

Research article

Mainstreaming Religious Moderation Through Islamic Literature

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Abstract.

Reading rooms filled with Islamic literature are one of the dominant factors causing the hardening of religious understanding in post-reform Indonesia. This research aimed to examine the roles played by the Gerakan Islam Cinta in mainstreaming religious moderation through popular Islamic literature. Based on interviews, participatory observations, and content analysis, we argue that popular Islamic literature is an essential instrument in the mainstreaming of religious moderation in Indonesia. The sustainability of this type of Islamic literature is important because it balances the massive conservative Islamic literature. It is precisely at this point that the Gerakan Islam Cinta plays a dual role as producer and distributor of dozens of books known as the Islamic Love series. This series of books has become a reference for the community, especially young people, in understanding a version of Islam which is friendly and peaceful. The Gerakan Islam Cinta also disseminates these books online and for free, conducts roadshows and book reviews in various cities, and initiates reading clubs in cooperation with various organizations, grassroots reading communities, and youth activists of peace in several cities in Indonesia.

Keywords: religious moderation, Islamic literature, Gerakan Islam Cinta

1. Introduction

The fall of the New Order has opened up the faucet of democracy and spaces for the contestation of religious ideology in the Indonesian public sphere. Radical Islamist groups that had been repressed under the New Order regime immediately got new opportunities to proliferate their political and religious aspirations.[1], [2] Martin van Bruinessen[3] uses the term "conservative turn" when describing the smiling face of Islam (friendly) that has lost its smile as the New Order regime fades. Bruinessen's conservative turn indicators vary widely. Ranging from significant conflicts between Muslim and Christian communities in several places; the bombings in Jakarta and Bali with hundreds of victims; also an attempt to re-insert the seven words of the Jakarta Charter into the amendments to the 1945 Constitution. It has led to the emergence of

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sharia regulations in several regions of Indonesia; the emergence of new movements such as Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) and Salafis; and a series of controversial fatwas from the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) that emerged in 2005.

Bourchier [4] mentions a change in ideological gravity from the embrace of democratic norms to a conservative and inward-looking religious nationalism in the immediate post-Soeharto era. By Hilmy [5], the formulation of moderate Islamic theology developed by Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama/NU, which is often seen as winning moderate Indonesian Islam, can no longer accommodate the latest developments and needs of this era. Akmaliah [6] even mentions Muhammadiyah and NU, which are the two largest of moderate Muslim Organizations, are increasingly threatened, and it is not impossible to become a minority due to the impact of the new religious authorities through the new media.

On the other hand, there is a different phenomenon which shows that moderate groups do not stand idly by witnessing the strengthening of religious conservatism. One of the efforts made is through strengthening discourse and practising religious moderation. Ismatu Ropi [7] states that in a multicultural society like Indonesia, religious moderation may not be an option, but a necessity. The government undoubtedly plays a vital role in ensuring the results of these efforts in society.

Various researches related to religious moderation in multiple aspects and dimensions are increasingly emerging. In the context of implementing religious moderation in the curriculum of educational institutions at numerous levels, studies do conduct by Hameed and Salih [8], Zuhdi [9], Siswanto [10], Ekawati, et al.[11], and Maghfuri [12]. In contrast to previous research, this research analyzes and examines the roles of strengthening religious moderation carried out by civil society organizations through the popular Islamic literature. Because as I understand it, the production of religious discourse is closely related to the production of religious literacy. If Indonesian widely consume Islamic literature, it will undoubtedly strengthen the understanding of Islam in Indonesia.

2. Research Method

This article is the result of field research using qualitative method. The focus of this research is the Gerakan Islam Cinta (GIC) organization as case study. I collected data by interviewing key actors in GIC, participatory observations in several activities to strengthen Islamic literacy conducted by GIC, as well as to do a content analysis of the Islamic Literacy Books published by GIC. The research conclusion will be drawn

from the analysis and from the combination of the field data (emic) and the researcher's interpretation (etic).

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Ideological Contestations in Islamic literature

The production of Islamic religious discourse is closely related to the production of religious literature. Thus, the strengthening of the tendency of religious conservatism in contemporary Indonesia, one of which is due to the public consumption of conservative Islamic literature. It also expressly concluded in the study of Noorhaidi Hasan et al. [13] that the role of Islamic literacy in the nursery of Islamist ideology among the millennial generation is grave. Islamist ideology generally infiltrated through religious books and readings which spread among students and scholars. We can generally group Islamism literature that is widely circulating among the younger generation of millennial Muslims into three types: Islamic ideology, puritanism, and popular piety. We can find Islamic ideological styles in Jihadi, Tahriri, and Tarbawi literature. Puritanism topics are abundant in much Salafi literature. Meanwhile, the issues of popular piety, motivation, and self-help are ample in the literature on popular Islamism. This latter topic is broad in scope and is written by authors from a variety of backgrounds in Islamic organizations, trends, and ideology.[14]

During the massive contestation between religious authorities in the early days of democracy, several scholars began to study the production of Islamic discourse through the literature. Just call it C.W. Watson [15] who maps Islamic books and Islamic publishers to see the plurality of religious literacy occurred in the era of democracy in Indonesia. Apart from published books, several other studies have focused on investigating periodicals such as Sabili magazine, Jihadmagz, Annida, Elfata, as well as Islamic literature written by local authors such as Abdullah Gymnastiar, Yusuf Mansur, and Habiburahman El-Shirazy. Besides examining the political economy aspects of the publication of Islamic literature, these studies also show how these magazines are circulating among students and scholars through various Islamic activism.

In the context of millennial Muslim youth, Najib Kailani [16] found that this generation generally no longer reads Islamist ideological literature like their predecessors. They prefer to access Islamic knowledge from Indonesian Muslim writers who appropriate Islamist ideas, compile, articulate, and package these Islamist ideas into pop cultures such as popular writing, novels, and comics. Borrowing the Pop-Islamism concept from

Muller [17], these new writers' works can marry Islamist ideas with youth pop culture. Islamism, which has been rigid, rigid, and fierce, is now presented in ambivalence, inconsistency, and paradox through novels, comics, and motivations.

Some of the similarities in the research findings are: (1) the modern publication industry performs well through its high sales; (2) its significant contribution to the development of Islamic ideology. This industry positions itself not only as a profitable business company but also as a vital da'wah unit. It can happen considering the openness of democracy as the antithesis of the repressive politics of the New Order. This situation then shaped the religious discourse and changed the face of Indonesian Islam. From a friendly face to an angry face.

However, even though the ideology of Islamism has dominated the market for Islamic literature in society, especially among its youth, moderate Muslim groups do not remain silent. There are counting attempts to balance the narrative of Islamism in society. Moderate Islamic texts are quite able to survive and even progress. There are efforts from the community to maintain Indonesian Islam which is moderate, friendly to local culture, committed to the nation-state, upholds democratic and other progressive values, and accepts the reality of diversity.

In response to the strengthening of conservatism and Islamism, Haidar Bagir collaborated with other moderate Muslim leaders to form the Gerakan Islam Cinta (GIC). In the GIC declaration which was attended by 40 moderate Muslim figures in Jakarta in 2012, Haidar Bagir said :

"Sengaja dipergunakan kata Gerakan untuk menegaskan niat bahwa, betapapun akan menjadikan cinta sebagai basis setiap kegiatannya, organisasi ini akan bersikap aktif dalam melancarkan upaya-upaya, baik dalam mewujudkan pergeseran paradigma dalam memahami dan menghayati Islam, maupun dalam mengambil langkah-langkah mewujudkan cinta-kasih dalam kehidupan kemasyarakatan, khususnya di negeri kita." ["The word *Gerakan* (movement) is deliberately used to emphasize the intention that this organization will actively seek an understanding and living up of Islamic values, as well as take steps to realize love in the lives of our society, with love as the base of his movement."][18]

Since its appearance, GIC has carried out many activities to promote Islam as a moderate and peace-loving religion. For example, the Festival Islam Cinta, discussions, book reviews, seminars, movie discussions, and training. GIC also recommends its members to study and disseminate Islam Cinta content sourced from Islam Cinta books, articles, papers, films, short videos, and other references.[19]

3.2. *GIC and the Literature of Religious Moderation*

Since 2015, GIC has focused on producing Islamic love series books to promote moderate Islam to the broader community and as a counterweight to the proliferation of Islamism literature in various genres. In the period 2015-2017, GIC has produced seven books, namely:

1. Belajar Hidup dari Rumi (2015), published by a Malaysian Publisher, entitled "Love Like Rumi" in the same year;
2. Semesta Cinta: Pengantar Kepada Pemikiran Ibn' Arabi (2015);
3. Risalah Cinta dan Kebahagiaan (2015), this book is translated into English and published by Kube Publishing, London-England, entitled "Islam: The Faith of Love Happiness" and launched at Oxford University (2016);
4. Mereguk Cinta Rumi (2016);
5. Muara Cinta: Menyiapkan Hati Menerima Pancaran Cinta-Nya (2016);
6. Islam Itu Ramah Bukan Marah (2017);
7. Islam Mengasihi Bukan Membenci (2017).[18]

The first to fourth books were written by Haidar Bagir, the founder of GIC. By publishing these books, GIC wants to bring inspirational figures like Ibn 'Arabi and Jalaluddin Rumi to the general readers, especially to the younger generation. GIC hopes that the millennial generation can be inspired by these figures to have peaceful behavior. Thus, the prevention of radicalism and terrorism becomes possible.

The fifth book was written by Ust. Husin Nabil Assegaf, an active preacher who discussed a lot about Sufism or aspects of Islamic esotericism. This aspect of Sufism is what GIC calls "love-oriented" in Islam as a counterweight to "law-oriented". This book contains quotes, straightforward advice, and inspirational stories. It invites us to purify our hearts so that we can receive the radiance of His love. Only with the emanation of His love we can carry out the role that He has mandated, to become a gift to the universe.

The sixth book was written by Irfan Amalee, the founder of Peace Generation Indonesia. This book presents fun and light books to read, yet it also tickles readers to think and reflect on Muslims' condition. Besides, this book also provides alternative solutions to restore Islam's image as a carrier of love and peace. The seventh book was written by Nurul H. Maarif, a caregiver at the Qothrotul Falah Islamic Boarding School, Lebak Banten. This book, which was published in collaboration between GIC, Mizan, and the Indonesian National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT), reminds us of the importance of

togetherness in diversity. Through a study of two primary sources of Islam (al-Qur'an and al-Hadith) and classical Islamic literature, this book confirms that differences in ethnicity, religion, race, and between groups (SARA) are not reasons to hate, insult, and hostile.

In 2018, GIC collaborated with the Pusat Pengkajian Islam dan Masyarakat (PPIM) Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in making a breakthrough through Love Islamic Literacy. GIC produced no half-hearted, 20 popular literature books on moderate Islam. These books are presented creatively and attractively with a popular culture approach, targeting young people as primary readers. Hopefully, youth reading rooms can be more balanced and healthier with the presence of love and awareness of love itself.[19]

Moderate young Muslim writers wrote the twenty books above from various backgrounds such as lecturers, activists, researchers, doctors, ustadz, and students. In general, these books' central theme is a response to radicalism and intolerance in the name of religion, which is increasingly prevalent in Indonesia. Apart from that, these books also promote religious moderation through specific themes such as tolerance, the concept of the state, democracy, jihad, hijrah, comparative jurisprudence, the history of the prophet, halal food, and the urgency of social media as a means of spreading peace. In line with Ismatu Ropi's [7] argument, in the Indonesian case, religious moderation is highly influenced by the concept of nationality or loyal dedication to the nation-state of Indonesia, harmony, elimination of discrimination, and recognition of traditional beliefs. These are four clear signs of Indonesian religious moderation.

3.2. Circulation and Transmission

Throughout 2015-2017, GIC, in collaboration with Mizan, has published books and then distributed them nationally. Thus, GIC books can be accessed easily through offline and online bookstores. GIC, in collaboration with local networks, also frequently conducts reviews and discussions of these books in several cities. Two of them are the Love Islamic Festival in Jakarta (2015) and Malang (2016).

Since 2018, GIC has begun to intensify the production, circulation, and transmission of popular Islamic literature with more varied strategies. In 2018, GIC also produced twenty book titles, as I discussed earlier, then printed 500 copies of each. GIC then distributed the books to public libraries, campuses, schools, and reading communities in various regions. Also, GIC provides free download facilities for electronic books for each title to be appropriately distributed.

TABLE 1: List of Islamic Love Series Books

No	Book Title	Author
1	Akhlak Nge-Medsos	Irfan Nurhakim
2	40 Hadis Cinta Untuk Milenial	Azam Bahtiar
3	Taat Pada Agama, Setia Pada Negara; Bagaimana Islam Berbicara Tentang Negara	Azhar Muhammad Akbar
4	Makin Mengimani, Makin Menghargai; Kisah Toleransi Ulama dan Bapak Bangsa	Sukron Abdillah
5	Beda-Beda Tetap Sama-Sama; Teladan Saling Menghargai Perbedaan Imam Empat Mazhab	Siti Aisah
6	Kalau Jihad Nggak Usah Jahat; Meneladani Jihad Akhlak ala Rasulullah	Rovi'i
7	Hijrah Sehari-hari Milenial	Adzka & Azky
8	Kiamat Sudah Dekat, Gitu?; Memahami Hadis-Hadis Akhir Zaman dengan Bijak	Ulfah Fauziah
9	Nikah Bikin Happy; Kisah <i>Best Couple</i> Zaman Nabi	Hilda Anastasya
10	<i>Happy Milad</i> ; Semoga Allah Damaikan Dirimu	Muhammad Mahmur
11	Rasul pun Mau Ngobrol; Tentang Demokrasi dan Musyawarah dalam Islam	Cakra Yudi Putra
12	Aku Muslim, Aku Humanis	Zulfan Taufik
13	Berislam Seperti Kanak-Kanak	Kalis Mardiasih
14	Apalagi Islam itu Kalau Bukan Cinta?	Husein Ja'far Al Hadar
15	Selain Cinta, Apa yang Membuatmu Ada?	Silmi Novita Nurman
16	Hidup Sehat Ala Milenial	Firda Bilma Assyfa Fauziah
17	Belajar Bijaksana dari Kaum Sufi	Cecep Zakarias El Bilad
18	Dear Allah, Berilah Aku Cinta	Pungkit Wijaya
19	Fikih Milenial	Ayi Yunus
20	Jihad Perempuan Milenial	Anisa

In 2018, GIC held a Literasi Islam Cinta Roadshow to various cities in Indonesia, such as Bukittinggi, Yogyakarta, Bandung, and Jakarta. GIC collaborates with various organizations, grassroots reading communities, and youth-promoting peace in several cities in Indonesia to discuss these books. Not forgetting either, GIC spreads messages of peace through the hashtag #AyoSebarCinta and #MeyakiniMengharga on its social media accounts.

We can see the positive impact of the response to the activities that GIC is doing. One of these is in Bukittinggi, a place where I am part of the activity. As a form of deep appreciation, IAIN Bukittinggi immediately proposed to GIC with a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) pact and became the first place to launch the Gen Islam Cinta Reading Club. At the event, lecturers and hundreds of students from various study programs of IAIN Bukittinggi attended and participated.[20]

Likewise, in Bandung, the Peace Roadshow activities in book talks, book bazaars, and the "pay with your smile" social campaign received massive and positive attention. Various online and offline media portals such as Kompas, Jabar Daily, Tribun Jabar, and Pikiran Rakyat have been busy reporting this activity. Even the Pikiran Rakyat Daily has made a special cover with the headline "Literasi Islam Cinta Roadshow, Turning the Spirit of Bandung Millennial Literacy." At the peak of its activities, GIC held a Roadshow at One Bellpark Mall, South Jakarta. GIC held various activities such as the Design and Poetry Reading Contest, Launch and Exhibition of Twenty Popular Books of the Gen Islam Cinta Series, and the Literasi Islam Cinta Talk Show. This roadshow attracted the attention of hundreds of visitors from various circles, both old and young.

In 2019, GIC again collaborated with PPIM UIN Jakarta and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) to hold a Peace Roadshow. An Islamic Literacy activity in various cities with the theme "Gen-Z and the Threat of Violence in the Name of Religion." The cities that are the destinations are Banjarmasin, Bandar Lampung, and Surabaya. The Chairman of GIC, Eddy Aqdhijaya, said that in general the activity was aimed at disseminating moderate religious knowledge and encouraging the younger generation to:

1. Have an open and critical mindset;
2. Supporting interfaith meetings and promoting an open, inclusive, moderate, egalitarian, and tolerant vision of youth;
3. Increasing public awareness about the threat of extremism and radicalism;
4. Increasing public awareness of the importance of diversity and embracing diversity;
and
5. Gathering young people and supporting them as agents of peace.

As with the activities in 2018, in 2019, GIC also distributed and serialized Islamic love books and spread peace messages through collaboration and actions on social media. However, in contrast to the program in the previous year, which targeted the millennial

generation in universities and the general public, the focus of GIC in 2019 is to embrace senior high school students (SMA/equivalent) or the Gen-Z.[19]

4. Conclusion

The Gerakan Islam Cinta (GIC) plays a dual role as producer and distributor of dozens of books known as the Islamic Love series. The series of books has become a reference for the community, especially young people, in understanding Islam which is friendly and peaceful. The GIC also disseminates these books online and for free, conducts roadshows and book reviews in various cities, initiates reading clubs in cooperation with various organizations, grassroots reading communities, and with youth activists of peace in several cities in Indonesia. The activism of GIC in production and dissemination of Popular Islamic literature is an essential instrument in the mainstreaming of religious moderation in Indonesia. The sustainability of popular Islamic literature that contains discourses of religious moderation can balance the massive literature of Islamism.

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