

The NU's Youths among The Radical Movements in Yogyakarta

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Abstract—This article aims at examining the contestation of identity of the Islamic youth movement, represented by the Nahdlatul Ulama's (NU) youths, in the midst of radical and extremist Islamic movements in Yogyakarta. The NU's youth movements which are mostly associated with peaceful faces of Islam have directly been facing the puritan and extremist Islamic movement communities spreading out massively in many elements of societal environment. The radical Islamist and extremist movements supported by transnational-affiliated Islamic movements such as Wahabism and Hizbut Tahrir as well have taken apart in the contestation of identity in public space to gain social and political attention. In practice, these groups have eroded and at the same time threatened tolerant values in Yogyakarta, such as the latest fact about removal of cross from grave in some areas of the city. The movement of NU's youths, however, is awfully required to minimize and even deny the means of radical and extremist Islam campaigns which are heralded by radical groups in general. This article will map out the forms of contestation of the identity of NU's youths and the main activities they have been done to intervene the public sphere in order to maintain tolerant values and diversity of Indonesia as a pluralistic country both ethnically and religiously. A qualitative approach is used for this research with an open-ended interview as a collective data technique. The findings have implications for tolerant-affiliated youth movements and those who advocate for, work with, and support them to always campaign peaceful faces of Islam, tolerance, and harmony within Indonesian society.

Key words: NU, Young generation of NU, Youth, Identity, Islamism, Radical Islam, extremism, Yogyakarta.

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, particularly after suicide bombings exploded at JW Marriott and Ritz-Carlton hotel in Mega Kuningan, Jakarta, on Friday, July 17, 2009, at around 07: 47 am, youth identity related to terrorism has inevitably begun to emerge in

Indonesian public awareness and has become a turning point of new wave of terrorist attack. The culprits are Dani Dwi Permana (18 years) and Nana Ikhwan Maulana (28 years). A year later on December 1, 2010 to January 21, 2011, Arga Wiratama (17 years) was considered guilty by the Klaten District Court for committing multiple acts of terrorism that was placing bombs in eight different places in Surakarta and Klaten with five other friends. The last action before being sentenced to 4 years imprisonment was placing the bomb at the location of Yaa Qowiyyu program in Jatianom, Klaten, on January 21, 2011 [1].

A series of acts of terrorism constantly recurring in Indonesia has been increasingly more familiar with the world of youth. One of the most striking tragedies were a series of bombings in three churches and a police station in Surabaya on May 13-14 2018. The terrorist attacks were employed by one family of six, with two teenagers and two small children. The incident has given rise to current and challenging phenomenon of terrorism and at the same time it has affirmed that radicalism and extremism teachings can thrive collectively in one family in which children innocently becomes victims of brainwashing by the parent.

Some information above has been like a snowball effect of which many people consider it as potential threat for the country. Indeed, it has increased the awareness of people to take radicalism among teenagers and youth into consideration and it is no longer a figment. It is generally speaking that intolerant and radical tenets have been widely preached and practiced to children in schools. Once at an interfaith dialogue event, as Kalis Mardiasih put it, cultural observer Lies Marcoes talked about her research findings that teachers in an early childhood education taught to the children a song "My Balloon" in which the lyrics were changed. A lyric of "my balloons there are five" is replaced by "my Lord there is one". Then, in the line of "my

green balloon is bursting” is replaced by [my Lord there is one] “Who said three, shut!” [2]

Today, majority of Indonesian Muslims are much more concerned with further spread of radicalism toward young generation. In this regard, NU’s youths must widely get involved in promoting peaceful Islam among their own bases. Having previously concentrated in internal bases culturally, NU’s youths have to start participating in structural levels, negotiating with other religious movements, and adjusting to social change in the surrounding area. In other words, sensitivity to social change around is the way how to strengthen existence. The awareness of maintaining identity is increasingly growing in line with the struggle against radical Islam maneuver threatening the teachings of inclusive and peaceful Islam carried out by NU’s youths.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative research, as Paul ten Have put it, to ‘work up’ one’s research materials, to search for hidden meanings, non-obvious features, multiple interpretations, implied connotations, unheard voices [3]. Qualitative research provides detailed description and analysis of the quality, or the substance, of the human experience [4]. This method is used to gain a deep understanding of the topic or background of the participants by collecting data in many forms required. The sample is determined by purposive techniques to obtain data in accordance with the purpose of research, including the social activists, members of the NU-affiliated youth organizations, stakeholders, and intellectuals. This research was conducted on May-June 2019.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Radicalism and Yogyakarta

The experience of radicalism and terrorism emerging in big cities has a chain effect even to the periphery which is relatively far from city center. Yet, in many cases, terrorism networks are formed more massively in peripheries or even in remote area often ignored by public attention. A distinctive model coined by Luther P. Gerlach called SPIN is able to look over the structure of social movements through “segmented, polycentric, and integrated network” [5].

Indeed, young generations are undoubtedly targeted by the network. The most striking example was paramilitary group built by Laskar Jihad under the leadership of Ja’far Umar Thalib (b. 1961). As Noorhaidi Hasan put it, thousands of young men, roughly half of whom are university students and graduates between the ages of 20 to 35 years old, were so eager to welcome the call for jihad announced by Ja’far Umar Thalib and compete to

risk their lives by enlisting to venture to the front lines and fight against Christians. This largest and best organized paramilitary group claimed to have dispatched more than 7,000 voluntary jihad fighters to the Moluccas [6].

A term of radicalism in this article does not refer to particular type of organization or group because radicalism, as Peter Mandaville put it, cannot therefore be conceived as monolithic category. Rather, like all political orientations, it has within it a spectrum of thought and action, and debates and tensions are ongoing between the various points along that spectrum [7]. In aspects of ideology and doctrine, it could be traced back to Wahhabism or Salafism often used interchangeably today. As Mandaville put it, Salafis and Salafism represent an effort to purify Islam of external and cultural influences and return to the model of the Prophet and his earliest companions consider themselves to be Salafis [8]. Wahhabism—which can be considered a variant of Salafism—takes its name from the eighteenth century Arabian religious revivalist Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab. Much influenced by the ideas of Ibn Taymiyya, Wahhab’s main concerns related to the centrality of *tawhid* and the dangers posed to Islam by *bid’a*. This has led to an emphasis among Wahhabis on the practice of *takfir*—that is, declaring someone to be an infidel or an apostate from Islam. And the concept of *takfir* has also been central to contemporary debates about *jihad* [9].

In political context, Mandaville further disclosed notion of the radical Islamic movement, commonly known as Islamism, by providing the following two important characteristics: (a) a vision of Islamic political order that rejects the legitimacy of the modern sovereign nation-state and seeks to establish a pan-Islamic polity or renewed caliphate; and/or (b) an emphasis on violent struggle (jihad) as the primary or even the exclusively legitimate method for the pursuit of political change [10]. In general notion, Asef Bayat defined that Islamism emerged as a disappointment movement of those (mostly middle class) who felt marginalized by the dominant economic, political or cultural processes in their society [11].

In Indonesian radical Islamic movements are mostly affiliated with *Laskar Mujahidin Indonesia* (the Indonesian Holy Warriors Force), *Laskar Jihad* (the Holy War Force), *Front Pembela Islam* (Defenders of Islam Force, FPI), *Ansharut Daulah* (JAD), *ISIS* (The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) and so on. In many cases, they consciously took advantage of social and political turmoil to reinforce their existence by capitalizing the crowds as social pressure against the government such as recent protests in Jakarta, also known as 212 Action on December 2016. The protests were led Islamists groups demanding for the termination of the

gubernatorial office held by Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok), who had been accused as a suspect in the blasphemy case. It was then followed by similar actions such as the latest protesting and riots of 21 and 22 May in Jakarta.

Yogyakarta is also one of the areas that is affected by radical Islamic movements. Although this so-called a tolerant and education city is not listed in twelve red-zone regions such as Central Java, Aceh, Jakarta, Banten, West Java, East Java, East Kalimantan, North Kalimantan, South Sulawesi, Central Sulawesi, NTB, and Bali, Yogyakarta is always vulnerable to terrorism acts since Islamic radical groups have already built foundations and spread them out through various activities such as teaching, propagation and recruitment. Many cases such as attacking a book discussion titled *Allah, Liberty, and Love* by Canadian Muslim writer Irshad Manji at LKiS, Bantul, on May 2012, violence against *Transgender Day of Remembrance* at Tugu Yogyakarta, on November 2014, attacking on Santo Fransiskus Church's members who did services in one of its house in Ngaglik, Sleman, on May 2014, and removal of cross from grave in some areas of Yogyakarta in December 2018 are some of the evidence of intolerant and radical acts in Yogyakarta.

The Wahid Institute (also known as Wahid Foundation) has put Yogyakarta in second intolerant city of Indonesia in 2014. Of the total 154 cases of intolerance and violations of freedom of religion and belief recorded by the Wahid Foundation throughout the year, 21 events took place in Yogyakarta [12].

B. The NU's Youths: Promoting Inclusiveness

Facing the facts about threatening extremism and radicalism in Yogyakarta, the progress of NU's youths has been profoundly hoped by many to take influence for making peace and harmony. Together with other Islamic organizations which preserve the relationship of Islam and democracy, NU's communities consciously put themselves as foundation to protect Indonesian ideology of Pancasila against those who want to replace it with Islamic sharia law and other separatist movements.

The emergence of NU's youths on the national stage is an integral part of the social and political dynamics that have occurred since the 1980s. *Gegerasi Muda NU* (GMNU) or The NU's Youth Generation, as Mochamad Sodik put it, represents a cosmopolitan, tolerant and transformative view of life by enhancing academic and intellectual activities among the NU's young activists. The young generation of NU does not only limit themselves to learn classical books (*kitab kuning/turast*) but also appreciate various contemporary thoughts ranging from philosophy,

psychology, and critical social theory with outstanding scholars such as Mohammad Arkoun, Hassan Hanafi, Amin al-Khuli, Nasr Abu-Zayd, Paulo Freire, Michel Foucault and so on. These young NU groups left the assumption which always labelled them with traditional way to life such as wearing sarong, *peci* (cap), and *teklek* (sandals); while their hand used to hold classical books and in the same time turn the prayer beads as well [13].

The encounter with modernity and political movements has tremendously changed the approach of NU's youths in negotiating identity with social and political realm. The young *santri* culturally-inherent NU and Muhammadiyah then joined new Islamic parties and other Islamic movements of either conservative or liberal, such as Liberal Islam Network (JIL, formed in 2001) or the Muhammadiyah Young Intellectual Network (JMM, formed in 2003). These progressive and young activists affiliated with two prestigious Islamic organizations of Indonesia generated a heated debate among the members of the two and many of them, in excessive response, excluded them culturally from organization. In addition, referring to Abdul Munir Mulkhan, they penetrated into practical field of NGOs to fight for progressive Islam with the main agenda concerning on the *mustadl'afin* (oppressed) people. However, not a few young *santri* entered in various movements which were later known as fundamentalis, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir, KAMMI, Majelis Mujahidin and various campus propagation institutes (LDK) [14].

As an education city with particular touches of local wisdom, Yogyakarta offers freedom of expression including for NU's youth movements which are philosophically similar value in preserving elements of treasures of culture and tradition in the city. The Institute for Islamic and Social Studies (LKiS) is the oldest one, an intellectual product of NU's youths in Yogyakarta, which still exists today. It has been a symbol for progressive and inclusive Islamic activism in Yogyakarta. Publicly having regarded as a tolerant city which is inherent with its identity, Yogyakarta always places itself as a laboratory for all initiatives and creativities of young generation that is dominated by university students from various backgrounds. This ideal condition supported by an academic and cultural environment is utilized by NU's youths who take part in intellectual, social, religious, and cultural movements. The roots of critical thoughts and progressive Islam inherited from LKiS have still influenced the younger generation, sporadically and in polycentric way as well.

The second community is Jaringan Gusdurian (The Gusdurian Network). Gus Dur's lifelong work has become a source of reference and inspirations for thousands of people. These followers and

disciples call themselves gusdurian. In their own walk of lives, the gusdurians are seeking to maintain the legacy of Gus Dur's struggle and develop it in a way that serves the challenges of the day. The GUSDURian Network Indonesia is an arena established for interaction & consolidation among gusdurians scattered all over Indonesia and the world. Through the network, comprehensive and collaborative actions are developed to serve the people. This network was established circa 2010, and managed directly by Yayasan Bani Abdurrahman Wahid (Bani Abdurrahman Wahid Foundation), founded by the immediate family of Gus Dur. As a value-based organization, the gusdurian uses Gus Dur Core Values as its paradigm on developing programs and strategies. The gusdurian network focuses its strategies on empowering grassroot people, strengthening civil society, disseminations of Gus Dur ideas & thoughts and its regenerations, producing social leaders through capacity building programs, and advocacy on strategic issues [15].

GUSDURian Network Indonesia exists in several areas of Indonesia independently carrying out programs and services related to the need of local people. The Gusdurian network does not limit the issues managed as long as they are related to Gus Dur's 9 Values namely monotheism (ketauhidan), humanity (kemanusiaan), justice (keadilan), equality (kesetaraan), liberation (pembebasan), humility (kesederhanaan), brotherhood (persaudaraan), persistence (keksatriaian), and local wisdom (kearifan lokal). These values are fundamentals of the network in promoting Islam peacefully—a very nature of God understood in Islam as *as-Salam* or the cause of peace.

The third party is called student movements such as Islam such as The Muslim Students' Association (HMI), The Indonesian Islamic Student Movement (PMII), Muhammadiyah Student Association (IMM), Indonesian Islamic Youth Assembly (MPIO), and Family of The Nahdlatul Ulama Students (KMNU). Besides academically-related activities, they have agenda in creating an inclusive Islam and promote values of Islam which is compatible with Indonesia as democratic nation-state. The NU's youth can freely join these organizations except to IMM which is exclusively associated with university students of Muhammadiyah.

Among those student organizations of which NU's youth activists get involved in, PMII and HMI become the most chosen ones providing various activities related to intellectual, spiritual, and mental trainings. After establishing many links and connections with numerous capitals within society and the elites, they could easily transform their own experiences to real challenge outside the campus. Taking apart in wider challenge such as joining

politics, NGOs and academic is the most demanding circumstance which requires outstanding ways to be always consistence with the values of NU and spread them out around. These ways are such obligation to vitalize

C. Strengthen Identity by Occupying Public Sphere

Contra-terrorism project held by state has tended to use a structural-power approach by cracking down terrorist members physically. These such ways, as Prof. Azyumardi Azra said, does not necessarily turn out the spread of radicalism among youth and students. Cultural, intellectual and ideological approaches, therefore, are the foremost steps to deeply influence the way how radical basis instituted. In The National Agency for Combating Terrorism (BNPT)'s terms, it is called counter-narrative, a message that offers a positive alternative to extremist propaganda, or alternatively aims to deconstruct or delegitimise extremist narratives [16]. In another notion, it is necessary to promote the moderation of Islam. Counter-narrative should allow people to be actively involved in it. Prof. Azra believes that the development of radicalism and intolerance on campuses because there are no equal rivalry movement so far [17]. De-radicalization is a continuous process that requires persistence, integrality, and supportive social environment to mutually create a counter-radicalism culture naturally immersing within society. Standing against radicalism must be an active awareness either for personal or society (social institutions).

For NU's youths, strengthening identity means seizing the public attention by occupying public sphere. Occupying public sphere is such pompous but, in particular, controlling the narrative of religious knowledge and its practice will allow them to more easily penetrate the values into circumstance. Here, the notion of public sphere does not strictly refer to what Jurgen Habermas mentioned it in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989) yet its position between private realm and public authority [18] will be regarded flexibly. Its models and boundaries are in debate among the social and political theorists on how to formulate it in specific societal contexts. The institutions of public sphere in Muslim societies are another debatable approach emerging to flourish development of the concept. Some theorist outlined the existence of *ulama*, *umma* (the community of believers), and *shari'a* as part of public sphere in Muslim societies and can influence it too [19].

Hence public sphere is able to transform its characteristics and models into particular contexts and Islam has its own limited public spheres as well in which all Moslem care about. It is a unique and identical to Islam in which many Moslem will put it in specific and particular position; that is world of mosque and other types of it in different forms.

Here, mosque is not merely about place of prayer but it become a space which allows people to speak, interact and make decision in collective ways. A process of making decision which is then able to be developed as legal system like shari'a by *fuqaha'* (jurists) can be started culturally in mosque in which ulama and umma naturally interact.

Mosque is a cosmopolite arena for Moslem societies to show the diverse identity and background of lives without any limit. They can speak each other and start connecting with others. For Moslem, mosque is an absolute authority in term of Islam itself and no coercive power of other authority can intervene. This Moslem public sphere has become struggling spot in which power and capital of Moslems themselves are contested. It is generally speaking that Moslems have been already polarized, spanning more than just about two sects between Sunni and Shi'ite. In the notion of polarization, radical Islam mostly affiliated with Wahhabism has arisen to snatch the power of Moslem public sphere and occupies it as long as possible. They truly take advantage of negligence of moderate Muslims in keeping their property like mosque. After capturing one mosque, actively performing ideal deeds of religious service, and then teaching its members according to their doctrinal tenets.

We consider that informal activities initiated by the NU community (*jama'ah*) will be much more sufficient to create counter-narrative. Online platforms both social media and website have been managed well by NU's youths to do dakwah (Islamic propagation) and create counter-narrative itself. "*Ngaji* online" (reciting classical book) on Facebook or Youtube is one of the most interesting initiatives conducted by several NU's *kiai* (preacher). A term *ngaji* is inherent to NU identity with particular styles, commonly used in traditional *pesantren*, and usually offers comprehensive understanding on Islam. Such program shows us a particular way how NU community is still persistent with style and communal identity. Contesting identity, in this context, is a struggle within Muslims themselves since other groups have special name the same activity.

IV. CONCLUSION

Promoting inclusiveness among youth and making counter-narrative need particular approaches in line with millennial notion of which practice and understanding on religion are transforming rapidly with the existence of digital technology. The NU's youths need to modernize the way of *dakwah*, adaptive to changing societal contexts, providing much more alternative media, frequently making a bridge for inter-religious meeting, and actively inviting so-called radicalists to share and hear.

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