

Boundary between Tolerance and Intolerance in a Multicultural Society
: A Case Study of Indonesia's Anti-pornography Law

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Indonesia, made up of over seventeen thousand islands spanning five thousand kilometers from East to West, has a population of 238,000,000 of which 87% make up the world's largest Muslim population. Indonesia is also a multicultural state with several hundred different ethnic groups, and a multi-faith state with believers in Islam and Christianity, Hindus and Buddhists. When investigating the background to this kind of cultural diversity born as a result of repeated migrations of people and cultures, we have to realize that the national borders of the state known today as Indonesia were inherited from the borders drawn by the colonial control which continued from the 17th to mid-20th Century and that, while important, they only represent one of the many borders that overlap each other in the region.

Freedom of religion is protected under Indonesia's constitution and, under the forcible Suharto regime which lasted until 1998, any situation in which the assertions of a particular religion gained social dominance was carefully avoided. However, as regulations and controls on speech were relaxed amongst the swelling of the movement for democratic reform after the collapse of the Suharto regime and a diversity of values began to cross national borders and permeate Indonesian society under globalization, religious arguments which had, until then, been under strict control started to be spoken about in the public sphere. These different trends have often caused debates regarding the boundaries between tolerance and intolerance.

The Indonesian Anti-Pornography Law passed after a debate which had lasted for a number of years on 30th October 2008 can be said to be symbolic of this situation. However, interpreting the passing of this law as simply a sign of the victory of Islamic conservatism only provides us with a one-sided understanding of the situation. In this presentation I will attempt to interpret the multi-dimensional nature of the establishing of the Anti-Pornography Law and examine the most desirable form of tolerance within a multi-ethnic state by looking at the transcultural and transnational Indonesian situation from a historical perspective.