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## **Mediating Islam in Post-Suharto Indonesia: performing Dakwah through popular TV shows**

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## Chapter 3

### **THE MAKING OF POPULAR TV PREACHERS AND THEIR ROLES IN THE SOCIETY**

The previous chapter discussed the way the charisma of TV preachers is formed through routines sermons in their *dakwah* programmes. This chapter strives to answer the question of what the social and educational backgrounds of TV preachers tell us about the nature of the *dakwah* on TV in Indonesia. This question will help us to understand their roles in the making of *dakwah* programmes on TV and their popularity in the society. I analyse the background of Yusuf Mansur and discuss it with that of other TV preachers including Aa Gym and others to explore the changes and shift of the characteristics of TV preachers between 2000 to 2017. Yusuf Mansur is an important figure in the broadcast of *dakwah* on TV. He has different background of education and economic position from Aa Gym before becoming a TV preacher. His education background resembles many other TV preachers appearing on TV after Aa Gym., I will also discuss Yusuf Mansur's network to understand key factors determining the popularity of TV preachers and the transformation of his figure from preacher to leader in the country.

#### **The landscape of popular TV preachers**

During the post-New Order era (1998 onwards) popular TV preachers can be typified by three figures: Zainuddin MZ, Aa Gym, and Yusuf Mansur. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Zainuddin MZ represents the TV preachers in the New Order, who was appointed by the government to deliver his sermons on state-owned channel, TVRI. Just like him, the preachers, who appeared on TVRI, were *santri* - students who had studied Islam in traditional *pesantren* (Geertz 1960) such as Iskandar SQ and other preachers from the department of religious affairs (Muzakki 2008: 207). They also graduated from the Institute of Islamic Studies (*Institute Agama Islam Negeri/IAIN*) Jakarta. Unlike other preachers on TVRI at the time, Zainuddin MZ was popular among Muslim communities through audio-cassettes played at houses, mosques, and Islamic events. He was invited to deliver sermons all over the country (Hadi et. al. 1994). I remembered hearing to his sermons played in audio-cassette before dawn prayer in mosques in my village in North

Labuhanbatu, North Sumatera every day. His popularity encouraged him to become a politician of PPP in 1977, which was founded by Idham Chalid, the chairman of NU in 1954-1984. Zainuddin MZ studied Islam in Idham Chalid's *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) in Cipete, Jakarta (Hadi MR. et. al. 1994). In 2003, he established the Reform Star Party (*Partai Bintang Reformasi/ PBR*) together with a popular *dangdut*<sup>89</sup> singer, Rhoma Irama (Hadi et. al. 1994 and Badjeber 2000).

The emergence of Aa Gym on TV in 2002 marked the interest of commercial TV companies to broadcast *dakwah* for their shows. Unlike the preachers before reformation, Aa Gym never studied in traditional *pesantren* or IAIN. He is known to be clever in rhetoric to use his limited knowledge of Islam acquired from a short course (*pendidikan kilat/Diklat*) in one of the *pesantrens* in West Java.<sup>90</sup> Before becoming TV preacher, he was popular only in Bandung where he usually teaches a group of Muslims about Islam. He established a *pesantren*, *Darut Tauhid/DT* in 1994 and MQ media company in 2002. The establishment of MQ was inspired by the enthusiasm of Muslim audience to attend his *dakwah* on TV. Afterwards, he spread his sermons through his media company, MQ in the forms of magazines, bulletins, and radio programme in addition to his *dakwah* programmes on commercial TV channels.<sup>91</sup>

Aa Gym became a national figure and alternative voice in Islam for Muslims in Indonesia since 2002. His sermons were spread widely through TV broadcast, MQ magazines, bulletins, and radio. He had followers all over the country including university and secondary students, who bought his sermons in the magazines and bulletins from book stores, markets, and listened to his sermons in the radio regularly. Rohuddin, a 30 years old elementary school teacher in Bogor, was one of Aa Gym's followers, who bought Aa Gym's sermons in MQ magazines when he was an Islamic senior high school student in Tasikmalaya in between 2002-2004. To him, Aa Gym was like a pop star, whom to meet was a dream. Aa Gym's easily understood sermons, rhetoric, and apparent modesty attracted Rohuddin the most regardless his lack of Islamic knowledge until his dream came to true when

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<sup>89</sup> Dangdut is a genre of Indonesian popular traditional music partly originating from Hindustani Malay and Arabic music. For further discussion on this, see Andrew N. Weintraub (2010) *Dangdut Stories: a social and musical history of Indonesia's most popular music*. NY etc.: Oxford University Press.

<sup>90</sup> Interview with Rohudin, Bogor, February 20, 2015.

<sup>91</sup> Interview with Rohudin, Bogor, February 20, 2015.

he became an employee in Aa Gym's *pesantren*, Darut Tauhid when he was a university student in Bandung.<sup>92</sup>

Yusuf Mansur differs from Aa Gym because he graduated from Islamic schools and IAIN even though he never studied Islam in *pesantren*. In terms of Islamic knowledge, Yusuf Mansur is more qualified to become a preacher than Aa Gym, but he was not popular - like Zainuddin MZ - before he appeared on TV. Yusuf Mansur appeared on TV and became popular after Aa Gym's popularity declined in 2006 because he decided to do polygamy. Both Aa Gym and Yusuf Mansur make use of media, *pesantren*, and business networks to increase their popularity and authority among national audiences. Yusuf Mansur has acknowledged that he has learned and followed some aspects of Aa Gym's model as a means to be both a successful preacher and businessman. In early 2000, when Mansur was released from prison for debt, he met several times with Aa Gym, to consult with him on spiritual matters.<sup>93</sup> Other preachers with similar background and popularity to Mansur include Arifin Ilham, Jefri Al-Bukhari (*ustaz gaul*/fashionable preacher), Maulana, Soleh Muhammad (Solmed), Mamah Dedeh, Badrussalam, Khalid Basalamah and Syafiq Riza Basalamah. They also have Islamic education background either from Islamic schools or *pesantren*. This evidence is against Burhani's generalisation that TV preachers lack of any Islamic education background (2020: 155). There is a change of TV preachers' education background after Aa Gym one of which is because criticism from various Muslim organisations concerning the education qualification for TV preachers.

The popular *reformasi* era TV preachers are addressed using Indonesian or Arabic appellations. The title, *ustaz* (teacher), is common but there are others such as *Mamah* (mum), *Bunda* (mother), and *Aa* (elder brother) and *Buya* (father). According to Yusuf Mansur, the appellations are made to make it easier for new audiences to remember their names. These appellations are also used to make the relationship between the preachers and audiences informal and casual.<sup>94</sup> Arabic appellation, *ustaz* or *ustazah*, is also used by students in *pesantren* and formal Islamic schools, *madrasah*, to call their teachers even though their teachers do not preach in the society.

The relevance of having a background in Islamic education has become central in the discussion to become a TV preacher in Indonesia since Aa Gym

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<sup>92</sup> Interview with Rohuddin, Bogor, February 20, 2015.

<sup>93</sup> Interview with Yusuf Mansur, Tangerang, March 5, 2015.

<sup>94</sup> Interview with Yusuf Mansur, Tangerang, March 5, 2015.

became popular on commercial TV channels in 2002. According to scholars from NU, Muhammadiyah, and MUI, TV preachers have to gain legitimacy by training in Islamic schools to be qualified to give advice for the audiences concerning religious and social issues. They are, to certain extent, a source of authority for Muslim communities. According to Siradj, Lack of Islamic knowledge amongst TV preachers can mislead the audience in understanding the teachings of Islam.<sup>95</sup> This opinion has become the main criticism to the broadcast of *dakwah* programmes on TV.

The three figures discussed above - Zainuddin MZ, Aa Gym, and Yusuf Mansur - show us a changing trend of TV preachers in Indonesia. It is only Zainuddin MZ who has not had a regular *dakwah* programme in the *reformasi* era. The appearance of Yusuf Mansur on TV suggests an increase in standards of requirements for becoming a TV-based preacher. Other preachers, who appeared after Aa Gym, like Arifin Ilham, Jefri Al-Bukhori, Maulana, Yahya Zainul Ma'arif, Adi Hidayat, Dede Rosyidah, Maulana, and others studied Islam in *pesantren*, *madrasah*, and even in Islamic universities in Indonesia and the Middle East like in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Yemen. It is not difficult for TV companies to find qualified preachers in Islamic knowledge since there are many preachers in Muslim communities, who graduated from *pesantren* and Islamic universities.

### **The figure of the TV preacher in the *reformasi* era: The case of Yusuf Mansur**

Yusuf Mansur is an example to explore common processes and strategies used to become a successful television preacher. Many popular television preachers present their professions as being a miraculous journey in their lives. They re-tell their life story in their preaching in many occasions. This is one of the strategies that they use to capture the attention of the audiences and to help audiences identify with them. Another strategy is to own modern *pesantren* or institutions, which feature integrated religious and secular subjects. In the case of Yusuf Mansur, the foundation including the *pesantren* is specialised in training students to read the Quran by heart and has formal secondary school. The popularity of Yusuf Mansur through his *dakwah* programmes on TV helps to develop his *pesantren* many Muslim parents send their children to the *pesantren* because they listen to Yusuf Mansur's sermons of the advantages of being a Muslim, who can read the Quran by heart and

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<sup>95</sup> Interview with the chairman of NU, Said Aqil Siradj, Jakarta, April 10, 2015.

trust him to guide their children. It is common that television preachers have already established several learning groups of Islam in their communities before they are invited to preach on television. In these learning groups, they deliver sermons regularly. They usually have loyal followers, who always attend their sermons in the communities. In addition to these learning groups, they are sometimes invited to preach to other learning groups in other communities. These activities may take place in mosques, offices or at the buildings of large companies.

Yusuf Mansur was born in Jakarta in 1976 to a recently divorced mother. Yusuf was brought up by his uncle, Sanusi Hasan, who worked at the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Yusuf Mansur, under the guidance of his uncle, was a diligent and smart pupil. With the education from his uncle, young Yusuf Mansur won the competitions of Quranic recitation and preaching in national level. His achievement did not surprise some people living around his home because they know his grandfather was also a preacher and teacher. In spite of these achievements, Sanusi did not send him to Islamic boarding school. Instead, he was sent to a formal Islamic school and IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah in Jakarta. He dropped out of university after becoming more interested in motocross and computer business (Junaedi 2014: 8–12).

According to Yusuf Mansur, it was work in a computer business that led him to become a preacher. The story began when he was a student at *Institut Agama Islam Negeri* (State Institute of Islamic Studies or IAIN) Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta. In his second year, he was interested to start a business in the field of information technology. Due to a lack of experience, the business went bankrupt, which left him with a huge debt. As he was unable to pay off the debt, he was jailed twice: in 1996 and 1998. He states that during his time in jail he obtained guidance from God to perform almsgiving. Although he was in jail, he asked his wife to give the rest of their wealth to the poor and tried a new business by *jualan bakso* (selling meatball) near his house even though he was bankrupt (Yayan 2013: 28–34).

After being released from jail, Yusuf Mansur attended many Islamic learning groups in mosques to acquire Islamic knowledge to become a better Muslim. He studied Islamic theology and the history of the Prophet Muhammad from several preachers in Jakarta while he did not have a well-paying job. From his activities in the learning groups of Islam that he followed, he met a preacher, Basuni in one of the mosques where he led Islamic learning groups. Yusuf Mansur and Basuni started an Islamic oriented consultation service to help people address their problems. They named the

consultation as *Tazkiyah Syifa* (Sacred Healing). He began to gain followers through this consultation (Yayan 2013: 35-40). The introduction of Yusuf Mansur to audience beyond his community began with a book titled *Wisata Hati: Mencari Tuhan yang Hilang* (Tourism of the Heart: Searching for the Lost God) that was printed in three thousand copies and sold out in less than two months (see Figure 3). Although, this number is small if we compare it with the Indonesian populations, the strategy of publication is important for the preachers to maintain their visibility in public. Yusuf Mansur states that his books are for the audiences who like reading and to make his sermons easy to remember by the audiences.<sup>96</sup>

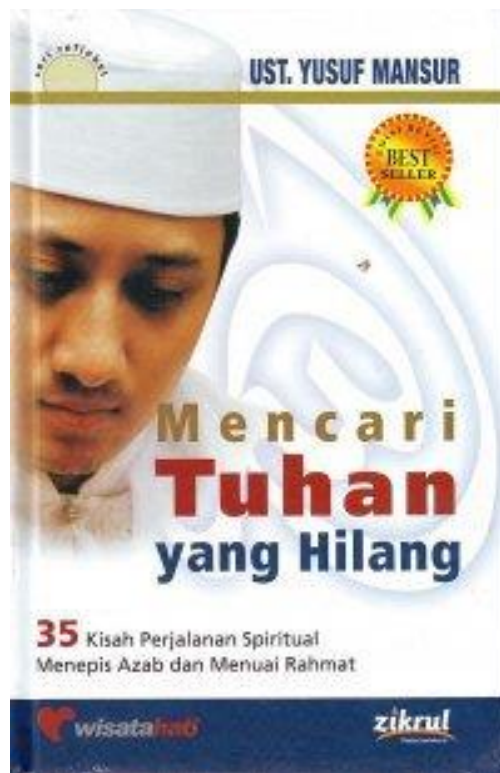


Figure 3.1.: The first book written by Yusuf Mansur, which later became the brand of his *dakwah* activities.

The book is structured as Mansur's memoirs, with a focus on the turning point of his life after he was released from jail. Yusuf Mansur asked the publisher to donate the royalties of this book to a charity. Other books written by Yusuf Mansur are *The Power of Giving*, whose content is written in Indonesia even

<sup>96</sup> Interview with Yusuf Mansur, Tangerang, October 5, 2014.

though the title is written in English, and *Temukan Masalah Temukan Solusinya* (Find the Problems, Find their Solutions) (Yayan 2013: 52).

Yusuf Mansur, and other television preachers like Aa Gym, Arifin Ilham, Dedeh Rosidah, already have established their own communities and networks before they appear in the *dakwah* programmes through television. Arifin Ilham, for instance, has an Islamic learning group, *Azzikra* (Remembrance of God). The success of *Azzikra* is founded on Ilham's skills as a preacher.<sup>97</sup> They also publish books based on their biographies. These books are written by themselves or with ghost-writers, who are hired to do it as part of branding exercise. Alfian explains that Yusuf Mansur and other popular television preachers do not have time to write books, so they hire their assistants to do it. They provide the guidelines of the books and read them before the publication of the books.<sup>98</sup> The life story of a preacher offers a reflection for the audience. It helps the audience to become involved in the life journey of a preacher. It provides attraction for the improvement of the self in religious and economic matters. Like motivators, preachers encourage audience through their personal life experience to consume their products. Moreover, preachers offer more than merely economic capital, they also offer religious capital based on the belief of the audience related to a person's 'safety in the life after death'. The preachers make the audience believe that by buying their products, the audience have donated their money in the God's path because the money is used to fund *dakwah* through schools, television programmes, and so forth. In return, it is claimed that God gives His blessings to the audience by adding their wealth and rewards that will send them to the paradise in the hereafter.

### **Islam for popular shows: the preacher's view**

Yusuf Mansur argues that it is important for TV preachers to create special characteristics for their *dakwah* in order to become well-known by large audiences. He further explains that it requires being a professional and having expertise in a particular field. The preacher also has to have his or her own brand and promote it to new audiences.<sup>99</sup> Yusuf Mansur transforms his propagation of Islam into films, which are supported by prominent Indonesian actresses and actors like Dessy Ratnasari and Syahrul Gunawan. Afterwards,

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<sup>97</sup> For more information about *Azzikra*, see its official website at "Majelis Az-Zikra." <http://azzikra.com/tentang-kami/majelis-az-zikra/>. Last accessed, December 22, 2016.

<sup>98</sup> Interview with Alfian, Tangerang, June 20, 2016.

<sup>99</sup> Interview with Yusuf Mansur, Tangerang, October 5, 2014.



collaborating with prominent production house Sinemart, Yusuf Mansur produced a series under the title *Maha Kasih* (Supreme Love), which consisted of several episodes broadcast in commercial television stations (Yayan 2013: 53).

When asked about his motivation to film his life stories and experiences, Yusuf Mansur states that the production house, *Wisata Hati*, is his effort to awake people's awareness of the importance of being close to God. It was also his effort to repent his sins in the past to God. He has found it advantageous not only religiously but also economically. He states that after he is committed to conduct propagation of Islam through popular shows, God blesses him with wealth and peace in his life.<sup>100</sup>

*Wisata Hati* and Sinemart continue to produce TV series, such as *Kasih Hati* (Love from the Heart). Yusuf Mansur's popularity among producers increased significantly through his TV series. His career as a preacher in the media began when he met Yusuf Ibrahim, the producer of Virgo Ramayana Record Company, who asked him to record his propagation of Islam on cassettes and videos. They produced its serial themes, which included *Kun Fayakun* (Be, and It is), *The Power of Giving*, and *Keluarga* (Family). His cassettes and videos of *dakwah* can be easily found in traditional markets, stores, and supermarkets in cities (Yayan, 2013, p. 53).

Mansur was invited to deliver sermons on several national private television channels. *Wisata Hati* has become his brand of *dakwah* through television. Compared with Aa Gym's *Manajemen Qolbu* (Heart Management), *Wisata Hati* provides a greater variety of themes. Yusuf Mansur believes that *dakwah* should be performed creatively and innovatively to meet the interest of audience and the development of technology. Yusuf Mansur admits that the success of Aa Gym inspired him to become 'the embodiment of the modern Muslim man: a pious preacher, shrewd entrepreneur and a doting family man.'<sup>101</sup> As a preacher, Yusuf Mansur refused to affiliate with Muslim organisations such as NU and Muhammadiyah, positioned himself as Muslim, who respects other Muslims and intends to improve public piety and Muslims' welfare.<sup>102</sup> The strategies of Yusuf Mansur's propagation of Islam consist of five pillars: (1) to perform prayers on time, (2) to perform complementary prayers, (3) to do almsgiving

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<sup>100</sup> Interview with Yusuf Mansur, Tangerang, October 5, 2014.

<sup>101</sup> James B. Hoesterey. October 2016. "Sincerity, Scandal, and the State: Islam and Media in Post-Authoritarian Indonesia." <https://pomeps.org/2017/01/25/sincerity-scandal-and-the-state-islam-and-media-in-post-authoritarian-indonesia/>. Last accessed, December 14, 2016.

<sup>102</sup> Interview with Yusuf Mansur, Tangerang, October 5, 2014.

by giving money to poor people or Islamic schools, (4) to do obligatory fasting, (5) to recite and read the Quran by heart. Based on the last strategy, Yusuf Mansur launched a programme called *One Day One Ayat* (ODOA) or *One Day One Juz* (ODOJ) (Nisa 2018). I was on a bus in Jakarta when I witnessed some Muslims, most of whom are university students, recited the Quran on the bus. One of them states that she followed Yusuf Mansur's programme, ODOA, to recite at least a verse of the Quran a day. She found it very useful and gave peace in her life.<sup>103</sup>

In response to the questions concerning *Wisata Hati* as a brand of his *dakwah*, Yusuf Mansur explained that it is important to have attractive and innovative characteristics in *dakwah* to stimulate the enthusiasm of audience to watch and attend it. Further, he asserts that having a brand in *dakwah* does not mean to be considered better than other preachers, but to compete with other preachers. For example, Aa Gym has MQ as his brand specialising in managing the feeling of heart, Arifin Ilham with Az-Zikra specialising in the collective remembrance of God. These preachers argue that Islam is the perfect religion and that it covers all aspects of human life.

In answering the criticism of several Muslim scholars concerning profit television preachers earn from their propagation of Islam, Yusuf Mansur states that God has promised a devoted Muslim reward during his life on earth and in the hereafter if they are committed to disseminate the teachings of Islam. He argues that this is how Muslims should live; that they should be successful in practicing their religion and earning their wealth for hereafter. Therefore, the profit they get from their *dakwah* is reward from God.<sup>104</sup>

Although each television preacher including Yusuf Mansur has his own brand, the content of *dakwah* intersects with one another because all brands are concerned with everyday Muslim practices, family, and youth matters. Television preachers choose topics to satisfy the needs of urban Muslims seeking practical matters of their religion, which can be performed while going about their everyday life.

The construction of a kind for *dakwah* by television preachers promotes competition between the various preachers. The brands target a particular segment of the society as a market for public piety.<sup>105</sup> Branding or commodification of Islam is not new in the Muslim world. Islamic branding is on the rise in the West and Muslim majority countries in terms of food and

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<sup>103</sup> Interview with Hanum, Jakarta, September 10, 2014.

<sup>104</sup> Interview with Yusuf Mansur, Tangerang, October 5, 2014.

<sup>105</sup> Interview with Wiryoutomo, Jakarta, August 3, 2014.

products with the certification of halal for Muslim customers. It ranges from food products to television programmes including propagation of Islam and movies. The rise of Islamic branding is a response of the growth of middle-class Muslims, who devote their efforts to balance the economic success with piety. The brand the television preachers build is therefore part of global trend for Muslim in the world (Shirazi 2016: 1).

The success of *dakwah* through television led Yusuf Mansur to establish Islamic enterprises and expand his schools and boarding schools to some cities in the country. He has raised large amounts of money through encouraging people to be generous with almsgiving – one of the obligations of Islamic practices. The donators mostly came from middle class Muslims. Like the audience of Yusuf Mansur, the donators came not only from around Jakarta but also from other cities in the country. The trust of these Muslims in Yusuf Mansur has shown the success of his style of *dakwah*, particularly about the miracles of almsgiving. He encouraged Muslims to donate of their wealth to the poor and weak, stating that it will never decrease due to the donation. God will double it as a reward, instead. Some amount of the money from the donators was used to establish Islamic boarding school and education institutions.<sup>106</sup>

Based on my fieldwork, he built the boarding school Darul Quran in Tangerang in 2005 with funding from donations. In addition to it, he established Islamic schools on the same area ranging from kindergarten to senior high school. It has an international branch, *Sekolah Darul Quran Internasional* (the International School of Darul Quran or SDQI), in 2008, which was specially addressed to middle- and upper-class Muslims, who can pay high fees to send their children to the school. The branch is intended to assist orphans financially, who studied in ordinary Darul Quran. The money he gained from SDQI was used to finance orphans who studied in Darul Quran. Yusuf Mansur also launched *Program Pembibitan Penghafal Al-Quran* (Regeneration Programme of Quran by Heart or PPPA) based on which he established *Rumah Tahfidz* (House of Quranic memorisation). This house has branches in a number of cities in all provinces too. He hired teachers to teach and guide students to read the Quran by heart. All the enterprises have been financially successful.<sup>107</sup>

His strategies to find relevant topics in Islam for his *dakwah* strengthen and expand his religious business and popularity in the country. In this

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<sup>106</sup> Interview with Yusuf Mansur, Tangerang, October 5, 2014.

<sup>107</sup> Interview with Alfian, Tangerang, October 5, 2014.

respect, television has accelerated his success through his performances on television. He usually chooses another theme to create a new brand for his *dakwah* when the previous one declines in popularity. Many other television preachers use the same strategy to maintain their existence in the *dakwah* programmes through TV shows.

### **TV preachers' networking**

Being a television preacher has enabled Yusuf Mansur to build networking with other preachers and enter business domain. The networking with other television preachers like Arifin Ilham and Jefri Al-Bukhori (d. 2013) enables Yusuf Mansur to broadcast his programmes of *dakwah* on television stations. He stipulates that television preachers like Arifin Ilham have always encouraged and asked other preachers that they have known well to replace them to preach. Besides his network with several producers in production houses, Yusuf Mansur's good relationship with other television preachers has made it possible for him to broadcast *Wisata Hati* in the forms of television programmes of propagation of Islam on ANTEVE.<sup>108</sup> The position of Yusuf Mansur is strategic because he is well known by both producers and television preachers so that his propagation of Islam is broadcast in several other television stations.

Jefri Al Bukhori is the son of a Muslim woman preacher who preached in a number of mosques and Islamic learning groups in Jakarta.<sup>109</sup> In general, Muslims understand the fact that familial lineage is important in creating a sense of authority as a preacher. Another example of television preacher who inherited the profession of their families is a Muslim woman television preacher Dedeh Rosyidah Syarifudin<sup>110</sup> (most commonly known as Mamah Dedeh) whose father was a well-known preacher and had an Islamic boarding school in Ciamis, West Java. Mamah Dedeh learned the skills of *dakwah* from her father. The status of being a descendant of preachers has advantages in terms of mass mobilisation and social stratum because their families built the audience for their propagation of Islam, who may become the followers for their next generation preachers.

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<sup>108</sup> Interview with Yusuf Mansur, Tangerang, October 5, 2014.

<sup>109</sup> The life story of Jefri Al Bukhori was filmed under the title *Hijrah Cinta* (Migration of Love). The movie was made after his death and screened in cinemas in Indonesia.

<sup>110</sup> For gender study on the *dakwah* programme of Mamah Dedeh, see Dicky Sofjan. 2012. "Gender Construction in *Da'wahainment*: A Case Study of *Hati ke Hati bersama Mamah Dedeh*" *Al-Jāmi'ah* 50 (1): 57-74.

As mentioned above, Aa Gym is exceptional. He is the son of a former mid-ranking officer in Indonesian army. Aa Gym grew up in a military housing complex in Bandung close to his present house. Although he has no relatives who were preachers, Aa Gym always tells his followers that he is grateful to be the son of a military figure because his father taught him discipline and hard work, which helped him gain his success as a business man and preacher. During his school education, Aa Gym was not a particularly bright student and also failed to pass an examination to enter a good university, yet he had a capacity of leadership learned from his father (Watson 2005: 780 and Gymnastiar 2005: 26). Rohudin, who worked for Aa Gym's *Darut Tauhid* in Bandung, states that Aa Gym is very disciplined and uses time efficiently. That is also what he demanded from all the staff in his Islamic boarding school and MQ Company. He further explains that the way of live Aa Gym has motivated him to follow his propagation of Islam in books, magazines, radios, and televisions since he was a senior high school student twelve years ago.<sup>111</sup>

As mentioned above, like his other fellow television preachers, Yusuf Mansur's *dakwah* has appealed to middle class Muslims, which enables him to build a business network. He is able to persuade these Muslims to invest in his schools and enterprises. He knows about this advantage. Although he has been bankrupted and has been to jail for failing to pay debts, business remains his passion. Therefore, Yusuf Mansur begins his business again by building hotels, apartments, and schools. He defines business part of propagation of Islam. He explains that *dakwah* can be conducted not only through sermons but also properties like hotels and apartments. The hotels that he aims to build aims to be Islamically inspired hotels, which facilitate Islamic trainings and accommodation for Muslims in Indonesia before going to Mecca for pilgrimage. To support his businesses and dreams, Yusuf Mansur persuades middle- and upper-class Muslims to collect funds and assets as donators from all over the archipelago and abroad. The amount of the donation is determined. Prospective donators should register via Yusuf Mansur's website by paying registration fee first.<sup>112</sup> Besides website, he has fan pages in social media where he remediates his sermons and promotes his programmes of almsgiving.

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<sup>111</sup> Interview with Rohudin, Depok, Oktober 11, 2014.

<sup>112</sup> We can visit Yusuf Mansur's website at [www.yusufmansur.com](http://www.yusufmansur.com). Interview with Yusuf Mansur, Tangerang, October 5, 2014.

Yusuf Mansur also has made a good relationship with several Muslim scholars and donators from Middle East countries, particularly from Saudi Arabia. The function of Muslim scholars from the Middle East is significant to promote his boarding school. Yusuf Mansur believes that they can make it legitimate as a place for children to study Islam because the scholars come from the place where Islam emerged. Also, many Indonesian Muslims see Muslim Scholars from the Middle East, especially from Saudi Arabia as Islamic authorities.<sup>113</sup> They are invited to preach and teach at *Darul Quran*. Their sermons and teachings are recorded and sometimes replayed during his *dakwah* programmes on TV (Figure 3.2.). Their sermons and teachings contain tips on how to memorise the Quran by heart. Generally, the Muslim scholars attend several events during their visits to Indonesia. For example, they give a lecture at LIPIA in Jakarta besides attending Yusuf Mansur's event in his boarding school. They play a significant role in promoting his Islamic education institutions to several stakeholders in the Middle East. Yusuf Mansur also believes that the coming of pious Muslim scholars to his Islamic boarding school has many advantages. They bring blessings from God through their prayers from the school and people in it. The blessings can be in the forms of donation and success for his institutions and career.<sup>114</sup> The appearance of Muslim scholars from the Middle East and Yusuf Mansur's relationship with them has increased the appeal for Muslims in Indonesia to follow his *dakwah* and send their children to his Islamic education institutions.

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<sup>113</sup> Interview with Yusuf Mansur, Tangerang, October 5, 2014.

<sup>114</sup> Interview with Yusuf Mansur, Tangerang, October 5, 2014.



Figure 3.2.: Yusuf Mansur (second from right) next to Syeikh Adil Al-Kalbani (wearing the red scarf), the leader of prayers at Al-Haram Mosque in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, when he visited *Darul Qur'an* in Tangerang. Source: [www.tribunnews.com](http://www.tribunnews.com).

In addition to the *dakwah*, these Muslim scholars are invited yearly to commemorate the graduation of the students who are capable of reciting the entire Quran by heart at Darul Quran. Most of the Muslim scholars that he invites to his Islamic boarding schools follow Salafi interpretations of the Quran. However, I found that they rarely discuss topics concerning Salafism because Yusuf Mansur asks them to speak about motivations to recite the Quran from memory. Yusuf Mansur states that he is not concerned with the Muslim scholars' ideology from the Middle East, he just invite them to teach the students through their experiences of how to be able to read the Quran by heart.<sup>115</sup> The presence of Muslim scholars from Middle East make a legitimation for parents that their children's memorisation of the Quran is approved by the imams.<sup>116</sup> To many Indonesian Muslims, scholars from the Middle East, particularly from Saudi Arabia are appealing because they consider them coming from the centre of Islamic authority.

Networking influences the popularity of television preachers and its institutions. They have to maintain good relationship with other preachers to share ideas, strategies, and innovations in *dakwah* through television. They also like to establish relationships with people from Middle East to show their

<sup>115</sup> Interview with Yusuf Mansur, Tangerang, October 5, 2014.

<sup>116</sup> Interview with one of the parents of the student in Darul Quran, Tangerang, October 5, 2014.

strength in Islamic knowledge. Individuals and organisations in the Middle East often provide funding for the institutions of television preachers as received by Yusuf Mansur. In some cases, television preachers also create networking with government officials and business conglomerates in Indonesia. This networking is one of the reasons that television preachers become popular in media and society.

### **Becoming TV preacher**

In terms of popularity and media exposure, it is hard to distinguish between television preachers and celebrities for two reasons. Firstly, like celebrities many television preachers involve in and become a model of the advertisements for *dakwah* and other TV programmes. They encourage the audience to buy the product in the advertisements. There are four products support Yusuf Mansur's *dakwah* in every episode on ANTV for a broadcasting contract. These products are promoted in advert sessions. In the case of *Mamah dan Aa Beraksi* on Indosiar channel, Mamah Dedeh is the figure used to promote the product *Tolak Angin*. She also promotes other products, which are mostly the sponsors of her programme in Indosiar. In Mamah Dedeh's *dakwah* programme, the products are not only screened in advertisement sessions but also put on the screen behind her stage and on the table in front of her (see Figure 2.2 in Chapter 2).

Secondly, their personal lives and lifestyle are exposed by the media to public through infotainment programmes. Yusuf Mansur's business companies such as syariah hotels, *pesantren*, and *Paytren*, a payment application, are promoted by TV stations in infotainment programmes to frame his success in business and *dakwah*. Mansur's family life is rarely covered by the media. He generally only seeks to promote himself as a good businessman, rather than attracting attention to his family life, like Aa Gym. Mamah Dedeh also is framed as a successful female preacher with her new luxurious house introduced in infotainment programmes. It resembles the house of a famous actor rather than that of a humble Islamic preacher.

The popularity and success of *dakwah* of TV preachers to attract public attentions coincide with the *hijrah* trend among celebrities. It is a movement among celebrities to become pious and committed to Islam by participating in forums and gatherings of studying Islam. For female celebrities, they start wearing the veil and attending Islamic forums taught by TV preachers and others. Actors grow their beard as the practice to follow the Prophet's tradition. For example, Oky Setiana Dewi, the main actress of the popular



Islamic movie, *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* (When Love Praises God)<sup>117</sup> states that she wore a veil after she learned that life after death is so important and thus she decides to be more Islamic by wearing veils.

Like a celebrity, the popularity of a television preacher can be highly temporal. Afterwards, they are generally replaced by the new ones, who are considered more attractive with their appearances or contents of their sermons. Yusuf Mansur is still famous among TV channels because he cleverly changes the contents of his sermons when he feels a particular topic is not interesting to the audiences. Some of the topics he delivers are almsgiving, the miracles of the Quran, and the importance to be a rich Muslim. Ustaz Solmed is one of the preachers, who has failed to maintain his popularity because he does not have new topics when the audiences start feeling bored to what he delivers in his sermons. His popularity declines and he seldom appear on TV channels gradually. Aa Gym's popularity has declined as his image as a loyal and good-loving husband became tainted by doing polygamy.

In respect of commitment to Islam, most popular TV preachers have stories about their conversion from 'bad' to 'good' Muslims. Before becoming preachers, they experienced a 'miracle', which is a turning point to become modest and pious and perform *dakwah* as their commitment to spread Islamic teachings. This miracle can be in the forms of a dream to meet the Prophet Muhammad or a pious Muslim cleric or to receive guidance from God. Such an experience seems adequate to make them preachers even though they are not graduated from *pesantren* and have limited Islamic knowledge.

As mentioned above, Yusuf Mansur's life experience about being in jail and then getting guidance from God, which led him to turn to doing propagation of Islam and business, is common among television preachers. Many television preachers have shared similar stories, which tell public that they were a misled people, who were then committed to repent their sins by calling people to Islam. The turning point to become a preacher can also appear from a dream. For example, Aa Gym and Arifin Ilham had a dream in

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<sup>117</sup> An Islamic movie adapted from a popular Islamic novel written by Habiburrahman El-Shirazy. For further reading about its novel, see Mohd. Zariat Abdul Rani. 2012. "Islam, Romance and Popular Taste in Indonesia: A Textual Analysis of *Ayat-ayat Cinta* by Habiburrahman El-Shirazy and *Syahadat Cinta* by Taufiqurrahman Al-Azizy." *Indonesia and the Malay World* 40 (116): 59 – 73. For further reading on Islamic movie, see James B. Hoesterey and M. Clark. 2012. "Film Islami: Gender, Piety and Pop Culture in Post-Authoritarian Indonesia." *Asian Studies Review* 36 (2): 207 – 226.

which they met the Prophet. According to their opinion, the dream was a sign to change their way of life to do propagation of Islam. Afterwards, they preach and do business in the name of *dakwah*. When people have an unfortunate or a bad experience in their lives and God still gives them time to fix it, it is a gift from Him to give them opportunities to change their lives in order to be in line with the guidance of His prophet. Moreover, if they have a dream in which they meet the prophet or a prominent Muslim scholar, it means that God mandates them to fight for the sake of propagation of Islam and good deeds. Not every Muslim can have a dream like that.<sup>118</sup>

Life stories, to a certain extent, supports television preachers' popularity among the Indonesian public. It also offers listeners or readers a reflection of their stories because everyone has made sins and then how to repent and do-good deeds. In the case of Yusuf Mansur, as so other television preachers, the fact that his first book about his life story was sold out in less than two months is evidence of the high interest of public.<sup>119</sup> On the other hand, Muslim preachers usually use the method of storytelling in *dakwah*. The stories they deliver to their audience vary from their life stories to those of the Prophet and his companions.

Before becoming TV preachers, their *dakwah* activities are confined to their communities around their residence until they meet mass media that are willing to promote the activities to broader audience. The creativity of Yusuf Mansur combined with the initiative of Zikrul Hakim publisher to publish his life story brought a success for them when his first book reaches a very high sale. It was when Yusuf Mansur began to be known by Muslims beyond his communities through his book. Moreover, his idea to screen his life experiences into film series is an entrance to appear on mainstream television stations with wider coverage than book publishers. Besides, most Indonesian people prefer to watch film to reading a book. Through the filming of his life experiences Yusuf Mansur can extend his networking to other producers, who work for television. Afterwards, Yusuf Mansur received broadcasting contracts offered by several commercial television stations to broadcast his sermons for certain periods of time. He sometimes should even refuse several contracts due to limited schedules and break to keep him healthy.<sup>120</sup>

Like popular actors, TV preachers also have a manager, who organise timetable of their preaching events, in some case helps selecting topics of

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<sup>118</sup> Interview with Yusuf Mansur, Tangerang, October 6, 2014.

<sup>119</sup> Interview with Yusuf Mansur, Tangerang, October 6, 2014.

<sup>120</sup> Interview with Yusuf Mansur, Tangerang, October 6, 2014.

preaching, update their activities on fan pages of social medias, and so forth. Bisri, the manager of Yusuf Mansur, confirms that Yusuf Mansur has his own management team to help him preparing and organising his *dakwah* agendas.<sup>121</sup> Most of his assistants are university graduates and ever studied at Islamic boarding schools.

Some television preachers launch *dakwah* services via SMS on mobile phones and open consultation for Muslims who have questions and problems to solve. They co-operate with mobile operators to make the programmes and share profit of them. Among them Jefri al Bukhori launched Uje Centre and its programme *Obat Hati* (Medicine for the Heart) via SMS of all mobile operators in Indonesia in 2006. This programme is intended to disseminate his thoughts on Islam and to provide consultation on religious matters through which Muslims can receive fast answers. Jefri Al Bukhori stated that Uje Centre was his new religious-oriented business and thus it was not intended only for profit-oriented but also seeking rewards from God.<sup>122</sup>

In addition to their appearances on television stations, they make accounts on social media like YouTube, Facebook and Twitter. They also publish their own websites on Internet. They usually upload the videos of their sermons and activities to these media where their followers may react and comment. They also promote and advertise their Islamic boarding schools and business companies through their social media and websites. The purpose of this is to be closer to their audiences and spread their *dakwah* because the time allocation for *dakwah* on television is limited, while on internet it is not. Yusuf Mansur adds that his social media accounts are followed by people who don't have time to watch his programmes on television.<sup>123</sup> More than six million people follow Facebook fan page of Yusuf Mansur while Aa Gym has more than five million followers. Although their followers often ask questions concerning religious matters on their fan pages, television preachers rarely answer them.

These preachers have reached their fame because of the availability of media technology, which enable them to accelerate their popularity among Muslim audiences. Their methods and strategies of propagation of Islam, which range from print to cyberspace media, capture borderless audience that is not limited to Indonesia. It shapes global communications between the

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<sup>121</sup> Interview with Yusuf Mansur's manager, Tangerang 7, 2014.

<sup>122</sup> Anton. June 2006. "Uje Luncurkan Uje Centre dan SMS Obat Hati [Uje launches Uje Centre and SMS heart healing]". <http://www.kapanlagi.com/showbiz/selebri/uje-luncurkan-uje-centre-dan-sms-obat-hati-lpytiap.html>. Last accessed, December 20, 2013.

<sup>123</sup> Interview with Yusuf Mansur, Tangerang, October 5, 2014.

preachers and their audience, which enable Indonesian Muslims in Hong Kong and Singapore, to follow their *dakwah* through video streaming and social media. The advantage of using the internet for *dakwah* in Indonesia is evident in the sense that Indonesia is in the sixth rank of the biggest Internet users in the world.<sup>124</sup>

According to the production manager of Trans7, Wiryoutomo, the audience for *dakwah* most coveted by the preachers is not television audience even though they can earn billions of rupiahs for the broadcasting contracts in a year. The real market is the opportunities to deliver sermons in front of Muslim congregation based on invitations because the television preachers can earn much more profit than those from private television channels. Some are often invited to preach abroad in front of Muslim diaspora. Therefore, it is necessary to bear in mind that the performances of preachers on television, as with other media, are a strategy to promote themselves and their products to audiences and to increase the bargaining power if an organisation or community is eager to invite them to preach. The more often they appear on television channels, the greater fee the preachers can charge.<sup>125</sup>

As mentioned above, the fact that preachers receive payment for their *dakwah* activities is not uncommon in Indonesia. In my village in North Sumatra, I witnessed my father, as the member of the board of the mosque, gave a payment to a preacher after he delivered his sermon in the commemoration of the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad when I was a child. In general, Muslim communities also understand the consequences of inviting preachers and know how much cost they need to pay according to their social status and popularity. In relation to this issue, Yusuf Mansur stipulates that if preachers receive payment from Muslim communities, it is a reward from God due to their efforts to teach them about Islam. It is a common practice in the Muslim world. Further, he admits that he never requests a specific fare for his *dakwah*.<sup>126</sup> The fact above implies that Muslim communities have become a market of preachers, which give economic benefits. TV preachers are perceived in a similar light to television stars or celebrities in the society. Stars (or celebrities) are created through a proliferation of media focusing on every aspect of their life (Dyer 2007: 85).

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<sup>124</sup> Oik Yusuf. November 2014. "Pengguna Internet Indonesia Nomor Enam Dunia [Indonesian Internet Users Rank 6<sup>th</sup> in the World]. <https://tekno.kompas.com/read/2014/11/24/07430087/Pengguna.Internet.Indonesia.Nomor.Enam.Dunia>. Last accessed, March 4, 2015.

<sup>125</sup> Interview with Wiryoutomo, Jakarta, August 3, 2014.

<sup>126</sup> Interview with Yusuf Mansur, Tangerang, October 6, 2014.

Building on this theoretical framework we understand how media raise television preachers to become national celebrities in so many ways. They promote their *dakwah* brands, films, publish their biographies, make interviews, cover their daily habits and private lives.

The private life of television preachers is exposed by media and has become the consumption of public as that of celebrities through infotainment programmes on magazines and commercial television stations. Many authors write and film their life stories. The exposé of the private lives of television preachers based on media perspective has appeal to public, which is measured by rating and share. Solmed is the most frequent television preacher whose private life is often broadcast in infotainment programmes on commercial television channels.<sup>127</sup>

Television industries have shaped the preachers' images produced for public with a quite specific feature of each of them. Aa Gym is featured as a very pious Muslim, loving husband, and caring father. Yusuf Mansur is promoted as the icon of the miracles of almsgiving and a memoriser of the Quran. Jefri Al-Bukhori is well known as a fashionable preacher specialised in youth matters. These images of the preachers are formed through their everyday appearances in propagation of Islam, infotainment, celebrity talk shows, and news on television. They have become elites in the same stratum as movies stars, politicians, and the leaders of Muslim mass organisations.

Besides, their private lives become commodity, as such celebrities, to public consumed through infotainment programmes. For example, the relationship between *Ustaz* Solmed and his wife media to public exposed before marriage and even after their marriage their private lives have been uncovered through infotainment programmes. As explained in Chapter 1, the physical appearance and rhetorical skill are the main criteria to be a television preacher. It is why most television preachers are young adult and have good-looking faces. In relation to educational background and Islamic knowledge she states that most producers do not make education and knowledge of Islam priority to choose television preachers because the topics of the programmes of *dakwah* through television are usually simple and easily understood by common Muslims in urban villages. They therefore do not need a deep knowledge of Islam and a good Islamic educational background.<sup>128</sup> In search of television preachers, physical appearance and rhetoric remain the main criteria for television stations. According to a producer, they can recruit a

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<sup>127</sup> Interview with Rusmitantri, Jakarta, September 7, 2014.

<sup>128</sup> Interview with Purnamasidhi, Jakarta, September 14, 2014.

person with no Islamic education and knowledge to preach in their programme of *dakwah* in their television stations. All the criteria are made based on the necessity of popularity for the television preachers and the programmes.<sup>129</sup>

The appearance of preachers on TV can be based on the invitation from producers or recruitment conducted by television stations. The necessity of the preachers for *dakwah* programmes through television reflects the similarity between television preachers and celebrities. The discussion of audience of *dakwah* programmes on television will come later in Chapter 5. It is to ‘combining material success and moral connectedness is coming to be seen as the exemplary way of being a modern, moral Muslim.’ (Osella & Osella 2009: 196). The fact that television preachers from around cities of Jakarta are dominant to appear on national television stations show the way that producers find them depending on their networking and that of television preachers. According to Purnamasidhi’s experience as a producer, it is the easiest way to ask to a particular preacher to find several candidates of preachers for *dakwah* programmes because most preachers have connection with each other around the capital city of the country.<sup>130</sup>

With the help of television broadcast, the social status of television preachers as celebrities to some extent gives advantages politically in the public. Some preachers position themselves as Islamic leaders and in some cases attempt to drive their followers for their political goals. At the same time, many Muslims, who follow them, consider them to have charismatic leadership as discussed in Chapter 3. Popular television preachers involve in political and religious discourses and activities like general election and mass protests against the government’s decision. The broadcast of their programmes on television elevates their status as charismatic as other leaders from Muslim organisations as I will describe in the following section.

### **From preaching to leadership**

Television preachers’ Islamic leadership to Muslim communities can be understood by focusing on their involvements in several socio-political events in the society. During the Indonesian presidential election of 2014, Yusuf Mansur had to announce his neutral position via his personal website that he did not support any presidential candidates because there were some edited

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<sup>129</sup> Interview with Wiryoutomo, Jakarta, August 3, 2016.

<sup>130</sup> Interview with Purnamasidhi, Jakarta, September 14, 2014.

photos of his with the two competing candidates Joko Widodo (popularly known as Jokowi) and Prabowo spread in social media. Instead, he asked his followers to pray to God may the election would run peacefully for the sake of the unity of the nation.<sup>131</sup> His position in that election was different from Aa Gym's, who publicly declared and asked his followers to support Prabowo because he considered Prabowo can unify Indonesian Muslim communities.<sup>132</sup> Many other preachers also supported Prabowo.

When I met Yusuf Mansur and spoke about his announcement during interview in his Islamic boarding school Darut Tauhid after the election, he stated that he did not choose Jokowi because he considered Jokowi to be insufficiently pious. Moreover, he was backed by the *Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan* (the Indonesia Democratic Party-Struggle or PDIP), which was regarded to support communism.<sup>133</sup> When I responded his answer with a question if he chose Prabowo, he just smiled without further explanation, so I turned into other questions. His smile was likely to indicate that he supported Prabowo just as Aa Gym and other television preachers. Considering the issues of piety and religiosity, which became the main discourse and debate in the election at that time, we can conclude that Yusuf Mansur supported Prabowo. There were four Islamic political parties, who supported Prabowo's presidential candidacy in 2014, which consisted of *Partai Keadilan Sejahtera* (the Properous Justice Party or PKS), PPP, *Partai Amanat Nasional* (National Mandate Party or PAN), and *Partai Bulan Bintang* (Crescent Star Party or PBB). Conversely, there was only one Islamic political party, *Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa* (National Awakening Party or PKB), which supported Joko Widodo. These political parties are categorised as Islamic because the majority of their supporters, who are Muslims (Umam and Junaidi 2017, Yunanto and Hamid, 2013).

Yusuf Mansur and other television preachers also called upon Muslims to join the protest against the former governor of Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama or Ahok (see Figure 5). Ahok was accused of having defamed Islam based on his statement on September 27, 2016 that Muslims should not be deceived by Muslim groups with the verse 51 of Al Maidah (5) in the Quran

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<sup>131</sup> Yusuf Mansur. July 2014. "Tentang Pilpres [About the Presidential Election]". <http://yusufmansur.com/tentang-pilpres/>. Last accessed, August 28, 2014.

<sup>132</sup> Sabrina Asril. May 2014. "Ceramah di Masjid Aa Gym Harapkan Prabowo-Hatta Satukan Umat [Preaching in a Mosque Aa Gym Hopes Prabowo-Hatta Unify Umma]." <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2014/05/20/1452467/Ceramah.di.Masjid.Aa.Gym.Harapan.Prabowo-Hatta.Satukan.Umat>. Last accessed on August 28, 2014.

<sup>133</sup> Interview with Yusuf Mansur, Tangerang, October 6, 2014.

to oppose him in the Jakarta Governorship Election 2017. His statement was recorded in a video, which was manipulated and then uploaded to Facebook. The recording of the video provoked a protest against Ahok by Muslim groups like FPI. They organised several mass demonstrations demanding the government to bring Ahok's case to the court. Yusuf Mansur and other television preachers asked Muslims to come to Jakarta to join the demonstrations through television and social media.<sup>134</sup> Later on May 9, 2017, Ahok was sentenced to two years in prison by North Jakarta District Court after being found guilty for blasphemy and inciting violence.<sup>135</sup>

I asked Yusuf Mansur about his opinion concerning Ahok's statement during the interview in his house. He responded that Ahok should learn to speak politely in public. He continued to say, 'that is what I would do if I become a governor or president because young generations learn from what they watch on television or media.' Further, he confirmed that Ahok's statement about the verse 51 of Al-Maidah from the Quran was related to the divinity of the Quran and was an insult to Muslims.<sup>136</sup> I watched and listened the same statement on several occasions on television when he was invited by several television stations to give his opinion about Ahok's case. Yusuf Mansur's support for the mass demonstrations against Ahok were shown by his providing of mineral water for the protestors and with his involvement in one of the demonstrations.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Herianto Batubara. October 2016. "Aa Gym Ikut Demo Ahok 4 November: Tetap Jaga Akhlakul Karimah [Aa Gym Participating in a Rally against Ahok 4 November: Keep Good Deeds." <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-3333050/aa-gym-ikut-demo-ahok-4-november-tetap-jaga-akhlakul-karimah> Last accessed, December 2, 2016.

<sup>135</sup> Tempo. May 2017. "Ahok Dihukum 2 Tahun Penjara, GNPf-MUI Terima Keputusan Hakim [Ahok is sentenced 2 years in prison, GNPf MUI accept the judge's decision]." [\[https://nasional.tempo.co/read/874086/ahok-dihukum-2-tahun-penjara-gnpf-mui-terima-putusan-hakim/full&view=ok](https://nasional.tempo.co/read/874086/ahok-dihukum-2-tahun-penjara-gnpf-mui-terima-putusan-hakim/full&view=ok). Last accessed, January 17, 2017.

<sup>136</sup> Interview with Yusuf Mansur, Tangerang, October 5, 2016.

<sup>137</sup> Interview with one of Yusuf Mansur's assistants, Jakarta, October 25, 2016.





Figure 3.3.: Television preachers including Aa Gym (background), Arifin Ilham (background), and Bakhtiar Nasir (middle) shown in the picture of the press conference to the media in Jakarta on May 2, 2017 before their demonstration against Ahok. Source: [www.tempo.co](http://www.tempo.co).

In the two examples above, we can see how television preachers position themselves as Muslim scholars and teachers, who give advice to Muslim community. They involve in the political arena of the country. Their significant position in the country can also be proven by the invitation from the president Jokowi in April 2017 when he asked for Muslim scholars' advice concerning the retribution of government's land. Yusuf Mansur and Arifin Ilham attended the meeting together with the representatives from MUI, NU, and Muhammadiyah. After the meeting with the president, Yusuf Mansur explained to the media that the president Jokowi asked Muslim scholars' opinion about possible cooperation with business stakeholders to cultivate the government's land asset through Islamic boarding schools.<sup>138</sup> The president's invitation shows recognition from the state to television preachers' leadership in the society.

Muslims in Indonesia may consider to follow television preachers' advice because each television preacher has followers, who follow their propagation of Islam on television and in social media. Purnomo, for example, one of Yusuf Mansur's followers from Jakarta stated in the interview with me that Yusuf Mansur's neutral position in the presidential

<sup>138</sup> Ray Jordan. April 2017. "Ini yang Dibahas Jokowi Bersama Yusuf Mansur dan Ulama di Istana [Here is What is Discussed by Jokowi with Yusuf Mansur and Muslim Scholars in State Palace]." <https://news.detik.com/berita/3476847/ini-yang-dibahas-jokowi-bersama-yusuf-mansur-dan-ulama-di-istana>. Last accessed, May 6, 2017.

election 2014 indicated his humbleness to call Muslims to keep the presidential campaign peaceful. Purnomo is convinced that Yusuf Mansur supported Prabowo in the election and so did he.<sup>139</sup> As mentioned in chapter 2, humbleness is one of the criteria of charisma. Afterwards, charisma shapes leadership of television preachers. In this respect, television preachers to certain extent have transformed their popularity through media into religious authority for Muslims in the country. This evidence will be reinforced in chapter 5 in the session of question and answer in *dakwah* programmes.

### Conclusion

Yusuf Mansur's case is a distinctive figure in *dakwah* programmes in comparison with Aa Gym. The appearance of Yusuf Mansur marks a new trend in TV preachers after Aa Gym because he has an Islamic educational background. Aa Gym and other TV preachers are considered illegitimate to represent the voices of Islam in the society because they were not trained as Muslim scholars. In that respect, Yusuf Mansur is similar to the TV preachers during the New Order era including Zainuddin MZ and Iskandar SQ who were educated in Islamic schools. Like other TV preachers after reformation, Yusuf Mansur considers his life experience from being a bad Muslim to becoming a pious Muslim by becoming a preacher as a miraculous journey to attract audiences. The life experiences of the TV preachers are viewed by the audiences as a reflection of their lives to take the same journey to practice *dakwah*. Therefore, their life experiences also add their popularity on TV and in the society.

TV preachers have to find their 'brand' in Islam for their *dakwah* in order to attract audiences and become popular. Brand means an interesting topic as the centre of their preaching. Yusuf Mansur makes almsgiving and then the advantage to read the Quran by heart as his brands of preaching to raise his popularity, which leads him to become a national celebrity. Other preachers using pious family in Islam, youth in Islam, and so forth as their brands. His popularity forms his businesses and leadership among Muslim communities in the country. This leadership enables him to have followers coming from different segments of the society. His role become significant not only as a TV preacher but also Islamic leader to advice and lead Muslim communities. Yusuf Mansur enhances his legitimacy as Islamic leader by showing his connections with Muslim clerics from Saudi Arabia as the origin

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<sup>139</sup> Interview with Purnomo, Jakarta, December 5, 2014.

of Islam. This leadership role of TV preachers in the society is evident in their involvement in political campaigns and their contribution in political debates in the elections. This evidence shows how they use *dakwah* not only for religious objectives but also political ones.