

THE TRANSMISSION OF ISLAMIC POPULISM AND EXTREMIST IDEOLOGY THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA IN INDONESIA

Ahmad Khoiri

Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta

ahmad.khoiri20@mhs.uinjkt.ac.id

Faizi

Universitas Pembangunan Nasional Veteran Jakarta

faizi.feb@upnvj.ac.id

Jindar Muttaqin

Avicenna Research Center, Indonesia

jindar.muttaqin@gmail.com

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan mengkaji transmisi ekstremisme yang terjadi di media sosial dan menjadi *musabab* merebaknya populisme Islam di Indonesia. Sementara kalangan beranggapan bahwa populisme identik dengan satu organisasi, yaitu FPI, dengan mobilisasi massa simbolis semisal 212, dan setelah eksistensinya terlarang ia tidak lagi menyebar dengan perhitungan yang berarti. Tulisan ini hendak mengulas bahwa di media sosial, ternyata populisme Islam justru menguat dan transmisi ekstremisme menjadi tren kalangan populis itu sendiri. Di YouTube, kanal Khilafah Channel dan Fokus Khilafah Channel *concern* membuat konten provokasi masyarakat dengan pemerintah sembari menyuguhkan gagasan khilafah ala HTI. Sementara itu, web keislaman seperti suaraislam.id dan kiblath.net juga masif membingkai berita seputar Muhammad Rizieq Shihab *vis-à-vis* polemik pemerintah. Di Facebook, akun dan fanspage representasi Muslim populis secara terstruktur tidak ada, tetapi narasi populisme bertebaran secara personal. Polarisasi ekstremisme kemudian menjadi perkara tak terhindarkan, yang bisa dilacak melalui trending tagar harian di Twitter. Para radikal-ekstremis bersatu, dengan musuh yang sama: pemerintah, dan narasi yang seirama: menawarkan sistem baru pemerintahan yang lebih islami, yang menyebar kemudian melalui pelbagai konten di YouTube. Penelitian ini bersifat kualitatif dengan metode deskriptif analitis terhadap narasi-narasi di pelbagai *platform* tersebut. Hasil penelitian menyimpulkan bahwa sekalipun hari-hari ini tidak ada lagi mobilisasi massa berjilid-jilid, populisme Islam tetap terlestarikan melalui transmisi ekstremisme di pelbagai *platform* media sosial. Sejumlah kebijakan membuat kaum populis, sementara, seolah terkerangkeng. Faktanya, tinggal menunggu momentum. Bahkan sekalipun organisasi formal mereka terlarang dan dibubarkan, eksistensi mereka tidak berkurang, hanya pindah tempat. Media sosial menjadi sarana paling aman bagi populisme Islam, ekstremisme dan benih-benihnya.

Kata Kunci: Ekstremisme; Media Sosial; Populisme Islam

Abstract

This study aims to examine the transmission of Islamic extremist ideology that massively flourishes in social media and causes the spread of Islamic populism voice in Indonesia represented by the Islamic Defender Front (Front Pembela Islam/FPI) . Despite the official banning of the organization in 2019, Islamic populism indeed still resonates clearly on social media and indicates the growing trend of Islamic populism in Indonesian mediascape. The *khilafah* ideology is still a stirring issue on YouTube Khilafah Channel and Khilafah Focus Channel. Meanwhile, Islamic websites such as Suaraislam.id and kiblata.net also massively frame news about Muhammad Rizieq Shihab vis-à-vis the government's polemic. On Facebook, accounts and fanspages of important populist Muslim leader seem to silence but are broadcasted through new populist converts. This populist narratives which later invites ideological polarization within Indonesian Muslim are also observable through daily trending hashtags on Twitter. Radical and extremists narratives are in concert to attack the government and offering Islamic governance as an alternative to secular. These narratives are flourishing through social media platforms and uploaded-video on YouTube. This article employs a qualitative study and uses descriptive analytical methods to analyze the populism narratives on the various social media platforms. It concludes that even though mass mobilizations in huge are at the moment absence, Islamic populism narrative becomes massively widespread and transmitted through social media platforms. Thus, it is mistaken to argue that, following the banning of radical and extremist organization, the populism ideology is declining. As a matter of fact, social media have been essential virtual place for the transmission of Islamic populism and extremist ideology.

Keyword: Extremism; Social Media; Islamic Populism

Introduction

At the final-half decade, there has been a significant escalation of Islamic narratives in Indonesia, particularly among urbanized middle class Muslim who are increasingly more Islamic, or even 'overdosed Islamic.' The promises of Indonesian reformation in 1998 seem to be at distance for sacrificing democratic principles and values. Resistance to democracy itself continues and has negatively impacted the ideals that Indonesian Muslim reformers, such as Nurcholish Madjid and Abdurrahman Wahid, had campaigned. Meanwhile, in reality, day-to-day efforts to contrast Islam and the secular state have been actually strengthening and calling for majority-favoritism politics. The political scientist Vedi R. Hadiz affirms that Indonesia has been plunged into an 'illiberal democracy' following the proliferation of populist movements.¹ The narrative of Islamic populism has disseminated both in the real world and in cyberspace which resorts as a new space for public contestation. As Gary R. Bunt argues, electronic jihad, fatwas in Islamic networks and cyber circles become an effective vehicle for the dissemination of religious opinion.² Through social media, expression and even transmission of Islamic ideas find free space and become a strategy for identity formation through the dissemination of religious values.³

It is important to note that the social media referred to here are not limited to Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Personal blogs, websites, and media contents, such as YouTube and TikTok, have allowed people to instantly interact with each other. Today, YouTube and TikTok provide live chat features; thus, in addition to comments, direct interaction between users has now been facilitated. In those media, the narrative of Islamic populism and the extremism transmission finds its place along with the rising number of internet users in Indonesia.⁴ On Facebook, the most popular social media, posts tend to be dualistic; positive and negative, soothing or even inviting polemics.⁵ These texts have been transformed

¹ Vedi R. Hadiz, *Populisme Islam di Indonesia dan Timur Tengah*, (Depok: LP3ES, 2019), xxii.

² Gary R. Bunt, *Islam in the Digital Age: E-Jihad, Online Fatwas and Cyber Islamic Environments*, (Virginia: Pluto Press, 2003), 2.

³ Bunt, *Islam in the Digital Age: E-Jihad, Online Fatwas and Cyber Islamic Environments*, (Virginia: Pluto Press, 2003), 4-5.

⁴ Redaksi, "Kilas Balik Radikalisme 2019," *Majalah Jalandamai*, Edisi Januari 2019, 14.

⁵ Muhammad Wildan, *Kontestasi Islam di Facebook; Studi Sociolinguistik*, (Tangerang Selatan: Cinta Buku Media, 2017), 51.

into social events,⁶ or what today is known as ‘social narrative.’ Facebook is the freest social media in which da’wah, provocation, hoax and indoctrination nest. In this study, personal account observations were not carried out. Hate speech on Facebook is probably incalculable since there is no limit whatsoever to uploading content. Meanwhile, observations on Twitter were more structured since they can be done by looking at daily trends. Since Habib Rizieq’s return from Saudi Arabia until he is in prison now, the hashtag of Islamic populism narrative is very massive. For example, hashtags about Rizieq Shihab and the government include #JokowiTurun, #HRSBikinIstanaMenggigil, #KamiBersamaHabibana, bluffing such as #JokowiTakutFPI, #SayaPercayaFPI, #TuntaskanKasus_KM50, #BebaskanHRS_AdiliKM50, #JannahUntukSyuhadaFPI, and the newest was #StopKriminalisasi_IBHRS as a response to the alleged involvement of FPI in terrorism that cornered Habib Rizieq’s name. If these emotional fires were not hashtags, they might turn into actions to defend Islam. On YouTube, the narrative is even more complex as politicians also provide comments. However, the most consistent example of the extremism transmission is the tireless indoctrination as can be found in *Khilafah Channel*. Every day, there is a narrative of the caliphate; the study of dust, war, and other anti-status quo khilafahism narratives.

There are two theoretical frameworks that the author used as a conceptual paradigm in analyzing Islamic populism and the trend of extremism in social media, namely contestation theory and Islamization.⁷ Contents on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, which are often also in the form of content sharing from Islamic websites, are in the context of narrative contestation and an Islamization agenda. Through contestation theory, populist narratives on social media will be mapped as the embodiment of the people’s political emotions which are visualized into tendentious texts including provocation, hoax, and hate speech. Meanwhile, through the theory of Islamization, the extremism transmission emerged as an alternative to da’wah after the government banned and/or dissolved Islamic organizations which were indicated to undermine diversity and conflict with the Pancasila ideology. In addition, the author used the theory of surveillance capitalism from Shoshana Zuboff stating that a smart

⁶ Norman Fairclough, *Analyzing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*, (London: Routledge, 2003), 21.

⁷ Lihat, misalnya, Wildan, *Kontestasi Islam di Facebook; Studi Sosiolinguistik*, (Tangerang Selatan: Cinta Buku Media, 2017), 39.

machine is not something that is independent but controlled.⁸ Social media platforms contribute to polarization through the work of algorithms; displays the most closely, frequently, and correlatively matched content.

Through the descriptive-analytical method, this research describes and analyzes the narratives of Islamic populism that are scattered on the platforms as mentioned earlier, as well as its relation to the transformation of extreme religious understanding on social media. Thus, there are three formulations of the problem to be answered in this study. First, why will Islamic populism, even though Hadiz said it lost in the realm of civil society and the government, never retreats from embedding its narrative in Indonesia and what are the impacts? Second, what are the strong indications of the transformation of extremism in social media and why is it happening? Third, why does Islamic moderation seem powerless in the face of populist narratives and extreme religious beliefs? Through these three questions, a portrait of Islamic populism and the extremism transformation on social media is presented. That social media, these days, has shifted from its main function to a relatively risky direction; a means of strengthening Islamism—perpetuating its existence as a national challenge.

Islamic Populism; Existence and Potential

Vedi R. Hadiz through his *Islamic Populism in Indonesia and the Middle East*, managed to uncover the reasons why Islamic populism in Indonesia lost in two sectors at once; civil society and the government, do not have strong legitimacy to represent the people,⁹ perhaps some will comment that the populists in this country are dead and no longer need to worry. Such a conclusion is not entirely wrong, but it is not always true either. The historicity of populism in the world often shows its fluctuating existence. In general, populism itself can also have positive and negative meanings, so defining it objectively is difficult. However, the discussion of the definition can be done by going to the root of the word and the history of populism itself.

The term populism refers to a set of political attitudes that emphasize the idea of ‘the people’, often contradicted to ‘the elite’. Populism is defined as a political program or movement that fights for, or claims to fight for ordinary people, which is usually in contrast to the elite or the

⁸ Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*, (New York: PublicAffairs, 2019), 10.

⁹ Hadiz, *Populisme Islam di Indonesia dan Timur Tengah*, (Depok: LP3ES, 2019), xv.

establishment. This means that populism is a political style used to mobilize mass movements against the forces of those in power. Populists claim to speak for the population, taking an “us against them” stance—using outrageous rhetoric or pitching conspiracy theories.¹⁰ However, Tjitske Akkerman affirms the duality of the meaning of populism as mentioned earlier, that populism can ideally manifest as a challenge to democracy towards an ideal, not a political pathology. This is because populism is no longer exclusively synonymous with radical novelty, but rather a progressive step, provided that it remains within the control of constitutional limits.¹¹

However, in the Indonesian context, populism has a negative connotation because, in practice, it is often transformed into identity politics. In Hadiz’s analysis, Islam is used as a force for populism as a consequence that it inevitably uses symbolism. The adaptation of Islamic romanticism for certain political purposes is a powerful weapon to ignite the rebellious spirit of the Muslim population.¹² The terms ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’ are politically dragged into the term ‘*ummah*’ which clashes with the ‘regime’, resulting in emotionally igniting narratives such as ‘Islam against infidels¹³; blasphemers of religion; blasphemers of the Qur’an; blasphemy of the Prophet; tyrannical regimes and the like. The narrative is that all these struggles are solely for the sovereignty and glory of Islam. In addition, the term ‘regime’ is identified as partisan anti-Islam, tyrannical, communist and applies the *taghut* system.¹⁴ The symbol of populism is clearly visible, for example, through the embedding of the label “*Imam Besar Umah Islam (Great Imam of Muslims)*” on Muhammad Rizieq Shihab—a label created by the Muslim populists themselves.

Rizieq Shihab’s character as the antithesis of the government has hegemonically brought Islamic populism to evaporate until now. Lack of space in the real world—because the government banned the FPI, detained the Great Imam and blocked the organization’s finances—is not an obstacle.

¹⁰ Ulasan historis tentang populisme bisa dilihat dalam, misalnya, Ahmad Khoiri (ed.), *Menakar NKRI Bubar*, (Jakarta: Pusataka Harkatuna, 2021), 8-12.

¹¹ Tjitske Akkerman, “Populism and Democracy: Challenge or Pathology?”, *Acta Politica*, Volume 38, 2003, 158.

¹² Hadiz, *Populisme Islam di Indonesia dan Timur Tengah*, (Depok: LP3ES, 2019), 63.

¹³ The term kafir and its derivation in the Qur’an connotes two meanings: theological infidel and moral infidel. For more, see Muhammad Hamdan, “Filosofi Kafir dalam Al-Qur’an: Analisis Hermeneutik Schleiermacher,” *Jurnal Tashwirul Afkar*, vol. 38, no. 02, 2020, 290-291.

¹⁴ Khoiri (ed.), *Menakar NKRI Bubar*, 14.

On the contrary, as Hadiz argues, Islamic populism does not have to culminate in identity politics alone,¹⁵ but also includes the real situation of the political climate that demands a public response. Thus, the banning of FPI would never stop the populist narrative. The arrest of Habib Rizieq has ignited the rebellious spirit of struggle against injustice among his followers. Thus, on many social media platforms, framing of Rizieq Shihab *vis-à-vis* the tyranny of the regime continues. On YouTube, the channel 'Pecinta Habib Rizieq Syihab'¹⁶ keeps burning the emotions of Muslims through uploaded video contents. On Thursday (25/3/2021), the content titled "Jelang Sidang Offline, Dipenjara Karena Menang Debat (Ahead of the Offline Session, Imprisoned for Winning the Debate)" was uploaded and later followed by the latest content with a similar topic: "Jaksa Berbohong Habib Rizieq Naik Pitam (Prosecutor Lies, Habib Rizieq is mad." Within two weeks, there have been 26 videos covering the trial of Habib Rizieq with hundreds of thousands of viewers. Likewise, on Tuesday (11/24/2020), Habib Rizieq's framing even dragged the name of the Prophet, through content entitled "Fakta...Ulama Ini Bermimpi Bertemu Rasulullah Saw Soal Habib Rizieq Syihab, Habib Muhammad Alhaddad (Fact...This Ulama Dreams of encountering the Messenger of Allah about Habib Rizieq Syihab, Habib Muhammad Alhaddad." In short, the content in the channel frames the Great Imam as the figure of *habaib*—a symbol of the highest hierarchy of figures in the view of populists—who is the most perfect and persistent in fighting for Islam, but now it seems that he is in the middle of the crush of a tyrannical and hypocritical regime.

In addition, the Kiblat.net¹⁷ run by FPI sympathizers keeps posting similar tone articles. Articles entitled "Sidang Online HRS dan Kezaliman yang Berlanjut (HRS Online Trial and Continuing Harassment)," "Kiblatorial: Generasi 212, Generasi Al-Quran (Kiblatorial: Generation of 212, Generation of Al-Quran)," "Kiblatorial: Usut! (Kiblatorial: Investigate!)," "Skenario Menggugurkan Praperadilan Kedua HRS (Scenarios to Abort HRS's Second Pretrial)," "Dualisme Penanganan Perkara Penembakan Pengawal HRS (Dualism in Handling Cases of Shooting of HRS Guards)," "Dampak Meninggalkan Kewajiban Mencegah Kemungkaran (Impacts Abandoning the Obligation to Prevent Evil)," or "Polisi dan Pelanggaran HAM Berat (Police

¹⁵ Hadiz, *Populisme Islam di Indonesia dan Timur Tengah*, (Depok: LP3ES, 2019), 6.

¹⁶ YouTube Channel of Pecinta Habib Rizieq Syihab can be accessed through: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC8LJ_hvo2QbA3rcYMkNBOOA.

¹⁷ All article described here can be fully accessed via the link: <https://www.kiblat.net/>.

and Serious Human Rights Violations)" are clear manifestations of populist narrative.

In fact, Muslims are currently experiencing problems with religious democracy which, in Wasito Rahardjo's term, is called "a conservative turn," an intolerant society, urban jihad, and a religious claimant.¹⁸ Conservative turn manifests itself with the rise of the cult of ulama, especially *habaib*, as an attitude of *taklid* of the people to the leader. In this case, Habib Rizieq is the symbolic climax of the cult. Meanwhile, religious claimants who manifest through acts of piety in public spaces based on religious symbols can be seen, for example, in the sudden piousness of the political elite. Munarman, Slamet Ma'arif, and even Amien Rais today are more religious than they were a decade ago. Islamic populism is indeed manipulative. Ironically, many people who like the intrigues of the populist hypocrisy—become their devotees.

Furthermore, Hadiz firmly said that Islamic populism is difficult to silence for three reasons. First, social and structural conditions keep providing opportunities, apart from intrigues at the level of the political elite. Mobilization for the interests of the elite is still happening, both at the national and regional levels. Second, the issue of economic injustice is closely related to issues that accommodate political raw materials for Muslim populists. The narrative about the economic decline of the Muslim-majority due to the government's corrupt policies in favor of non-Muslim minorities is something that stirs the emotions of Muslims. Third, there has been a mainstreaming of moral conservatism in the Indonesian political lexicon.¹⁹

However, according to the author, there are two more reasons that existentially Islamic populism will never recede. First, the discourse of threats to the existence of Islam which appear, for example, through the massive anti-communist narrative echoed by the populists. In fact, everyone knows, the discourse is unfounded, and communism will not rise. Populists simply play a narrative, and people at the grassroots swallow the discourse as a very terrible threat—supported by the collective trauma of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI)'s atrocities in the past.²⁰ It may also be

¹⁸ Wasito Rahardjo Jati, "Trajektori Populisme Islam di Kalangan Kelas Menengah Muslim Indonesia," *Prisma*, Volume 36, No. 3, 2017, 22.

¹⁹ Hadiz, *Populisme Islam di Indonesia dan Timur Tengah*, (Depok: LP3ES, 2019), xx.

²⁰ Alasan yang pertama ini sebenarnya sudah pernah penulis ulas. Lihat, Khoiri (ed.), *Menakar NKRI Bubar*, 21.

because, as emphasized by As'ad Said Ali, the populist narrative that brings up primordial issues, i.e., religion, into electoral politics is actually not only happening in Indonesia. Right-wing populism has also won Donald Trump in the presidency of the United States by playing the issue of terrorism and anti-Muslim immigration. Said Ali considers that all of this does not only contain negative elements, because it can be a correction to a way of politics that is too rational and oriented towards secular democracy.²¹

Second, social media has liberalized public spaces. Hoaxes, hate speeches, and hate spins took part in playing religious sentiments by involving symbolic figures such as Habib Rizieq and his confrontation with the government. Social media, regardless of the type of platform, becomes a kind of mood booster so that people's emotions never subside. The situation will be different if all the content on social media is objective that their idol is really guilty and must be prosecuted, then the people's antipathy to the regime will clearly decrease. In fact, social media is deliberately projected that way. Populists do take advantage of it. Indeed, there will be no marches like the Defending Islam Action volumes I-VII, nor will there be a reunion at Monas, which incidentally is a symbol of the uproar of Islamic populism. However, social media has taken over the role, so their existence will not fade at all. It is just moving places, not destroyed. The hashtags on Twitter would be concrete evidence of this, as well as hoaxes on Facebook. Opposition political elites are also starting to become YouTubers.

Finally, Islamic populism tends to polarize opponents of the government. In the future, there will be no significant difference between FPI and HTI, or even with terrorist organizations such as JI and JAD. All blend in a rhythmic narrative against the government. One acts with provocative narratives on social media, and the other acts through terror. Eventually, it can no longer be distinguished who the actors behind terrorism are. It is possible that the perpetrators are inspired by terrorist ideology, but it is also possible that they are inspired by populist narratives. Both populists and terrorists rely on one thing that endangers everyone: they have the potential to do anything for their political ends. To be remembered, this is all because of social media, which from its ideal function of disseminating information has turned frightening into a hotbed for spreading propaganda.

²¹ As'ad Said Ali, *Islam, Pancasila dan Kerukunan Berbangsa*, (Depok: Pustaka LP3ES, 2019), 130.

Extremism on Social Media

Extremism is a real treat for Indonesian as it culminates also to terrorists' attacks. The most recent terror are the suicide bombing in front of the Makassar Cathedral Church on Sunday (28/3/2021)²² and, three days following the attack, the Zakiah Aini terror at the National Police Headquarters²³ on Wednesday (31/3/2021). A number of terrorism analysts appeared on public screens giving explanations, and counter-terrorism activities in various Islamic media were revived. The attacks point to Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and Jemaah Ansharud Daulah (JAD) as the organization structure responsible for the attacks. Ayik Heriansyah, the ex-Chairman of HTI Bang Kabelitung, as of 2021, said there have been 73 terrorists from JI and JAD arrested by the police.²⁴ The number continues to grow. The trend of terrorism in Indonesia then discovered a new fact that apart from JI and JAD affiliations, acts of terror also tend to be carried out by self-initiated (lone wolf), without negating the possibility that regardless of affiliation, and the strongest driving factor for such acts is ideology. Terror, then, is the final consequence of extremist's ideology.

Salafi, Wahhabi, and *takfiri* are the three ideological platforms often mentioned as the roots of extremism. Said Aqil Siradj, the current chairman of PBNU, even called Salafis and Wahhabis as extremist's ideologies that open the door to terrorism. Said stated, "Wahhabi teachings are not terrorism, no, Wahhabism is not terrorism, but the entrance. If it is Wahhabi, 'this is polytheism, this is heresy, this is heretical, this is not allowed, this is infidel, it is one more step, one more step it is lawful to kill the blood'. So, the roots of terrorism are Wahhabis and Salafis ideology as they are extremists' doctrine."²⁵

²² Kompas, "Bom Gereja Katedral Makassar: Kronologi Kejadian, Keterangan Polisi, dan Sikap Presiden," <https://www.kompas.com/tren/read/2021/03/29/100000165/bom-gereja-katedral-makassar-kronologi-kejadian-keterangan-polisi-dan-sikap?page=all> (accessed on 3 April 2021).

²³ Kompas, "Detik-detik Mabes Polri Diserang, Terduga Teroris Masuk lalu Todongkan Senjata ke Polisi," <https://megapolitan.kompas.com/read/2021/04/01/05423911/detik-detik-mabes-polri-diserang-terduga-teroris-masuk-lalu-todongkan?page=all> (accessed on 3 April 2021).

²⁴ Ayik Heriansyah, "Bom Gereja di Makassar Pesan Teroris Untuk Densus," <https://harakatuna.com/bom-gereja-di-makassar-pesan-teroris-untuk-densus.html> (accessed on 3 April 2021).

²⁵ Detik, "Said Aqil: Pintu Masuk Terorisme Adalah Ajaran Wahabi dan Salafi, Habisi!," <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-5513631/said-aqil-pintu-masuk-terorisme-adalah-ajaran-wahabi-dan-salafi-habisi> (accessed on 3 April 2021).

The terms '*salaf*', 'Salafi', and 'Wahhabi' tell different meanings and put an emphasis on different theological understandings.²⁶ Adhering a certain Islamic theological school (*ittiba'*) connotes also different meaning an is essential to understand different approach to Islamic practices. Sa'id Ramadhan al-Buthi, who was assassinated while lecturing, argues that *ittiba'* the schools and methodologies of the Salaf is obligatory²⁷ because the Salaf are those who lived in times of the Prophet and in subsequent periods after. However, containing the Salaf into the Salafi school is a heretic for inferring exclusive and fanatical ideology. Furthermore, he explained, "those who follow this school must follow all the principles and rules they have made and reject anything that does not suit them."²⁸

Then, the question is 'how the Salafi relates to ideological extremism'. For Al-Buthi, ideological dynamic is the key to comprehend the two. The Salafis, and so do the Wahhabis, condemned Islamic interpretation which contradict to their theological understanding²⁹. The Salafi and the Wahabi are no longer an Islamic purification movement—which is also manipulative and ideological—but instead become a resistance to ideas that differ to their truth claim. As a result, Salafis and Wahhabis tend to excommunicate (*takfir*) Muslim who has different understanding. The *takfiri* movement is the source of radicalism³⁰ as the Salafis insist to abolish the non-Islamic system of government, *taghut*, while promising to establish the Islamic caliphate.

Indonesian Salafi-jihadist organizations (*tanzhim*) with their extremist ideology are present during the course of Indonesian history. Their agenda had emerged since the Old Order era, later was silenced by the New Order era due to the repression of the Suharto regime, then reemerged freely in the Reformation era. The Front Pembela Islam (Islamic Defenders Front) (FPI) with the idea of formalizing the Shari'a aspires to create a Shari'ah

²⁶ Unlike the last two terms, the term '*salaf*' is not a particular school. They are the companions of the Prophet, the *tabi'in*, and the followers of the *tabi'in*, which is commonly known as the times that get the priority (*al-qurun al-mufaddalah*) or *salaf al-sali* For more, Endang Madali, *Sikap Pengikut Salafi Wahabi di Indonesia dalam Masalah Khilafiyah*, (Bogor: PT Bakti Insan Globalindo, 2015), 87.

²⁷ Sa'id Ramadhan al-Buthi, *Salafi: Sebuah Fase Sejarah Bukan Mazhab*, translated by Futuhal Arifin, (Jakarta: Gema Insani Press, 2005), 272.

²⁸ Al-Buthi, *Salafi: Sebuah Fase Sejarah Bukan Mazhab*, translated by Futuhal Arifin, (Jakarta: Gema Insani Press, 2005), 275.

²⁹ Jamhari and Jajang Jahroni (ed.), *Gerakan Salafi Radikal di Indonesia*, (Jakarta: PT RajaGrafindo Persada, 2004), viii-ix.

³⁰ Jamhari and Jajang Jahroni (ed.), *Gerakan Salafi Radikal di Indonesia*, (Jakarta: PT RajaGrafindo Persada, 2004), viii-ix.

NKRI (*NKRI Bersyariah*), while Hizbut-Tahrir with its Khilafah Tahririyah aspires to overhaul the government system. The Ikhwanul Muslimin was an Islamist organization with intellectual background and in Indonesia is represented by the Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS). The Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (Indonesian Mujahidin Council) (MMI) is not as lethal as the Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (East Indonesia Mujahidin) (MIT).³¹ However, the most active of all remained JI and JAD, as was mentioned earlier. Although all of them are fundamentalist in character,³² these organizations cannot be generalized. FPI accepts Pancasila and is based on the *ahl as-sunnah wa al-jama'ah*. HTI only plays a narrative, and does seriously takes military steps to take over the state, in contrast to MIT, which often engages in terrorist attacks.

The Indonesian government has officially disbanded the HTI on the basis of ideological treat, whereas the state abolished the FPI for administrative reason that the FPI did not follow the procedures to extend the Certificate of Registration (SKT). As for the abolishment of these two organisations, Hadiz sees that the President Jokowi has imposed “repressive measurement”³³ to tackle treats of extremism. Nevertheless, the official abolishment of the HTI and the FPI failed to prevent extremist ideology as it is massively disseminated through social media platforms. There are two official HTI YouTube channels are still active to disseminate transnational caliphate; Khilafah Channel videos have been watched 2,300,755 times and Fokus Khilafah Channel with a total of 1,189,111 views as of Saturday (3/4/2021). Khilafah Channel mainly broadcasts HTI *khilafah* ideology, whereas the Fokus Khilafah Channel contains the HTI sermons by its spokesperson, Ismail Yusanto. Videos with titles, such as “Daulah Islam (Islamic State)”, “Khilafah Wajib Hanya Menerapkan Syariat Islam (Caliphate Must Only Apply Islamic Shari’a)”, “Khilafah & Hadits Fitnah Akhir Zaman (Caliphate & Hadith Slander at the End of Times)”, “Pemimpin Fasik: Sebab Kehancuran Sebuah Negeri (Wicked Leaders: Cause of the Destruction of a Country)” or “Taat Kepada Allah atau Taat Kepada Para Penghianat? (Obey to Allah or Obey Traitors?)” were regularly broadcasted.³⁴ On Friday (12/3/2021), the channel held a study entitled

³¹ Jamhari and Jahroni (ed.), *Gerakan Salafi Radikal di Indonesia*, x.

³² Konotasi fundamentalisme ialah mengedepankan kekerasan ketika menghadapi lawan. Lihat, Adib Hasani, “Kontradiksi dalam Konsep Politik Islam Eksklusif Sayyid Quthb,” *Epistémé*, vol. 11, no. 1, June 2016, 3.

³³ Hadiz, *Populisme Islam di Indonesia dan Timur Tengah*, (Depok: LP3ES, 2019), xix.

³⁴ Semua konten tersebut dapat diakses melalui link: <https://www.youtube.com/c/KhilafahChannel/videos>.

“Benarkah Khilafah Akan Ditegakkan oleh Imam Mahdi? (Is it true that the caliphate will be upheld by Imam Mahdi?). On Thursday (25/3/2021), a study was held for the Preamble of Datur “Kontrol Khalifah terhadap Mu’awin (Control of the Caliph against Mu’awin).”

On the Fokus Khilafah Channel, Ismail Yusanto keeps sending his lectures with titles such as “HTI Lanjutkan Perjuangan dan Bukan Ormas Terlarang (HTI Continues Struggle and Not a Forbidden Social Organization)”, “Benarkah Khilafah Ajaran Radikal? (Is it true that the Caliphate Teachings is Radical?),” “Bagaimana Nasib Non-Muslim di Negara Khilafah Kelak? (What will be the fate of non-Muslims in the Caliphate State in the future?)” and “Menjawab Tudingan Khilafah Sebagai Ancaman (Responding to the Caliphate’s Allegation as a Threat)”.³⁵ Different from FPI whose narrative orientation is the image of Habib Rizieq as a symbol of genuine Islam, HTI is more structured because their leader are educated ones. If analyzed using a contestation framework, they are building an image to the public that they are the only organization firmly struggling for the teachings of Islam. Thus, it is argued that the HTI ideology is still prevalent, particularly on social media.

According to Ayik Heriansyah, the *da’wah* of Ismail Yusanto, as HTI Spokesman who was appointed directly by the International Amir of Hizbut-Tahrir, used *tauriyah* rhetoric, i.e., “ambiguous expressions with multiple interpretations. Words whose meaning is captured by the interlocutor are different from the meaning intended by the speaker. The speaker deliberately hides the true meaning for reasons of ethics, security and safety.”³⁶ All HTI chaplains use this method to secretly invite the audience. For example, when discussing the *dustur* of the caliphate, the message is actually that their *dustur* is better than the constitution of the Republic of Indonesia. Another example is a commentary study entitled “Method of Interpretation of the Qur’an” on Monday (15/3/2021), referring to the method of Taqiyuddin an-Nabhani, the founder of Hizbut-Tahrir, whose methodical orientation is textual and nuanced confrontation.³⁷

³⁵ All video contents can be accessed on <https://www.youtube.com/c/FokusKhilafahChannel/videos>.

³⁶ Ayik Heriansyah, *Mengenal HTI Melalui Rasa Hati*, (Jakarta: Pustaka Harakatuna, 2020), 256-257.

³⁷ Memahami teks Al-Qur’an dan mengesampingkan realitas bertendensi menghasilkan tafsir ekstrem. Ayat perang dan tahkim adalah bukti konkret atas ini. Selengkapnya lihat, Tim AFKAR, *Kritik Ideologi Radikal: Deradikalisasi Doktrin Keagamaan Ekstrem dalam Upaya Meneguhkan Islam Berwawasan Kebangsaan*, (Kediri: Lirboyo Press, 2019), 34.

However, it is actually not the discourse on the method of interpretation that they want to present, but the offer of a method that allows someone to produce a confrontational-textual interpretation and justify against the government system. Furthermore, the “new Muslim convert (*hijra*)” celebrities, such as Arie Untung and Teuku Wisnu, who collaborated with Felix Siauw, the most popular HTI figure, and at one time collaborated with Khalid Basalamah, a Salafi figure, are also active to campaign for HTI ideology. Being social-media influencers, these celebrities are crucial to popularize the HTI ideology.

Challenges to Islamic Moderation

On 8 August 2019, the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs launched the book and the project of *Moderasi Agama*. The event invited media reports as representatives of important Muslim leaders and organisations joined attended the launch.³⁸ However, it is important to underline that fighting populist Muslims and extremists is not enough to launch a book, let alone a scientific book for academic products that is only in the hands of academics. For the extremists, it has no effect. The mainstreaming of Islam by Salafi-Wahhabi circles is more tactical, so that even though the ideal of religion is moderate (*tawassut*), extremists are trapped by the doctrine of no compromise with diversity.

Muslims in Indonesia are in the vortex of a very strong ideological contestation. Parents are not able to control their children from the tendency to choose the wrong ideology. Along with the dominance of technology, their interactions with their children are increasingly insulated. Extremism afflicts the youth with peak religious zeal but lack of knowledge about hard vs soft ideology, nationalist vs Islamist ideology, and *wasathiyah* vs extremism.³⁹ Interestingly, the feud is not influenced by the ideal concept, but the public’s reaction to reality. If the people of the Old Order era were asked who Kartosoewirjo was, they would answer that he was a fighter for the Islamic State, while believing that Soekarno’s nationalism was fighting fiercely in his time to defend the Unitary Republic of Indonesia. Meanwhile, if millennials are asked who is Habib Rizieq, Ismail Yusanto, Felix Siauw, or

³⁸ Kemenag, “Menag Luncurkan Buku Moderasi Beragama,” <https://kepri.kemenag.go.id/page/det/menag-luncurkan-buku-moderasi-beragama> (accessed on 4 April 2021).

³⁹ According to Quraish Shihab, these two antonym terms go hand in hand. Practicing moderation is tantamount to avoiding extremism; and vice versa, doing the extreme distances from *wasathiyah*. For more: M. Quraish Shihab, *Wasathiyah: Wawasan Islam tentang Moderasi Beragama*, (Tangerang: Lentera Hati, 2019), 113.

Khalid Basalamah, the answer may be quite surprising: “they are the guides of the people who are patient and persistent in fighting for Allah’s rights through straight Islam.”

The important question is, why in practice, Islamic moderation seems powerless in the face of Islamic populism narratives and extreme religious beliefs, and why on social media, the sympathy of the people for Habib Rizieq and their closeness to Salafi preachers is more lively than moderate ones. Those are the challenges for moderation itself. Islamic populism and extremism find an established place in terms of their existence on social media. Their transformation using new media escalates quickly rather than stagnant and ineffective countermeasures. Azyumardi Azra confirmed the absence of such effectiveness, saying that mainstream Islam is represented by NU, Muhammadiyah, Nahdhatul Wathan and others when preaching Islamic moderation; rejecting violence in *amar ma’ruf nahi mun’kar*, losing prestige and not being heard much.⁴⁰ It is undeniable that Salafi and Wahhabi mainstreaming has been successful, so that what is truly mainstream⁴¹ seems to be foreign and unattractive to follow. With a somewhat paradoxical language, political Islam is imaged as not genuine by the political actors of Islam itself.

Judging from these challenges of Islamic moderation, there are two important to perform. First, the consolidation of the religious moderation project with the radicalism-extremism counter-narrative project. So far, parties who are struggling to promote religious moderation have taken up barriers with those who are concerned about counter-extremism. The reason is understandable; counter-extremism with its reactive nature is often misunderstood as scary, frightening, and dangerous work. Every day, HTI uploads propaganda content on YouTube or their Islamic website; thus, counter-extremism must be reactive to do counter-propaganda. The logical consequence is that it is as if HTI is being attacked, while some consider the counter-narrative to be intolerant and aggressive. In fact, these extreme counter-narratives and counter-propaganda aim to straighten out the misguidance that the extremist breeds present to the public sphere. Therefore, it must be admitted, counter-extremism is a tough and risky job.

⁴⁰ Azyumardi Azra, Noorhaidi Hasan, dkk, *Deradikalisasi: Kontra Radikalisme dan Deideologisasi*, (Jakarta: Puslitbang Lektur Khazanah Keagamaan dan Manajemen Organisasi, 2018), 9.

⁴¹ What mainstream means, connotatively, is the extent to which its teachings are not counter-productive in perceiving the universality of Islam vis-à-vis Indonesian locality. For more, M.B. Hooker, *Indonesian Islam*, (Hawai: University of Hawai’i Press, 2003), 48.

Infrequently, those who intend to straighten out are actually accused of making things worse and spreading provocations.

Meanwhile, religious moderation looks more charming, not scary, not frightening, and not stigmatizing. Steps to promote moderate Islam are more common in the academic environment; there have been a lot of research on Islamic moderation but society never becomes moderate. These two barriers, moderating and counter-narrative, must be discarded. Constantly hitting the Salafi narrative and Islamic populism is something that must be done. This is in order, as Noorhaidi Hasan said, tackling extremism with a population-centric paradigm, namely “an approach that focuses on a long-term strategy to block the rate of influence of radical groups infecting the population and inciting them to commit violence in the name of religion.”⁴² In other words, spreading religious moderation must be simultaneously with counter-extremism. To make people aware that Islam is a religion of peace, while teaching that violence, both attitude and practice, is never justified by Islam.

Second, universal prevention through moderate preachers on social media. After the lone wolf terrorism case at the National Police Headquarters, the perpetrators of which were millennial women, many parties realized that social media has a big role in extremizing someone. Jihad is distorted⁴³ as a naive act of terror, and extremist organizations continue to spread this radical ideology and jihadism to society.⁴⁴ Seeing this fact, moderates must move much more massively in spreading Islamic moderation. This is because the preachers with a conciliatory narrative are still in a measure that is not comparable to the Salafi-Wahhabi preachers. In addition, moderate preachers tend to depart from personal initiatives with limited impressions. Quraish Shihab, for example, attended certain events with a limited audience. Gus Baha is a moderate scholar who through the Santri Gayeng YouTube channel is very active in teaching Islam that is friendly, easy, full of jokes, and not burdensome. Although, as of Sunday (4/4/2021), the entire video has been watched 33,295,169 times, far

⁴² Azyumardi Azra, Noorhaidi Hasan, et al., *Deradikalisasi: Kontra Radikalisme dan Deideologisasi*, (Jakarta: Puslitbang Lektur Khazanah Keagamaan dan Manajemen Organisasi, 2018), 43.

⁴³ Syamsul Arifin, *Populisme, Demokratisasi, dan Multikulturalisme*, (Malang: Intrans Publishing, 2019), 117.

⁴⁴ Azyumardi Azra, Noorhaidi Hasan, dkk, *Deradikalisasi: Kontra Radikalisme dan Deideologisasi*, (Jakarta: Puslitbang Lektur Khazanah Keagamaan dan Manajemen Organisasi, 2018), 39.

exceeding the HTI channel, but how many moderate preachers are as active and massive as Gus Baha? There are no representations from the Ministry of Religion itself.

The International Crisis Group (ICG), as reported by Noorhaidi, once reported on the distribution of books with the theme of jihad and radical Islamic ideas initiated by Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and its publisher network. To counter it, in addition to the ban, the presence of counter-radical books at that time became a necessity. Nowadays, the challenge is no longer books, but social media. If the idea of Islamic moderation only spreads in books and journals, while on social media it is absent, then the winner of the narrative is clear, i.e., the Salafi-Wahhabi with their doctrine of extremism. In fact, the challenge of Islamic moderation is to win public discourse and sympathy. The projection is that through moderation, the Ummah will no longer be trapped by deceptive Islamic populism, nor they will be affected by extreme trends on social media that will plunge them into terrorism. FPI, HTI, MMI, MIT, JI, JAD and other ideological-extremist Islam should not get space in the new media like YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and websites. This is because extremism is not only a gateway to acts of terror, but also a trigger for the destruction of our beloved nation, Indonesia.

Conclusion

There are two factors grinding the existence of Islamic populism and the trend of extremism on social media. First, polarization between radicals. Although politically populist Muslims have lost in the realm of civil society and government, they have adapted by changing their narrative base. If the Defending Islam Action in volume is the Ahok-effect, then the emotions that are sticking out today are not the same, instead of more to the Rizieq-effect. They upload everything about Habib Rizieq on various social media platforms. Even though there are no demonstrations at Monas anymore, they still exist: social media is the basis for polarization. Second, the lack of solidity of Islamic moderation preachers. This is not in order to say that moderates are few and moderation is not effective, but rather to emphasize that Salafi-Wahhabi with its extreme understanding is much more massive and hypnotizing social media audiences, especially the millennial generation. Both Islamic populism and extremism are both transforming in their own way. Different from Islamic populism that spreads on social media through Habib Rizieq's framing, extremism actually transforms from one person to another through the channels of preachers and influencer networks with puritanical Islamic mainstreaming tactics. Populist narratives and extreme understandings are a challenge for efforts to

promote Islamic moderation. Through social media, each exerts influence to indoctrinate extremism. YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter are full of contents that become the gateway to their propaganda: Muslim populists and salespeople of extremism.

References

Book

- Akkerman, Tjitske. "Populism and Democracy: Challenge or Pathology?," *Acta Politica*. Volume 38. 2003.
- Ali, As'ad Said. *Islam, Pancasila dan Kerukunan Berbangsa*. Depok: Pustaka LP3ES, 2019.
- Arifin, Syamsul. *Populisme, Demokratisasi, dan Multikulturalisme*. Malang: Intrans Publishing, 2019.
- Azra, Azyumardi, Noorhaidi Hasan, dkk. *Deradikalisasi: Kontra Radikalisme dan Deideologisasi*. Jakarta: Puslitbang Lektur Khazanah Keagamaan dan Manajemen Organisasi, 2018.
- Būfī, Sa'īd Ramaḍān al-. *Salafi: Sebuah Fase Sejarah Bukan Mazhab*. Terj. Futuhal Arifin. Jakarta: Gema Insani Press, 2005.
- Bunt, Gary R. *Islam in the Digital Age: E-Jihad, Online Fatwas and Cyber Islamic Environments*. Virginia: Pluto Press, 2003.
- Fairclough, Norman. *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*. London: Routledge, 2003.
- Hadiz, Vedi R. *Populisme Islam di Indonesia dan Timur Tengah*. Depok: LP3ES, 2019.
- Heriansyah, Ayik. *Mengenal HTI Melalui Rasa Hati*. Jakarta: Pustaka Harakatuna, 2020.
- Hooker, M.B. *Indonesian Islam*. Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2003.
- Imtiyaz, Mahardika Abu. *Negara Islam Indonesia*. Jakarta: Harakatuna Pustaka, 2019.
- Jahroni, Jamhari dan Jajang (ed.). *Gerakan Salafi Radikal di Indonesia*. Jakarta: PT RajaGrafindo Persada, 2004.
- Khoiri, Ahmad (ed.). *Menakar NKRI Bubar*. Jakarta: Pusataka Harakatuna, 2021.
- Madali, Endang. *Sikap Pengikut Salafi Wahabi di Indonesia dalam Masalah Khilafiyah*. Bogor: PT Bakti Insan Globalindo, 2015.

Shihab, M. Quraish. *Wasathiyah: Wawasan Islam tentang Moderasi Beragama*. Tangerang: Lentera Hati, 2019.

Tim AFKAR. *Kritik Ideologi Radikal: Deradikalisasi Doktrin Keagamaan Ekstrem dalam Upaya Meneguhkan Islam Berwawasan Kebangsaan*. Kediri: Lirboyo Press, 2019.

Wildan, Muhammad. *Kontestasi Islam di Facebook; Studi Sosiolinguistik*. Tangerang Selatan: Cinta Buku Media, 2017.

Zuboff, Shoshana. *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2019.

Media Articles

Detik. "Muhammadiyah: Jika Ada Teroris Salafi, Tak Berarti Salafiyah Identik Terorisme," 2021. Diakses pada tanggal 3 April 2021. <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-5515341/muhammadiyah-jika-ada-teroris-salafi-tak-berarti-salafiyah-identik-terorisme>.

Detik. "Said Aqil: Pintu Masuk Terorisme Adalah Ajaran Wahabi dan Salafi, Habisi!," 2021. Diakses pada tanggal 3 April 2021. <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-5513631/said-aqil-pintu-masuk-terorisme-adalah-ajaran-wahabi-dan-salafi-habisi>.

Heriansyah, Ayik. "Bom Gereja di Makassar Pesan Teroris Untuk Densus," 2021. Diakses pada tanggal 3 April 2021. <https://harakatuna.com/bom-gereja-di-makassar-pesan-teroris-untuk-densus.html>.

Kemenag. "Menag Luncurkan Buku Moderasi Beragama," 2019. Diakses pada tanggal 4 April 2021. <https://kepri.kemenag.go.id/page/det/menag-luncurkan-buku-moderasi-beragama>.

Kompas. "Bom Gereja Katedral Makassar: Kronologi Kejadian, Keterangan Polisi, dan Sikap Presiden," 2021. Diakses pada tanggal 3 April 2021. <https://www.kompas.com/tren/read/2021/03/29/100000165/bom-gereja-katedral-makassar-kronologi-kejadian-keterangan-polisi-dan-sikap?page=all>.

Kompas. "Detik-detik Mabes Polri Diserang, Terduga Teroris Masuk lalu Todongkan Senjata ke Polisi," 2021. Diakses pada tanggal 3 April

2021.

<https://megapolitan.kompas.com/read/2021/04/01/05423911/detik-detik-mabes-polri-diserang-terduga-teroris-masuk-lalu-todongkan?page=all>.

Redaksi. "Kilas Balik Radikalisme 2019," *Majalah Jalandamai*. Januari 2019.

Journal

Hamdan, Muhammad. "Filosofi Kafir dalam Al-Qur'an: Analisis Hermeneutik Schleiermacher," *Jurnal Tashwirul Afkar*. Vol. 38. No. 02. 2020.

Hasani, Adib. "Kontradiksi dalam Konsep Politik Islam Eksklusif Sayyid Quthb," *Epistémé*. Vol. 11. No. 1. Juni 2016.

Jati, Wasito Rahardjo. "Trajektori Populisme Islam di Kalangan Kelas Menengah Muslim Indonesia," *Prisma*. Volume 36. Nomor 3. 2017.