

Keep it Altar or Alter Community? Re-framing a Myth of Conversion in Indonesia

Introduction

The history of missionaries to Indonesia is replete with stories of how missionaries used health, education and social ministries among the Javanese churches (GKJ, Gereja Kristen Jawa) as tools to convert people to Christianity (Sumartana 1993; Steenbrink 2008). Most of these ministries or programmes were institutionalised in the form of foundations or *yayasan* (Suwarto 2017: 157–162). Within Indonesia’s history, this organizational unit is the origin of modern NGOs which emerged during the New Order regime from the mid-1960s (Ufford 1988; Fakhri 1996; Hadiwinata 2003). A foundation is a legal form of organisation to implement a programme in a community. Through these foundations or NGOs, a church as a religious institution is able to enter the secular arena, dominated by the state. In the Indonesian context it also provides the legal basis of operation for NGOs (Sakai 2002: 165). By its foundation, an NGO is able to engage in development programmes for the community (Hadiwinata 2003: 90–91), and open a bank account to receive funds from abroad (Sakai 2002). This chapter narrates the effort of a local church in developing a social ministry; by forming an NGO the church expresses its motivation to play a significant role in social transformation.¹

The NGO discussed here is IPSEM (Institut Pengembangan Sosial Ekonomi Masyarakat, Institute for Developing the People’s Society and Economy). IPSEM is located in Sala, Central Java. Sala is known for its cultural heritage, being the historic center of the Javanese Kraton or Kingdom. Established in 1988 by a local Javanese church in the tradition of Dutch Reformed Churches, IPSEM’s main objective was to provide poor families access to education for their children, particularly those living in ghetto-like conditions outside Sala. Later on, IPSEM changed its profile when the

1 The data for this paper are collected in a fieldwork from January to March 2016; they form part of my PhD research on Christian NGOs in Java. I am grateful to Philip Michael Fountain for his valuable critics, and to my supervisor, Yahya Wijaya, for commenting on the first draft of this chapter.

Indonesian government implemented a programme of compulsory schooling for all children and is now focussing on socio-economic development. Although IPSEM is a localised religious NGO, it is also part of a larger network of mainly church-related organisations. In Java, IPSEM acts as an intermediary organisation (Riker 1995:94), receiving financial support from New Zealand Aid.

What encourages a local church to set up a foundation or NGO? Is the underlying motivation religious or secular? How does it navigate between religious motivations and secular action in society? How does this NGO encounter the myth Christian foundations frequently encounter, namely that Christian social action and programmes are stereotyped as means of Christianization? This paper seeks to answer these questions by narrating the history of IPSEM as an example of Javanese Christian NGOs, its policy changes, and its developmental designs.

GKJ Elang, IPSEM Foundation and Religious Entrepreneurship

This paper uses the framework of ‘religious entrepreneurship’ to discuss the work of a church that has established a foundation to carry out development work. In a simple way, the concept of religious entrepreneurship is used to refer to a socio-theological concept that locates pastors as agents of social change. In the given case, the religious entrepreneurship of a pastor shows through his ability to use self-reflection to connect religious values and spiritual experiences to social change (Suwarto 2017).

In elaborating on the concept of religious entrepreneurship, Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1999) offers useful inspiration. He argued that everyone seeks to struggle for their interests by using all ‘capital’ they have or can gain in the field. Capital is not simply about finances but also many other forms of social, relational, and political resources. Bourdieu opined that capital utilisation will result in patterns of capital mobilisation or transformation. Bourdieu’s ideas, in some aspects, presumed a pervasive utilitarianism in which ethical values are largely sidelined for capital maximising behaviours. This limitation in Bourdieu’s framework can be completed by Max Weber’s understanding of ‘value rationality’, *Wertrationalität* (Weber 1968). Weber’s theory of social action was based on the understanding that social action is influenced by two important things: the first is means-ends rationality or the idea that action is “determined by expectations as to the behaviour of objects in the environment and of other human beings. These expectations are used as ‘conditions’ or ‘means’ for the attainment of the

actor's own rationally pursued and calculated ends". The second is value rationality or action that is "determined by a conscious belief in the value for its own sake of some ethical, aesthetic, religious, or another form of behaviour, independently of its prospects for success" (Ritzer 1992: 126). The understanding of this second form of rationality is important in order to make Bourdieu's ideas more complete.

GKJ Elang, the church that founded IPSEM, has an interesting history itself.² Founded in the 1960s, a characteristic feature in its history is the involvement of laypeople, particularly local school teachers and members of political parties, including a political party leader. It might seem surprising that a political leader supported the emergence of the church. Yet, in the years around 1965, if an Indonesian citizen did not have a religion specified on their ID documents they could suffer significant discriminations (Seo 2013).³ This especially affected former members of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI, Partai Komunis Indonesia). In the political contest around 1965 PKI failed to assume power. Portrayed in public as an anti-religion party, PKI had frequently been a scapegoat for all political violence and turmoil in that year. Eventually, ex-party members adopted a religion as a pass-card to get Indonesian citizenship. Many of them selected Christianity as their religion. In a sense, the politics of citizenship of ex-communist party members impacted the growth of Christian congregations. Another effect of this influx of lay members was that churches saw an opportunity of evangelization in the aftermath of the massive political violence. Encountering such a situation, Pastor Markus Noroyono of GKJ Elang sought to make use of the potentials of the new lay membership. Being aware of the political background of many members he opened the space for internal debates on how to develop a kind of a new, public identity. GKJ Elang under Pastor Noroyono's leadership became a progressive and creative church. The approach adopted was to connect church and (school) campus, in the form of a theological seminary, to enhance outside communication and to seek cooperation with other institutions or influen-

2 GKJ is a pseudo name for a church located in one of the big cultural cities of Java. Elang means an eagle so that by using this name, it is to show how this GKJ is performing like an eagle that can cover the sky with its big and strong wings.

3 In his analysis of the failed PKI politics to assume power, Tornquist identifies a weak understanding of the peasant movement at the local level. PKI was operating with uniform concepts "unable to make a correct analysis of what kind of monopoly of land determined the decisive contradiction and hampered development in the rural areas" (Tornquist 1984: 240).

tial individuals for the sake of actively addressing community problems. All of it gained ground by operating as a religious NGO.

Church and Diaconia: Education for Children of Labour Family

Since his appointment as a pastor, Noroyono had been actively laying down a new basis for the relationship between church and pastor. First, for him the ministry is a sacramental office with the ability to minister to a church and with the function of celebrating the sacraments. A pastor could obtain a salary from anywhere, but his/her sacramental office cannot be replaced by someone else. Secondly, the relationship between a pastor and a church council is as equals; a pastor is not the “handyman” of the church council or parish, nor is a pastor a “director” or “architect” of church progress. Instead, all church programmes should be conducted by all governing bodies of the church in harmony. In order to enhance the capacity of change, this harmony between parish, church council and pastor is vitally important. In Pastor Noroyono’s words:

“I don’t want to implement this change of paradigm alone by myself; therefore, I discuss it with some members of the church council that are supportive of this idea. Based on it, we can set up a ‘core team’ to progress this idea among church members. A pastor is not Superman! I need support from the church council.”⁴

Before becoming a pastor, Noroyono had participated in training as a community organizer at YBKS, Yayasan Bimbingan Kesejahteraan Sosial (a local NGO). The instructors at that time included, among others, prominent figures such as George Junus Aditjondro, Arief Budiman, and Gus Dur.⁵ They encouraged him to implement a theology of liberation. At that time the New Order regime was at the peak of its power. In political scientific nomenclature New Order Indonesia is categorized as a semi-authoritarian state. New Order Indonesia has taken place between 1967 and 1998, under the long-time leadership of President Soeharto. He had a military background and his regime enforced many restrictions regarding the

4 Interview, FN_160216 and FN_080316. All field notes had been coded with FN, followed by the date of interview.

5 The first two persons are lecturers in Satya Wacana Christian University teaching on social movements, critical education and development. Both are graduates from US universities and close to the thinking of Gustavo Gutierrez and Paulo Freire. Abdurahman Wahid his nickname is Gus Dur is considered in Indonesia as a moderate Islam leader of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and has been the fourth Indonesian President. Defending human rights, he supported religious pluralism in Indonesia.

freedom of expression, such as strictly monitoring the press and cutting the right to form social organisations. Yet, this training at YBKS inspired Pastor Noroyono to envision a church which would transform into a movement for social change.

In order to manifest this idea in the community, Pastor Noroyono set up an educational foundation focused on children of poor families named Yayasan Pelita Pendidikan (YPP) in early 1990. This foundation did not replace church diaconal activities. Pastor Noroyono told me that: “This yayasan is an extension of church diaconia to society and is simultaneously an arena for doing practical theology”. This yayasan sought to engage with education on the basis of theological thought. Since its beginning, YPP was not funded by a diaconia commission, but it raised funds independently from church members and other partners by implementing a foster parent programme. Pastor Noroyono explained:

“The concept of the foster parent is not personal in nature, but it is managed by the yayasan. It means, if there is somebody who would like to help five children, for instance, the funds should be submitted to yayasan. Then, this yayasan looks for five children from poor families, so that they can go to school.”⁶

At that time the main problem was the lack of a kindergarten, so the main programme set up by YPP was the construction of kindergarten facilities. This project was supported by many people and the eventual result was the construction of six school buildings, all of which were located in the areas where poor families were concentrated. The main objective was to help children of poor families get access to educational rights. In the long run, and after evaluations, the main objectives were fully achieved. Although the project was very successful, this yayasan was frozen. The political climate had changed completely.

Transformation of the Church’s Diaconal Programme

By the year 2015 the Indonesian Government has been more successful in fulfilling educational access to poor people through its programme of wajib belajar sembilan tahun (compulsory learning for nine years). The pastor and church council had evaluated that YPP was no longer effective and therefore needed to be amended. The main objective to help the poor children had been accomplished. They decided therefore to change the yayasan into a foundation for social-economic improvement. The pastor told me that

6 Interview, FN_090216_2, <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:5:1-63864-p0011-9>, 10.5771/9783748907633-207, am 17.03.2025, 02:43:47

“IPSEM is not part of diaconal church programme but it will give the church further space to do community service at large”. Further, he stated:

“IPSEM is able to be called as a means of social diaconia. The main program is micro credit. However, there are additional programs to support it, i.e. advocacy and community training. In implementing community development, IPSEM is stressing self-independence.”⁷

Meanwhile, the church cooperated with outside development partners, especially New Zealand Aid. The church intended to make use of this international cooperation to support claims of self-independence. The strategy was to limit international cooperation to a certain time span. Regarding independence the pastor explained: “We are only eager to do a contract with New Zealand Aid for six years”. His vision was to develop an independent community programme without any support from other parties. “How can we teach self-reliance in community”, he explained, “if in our organisation there is no spirit of independence?” Based on such an idea, the six-year cooperation between IPSEM and New Zealand Aid implemented community programmes to form a spirit of independence. The core strategy was to link small projects with official governmental programmes. “Our target groups are connecting to governmental bureaus”, he mentioned. “It is to prevent them being dependent.”⁸

In fact, there were some organic farming groups receiving financial support from government. Therefore, to embody self-reliance, all target groups were encouraged to become a statutory legal entity. By becoming a legal entity they could independently arrange cooperation with government departments.⁹ Today, even though the cooperation with New Zealand Aid has ended, IPSEM still conducts regular meetings with community members. In five years of providing community service, between 2003 and 2008, IPSEM had served five districts around Sala in the southern area of Central Java, and moreover, it reached out to Grobogan District, the northern area of Central Java.

IPSEM implemented microcredit programmes in five districts in three different forms: cooperatives (similar to credit unions); banking system cooperatives; and through a microfinance unit. For the first and second programmes, the source of capital was from members themselves who are oriented to attaining community independence. The last programme

7 Interview, FN_100216.

8 Interview, FN_100216. <https://doi.org/10.5771/9783748907633-207>, am 17.03.2025, 02:43:47

9 Interview, FN_240216.  <https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/abg>

intends to support IPSEM itself to stay independent. The capital from the third programme is derived from the cooperation programme with donor organisations; it acts as contingency fund for local partners, covering around 12.5 % of the total programme budget. This fund is now developed as an institutional fund. It is expected that by managing this capital, IPSEM can free itself from the need of further external funds in order to operate as an autonomous foundation.¹⁰

The important question here is: what social and theological thinking was underlying these church-run social services and how were such thoughts developed? “It is self-reliance and independence“, Noroyono clearly answered, by which he means that the church as an institution should be independent and self-supporting. Yet, since he became a pastor, he has stressed that the church should not have a budget with a negative balance, but rather it should have a surplus. The first step to reach this is to cultivate the spirituality of church members. He explained:

“First of all, among church members should be a growing spirit of giving. The other way is entrepreneurship. To reach this degree of independence, the pastor should have a spirit of entrepreneurship. If this is attained by the pastor, it could spread to other church members.”¹¹

He has developed this spirit of entrepreneurship through financial decentralization, marketing, and transparency. “Since its inception, it had already achieved financial decentralisation”, he commented. Every church commission, foundation or any unit established by the church has the responsibility to manage its own finances. In order to access funds, programme marketing is another important tool. Any programme of a commission should be offered and ‘sold’ to church members. For instance, in its aim to provide a programme of education assistance to poor children, the diaconal commission should introduce its plans through an attractive proposal and should actively publicise this in the *Warta Gereja* (church bulletin) every Sunday. After attracting support from church members, the funds should be managed in an accountable and transparent way. “The good commissions are able to manage the funds independently”, the pastor explained. There is one condition that all people should obey: the marketing of the programme is only conducted through *Warta Gereja*. “Here, since the beginning”, the pastor insisted, “raising and collecting funds by door to door mechanism is

10 Interview, FN_080316.

11 Interview, FN_090216.

not allowed”.¹² This condition was implemented to prevent corruption and mismanagement. Warta Gereja became a significant platform to advertise such programmes. By this, the programme concepts are widely known and discussed among church members. In addition, the commission and other committees focus on their project designs, and projects are implemented only once the financial needs are sufficiently supported by church members.

To stimulate these activities, the church cultivates a spirit of giving. Money collection in GKJ Elang differs from other churches. During Sunday service no collection plate or bag is distributed. “Because the spirit of giving among members is growing”, Pastor Noroyono argued, all church members are pleased to put their collection into a box that is placed at the front of the church. Money collection can be carried out also outside Sunday service. This collection is usually intended to support the projects. “By doing such a thing”, he remarked, “our weekly Sunday service collection is small”. However, any kind of collection or donation should be accompanied by a clear message that supports the project idea. As a result, donations raise sufficient amounts of money for development programmes. All donations outside the Sunday offering are submitted directly to the commission:

“This is a kind of financial decentralisation we are developing. In Klasis (regional church association) our self-reliance fund is small, because our weekly collection fund is very small. However, the other money collection is big. All collection money are put into the church bank account and then go to the commission. The church account is a kind of transitory fund. Finances are transferred to the commission.”¹³

Does this church model run the risk of being too materialistic? Pastor Noroyono replied that the “danger of materialism” can be balanced by a “spiritual thirst”. Therefore, the church proclaims a “spirituality of giving”. The spirituality of giving addresses the need of material blessings. Food and earthly things are important for the life of human beings. Yet, the strife for material blessings is put into an eschatological perspective. Any earthly activity is done in the light of the Kingdom of God. A church can be materially rich, but she has to share it with people who are in need. Or, in the process of becoming rich, the church has to share continually. Thus, GKJ Elang has emphasized solidarity, a power of giving. It is not earthly things that are emphasized; both earthly things and the Kingdom of God are rather related to one and another.¹⁴

12 Interview, FN_090216.

13 Interview, FN_090216. <https://doi.org/10.5771/9783748907633-207>, am 17.03.2025, 02:43:47

14 Interview, FN_090216 and FN_1702216. <https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb>

The aspect of solidarity is coupled with the conversion of the heart. Pastor Noroyono does not stress material abundance as such but sharing in solidarity. The spirit of giving among church members aims at bringing about solidarity that supports one another. This is the essence of giving in the church. Pastor Noroyono refers to Luke 9,10–17. The feeding of the crowd of 5000 listeners to the message of Jesus by only five loafs of bread and two fish is a miraculous event already. But the climax of the story points at the “twelve baskets” of left-overs, interpreted by him as abundance. Because there is solidarity, a spirit of giving among people small material resources can bring abundance. By giving even something small, a person becomes rich. For Pastor Noroyono, the constant act of giving in solidarity with other church members will create material abundance.¹⁵ At this juncture, the transparent management of resources comes into play. Accountability and methods of entrepreneurship are indispensable for Pastor Noroyono to develop social diaconia programmes. This is especially important, because such projects are intended to also benefit people outside the church.

The Development of Service: From Capacity Building to Peace Building

Pastor Noroyono insists on flexible responses to outside demands. In one interview, I asked the question: “Why was IPSEM, a social diaconia institute, closed?” Pastor Noroyono gave me a short answer: “This institute is just a diaconal tool, so it can be changed to answer the changing context of the church”. Previously, this yayasan was intended to give poor children access to education. As the government began addressing this issue, the yayasan was transformed into IPSEM. Apparently, this institution can also be changed according to new insights and priorities designed by the church. Pastor Noroyono’s idea is to change IPSEM into an institute for culture and peacebuilding studies:

“As it is a tool, somebody can be easily tricked by IPSEM; because we want this institute to be a means of peacebuilding service now! Social service through micro-credit is over. All target groups are self-reliant. Therefore, we stop here.”¹⁶

15 Interview, FN_090216, and FN_130216.

16 Interview, FN_090216.

Pastor Noroyono's new framework is a theology of peace building. Currently, according to him, inter-religious conflicts are emerging in several places. In his opinion, the vital interest in building peaceful relationships among members of different religions in the country is losing ground. Several radical religious movements are emerging in the area where GKJ Elang is located. They openly oppose religious pluralism. In this precarious situation, Pastor Noroyono likes to redirect GKJ Elang and make it a church-based *yayasan* for peace and inter-religious tolerance.

"I don't want to perpetuate this institution without any revision. This institution is just a means. Once the objective is achieved, it should be evaluated! If it is forced to continue, it will probably become inefficient."¹⁷

The new programme was made known in public by services of transformation. The idea to support a culture of peace has been discussed in the church since 2011, and it has been discussed internally since then. The right occasion to implement the new approach was identified with a *Kenduri Nasional* (National Festival) in 2015, a New Year's Eve celebration. This festival was led by the Sala city's Mayor and attended by representatives and members of all religions based in the region.¹⁸ The following paragraphs describe the process of discovering the church's peace-building potential in two sections, an internal church perspective is followed by an inter-religious perspective.

According to Pastor Noroyono the idea to concentrate on peace building has its background in internal conflicts.¹⁹ In some local churches of GKJ, tensions were growing due to centralizing church politics. Pastor Noroyono identifies a local case over the appointment of a pastor as the root of conflicts. A local congregation, GKJ Rejosari, was suffering a dilemma in regard to the anointment of a pastor who had already transgressed the official age limit of fifty years. However, the candidate did not demand a salary with his appointment. This caused a problem in two aspects: first, the age of the person does not comply with the *Tata Gereja* (church guidelines); second, the candidate flouts the precedent by not requesting a salary. The Synod rejected the anointing process of the pastor-to-be. However, the local church supported the candidate and sought assistance from GKJ Elang to mediate this conflict. GKJ Elang saw this case as a misunderstanding. The mediation team separated the calling of a pastor from the

17 Interview, FN_090216_2.

18 Interview, FN_0900216, <https://doi.org/10.5771/9783748907633-207>, am 17.03.2025, 02:43:47

19 Interview, FN_160216.  <https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/abg>

question of salary. Therefore, GKJ Elang affirmed the inauguration of the pastor.²⁰

The completion of this case marked GKJ Elang's first experience in successful conflict resolution. As a result, the church felt encouraged to extend the service from economic to peace building projects. But it was aware of the fact that in order to implement such a process, the basic structure of NGO work needed to be changed. One of the ideas the church strongly kept was that people are the subject of history.²¹ Pastor Noroyono claimed that "church members should change their way of thinking: they are the actors of history". Without the agency of people, he opined, churches were difficult to change. In this context, Pastor Noroyono brings in a self-reflective note. He identifies the central position of pastors, like himself, in the church as one basic problem. Therefore, he insists on the empowerment of the church council which can even be traced back to the beginnings of GKJ Elang. Pastor Noroyono refers to the impact of the theology of liberation on his own thinking. He expressed that "the future vision of GKJ Elang is to have twelve pastors". The concept of the twelve-pastor church is symbolic. It means that the church should serve many aspects of life and it also hints at a new understanding of how to run a church in a context troubled by poverty and marginalization. A shared concept of pastoral ministry relieves the heavy load of responsibility for just one person. A twelve-pastor church also distributes the salaries of pastors to the congregation and to other institutions or *yayasan*. In GKJ Elang, the concept of entrepreneurship helps to generate the material resources for this kind of shared ministry. The twelve-pastor-church represents a multi-perspective ministry that can prove viable if the church develops a range of sub-divisions running their own projects autonomously. Overall, the concept of redirecting power pastoral to congregational levels has become an integral part of the peace-building vision for the church.

The idea of peace building intends to equip church council members with an awareness of conflict resolution. The need for peace-building arises on diverse, both local congregational and the broader GKJ levels. Referring to the conflict in GKJ Rejosari mentioned above, EHUD Saputra, a church council member, suggested that one principle issue of the church conflict is the pastor's salary: "Salary is one interesting factor in conflict resolution", he continues:

20 Interview, FN_130216.

21 In some interviews he emphasized that people or church members are the real actors in history.

“The calling of pastor is related to self-motivation and intention, while claiming a salary is a different thing. Shortly, both calling of a pastor and claiming a salary are not mixed with each other. To be a pastor and to accept a salary from the church is not a problem. So, if the pastor does not accept a salary from the church, this is not a problem as well. It is all dependent on the agreement between pastor and church (members) respectively. It is not fair however, if there is a pastor not claiming a salary and because of this is prevented from being a pastor. A calling to be a pastor is not the same as being a church employee.”²²

Ehud Saputro argues that the calling of a pastor is very different to the position of a church employee or corporate employee. For him, a pastor should be self-reliant which gives them a sense of independence. On the salary issue, he recommends a joint effort between pastor and church council. He opts for a non-hierarchical church. A pastor should be a partner, learning and growing together with the congregation. A pastor should not be in a higher or lower position than any church member. Conversely, church members should be independent from the pastor in theological aspects or congregational services (except in sacramental services). In short, the relationship between a pastor and a congregation is characterized by freedom and responsibility. If both freedom and responsibility are absent, churches make a pastor a slave, and conversely a pastor exploits the church members.²³ For GKJ Elang, the motivation to assist other congregations that are in conflict is supported by a theology of the Good Samaritan. From there GKJ Elang conceptualizes an ecclesiological reconstruction. Pastor Noroyono explained:

“By this parable, Jesus sought to refuse particularism and to stress universalism. What is important here is the figure of the Good Samaritan. He is marginalised, but even he does help and saves someone other. He looks after the robbed; furthermore, he lifts him up on his donkey—a symbol of service to others; and then brings him to hospital, and he pays some money. But more so, he announces to return and make sure that everything is well. This is a picture of total salvation.”²⁴

However, the concept of conflict resolution so far refers to internal issues. For Pastor Noroyono it does strengthen the spirit of self-reliance. But what about interventions in inter-religious conflicts; what about peace-building going public?

22 Interview, FN_130216.

23 Interview, FN_130216. <https://doi.org/10.5771/9783748907633-207>, am 17.03.2025, 02:43:47

24 Interview, FN_090216.  <https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/abg>

Christian NGOs in Islamic Indonesia

The concept of a twelve-pastor church deserves a more detailed exploration. This symbolic concept is connected to the implementation of foundations, or *yayasans*. From an ecclesiological point of view, out of the twelve only one pastor would be based in the congregation. All others, although they are pastors, should work with foundations and Christian NGOs. As mentioned above, it is only through *yayasans* that the church can operate openly in society. Seo defines foundations as a kind of “church which is working in community” (Seo 2013: 120). We remember that church-based *yayanan* do abandon any goal of evangelization. By coining a programme directed to the poor community, IPSEM is GKJ Elang’s tool to do service in society. IPSEM is a kind of Christian NGO which is likewise open to changes. When redesigned in terms of peace-building, IPSEM implements a Good Samaritan discourse in the church as well as in public. The first experience in conflict resolution was within GKJ. However, the appearance of church-run programmes in public has been long prepared in previous projects. It also shows in the theological flexibility and adaptation to different challenges. Part of IPSEM is a micro credit programme. It is a basic element of supporting projects of socio-economic improvement among the poor. The credit programme is based on the assumption that if a community can access capital it will be able to create opportunities to achieve a better life. Capital distribution is one key to community empowerment. Next to credit programmes, IPSEM also undertakes some advocacy programmes. They are especially directed at the local level to support the community empowerment programme. But the political goal of advocacy programmes is to convince the government to provide better facilities and resources for the poor. “It is a way to bring the government down to earth”, Pastor Noroyono argued, and “to create a political equilibrium in society”.²⁵ Changing government policy is not an easy task, especially in a country such as Indonesia with a particularly labyrinthine complex of government departments and political parties. The pastor’s strategy to change policy for the better is aimed at creating networks. IPSEM foundation is a kind of umbrella institution through which Christians participate in a broader network of NGOs, operating at local and national level (Smet 2011:31–36). The pastor introduces Christianity to others “not by a verbal method” but “by meaningful social action”.²⁶ GKJ Elang addresses societal

25 Interview, FN_090216.

26 Interview, FN_160216. <https://doi.org/10.5771/9783748907633-207>, am 17.03.2025, 02:43:47

problems by adjusting the foundation. These transformations have kept the foundation relevant and dynamic within a changing context. In addition, such institutional transformations help prevent the church from being accused of Christianizing people. The changes demonstrate that GKJ Elang counters new social challenges and does not seek the conversion of Muslims to Christianity. From a historical point of view, the GKJ pastor realised that Muslim conversions to Christianity were a source of tension and conflict in the community (Seo 2013: 115–116). In other words, the institutional transformations of IPSEM are a strategy to avoid inter-religious conflict in Java. In addition, through such programmes of social development, people become more open to the work of the foundation. The foundation is presented as serving people regardless of their religious background. By engaging in social action, religion no longer contributes to disunity and violence, but it can become a source of peace and cooperation.²⁷

A similar experience was made by another Christian NGO, Yayasan Kristen Trukajaya (Trukajaya Christian Foundation), which was established by the GKJ Synod. In order to avoid significant tensions with Muslim groups in rural areas, Trukajaya downplayed its Christian affiliation. It was expected that by abandoning the word ‘Christian’ all its programmes could be adopted and adapted by the people. Trukajaya was openly accepted by the people as long as it refused to convert people and as long as it chose a secular approach (Seo 2013: 118–120, Suwarto 2017: 156–158). Pastor Noroyono appears to build on such experiences. IPSEM’s approach is to foster communal awareness. He applies the spirit of giving to maximise the foundation’s funds in order to purchase land and property to enable social projects.²⁸ In addition to capacity building, IPSEM displays strong communication skills. Communication skills are of high priority in social movements especially in the area of peace building (Clark 1995; Diani 2006; Smet 2011: 91–93). The language that they use in society has accommodative nuances (de Mars 2005). Christian NGOs in Indonesia frequently use an accommodative language. They face double layers of threats if their political-advocacy language is too strong: the first danger is from the state banning NGO operations, and the second from Muslim groups accusing Christian NGO of converting people.

Accommodative language seeks to adapt an NGOs programme as close as possible to the language used by the government. For instance, in the micro credit programme a Christian NGO makes use of political terms. In

27 Interview, FN_080316, <https://doi.org/10.5771/9783748907633-207>, am 17.03.2025, 02:43:47

28 Interview, FN_090216.  <https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/abg>

addition, recruiting Muslim people as staff or as mediators with the Muslim community can be effective. Carrying out such a strategy has a double benefit: on the one hand it makes it easy to facilitate community projects in areas with Muslim majority, and on the other hand Christian NGOs function as a bridge between Islam and Christianity. Christian NGOs in Indonesia open up an arena of inter-religious encounter (Seo 2013: 123; Suwanto 2017: 263–265).

However, the success of Christian NGOs in the context of Muslim-majority Indonesia is mainly related to carrying out societal services not as a missionary programme, but as social diaconia. Diaconia has long been emphasized within the Calvinist tradition of Christian theology inherited and emphasised by GKJ. In comparison to other Dutch churches, the Reformed-Calvinist churches are oriented to a theology of the New Testament which grants significant space for diaconal services (Parker 2003: 112–118). If in other churches diaconia projects are occasionally abandoned, in the Reformed churches in Java they are a central issue (Soleiman 2012: 96–103; 161–170).

Social diaconia is a type of church developmental programme for society. By forming a *yayasan* the church's diaconal services support values of social change rather than charity.²⁹ By engaging in social transformation they can develop deeper inter-religious relationships through mutual cooperation. Projects are neither aimed at individuals nor at conversion, but rather at a whole community (Seo 2013: 120).

Concluding Remarks

The story of GKJ Elang's pastor discussed in this chapter shows that the pastor's perspective is one of social change. His vision is closely related to personal life. What is important is that the personal life of the pastor cannot be limited to private aspects, but it also affects the church and community at large. By using a lens of religious entrepreneurship, the social performance of Pastor Noroyono is replete of service innovation, and it is carried out creatively. This creative potential can bring about important changes in both church and community.

Religious entrepreneurship reacts to social realities, such as poverty and the ignorance of basic rights, for example access to education, or marginalisation suffered by church members. The social dynamics extends from services in the church to community at large. Pastor Noroyono carries out dia-

29 Interview, FN_080316.org/10.5771/9783748907633-207, am 17.03.2025, 02:43:47

conal praxis along a ‘three C’ axis: church, school campus, and community. The tool to implement such projects in the community is setting up a yayasan as mode of operation.

Church-based yayasan operate in two forms that are also highlighted in theories of social movements: (1) public education programmes teach a community with the goal of changing behaviour (Smet 2011: 9); and (2) public advocacy is used to change public policy in order to support freedom, equality, and justice for all (Diani 2006: 231–233). Public education programmes are extending activities to raise awareness for the dignity of each person. By such a policy it is hoped that people might change their behaviour. There is some evidence that such behavioural changes are emerging, for instance in the field of inter-religious relations.

The entrepreneurial performance is based on theological creativity. The pastor inspires several theologies to orient the church’s social praxis, reaching out from a theology of liberation to a theology of giving and social welfare. Being aware of accusations against the yayasan as a conversion tool, however, the use of secular idioms is a necessity. The use of secular terms also helps to propagate the concepts of projects in rural milieus. In this respect, religious entrepreneurship is developing a general attitude for social transformation. By using religious entrepreneurship as a theoretical framework, the secular/religious dichotomy becomes blurred. Moreover, by harmonising religious and secular perspectives, social transformation can happen in the context of religious pluralism in Indonesia. As a result, GKJ pastors are able to build a new social ethics in a developing democracy based on Christian values made public primarily through a Christian NGO.

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