MILLENNIAL ISLAMIC PROSELYTIZING MOVEMENT AND POST-ISLAMISM DISCOURSE IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

The emergence of Islamic populism is in line with the rise of popular culture (pop-culture). This condition shows that the phenomenon of millennial Islamic proselytizing movement among Muslim young in Indonesia as an indicating symptom of the spread of pop-culture and Islamic populism at once. Just like pop-culture, the narrative of millennial Islamic proselytizing movement is always characterized by some identical keywords; popularity, lifestyle and fandom. Therefore, the phenomenon of millennial Islamic proselytizing movement fosters several commodities such as the fashion industries, accessories and lifestyles which are considered normatively correct. Some of these commodities appear in campaign of millennial Islamic proselytizing movement in online public sphere; social media. Islamic populism, which was close to Islamism ideology, gradually transform to be more adaptive with democratic political circumstance. Some scholars define this transformation with post-Islamism era. The aim of this article is to discuss millennial Islamic proselytizing movement and its relationship to the discourse of post-Islamism in Indonesia. According to this article theme, some research questions emerge; can the phenomenon of millennial Islamic proselytizing movement be read in the post-Islamism landscape in Indonesia? To what extent is the closeness between millennial Islamic proselytizing movement and the post of Islamism discourses? Using a sociological approach, this article takes “YukNgaji” Movement as an object of research. The research data are collected from observations, interviews with several informants and content post on social media, especially Instagram. Such data then analyzed using Social Movement and post-Islamism theory. Millennial Islamic proselytizing movement campaigns will be linked identically to the identity and the discourse of post-Islamism.

Keywords: Millennial Islamic proselytizing, post-Islamism, YukNgaji movement

Introduction

One of strategies used by some Muslim youth to strengthen a Muslim identity in contemporary Indonesia are usually deal with an intensive involvement in modern religious proselytizing in a public sphere. This
strategy, however, is an effort to arrogate public sphere and can be related with identity politics struggle. The issue on religious identity politics struggle is a symptom of Islamism and political Islam. Islamism and political Islam are indicated by the emergence of Islamic group which explicitly state that Islam is not only several values of worship, but also a whole system of life; economic, social, political, and law. Symptom of Islamism and political Islam are increasingly appear after the Indonesia democratization on Mei 1998. In the development of Islamism and political Islam discourse, some scholars respond to this situation with variety of arguments. Some scholars argue that Islam in public sphere indicates flourishing the symptom of political Islam. Islamism and political Islam play a narrative discourse that Islam is not only a ritual of worship, but also must be fought for through a tough power struggle.(Kepel, 2006) On the other hand, another scholar has heard resistant arguments who say that political Islam has actually failed to form a mass base in the public sphere. Political Islam precisely must adopt several popular cultures that amplified the hegemony of one culture over other cultures due to factor of popularity. If not, political Islam will only become a small fragment of Islamic groups that are uprooted from the roots of traditional Islam and give birth to violence as the actual form of aspirations for the political situation which allegedly detrimental to Islam and Muslim in general.(Roy, 1994) The discussion between the failure and success of Islamism was also responded from an anthropological perspective by Asef Bayat. Bayat optimistically argued that Islamism has become a common symptom in the Islamic world as a result of historical romanticism after the collapse of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924. Islamism has indeed left a black mark on humanism condition with several terror incidents in the name of Islam. The arguments of these Islamists are often related to their rejection of some of the important values of a modern state such as freedom and democracy. According to Bayat, the era of Islamism which is often associated with acts of terror in the front gate of transformation. The current of democracy is torrential to be contained through the thought of Islamism. Then, Islamism has transformed to be more able to accept democratic values. This symptom of this social change is termed by Bayat as post-Islamism.(Bayat, 1996)

The symptoms of post-Islamism are indicated by several phenomena. In the political field, post-Islamism is demonstrated by the emergence of political parties inspired by the predecessors of other Islamist movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Hizbut Tahrir. One of the symptoms of the arrival of the post-Islamism phase is the proliferation of the Islamist movement framed in popular narratives. There are growing acknowledgment that Islamism has been accepted several important elements of democracy, such as human rights, civil liberty and gender equality. By benefiting popular culture, Islamic movement - which had previously rejected
democracy - received wider people attention. Thus, the ideas of Islamism can fuse with popular culture that is enjoyed by the public. The symptoms of post-Islamism that are present in this popular culture is also called by other scholars in several terms such as popular religiosity and popularizing Islam.(Noor, 2015; van Nieuwkerk, 2012)

Referring to the aforementioned symptoms of post-Islamism, Indonesia has relevant political condition to discuss. The millennial Islamic proselytizing movement, for instance, shows the spirit of Islamism on the one hand, while utilizing popular culture to attract the attention of the wider people on the other hand. Of course, not all Islamic proselytizing movement can be generalized as movements that close to post-Islamism discourse. Therefore, this article will address the object of discussion on the YukNgaji movement. The selection of Yuk-Ngaji as an object of discussion is laid down by several reasons. First, this movement has an extensive network of 48 regional movements. Second, this movement has an active campaign on social media. Islamic discourse campaigns always have relevance to the contemporary context which is the problem of young people. Furthermore, this online proselytizing movement was also founded by -one of them- an Islamic activist who was affiliated with Hizb ut-Tahrir. This last reason is interesting to look at on the discourse of Islamism transformation to post-Islamism phase.

This brief article is neither entirely a special study on the affirmation nor rejection of the post-Islamism discourse in Indonesia. As a theoretical concept, post-Islamism is still very much debated among scholars. The aim of this article is to look at how popular culture among millennials could be a transmitting vehicle of Islamic activism discourse which is occupied by identity politics. This article hereby, becomes more relevant to be related with post-Islamism term than other academic discussion terms.

**YukNgaji and Millennial Islamic Proselytizing Movement**

Da’wah (Islamic proselytizing movement) is often defined as a series of activities to persuade others by introducing religious teachings (Islam). This goal is often seen as an action in bringing about social change.(M.A & M.A, 2013; Madani, 2017) Islamic proselytizing movement in Indonesia can be traced back since the beginning of development of modern mass Islamic organization. Islamic proselytizing movement has been existing from time to time; colonialism era, national movement era, and after the Independence Day of Indonesia. In the pre-Independence Day era, Islamic proselytizing movement became an institution to fight against colonialism. The two biggest mass Islamic organization in Indonesia: Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama are representation of pre-Independence Day proselytizing movement. After independence, Islamic proselytizing movement began to focus on making improvements to the muslim society. So, from time to time,
religious preaching has a special characteristic for propulsive realizing social change. (Alfian, 1989; Bush, 2009; Fatwa, 2004; Fealy, 1997; Geertz, 1960; Hefner & Horvatich, 1997, 1997; Kersten, 2017; Madinier, 2015; Mulkhan, 2010; Qodir, 2010)

Some scholars have classified the generation of contemporary society into several phases. The most significant phase is the birth of baby boomers, X and millennial generations. Baby boomers are a generation born at the end of World War II, between 1945 and 1964. Children who grow up and develop in this era are considered to have had their first identity as “teenagers”. After 1964, social scientist identified the growing and developing society as generation X until 1981. Then, children who are born and developed after 1982 to 2000 were known as the millennial generation. The millennial era is considered an era in which various social changes have drastically changed, supported by the very fast willingness of information technology. (Howe & Strauss, 1992, 2009; Tulgan & D.), 2001) Technological and informational advancement have an impact on religious behavior. Therefore, scholars in the social sciences conduct various research to discuss religious phenomena in this millennial era.

YukNgaji is a millennial Islamic proselytizing movement that is infatuated by Muslim youth in Indonesia. YukNgaji identifies itself as a community that gathers many potentials from various professions, generations, and identities to share goodness. The movement’s tagline is “the Power of Ngaji”. Through this bombastic tagline, the YukNgaji Movement convinces the community, especially young people, that the journey of human life really needs a sufficient provision to reach their objective. This provision is really needed both in material and non-material form. Knowledge is one of many provisions that needed primarily by human life. YukNgaji interprets the term "Ngaji" which is derived from the word "kaji" (study) as a process of self-provision, character building, and world view of an understanding of Islamic foundations. People have to solve their problem through completely belief in Islam as the whole solutions of life even in a micro, meso, and macro level.

The interesting topic in YukNgaji movement is the proselytizing movement was formerly founded by the popular young preacher; ustadz Felix Siauw. Felix Yanwar Siauw (Siauw Chen Kwok) is a figure important figure in the existence of the YukNgaji community. Felix Siauw is a millennial preacher who often deliver Islamic teaching through online social media. Felix was formerly famous as one of the orators at the Islamic Movement of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI). His pace as a figure of the Islamic Movement has been trained since he took his higher education in Institut Pertanian Bogor (Bogor Agricultural Institute) 2006. Felix confess that HTI changed his view on Islam a lot. his religious experiences as a “Muallaf” (New Muslim) with a strong Islamic spirit, this trendy, modern and
Islamic ustadz Felix easily persuade many people. He has a good capability in conveying Islamic proselytizing with visual persuasion through his social media; Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and Instagram. (Wang, n.d.) Thus, Felix is a key figure in YukNgaji who has inspired many millennial Muslims.

The YukNgaji community was initiated in 2015. Its first major activities were held in two places; Gedung Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia Bogor (Indonesian Institute of Sciences building) in 4th of July 2015 and at the Asrama Haji Pondok Gede (Pondok Gede Hajj Dormitory) Jakarta 5th of July 2015. The beginning of YukNgaji was founded because of an ideological background from founders of movement. Some people who were found YukNgaji movement have common perceptions in the impact of cultural liberalization on youth generation. Millennial generation is believed to be full of achievements but is vulnerable to being influenced by the misinterpretation of freedom in this disruption era. Therefore, the founders believe that there is a need for joint efforts to provide space for mutual sharing of kindness to create a forum for social interaction. YukNgaji is claimed to be a community that is not only a gathering forum, but also provides systematic Islamic teaching for its members. YukNgaji always deliver that with the provisions they get from Al-Quran, people who believe can solve their own problems and be useful for others. At the beginning of the year after its establishment, YukNgaji already has regions in 15 major cities such as Bogor, Jakarta, Bandung, Solo, Yogyakarta and Semarang. Nowadays, there are more than 46 regional YukNgaji local communities from several regions in Indonesia.

Millennial Islamic proselytizing movement always utilizes the latest technology and information media and is widely accessed by other young people. In this case, the most useful platform used by YukNgaji are Instagram, Youtube, WhatsApp, and Telegram in conducting Movement campaigns. The social media platforms and online short messenger are used according to their respective portions. With current issues, YukNgaji can reach high enthusiasm of the wider people, in particular millennials, in campaigning for Islamic discourses. The number of followers of YukNgaji social media accounts is really reached by millennials, both the account of central YukNgaji (the account managed by founders) and some regional YukNgaji Movement accounts in several regions.

**Post-Islamism; between moment and movement**

The term of post-Islamism was early popularized by Asef Bayat, Iranian scholar. Bayat started his post-Islamism study with a question about Islamism and its relationship with modern democracy. According to Bayat, Islamism is an ideology and movement that strive to establish some kind of “Islamic order” like an Islamic state, sharia law, and normative code of Islam. Islamism has impasse in raising a rigid ideology in capturing state
power realize an Islamic state. The same thing was also conveyed by Olivier Roy, that the political Islam strategy has failed to offer a better future as an alternative solution to the political chaos, disparities and injustices that have occurred in several countries. The large number of political Islam voices in Muslim countries has actually fostered neo-fundamentalists. (Roy, 1994) Instead of winning over the hearts of the Muslim community, Islamism is trapped in stagnation in political movements, civil wars, radicalism, terrorism and government crises. According to Bayat, Roy's thesis about The Failure of political Islam does not mean the end of Islamist activism. Politics in Muslim majority countries is still predominantly religious. Referring to the case in Iran, Islamism will eventually come to terms with democratic values that it was against. Thus, the ideology of Islamism negotiated with democratic identities such as human rights, freedom and the free public sphere. Looking at Iran's political background, Bayat considered the condition of Islamism after decades of Iran's revolution, gradually drawn critics by some intellectuals, youth and women. These groups began to demand more space for democracy, individual freedom, tolerance, and gender equality. Bayat argued that the social condition in Iran is a symptom of post-Islamism that will occur in other Muslim majority countries all over the world. (Bayat, 1996, 2007)

This initiate thesis has been responded by several scholars in several countries, particularly in Muslim majority countries. They began to make a projection study related to post-Islamism at large in almost Muslim majority countries. This academic effort seems to make post-Islamism a projection of the condition of Islamism which is allegedly failed to gain public sympathy. Other scholars also highlighted the political Islam that occurred in Iran. Indeed, there were many Islamic dissent after the Iranian Islamic revolution. However, Islamic dissent did not only occur socially and grew naturally from the democratic consciousness of the academia, but was also driven by contentious politics that occurred in Iran. Yasayuki Matsunaga terms this condition as post-revivalism, a political moment that occurred after the Iranian Islamic revolution. (Matsunaga, 2014)

From some scholars thesis, Muslims in democratic country are always looking for free public space. This kind of expression can be seen clearly in millenial Islamic proselytizing movement groups such as YukNgaji. Movement activists respond to political phenomena that are considered detrimental to Muslims in general. The responses conveyed through social media are adjusted to democratic values. For instance, they raised the issue of the right of wearing clothes when there was a discourse on banning the veil in universities. They campaign on the importance of civil liberties when there was monitoring of proselytizing activities. From public sphere perspective, the voices of these millennial proselytizing activists are democratically correct.
How Do We Relate the Millennial Islamic Proselytizing Movement With?

The paragraphs below in this article attempt to contextualize the phenomenon of the millennial da'wah movement with the general theme of this conference. From the point of view of political activism, we can parallel the discourse of Islamism with this phenomenon of millennial preaching. The main objective of the da'wah movement is to persuade the public to shift to one identity that is ethically correct and norms. Therefore, the da'wah movement on the one hand can be called a form of activism in the struggle for identity politics. According to tillly, activism is shown by the formation of a new social movement. New social movement emphasizes on some characteristics such as contentious politics, collective action, and mass mobilization.

From the perspective of this new social movement, YukNgaji has fulfilled the elements of a social movement. Several discourses presented to the public has shown an attitude that is contrary to government policies which is allegedly far from justice. Obviously, this is kind of contentious politics. The YukNgaji movement has also succeeded in forming small groups from various regions to amplify the Islamic discourse voiced by the movement’s founders. The organizing of this movement was carried out through the youth as a resource for the movement. The organizing of movements from various regions simultaneously indicates collective action and mass mobilization, even though in some action they have to act virtually through online social media.

Culturally, the YukNgaji movement affirms the fusion of Islamic values and popular culture. The thesis on Islamic popularism can be related with the YukNgaji movement because of the systematic efforts of movement activists to persuade millennial Muslims. Movement activists aware of the generational mapping that psychology scientists have mapped. They also know the characteristics and needs from every generation – particularly for X and millennial generation – on social media. By raising popular contemporary themes such as food, entertainment, and traveling, movement activists convey Islamic messages that are in accordance with the culture and habit of the millennial generation.

We, as author, admit that it is too early to confirm the presence of post-Islamism momentum in millennial Islamic proselytizing movement such as the YukNgaji without any other depth supporting studies. However, the presence of YukNgaji confirms some of the symptoms of post-Islamism that Asef Bayat has described. Ustad Felix Siauw, as a key figure in the YukNgaji movement, has shifted the discourse of Islamism from the establishment of an Islamic state to the formation of a modern and democratic Muslim society on the one hand, while still having to affirm belief in the unnegotiable teachings of Islam on the other hand. Proselytizing, however, is
a part of religious order which needs a sophisticated strategy to persuade people. One strategy is to reinterpret religion to adjust the surrounding society and a solution for some of a religious conviction seems to be to privatize faith and religious practice. Actually, such movements like YukNgaji are still in minority stream. This condition is just like other minority groups such as Salafism in Europe. Thus, they need a cultural conformity as a predominating attitude or strategy chosen by Muslim. (Olsson, 2014)

Conclusion
The millennial Islamic proselytizing movement is one form of complex struggle between Islamic identity on the one hand and modernity on the other. The condition of democracy in Indonesia has played a role in the hug proliferation of this movement. From several core discourses voiced by activists of the YukNgaji movement, this millennial Islamic proselytizing movement can be read from the post-Islamism landscape in several ways. First, the movement discourse which focuses on the formation of an Islamic society, starting from the grassroots community. This effort is very different from the efforts of previous Islamist movement activists who are actively campaigning the formation of an Islamic state through the elite. Second, the Islamic discourse campaign is not merely about the political awakening of the Islamic world. YukNgaji consistently spreading Islamic discourses which close to popular themes such as clothing, food, and the Islamic lifestyle. Thus, Islamic teaching could be easily understood by the wider community.

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