

CONTESTATION OF RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE AMONG MUSLIM DAWAH ACTIVISTS IN CONTEMPORARY INDONESIA

Achmad Muhlis¹ , Abd Hannan^{2*} 

*Correspondence :

Email :
hannan.taufiqi@gmail.com

Authors Affiliation:

^{1,2} Institut Agama Islam
Negeri Madura, Indonesia

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Abstract

This study examines the phenomenon of religious contestation among Muslim preachers in contemporary Indonesia. This study is a qualitative research and uses the digital ethnography (netnography) approach. This study uses two sources of data, namely, primary data, in the form of text, visuals, videos, and images obtained from several social media platforms, and secondary data in the form of literature data from previous studies. This study finds that the contestation of religious discourse among Muslim preachers in Indonesia, in particular that which have taken place on social media, has revolved around four major issues, namely, the controversies of "rendang babi" (pork rendang), "pawang hujan" (the rain shaman), the regulation of sound amplifiers in mosques and prayer spaces, and the art of wayang (puppetry). The religious contestation among Muslim preachers in Indonesia follows two patterns. The first is the substantive – inclusive religious narrative pattern, which emphasizes the core and principles of a problem. Next is the exclusive legal – formalist narrative, which tends to be normative and rigid. This last narrative is typically associated with Muslims preachers who have conservative views.

Studi ini bertujuan melakukan kajian terhadap media sosial dan fenomena kontestasi keagamaan di kalangan pendakwah Muslim di Indonesia kontemporer. Kajian ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif dengan menggunakan pendekatan etnografi digital (netnografi). Sumber data penelitian ini ada dua, data primer berupa teks, visual, video, dan gambar yang diperoleh dari sejumlah media sosial, serta data sekunder berupa data-data kepustakaan yang didapat dari hasil kajian sebelumnya. Berdasarkan analisa data lapangan, studi ini mendapati temuan bahwa kontestasi wacana keagamaan antarpdakwah muslim di Indonesia yang selama ini berlangsung di kanal media sosial, itu tergambar dalam empat isu besar, yakni isu rendang babi, pawang hujan, aturan terkait pengeras suara di masjid dan musala, dan terakhir adalah isu tentang seni wayang. Berdasarkan narasinya, kontestasi keagamaan di kalangan pendakwah Muslim di Indonesia memiliki dua pola, yakni narasi agama berpola substantif-inklusif, lebih menekankan pada isi, inti, dan pokok suatu permasalahan. Berikutnya, yaitu eksklusif-legal formalis, narasi keagamaan yang cenderung normatif dan kaku. Bentuk narasi ini lazimnya identik dengan aktor agama atau pendakwah muslim beraliran paham konservatif.

Introduction

The rapid development of information technology and media in the present era has inaugurated a new public space in the lives of people to the point of replacing the traditional social space. Although it is considered a new social space, it must be acknowledged that social media has succeeded in transforming multiple aspects of social life, including religion, which many consider sacred.¹ In general, this success is inseparable from the transfer of information through digital platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and dan Line. At the religious level, social transformation is clearly

¹ M. Nanda Fanindy and Siti Mupida, "Pergeseran Literasi Pada Generasi Milenial Akibat Penyebaran Radikalisme Di Media Sosial," *Millah: Jurnal Studi Agama* 20, no. 2 (2021): 195 – 222, <https://doi.org/10.20885/millah.vol20.iss2.art1>.

reflected in the appearance of a new type of religious figures, who have emerged in Indonesia in the past decade.

These new religious figures the label of "modern ustads" (modern teachers).² Those who belong to this group are dawah (Islamic propagation) activists hailing from the millennial generation of Muslims. The distinctive characteristics of this Muslim group is that their dawah activities occur mostly online, a pattern that is in contrast to the dawah activities of the previous generations that were mostly offline and used conventional methods and approaches.³ Though born and raised in the same era, there are times when this new group of contemporary preachers exhibits different religious views, be it at the level of discourse or practice. These differences often incite heated debates among the public, leading to an uproar in the public space.⁴ At the level of discourse, contrasting views among preachers can be found in a certain number of current socio-religious issues that have gone viral in recent years. For instance, the issues of Islamic klepon cake, Indonesian Ulema Council's (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, MUI) halal logo, the haram rulings on wayang, the donning of niqab/veil, and most recently the issue of pork rendang.⁵

Studies on the existence of contemporary preachers in Indonesia can be grouped into three major themes. First, according to a study by Ermeilinda Kartina Sari (2020), the emergence of contemporary preachers in Indonesia is the outcome of the rapid development of information technology and media, which has now influenced all social domains, including the socio-religious domain.⁶ Second, the new types of modern preachers is part of a concerted effort by certain religious group to target and influence the religious behavior of Muslim netizens, especially millennial, Gen Z, and Gen Alpha Muslims, who are the most active generations on the internet. This was elaborated in the studies by Abdul Karim (2021).⁷ Third, the appearance of contemporary dawah activists in social media spaces is an indication of a shift in the role and function of religion, from what was once synonymous with traditional methods and spaces to utilizing much more modern techniques and spaces, namely, the digital social media.⁸

Although studies on the existence of contemporary preachers have been carried out, there has not been any research that specifically captures their existence from a more in-depth perspective, such as the contestation religious discourse among modern day preachers. In the context of Indonesia, this kind of study is needed, because religious figures in the country have diverse religious perspective, whether in terms of interpretation, sectarian commitments, ideology, or even movement. Intriguingly, this

² Praditya Mer Hananto, "Pemanfaatan Media Sosial Untuk Berdakwah," *Jurnal Ushuluddin: Media Dialog Pemikiran Islam* 23, no. 2 (2021): 41–51, <https://doi.org/10.24252/jumdpi.v23i2.23114>.

³ Abd Hannan, "Covid-19 Dan Disrupsi Praktik Ritual Keagamaan Di Indonesia: Dari Tradisional Ke Virtual (Covid-19 and the Disruption of Religious Practices in Indonesia: From Traditional To Virtual)," *Jurnal Sosiologi Reflektif* 16, no. 2 (2022): 263, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jsr.v16i2.2378>.

⁴ Abd Hannan, "Cyberspace Dan Populisme Islam Di Kalangan Netizen: Studi Kasus Pada Akun Media Sosial Felix Siauw," *Jurnal Sosiologi Reflektif* 15, no. 2 (2021): 224, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jsr.v15i2.2116>.

⁵ Yosep Suprayogi, 'Akhiri Kontroversi Rendang Babi', *Tempo*, 13 June 2022, <https://kolom.tempo.co/read/1601149/akhiri-kontroversi-rendang-babi>; Tim detikJateng, 'Kontroversi "Wayang Haram", Keraton Solo Hingga Seniman Bereaksi', *Detikjateng*, 20 February 2022, <https://www.detik.com/jateng/berita/d-5950239/kontroversi-wayang-haram-keraton-solo-hingga-seniman-bereaksi>; Edwin Zhan, 'Pro-Kontra Aturan Penggunaan Pengeras Suara, Dewan Masjid: Aturan Dibuat Agar Masyarakat Harmonis', *KOMPAS.Tv*, 24 February 2022, <https://www.kompas.tv/article/264821/pro-kontra-aturan-penggunaan-pengeras-suara-dewan-masjid-aturan-dibuat-agar-masyarakat-harmonis>.

⁶ Ermeilinda Kartina Sari, "Paradigm of Dakwah in The Millennial Era Paradigma Dakwah Di Era Millennial," *Spektra* 2, no. 1 (2020): 46–51, <https://doi.org/10.34005/spektra.v2i1.1538>.

⁷ Abdul Karim, "Strategi Dakwah Dalam Meminimalisir Penyebaran Informasi Hoax Di Media Sosial," *Jurnal Ilmu Dakwah* 41, no. 2 (2021):14.

⁸ By Robert and E Bob Brown, *Kegagalan Identitas Keagamaan*, ed. Didin dan Ismatu Ropi Syafruddin (Jakarta: PPIM-UIN Jakarta, 2018).

diversity is not limited only to the online platform. In fact, it has spread to the realm of religious discourse that are produced on a daily basis.⁹ Thus, it is necessary to enrich the our knowledge regarding religious contestation among millennial ustads and preachers in contemporary Indonesia.

This study is based on the argument that the contestation of religious discourse among Indonesian preachers can at some level have a positive impact to democracy. Conversely, excessive contestation of religious discourse, especially if it happens on social media platforms, can in certain situations provoke antagonistic emotions and sentiments.¹⁰ However, hardline religious sentiments can easily incite negative reactions and responses from the public. From the researcher's perspective, social unrest can occur if the contentious religious discourse in the media expressed by contemporary dawah activists is amplified public spaces with the aim of reviving Islamic populism among the grassroots. In the more macro and critical perspective, it is not farfetched that in the future this situation may worsen and affect a broader social spectrum. It might evolve into a new axis power that facilitates the flow of Islamization and religious revivalist movements in Indonesia and influence and control state policies, be it at the political or structural aspect of the government.

Methodologically, this study uses a qualitative approach comprised of two methods. The first is the method of social media observation and discourse analysis. This method is used to understand and interpret various religious phenomena, specifically those related to the contestation of religious discourse among Muslim dawah activists in contemporary Indonesia. The second method is the virtual ethnography (netnography) method. Cristine Hine (2016) stated that visual ethnography is aimed at carrying out in –depth investigation of various religious realities that occur in the domain of social media.¹¹ Besides investigating the subject's side, visual ethnography also examines the dynamics and implications that arises as a result of the media. In the context of this study, the visual ethnography method is used to observe, investigate, and analyze the social media accounts of several Muslim preachers, both modern and traditional. The goal is to find patterns and analyze how they construct religious narratives in their dawah activities from 2015 to 2022. The religious narratives dealt with in this study include the following issues: whether or not a rain shaman is haram (religious forbidden); whether or not the wayang is permissible; debates surrounding the volume settings of amplifiers used for adhan (the call to prayer); religious polemics over pork rendang, and the like. The discussion in this article is limited to answering three questions. What is the current situation regarding Muslim dawah activists in Indonesia? How does social media affect religious discourse contestation among Muslim preachers in Indonesia? In what contexts do preachers construct their religious discourses on social media?

Contemporary Religious Figures

How does the new type of Muslim preachers build their religious roles and coimunicate to gain the attention of Muslims in contemporary Indonesia? Who are the religious figures included in this new group? What are their religious typology and

⁹ Maqbul Arib, "Dakwah Di Tengah Keragaman Dan Perbedaan Umat Islam," *Jurnal Dakwah Tabligh* 15, no. 1 (2014): 35–49.

¹⁰ M Hizbullah, "Dakwah Harakah, Radikalisme, Dan Tantangannya Di Indonesia," *Misykat Al-Anwar* 29, no. 2 (2018): 12.

¹¹ Christine Hine, *Virtual Ethnography* (6 Bonhill Street, London England EC2A 4PU United Kingdom: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2000), doi:10.4135/9780857020277.

paradigm? To answer these questions, a number of representatives of the new religious figures, who often appear in the public sphere will first be described.

There are at least four new dawah activists studied in this article, among whom are Gus Miftah and Gus Muwafiq. These two figures belong to the progressive dawah group due to their emphasis on the contextual nature of religious interpretation. On the other hand, Ustad Khalid Basalamah and Ustad Adi Hidayat are modern dawah activists belonging to the conservative group due to their emphasis on the normative and textual basis of religious interpretation. Based on the field data, these four Islamic figures are known to have engaged in debates regarding contemporary Islamic issues in Indonesia. The issue of pork rendang was debated between Gus Miftah and Ustad Adi Hidayat, whereas the wayang issue involved Gus Miftah and Ustad Khalid Basalamah. The rain shaman issue found Gus Mawafiq and Ustad Khalid Basalamah on opposite sides; and finally the issue of amplifier volume limitation for adhan was a dispute between Gus Miftah and Ustad Adi Hidayat.

Of course, there are many other names belonging to the group of new religious figures and preachers. However, to maintain the focus and direction of this study, the subjects of new religious figures are limited to these four figures.

Gus Miftah

Gus Miftah, whose real name is Miftah Maulana Habiburrahman, was born in East Lampung, Lampung on August 5, 1981. Gus Miftah is the head of Ora Aji Islamic Boarding School in Sleman, Yogyakarta, that he established in 2011. Like many other pesantren ("boarding school") families, Gus Miftah is a ninth-generation descendant of a renowned ulema, Kiai Ageng Muhammad Besari, the founder of Tegalsari Islamic Boarding School, in Ponorogo. He received his education at Bustanul Ulum Jayasakti Islamic Boarding School in Central Lampung. In 1999, Gus Miftah pursued his higher education in the State Islamic University (UIN) Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta. In the 2000s, amidst his busy student life, Gus Miftah began to leap into the dawah scene.¹²

In Indonesia, Gus Miftah is known as an eccentric religious preacher. Unlike most preachers who conduct their dawah activities in places of worship such as mosques or in religious assemblies, he prefers to carry out his preaching in the "seedy" underbelly of society, such as under the dazzling lights of nightclubs, in the streets, or even at red light districts.¹³ Due to this dawah method, Gus Miftah, who belongs the group of new preachers, often incites polemics, controversy, and even criticism. Some people approve his method, while some think that his method of preaching in places rife with immorality is unethical, while others deem it as an effort to generate sensation and to go "viral" on social media.¹⁴

However, despite the detractors above, it needs to be acknowledged that Gus Miftah is currently a highly rated new religious figure in Indonesia. His name belongs in the lineup of contemporary preachers who possesses great influence among young nahdiyyin (a term referring to Muslim adherents of the organization Nahdlatul Ulama). In the world of da'i (preacher), Gus Miftah's name began to be recognized after acquiring the reputation of preaching in red light districts such as Pasar Kembang (lit.

¹² Putra Pujiantara, "Dakwah Gus Miftah Dalam Bingkai Media Daring," *Kalijaga Journal of Communication* 2, no. 2 (2021): 135–52, <https://doi.org/10.14421/kjc.22.04.2020>.

¹³ Muslimin Ritonga and Dewi Sartina, "Komunikasi Dakwah Gus Miftah Di Lokalisasi Pasar Kembang Yogyakarta," *AI-MUNZIR* 13, no. 2 (2020): 273, <https://doi.org/10.31332/am.v13i2.2051>.

¹⁴ Uswatun Hasanah, "Kontroversi Orasi Kebangsaan Gus Miftah Di Gereja Gethel Indonesia (GBI) Penjaringan Jakarta Utara (Analisis Dakwah Dan New Media)," *An-Nida: Jurnal Komunikasi Islam* 13, no. 2 (2021): 123–32, <https://doi.org/10.34001/an-nida.v13i2.2092>.

Flower Market) in Yogyakarta and several other places. Most recently, he was the subject of controversy because he organized a wayang art performance in his pesantren residence. In this performance, one of the wayang puppet was given a facial features and cap that resembled Ustad Khalid Basalamah, who had famously stated that wayang shows are forbidden in Islam.¹⁵

In addition to actively carrying out his dawah activities through conventional means, Gus Miftah is also quite active on social media. In fact, based on the field data, his social media accounts boast a high number of followers. On many occasions, Gus Miftah uses his social media as religious information (dawah) channels to talk about contemporary religious issues in Indonesia. Among his social media accounts are an Instagram account with the username 'gusmiftah', which currently has two million followers; a YouTube channel under the name of Gus miftah official, with 825 thousand subscribers recorded; and a Facebook fan page named Gus Miftah, which has 4.8 thousand followers.

Gus Muwafiq

Gus Muwafiq, whose full name is KH Amad Muwafiq, was born in Lamongan on March 2, 1974, and currently resides in the Sleman Region of Yogyakarta where he leads a small pesantren. Like most kyais in pesantrens in general, Gus Muwafiq has led a pesantren life since childhood. He experienced life as a santri (a student in a pesantren) in multiple pesantrens, such as the Lirboyo Islamic Boarding School in Kediri and Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School in Paiton, Probolinggo. In 1994, Gus Muwafiq enrolled at UIN Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta. In campus, he was active in collegiate organizations and was involved as an activist of Indonesian Islamic Student Movement (Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia, PMII). When Kiyai Haji (KH) Abdurrahman Wahid (Gusdur) served as the president, he appointed Gus Muwafiq as his personal assistant. These testify to the strong ties that Gus Muwafiq has with the Islamic organization Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), be it structurally or culturally. Due to this proximity, Gus Muwafiq is frequently hailed as one of the modern orators of the NU community.

In the dawah scene in Indonesia, Gus Muwafiq is known as a preacher who is laid – back and calm. He is also renowned for consistently upholding local religious traditions. In some of his lectures, Gus Muwafiq often discussed religion, Islamic history, and politics. What made him stand out is his frequent use of comparisons with famous Japanese animation shows, such as Naruto and Samurai X. Due to this uniqueness, Gus Muwafiq succeeded in garnering the attention of Indonesian Muslim communities, especially those who belong under the banner of NU. In 2018, Gus Muwafiq was invited by President Joko Widodo and his ministers to deliver a Maulid Nabi (the Prophet Muhammad's Birthday) sermon which was held at the Bogor Palace. This is perhaps the peak of his career as a da'i in Indonesia.

In 2019, Gus Muwafiq became more intensely discussed by the public after he was accused by some parties to have insulted the Prophet Muhammad. This accusation began when in one of his lectures, Gus Muwafiq stated that the Prophet's birth was

¹⁵ Tim detikcom, 'Duduk Perkara Gempar Wayang "Khalid Basalamah" Di Ponpes Gus Miftah', *Detikjateng*, 26 February 2022, <https://www.detik.com/jateng/berita/d-5959585/duduk-perkara-gempar-wayang-khalid-basalamah-di-ponpes-gus-miftah>.

ordinary and he had also had runny nose.¹⁶ Due to his statement, Gus Muwafiq was accused of slander, which led to him being reported to the police. Moreover, there are also several other controversies, some of which are his opinion regarding the practice of shamanic weather –working at the MotoGP event in Mandalika. He posited that the practice of rain shamanism is an aspect of spiritual science that is not prohibited in Islam. Therefore, he considers that the practice of weather –working, as is commonly practiced among the people, cannot be considered as a practice of shirk (polytheism).¹⁷

Akin to religious orators in general, apart from carrying out dawah activities conventionally, Gus Muwafiq is also known to be active in social media channels. Based on field data, there are at least three active accounts that he has been using to convey his dawah messages. There is a YouTube channel called Gus Muwafiq Channel with 178 thousand subscribers, a Facebook fan page of the same name, Gus Muwafiq Channel, with 164 thousand followers, and an Instagram account with the username gus.muwafiq with 186 thousand followers.

Khalid Basalamah

Ustad Dr. Khalid Zaid Abdullah Basalamah, Lc., MA or more widely known as Ustad Khalid Basalamah is a Salafi preacher born in Makassar, South Sulawesi in 1975. Judging from his name, Ustad Khalid Basalamah has Arab ancestry represented clearly by his surname Basalamah. Basalamah is an Arab surname originating from the descendants of the Arabs of Hadhramaut Yemen. Khalid Basalamah underwent his education at foreign universities. For his undergraduate studies, he studied at the University of Madinah, before continuing his Master degree in University of Indonesia. He completed his doctorate at Tun Abdul Razaq University in Malaysia. The name Khalid Basalamah is known in the public as an ustad and dawah activist. Beyond that, Khalid Basalamah is also known as an entrepreneur or businessman. There are two types of businesses that he focuses on, namely, the timber industry and the Middle East culinary business.

In the world of dawah, Khalid Basalamah is known as a proponent figure of Salafism. In Indonesia, this movement often draws controversy and protests, due to being at odds with the tradition and culture of the Indonesian Muslim communities, especially followers of the NU (commonly known as aswaja an –nahdiyyah). In 2017, the Islamic organizations GP Ansor and Banser in Sidoarjo, who are affiliated with NU, rejected the arrival of Ustad Khalid Basalamah at a religious assembly event. This rejection was based on the claim that his Salafi ideology contradicts the religious practices of the local community, especially the nahdiyyin (i.e., followers of the aswaja an –nahdiyyah approach), who are the embodiment of local religious tradition.¹⁸ In 2022, a viral footage of Ustad Khalid Basalamah's lecture contains a statement prohibiting wayang performances for Muslims.¹⁹ Footage of his lecture became widespread on social

¹⁶ Farih Maulana Sidik, 'Gus Muwafiq Kembali Dilaporkan Ke Bareskrim Polri Soal Isi Ceramahnya', *Detiknews*, December 2019, <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-4811651/gus-muwafiq-kembali-dilaporkan-ke-bareskrim-polri-soal-isi-ceramahnya>.

¹⁷ Thaoqid Nur, 'Soal Pawang Hujan Mandalika, Begini Pendapat Gus Muwafiq', *TIMES Indonesia*, 23 March 2022, <https://www.timesindonesia.co.id/read/news/402398/soal-pawang-hujan-mandalika-begini-pendapat-gus-muwafiq>.

¹⁸ Rahmat Fajar, 'Ini Alasan GP Ansor Tolak Ceramah Ustad Basalamah', *Republika Online*, 9 March 2017, <https://republika.co.id/berita/nasional/umum/17/03/09/omih14382-ini-alasan-gp-ansor-tolak-ceramah-ustaz-basalamah>.

¹⁹ Muhamad Husni Tamami, 'Disebut Haram Oleh Ustad Khalid Basalamah, Ini Fakta –Fakta Menarik Tentang Wayang', *Liputan6.Com*, 15 February 2022, <https://www.liputan6.com/regional/read/4886984/disebut-haram-oleh-ustaz-khalid-basalamah-ini-fakta-fakta-menarik-tentang-wayang>.

media, and garnered both support and disapproval from the public. Some came to his defense, while others criticized him.

Currently, Ustad Khalid Basalamah is famous as the preacher who is most successful in utilizing information media channels for dawah activities. This is evident from the amount of public attention and interest shown towards his social media accounts. His YouTube channel named Khalid Basalamah Official, for instance, has amassed 2.35 million subscribers. Such is also the case for his Instagram account with the username khalidbasalamahofficial, which has a follower count of 2.9 million. In addition, there is also a Facebook page called Ustadz Khalid Z.A Basalamah with a total of 268 thousand followers.²⁰

Adi Hidayat

Ustad Adi Hidayat is a young dawah activist born in Pandeglang, Banten on 11 September 1984. His education started in the Muhammadiyah boarding school called Darul Arqam Islamic Boarding School Garut in 1997. After finishing his pesantren education in 2003, Ustad Adi Hidayat continued his studies at the Faculty of Islamic Studies (Dirasat Islamiyah), UIN Syarif Hidayatullah. However, before completing his studies, in 2005, he received an invitation to continue his study in Libya. Finally, in 2009, he completed his undergraduate studies, and in the same year started his Master studies at Islamic Call University College.²¹

Beyond his reputation as an expert on Hadith and Quran interpretations, Ustad Adi Hidayat is also known as a prominent modern preacher. In 2013, he founded an institution called the Quantum Akhyar Institute, a foundation focusing on the field of Islamic Studies and the development of dawah.²² As of the writing of this article, Ustad Adi Hidayat has led many religious activities, be it in the form of knowledge circles (ta'lim), seminars, assemblies, and the like. Throughout his career as an Islamic preacher, Ustad Adi Hidayat has faced a number of polemics and controversies, among which is related to his statement claiming that the national hero, captain Pattimura, was a Muslim whose actual name was Ahmad Lussy.²³ Apart from that, another controversy from Ustad Adi Hidayat was when he answered Gus Miftah's question regarding the pork rendang issue, which at the time drew massive protest and criticism from the Minang community.

Like other millennial Muslim preachers in general, Ustad Adi Hidayat performs dawah not only through conventional means, but also through modern means, such as Instagram, YouTube, and the like. Based on field data, Ustad Adi Hidayat's use of social media channel appears to be quite successful, as shown by the amount of public interest in his social media accounts.²⁴ His YouTube channel, Adi Hidayat Official boasts a massive count of 3.5 million subscribers. Even higher is his Instagram account named

²⁰ Apang Abdul Goffar and Nanda Fahrur Nisa, "Audio Visual Dakwah Media Baru Khalid Basalamah Perspektif Honeycomb Social Media," *Panangkaran: Jurnal Penelitian Agama Dan Masyarakat* 5, no. 1 (2021): 130–49, <https://doi.org/10.14421/panangkaran.2021.0501-07>.

²¹ Rahma Alfiah, Syahrul Fauzi Bisri, and Nurul Fauzia, "Dakwah Argumentatif Ustadz Adi Hidayat Di Media Sosial Youtube," *AdZikra: Jurnal Komunikasi & Penyiaran Islam* 13, no. 1 (2023): 62–76, <https://doi.org/10.32678/adzikra.v13i1.6040>.

²² Luthfi Luthfi et al., "Gaya Bahasa Repetisi Ustaz Adi Hidayat Tentang Penyelenggaraan Ibadah Dalam Wabah Covid-19," *Bahastra* 40, no. 1 (2020): 39, <https://doi.org/10.26555/bahastra.v40i1.15306>.

²³ Danu Damarjati, 'Ustaz Adi Hidayat Sebut Pattimura "Ahmad Lussy", Teorinya Ada Di Buku Ini', *Detiknews*, 5 July 2022, <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-6163412/ustaz-adi-hidayat-sebut-pattimura-ahmad-lussy-teorinya-ada-di-buku-ini>.

²⁴ Guntur Cahyono, "Pemanfaatan Media Youtube Dakwah Ustadz Adi Hidayat Dalam Pengembangan Materi Fikih Madrasah Ibtidaiyah," *At-Tarbawi: Jurnal Kajian Kependidikan Islam* 4, no. 1 (2019): 78, <https://doi.org/10.22515/attarbawi.v4i1.1474>.

adihidayatofficial, which has reached a follower count of 3.7 million as of the writing of this article. These numbers do not even include other social media platforms, such as Facebook, Line, Twitter, and so on.

Religious Discourses in Contemporary Indonesia: From Wayang Art to Pork Rendang

Religious contestation on social media involving preachers or religious figures has become commonplace in Indonesia over the last few years. Various religious discourses burst on the internet with various themes and materials, such as the issue of religious beliefs and practices to non-religious social issues. When such issues are raised on social media and are 'cooked up' with religious sentiments, they will end up attracting a lot of attention. Based on field data discovery, there are at least four religious issues involving religious figures that have gone viral in the world of social media in the last three years. The four issues are the policies or regulations on loudspeakers (amplifiers or more commonly known by Indonesians as TOA) in mosques, the question of wayang art, pork rendang, and the practice of rain shamans.

TOA in Masjids and the Barking of Dogs

The controversy, which is related to the regulation of loudspeakers in mosques, began when the Ministry of Religion issued a Circular Letter (Surat Edaran, SE) No. 5 2022 containing guidelines on the use of loudspeakers in mosques and prayer spaces (musalla). In this Circular, the minister of religion limits the volume of masjids' TOA used as a loudspeaker at 100 decibels. In addition, the materials, broadcasted from the masjids through TOA, are constricted to only adhan (the first call to prayer), iqama (the second call to prayer), and the Quran recitation preceding the adhan with a maximum duration of 5 to 10 minutes. This Circular drew controversy from the public, especially the Muslim community. Some supported the policy for the sake of public order and general comfort. Others criticized and outright disregarded it because it was deemed as limiting religious freedom.²⁵

At the outset, this circular did not really incite massive reaction and criticism, the majority of which came from grassroots communities. In subsequent developments, the polemic over the regulation of mosque loudspeaker became increasingly heated and was intensely discussed by the public, especially on social media. This development was provoked by the statement of the minister of religion, Yaqut Cholil Qoumas, who likened the sound of badly performed and overly loud performances of the adhan to the barking of dogs. This statement elicited strong reaction and criticism, not only from grassroots communities, but also from religious figures. Criticism and reactions were launched from every direction, whether directly or indirectly through media channels, especially social media.²⁶

In social media, one of the harsh criticisms of the regulations on mosque loudspeakers and of the statement by the aforementioned minister came from Ustad Adi Hidayat. In his YouTube channel, Adi Hidayat Official, in a video titled Pesan Kebangsaan UAH !! Dari TOA sampai Taubat Nasuha (24/2/2022), the young religious figure lamented the attitude and statement of the minister who analogized the sound of

²⁵ Edwin Zhan, 'Pro-Kontra Aturan Penggunaan Pengeras Suara, Dewan Masjid: Aturan Dibuat Agar Masyarakat Harmonis'.

²⁶ Sri Yanti Nainggolan, 'Kontroversi Suara Azan Dan Gonggongan Anjing, Kemenag: Itu Contoh, Bukan Membandingkan', *Medcom.Id*, 24 February 2022, <https://www.medcom.id/nasional/peristiwa/JKR3W8pN-kontroversi-suara-azan-dan-gonggongan-anjing-kemenag-itu-contoh-bukan-membandingkan>.

the adhan with the barking of dogs.²⁷ According to him, comparing the sound of adhan to the sound of certain animals or other things that are inappropriate is not dignified or appropriate, especially when such statements come from a public official. In his opinion, such statement is detrimental to the spirit of religious tolerance and even offensive to religious people.

Contrary to the attitude of the two preachers above, Gus Miftah, in his YouTube channel, posted a video titled Gus Nur: Adzan Guk Guk Gukkk; Tanggapan Gus Miftah Tentang Toa Masjid Gus Yaqut (19/03/22) where he expressed his thought that there was nothing wrong with the attitude and statement of the Minister of Religious Affairs regarding the regulation of TOA in mosques.²⁸ In his opinion, what the Minister was doing was to enforce the regulation of the adhan, rather than likening it to the barking of dogs.

The Art of Wayang

Wayang is a human – shaped puppet made of leather or carved wood that is used to portray characters in traditional drama performances. The conductor of the performance is called a dalang. Typically, these performances can be found in Javanese, Balinese, and Sundanese communities. Wayang is famous not only as art or entertainment, but also as the cultural identity of Nusantara, which is the ancient designation of the Indonesian and Malay Archipelago. Wayang is an indigenous product of Nusantara culture.²⁹ In Indonesia, wayang is a symbol of the successful interaction and integration of Islam and the local culture, especially on the island of Java. Thus, when some people claim that Islam opposes wayang, this will draw strong reactions from the public, including religious figures, ustads, and preachers.

In the context of religious discourse in Indonesia, the controversy regarding the relation between religion and wayang arose when a "viral" footage of a lecture from the Salafi ustad, namely Khalid Basalamah, emerged on YouTube. In the footage, Ustad Khalid Basalamah answered a question regarding wayang asked by one of the participants of his assembly and stated that Islam prohibits wayang performances and the practice should be abolished.³⁰ This answer generated debate in the public. Many people did not appreciate the question and associated it with the Salafi ideology, which is known for their criticism of local traditions and culture. One of the figures who vigorously opposed this perspective was Gus Miftah.

Gus Miftah did not only counter the opposition to wayang with words. Instead, he held a wayang performance in his pesantren. Intriguingly, in the wayang show, there was a wayang character that resembled the figure of Ustad Basalamah. In the show, this wayang was eventually beaten up because it was deemed to be a threat to the world of wayang art in Indonesia.³¹ According to the field data, the video was uploaded through his twitter account on Sunday (20/2) and went viral on social media. Gus Miftah

²⁷ Ustadz Adi Hidayat, 'Pesan Kebangsaan UAH!! Dari TOA Sampai Taubat Nasuha', *Adi Hidayat Official*, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3mlW5Cun-G4>.

²⁸ Pojok Tradisi, 'Gus Nur: Adzan Guk Guk Gukkk | Tanggapan Gus Miftah Tentang Toa Masjid Gus Yaqut', *Pojok Tradisi*, 19 March 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AXi1n7Vp_DE.

²⁹ Bayu Anggoro, "'Wayang Dan Seni Pertunjukan' Kajian Sejarah Perkembangan Seni Wayang Di Tanah Jawa Sebagai Seni Pertunjukan Dan Dakwah," *JUSPI (Jurnal Sejarah Peradaban Islam)* 2, no. 2 (2018): 122, <https://doi.org/10.30829/j.v2i2.1679>.

³⁰ Siti Ruqoyah, '8 Fakta Khalid Basalamah Soal Wayang Hingga Dilaporkan Ke Polisi', *Viva.Co.Id*, 16 February 2022, <https://www.viva.co.id/berita/nasional/1449774-8-fakta-khalid-basalamah-soal-wayang-hingga-dilaporkan-ke-polisi?page=2>.

³¹ Joko Sadewo, 'Mempertanyakan Maksud Pergelaran Wayang Gus Miftah', *Republika Online*, 24 February 2022, <https://republika.co.id/share/r7r8jp318>.

uploaded the video with a caption that reads "Nek ora seneng wayang ojo kakehan cangkem," which means "if you don't like wayang, refrain from talking too much." From the content and the caption, it is apparent that the video post in his Twitter account was intended as a counter-narrative against Khalid Basalamah regarding the supposed opposition between wayang performance and Islam.³²

Pork Rendang

One of the religious issues that attract a lot of attention in Indonesia was the discovery of a pork rendang menu at a Nasi Padang restaurant in Jakarta called Babiambo.³³ This issue provoked debate in the public sphere because it was considered to be detrimental to the culinary specialty of the Minangkabau people. According to some people rendang rice is renowned for its halal values and is supposed to be harmony with Islamic practices, as it has always been a part of the culture, tradition, and customs of the Minang people.³⁴ Polemics and uproar in the social media were inevitable. Some consider it normal and there is no problem with the menu, while others are against it, stating that pork rendang undermines the "philosophical values" of rendang.

The polemic of pork rendang became even more heated after a video uploaded by Gus Miftah in his social media post went viral, the content of which elaborated his opinions regarding the polemics of pork rendang. In the video uploaded to his Instagram account on 14 June 2022, he stated that the regulation of halal food applies only to Muslims, and non-Muslims are free to eat without concern. In the video, he appeared to not have any problem with the existence of the pork rendang menu. On the contrary, he took a jab at the parties who had issues with the emergence of pork rendang asking since when did rendang have a religion.³⁵

Gus Miftah's attitude and comment that appeared to advocate pork rendang was swiftly rebuked by a fellow preacher. Ustad Adi Hidayat, in a video upload on his YouTube account, Adi Hidayat Official, on 19 June 2022, stated that rendang is a product of Minang culture, the philosophy of which *adaik basandi syarak, syarak basandi kitabullah*, which translates roughly to "culture is formed by Islamic law, Islamic law is formed by God's Book." In Adi Hidayat's view, the question asked by Gus Miftah had no value and only served to disturb the atmosphere even more. Even if such a question is forced, asking when rendang embrace a religion is the same as questioning since when did batik and angklung obtain citizenship.³⁶

³² Rizqi Arie Harnoko, 'Beredar Video Pertunjukan Wayang Diduga Sindir Ustadz Khalid Basalamah, Fadli Zon: Budaya Bukan Memecah Belah', 21 February 2022, <https://kabarbesuki.pikiran-rakyat.com/berita/pr-193792750/beredar-video-pertunjukan-wayang-diduga-sindir-ustadz-khalid-basalamah-fadli-zon-budaya-bukan-memecah-belah>.

³³ Joko Sadewo, 'Soal Rendang Babi, Gejala Perusakannya Sangat Sistemik', *Republika Online*, 19 June 2022, <https://republika.co.id/share/rdpw84318>.

³⁴ Safyra Primadhyta, 'Heboh Rendang Babi, Pemilik Dipanggil Polisi Hingga Minta Maaf', *CNN Indonesia*, 11 June 2022, <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20220611070547-20-807661/heboh-rendang-babi-pemilik-dipanggil-polisi-hingga-minta-maaf>.

³⁵ *jpn.com*, 'Heboh Rendang Babi, Gus Miftah Bilang Begini, Tegas!', *Www.Jpn.Com*, 15 June 2022, <https://www.jpn.com/news/heboh-rendang-babi-gus-miftah-bilang-begini-tegas>.

³⁶ Desi Kris, 'Viral Video Ustadz Adi Hidayat Saat Jawab Gus Miftah Sejak Kapan Rendang Punya Agama', *Malang TIMES*, 20 June 2022, <https://www.malangtimes.com/baca/80942/20220620/105000/viral-video-ustaz-adi-hidayat-saat-jawab-gus-miftah-sejak-kapan-rendang-punya-agama>.

Contestation of Religious Discourse among Dawah Community; A Theoretical Analysis

In the perspective of communication science, social media is defined as an information instrument that leverages the use of digital platform to provide a variety of tools and facilities to conduct social activities, especially in terms of establishing communication. Social media allows their users to obtain services to form social interaction with the community in a more practical and efficient manner. The process of interaction and communication offered is also more complex and diverse, as it can be in the form of writing, images, audio, and even the display of moving images. Another advantage is that social media provides information at any time, as the content can be accessed and distributed 24 hours a day. On social media, users can produce information freely and without much restriction, so that each individual or group can position themselves as both subject and or object. As a subject, an individual can produce information and process it, whereas as an object, an individual position themselves as a target audience, consuming information and using it as a reference for daily life.

According to Dave Kapren (2011), social media has an elastic and dynamic nature, transforms messages from communicants to communicators in a rapid manner, and can easily adapt in any situation and condition.³⁷ Due to this elastic and dynamic nature, social media can be used by anyone at any time and the messages or information can target any group. Based on these advantages, it is understandable that nowadays people are flocking to use social media as a medium of communication and to build personal branding. This includes religious figures. The past decade saw the widespread use of social media as a means of dawah. The massive use of social media among religious figures ultimately impacts the religious map or landscape in Indonesia, specifically at the level of discourse. The space for religious debate and contestation no longer takes place in traditional places. Instead, it has shifted to the virtual space or the internet.

Linguistically, contestation is comprised of debates, exchange processes, and discussions of opinions regarding certain topics.³⁸ Contestation involves several different figures or groups, each of which strives to defend their views by proposing arguments that can convince other people. Contestation in the field of religion (such as Islam) refers to the activities involving religious figures or groups. The religious figures in question refer to contemporary ustads or dawah activists, as described in the previous discussion. The question now is what is the actual pattern or form of religious contestations among Muslim dawah activists in contemporary Indonesia?

Citing Alissa Wahid's thoughts on the paradigm of religious practice, as well as referring to the description of the data above, the pattern of religious contestations among Islamic religious figures in contemporary Indonesia can be categorized into two mainstream groups, namely the substantive – inclusive religious narrative and legal – formalistic – exclusive religious narrative.³⁹ The first narrative pattern emphasizes more on the content, essence, and basis of a problem. The term "inclusive" implies believing in the teachings of the religion, while at the same time accommodating those who have

³⁷ Dave Kerpen, *Likeable Social Media: How to Delight Your Customers, Create an Irresistible Brand, and Be Generally Amazing on Facebook (& Other Social Networks)* (New York: McGraw – Hill, 2011).

³⁸ KBBI Online, 'Arti Kata Kontestasi – Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI) Online', in *KBBI Online*, accessed 6 September 2022, <https://kbbi.web.id/kontestasi>.

³⁹ Harian Jogja Digital Media, 'Kerangka Agama Inklusif Substantif Diperlukan Di Indonesia', *Harianjogja.Com*, 25 February 2019, <https://jogjapolitan.harianjogja.com/read/2019/02/25/512/974098/kerangka-agama-inklusif-substantif-diperlukan-di-indonesia>.

different beliefs. In the context of this study, the substantive – inclusive narrative can be found in Gus Miftah's comment on the pork rendang issue. He exhorted Muslims to consume good and halal food, while at the same time emphasizing that injunction to eat halal food applies only to Muslims. Therefore, when Muslims encounter non – halal food, they should not get emotional or angry and instead simply move on and not consume it.

In this situation, Gus Miftah positions himself as a Muslim preacher who presents clear boundaries and emphasis on the haram ruling of pork. The obligation of a Muslim is to avoid consuming non – halal food, including pork. However, Gus Miftah also stated that the obligation of a Muslim is to just avoid eating it, rather than getting emotional or even propagating hatred towards the people who normally eat pork. Simply put, the substantive – inclusive religious narrative requires the individual to commit to their own religion, while at the same time also exhibiting an accommodating and tolerant attitude to teachings other than one's own.

On the other hand, the legal formalistic – exclusive religious narrative has a normative and rigid characteristic and has an extremely literal and textual religious understanding. Religious exclusiveness implies that those who do not adhere to the same religion are considered to be the "other" and to be at the "wrong" side of things, and are often portrayed as enemies. Legal formalistic emphasizes rigid interpretations of scripture.⁴⁰ The legal formalistic – exclusive narrative can be found in Ustad Khalid Basalamah's comment on the issue of rain shaman, the practice of which he considers to be haram or forbidden in Islam.

Based on the field data analysis, the legal – formalistic group has been dominated the space of religious discourse on social media in Indonesia. This can be traced in the findings by the Center for the Study of Islam and Society (Pusat Pengkajian Islam dan Masyarakat, PPIM) UIN Jakarta, based on research on two social media platforms, Twitter and YouTube in Indonesia throughout 2009 to 2019. The study shows that the Islamic narratives in the Indonesian cyberspace is dominated by conservative groups, with a percentage of 67.2%, followed by moderate group at 22.2%, then liberal group at 6.1%, and other Islamist sects at 4.5%.⁴¹

As discussed above, included among proponents of the substantive – inclusive narrative are Gus Miftah and Gus Muwafiq, whereas the legal formalistic – exclusive mindset is represented by Ustad Khalid Basalamah. In the case of Ustad Basalamah, he is not only renowned for having legal formalistic – exclusive understanding but also for having radical tendencies, as discovered in the findings of the Center for the Study of Islam and Society (PPIM) UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta.⁴²

Conclusion

Based on the discussion above, there are three important points that must be emphasized. First, in the last decade social media has transformed into a new social space, a place where every individual can establish social relationships, communicate with each other, befriend others, and even conduct religious dawah activities. At the

⁴⁰ Karyudi Sutajah Putra, 'Perang Narasi Islam Di Media Sosial, Begini Penjelasan Putri Gus Dur', *Kab News (Blog)*, 27 January 2022, <https://kabnews.id/perang-narasi-islam-di-media-sosial-begini-penjelasan-putri-gus-dur/>.

⁴¹ PPIM UIN Jakarta, 'Pakar: Perlu Kolaborasi Redam Konservatisme Agama Di Medsos', *PPIM UIN Jakarta (Blog)*, 17 November 2020, <https://ppim.uinjkt.ac.id/2020/11/17/pakar-perlu-kolaborasi-redam-konservatisme-agama-di-medsos/>.

⁴² Saiful Mujani and Freedom Institute (Jakarta, Indonesia), eds., *Benturan Peradaban: Sikap Dan Perilaku Islamis Indonesia Terhadap Amerika Serikat* (Jakarta: Diterbitkan atas kerjasama Freedom Institute, PPIM – UIN Jakarta [dan] Nalar, 2005).

religious level, the use of social media facilities is embodied in the prevalence of religious figures, such as ustadhs and preachers, who are actively carrying out religious activities in the cyberspace. They use various digital platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. Second, the use of the internet as a dawah channel has implications on the shift of religious narrative, from taking place in conventional space to now taking place in online social media platforms. Contestations and debates regarding religion no longer occur only in traditional spaces such as mosques, prayer spaces, and religious study assemblies. Instead, they have moved to the more elastic cyberspace of social media. Third, based on the issues that have developed in recent years, the contestation of religious discourse among Muslim dawah activists in Indonesia on social media channels has revolved around four major issues, namely, the issues of pork rendang, regulations on loudspeakers in mosques and prayer spaces, and lastly wayang puppet art performances. Based on the religious practice, the contestation of religious narrative among Muslim preachers in Indonesia can be categorized into two: the substantive–inclusive narrative, which emphasizes on the philosophical content and basis of an religious issue, and the legal formalistic–exclusive narrative, which tend to be normative, rigid, and literal in religious interpretation. Legal formalistic–exclusive narrative can be found in the religious stance and paradigm of conservative dawah activists. Whereas substantive–inclusive can be found in the narratives advocated by moderate dawah groups.

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