CULTURAL POLITICS OF EX-NONMAINSTREAM RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS MUHDI AKBAR IN THE SELAYAR ISLANDS

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Abstract

Non-mainstream religious movements are a characteristic feature of island regions isolated by the sea. This movement first existed as a societal need at that time. This article attempts to answer the question of how a community of ex-nonmainstream religious movements carries out cultural politics to survive amid the increasingly dominant mainstream religion. This study is based on interview data and observations conducted on several informants. Movement history manuscripts are also a secondary data source in this research. Objectively, it was found that the ex-Muhdi Akbar community carried out cultural politics in three forms. First, they reoriented their movement from focusing on religion and politics to social and cultural ones. Second, open membership regulations and freedom in choosing an official religion means they have a higher emotional bond. Third, accommodation in the government strengthens their position as religious people and does not deviate so that the problems they previously experienced can be minimized. This form of cultural politics is a formula for the success of a non-mainstream religious movement.

Keywords: Cultural Politics, island society, muhdi akbar, nonmainstream religion, selayar

INTRODUCTION

mid the dominance of the two poles of the mainstream Islamic movement, non-mainstream religious movements are thriving. The Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) says there are 300 non-mainstream sects in Indonesia (CNNIndonesia.com). The presence of non-mainstream movements is growing in areas isolated from the influence of broader society, in this context, the archipelago. Island communities have a unique true self, a self-concept representing personality rights, social rights, culture, and ideological rights as essential life priorities for island communities (Watloly, 2012; Tiwery, 2018; Reddy et al., 2019). The

presence of this movement is a response to religious life so far, especially when studying religious knowledge (pengajian). First, the type of recitation that is too traditional gives rise to thoughts as if religion is rigid, so people think that studying religion is static. Second, liberalist preaching simplifies and trivializes religion so that its congregation easily changes beliefs (republika.com.id). This is in line with what was stated by Pabbajah et al. (2012) that non-mainstream religious movements emerged as a response to mainstream religion, which no longer supports spiritual satisfaction, giving rise to disappointment and ultimately choosing other paths outside the mainstream.

Selayar Islands Regency is one of the districts in South Sulawesi Province, located at the southern tip and stretches from North to South. This region is the only district in South Sulawesi whose entire territory is separated from the mainland of South Sulawesi and consists of a group of large and small islands, so it is an archipelago (Najamuddin & Ridha, 2020). According to the sources, the name of Selayar is derived from the word Salayar, which means the sail. It is significally to the indigenous Selayar type of boat with only one sail. The natives call Selayar silajara or salajara, which the prefix "si" presents meaning as "satu" (one). Similarly, the word gompo in the local language means the stack or the heap in Indonesian. A region still allied with the island of Selayar, such as Makassar, is called silayara, and the Bugis is called silage (Hasaruddin et al., 2016).

At the beginning of its appearance, Muhdi Akbar was Islamic. Still, he was considered sinful because he did implement Islamic Shari'a because Allah is subtle. At the same time, the implementation of Shari'ah is rough, so humans cannot know Allah SWT in that way. Muhdi Akbar was founded in 1912 by H. Abdul Gani to protect Islam from the many new interpretations emerging regarding the Al-Qur'an. The essence of Muhdi Akbar's teachings is to unite oneself with Allah SWT. Another reason is simplifying Islamic teachings to make it easier for humans to worship Allah SWT (Risdayanti, 2022). The failure (of minority religious groups) to compete with the religious majority supported by the formal structure of religion, in this case, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, has led them to carry out a kind of escapism with a formulation of religious understanding that is more internal and fosters a sense of social group solidarity (Arsyad, 2018). As a result of the spread of his teachings, H. Abdul Gani, as the founder, needed help to avoid conflicts with local Islamic leaders and was hostile to many local ulama in Selayar. His views and opposition to orthodox Islam, as well as sharia and figh, he considered to be a understanding of a primitive and backward superstition, made him increasingly hostile to traditional ulama. H. Abdul Gani tried to free the Islamic religion and implement Islamic law from the rigidity inherited from the Middle Ages. He wanted to adapt it to the modern era, even though this effort clashed with the literal meaning and meaning of the Al-Qur'an itself (Hasaruddin, 2018).

A religious group's potential for social exclusion undoubtedly motivates them to create coping mechanisms for the different forms of exclusion they encounter (Hasyim et al., 2024). Cultural Politics carried out by the ex-Muhdi Akbar community is their strategy to maintain their existence. The reorientation of the movement carried out by the ex-Muhdi Akbar community resulted in a more peaceful life for them. Although the non-binding membership regulations and freedom in choosing a religion result in a reduction in the number of followers, they further strengthen emotional ties between Communication and accommodation with the government further strengthen the belief of the community that former members of Muhdi Akbar have embraced other religions (Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism) so that practices previously considered deviating from Islam will no longer be considered deviating from Islam. In this way, the cultural politics carried out by former members of Muhdi Akbar can protect themselves from threats that might come back.

This article maps explicitly the forms of cultural politics and analyzes the impact of their cultural politics. For this reason, this article will discuss the phenomenon of this non-mainstream movement in three main questions. First, what is the form of the ex-Muhdi Akbar non-mainstream movement community? Second, what are the factors underlying the practices of these nonmainstream movements? Third, how does the ex-Muhdi Akbar community continue to exist after the movement's dissolution? Careful mapping and analysis of cultural politics makes it possible to understand the phenomenon of non-mainstream religious movements and formulate appropriate handling steps for them in Indonesia.

Literature Review

Studies conducted on non-mainstream religious movements look at two main things. First, studies discuss non-mainstream religious movements as radical movements that seek to change the foundations of the state. The contemporary Islamic movement must be distinct from the ideas promoted by the old movement, which focused on Islamic

law as a state ideology (Abdullah, 2016; Rubaidi, 2011). Abdullah's (2016) research found that the origin of the birth of contemporary radical Islamic sects or groups or organizations came from the history of Islam itself, which was initially pioneered by the Khawarij group, which was stubborn and compromise and dialogue. Meanwhile, Rubaidi's (2011) research found that the contemporary Islamic movement, as it is found today, must be distinct from similar movements that have grown and developed in Indonesia in the past. Substantially, the movement ideas promoted by this Islamic movement (read: radical Islam) remain the same, namely issues whose common thread is the spirit of Puritanism and are focused on "Islamic law". The ultimate goal of all the ideas of this movement is none other than the "Islamic State" or various forms of its derivatives, such as Dar al-Islam, Khilafah al-Islamiyyah, or the like.

Second, studies that analyze the existence of non-mainstream movements. The non-mainstream movement is a form of criticism of existing orthodoxy (Pabbajah et al., 2012; Saleh, 2018). The research discovered that Wahdah Islamiyah can survive by spreading its wings to sociocultural, economic, political, and women's movements. The choice of the Wasathiyah Islam model made Wahdah Islamiyah then present in a moderate face so that the Islamic Puritanism of Wahdah Islamiyah is articulated in a distinctive Salafi Islahi face, namely an Islamic group that is genuinely Salafi in nature but presents moderate and inclusive articulation and tends to take modern methods in its preaching.

Meanwhile, Pabbajah et al. (2012) found that Jamaah An-Nadzir is a religious movement that actualizes Islamic values in community life and economic and social activities. Integrating religious values into economic life and social activities is a strategy to maintain its existence. The followers of An-Nadzir are ultimately helped in their economic activities. The benefits obtained also spread to the surrounding community outside the Movement so that they can maintain their group.

From these two tendencies, nonmainstream movements such as cultural politics receive less attention. Cultural politics has created the survival of non-mainstream religious movements to this day. This study offers novel insights into the cultural strategies of non-mainstream religious movements. This paper aims to complement the shortcomings of previous studies which ignored the cultural politics of non-mainstream religious movements. If in the first group of research, non-mainstream religious movements aim to change the foundation of the state, Muhdi Akbar's movement does not lead to government issues. The second group of researches describes how non-mainstream religious movements can continue to exist in the ways they do but not with cultural politics.

Conceptual Framework Cultural Politics

Cultural politics is a pattern of behaviour in a society that focuses on aspects of state life, state administration, government politics, laws, norms, and habits that are shared by all members of society (Anastasiou & Kauffman, 2019; Suryawan, 2020; Farhat, 2019). Suryawan (2020) further said that from cultural and political perspective, Indonesian society cannot be separated from the practice of a new style of colonialization, which views minority ethnocentrically. In this context, cultural politics is also a tactic that makes an essesntial contribution to the needs of society with specific goals (Ibrahim, 2018) and is influenced by internal dynamics, the influence of values and traditions, and the influence of globalization, which provides new choices in social, economic and cultural life (Candra Jaya, 2019). Cultural politics is the process of reproducing knowledge from society in responding to and negotiating cultural complexity to accommodate the goals of individuals and community groups in religious and social contexts (Hariyanti et al., 2018; Pradana, 2019; Zandra & Rustopo, 2020).

Not a few cultural politics contain elements of power, where this power contains aspects of identity, ideology, and political economy carried by society (Ardini, 2017; Rosojati, 2019). In line with that, cultural politics, apart from fighting to achieve specific goals, can also establish a social relationship based on the interests carried out by both ethnic groups or community groups in terms of language, structure and beliefs

(Gregory AS Jamlean, 2021; Paradise, 2017; Chen et al., 2020). Firdaus (2017) further said that cultural politics has shaped social organizations and constructed society's values, and identity. Constructing community values and identity is also an artistic strategy that is not least influenced by economic elements, traditions and religious values in achieving communal goals (Qibtiyah, 2019; Denk et al., 2015; Yang, 2020). So, it can be said that cultural politics is oriented toward individual life as a society, which is actualized in attitudes, structures, and culture through the political process (Jamlean, 2021).

Nonmainstream Religious

Non-mainstream religion is a belief and a social movement that can shape discourse in political contestation (Ahyar & Alfitri, 2019; Willander, 2020; Collins-Kreiner, 2008). Wallander (2020) further said that nonmainstream religious flows had implications for Swedish society by conceptualizing nonreligious identity, which influences the country's political direction. In Indonesia itself, non-mainstream religion appears in the form of social movements based on religious organizations such as the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) and Hiztbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), where the ideological expressions of these organizations often take the form of violence and terror based on a narrow understanding of religion, textual, fanaticism, and formalism (Rahman, 2019). Therefore, ideological views regarding non-mainstream religions in Indonesia correlate with the emergence of religious conflicts and can also form new knowledge, structures, and cultures among religious communities. (Survana, 2018). In line with this, the existence of nonmainstream religions that developed in Indonesia after the reform era reconstructed the social relations of religious communities from those based on social values to emotional ones (Kristiantoro, 2020).

The emergence of non-mainstream religions in Indonesia began with the reformation in 1998, which influenced the development of these social religious movements. The emergence of non-mainstream religions emphasizes the identity of religious diversity in Indonesia as a democratic country by accommodating religious values, values, norms, and practices (Pabbajah et al., 2019). However, apart from

being a democratic country, Indonesia also adheres to the Pancasila ideology, which makes Indonesia a monotheistic religious country and forces non-mainstream religions to be accepted by mainstream religions and officially recognized (Ahyar & Alfitri, 2019). Therefore, the main problem in a democratic country is how to manage diversity, especially for non-mainstream religions, which are often victims of discrimination. This discrimination can be seen through three factors, namely: (1) There are still many regulations produced by the state which essentially make it difficult to manage diversity itself; (2) Lack of action to protect freedom of religion and belief for the community by law enforcement officials; (3) The foundation of tolerance within society itself is still fragile (Rahman, 2019; Sudarto, 2018; Abdurrohman & Syamsiar, 2017).

Island Society

Island society is a society that is very complex in its identity and beliefs. In this context, an island society is a society that has a unique authentic self. This self-concept represents personality, social, cultural, and ideological rights as essential life priorities for an island society (Watloly, 2012; Tiwery, 2018; Reddy et al., 2019). Tiwery (2018) further said that island communities also have local wisdom, which can be a unifying force for progress for religious communities and social communities in island communities which is passed down from generation to generation, such as that of the Kei Island people in the Larvu Ngabal and Ain ni Ain traditions as local wisdom, which aims to unite and solve problems. Many of the issues in island communities arise from religious belief systems that influence the life patterns of island communities individually and collectively, as experienced by the people of the Riau Islands (Rahmat et al., 2021). Archipelago society is a distinctive and unique society with a complex ethnicity and social system (Handaka, 2018).

The complexity of island communities is often related to managing multiculturalism and environmental conduciveness to minimize conflicts and discriminatory actions against minority groups (Sari & Fitriani, 2021; Said, 2020; Kahn & Sinoto, 2017). Sari & Fitriani (2021) further stated that the potential for discriminatory actions

experienced by island communities does not arise in a religious context. Still, cultural practices such as those implemented by the Nias island community can minimize the occurrence of discrimination against minority beliefs with Sitangiangalau and Pangetsabbau values. In line with this, the cultural practices of island communities in minimizing discriminatory practices can also be seen in the Kei Island community in ensuring religious practices carried out by the Chinese minority group. (Pattiasina, 2020; Party, 2018; Reddy et al., 2019). Therefore, Party (2018) further said that island society adheres to unique spiritual, economic, cooperation, and political togetherness values and is based on humanistic existentialism.

RESEARCH METHOD

This qualitative research analyses the Muhdi Akbar community as a movement that can live and mingle with other communities. The Selayar Islands were chosen to represent the Indonesian region, which consists of many islands. Furthermore, the Selayar Islands are the archipelagic region furthest from the mainland centre of South Sulawesi Province, where the people have unique characteristics. Muhdi Akbar was born and developed in the Selayar Islands due to the island's isolation from the outside world.

Primary data in this research was obtained through informant interviews and news from online news portals. Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained through the historical archives of the Muhdi Akbar community held by Islamic religious leaders and other supporting data. Secondary data is selected to ensure the authenticity of the manuscript. Data originating from historical archives was triangulated by confirming with Islamic religious leaders and parties trusted to store the archives. The informants in this research consisted of descendants of Ex-Muhdi Akbar and the people of Binanga Sombaiya Village, Bontosikuyu District. Informants are selected based on their experience and understanding of the issues studied.

This research started with a desk review to map aspects related to the issue of religious movements. Observations were carried out to map the village's condition and the community's characteristics. This research also uses interviews as a basis for data collection techniques, especially information about the history, core teachings, and movements of Muhdi Akbar today. Data analysis was carried out through three stages, as indicated by (Miles et al., 1994) reduction, display and data verification. The analytical methods used include restatement of the data, description to find patterns, and trends, and interpretation to understand the meanings of the data used.

DISCUSSION

Movement Reorientation

After being disbanded in 1966, the Muhdi Akbar Movement continued to reorient the movement towards social and cultural direction. In the social field, they open themselves up and become part of the local community, which lives in harmony. They work in several sectors, including plantations, fisheries. community and services. Their children are sent to Madrasah, which is still far away. As a movement that, from the beginning, was always described as a non-political sect, Muhdi Akbar always stayed away from various forms of commotion. They are simple people who love peace and are residents who like order and security. He continued his teachings after H. Abdul Gani died (he had around 500 or 600 students, many of whom were pilgrims).

Meanwhile, their symbol is the slogan "damena sikontu Agamayya", peace of all religions, written above the entrance of every house of members of this faith. However, they are often drawn into political interests, especially because they are considered to deviate from Islamic teachings. They have caused widespread hatred among Muslims (Armin, 2018).

Apart from reorienting in the social field, former member Muhdi Akbar also reoriented in the cultural field. They highlight harmony as a picture of heterogeneous rural life. The designation of Binanga Sombaiya Village demonstrates this as a harmony-conscious village by the Selayar Islands Regency government in 2021. The harmony-conscious town was formed in collaboration with the Selayar Regency Government and the Regency Ministry of Religion. Selayar. The Selayar Regency Government has launched a harmonious village since 2018. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Religion of the

Regency. Selayar, in March 2021, has prepared this plan.

"Binanga Sombaiya village was designated as a village aware of harmony because the religions there are diverse and many people in one family have different religions." (Interview with Ustadz Syamsuddin, "Islamic Religious Leader", June 26, 2021)

"The choice of Binanga Sombaiya Village, Bontosikuyu District, as a village aware of harmony is not without reason. Based on data recorded during yesterday's afternoon visit, data was obtained that the number of Muslims in the village reached 1226 people, 83 Hindus and 91 Christians. What's unique is that the team found that in one family, there is more than 1 type of religion adhered to." (sulsel.kemenag.go.id)

Former Muhdi Akbar members made efforts to blend into society as a way for them to be accepted into society at large and not be expelled from their homes. Their ideology and belief practices are considered deviant from Islam and will affect the faith of Muslims. In this case, there is always a positioning in identity construction that involves social relations between the dominant and the dominated (Udasmoro, 2010). Muhdi Akbar is a subordinate belief movement that tries to fight against the domination of mainstream religion. At the same time, former Muhdi Abar members became a group that did not have a visible identity. (Spivak, 1988) call this a subaltern group.

Muhdi Akbar's changes in movement patterns resulted in a more peaceful life for them. They are no longer seen as deviants and can live their social lives. As an island community, they try to minimize conflict and discrimination against their community. The complexity of island communities is often related to managing multiculturalism and environmental conduciveness to reduce the occurrence of disputes and discriminatory actions against minority groups (Sari & Fitriani, 2021; Said, 2020; Kahn & Sinoto, 2017).

Membership Regulations and Accommodation of Religious Differences

There are two forms of accommodation for Muhdi Akbar's membership: freedom to choose another religion and no rejection of those who convert. After the suspension of Muhdi Akbar in 1966, former members were forced to change their religion to religions declared official by the government. In terms of choosing a religion, there is no pressure to choose one religion, but humans are free to choose any religion. They were given the choice to embrace Christianity or return to Islam. Currently, several families in the village have members from various religions.

"My father is Christian; my mother is Muslim. When I was little, I was a Christian but went to an Islamic school. Starting from junior high school, I converted to Islam." "Former follower of Muhdi Akbar", June 27, 2021)

"Many have converted to Hinduism and Christianity, and some have returned to Islam. Some people who converted to Christianity are already practicing Christianity because some priests came here and founded churches." Some Hindu religious leaders have also come here but have always been rejected because their teachings believe differently from theirs, but the Hindu religious label is very much accepted." (Interview with Ustadz Syamsuddin, "Islamic Religious Leader", June 26, 2021)

Hinduism entered in 1970 and found a place in the hearts of ex-Muhdi Akbar, who were Christians, because Hinduism allowed them to practice their Sufistic beliefs. Tuan Nya'la, one of the former leaders of Mukhdi Akbar who had converted to Christianity, introduced Hinduism.

"Tuan Nya'la went to Bali to study Hinduism. There, he felt that Hinduism was similar to Muhdi Akbar's emphasis on the spiritual, meditating like that. Returning to Selayar, he converted to Hinduism, and his followers, who had converted to Christianity, also converted to Hinduism again." (Interview with Ustadz Syamsuddin, "Islamic Religious Leader", June 26, 2021)

What is interesting is that when a resident previously claimed to be a follower of the Hindu religion, the family asked the village Imam to be washed, shrouded, and buried in an Islamic manner. Another accommodation is the absence of rejection for those who change religions. Administratively, they have different religions, but in practice, they are still part of the community.

"We have never been forced or accepted by the community. Since I converted to Islam, I have never practiced monotheism again." (Interview with Faisal, "Former follower of Muhdi Akbar", June 27, 2021)

"They call their activities monotheism. Most of those who are still like that are Hindus, while there are only a few Christians left." (Interview with Rahmi, "Former follower of Muhdi Akbar", June 27, 2021)

officially declared by the Indonesian government, Muhdi Akbar chose the freedom to choose a religion. Muhdi Akbar does not require its members to belong to the same religion (for example, Islam) as stated on their KTP. It is intended to prevent discrimination from occurring again in the surrounding community. There are at least three factors to see discrimination, namely: (1) There are still many regulations produced by the state which essentially make it difficult to manage diversity itself; (2) Lack of action to protect freedom of religion and belief for the community by law enforcement officials; (3) The foundation of tolerance within society itself is still fragile (Rahman, 2019; Sudarto, 2018; Abdurrohman & Syamsiar, 2017). In this case, the regulations made by the Indonesian government make things difficult for them even though the 1945 Constitution regulates the freedom to choose religion and belief. The government also does not protect minority groups such as Muhdi Akbar, which is unique to the region. Tolerance in society is still low, so differences in beliefs, such as Muhdi Akbar's, are responded to negatively by other communities.

The freedom given by Muhdi Akbar had two impacts. The first impact is the emergence of an emotional bond between them, thus strengthening their differences. Diani (2015) calls this a strong network, but the interactions could be more informal or structured. In other words, there is a bond of shared ideas and commitment among the members or constituents of the movement even though they are differentiated in profession, social class, and others. In this case, Muhdi Akbar has the same commitment even though his members are administratively different religions. Non-mainstream religious movements reconstruct the social relations of religious communities from those based on social values to emotional ones (Kristiantoro, 2020). The second impact is the reduced quantity of Muhdi Akbar's followers. It happened because members who converted to Christianity along the way received Christian religious broadcasts from Christian leaders who came to Binanga Sombaiya Village and founded a church.

Accommodation of Authority Official

Muhdi Akbar's accommodation with authorities was seen in the religious ministry and regional government. Accommodation with the Ministry of Religion occurred in 1976, ten years after Muhdi Akbar was suspended. At that time, the Ministry of Religion issued a decree for Hindu religious instructors to two people.

"What is very surprising is that some of the figures or former leaders, after choosing Christianity and Islam, suddenly two received a decree from the centre to be appointed as Hindu Religious Instructors, with the Decree of the Head of the Hindu-Buddhist Da'wah/Sermon Guidance Information Project No. 06/sp/PPP.II/IIB/3/76 dated 15 June 1976, namely Abd. Rahim and Nurdin Samad, even though previously there were no Hindus in Selayar." (Muhdi Akbar Historical Archives, Binanga Sombaiya Village).

Accommodation in the regional government can be seen from the election of one of the former leaders of Muhdi Akbar in the Political Party format to become a member of the Selayar Regency DPRD. Apart from that, one of the Hindu religious instructors was also appointed to the same position.

"It is added here that the former leaders of Muhdi Akbar who chose Islam were Ruku Daeng Mappata (now a member of the Selayar Regency DPRD, and his younger brother Abd. Rahim, who was appointed as a Hindu religious instructor, also a member of the Selayar Regency DPRD." (Historical Archives of Muhdi Akbar, Binanga Sombaiya Village).

The entry of former Muhdi Akbar members into government agencies, such as the Selayar Regency Ministry of Religion Office and the Selayar Regency Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD), could benefit their position. First, the appointment of two Hindu religious instructors among them was in line with their conversion to Hinduism. It can confirm in the eyes of the authorities that they are genuinely practising Hinduism. Second, the election of two people as members of the DPRD can be an extension of their voice in government. Non-mainstream religion is a belief and a social movement that can shape discourse in political contestation (Ahyar & Alfitri, 2019; Willander, 2020; Collins-Kreiner, 2008). In this case, the presence of Muhdi Akbar's

representatives in government can strengthen their political position.

The local people who knew about their existence never bothered them. They are definitively declared a Hindu religion, complete with Hindu religious instructors prepared by the Ministry of Religion so that even though they are considered deviant, they not deviant from Islam. representation in the DPRD secures their existence, especially in policy-making and electoral district development. a democratic country that adheres to the ideology, Indonesia Pancasila is monotheistic religious country and forces non-mainstream religions to be accepted by mainstream religions and officially recognized (Ahyar et al., 2019).

CLOSING

What has been stated as inter-religious harmony does not happen in the ex-Muhdi Akbar community. This research finds that harmony is not formed based on tolerance between different people. This harmony is created because one community once practiced the same beliefs. They split into several adherents of other religions as a population administration requirement determined by the government after the movement was banned.

The use of the concept of cultural politics in this research has made it possible to understand the strategy of a movement community so that it can survive even though the movement has been disbanded. Politics and Religion have the character of an interactive relationship that gives each other dimensions in social reality. This is an example of how local communities deal with the dynamics of existing religious practices. The geographical limitations of the islands color the process of perception, construction, and dynamics of the community's social movements.

This research focuses on how a community can survive threats that may arise either from other communities or from the government. In line with that, this study seeks to push higher implications so that further research can be conducted by accommodating the position and situation of the current young generation of society as recipients of the legacy of values believed by Muhdi Akbar.

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