

STUDIA ISLAMIKA

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PUBLIC ISLAM IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: LATE MODERNITY,
RESURGENT RELIGION, AND MUSLIM POLITICS

Sumanto Al Qurtuby

HAK ANGKET HAJI:
PILGRIMAGE AND THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF
HAJJ ORGANIZATION IN CONTEMPORARY INDONESIA

Dadi Darmadi

ISLAMIC SCHOOLING IN ACEH:
CHANGE, REFORM, AND LOCAL CONTEXT

Eka Srimulyani

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Islam, Media, and Social Responsibility in the Muslim World

Yeni Ratnayuningsih

In recent years, the internet and social media have played a great role in the society. This has been indicated by, among others, how popular culture in the film and media industry has influenced youth culture, including those in the Muslim world. Meanwhile, certain images of Islam might have changed overtime but the discourse about the Muslim world might have also been shaped and reshaped by the media and the powerful media industry behind it. So, how should the Muslim world respond to this? Should the media be responsible for this change? If the Muslim world, as perhaps many others, has concerns about the way the media shapes our world and our way of perceiving things, what is the best solution to communicate these concerns and convey these messages to the wider audience?

In early December 2013, approximately 150 scholars, researchers, experts, and media practitioners from more than 50 countries gathered in Jakarta, Indonesia to discuss these current issues. They participated in the third international conference on Islam and media, held in the Jakarta Shangri-La Hotel on December 3-5, 2013, focusing on “media and social responsibility” in the Muslim world. Indonesia

was represented by approximately 300 active participants consisting of students, local observers, and media practitioners. The conference, sponsored by the World Muslim League and the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA) of the Republic of Indonesia, was organized by the State Islamic University.

There were eight major different themes discussed in the conference. For three days, the speakers and participants shared their knowledge and experience in these following topics: The World Media and Value-based and Ethical Dimensions, Towards Islamic Vision of Relationship between Media and Society, and Media in Muslim Society (Prospects and Challenges). The other topics include Media in the Muslim World (Examples and Applications), Media Industry – Reality and Expectation, Media in Muslim Minority Communities, Regulating the Electronic Media, and Media in Crises and Political Instabilities. These themes are a clear indication that these Muslim scholars and media experts have been concerned with media and their role expectation and their responsibility to the society. The themes above were selected as part of the continuing project on Islam and media, and this was the second conference on the subject held in Indonesia. Previously, in 2010, the Islam and media conference was held in the Hotel Sultan, Jakarta, and was sponsored by the World Muslim League and the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA) of the Republic of Indonesia was organized by the Jakarta State Islamic University.

The conference invited some guest speakers and featured some of the most prominent scholars, researchers, and experts on Islam and media. The World Muslim League had received numerous paper submissions in English and Arabic since July 2013 but, because of limited time and space available, only selected speakers were able to present their papers. They are, among others, Erick Thohir (owner of Indonesia's Mahaka Group Media and owner of Italy's Inter Milan football club) who spoke on media practice between mission concept and business requirements; Abdulhaq Azzouzi from Morocco who talked about the new media between technological inevitability and value-based necessity.

Other speakers include Nasya Bahfin, a female Muslim professor from Australia, who discussed the social function of media in the light of contemporary IT advancement, and Haidar Bagir (owner of Mizan Publishing and himself a prolific writer on Islam and philosophy in Indonesia) who presented a paper on the Code of ethics for professional

media. Finally, there is Muhammad Siddiqi, a professor of Media and Communication at the University of Western Illinois, USA who discusses the prospects of Islamic media networking.

In his welcoming note and keynote speech, Mr. Jusuf Kalla, the former Vice-President of the Republic of Indonesia, media has played a key role and it has been a very important aspect of the everyday lives in the Muslim world. Indonesia, the biggest Muslim country in the world, has become a major player in media industry, he asserts. In the last few years, Indonesia has produced thousands of TV and radio programs, including those segments on Islam and religious issues, which have been broadcast to more than 250 million viewers in the country. Dr. Komaruddin Hidayat, the President of Jakarta's Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University, says that it is imperative to discuss media and social responsibility as many groups in the Muslim world have become an integral part of the world's media industry, and the increased importance of social media has been tremendous. In a statement made in the press conference after the opening ceremony, he pointed out the case in which hundreds of millions of Indonesians have actively used the internet and social media for daily communication, especially on Facebook and Twitter, the two of world's biggest social media companies.

Beside the dynamism within and during the panels, most of the speakers have agreed on these six following points: *first*, the Muslim Ummah must apply the principles and values of Islam in different areas of social life including the media; *second*, the development of media systems and means as well as the onset of media globalization is good for the Ummah, if it adheres to Islam's civilizational and moral models; *third*, they need for more interaction of Muslim individual and community, and their contribution in enriching the media content and evaluating it through criticism and correction.

The conference also pays attention to certain media discourse that may misrepresent Islam and the Muslim world. Hence, *fourth*, the speakers caution against the hostile media discourse that distorts the Islamic principles, values, and legislations. *Fifth*, the conference urges the media in general and the Islamic media in particular not to involve in provoking the feelings of tribalism, factionalism, and sectarianism. And, finally, all the speakers call on the media especially the Islamic media to adopt objectivity, balance, impartiality, and unbiased criticism

in order to solve the problems of society by focusing on them and creating awareness about them as well as proposing the best solutions on how to address them.

In the final day, Dr. Hassan al-Ahdal (the conference's Steering Committee, the World Muslim League) and Dr. Bahrul Hayat (the Secretary General of the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA) of the Republic of Indonesia) submitted the conference recommendations, written in both Arabic and English. The conference, among others, highlights the positive efforts in the Islamic media, especially the efforts of Muslim minorities, including the *Da'wah* websites. The conference takes into account the relationship between media and society while formulating the media strategies and policies and calling for the application of peace journalism model in Muslim societies particularly the conflicts ridden ones.

In addition to this, the speakers during the conference asked the media practitioners to enroot principles of coexistence, dialogue and respect of other religions in all forms of media. They think that consolidating the culture of dialogue, consultation, transparency and fighting both corruption and abuse of power are equally important. In doing so, they urge Muslim media practitioners in the industry to invite banks and financial institutions to finance media projects that will contribute to the human and cultural development in Muslim countries.

Other speakers emphasize the importance of improving the content, style and layout of Islamic *Da'wah* websites and to hold periodical meetings between those who are responsible for these websites in order to interact with each other for exchange of ideas, experiments and experiences. They also urge the media to highlight the various social projects undertaken by the organizations the civil societies. Since media is also important for education, the conference suggests the importance of circulation of educational curriculums in schools, universities and related institutions to create awareness about the problems of electronic media related to security, privacy and IT crimes.

Beside social responsibility issues, there was a panel discussing the importance of media and moral values, and supporting the Muslim minority case. The conference affirms that in light of the growing importance of advertising, it is necessary to regulate their messages so they do not elevates the status of materialistic values at the expense of

moral values. The issue of Muslims as minority group in Myanmar was brought to the table by several representatives of Rohingya Muslims who came all the way from Mecca to Jakarta to attend the meeting. They specifically asked the conference to support Muslim Minorities in the field of media, so that they have a role in the decision making process of their countries.

The World Muslim League has developed a media research agency, but the recent developments in the internet and the digital media has forced the organization to encourage Muslim countries to create a media center for research and training. Such efforts are important because there have been needs and the demands to promote the development of media industry that pay attention to Islamic values. Therefore, it is imperative for the World Muslim League to consider these following steps: (1) preparation of a guide for Muslim journalists to cooperate on regional and global level; (2) monitor the negative programs, news articles and books released to distort the image of Islam around the world; (3) reach out to the Ministries of Culture, Information, Islamic Affairs and Da'wah organizations and institutions as well as universities to cooperate with them in the preparation of joint programs that would enhance the role of the Islamic media; (4) to start an ongoing program to organize activities, symposium, media forums in the Islamic Centers to face the campaigns directed towards Islam and its symbols.

To critically discuss the above issues, in the final day of the conference, some prominent scholars and experts presented their different approaches to Islam and media. Hamdi Abulaynain from Egypt scrutinizes the reality and expectations in the media industry, especially those he witnessed in Egypt and the Arab world. From Indonesia, Azyumardi Azra, the professor in Islamic history, and the Dean of Graduate School of UIN Jakarta, examines the media in Muslim communities. He specifically questions the way in which Muslims have become more of media consumers, not media producers. Ali Shamou of Sudan presented his paper on how to control and rationalize the electronic media, as digital revolution takes places and took over the conventional media mechanism in our society. And finally, Abdurrahman Al Shobaily from Saudi Arabia argues that the Muslim world should examine the expected media performance in crises and political instabilities as witnessed in many parts of the world. This last point is crucial as many parts of the Muslim world have witnessed

the growing social and communal conflicts. The media should play a positive role in presenting facts and opinions to promote peace and conflict resolution.

The conference concludes that through the discussion of these themes mentioned above, it aims at achieving the objectives of Islam in highlighting the tolerant values, coordinating the efforts of those working in the field of Islamic Media. In his speech, Dr. Abdul Mohsen Al-Turki, the Secretary General of the Muslim World League, took the opportunity to remind us that the conference is a good medium for Muslim scholars and media experts to share their expertise and experiences with one another, raising the level of Islamic mass media, and upgrading the professionalism of Islamic media. Moreover, in line with the final statement of this conference, these scholars and media experts wish the Islamic media to enter the global arena and move from its local and regional settings.

By the same token, Mr. Suryadharma Ali, the Minister of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, expressed the same optimism that Indonesia and the Muslim world will see media as a good opportunity to develop professionalism while maintain a special character that Islam has shown to the world through its long history. However, in his closing statement for the conference, the Minister urges everyone in the media industry to take social responsibility seriously as the media continues to play its key role in the society.

Yeni Ratnayuningsih, *Faculty of Arts and Humanities; International Office, Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University (UIN) Jakarta.*

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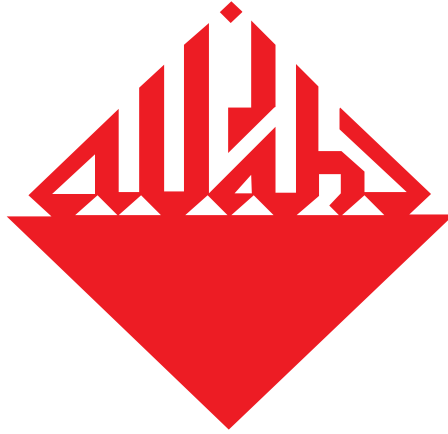
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