetime would be evaluated at the end of the world, and could jeopardize one's prospects of being accepted into paradise. Even in those cases where acceptance was said to be 'guaranteed' – because, say, the deceased had spoken the testimony of faith (*syahadat*) as their last words – a lifetime's misdeeds would still be punished, angels descending every night to torture deceased sinners as they lay in their graves. Consequently, much time and effort

was devoted to avoiding and atoning for sins, and also acquiring merit (*pahala*), said to be capable of ‘cancelling sins out’. Although religious discourses in circulation within the Riau Islands stressed the possibility of perfectibility, stimulating some Muslims to embark on a path of intense ethical self-cultivation similar to that witnessed in Cairo by Mahmood (2005: 45–6), most of my informants simply focused on keeping the budget of their actions in the black. This was an anxious pursuit. They could not be sure how harshly God would weigh their sinful actions, and knew that some sins could wipe out a lifetime’s accumulated merit (see also Mittermaier 2013: 284–5). Better, they said, to avoid sin whenever possible.

Doing so required learning how to identify when morally ambiguous actions were sinful, and indeed when seemingly innocuous actions would put one on a path on which sinning became inevitable. Abdul, a Malay entrepreneur, encountered the latter problem in 2014. Shortly before the presidential election, a campaigner offered him 500,000Rp (US\$24, the equivalent of a week’s profits from his laundry business) in exchange for his vote. At the time, Abdul heard a ‘whispering’ (*bisikan*) telling him, ‘Go on, take it. Why not?’ And so he did. But a few days later he ‘discovered information’ about the campaigner’s candidate that meant he could no longer countenance voting for him. Abdul declined to reveal what he had learned, but insisted it was enough to know that if he voted for the man, and – worse still – played a role in his victory, it would be a serious sin. Yet breaking his promise to the campaigner would also be sinful. What could he do? Ultimately he decided to abstain, hoping that sincere repentance would stop this sin being held too strongly against him, but he still felt wretched. Taking the money had not, in itself, been sinful (or so he claimed), but it had left him trapped in an invidious position. He should never have listened to the encouraging whispers. His moral perception had failed him.

Almost all Riau Island Muslims agreed that moral perception, along with capacities such as reason, desire, and emotion, was a faculty of the ‘spirit’ (*usu*, *jiwa*, but also *batin*, or *hati*). Although the precise structure and function of this ‘spirit’ was hotly debated, the importance of accurate moral perception compelled my informants to develop provisional models with which to navigate daily life. They spoke of their wakeful states as a stream of conflicting impulses, feelings, and ‘whisperings’. These had several sources. The first was the ‘psychosocial development’ (*perkembangan psikososial*) of an individual’s personality. Numerous tales of spoiled, traumatized, and deviant individuals revealed my informants to believe that spiritual animation was, at least in part, forged by relationships and the experiences one had lived through, rendering psychodynamics a primary source of emotions (*emosi*), feelings (*rasa*), and desires (*nafsu*), although some of these (hunger, aggression, libido) were also attributed to *naluri* – the animalistic instincts and appetites common to all creatures.

Whispers also came from entities within. Human beings, Riau Islanders explained, were organisms that were both composite and permeable. The malign forces of Satan (*Iblis*) and his army of demons (*setan*) could circulate in the bloodstream, conjuring up multisensory illusions that distorted their hosts’ perceptions of reality and spurred them to sinful action. Zikri, a motivational speaker, framed the issue differently. In his view, which also enjoyed widespread currency in town, the spirit itself was ‘held’ (*dipegang*) by four angels and four devils. Thus in any given situation, any one of the eight could be influencing one’s thoughts. Zikri himself suspected these angels and devils could directly provoke impulses within human consciousness; others argued that feelings and desires emerged from a person’s psychosocial development and the angels

and devils would then offer ‘whispers’ advising as to whether or not such impulses should be acted upon.

A final source of whispers came from the *hati nurani* (literally, ‘illuminated heart’, but widely translated as ‘conscience’ or ‘heart of hearts’), a distinct organ within the spirit which offered advisory whispers on the correct course of action. Widya, a Javanese businesswoman, described it as ‘a large organ, the most powerful part of which is an “eye”, through which divine insight (*ilham*) flows from God into the human spiritual plane’. The *hati nurani* ‘filtered’ (*menyaring*) impulses and thoughts by sounding whispers that served as an ‘alarm’ (*alaram*) if someone considered actions that would lead them down an immoral path. As Widya made plans for a new branch of her business, doubts began to plague her. Where would she get the money? If she had to borrow it, could she pay off the debts in a timely fashion? Shouldn’t she be using her spare cash to help the poor? These, she realized, were all alarms sounded by her *hati nurani*. Though she could still act on her initial desires, she would be wrong to do so: the alarm was coming directly to her from God. Yet as Fadli, a Minangkabau schoolteacher, explained, too many misdeeds could cause the *hati nurani* to become ‘dirty and diseased . . . just like the hearts of people who have eaten too much fatty food’, further compounding the difficulty of moral perception.

With all these different feelings and whispers circulating in their consciousnesses, and the stakes of sin being so high, Riau Islanders often struggled to decide which whispers and impulses they should heed. Some undertook training designed to heighten their powers of moral perception: a long-standing theme of Sufist and Javanese mysticism finding new life in expensive programmes that promised to ‘unshackle’ the centre of human spirituality – no longer called the *hati nurani* but rather the ‘God Spot’ – and facilitate correct moral judgements (Rudnyckyj 2009: 121–2). For those unwilling or unable to devote themselves to extensive training, other strategies could be deployed. Seeking counsel from friends, family, or a religious teacher (*ustadz*) often made matters clearer. By bringing their own moral perceptions to bear on the dilemma, such consultants afforded a kind of triangulation. Another strategy was to take one’s time in making a decision. Abdul, still shaken by the experience of selling his vote, reflected that his error had lain in how hastily he had responded to the whispering he had heard. He had allowed no time for the *hati nurani* to filter his consciousness effectively. He usually avoided acting immediately, instead researching all possible factors and turning them over in his head for consideration, hoping that the *hati nurani* would eventually become the loudest whisper and point him in the right direction; Abou El Fadl (2009: 132) labels this ‘conscientious pause’. Yet as Abdul noted, although consultation and deliberation reduced the risk of acting on devilish whispers, they did not eliminate it. Zikri agreed, concluding it was often best not to act at all:

If there’s no need, don’t act! This problem of interpreting the spirit is why we [Muslims] don’t create pictures of God. Don’t get me wrong – God is all around us, in everything. But that can be hard to grasp, so it helps to imagine him as a personified figure. That’s OK. But to draw his face? No! How could we be sure whether what we drew came from an angel within us or a devil? Better to have no images of God at all. No need to make a drawing, no need to take that risk.

A final strategy involved not the avoidance of *action* so much as the avoidance – or rather the referral – of *decision*. Riau Islanders explained that they could be voided of responsibility for their actions if they followed the directions of a person or entity who had made an Islamic pronouncement on their behalf. Instead, the authority would ‘take

responsibility' (*menanggung*) for the actions, and any fault that might accrue. This was an ethical infrastructure in which the upward transfer of responsibility was possible. Individual Muslims, however, remained free to disregard such pronouncements – in which case, my informants said, their actions would be a matter 'between them and God'. For Zikri, this agentive, optional form of submission proved his religion was not 'authoritarian', as he feared some Westerners might think. 'It's semi-authoritarian (*semi-otoriter*)', he explained. 'Islam is all about responsibility. Nobody is forced; we choose whether or not to follow'. And yet the 'choice' often seemed inevitable, precipitated by the metaphysical uncertainties outlined above.

Riau Islanders could transfer responsibility in any context considered a matter of Islamic jurisprudence – a field classically divided into matters of *ibadah* (worship) and *muamalat* (everyday life; social intercourse). Thus, my informants explained how every time they went to the mosque, they were in fact transferring responsibility to their imam (prayer leader). Should prayers be misspoken or forbidden ritual procedures introduced, the imam took all responsibility. A similar dynamic inhered when following pronouncements made by Islamic authorities in matters of *muamalat*. These range from fatwas issued by *ulamas* and the verdicts of Islamic courts to the guidance provided by the Ministry of Religion's on-line Sharia consultation portal. They also include halal certification, something for which Ayu once casually remarked she was 'grateful'. She said it allowed her to shop with confidence. Importantly, though, this did not mean she was confident that certified products only included ingredients that were permissible under Islamic law. It was a confidence that she could act *as if they did* and not be committing a sin if forbidden substances had entered the product unnoticed – responsibility for her consumption would be transferred to the certifiers.

Transfer of responsibility is not always a solution to moral quandaries. It violates what reformists consider the 'core Shari'a value' that 'no one can be called to answer for the sins of another' (Abou El Fadl 2009: 137); Muhammadiyah members thus denied that it was even possible. And some dilemmas, like Widya's prospective business expansion, fall outside the purview of Islamic jurisprudence – one can only receive advice, the Islamic authority of which hinges on such factors as the speaker's scholasticism, charisma, genealogy, and social connections (Kloos & Künkler 2016: 483). Directives on jurisprudential matters exert a different kind of authority. Compliance may be motivated as much by the desire to abrogate responsibility as by trust or faith in the edict's veracity. Followers do not need to trust the directive or its source. They comply because they *distrust themselves* to adjudicate a situation correctly, saddled as they are with the hazy moral perception outlined earlier.

Ramadan revisited

Consider Ayu's dilemma as she sat by the television, watching the devastating outcome of the *sidang isbat*. It would be a serious sin to celebrate Lebaran while it was still Ramadan. But it would also be a serious sin to continue fasting on Idul Fitri – a fact clearly stated in the hadith of Abu Sa'eed al-Khudri and on which Muslim scholars are agreed. What was she to do?

All her instincts were telling her to celebrate immediately. Sami's cries were tugging at her heartstrings, begging her to spare him a further day of fasting. Having spent the day cooking, she found herself persuaded by the argument that the efforts of the nation's housewives should factor into the Minister's verdict, that compassion of this kind would represent a good Islamic decision. Her husband's dismissive attitude towards

the NU also struck a chord: was Lebaran simply being delayed because of political point-scoring between Islamic organizations? It seemed possible. And her friends and relatives in Singapore and Malaysia were already celebrating. With those countries just a few kilometres away, it seemed probable that the moon was already high enough above the horizon for Riau Islanders to start feasting too. But was this her *hati nurani* speaking, or a devil tempting her to follow a selfish and impious path? She couldn't be sure.

Few could. 'Nobody in [our] house knew whether it would be a sin to celebrate', recounted Jefri, a young migrant from Lampung. 'We decided it was better just to follow the government'. Ayu had reached a similar conclusion. As she glumly explained on the Tuesday she had expected to be Lebaran, 'I'm used to following the government. If we don't, I don't know what will happen . . . They've made a declaration in the name of all the people of Indonesia. If there's been a mistake, they will take responsibility for it'.

Ricky, a Batak journalist who had recently converted to Islam, was at the governor's office when the news broke. He had hoped that the governor, H.M. Sani, might defy the Ministry of Religion and declare a local Lebaran, as had reputedly happened in the East Javanese city of Surabaya. For days, my informants spoke enviously of how lucky the Surabayans were to celebrate as expected without any anxiety, responsibility having been transferred to their mayor. But it was not to be. 'If anyone wants to celebrate Lebaran tomorrow', Sani had said, 'that's between them and God. But [the provincial government] will stick to following the centre'. Sani would not forbid anyone from celebrating, but nor would he tell them that they *should*. In fact, he had carefully formulated his words so that he could not take responsibility for anything at all. Ricky had been disappointed, but his friend Yanti was unsurprised. 'Sani's an elderly man now', she remarked. 'He'll be thinking of what comes next. After death. No way would he take on the sins of a whole province'.⁴ The possibility of transferring responsibility, as Yanti's remarks implied, could influence not only how citizens behaved but also the governance state actors were prepared to provide.

This material reveals a distinctive, Islamic, modality of state authority. It also shows how Islamic authority can withstand the challenge of suspicion. In theory, suspicion *could* trump even the authority of Islamic pronouncements – because the *hati nurani* always reveals the morally correct course of action. Thus for all that Ayu appreciated halal certification, she wouldn't buy a certified product if she had a 'strong feeling' it wasn't halal. 'If I ignore that feeling', she explained, 'the purchase becomes a matter between me and God'. Intense or persistent doubt, the kind one could confidently associate with the *hati nurani*, transformed the moral status of action, rendering the transfer of responsibility impossible. Yet, as we have seen, it was in practice very difficult to determine whether a whisper actually originated from the *hati nurani* – especially in circumstances affording no opportunity for conscientious pause. Unsure what to do, and unable to trust her own suspicions, Ayu complied with Suryadharma's edict and transferred responsibility to him.

Ricky's hope that the provincial governor might step in as an alternative authority to the Minister of Religion raises further questions. Which authorities can one transfer responsibility to in any given situation? How are different authorities positioned relative to each other? My non-Muhammadiyah informants were generally agreed that 'the government' was the highest authority of them all – a stance that, as noted earlier, is widespread in Indonesian public culture. Its prominence in Tanjung Pinang was reinforced by three factors. Firstly, there was a relative absence of local Sufi masters

and traditionalist Islamic boarding school leaders (*kyai*) who in some other parts of Indonesia present themselves as alternative religious authorities, autonomous from and sometimes opposed to the state. Secondly, high rates of recent migration and a transient population had made it difficult for shared local traditions of non-state religious authority to develop. Finally, the town's two most prominent religious figures – Huzrin Hood, head of the provincial MUI, and Syahrul, imam of the Mesjid Raya (Grand Mosque) – had both taken prominent positions in local government and fully supported the Ministry of Religion. By contrast, during recent fieldwork in Semarang Regency, Central Java, rural villagers explained that Ministry of Religion officials rarely came into the mountains; they would rather follow the edict of a local *kyai* than a remote bureaucrat. Yet they would also happily follow Ministry guidelines on such matters as prayer times, unless their *kyai* (or *hati nurani*) gave them reason to do otherwise. The diversification and fragmentation of religious authority had not stopped the state being relatable to as an Islamic authority by its citizens; it simply rendered such relationality more fleeting and more contextually variable than in Tanjung Pinang.

The relative standing of different government authorities was often unclear, reflecting widespread confusion over the respective jurisdictions of district and central governments in the wake of Indonesia's ongoing political decentralization. Uncertain about how different government authorities were positioned vis-à-vis each other in everyday administrative matters, let alone in the ethical infrastructure undergirding Islamic pronouncements, Riau Islanders agreed that, barring any alarms from the *hati nurani*, they could follow national, provincial, or regional Islamic edicts without fear of sinning.⁵ Had Sani declared an early Lebaran, then, many would have doubtless followed his edict, turning the ambiguities of moral perception to their advantage in order to stop their *ketupat* from going to waste.

The broader implications

The events of Ramadan 1432H rendered explicit a modality of authority that state personnel can wield whenever they issue directives on matters that citizens consider to fall within the purview of Islamic jurisprudence. This form of state power saturates the lives of Riau Island Muslims. Most obviously, it is integral to the activities of the Ministry of Religion, a notoriously corrupt state agency which Hooker (2008: 205) deems 'all-pervasive in Muslim affairs', its procedures 'a source of syariah'. It currently oversees when and how citizens should pray, their pilgrimages to Mecca, marriages, the calendar, the core principles of Islamic jurisprudence, and the curricula taught in Islamic schools. Whenever Indonesians go along with its regulations and recommended procedures – as most do on a daily basis – they transfer responsibility from themselves to state employees, ratifying the Ministry as a legitimate Islamic authority on which they can depend. Hence my friend Melly's dark warning to a nephew with dreams of becoming a civil servant: 'God willing, you won't work for the Ministry of Religion! Imagine being responsible for everyone's sins . . . ?'

The transfer of responsibility did not necessarily win the Ministry citizens' support, but it could shut down opposition. Early in my fieldwork, my neighbour Anton invited me to watch the forthcoming Qur'anic Recitation Contest (MTQ) with him. 'Actually, I don't agree with the MTQ', he then added. 'It's not appropriate for people to compete at Islam, for prizes to be given out. An exhibition would be better than a contest'. Many Riau Islanders had such concerns; some even boycotted the MTQ for these reasons. But not Anton. 'The Ministry of Religion's organizing it', he explained, 'so I'm happy to go'.

And go he did, beaming as he enjoyed the contest's festive atmosphere. Ministry backing, whilst doing nothing to alleviate Anton's substantive concerns, stopped his attendance being problematic: since the Ministry had said Muslims could attend tournaments where contestants compete at Islamic pursuits, the Ministry would take responsibility if this was in fact sinful. We see here how the transfer of responsibility lets the Ministry of Religion go about its business, propagating its preferred forms of Islamic self-formation. But we also see how, in a world where moral perception is ambiguous, desire can strip suspicion of its authority. Anton had doubts about the MTQ but, perhaps because of the pleasures of the event, he disavowed these doubts, allowing MTQs to be a matter on which he deferred to his government.

State Islamic authority could enable citizens to cultivate an ethic of nationalism. Once the 1432H Lebaran festivities had finally begun, I joined Fadli, my Minangkabau schoolteacher friend, for a celebratory evening coffee by the seaboard. He pointed to the buttery curl that hung in the sky. 'When I see how big and bright the moon is tonight . . . Wah!' He shook his head sadly. 'I know that my government was wrong. Lebaran should have been yesterday. *But right or wrong, it's my country* [English used]'. He paused. 'Besides', he added casually, 'the government will be responsible for what's happened'. Whatever his thought processes had been after the *sidang isbat*, Fadli now presented his decision to heed Suryadharma's edict as an act of patriotic devotion and not a source of regret; it was something of which he could feel proud. But as his final remark reveals, this was easy nationalism. It carried no consequences – for him. Transferring responsibility had allowed him to express his emotional attachment to the nation-state with impunity.

Finally, state Islamic authority could influence civic activism. Zainal was a middle-aged Malay renowned for his vitriolic critiques of the government. He attended political demonstrations, he was pursuing a lawsuit against Tanjung Pinang municipality; civil servants, he said, turned his stomach. I was therefore surprised when he explained why, despite having joined his local branch of Muhammadiyah, he did not operationalize modernist religious principles in his daily life:

Philosophically, I prefer Muhammadiyah's version of Islam. It's more scientific. The problem is that our state is under the thumb of the NU. I have a country. I have to be loyal to it, right?! Whether I like it or not, the government wins out, even though it's wrong.

He elaborated by turning to an analogy:

In Islam, even when an imam is wrong, we go along with him, and he becomes responsible for any sin. That's just a miniature example of how important togetherness is. In Islam, the merit we get for praying together is far greater than for praying alone. And in life generally, the more social we are, the closer we are to God. So I'm loyal to the state, and the state gets my sins.

What motivated Zainal to follow the government, then, was not (just) a sense of its supreme authority, nor (simply) nationalist sentiment, but an appetite for 'togetherness' – for the social and ethical benefits of acting in co-ordination with other Indonesian Muslims.⁶ The transfer of responsibility allowed him to pursue this end unflinchingly, even though it meant disregarding his own reformist inclinations. It shaped other aspects of his political outlook too. He knew, for example, that there were controversies over the death penalty – even the tax system. Did the state really have the right to take someone's money or life? 'It's not a case of whether or not I agree!' he said of capital punishment. 'Since the state has implemented it, I must go along with it. If it's wrong, responsibility lies with the President (*pemimpin*)'.

It surprised me to hear a well-known political firebrand talk in this way, but perhaps it should not have. Zainal protested over problems with the correct and efficient *implementation* of policies and laws that had already been decided, fighting hard for the services to which he and others were entitled. But he showed little interest in evaluating whether laws were just, or in protesting against them *on principle*. Deciding the principles by which a state should be run was, for him, a religious matter, the consequences of which were spiritual, and responsibility for which lay with state elites. As a citizen, it was simply not his concern. Of course, not all Riau Islanders shared Zainal's view that policy decisions on morally contentious issues were matters that fell within the purview of Islamic jurisprudence; informants disagreed considerably on where the boundary between 'religious' and 'non-religious' aspects of governance should be drawn. But even taken in isolation, Zainal's case demonstrates the practical ramifications of a citizen seeing 'the state' as an Islamic authority. For as well as influencing his religious life, it determined the issues to which this charismatic and indefatigable campaigner would devote his considerable energies.

Conclusion

In 1977, Benedict Anderson offered a provocative overview of how scholars at the time had conceptualized the relationship between religion and politics. 'We are so accustomed to thinking ... only of politicians using religion for political ends', he wrote, 'that it is extremely hard for us to understand what politics might look like if we could see it through religious eyes'. It was time, he argued, for analysts to 'imagine the possibility of religious people using politics for religious ends' (1977: 21).

With anthropologists having convincingly argued that modernist state projects are neither inevitably nor straightforwardly secular (see, e.g., Starrett 2010), such a possibility now seems undeniable. Indeed, in recent decades, people of all faiths have been turning to political institutions such as the law and the bureaucracy in order to realize their visions of a more moral society (Comaroff 2009). Anthropologists have repeatedly documented the use of biopolitical techniques and legal coercion to spur citizens into conforming with norms of religious piety (e.g. Feener 2013; Khosravi 2011; Peletz 2015). It is clear from the ethnography that such developments have been transformative of citizens' lives.

Less frequently examined is the possibility that such developments might also be transforming the ethical status of the state. Yet as my Indonesian materials demonstrate, a government legislating on religious matters affords both state personnel and citizens opportunities to claim that the state is a religious actor. Such claims, moreover, can transform the means by which, and the extent to which, state pronouncements secure citizens' compliance. They change the stakes of civil disobedience. Knowing when, and to what effect, citizens see their governments as religious authorities is therefore essential to fully understanding political life in settings that have witnessed an 'infusion of the sacred into governance' (Comaroff 2009: 205).

My material also prompts several reflections on how best to theorize the religious authority of both state and non-state actors, within and beyond Islamic traditions. As Foucault (2007) recognized in his lectures on pastoral power, as Agrama (2012) highlighted in his study of Egypt, and as my ethnography has demonstrated, the principles by which responsibility is allocated within a particular religious tradition (however that tradition has been locally interpreted and vernacularized) have crucial implications for how subjects and authorities relate to each other. Essential though

attention to such ethical infrastructure may be, though, it is insufficient for fully understanding when and why specific pronouncements acquire religious authority. We must also attend to suspicion-as-lived. Since most religious traditions consider it possible for believers to be contacted directly by God (or gods), there is always a chance that one's suspicion is a message from the divine, and therefore that it might invalidate the pronouncements of a worldly religious authority. Yet God tends to communicate in mysterious ways, via dreams, visions, voices, whispers, and impulses that can also be attributed to other sources. Consequently, there is also always a chance that one's suspicion is *not* divine in provenance, but a satanic temptation or a personal whim. Thus, whereas Agrama's (2012) comparison of Cairo's personal status courts and Azhari Fatwa Council led him to argue that the Islamic authority of a pronouncement hinges on the context in which it is issued, and the relative degree of trust or suspicion that such a context evokes, I contend that a pronouncement's religious authority is determined not just by the mere presence or absence of suspicion, nor even by the intensity of suspicion it elicits, but rather by the ways in which any such suspicion is experienced and interpreted.

Several factors shape how suspicion is lived. Locally dominant models of personhood – ideas about what the 'mind' and 'spirit' are, and how they shape one's consciousness – provide the categories and criteria with which subjects can parse their internal experiences, making it more or less difficult to discern suspicions that should be heeded from those that should be ignored. A recent, stronger, version of this argument posits that by inviting subjects to pay attention to mental events in different ways, cultural discourses actually generate substantively different forms of 'spiritual experience' for subjects to interpret (Cassaniti & Luhrmann 2014: S341). Differences in cultural conceptions of the person could thus, partly, explain why suspicion appears to have so little power amongst Riau Islanders (many of whom found it difficult ever to be certain which impulses they could trust), whereas in some other settings intuition constitutes a primary source of authoritative knowledge (see, e.g., Davis-Floyd & Davis 1996).

Yet ultimately, I suggest, it is citizens' subjectivities – their individual anxieties, fears, and desires – that lead them, consciously or unconsciously, to act on or disregard their suspicions. We have seen how Ayu's anxiety about sinning led her to avoid certified halal food about which she harboured suspicions and yet, when confronted with an unfamiliar, technical, and, to her, rather arbitrary decision on lunar visibility, to comply with an edict she mistrusted; Anton, by contrast, disavowed his doubts about the MTQ so as to enjoy its festive temptations. But whilst irreducibly individual, subjectivities are not without their social and national histories. My informants' disinclination to heed their suspicions may in fact be symptomatic of the contemporary Indonesian situation. Several anthropologists have suggested that Suharto's dramatic resignation after decades of authoritarian rule generated 'rampant uncertainty about the conditions and terms of locatedness and recognition' (Spyer 2008: 37 n. 39), engendering, for some Indonesians, an 'incapacity to figure oneself' (Siegel 2005: 124). A less state-centric analysis would be that in the distinctive political atmosphere of post-Suharto Indonesia, characterized at once by rampant suspicion and earnest hopes of democratic reform (see Gibbings 2013), Indonesians are finding their moral perception to be painfully imperfect. Many, like Abdul, have put their faith in something or someone that has later been besmirched by rumour, or have doubted persons and institutions that have subsequently been exonerated. Compared to relying on a demonstrably fallible faculty

of suspicion, transferring responsibility offers a comforting certainty, especially if doing so allows one to indulge normative political fantasies of nationalistic togetherness and citizenly obedience. Alternative political and economic conditions may foster quite different relationships to suspicion. For example, as Wikan (1980) argued in her classic ethnography of Cairo, when faced with intense competition for scarce resources, people may learn to *depend* on their suspicion to avoid the ever-present dangers of exploitation and betrayal, and consequently be disinclined to give anyone or anything the benefit of the doubt. Indeed, if Wikan's argument on this point still holds true, we can see how Agrama's own pathbreaking analysis of Islamic authority might be enhanced by paying greater attention to subjectivity: the tremendous authority suspicion exercised in his informants' lives could derive not just from liberalism's vigilance against abuses of power, but also from the distinct modes of relating-to-self that arose during the decades of poverty that Egyptians endured under the Nasser and Mubarak regimes.

These reflections point to one final conclusion. Just as a state's religious authority can have ramifications for non-religious spheres of political life – helping cultivate Fadli's civic nationalism, say, or leading Zainal to focus his activist zeal on what were, for him, 'non-religious' matters – so its handling of ostensibly non-religious affairs, such as government transparency or economic management, can, through the production of particular kinds of subject, set the conditions of possibility for the degree of religious authority it is able to wield. Though analytically distinct – because embedded in quite different ethical infrastructures – a state's religious and non-religious modes of authority are imbricated with, and constitutive of, each other in complex ways.

NOTES

Research was supported by the ESRC (PTA-031-2004-00183), a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship, and a Junior Research Fellowship at St Catharine's College, Cambridge. It was sponsored by LIPI, Ristek, Universitas Riau, and STISIPOL Raja Haji. Thanks to Elizabeth Hallam, my anonymous reviewers, and audiences at the LSE 'Brown Bag' and LSE Southeast Asia Centre seminars, for their incredibly valuable suggestions for improvements. Responsibility for any shortcomings is mine alone.

¹ All names are pseudonyms except those of public figures.

² Indonesia's constitution declares a belief in 'one Supreme God'; six monotheistic religions are state-sanctioned.

³ Muhammadiyah, Indonesia's largest reformist/modernist organization, has only 5,000 members in Tanjung Pinang.

⁴ Sani was 69 years old at the time. He died five years later, and less than two months after his re-election, on 8 April 2016.

⁵ Constitutionally, regional governments have no legislative authority over religious affairs. Few of my informants were aware this was the case, however, and indeed it has not prevented many districts from incorporating the Sharia into their byelaws.

⁶ A few informants also invoked 'national togetherness' to justify following Suryadharma's edict.

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De l'autorité islamique de l'État indonésien : responsabilité, soupçon et actes de conformité

Résumé

L'article examine la manière dont les efforts de l'État indonésien pour se donner l'image d'une autorité islamique ont influencé le comportement des Indonésiens musulmans. L'auteur présente des cas dans lesquels les musulmans des îles Riau se conforment aux directives islamiques de l'État pour transférer à celui-ci la responsabilité de leurs actes, et montre comment cette pratique peut soutenir la gouvernabilité islamique, renforcer le nationalisme et brider l'activisme pour les droits civiques. Il est intéressant de noter que les citoyens peuvent se conformer à des directives envers lesquelles ils sont pourtant très réticents, ce qui conduit à se demander si le soupçon est nécessairement hostile à l'autorité. L'auteur conclut que l'autorité islamique d'un décret s'articule sur la manière dont les musulmans abordent les soupçons qui le concernent et que, pour les insulaires des îles Riau, l'urgence du soupçon a été tempérée par des modèles culturels de personnalité, de subjectivité individuelle, et par l'opacité morale de l'Indonésie post-Suharto.

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