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Article

# An Unfinished but Hopeful Country

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## A film series on equality and faith in post-pandemic Indonesia

[\*Indonesian Pluralities\*](#) is a film, print and multimedia project that explores cultural and religious diversity, democracy, and civic coexistence in contemporary Indonesia.

Spearheaded by Robert B. Hefner at Boston University and Zainal B. Abidin Bagir at Gadjah Mada University, it explores both the rich promise and ongoing challenges of Indonesia's religious and ethnic plurality. All of the films highlight aspects of the complex diversity of Indonesian culture, politics, and society, as well as social conflicts that have emerged in relationship to that plurality. In the words of Hefner and Bagir, the series is "the story of an unfinished but hopeful Indonesia."

### The Question of Religious Diversity

*In the Name of Belief* (36 minutes) focuses on the struggle to keep Indigenous belief systems (*kepercayaan*) alive against the backdrop of a landmark 2017 ruling by the Constitutional Court that failed to fully recognize their legitimacy. In that ruling, Indigenous faiths are not afforded the same status and protection as major religions like Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, and Confucianism. As a

consequence, those who adhere to traditional faiths face the constant threat of discrimination. The film narrates the general story of Indonesian spiritualities through the lives and words of individuals associated with the Marapu religion in Sumba and the Perjalanan spiritual movement in West Java.

Watch the full film below.

## Faith in Quarantine

The pandemic has changed so many aspects of our lives, and religion is no exception. Religious communities have responded to the pandemic in a variety of ways, from resisting restrictions to adapting to circumstances. At the same time, social solidarity from religious and interfaith communities emerged to deal with this situation. *Religion in Quarantine* (56 minutes) asks, how will our religious practices adapt to the new post-pandemic world?

## Citizenship and Religion

Two films in the series explore how religion and culture mediate the experience of citizenship in Indonesia. *Unfinished Indonesia* (47 minutes) examines the political use and abuse of Islamic appeals and symbols in Indonesia's 2019 national elections. Against this gripping contemporary backdrop, the film also explores how Islam came to be such a point of contention in Indonesia and what having rival understandings of faith, citizenship, and nation could lead to.

*Equal Citizens? Chinese Indonesians in Yogyakarta* (33 minutes) presents a moving account of the daily lives and citizenship struggles of Indonesians of Chinese descent in Yogyakarta. The Chinese Indonesians, who speak Indonesian heavily laced with Javanese idioms, highlighted in this film aspire to be recognized as full and equal Indonesian citizens. Their artistic traditions are a prominent and esteemed part of Yogyakarta's cultural landscape. In most settings, Chinese Indonesians are welcomed and respected by their fellow citizens. However, in local state offices, Chinese Indonesians sometimes encounter difficulties and have to negotiate their civic and political rights in a differentiated and unequal manner. This film explores the reality of social citizenship for Chinese Indonesians and examines how and why Chinese Indonesians are sometimes treated as less-than-equal citizens.

## Seeking Equality

Stretching across the equator with more than 17,000 islands, Indonesia is home to at least 1,340 ethnic groups with various languages and religions. Yet, this diversity is often deployed as a political narrative, ending tragically. The final film in the series, *Indonesian Pluralities Today: Seeking Equality in Diversity* (33 minutes) invites us to not only celebrate Indonesia's diversity but also understand the potential, problems and contestation within.

**Executive Producers:** Andhy Panca Kurniawan, Dandhy Dwi Laksono | **Senior Producers:** Robert W. Hefner, Zainal Abidin Bagir | **Director:** Edy Purwanto | **Lead Researcher:** Mohammad Iqbal Ahna