

DELUSION OF POWER-KNOWLEDGE: THE USE OF SACRED TEXTS FOR RELIGIOUS POLITICIZATION IN INDONESIA

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Abstract:

This paper explores the phenomenon of politicization of religion in Indonesia with a focus on the use of sacred texts as a tool to strengthen power. In this context, the concept of "power-knowledge" is studied to understand how knowledge, especially related to sacred texts, is used as an instrument to achieve political goals. Using the theoretical lens of Michel Foucault, it is interesting to highlight how political leaders use tendentious interpretations of sacred texts to manipulate public opinion, shape religious perceptions, and gain political support. Particular focus is given to the scope of Indonesia, where the politicization of religion has become an important part of the political landscape. Through in-depth analysis of case studies, this paper discusses the impact of the politicization of religion on social stability, human rights, and religious freedom in Indonesia. By delving deeper into the relationship between power and knowledge in the context of religion using library research, this paper aims to provide insights into how the use of sacred texts can shape political dynamics in Indonesia.

Keywords: Power-knowledge, Sacred Text, Religious Politicization

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is one of the multicultural countries that adopts a democratic system in its government, where Pancasila is the foundation of the basic ideology of the state in carrying out the vision and regulating the direction of the nation's life and state. The vision aims to realize a life that upholds the values of divinity, humanity, unity, democracy, and justice. In addition, religion also has an important role, because religion has a very dominant influence in the lives of Indonesian people. It can be seen how the influence of religion is never absent in every activity of Indonesian life, including in the political sphere in this country.

The use of religious verses in the context of practical politics has become a topic of interest in the Indonesian context. In recent decades, it can be seen how political leaders and certain groups use religious verses as a tool to gain power, strengthen their authority and influence public opinion. This raises serious questions about political ethics, religious identity, and the separation of religion and state in a democratic system.

Considerations on the politicization of religious verses become even more complex due to the abundant religious and cultural diversity in Indonesia. In such a plural society, the use of religious verses by politicians often causes polemics and tensions between religious groups. In addition, the politicization of religious verses also creates challenges to the principles of secular democracy upheld in the Indonesian constitution. On the other hand, Indonesian society seems to 'deliberately' provide space for the game of politicization of religious verses with the involvement of various elements of society when the phenomenon of politicization occurs in various regions. One of those involved is the academics themselves, who are supposed to be the ones who justify what is not true, but instead are deliberately involved in the politicization of religious verses.

The presence of intellectuals on the political stage with the machinations of politicization is not a new phenomenon. Power, which is an inseparable dimension of politics, is a dimension that is close to knowledge. Power can be achieved with strength, and knowledge - in this case represented by intellectuals - has long proven to be one of the tools needed for the succession of power. This is where the phenomenon described by Michel Foucault as Power-knowledge emerges, which will be discussed further in the next review. This paper will take a specific focus on several cases in Indonesia as the object of analysis.

Politicisation of Religion in Indonesia

In the context of politics in Indonesia, religion is often used as a means of supporting political activities by a number of elite groups such as the use of religious symbols when campaigning, especially the use of sacred texts which are often used as a tool of religious politicization. In the context of religious politicization, a number of political elite groups use sacred texts or religious teachings to gain power, strengthen authority, and even strengthen their legitimacy in the eyes of the general public. But along the way, the use of sacred texts as a tool of religious politicization has drawn negative responses and even triggered conflicts among other religious groups.

The politicization of religion is common in the world of politics in Indonesia. As happened during the political contestation of the 2017 regional elections in Jakarta, where religious sentiments were played by certain parties for their political interests. The phenomenon involved one of the candidates, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok), who was accused of committing blasphemy, because he mentioned sacred texts in his campaign agenda (Mayasari, 2017, p. 8). This stems from his speech that alludes to Surah al-Maidah verse 51 which is associated with the word "lied to", the statement used by Ahok seems to question and oppose the user behind the truth of al-Maidah verse 51 for political purposes (Prayogi & Putra Adela, 2019, p. 32). This moment was actually used by his political opponents to ask the people of Jakarta not to vote for leaders who blaspheme, this request became even stronger when it received legitimacy from the Indonesian Ulema Council (Abiyoso & Thohari, 2019, p. 80). The issuance of the fatwa led to one of the largest demonstration movements in Indonesia and became one of the clear proofs of how extraordinary the politicization of religion in Indonesia is.

In the development of the history of human civilization, the relationship between religion and politics is very closely related as if it will never end, even today it is still always a very interesting thing to discuss. This discussion becomes interesting when religion is used as a means or tool to achieve political goals, so this can lead to the politicization of religion which can bring conflict and even division. The politicization of religion is a moment of political agenda that almost occurs in every country, one of which is Indonesia. In every political contestation such as elections, it often becomes a center for politicizing religion, with the aim of influencing political views, gaining power, gaining

support from the strongest religious groups, maintaining authority, and even to strengthen its legitimacy.

Universally, the politicization of religion is a politics of manipulation related to religious understanding and knowledge by using methods such as propaganda, dissemination, indoctrination, campaigns, socialization in public areas so that there is a transfer of understanding, problems and making it as if it is religious knowledge, then pressure is applied to influence religious consensus in an effort to incorporate the interests of something into a political agenda of manipulating society or public policy (Nur, Bih, Asror, Zaini, & Sa'id, 2020, p. 116). It should be emphasized that when parsing the word politicization of religion, the meaning and intention obtained are very different from the word politics of religion. The word "politicization of religion" is more or less the same as "politicized religion", so in the context of this term what is meant by the politicization of religion is the use and instrumentalization of religion for political purposes. In contrast, the term "politics of religion" means that religion should be useful to achieve something for society through aspirations on the political track.

The above definition provides an understanding that the politicization of religion refers to a practice of using doctrines, norms, principles, religious symbols, and sacred texts for practical political purposes-power. The word politicization if linked to religion will be an act in the form of an idea, idea, understanding regarding religion to be political and not religious anymore. Practically, this action is used by actors or interested parties who will make religion an object that is understood, conceived, and initiated in order to reap the votes of certain religious adherents who have the strongest voice and are intended to control the seat of power.

In Indonesia, the politicization of religion has become a shortcut for politicians who have the desire or ambition to achieve power. Because indeed in essence humans cannot be separated from the ambition or desire for power (the will to power) in their existence (Sunardi, 2011, p. 41). So it is not surprising that many politicians use practical methods (politicization of religion) in an effort to gain power, the method is usually manifested in the form of using ideology and religious symbols in front of the public in order to spread the charm, the end of which is none other than to be elected by the public.

Even worse, if a politician performs an act of politicization of religion by using religious sacred texts by interpreting holy verses without going through a study in

accordance with the methodology of interpretation but only matched according to his political desires, or by cutting sacred texts to ignite hostility towards opponents who have different political views.

Sacred texts that are supposed to guide the lives of mankind on earth are instead used as tools to strengthen their electability in political competition. This can be seen from several issues that have occurred in Indonesia, such as the 2017 DKI Jakarta elections, where surat al-Maidah verse 51 was packaged in such a way as to weaken and drop the electability of one of the political opponents until it led to blasphemy. Another case also occurred in Malang when a legislative candidate Pieter C Zulkifli who came from Christianity used the basmalah in every banner or billboard to attract public support, which in the end received criticism by the community and the local MUI. Here it is very clear that there is an element of interest in linking the sacred text with politics, clearly the sacred text is used as a tool to strengthen or weaken one of the camps in order to gain support from the majority.

Substantially, the politicization of religion is a natural thing, if in practice it still pays attention to certain limitations (Solechan, Zuhdi, & Syauqillah, 2023, p. 492). Because it needs to be recognized that politics can never be separated from religion, because in its journey politics and religion will always go hand in hand and not to dominate each other. However, the reality is that the politicization of religion always connotes something negative, if we look at some cases that have occurred in Indonesia, many politicians have politicized religion excessively without looking at the aspects of morality in its implementation.

Delusion of Power-knowledge

Michel Foucault's approach to the relationship between power and knowledge provides a deep and complex view of the dynamics of power in society. According to Foucault, power is not just a hierarchical structure held by government institutions, but a network of relations that are widespread throughout the social strata. In his analysis, knowledge is not a neutral or objective entity, but is produced and controlled by power (Foucault, 1980). Thus, power and knowledge are dialectically linked, where power influences the production of knowledge, and vice versa.

Foucault explains that power is not only repressive, but also productive, as it can shape norms, values, and knowledge that influence the behavior of individuals and society. One example often cited by Foucault is institutions such as prisons, schools, and mental hospitals, which not only function as places of restriction or surveillance, but also as loci of certain knowledge production. Through mechanisms of power such as discipline and surveillance, these institutions form knowledge that validates their authority and controls individual behavior. In addition, Foucault highlights the importance of genealogical analysis in understanding the relationship between power and knowledge (Foucault, 1980). By tracing the origins of ideologies, practices and institutions, genealogical analysis reveals how knowledge is produced, disseminated and received in a society. Thus, understanding the relationship between power and knowledge demands a study that not only focuses on the formal structures of power, but also on the processes that shape and sustain knowledge in society.

Specific to the direct relationship with knowledge, Foucault invites his readers to look more intensely at the political phenomenon itself. Unlike the Marxian and Weberian concepts of power, power is seen by Foucault as positive and productive (Kamahi, 2017, p. 118). The holder of this power is the decider, so ideally political actors are intellectuals because knowledge and power are integral subjects that are interrelated. By intellectuals and even clerics who are involved in political contestation, it is hoped that they can bring the direction of power for the better. Unfortunately, as previously exemplified, intellectuals often play different roles, including as perpetrators of religious politicization.

In the Indonesian context, the politicization of religious verses can be seen as one of the manifestations of power described by Foucault's theory. When religious verses are politicized, they become not only spiritual or moral means, but also tools to support certain political agendas. This creates a complex relationship between religion and political power, where religion is used as a justification or legitimization for diverse political actions.

Intellectuals and religious figures who play the holy verse as a support for their efforts to achieve power certainly cause many negative social effects. In Foucault's perspective, power that is positioned as a controller also limits the actions of the people's minds will switch to a model of power that is not objective in taking sides. The holy verse that should be used as a guide to life instead becomes a 'tool' that follows the will of its

diverse owners. If power relies on this kind of phenomenon, it is not impossible that there will be more violent and interpretation-free manipulation of holy verses not only in political contestation, but also for other purposes.

CONCLUSION

It cannot be denied that the politicization of religious verses has played an important role in Indonesia's political dynamics, both in elections and in public policy. The politicization of religious verses in the Indonesian context brings risks to religious diversity and pluralism in the country. By manipulating or interpreting religious verses according to political interests, certain groups or individuals can strengthen their position in the political sphere, but often at the expense of the principles of inclusivity and tolerance towards religious diversity. This can threaten social stability and trigger inter-religious conflict.

Furthermore, the politicization of religious verses also creates inequalities in the public sphere, where views that do not align with the dominant political narrative can be ignored or even censored. This creates a power dynamic where truth or authority is determined by political rulers or powerful groups, rather than by inclusive processes of dialogue and research. Thus, the politicization of religious verses not only endangers religious freedom, but also erodes freedom of speech and diversity of thought in society. Nevertheless, the debate on the appropriate boundaries between religion and politics continues, with significant implications for political stability, pluralism and social justice in Indonesia. Therefore, it is important to critically examine how the politicization of religious verses can affect practical political dynamics and democratic values in this unique Indonesian context.

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