



Cultural Preaching on Modern Society: A Phenomenological Study of an Islamic Foundation in Kudus

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Abstrak

Perkembangan dan perubahan zaman yang pesat menuntut dakwah Islam untuk terus dibenahi, baik di pedesaan dan lebih khusus di perkotaan dengan karakter masyarakat yang lebih kompleks. Penelitian ini mengkaji perkembangan budaya dakwah pada masyarakat modern dengan pendekatan sosio kultural dalam menyampaikan pesan Islam dari seorang muslim. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan fenomenologi kualitatif dan mengambil kasus di Desa Sunggingan, Kudus yang memiliki sebuah lembaga pendidikan dan dakwah yang bernama Yayasan Pendidikan Islam Kyai Telingsing (YPIKT), terungkap bahwa pendekatan budaya dakwah kepada masyarakat perkotaan terwujud dalam bentuk tiga cara: pendidikan, warisan budaya (ziarah kubur), dan pengajian. Pada aspek pendidikan yayasan ini memiliki empat level tingkat pendidikan, sementara pada kegiatan warisan budaya terwujud pada kegiatan haul Kyai Thelingsing setiap bulan Muharram yang dihadiri tidak hanya masyarakat muslim, tetapi juga non muslim (warga keturunan China). Aspek kegiatan pengajian merupakan aspek menonjol karena dilaksanakan setiap hari setelah selesai shalat Maghrib atau pada malam Jum'at dalam bentuk kegiatan tahlilan.

Kata Kunci: Dakwah, Budaya, Komunitas, Modern, Pendidikan

Abstract

Rapid changes in both rural and urban societies require da'wa to be delivered more creatively. This paper aims at investigating the development of cultural da'wa by analyzing the dynamics of socio-cultural life in an Islamic da'wa institution named Yayasan Pendidikan Islam Kyai Thelingsing (YPIKT). This paper applies a qualitative phenomenological approach. Finding reveals that the cultural da'wa approach to the urban community was manifested in three ways: education, cultural heritage (grave pilgrimage), and recitation. On the education aspect, the YPIKT has four levels. The cultural heritage is shown by Haul Mbah Kyai Thelingsing activity, which attended whether Muslim and

non-muslim (Chinese descendent) every Muharram. The recitation aspect has an ultimate goal this activity is happened every day after Maghrib or every Thursday night by the name of *tahlilan*.

Keywords: *Da'wa, Cultural, Community, Modern, Education*

A. Introduction

Cultural Da'wa is important media for preacher in facing the very complex realities of society with a variety of cultures, religions, and increasingly advanced developments. This strategy is very important in implementing humanist Islamic values by understanding the heterogeneous structure of society. Furthermore, religious messages provided by preacher can be easily accepted by the community in the midst of the complexity of today's problems. In addition, it also proves that Islam can adapt to times and places (Hew, 2018).

Today, there are still many *Islam Kejawen*, namely Muslims who still adhere to the traditions of their ancestors. In socio-cultural terms, Islam Kejawen is a sub-culture and part of Javanese culture. In this regard, the term Islam is used in the Kejawen tradition as a separate identity that is different from puritan Islamic identity and Javanese identity. This is a form of religious phenomenon which is loaded with the content of religious traditions in Javanese society with a cultural approach. To answer many questions that emerge from this phenomenon, some society in recent years have formulated various *Da'wa* models that are in line with the progression of times, namely cultural *Da'wa* (Muhammadiyah, 2004). In this case, it is important to note that *Da'wa* is an activity of inviting or calling on humankind to the way of Allah (Islamic system) which is in accordance with their nature, either through oral and written activities or activities of reasoning and deeds, as an effort to manifest good values and spiritual truths universal according to the basis of Islam (Muhidin, 2002).

Da'wa can also be interpreted as a process of transforming Islamic teachings and values from a person or group of preachers to *mad'u* with the aim that people who accept the transformation of Islamic teachings and values will enlighten their faith and improve their attitudes and behavior (Bensaid, 2013; Cahyadi, 2018; Hatta, 2016). The culture of Islamic *Da'wa* is a more open, tolerant model of delivering Islamic missions by accommodating the culture and customs of the local community. Cultural *Da'wa* was born as a reaction to the *Da'wa* activities that had been carried out so far. Currently, society's problems are getting more complex along with the influence that comes as a result of globalization. Modern society can be seen from the dynamic and creative structure of community life to generate new ideas for the benefit of humans in various sectors of life. The power of thinking and creativity are increasingly developing to formulate the meaning of life in a real context, which results in a shift in cultural values which takes place at any time even though slowly or surely (Alatas, 2000).

Jamaluddin explained that the village is a self-community, namely a community that regulates itself (2015). With the understanding that the village has the authority to manage and regulate the interests of the community in accordance with local conditions and socio-culture. For example, the development of *Da'wa* in Java which has been carried out by Walisongo. In the days before the arrival of walisongo, the spread of *Da'wa* still used the system of inviting the community of various faiths to follow Islamic teachings. This kind of *Da'wa* distribution system did not get a response from the public. The condition of the community before the arrival of Walisongo was still strong with the customs and traditions of their ancestors. After the arrival of walisongo, the spread of *Da'wa* emphasized the pattern of introducing a new culture amidst royal institutions, namely Islamic religious culture integrated with local wisdom. The communication pattern of walisongo *Da'wa* is not in the form of inviting, but in the form of communicating a new culture that plays an

old tradition in the archipelago. The definition of *Da'wa* in the archipelago is very different from the Middle East region, which means inviting and emphasizing confrontational symbols so that those who are the object of the *Da'wa* follow them, either forced or symbolically religiously.

Bearing in mind that *Da'wa* activities aim to form and enhance good personality characters, have good morals and can form a balance of mental elements as human beings with physical, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions (Mughtar & Alam, 2019). In the *walisongo dakwah* pattern, cultural development is carried out by incorporating universal values, local wisdom, and the teachings of the Islamic religion *rahmatan lil 'alamin*. The spread of cultural *Da'wa* is very influential on education, namely the existence of Islamic boarding schools. Pondok Pesantren is a culture that is inspired by the values of religious ancestors. Therefore, Islamic boarding schools as the basis of traditional education in Indonesia. Islamic boarding schools as educational institutions are "*copy machines*" whose job is to "print out" religious smart people (*tafaquhfiddin*), and able to convey the sublime teachings of Islam (*syi'arul Islam*) to the community (Djauhari, 2008). Islamic boarding schools also live and color society with their principles and souls. Thus, the culture creation in the form of the establishment of Islamic boarding schools is a milestone in the enforcement of the prophetic mission (*al-nubuwat*) to spread goodness (*al-khair*), so that it can live up to divine values and humanity in the souls of the people (Muslimin, 2020). Pesantren is the procession of santri which have two means, it is a place of santri or processed to be "*santri*" (Soebahar, 2013). The origin of pesantren's system of education can be traced back to India as an education system for to teach Hinduism. In the Indonesia context, the original model of pesantren was basically used for Hinduism education in Java (Steenbrink, 1986).

In Indonesia, National Education is based on Pancasila and the state constitution. The function of national education, according to those

documents, thus, is not only to educate Indonesians in areas such as technology but also to instill the divine spirit of religion to the people's souls (Nasional, 2003). In this regard, pesantren plays significant role in the production of Islamic thinkers in Indonesia (Alam, 2018; Azra & Jamhari, 2006). Not only that pesantrens play central role in the area of education, pesantrens also play major role in terms of building powerful of human resource through the creation of strong grass root economy for the people around the pesantrens (Arifin, 2013; Millie, 2017; Sahin, 2018).

However, the definition of *Da'wa* has many interpretations because it has an extensive scope. In *Hidayat Al Mursyidin*, for example, Syaikh Ali Mahfudz believes that *Da'wa* is an act that encourages people to always be in goodness and to obey God's instructions so they can get happiness in this world and the hereafter (Mahfudz, n.d.). This opinion is also in line with the opinion of al-Ghazali in his seminal book *Ihya 'Ulumuddin* in which he states that *amar makruf* and *nahyi munkar* are the core of the *Da'wa* movement as well as activators in the dynamics of the Islamic world (Munzier, 2006). A different definition is raised by Quraish Shihab, who argues that *Da'wa* is an appeal or invitation to conversion, or an attempt to change the situation to a better and perfect situation, both for the person and the community (Shihab, 1995). In short, a correct understanding of the definition of *Da'wa* for a preacher will affect the way of communicating propaganda, both verbal and non-verbal (Asmaji, 1997, 2017; Muchtar & Alam, 2019). In verbal communication, for example, the series of words that come out of the preacher are words that have the power to influence and move human behaviour so that it has an adequate calling capacity.

Da'wa has two purposes, general and special. The general purpose of *Da'wa* is something to be achieved in all the activities of *Da'wa*, starting from the process until being able to influence someone to be better, whereas the specific objectives are the formulation of objectives as details rather than the

objectives of *Da'wa*. This purpose is intended so that in carrying out all the activities of *Da'wa* can be known, where the direction and what type of activity to be carried out, to whom preaching in what ways and as in specific ways (Aziz, 2004).

Pertaining to the concept of cultural *Da'wa*, it is important to note that the concept of cultural patterns was first introduced by Ruth Benedict. According to him, culture is a method that becomes the basis of human life and is displayed through unique cultural characteristics. Soeriono Soekanto argues that cultural patterns are the order of cultural elements which form the basis of the integrity of a particular culture. Cultural *Da'wa*, therefore, involves studies between disciplines in order to improve and empower society.

B. Research Method

This is qualitative research using a phenomenology approach with focusing on the cultural preaching among modern society in Kudus, by taking a case study of the oldest Islamic Foundation, namely Yayasan Pendidikan Islam Kyai Telingsing (YPIKT). Basically, this study examines the phenomenon of community who committed and deal with cultural preaching while they are still lived on surroundings in which *Islam Kejawen* is also thriving. The data was collected through literature study, observation, and in-depth interviews with five respondents who engaged directly with the YPIKT in teaching activities in the community. The five respondents come from the various occupations such as teacher, lecturer, businessman, and freelancer. Through verification of data sources, research results are analyzed, discussed, and presented in tables and narratives.

C. Results and Discussion: The Dinamic History of Kyai Telingsing and His Cultural Preaching

The history does not record much about Kyai Tee Ling Sing (some call Telingsing), a Chinese descendant of the Tee clan who became a leader of

Islamic *Da'wa* in Kudus. Most of the information about Tee Ling Sing in general comes mainly from oral sources, which of course can hardly be categorized as a historical record. Like a biography of a character who, if traced, will find a clear line of scripture, this is not the case with Kyai Tee Ling Sing (Telingsing) (*Interview with KH. Asmaji Muchtar, 17 October, 2020*). Research made by historians and academics, which in their writing refers to several sources, states that Kyai Telingsing is an Arab descendant (father) with Thionghoa mother. Telingsing's father was named Kyai Sungging, referring to the name of a village in Kudus, called Sunggingan; an area located on the Gelis river crossing, about 500 m from Menara Kudus.

This view is certainly not the same as the narrative of some other people who believe that Kyai Telingsing's father was a native of the village of Sunggingan, whose name is not known apart from his expertise, namely Sungging (an expert in wood carving). Then on his life journey (according to the folklore) he was carried by the wind to China (Yunan), through a string of kites that were flown by himself. In China, Kyai Sungging married a native girl who gave birth to Tee Ling Sing.

Entering the age of 17 years in 1495, it is believed that Tee Ling Sing received orders from his father (Kyai Sungging) to return to Jawa Dwipa (Java) to continue his father's *Da'wa* in the Kudus area (originally called Tajug). Arriving at Kudus Telingsing carried out his father's mandate to become a preacher. This profession led Telingsing to meet Sayid Jakfar Sadiq Azmatkhan (better known as Sunan Kudus), a Palestinian descendant, who lives in Ngudung, Blora, the son of Raden Usman Haji bin Sayid Fadhal Ali Murtadha. Sayid Jakfar Sadiq was born in 1400 in Palestine and died in 1550 in Kudus. From that meeting they agreed to develop *Da'wa* through a cultural approach (local wisdom). One of the *Da'wa* approaches undertaken by Kyai Telingsing was through the wood carving and carving in general, which at that time was

not widely known in Kudus and its surroundings (*Interview with KH. Asmaji Muchtar, 17 October, 2020*).

1. Entrepreneurial Da'wa

Kyai Telingsing's entrepreneurial talent in the field of carving had been widely known since his father was also great at carvings. This talent was then developed more widely and passed down to the Kudus community and its surroundings. Carving, thus, was slowly becoming a fairly prominent new profession. Due to his great talent in the art of carving, Kyai Telingsing was famous among both general public and saints in Kudus thus when Sayid Jakfar Sadiq received an honorary visit from abroad (China) to establish bilateral cooperation between the Kudus city and China, he asked his colleague, Kyai Telingsing, to make a souvenir from carving.

That wish was fulfilled by Kyai Telingsing. Not long after, he handed over a souvenir in the form of a wooden pitcher. But apparently Sunan Kudus did not want to accept the souvenirs which seemed cheap. In his view, it is very inappropriate for foreign guests to only be given a souvenir in the form of a miniature jug made of wood. Then Sunan Kudus threw the miniature jug until it broke. Sunan Kudus was shocked, it turned out that the pieces of the jug were engraved with Arabic calligraphy from the *Kalima Shahada*. This incident made Sunan Kudus realize that, Kyai Telingsing was a person who had high knowledge in the mystical field (sufism).

This event inspired Sunan Kudus to develop handicrafts and carvings made of wood in the Kudus area under the instructor of Kyai Telingsing. Apart from that, Sunan Kudus also applied the work of this work to public facilities such as mosques and *langgar* (smaller mosques). This can be seen in the motifs of the walls of the Masjid's minarets where some of them are in the form of sculptures. Apart from being economical in nature, this Sunan Kudus business

can also be used as a media for preaching to people who want to learn the art of carving (*Interview with Bp. Muhammad, 15 October, 2020*).

2. Typology of Entrepreneurial Santri

The very rapid economic growth in Kudus, if traced upstream, cannot at all be separated from the role of Sunan Kudus, Jakfar Sadiq, when controlling this area under his rule. Kudus just not was created to be the City of Santri, but it is also a very developed economic city compared to the surrounding cities. Since his dispute with the Demak Sultanate regarding the determination of the fasting month (the beginning of Ramadan), Jakfar Sadiq “stepped aside” to Kudus to concentrate on spiritual development and economics (entrepreneurship). The Kudus community believes that Jakfar Sadiq was the first to introduce “*Dandangan*” to welcome the coming month of Ramadan. At first this tradition was local in nature; it had not yet reached out to other areas to enliven it. In the course of time, this annual event is then packaged in a tradition that takes place before Ramadan. The emergence of the *Dandangan* event has been able to move the economy of the lower-class society and generate foreign exchange for local governments.

When it viewed from a modern perspective, what Sunan Kudus has done shows a strategic step that characterizes an entrepreneur. According to Zimmerer(1996), entrepreneurs are people who have innovation so they can create something new with various challenges, risks and also uncertainties with the aim of seeking profit through identifying opportunities combined with several resource.

Starting from that view, there are several typologies that must be owned by entrepreneurs, namely: 1) having a creation to create a business opportunity from existing opportunities; 2) developing innovations in its business environment which include new products, either in material form or otherwise; 3) ready to accept risks to the business being run; 4) able to manage

and allocate resources appropriately. These four characters have generally been integrated into the trading spirit of the santri in Kudus, who are closely known as Gusjigang (Interview with H. M. Hilmy, 16 October, 2020). In addition, the santri community in the city of Jenang is also known to have great motivation in running their business. They dare to take risks by leaving the convenience of existing facilities for the sake of a greater future goal and have a different perspective than other existing business activists. Gusjigang's typology which is known in the santri society is also known to like challenges, has high creativity, is able to read every opportunity and has faith in the steps they are taking. In the view of modern theory, all the potential possessed by entrepreneurial santri in Kudus shows the ability to process human resources from the mind into facts. This is part of the legacy of Sunan Kudus and Kyai Telingsing which until now is still being followed by his students in developing businesses.

3. Cultural Preaching on Kyai Telingsing Islamic Education Foundation

Kyai Telingsing was someone who believed by the community in Kudus as a guardian who lives in the same age as the walisongo. He lived around the 15th century and lived in Sunggingan, which is a village area located in the city of Kudus. Kyai Telingsing or also called Telingsing, also known by the community as a teacher of Sunan Kudus, Sayid Jakfar Shodik, in the field of *kanuragan* (secondary science) and at the same time as a student of Sunan Kudus in the field of sharia and Sufism.

There are many versions developed in the community about the identity of Kyai Telingsing. He is known to have been born to a native Chinese mother (Canton) and a Javanese father (Kudus). Kyai Telingsing's father is known as Kyai Sungging (a name that refers to the name of the village of Sunggingan). He is known as a great chisel/carving expert. Kyai Sungging arrived in China after going through a spiritual journey that was difficult to understand, namely

using a kite as a vehicle to mainland China. After a long journey, Kyai Sungging married a native Chinese woman. After Telingsing grew up, he was assigned by his father to settle in Java to spread Islam (*interview with KH. Asmaji Muchtar, 17 October, 2020*).

The preaching touch of Kyai Telingsing in Sunggingan and Kudus area in general is done through carving activities according to their fields. He taught the art of carving to the community so that Sunggingan was known as the area where the best carvings were produced. The introduction of this art of carving then spread to various regions to enter Jepara, which later became known as the center of the art of carving. The art of carving that was introduced by Kyai Telingsing was not merely an artistic carving, but educational messages were inserted through the supernatural. In a story that developed in the Kudus community, Kyai Telingsing was once asked by an envoy from the Demak kingdom, to make a carving of a jug for souvenirs for people from China who visited. After being finished, there was a sense of disappointment from the customer. Then the jug was slammed and broke. How shocked the messenger and the people who saw him when he found out that inside the jug was inscribed the *Kalima Shahada* and a row of Javanese lettered sentences which essentially taught the meaning of life and did not forget worship to God (*Allah*). This jug was later known as the "*Kendi Toyyibah*".

The acculturation between Islam, Hinduism, Chinese and European heritages is indeed very thick in Kudus. However, historically the features of the Kudus traditional house cannot be separated from the role of Telingsing. And indeed, the art of carving colors the carving style which is full of religious, ethical, and aesthetical meanings in the traditional house. These motifs are highlighted in the sculpture of Telingsing. Kyai Telingsing *Da'wa* is not only through the Quran, but also through the development of *gebyog* and the art of carving. It is the same with Sunan Kudus, whose myth is always associated with the development of the kretek cigarette industry in Kudus.

The different comment came from KH. Agus Nafi' (*Interview with KH. Agus Nafi', 15 October, 2020*), head of Pesantren Yasiniyyah, Sunggingan, Kudus. He argues, that to commemorate Kyai Telingsing's struggle in the field of *Da'wa* and education, several community leaders in Sunggingan, since the 60s, established an Education Foundation named: Kyai Telingsing Islamic Education Foundation. This foundation houses several levels of education including: 1) PAUD Mafatihul Ulum; 2) TK Mafatihul Ulum; 3) MI Mafatihul Ulum; 4) Pondok Tahfid; 5) Mosque and 6) Cultural heritage (grave pilgrimage). Apart from education, the Kyai Telingsing Islamic Education Foundation also develops the art of reciting the Quran and preaching. School and Islamic boarding school students from an early age are trained in the art of reciting the Quran and this method of properly cooked *Da'wa*. That way students get the supplies needed by the community after they have completed their learning assignments according to their level.

Every year at the 15th of Muharram, the Kyai Telingsing Islamic Education Foundation holds *Haul Mbah Kyai Telingsing* (*Interview with Bp. H. Sadikin, 17 October, 2020*). This activity was intended to commemorate the history of the struggle of Kyai Telingsing in his journey to spread Islamic preaching in the Kudus area. Many people attended the event. They are not only from Javanese ethnicity, but also from the Chinese from various regions in Indonesia, even though they are of different religions (non-Muslims). Their presence is motivated by the feeling of belonging to Kyai Telingsing and making them an icon of the pride of their ancestors who are established in other countries. What is amazing is that not a few of the members of the community of Chinese descent are originally non-Muslims, after knowing the history of Kyai Telingsing and then changing their faith to become Muslims.

In addition, people around Kudus also carry out pilgrimage activities at the grave of Kyai Telingsing every Thursday night. They are generally young

children from Islamic boarding schools who felt compelled to follow in the footsteps of Kyai Telingsing in preaching.

The *Da'wa* approach in modern society must have characteristics and uniqueness, so that it can be well received. One approach that is suitable to be applied is by modeling. The term modeling means the existence of an imitation process, imitation of the subject or model by an individual or group. Referring to the psychological theory of social learning, the term modeling was developed by Albert Bandura, which states that humans are social learners. Bandura stated that "humans are living the situation of others, can use symbols and can organize themselves" (Sukmadinata, 2000).

Human behavior cannot be separated from the results of learning about the environment, the results of their observations on the environment. This means that there must be a figure who becomes a model for each individual so that certain behaviors are formed, whether in the form of behavior, ways of thinking, attitudes, or speech and various other performances. Theoretically, modeling occurs in four stages (Alwisol, 2004). *First*, there is the subject's attention to other subjects (attention). Attention occurs because there is something that attracts attention in a person's view of the subject that is his attention, whether it is behavior, speech, appearance, or other behavior that subjectively becomes the object of one's attention. In this case, the people around YPIKT really pay attention to every activity that takes place, both in the form of recitation, prayer, *tahlilan*, and others.

Second, the result of attention is retention, which is the process of storing the results of observations or deposition of what is of one's attention. The results of these observations will later appear in the *third* stage, namely reproduction. Reproduction is that one day a person will behave in a certain way because of his attention and retention process. Even though it could be that the product of the new behavior is different from the behavior pattern of

the subject it imitates, there is already a model as a reference for someone to do certain actions. There are behaviors or performances that can be in accordance with what they imitate, for example imitating hairstyles, clothing styles, ways of talking, as a reflection that someone who imitates others because of their hairstyle, clothing style, or the way they speak. In the second and third stages, the community around YPIKT also participated in the whole ceremonial activity so that it became a habit and even a necessity, so that communication between residents was well established with this activity.

The fourth stage is motivation (strengthening). This motivation determines whether a person behaves in a certain way after he makes observations in his social process. Each individual has his own basis or motivation so that he determines to behave in accordance with the conditions and the results of his imitation or observation of the model subject. In this fourth stage, the behavior of the people living around YPIKT becomes more religious. The real evidence is the increasing number of jama'ahin five times a day, and weekly Friday prayers.

Modeling which is one of the systems in the *Da'wa* process has a strategic role to communicate Islamic messages in the midst of people's lives. This means that in preaching activities the role of a preacher, cleric, or any term that leads to the understanding of someone who is worthy of being a religious figure plays an active role to condition the people or society to accept, understand, and practice *Da'wa* messages. which he conveyed. It is not only seen from its ability to explain and explain various Islamic religious sciences, but at the same time as a model capable of displaying Islamic behavior, attitudes and ways of thinking, so that it can become a role model and an example for the community to apply *Da'wa* messages in everyday life. This modeling process, in daily life in the village of Sunggingan, is manifested in the figure of the YPIKT management, especially the figure of the chairman, who is always in the spotlight in every action and activity that he carries out. Not

infrequently, residents also provide input so that intra tolerance appears and becomes its own character.

D. Conclusion

The cultural *Da'wa* approach to the urban community in Sunggingan village was manifested in three ways: education, cultural heritage, and the art of Quranic recitation. This phenomenon is ultimately found because of the strength of customs or culture that characterizes the local community. These three things should be able to open the insight of the preachers, that modern society needs the activities who can influence themselves personally. This influence then gives a stimulus for them to do better after joining and made the deep change on their attitude, religiosity and spirituality. Cultural *Da'wa* exists to reinforce local wisdoms that exist in a certain cultural pattern by separating it from the elements that are against the values. In its implementation, *Da'wa* will always face, meet, and intersect with the culture of the people where *Da'wa* is carried out.

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