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The New Visibility of the Salafi Da'wah in the Digital Space: Fundamentalism and Political Identity in the Post Suharto

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Abstract

This paper investigates the new visibility of Salafist da'wah on the new media. The media such as cassette, bulletin, television and the digital made religious material and the agents be more visible in the secularized world. The basic inquiries is how the Salafi agent reforms their visibility in the post Suharto era and how it deals with their Islamism agenda in the media. Alongside that visibility has also revised the secular thesis on the privatization of religion it also marks the resurgence of religion globally. Through analysing the Islamic post in the social media content in Instagram and using a qualitative research (content analysis), this paper sees about the new visibility and rise of fundamentalism and the Salafi preaching in the digital space. This paper also finds that fundamentalism is a radical response to secularism, and modernization which originated from the colonial period. However, currently the fundamentalism is not in antagonistic relation with democratization, they embrace it as a medium to spread their idea widely and to shape their political identity. Indeed, in the "digital space" where any people could voice their ideas and accept limitless information, Salafi's preachers also modify their preaching to be more casual look, friendly, attractive and inspirational yet the idea is still conservative. Such modification was taken to grabs more audience and to be more visible in the digital space. This research implies that Salafi da'wah

was reforming its visibility, especially in the post Suharto era where Islam, politic and technology were intermingled relation.

Keywords: *Salafi, Political Identity, Fundamentalism, Digital Space.*

A. Introduction

Following the political collapse of Suharto authoritarian regime, there was a new hope for better democracy and better political freedom in Indonesia.¹ Hitherto, the political life was seriously controlled and limited by government in order to maintain the status quo, political stability and militaristic social order.² As political reformation in 1998 expected to bring about change in social and political life, and also better recognition to religious minority group, democracy then becomes a prerequisite key to guarantee the freedom of people religious expressions and ideas.³ However, democracy has also unintended consequences, that it also accommodates fundamentalist religious views in the public sphere. Here, the fundamentalist groups such as Salafi which beforehand remains quite and apolitical began to take the opportunity in the real political contestation.⁴

In the global context, both Hefner⁵ and Tibi⁶ are explained that that the prominent features of democracy in the modern world politics today are the involvement of fundamentalism, religious politics of identity in the public affair and the transnational ideas of religion across the worldwide. Either it is Christianity in America

¹Donald J. Porter, *Managing Politic and Islam in Indonesia* (New Jersey: Routedge Taylor and Francis Group, 2002).

²Robert W. Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia* (New York: Princeton University Press, 2011).

³Zainal Abidin Bagir, "Advocacy for Religious Freedom in Democratizing Indonesia," *The Review of Faith and International Affairs* 12, No. 2 (2014): 27-39.

⁴Noorhaidi Hasan, "The Salafi Movement in Indonesia: Transnational Dynamics and Local Development," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 27, No. 1 (2007): 83-94.

⁵Robert W. Hefner, "Public Islam and the Problem of Democratization," *Sociology of Religion* 62, No. 4 (2001): 491-514.

⁶Bassam Tibi, *The Challenge of Fundamentalism: Political Islam and The New World Disorder* (London: Univerity of California Press, 1998).

and Europe, Hindu in India, Buddhism in Srilanka or Islam the rest of Islamic world. The current look then is that religious populism-fundamentalism utilized democracy to challenge the secular and modernity ideas as the impact of globalization.⁷ The old prediction that religion would become irrelevant in the modern-secular world was revised; even religion becomes so visible publicly.⁸ Roland noted that to the current situation, religion in the global context is undergoing revivalism, resurgence and transformation. It happens shortly after the Cold-War, and short after the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, which is also as a marking point for the total collapse of communism in 1991.⁹

In Indonesia and at the time of the downfall of communism globally, Soeharto was in close relationship with fundamentalist group for alliance against the growth of moderate middle class Muslim.¹⁰ Given the ample room at the authoritarian regimes, the fundamentalist group in the post-reformation is identical to the fundamentalist at the time of Independence in 1945 both of them are demanding to the establishment of Islamic law and inclined to substitute the secular state to the theocracy.¹¹ According to fundamentalist, secular state has failed to establish social justice and welfare within the society and therefore during the freedom of religious expression in the post-authoritarian regime, many religious fundamentalisms were also taking opportunities.¹²

Currently, the rise of fundamentalist view was followed by the high advanced technology which allows people to interact

⁷Roland Benedikter, *Religion in the Age of Re-Globalization* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2022).

⁸Noorhaidi Hasan, *The Making of Public Islam: Piety, Agency, and Commodification on the Landscape of the Indonesian Public Sphere* (Netherland: Springer, 2009).

⁹Benedikter, *Religion in the Age of Re-Globalization*.

¹⁰Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia*.

¹¹Amanah Nurish, "Populisme Agama Dalam Pentas Demokrasi Indonesia Di Era Internet," in *Demokrasi Di Era Digital*, ed. Nasir Tamara (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 2021).

¹²S. Fealy G. and White, *Expressing Islam: Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2008).

each other in the “digital space”,¹³ a term which interchanged with William Gibson’s idea on ‘cyberspace’ or previously the “internet studies”. It refers to the idea of digitalization and virtualization of human activities and its global interaction in the digital area which is crossing the physical boundaries across the worldwide.¹⁴ As the medium to convoy the message-ideas, digital space has more potency to grab wider audience, to consolidate mass movement and to redefine the structure of religious agent in society.

Hitherto the discourse on the “digital space” was intriguing many scholars to discuss about the relation between the reality and the hyper-reality. Here Baudrillard describes it as “simulacra” which refers to certain kinds of simulation or representation that substituted the original or the real thing.¹⁵ According to Baudrillard, the contemporary world has been overwhelmed with images, sign, and simulation that have no any connection to reality. In a hyperrealist society, people inclines to experience a mix of real and simulated experiences, making it difficult to distinguish between what is authentic and what is artificial, what is fantasy-imagination and what is real.

As freedom in post-authoritarian Indonesia was increased, many religious groups also utilize “digital space” to share their simulacra of social-religious activities online. Ranging from pilgrimage, following *syariah* lifestyle, following the preaching, and sharing their activities with their community.¹⁶ It is making the digital space as an extension for their real space. Here, Slama noted that Muslims always consider that their activities of online

¹³Eva F. Nisa, “The Internet Subculture of Indonesian Face-Veiled Women,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 16, No. 3 (2013): 241–255.

¹⁴Chiung Hwang Chent August E. Grant and Amanda F.C. Sturgill, *Religion Online: How Digital Technology Is Changing the Way We Worship and Pray*, ed. Daniel A. Stout (Colorado: Praeger, 2019).

¹⁵Jean Baudrillard, *Simulation*, ed. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University, 1983).

¹⁶Dayana Lengauer, “Sharing Semangat Taqwa: Social Media and Digital Islamic Socialities in Bandung,” *Indonesia and the Malay World* 46, No. 134 (2018): 5–23.

engagements as also a mean to enhance their religious devotion. In this point, social media platforms in the digital space play a crucial role in studying religious life, discourse and ideas, as they are constructed from user's daily life. Indeed the use of digital space is more than any other form of media.¹⁷ It can be said that through media, the religious agency, idea and the practice of certain religious groups were discoverable and observable digitally-anthropologically.

Besides sharing religious practices, one of the most obvious new trends in contemporary religion is the use of media to propagate the fundamentalist ideas. According to Nurish the radical and extremist group utilize digital space to promote their ideas. Likewise in a market place, they were also targeting the audience to spread their ideology and to manage their follower.¹⁸ In targeting the group, Lim explained that the internet in modern Indonesia used to shape the meta-narrative about the enemy and the alliance. Meta narrative is set body of knowledge that legitimates the idea of identity, the construction of nationality and solidarity and to figure out the common enemy and the sentiment of those classified as the "other".¹⁹ Thus meta-narrative in the digital space contributes to the distinguished ideas about "we" and "they" or as political identity.

Further, the meta-narrative in the digital space, not only influence people's ideas but also people religious attitude-behaviour to "the other". For the example, according to Center for the Study of Islam and Society (Pusat Pengkajian Islam dan Masyarakat, PPIM) survey to gen Z (according to Alvares research, they were born around 2001 at present or what so called as digital native) about their religious attitude and behavior, it is found

¹⁷Martin Slama, "Practising Islam through Social Media in Indonesia," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 46, No. 134 (2018): 1-4.

¹⁸Amanah Nurish, "Dari Fanatisme Ke Ekstremisme Ilusi Kecemasan Dan Tindak Kekerasan," *Masyarakat dan Budaya* 21, No. 1 (2019): 31-40.

¹⁹Merlyna Lim, "Islamic Radicalism and Anti-Americanism in Indonesia: the Role of the Internet," in *Policy Studies 18* (Washington: Eas-West Center Washington, 2005), 85.

that the majority of them were getting exposure from religious fundamentalism through online media. One of significant finding is that there are still many of them agree that the closely associated meaning of *jihad* is *qital* (to kill), allowing persecution to those who out of Islam (*murtad*) and religious intolerances were not a big deal or as it is normal.²⁰ Such understanding was also produced by their Islamic religious education teacher in their educational process. Interestingly, these gen Z generations were getting the information mostly from the internet.

PPIM's survey is remarkable, it confirm previous scholars concerning on the link between fundamentalist ideas and youth religious activities. Here Wahib,²¹ Firly,²² and Yuyun²³ argue that fundamentalist idea were targeting urban middle class youth for they were eager for embracing their religiosity and they were concerning on the idea of individual-social piety. They link the characteristic of performance among youth undergoing the idea of *hijrah* (which literally means to move into better place) to the characteristic of popular consumption. The performativity of symbol and attribute, such as *niqab* (Arabian Style of veil), and *syar'i* dress are booth an aspiration on being pious and also popular symbol and part of lifestyle from artist, entrepreneur and influencer.

Before actively promoting in the digital space, many Indonesian preachers were actively carrying their da'wa messages throughout various media such as radio and cassettes which were familiarized in the early 1920s to the late 1960s.²⁴ Beside

²⁰ See the info graphic video of PPIM on its YouTube Channel <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eHOzggORpV&t=21s> , accessed on March 30, 2023.

²¹ Ahmad Bunyan Wahib, "Being Pious among Indonesian Salafis," *al-Jami'ah* 55, No. 1 (2017): 1–26.

²² Firly Annisa, "Hijrah Milenial: Antara Kesalehan Dan Populism," *Ma'arif* 13, No. 1 (2018): 38–54.

²³ Yuyun Sunesti, Noorhaidi Hasan, and Muhammad Najib Azca, "Young Salafi-Niqabi and Hijrah: Agency and Identity Negotiation," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 8, No. 2 (2018): 173–198.

²⁴ Eva F. Nisa, "Creative and Lucrative Da'wa: the Visual Culture of Instagram amongst Female Muslim Youth in Indonesia", *Asiascape: Digital Asia* 5 (2018): 68–99.

spreading bulletin in mosques for every Friday, the invention of television channel also featured with religious program such "Mimbar Agama", "Qasidah" and "Sari Tilawah". Various programs indicated the massive development of Indonesia da'wah, which unintentionally giving an ample room for the raising of Islamism and the political identity among urban middle class Muslim.²⁵ Likewise in Indonesia, during the late 1970s, in Egypt, Jordan and Iran media was utilized not only for religious-entertainment but also for religious-political purposes and as the channel for Islamic populism to criticize the oppressive secular government, and to engage in their religious activities.²⁶

In the set of political practice, digital space also utilized to spread religious populism.²⁷ The utilization of media to da'wah increased the visibility of urban religious preachers which inclined to certain political parties. The resurgence of these preachers was marked by the emergence of Islamic based political parties which are characteristically different from its predecessor. Such as the fast-growing of Islamic party based on *Da'wah* and *Tarbiyyah* which was inclined to Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwanul Muslimin) movement originated from Egypt.²⁸ In the screen media, globalization of media industry produced the adapted novel movie of "Ayat-ayat Cinta" which presented pious Muslim, modern and educated, and the visibility of beautiful-ideal women wearing Arabian robe (*cadar*) with modern outlook who allows polygamy for her husband. Here, Hakim noted that the movie shapes new hip and mass hysteria for the depiction of urban modern Muslim. Indeed it was the first

²⁵ Inaya Rakhmani, *Mainstreaming Islam in Indonesia: Television, Identity, and Middle Class* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017).

²⁶ Charles Hirschkind, *Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere*, ed. Birgit Meyer and Annelies Moors (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018).

²⁷ Amanah Nurish, "Populisme Agama Dalam Pentas Demokrasi Indonesia Di Era Internet."

²⁸ Noorhaidi Hasan, "Islamist Party, Electoral Politics, and Da'wah Mobilization among Youth: the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) in Indonesia," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 6, No. 1 (2012): 17-47.

movie that successfully attracted millions of Muslim Youth and the political elites. As the movies presenting the “ideal character of Muslim” there was conservative ideological narrative presented in the movies in the mind of popular culture.²⁹

The movie becomes point of departure in seeing a new look of urban religiosity which is depicted as more fashionable and attractive in the screen media and Indonesian popular culture. The modern characteristic of religiosity globally is not that resistance to modernity or anti-democratic state as it was previously visible. It looks like Islam, modernity and democracy are no longer in antagonistic relations. As it was visible in the current Malaysia, Indonesia, and some countries with Muslim majority such as in Egypt and Turkey. Here, Wei Wang noticed the transformative visibility of young Muslim in the public sphere. The characteristic of young urban preachers were not that old fashioned, they were wearing casual outfit with casual look, speaking English fluently and in engage with their audience, and primarily they were visible in the digital space for most of them are digital-savvy.³⁰

Indeed, many researchers have investigated the religious fundamentalism in the online media, Akhyar,³¹ Daniel,³² and Nurish³³ were investigated the current political activism in the online Media and argue about the rise of fundamentalism and religious populism. Further Yuyun and Hasan,³⁴ Iswandi,³⁵ through

²⁹ Lukman Hakim, “Conservative Islam Turn or Popular Islam? An Analysis of the Film *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*” (n.d.).

³⁰ Wai Weng Hew, “The Art of Dakwah: Social Media, Visual Persuasion, and the Islamist Propagation of Felix Siauw,” *Indonesia and the Malay World* 46, No. 134 (2018): 61–79.

³¹ Muzayyin Ahyar, “Islamic Clicktivism: Internet, Democracy, and Contemporary Islamist Activism in Surakarta,” *Studia Islamika* 24, No. 3 (2017): 435–468.

³² Daniel Trottier, “Digital Vigilantism as Weaponisation of Visibility,” *Philosophy and Technology* 1, No. 55 (2017): 55–72.

³³ Amanah Nurish, “Populisme Agama Dalam Pentas Demokrasi Indonesia Di Era Internet.”

³⁴ Sunesti, Hasan, and Azca, “Young Salafi-Niqabi and Hijrah: Agency and Identity Negotiation.”

³⁵ Iswandi Syahputra, “Activities on Twitter and the 212 Defend Islam Rally through the Perspective of the Indonesian Ulema Council,” *al-Jami'ah* 58, No. 2 (2020): 323–354.

investigating Islamist agent and political activism in the online media also stands on the idea that a sense of connection and visibility play a vital role in both online and offline religious sermons in the contemporary landscape of religion. Filling the academic gap, this paper problematizes the visibility of and visual element utilized in the online media. Visualization was used a means to adapt the audience in the online media. The basic argument on this research is the visibility and visualization play significant element in the online religious preaching (da'wah) for it was grabbing more audience. Indeed, the visibility also deals with the discourse of religion in the online media as it was utilized to spread the fundamentalist ideas.

Further, this article explores the rise of the *Salafi* within the “digital space”, which characterized as DIY (Do It Yourself) to post, to share and to comment the religious idea. This paper is also analysing how online platforms have served as a canal for communicating their beliefs, sharing their ideas, as well as shaping mutual concerns via digital media. Therefore, this paper will focus on *Salafi* group utilizes social media to disseminate their messages and teachings, fostering the movement's expansion throughout the Muslim world and beyond.

The term digital visibility refers to a state of being visible and getting more exposure and exhibited; it could be a symbolic appearance, the idea, and the agent in the digital space.³⁶ According to Hirschkin, the visibility of Islamic agent made Islam omnipresent in the public spheres through sound, cassette and visual images on screen.³⁷ The intersection between religion and media transforms religious practices, sermons into commodities for mass consumption and for popular culture.³⁸ Indeed, the intersection has blurred the boundaries between the sacred and the secular, the public and the private. As more visibility of religion in the secular

³⁶Trottier, “Digital Vigilantism as Weaponisation of Visibility.”

³⁷Charles Hirschkind, *Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere*.

³⁸Abdur Rozaki, “Komodifikasi Islam,” *Jurnal Dakwah* 14, No. 2 (2013): 199–212.

media, religion becomes an important element in the discourse of public sphere, especially in the post 9/11.³⁹

This article gathers the data from the post of Islamist agent in Instagram and Youtube. The gathered data are the visual element such as the visualization, the caption and quoted text, and the appearance of the preacher and the use of language. The data then qualitatively described its content for analysis. Analysis contents will systematically identifying the pattern, the message and the relevant feature of the content. Surely there are wide ranges of branches and agents within Indonesian Salafi groups, either they were inclined to puritanism such as Salafi-Wahabi, or inclined to political movement (Salafi-Tahriri) or inclined to mass movement (Salafi-Tarbawi). This paper will focus only on to the shared characteristic of popular Salafi preachers in the Youtube, such as Khalid Basalamah and Firanda Andirja who are inclined to Wahabism. Some popular preachers such as Felix Siau, the ex-member of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), and Hanan Attaki, the founder of Gerakan Pemuda Hijrah (Youth Hijra Movement) and inclined to Ikhwani will also be mentioned to see the shared characteristic of these groups. The underlying for of Salafi is the revivalist Islam which advocated returning to the early tradition of Muslim for it is the authentic and pristine form of Islam.

B. Discussion

1. The Rise and New Visibility of Salafi Preacher and Influencer

Islamic fundamentalism considered as a global phenomenon in the world politics today. Many scholars had recognized the resurgence of religion as a global phenomenon long before the

³⁹José Casanova, "Public Religions in the Modern World," in *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019).

end of the Cold War. Tibi⁴⁰ noted that the western world examines religious fundamentalism and linked it with Iranian Revolution led by the Ayatollahs Khomeini in 1979. Shortly then, religious fundamentalism has notorious name for its close association to extremism. Further, at the fall of communism, the western worlds are seeking for the new enemy to establish its supremacy, and Islamic fundamentalism is seen as a threat after communism. The Islamic fundamentalism was portrayed as a threat to Western civilization and evoking what so called by Huntington as “clash of civilization”.

Indeed, Tibi also reflected Jürgen Meyer idea explaining that inside the idea of perpetrator of religious fundamentalism, there were religious and moral legitimacy and religious fundamental belief which was disrespected by western modern secularism.⁴¹ Both secularism and modernism are western problem, and it was imposed during the age of colonialism. Therefore, Jürgen Meyer noted that most perpetrator were not against religion, but secularism and modernity ideas. At this idea, fundamentalism is the product of modernity and globalization and it is explaining the idea of warfare in the most advanced society.⁴²

Since secularism-modernity project, there was an assumption that the root of Muslim's failure in preserving its superiority over the west was due colonialism that made Muslim lost its original root of Islam. Muslims are accepting the heretic tradition from the west, Eurocentric and therefore there was need to purify Islamic understanding and following the practice of pure Islam as taught by the Prophet Muhammad, his Companion and that of *Salaf as-Salih* (pious ancestor generation); The term *salaf* then used to refer the early generation of Islam, from the period of the Prophet (*Nabi*),

⁴⁰Bassam Tibi, *The Challenge of Fundamentalism: Political Islam and the New World Disorder* (California: University of California Press, 2002).

⁴¹Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: the Global Rise of Religious Violence* (London: University of California, 2001).

⁴²Juergensmeyer.

the Companion (*Shahabah*) and the follower of the Companion (*Tabi'in*), and the generation next to Follower's companion (*Tabi'it Tabi'in*). These generations were depicted as representation of pure Islam and respectable-pious ancestor (*Salafas-Salih*). The followers of *salafi* often appear in Arabian style, such as wearing long beard (*lihya*) for man, face-covered veil (*niqab*) for woman and wearing ankle-trouser to avoid *isbal* (long dress) for man.⁴³ Surely defining *salafi* through their attributes is an ill-definition as many of *salafis* also open their veil, but the appearance was also symbolizing the visibility and to point out the common adapted style of *salafism*. Indeed, when a person becoming part of *salafist*, they will recognize certain knowledge about the true Islam and such attributes will be part of their cultural-political identity.

In reaction to the western hegemony, in the late half of 20th century, a *salafi* prominent figure in Egypt such as Sayyid Qutb and Hasan al-Banna condemned the government copying western culture of secularism and revoking the idea to restore Islam to its original teaching. According to Qutb and al-Banna Islam is self-sufficient system, comprehensive and does not need to copy other system. The failure of Muslim across the globe was due their irresponsible act of copying western culture. Following the idea, there was utopia to rebuild the "ideal world" for Muslim that is through re-establishment of Islamic state or Islamic caliphate (*Khilafah Islamiyyah*). Likewise in Egypt, in Iran and Pakistan, the resistance over western culture had turn into numerous political movements which then turn the revolutionary system of culture and state's economy.⁴⁴

In Indonesia, van Bruinessen explained that since 1980 and it was inspired by Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, numerous *salafi*

⁴³Hasan, "The Salafi Movement in Indonesia: Transnational Dynamics and Local Development."

⁴⁴Timur Kuran, *Islam and Mammon: the Economic Predicament of Islamism* (United States of America: Princeton and Oxford, 2004).

movements were successful through student movement activism. Such as the involvement in Rohis (Rohaniawan Muslim) in senior high school, and to college propagation activism such as Lembaga Dakwah Kampus (LDK) and Islamic Tarbiyyah such as *liqa* (circle for education upbringing) which were thrived in Indonesia universities.⁴⁵ They were politically-religiously motivated by the spirit of enjoying the good and forbidding the evil (*amar ma'ruf nahi munkar*) and in accordance to Q.S. Ali 'Imran [3]: 104.⁴⁶ In doing so, Indonesia *salafist* is following the global shared issues; such as the issue on the establishment of religious principle (*syari'ah*) in the daily life of Muslim across the world, nationalism, feminism and short kind of "secular invention" which considers as "weakening" and "threatening" the rightful teaching of Islam.

The successful of *salafi* movements in Indonesia has also much to do with Saudi ambition to be the centre of Islamic civilization through actively campaign the Wahabism idea across Muslim countries and evoking the sense of global political unity (*ummah*). At the post-gulf war, Saudi was financially benefited from the rise of oil price and giving the generous funding for da'wah activities.⁴⁷ The da'wah includes building mosques, madrasa, and Islamic university and even provides large amount of scholarship for Indonesian to study in the Arabian countries. According to Azra such efforts were taken to reclaim the historical legacy of Mecca and Medina as house for Islamic religious knowledge across the globe. Short after the rise of Salafism-Wahabism in Saudi, Al-Azhar in Cairo was substituted its role as the centre for religious authority. As the religious authority has shifted from Saudi to Egypt, Saudi

⁴⁵Martin van Bruinessen, *Contemporary Development in Indonesian Islam: Explaining the Conservative Turn* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2013).

⁴⁶Anies Rasyid Baswedan, "Political Islam in Indonesia: Present and Future Trajectory," *The Politics of Religion in South and Southeast Asia* 44, No. 5 (2011): 669–690.

⁴⁷Robert W. Hefner, *Schooling Islam: the Culture and Politic of Modern Muslim Education*, ed. Robert W. Hefner and Muhammad Qasim Zaman (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2020).

campaign for Salafism-Wahabism has also faced serious challenge, especially across the Muslim in Southeast Asia.⁴⁸

In Indonesia, the challenge of *salafi* movement was on its intersection with local context as well as multifaceted interpretation of Islam in certain areas.⁴⁹ The manifestation that Islam grows together with local culture as well as the dynamic of political Islam outside Arabia contributes to the transnational dynamic of *salafi* outside its hub. In facing that challenges, the face of *salafi da'wah* was renowned for its visibility. Wai Wang narrated about Felix Siau, an Islamist inclined to Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) who always appears wearing batik, in casual look, and using visualization to persuade and motivated the audience. His background as a Chinese and Muslim by convert (*muallaf*) made him as booth preacher and religious motivator.⁵⁰ Likewise Felix, Hanan Attaki also visualizes himself in a casual look by wearing jeans, T-Shirt and fashionable head-cup. Unlike the previous popular preacher, Khalid Basalamah, a popular *salafi* preacher in YouTube appears to have long beard and traditionally, but the visualization of his video is appealing. So does other Salafi, such as Firanda Adirja who actively promotes Salafi's idea in Spotify, online streaming radio. They were characterized in provoking the return to the pristine Islamic teaching, following Al-Qur'an and Sunnah. The preaching delivered through advanced technology and with more engaging language to garb audience's attention.

Besides visualizing their apparent to be up to date, these figures are also utilizing the digital space to share and to engage with more followers. Khalid ba Salamah official You Tube reaches

⁴⁸Azyumardi Azra, *The Origin of Islamic Reformis in Southeast Asia: Network of Malay-Indoneian and Middle Eastern "Ulama" in the Seventh and Eighteenth Centuries* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2004).

⁴⁹Noorhaidi Hasan, "The Failure of Wahhabi Campaign: Transnational Islam and the Salafi Madrasa in Post-9/11 Indonesia," *South East Asia Research* 18, No. 4 (2010): 705-735.

⁵⁰Hew, "The Art Of Dakwah: Social Media, Visual Persuasion, and the Islamist Propagation of Felix Siau."

2.55 Million active subscribers, Hanan Attaki got more than 2.4 million and Felix Siauw got more than 1.3 million subscribers.⁵¹ In term of internet active number, the active subscriber is huge. However, what can be point out here is that the “digital space” has amplified and consolidated the voice of *salafi* movement and the potential spread for their ideology into wider communities, especially the digital native.

Likewise their visibilities, their theme of preaching in the digital space are also be focused on the personal piety and the teaching which emphasizes on the movement to better Muslim and its lifestyle. The better step of being Muslim often depicted as the one who move from a secular condition to be more engaged in the religious activities such as *hijrah* or kind of the term.⁵² By following the lifestyle, it was also leaving-rejecting the heretic and customary tradition that has no Islamic textual basis, following the *sunnah* and its moral values, and primarily referring to Al-Qur'an and Sunnah (prophetic tradition) for Muslim's daily life. The themes presented in their YouTube official account are interesting for it emphasizes on personal piety and Muslim behaviour. However, it has unintended consequences; such as sense of religious exclusivity, sense of practicing the true meaning of Islam in which the local custom and tradition which has no textual basis was rejected and even condemned as heretical practices.

2. Urban Muslim and the Politic of Religious Identity

Although Syari'ah ideology, as advocated by Islamist groups and promoted since the Indonesia's independence, it never gains support from Muslim majority. Particularly, there were numerous efforts to established Syari'ah based law, but always it met constant failure constitutionally and even Islamic based parties always fail

⁵¹The data accessed through their Official YouTube Channel on April 15, 2023.

⁵²Annisa, “Hijrah Milenial: Antara Kesalehan Dan Populism.”

to lead Indonesian parliament.⁵³ Couple of years ago, *salafi* group campaigning for caliphate also faced post-dissolution under law no 16/2017 concerning on the radical mass organization. The government has disbanded radical group such as Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), Front Pembela Islam (FPI), and number of group suspected for their radical inclined ideas of Islamic law (*daulah* Islam). The decision was also following the repression of Ikhwanul Muslimin (IM) across the Middle East. Politically, under Jokowi's era, the law was seriously taken to suppress the radical group threatened the basic foundation of state (Pancasila). As well as the policy was taken for has no precedent to take the action since post-authoritarian regime.

Failure after failure politically means *salafi* group also fail in succeeding their ideology from above, but in the grassroots-social level, they were still alive and undergoing transformation.⁵⁴ Instead of politic, *salafist* is now playing at identity level, especially at the digital space. Bunt, for the example, found that in the post 9/11 fundamentalist groups are often intriguing to make sense of Palestinian-Israeli conflicts as justification for violation action in the digital space. The narration of *intifada* scaled up to the narration of David vs Goliath. He mentioned the phenomena of "electronic jihad" which refer to virtualizing the idea of Jihad into digital action had been turning the spirit of populism into digital space.⁵⁵ Likewise Bunt, Nisa also investigates female-Muslim activities on the *jilbab* in Instagram and found that according to the activists, posting and sharing in the Instagram is like the continuation of da'wah. Her informants clarify that as a picture can speak more than hundred words it is more inspirational than traditional da'wah. Indeed, if someone gets inspiration from the posting, the deed will always

⁵³Baswedan, "Political Islam in Indonesia: Present and Future Trajectory."

⁵⁴Hasan, "Islamist Party, Electoral Politics and Da'wah Mobilization among Youth: The Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) in Indonesia."

⁵⁵Gary R. Bunt, *Islam in the Digital Age: E-Jihad, Online Fatwas, and Cyber Islamic Environments* (Michingan: Pluto Press, 2003).

continue simultaneously. Interestingly, her informant, Uktisally, is not only posting the picture solely for the purposes of da'wah, but also for her *jilbab* businesses and building community through has tag.⁵⁶ So does Langgeur in investigating community in Bandung, they shared the same ideas that their online activities are part of social concern. They attempts to build great Muslimah which not only educated but also find the meaning of life, saving them from the state of being in the dark (*berada dalam kegelapan*) to journey to Allah through *hijrah*.⁵⁷

Besides playing on political identity, in many cases digital space has utilized by many agents to convey the idea of being pious and morally religious. Since they were engaging in the digital space, their targets are mostly urban middle class millennial Muslim for they are digital-savvy, easy access to the internet as well as having strength in the purchasing power and mostly educated. In the context of *salafi* da'wah, they were also targeted for their need to be modern and religious at the same time. Here the religious morality delivered in *salafi* preaching is no more criticizing the democracy and set of political system, but by evoking individual piety and embracing Islam through their lifestyle. Surely in this point, digital space already provides the religious believer a new stage to express their religiosity. Hosen in this concern makes a remarkable point by his article "Googling Kiai" or Islamic scholars to point out that digital space utilized by urban religious believer to search religious answer as well as to express their morality and religiosity.⁵⁸

Urban religiosity is becoming central theme for the discussion of current Islamic preachers. In the case of Aa Gym, Hostery notes about the rise of preaching which emphasizes religiosity-morality.

⁵⁶ Nisa, "Creative and Lucrative Da'wa: the Visual Culture of Instagram amongst Female Muslim Youth in Indonesia."

⁵⁷ Lengauer, "Sharing Semangat Taqwa: Social Media and Digital Islamic Socialities in Bandung."

⁵⁸ Nadirsyah Hosen, "Online Fatwa in Indonesia: From Fatwa Shopping to Googling a Kiai," *Expressing Islam: Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia* (February 2008): 159–173.

Through Management Qalbu (Hearth Management), Aa Gym has successfully gained wider audience. Aa Gym was admired for pious-love to his wife, Teh Nini, but then his renown then declined after he decided to polygamy.⁵⁹ Aa Gym is a marking point for the rise and the fall of entertainer-preacher because of morality issues among urban Muslim.

Here, the *salafi* preachers also did the same, Basalamah in many of his *halaqah* also attempts to entertain his audience by telling the stories about the pious ancestor such as the stories of pious love between the prophet and his wives, the companions, giving motivation for his audience and importantly he also pay attention to the issue of identity and morality. He warns his audience to prevent themselves from any moral decay that jeopardizes their identity as a Muslim. Indeed, to keep the identity is through following the teaching of the pious ancestor and the prophetic tradition (Sunnah) and that is the way on being the total Muslim (*kaffah*). Moral decay in this sense has much to do with modern liberal ideas contradict to the Islamic fundamental teaching. In the context of family guidance, such as giving advice for parent is to nurture her daughter to cook, but not for boys for it will influence their characters. It is also in the context of everyday life, such as seeking for economic welfare (*rizqi*), avoiding the *fitna*, sexual seduction, free sex, and what are considered as un-Islamic.⁶⁰

Telling stories is a prominent element in the political identity since it legitimates the narrative of what made a person be different from other, what have separated between “they” and “we”. Surely the imaginative boundaries between “they” and “we” were still unclear, but as it is retold it will shape such mass-collective identities

⁵⁹James B. Hoesterey, “Marketing Morality: the Rise, Fall and Rebranding of Aa Gym,” in *Expressing Islam: Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia*, ed. Greg Fealy and Sally White (Singapore: ISEAS, 2008), 90–107.

⁶⁰To see the complete video for his preaching, please follow the link: https://youtu.be/arAk_C1IZFM, accessed on April 16, 2023.

which inspires a person to do and not to do any actions.⁶¹ Hence, although the idea represents conservative, the *salafi* preacher had delivered it in a modern look and evoking sense meaning on being true Muslim in the secular world. Giving the myth and the meta-narrative that modern world is a limbo for religious person and the solution is going back to where the Muslim finds their identity. As modern da'wah has utilized modern media to spread their idea, its visibility seized more audience and followers. The rising of *salafi* da'wah in the digital space has linked to the idea of Islamism in rebuilding the past-glorious moment of religion.

3. Creative But Conservative

The visibility of conservative religion grows in the “digital space” are an interesting point to link between fundamentalism and the political identity in the newest version. In one hand conservatism assumed as out of date and old fashioned form of religion. However, in other hand, fundamentalism got more followers in the digital space than it was. I do assume that certainly fundamentalism-salafism is religious teaching that encourages following old-fashioned form of religion. However, media is part of cultural industry in which it should be creative to attract more audiences. Indeed, media for da'wah is also following the market rule for the supply and demand. It drives the agent to be more creative in delivering the message for supplying their conservative ideas.

Further, as the *salafi* preachers delivers their ideas, some *salafist* also done for some modification for their da'wah content. The modification intended to make the content more attractive as the content was deigned to make it appropriate and to gain the attention of potential target which mostly urban millennial Muslim. Such appropriation for the example that in the opening of his preaching uploaded in his official YouTube, Basalamah, a

⁶¹ Yuval Noah Harari, *21 Lesons for the 21st Century* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2019).

salafi preacher compares between the opened food with more flies and the covered food which protected from the flies to depict the differences between the veiled and non-veiled women.⁶² Further, he also noticed for the veiled *akhwat* (girls) to not show their face to other nor to take more accessories for it will attract the other. He called it as *tabarruj*, Arabic word which means “to show” or “exposing self to be visible for other”.

It is interesting to note that the practice of veiling among *salafist* is different from other Islamist group such as Indonesian artist and designer who committed *hijrah*, such as Zaskia Sungkar or Dian Pelangi who designed various brand for expensive *syar'i* veil. Indeed, veiling in *salafist* is stricter and have to follow the guideline from Al-Qur'an and Sunnah, such as the robe should be long, covering the ankle and more importantly it was followed by the explanation from Al-Qur'an and Sunnah.

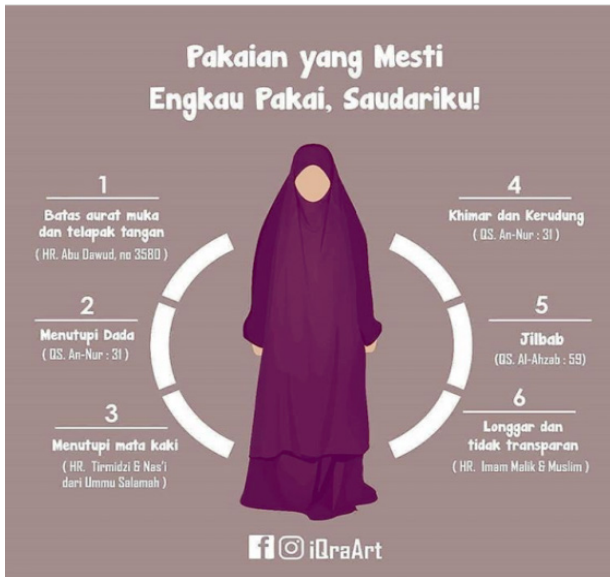


Figure 1. Islamic women dress as in Al-Qur'an and Sunnah, taken from IqraArt, an Instagram based on Salafism

⁶²For more of his preaching, please follow the link: <https://youtu.be/5rrcLjPEB4o>, accessed on April 16, 2023.

Likewise veiling that should in accordance to the textual sources, the *salafist* preachers also condemned cultural tradition which has nothing to do with Islam and considered as “western product”, such valentine and dating. The massive of anti “dating” among youth was advocated by “Anti-Dating Activism” or “Indonesia without Dating”. The movement perceived dating as seduces to *zina* (sexual act) and it was prohibited in Islam. In opposing against “dating” they were also introducing as well as encouraging young marriage to avoid any kind of sexual misconduct. They also encourage *ta'aruf* as an Islamic process of dating and “pious love”.⁶³

Such persuasion of wearing fully covered body in accordance to Al-Qur'an and Sunnah, as well as promoting anti-dating movement in the “digital space” is interesting to note as the successful conservative da'wah among youth. Here Nisa noted that there were content creators behind the posting of *salafi* member to attract more audiences. The creativity was through visualizing and creating an attractive image with quote from Al-Qur'an, Sunnah, or the pious ancestor on being pious.⁶⁴ Such activisms were accepted among youth for their desperate condition of modern life as well as to accommodate their need to be true Muslim in the more instant process or what Hasan said as “Islam Instant”. It is set of commoditization of ideologies to be the ideal Muslim with a new package and new media to attract new and segmented consumer that i the urban Muslim youth.⁶⁵

In the context that veiling for women, the *lihya* for men and short of material culture which represents Muslim endeavour in returning the original form of Islam and a sense of being an *ummah*, the *salafi* preachers had adapted the creative content. Indeed, the

⁶³Perdana Aysha Puteri, “Religion in the New Media: Anti-Dating Movement in Instagram,” *al-Adyan: Journal of Religious Studies* 1, No. 2 (2020): 103–114.

⁶⁴Nisa, “Creative and Lucrative Da'wa: the Visual Culture of Instagram amongst Female Muslim Youth in Indonesia.”

⁶⁵Hasan, *The Making of Public Islam: Piety, Agency, and Commodification on the Landscape of the Indonesian Public Sphere*.

characteristic of preaching, posting and sharing performed in the “digital space” is an extension of what they did in the real space and even hyper in reality. It means the strategy of da’wah above, had made the *salafi* agent be more visible and more accepted in playing the issues of religious identities.

C. Conclusion

Amid the intersection between religion and digital media, *salafist* religious agent had been more visible and modified their preaching and made their content appropriate for the targeted audiences which are mostly urban middle class Muslim. Here, digital media becomes a new tool to amplify and consolidates the ideas on the being true Muslim as well as spreading the *salafist* religious be more visible publicly. Their visibility that provokes sense of being the rightful Muslim by reminding the audience to the glorious past-era during the early period of Islam or what so called as the era of pious ancestor (*Salaf ash-Shalih*). During that era, the agent also promotes Islamic system based on Islamic religious law and under political unity of *ummah*. The idea was also to oppose western modern culture such as secularization and modernization which were considered as threat for Islam. In the global context, the rise of *salafism* had also seen as Muslim response to social injustice, and the broken religious environment due colonialism and westernization. Here based on the content analysis and the idea of visibility, digital space becomes a new site where Islamist provokes for their religious idea and instead of provoking the establishment of religious law constitutionally; their persuasive through visual images and preaching is to promote the idea on being a pious Muslim in the secularized online world.

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