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

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Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that the rise of *dakwah* broadcasts on TV is more than just a commodification of Islam as suggested by Fealy (2008: 38), Hasan (2013: 5) and Hoesterey (2016b: 95-114). It is a part of the formation of religious authority through TV in the post-authoritarian era. It is part of an Islamic trend, which is motivated by and aims at domestic markets as well as Indonesian audiences globallyThis answers the question of competing ideologies behind the production of *dakwah* programmes on TV (in Chapter 1). It is a commodity, which is demanded by urban middle-class Muslims along with other 'Islamic' products such as movies, Muslim (halal) fashions, and tourism to seek economic and religious comfort through piety in the aftermath of the reformation movement in 1998. This high demand for Islamic products inspires TV companies, even those owned by non-Muslim stakeholders, to approve the broadcast of Islamic programmes. I found that the broadcast is a medium for the preachers to promote their performances, rhetorical skills and specialty of the content or brand of *dakwah* and to attract Muslims' attention. As a result, they receive many invitations to preach in various Muslim communities, which are economically beneficial. This finding shows that the real market for the TV preachers is not the TV shows alone but Muslim communities, which are anticipated to invite them to preach in their congregations. They receive payments for both the performances on TV programmes based on the agreed broadcasting contracts and in the Islamic learning groups throughout Indonesia. To be paid for preaching is not something new in the practices of *dakwah* in Indonesia, but to decide the amount of the payments based on contracts is considered misguided by the majority of Muslim scholars and Islamic teachings.

Moreover, beyond economic profit, the study shows the important role of TV in shaping a new religious authority in contract to traditional ones such as elder clerics or Islamic institutions. This religious authority is shaped through everyday production and reproduction of *dakwah* programmes which provide religious advice and answer questions from various audiences. The producers are unaware that religious authority can be formed through their everyday production and reproduction of *dakwah* programmes. The process of the formation fits well to the theory of 'routinization of charisma' of the

preachers (Turner 2007: 118). This charisma and recognition are gained by the preachers by giving advice daily through their shows. Further, religious authority is also formed when the preachers of the programmes act as good teachers to whom audiences as their students seek answers for their question regarding religious matters (Turner 2007: 119).

This new type of religious authority is different from the traditional one, which comes from Muslim scholars or Muslim organisations such as NU or Muhammadiyah, or Islamic institutions such as MUI with individual or collective advice or fatwas. Authority gained through preaching on TVs comes from individuals, who were not *ulama* before appearing on TV and are not necessarily affiliated with any Muslim organisations or Islamic institutions. Indeed, in their preaching we can recognise some similarities of their Islamic knowledge to that of NU, Muhammadiyah, or others. They are now the new voices involving in Islamic discursive tradition and religious debates among other voices of Islamic in Indonesia. This is possible to happen due to their appearances on TV shows. With this evidence, Indonesian Muslims are provided with choices to which voices they prefer to listen as results of media accessibility, 'mass education and growing literacy,' (Kaptein 2004: 128).

This religious authority is created with the help of TV professionals and comes from people whose specialty is not in Islamic knowledge. Two cases in this study show that popular TV preachers, Yusuf Mansur and Mamah Dedeh, have no specialty in Islamic knowledge. Yusuf Mansur is a businessman, who finds *dakwah* as a new way for his business in the name of the empowerment of Muslim society after facing bankruptcy several times. He even needs to show that he was innocent on several occasions to Indonesian financial authorities regarding his 'Islamic' businesses after he became a popular preacher. He was not trained to become a Muslim scholar who had studied Islamic knowledge in boarding school and in the Middle East (in Chapter 3). He built an Islamic boarding school and often invited Muslim scholars from Saudi Arabia to teach there after he became a popular TV preacher. This step was vital in consolidating his legitimacy and authority. Mamah Dedeh is also not trained in Islamic boarding school to become a Muslim scholar, but she has a talent for public speaking, which she possibly learned from her father, who was a preacher. Her background and rhetorical skill make audiences like her preaching style which is characterised by her firm and frank, yet humorous, statements (in Chapter 3). Both Yusuf Mansur and Mamah Dedeh emerge alternative voices of Islam, which challenge and

compete with traditional voices of authority in Indonesian society. Their voices are not confined to religious matters, but also political matters. This study fulfils the lacuna in the media and Islamic studies that religious authority can be shaped not only in the radio (Sunarwoto 2016) and the Internet (Hosen 2008).

In respect to adding value to their legitimacy of Islam, Yusuf Mansur and Mamah Dedeh have their stories of the miraculous transformative life experiences before they become popular TV preachers that strengthen their claims to religious authority. This life transformation is labelled by Burhani as 'conversion narratives,' a shift from a bad Muslim to a good one (Burhani 2020: 157). However, what is missing for Burhani's study is the key role of media in shaping their charisma and legitimacy of Islamic knowledge. Indeed, Yusuf Mansur and Mamah Dedeh have miraculous transformation in their lives, yet to reach nationwide success as top rating TV preachers they use various media to boost their recognition among Indonesian Muslims. Before performing on TV, their popularity is limited. This finding can be proven by looking at the rise and the fall of popular TV preachers. It is not the conversion narratives, which can maintain their popularity among Indonesian Muslims, but it is their 'branded' topics of preaching that can fulfil that (in Chapter 3).

In fact, compared with Aa Gym, Yusuf Mansur and Mamah Dedeh indicates a new development in terms of the educational background of popular TV preachers. Unlike Aa Gym who never graduated from Islamic boarding schools or diploma from Islamic schools (Hoesterey 2016: 216), Yusuf Mansur and Mamah Dedeh studied Islam in Islamic elementary and secondary schools and then at Islamic institution (IAIN) (in Chapter 3). Therefore, there is a change of how the producers choose the preachers for their TV shows. This change of criteria for TV preachers is a response from the producers to the criticism from Muslim scholars and organisations that their programmes emphasise merely the entertaining aspects, while neglecting the important of the mission of *dakwah* to call the audiences to improve their Islamic knowledge and piety. There is a negotiation between economic and religious values in the production of the programmes. When Aa Gym's popularity fell after he announced his second marriage in December 2016, Yusuf Mansur and Mamah Dedeh emerged as the new icons for *dakwah* programmes on TV. They often cite and refer Arabic version of the Quran and Hadith unlike Aa Gym who prefers to read just the Indonesian translations (in Chapter 3). This evidence matches the public demand to have

TV preachers with better qualification in Islamic knowledge. This development marks the process of Islamisation of secular popular TV shows including talk shows, quizzes, and interactive dialogues in terms of adding Islamic substances to the programmes without decreasing the entertaining ones. This process is typical in Southeast Asia, especially in Indonesia and Malaysia, where Muslim societies have tendencies to conservative Islam and life-styles (Azra 2006:164). In respect of the rise of *dakwah* programmes, there are more and more celebrities change their orientation to combine economic and religious benefits, which they call it as *hijrah* (move to religious life-style), Islamic fashion and cosmetics, halal brands in food and other materials and halal tourism.

Furthermore, the importance of commercial TV with its broadcasting coverage for *dakwah* has captured the attention of Muslim organisations throughout the country, but it is the Salafi Radio station, Rodja, which has positioned their programmes on Trans7 and TransTV. I found that the 'conversion' of the producers of the two TV channels, is crucial to the broadcast of Salafi agendas on TV after they follow their Islamic learning groups and radio regularly to become better Muslims. Their appearance in the commercial TV networks since 2010 is underlined by the anxieties of the producers to the need of more qualified Islamic programmes. Rodja itself has been central in religious discourses and debates in Indonesian public spheres regarding their agendas to purify Islamic practices from heretical values and improve the contents of *dakwah* in TV shows. The Salafi programmes on Trans7 and TransTV are characterised as very 'Islamic' (with no humour, no celebrities and advertisements). As mentioned in Chapter 4, Salafi preachers criticise some practices performed by the followers of NU in the programmes, which they regard as misleading. They also condemn some Muslim countries including Indonesia, which use democratic system while offering Islamic caliphate (*khilafah*) as the sole solution to the crises happening in the Muslim countries. Their blatant criticism upsets NU and FPI leaders, whose followers are performing the practices and believe in democracy as the best system for Indonesian politics. They challenge religious and state authorities. As a result, there have been some meetings and dialogues mediated by KPI to settle the debates and conflicts. This evidence shows contestation and competition of opinions of what is regarded Islamic or not between religious authorities in TV shows and the society. In other cases, TV preachers, on some occasions, are forced by Islamic leaders from NU or MUI to publicly apologise on TV and revise their religious advices because they consider them misleading (in

Chapter 3). These various of events in this study proves that religious authority formed in TV shows become competitive with the ones in the society and indicate how Indonesian Islam transformed to become more conservative.

Religious authority is also reinforced with its remediation in the forms of postings on YouTube channels, social media accounts, blogs, and books by the creative or management teams and followers. It transforms the popular TV preachers into public leaders, whose opinions, political votes and life-style are considered and followed by large audiences. This study shows that remediation of *dakwah* programmes proves the interconnectivity of media technologies and blurs which medium has more important role and more immediate than the others. It also affects watching accessibility where audiences can choose when they want to watch the programmes. They do not need to worry because they miss the live broadcast of the programmes, they can watch them anytime and anywhere in the Internet. They can also unexpectedly encounter the contents of the programmes through newsfeeds of social media such Twitter or Facebook. This allows popular TV preachers to have strong recognition in the Muslim communities.

In respect of viewing practices, watching *dakwah* programmes on TV is, to a certain extent, not a choice because almost all the *dakwah* programmes are broadcast at the same time leaving them no choice if they are inclined to view TV shows. Although the viewing practice of *dakwah* on TV has similarities to *sinetron* viewing practice in terms of watching as leisure and entertainment (Nilan 2001), audiences have insights about Islamic knowledge which to some extent influence their everyday activities for those who choose to follow the preachers' advices through preaching or Q&A session. It is like a fatwa from individual Muslim scholar (*mufti*), which is not legally binding for the audience, who ask for them (*mustafti),* they are free to decide whether to follow it or ignore it (Kaptein 2004: 115 and Hasyim 2015: 29). To many audiences, watching the programmes is not their primary activity, rather than complementary one to others like preparing breakfast or reading the Quran.

Furthermore, preference for watching *dakwah* programmes is influenced mainly by the figure of the preachers, style of preaching, and topics of preaching regarding everyday Muslim lives. The figure of Yusuf Mansur as a successful Muslim businessman establishes a group of audiences, which considers him as an ideal Muslim figure to follow. On the other hand, to many Muslim women, Mamah Dedeh is an ideal figure in terms of her success as a mother and preacher. Both preachers use *Betawi* dialect and style

in their preaching, which are considered by many as clear, direct and firm. Yusuf Mansur provides solutions to economic problems through his preaching topic, *sedekah* while Mamah Dedeh through *keluarga sakinah*. These topics are very close to everyday reality of Indonesian Muslims. These 'brands' of preaching has kept them hired by TV stations and maintained their popularity among Indonesian public. These preferences form groups of audiences, which to certain extent resemble fans of celebrities.

This study has sought to create better understanding of the relation between Islam and media by showing that they influence each other to fulfil their mission of Islamisation or commodification. Audiences, to a certain extent, have the agency to pressure the producers to meet their demands for qualified preachers and better shows of *dakwah* on TV. This study shows that the encounter between Islam (*dakwa*h) and media (television) often, if not always, results in a competition to gain domination among them, which is dynamic and changing. To TV industry, this study indicates that by fulfilling the demands of Muslim leaders, organisations, and audiences for better programmes, they can still achieve their economic goals.