

Call for Papers Conference on

“Religious Authority in Indonesian Islam: Contestation, Pluralization, and New Actors”

ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute
Singapore, 3-4 July 2018

Introduction

Religious authority has never been monolithic and, in Sunni Islam, it has always been decentralized and contested (Azra 2010; Feillard 2010; Mandaville 2007; Norshahril 2018). Like in many other religious communities, the fragmentation of religious authority has become a feature of Islam throughout its history. In this modern day and age, the intensity of the contestations among the different religious elites is likely to grow. In Indonesia, at least three factors have significantly influenced recent contestations within the Islamic religious arena: globalization, post-*Reformasi* democratization, and the growing number of private television stations and social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube).

Religious authority is conventionally based on “the interaction between text, discursive method and personified knowledge, with constructions of the authoritative in Islam seen as combining these ingredients to varying degrees and in diverse configurations” (Mandaville 2007, 101). However, the above three factors have strong impact in shaping and animating the construction, contestation, fragmentation, and pluralization of religious authority in contemporary Indonesia.

Transnational movements, like Hizbut Tahrir (HT), for instance, have ridden on globalization and geopolitical issues as devices to frame religious discourse, sense of unity, identity, loyalty among their followers, and construct their authority. The democratization of Indonesia after the *Reformasi* in 1998 has made possible the emergence and establishment of religious organizations such as the FPI (Front Pembela Islam), MMI (Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia), and FUI (Forum Umat Islam). Some organizations that had been working underground, restricted or banned are now actively promoting their vision of Islam in the public sphere. Some of these organisations were JI (Jamaah Islamiyah), DDII (Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia), LPPI (Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengkajian Islam), and HTI (Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia). These organizations have continuously challenged the authority of mainstream organizations like Muhammadiyah and NU (Nahdlatul Ulama).

The proliferation and establishment of private television channels and new modes of communication technologies have facilitated the rise of new preachers such as Abdullah Gymnastiar, Arifin Ilham, Yusuf Mansur, Abdul Somad, Mama Dedeh, and Felix Siauw. These

new media have transformed lay Muslims with limited religious qualifications into new religious authorities.

The series of *Aksi Bela Islam* protests against then Jakarta governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama at the end of 2016 provided a clear example of the rise of an alternative religious authority. The authority of NU and Muhammadiyah, previously regarded as mainstream Islamic organisations in Indonesia, was challenged. The act of ridiculing, mocking, and disrespecting traditionalist *kiais* and “high-brow” ulama, such as Ahmad Mustofa Bisri, Quraish Shihab, and Ahmad Syafii Maarif, has become more evident in recent years. This has resulted in the undermining of *pesantren* and UIN or IAIN (State Islamic University) as the traditional system for producing ulama and Islamic scholars. On the other hand, new preachers and *habaib* (descendants of the Prophet Muhammad) have emerged to gain significant standing among Muslims apart from the traditional clergy.

The current phenomenon of contestation of religious authority can be seen, positively, as part of the democratization of religious authority. This can provide various Muslim communities access to religious authority and provide alternatives to the hegemony of NU and Muhammadiyah. On the other hand, religion could also be easily reshaped to cater to the demands of the market and capitalism, or prone to be manipulated to support certain political interests.

This conference intends to discuss and analyze the construction, contestation, pluralization, fragmentation, and segmentation of religious authority in Indonesian Islam. How was this authority traditionally constructed and recently re-constructed? Which religious groups currently have strong influence in Indonesia? How does religious authority influence democracy and the dynamics of politics in Indonesia, and vice versa? What is the role and influence of globalization, new media, and the *Reformasi* in shaping and reshaping Islamic religious authority in Indonesia? What is the response of mainstream Muslim organizations to challenges from new religious groups? These are some of the questions, among others, that will be addressed in this conference.

Objectives

1. To study conventional accounts of traditional structures and figures of Islamic religious authority.
2. To understand the underlying forces that shape and animate the construction, contestation, fragmentation, and pluralization of authority in contemporary Indonesian Muslim society.
3. To analyze the role and influence of democracy, globalization, new media in the contestation and pluralization of religious authority. The proliferation and establishment of private television channels and new forms of information and communication technologies like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube would be one of the main focuses.
4. To examine efforts to politicize religious authority in Indonesia for disparate political objectives.
5. To identify diverse trends of religious authority in Indonesian Islam and to speculate on the future of mainstream organizations, particularly the NU and Muhammadiyah.

Panel Topics

1. Ulama and religious authority in Islam: Conventional and contemporary accounts
2. New Islamic organizations and the challenges to mainstream Islamic organizations

3. The influence of globalization, transnationalism, and democracy in shaping religious authority
4. The role televisions and new media in the contestation of authority
5. New religious preachers, new *santri*, and the construction of religious authority
6. New contestation in interpreting religious texts: Fatwa, *Tafsir*, and shari'a
7. Religious authority among female preachers, ulama, and religious institution
8. The role of ethnicity (*suku*) and religious conversion in the making of new religious authority
9. Politicization of the pluralized religious authority in Indonesia
10. Religious education, capitalism, and religious authority

Venue and Date

This two-day conference will be held at ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore.

Date : 3-4 July 2018

Important Dates

Deadline for Proposal Submission	: 31 January 2018
Notification of the Accepted Proposals	: 15 February 2018
Submission of Full Paper	: 19 May 2018

Abstract and Paper Submissions

Paper proposals should include a title, name of author, institutional affiliation, email address, an abstract (250 words) and a brief personal biography (150 words). Those whose proposals are accepted will be expected to submit a full paper of 6000 words. Selected papers may be included in a special publication.

Funding

Accommodations will be provided for all overseas participants. For participants traveling from Asia, economy class airfare will be provided. Participants traveling from beyond Asia may receive partial funding for air travel. Reimbursements will only be made upon receipt of the full paper and attendance at the conference.

Organizers

This conference is jointly organized by ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore and the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI), Jakarta.

Conveners:

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