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# AL-ALBAB

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## RELIGIOUS SOLIDARITY FOR COPING WITH ECONOMIC CRISIS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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### ABSTRACT

*The COVID-19 pandemic has devastated global and local economies alike. However, it has also contributed to the functioning of social solidarity in dealing with crisis pressure among local people, which became a survival strategy for various businesses. This paper aims to map the patterns of economic pressure resulting from the pandemic and analyze the social strength factor that became a survival strategy in the economic field. This research was conducted on several Chinese Indonesian converts to Islam [mu`alaf] to examine their religious solidarity that served as the strength for their survival as entrepreneurs. Therefore, qualitative research was conducted in a community of converts to Islam in Pontianak city, one of the centers with a significant Chinese population. In addition to data on the crisis they experienced during the pandemic, this research also revealed their perceptions, motivation, and actions in response to COVID-19. The research results showed that social and spiritual capital is the most important support for converts to recover from difficult times. Religion has become the moral basis of these entrepreneurs for solidarity and a source of support in coping with pressure and problems. Amid scarcity of economic resources, religion-based social resources have become the answer to the problems encountered by these entrepreneurs.*

**Keywords:** Social Solidarity; Economic Crisis; Muslim Entrepreneurs; COVID-19 pandemic

### INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 has killed not only humans, but also the economy. Therefore, various strategies have been adopted for dealing with these situations in society. People led movements to collect donations which were then distributed to those affected by COVID-19. Community solidarity, called *Tempat Nasi Gratis Jogja*

[Jogja Free Rice Venue], distributed free rice packs to the public with as many as 140 rice packs given out a day (A. Kurniawan Ulung, 2021). The Gusdurian Community raised funds to help people affected by COVID-19. In addition to raising funds, this community also helped street vendors market their wares (Aru Lego Triono, 2021). As shown by Chinmayee Mishra and Navaneeta Rath, the importance of social solidarity is that solidarity gives rise to strength to face the impact of COVID-19 (Mishra & Rath, 2020). In line with that, solidarity in social networks plays a vital role in mobilizing community force to deal with the impact of COVID-19 (Vandenberg, Berghman, & Schaap, 2021)

To date, studies on social solidarity in dealing with the economic crisis due to a pandemic have focused on two main issues; first, studies of social solidarity that view it from mechanical and organic perspectives developed by Durkheim, (Anderson, 2020; Leap & Thompson, 2018; Ritzer & Goodman, 2009). Ritzer & Goodman (2009) indicate that a society formed by mechanical solidarity is a collective consciousness encompassing the entire community and all of its members, where this condition is deep-rooted and religious in nature. While in a society that has organic solidarity, collective awareness is limited to some groups, non-obligatory, less deep-rooted, and concerns only individual interests. The same thing is also illustrated by Leap & Thomson (2018) and Anderson (2020) that mechanical solidarity gives rise to strength in dealing with difficult situations in society (Ritzer & Goodman, 2009). Second, solidarity is formed in inclusive social networking groups (Haryadi & Malitasari, 2020; (Irwan, M, Muljono, & Yonvitner, 2019; Yudina & Alekseenko, 2020). The three researchers indicate that social solidarity can be formed in social media or online communities. From the two models above, studies on social solidarity have yet to analyze the subjective perspectives of the actors involved profoundly. The actor's perspective is needed to provide a better insight even though it is very conservative to formulate the right strategies for community groups to overcome the impact of COVID-19.

This research aims to complement the existing studies that have yet to accommodate subject perspectives in analyzing social solidarity in overcoming the economic crisis due to COVID-19. In line with that, this paper aims to map the patterns of solidarity and analyze the conditions that cause solidarity to form among the Chinese Indonesian converts to Islam – hereafter referred to as *mu'alaq*. The answer to this question allows for an in-depth insight into the correlation between social solidarity and the community's socio-economic strength in facing the economic crisis. This insight can serve as the basis for formulating more contextual and effective policies in coping with the impact

of COVID-19.

Social solidarity involving communities can be a potential social strength in dealing with crises, especially the economic crisis felt by the community. On the one hand, this social solidarity shows togetherness and solidarity that accommodates community participation in helping others. On the other hand, it is built on pragmatic interests. In addition, at the same time, these communities cannot overcome all their problems. However, in this case, social solidarity was in line with the government's policy of handling crises during the pandemic, which involved various social forces with their interests.

This research analyzed the form of solidarity during the COVID-19 pandemic among the *mu'alaif* in Pontianak City, Indonesia. This solidarity was closely observed regarding the support they provided to fellow converts. Then, we also focused on the form of capital, business network, and mental-spiritual support, which aim to enable these *mu'alaif* to face challenges and economic crises caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. These *mu'alaif* are members of the Indonesian Chinese Muslim Association (PITI). This association has become the center for studying Islam for the *mu'alaif*.

The data used in this research were primary qualitative data using three types: knowledge, attitude, and practice. The data on knowledge is the conception of *mu'alaif* about their understanding of the conditions of the impact of COVID-19 and their knowledge of the importance of solidarity built on social identity (Zhong et al., 2020), while attitude is the ability to process beliefs and relevant information. It turns into an attitude responding to context (Ajzen, 1993). The data on practice is a concrete action that they take intentionally.

The source of information in this paper is in the form of primary data (Lexy J. Moleong, 2019). Information in this study was obtained from the *mu'alaif* who had converted to Islam for at least two years, who believed that they had understood Islamic teachings and often interacted with fellow *mu'alaif*. These informants are members of the PITI [Indonesian Chinese Muslim Association] in Pontianak City.

The data collection process in this study began with the collection of materials that became the central issue of research, related to social solidarity built by community groups, then continued with field observations. (Sugiyono, 2018). Field observations were mapped into three parts; first, the routine activities of the convert community at PITI; second, social movement activities; and third, individual actions. Then we also conducted in-depth interviews (A. Anggito & J. Setiawan, 2018). Informants in this study consisted of West Kalimantan PITI management, members of PITI, and *mu'alaif* retailers. It aimed to confirm the

solidarity among the *mu'alaq* community in coping with the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The data analysis in this research follows the stages of Miles & Huberman's qualitative research (1994): after data collection, we carried out data reduction, data display, and data verification. Data reduction was done according to the themes and research questions by classifying, focusing, organizing, and analyzing the data in-depth. Data display was done by displaying the data by writing it along with direct quotations from the interviews. The verification process used the method of interpretation of data with tendencies having been mapped since the beginning of data collection.

### COVID-19 PANDEMIC

COVID-19, designated by the WHO (World Health Organization) as a pandemic as this research was conducted, had entered its second year in Indonesia (SMERU, 2021). Mascie Taylor & Moji (2021) states a pandemic is "an epidemic occurring worldwide or over a vast area." In line with this, Nossem (2020) added that a pandemic knows no administrative boundaries because of the high level of people's mobility so that the impact of its outbreak is felt by the majority of people in the world or a wide region (Iaquinto, 2020; Iacus et al., 2020). The influence of a pandemic triggers various problems (Uzun et al., 2021; Sharma et al., 2021). The problems caused by this pandemic affect people who are victims of COVID-19 and the general public who live in affected regions or countries. For those who contracted COVID-19, the problems they face are threats to their health and life (Cepel, Gavurova, Dvorsky, & Belas, 2020), given that this virus attacks the human respiratory system and anyone who is infected is at high risk of death (Pascarella et al., 2020; Rothan & Byrareddy, 2020).

In addition to issues related to health and life-threatening risks, various other issues also threaten the unaffected community, including economic, social, and psychological issues. (Cepel et al., 2020). These problems then turn into a crisis that threatens people's lives (Puchkova et al., 2021). The drastic decline in income due to the termination of employment carried out simultaneously by many companies also triggered economic instability (Gassman-Pines et al., 2020; Eisenbeck et al., 2022). It didn't stop there; the economic crisis then created a series of emotional pressures such as anxiety, depression, a large responsibility burden, and mental disorders (John et al., 2019; Caffo et al., 2020). This economic, social, and psychological crisis occurred to people around the world. In a study entitled "Covid-19 Outbreak in Italy: Are We Ready for the Psychosocial and the Economic Crisis? Baseline Findings From

the PsyCovid Study” that the emergence of this crisis has fostered a sense of empathy in the community for each other as a result of awareness of the gravity of the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Cerami et al., 2020).

### **ECONOMIC CRISIS**

Economic activities are activities carried out by the community by providing input in the form of labor, material, and thoughts to produce output in the form of daily income (Saepuloh & Aisyah, 2020). In daily life, economic activities cannot be separated from people’s lives, even people always seek to increase income to achieve welfare (Marlinah, 2019). This welfare is the community’s desire because when it is achieved, stability in life can be ensured (Shin, 2016). On the other hand, efforts to improve the economy do not always run smoothly. Various challenges also hinder this effort, including the crisis (Buendía, Gómez Serrano, & Molero-Simarro, 2020). The economic crisis is diverse and widespread across sectors (A. Sharma & Borah, 2020). There are three forms of economic crisis: the monetary crisis triggered by the current account deficit (CAD) phenomenon caused by liquidity and solvency problems in the banking system (Bitar, 2021). Second, the global financial crisis is driven by an imbalance in global capital flows, loosening monetary policy, and inadequate supervision and regulation (Nier & Merrouche, 2012; Purwono et al., 2018). Third, the impact of the crisis caused by this pandemic has been worsened by a decrease in people’s income due to policies made to reduce the rate of spread of the pandemic. (Mehta, Saxena, & Purohit, 2020).

The three forms of economic crisis mentioned above have obstacles (Irawan & Alamsyah, 2021). One of them is the COVID-19 pandemic which is capable of destabilizing the economy on a global scale and is even causing a crisis (Lucchese & Pianta, 2020). Still, the economic crisis caused by a pandemic is becoming more complex because it involves not only economic issues, but also health factors that should be considered. The economy in Indonesia has started to weaken since the implementation of social restrictions paralyzed economic sectors (Saputra & Salma, 2020). A study by Herdiana (2020) argued that the policy was ineffective in addition to the paralyzed economy, the level of public compliance was still low. This example indicates that the policy does not favor both (Lusianawati, 2020; Nasruddin & Haq, 2020).

### **SOCIAL SOLIDARITY**

Social solidarity is a form of solidarity resulting from a relationship between individuals or groups based on belief in shared values and strengthened by emotional experiences. (Hanifah, 2019; Saidang & Suparman, 2019). The

emotional experiences here can be triggered by the threat of a collective enemy or the threat of disaster felt by one individual or group (Hekmatyar & Vonika, 2021). Groups in social solidarity are formed based on a shared homeland or primordialism, feelings of shared fate and responsibility, and a sense of empathy. In addition, solidarity can also be included based on religion and ethnic community (Weol et al., 2021; Tomasini, 2021). Furthermore, Morgan & Pulignano (2020) examined the performance of this social solidarity. They mentioned that the resulting performance is only sometimes optimal because it depends on other forms of capitalism. Eckenwiler (2018) added that dependence on this form of capitalism results from moral imagination in recognizing individuals or groups who need to be assisted through responsive actions. The differences in moral imagination make the performance of social solidarity dynamic.

In an era where globalization can unite these economic, social, political, and cultural dimensions, it is relatively easier to create space for social solidarity within these dimensions (Estuningtyas, 2018). In addition, the emergence of social solidarity can fill the empty space for the government's ineffectiveness in making public policies (Lee, 2020). The ineffectiveness of the government is caused by the limited space used to overcome crises, especially for vulnerable groups (Angaw, 2021). In responding to the limited space, virtual space is used as a medium to build new solidarity (Saifudin, 2018). Much convenience is offered when it comes to donations using virtual-based social solidarity, given that there are no space and time restrictions in using it (Astuti & Prijanto, 2021). Even today, *crowdfunding*, an open donation phenomenon utilizing virtual media, has become a trend in Indonesia (Sitanggang, 2018). Kitabisa.com is one of the successful crowdfunding sites in Indonesia, so many donations have been opened and channeled from this institution (Warapsari, 2020; Rachmawati & Solikhati, 2020).

### **CAPITAL SUPPORT DURING THE PANDEMIC**

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the socio-economic aspects of all walks of life. The economic impacts can be seen in the form of reduced income, termination of employment, stagnancy in trade distribution channels, scarcity of raw materials for production, etc. These conditions led to the instability of the country's economy and a decrease in public consumption. It was then worsened by the government's social restriction policies, which limited the space for economic activity. This can be seen from the closing of access to public spaces. The chaos of this condition caused helplessness in the community, especially in the economic aspect, which ultimately created a sense

of solidarity in society, helping each other and overcoming problems together. Solidarity from various groups effectively deals with everyday problems, as in the *mu'alah* community. Based on observations in the field, at least three forms of support as a form of solidarity shown by the *mu'alah* community in dealing with the impact of the pandemic. First economic capital support; in this case, fellow members of the *mu'alah* community provide capital support in the form of money or goods to help other *mu'alah* in continuing business affected by the economic crisis.

(Mutiara, 2020) which was later replaced with the term of Community Activities Restrictions Enforcement (CARE) (Moegiarso, 2021), all of which aimed to limit the space for people to interact with fellow citizens in the public space (Mashabi, 2021). It is commonly known that during the pandemic, many retailers, business people, and entrepreneurs were unable to continue their business, such as the inability to extend the lease of a kiosk or shop for trading purposes due to a decrease in the number of buyers, which had caused a decreased income. This reduced sale is one of the consequences of the Large-Scale Social Restrictions (LSSR) policy issued by the government. Due to such a situation, the retailers' income decreased dramatically, so they sometimes needed help to rent their stores. AH (age 59) reported that since the Covid-19 pandemic, his income had been reduced significantly, so he could not pay the rent for his store in downtown Pontianak. He even had to lay off his employees. However, he still felt grateful because he had a friend who helped him pay the rent of IDR 90 million [USD 5,772] a year.

"I can't afford to pay the rent; I even laid off my employees because my income wasn't enough for all of that," said AH. He added, "Fortunately, there was help from Mr. A, an old friend of mine who helped me to pay for my needs so that I could continue my business." Another businessman, Al (age 45), an ornamental fish seller who experienced a shortage of capital during Covid-19, was assisted by his friend in form of fish feed. Al said: "I felt frustrated because my business could not meet my daily needs, let alone pay for the store rent after all my business fulfills people's hobby needs because today, they are more concerned with basic needs than hobbies." Al was quoted as saying. The capital support from fellow *mu'alah* helped with the business continuity of other *mu'alah* retailers affected by the co-19 pandemic.

In addition to the capital support from fellow *mu'alah*, as members of West Kalimantan PITI, they also received entrepreneurship training from the Association. This training was attended by the *mu'alah* who were laid off and women to help build the family economy. Hendris (age 49) said that this entrepreneurship training activity was to help *mu'alah*, who had been affected

by Covid, to recover from the economic downturn. The training provided by the Association was among others making frozen chicken noodles and frozen meatballs and sewing. As a result, some *mu'alah* were able to start new businesses. Bringing up this entrepreneurial spirit is part of organizational support to help *mu'alah* recover economically. Meanwhile, another informant initialed, D said, "My husband was laid off, so I helped him by selling food. I was trained to sell foods online, [especially] frozen foods; what's important is we can survive in such a difficult condition."

In the short term, the solidarity movement for *mu'alah* is to help by distributing groceries to poor *mu'alah* families. According to Hendris, PITI's Secretary, they distributed staple food packages for poor families. These packages were donated by donors who were contacted by the PITI management. The package contains 2 liters of cooking oil, 10 kg of rice, 1 kg of sugar, ½ kg of coffee, two cans of milk, and vitamins. These staple food packages were distributed to poor *mu'alah* families based on the data compiled at the PITI. A total of 150 packages were distributed. This concern for fellow *mu'alah* was shown by their real actions of support in the form of the first category, namely economic capital, which indicated that it was done out of the awareness of the *mu'alah* themselves.

### **SOCIAL CAPITAL SUPPORT IN BUSINESS RESILIENCE**

The second form, Social Capital Support, is a support that indirectly helped members to overcome economic problems during the pandemic when the *mu'alah* could not sell their wares. One of the solutions was to offer their wares to members of their community. Mr. NL, a food seller, often advertised his food to the *mu'alah* community and young entrepreneurs in Pontianak City. He often shared food photos in the WhatsApp group where community members buy items from each other. Other members of the group shared their posts with other groups. Many *mu'alah* and young entrepreneurs buy food at Mr. NL's outlets in this way. It was also the case with Mrs. N. She posted the foods she was selling to the WhatsApp group and asked group members to share her posts. Mutual buying of merchandise occurred to help fellow traders.

Additional social capital support was also given by the *mu'alah* community using social media to market the merchandise to community members. They helped to market their merchandise by posting their fellow members' merchandise on social media such as Facebook and Instagram. They shared each other's posts and promoted and reviewed this merchandise on social media to attract social media followers. The use of social media allows for online sales to reach many groups in the hope of increasing sales which

contributes to more income.

The *mu'alah* community often builds good relationships with fellow *mu'alah* by visiting one another. It is not a routine but is often done in the context of strengthening solidarity. Individuals and organizations make these visits. Visiting one another is a way to chat, discuss, and exchange ideas. Mr. Um (age 56) often visits Mr. AH, and vice versa. They often exchange ideas about many things, including economic issues, which sometimes led to finding solutions to problems, ranging from capital, sales, to cooking spices. Therefore, these visits give them a feeling that they are not alone in coping with economic problems. The support of community members is important to boost the morale of fellow *mu'alah*. Mr Um was quoted as saying, "I often visit Mr. AH. We are fellow *mu'alah*, so we often exchange ideas to give alternative solutions to the problems we are facing."

Thus, it indicates that the community members have emotional closeness and solidarity with one another, so sharing experiences and discussing problems is a way for them to interact and find solutions.

### **MORAL SUPPORT IN FACING THE CRISIS**

*Third*, Spiritual Capital Support. It is called spiritual capital because this form seeks to strengthen the mental and spiritual well-being of every *mu'alah*. In strengthening the religiosity of the *mu'alah*, routine Qur'anic recitation is held at the Darussalam Al Arif mosque in the center of Pontianak City, at Jl. Tanjungpura No. 340. This routine recitation is held after the noon prayer, every Thursday. This recitation also contains Islamic studies on worship, both ritual worship and social worship. In addition, this activity can also give consolation over the problems they are facing in life, especially during the pandemic. Patience, effort, power of prayer, etc., are parts of the materials discussed in the group study. This recitation activity gives spiritual support to the *mu'alah* affected by COVID-19.

Another form of spiritual capital support during the pandemic is disaster relief which is often given during adversity, for example, cases of illness, death, etc. Thus, spiritual capital support provides moral support to one another, and they also pray for and make donations to one another. Donations are often made to the *mu'alah* community. Voluntary donations, prayer support, and mutual moral support are family bonds built among them so that they can recover and be strong in coping with the hardship in life. Hendris (age 49) reported as follows. "If our friends who are members of the PITI get into a difficult situation, such as illness or death, then we visit them and donate. But

because we have CORONA [Covid] now, we only collect voluntary donations from members that we ask from the group. Then if it has been collected, we give it to our members who are going through hardship” (Hendris, 2021).

## RELIGIOUS SOLIDARITY AS A STRATEGY FOR COPING WITH CRISIS

This study illustrates that the solidarity in the *mu`alaf* community is based on the shared identity, namely the same ethnicity and situations, as a person who converts to Islam. This solidarity is shown by the support they give one another in the form of economic, social, and spiritual capital. This support is given to ease the burden and to help recover from the economic crisis due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The motivation to help fellow *mu`alaf* can be seen from the capital assistance to extend the rent of kiosks, assisting in the sale of merchandise, buying one another’s merchandise, helping to market a member’s merchandise through social media, and mutually reinforcing through gathering and religious studies which remind one another of the importance of patience and the power of God.

Such social solidarity displayed by the *mu`alaf* community above indicates that a community, no matter the size, can make its members “stand tall” even in this dark hour because there is a close friendship, togetherness, and shared conditions to give rise to a close relationship. This is an example that we should never disregard something small because it can bring members together in emotional unity.

Solidarity in the form of economic capital support in the *mu`alaf* community when economic conditions are bad, and everyone needs economic capital to do business, is very helpful as they can still give economic support by providing loans to help a fellow *mu`alaf* to continue their business. This is possible because a bond of solidarity is built for a long time, and there is trust. Because solidarity in supporting a fellow member by giving them quite a large amount of money will never happen if trust is non-existent between them. Trust is made possible by the belief that their friend is a good, honest, trustworthy person with a strong work ethic; therefore, this economic support will not be misused. It would be different should the individual not fulfill the aspect of trust. Social support among the *mu`alaf* community is given because of friendship and a sense of togetherness. It creates a feeling of being in a difficult economic situation during the pandemic. This sense of solidarity triggers mutual support to provide social capital to recover together by overcoming economic difficulties. Meanwhile, spiritual support emerges due to the need for every human being to feel calm and comfortable

to create a feeling of comfort, peace, piety, and a high sense of humanity. These psychological responses arise naturally and are reflective due to religious and human awareness.

The solidarity displayed by the *mu'alah* community is a form of individual and collective solidarity because of unity. It arises due to the intensity of social interaction between them. In addition, it is strengthened by the same situation they are facing, namely coping with the economic crisis as an impact of the pandemic (Hekmatyar & Vonika, 2021). Besides, they also have the same emotional bond as *mu'alah* and come from the same ethnic group. (Hanifah, 2019; Weol et al., 2021). However, this solidarity is not always static and linear. It tends to be dynamic, especially concerning coping with economic (read: financial) problems, since economic capital requires “speculation” or “guarantee” of proven trust in an individual. Not everyone will support economic (financial) capital if this “guarantee” is unmet. This aligns with what Morgan & Pulignano (2020) stated. Therefore, this research confirms previous studies that solidarity can occur spontaneously in certain conditions because its elements are fulfilled. However, in other conditions, solidarity requires a ‘guarantee’ to strengthen faith and trust. This research has proven that a small community’s social solidarity can fill empty spaces that government authorities cannot reach. Therefore, if small communities from this society can be embraced and empowered, development can reach all walks of life in society. In this light, it is necessary to promote community-based empowerment to create an equal distribution of human development in the country.

## CONCLUSION

It turns out that social solidarity has become the basis of resilience in coping with the crisis. Social solidarity in the community grows because there is an awareness, sympathy, humanity that arises due to togetherness and a need for calm and comfort. The form of support for economic capital, social capital, and spiritual capital for fellow community members proves this solidarity. However, this research shows that solidarity that requires financial sacrifices will only emerge because of a full sense of trust. This research provides a new perspective on the issue of social solidarity that community-based empowerment could potentially reach small communities that government’s development programs have not touched.

This research has limitations in the number of samples, so comparison and generalization cannot be made. That being the case, further research should be conducted to accommodate more diverse communities.

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