

# 1

## INTRODUCTION

*Norshahril Saat and Ahmad Najib Burhani*

Mills (1956, pp. 2–3) defines the power elite as “men whose positions enable them to transcend the ordinary environments of ordinary men and women; they are in positions to make decisions having major consequences.” This definition applies to religious authority as well, but with divine and legal dimensions added, as Marc Gaborieau (2010, p. 1) defines, is “the right to impose rules which are deemed to be in consonance with the will of God”. Authority here is certainly different from sheer power, or the use of force or violence, but the art of persuasion. A person with the said authority will be listened to, followed, and obeyed, not because of intimidation, money, or servitude, but because of shared values. People submit to a certain religious authority willingly and voluntarily because they believe he is the guardian of God’s law, if not the voice of God on earth.

In Christianity, the institutions of authority that determine religious matters are councils or synods. Sunni Islam does not recognize such authoritative body because the gatekeepers of religion vary from one group or sect to another. Religious authority can refer to an individual *ulama* (*ustadz*) or Islamic organizations. Some of these *ustadz* serve as bureaucrats and received their appointments from the state, thus they

can be referred to as “official *ulama*” (Norshahril 2018). In the case of Indonesia, the personalities can be learned individuals such as the late Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah (Quranic exegete and novelist), Professor Quraish Shihab (an exegete of the Quran), the late Nurcholish Madjid (professor of Islamic studies) or Abdurrahman Wahid (former Indonesian President); or organizations such as Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), and the Council of Indonesian Ulama (MUI). Religious authority, in different Muslim communities, can also refer to the *habaib* (descendants of the Prophet), *imam* or *marja'* (in Shia Muslim), and caliph (in Ahmadiyya). Traditionally, religious authority can be acquired and exercised by knowledgeable and devout Muslims. The construction of religious authority, as explained by Peter Mandaville (2007, p. 101), 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”.

In Islam, religious authority has never been monolithic, and in Sunni Islam, it has always been decentralized and contested (Feillard 2010; Mandaville 2007; Norshahril 2018). The fragmentation, pluralization, and contestation 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 (since 1998), and the growing number of private television stations and social media usage (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube). These three factors have a strong impact in shaping and animating the construction, contestation, fragmentation, and pluralization of religious authority in contemporary Indonesia.

Transnational movements, like the 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 organizations are JI (Jemaah 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.

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, Mamah Dedeh, and Felix Siauw. These new media have transformed lay Muslims with limited religious qualifications—unlike the personalities mentioned above—into new religious authorities. These preachers are part of what we call in this book as a new *santri*. Still, television channels are beginning to be a thing of the past now, with preachers using alternative mediums to challenge traditional authority of the *ulama* class. Some ride on popular culture, while others on sub-culture and even counter-culture symbols.

For scholars on Indonesia or those who live in Southeast Asia, the term *santri* is often used to mean a religious or pious individual. The term is also used to refer to a person or groups trained in the religious sciences. In Morocco, the equivalent term with *santri* is *taleb*. Clifford Geertz (1964) has popularized this when he mentions *santri* as one of the trichotomy in the classification of Indonesian society, namely: *santri*, *abangan*, and *priyayi*. For Geertz (1964, p. 6), *santri* refers to those who adopted Islamic values as their way of life, whereas *abangan* are those who religiously stressed “on the animistic aspects of the overall Javanese syncretism”. The inclusion of the last category, *priyayi*, in this classification on Indonesian people has been heavily criticized, mainly because it is a social class, and not a religious category (Burhani 2017). *Priyayi* could have *santri* religious values, i.e. *santri-priyayi*, and also an *abangan* way of life or *abangan-priyayi*.

Geertz is in fact not the first person to introduce the dichotomy of *santri-abangan*. Two Dutch missionaries and scholars S.E. Harthoorn and Carel Poensen (1836–1919) have also pointed out the categorization of Javanese or Indonesian society in the 1850s and 1880s. They wrote that the Javanese people divided themselves into two categories: the *bangsa putihan* and the *bangsa abangan* (whites and reds). The former refers to a group of people who considered Islam as their way of life inwardly and outwardly, while the latter refers to those who accepted Islam as their formal religion, but their ideas and practices were still guided by another “religion” called Javanism (Poensen 1886). In short,

what is commonly called as a *santri* is the one who adopts Islam as his or her religion and makes Islamic values central to his or her life. Whereas *abangan* refers to a person who adopts Islam as his or her religion, but he or she does not make Islamic teaching central to his or her life.

In some Western scholarships, the term *santri-abangan* connotes *practising* and *non-practising* Muslims. In West Sumatra, the terms that refer to this kind of dichotomy are *kaum padri* and *kaum adat*. A few years ago, the terms commonly used by some Indonesian preachers to his dichotomy were *Islam kaffah* and *Islam KTP* (complete Muslim and Muslim only ID card). Although *santri* has been referred to as a religious category, it is actually not a single entity, and more importantly, it is an external imposition towards local indigenous communities. Previously, as Clifford Geertz mentioned in the 1960s, there were only two categories: *santri kolot* and *santri moderen*. The former refers to members of NU, commonly known as the traditionalist group of Islam, while the latter refers to members of Muhammadiyah, a modernist Muslim movement. With the development of Islam in Indonesia since the 1960s, these two categories can no longer cater to the dynamics and trajectory of *santri*. Besides the classic one, there are at least four additional groups of *santri*: neo-modernist, neo-revivalist, radicalist, and liberal (Burhani 2017, p. 345). During the 2019 Indonesian elections, one additional category of *santri* was introduced by the leaders of Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), namely: *santri post-islamism* (post-Islamism *santri*), which refers to persons like Sandiaga Uno, vice presidential candidate of Prabowo Subianto, who has a strong commitment to Islam although he is of no clear *santri* pedigree.

Some may ask, why do we use the word *santri* rather than *ulama* for the title of this edited volume? In the past, religious authority belongs solely in the realm of the learned *ulama* class, and we feel that this remains the ideal. The word *santri* is broader as it encompasses both *ulama* and religious preachers (*da'i*) in Indonesian setting, or even individuals who portray a pious image and have a wide following though not necessarily trained in religious sciences. With these new categories of *santri*, the religious authority in Indonesian Islam has become more contested. The high-brow *ulama* (those who have strong background in Islamic studies) have been contested by the low-brow (those with minimalist knowledge on Islam) but populist *ulama* and preachers. In terms of organization, previously, Muhammadiyah and

NU were often considered as the authoritative body of Islam and the main representations of Indonesian Islam. Now, one doubts if Muhammadiyah and NU remain the sole authorities in the religious sphere in this modern day and age. With contrasting *fatwās* available at their fingertips and in the world, youths can simply ask Google to get religious ideas and no longer need to rely solely on traditional clerics or big Islamic organizations.

The series of *Aksi Bela Islam* protests towards 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 Muhammadiyah and NU, previously regarded as mainstream Islamic organizations 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 Syafi'i 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 Muhammadiyah and NU. 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.

In 2010, ISEAS published a book entitled *Varieties of Religious Authority: Changes and Challenges in 20th Century Indonesian Islam*. This book focuses on *ulama*, *fatwa*, Islamic education or *madrasah*, and sufism and *tarekat* (sufi order). The book does not talk about the role of new media in constructing and deconstructing religious authority. It also briefly touches on the role of the transnational Islamic movements in the development and dynamics of religious authority in Indonesia.

This book tackles issues drawn from recent episodes. The background of this book mostly comes from the recent dynamics of religiosity in Indonesian Islam: the transformation of Habib Rizieq Shihab from, using his own term, "*pembasmi hama*" (pest eradicator) into "*imam besar umat Islam*" (highest religious authority in Indonesia Islam), the

seemingly declining influence of Muhammadiyah and NU, the coming of transnational movements such as Hizbut Tahrir and Tablighi Jamaat, the rise of low-brow but populist preachers, the emergence of new *santri*, the humiliations of high-brow *ulama* like Quraish Shihab, Ahmad Syafi'i Maarif, and Ahmad Mustofa Bisri by laymen or ordinary people.

This book discusses and analyses the construction, contestation, pluralization, fragmentation, and segmentation of religious authority in Indonesian Islam. How this authority was traditionally constructed and now re-constructed? Which religious groups currently have strong influence in Indonesia? Who are the new actors who can shape the public discourse? How do these actors apply new media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram? These are some of the questions, among others, addressed in this book.

The first part of the book discusses the general concept of religious authority and the current contestation of authority. In Chapter 2, Amin Abdullah appraises the current state of mainstream Islamic organizations in Indonesia, namely Muhammadiyah (a modernist organization formed in 1912) and NU (a traditionalist organization formed in 1926). He introduced the term "oppositional Islam" to characterize challenges to these organizations, which he referred to as official Islam. As opposed to mainstream organizations, which have shaped the country's moderate practices, oppositional Islam's message is divisive, as demonstrated during the 212 campaign against Jakarta Governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama. Despite these challenges, Abdullah argues that official Islam's legitimacy remains strong. In Chapter 3, Azhar Ibrahim examines another group of scholars who are trained in the religious sciences but do not have religious authority. Although religious intellectuals, such as Nurcholish Madjid, Gus Dur (Abdurrahman Wahid), Amin Rais, and Ahmad Syafi'i Maarif are prominent figures in their respective fields, they are not seen as authoritative. Some even consider their views constituting blasphemy as liberal. Still, Azhar argues that their contributions and achievements must not be overlooked. Syafiq Hasyim (Chapter 4) provides a different perspective regarding traditional authority by looking at the various contestations among several Islamic groups in the field of Islamic interpretation. He posits that Islamic texts and traditions do not only undergo interpretation, but also re(interpretation) of views of classical Islamic scholars. Comparing to the authoritarian period under the Suharto New Order, where ironically the religious discursive space promoted progressive ideas, the current post-reform period resulted in

conservative and exclusivist versions of Islam. Arskal Salim and Marzi Afriko (Chapter 5) provide a local example (in Aceh) of how religious authority can be weakened without proper thinking and planning, as well as lack of vision of the drafters of bureaucratic regulations. They highlighted the problems facing Dinas Syariat Islam (Department of Islamic Shariah [The DSI]) because of this lack of planning. In Chapter 6, Euis Nurlaelawati focuses on how female preachers tackle issues concerning family laws. On the one hand, women's role as religious authority is widely acknowledged in public; on the other hand, the discourse does not necessarily benefit women. Applying the theory of social movements, Eunsook Jung in Chapter 7 observes how conservative movements shape policies in contemporary Indonesia, which are no longer dominated by traditional Islamic organizations. Conservative groups are now pushing the state to adopt their Islamic worldview and competing with existing Islamic organizations that have all the while been promoting moderate Islam.

The second part discusses transnational Islamic movements and their role in the transmission of Islamic knowledge and the dynamics of religious authority in Indonesia. In Chapter 8, Noorhaidi Hasan discusses the Salafi influence which originated from Saudi Arabia's plan to spread Wahhabism to the global Muslim community. Returning graduates from the Middle East helped spread the movement of these ideas to Indonesia and organized themselves into small reading circles. Yet, the Salafi group in Indonesia is not homogeneous, and has to be distinguished from jihadist and quietists, thus not all Salafis can be considered as promoting radicalism and terrorism. In Chapter 9, Syamsul Rijal highlighted how certain groups that claimed to defend Sunnism Islam against Wahhabism ended up promoting an exclusivist, anti-liberal, and chauvinist understanding of the religion. Apart from the traditional NU, which is regarded as the gatekeeper of Sunnism, the author looks at new groups such as *sarkub* (scholars of the grave) and *habaib* that have gained popularity in the country. These groups contribute to a fair share of problems as well as gains for the whole Islamic discourse in the country. In Chapter 10, Muhammad Adlin Sila provides a new interpretation of *khuruj*, a method of preaching among Jamaat Tablighis. Based on an ethnographic study in Kebon Jeruk mosque, Jakarta, in 2010 and 2016, he argues that the practice of preaching during *khuruj* challenges the conventional conception of a religious preacher, including those from Muhammadiyah and NU or

even to MUI. The *khuruj* is a way for Tablighis to obtain legitimacy even without having to obtain formal religious education. This does not bode well with the government, and some segments of society, who prefer a more centralized body to determine who can speak about Islam. In Chapter 11, Firdaus Wajdi examines the role of the Sulaymaniyah, a movement originated from Turkey. Indonesian students began to enrol in such schools not only because they can learn about religion and later become religious authorities, but are also attracted to the prospect of studying in luxurious dormitories and travelling to Turkey to complete the fourth and final year of their studies. The Sulaymanis are also sophisticated in their approach in order to gain acceptance among the students by changing their schools' name to *pesantren* (the name of Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia) and respecting the authority of the Indonesian religious ministry.

The third part of this book discusses recent issues, such as politicization of religious authority and the role of new media in the fragmentation of religious authority. In Chapter 12, Yanwar Pribadi explores the complex entanglement between communal piety, religious commodification, Islamic populism, and Islamism, in urban religious congregations, known as *pengajian*. It also examines the making of religious authority in the increasingly democratized and Islamized Indonesia. He argues that the making of religious authority in Indonesia's urban areas has been frequently marked by the complexities of interactions between local expressions of Islam and foreign influences, mostly Salafism originated from Saudi Arabia and Egypt, in complex and fluctuated relationships. In the context of Islamic populism and Islamism, the members of *pengajian* groups appear to follow populist ideas in socio-political issues such as, among other things, identifying and condemning a collective enemy. In terms of ideology, middle-class Muslim groups tend to follow populist ideas on social and political issues. In Chapter 13, Wahyudi Akmaliah examines celebrity preacher Ustadz Hanan Attaki (UHA) and his movement *Pemuda Hijrah*, particularly on how online platforms such as Instagram and YouTube were used as means of Islamic preaching to reach out to young Indonesian Muslims. In contrast with established practices of Islamic teaching, this chapter argues that the key success of UHA lies in his new methods of preaching. Following the subculture's lifestyle and its symbol, he adjusted his fashion style and appearances as well as the approach's rhetoric in order to attract massive young audiences within the logic of pop culture. This, however, invited

drawbacks from the subculture community, and thwarted Indonesia's moderate Islamic discourse. In Chapter 14, Denny Hamdani discusses about Ustadz Abdul Somad (UAS), currently a megastar preacher, whose way of preaching has opened the eyes of Muslims concerning a new method and proclivity of transmission of religious knowledge in the middle of old fashion Islamic preaching. The emergence of UAS in the era of new media does not only signify the changing patterns of religious authority, from traditional to a more intertwined trend of religiosity, but it has also demonstrated a successful experiment of new media as the tool of *dakwah* (propagation).

In Chapter 15, Ahmad Nuril Huda talks about the rise of cinematic *santri* in present day Indonesia that reflects the contestation and fragmentation of religious authority in the traditionalist Muslim Indonesia. He examines the extent to which the current rise of cinematic practices among the *santri* communities in present day Indonesia resonates with the projects of exploratory discourse and practices that inform the construction and fragmentation of religious authority in modern Islam. Among the *santri* communities, the role of textuality, discursive methods and personified knowledge remain central; yet this chapter shows that a turn to visual images has allowed the cinematic *santri* to explore the possibilities of using film technologies for Islamic purposes. This challenges the traditional construction of authority in their communities, which have been solidly institutionalized and dominated over centuries by and through textual tradition.

In Chapter 16, M. Najib Azca and Moh Zaki Arrobi explain the construction of cultural, religious, and political authority in the Sultanate of Yogyakarta and the Sultanate of Ternate. The narratives from these two sultanates have revealed that authority is a product of political struggle. The Sultanate of Yogyakarta has successfully reclaimed its political authority by demonstrating exceptional leadership during *reformasi*, including in maintaining peace and order and more importantly in gaining victory in the political struggle on the issue of *Keistimewaan* Yogyakarta in 2012. In Ternate, the repeated failure of the Sultanate of Ternate in reclaiming political authority during communal conflicts as well as during power struggle in the making of North Moluccas province has led to the collapse of its authority.

The issue of underground Muslim youth cultural groups is discussed by Hikmawan Saefullah in Chapter 17. He shows that unlike their predecessors who tended to regard religiosity as a private matter, some

participants of “underground youths” (*pemuda underground*) display religious piety as a necessity and use right-wing Islamism as a political ideology. Overlooked by scholars of Indonesian Islam, this stream of underground movement played an important role in disseminating conservative and even “radical” narratives of Islam to marginalized youths through ways that were never carried out by mainstream Islamic organizations. The post-authoritarian Indonesia has paved the way for ideological prominence of right-wing Islamism in some underground music scenes, as manifested in the formation of religious youth collectives and communities such as the Liberation Youth, Punk Muslim, Underground Tauhid and One Finger Movement.

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