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Leiden
The Netherlands

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

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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

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

SUMMARY

This dissertation is about the broadcasting of *dakwah* on Indonesian TV stations. It deals with the production and circulation of *dakwah* programmes on TV and elucidates the social and educational backgrounds of popular TV preachers in order to understand the rise of the programmes in post-Suharto Indonesia. Furthermore, this dissertation discusses the competition among various Muslim organisations to influence the production of *dakwah* programmes and the formation of religious authority through the broadcasting of *dakwah* programmes on TV channels. This dissertation is based on one-year ethnographic fieldwork in Jakarta, Medan, and Bali, which includes observations and interviews with the producers, preachers, and audiences of *dakwah* programmes, Muslim leaders, and members of Indonesian Broadcasting Commission (KPI).

In chapter 1, I describe the significant increase of *dakwah* programmes on Indonesian TV channels in the beginning of the twenty first century shortly after the fall of Suharto's authoritarian regime in 1998. I also discuss the broadcasting of *dakwah* on TV during the Suharto period to understand the transformation of *dakwah* activities on TV in post-Suharto. Afterwards, I explain the proliferation of commercial TV channels after the demise of the authoritarian regime, which has a pivotal role in the rise of the broadcast of *dakwah* on TV stations.

Chapter 2 deals with the production of *dakwah* programmes and how they appeal to audiences, which lead to a variety of formats of *dakwah* programme ranging from the teaching classroom model to a talk show with a range of topics. The production of *dakwah* on TV involves creative teams to arrange the performances and find relevant topics. *Dakwah* programmes are aired live on TV, and on several occasions live from Islamic historical sites when the preachers deliver stories about them to create a sense of immediacy. The programmes are not only circulated through their broadcasting on TV, but are also spread through other digital media platform such as Facebook and YouTube, either by the manager of the preachers or their followers. The daily *dakwah* programmes on TV have formed a medium for the preachers as teachers and the audiences as students to learn about Islam. These daily interactions create the charisma of TV preachers among their audiences, who consider them as authoritative voices of Islam. The production of *dakwah*

programmes is the result of the negotiation between producers' and preachers' interests, between commodity and public piety.

Chapter 3 elaborates the social and educational backgrounds of popular TV preachers in which I take Yusuf Mansur as a case study to explain the natures and transformation of TV preachers. Physical appearance and rhetorical skill are important attributes of popular TV preachers because they can attract audiences to watch their *dakwah* programmes. 'Miraculous' turns of life experiences from bad to good or from poor to successfully rich people are also appealing to the audiences. Social and Islamic education background play less important roles in creating popular TV preachers. The transformation of TV preachers occurred in 2005 when criticisms about the lack of Islamic education background of TV preachers were expressed by Muslim leaders of various Muslim organisations like Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI), Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), and Muhammadiyah. Since 2005, there have been more TV preachers with Islamic education backgrounds. Networking among preachers is also important to become popular TV preachers. Some TV producers use this networking to find their preachers for their *dakwah* programmes based on the recommendation from other preachers because this method is cheaper and less time-consuming than conducting a casting to hire TV preachers. Other producers observe talented preachers in mosques and Islamic learning groups. With their popularity and charisma, the popular TV preachers become leaders for their followers, who take their opinions into account in their religious, cultural, and socio-political matters.

Chapter 4 provides a picture of the contestation of religious authority among Muslim organisations in the broadcasting of *dakwah* on TV stations. The emergence of Salafi *dakwah* on TV stations exacerbates the criticisms of the leaders of Muslim organisations and the public against *dakwah* programmes on TV. They have criticised the programmes because of the contents which are more entertaining than educative. The Salafi *dakwah* programmes were brought to the commercial TV stations by producers, who were interested in and follow Salafism. Previously, Muslim organisations like NU and Muhammadiyah criticised the light contents of *dakwah* on TV because the preachers are not qualified in Islamic education. After the emergence of Salafi *dakwah* programme in 2007, they questioned the TV stations for their contents of *dakwah*, which forbid some Islamic rituals commonly practiced by the majority of Muslims in Indonesia, promote the implementation of Islamic law, and propose the establishment of Islamic state. The criticism of various Muslim organisations such as MUI, NU, and

Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) against the broadcasting of Salafi *dakwah* on TV forced KPI to mediate the dispute between these Muslim organisations and TV producers. Muslim organisations demand that Salafi *dakwah* programmes respect the different interpretations in Islam. They also ask the preachers to discuss the contents of their *dakwah* with MUI before the broadcasting.

In chapter 5, I discuss the practices of watching *dakwah* programmes on TV channels, which consist of watching activities and various backgrounds of audiences of *dakwah* programmes on TV in Jakarta, Medan, and Bali. Watching *dakwah* on TV is not a single activity, it is always accompanied by other activities such as having breakfast or preparing for work. As the majority of the audiences of the live broadcasting, Muslim women are more enthusiastic about watching the programmes than Muslim men. In Jakarta and Medan, they watch the programmes in homes, restaurants, stores, offices, and so forth as long as a TV set is available. Bali is an exception. Muslims in Bali do not watch Islamic programmes on TV in public spaces such as restaurants and offices. One of the reasons is because the majority of the people, who live in Bali are Hindu. Most of Muslims in Bali do not watch the programmes in their homes either. Their activities are centralised in mosques and Islamic learning groups. Most of the audiences in Jakarta, Medan, and Denpasar consider *dakwah* on TV as entertainment. This is the reason why there are several non-Muslims who also watch it in their routines for entertainment.

This dissertation shows the important role of TV in the construction of religious authority, which becomes fragmented in Muslim societies like in Indonesia partly because of televised *dakwah*. Most of the current researches on *dakwah* activities focus mainly on social media like Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram but neglect the role of other media like TV. In fact, TV still plays an important role in daily activities of Indonesian society with its programmes including news, soap opera, reality show, and *dakwah*. Muslims watch TV programmes such as *dakwah*, news, soap operas, talk and reality shows during their leisure and busy time. Presidential candidates and political leaders use TV stations to promote their political agendas to gain supports from the society.