



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

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

Siddik, S.

### **Citation**

Siddik, S. (2021, November 9). *Mediating Islam in Post-Suharto Indonesia: performing Dakwah through popular TV shows*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3239164>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3239164>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

## Chapter 5

### WATCHING PRACTICES OF *DAKWAH* ON TV IN EVERYDAY LIVES

The previous chapter explores the agendas of Salafi *dakwah* on Trans7 and TransTV in order to understand the contestation of religious authority on TV and in society. The discourses and debates surrounding the Salafi *dakwah* on TV reveals the disputes among Islamic authorities to define what are the legitimate practices of Islam. In respect to religious authority, it is also pivotal to understand how *dakwah* programmes on TV are consumed by the audiences and how they react to the programmes. Therefore, this chapter elaborates on the watching practice and reactions of audiences to *dakwah* programmes to understand their reception in society. I will argue that the daily reception of *dakwah* through TV stations forms alternative religious authorities for Muslims in contrast to the traditional religious authority which is dominated by NU, Muhammadiyah, and MUI. Moreover, the reactions towards the discourses of *dakwah* on TV in the form of public debates prove the contribution of *dakwah* programmes on TV to the fragmentation of religious authorities (Eickelman and Anderson 1999).

This chapter begins by discussing several relevant studies of television consumption in Indonesia to understand the attitude of watching TV among Indonesian audiences. Afterwards, I discuss the cases of watching *dakwah* programmes in Jakarta, Medan, and Bali. Further, I explain the characteristics of the audiences of *dakwah* programmes on TV and their formation in the society. Furthermore, I analyse the audiences' perception of *dakwah* programmes. Lastly, it deals with how *Tanya Jawab* (Question-Answer/Q&A) section of the programmes forms alternative religious authority and play an important role in public discourses and debates on Islam in the society.

#### Watching *dakwah* on TV

There have been few studies on watching television practice in Indonesia. For example, Loven (2008) has investigated the audience's interpretation of *Si Doel*, an Indonesian soap opera, which was broadcast on the first commercial television RCTI, in 1994. Using Fairclough's (1995) concept of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Loven studied the audience's language

interpretation articulated in the dialogue of *Si Doel* to understand cultural ideology expressed through it. One of the findings suggests that *Si Doel* mediated and promoted Betawi Malay language to the public. Betawi refers to one of the languages spoken by the inhabitants in the city of Jakarta. It is also known as Jakarta Malay or Batavian Malay language. Another example is Nilan's study on the audience of *Telenovela*, a soap opera, in Bali (Nilan 2001). The study explores gender and women's engagement as an audience watching *Telenovela*. She found that watching *Telenovela* in Bali represents gender and women's involvement 'with textual representations which are inflected by class and fractured by religious and political tensions.' (Nilan 2001: 95). Rakhmani observed the audience of Islamic soap operas on Indonesian TV channels. In her study, she discussed the discourses and debates among the audience about religious modernisation and limited pluralism (Rakhmani 2016: 132–161). However, her study does not include *dakwah* programmes on TV which are important if we want to understand how Islamic discourse and debates on TV and in the society influence each other. In this respect, this chapter attempts to continue the aforementioned studies by observing the watching practice of *dakwah* programmes on TV.

TV audiences receive a set of programmes from TV stations leaving them to choose what is provided by the TV producers. In this respect, watching TV can be considered as active attitude because the audiences are able to choose what they want to watch. At the same time, it can also be regarded as passive attitude because actually they can only choose what programmes available, they watch TV at that time. It is the same situation in watching *dakwah* on TV because it is broadcast at the same time in various TV stations leaving audiences with limited choices. Since the contents of *dakwah* programmes on TV are repetitive, the audiences of *dakwah* programmes on TV can easily become involved in the making of discourses and debates of Islam in the public through their reaction to particular topics. Their involvement can occur through the questions they were asking during the programmes or their commentaries on the programmes especially regarding the disagreement against what was delivered by the TV preachers. In other words, religious advice from TV preachers is received by the audience in different ways. Some of them agree and do the advice, some ignore it, and others disagree and debate it (Hobart 2006: 281).

MAny of the audiences watch *dakwah* on TV as well as entertainment programmes as part of their everyday activities. They enjoy the images, fun stories and emotions in *dakwah* programmes on TV, which are combined with

religious advice about how to be a good husband or wife in Islam, how to be successful Muslims, what Muslims should do to go to heaven and so on. The audience may have different perception of the particular topic delivered by the preacher in the programme, but they still may enjoy the entertaining parts of it. The entertaining part of *dakwah* programmes on TV is obvious even for non-Muslims, who like watching them every day. For example, a non-Muslim friend in Medan, Asken, tells a story of his mother, who always watches *Mamah dan Aa Beraksi* on Indosiar in the morning because she likes the entertaining style of Mamah Dedeh. <sup>198</sup> The audiences can be entertained through the performance of the preachers, their appearance, rhetoric or stories.

On the other hand, they can obtain new insights and information of the teachings of Islam that may be useful for them to enhance their faith and morality or to improve their daily rituals. To the audience, it is generally an effort to be educated and entertained at the same time. <sup>199</sup> However, assuming that the audiences will automatically behave in accordance with what the preachers said in the *dakwah* programmes is misleading. Some audiences ignore, disagree, or debate what they heard from the programmes. In this respect, the notion of audience engagement implies an active practice in which the audience have their own decision to make based the messages and images they receive (Ang 1991 and Horrocks and Kolinsky 1996).

For example, Wahyu in Medan watches *Mamah dan Aa Beraksi* on Indosiar in the same restaurant near the University of North Sumatera every morning at the same time. He is a forty-five years old driver of *Becak Montor* or *Bentor* (Motorcycle Peci cab). He graduated from Senior High School. He did not continue his education to university level because his parents were poor. After I saw him in the restaurant three times, I introduced myself and started a chat with him about the programme. In my opinion, Wahyu enjoyed watching *Mamah dan Aa Beraksi* very much. He laughed every time he heard Abdel or Mamah Dedeh make a joke or tell funny stories. He told me that *Mamah dan Aa Beraksi* on is his favourite programme. Wahyu often asks the restaurant owner to switch to *Mamah dan Aa Beraksi* programme when he comes in for meals. He likes watching the programme because it is attractive in the way it is designed: the opening song, colourful costumes of the live female audiences in the studio, gestures that they make during the broadcast of the programme and the rhetorical skill of the host and the preacher of the

---

<sup>198</sup> Interview with Asken, Medan, January 16, 2015.

<sup>199</sup> Interview with Hamdan, Medan, January 17, 2015.

programme. In regards to the Islamic messages in the programme, he asserts that he neglects what the preacher delivers. He is a pious Muslim who performs prayers five times a day and fulfils his obligations as a Muslim.<sup>200</sup> I also found the same kind of audiences in Jakarta, who only enjoy the entertainment part of *Mamah dan Aa Beraksi* in Indosiar. They do not take into account of what Mamah Dedeh delivers in her programme. This means that this type of audience watches *dakwah* programmes on TV only for entertainment. They watch them because they like the decoration of the stage, host and preacher, live audiences, and articulation of the messages with jokes or funny stories. In this respect, Islamic advice and teachings in the programmes are not of primary importance.

On the other hand, some audiences take the messages delivered in the programmes into account to improving their faith, piety, and morality in their everyday lives. When I went to Jakarta to do fieldwork in 2015 and 2016, I contacted several high school friends of mine from Jakarta, who always read Aa Gym's preaching through books, magazines, and novels, when they were studying with me in Islamic senior high school (MAN) in Cipasung, Tasikmalaya, West Java. I wondered if they still read Aa Gym's preaching, especially for female friends after Aa Gym decided to marry a second wife. Nahida was one of them. She is a 31-years-old wife and business woman with two children. She sells hijabs and halal cosmetic products to help her husband financially, who works in the Indonesian Immigration Office in Jakarta. Her husband was her school friend in MAN Cipasung. She told me that she returned to Jakarta after she finished her study at Islamic boarding school and MAN Cipasung in Tasikmalaya to continue her study in business management at the University of Indonesia. Her appearance is still the same showing piety and modesty with big hijab, which covers her hair and much of her torso. I asked her whether she still listened to Aa Gym's preaching. She responded that she no longer did, as Aa Gym became a celebrity for Indonesian television stations. He became implicated in gossiping – something which, according to her, is forbidden in Islam.

More recently, Nahida prefers to watch *Mamah dan Aa Beraksi*. She likes the programme because the messages and advice are mostly about household matters and the ways to educate children in Islam. She explains that her husband likes it too and therefore they often watch the programme together in the morning before her husband goes to work. I asked whether she does what Mamah Dedeh said in the programme like what she did to what Aa

---

<sup>200</sup> Interview with Wahyu, Medan, January 15, 2015.

Gym said when she was in senior high school. She answers that she strives to be consistent to behave in accordance with what she listens from Mamah Dedeh like teaching her children how to read the Quran correctly and *Salawat* (Prayers for the Prophet Muhammad) in order to make them devout Muslims.<sup>201</sup> There are some audiences, who listen to the advice delivered by the preachers of the *dakwah* programmes on TV in Jakarta and Medan. They listen to the programmes and preachers every day in houses and other places and try to act based on what they hear from the programmes. In this respect, the audience perceive the preachers of the programmes as the sources of Islamic knowledge where the audience refer to deal with daily matters concerning their religion.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that the messages of programmes of propagation of Islam on television in some cases turn into public debates because the audiences have different interpretations about the contents. The interpretation of the audiences concerning a particular case in *dakwah* programmes on television is determined by their political understanding. It happens also in the audiences' responses towards soap operas and films in Indonesia (Nilan 2001: 86 and Sen 2000: 9–10). The influence of the audiences' political understanding in *dakwah* programmes on television in Indonesia can be found in the formulation of questions delivered during Question-Answer section as discussed in the next section of this chapter. The questions are formulated based on the current issues in the society brought by the audience to the programmes to seek answers or justifications from the preachers, who are considered knowledgeable in Islam by the audience. The questions are not only influenced by their political understanding, but also social and cultural one concerning what happens in the society.

Like watching other television programmes, the attitude of watching for the audiences of propagation of Islam on television is typically busy with everyday activities such as eating (breakfast, dinner, or snacks), talks between viewers, child-care duties, and household tasks (Nilan 2001: 85). I found that watching for Indonesian audiences is complementary activity, which is considered useful and attractive to improve piety and entertain their daily life at the same time. As I mentioned in chapter 1, many activities of propagation of Islam in Indonesian society are combined with entertainment events and the messages of the propagation includes jokes and humorous stories (Millie 2017). This form of propagation of Islam is brought and modified to television by the preachers and producers for the audiences. In the coming

---

<sup>201</sup> Interview with Nahida, Jakarta, March 15, 2015.

section, I elucidate the activity of watching *dakwah* programmes on television from the field in Medan, Jakarta, and Bali.

### **Audience in Medan and Jakarta**

During my fieldwork in Medan 2015 and 2016, I lived with Agus, one of my nephew's lecturers, who works in the faculty of Islamic Law at North Sumatra State Islamic University. Initially, I had asked my nephew, who to find me a place to stay during my observation in Medan. My nephew introduced me to Agus when we meet at his office. Agus is about forty years old and teaches the sciences of Hadith and Quran in the faculty of Islamic Law at the university. He has two children. I told him that I was conducting a research project on propagation of Islam on television. He responded that he liked several *dakwah* programmes on TV stations. It is interesting to know that someone, who has sufficient knowledge of Islam and teaches in Islamic university, likes to watch *dakwah* programmes on television. Agus stated that he was delighted to meet me and want me to share my experience and knowledge about studying abroad.<sup>202</sup> We drove to his house, which was about 30 minutes away, where I then met his wife and children.

Agus invited me to have dinner together with his family at a table with six chairs next to the living room where there was also a Television. During dinner, the television was on, showing a news programme on TVOne. The conversation during the dinner was about my life story because Agus and his wife wanted to know more about my background. Afterhaving dinner, Agus and I went to a mosque in the neighbourhood for our evening prayers. After our evening prayer, Agus' family watched a comedy programme on Trans7. They sometimes switched the channel to other television channels like NET, RCTI, and so forth to find other more interesting comedy programmes.

In the morning, Agus's family began their activities at 5am. They conducted the dawn prayer together at home. Afterwards, his wife, Ida prepared their breakfast in the kitchen while Agus read several verses of the Quran in the living room and the children took a bath. They watched, *Mamah dan Aa Beraksi* on Indosiar while having breakfast at around 6am. I had breakfast with them. Agus shared his opinion about the programme during breakfast even though I did not ask him because he knew my research project. He stated that he preferred the programme of *Mamah dan Aa Beraksi* to others because the topics were up to date and because of Mamah Dedeh herself. He

---

<sup>202</sup> Interview with Agus, Medan, January 1, 2015.

explained that Mamah Dedeh had deep Islamic knowledge to support her sermons and answer to the questions that Muslims asked during the programme. I asked him what kind of questions, he asserted that the problems varied and addressed to different levels of ages. Mamah Dedeh can deal with all of them.<sup>203</sup>

We talked casually while eating our breakfast. Agus and his family did not focus on the programme at the time because he chatted during breakfast. The topic of our conversation varied not only about propagation of Islam but also about his children's school, neighbours, and the city of Medan. On the second and third day, I did not have breakfast with them. I wanted to check whether or not they watched the same programme. They did but they enjoyed their conversation on the table as usual.

A similar attitude to watching *dakwah* programmes applied to Halimah's house in Pasar Minggu, Jakarta where I stayed during my fieldwork in Jakarta. Halimah, a 33-year-old housewife and a seller of mobile phone, whom I have mentioned in chapter 3. Halimah, watched a programme of propagation of Islam, *Indahnya Kebersamaan* (Beauty of Togetherness) on SCTV at 4 am in the morning with her families while preparing breakfast. Her husband (35 years old) was sitting on the chair in their small living room watching the same programme. He was ready with his uniform as a security in a manufacturing company in North Jakarta. After the breakfast was ready, they sat on the floor together in front of the television set to have breakfast and watch the programme. I was watching them from my bedroom behind the table where I sat with my notebook. I was facing the living room. I intentionally opened the door to see their activities in the morning. They chatted and watched the programme of propagation of Islam at the same time. They smiled and laughed whenever they watched or heard fun statements from the preacher. Halimah sometimes discussed the preacher's cloth, background, and wealth, with her husband.

After breakfast, the husband went to his office and Halimah took their children to school. She went to her mobile phone shop from school, which is not far from her house. In her small shop, she often watches *Mamah dan Aa Beraksi* on a 10-inch portable television set while waiting for and serving the costumers. This was where I first met her when I bought seom phone credit for my mobile phone. I had observed her activities in that shop for three days from a small restaurant across the street from her shop before I asked to rent a room in her house during my fieldwork in Jakarta.

---

<sup>203</sup> Interview with Agus, Medan, January 2, 2015.



In small restaurants in Jakarta and Medan where I usually had breakfast during my fieldwork, people often watched *dakwah* programmes. The owners of the restaurants chose the programmes for their customers. Customers usually would not complain or ask the channel to be changed. I found once that one of the customers of the small restaurant in Medan was non-Muslim but he enjoyed watching *Mamah dan Aa Beraksi* while having breakfast. In an interview after having breakfast, Sinaga, a 42-year-old taxi driver, explained that:

I find it (the programme of *Mamah dan Aa Beraksi* on Indosiar) funny and entertaining to watch. I enjoy the jokes that the host and preacher make. I am a Christian and, in my opinion, it is important to know others' religion to avoid misunderstanding. No wonder there is many Islamic programmes on television because Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the world. No problem with that for me as long as we can live together in harmony and peace like in this city (Medan).<sup>204</sup>

Entertainment plays an important part in the marketability of *dakwah* programmes on TV to attract audiences throughout the country (Chapter 2). In this respect, they are attractive for not only Muslims but also non-Muslims. A Christian friend of mine in Jakarta found her mother to have the same opinion as Sinaga's. She told me that her mother watches the programme of *Mamah dan Aa Beraksi* every morning while cleaning her house. She stated that the programme and preacher entertained her. She laughed whenever the host and preacher made jokes and concentrated whenever she heard statements or questions that are of her interests.<sup>205</sup>

To Muslims' audience in the small restaurants in Jakarta and Medan, what the owners of the restaurants watch does not matter. They just enjoy watching television while eating. They do so at their homes too. In a short conversation after breakfast, Kurnia, a 32-year-old staff in a Tax Office Headquarter at Jati Padang Street near the restaurant in Pasar Minggu, explained that he just liked the images on television: the women in nice clothes, as well as this the songs and tunes played by the Islamic band were good to listen to. The jokes told by the host and preacher were natural and inoffensive.<sup>206</sup>

---

<sup>204</sup> Interview with Sinaga, Medan, January 5, 2015.

<sup>205</sup> A conversation with Yvonne, Jakarta, March 22, 2015.

<sup>206</sup> Interview with Kurnia, Jakarta, March 14, 2015.

Many of the customers of the restaurants came to eat with their friends. Similarly, with Agus's and Halimah's families, they ate while watching TV and chatting. They shared their opinions about the preacher's statements. I was sitting behind them when a customer of the restaurant in Jakarta began to chat with his friends:

Customer 1: *Mamah Dedeh* is clever and firm. She answers the questions from the audience firmly and is straight to the point (*tidak suka basa-basi*). Her programmes last longer than any other *dakwah* programmes on television. May be because Muslim women like it. Just see Muslim women who attend her live performance. There are different groups every day.

Customer 2: are those live audiences paid to attend the programme like those who attend music shows on television? Or they pay to appear on the programme?

Customer 3: I do not think so. People in Indonesia like to appear on television. Perhaps the television has a long list of groups who want to attend the programme.

The opinion expressed by customer 1 often appeared when viewers were watching *dakwah* programmes on TV. It was a casual statement about their feelings. Such expression usually emerges after they have watched the programmes several times. The same situation applies to customer 2 and 3, who expressed his curiosity and opinion. These opinions and questions imply that the viewers have their perceptions about what they watch and hear even though the main activity of watching is just to enjoy the performance. They also reflect what they see to their experience like what customer 2 did in the chat above.

Rusmidin, the owner of the restaurant in Medan, chose *Mamah dan Aa Beraksi* as a means to learn more about Islam and to propagate Islamic teachings to his customers. In response to my question whether or not he was worried if non-Muslims would not buy food from his restaurant because he watched the programme, Rusmidin (37 years old) answered:

I do not care about that. I believed (that) profit of my business came from Allah (not from the programme that I chose to watch). My intention of watching the programme was to learn and spread of propagation of Islam. If there were non-Muslims coming to the

restaurant for breakfast, might they get direction from Allah to convert to Islam. If they do not, it does not matter.<sup>207</sup>

To learn Islam from watching the *dakwah* programmes on TV is a common purpose, expressed by several respondents. For example, Widodo, a 32 years old teacher in one of Junior High Schools in Medan, has the same opinion as Rusmidin's. He watched programmes of propagation of Islam to improve his Islamic knowledge. He argued that television programmes, which had education values, were rare in Indonesia. He usually watched programmes of propagation of Islam in the morning and sometimes in the night. He watched any kind of *dakwah* programmes on TV.<sup>208</sup> Halimah also explained that her intention was to study Islamic teachings from the programme of propagation of Islam. She hopes that God rewards her with the blessing for her businesses with a lot of profit.<sup>209</sup> Profit here not merely means money. Rusmidin and Halimah believe that profit from God can be in forms of health for their families, success for their children, and so on.

### **Audience in Bali**

The findings in Denpasar show a different picture, from those in Jakarta and Medan. I did my observation in the neighbourhood of Teuku Umar Street, Denpasar and *Kampung Bugis* (Bugis area) in Kuta. Most of the family in both areas are Muslims. Their ancestors came to Bali from East Java, South Sulawesi, and other provinces in Indonesia. Some of Muslims in Bali are Hadhramis, descendants of Indonesia's Arab immigrants.<sup>210</sup>

During my stay in Denpasar, I lived with my 29 years old cousin, Nani. She is from East Java. She worked in a restaurant and her husband, Nurman (30 years old), works as a tour guide. They have a two years-old son. A baby sitter took care of him while their parents were at work. They never watched *dakwah* programmes on TV at home. They watched news or reality shows. The Muslims in Denpasar that I interviewed did not watch *dakwah* programmes on TV. Some stated that the reason was that they have already started their work at offices, shops, restaurants, and so on when *dakwah*

---

<sup>207</sup> Interview with Rusmidin, Medan, January 9, 2015.

<sup>208</sup> Interview with Widodo, Medan, January 3, 2015.

<sup>209</sup> Interview with Halimah, Jakarta, September 20, 2014.

<sup>210</sup> For more discussion of Hadhramis and the map of Muslim areas in Bali, see Martin Slama. 2005). "Orang Indonesia Keturunan Hadramaut di Bali: Masyarakat Diaspora dalam Perbandingan [Indonesians with Arabic Hadramaut descendants in Bali: Diaspora community in comparison]." *Masyarakat Indonesia: Majalah Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial Indonesia*, XXXI (2): 1-24.

programmes are aired on TV. Their opinion is understandable because local time in Bali is a head one hour of that in Java.<sup>211</sup> Others said that they prefer *dakwah* from established Muslim scholars from NU and Muhammadiyah because they have legitimate Islamic knowledge.<sup>212</sup>

Many Muslims in Denpasar and Kuta work as travel agents or traders. They also open restaurants, cafes and shops, which sell souvenirs for tourists. Some work as civil servants in government offices. Unlike in Jakarta and Medan, I did not find that the owners or caretakers of small restaurants or coffee shops in Denpasar and Kuta that I visited choose to watch *dakwah* programmes. Instead, they preferred to watch news programmes on TV in their restaurants. Hadi (38 years old), the owner of a small restaurant at Teuku Umar Street in Denpasar, stated that he did not choose to watch *dakwah* programmes in his restaurant because he wanted to welcome all customers, not only Muslims. He selected a news programme on local television stations in order to keep up to date with recent news about what is happening in Bali which might influence his business. For example, he wanted up-to-date news about the prices of vegetables and ingredients in traditional markets in Denpasar.<sup>213</sup> We can also easily identify restaurants owned by Muslims in Denpasar and Kuta by looking at their names. If Hadi is worried about hesitancy or rejection from Hindu customers because of watching Islamic programmes, he would not have attributed his restaurant with the word 'Muslim'.

During my observation in Jakarta and Medan, I found public announcements and advertisements on roads and streets about upcoming Islamic gatherings where famous would be present. Their names appeared on banners and billboards. However, I did not find any of them in Denpasar and Kuta. I asked Hadi whether there are Islamic gatherings around Denpasar. He responded that the gatherings are held on mosques, never in a big hall or field like in Java because Muslims are afraid of such events will offend their Hindu neighbours (*menyinggung perasaan tetangga yang beragama Hindu*).<sup>214</sup> His statement indicates there are worries among Muslims to offend Hindus for what they do in everyday life.

When I visited Bali for the second time, I contacted Jatmiko, a 45-year-old tour guide through his account on Facebook.<sup>215</sup> I found his name when I

---

<sup>211</sup> Interview with Rafi, Denpasar, March 1, 2015.

<sup>212</sup> Interview with Rohil, Denpasar, March 3, 2015.

<sup>213</sup> Interview with Hadi, Denpasar, March 5, 2015.

<sup>214</sup> Interview with Hadi, Denpasar, March 5, 2015.

<sup>215</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/muslimtours>, accessed on 29 November 2017.

was browsing Muslim travel agencies on Facebook. Jatmiko, originally from Central Java, owns a business called Bali Muslim Tours in Denpasar. He helped me to find an accommodation and motorbike during my stay in the Muslim areas in Kuta – a popular area for domestic and international tourists. When he knew that I came to Bali to do ethnographical research, Jatmiko offered his house for my accommodation during my stay in Bali. His house is also located in Muslim areas in Kuta. His wife works at their souvenir shop every day. He has two sons: one is already married and works as civil servant in Negara, the capital city of Jembrana regency, Bali. His other son studies at Udayana University. There was a room in his house. At the time I came, the room was vacant, which Jatmiko offered to me.

He told me that he often accompanied domestic and international Muslim tourists from Java, who wanted to visit Islamic heritage and the tombs of Muslim saints in Bali.<sup>216</sup> He also helped Muslim travellers to find halal restaurants and hotels in Bali. He showed me several Muslim restaurants, hotels, shops and other tourism businesses in Kuta. My impression is that he has made strong connections with the owners of these tourism businesses, some of whom are Hindus. When I asked about the reason why he had good relation with businesses run by Hindus, he explained:

In business matters in Bali, we (Muslims) must have good relation with Hindus here because they are the majority of the population. Besides, it is important for them to know us as Muslims from this relationship, especially after Bali bombings (2002), in order to avoid hatred and prejudice. They (Hindus) are also glad because we trust them. They often ask me about Islam directly and I explain to them. This is important rather than they know it from media. However, I make relation with them only for souvenirs, not for food and hotels.<sup>217</sup>

In this respect, Jatmiko's attempt to embrace the majority of the population is seen as a strategy to extend his tour company because of limited Muslim souvenir shops available in Kuta. It can also be seen as a strategy to save his company from the issue of the implementation of Sharia tourism in Bali by the central government in Jakarta. Jatmiko limited his business relation with Hindus to souvenirs is understandable because many Muslims are often strict

---

<sup>216</sup> For the study of Balinese Muslim saints, see Syaifuddin Zuhri. 2013. "Inventing Balinese Muslim Sainthood." *Indonesia and the Malay World* 41 (119): 1-13.

<sup>217</sup> Interview with Jatmiko, Kuta, May 5, 2016.

in regards to food and hotels. Most of them want halal food and hotels, which have *Kiblat*<sup>218</sup>.

During my stay in his house, the members of the house never watched *dakwah* programmes. They rarely turned on the television set in their living room. I saw Jatmiko watching news programmes several times. When I interviewed him why he did not watch television often, he stated that he had no time for that because he had to find customers and serve them. His wife also worked until 9pm. His youngest son worked part time in a restaurant. Clients often asked him to drive until late at night.<sup>219</sup> When I assumed that there might be some Muslims in Bali, who watch *dakwah* programmes on TV, Jatmiko responded that I did not know for sure. He said that ‘maybe there are some. However, most are busy with their jobs, trying to make a living.’<sup>220</sup>

I found a similar situation amongst young Muslims, most of whom were university students in several campuses in Jakarta, Medan, and Bali. They had a television set in their dormitory buildings, but they rarely used it to watch programmes of propagation of Islam. For instance, Arif, a 23-year-old student of North Sumatra State Islamic University argued that he and his friends never watched *dakwah* programmes because they were broadcast in the morning when most of the students were asleep or had gone to their campuses. They preferred to watch football matches on television. Further, he noted concerning my question about his opinion about the programmes that the broadcast of propagation of Islam through television was significant for Muslims because they could access Islamic education at home.<sup>221</sup> This is a common opinion that I found during interviews with university students in Medan, Jakarta, Denpasar, and Kuta.

Several studies have shown that many Muslim students in campuses are actively involved in propagation of Islam. They organise propagation of Islam forums to study Islam together in university mosques, classes, and public spaces in their campuses. They often invite preachers to come to their campuses to preach Islam (Hasan 2013: 4 and Rosyad 2006). In response to this fact, Zainal, a 25 years old student at Indonesian University, asserted that many Muslim students prefer to study Islam from student organisations in their campuses such as *Lembaga Dakwah Kampus* or LDK (the Institute for

---

<sup>218</sup> The term ‘kiblat’ is originally from the word ‘qibla’ in Arabic, which means the direction that Muslims should face when they are performing prayers. The direction of the face leads to Mecca in Saudi Arabia.

<sup>219</sup> Interview with Jatmiko, Kuta, May 7, 2016.

<sup>220</sup> Interview with Jatmiko, Kuta, May 7, 2016.

<sup>221</sup> Interview with Arif, Medan, January 25, 2015.

Propagation of Islam in Campus) and other small groups of Islamic pedagogy and from the Internet rather than television.<sup>222</sup> My observation in the campuses in Medan and Jakarta shows that the preachers that they invited, have Salafi backgrounds and some of them become preachers on Rodja TV and Trans7 as discussed in chapter 4. This finding means that there is a strong connection between propagation of Islam on television and in campuses. Muslim students consume the products of *dakwah* programmes on TV by inviting their preachers to their circles and learning groups. As discussed in Chapter 3, the broadcast of programmes of propagation of Islam have become a moment to promote new preachers to the society.

The combination of watching *dakwah* programmes on TV with other activities in Jakarta and Medan proved that watching programme of propagation of Islam was not the main activity for the audiences. They consider it as an entertainment, which also has some education value. The audiences in Jakarta and Medan enjoyed the style of *Mamah dan Aa Beraksi*. At the same time, they listened to the messages of the programmes. They paused their activities a little bit and glanced over the television when they heard and found the message meaningful or entertaining. They also talked to each other about the topics, hosts, preachers, and other things related to the programme that they were watching. Those activities are inseparable from a single process of watching programmes of propagation of Islam. The audiences' experiences in Jakarta, Medan, Denpasar, and Kuta show that the attitude of watching *dakwah* programmes is an active and social activity. They can decide which programmes that they want to watch or not to watch at all like in Denpasar and Kuta. If they watch, they will do together.

### **Audience of *dakwah* on TV in the society**

The previous findings about the audiences of *dakwah* programmes on TV in Medan and Jakarta shed light on their formation in the society. The audiences of *dakwah* programmes on TV consist of not only Muslims but also non-Muslims, whom also enjoy watching the programmes. Non-Muslims watch propagation of Islam through television due to its entertaining nature. It can be regarded as being beneficial for both Islamic and commercial industry. The use of television as an instrument for propagation of Islam and its creative formats for television broadcast makes it accessible to non-Muslims either in private and public spaces. To commercial television companies, it is

---

<sup>222</sup> Interview with Zainal, Jakarta, February 17, 2015.

important at least to increase their popularity among national audience. They benefit from a high fee that can be charged for advertising.

Based on the descriptions above, I found that the audiences of the *dakwah* programmes on TV are middle-class Muslims. It is not to say that working class Muslims do not watch the programmes but it is the middle-class which engage with in terms of discourses and debates of the *dakwah* programmes in the public sphere. The rise of Indonesian middle class happened in the beginning of the twenty-first century marked by Indonesian democratisation and globalisation (Rinaldo 2008: 23-39 and Rakhmani 2016: 5–11). The rise of middle class in the most populous Muslim country in the world triggers commercial industries including television to meet their demands of modern lifestyle, which later shape their identity (Hasan 2013: 143–178). *Dakwah* programmes on TV serve their demand of Islamic products together with cinema (Izharuddin 2017), fashion (Bucar 2017: 74–122), space and time during special month of Ramadan (Schmidt 2017: 25–54), and social media (Nisa 2018: 66–99). Middle class Muslims have played an important role as the consumers of Islamic products. They encourage commercial television industries to produce such Islamic programmes as propagation of Islam.

In terms of age, the audiences of *dakwah* programmes on TV vary widely. They are made up of university students, young adults and adults from middle class families. Many of them are highly educated. They own houses, motorbikes or cars and send their children to expensive schools. They have their own shops and restaurants. However, this finding does not mean that kids and teenagers do not watch the programmes. They may watch them with their families and friends. Like other television programmes, propagation of Islam can capture diverse audiences, who share common interests.

In regards to gender, much of the audience of *dakwah* programmes on TV are women. They watch the programmes by attending the broadcast in the studios and mosques or at homes with their families and friends. Some programmes of propagation of Islam are broadcast live with the presence of audience, whom are mostly women, on the stage. This audience comes from different Islamic study groups from throughout Java and parts of Sumatra. In the case of *Mamah dan Aa Beraksi*, the audiences have to register for the waiting list to attend the programme live in the Indosiar studio. At home, women usually initiate to watch a programme of propagation of Islam for their families or friends.



The enthusiasm of women to attend Islamic learning session is not new. The finding of this chapter about the dominance of women in watching or attending *dakwah* programmes on TV reflects their consumption of Islamic preaching in the society. For example, many Muslim women in Bandung, West Java, can attend three to five Islamic preaching or gatherings a week (Millie 2011: 151–169). This also applies to many Muslim women in Jakarta, Medan, and Bali. Besides watching *dakwah* programmes on TV, they attend Islamic learning gatherings in their communities regularly.

Their presence in preaching events either in their communities or in the studios of television companies should be understood in a wider sense than just to get Islamic knowledge from the preachers. They build and expand their business network, are involved in economic activities and promote a consumerist lifestyle. According to several informants, who attend *Mamah dan Aa Beraksi* live in the studio, every Islamic study group have three to five uniforms which they wear for special events such as the celebration of the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad or attending programmes of propagation of Islam in television studios. Some of them sell and buy dresses or makeup from each other.<sup>223</sup>

This evidence shows that watching *dakwah* programmes on TV is part of pious consumption of religious commodification. Audiences see *dakwah* programmes on TV as a product promoted and offered to the Muslim market like clothes, makeup, movies and so on in which portray a complex process of negotiation between Islamism and commercialism. It is therefore intriguing to know how the end of this negotiation in the case of *dakwah* programmes on TV in Indonesia. This will be explored in the coming sections.

### **Consumption of *dakwah* on TV**

Watching *dakwah* programmes on TV is part of the activity of consumption of ‘Islamic’ products, which are addressed to Muslims in Indonesia. The term ‘Islamic’ here refers to two different meanings. Firstly, it means any product, which has halal certificate on it. Halal here means that there is no ingredient in the product, which is forbidden by Islamic Jurisprudence based on the Quran and hadiths. Of the forbidden ingredients in Islam is anything made of the substance containing pork or dog meat. Besides, Muslims are also forbidden to eat meat which is not slaughtered with the name of God. Some

---

<sup>223</sup> Interview with the live audience of *Mamah dan Aa Beraksi*, Jakarta, February 20, 2015.

of the verses of the Quran, which explain halal food are Q.S. 2: 173 and Q.S. 16: 66.

Secondly, it means the products, which are considered to be able to improve piety and morality of Muslims. These products include fashion, banking, healing and others. We can witness the growth of Muslim women's fashion in shopping mall and online shops. Many conventional banks have also opened sharia-based branches to accommodate Muslims' demand for Islamic banking system. One such requirement is to have economic transaction without interest. Several Islamic banks are established to meet the demands. Some Muslims in Indonesia prefer to have health treatment based on the Prophet's methods.<sup>224</sup> Some of popular health treatments in Indonesia, which are claimed to root from the Prophet's traditions, are medicines, which are made of honey or olive oil. Some Muslims in Indonesia believe that these materials were used by the Prophet Muhammad for medicines. To Muslims in Indonesia, all these efforts is to improve their piety.

The demand of Islamic products in Indonesia is high and many investors and business companies want to benefit from the popularity of Islamic branding. Middle class Muslim have been the segment of the population targeted by companies for the reassurance of profitable businesses because they only buy products which are labelled as halal. As a result, many companies, which sell their products in Muslim countries like Indonesia and Malaysia, want to obtain halal certificate from Islamic authorities to be attractive to middle-class Muslims. This certificate is also demanded by some Muslims, who live in western countries like in The Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, and England (Shirazi 2016: 199 and Barkin 2013: 1-24).

Many middle-class Muslims in Indonesia believe that foreign products have better quality than local ones, but they have doubts whether or not their ingredients or materials are halal. By the label of halal on the products, they are sure that such products are halal to consume. Apart from food, perfume, soap, shampoo and other products also require halal certification. In respect of the *dakwah* programmes on TV, several foreign products with halal labels become the sponsors of the programmes. With the halal labels and the advert by television preachers, the audience is expected to be interested to use the products.

---

<sup>224</sup> Agung Sasongko. March 2018. "Pengobatan Ala Rasulullah [Healing Like the Prophet's]." <http://khazanah.republika.co.id/berita/dunia-islam/islam-digest/18/03/02/p4yfo5313-pengobatan-ala-rasulullah>. Last accessed, March 15, 2018.

Many celebrities, who decide to improve their religiosity by leaving their careers as an actor, actress, or singer, engage in preaching and selling Islamic dresses and halal cosmetics. They set up businesses like boutiques, restaurants and other kinds of products on their names and advertising them in the media. Some become brand ambassadors for foreign products. For example, Zaskia Sungkar,<sup>225</sup> an actor and singer, sells Islamic fashion including hijab and dress for Muslim women in social media after they are committed to Islam in 2014 (see Figure 5.1.). Many audiences of *dakwah* programmes on TV buy her products because they are popular. They argue that the fashion products offered by celebrities are both fashionable and Islamic.

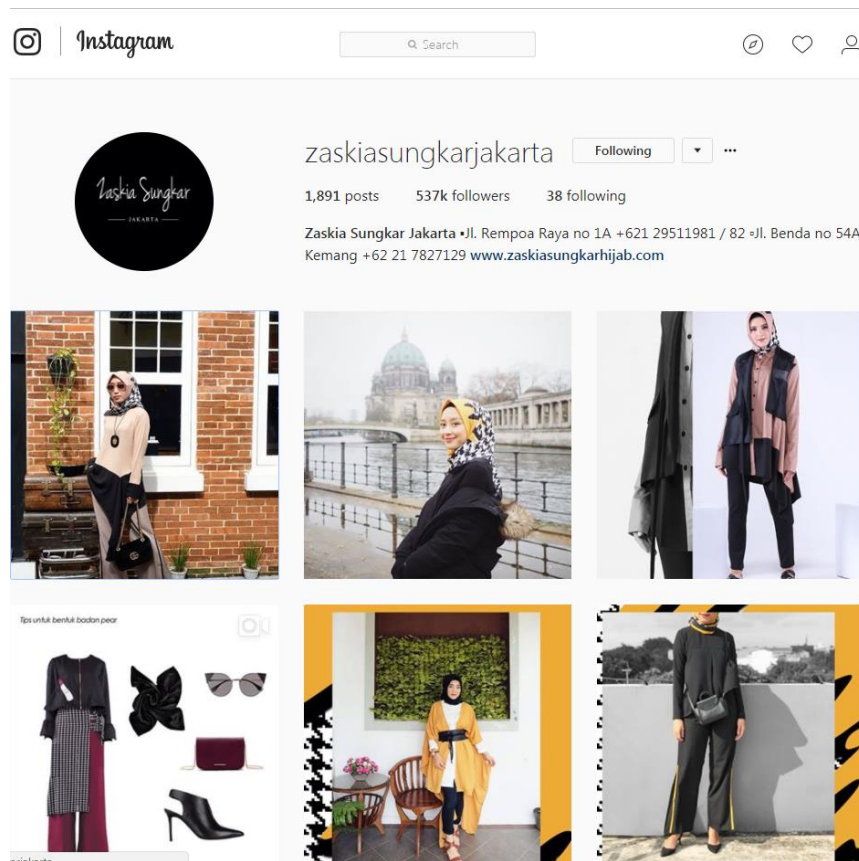


Figure 5.1.: Indonesian actress', Zaskia Sungkar's, Islamic fashion shop in her *Instagram* account. Source: Zaskia Sungkar.

<sup>225</sup> Zaskia Sungkar is an Indonesian actress, singer, and fashion designer. She is the eldest child of the actor Mark Sungkar. She was born in Jakarta 1990. For the collection of Zaskia Sungkar's products, see <http://zaskiasungkarhijab.com/>, accessed on 30 November 2017.

Many pop singers, actors and actresses, and band personnel have become increasingly pious. They have started wearing hijab, growing a beard and performing other activities, which are suggested in the Quran and hadiths. Audience of *dakwah* programmes on TV have two contrasting opinions concerning their change of lifestyle. Some see it beneficial for Indonesian public because they have followers, which may follow their paths to live in Islamic way. Some critics consider it as a strategy to participate in the Islamic trend to raise their popularity among Muslims. Afterwards, they use their popularity to attract followers to buy their Islamic products.

The increase of propagation of Islam broadcasts on television in Indonesia since the beginning of the twenty-first century is in line with the rise of the demand of Islamic products. Their needs of products stimulate investors to register their products to Islamic institutions such as MUI to get halal certificate. They use pious celebrities to promote, sell, and distribute their products to Muslims. On the other hand, Muslims are keen to become modern and pious at the same time. Therefore, they buy imported products, which have halal label, and those, which are promoted, sold, and distributed by pious celebrities. Modern here means that they have access to recent fashion designs, sophisticated technology, and economic development.

The consumption of Islamic products by middle class Muslims shows their effort to become stylish and find Islamic entertainment. Their engagement with programmes of propagation of Islam on television influences their perception on religion. In some occasions, middle class Muslims refer to programmes of propagation of Islam to deal with 'the fast-flowing current of social change and globalization' (Hasan 2013: 3). For example, there was a live audience, who asked whether Muslims were allowed to vote for non-Muslim in the elections, or to be vaccinated by foreign medicines. The majority of television preacher answer that Muslims are forbidden to vote for non-Muslim in the elections. Television preachers' opinion varies concerning vaccinations. These questions reflect socio-political conditions facing Muslims in Indonesian. The questions also show the dynamics of discourses surrounding *dakwah* programmes on TV.

In this account, Muslims to some extent can encourage the companies to provide the products that they need. The broadcast of propagation of Islam through television is the endeavour of television companies to provide Muslims a good television programme, which they may like to watch. Muslims audiences of *dakwah* programmes on TV not only become consumers but they also participate in the dynamics of the discourses of the

programmes. Political elites, investors, and business executives consider them a significant force to reach their goals: making profit for their companies or winning the elections.

In regards to *dakwah* programmes, Muslims, especially those who make up the middle class, expect good programmes, which can entertain and educate them at the same time. In fact, the quality of education in programmes of propagation of Islam can be lacking due to the domination of entertainment. Many viewers believe that the programmes on Indonesian television channels lack of education values, full of humours and jokes. In this respect, the viewers are vulnerable to being misled by what they watch on television (Hobart 2006: 347).

### ***Dakwah* on TV as entertainment**

In this section, I elucidate upon the way audiences see *dakwah* programmes on TV in their everyday life to understand their perception about the programmes. Based on the preceding discussion about the attitude of watching *dakwah* programmes on TV during my fieldwork, I found that the audiences perceive the programmes as either an entertainment or a medium to improve their understanding of Islam. There are three reasons underlying this finding.

First, audiences are keen to watch *dakwah* programmes in which the preachers make jokes, tell funny stories about their experiences and sing songs with a beautiful voice. They like this type of preacher. It is not an entirely new phenomenon in Indonesian society. The audiences of *dakwah* programmes on TV are not different from those, who attend the events of propagation of Islam in other parts of society. Muslims will attend propagation of Islam, which is delivered by preachers, who are clever to make jokes, have beautiful voice to sing or recite the verses of the Quran, and can tell funny stories. This activity of propagation of Islam is conducted in weddings and circumcision celebrations across Indonesia. Propagation of Islam becomes the closing part after other entertaining agendas like a performance of *Dangdut*, ‘the infectiously rhythmic music’ and Muslims attend it to entertain themselves (Millie 2017: 1–4).

Second, the audience watch *dakwah* programmes on TV while doing other activities. This makes *dakwah* no difference from other entertaining programmes on television. They laugh at the jokes and funny stories in the programmes or just enjoy the images of the programmes. If the audience’s

intention of watching *dakwah* programmes is to learn Islam, they will focus on hearing the messages of the programmes delivered by the preachers.

Third, *dakwah* programmes are broadcast when there are no entertaining programmes for audiences. Their competitor is only the news programmes, which leaves audiences no choice for entertaining programmes. They watch programmes of propagation of Islam as entertainment or they do not turn on the television set because they do not like the programmes broadcast in the same schedule as *dakwah*.

The audiences, who watch *dakwah* programmes on TV, enjoy the performances of programmes of propagation of Islam in terms of the design, decoration, host, preacher, and format of the programmes. The programmes are set up for audiences in various ways to attract them to watch. One of the entertaining parts of *dakwah* is the appointment of comedians to become hosts or attend the programmes. The format of *dakwah* programmes appeals to not only Muslims but also non-Muslims as mentioned in the second section of this chapter.

### **From religious authority towards public debates: Q&A session**

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the routinisation of giving advice and recommendations for the audiences through the performances of *dakwah* in TV shows shapes the charisma of the TV preachers as part of religious authority (Turner 2007: 118). The Q&A session of *dakwah* programmes enhances that finding of Chapter 2. Religious authority can be established when there are some Muslims, who seek answers for religious matters from Muslim scholars (*mufti*). In the Q&A session, TV preachers play a role of a Muslim scholar, while the audiences who ask questions act *mustafti*, people who come to Muslim scholars in need of a fatwa or advice. Afterwards, the preachers will answer the questions from the audience referring to the Quran or Hadiths or using their own reasoning (Kaptein 2004: 122). TV preachers of *dakwah* programmes become new religious authority because they give advice, recommendation, answers or fatwas for the audiences.

On several occasions, advice and answers to the audience's questions in Q&A session of *dakwah* programmes on TV turn into public debates. This usually happens where debatable issues appeared in the programmes. The audiences asked questions about the issues because they wanted to hear the preachers' opinions. The audiences' responses to the answers of the preachers depended on their knowledge background of Islam. The audiences usually

ask the questions based on the topics debated by Muslims in the society such as the obligation to wear hijab or to do polygamy. The audiences and Muslims debated the answers of the preachers. The audiences of other programmes of *dakwah* often repeat the same questions to other preachers.

To know audiences' responses and receptions on the answers of the preachers, I interviewed the audience members, who attended the live broadcast of *dakwah* programmes and who watched from television. The debates cover the issues of hijab and polygamy.

### *1. The controversy of hijab*

Indonesian Muslims heatedly debated the definition and legal status of hijab in Islamic law after a famous preacher and Quran interpreter, Quraish Shihab, stated that the hijab is not obligatory for Muslim women. This statement was delivered during a Q & A session of a *dakwah* programme on MetroTV. At that time, MetroTV invited him and his family to the programme to discuss about how to build a good Muslim family. The good family here was framed as smart household by having access to good education at universities abroad. Quraish Shihab himself graduated from Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt from bachelor to doctoral degrees. He served as the minister of religious affairs in 1998 under Suharto's regimes. Economic crisis, which hit Indonesia in 1997 and 1998 and the protests against Suharto's New Order regimes resulted in his short service as the minister of religious affairs as on 21 May 1998, Suharto announced his resignation as the president.

At the broadcast time, a woman in the live audience in the studio asked Quraish Shihab why his wife and daughters did not wear a hijab. The woman stated that it is an obligation for Muslim women to cover their bodies except palm and face. It is worth noting that Muslim scholars in Islamic jurisprudence have different interpretations concerning which part of women's bodies should be covered in public. The audience member's statement about hijab obligation is the opinion of the majority of Muslim scholars. The question of the audience was based on the Shafi'i School of Islamic Jurisprudence. In response to the question, Quraish Shihab answered:

Muslim scholars have different opinion about hijab. Some define it as the coverage of all the bodies; others understand it as the hijab based on the verses of the Quran and hadith. I defined it as an honoured and proper dress for women. My youngest daughter, who studies medical sciences, wants to wear hijab, but I say to her that she should wear hijab based on her sincere intention, not because it

is a trend now. Do not force Muslim women to wear hijab because Muslim scholars have different interpretations about it! Wearing hijab is better for Muslim women, but not wearing it is also good as long as they wear an honoured and proper dresses. The dispute of the interpretations of hijab is based on two verses of the Quran (Q.S. An-Nur: 31 and Al-Ahzab: 59). The majority of Muslim scholars have agreed that hijab is an obligation for Muslim women. Only a few allow them not to wear it. Quraish Shihab's statement about an honoured and proper dress for Muslim women is problematic because its interpretations vary. People may have different perceptions about it, which are influenced by their regions and cultures.<sup>226</sup>

Quraish Shihab's explanation about the hijab triggered a public debate. It was discussed in other *dakwah* programmes on TV, mosques, learning groups, and so on either it is selected as a topic or questioned by people. Due to his explanation, Quraish Shihab is accused of being misleading and destroying Islamic teachings. All television preachers oppose his opinion about hijab.<sup>227</sup> For example, the audience in Medan mentioned above argues that Quraish Shihab is liberal, who consider all opinions of Muslims scholars are true and legitimate. In fact, he further explains that there are illegitimate Muslim scholars whose opinions are based on their thought, not the Quran and hadiths. I believe that hijab is obligatory for women because it is the majority of Muslim scholars' opinion.<sup>228</sup>

However, a number of Muslim women listen to Quraish Shihab's opinion about hijab. For example, Sari a 28-year-old employee at the British Embassy in Jakarta states that she does not wear hijab because she follows the opinion of Muslim scholars' opinion as stated by Quraish Shihab. Although they are minority among the Muslims scholars, who consider hijab obligatory, they have reasons based on the Quran and hadith too. She argues that what is important in being a Muslim is that she knows the reason why she follows a particular Muslim scholar's opinion. She performs prayers a day, fasting and other obligations as is required in Islam.<sup>229</sup>

## 2. *The definition of fairness in polygamy*

---

<sup>226</sup> For detailed conversation between the audience and Quraish Shihab, see [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qqlec4MZ\\_Gw&t=7s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qqlec4MZ_Gw&t=7s), recorded on July 18, 2014 and accessed on November 25, 2017

<sup>227</sup> See for example <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5PR4IoGKrfY>, recorded on July 7, 2017 and accessed on November 25, 2017.

<sup>228</sup> Interview with Widodo, Medan, January 21, 2015.

<sup>229</sup> Interview with Sari, Jakarta, April 4, 2016.



Polygamy has become widely debated since the decision of a popular television preacher, Aa Gym to take a second wife in 2011 (Hoesterey 2016: 175-187). Many Muslim women believe that Muslim men who practice polygamy will never be able to treat their wives fairly in terms of wealth and love. All television preachers have discussed and debated the topic of polygamy. For example, Mamah Dedeh in her programme of propagation of Islam, *Mamah dan Aa Beraksi* explained:

Islam allows Muslim men to have four wives as stated in the Quran that if you fear that you will not deal justly with the orphan girls, then marry those that please you of [other] women, two or three or four. But if you fear that you will not be just, then [marry only] one. That is more suitable that you may not incline [to injustice].<sup>230</sup> Just here means that Muslim men, who do polygamy, must be able to share their wealth, time, and feeling fairly to their wives. They must buy houses for their wives with the same price, share the same allocation of time with them, and have the same feeling over them. But if they feel different feelings about their wives, they must not express these feelings to their wives. To do just is hard.<sup>231</sup>

Mamah Dedeh's stance pictures Muslim majority opinions about polygamy in Indonesia. The viewers of *dakwah* programmes on TV have different opinions about this. Many Muslim women do not agree with polygamy because it is hard to practice fairly. Several audience members of *Mamah dan Aa Beraksi* in the studio do not agree with polygamy when they are asked by the host whether or not they allow their husband to do polygamy. In an interview about this topic, the audience in Jakarta also does not agree with polygamy.<sup>232</sup> Her gesture shows a rejection of those who practice polygamy. She provided Aa Gym's case of polygamy as an example of how at the end his marriage with his first wife turn to divorce. When I provided her another case of polygamy by Arifin Ilham, she argued that it was just the beginning for him. People would see how it worked later.<sup>233</sup>

As mentioned in Chapter 3, Arifin Ilham started polygamy after Aa Gym. Muslim women in Indonesia reacted to their cases of polygamy differently. Unlike Aa Gym, who received criticism and hatred, many Muslim women do not bother with his polygamy. It may be because the visualisation

---

<sup>230</sup> <https://quran.com/4/3>, accessed on December 1, 2017.

<sup>231</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_pFhHVMw2a0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_pFhHVMw2a0), recorded on October 7, 2015 and accessed on October 17, 2017.

<sup>232</sup> Interview with Halimah, Jakarta, October 1, 2014.

<sup>233</sup> Interview with Halimah, Jakarta, Oktober 1, 2014.

of Arifin Ilham as a television preacher is not about the loving husband and family man like Aa Gym. His brand of preaching is the closeness to God by practising recitations.

The issue of polygamy is central in Indonesia. Indonesian government have a strict regulation for government offices and civil servants, who intend to do polygamy. Among other points in the regulation about polygamy are if they are men, they have to have permission from their boss to do polygamy. Women, who become government offices or civil servants, are not allowed to become the second, third, or fourth wife from the men, who do polygamy. Muslim women are not allowed to do polygamy (Wirastri and van Huis 2021, Nurmila 2009, and Feillard 1999).<sup>234</sup>

Based on these two issues of the topics of programmes of propagation of Islam, we can see how Muslims in Indonesia are struggling to define their identities in public sphere. The audiences do not always behave in accordance with the guidance and advice provided by the preachers of *dakwah* programmes on TV. Their positions are much more determined by their background of knowledge. This evidence shows the audience as an active receiver rather than as a victim of *dakwah* programmes on TV.

## Conclusion

Watching *dakwah* programmes on TV stations is mostly a collective and complementary activity. Muslims in Jakarta and Medan watch *dakwah* programmes on TV stations together with other daily activities. They watch them while having their meals or chatting with their family members or friends at homes, restaurants, or other public areas. The audiences in Bali do not watch *dakwah* on television. These findings provide us understanding that *dakwah* programmes on TV are mostly viewed as entertainment by Muslims in Indonesia. In this respect, they are no different from other programmes on television channels in Indonesia. Like other entertainment programmes on television, audiences watch the programmes because they are designed to entertain with their format, jokes and funny stories delivered by the preachers and hosts of the programmes. They watch them when they want. Some viewers do not watch them and prefer other programmes to *dakwah*. Audiences watch the programmes while doing other activities. They place *dakwah* as entertainment programme with the expectation of having

---

<sup>234</sup> For more information about the regulation of polygamy, see <http://www.hukumonline.com/klinik/detail/lt53ea39d17ed2e/aturan-hukum-jika-pns-ingin-berpoligami> (regulations for civil servants to do polygamy), accessed on 1 December 2017.

additional value of education in it. The content of entertainment determines the success of *dakwah* programmes. These findings are similar to the interest of audiences of conventional activities of *dakwah* in the society.

I have found that Muslims as audiences in Indonesia follow the preachers, who can combine their *dakwah* with entertaining aspects such as funny stories, song, and beautiful recitation of the verses of the Quran. When television companies bring *dakwah* to their screen for the audiences, they try to provide the same package to attract the public in the country. In this respect, entertainment is more important than education aspect of *dakwah* programmes on TV. Many preachers become popular because of their skills to combine *dakwah* with entertainment. The findings in Bali shows the lack significance of *dakwah* programmes to Muslims in Bali. Many Muslims in Bali do not watch the programmes in their houses because they have already started their work. They also do not watch them in public spaces like in Jakarta and Medan because they are concerned about the sentiment of the majority of Hindu residents after the Bali bombings in 2002 and 2005. They prefer other television programmes such news or talk shows. They learn Islam through gathering in mosques rather than through *dakwah* programmes on TV. In fact, their presence on television brings Islamic learning to their private spaces because they can watch the programmes in their rooms, houses, and other places where they have access to television.

Although *dakwah* on TV are designed to entertain the audiences, it has formed alternative religious authorities for Muslims. Watching practice of *dakwah* on TV in daily basis creates the charisma of the preachers. Q&A sessions of *dakwah* programmes on TV provide alternative domains for Muslims seeking answers about religious matters. As a result, religious authority in post-Suharto Indonesia has been fragmented and fluid, not limited to Muslim scholars in *pesantren* or Muslim organisations (NU, Muhammadiyah, and MUI). Authoritative voices of Islam are now present on private TV stations. This fragmentation results in diverse discourses and public debates on Islam. Audiences' responses to *dakwah* programmes on TV depend on their Islamic knowledge, public discourses, and socio-political and cultural situation in the countries. The audiences ask the questions concerning the topics, which have been heatedly discussed and debated by the society. They raise the questions because they want to hear the preachers' answers about the topics. On many occasions, the preachers' answers do not put the end to the debates, but their answers evolve to be debated again and again in other activities of propagation of Islam by both audiences and preachers as

well as by the public in general. The process of question and answer between television audiences and preachers in *dakwah* programmes can be categorised as the formation of religious authority in which the audiences as students seek for answers from the preachers as their teachers.