

Family Homicide Bombing in Contemporary Indonesia: The Use and Abuse of the Qur'an as Reflected in Media Coverage

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Abstract: This paper discusses the ironic practice documented in the media (internet) about the fact that Islam (the Qur'an and Hadith) evidently forbids suicide, yet some Muslims from time to time end their lives for various reasons. The recent suicide was even surprising because it was done by Muslim families themselves. The QS 4: 29-30 informs clearly that God forbids suicide and anyone does it will be sent to the Hell. Some Hadiths narrated by Bukhary and Muslim inform that God will punish anyone who ends his or her life. The phenomena become more interesting to discuss since element of societies recently abused religion to do so by utilizing it to end other lives. The suicide bombing was done by a family, the concept of the smallest institution in societies in which every social force idealizes it as the place where reproduction is legitimately carried out, fundamental values such as honesty, bravery, justice, and equity are nurtured, and love is planted. Using a descriptive-analysis, this study identifies how this irony of the discourse and practice of suicide as represented in the media can be explained, what it does represent in terms of being Muslims in modern era. The study finds that the discussed media use different perspectives in documenting the phenomena of family homicide bombing recently occurred in Indonesia, and resulted in different viewpoints. However they have similar insight when it comes to the condemnation of terrorism, and to the need of reinterpreting religious texts and re-evaluating how to educate family nowadays.

1 INTRODUCTION

If we read news in media (printed or virtually) on May 13-14, 2018, and days of May 2018 after that, we were shocked to hear information about the blast done by unprecedented agency, i.e. one whole family. Family suddenly becomes vulnerable social institution because of its new dangerous potential that can be exploited. The family of Dita Oepriarto appeared to be a showcase of this worrying social phenomenon.¹ The blast done by the Dita family, and two other blasts were done by families. The blast also took place at Rusunawa Wonocolo (Apartment and Store), Sidoarjo, and at Malpolrestabes (Local Police Office), Surabaya. Moreover, though not done by the whole members of a family, studies informs that 298 out of 1214 members of terrorists have relatives or familial relationship. (Trisno S. Sutanto, *Kompas*, May 19, 2018, 7).

By the emergence of this case, we are awakened that the family is no longer a safe place for us to nurture all good values and life system. The fact that the Dita family are Muslims is another important point to be taken into consideration. Why were these

strong messages of the religious sources not able to prevent them in so doing? How did they manage in this distorted meaning of the message of the religious sources into an act of violence? What factors that influenced them to do so? How this horrible event covered in media? And there are many questions that we can pose to understand this discourse.

Since the family is traditionally seen as the vital principle of functions and values of the society and contemporarily perceived by some as having danger of terrorism as well, media takes serious consideration to cover this perilous discourse. Nevertheless, in covering the discourse and practice of religion and violence in relation to the family media often give an unbalanced and inaccurate picture. (Reid Hutchins, Vol. 9, No. 11 [November 2017], 7) Therefore the media is also a theme of interesting discussion. Using a descriptive- analysis, this study identifies how this irony of the discourse and practice of suicide and family as represented in the media can be explained, what does it represent in terms of being Muslims in modern Indonesia. To begin with, the paper discusses method, and the concept of suicide, *istishhadi*, and *inhimas*

(martyrdom) and family. It then presents the collected data of study and discusses them with existing discourse.

2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND BASIC THEORY

2.1 Literature Review

The emergence of suicide bombing or homicide bombing has attracted many scholars to study further. Accordingly a number of publication books, research reports and articles appeared in circulation. For example, Talal Asad (2007) questions the accusation of some over a number of terror and at the same time condemn the banality and horror of suicide bombing. He tries to clarify this delicate issue by explaining the nature of suicide bombing as the strategy of movement.² Robert J. Brym and Bader Araj (2006) adds the explanation of why one did a suicide bombing. While many scientists found this act of terror mainly as a strategy to threaten enemy, both find that suicide bombing has been used in the case of Intifada movement for both strategy and retaliation over Israelis who have been attacking and making their life in miseries.³ Scott Atran (2003) published his research on the genesis of terrorism taking Middle East Countries as the site of the study. He finds that poverty and ignorance as the required qualities that make one easily do a prostrate act of terror.⁴ Inspired by Israel who learned how to understand terrorism, Bruce Hoffman (2003) invites readers also to learn how "to recognize and disrupt the step on the path to suicide attacks."⁵

The emergence of family suicide or homicide bombing surprises many including scholars to find out what does it mean in the midst of the increased awareness of respecting life, and why some families do that, and how those acts are dealt. Yet, studies on this issue are still scarce. This paper is an initial and small effort of these needed many studies to be held.

2.2 Basic Theory

The term Muslim family refers to a certain social structure in which relations and mutual role expectations are prescribed by religion, strengthened by law, and sustained by society. (Hammudah Abdal-Ati and Hamidah Abdal-Ati, 1974, 38) Islam underlines a number of basic guidelines to nurture the inclusive nature of the family, respecting each

individual member of it as well as expecting them to maintain kindness and moderation (QS. 2: 177-182, 225-237; 4: 176; 17: 23-26; 49: 10). (39) (Hammudah and Hamidah, 1974, 39-40) In short, Islam emphasizes that Muslim family is

"...the base of individual identity, the strongest safeguard of sexual morality, and the most natural of bonds. Human societies have experienced different ways of sexual gratification, of kinship inclusion and exclusion, and of individual identity. But Islam, as a divine religion, approves only of those that are both natural and wholesome. And nothing seems more so than a family system based on the natural blood ties and/or marital commitments and reinforced by a community of believers." (Hammudah and Hamidah, 1974, 40)

The term suicide may indicate an act of self-inflicted starvation or hunger such as what happened in Ireland in 1980s, or suicide by fire or self-immolation such done by Buddhist monk in Saigon in the war in Vietnam (James M Poland, Vol. 27, No. 2, 2003, 103-4) Suicide is done for various reasons either because of deprivation (Robert J. Brym and Bader Araj, Vol. 84, No. 4 9, Jun., 2006, 1971) or of political reasons, (Poland, Vol. 27, No. 2, 2003, 103-4), or culture (Brym and Araj, Vol. 84, No. 4 9, Jun., 2006, 1972), or strategic choice. (Brym and Araj, Vol. 84, No. 4 9, Jun., 2006, 1972-3) Normatively, the QS 4: 29-30 informs obviously that God prohibits ending one's life and threatens anyone who does it by sending him/her to the Hell. Bukhary and Muslim narrated Hadiths which inform that God will penalize anyone who does suicide. Agreed with the critical view of Murad M Khan, Robert Goldney, and Riaz Hassan, I prefer to use the term homicide bombing rather than the term suicide bombing. It is because the act of suicide entails the feeling of frustration, and unbearable psychic pain which make one does not have any other option except to end her or his life as explained above. (Murad M Khan, Robert Goldney, and Riaz Hassan, Vol. 38, No. 3, 2010, 482)

The term *istishhadi* and *inghimas* refer to similar meaning, "martyrdom." (Muhammad Haniff Hassan, Vol. 9, No. 7, July 2017) the term *inghimas* constitute "an act of self-immersion into enemy ranks" or attacking the enemy in such a manner where the likelihood of survival is low. This is done with three primary motivations: (a) to inflict maximum losses on the enemy; (b) to motivate Muslim fighters to fight and (c) to attain martyrdom." (Hassan, Vol. 9, No. 7, July 2017) Muslim clerics infers to the Qur'an on

several verses such as QS. 2: 207, QS. 4: 74 [human total service to God]. The direct reference on *inghimas* can be found in Hadiths. Muslim narrated a story of human shield to protect the Prophet Muhammad in Uhud war; al-Shafi'i told a story of an Anshor (a resident of Madinah who welcome and helped the Prophet and his Companions to reside at Madinah) got himself killed by the enemy in order to protect other Companions. One Companion named 'Amr bin Umayyah saved from killing and reported the event. These religious sources have been abused by contemporary muslim radicals to legitimize their actions. (Hassan, Vol. 9, No. 7, July 2017) In the past, Muslims did it for the reason of self-defense, but now they abuse them for tactical radical political movement.

2.2.1 Methods

The study focuses on discourse as social practice in which news narrated in the newspapers were seen as representation of the certain meanings of values or systems on Muslim Indonesia about the discussed subject. The data used in this study is confined to the event of suicide bombing happened on May 13-14, 2018 in Surabaya and Sidoarjo reported mainly by *Kompas*, and *Republika* in the same month of the blast itself. *Kompas* is well known newspaper in Indonesia established since 1965 and receives the highest rating in the country. *Kompas* adopts a careful and adaptable policy towards the state policy and majority's tendencies by keeping its reports in balance and avoiding news that sparked disunity and disharmony (Anett Keller, 2009, 45-6). *Republika* is a leading Islamic newspaper in the country, which more than 100 000 circulations each day. Though the newspaper adopts Islam as its identity, it applies a moderate policy in reporting its news. (Keller, 2009, 82-100) In a sense these sources represent moderate coverage of the reported discourse. Other virtual sources are also consulted as long as they are relevant to the discussion.

The schemes of this study are: 1. Reading related documents such books, articles, and news; 2. Formulating basic assumption, and research problem; 3. Determining main data and selecting method of data collection; 4. Choosing method of data analysis; 5. Evaluating the collected data and analysing them; 6. Presenting findings and discussing them with other scholars' findings; 7. Answering the research problem, and recommending it for further studies and for practical purposes.

3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Kompas Narration

As usual, being known media for its careful coverage, *Kompas* reported the blast of suicide bombing in Surabaya in balance style not to accuse adherent of any religion, featuring the view or report of state authority, religious clerics, scholars, and people in general. It documented this blast as a condemned social event. The word "the Qur'an" once was used but in the context of reporting a vendor who interacted with the family of suicide bombing a day before the blast.⁶

Kompas highlighted the comment and order of the President of Republic of Indonesia Joko Widodo which asserted that this terror cannot be tolerated, and asked Police Department to take any measure to tackle down terrorism in this country. The vice President who is also the head of Indonesian Council of Mosque, Yusuf Kala, allegorically using religious language in criticizing the suicide bombers by saying "not that easy to enter the Paradise." He was afraid that bombers actually would not enter it. Instead, they would enter the Hell. This comment was given at Century Atlet Hotel, Jakarta on May 15, 2018.⁷

On another coverage *Kompas* documented the police's work on the case, reporting that the doers of the blast not only involved conventional actors (men), but also new ones, mother/woman and children. In another reports it also informs that the police has caught about 23 accused terrorists of the Surabaya blast.⁸ the Police also reported that the tree blasts killed 10 peoples and injured 41 peoples.⁹ A little daughter AAP (7) who was brought by their parent Tri Ernawati (mother), Tri Murtono (father), to do suicide bombing at local police office in Surabaya, was reported to be under the state custody.¹⁰

In another report, *Kompas* documented Michael Hangga Wismabrata's writing. He explained why someone could get involved in terrorism. Quoting Harvey Whitehouse's theory, Wismabrata explains that the desire to unify oneself into the intended group played important role to make someone is willingly ready to die for the sake of the group or of certain religious belief. This faith is stronger than the faith of doing suicide bombing for the sake of collective identity, due to the strong feeling of brotherhood in the group. He also proposes alternative solution on how to handle terrorists effectively by knowing what or who they stand for, and why they are doing it. He explains that

"Deradicalization will succeed if it is able to eliminate the feelings of siblings within

the militant group, and it will be very helpful in the process of mentoring. The role of parents and families, as well as other environments such as schools, jobs, and religious leaders, will help them emerge with new life motivations. 'Only by understanding the emergence of commitment within the group can we gain trust and cooperation, while limiting the possibility of inter-group conflict.'"¹¹

On May 14, 2018, *Kompas* presented an analytical report, focusing on the role of woman in the act of terror. The report argues that the Surabaya bombing phenomenon sends strong message of the women's involvement in radical movements. It identifies that woman exploits certain understanding of the teaching of religion, i.e. jihad in a certain way; women not only have a dream to smell heaven through their husbands, but they also have their own roles by involving themselves and by manipulating their children in this false belief.¹² In another report, *Kompas* highlighted this point by quoting the opinion of Said Nassir, former member of Jama'ah Islamiyyah. He explained that some members of terrorists whose husband died as martyr in the suicide bombing received stigma and harassment from societies. So, instead of receiving more miseries, it is better to joint their husband and father of their children in the heaven. It concluded the report by presenting the view of Chairman of the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) Susanto who criticized the involvement of children in acts of terrorism as "not humane..."¹³

3.2 Republika Narration

As an Islamic newspaper, *Republika* reported the news of suicide bombings in Surabaya that occurred on May 13-14, 2018, by maintaining that Islam is not the religion of terror but the religion that loves peace. At the same time, *Republika* is also like other newspaper agencies in which it tried to pay attention to the interests of the nation and the integrity of the nation. All of these were done by way of reporting the views of heads of state, police, Majelis Ulama Indonesia/MUI (Indonesian Council of Ulama), Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and Muslim clerics/ Muslim thinkers.

Republika made a headline taken from the quote of the President of Indonesian Republic, "Jokowi: Aksi Teror tidak terkait agama apapun!" (Jokowi: Terror Action is not related to any religion!). It retained his view saying that "suicide bombing is really cruel and barbaric, especially involving children."¹⁴ *Republika* also reported a fairly rapid response from the

Indonesian Police. It was reported that the police arrested forty one suspected suicide bombers that occurred in the city of Surabaya and Sidoarjo. Four of them died at the scene. It is reported that the police did this in order to provide a sense of security to the community. General Tito K explains that these blasts give us two lessons: terrorism can be happened to any city including to Surabaya, and terrorism has now involved families, including mothers and children.¹⁵

MUI, represented by head of Dakwah, KH. Chalil Nafis was also asked by *Republika*. He asserted, that the Qur'an does not teach evil deeds as mentioned in QS. 2: 195. "Islam forbids doing something self-destructive, especially while endangering and even killing others." It is therefore he condemned the suicide bombing that occurred in Surabaya. He hoped that the state investigate the incident, and prevent the occurrence of terror acts in the future. He expects that MUI can take part in increasing people's awareness of terrorist and destructive acts.¹⁶

Republika also retained the opinion of Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Yousef Al-Othaimeen. He strongly condemns the terror occurred on May 13-14 in Surabaya, and it tarnished the name of Islam. He also expected that this was not related with any religion, any citizenship and any race. It is a crime against humanity and he deeply expressed his condolences to Indonesia, and expected that Indonesia can soon recover. At the same report, *Republika* also presented Minister of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia's call, Lukman Hakim Saifuddin. He invited religious figures and community leaders in response to the three bomb explosions in Surabaya, to "pray that the terrorists can return to their humanitarian identity and avoid any form of criminal action that is a crime against humanity."¹⁷

Quoting the view of Sofyan Tsauri, a terrorism observer and former terrorist and former member of Brimob, "Nak, mau *nggak* kamu ikut Abi dan Umi ke surga? *Nggak* sakit *kok*?" (Son, would not you follow father and mother to Heaven? It would not hurt), Syafi'i Ma'arif in his essay condemned the action, and remained us that "the phenomenon of the future threats of Indonesian children by the suicide bombing practice should awaken us all that religion in the hands of terrorists has been used as a tool to make fasâd (disaster and destruction) on earth, something that is repeatedly condemned by the Qur'an."¹⁸

3.3 Other Narration

Four other reports -by Hannah Beech, Muktitu Suhartono and Rukmini Callimachi, Joe Cochrane, and Sidney Jones- are also consulted in order to add other dimensions about the issue. Similar with the coverage of *Kompas* and *Republika*, these four reports also condemned the recent suicide attacks in Indonesia, with one additional information on the institution which claimed responsibility for the terror, and an analysis from senior researcher on terrorism and radicalism, Sidney Jones.

Beech wrote a report based on what she could identify from the site right away after the blast. She identified about what really happened and who were really the bombers, and why they did that? She found that everything looked quite normal, and realized “that we would never know the truth”.¹⁹ Saying that she seemed being careful in order not to miss-judge the event. Suhartono and Callimachi added other reports, detecting the Islamic State’s (IS) claim of responsibility for suicide bombing in Surabaya. In IS terminology that suicide bombing called as a martyrdom operation, and it has three modes of attack: a car bomb, a suicide vest and a motorcycle-borne bomb.²⁰ Joe Cochrane named this suicide attack as “a new and shocking development” in Indonesia” as woman and kids participated in this kind of terror.²¹

Jones, *director of the Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict in Jakarta, Indonesia*, made an analysis which was published in <https://www.npr.org>, ten days after the blast. As indicated in the chapter of her essay, “Family Suicide Attacks: Indonesia Must Deradicalize Mothers And Kids Too” Jones urges that Indonesia is expected to pay attention more seriously on the effort to deradicalize woman and kid. The recent suicide attacks are strong signal that the radical movement is there in the country and connected to international terrorism network. This is corroborated by systematic evidence, both in the form of network relationships as with the Islamic State (IS) and in the form of real action in the field.

In another part, Jones believes that the involvement of families -particularly mother/woman and children- won’t be “the new normal” because the terrorist families are also the same with the rest of families for their care for them, and most of them won’t readily get involved in suicide attack in Indonesia.” She understood from social workers who have talked to the children who were survived from the bombing that one of the older sons did not want to participate in, and the neighbors witnessed crying hysterically. However she suggested that Indonesia to improve its effort to deradicalize families. The process of

religious radicalization in Indonesia is still worrying because of the false belief over the accused enemies who have been committing real and threatening injustice and destruction to Muslims. The current surge in Surabaya shows the process of radicalization taking place at two levels: pragmatic and theological. Many in Indonesia ponder the police as corruptive and abusive, yet the institution has a lot of offices in the country. The other, a number of Muslims still have a theological perspective that the Christianity is the enemy of Islam in which some of its adherents feel compelled to make a move before they really destroy Muslims.²² What she mentioned as the extremist ideology, “Christians and Jews are the enemies of Islam and will seek to destroy it,” was actually found in QS. 2: 120. Nowadays, many abuse the verse for political purposes due to its clear literal wording of the verse. The verse itself is about a reminder for the Prophet Muhammad and now for Muslims to abandon the effort to make them happy and like you. Instead, approach ourselves to ask God's pleasure after we have done a proper effort.

Finally, she suggests that the government of Indonesia make a more serious effort to deradicalize terrorists’ radical understanding of their religion not only limited to their husbands who are in jail, but more importantly to whole family members in particular mothers. Mothers in a peculiar situation can be turned out as hate-builders. By this more thorough approach, it is expected that they would disengage from act of violence. The government is strongly expected to take lesson learned from the Surabaya blast by reevaluating the existing deradicalization program in order to make a more effective program that can immunize the whole family members from radical and terrorist thinking.²³

Considering the recent media reports of family-affected suicide bombings in the city of Surabaya and Sidoarjo, some findings are interesting to discuss. First, the use of religion (al-Qur'an and Hadith) in the act of terror, *Kompas*, and especially *Republika* avoid the association of the incidence of terror acts with religion. *Kompas* and *Republika* reported a number of government opinions to thinkers to affirm religious discontent with acts of terror in two cities in East Java in May13-14, 2018. Normatively, Islam condemns suicide as a foremost immorality with perpetrators left without entry to heaven as indicated in the Qur'an mentioned above. (M Khan, Goldney, and Hassan, Vol. 38, No. 3, 2010, 482; Brym, Vol. 6, No. 4, [Fall 2007], pp. 40-45) Reid Hutchins further explains that religion (al-Qur'an and Hadith) has been abused for political purposes, as did the Islamic State. (Reid

Hutchins, Vol. 9, No. 11 [November 2017], 7) The tactics of terror have been widely used in various countries in the last 20 years. Moreover, concerns among some that there is a new pattern of homicide bombings is reasonable because there seems to be a worrying developments in conservatism among young Indonesians, as indicated by a research done CSRC-PPIM UIN Jakarta carried out during September 2017-January 2018. (Chaidir S. Bamualim et.al., 2018, h. 2)

Secondly, the coverage of women and children's involvement in the Indonesian bombing attacks which happened recently has been alarming. Although it is only the first occurrence, but the precedent has occurred on December 16, 2016, a failed bomb attempt by Dian Yulia Novi. The author agrees with Sidney Jones's analysis that assures the reader that women and children will not actually be involved so far if their beliefs and understanding are not manipulated by the process of radicalization. This is supported by the fact that women in Indonesia have been so far exposed to modernization and education even to a high degree. This is reinforced by a much more open Indonesian culture. While in some other Islamic countries like Pakistan the situation is somewhat less favorable because it is still conservative where women are very vulnerable to being manipulated and radicalized. (Sana Noor, Vol. 3, No. 11 [November 2011], pp. 1-3)

Finally, thirdly, media coverage of attempts to reduce or even eliminate acts of suicide is desperately needed to be followed up. This is to ensure the deradicalization process runs properly. However, more thorough and comprehensive efforts need to be made by all parties and in particular the state, since the state is the most social agency that has the ability to make changes. The process of deradicalization must start from education, meaning that there is a need to review the curriculum, especially in elementary to senior secondary education. No less important is the improvement of religious education curriculum to be more open and tolerant again. Socially, family institutions also need attention. Majelis Taklim, Islamic studies and counseling conducted by the state apparatus are also required to take an important role in efforts to deradicalize religious merit. In short, all parties need to encourage this effort so that events in Surabaya and Sidoarjo will not happen again in the future.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The emergence of family homicide in Indonesia is alarming, as this kind of terror endangers the most

fundamental institution of society where every member of family is nurtured and nurtures expected good qualities needed for life. The virtual world - internet- where information about these phenomena retained becomes one of the sites where everybody can access; this kind of media provides various needs of information of its readers, and at the same time, it becomes the place for everyone to send what would one like express or to read what would one like to know. This study finds that the Qur'an and other religious sources have been used and abused to cover information regarding Muslim family bombing occurred recently in Indonesia.

The study also finds that the media as reflected in the discussed media apply various approaches in retaining the emergence of family homicide bombing which lately happened in the country, and brought about in diverse vantage points. However they have analogous view when it deals with the condemnation of terrorism, and the need of religious reinterpretation, and family education reform.

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- As narrated by Trisno S Sutanto, Madia researcher, the story goes as follows: "That morning May 13, 2018, Dita Oepriarto, the father, let his wife Puji Kuswati with their two daughters Fadilasari and Pamela Rizkita in front of Gereja Kristen Indonesia/GKI (Indonesian Christian Church) located at Jl. Diponegoro. Dita then crushed his car which carried bomb to Gereja Pantekosta Pusat Surabaya/GPPS (Central Church of Pantekosta Surabaya), meanwhile his wife and the two daughters did suicide bombing in the complex of GKI Diponegoro. At the same time, their two sons, Yusuf Fadil and Firman Halim ride motorcycle which also carried bomb towards Gereja Santa Maria Perawan Tak Bercela. Both tried to passed through the church, but Aloysius Bayu Rendra Wardhana who was volunteer for that morning ceremony, menghadang them. The motorcycle was meledak, but the heroic action of Bayu save many people who were performing religious ceremony. Bayu himself got killed leaving his wife and his two children including the baby who was baptized. At Sunday morning, the fate made Dito family and Bayu meet." *Kompas*, May 19, 2018, p. 7
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