

The Reaction of Pesantren Al Mukmin to Radicalism and Terrorism

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Abstract: This study discusses the reaction of Pesantren Al-Mukmin Ngruki to radicalism and terrorism. Shortly after the Bali bombings in 2002, the world's attention turned to Islamic institution namely *Pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) for the suspected radical perpetrators graduated from Pesantren, such as Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, Imam Samudra, Amrozi, and Mukhlas. Among Pesantrens considered promoting radicalism and terrorism is Pesantren Al-Mukmin Ngruki Solo. The purpose of the research is to find out the reaction and steps taken by Pesantren al Mukmin to dismiss the negative stigma of it's allegedly involvement in radicalism and terrorism. Methodologically, the research is based on a qualitative research with a multi-case and cross-sectional research design and in-depth interview. The results of this research show that Pesantren al-Mukmin is like other Pesantren in Indonesia with national curriculum. Therefore, as an institution it cannot be said that it supports radicalism and terrorism. The serious efforts of the Pesantren al Mukmin have been made to dismiss the negative stigma by moderate education, actively open to outsiders having better relation with government.

1 INTRODUCTION

The increase of radicalism and terrorist attacks in the recent decades in the Southeast Asia and other parts of the world has attracted much attention of world leaders on Islamic Schools for the suspected perpetrators are said to have graduated from radical Pesantren (Islamic Boarding School). The clear examples are 9/11 attacks and Bali Bombing (Hefner, 2009).

Pesantren al Mukmin Ngruki in Solo is one of the pesantrens labelled as the school producing Muslim militants due to involvement of its alumni in some radical movement and terrorist attacks in Indonesia and Southeast Asia such as Amrozi, Imam Samudra and Mukhlas (Misra, 2003).

Sidney Jones stated that most people who commit acts of terror in the country have estuary to the Pesantren Al Mukmin Ngruki as termed "Ngruki Network" (Jones, 2002)

This negative image has prompted the pesantren to make some efforts to dismiss the stigma since Pesantren Ngruki is generally like other pesantren having curriculum to master Islamic knowledge. Thus, this study is trying to find what are the reactions and steps taken by Pesantren al Mukmin to dismiss

the negative image. Hence, the general overview of the pesantren, its effort and moderation education strategy will be discussed.

2 METHODS

This is a qualitative research with multi cases and cross-sectional research design with participative observation. Data is collected through in depth interview and library research concerning previous studies on the topics. In this study, the researchers interviewed leaders of Pesantren, staff, teachers, students, alumni and surrounding society. The data sought to find in Pesantren is related to two things. Firstly, the written documents such as curriculum, books, activity schedule which is obtained from Pesantren office. Secondly, the reaction, response and effort of pesantren to counter the stigma. This is found by in-depth interview and participatory research during researcher's stay in Pesantren al-Mukmin Ngruki. The information obtained is compared, examined with other relevant sources on the topics. This collected data is then interpreted and used to answer the research questions above.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Pesantren Al Mukmin and the Possible Cause Factors of Radicalism

Pesantren Al Mukmin is founded in 1972 by six persons. They are Abdullah Sungkar, Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, Yoyo Rosywadi, Abdullah Baradja, Abdul Qohar, H. Daeng Matase, and Hasan Basri. The whole process of education in Pesantren Al Mukmin Ngruki guided by a single entity *ruh* (spirit) is called "Panca Jiwa Pesantren", namely Sincerity, Modesty, Self-Reliance, Muslim brotherhood and the willingness of Sacrifice. In addition, Pondok Pesantren Al - Mukmin Ngruki has motto Shalih, Smart.

Viewed from its curriculum, it does not differ from other pesantrens and even the program is in accordance with the Government Program both the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia. Therefore institutionally, there is no political paradigm of high politics and low politics into a target the goal in boarding school education.

It is quite interesting, why radical thinking among students and alumni appear, in fact they are never formally taught about radicalism. There are several opportunities that could open the mindset of students toward understanding the thinking of radical movements

Firstly, books taught informally in Pesantren Ngruki simultaneously form the mindset of the students. This pesantren teaches various books covering field's faith, Islamic law, Quranic exegesis, Arabic, and English. Some of the texts written by the characters Muslim brotherhood movement or known as *Ikhwanul Muslimin* (Greg Fealy-Anthony Bubalo, 2005) like in Egypt the works of Fathi Yakan, Sayyid Quthb and Hassan Al-Banna which are studied informally by individual (*sorogan*) or in small group (*bandongan*). Book *Al-Wala' wa al-Bara'* works of Said salim Al-Qahthani and *Tarbiyah Jihadiyah* (Jihad education) work of Abdullah Azzam are also used in particular or public discussion. Finally, the study of this book played a vital role in influencing the mindset of the students to have a view and a principle similar to that in the book (Mubarak, 2016). One of the texts used in Pondok Pesantren Al - Mukmin Ngruki Solo is written of Hassan al-Banna. He was the reformer and a founder of one of the world's largest Islamic movement, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. According to him, God establishes the obligation of jihad to the Muslims, not

to disseminate hostility for personal ambitions, but to protect and ensure the *dakwah* of peace.

Secondly, some cases faced by the preachers of this school or other Islamic leaders when in contact with the government have always been in the news and actual theme in a variety of occasions, such as public lectures, sermons on Friday, the Subuh lectures and other events in Pondok Pesantren Al - Mukmin Ngruki Solo. Conflicts with the government raises the resistance of students against the government position.

Thirdly, The influence of the ideology of the movement obtained from study outside of formal education has influenced the thinking of most students. Effect of thinking about Islamic movement ideology has spawned radical movements and terror in most alumni of Pesantren Al Mukmin Ngruki Solo. One of the occurrences that drag this institution is the first Bali bombings in 2002. Among the alumni of Pesantren Al Mukmin Ngruki Solo involved in the movement of radicalism and terrorism are Farhan Mujahidin, Firmansyah, and Muchsin Tsani. According to *the International Crisis Group*, some of alumni of Pondok Pesantren Ngruki who are involved of terrorist namely Gempur Budi Angkoro alias Jabir. Joni Achmad Fauzan, Mohamed Ihsan, Sardona Siliwangi, Tohir, Toni Togar, Zulkarnaen. Ali Gufron and Mukhlas are sibling of Amrozi, defendants of Bali bombing. From the various names above, Pesantren Ngruki is always accused of being radical.

Thus, the radicalization of the thought of the alumni of Pesantren Al Mukmin Ngruki involved with a network of radicalism and terrorism, is in line with their experience of seeing and perceiving oppression, coupled with the justification of the texts of the Qur'an and hadith understood partially, literally, and outside the context of the actual verses. Such scholarly transmission process usually occurs in the context of global political conflicts such as in Afghanistan, Iraq, the southern Philippines, and Poso in Indonesia. The network is not formal and non-specific. Networking among alumni of pesantren al-Mukmin who have settled in various boarding schools abroad, often encourage radicalization easily and in turn influence other alumni. The alumni's thought is even more radical if they are connected to Jihadist in Afghanistan. No doubt, the original understanding of rational often turns into a radical understanding and textual literalists. Such knowledge transfer process also occurs in other Islamic boarding schools, which have a network with several boarding schools in the Middle East.

3.2 The Reactions and Steps Taken to Counter the Negative Stigma

The Ministry of Religious Affairs Indonesia states the curriculum and Islamic teachings in Pesantren Ngruki does not indicate the presence of radicalism and terrorism as well. The advisor of Pesantren Ngruki, Wahyudin, said the Pondok Pesantren Al Mukmin Ngruki, as institution, should not be linked, either directly or indirectly to the criminal acts of terrorism and radicalism occurring in Indonesia. The director of Pesantren Al Mukmin, Ibnu Chanifah, added that the pesantren never teach, direct, let alone approve acts of violence. More specifically, if there are alumni of Pesantren Al Mukmin Ngruki commit criminal acts of terrorism or engaging in actions directly or indirectly in terrorism, the pesantren leaders handed over entirely to the legal process, so it should be treated based on legal process in the court.

In the eye of Pesantren Al Mukmin Ngruki, terrorism and radicalism that have occurred are closely related to political, religious and economic interests, and this should be shunned by all parties, especially by the policy makers and leaders. Therefore, the pesantren objects to those who commit radicalism and terrorism on behalf of Pesantren Ngruki.

Pesantren in Indonesia generally only teaches about Islam *rahmatan lil Alamin* since Islam brings mercy to all mankind not violence and intolerance. Pesantren Al Mukmin declares that the pesantren is open to anyone. Guests who come to pesantren could find out programs, the strategic plans, vision and mission, as well as a curriculum that teaches students.

The position of Pesantren Al Mukmin Ngruki on jihad and suicide bombings can be seen in the "Declaration of Ngruki". The declaration suggests that the alumni of Ngruki will always struggle *fi sabilillah* (in the God's path) in enforcing Islamic law. They declared that jihad here should not be defined as terrorist-jihad style which permit killing the innocent people but it is the jihad directed in accordance with the demands of the Koran and promoting peace.

One of the efforts of Al Mukmin Ngruki Solo in countering Radicalism and Terrorism ideology is deradicalization. Deradicalization in Pesantren is not only done through a form of discussion and rhetoric way, but also through concrete action by tolerance, even to some points provide the students with the skills to develop their creativity in the framework of the economic development of the people. This is in line with their view that radicalism and terrorism is sometimes caused by social injustice.

Deradicalization must be carried out within the framework of the strengthening effort to reduce the gaps of social, economic and political life enabling to trigger the growth of understanding of violence leading to acts of terror.

According to Wahyudin, the solutions of radicalism are: *first*, respecting the aspirations of fundamental Islamists by means of dialogue and democratic way; *second*, treating them humanely; *Third*, not to fight them with the same radical and violent way. The extremely radical groups should be pulled to the moderate positions; *Fourth*, giving freedom of thought for all the groups that will manifest a healthy dialogue and constructive criticism; *Fifth*, stopping to label infidel (*kafir*) to others; *sixth*, studying religion properly in accordance with the methods that have been determined by Islamic scholars who promote a peaceful Islam for all. *Seventh*, understanding Islam completely not partially.

Deradicalization conducted in Pesantren Al Mukmin Ngruki is trying to use a peaceful manner and constitutional way through education, dakwah, economic empowerment, social, cultural and political efforts which are called the peaceful Jihad. According to Louay Fatoohi, Peaceful jihad is the approach, attitude, and practice that ensure Muslim is in continuous progress toward the ideal state of man: perfect servant hood to Allah (Fatoohi, 2009). The failure to recognize peaceful jihad as the *main*, not only as *one*, form of jihad is bound to reflect negatively on the soul and character of the Muslim and his spiritual progress. This failure effectively indicates the person's willingness to cohabit with various bad qualities that he has.

In Indonesia, this peaceful Jihad terminology popularized by Ronald Lukens-Bull in *A Peaceful Jihad: Negotiating Identity and Modernity in Muslim of Java*. The use of terminology by Lukens-Bull is motivated by his curiosity to the phenomenon of Islam in Indonesia and other practices of Islam in the other countries, which promote the harmony and peace.

Pesantren Al-Mukmin Ngruki is trying and working hard in an effort to erode the negative stigma by a way of press conferences and seminars. Actually, other things should be done by pesantren Al-Mukmin Ngruki is to be more open and frequently establish political communication, and seminars, especially with parties outside pesantren either by experts, scholars and even the parties which have negative view of Pesantren Ngruki, so there is a common ground and similarities perceptions of those who label the pesantren as radical school.

3.3 The Better Relation with the Government and Openness of Pesantren Al Mukmin Ngruki to Government Aids

There are at least three governmental aids showing the better relation of Pesantren al Mukmin with government nowadays. This kind of openness also indicates the moderate thinking and the changing perception among leaders within Pesantren al Mukmin Ngruki to cope with the government. This is because, in the past, the pesantren leaders are well known for their opposition to the New Order era. The three grants are as follows: Firstly, The pesantren has received the grant from the local administration, such as receiving the fund from the mayor of Solo to build a bridge connecting Pesantren directly to Solo. Secondly, receiving the Grant of School Operational Aid, known as BOS (*Bantuan Operasional Sekolah*) from the government. Thirdly, some senior teachers including the director already receive the certification fee, an additional salary from the government. This is interesting to see since the mayor of Solo is a non-Muslim major and this openness is thought to be in the moderate position for some radical parties do not cooperate or receive any help from non-Muslim. The Grant of School Operational Aid and the certification fee received by Pesantren constitute their acceptance to the government for some radicals would not receive from government not applying Islamic rules.

The better relation with the government is considered to be a part of Pesantren efforts to raise a trust from government and at the same time to counter the negative stigma from the outsiders who accuse Pesantren of being exclusive and radical.

Apart from that, the students of Pesantren al Mukmin Ngruki also followed *Pancasila* education on April 15, 2016 in collaboration with the Ministry of the Domestic Affairs. The seminar is on "Revitalization and Actualization of the identity of Pancasila in the Framework Strengthening the Nation" for the faith-based community. This shows a serious effort of pesantren Ngruki to reduce the stigma that the school respects the diversity, far from being radical and is also expected to dismiss the assumption that the pesantren rejects Pancasila as the pillars of Indonesian state. There are 116 students attending this event. The director also suggests that nothing to fear of Pesantren Ngruki. To establish a good image in the eyes of the public and the government, one of the efforts is launching a VCD on learning activities

at the boarding school, so any party could observe their activities.

4 CONCLUSIONS

As an institution, Pesantren al Mukmin Ngruki has seriously made an effort to dismiss the negative stigma. Pesantren al Mukmin Ngruki has a standardized curriculum like other "Pesantren" Indonesia and as an institution it cannot be said that it supports terrorism. Yet, there are some factors could provoke the students or alumni to have radical mindset like books of Jihad, provoking words, and unjust treatment and pressure of New Order government of Indonesia to their leaders and alumni who are emotionally associated. The involvement of its alumni in act of terror occurs after the students graduated from the school and being close with the radical alumni, as Sidney Jones, as "Ngruki Network". Yet, labelling the current pesantren of Ngruki to "radical pesantren should be put into question. The openness of the Pesantren to outsiders including government aid indicates its effort to counter the negative stigma. The pesantren is well received by surrounding society and the number of student's increases (1300 students). The field research also shows the faction within the pesantren. "The ruling faction" which condemns terrorism is trying to counter the stigma. Although Pesantren Ngruki is trying to reduce the negative stigma, the success of it in the future depends on to what extend the pesantren is consistent with its step to apply peaceful Jihad.

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