

Strengthening Islam and Ethnicity through Social Media: Sundanese Translation of the Qur'an on Facebook

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the relation between Islam, ethnicity and the use of social media among Sundanese people, using the construction of identity approach. The object of the study is the translation of the Qur'an in Sundanese which posted to revive Muslim interests through the mobile application Facebook. My focus is one of social groups on Facebook, Pustaka Sunda or Sundanese literature, which already discussed the Sundanese translation of the Qur'an since 2016. This study shows that the emerging of new literacy of media culture through media technologies is creating structural changes of religious practices within society, including the reading of the Qur'an and its Sundanese translation on social media. The reading of the Sundanese translation of the Qur'an through social media is more stronger than before especially when it relates to the issue of ethnic identity. It is a part of an effort to affirm the closeness of Islam and Sundanese culture. The group of Pustaka Sunda as one of the largest Sundanese groups on Facebook shows the effort to affirm their Islamic identity and culture in the form of strengthening of Islamic literacy through Sundanese translation of the Qur'an.

1 INTRODUCTION

The very central issue in the studies on Islam, ethnicity and the use of social media is concerned with the reasons increasingly widespread of the use of social media through the mobile application as a means of disseminating information and networking of religious activities. Some scholars already studied on religious activities on social media Whatsapp, Facebook, Twitter, Line, Telegram and others. Both Muslim (Muslim, 2017) and Nisa (Nisa, 2018), for instance, have studied the use of social media in *dakwah* by One Day One Juz (ODOJ). It is a daily recitation program of the Qur'an through mobile application Whatsapp in Indonesia. The case of ODOJ is also studied by Husein and Slama (Husein and Slama, 2018) who examine Islamic anxieties due to online piety activities on social media that are emerging *riya'* or showing off one's piety on ODOJ and *sedekah* activities that utilise social media. Meanwhile, Weng (Hew, 2018) highlights the intersection between online activities (Facebook, Twitter) and offline events in contemporary Islamic preaching as in case of Felix Siau and his *dakwah* team in Indonesia. Another important study is Fakhruroji's article on Islamic app and religious

engagement in contemporary Indonesia (Fakhruroji, 2018). He argues that what the so-called as 'Aa Gym app' illustrates how the mediatization of religion inherent in mobile technologies is reshaping the way that Indonesians engage with Islamic teachings.

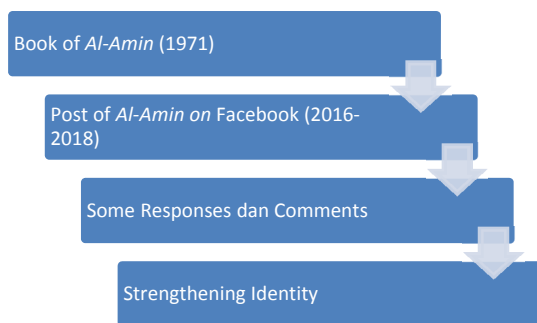
This study focuses on the other side of religious practices through social media that related to strengthening of Islam and ethnic identity. I will focus on online activities of the translation of the Qur'an in Sundanese Group on Facebook, *Pustaka Sunda* or Sundanese literature since 2016 to 2018. It is a social media group that Sundanese people come together in an online group of Sundanese literacy. Sundanese is one of greatest ethnic groups who mostly lived in West Java, Indonesia. The title of Sundanese translation of the Qur'an on *Pustaka Sunda* group is *Al-Amin_net* which was posted on Facebook everyday by one of the members of *Pustaka Sunda*, Agus Age Rustandi. Agus rewrites the Sundanese translation of the Qur'an which copied from the book of *Al-Amin*, trustworthy (Shaleh, Dahlan and Rusamsi, 1971). *Al-Amin* is the most popular book on Sundanese translation of the Qur'an which previously was written by Shaleh, Dahlan and Rusyana and has been

published since 1971. I will not only study the frequency of Agus’s status of Qur’anic translation of *Al-Amin* on Facebook, but also analyze the responses and comments of fellow group members of *Pustaka Sunda* to Agus’s status on the Sundanese translation of the Qur’an.

This study explain that the religious practice in the form of Sundanese translation of the Qur’an on social media is not only strengthened the identity of Islam, but also intersected with that of Sundanese ethnic identity as affirmation of the closeness of Islam and Sundanese culture. It is easy for Sundanese people to identify Islam as their religions when they also have the Sundanese identity (Millie and Syarif, 2015). Sundanese translation of the Qur’an on social media is one of expressions of the identity construction of Islam-Sunda in the digital age. It marks the strengthening of literary shift of *santris* into modern culture. i.e. from *pégon* (Sundanese or Javanese using Arabic script) to latin script, from manuscript tradition to print culture (Moriyama, 2003), from print culture to digital technology. I argue that the issue of religious and ethnic identities on social media is very important. It will show that Islam in West Java is more stronger than before in line with the use of media technologies by Sundanese people. Sundanese people as the second greatest ethnic after Javanese people who mostly lived in West Java were regarded as the largest Muslim population in Indonesia (Suryadinata, Arifin and Ananta, 2003).

2 METHOD

This research uses case studies method on strengthening Islam and Sundanese identity in the case of translation of the Qur’an on Facebook. I collect the primary data from online activities of translation of the Qur’an which posted by Agus Age Rustandi on the group of *Pustaka Sunda* from 2016 to 2018. There are about one hundred Agus’s posts. I also make reference to the book of *Al-Amin* which used by Agus. All responses and comments from the members of group to Agus’s posts will be listed in the form of posting table (see appendix). The comments of members of the group are very important to correct the quality of the translation of the Qur’an. I also interviewed Agus via messenger several times. The data would be analyzed by the construction of identity approach. Following picture describes the process of my research:



3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 The Group of PustakaSunda on Facebook

There are many groups on social media of Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter and others that are established by their members for certain purpose. I found on Facebook, for instance, a lot of Sundanese social groups which established about the first decade of twenty first century, such as *SALAKANAGARA*, the first Sundanese kingdom (45,474 members), *Gerakan Pilihan Sunda*, Sundanese elections movement (43,072 members), *Fikmin Basa Sunda*, Sundanese flash fiction (6,464 members), *Cakar Kuda: Carita Motekar Kulawarga Sunda*, Creative story of Sundanese family (6,458 members), *Facebook Aksara Sunda*, Sundanese script on Facebook (1,899 members) etc. The *PustakaSunda* group (17,264 members) was established to revive an interactive discussion on Sundanese people, nature and culture.

This group was established in December 30, 2011 by Ki Hasan alias Harja Santana Purba, a scholar from Ciamis who was a lecturer at Lambung Mangkurat University, Banjarmasin, South Kalimantan. It is a Sundanese group which intended to make a citizen journalism for their members or *baladPustakaSunda* to be an ambassador of the story of their regions. The main purpose of the group is to produce various documentations on Sundanese nature, culture, and people. The group of *Pustaka Sunda* has more than ten thousands members from different parts of the world. The members are not only from West Java where majority of Sundanese people stayed there, but also other Sundanese members who live in various regions in Indonesia or who stayed abroad, such as USA, Morocco, Egypt, Hong Kong, Georgia and others. In addition to Facebook, the group of *Pustaka Sunda* also opened other online groups on google and yahoo, but

unfortunately it cannot led to rise the member interest.

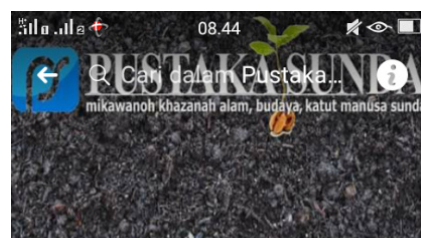
If we look at the documentation which stored in the group's files (*koropak*), there are many works on Sundanese nature, culture, and people. It were reported and discussed in the group for last seven years (2011-2018). It is not only writing on flora and fauna, food, tradition, family, and the life story of its members, but also the translation of some Islamic texts into Sundanese, such as the Qur'an.

The group of *Pustaka Sunda* generally do not only reported and discussed on Sundanese nature, culture, and people, but also discussed Muslim's religious practices in daily lives. All members of group are Muslim. It is different with other Sundanese group on Facebook, such as *SALAKANAGARA* that mostly discussed the story of glory of Sundanese kingdom when ruled in Sunda regions based on pre-Islamic values. The group of *Pustaka Sunda* held consistently on believe that both Sunda and Islamic identity cannot be inseparable. There is a number of Facebook statuses on the group of *Pustaka Sunda* which commonly referred to strengthening Islamic identity, such as the serial of Sundanese story of hajj or pilgrimage to Mecca (*guguritan naek haji*); the instruction of group chairman who suggests to make the Qur'an and its translation as the main collection of library for every Sundanese families when commemorate the mother language in February 21, 2018; the Ibn Kathir's work on history of Islam; and the translation of the Qur'an in Sundanese which are studied in this article.

3.2 Agus Age Rustandi and Sundanese Translation of the Qur'an

The translation of the Qur'an on Facebook on the group of *Pustaka Sunda* has operated for more than two years. The translation was uploaded on Facebook everyday by one of the members of *Pustaka Sunda*, Agus Age Rustandi (52 years old). He is a Sundanese art expert and librarian who is currently working as a Local Village Assistant (*Pendamping Lokal Desa*, PLD) in Ciparay, Bandung. Since September 2016 to April 2018, Agus uploaded Qur'anic translation to the group of *Pustaka Sunda* on Facebook. The period of 2018 (January-April) has become the most productive of Agus who has posted his translations for 52 times. He previously only posted 43 times in 2017 (January-December). Even two years ago in 2016, he only posted 5 times. The last post is April 21, 2018, which his translations stopped in *sura Fushshilat/41: 51-54*. He posted his early translation of the Qur'an in the

form of long translation up to 50 verses for every status. However, his post in 2018 generally between 5-10 verses. Following picture is a screenshot which drawn from Agus's Qur'anic translation status on Facebook:

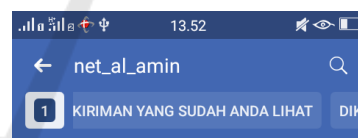


Tulis
sesuatu...

Pengumuman

AKTIVITAS TERBARU

Bah Dirman



Agus Age Rustandi
Pustaka Sunda

21 Mei pukul 19.56 · 🌐

#Net_Al_Amin – Ad-Dukhán
(Haseup) (44 : 41-50 [59 ayat])

41. (Nyaéta) poéan dimana anggota kulawarga anu deukeut henteu bisa ngalésotkeun naon-naon saeutik ogé ti kulawargana anu deukeut, sarta maranéhna moal ditulungan;

42. Kajaba jalma-jalma anu dipaparin rahmat ku Allah. Saéstuna Anjeunna Nu Maha Gagah, Nu Maha Asih.

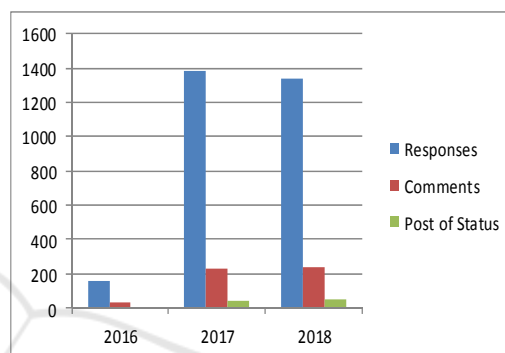
43. Saéstuna tangkal zaqum téh,...
Lanjutkan Membaca

Agus says several reasons why he posted the Sundanese translation of the Qur'an on the group of *Pustaka Sunda*. The first is relating to the encouragement of the group leader of *Pustaka Sunda*, Ki Hasan. The group leader motivated its members to post their own interest in order to revive Sundanese literacy; Second, it is relating to Agus's motive as a Muslim who is always read the Qur'an every day. His post of the translation of the Qur'an became an effort to fulfilled the Islamic worship. He believed that Sundanese Muslims not only have to maintain the Sundanese identity, such as using Sundanese language, but also become pious Muslims who obey God's rules based on the guidance of the Qur'an; Third, Agus says that he want to learn continually and emerge his skills in using Sundanese language well. Sundanese people mostly are feeling weakness speaking now. It is relating to the policy of Indonesia government to use *bahasa Indonesia* as the national language in the socio-religious activities as well as the insistence of international languages that contributed to the decreasing the speakers of regional language (Sobarna, 2007); Fourth, he believes that the translation of Sunda is more compatible and richer, so it is more pervasive into Sundanese heart than the Indonesian language. Agus, for instance, cited Qur'anic translation of *sura Al-Baqarah/2: 180: idh jā'ahum al-mawt* (QS: 2: 180). The verse is more accurately translated into Sundanese "*méh maot*," almost death, than "*kedatangan (tanda-tanda) maot*," when coming (signs) of death (Age Rustandi, 2018).

There are many responses and comments from group members of *Pustaka Sunda* who usually read Agus's post on Sundanese translation of the Qur'an, though not as much as comments on other posts. There are five comments for each post. Meanwhile, the number of responses in both form of emoticon of *like* and *super* for each post of status are 25-31 responses. Some members frequently also provide some comments positively in the form of the experience stories when interact with Qur'anic translation of *Al-Amin* book as we can see on Aris Kumetir's status which posted on the group of *Pustaka Sundain* June 18, 2015. Another members, for instance, give good responses and comments. They said: "*agresiptarjamahanana (Al-Amin book is an aggressive translation); samikameumeutabdi (Al-Amin is my favorite too)*" etc.

The comments shows the other side of social interaction on social media in reading the translation of the Qur'an. If we look at an offline activities of Qur'anic reading, the readers passively read the translation of the Qur'an. However, on the online activities, the readers more active to give their responses and comments into the member who

posted the translation of the Qur'an. The post of Qur'anic translation status are then filled with some discussions and comments on the quality issue of the translation. The comments mostly related to sentence or word choices that tend to be like a Malay (*kamalayon*) because it often use Indonesian word, not only Sundanese. One of examples is the use of the term "*ibukota*" (a capital of the city). *Al-Amin* do not use Sundanese term "*puseur dayeuh*" and others. Following chart is Agus's post of translation of the Qur'an on Facebook which recorded on the group of *Pustaka Sunda*:



Source: Agus's post of status on Facebook in September 2016-April 2018.

3.3 The Translation of the Qur'an and Sundanese Islamic Identity

In the digital age, social media is not only strengthening the social relationship of the users, but also becomes a platform for the formation of shared identity. For Sundanese Muslims, social media is one of spaces where they can express Islam and Sunda as we can see at the group of *Pustaka Sunda* on Facebook. It is an expression of the construction of Sundanese Islamic identity in the digital age. It marks increasingly what Moriyama says as shifting the literacy of Sundanese Muslims into oral culture in the digital age, from print culture to digital culture. It is an unimaginable shift since the outbreak of the 19th century print culture in West Java (Moriyama, 2005).

It is a mirror of the vertical mobility of scripturalist Sundanese Muslim or *santri* who increasingly took a significant role in seizing the Islamic discourse in Sundanese daily lives. It is a construction of identity which formed by society in certain tension of social relationships with many factors, such as global culture, the politics of national language, and Sundanese cultural resistance on pre-Islamic values.

The construction of the Islamic identity in Sundanese translation of the Qur'an on Facebook takes place during a process of social interaction in identifying itself with other groups in certain situations. They then strengthen the divisions and boundaries in two conflicting categories in Sundanese society, namely between similarities and differences (Eriksen, 1995; Bowie, 2001). Although there are various of Muslim organizations in West Java, all Sundanese believe that the Qur'an is able to unify the various Islamic backgrounds dealing with other groups that tend to be *abangan*. The latter group is the Sundanese Muslims who are more inclined to the pre-Islamic belief and practices. Foucault, for instance, asserts that the identity cannot be separated with the discourse. Therefore, human understanding (including Facebook users) about the world is shaped by their frame of minds in which this frame limits the variety of identities (Foucault, 1981).

Therefore, the Sundanese translation of the Qur'an on Facebook shows increasingly expression of Sundanese Islamic identity dealing with the infiltration of cultural diversity in the digital age. It is an increasingly Islamic identity which more clearer than other Islam in Java. It is a formation of strengthening Islam which regarded as a great tradition over the values of Sundanese (Redfield, 1956).

The Qur'an often read by Sundanese people everyday. It adorns daily religious life. From birth to death. Sundanese people usually read the Qur'an in following rites: pregnancy, birth, circumcision, marriage, sickness, death and many others rituals. The important role of Qur'anic position in Sundanese culture makes it a generic culture inherited from previous generation collectively (Abdullah, 2007).

It can be seen from following *surahs* that usually read: *surah* Al-Fatihah that commonly used in almost all rituals; *surah* Yusuf or Maryam that read to expect pious and beautiful or handsome children; *surah* Al-Mulk that read to keep away from the torture of the grave or expect the life becomes more prosperous; *surah* Al-Waqi'ah that read in order to bring a lucky; and *surah* Yasin which read to expect the dead people will find peace in hereafter. Therefore, the rubric of *tafsir* in Sundanese Islamic magazines is also relating to the verse or *surah* that read by Sundanese people in their daily lives. All *surahs* that is commonly read and memorized by Sundanese people then shape their identities as a Sundanese Muslims whose seeks close to the Qur'an (Moestapa, 1913).

In West Java, the religious life of Sundanese that connected to the Qur'anic tradition as a formation of Islamic identity then continually to be ingrafted by current Sundanese Muslims through social media. Sundanese traditions and customs which are regarded as truly Sundanese heritage almost limited to the use of Sundanese language and a number of customs (*adat*) that were constantly influenced by Islam and continually Islamized. The Qur'anic tradition is one of the significant elements of the greater Islamisation process of the Sundanese people, succeeded in circulating through the Sundanese through localised traditions of the Qur'anic translation. For this reason, the translation of the Qur'an in Sundanese, and of other Qur'anic tradition in the region, are critical knowledge for the Sundanese people seeking to understand the successful indigenisation of Islamic teachings.

Therefore, from the comparison of Sundanese traditional teachings that disseminated by other groups on Facebook, the member of *Pustaka Sunda* who read the translation of the Qur'an in Sundanese emphasize the core of Islamic teachings that are believed have to practiced in their daily lives to be a pious and obedient Sundanese Muslims.

4 CONCLUSIONS

This article affirms the intersection between religiosity, ethnicity and the use of social media among Sundanese people in the digital age. This study shows that the emerging of new literacy of media culture through media technologies is creating structural changes of religious practices within society, including the reading of the Qur'an and its Sundanese translation on social media. The reading of the Sundanese translation of the Qur'an through social media is more stronger than before especially when it relates to the issue of ethnic identity. It is a part of an effort to affirm the closeness of Islam and Sundanese culture. The group of *Pustaka Sunda* or Sundanese literature as one of the largest Sundanese groups shows the effort to affirm their Islamic identity and culture in the form of strengthening of Islamic literacy through Sundanese translation of the Qur'an. It is a religious practice that reinforces the reality of Islamic success in the Indonesian public sphere (Millie, 2017).

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