

# CONTEXTUAL JIHAD AND MAINSTREAM MUSLIM IDENTITY IN INDONESIA: THE CASE OF *REPUBLIKA ONLINE*

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## Abstract

Jihad in the history of Islam has developed into a contested doctrine over a period of time. The term jihad as related to any exertion of power has been used by Muslim leaders to justify wars. On the other hand, the non-violent interpretation of jihad has been promoted by so-called moderate Muslim groups to support a moderating attitude towards colonial powers, un-Islamic authorities and non-Muslims in general. This paper investigates the discourse of jihad presented by *Republika Online* as the biggest Islamic commercial online news service in Indonesia. The paper argues that the description of jihad in *Republika Online* represents the contextual interpretation of jihad which is commonly held by the mainstream moderate Muslim groups in Indonesia. The description of contextual jihad can be seen as a process of negotiation between national identity and Islamic identity in Indonesia. This contextual interpretation suggests the possibility of the interpretation of the doctrine of jihad as an armed struggle as well as other generalised struggles depending on specific local conditions. This contextual interpretation also represents the construction of an integrated identity formation by projecting a distinct Indonesian Muslim identity which is Islamic in nature but also bounded by the awareness of a nationalist and an anti-imperialist identity.

**Keywords:** jihad, internet, Muslim, identity, Indonesia, *Republika*

## INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses the idea of jihad as presented by *Republika Online*, an Islamic online news service in Indonesia. The article proposes that *Republika* represents mainstream Islamic media in Indonesia. *Republika* is commonly described as the biggest “Islamic” commercial newspaper in Indonesia and, based on the web popularity rank published by Alexa website traffic information service, *Republika Online* can also be seen as the most popular Islamic online news service in Indonesia. In the list of ten most popular online news services in Indonesia, *Republika Online* is the only one which identifies itself as Islamic media. This paper argues that the contextual interpretation of jihad as presented by *Republika* represents the view of mainstream Muslim groups in Indonesia which have tried to contextualise the universal Islamic teaching within the local culture.<sup>1</sup> This contextual interpretation can also be seen as a result of negotiation

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<sup>1</sup> The depiction of moderate mainstream Muslim groups in Indonesia by scholars in Indonesian Islam usually refers to the two biggest Muslim organisations namely the traditionalist, *Nahdhatul Ulama* and the reformist, *Muhammadiyah*. Bruinessen prefers the use of the dichotomy traditionalist-reformist to explain two different mainstream Muslim groups in Indonesia in term of religious belief. The traditionalists maintain syncretistic practices found in early Islamisation in Indonesia, and the reformists criticise those practices based on the argument that there is no justification of those practices in the Qur'an and the prophetic traditions (see for instance, Bruinessen 2008 and Pringle, 2010).

between local and global awareness in the construction of contemporary Muslim identity in Indonesia.

The analysis of *Republika Online* in this paper is conducted mainly by employing media framing and analytical discourse tools to uncover the interpretation of jihad and the tendency to construct a certain type of Muslim identity represented in the texts. I specifically draw on a constructivist approach of the identity formation process introduced by Manuel Castells. Castells (2009) identifies three different types of identity formation process, namely “resistance identity”, “legitimizing identity” and “project identity”. “Legitimizing” identity is mainly exercised by the mainstream groups to maintain domination over the non-mainstream groups. “Resistance identity” and “project identity” are mainly constructed by the less dominant groups to challenge the domination. The difference between “resistance identity” and “project identity” lies in the way the groups challenge the domination. Resistance groups tend to express oppositional voices as a survival tool, while groups which develop ‘project identity’ tend to move forward from merely resisting the domination to promoting the development of a new identity for the transformation of overall society. According to Castells, civil society is an ideal form of a “legitimizing identity”, because although civil society organisations are usually “rooted among people” they also “prolong the dynamic of the state” (Castells, 2009: 9). He further argues that the example of “resistance identities” can be seen in various religious and ethnic based groups or social movements which are still trapped in the “trenches of resistance” against the perceived dominant powers and the manifestation of ‘project identities’ can be seen in several new social movements such as feminism and environmentalism which have moved out from “the trenches of resistance” to “redefine their position in society” and “seek the transformation of overall society” (Castells, 2009: 8).

### THE DISCOURSE OF JIHAD

In the history of Islam, the interpretation of the Arabic word jihad has been highly politicised to such an extent that its Qur’anic meaning can no longer be fully recovered. Although the Qur’anic origins of the term jihad are not related to war, classical Islamic legal texts developed by Muslim jurists in the post-prophetic period (especially in the 7th and 8th centuries) played an important role in the association of the term jihad with war (Saeed, 2002). Saeed further argues that the “classical doctrine of jihad thus became closely associated with the Islamic doctrine of war and peace” which is “largely equivalent to the modern doctrine of defence of the homeland” (Saeed, 2002: 74, 79). In addition, the term jihad was also used for many reasons including the justification of early Arab conquests of non-Muslim lands and also the justification of Muslims’ struggle against colonialism and communism in many parts of the world (Hassan, 2006). Esposito supports the opinion that the interpretation of jihad is highly politicised, he argues

The doctrine of jihad is not the product of a single authoritative individual or organization’s interpretation. It is rather the product of diverse individuals and authorities interpreting and applying the principles of sacred texts in specific historical and political contexts. (Esposito, 2002: 64)

More systematically, Hassan (2008) classifies the articulation of the term jihad as an armed struggle in Islamic history into several stages from the formative stage of jihad to the jihad in contemporary Muslim world. He argues that in the formative stage

(7th century), the doctrine of jihad can be seen as an individual's duty to construct and establish an Islamic identity, while in the empire stage (8th-16th centuries), it has been used to motivate and mobilise Muslim communities to establish Islamic hegemony. During the colonization of Muslim countries (17th-19th centuries), the doctrine of jihad has been mainly used as an ideology of resistance against colonialists and in the post-colonial and cold war period (mid to late 20th century). This doctrine was used to mobilise many different actions including the struggle for Islamic states in many parts of the world and the fight against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. The use of this doctrine in the post-cold war period (1990 to the present) has been far more diverse and includes the struggle for Islamic states, offensive jihad against the West/United States and current martyrdom operations in several predominantly Muslim countries (Hassan, 2008). The continuous use of the doctrine of jihad to justify armed struggle in the post-cold war period is mainly promoted by the contemporary global and transnational *Salafi jihadi* movement which has developed in many parts of the world.

Many modernist Muslim scholars believe that the defensive interpretation of jihad is more relevant in the modern world (See for instance Peters 1979; Saeed, 2002). According to them jihad can only take the form of armed struggle if that struggle is specifically to liberate Muslims from 'religious oppression' (Peters, 1979: 160). Peters further argues that this interpretation was firstly introduced in the colonial period in India by Islamic clerics in 1870s to reduce the conflict between Indian Muslims and the British colonialists. A prominent representative of Indian Muslims during this period, Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-98), promoted this interpretation:

by restricting the scope of jihad-obligation to wars for religious reasons, i.e. armed struggle in order to defend Moslems (*sic*) against religious oppression, and excluding from it wars for temporal reasons like e.g. (*sic*) wars for territorial conquest or armed resistance against civil oppression (Peters, 1979: 160).

More recently, this opinion was also supported by an Indian Muslim scholar Maulana Wahiduddin Khan (born 1925). He argues that the interpretation of jihad as armed struggle was historically used to defend freedom of belief and worship. According to Khan, since Muslims are now generally free to practice their religion in any part of the world, there is no Qur'anic justification for the use of violence or waging a war to defend this freedom (Omar, 2008).

A similar pattern of interpretation of jihad can also be found in Indonesia. Islam arrived in Indonesia through a peaceful process, therefore the doctrine of armed jihad can not be found in the early Islamisation of Indonesia. However, since the establishment of Islamic states/kingdoms in several parts of Indonesia, the doctrine of armed jihad started to be used to justify the wars between the states and the fight against colonialists (See for instance Ahmad, 2006; Iletto, 1994; Feillard & Madinier, 2011). From the nineteenth century, mainstream Islamic movements in Indonesia started to build an accommodating relationship with the colonial rulers by focusing their activities on the dissemination of Islamic teaching through the establishment of various educational institutions and charitable activities (Bruinessen, 2008). However, the political situation after Indonesian independence in 1945 triggered mainstream Muslim organisations to declare armed jihad against the perceived state's enemies. Mainstream Indonesian Muslims justified the fight to defend independence as a legitimate jihad and this justification was repeated in the fight against Indonesian communists in 1965-66 and also during the conflict between Muslims and Christians in Ambon in 1999-04 (see for instance Solahudin, 2011; Feillard & Madinier, 2011). The interpretation of jihad as

armed struggle has also been used by several non-mainstream Muslim groups to justify the establishment of an Islamic state in Indonesia and the attack on non-Muslims, particularly Westerners, especially after the arrival of the *Salafi jihadi* movement in Indonesia in the early 2000s (Solahudin, 2011).<sup>2</sup>

This non-mainstream interpretation is rejected by mainstream Muslims organisations, especially the state sponsored Indonesian Ulama Council (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia*-- MUI) and the two biggest non-government organisations *Muhammadiyah* and *Nahdlatul Ulama*, which generally accept the concept of an Indonesian nation state and prefer to focus on the interpretation of jihad as a struggle in education, welfare and economic development. These mainstream organisations argue that jihad can take place through non-violent struggle for the development of Islamic communities. For instance, in a *fatwa* (religious opinion) in 2004, MUI as the official Muslim clerical body in Indonesia contends that jihad can be interpreted in two different forms: namely jihad as a struggle to fight and defend Islam from the aggression of enemies and jihad as any serious and sustainable endeavour to protect and uphold the religion of Allah (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia*, 2004). According to these mainstream organisations, the adaptation of the meaning of jihad with the social condition is a process of contextualisation and not a process of constriction of the doctrine of jihad (Romli & Sjadzili, 2004). *Republika*, the most popular Islamic newspaper in Indonesia, has also supported the interpretation of jihad in a more general meaning. The online version of the newspaper ([www.republika.co.id](http://www.republika.co.id)), *Republika* has also published news items and opinions articulating this broad interpretation of jihad. This article focuses on the interpretation of the doctrine of jihad by the mainstream Muslim groups in Indonesia as presented in *Republika Online*.

### THE PROFILE OF *REPUBLIKA*

Contradictory as it may sound as the following account shows, *Republika* is the biggest Islamic commercial newspaper in Indonesia which is “broadly secular in its coverage of events and issues, yet informed ideologically by Islamic values” (Hill, 2007, p. 126). The name of the newspaper “*Republika*” is derived from the Latin’s word *res publica* which literally means public affairs or the concern of the community and does not have any particular connection with Islamic identity. *Republika* was established in 1993 under the holding company *PT Abdi Bangsa* (translated in English as “a servant of the nation”), with strong support from the Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals (*Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia*--ICMI). *Republika* also initially received significant support from Muslim business people such as Tanri Abeng, a prominent Muslim business executive in 1990s. In mid-February 1993, *Republika* offered shares in the newspaper to the public; but interestingly the shares could only be purchased by Muslims and “could not be re-sold without the permission of the company” (Hill, 2007, p. 127). The reason behind this exclusive sale was to develop a sense of ownership from Muslim families in Indonesia and to have as many Muslim families as possible purchasing the shares, because every Muslim family could only purchase one share with the price of 5000 rupiah (Utomo, 2010). This exclusive selling can be seen as part of

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<sup>2</sup> The *Salafi jihadi* movement gained momentum in Afghanistan since early 1980s. This ideology developed as a combination of the ideology of *Ikhwanul Muslimin* (Islamic Brotherhood) introduced by Sayyid Quthb in Egypt and Abul A’la Al-Maududi in Pakistan and the *Salafi*’s ideology introduced by Ibn Taimiyya and Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab (As-Suri, 2009).

*Republika's* marketing strategy to position themselves as representing the voice of Muslims in Indonesia. Therefore, since its early establishment, *Republika* has developed an integrated construction of nationalist and Islamic identity as the editorial position of the newspaper. This exclusive selling was ended due to a financial crisis faced by the company in 2000. At this point, several young Muslim businessmen took over the majority of *Republika's* share and in 2002 the company was listed on the Indonesian Stock Exchange (previously called Jakarta Stock Exchange) and the shares became available to the general public (Utomo, 2010).

In 2003, the holding company changed the name from *PT Abdi Bangsa* to *Mahaka Media* and started a business expansion as a multimedia holding company with two subsidiary business units, namely *PT Pustaka Abdi Bangsa* and *PT Republika Media Mandiri*. The change of the name of the holding company from *PT Abdi Bangsa* to *Mahaka Media* indicates a more commercial orientation rather than ideological orientation. The word 'mahaka' was apparently taken from a Javanese language dictionary which means the first step (Utomo, 2010). In 2004 the expansion of *Mahaka Media* was broadened and it currently owns significant shares in sixteen subsidiary business units which include *Harian Republika*--the largest Muslim daily newspaper in Indonesia, *Golf Digest Indonesia*--the No.1 Golf Magazine in Indonesia, *Alif TV*--an Islamic cable TV station (the name *Alif* is taken from the name of the first letter in the Arabic alphabet), *Jak TV*--a local Jakarta TV station, and *Gen FM*--the Jakarta radio station with the largest audience (source: [www.mahakamedia.com](http://www.mahakamedia.com)). Most of these subsidiaries are 'secular' business units except *Harian Republika* and *Alif TV* which have a clear Islamic orientation. The expansion of *Mahaka Media* to develop more secular business units can be seen as a survival strategy of a money-making enterprise. However, *Mahaka Media* has not completely forgotten its Islamic roots; as evidenced in the continuing preservation of Islamic identity in the *Republika* daily newspaper and *Alif TV*.

*Republika* is the only Islamic newspaper which can compete with the more secular newspapers in Indonesia. It is not easy to define the term Islamic media in a predominantly Muslim country like Indonesia. In a study about Islamic press in Indonesia, Irawanto quotes a definition of Islamic press as a press 'in which journalism practices serve Muslim interests, both material and ethical' (Irawanto, 2010: 68). According to a Nielsen Media Research survey in 2012 *Republika* has the fourth biggest readership among the national newspapers in Indonesia with 106,000 overall readers after *Kompas* (1.24 million), *Pos Kota* (568,000) and *Seputar Indonesia* (178,000) (infoasaid, 2012).<sup>3</sup> The online version of the daily newspaper, *Republika Online*, is also one of the most popular online news services in Indonesia. *Republika* started the online publication as an extension of the newspaper in 1995 and became the first online news service in Indonesia (Nugroho et al, 2012). In the early years of the publication, *Republika Online* uploaded the items which had already been published in the printed editions of the newspaper, and only started to develop independent content in 2009. In April 2013, *Republika Online* was ranked sixtieth among all websites in Indonesia and was one of the ten most popular online news services in Indonesia ([www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/ID](http://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/ID)). The ten most popular online news services in Indonesia in April 2013 can be seen in Table 1 below.

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<sup>3</sup> *Kompas* is the most influential national daily newspaper in Indonesia; *Pos Kota* is a Jakarta-centred blue collar workers newspaper; and *Seputar Indonesia* is a national daily newspaper belonging to MNC Group, the dominant player in Indonesian commercial television.

Table 1: Ten most popular online news services in Indonesia (April 2013)

Number	Media name	Web page address	Alexa top sites ranking Indonesia
1	Detik	www.detik.com	7
2	Kompas	kompas.com	12
3	Viva	us.viva.co.id	19
4	Merdeka	www.merdeka.com	21
5	Okezone	www.okezone.com	25
6	Tribunnews	www.tribunnews.com	35
7	Tempo	www.tempo.co	40
8	Inilah	www.inilah.com	50
9	Liputan6	www.liputan6.com	58
10	Republika Online	www.republika.co.id	60

Source: [www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/ID](http://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/ID)

The table shows that secular media continue to dominate the Indonesian public sphere and even the ‘moderate’ category of Islamic media such as *Republika Online* are still less popular than their secular competitors.

In the Islamic media category, *Republika Online* is regarded as the most popular Islamic online news services in Indonesia. This information can be found in the list of 500 most popular websites in Indonesia, published by Alexa website traffic information service in April 2013 and summarised in the following table.<sup>4</sup>

Table 2: Five most popular Islamic online news services

Number	Media name	Web page address	Alexa top sites ranking Indonesia
1	Republika	www.republika.co.id	60
2	Dakwatuna	www.dakwatuna.com	270
3	Arrahmah	arrahmah.com	289
4	Voice of Al-Islam	www.voa-islam.com	372
5	Eramuslim	www.eramuslim.com	418

Source: [www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/ID](http://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/ID)

*Republika* is the only online news service which has the print version of the publication from this list. All other media listed above are only available online.

The recent secular and commercial expansion of *Mahaka Media* as the holding company seems to have had a minimal impact on *Republika*’s Islamic orientation. Beside its secular coverage, the printed edition of the newspaper still provides significant coverage of Islamic events and issues and the publisher regularly publishes special Islamic supplements in addition to the daily newspaper editions such as the “Islam digest” supplement and the *Dialog Jum’at* (Friday dialogue) supplement which specifically publish Islamic issues and events. In the online version of *Republika*, the publisher also provides a special section named “Dunia Islam” (Islamic world) in addition to the secular items which are normally found in other secular news services.

<sup>4</sup> I developed this table from the general list of 500 most popular websites in Indonesia. Alexa does not provide the ‘Islamic media’ category in the list and I made the judgement according to their self-proclaimed editorial position.

The Islamic world section specifically covers various events and issues related to the daily life of Muslims. This special section was divided into several sub-sections, namely “Islam Nusantara” (Islam in the archipelago), “Islam Mancanegara” (Islam in foreign countries), “Mualaf” (Convert), “Hikmah” (Wisdom), “Khazanah” (Repertoire), “Fatwa” (Legal opinion), “Tasawuf” (Sufism), “Buku Islam” (Islamic book), “Wakaf” (Islamic endowment), “Pojok Arifin Ilham” (Arifin Ilham’s Corner) and “Celoteh Kang Erick Yusuf” (Erick Yusuf’s Chatting).<sup>5</sup>

However, as part of its mainstreaming, *Republika* has also tended to conceal some symbols of Islam in the publication. There is no specific information on the identity page of the publication about *Republika*’s Islamic orientation. However, on the identity page of the printed newspaper, *Republika* mentions its national and universal mission with the statement *Republika terbit demi kemaslahatan bangsa, penebar manfaat bagi semesta* [*Republika is published for the good of the nation, to spread benefits for the universe*]. The phrase ‘benefits for the universe’ provides an oblique reference to a commonly quoted Islamic phrase *rahmatan lil alamin* [a blessing for the universe] taken from a verse in the Qur’an to show the universal mission of the prophet Muhammad.

In 2012, the name of “Dunia Islam” (Islamic world) section was changed into “Alif” and the word “Islam” in “Islam Nusantara” and “Islam Mancanegara” sub-sections was removed and simply named “Nusantara” (Archipelago) and “Mancanegara” (Overseas).<sup>6</sup> In 2014, the “Nusantara” and the “Mancanegara” sub-sections were removed, and the contents of these sub-sections were integrated into two new sub-sections namely Cahaya Islam [the light of Islam] and Jejak Islam [the trail of Islam]. In early May 2013 the ‘Alif’ section name was changed once more to “Khazanah”.<sup>7</sup> According to the editor, the change of the name of the “Dunia Islam” section was mainly based on the editorial policy to focus on content rather than symbols in *Republika*’s Islamic representation (personal interview with M. Irwan Ariefyanto, the managing editor of *Republika Online*, April 23 2013). The use of the word “khazanah” also indicates a more Indonesian choice rather than the word “alif” which is clearly an Arabic word. The removal of the word “Islam” in the name of the section and sub-sections and also the change of the name of the Islamic section from “Alif” to “Khazanah” can be seen as part of *Republika*’s marketing strategy to attract a wider audience inside and outside Muslim communities in Indonesia and overseas.

## JIHAD FROM REPUBLIKA’S PERSPECTIVE

*Republika* does not specifically discuss the concept of jihad in a special section. *Republika*’s perspective on jihad can be observed in the analysis of the items which contain the word jihad. I conducted a search of *Republika*’s items which contain the word ‘jihad’ by using the search tool in *Republika Online*’s website. From the first fifty items appearing in the search, 28% of the items specifically describe jihad as non-violent struggles and 12% describe jihad in a general meaning as both armed struggle and non-armed struggle. However, even in a self-proclaimed moderate news source

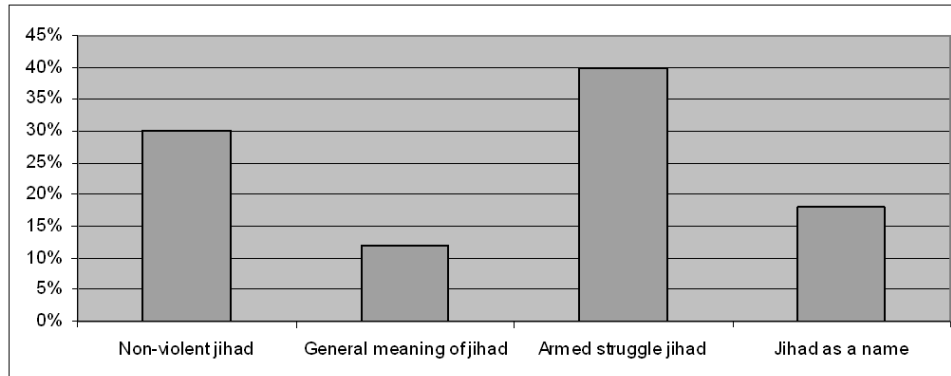
<sup>5</sup> Arifin Ilham and Erick Yusuf are both prominent Muslim preachers who are popular among cosmopolitan Muslims in Indonesia

<sup>6</sup> The name *Alif* is taken from the first alphabet of the Arabic alphabets.

<sup>7</sup> The word *Khazanah* is an Indonesian word borrowed from Arabic which means treasure.

such as *Republika*, jihad was most commonly used to describe an armed struggle (40%) (see Graph 1).

Graph 1: Jihad items in *Republika*



Jihad as armed struggle was generally used either to describe historical events or, referring to others' use of the term, rather than presenting an editorial endorsement of the armed struggle meaning. These armed struggle descriptions of jihad were mainly found in the news reporting the appearance of anti-jihad advertisements in the United States in 2012 and the news reporting of the commemoration of the 'Jihad Resolution' during the struggle to defend Indonesian independence. Headlines related to the appearance of anti-jihad advertisements in the United States include: "Anti-jihad advertisements appeared in New York [Iklan anti jihad muncul di New York]", "Anti-jihad advertisements go up in Washington [Iklan anti jihad rambah Washington]", "A woman ruining an anti-jihad advertisement is arrested [Rusak iklan anti-jihad, 1 wanita ditangkap]". It seems that *Republika* published the news items related to the appearance of anti-jihad advertisements in the United States for the reporting purpose only and does not suggest *Republika's* support of jihad as armed struggle.

However, the content of several news items related to the "Jihad Resolution" indicates *Republika's* editorial policy to allow the publication of items related to militaristic jihad in the context of defending a nation from colonial occupation. Such headlines related to the commemoration of the "Jihad Resolution" include: "Jihad resolution is almost forgotten [Resolusi jihad nyaris dilupakan]", "Hasyim Asy'ari the initiator of jihad resolution [KH Hasyim Asy'ari pencetus Resolusi Jihad]", "Reviving history through the jihad resolution carnival [Bangkitkan sejarah melalui kirab Resolusi Jihad]". *Republika's* tendency to allow the legitimisation of nationalist oriented militaristic jihad has also been found in *Republika's* portrayal of a conflict between Muslims and Christian in Ambon in 1999. In research on the media frame during the conflict in Ambon, Sharp argues that *Republika* "attempts to redraw inter-communal fighting in Ambon as a Muslim nationalist struggle against renegade Christian separatists with foreign backing" (Sharp, 2013, p. 158).

From the search using the key word 'jihad', six articles and statements which contain detailed explanations about the meaning of jihad were found in *Republika Online's* archive. Three articles titled "De-radicalisation of the meaning of jihad [Deradikalisasi makna jihad]", "Between jihad and terror [Antara jihad and teror]" and "The greater jihad [Jihad akbar]" were found in the *Hikmah* sub-section, two statements titled "jihad" and "The biggest jihad in life [Jihad terbesar dalam hidup]" were found in the *Pojok Arifin Ilham* sub-section and one article titled "This is the field of jihad for



Muslim women [Inilah medan jihad bagi Muslimah]” was found in the “Khazanah” sub-section. All of the items mentioned above were written by prominent Indonesian Muslim scholars who were selected by the editor.

Four of the items mentioned above describe jihad in a general meaning as a serious endeavour in any aspect of the life of Muslims, which include physical, intellectual and spiritual struggles and two other items highlight the non-violent interpretation of jihad. In the article ‘De-radicalisation of the meaning of jihad’ the author, Nasaruddin Umar (the vice minister for religious affairs and also a prominent leader of *Nahdhatul Ulama*), argues:

Jihad aims to defend the dignity of human life and is not for tormenting or bringing to death innocent people [Jihad bertujuan untuk mempertahankan kehidupan manusia yang bermartabat, bukannya menyengsarakan, apalagi menyebabkan kematian orang-orang yang tak berdosa] (*Republika Online*, September 28 2011--Deradikalisasi makna jihad).

In the article “Between jihad and terror”, Ilyas Ismail (a senior lecturer at the Islamic State University Jakarta), suggests a broad interpretation of jihad which includes intellectual and spiritual struggle as well as physical struggle. He contends:

Jihad can be conceptually understood as a long struggle to achieve glory. As a concept and a path for struggle, jihad should be implemented by tireless hard and smart work and optimise all potential and power not only limited to physical power but also moral, intellectual and spiritual power. Jihad is obviously a main doctrine of Islam and a way of life for Muslims to attain success and glory. [Jihad, yang dapat dipahami sebagai konsep perjuangan, merupakan jalan panjang yang harus ditempuh untuk mencapai cita-cita (kemuliaan). Sebagai konsep dan jalan perjuangan, jihad tentu harus diaktualisasikan melalui kerja keras dan kerja cerdas, tanpa kenal lelah, dengan mengoptimalkan penggunaan segenap potensi dan kekuatan yang dimiliki, tak hanya kekuatan fisik, tapi juga kekuatan moral, intelektual, dan spiritual. Dalam pengertian ini, jihad tak pelak lagi merupakan doktrin pokok Islam dan jalan hidup kaum Muslim menuju kesuksesan dan kemuliaan.] (*Republika*, March 18 2010--Antara jihad dan terror).

Both of the descriptions mentioned above challenge the interpretation of jihad as a revolutionary armed struggle against non-believers promoted by *Salafi Jihadi* movement. This editorial interpretation of the general meaning of jihad can also be found in online version of the daily newspaper *Kompas*, one of the most popular “secular” news websites in Indonesia.<sup>8</sup> This interpretation is found in the headlines such as “Terror is not jihad [Teror bukanlah jihad]”, “BNPT (National Anti-Terrorism Agency): Do not equate terrorism with jihad [BNPT: Jangan samakan aksi terorisme dengan jihad]”, “Terrorists misinterpreted jihad in the Qur’an [Teroris salah menafsirkan jihad dalam Al-Quran]”. In the first item mentioned above, *Kompas* quotes a statement from Ma’ruf Amin, a prominent Muslim scholar in Indonesia, that jihad is “all utmost effort and willingness to endure hardship in the fight against all types of enemies [segala usaha dan upaya sekuat tenaga serta kesediaan untuk menanggung kesulitan di dalam memerangi dan menahan agresi musuh dalam segala bentuk]” (*Kompas*, November 27 2009).

<sup>8</sup> *Kompas* is a leading Indonesian national newspaper initially established in 1965 by Chinese and Javanese Catholic journalists to represent a Catholic voice in Indonesian politics during the transition between the Old Order to the New Order regime (Hill, 2007).

*Republika* often publishes items which support a non-violent interpretation of jihad in the Indonesian context. In a contribution titled “The biggest jihad in life [Jihad terbesar dalam hidup]” Arifin Ilham specifically highlights the non-violent interpretation of jihad as an inner struggle within every Muslim individual to stop undertaking immoral actions. Ilham says “My dear friends, the biggest jihad in our life is when we are engrossed in vice and then we struggle to stop doing it!” [Ketahuilah sahabatku, jihad terbesar dalam hidup kita adalah, saat kita sudah asyik tenggelam dalam maksiat, lalu kita berjuang keluar untuk tidak melakukannya lagi!] (*Republika*, January 25 2012--Jihad terbesar dalam hidup). The tendency of *Republika* to allow the non-violent interpretation of jihad is also supported by the publication of several news items related to jihad in many different contexts. The search reveals many editorial interpretations of jihad as a generalised struggle; such as jihad in business, jihad for food sovereignty, jihad against corruption and jihad against illegal drugs. Such headlines include: “Jihad in business, a breakthrough for the prosperity of Muslim communities [Jihad bisnis, langkah terobosan memakmurkan umat]”, “The jihad of a Muslim to advance the hinterland of Papua [Jihad seorang Muslim memakmurkan pedalaman papua]”, “Muslim scholars from NU (the abbreviation for *Nahdhatul Ulama*) call for a jihad against AIDS [Kiai NU serukan jihad melawan AIDS]”, “The Central Board of *Nahdhatul Ulama* calls for a jihad to eradicate illegal drugs [PBNU serukan jihad berantas narkoba]”, and “Jihad for food sovereignty is urgent [Mendesak, jihad menuju kedaulatan pangan]” can also be found in the search. To support this non-violent interpretation of jihad, *Republika* also publishes a series of items related to a pacifist jihad ad campaign by Muslims in the United States called “My Jihad” to counter the narrow interpretation of jihad and the appearance of several anti-Islam ad campaigns in the US in 2012. In the campaign initiated by the Council on American Islamic relations’ Chicago chapter (CAIR Chicago) in December 2012, several pacifist interpretations of jihad were introduced such as “My Jihad is to build friendship across the aisle, what’s yours?” (*Republika*, January 2 2013-Kampanye jihad ala Muslim AS).

*Republika* has also published some statements that support some jihad involving the use of force such as in Gaza, Iraq and Afghanistan as legitimate jihad in the particular contexts of those struggles. In the *Pojok Arifin Ilham* sub-section, Arifin Ilham, a popular Muslim preacher in Indonesia, distinguishes two different types of jihad in wartorn and the peaceful territories. Ilham says:

There are two different forms of jihad. If Muslims are attacked jihad is war...such as in Gaza, Iraq and Afghanistan. But in peaceful territories jihad is a struggle with knowledge...such as in our beloved country. [Jihad ada dua macam, ketika umat Islam diperangi maka jihadnya adalah "Jihadul Qital"...seperti di Gaza, Irak, Afghanistan. Tetapi di wilayah damai, maka jihadnya adalah "Jihadul Ilmi"...seperti di negeri tercinta ini] (*Republika Online*, December 14 2011-jihad).

The publication of this statement indicates *Republika*’s editorial policy to allow the publications of items related to militaristic jihad in several war zones, especially Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan. The support of militaristic *jihadi* groups in these war-torn territories is relatively significant in Indonesia. For instance, Pew Global Attitude Survey in 2010 showed that 39% of Muslim respondents in Indonesia explicitly expressed a favourable attitude toward Hamas in Palestine and 43% of them explicitly expressed a favourable attitude toward Hezbollah in Lebanon; whereas only 33% of the respondents explicitly expressed negative views toward Hamas and 30% of them

explicitly expressed negative views toward Hezbollah. The rest of the respondents did not offer their opinion (Pew Research Center, 2010). Although these numbers highlight a moderate attitude on behalf of the majority of Indonesian Muslims, the numbers indicate Muslims in Indonesia confess a relatively strong support for the militaristic application of jihad in Palestine and Lebanon.

The description of jihad in *Republika* represents the contextual interpretation of jihad which is commonly held by mainstream Muslim groups in Indonesia. This contextual interpretation suggests the possibility of the interpretation of the doctrine of jihad as an armed struggle, as well as other generalised struggles, depends on specific local conditions. *Republika*'s editorial policy has allowed various interpretations of jihad including limited type of violent jihad in the context of defending a nation and also an interpretation of jihad as a struggle in any aspect of human life in order to advance the life of Muslim communities across the Indonesian archipelago. However, as part of its identification with the mainstream Muslims in Indonesia, *Republika* has never used jihad as a justification or explanation for contemporary terrorist actions in Indonesia.

## THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITIES

After the collapse of Soeharto's authoritarian regime the contest over communal identities started to occupy the Indonesian public sphere including the emergence of radical groups on the internet. Many non-mainstream Muslim groups which were previously suppressed by the authoritarian regimes 'rose to the surface' and 'competed for the newly liberated public sphere and fought for popular support' (Hasan, 2006, p. 13). This contestation has created a complex process of identity formation influenced by local, transnational, and global identities. In this contestation *Republika* tends to legitimise the common perception of the moderate attitude of mainstream Indonesian Muslims who condemn the use of jihad to justify terrorist actions but who also criticise the response of the United States and other western countries toward global terrorism.

### Legitimising mainstream moderate Muslim identity

The description of mainstream Muslims in Indonesia is commonly associated with the term moderate Muslims (*Islam moderat*). *Republika* echoes this common perception by highlighting through the repetition of the "moderate" label in relation to mainstream Muslims in Indonesia such as: "Democracy and moderate Islam has become a new identity of Indonesia [Demokrasi dan Islam moderat jadi identitas baru Indonesia]", "Indonesian moderate Islam must become an example [Islam moderat Indonesia harus jadi contoh]", and "The role of moderate Islam groups is needed to overcome radicalism [Peran kelompok Islam moderat dibutuhkan atasi radikalisme]".

*Republika*'s distinction of the mainstream moderates from the violent groups particularly can be observed in its promotion of non-violent interpretation of jihad. *Republika* criticises the violent interpretation of jihad and the use of jihad as the justification of terrorist actions. In the sample of news items under the themes Islam, radicalism and terrorism, *Republika* considers terrorism as un-Islamic and condemns the use of jihad to justify terrorist actions. In the samples of news items in the period of July 2009 (this period coincided with the bombing of two hotels in Jakarta in 17 July 2009), *Republika* published eight items which contain statements from Muslim scholars and

organisations condemning the actions. The headlines, published over several days, included: “Hasyim: NU condemns the bombers [Hasyim: NU kutuk pelaku bom]”, “Alkhairat condemns the bombing in Jakarta [Alkhairat mengutuk bom di Jakarta]”, “Do not associate the bomb with Islam [Jangan kaitkan bom dengan Islam]”, “Terrorism is not a religious teaching [Terorisme bukan ajaran agama]” and “Terrorists should not hide themselves behind religions [Teroris jangan bersembunyi dibalik agama]”. *Republika* also tends to distinguish the characters of mainstream Indonesian Muslims with the violent minority of Muslims. In a news item titled “Terrorism and mainstream Muslims [Terorisme dan mainstream Muslim]” terrorists were contrasted with mainstream Muslims in Indonesia. In this article the author argues:

The silence of the mainstream group in response to crucial problems is questionable. Why do they not dare to speak out? Why do they allow the minority groups to ‘capture’ Islam by claiming themselves as the most Islamic, and sometimes in the name of Islam they do something contradictory toward Islam itself. One group freely cuts a verse of Qur’an or a saying of the prophet Muhammad and disconnects it from the historical background to justify their ways. Consequently, for instance the terrorists kill thousands of innocent lives. [Diamnya kelompok mainstream di dalam menghadapi persoalan krusial menarik dipertanyakan. Mengapa mereka seperti tidak berani speak out? Mengapa mereka membiarkan kelompok minoritas “menyandera” Islam dengan mengklaim dirinya paling Islam, dan terkadang atas nama Islam melakukan sesuatu yang sesungguhnya kontraproduktif dengan Islam itu sendiri. Satu kelompok begitu bebas memotong-motong ayat atau hadis serta melepaskan historical background -nya untuk membenarkan tujuan dan cara mereka. Akibatnya, antara lain, teroris melayangkan ribuan nyawa tak berdosa] (*Republika Online*, July 19 2009—Terorisme dan mainstream Muslim).

In this item, *Republika* explicitly quotes the English term “mainstream” to represent the majority of Muslims who are affiliated with traditionalist and reformist Muslim organisations in Indonesia.

In Manuel Castells’ term, this construction of the mainstream could be seen as a creation of a legitimising identity. According to Castells (2009, p. 8), “legitimizing identity” is “introduced by the dominant institutions of society to extend and rationalize their domination *vis a vis* social actors”. Castells echoes Gramsci in defining civil society as an entity which is “formed by a series of apparatuses” which “on one hand, prolong the dynamics of the state, but, on the other hand, are deeply rooted among people” (Castells, 2009, p. 9). The establishment of the Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals (ICMI) as the founder of *Republika* was seen by many observers as part of Soeharto’s “legitimizing” policy to control the political aspirations of middle-class Muslim in the late New Order era. According to Liddle:

Despite the hopes of some Muslims and the fears of some non-Muslims, ICMI is not an autonomous organization representing the political interests of the Muslim community to the government. Rather it is a state corporatist organization, dominated by high officials beholden to President Soeharto, whose main policy slogan is human resources development and whose chief political enemies are not Christians and other non-Muslims but market-oriented economists (Liddle, 1996, p. 625).

In addition, the establishment of *Republika* in the middle of the New Order authoritarian regime would have been impossible without the approval of Soeharto. There was also a

period when Soeharto ordered the change of the editorial in chief of *Republika* because Soeharto was unhappy with the appearance of a contribution written by Amien Rais, a prominent Muslim intellectual, in May 29 1997 which criticised the 'status quo' of the New Order regime (Utomo, 2010).

Several Muslim organisations such as *Al-Irsyad*, *Persatuan Islam*, *Muhammadiyah* and *Nahdhatul Ulama* existed long before Indonesian independence and have played an important role in the development of civil society in Indonesia (see for instance Mitsuo et.al., 1991 and Azra, 2006). These organisations, especially the two biggest *Nahdhatul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah* have developed civil networks from the provincial down to the district, sub-district and village levels. *Republika* frequently publishes the activities of these organisations and quotes statements from the prominent leaders of the organisations. *Republika* is both a creation of the moderate mainstream and one of its key outlets.

### **Criticising the United States' dominant power**

Many Muslims believe that the term moderate Muslim is perpetuated by western countries to undermine Islam. Bokhari and Senzai (2007, p. 139) argue that "the call for moderation" is often seen by many Muslims as "part of the larger plan by the West to dilute the religion". However, the attitude of mainstream moderate Muslims in Indonesia is not identical to western moderate values. *Republika* maintains a critical voice toward western countries especially the United States. The criticism toward the United States' dominant power has become a distinct feature of *Republika's* editorial perspective. *Republika* condemns terrorism and the use of religious teaching to justify terrorist actions. However, *Republika* often criticises the responses of the United States Government and its allies toward Islamist terrorism. In a section named *Resonansi* (resonance),<sup>9</sup> *Republika* published a series of two articles titled "Terrorism (1) (terorisme (1))", written by Ahmad Syafii Maarif, a prominent Muslim intellectual and a former leader of *Muhammadiyah*.<sup>10</sup> In the articles Maarif quoted Johan Galtung's opinion that the United States and Israel are terrorist states. Maarif argues

Speaking about terrorism, I remember an article written by Johan Galtung on 20 September 2002, titled 'To end terrorism, end state terrorism'. Galtung explicitly dubbed the United States as a terrorist state, in addition to Israel. In Galtung's notes, since 1945 the United States, by direct commands from Pentagon to attack other countries or through CIA's operations, has killed 12 million people, excluding what has happened in Afghanistan and Iraq. [Berbicara tentang terorisme, saya teringat artikel Johan Galtung bulan 20 September 2002 di bawah judul "To End Terrorism, End State Terrorism" (Untuk Menghentikan Terorisme, Hentikan Terorisme Negara). Galtung terang-terangan mengatakan Amerika sebagai negara teror, di samping Israel tentunya. Dalam catatan Galtung, sejak tahun 1945, Amerika, baik melalui perintah langsung Pentagon

<sup>9</sup> *Resonansi* (resonance) is a daily column published in the printed and online version of the newspaper which are written by prominent Muslim intellectuals in Indonesia including several senior editors of *Republika*

<sup>10</sup> Ahmad Syafii Maarif was the president of *Muhammadiyah*, one of the biggest Muslim organisations in Indonesia and the founder of *Maarif* Institute for Culture and Humanity. In 2008 he received the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Peace and International Understanding, which is commonly regarded as an Asian version of the Nobel Peace Prize.

untuk menyerang negara lain atau melalui operasi CIA (Central Intelligent Agency), tidak kurang dari 12 juta umat manusia telah menjadi korban, belum termasuk apa yang berlaku di Afghanistan dan Irak. (*Republika Online*, January 29 2013—Terorisme (1)).

The critical view toward the United States Government is found in other articles written by Maarif which were published in the same section. In an article titled “The cost of neo-imperialist war [Ongkos perang neoimperialisme]” and another series of three articles titled “The US empire is in a critical condition (I) [Imperium Amerika di ujung tanduk (I)]”, Maarif strongly criticises the United States’ neo-imperial ambition, he says

In order to support its imperial ambition, the United States has drained millions of tax dollars from its own people and also sacrificed its own people and also people from other nations in the wars. These actions have been justified by using many arguments such as to export democracy or human rights [Untuk mendukung nafsu imperiumnya, Amerika telah menguras uang pajak rakyatnya sendiri dalam angka triliunan dan mengorbankan rakyat bangsa lain serta rakyatnya sendiri di medan pertempuran. Semuanya ini dilakukan dengan berbagai helat dan pembenaran, apakah untuk mengekspor demokrasi atau hak-hak asasi manusia]. (*Republika Online*, September 18 2012-imperium Amerika di ujung tanduk (I)).

In addition to the articles mentioned above, *Republika* also frequently quotes critical statements from several opponents of the United States’ policy from vastly diverse critics inside and outside the United States, such as Noam Chomsky the leading linguist on the one hand and on the other, Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and the former president of Venezuela Hugo Chavez. These critical statements can be seen in the headlines such as “Chomsky: the US is a prominent terrorist state [Chomsky: AS negara teroris terkemuka]”, “Ahmadinejad: the US is desperate, can only spread threats [Ahmadinejad: AS sudah kehabisan akal, hanya bisa main ancam]”, “Iran: US is the initiator of terrorism in the world [Iran: AS adalah penggagas terorisme dunia]”, and “These are controversial statements of Hugo Chavez for the US [Inilah untaian kata kontroversial Hugo Chavez buat Amerika]”. These statements are selectively chosen by *Republika* to support the operation of anti-imperialist identity in *Republika* in addition to its Islamic identity.

This oppositional voice is sometimes exaggerated by *Republika* publishing conspiracy theories related to the United States’ hidden agenda in the war against terrorism. For instance, in an analysis of news items related to the Bali bombing in 2002, Greg Fealy (2003) criticised *Republika*’s “lapse in standards” in reporting the bombing incident. After the bombing, *Republika* published numerous unconnected conspiracy theories surrounding the bombing event, such as the suspicious death of a key eyewitness of the bombing in an Australian hospital, the presence of several United States and Australian navy ships in Balinese docks several months before the bombing, the disappearance of the corpses of four Australian soldiers from the bombsite, and an opinion from a conspiracy theorist, Joe Vialls, who asserted that the bomb was actually a micro-thermo nuclear device and not a conventional explosive. As Fealy has suggested further, that with regard to the Bali bombing, *Republika* ‘has served its readers poorly by focusing on fanciful conspiracy theories rather than substantive reporting’ (Fealy, 2003). In the case of the ISIS, *Republika Online* also published several articles mentioning a speculation about a connection between the ISIS and the US and Israeli governments. Such speculation can be observed in headlines such as

“Snowden: ISIS is a creation of Israel, the US and the UK’ [Snowden: ISIS bentukan Israel, AS, dan Inggris]”, “Is ISIS truly a creation of Israel and the US? [Benarkah gerakan ISIS bentukan Israel dan AS?]” and “Is the video showing the execution of two US journalists fabricated by the US? [Video dua jurnalis dipenggal ISIS rekayasa AS?]”. The publication of these conspiracy theories represents a strongly suspicious attitude in Indonesia toward western countries especially the United States. *Republika*’s editorial policy to allow critical voices toward western countries especially the United States can be seen as part of the operation of “legitimizing identity”, which legitimises Indonesian sovereignty and prolongs “the dynamics of the state” by establishing a distinctly national Islamic identity (Castells, 2009, p. 9).

### **Constructing a distinct Indonesian Islamic identity**

*Republika*’s editorial policy seeks to construct a distinct Indonesian Islam identity. *Republika* shares a critical position against the United States’ dominant power alongside a range of groups around the world, including but by no means limited to the *jihadi* groups. However, *Republika* does not promote a global revolutionary armed jihad as a response to this domination. Instead, *Republika* tends to focus on a national agenda to develop a distinct Indonesian identity of Islam within the boundary of the nation state. *Republika*’s Indonesian identity is as much about separating its position from the US-dominated west as about separating from Middle-Eastern cultural practices and radical Islam.

The nationalist agenda of *Republika* is not a new phenomenon, because *Republika* was initially published as a newspaper with a strong nationalist agenda. By condemning the use of jihad to justify terrorist actions and emphasising the non-violent interpretation of jihad, *Republika* tends to show the common perception of a tolerant and peaceful Islam in Indonesia. In contrast, *Republika*’s support of armed jihad in the particular global contexts indicates its intention to demonstrate global Muslim solidarity. In addition, the strong criticism of *Republika* toward the United States’ dominant power indicates the legitimisation of nationalist identity of mainstream Indonesian Muslims by rejecting the intervention of western countries especially the United States in the future development of Islam in Indonesia.

The notion of a distinct identity as a mixture of an Islamic and a nationalist identity can be found in the description of jihad promoted by *Republika*. The descriptions of non-violent jihad are usually associated with the Indonesian development agenda and the descriptions of jihad as armed struggle are usually associated with the struggle to fight against colonial occupations in Indonesia. In order to articulate its claim as the newspaper for mainstream Muslims in Indonesia, *Republika* seeks to negotiate the meaning of jihad by rejecting the notions of terrorism as an expression of jihad and providing a range of non-violent interpretations of jihad. *Republika* tries to emphasise the position of mainstream Muslims in Indonesia as a moderating force in the process of Indonesian nation building. However, despite *Republika*’s important role in distinguishing mainstream Muslims from violent groups, the description of mainstream Muslims in Indonesia as moderate Muslims remains problematic. Burhani criticises this moderate position as a tendency to ‘play safe’. He argues:

In the global and local Indonesian context, being moderate Muslims can be seen as a suitable and a safe option. However, the moderate label is normally used as

a cover when someone cannot explain his/her position in the midst of the struggle for influence between the hardline Islamic groups and the liberal Islamic groups. Neither 'right' nor 'left' is a negation, and not yet an identity. [Dalam konteks percaturan global saat ini, dan juga konteks lokal Indonesia, menjadi Muslim moderat barangkali menjadi pilihan yang pas dan "aman". Tapi label moderat ini seringkali hanya menjadi baju ketika seseorang tidak bisa menjelaskan posisi dirinya di tengah perebutan pengaruh antara kelompok garis keras Islam dan kelompok liberal Islam. "Tidak kanan" dan "tidak kiri" adalah sebuah negasi, belum menjadi sebuah identitas] (Burhani, 2008).

*Republika* does not adopt any external ideological positions about the true identity of Islam and the correct use of jihad. Rather, it presents its definitions which betray a wide range of influences but which are all fused with a distinct interest in the preservation of the Indonesian nation.

## CONCLUSION

The editorial position of *Republika Online* reflects the difficulties of defining a mainstream Muslim identity in Indonesia. While references to mainstream Islam in Indonesia are commonly associated with the traditionalist *Nahdhatul Ulama* and the reformist *Muhammadiyah*, the plurality of ideas within these mainstream groups is evident. *Republika's* commitment to the nation state has been articulated into more contextual interpretations of jihad from the perspective of Indonesia as a sovereign nation state as mentioned in the headlines such as 'Jihad for food sovereignty is urgent [Mendesak, jihad menuju kedaulatan pangan] and in the items related to the commemoration of the 'Jihad Resolution' during the struggle to defend Indonesian independence. The description of contextual jihad can be seen as a process of negotiation between national identity and Islamic identity in Indonesia. The doctrine of jihad has been used by *Republika* to support the development of national awareness among Indonesian Muslims. Therefore, the way *Republika Online* constructs Islamic identity in Indonesia can be seen as extending the role of the print version of *Republika* and other national commercial newspapers in the preservation of the construction of traditional imagined community within the boundary of the Indonesian nation state.



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