Political Identity on Pop-Tafsir: An Analysis of Celebrity Dai's Interpretation on YouTube

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Abstract. This study seeks to look at political identity in a modern landscape. This essay specifically shows how political identiy lives in the content of various preaching channels broadcasted through YouTube which, to some extent, represent certain radical groups' teachings. Furthermore, this study examines how external factors such as socio-political situations have inscribed the notion of *caliphate* ideology within the YouTube content uploaded by the four celerity preachers included in this study. This study is library research that employs a virtual ethnographic method that has been considered as a new approach in cyber-religious research. The result shows that the four celerity preachers who posted sermons on YouTube have interpreted political identity in the shape of *caliphate* ideology, particularly in state affairs. They choose social media as a new "battlefield" as it has been a valuable alternative space where individuals can express themselves freely. This has made the *caliphate* ideology to spread online, despite the state's prohibition upon the ideology.

Keywords: Political Identity, Pop-Tafsir, Celebrity Dai

1 Introduction

As a democratic country, Indonesia allows its citizens to express themselves freely. However, Indonesian government has outlawed the activities of various mass organizations. For some parties, it has violated one's right to freedom of expression [1]. The ban mentioned above is referred to as no-platforming [2], a boycott toward organizations or people who appear in public because their opinions are deemed threatening. Front Pembela Islam (FPI), Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), Gerakan Fajar Nusantara (Gafatar), and Jamaah Islamiyah (JI) are among the few groups that have been prohibited by the government.

Even though the above mentioned mass organizations are on Indonesia's list of banned organizations, their ideology has not entirely vanished. In an information age like today, the freedom of expression provided by various online media has allowed anyone to openly express themselves, promote their ideology, and use other services unavailable in the physical world [3]. The presence of clerics or famous preachers on social media can be interpreted as evidence that their ideology is still alive and preserved. Hanan Attaki, Abdul Somad, Felix Siauw, and *Oemar* Mita are well-known preachers (celeb-dai) with a big number of followers on social media sites such as YouTube. They propagate Islamic information using their official accounts.

According to Kort (2005), social media could be of a propaganda tool for certain groups to influence public opinion and create an alternative social fact, in addition to being a channel for people to openly discuss various social changes for the betterment of democracy [4]. Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and other radical groups utilize social media to recruit new terrorists. They are heavy social media users and have even created apps for them. For them, social media offers a promising new battlefield for promoting ideas and ideological concepts [5].

Based on the description above, This study aims at looking at political identity on pop-tafsir in a more modern landscape delivered by celeb-dai. The term "pop-tafsir" is used to describe a popular type of Qur'anic exegesis or commentaries published in the digital era and disseminated via social media instead of printed books [6]. At the same time, the term "dai" is referred to those who transmit religious doctrines. This essay also specifically shows how political identity is instilled in the interpretation of the aforementioned celeb-dai representing certain radical groups mentioned earlier. Furthermore, this study examines how external factors like socio-political situations have engraved some impression of *caliphate* ideology implanted in the content.

2 Literature Review

Various research have been conducted on the topic of Qur'anic interpretation on social media, including YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram. The research covered some areas such as themes offered by the public figures on YouTube, the methodologies utilized, and so forth. In this study, pop-tafsir refers to Ulya Fikriyati and Ahmad Fawaid's essay "Pop-Tafsir on Indonesian Youtube Channel: Emergence, Discourses, and Contestations." Pop-Tafsir is a popular kind of interpretation that has emerged in the digital era and is widely spread via the internet. Fathurrosyid's work entitled "Nalar Moderasi Tafsir Pop Gus Baha': Studi Kontestasi Pengajian Tafsir Al-Qur'an di Youtube (The popular interpretation of moderation reasoning of Gus Baha': A study of Qur'anic interpretation contestation on YouTube) " is another study that employs the term pop-tafsir. For scholars, the use of the word 'pop-tafsir' here is no different than the interpretation of Quran posted social media or oral interpretations.

Fikriyati and Fawaid (2019) in their research discuss the emergence of pop-tafsir on YouTube channels in Indonesia and the ideology they carry in that interpretation. The research ranges from 2011-2014. In their research, Fikriyati and Fawaid mentioned that there are several ideologies contained in the pop interpretation, such as, moderate, *salafi*, and *ikhwani*. The research was conducted on about ten YouTube channels. In general, the type of ideologies conveyed on YouTube can be categorized into two groups. The first group campaigns for a purely theocentric view of an exclusive person or group, while the other group emphasizes on a Theo-anthropocentric view that sees all people as equal.

Fathurrosyid's article that has been mentioned above is the second study that utilizes the term 'pop-tafsir'. According to Fathurrosyid's research, Gus Baha's moderation reasoning which was propagated through popular media like as Youtube, Instagram, and Facebook, is an attempt to impart the paradigm of deradicalization of interpretation. According to Fathurrosyid, Gus Baha' employs three types of moderation reasoning: 1) an explanation of the reconstruction of the Qur'an's miracles and the use of argumentative logic in preaching, 2) an explanation of the urgency of *nasikh-mansukh* as a criticism toward the movement carrying the jargon of Islam *kaffah*, and 3) an explanation of the counter-narrative to fight against extremism and radicalism.

Unlike previous studies, this research looks at the Qur'anic interpretation on YouTube conveyed by the celeb-dai as a political identity struggle, namely the application of sharia in Indonesia. Academics from different scientific backgrounds have researched the topic of political identity and extremism groups in Indonesia. However, research that specifically discusses the Qur'anic interpretation of this celeb-dai has never been carried out. Furthermore, this research also examines how socio-political conditions, especially government policies, have impacted their interpretations broadcasted on their YouTube channels. Their interpretations on YouTube were chosen based on the theme presented, namely the *caliphate*. This theme was taken from various YouTube channels that upload their sermons or preaching at mosques, seminars, and their personal YouTube account.

3   Methodology

This study is a library research that tries to see political identity content in the video posted by the four celeb-dai on Youtube. The videos uploaded on YouTube by the four celeb-dai serve as the primary data in this study. The researcher chose the videos with the theme of   *Caliphate* or state law. In addition to these videos, the researcher also used books, journals, theses, news, and articles obtained from online or offline channels. This study employs a virtual ethnographic method, a novel approach in cyber-religious research. This method examines at least four aspects, one of which is media documents (media archives). The researcher examines the subject of the substance of religious texts in a virtual environment while studying this media library (YouTube). The concept was promoted by Ward Goodenough and James Spradley in the ethnographic technique [7]. In contrast to the old ethnographic methodology based on Geertz's semiotic paradigm, Levi Strauss' structural style, and others, the new ethnographic approach is based on the interpretivism paradigm.

The analytical tool in this study is Gadamer's theory. Gadamer proposed a theory of "history of influence" (Wirkungsgeschicte), also known as "historically influenced history, " which is understood as the participation of an interpreter in history or events in which he becomes a historical actor. Gadamer's contribution fills the interpreter's historical impact gap[8]. Gadamer's theory will be used in this study to examine how certain historical events that occurred at a time have influenced the four celeb-dai when they delivered their sermons. The narrowest definition of the historical events discussed in this study comprises government policies and a few other events directly related to the previous definition of the word "*caliphate*."

4   Result and Discussion

4.1   Pop-Tafsir: The Quran Interpretation and Social Media

The advancement of science is inextricably linked to the media employed. This also illuminates the history of tafsir in Indonesia. Marshall McLuhan stated that there are at least four distinct phases of media evolution: the tribal age, the age of literacy, the print age, and the electronic age[9]. The study of the Qur'an now has moved into a new phase. The utilization of many new media spawned by technological advances characterizes this era. The easiness of access provided by new media and the support of more advanced technology aids Muslims in learning the Qur'an rapidly. This is inextricable from the strain of industrialization and

globalization, which has shattered human life's dimensions and has implications that cannot be denied and must be confronted. Muslims are obligated to respond and seek various breakthroughs to contextualize the Qur'an so that its principles might become answers under the maxim of "*Al-Qur'an sālih fi kulli zamān wa makān*" (Al-Qur'an is always applicable for any time and location) [10].

Qur'anic interpretation on online media does have various forms and models. Some of these models include, first, websites with specific content on interpretations, such as http://www.tafsir.web.id/. Second, the interpretation is included in a discussion about the Qur'an, such as the interpretation from the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Third, contextual type of interpretation, for example, Nadirsyah Hosen's interpretation, which he wrote on his website. On his website, Gus Nadir discusses religious concerns that are occurring in nowadays-society. Fourth is an interpretation that uses audio and visual media, or one of the two. This can be seen in the study of interpretation of *Tafsir Jalālain* by Maimun Zubair (using audio), tafsir Adi Hidayat (who uses audio-visual), and others. Qur'anic interpretations that use audio-visuals are primarily found on YouTube. This is also carried out by the four celeb-dai that have become the locus of this study. Fifth is the interpretation written on social media accounts such as Facebook. The commentators (*mufasir*) who use this model are Salman Harun and Nadirsyah Hosen [9]

4.2   The Interpretation of *Caliphate* ideology on Youtube

4.2.1 Al-Ahzab: 9

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ ٱذْكُرُوا۟ نِعْمَةَ ٱللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ جَآءَتْكُمْ جُنُودٌ فَأَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ رِيحًا وَجُنُودًا لَّمْ تَرَوْهَا ۚ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرًا ٩

O believers! Remember Allah's favour upon you when ˹enemy˺ forces came to ˹besiege˺ you ˹in Medina˺, so We sent against them a ˹bitter˺ wind and forces you could not see. And Allah is All-Seeing of what you do.

According to Khalid Basalamah, verse 9 of Surah Al-Ahzab indicates that Muslims would control the globe. He began by describing the situation of the *Khandaq* war, during which the Prophet predicted that the Muslims would take Syria, Roman Byzantium, Persia, and Yemen. The horror of Islam recorded in history such as the expansion of Islam to numerous countries as carried out by the *Khulafa'ur Rasyidin* (the four *caliphate*s succeeded the prophet), particularly under the leadership of Umar bin Khattab occurred as the result of their utilization of the *caliphate* system. In the meantime, Muslims in various regions collapsed because they abandoned the *caliphate* system that had existed and practised since the time of the Prophet Muhammad[11]. Basalamah cited the Ottoman Turks as the last *caliphate* in Islamic history.

4.2.2 Shad: 8

أَءُنزِلَ عَلَيْهِ ٱلذِّكْرُ مِنْ بَيْنِنَا ۚ بَلْ هُمْ فِى شَكٍّ مِّن ذِكْرِى ۖ بَل لَّمَّا يَذُوقُوا۟ عَذَابِ ٨

Has the Reminder been revealed ˹only˺ to him out of ˹all of˺ us?" In fact, they are ˹only˺ in doubt of My ˹revealed˺ Reminder.1 In fact, ˹they do so because˺ they have not yet tasted My punishment.

Abdul Somad explains secularization and westernization using surah Shad verse 8. He regarded the secularization and westernization, that replaced the *caliphate* system in Turkey, as

darkness and those who supported it as extinguishing the light of Allah. According to Abdul Somad, when all Islamic systems tried to extinguish the secular state system, there was only one bright spot that was not removed from Islam in Turkey at that time, namely the *Madrasah I mam wa al-Khatib*. A courageous leader named Erdogan was born in this school. In Abdul Somad's conceptualization, Erdogan represents the passage verse "*wa allahu mutimmu nurihi*." He claimed that Islamic education must go on since Muslims are helpless and defeated in politics and economy. He continued by saying that Indonesia could experience the same fate as Turkey[12].

He then mentioned a case during the Jakarta regional head election campaign. The elections for governor of Jakarta in 2017 and president of Indonesia in 2019 are notable examples of the societal polarization caused by political identity which has been happening for a long time and has become more polarized at democratic events[13]. The 2016 Jakarta election campaign between Anies and Ahok coloured by reports of blasphemy by Ahok who, at the time, was a candidate for Governor of DKI Jakarta. Undoubtedly, this infuriated the population, particularly Muslims, who were offended by Ahok's statement. Regarding his remark about verse 51 of surah Al-Maidah in Pulau Seribu, Ahok has issued an apology and clarification. However, the people are already enraged. Muslims have often stated they will not vote for a Christian[14].

In 2019, Indonesia was distinguished by a sharp societal split between the factions backing the two presidential candidates: Jokowi and Ma'ruf Amin on one side and Prabowo Subianto and Sandiaga Uno on the other. Most fundamentalist Islamic groups supported Prabowo-Sandi, whereas nationalist, liberal, and pluralist groups supported Jokowi-Amin[15]. In this situation, social media plays an important role. It is vital to remember that, in addition to globalization, the internet and social media are slowly eliminating national borders and assisting individuals in discovering their identities.

4.2.3 Al-Baqarah: 30

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ إِنِّى جَاعِلٌ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةًۖ قَالُوٓاْ أَتَجْعَلُ فِيهَا مَن يُفْسِدُ فِيهَا وَيَسْفِكُ ٱلدِّمَآءَ وَنَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَۖ قَالَ إِنِّىٓ أَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ٣٠

Remember ˹when˺ your Lord said to the angels, "I am going to place a successive ˹human˺ authority on earth." They asked ˹Allah˺, "Will You place in it someone who will spread corruption there and shed blood while we glorify Your praises and proclaim Your holiness?" Allah responded, "I know what you do not know."

Felix Siauw interprets surah Al-Baqarah [2:30] on his own YouTube channel[16]. This passage was used to characterize the *Caliphate* concept by Felix Siauw. According to him, Allah would choose a caliph, administrator, and representative of Allah on earth. Therefore, Muhammad is the Caliph in a political sense. Therefore, after the Prophet passed away, Abu Bakr was in control of the Muslims. He added that after Abu Bakr's death, his throne was succeeded by Umar, Usman, Ali, and other caliphs in the Islamic dynasty's history. In 1928, when the Ottoman *caliphate* was in control, the Islamic dynasty collapsed, according to him. He added that the West and the East recorded these occurrences in their histories. He utilized this interpretation as the basis of his argument to assert that the concept of *Caliphate* is frightening and that those who fear it do not comprehend it. He continued that the Islamic zenith happened during the *Caliphate*. There was more happiness than terror during those times.

Oemar Mita even stated that those who are allergic to or unable to accept *caliphate* are illiterate and historically illiterate. In their terms, the conquest of Constantinople and the collapse of the Ottoman *Caliphate* or the Ottoman Turks also seem to be topics frequently discussed by these preachers. *Oemar* Mita touched on this topic when he tried to explain *caliphate* that would be established one day after the last *caliphate*, the Ottoman Empire, collapsed in March 1924. In addition, he also discussed the purpose of *caliphate*, which he divided into two parts. First, to protect religion (*Hirasatu al-Din*). Second, to regulate world affairs in the name of religion (*Siyasatu al-Dunya bi al-Din*), he mentioned that the Qur'an and Sunnah as the basis that needs to be followed. The above mentioned celeb-dai explain the concept of *caliphate* and several religious texts that support it by citing verses from the Qur'an, the hadith of the Prophet, and the opinions of scholars who adhere to the *caliphate*'s philosophy.

5 Conclusion

It is clear from the description above that the four celeb-dai who post sermons on YouTube interpret political identity in the shape of *caliphate* ideology toward the state affairs. They choose social media as a new "battlefield" because it has become a valuable alternative space where individuals can express themselves freely. Despite the state's prohibition, the *caliphate*'s ideology still spreads online. This truth can be seen in the state law that forbids HTI, FPI, and other groups that are deemed extremist and dangerous to the country's stability. Additionally, the 2019 Presidential Election and the 2017 Jakarta election both strengthened this political identity in several of their talks on YouTube.

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