

# To Preserve the Glory of the Scripture

## Four Fatwas of the Council of Indonesian Ulama on the Qur'an

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Abstract: This study focuses on the attitude of the Council of Indonesian Ulama (MUI) in order to preserve the glory of the Qur'an in Indonesia. It is a study of four MUI's fatwas relating to the Qur'an between 1975-2017 using the critical discourse analysis. This study states that there is political change influence towards opened up a space for MUI religious attitudes in establishing relationships with government and society. This can be seen, for instance, in the use of the sentence of the MUI's fatwa. In the New Order era, MUI used a normative, suggestive and infirm language in its three fatwas. This is different from the fatwa in the period of "Reformation" which shows much more firmly with the phrase "obligatory to preserve the glory of the Qur'an" and placed on the part of the dictum or the content of its fatwa. It is a change in the use of language of fatwa decisions that indicate the turn of the MUI fatwa along with changes in its increasing position in society and tend to keep the distance from the government.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Ulama play an important role in the historical dynamics in Indonesia. There are a variety of characters Ulama possess in it; some of them are government supporters, some of them of the society leaders, and some are in opposition. As they keep having an important role in changing situations, it is safe to call them custodians change (Zaman, 2002: 2). In politics, their role is getting more important since the rise of Council of Indonesian Ulama (MUI) on July 26, 1975 or Rajab 17, 1395 Hijri. The "birth" of MUI was aimed to support government agenda in terms of religious affairs during Soeharto's administration. Consequently, there are several fatwas and preaches by MUI attached by the government interests. The government also encourages MUI to get involved in socio-cultural aspects so that Islam is becoming not only political power, but also cultural one (Effendy, 2011: 25-50; Hefner, 1987: 535). However, this situation has changed as the "reformation" era began. MUI has kept their distance from the government an instead took the so-called conservative turn, or some might call the symptoms of Islamic authoritarianism (Ichwan, 2014: 102-3; Olle, 2009: 95-116). Thus, MUI declare that they are no longer government servants, yet they are public servants. One of their

most obvious changes lies in their fatwa related to Al-Qur'an within the years of 1975-2017.

The study focuses on the changes of MUI's attitude described in their four fatwas in relation to Al-Qur'an, including the transliteration of Al-Qur'an in non-Arabic letters (1977), fatwa on *Qira'at Sab'ah*, the seven variations of Al-Qur'an recitation (1983), singing Al-Qur'an verses (1983), and photo sticking on Al-Qur'an *mushaf* (book) (2005). Using a critical discourse analysis approach, this study tries to reveal the mechanism of internal texts of MUI's fatwas in the process of their wording (Eriyanto, 2001: 7). This discussion is of an important matter since the change of the fatwas' wording is in separable with the relationship between the religious institution and the government in viewing the socio-political and cultural issues. The change can also be seen by MUI's attitude which is getting stronger in giving pressure to the government related to the issue controversial issue of Al-Qur'an, particularly that of in relation to the statement of former Governor of Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok) about Al-Ma'idah/ 5:51 in 2016.

## 2 MUI'S FATWAS ON AL-QUR'AN

Since its birth in 1975, MUI has had 249 fatwas. Those fatwas are made by the Commission of Fatwa and the National Sharia Board of MUI. The commission focuses on schools of thoughts in religion, worship, socio-culture, food, medicine, and cosmetics and also science and technology. In the meantime, the board focuses on fatwas on sharia economy. In addition, there is also *ijtima'*, a collection of decisions by the fatwa commission of all the commissions all over Indonesia in 2003. *Ijtima'* fatwas include issues on nation (*mas' il asasiyyah wathaniyyah*), contemporary *fiqh* (*mas' il fihiyyah mu' irah*), and also law (*mas' il q n niyyah*). Some of the fatwas by MUI can sometimes trigger controversies such as those related to Christmas celebration, pluralism, liberalism, secularism, *Ahmadiyah*, abortion, economy, and so on (Sirry, 2013: 100-17). Generally MUI's early fatwas did not refer to official letters. This fact can be seen from the format of each fatwa which did not pay attention to the number of the fatwas. Of those many fatwas by MUI, there are four of them related to Al-Qur'an.

### 2.1 Transliteration of Al-Qur'an in non-Arabic Letters (1977)

MUI's fatwa on transliteration of Al-Qur'an in non-Arabic languages was set on June 27, 1977 by the head of the commission, K.H. M. Syukri Ghozali and the secretary, H. Amiruddin Siregar. In conclusion, the fatwa said that 1) there are some ulama allowing the transliteration of Al-Qur'an in non-Arabic letters and there are some that do not; 2) the pronunciation of Al-Qur'an should follow the Arabic one no matter in what letters it is written; 3) the transliteration of Al-Qur'an in non-Arabic letters often lead to difficulty of learning and reading it; 4) the transliteration in non-Arabic letters, since some think it is necessary, should be limited in certain contexts and should be written after the original Arabic version (The arranging team, 2015: 323-4). Based on those fatwas, it can be inferred that the transliteration is actually allowed as long as there is the Arabic version along with it.

What can also be implied from the fatwas is that there are two opposite opinions about the transliteration. It seems that they are fully aware the rejection is based on the worry of false Al-Qur'an recitation. Thus, the decision making of the fatwas refer to the substantial essence of Al-Qur'an

transliteration, which is to be recited accordingly. This is actually a realistic idea to promote the messages of the holy book in the real life that keeps changing (Kaptein, 2004: 1).

### 2.2 Qira'at Sab'ah (1983)

The fatwas on Qira'at Sab'ah, the seven variations of Al-Qur'an recitation, were born on *Jumadil Awal 17, 1403 Hijri* or March 2, 1983 by Professor Ibrahim Hosen, LML as the head of the fatwa commission of MUI and H. Musytari Yusuf, LA as the secretary. The fatwa was actually the result of 'communication' and 'interaction' with the national Al-Qur'an Recitation Development Board (LPTQ). The decree number was 53/LPTQNAS/ IU'83 set on February 5, 1983. Not only did the participants in Indonesia get involved, but some experts in Cairo, Egypt were also invited to contribute by having a meeting there. Regarding the fatwa, there are several important points related to the importance of *Qira'at Sab'ah* and LPTQ as the official board studying and developing it: 1) that *Qira'at Sab'ah* is knowledge that, like other ones, LPTQ should take care of; 2) LPTQ should obey the decisions made by experts in Cairo. In the meantime, there are two fatwas about *Qira'at Sab'ah* as follows: 1) it is one of the branches of knowledge about Al-Qur'an, thus its existence needs to be preserved; and 2) reading it is nor prohibited as long as it is done by legal people (those who really master it (Team, 2015: 172-3). Unlike the previous fatwas on the transliteration of the holy book, which accommodates the new tradition, fatwas on *Qira'at Sab'ah* appear to strengthen the old tradition of Al-Qur'an recitation since the recitation using the seven variations are limited in several areas and several people.

### 2.3 Singing Al-Qur'an Verses (1983)

MUI's fatwas on singing Al-Qur'an verses were set on Shafar 27, 1404 H/ December 3, 1983 by the head of the commission at that time, Prof. Ibrahim Hosen, LML and his secretary, H. Mas'ud Saiful Alam. BA. There are four fundamental considerations on the fatwas covering: 1) that Islam basically accepts artwork that is relevant to the teaching and law of Islam; 2) that *da'wah*, calling people to the religious ways of life, can also be done through art; 3) that there have been several musical groups whose lyrics are taken from Al-Qur'an; and 4) that to glorify the holiness of Al-Qur'an, it is necessary to make fatwas about it. Other consideration is Al-Qur'an itself; Yasin// 36:69 and Al-Muzzammil/ 73:4. Based on that, MUI has finally come to two points: 1) singing

the verses of Al-Qur'an should strictly follow the rules; and 2) it is free to sing the translation of Al-Qur'an (The team, 2015: 355-6). In comparison with the previous fatwas on Al-Qur'an, this fatwa is relatively complete, particularly in terms of consideration. Besides normative points of view of Al-Qur'an and some of hadith in relation to that, the fact that there are some musical groups singing verses from Al-Qur'an is also taken as consideration. In this context, there is even a statement that the holiness of Al-Qur'an needs to be maintained as consideration. However, this is viewed as normative since the word used is 'need' instead of 'should' or 'must'. As a matter of fact, consideration is usually a main idea or background of a fatwa making. This is different from the content of the fatwa which is the core.

#### **2.4 Sticking photos of Al-Qu'ran book (mushaf)**

MUI's fatwa on sticking photos on mushaf was officially applied in Jakarta on May 12, 2005 or Rabiul Akhir 1426 Hijri by KH. Ma'ruf Amin as the head of MUI's Fatwa Commission and Drs. H. Hasanuddin, M.Ag. As the secretary. In the consideration part, this fatwa explains that the background of the fatwa includes 1) the fact that lately people start to stick several things including photos on their mushaf; 2) the issue has raised a controversy among them on whether that is allowed or not; 3) starting for the controversial phenomenon, MUI finally agrees to make a fatwa on it; 4) in Indramayu, there was a fatwa about this No.1 2005; and 5) the meeting on this was held on Rabi'ul Akhir 10, 1426 Hijri.

In relation to that, the fatwa came up with two main decisions covering 1) it is compulsory to glorify Al-Qur'an; and 2) sticking stuffs on mushaf are strictly prohibited (haram) if a) there is a tendency of harassment towards Al-Qur'an; b) it has potentials to raise war and conflict (Fatwa team, 2015: 488-91).

In comparison with the previously-discussed fatwa on singing the verses of Al-Qur'an, fatwa on sticking things on mushaf appears to be tougher. This indicates that MUI is getting better in positioning themselves particularly in maintaining the glory and holiness of Al-Qur'an.

The shift of MUI's fatwa tone to be tougher also shows that MUI is making distance with the government. This means that the conflict of interest between MUI and the government is getting lesser. Politically, when MUI declared the fatwa on sticking things on mushaf, they were in the new order era. Meanwhile, the previous fatwa on singing the verses

of Al-Qur'an happened when they were in the old order era. This clearly proves that MUI is turning from the servant of the government into the servant of the society.

### **3 POLITICAL CHANGE AND SHIFT OF FATWAS**

From the four fatwas by MUI related to Al-Qur'an, it can be seen that political situations from the new order era to the reformation era play an important role for MUI to declare their religious points of view. In the new order era, it was obvious that MUI is the government's political vehicle so that their fatwas are always supportive of the government no matter how the situation was (Reid, 2009: 70; Hefner, 2000: 121). However, in the next era, the reformation era, their fatwas started to be more objective; they do not belong to the government's representation anymore. The fatwas are actually the representation of ummah, the society (Ichwan, 2005: 71-2; Hosen, 2003: 68-80).

Thus, the socio-political context does influence fatwa making. The process of discussion even debate usually the process of conflict of interest fight. Fairclough names this situation sociocultural practice. Even though the practice does not directly relate to the fatwa making, it does influence the whole process of fatwa declaration in situational, institutional, and even social levels (Eriyanto, 2001: 320-2).

The strength of MUI position among the society can lately be seen in the recent case of Ahok's statement (the former governor of Jakarta) about Al-Ma'idah 51 on October 11, 2016. MUI has a very strong tone about this case. The word "compulsory" is repeated six times in the fatwa (MUI, 2016). This is totally different from the previous fatwas in which bold words such as compulsory are not repeated very often, either in the fatwa on singing the verses of Al-Qur'an or that of sticking things on mushaf (Fatwa team, 2015: 491). This fatwa is believed to be one of the biggest triggers of several big demonstrations such as "Aksi Bela Islam 411" and "Aksi Bela Islam 212". This finally ends up with a trial of the former governor the harassment of Islam case attended also by the head of MUI as one of the witnesses. As the court decided, Ahok was sentenced two-year imprisonment. This shows that MUI's fatwas have strength to legitimize the law in Indonesia (Ichwan, 2016: 87).

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

This paper shows there is a shift of MUI's attitudes and perspectives in the effort of glorifying Al-Qur'an. The shift is revealed in four fatwas of MUI declared in different eras (1975-2017). This paper also emphasizes that the political situations from the new order era to the reformation era influence MUI in making decisions. They turn from the agents of the government into the agents of the citizens, even the agents of justice. In fatwas, the change or the shift can be identified in the wording. The first three fatwas, that were declared in the new order era, were normative yet the last fatwa appears to be a lot tougher in terms of the language by using bold words such as compulsory, mandatory, and so on.

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