

Enhancing the Role of Religious Education in Countering Violent Extremism in Indonesia – **CONVEY Indonesia**

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CONVEY Indonesia aims to build peace in Indonesia and to prevent violent extremism and radicalism through a series of research-survey, policy advocacy, and public interaction based on the potential of religious education. CONVEY Indonesia project covers on the issues of tolerance, diversity, and non-violence among youth.

## Counterbalance the Islamic Literatures among Millennials

## Key Findings

1. Religious books and literatures among students and higher education students have been massively infiltrated by Islamic ideology.
2. Moderate Islamic Religious Education (IRE) textbooks used by teachers at schools and lecturers at universities are not desirable for millennials and much less popular than Islamic literatures.
3. There are 5 styles of Islamic literatures among students: jihadi, tahriri, salafi, tarbawi and popular Islamism.
4. Islamic literature styles are affiliated to Islamic ideology and movement which aim to establish caliphate system.
5. Preaching activists among students, such as ROHIS (Islamic spiritual club) and LDK (students preaching association), have an important role in the distribution of Islamic literatures.
6. Some publishers contribute in the distribution of Islamic literatures, especially in these 4 cities: Solo, Yogyakarta, Jakarta, Bekasi and Bogor.

## Background

Millennials are currently surrounded by various Islamic literatures. Islamic literatures are books which contain Islamic ideology that is centered on the totality of Islam implementation in all aspects of life and leads to the change of state system toward caliphate system, using violence if necessary in order to achieve it. The presence of Islamic literature books is conspicuous, they flood the social landscape among students.

Young generation in Indonesia, especially students, are vulnerable to radicalism, extremism and in the extreme conduct acts of terror in the name of Islam. On a certain level, this is caused by their religious understanding that tends to be scripturalist that results in difficulty while facing structural problems and insecurity about the future.

The fast pace of modernization and globalization has a significant impact for the development of millennials. Millennials were born between the last 20-25 years, they grow and develop in digital culture domination that offers instant lifestyle. This instant lifestyle shapes the pattern and style of life of young generation who want instant gratification which results in lazy individuals who lose their critical thinking. On another level,

young generation is also colonized by culture of capitalistic-consumerism, where an individual is not satisfied if he or she has not bought trendy products in the market. This culture is a new form of colonialism, sooner or later it will erode the existing culture and create individuals who are irrational in facing life.

In the middle of that situation, millennials are tossed in an uncertainty. In this condition, young generation faces massive Islamic ideology through various styles of Islamic literatures. Islamic ideology offers hope and dream about change, that is a system built on a narrative that emphasizes on the importance of returning to Islamic fundamental values and the paragon of early generation and tries to create distance and demarcation between Islam and the world. Islamic ideology leads young generation into thinking that the current system is full of sins, *bid'ah*, *shirk* and infidels and it is common to consider the government as a tyrant (*taghut*). Through those literatures, even though Islamic ideology is considered as a mere utopia, it has an appeal for young generation, because it does not only offer narratives of injustice with passion to fight against the establishment, but also presented in popular language and interesting packaging. This fact portrays the current reality of diversity in Indonesian society

that is apprehensive as well as the necessity to compete.

So, why must Islamic literatures be balanced? Islamic literatures are a funnel of Islamic ideology that convey intolerant and radical notions that lead to violence. Like it or not, Islamic books are in demand among the young generation. Therefore, in order to counterbalance it, another alternative should be given that is by flooding the literature with Islamic books which contain inclusive and moderate values that lead to noble values of humanity.

## Focus of Problem and Methodology

This research focuses on the patterns of production, transmission and distribution of Islamic literatures of various styles and ideological perspectives as well as understanding of its accessibility and acceptance among millennials. This research was conducted in 16 cities, which were Medan, Pekanbaru, Padang, Bogor, Bandung, Solo, Yogyakarta, Surabaya, Jember, Pontianak, Banjarmasin, Makassar, Palu, Mataram, Ambon and Denpasar. These cities were chosen by taking into account their distribution, typology and other important inherent characteristics. As samples, we chose some high schools, vocational high schools and Madrasah Aliyah (Islamic high schools), both public and private schools, as well as public higher education institutions under Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education and Ministry of Religious Affairs and private higher education institutions, all of which represent the diversity map and distribution of middle and higher educational institutions in their respective cities. The data was collected through observation, survey, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) which involved more than 320 student participants, as well as in-depth interview which involved more than 280 informants.

## Exclusivism Among Young Generation

One of the cause of massive Islamic ideology growth through Islamic literatures among students, is their exclusive religious notion. Ideally, religious notion should be directly proportional with civic insight. That means that a good muslim is supposed to be a good citizen. However, in reality it is not so. National survey of Center for the Study of Islam and Society (PPIM) UIN Jakarta concerning religiosity attitude of young generation at schools and universities, confirmed that 91.23% students agree with the implementation of Islamic law. On the caliphate issue, 61.92% students agree with caliphate government system (PPIM, 2017). That means the religious notion among students is apprehensive for the integrity of Pancasila and Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI).

At the same time, the attitude and behaviours of young generation, starting from Islamic spiritual club (ROHIS), students council (OSIS), students executive body (BEM), (students preaching association) LDK, Islamic Students Association (HMI), Muhammadiyah Students Association (IMM), Indonesian Islamic Students Movement (PMII), Indonesian Muslim University Students Association (KAMMI), and even nationalist organizations such as Indonesian National Students Movement (GMNI), Pemuda Pancasila, Pemuda Pancamarga, and National Committee of Indonesia Youth (KNPI) also showed the same thing, which was a tendency of conservative religious spectrum with communal, scripturalist and puritan style (CSRC, 2017).

Exclusive religious notion is an entry point for Islamic ideology among young generation through Islamic literatures which are presented using popular language, easy to understand by bring up popular themes among the youth. The most interesting example is how religious topics are being talked about popularly, such as the term "ta'aruf" shifts the term "dating". This is extremely need for young generation who do not have strong religious basis, but have a desire to look good in religious perspective (*syar'i*). At this point, Islamic literatures appear as an

alternative that is very likely to be consumed by students with ease.

## Measuring the Government's Endeavours

In the midst of the massive growth of Islamic literatures among students, the role of government cannot be denied. The government's effort can be seen from the publication of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) standard textbook for high school students with the title *Pendidikan Agama Islam dan Budi Pekerti* [Islamic Religious Education and Character]. Following the 2013 curriculum, this book tries to present Islamic materials with "moderate-progressive" style, with a certain emphasize on character education. In *Madrasah Aliyah*, the prescribed book in class is the published book from Ministry of Religious Affairs which aims to "maintain interfaith peace and harmony". In addition, the IRE book used among higher education students is Islamic Religious Education for Higher Education Students published by Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education (2016). IRE textbooks both for students and higher education students apparently failed in becoming main reading.

On the other hand, in terms of curriculum, the problem that surfaces is that there are still Islamic materials that have not emphasized dialogue and openness aspect and even lead to intolerant notion (PPIM, 2016). Another problem is that most of IRE teachers did not graduate from IRE department but from general departments so the problem is not only concerning textbooks or curriculum but also there is a mistake in recruiting IRE teachers who do not understand Islamic problems (PPIM, 2016).

Considering that fact, there is a gap between the aspiration and reality. Islamic literatures that contain Islamic ideology with *Jihadi*, *Tahriri*, *Salafi*, *Tarbawi* and popular Islamism styles have succeeded in filling that gap so they influence students' aspiration and outlook. With no doubt, these Islamic literatures are massively consumed by millennials.

## Islamic Literatures and Millennials

This study of UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta Postgraduate finds that there are five categories of Islamic literatures, which are *Jihadi*, *Tahriri*, *Salafi*, *Tarbawi*, and popular Islamism literatures. These literatures flood the Muslim youth and get into their minds.



The graph above shows that the most common literature style that circulates and desired by youth is popular Islamism. Meanwhile, *Jihadi* is the least of all, but it is still incredibly apprehensive. *Salafi*, *Tarbawi*, and *Tahriri* are in the middle. That means those three styles of literature are massively circulated. From this study, the distribution of Islamic literatures in some cities is found: Yogyakarta, Jakarta, Bogor and Bekasi.

### Jihad



Circulated literatures in Solo, with publishers such as Jazera, Arafah, Aqyam, and Gaza Media, manage to disseminate

*Jihad* literatures. This kind of literature portrays the world in a comprehensive war situation due to the neglect of God absolute sovereignty and therefore emphasizes the necessity for muslim to wage *Jihad*. Popular *Jihad* books that sell well among others are *Tarbiyah Jihadiyah* by Abdullah Az-zam, *Jihad Jalan Kami* [Jihad Our Way] by Abdul Baqi Ramdhun and *Kepada Aktivist Muslim* [To Muslim Activists] by Najib Ibrahim. It is interesting to note that this *Jihad* movement is an educational institution that leads to Ngruki

Islamic boarding school in Solo, which is often associated with terrorist group. It does not stop in Solo, *Jihad* literatures are also massively distributed through publishers such as Al-Qomar Media (Yogyakarta), Pustaka Ibn Umar (Bogor), Darul Haq (Jakarta), and Pustaka Imam Syafi'i (Bekasi).

## Tahrir

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No less interesting than *Tarbawi* (*Jihad*) is the *Tahriri* literatures which persistently advocate caliphate ideology initiated by

Taqiyuddin An-Nabhani, the founder of Hizbut Tahrir, an Islamic political party in Lebanon. Literatures that seem to earn students' interest are literary works of Felix J. Siau, Beyond the Inspiration and Muhammad Al-Fatih 1453.

## Salafi

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Next, *Salafi* literatures, *Salafi* is an ideology that offers pure Islamic teachings in accordance with Islamic law during the period of Prophet Muhammad. *Salafi* literatures also sell well in the market with a wider audience, especially muslim youth. *Salafi* books among others is the literary work of Aidh Al-Qa-rni, La Tahzan, published by Qisthi Press. A more classical *Salafi* literature, such as works of Qayyim al-Jauziyah, or *Salafi* literatures written by contemporary *Salafi* authority such as Nasir al-Din al-Albani and Muhammad Salih al-Usaimin, are also circulated a lot among students.

## Tarbawi

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In Solo, there is Era Adicitra publisher that focuses on expanding *Tarbawi* literatures. *Tarbawi* is a tool to strengthen the ideas of Ikhwan al-Muslimin, an Islamic movement based in Egypt. This growth is in line with the transformation of *Tarbiyah* movement from campuses to a political party, which was Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) in the 1990s. Circulated books in public, especially among students, was the works of Hasan Al-Bana

and Sayyid Qutb. Today, *Tarbawi* literatures have transformed into popular literary works such as works of Salim Fillah, *Salam Cinta Para Pejuang* [Love Greetings of Warriors], *Saksikan Aku Seorang Muslim* [Watch that I am a Muslim], and *Dalam Dekapan Ukhwah* [In the Embrace of Ukhwah], and work of Solikhin Abu Izzuddin with the title *New Quantum Tarbiyah: Membentuk Kader Dahsyat Full Manfaat* [New Quantum Tarbiyah: Shaping an Incredible Cadre Full of Benefits]

## Popular Islamism

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Last, the most popular literature among young generation with a wider target audience and popular language presentation is the popular Islamism literatures. Some examples of literature in this category is *99 Cahaya di Langit Eropa: Perjalanan Menapak Jalan Islam Eropa* [99 Lights on the Sky of Europe: A Journey of Treading the Road of European Islam] by Hanum Salsabiela Rais, *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* [Verses of Love], *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* [When Love Extolls] and *Api Tauhid* [Fire of Tawhid] by Habiburrahman El-Shirazi, *Negeri 5 Menara* [Land of Five Towers] by A. Fuadi. *Hapalan Shalat Delisa* [Delisa's Prayer Recitation] by Tere Liye, and *La Tahzan for Hijabers* by Asma Nadia. No less important are books by Felix J Siau such as *Udah Putusin Aja!* [Just Break Up!] and *Yuk Berhijab* [Let's Wear Hijab!]

In the midst of outpouring Islamic literatures, another important finding of this research is that apparently moderate Islamic literatures can still survive and even progress. In order to respond to the invasion of Islamic literatures, Indonesian Muslims try to produce alternative Islamic books. These alternative texts encompass traditional Islamic textbooks, moderate and progressive Islamic textbooks, and counter-narrative textbooks that try to counterbalance the dissemination of radical ideologies. However, it must be acknowledged that they are not as many as Islamic literatures.

It is unfortunate if the government underestimates this problem. The existence of Islamic

literatures cannot be ignored because it is a hotbed of intolerance and radicalism ideologies that lead to terrorism. This is a collective assignment, therefore we need to sit together to formulate the necessary breakthroughs.

## Recommendation

In order to counterbalance the outpouring Islamic literatures, the government needs to take these following strategic actions:

**1** In order to counterbalance the impact of the distribution of Islamic literatures that is spread by Islamic movement network, the government needs to strengthen Islamic literatures which carry the mission to sow moderate mainstream Islam, that can be used as the main guidance for students in studying Islam.

**2** Encourage the achievement of *lajnah penashih* IRE textbooks as an effort to control the infiltration of intolerance and radicalism ideologies in education sector.

**3** The provision of moderate Islamic literatures must be followed by strengthening the awareness and expanding the knowledge of stakeholders who are involved in Islamic religious teaching in schools and higher education institutions, especially teachers and lecturers so they can explain the issues of literatures well.

**4** Urge the Ministry of Religious Affairs, based on Act Number 3 of 2017 concerning Books System, to tightly filter/control the circulated religious books in schools in order to prevent the infiltration of radical ideology.

**5** If the government does not control and restrict Islamic literatures that can be circulated in the market, the government can counterbalance the distribution of dangerous ideological Islamic literatures by encouraging the publication of books which carry the mission to sow moderate mainstream Islam, including the translated works of progressive muslim authors from all over the world, by private publishers with certain lucrative incentives.

**6** Because the target is students, such literary works must be written in popular style and the content must be presented in a crisp and trendy manner that offer practical guidance in facing life challenges without overly dictating. The works can be presented in fiction or comic style or other popular styles.

**7** The government must work together with civil society (universities, academics, Islamic mass organisations such as NU, Muhammadiyah and non-governmental organizations that work on peace and tolerance issues) to formulate an adequate religious enrichment book, which contains religious teaching that is inclusive, tolerant, and upholds the values of humanities.



### Enhancing the Role of Religious Education in Countering Violent Extremism in Indonesia

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