

Being Pious Muslims: Religious Devotion and Radicalism in Indonesia

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Abstract

Objectives: This article aims to know the Muslims' desire and aspiration reflected in the Indonesian Islamic mobilization of 212 action or demonstration.

Methods: This article used descriptive qualitative methods. Media news on this mobilization was used to be analyzed. Furthermore, ten participants joining the 212 action were interviewed.

Results: Indonesian Muslims have not been radical as assumed. They just have a desire to be pious Muslims. During this time there is a misunderstanding among scholars who are involved in Muslim society and Western politicians who tend to be difficult to distinguish between pious and radical Muslims. The tendency that appears on the surface is their high suspicion of Muslims who have the desire to increase the level of piety in practicing their religion.

Conclusion: The 212 action which consists of several volumes, is not threatening religious tolerance in Indonesia. It has nothing to do with the strengthening of Islamic radicalism or the anti-minority movement. The movement was only an accumulation of public piety symptoms of the Islamic community in Indonesia

Keywords: Piety, muslims, Indonesia.

كونهم مسلمين متدينين: التفاني الديني والتطرف في إندونيسيا

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ىلخّص

الأهداف: عهدف هذا المقال إلى تعرُّف رغبة المسلمين وتطلعاتهم التي انعكست في التعبئة الإسلامية الإندونيسية 212 عملاً أو تظاهرة. المنهجية: استخدمت هذه المقالة الأساليب النوعية الوصفية. جرى استخدام الأخبار الإعلامية حول هذه التعبئة لتحليلها. علاوة على ذلك، جرت مقابلة عشرة مشاركين انضموا إلى الإجراء 212.

النتائج: لم يكن المسلمون الإندونيسيون متطرفين كما يفترض. لديهم فقط الرغبة في أن يكونوا مسلمين أتقياء. خلال هذا الوقت، هناك سوء فهم بين العلماء المنخرطين في المجتمع الإسلامي والسياسيين الغربيين الذين يميلون إلى أن يكون من الصعب التمييز بين المسلمين المتنطرفين. والاتجاه الذي يظهر على السطح هو شكوكهم الكبيرة تجاه المسلمين الذين لديهم الرغبة في زيادة مستوى التقوى في ممارسة دينهم. الخلاصة: الإجراء 212 الذي يتكون من عدة مجلدات، لا يهدد التسامح الديني في إندونيسيا. ولا علاقة لها بتعزيز التطرف الإسلامي أو الحركة المناهضة للأقليات. ولم تكن الحركة إلا تراكمًا لأعراض التقوى العامة للمجتمع الإسلامي في إندونيسيا.

الكلمات الدالة: التقوى، المسلمون، إندونيسيا.

Introduction

In Indonesia, political Islam has always been fighted although it is unsuccessfull. This can be seen from historical context in which several Muslim elites struggled to implement Islam as the state ideology. In 1945, to prepare Indonesian independence, some Indonesian elites discussed about the state ideology. In this discussion, Muslim elites failed to include the statement 'dengan kewajiban menjalankan syariat Islam bagi pemeluk-pemeluknya' (obligation for Muslim to practice Islamic law) in the Jakarta charter (Effendy, 2011).

In Indonesian first general election, in 1955, Islamic political parties failed again to obtain the majority votes so that their attempts to include Islam to be Indonesian state ideology was not successful in the legislative forum. Under Soeharto's regime known as the New Order (1966-1998), political Islam was controlled and even banned. Islamic political party was prohibited. Under this regime, several general elections done were merely a tool to keep this regime. Soeharto's party, Golkar (Golongan Karya), always won from other two political parties in the election. After the collapse of this regime in 1998, political freedom was opened making the growth of Islamic political parties. However, in 1999's general election, there were no Islamic political parties gained more than 15% of the votes. This indicates that the struggle of political Islam through political channel in Indonesia has not been effective.

Some Muslims then try to use different channels to implement their goal of Islamizing the state. As stated by Hwang (2019), Islamic groups in Indonesia have used several channels to implement their goals, not only the above political channels. One of them is through mobilization (Hwang, 2019). This mobilization can be seen from the 212 action in Jakarta which involves many Muslims. The 212 action was a Muslim mobilization done on 2 December 2016 in which thousands of Muslims came to Monas, Jakarta. They were from many regions in Indonesia. Their arrival cannot be separated from Ahok's comments in Kepulauan Seribu which were regarded as insulting the Qur'an. Ahok or Basuki Tjahaya Purnama was a Jakarta's Governor at that time. His comments invited protests from some scholars and political figures in Indonesia. The protest has strengthened along with the rapid and dynamic flow of information through television and internet media (Rosidi, 2017).

The sea of people at the time of the event originating from various regions in Indonesia reflected that political Islam in the Indonesian context needed to be reexamined. The main question is what is the meaning behind this mobilization based on Muslim sociological context in Indonesia? Several discussions on political Islam in Indonesia (Effendy, 2011; Anderson, 1977; Anshari, 1979; and Rosidi, 2011) do not include this issue. Their discussion mainly focuses on political aspect of Islam which leaves the discussion about the internal spirit of every Indonesian Muslim to be pious. In fact, since the Dutch colonialism, Muslims struggled for Indonesian independence by the spirit of Islam (Fogg, 2020). This spirit is actually inherent among Indonesian Muslims although Indonesia already reached its independence in 1945.

I argue that the mobilization of 212 can not be treated as having a single goal, namely to implement Islam as state ideology. Rather, its participants joining this mobilization have plural goals. One of them is to strengthen the spirit of Islam, namely to improve the dimension of piety in Indonesia. In this case, I propose that it is a symbol of the strengthening of the public piety in Indonesia which does not threaten religious tolerance in the lives of Indonesian people. Furthermore, this article indicates that, through this mobilization, Indonesian Muslims have not been radical as assumed. They just have a desire to be pious Muslims.

To answer the above question and support my argument, this article uses descriptive qualitative methods. Media news on this mobilization is used to be analyzed. Furthermore, I interview some participants joining the 212 action. Interview was not only done for participants but also to some Muslims who members of *Persaudaraan Alumni* 212 (212 Alumni Organization) which has several branches in Indonesia. I interviewed ten people in Pekanbaru and Padang, Indonesia. It was done occasionally in 2017, 2018 and 2019.

Piety and Radicalism

Before entering into the main discussion, it is important that in this article the terms piety and radicalism are explained. These two words have actually relative meanings. However, this article provides the meaning of these words to distinguish among them. According to the Indonesian Language Dictionary (Indonesian Ministry of National Education Language

Center, 2008), radicalism is radical understanding, politics, ideology or school. This term refers to an individual or a group of individuals that wishes social or political changes. It can also refer to those who want to propose renewal by means of violence. This term furthermore can be denoted to extreme outlooks in political ideology. This means that radical Muslim groups have a strong tendency to carry out social and political changes in Islam in various ways, even with violence. The meaning of radicalism thus has a negative nuance.

In contrast to radicalism, piety has a neutral meaning. Piety in Islam according to Pipensky (2016) is encouraged. Every Muslim should be pious normatively. Therefore, a pious Muslim believes and practices or performs the pillars of Islam (Rukun Islam). Muslim's piety then is identified by his belief and practice on the Rukun Islam which includes reading the shahada, performing prayers, fasting in the month of Ramadan, paying Zakat, and performing Hajj to the holy land.

The symbol of piety is also demonstrated by some *sunnah* (recommended) worships. Muslims who are pious generally do not only practice the Rukun Islam which is obligatory but alos they perform the *sunnah* religious practices. These include fasting on Monday and Thursday, reading the Qur'an, giving alms, praying at midnight, and so on.

However, in personal context, piety is difficult to observe. Piety basically cannot be measured quantitatively. Every Muslim can acknowledge that he is a pious Muslim. However, piety can be seen from its public appearance. Some symbols of public piety are recognized. The practices of Muslim on performing the Hajj, for instance, can be observed although their internal intention cannot be observed.

Religious Radicalism versus Religious Devotion

Piety and radicalism are two terms with different meanings. As explained earlier, piety is a term that is not static or fixed. It tends to be very flexible depending on social and cultural conditions. Its meaning also depends on the interpretation of authoritative sources such as Ulama and religious texts. However, radicalism is more easily identified because its effects are very quickly visible and tend to be minority in the context of Indonesian Islam.

Historically, Islam came to Indonesia peacefully. In fact, Islamization in Indonesia according to Uka Tjandrasasmita (2009) was done without war. There were several ways of Islamization. They include trade, nuptial, officialdom, learning through the establishment of the pesantren or Islamic boarding school, Sufism or *tarekat* and art through the *wayang* (puppets). As a result, the character of Islam in Indonesia nowadays is not radical and tends to sometimes be syncretic (Geertz, 2013).

Like culture, any religion in the world needs other elements to be perfect. So that in cultural studies, any culture in this world is not pure. This is certainly contrary to the essentialist who says that there is a pure culture. There is no intention here to explain that culture is the same as religion but as a description that religion has relations with other elements. Islam itself was revealed to Muhammad in charge of perfecting other celestial religions. No wonder the ritual practice in the Hajj is actually a ritual that was once carried out by Ibrahim and his wife, Hajar.

But as interactions with the global world result from globalization, Indonesia's peaceful Islamic typology begins to unravel a bit. This can be seen with the emergence of religious groups that tend to be rather radical such as FPI (Islamic Defenders Front), Hizbrur Tahrir and Laskar Jihad (Jihad Army). Yet in a global context, religious radicalism has caused social turmoil. In the context of Islam, a number of countries such as Iraq, Syria, and Libya have experienced Islamic radicalism which destroy their social order. Islam which has the second largest adherents in the world is considered the most responsible for the strengthening of radicalism among Muslims. Islam as a religion is believed to have a universal ideology that can create a homogeneous Muslim community. If this assumption is used, then what happens in Iraq and Syria can happen in Indonesia because these three countries together have the largest Muslim community.

Thus, radical Muslim communities in Syria and Iraq could emerge in Indonesia. However, as said by Azra (2006) that Islam at the ideological and symbolic level is indeed universal and homogeneous. It means that in doctrinal level there is no plural Islam. However, at the empirical level, it is very heterogeneous. It means that Islam is a singular form but Muslims are plural. Islam as an ideology has a universal value. However, due to social, cultural and lifestyle differences, Islam then has been practiced differently. No wonder that the symbolic meaning of radicalism will be interpreted differently by Muslim societies depending on social, cultural, and other backgrounds. Radicalism for some Muslims is the implication of the form

of piety, while other Muslims hold that piety does not lead to radicalism. An informant, Rudi, stated:

I attended the 212 action in Jakarta with my money. I went there to prove that I was not radical. If I were a Muslim, I would have kill Ahok. But I was not (Rudi, personal interview, 4th January 2017).

During this time there is a misunderstanding among scholars who are involved in Muslim society and Western politicians who tend to be difficult to distinguish between pious and radical Muslims. The tendency that appears on the surface is their high suspicion of Muslims who have the desire to increase the level of piety in practicing their religion. Several cases are found where the names of someone who are identical with the meaning and aim for piety such as Ihsan, Muhammad and others are suspected of being radical Muslims. Another example is some countries whose phobias against radical Muslims tighten checks on immigration or even deportation when they find a Muslim wearing Islamic attire that is characterized as devout Muslim. Some countries even forbid the use of Muslim clothing such as the hijab which is identical with piety as a Muslim woman. Any Islamic practice aimed at increasing the level of piety of a Muslim is suspected of being a serious vehicle for spreading the virus of radicalism. The various phenomena mentioned above are evidence of misunderstanding certain people in interpreting religion, especially Islam in relation to radicalism.

But clearly the last peaceful demonstration of 212 action shows how piety has been displayed publicly and openly. This means that the piety movement has moved from the direction of the private sphere to the public sphere. The 212 events marked the publicity of Islamic piety in Indonesia.

Religious piety that has been understood by internal Muslims does not always lead to radicalism as seen from the piety of Islamic boarding school teachers in certain regions of Indonesia. They show a positive role and social function of Islam. Thus the function of Islam is maintained and managed in the right direction because everyone in any society in Indonesia still believes in the realm of the function of Islam.

Social Function of Islam

Nottingham (2002: 9) states that religion may have two main functions. The first is that it supports to produce cohesive social value systems. The last function is that it can be used significantly in providing powerful authority which reinforces customs. This means that religion is functionally keeping and sustaining social order in a religious community. One cannot imagine when religion does not exist. It has same values, norms and regulations for its followers. Its values, norms and regulations are adavantagous for human beings. Public order, security and social relations are strengthened in every religion. Nonethelles, every religion actually can teach its followers to destroy social order and public security.

In this context, although Islam may lead to its adherents to create social destruction, Islam clearly plays an important role in the social life of its adherents. In the context of the state, Islam has a major contribution for the independence of Republic of Indonesia. In the pre-independence era, the spirit of Islam was promoted by Ulemas (Muslim scholars who have religious authority). They supported the independence of Indonesia through *Jihad* (Islamic war) (Fogg, 2020). Harry J. Benda (1958) said:

ever since the arrival of the Dutch East India Company in Southeast Asia at the turn of the seventeenth century, the Dutch had encountered Muslim hostility in Indonesia. Time and again, the consolidation of their expanding power was threatened by local outbreaks of Islamic inspired-resistance (Benda, 1958).

Islam supports every young Muslim to be pious. Islam teaches about the importance of moral order among young Muslims (Khotimah & Rosidi, 2020). The 212 action is supported by young Muslims since it is a part of performing their piety. Their participation in this mobilization is supported by their parents. Syahid, an informant, said:

I actually went to Jakarta with my children. I wanted to show them how to be good Muslims...during my talk with them; I always suggest them to practice Islam well. Islam will guide them. When Islam has a foundation for them, I believe they will not be bad (Syahid, personal interview, 7th March 2018).

No wonder that Islam in Indonesia socially serves to strengthen the public piety among its followers. Islam is expected to support the public appearance of every Muslim to be pious. This can be seen from the command of Islamic teachings to wear Muslim fashions in the public sphere, especially for woman Muslims. In addition, Islam also functions as the glue of social relations and harmony. When Islam is being harassed, social solidarity is promoted among all Muslims. Furthermore,

mosques Indonesia are not only used as individual worship but also as a means to strengthen social relations among Muslims. In several mosques in Indonesia, many Islamic activities such as the birthday celebration of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH and reading the Qur'an are done. Even, the 212 action was coordinated in the mosque. Mulya, an informant, said:

I went to Jakarta to join the 212 action after I had heard the Khutbah (preaching) in the mosque... In Jakarta, I stayed in the mosque. I slept and ate there (Mulya, personal interview, 17th October 2019).

The 212 Action and Religious Piety

The peaceful acts of 212 at least have various interpretations. The timing on that date resembles a number that is identical to Islamic prayers done five times a day. These prayers are crucial for every Muslim since Muslims are obliged to perform them. Secondly, the peaceful action that was carried out coincided with Friday. This symbol is more sacred because Friday is the most respected day in Islam. In addition, the reason for being chosen on Friday also has a religious dimension. This is because on that day there was a Friday prayer held in congregation.

The event of the peaceful protest of 212 is interpreted as a demonstration of the public piety of Indonesian Muslims. Piety needs a vehicle for the show because the action does require 'support' for many people to awaken the spirit of piety of Muslims. The mass media in the form of newspapers and television were involved as important media in the performance. Behind the scenes of the newspaper and television media, there are editor-in-chiefs, managing editors, and others. In the news, there are important actors such as action leaders and action participants. Television media take live pictures of Friday sermon events with Habib Riziq Shihab's preacher. Television also showed pictures of President Jokowi sitting listening to the sermon. Elegant stage shows that we may rarely find in other events; an'Islamic figure gives' lectures 'in front of a President who is often identified as' defending 'this Islamic group. News display in the form of 'breaking news' which shows a direct picture of the Monas field is a symbol of showing the public piety in Indonesian cultural lanscape. The news is packaged in interesting language interspersed with interesting images as well.

The social reality of the peaceful demonstration through television shows that Muslims in Indonesia want to be known by the public as peaceful Muslims. What is shown by television is actually a common thing. Most participants in the demonstration showed was how to win the hearts of the Indonesian Muslim community in general and in particular President Jokowi. Ways that could prove their sincerity were done by displaying Muslim clothing and carrying prayer rugs.

In fact, the peaceful action demonstrates Islamic identity in the social context of the Indonesian Islamic community who are experiencing symptoms of public piety. Therefore, this event, although some say it is a revival of political Islam or a symptom of strengthening political Islam, is nothing more or less an event that does not touch the substance of political Islam. Moreover, the Islamic issues carried by them were not followed by serious efforts to enact Islamic law in Indonesia. What is clear is that the phenomenon of piety moves from the private to the public as is the Friday prayer phenomenon which is broadcast live on TVRI once a week.

Thus, the growth of piety among Muslims in Indonesia might be appropriate to be used to describe this social phenomenon. At first glance the action seemed to be a revival of political Islam that endangered religious tolerance in Indonesia. However, the incident was clearly an anti-climax of the efforts of political Islam that had never been successful and realized in Indonesian society. Historically, efforts to fight for political Islam have never been successful in the Indonesian context. Islamic political parties often fail when they try to carry out the application of implementing Islam as the basis of the State. Thus, the peaceful action of 212 did not threaten the religious tolerance model in Indonesia because categorically in the action there were at least three groups in it. The first is the Islamic group offended by the words of Basuki Thahaja Purnama. They are willing to come from various regions to Jakarta to show the government, especially the President, their heartache for Ahok's words. This group is very dominant and majority in the 212 action. They do not have any agenda other than to show their piety towards Islam.

The second group is the group that has a specific agenda behind the action. They use this action as a tool or channel for a broader Islamization agenda. They have long aspired to carry out the Islamization of the State or implement Islamic Sharia in various lines of Indonesian people's lives. This group clearly wants to revive political Islam in Indonesia. Typically this

group is radical. The main motor of this group is the FPI (Islamic Defenders Front). This organization is known as an Islamic group that is keen to work towards the application of Islamic law in Indonesia. Their characteristics, as explained by Jamhari and Jajang Jahroni (2004), are dressed in white, white knee-length trousers and their heads covered with white turbans. This group has identities that are easily recognizable, even some of them often use the FPI name symbol on the clothes they wear. As often reported in national media, this group often destroys immoral places because for them such places should not exist in Indonesia. This shows the commitment of this group to uphold Islam in Indonesia.

The third group is the group that wants political change or wants to replace the current government with a new one. This group actually has no State Islamization agenda. Their aim is no more based on dissatisfaction with the current political conditions. They are controlled by political motives, not religion as the second group. In the language of the present government, this group is said to want to take the action 'plots'. Their characteristics include; they do not have the history or background of the political Islamic movement, some of them do not have a strong Islamic commitment even some of them do not like the actions or movements of the Islamization of the State carried out by FPI. This group before the 212 action had joined the 4 November 2016 action. In the action, the group gave speeches that surprised the government. What is interesting is that like Ahmad Dhani who before the action of November 4, 2016 was a person who really disliked the methods carried out by FPI in destroying immoral places. Even before this event, Ahmad Dhani was an antagonist for FPI. This event has succeeded in reconciling Ahmad Dhani and FPI.

From the categorization presented above, it seems that peaceful actions 212 and actions before and after it do not threaten religious tolerance in Indonesia. This is because the first group is very dominant compared to the second group. Although the driving force of these movements is the second group, the first group is not or will be very difficult to be invited to have or be interested in the Islamic ideology of the second group (Fealy, 2016).

Furthermore, the peaceful action of 212 and other Islamic demonstration events are related to religiosity or piety, not a signal of strengthening Islamic radicalism. In the Indonesian context, Islamic movements in radical ways are still a minority. The majority of Indonesian Muslims still hold the view that radical methods such as those carried out by FPI are inappropriate. However, it is undeniable that the event successfully benefited the second group's movement because the group's leaders became popular and were widely known by the Indonesian public. Will this popularity increase the sympathy of the Muslim community with FPI? It will not be easy to answer the question because public sympathy for this movement may not be the same as their sympathy for the radical Islamic movements of this group.

The prospect of religious tolerance in Indonesia is not only influenced by such movements or actions. However, as a movement that was followed by such a large mass, some recorded 1 million people who said 500,000 to 750,000 people, the event shocked all parties. However, the prospect of religious tolerance in Indonesia will not be threatened by such movements because mainstream Islam still upholds the values of religious tolerance as enshrined in *Bhineka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity). Furthermore, such movements will be very difficult to repeat because the momentum of the issue will decrease in direction with the development of Ahok's law. Emphasis from Mainstream groups such as NU (Nahdlatul Ulama) about the importance of maintaining trust in the law in Indonesia ensures that any court decision should be accepted by Muslim groups. As a momentary movement, this mobilization has a close connection with the government treatment to Muslim society. When there is an unfair treatment towards Muslim society, it will invite Muslims to conduct such mobilization. Furthermore, under democratic country, such mobilization is difficult to be done. This is because political freedom has been opened making many ways for Muslims to channel Islamic agendas. In this context, the difficult task for those who want to mobilize the similar actions in future is how to persuade the majority Muslims in Indonesia to follow their Islamic agenda.

Conclusion

During this time there are mistaken views from some people about radicalism and piety. Sometimes they fail to understand the difference between the two. Symptoms of piety are often interpreted as symptoms of radicalism. The emergence of Islamic actions in response to Ahok's comments is feared as the victory of Islamic radicalism in Indonesia

which in turn threatens religious tolerance in Indonesia. However, as discussed in this paper, the Islamic action movement whose peak occurred on December 2, 2016 at the Monas field was a symptom of piety among Muslims in Indonesia. They have a desire to be Muslims. Through the 212 action, this desire needs to be acknowledged by the public, especially Indonesian government.

Thus it can be concluded that the 212 action, which consists of several volumes, is not a radical mobilization or a symbol of radicalism among Indonesian Muslims. It has nothing to do with the strengthening of Islamic radicalism or the antiminority movement. The movement was only an accumulation of symptoms that strengthened the public piety of the Islamic community. Although the driving force is a radical Islamic group, the majority of participants are mainstream Islamic groups that do not have an agenda of Islamization of the State or change the constitution of the Indonesian State. The majority of participants in the action purely and sincerely participated in the activity because of the encouragement of 'piety' to demand legal justice for the 'religious blasphemers'. The Islamic action movement cannot be interpreted as a movement to hate minority groups.

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