Liberal Islam:
Religious Play in Post-Authoritarian Indonesia

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Many new religious and political actors emerged in Indonesia following the deposal of Indonesian President Suharto’s authoritarian regime in 1998 and the subsequent adoption of democratic systems. Emerging from Islamic seminaries and universities, individuals terming themselves ‘Liberal Muslims’ wish to inject values like individual autonomy, gender equality, and human rights into Islam, and they do so by reading the Islamic scriptures through the lens of Western humanities and social sciences. These activities occur in private study settings that permit insults, jokes, and laughter, which render religious doctrines vulnerable and thus ultimately changeable. Focusing on the playful aspects of the liberal Muslim pedagogy, this talk explores the potential and limits of religious critique in politically fluid contexts.

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