



The Changing Trend of Islamic Pop Culture in Indonesian Reform Era

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Abstract :

Islam in Indonesia can be seen from its adherents' various expressions, one of which is through the lens of pop culture. This study seeks to update Islamic pop culture examples by using a qualitative approach based on observations in virtual spaces as an alternative space for Muslim expressions that is increasingly popular. The expression of Islam in Indonesia looks significantly growing, including within the context of Pop-Culture. This was initially marked by Muslim intellectuals appearing in public spaces bringing out Islamic themes and topic as well as the increasing popularity of Islamic literatures. This paper shows that there is a changing development in the expression of Islamic pop culture among Indonesian Muslims from colouring the culture to creating the trend and from academics Ustaz to youth artists. This further development shows that Muslim expressions or Islamic expression in Indonesia is highly developed in the perspective of pop culture. In the future, this culture can become one of the identities of Indonesian Muslims who are generally accommodative and moderate in their understanding of Islam. It is also possible that the Indonesian Islam style of pop culture might develop into an international scope.

Keywords: *pop culture, Muslim in Indonesia, academic ustadz, muslim artists*

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is the majority Muslim country although it is not an Islamic country. Muslim in Indonesia multi-cultural in their backgrounds. They have various backgrounds in terms of Islamic education, economic status, as well as political affiliations and other aspect too. Many of them are educated with special degrees in Islamic schools including the madrasa, *pesantren* or private Islamic schools. Majority of them are Sunni and practicing the Safii Islamic law school. There are many Islamic organizations that have become the locus of education and interaction of the Indonesian Muslim. To mention here, there are two main and biggest Islamic organizations, the Muhammadiyah and the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). These two organizations play significant role in educating and maintaining did identity of Indonesian Muslims as moderate Muslims. It is one of the significant Indonesian Muslim images that shared across the globe (Binfas, Fitriani, & Wahjusaputri, 2018; Jainuri, 1992; Rumadi & Lunnon, 2015).

Muhammadiyah was establish in 1912 and widely known as modernist Islamic movement which aims to educate people with modern Islamic schools and giving services with social, health, and economics aspect. The Muhammadiyah run Islamic schooling from kindergarten to university levels. The educational

institutions span across cities in Indonesia from Aceh to Papua. The Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) was established in 1926. It is also known widely with its role in Islamic education, mostly in terms of traditional Islamic education (*pesantren*) and then later also run university level of Islamic (and general) education services. There are a growing number of UNUSIA (Universitas Nadhlatul Ulama Indonesia) branches across Indonesia. The role of the Muhammadiyah and the Nahdlatul Ulama has been known for decades. During the reform era of Indonesia, their roles even more significantly established among Indonesian Muslim (Muttaqin, 2017).

The reform era marks a wider and robust expressions of the Indonesian Muslims in the public spaces after the fall of Suharto and the New Order Era. More and more Indonesian expression can be seen both in the offline or online context. Muslim intellectuals, novelists, televangelists, artists, musicians, and filmmakers have become pop culture figures who claim their authorities to speak on behalf of both Islam and nation (Hoesterey Clark, Marshall, 2012). Hasan has also observed that “[t]he development of an Islamic pop culture has taken place in Indonesia where Islam has become part of an extensive consumer culture and served as much an important identity marker as a sign of social status and political affiliation” (Hasan, 2009, p. 231).

One of the significant features of seeing the expression of Indonesian Muslims through the lenses of pop culture is that Islam is widely expressed and continuously popular. Showing the significant and the development of Islam in the most populous country. It also shows that many Muslims are not reluctant to show their identity and expression through various means in the public spaces. This research seeks to update Islamic pop culture examples in the Indonesian context. There are number of reasons that the update should have taken place. The ongoing globalization that marks with the easy access to travel across the globe and inexpensive communication connections that relatively connect people across the globe. It shares the information and share some cultural expressions as well. In addition to that the penetration of the Internet usage and it is growing practice among the younger generation have made it easier to share the information and culture expression. In fact, the Internet has become significant alternative expression for Muslim across the globe, including in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs qualitative research approach. It seeks to understand and explain how Muslims in Indonesia show their Islamic expressions in the public sphere. The expressions are recorded in various websites or social media. Those religious and cultural expressions are justified as examples of so-called popular culture. This study also aims to understand the dynamics and changes of the Islamic related expression. Therefore, qualitative research is considered a useful approach to achieve the objectives of this research.

Data collection is carried out in general with the observation method. The media or objects observed are news and information related to Muslim religious expressions in the public spaces that are related to popular culture both from websites and social media. The researchers used search engine website to start the search for relevant data. It then followed with necessary step of data collection and observation of this research. The information in text or picture is a useful data source for this research. In addition to the above, marketplace information as part of Internet based data also a useful source of data to see how popular some elements or examples of pop culture in Indonesian context.

Data collection then followed by qualitative data analysis. There are four stages in qualitative research data analysis: data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and finally making conclusion from the data. At the data collection stage, researchers looked for data and facts related to Muslim expressions in public spaces, especially those that can be found on the Internet related to pop culture expressions. The data was collected from various websites and social media as well as search engines related to the research topic. In the data reduction stage, the researcher then filtered out any irrelevant data and only selected relevant data. This is important to ensure that the data selected and processed is only relevant data. The next stage is data presentation which is the time when the data was displayed to show a correlation or conformity with related theories. Finally, making conclusions based on the data that show the answers to the problem raised and identified at the beginning of this study (Haradhan Mohajan, 2018; Macdonald & Headlam, 1986).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Defining the Islamic Pop Culture

Discussing pop culture give us a time to understand how humans in general create, practice, and develop culture. The culture that develops in the community can also be distinguished in terms of who practice it according to the distinction of social class. Elite group within the society create and practice certain culture that is only available for the elite group. The culture requires certain requirements to be able to be practices and maintained. This is how one said that they practiced so called “high-culture” to refer to the culture that only practiced by high level of society members. On the contrary, most society members can only practices “affordable” culture according to the majority and this is how the culture is called “low-culture”. However, as the affordable one is easily become popular among the society, therefore the culture is called popular culture or pop culture. According to Crothers, popular culture which also called mass culture or pop culture is “generally recognized by members of a society as a set of the practices, beliefs, and objects that are dominant or prevalent in a society at a given point in time”. Crothers added that “popular culture also encompasses the activities and feelings produced as a result of interaction with these dominant objects” (Crothers , 2021).

Defining the Islamic pop culture is, however, not an easy task. It is sometimes so challenging to give certain definition to what so called as Islamic pop culture. It is proposed that the so-called Islamic pop culture contains an Islamic value or teaching to inspire other to be more Islamic. This practice can be in the form of Islamic movies, Islamic songs, Islamic soap operas, as well as Islamic literatures (Hoesterey Clark, Marshall, 2012, p. 209).

Emerging of the Islamic Pop Culture

The reform era has witnessed the booming of Islamic pop culture in many of its forms as well as the expansion of Muslim middle class in Indonesia (Hoesterey Clark, Marshall, 2012, p. 209). The opportunities that were opened during the reform era in Indonesia seemed to provide an opportunity for religious expressions of Islamic culture. So, at the end of the new order era and the entry of Indonesia into the reform era, it was also marked by the rise of pop culture expressions. National TV stations started to be operated and show some Islamic soap opera and celebrities *ustadz* with interesting topics. In addition, the Islamic

films also became more popular among the growing middle-class Indonesian Muslims. Becoming Islamic was a new trend.

The beginning of the popularity of Islamic pop culture marks the colouring the culture with Islamic values and teachings. The regular opera soap on Television for example has been coloured with artist and themes that highly Islamic. The regular novel has been coloured with Islamic related themes. This new development in the post new order Indonesia, along with the growing Muslim middle class then show the popularity of Islamic culture in the public spaces. Mainly in the television and printed medias. The emerge of Islamic pop culture also showed the emerged of the academic, university lecturers and professor as well as *kiyai* and *ustadz* who appeared on Television programs and explained Islamic topics. This received huge attention from the Indonesian Muslim society and add the popularity in the public spaces. Many Muslims appeared to follow the *ustadz* and made them new celebrity *ustadz*. As a result, the *ustadz* gained more schedule to be appeared on the national TV stations.

The later development of the Islamic pop culture also shows a new trend such as the *hijrah* celebrity trend. This trend has become popular as some Indonesian young celebrity made themselves associated with this trend and then inspire other young Muslims generation. Also, the appearance of young artist marks the later stage of the development of the Islamic pop culture. It is distinct with the beginning stage of Islamic pop culture with did not show many young artists, rather, more academic *ustadz* appeared. In fact, the artist world might seem to be other world compared to the Islamic culture. However, this has changed, and Islamic pop culture also initiated or practised by some young celebrities or artist.

This new development has marked the further development of the Islamic pop culture among the Indonesian Muslim. It show that in the future, with the advance usage of Internet that will open up more opportunities for so called Islamic pop culture, the identity of Muslim in the medias based on the Internet will continue to develop. It will influence many more public and open up more development in the future.

CONCLUSION

The above study has showed the emerging of Islamic pop culture among Muslim in Indonesia that started in the beginning of reform era or the fall of new order era of Indonesia. The Islamic pop culture has changed due to the fast development of the Internet among the Indonesian Muslims which open up more wider opportunities. This has allowed the Islamic pop culture actors to colorize the Indonesian middle-class culture with Islamic values but also to synthesize new trend such as the *hijrah* celebrity trend in terms of the later development of Islamic pop culture. The pop culture has continued its role to the development of Islam in Indonesia and is predicted to continue the trend in the future.

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