

CONFLICT OF SEMIOTIC IDEOLOGIES: CHARLIE HEBDO CONTROVERSY AND INDONESIAN MUSLIMS' RESPONSES

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Abstract

The controversy of the Prophet Muhammad's caricature in Charlie Hebdo magazine resulted in Muslim communities' protests from various parts of the world, including Indonesia. In response to this religious harassment, various steps were taken, including boycotting French products and criticizing secularism, which has been the constitutional principle of French. This article aimed at providing another perspective in viewing the controversy by looking back at the point where this problem began, the caricature of the Prophet Muhammad. This study sees that caricatures are not only inanimate objects, but they also have agency. To be able to see this agency in the particularity of space and time, we rely on semiotic ideology as the theoretical framework. Semiotic ideology is an assumption of signs that see various possibilities in signs, including their materiality. The Charlie Hebdo controversy is a clash of semiotic ideologies formed by the particularity of space and time and manifested in the responses shown in the face of the Charlie Hebdo controversy. In Indonesia, this semiotic ideology was born from political polarization, religious resurgence, and conservative turn. We see that the analysis of icon and materiality still have not really taken any significant part of religious studies and Islamic studies in Indonesia, including in studying the Charlie Hebdo controversy.

Keywords: Charlie Hebdo; Semiotic Ideology; Religious Resurgence; Conservative Turn; Indonesian Muslim.

Abstrak

Kontroversi karikatur Nabi Muhammad dalam majalah Charlie Hebdo membuat masyarakat Muslim dari berbagai belahan dunia, termasuk Indonesia, geger. Sebagai respon atas tindakan yang dianggap menistakan agama tersebut, berbagai langkah diambil, termasuk memboikot produk Prancis dan mengkritisi sekularisme yang selama ini menjadi prinsip kenegaraan Prancis. Artikel ini berupaya memberi perspektif lain dalam melihat kontroversi tersebut dengan menengok kembali pada titik paling awal masalah ini dimulai, karikatur Nabi Muhammad. Studi ini melihat bahwa karikatur bukan hanya benda mati, tetapi memiliki agensi. Untuk mampu melihat agensi tersebut dalam partikularitas ruang dan waktu, kami mengandalkan ideologi semiotik sebagai pisau analisis. Ideologi semiotik sebagai asumsi terhadap tanda yang melihat berbagai kemungkinan dalam tanda, termasuk materialitasnya. Kontroversi Charlie Hebdo adalah benturan ideologi semiotik yang terbentuk oleh partikularitas ruang dan waktu dan termanifestasi dalam respon yang ditunjukkan dalam menghadapi kontroversi Charlie Hebdo. Di Indonesia, ideologi semiotik ini lahir dari polarisasi politik, kebangkitan agama (religious resurgence), dan palingan konservatif (conservative turn). Kami melihat analisis mengenai ikon dan materialitas masih kurang mendapat tempat dalam studi agama dan studi Islam di Indonesia, termasuk dalam melihat kontroversi Charlie Hebdo.

Kata Kunci: Charlie Hebdo; Ideologi Semiotik; Kebangkitan Agama; Palingan Konservatif; Muslim Indonesia.

INTRODUCTION

The publication of the caricature of the Prophet Muhammad by Charlie Hebdo Magazine in France recently caused controversy and a series of actions and events. The publication of a caricature that was claimed to be a caricature of the Prophet Muhammad in Charlie Hebdo Magazine was not the first. On September 1st, 2020, Charlie Hebdo announced that it would republish a caricature of the Prophet Muhammad to commemorate the start of trials for the 2015 attack on Charlie Hebdo's offices that killed 11 people. It was assumed that the attack occurred due to the publication of the Prophet Muhammad caricature.¹ The republishing of the controversial cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad in 2015 is seen as a memorial to the tragedy of which Charlie Hebdo had defined as the injury to urge freedom in France.

Charlie Hebdo is well known for its "provocative" reputation and often publishes coverage of sensitive issues in society equipped with caricatures that seem vulgar as a form of satire on the issues discussed, including religion. This is claimed by Charlie Hebdo solely for the sake of freedom of expression as a manifestation of French democratic values. After the publication of the cartoon of the Prophet Muhammad, there was an attack on Charlie Hebdo's office by a man at the same location as the attack that happened in 2015. In response to this, French President, Emmanuel Macron, firmly defended Charlie Hebdo as a form of freedom of the press that threatened by terror and took a stand against all forms that he considered Islamic radicalism.

The next series of events occurred on October 16th, 2020. Samuel Paty, a teacher, was beheaded by a young Chechen. The beheading was allegedly due to Samuel Paty showing a caricature of the Prophet Muhammad in Charlie

Hebdo Magazine in front of his class. Paty was attacked on his way home after teaching. French authorities reacted to this tragedy by closing a mosque in Paris that had previously posted a video against the use of caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad in teaching. The video was uploaded before the attack on Samuel Paty. Macron also spoke out about this and stated that Paty was killed because Islamism wanted France's future. Paty was also awarded the Legion of Honour, France's highest civilian honor, and is considered to represent France's secular and democratic values.²

The French domestic upheaval in fact attracted international reactions. There were several Islamic countries that openly rejected and condemned the actions of Charlie Hebdo and the French government. There had been demonstrations from the world's Muslim community to call for a boycott, stated by the officials of Muslim-majority countries such as Saudi Arabia and Turkey. These countries consider what Charlie Hebdo had done is a blasphemy against a figure that is considered sacred and prohibited from being depicted in Islam as well as against Macron's attitude which is considered to exacerbate Islamophobic sentiments in Europe. One of the criticisms came from the President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Erdoğan said Macron needed a mental examination and did not understand the freedom to embrace a belief. Charlie Hebdo responded to this criticism by publishing a caricature of Erdoğan on its October 28, 2020 issue. The attacks were repeated not only in France, but also in Saudi Arabia. In France, three people were killed in a church in the city of Nice. In the city of Avignon, police froze a man to death after he threatened people with a gun. In Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, a man was arrested for assaulting a security guard at French consulate.

¹ Norimitsu Onoshi, "Charlie Hebdo Republishes Cartoons That Prompted Deadly 2015 Attack," NY Times, 2020.

² Al Jazeera, "Timeline: A Series of Attacks in France amid a Debate over Islam," Aljazeera and News Agencies, 2020.

On the other hand, there were parties from several countries who actually took a positive attitude by supporting Charlie Hebdo such as the UK, Brazil, Germany,³ and India⁴ as a form of the freedom of expression in the world of journalism—marked by the emergence of the hashtag *Je Suis Charlie* (I'm Charlie). From Islamic countries, the chairman of the Arab League, Nabil Elaraby; Al-Azhar University; The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia also condemned the attack on Charlie Hebdo. Among all these criticisms, the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon and the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, linked it with freedom of expression. Turkish Foreign Minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu, condemned the attack on Charlie Hebdo and warned Europe against Islamophobia.

In Indonesia, various responses emerged, most of which were critique from various elements of society to the government. On November 2nd, 2020, Front Pembela Islam (FPI) and other Islamic organizations demonstrated in front of the French Embassy in Central Jakarta. They protested the attitude of Macron who was considered to spread the stigma of Islamophobia and Charlie Hebdo who had insulted the Prophet Muhammad. They demanded an apology from Macron and called for boycott of French products as had been called by the top brass of other Muslim-majority countries such as Saudi Arabia and Turkey. The demonstrations did not only take place in Jakarta, but also in a number of areas, such as Medan, Bandung, Surabaya, and Makassar.⁵ A similar attitude came from Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) which supported the boycott of French products while supporting the criticism of other high-ranked Muslim

countries.⁶ Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS) also called for a boycott and sent an open letter to Macron through French Embassy protesting Macron's statement. These parties thought that Charlie Hebdo's actions are something that is forbidden in Islam and deserves to be condemned. The boycott of French products aimed at providing a deterrent effect to the French government.

A slightly different attitude came from the President of Indonesia, Joko Widodo, who conveyed his political stance on the case in France at the Istana Negara on October 31st, 2020. He criticized Macron for hurting Muslims. But he appealed to all Muslims around the world to maintain tolerance and unity and prevent terror or acts of violence as had occurred in France. The government also did not call for a boycott of French products.⁷ Another opinion came from Ja'far Husein al-Hadar. This religious scholar and graduate of the Master of Qur'an and Tafsir Science at UIN Jakarta expressed his personal opinion regarding the case of insulting the Prophet Muhammad through a video on his YouTube channel, Jeda Nulis, on October 29th, 2020. In his upload, Ja'far considered that no one can insult the Prophet Muhammad because the Prophet Muhammad is a perfect human being so that praise and insults will not have any impact on the glory of the Prophet Muhammad.⁸

It is undeniable that a series of events and various opinions that occur globally is centered on the publication of the caricature that is considered offensive. Not only the news, this incident also attracted the attention of academics who gave their analysis on this issue.

³ Deutsche Welle, "World Leaders Show Support after Attack on France's Charlie Hebdo," Deutsche Welle, 2015.

⁴ Ajoy Ashirwad Mahaprashasta, "Why the Hindu Right, Not Usually a Champion of Free Speech, Is Supporting Charlie Hebdo," *The Wire*, 2020.

⁵ Restu Diantina Putri, "Polisi Tangkap 10 Pemuda Yang Ikut Demo Di Kedubes Perancis," *Tirto*, 2020.

⁶ Friski Riana, "Presiden PKS Kirim Surat Terbuka Untuk Presiden Emmanuel Macron," *Tempo.co*, 2020.

⁷ BBC Indonesia, "Protes Terhadap Presiden Prancis Berlanjut: Ribuan Orang 'marah' Atas Pernyataan Macron," *BBC Indonesia*, 2020.

⁸ Ja'far Husein Al-Hadar, "Bisakah Nabi Dihina?," *youtube*, 2020.

In Indonesia, academics generally highlighted the problem of French secularism which actually cornered Muslims.⁹ These analyzes are not new. In scientific developments in Indonesia, including religious studies and Islamic studies, secularism has often been a topic of discussion.¹⁰ The discourse of secularism in Indonesia also tends to be divided into conservative and moderate groups and closes the complexities of secularism and other issues. This academic analysis of French secularism in the context of the Charlie Hebdo controversy can be considered as a continuation of the discourse and does not bring any significant novelty. In this context, the above criticism still applies.

This article updates the iconography topic that has received less attention in Indonesia. This paper will look at the most elementary layer of a series of Charlie Hebdo controversies, namely the caricature of the Prophet Muhammad itself which is often forgotten in the comments that tend to discuss the impact of the controversy that arises from the caricature. In other words, this study places the caricature with its own agency, not just an object. The iconography of the caricature of the Prophet Muhammad was analyzed by using the theory of semiotic ideology from Webb Keane.¹¹ Semiotic ideology is the background of people's assumptions about signs and the function of signs. This concept is derived from the concept

of index and icon in the semiotics of Charles Sanders Peirce.¹² An index refers to the presence of an object even though the object is not present. An icon is a sign that has the same qualities as that of an object. In Peirce's semiotics and Keane's semiotic ideology, signs do not have a fixed meaning, but are open to change. By looking at semiotic ideology and its relation to the index and icon of the caricature of the Prophet Muhammad, we seek to see the process of perceiving the caricature which ultimately leads to an expression. The nature of semiotic ideology is also not static, but is open to the particularities of space and time, thus a discussion on the social context of the rise of Islamic conservatism in Indonesian politics is needed, which is linked to the wave of criticism of the Charlie Hebdo caricatures.

The formation of this perception was also analyzed by using the approach of Mitchell¹³ which seeks to identify the desire for images and the reactions they cause. The desire of the image is different from the desire of the creator. Mitchell's analysis looks at the image itself, as Keane's analysis of the possibility of meaning that a sign carries. With these two theories, the iconographic problem, which only takes into account the real meaning of the sign, could be avoided. Image as a sign is able to produce a sensory experience. This sensory experience is related to the semiotic ideology formed by the various backgrounds of a party. Meyer¹⁴ sees

⁹ Abdul Mu'ti, "Charlie Hebdo Dan Kegagalan Multikulturalisme," SINDONews, 2015; AL-ZASTROUW, "Emmanuel Macron Dan Declinasi Modernisme Liberal," Alif.ID, 2020; Amin Mudzakkir, "Soal Karikatur Nabi Muhammad SAW Dan Problematik Sekularisme," Alif, 2020; Mujiburrahman, "Charlie Hebdo Dan Ekstremitas," Tribun Banjar, 2020.

¹⁰ Goenawan Mohamad, *Sekularisme, "Revivalisme", Mimikri."* in Novriantoni (Ed.) *Sepatah 'Kata Kotor': Sekularisme Di Asia* (Jakarta: Kalam-Hivos, 2006); Arskal Salim, *Challenging the Secular State: The Islamization of Law in Modern Lndonesia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008); Budhy Munawar-Rachman, *Membela Kebebasan Beragama: Percakapan Tentang Sekularisme, Liberalisme, Dan Pluralisme*, 1st–4th ed. (Jakarta: Democracy Project, 2011); Budhy Munawar-Rachman, *Reorientasi Pembaruan Islam:*

Sekularisme, Liberalisme, Dan Pluralisme Paradigma Baru Islam Indonesia (Jakarta: LSAF-Democracy Project, 2011).

¹¹ Webb Keane, "Signs Are Not the Garb of Meaning: On the Social Analysis of Material Things," in *Materiality* (Duke University Press, 2020), 182–205, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822386711-008>.

¹² Charles Sanders Peirce, "Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs," in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce* (New York: Dover Publication, 1955).

¹³ W. J. T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005).

¹⁴ Birgit Meyer, "Media and the Senses in the Making of Religious Experience: An Introduction," *Material Religion* 4, no. 2 (July 2008): 124–34, <https://doi.org/10.2752/175183408X328262>.

religion as mediating through media that provides sensory experiences to understand the transcendent. In the approach proposed by Meyer,¹⁵ immanence and transcendence are no longer contradictory, but transcendence is based on immanence. In other words, religion is formed from various sensory experiences of signs, rituals, and others.

Previously, Charlie Hebdo controversy that had happened many times has also been studied quite a lot. Barry (2016) which describes Iran's response as a continuation of the blasphemy fatwa during the time of Ayatollah Khomeini which was addressed to Salman Rushdie.¹⁶ Walter, et al. (2016) looked at the effect of framing on Charlie Hebdo in the United States, which led to victimization and comparison with the events of 9/11.¹⁷ The ideological ties to the depiction of Charlie Hebdo were also investigated by Constantinou (2019) who analyzed the narratives translated in the articles about Charlie Hebdo in three different languages: English, French, and Greek.¹⁸ Our research is more like Vasilopoulos (2018) which analyzed the emotional response of French society and its relation to public support for authoritarian rule.¹⁹ However, we did not only look at the emotional response itself, but also its relation to the trigger for controversy, namely the caricature.

Based on the above theory, we placed the caricature in a central position. Various studies

on the relationship between religion and visuals have been carried out, including Flood (2013) which analyzed the Jyllands-Posten controversy in 2005 and the contingency of image circulation in the globalized modern era.²⁰ Rasidi (2021) sees the distribution of images and videos on social media that fuels the anger of Muslims in Indonesia, such as Ahok's video in the Kepulauan Seribu, as a link between technocapitalism and the interpretation of "signs".²¹ Strassler (2020) looks at visual positions in post-Reformasi Indonesian politics, including those of the conservative Muslim movement, such as the push to pass the Anti-Pornography Bill. In line with the research above, we attempted to analyze the controversy that were visuals and their intertwining with religion. However, it was observed in a different socio-historical context as a series of controversies and boycotts that have occurred previously as a religious revival by paying attention to Islamic iconography and the clash of semiotic ideologies between the West and Muslims.²²

This is qualitative research in the form of case study that aimed at seeing the connection of the caricature icon of the Prophet Muhammad to Muslims in Indonesia by paying attention to the social context of the icon which has formed a certain meaning for Muslims in Indonesia which was different from the reaction of Muslims in other places. Case studies are able to connect abstract concepts with concrete

¹⁵ Meyer, "Media and the Senses in the Making of Religious Experience: An Introduction."

¹⁶ James Barry, "Pragmatic Dogma: Understanding the Ideological Continuities in Iran's Response to the Charlie Hebdo Attacks," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 27, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 77–93, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2015.1088746>.

¹⁷ Nathan Walter et al., "Je Suis Charlie? The Framing of In-Group Transgression and the Attribution of Responsibility for the Charlie Hebdo Attack," *International Journal of Communication* 10 (2016): 3956–74.

¹⁸ Maria Constantinou, "Charlie Hebdo's Controversial Cartoons in Question: Stances, Translational Narratives and Identity Construction from a Cross-Linguistic Perspective," *Social Semiotics* 29, no. 5 (October 20, 2019): 698–727, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2018.1521356>.

¹⁹ Pavlos Vasilopoulos, George E. Marcus, and Martial Foucault, "Emotional Responses to the Charlie Hebdo Attacks: Addressing the Authoritarianism Puzzle," *Political Psychology* 39, no. 3 (June 2018): 557–75, <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12439>.

²⁰ Finbarr Barry Flood, "Inciting Modernity? Images, Alterities, and the Contexts of 'Cartoon Wars'," in *Images That Move*, ed. Patricia Spyer and Mary Margaret Steedly (Santa Fe: SAR Press, 2013).

²¹ Pradipa P. Rasidi, "Melampau Literasi Digital: Kelindan Teknokapitalisme, Ideologi Media, Dan Hiperhermeneutika," *Jurnal Komunikatif* 10, no. 2 (December 2021): 129–40, <https://doi.org/10.33508/jk.v10i2.3525>.

²² Karen Strassler, *Demanding Images: Democracy, Mediation, and the Image-Event in Indonesia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020).

specific cases.²³ The data were collected by using the literature study method by looking at various similar studies regarding offensive images and iconography as well as various reports from credible sources that have been verified by comparing them to other sources. Most of the news was taken from the internet because they were easier to access.

THE RISE OF ISLAMIC MOVEMENT IN THE WORLD AND INDONESIA

In understanding the Charlie Hebdo controversy that has spread throughout the world, a framework of thought that transcends national borders is needed. The Charlie Hebdo controversy has become an international phenomenon involving actors from various countries and various poles of political ideology. Even if this controversy is seen within the scope of Indonesia, the international nature of the Charlie Hebdo controversy still needs to be considered. The international nature is not only shared by the controversy itself, but also by its actors, including the Muslim side. This characteristic, which is often referred to as Islamic transnationalism, needs to be considered even in observing the response of Muslims in a certain spatial scope, such as Indonesia. Charlie Hebdo never clearly described which Muslim society they were aiming at in their criticism of the caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad. From Macron's statement, the criticized Muslims were the Muslims who are considered to be trying to disrupt democracy in France. Even so, the Charlie Hebdo controversy actually made Muslim communities from various places outside France also felt offended. The

controversy has shaped the connectedness of Muslim communities in various places. The response of the world's Muslims to the Charlie Hebdo case in France has hinted at the transnational nature of Muslims operating across borders that are not defined by a country, nation or region.²⁴

The Muslim community is undergoing a process of forming an imagined community²⁵ centered on a particular discourse that is considered troubling to Muslims around the world. But this image of global Muslim solidarity is linked to the local contexts of Muslim societies. This local context appears, for example, in the criticism leveled against French secularism which is considered to discriminate against Muslims. The nature of this transnationalism does not completely eliminate state boundaries, but interacts with these boundaries and forms unique dynamics in a certain spatial scope instead. There was a process of translation carried out by Muslims from various places on this phenomenon. The process of translating discourse does not only bring foreign discourse into a language that is understood by local people, but is a socio-political activity that can be characterized by distortion, addition, or reduction of the meaning of the translated discourse.²⁶ From here, Islamic trans-nationalism not only transcends national boundaries, but it is also a trans-locality with dynamics in various translocal spaces within these boundaries.

The entry of the Charlie Hebdo controversy in Indonesia did not occur in a vacuum. Indonesia is experiencing its own dynamics in which the various poles of Islamic thought play a role. van Bruinessen²⁷ mentions

²³ W. Lawrence Neuman, "Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches," in *Teaching Sociology*, 7th ed. (Edinburgh: Pearson, 2014), 42.

²⁴ Peter Mandaville, *Transnational Muslim Politics: Reimagining the Umma* (London: Routledge, 2001), 16.

²⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Komunitas-Komunitas Terbayang* (Yogyakarta: INSIST Press, 2008).

²⁶ Constantinou, "Charlie Hebdo's Controversial Cartoons in Question: Stances, Translational Narratives and Identity Construction from a Cross-Linguistic Perspective," 700.

²⁷ Martin van Bruinessen, *Pengantar Perkembangan Kontemporer Islam Indonesia Dan "Conservative Turn" Di Awal Abad Ke-21*, n.d.; Mujiburrahman Moch Nur Ichwan, Ahmad Najib Burhani and Martin van Bruinessen

a change in Islam in Indonesia after the fall of Suharto. One form of the changes was the turn towards conservative Islam. Although these changes, which appeared in the form of conflict and terrorism, began to subside, the wave of Islamic conservatism still persists to this day. According to van Bruinessen,²⁸ conservative Islam is "a school that rejects all modern, liberal, or progressive interpretations of Islamic teachings, and holds fast to established social doctrines and doctrines". This recent development of conservatism has contributed to an extreme polarization between moderate and conservative Islam. This polarization is exacerbated by the populist attitude shown by the political elite trying to take the advantage of the polarization of the ummah to gain support.

This phenomenon is not unique to Indonesia. The moment of the rise of conservative groups occurs in various parts of the world and is not only experienced by Muslims. Chacko and Jayasuriya²⁹ show this phenomenon in the scope of Asia and Australia. Using a political economy perspective, the rise of conservative groups in various countries such as Japan, India, Philippines, Thailand, Cambodia, South Korea, and Australia is still related to the expansion of global capitalism and neoliberalism. This condition is in line with the findings of Hefner³⁰ which mentions the phenomenon of religious resurgence which is characterized by the revival of religious expressions from ordinary believers who seek to achieve piety through various expressions and consumption. The lifestyle pursued by ordinary believers is finally linked to the expansion of global capitalism and neoliberalism. Making divisions that have been

propagated by political actors becomes blurry by looking at these divisions not only at the macro level, but also meso and micro. The rise of the conservatives cannot be separated from the relationship with the state and the market that helped shape the lifestyle of these ordinary believers.

The important point of Hefner's analysis, which distinguishes it from Chacko & Jayasuriya who also pays attention to the religion-state-market relation, is the presence of passion from these ordinary believers. Religion is not just co-opted for certain interests, either electoral politics or certain consumption. Both the political elite and the market cannot take the advantage of the resources of the conservatives if they continue to play the same pattern. There must be a passionate desire from these conservatives from which they can follow to attract enthusiasm, both in the form of electoral votes for the political elite and consumption of commodities for the market.

We see the rise of conservatives as ordinary believers who are in the process of fulfilling their desires. This desire is marked by the desire to show their Islam by consuming various products that are considered to represent Islamic values. This desire forms a special consumption pattern that these ordinary believers have with the massive emergence of products with halal label as a symbol of Islam on their products. The use of halal-labeled products is an effort to fulfill consumption needs which are not only limited to product consumption but also symbol consumption. This is what Hefner calls the micro-level of religious resurgence characterized by changes in

Muhammad Wildan, *Conservative Turn: Islam Indonesia Dalam Ancaman Fundamentalisme*, 1st ed. (Bandung: Al-Mizan, 2014), 11–14.

²⁸ van Bruinessen, *Pengantar Perkembangan Kontemporer Islam Indonesia Dan "Conservative Turn" Di Awal Abad Ke-21*.

²⁹ Priya Chacko and Kanishka Jayasuriya, "Asia's Conservative Moment: Understanding the Rise of the

Right," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 48, no. 4 (August 2018): 529–40, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2018.1448108>.

³⁰ Robert W. Hefner, "Religious Resurgence in Contemporary Asia: Southeast Asian Perspectives on Capitalism, the State, and the New Piety," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 69, no. 4 (November 2010): 1031–47, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911810002901>.

everyday practices that seek to demonstrate piety.

One of the actors who played a role in the rise of conservatives from the state side struggling with market-state religion was Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI). MUI intensively labels haram in the form of fatwas while on the other hand it allows conservative Muslims to join the MUI membership. This at the same time makes MUI a group that tends to be puritanical— or moderate-puritan—by issuing fatwas about halal-haram that own as well as give legitimacy to various actions of other conservative Islamic groups.³¹ Burhani³² explains that the central MUI instructs every regional MUI to support the will of the state through Regional Regulations (Peraturan Daerah [Perda]) inspired by sharia (law based on Islam) to achieve the interests of the government. On the other hand, MUI is the sole actor in Indonesia that holds the authority for halal certification for all products such as food, medicine, and finance.

Meanwhile, the actor who played a role in spreading conservatism from the grassroots sector is a civil organization (organisasi masyarakat [ormas]) such as Front Pembela Islam (FPI). This organization was first formed by its leader until now, Rizieq Shihab, on August 17th, 1998. FPI was noted to be fond of carrying out movements with the argument "amar maruf nahi munkar" (doing good and avoiding evil) by closing places that they value as the frequent occurrence of immorality such as discotheques, bars, and massage parlors. FPI also often clashed with other communities or religions, such as the Ahmadiyah, which was considered heretical. This usually happened

when there was a prohibition on the construction of non-Muslim religious houses of worship for reasons that were not clear and often conflicted with legal decisions regarding the legality of the construction of non-Muslim houses of worship. When carrying out actions, they often used provocative and coercive actions to achieve their goals which were considered "good" (maruf). Van Bruinessen³³ notes that FPI did have access to the state, because it had close relations with state actors, such as politicians, people in the police force, and also bosses of the racketeering. FPI was also the one who pioneered vigilantism in Indonesia with all its actions that sought to "purify the teachings of Islam". They also tried to regulate the lifestyle and consumption of other residents who were considered to bring immorality, for example by sweeping or rejecting the Lady Gaga concert.³⁴ Like MUI, they sought to enforce a value on certain forms of consumption and products to match their values.

The forms of consumption and commodities related to religious values provide the background for Indonesian society in understanding the Charlie Hebdo controversy. There is a shift from religion which is often considered leading to the rejection of worldly materials as the opposite that religion actually gives value to consumption and commodities and religious life that is marked by the consumption of commodities that have religious values, such as halal products. This linkage forms another unique condition when religion and matter can no longer be separated. The material dimension of religion is no longer

³¹ Moch. Nur Ichwan, *Menuju Islam Moderat Puritan: Majelis Ulama Indonesia Dan Politik Ortodoksi Keagamaan.* Dalam Moch. Nur Ichwan, et Al. *Conservative Turn: Islam Indonesia Dalam Ancaman Fundamentalisme* (Trans. Agus Budiman) (Bandung: Mizan, 2014).

³² Ahmad Najib Burhani, "Islam Murni" vs Islam Progresif Di Muhammadiyah: Melibat Wajib Islam Reformis Di Indonesia, n.d.; Moch Nur Ichwan, Ahmad Najib Burhani

and Muhammad Wildan, *Conservative Turn: Islam Indonesia Dalam Ancaman Fundamentalisme.*

³³ Martin van Bruinessen, *Selayang Pandang Organisasi, Sarikat, Dan Gerakan Muslim Di Indonesia*, 2014; Moch Nur Ichwan, Ahmad Najib Burhani and Muhammad Wildan, *Conservative Turn: Islam Indonesia Dalam Ancaman Fundamentalisme.*

³⁴ Tempo.co, "Gagalnya Konser Lady Gaga," Tempo.co, 2012.

understood only as artifacts of sacred religious symbols such as places of worship, but also to profane material forms. The same context arises in the Charlie Hebdo controversy because this controversy arose not over a religious symbol, but a caricature in a secular newspaper. This shift is the basis for understanding the iconography and semiotic ideology of Muslims in Indonesia in understanding the Charlie Hebdo controversy as discussed in the last section.

PROPHET MUHAMMAD'S CARICATURE AND ISLAMIC ICONOGRAPHY

The wave of rejection, apart from looking at the socio-political context of the objectors, also needs to be understood by looking at the prescriptive views, especially since this wave of rejection mostly comes from a certain religious group, namely Islam. Geertz³⁵ observes that religion is a model of and models for reality. As models of reality, religion provides a description of the world order. And as a model for reality, religion gives prescriptive appeals in responding to various things in the world. This prescriptive side also needs to be studied to understand the Charlie Hebdo controversy and the anger of Muslims.

The appearance of caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad in France was met with criticism and disapproval from Muslims. The Muslim world has a prescription in the form of a prohibition to describe the purified people including the Prophet Muhammad. Some even interpreted it with a prohibition on describing any living beings. One form of this prohibition can be found in various hadiths, one of which is hadith narrated by Bukhari No. 2073 which states that:

Whoever makes pictures or paintings, "God will torture him until he gives lives into the paintings, however he will not be able to make them alive forever." Then the person was very scared with a pale face and then said: "What do you think if I can't leave it unless I keep drawing?" He (Ibn Abbas) said: draw the trees and everything that has no life."

It can also be based on the words of the Prophet Muhammad in Hadith No. 1291 and hadith narrated by Muslim No. 4 which is, "lying in my name is not the same as lying in the name of another. For whoever lies in my name, let him prepare his place in hell." The prohibition is also based on the assumption of the scholars not to spread slander or lies related to the Prophet Muhammad in order to "maintain" the holiness of the Prophet Muhammad. It should be noted, in addition to the above hadiths which are based on the consensus of the scholars (ijma), there is no argument that explicitly prohibits describing the Prophet Muhammad. The prohibition was decided by most scholars based on the assumptions and qiyas of the prohibition on drawing in general, especially depicting animate creatures.

One of the scholars who forbade depictions of the Prophet Muhammad was Quraish Shihab.³⁶ According to Shihab there is an ijma sukuti which prohibits anyone from drawing or playing the greatest character in human history. Ijma sukuti is an agreement of scholars in which an idea arises and all accept it without any objections. The idea then spread widely. Ijma is the basis of Islamic law in addition to the Quran and sunnah. The prohibition was carried out due to concerns that the images made would be made into worship and lead to polytheism. The above hadith was finally patented as an absolute prohibition based

³⁵ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 93–94.

³⁶ Atik Fikri Ilyas and Dini Indah Wulandari, "Visualisasi Nabi Saw Dalam Film Perpektif Hukum

Islam," *Yudisia : Jurnal Pemikiran Hukum Dan Hukum Islam* 8, no. 1 (April 8, 2018): 102, <https://doi.org/10.21043/yudisia.v8i1.3233>.

on "faking" the image of the Prophet Muhammad. In the Indonesian context, the basic argument for the prohibition of visualizing the Prophet Muhammad was recorded in the decision of the MUI Fatwa Commission in 1976, at that time the MUI rejected the visualization of the Prophet Muhammad. The MUI based the decision on the prohibition on the basis of the hadith narrated by Bukhari-Muslim which was mentioned earlier.³⁷

From this prohibition, one can see a prescriptive Islamic religion on the depiction of not only the Prophet Muhammad, but also other living beings. Moreover, Islam is often associated with aniconic (avoiding icon), iconophobic (fear of icon), or iconoclastic (destroying icon) especially images of living things. However, Islamic visual culture is not static but is full of aspirations, debates, and experiments rather than fixed principles. All of them are rooted in social, cultural, historical, and political contexts. The discourse on Islamic visual culture, like Islam itself, has also undergone changes through various discourses.³⁸ Asad³⁹ criticized efforts to define religion universally because there is no universally the same religion without a certain historical and parochial setting. This criticism also applies to the relationship between Islam and visual culture. Muslims are constantly rethinking the relationship with art and their

response to cultural, political, and historical changes negotiated with matters such as country, ethnicity, kinship, and ideology. As Finbarr Barry Flood puts it, "no visual theology is permanent."⁴⁰

The image of Islam as an aniconic cannot be separated from the view of Islam as an ideology. On the other hand, we see these prohibitions as a form of the semiotic ideology of Muslims. However, it is necessary to emphasize the crucial difference between the ideology that is often understood so far and the semiotic ideology. Semiotic ideology is open to changes in history. Different from Saussure⁴¹ who sees the sign as a dyadic between the signifier and the signified, Peirce, whose semiotic concept forms the basis of Keane's concept of semiotic ideology, sees the sign as a triadic consisting of an index, icon, and symbol.⁴² These triadic offer another possibility in seeing signs and connecting them to a wider social reality. One of them is related to religious conflict which will be discussed here and has also been discussed by Keane.⁴³ In the context of Charlie Hebdo, this triadic will be explained again in the next section.

The caricature of the Prophet Muhammad in the Charlie Hebdo Magazine in France caused an effect on Muslims. The affect is perceived as a collective "pain". This collective is referred to by Meyer⁴⁴ as an aesthetic formation which is considered to overcome the

³⁷ Fadilah Yusuf, "Larangan Visualisasi Dalam Konteks Gambar Nabi Muhammad SAW (Studi Analisis Hadis Dan Historis)" (Institut Ilmu Al-Quran (IIQ) Jakarta, 2016), 16.

³⁸ Kenneth M. George, "Ethics, Iconoclasm, And Qur'anic Art In Indonesia," *Cultural Anthropology* 24, No. 4 (November 2009): 591, <https://doi.org/10.1111/J.1548-1360.2009.01041.X>.

³⁹ Webb Keane, "The Evidence of the Senses and the Materiality of Religion," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 14(S1) (2008): S115–16.

⁴⁰ George, "Ethics, Iconoclasm, And Qur'anic Art In Indonesia," 591.

⁴¹ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. Wade Baskin (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959).

⁴² Elizabeth Mertz, "Semiotic Anthropology," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 36, no. 1 (September 2007): 338, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.36.081406.094417>.

⁴³ Webb Keane, "On Semiotic Ideology," *Signs and Society* 6, no. 1 (January 2018): 64–87, <https://doi.org/10.1086/695387>.

⁴⁴ Birgit Meyer, "Introduction: From Imagined Communities to Aesthetic Formations: Religious Mediations, Sensational Forms, and Styles of Binding," in *Aesthetic Formations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2009), 7, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230623248_1.

limitations of Benedict Anderson's imagined community concept by focusing on aesthetic similarities and sensory experiences of objects. The response that arises from Muslims around the world is almost always the same, in the form of rejection as if they felt a collective "pain". In the assumptions of Muslim society in general, drawing living creatures is something that is prohibited by religion, especially depicting the Prophet Muhammad which in Islamic tradition is very sacred. The creation of a caricature of the Prophet Muhammad in violation of this prohibition leads Muslims to collective pain in the form of disappointment. The caricature of the Prophet Muhammad not only depicts the Prophet Muhammad, but also "attacked" the Prophet Muhammad because the image of the Prophet Muhammad is considered to be completely devoid of the qualities usually attributed to the Prophet Muhammad. It is impossible to describe the overall heterogeneity of Muslim responses and their diverse motivations, but it can be concluded that Muslims experience a connection in the form of shared disappointment. The response of the Muslims above cannot be separated from the influence of the media as a forum for the caricature of the Prophet Muhammad. But Charlie Hebdo did not get deep attention from Muslims as the party who spread this caricature in the public sphere. The response that stands out is the boycott of French products and criticism of the French government. In fact, the role of the media is what makes this global controversy possible.

Here, the media is used in a broad sense, namely all forms of culture that allow communication to occur. Meyer⁴⁵ places particular emphasis on the definition of media in this religious study as something that bridges spatial and temporal relationships, either with other people or with spiritual entities. Meyer

found that basically the media is an intrinsic element in religion. He borrowed the concept from the philosopher Hent de Vries, namely that religion offers the practice of mediation and provides experience with the transcendent. Media, for example, is present as a material form that connects humans with the divine (transcendent). In addition, religious studies and media are possible because there is no ontological contradiction between belief and technology. The example of the case raised by Meyer shows various acceptances from the religion itself, the form of acceptance is a response, either in the rejection of an identity or the acceptance of an identity rather than the media itself. Starting from paintings, portraits, and also films. The paintings of The Holy Virgin Mary, Piss Christ, and the Crucified Horse are accepted by Christians as derogatory. In contrast to Credo Mutwa's acceptance of the film ET as a sign of their belief.

However, all of these examples have broad similarities, including with the caricature of the Prophet Muhammad in Charlie Hebdo, namely producing a sensory stimulation that is received by the people of these religions. These stimuli are referred by Meyer as sensational forms. The existence of sensational forms plays an important role in shaping religious subjectivity. In the case of this caricature of the Prophet Muhammad, Muslims can feel a symptom similar to the examples of the paintings conveyed by Meyer, namely feelings of humiliation, because they are considered to desecrate things that are considered sacred, in the form of theological claims by Islamic tradition so far. Religious experience affects corporeal (bodily) and this is shaped through long-term socialization resulting in a collective experience. This media also shows the effect of sublime on certain religious people. The sublime effect felt by Muslims when they sense

⁴⁵ Meyer, "Media and the Senses in the Making of Religious Experience: An Introduction."

sensory about the caricature of the Prophet Muhammad clashed with theological claims in the form of a prohibition on visualizing anything that is considered sacred, such as the Prophet Muhammad, which is rooted in the Islamic tradition and an ideology that is considered as the standard. The case is nothing but regarded as something that harasses, desecrates, and corners Muslims.

THE CONFLICT OF SEMIOTIC IDEOLOGY: THE CHARLIE HEBDO CONTROVERSY

From the explanation above, it has been described about the socio-political context of Muslims in general and Muslims in Indonesia. In addition, it has also described a model for the religion of Islam in seeing the reality of the world in the form of prohibitions and aniconic nature of Islam which aims at creating purity in Islamic teachings. We see these contexts as the basis for viewing the Charlie Hebdo controversy as a conflict of semiotic ideology.

Peirce's semiotics brought a breakthrough by seeing signs as triadic namely icons, indexes, and symbols. Symbols and signs whose meanings have been determined through social conventions, have often been discussed, but icons and indexes in Peirce's semiotics bring newness in seeing signs. This difference is very striking when compared to the Saussurian approach which sees signs as dyadic, signifier and signified. To know the implications of the difference between Peirce's semiotics and Saussure's semiology, it is necessary to first know about icons and indexes. An icon is a sign which is related to the signified in the form of a similarity in nature or form. For example, the photo of the president is an icon of the president because the photo has a resemblance to the president. If the photo does not have the materiality that resembles the president, then

the photo cannot be called an icon. The index brings novelty in the form of a social context in seeing signs. An index is a sign whose relationship shows marked attendance even if it is marked absent. An example is a trail that shows someone has passed even if that person is not there. Another example is the signpost to the mosque, which indicates there is a mosque in the vicinity even though the mosque is not yet visible. Context is important in seeing the sign because different contexts will produce different meanings. Imagine if the signpost, which initially points to the left, was reversed to the right, then the connection between the guide and the mosque would be lost. The space given by Peirce's semiotics is used to analyze social problems as Webb Keane did with the concept of semiotic ideology. In the term of context, signs are no longer simply the result of social conventions such as language.

In understanding Charlie Hebdo, conflicts occur between secular semiotic ideology and Muslim semiotic ideology in a certain socio-political context. It is undeniable that the cause of the controversy is the caricature of the Prophet Muhammad in Charlie Hebdo magazine. Before looking at the conflict, it is necessary to explain about the competing semiotic ideologies. If the semiotic ideology of Muslims has been explained in the previous section—and will be elaborated again later—then here will be explained first about secular semiotic ideology. Mahmood⁴⁶ sees that the polarization between freedom of expression and blasphemy makes the problem cloudy because the two different semiotic ideologies escape the analysis. The controversy was created because of the neglect of semiotic ideology by both parties which actually shifted the issue of the sign controversy into a conflict between secular versus Islam, France versus Islam, or West versus Islam. This form of

⁴⁶ Saba Mahmood, "Religious Reason and Secular Affect: An Incommensurable Divide?," *Critical Inquiry* 35,

no. 4 (January 2009): 836–62, <https://doi.org/10.1086/599592>.

misunderstanding is carried out by both parties who threaten each other. The French government closed a mosque in Paris and Muslims directed a boycott of French products.

This misunderstanding can be traced to its roots by looking at the history of European civilization itself. Protestantism brought significant changes to European civilization's attention to signs. One of the most significant is the separation between object and subject, substance and meaning, form and essence. In this separation, the material is placed in a subordinate position. This belief is the basis of secular semiotic ideology which assumes that between an image has nothing to do with what is depicted. The caricature of the Prophet Muhammad, in the secular semiotic ideology, has absolutely nothing to do with the Prophet Muhammad himself. Referring to Mitchell,⁴⁷ an image is not a speech act that has a meaning that is trying to be conveyed, on the contrary an image must be observed as something filled by the viewer himself with the message he wants to hear. The example that Mitchell⁴⁸ uses is the ventriloquist doll with which people input their voices. In other words, the caricature of the Prophet Muhammad, in a secular semiotic ideology, is like a ventriloquist puppet that Muslims fill with their angry voices. French democracy has a value known as Laicite. Laicite is a French version of secularism that separates state and religion very strictly. This separation not only does not allow religion to enter into state control but also does not allow religion to appear in the public sphere. Religious symbols or rituals are prohibited from appearing in public. One form of Laicite in prohibiting religious symbols is prohibiting the use of headscarves in public spaces. Laicite can be said

to be strict secularism⁴⁹ and the basis for French semiotic ideology.

However, it is an oddity considering that the Prophet Muhammad as a symbol of Islam is actually allowed to appear in public spaces, in Charlie Hebdo magazine, in a quoted form. Religious symbols were allowed to appear after being secularized. This makes the perspective of Mitchell's drawing as merely a ventriloquist doll, difficult to accept. The image of the Prophet Muhammad, in any form, is a violation of religious teachings. The issue of caricature has even been controversial since the discourse level, but the anger response finally emerged after the discourse was materialized in the form of a caricature. Mahmood revealed that the Prophet Muhammad was not only considered holy, but also close to Muslims. This closeness is in the form of the way of life of the Prophet Muhammad which is also followed by Muslims. This condition was not understood by the French secularists and made the acceptance of the problematic image both in terms of discourse and materiality that it could not be called a dummy ventriloquist, but seen as a text. As revealed by Kruse,⁵⁰ Mitchell only looks at the image problem one-sided.

Another problem is that the appearance of the Prophet Muhammad himself is unknown. The caricature of the Prophet Muhammad is made possible only by the claim of the creator that the image is a caricature of the Prophet Muhammad. The combination of the materiality of the caricature and Charlie Hebdo's claim that the image is a caricature of the Prophet Muhammad makes it possible for the caricature to be interpreted as an "attack" against Muslims. Mitchell himself stated that in offensive drawings it was important for the creator to implement his intention to "attack".

⁴⁷ Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images*.

⁴⁸ Mitchell.

⁴⁹ Wening Udasmoro, "Discourse Subaltern Dalam Masyarakat Interkultural: Menceramati Relasi Gender Jilbab Dan Perempuan Berjilbab Di Prancis," *Jurnal Ilmu*

Sosial Dan Ilmu Politik 14, no. 1 (2010): 1–22, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.22146/jsp.10946>.

⁵⁰ Christiane Kruse, "Offending Pictures. What Makes Images Powerful," in *Taking Offense* (Brill | Fink, 2018), https://doi.org/10.30965/9783846763452_004. 20,

This intention is so clear not only in appearance, but also in the claim on the caricature of the Prophet Muhammad that it is difficult to see the image as merely an image, not text, as Mitchell intended. On the contrary, this condition can be understood by looking at the semiotic ideologies of both parties. Moreover, Mitchell⁵¹ also mentions that the problem of interpreting offensive images is rooted in a double consciousness, an awareness that does not separate the image and its meaning. The same thing was also expressed by Latour that humans have never achieved modernity which seeks to separate nature and culture because in his mind there are still premodern thoughts that unite the two and the modern-premodern dichotomy is no longer valid.⁵² This condition became a crucial point of conflict between the semiotic ideologies of Muslims and French secularists. This is where the misunderstanding between secular semiotic ideology and Muslim semiotic ideology occurs.

The response of conservative Muslims in Indonesia is also formed from the semiotic ideology conflict among conservative Muslims in Indonesia, secular, and moderate. As stated by Keane (2018: 65),⁵³ semiotic ideology is a manifestation of the reflexive dimension of human capacity to use signs. This reflexive dimension is very particular in the form of articulation of the semiotic process and depends on the social context. This particularity in Indonesia is manifested in the various responses to the Charlie Hebdo controversy, even though all of them represent Islam.

CONCLUSION

The controversy over the cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad in Charlie Hebdo magazine sparked various reactions, especially from Muslims. The emergence of a series of reactionary actions as a form of protest against

France who defended Charlie Hebdo was considered to have created new problems and made some parties questioning the value of French secularism and its relationship with Muslims. Slowly the issue grew into a dispute between the French government and the Muslims. The discussion that was present narrowed and formed two camps with their respective arguments. Secularism promotes the freedom of the press and rejects punishment for what is considered the right of opinion. Muslims raised the issue of the marginalization of Muslims due to secularism and excessive press freedom and attacked values that were considered sacred to Muslims.

Caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad are finally not seen as a main problem. As objects, caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad are considered to only represent the value of secularism, both as evidence of press freedom and the marginalization of Muslims. We see this controversy is inseparable from the agency of the Prophet Muhammad's caricature which is considered offensive.

In Indonesia, the controversy is combined with a burgeoning religious resurgence promoted by conservative Muslim groups and based on Islamic iconography that rejects images of living beings. Indonesian politics has generated a variety of different responses between the government and conservative Muslim groups. All of them are intertwined to form the semiotic ideology of Indonesian Muslims which is increasingly distinct from Western semiotic ideologies which fail to capture the emotional responses of Muslims arising from sensory perception of the caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad. This effort is made to fill the void left in the discussion of this controversy which is mainly circulating in Indonesia.

⁵¹ Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images*.

⁵² Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 103.

⁵³ Keane, "On Semiotic Ideology."

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