
RESURGENCE OF THE BANNED GAFATAR GROUP MOVEMENT IN PALOPO CITY SOUTH SULAWESI

KEBANGKITAN KEMBALI GERAKAN KELOMPOK TERLARANG GAFATAR DI KOTA PALOPO SULAWESI SELATAN

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Abstract

This article delves into the resurgence of a banned group, Gafatar, in Palopo City. The group was officially banned by the government in 2016. The resurgence of this movement was known to the public when a video featuring the pledge of allegiance or baiat by three religious college students in Palopo City on November 9, 2020, went viral. The research employed a fact-finding method to uncover the details and underlying issues surrounding this pledge of allegiance. The research primarily focuses on establishing the timeline of events related to the pledge and identifying the religious group responsible for the incident. This study found the involvement of the ex-Gafatar group in the video, as the figures have beliefs and teachings similar to those of the group. This indicates that, despite being banned, the Gafatar group remains active in disseminating its beliefs and recruiting new members. The resurgence of Gafatar's activities poses a significant risk of triggering socio-religious issues within society, necessitating swift responses from relevant authorities.

Keywords: Ex-Gafatar, Messianic Religious Movement, Baiat

Abstrak

Tulisan ini mengungkap fenomena bergeliatnya kembali kelompok yang ditengarai sebagai eks-Gafatar di Kota Palopo. Gafatar adalah sebuah gerakan keagamaan baru bercorak mesianistik yang telah dinyatakan terlarang oleh pemerintah pada 2016. Geliat tersebut ditandai dengan beredarnya video berisi peristiwa baiat oleh tiga mahasiswi perguruan tinggi agama di Kota Palopo pada 9 November 2020. Penelitian menggunakan metode *fact finding* untuk mengungkap fakta-fakta dan mengidentifikasi permasalahan di balik peristiwa baiat tersebut. Permasalahan yang diangkat seputar fakta kronologi baiat dan identifikasi kelompok keagamaan di balik peristiwa tersebut. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan kelompok identik Gafatar yang berada di balik peristiwa baiat tersebut. Hal ini menunjukkan bahwa kelompok Gafatar, meski telah dinyatakan sebagai organisasi terlarang, masih bergeliat menyebarkan paham dan merekrut anggota baru. Bergeliatnya kembali aktivitas kelompok Gafatar sangat rentan menimbulkan problem sosial keagamaan di tengah masyarakat yang harus segera direspons oleh pihak-pihak terkait.

Kata Kunci: Ex Gafatar, Gerakan Keagamaan Messianik, Baiat

INTRODUCTION

During the second week of November 2020, 2-minute and 19-second video featuring a young woman reciting a religious pledge characterized by messianic beliefs gained widespread attention. The video explicitly mentions the term "messiah." The young woman, wearing a black headscarf, recites her allegiance pledge, which is believed to be derived from traditional Islamic teachings. The text is displayed on the screen, and the woman reads it aloud while a man in black frequently adjusts the electronic device connected to the display. The man in black is believed to serve as the operator, as the allegiance process is conducted virtually with someone in Makassar using the Google Meeting application.

The release of the video led to a public outcry, prompting authorities to initiate an inquiry into the group responsible for the allegiance pledge. The researchers initially received reports indicating that the video depicted a pledge of allegiance or *baiat* within the Bahai faith, which had garnered significant attention in Palopo City (Reslawati 2015). However, the information that was received subsequently confirmed that the allegiance in the video was related to the ex-Gafatar (Gerakan Fajar Nusantara) group. Listening to the points of the *baiat* spoken in the videos show apparent similarities

with the teachings of Gafatar. Therefore, it is strongly suspected that the *baiat* activity is related to the recruitment of followers by the ex-Gafatar group or its metamorphosis (Makin 2019).

The Gafatar group, the suspected party behind the videos, is a religious group that began to emerge in November 2016. At that time, there was an arson in Gafatar village in East Mempawah, West Kalimantan. Gafatar is a religious organization founded in 2011 and was subsequently convicted of heresy in 2016 by the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) (Muzni and Haniwati 2019). The Gafatar group is associated with issues surrounding religious ideology, subversive movements, and allegations of involvement in kidnapping cases (Asrawijaya 2019). A series of problems made Gafatar a concern for the public and government officials. The Gafatar group is suspected to be a continuation of Ahmad Musaddeq's Al-Qiyadah Al-Islamiyah organization, which was convicted of heresy by the MUI in 2007 (Rosyid 2017).

Based on previous research on Gafatar, it is said that the group is an ideological movement rooted in Al-Qiyadah Al-Islamiyah and the Millah Abraham Community, which was founded and led by Ahmad Musaddeq. In some previous movements, Musaddeq declared himself Al-Masih Al-Ma'ud, Imam Mahdi, and even the Prophet. This characterizes

Gafatar as a messianic religious movement. Apart from being a religious movement, Gafatar is also a political movement because it aims to establish the Unitary State of the Lord of the Universe (HCV). The Gafatar community living in a village in Mempawah, West Kalimantan, is possible as a prototype of the NKTSA (Negara Karunia Tuhan Semesta Alam) society concept (Wildan 2019). It was the reason why the government officials disbanded the Gafatar organization and their villages.

Al-Qiyadah was banned in 2007, and Musaddeq was sentenced to five years in prison on blasphemy charges. After that, Al-Qiyadah transformed into the Gafatar organization, as described above, and was finally banned in 2016. Musaddeq was again sentenced to four years in prison on the same charge of blasphemy. After the 2016 incident and banning the Gafatar organization, Gafatar members who migrated to Mempawah were returned to their respective areas of origin. The central and local governments tried to handle and guide former Gafatar members Research Team of Jakarta Religious Research and Development Center (2016). Published research on the government's role in handling the rehabilitation and guidance of former Gafatar members in various regions in Java and Sumatra. Following the prohibition of Gafatar and the repatriation of its members from Mempawah to their

original regions, former Gafatar affiliates adopted a more cautious approach when engaging with their local communities (Muzni and Haniwati 2019).

Nevertheless, communication among ex-Gafatar members persists (Muzni and Haniwati 2019). This finding indicates that the network of former Gafatar associates remains operational, with their collective effort continuing, albeit discreetly. The Palopo incident serves as a moment that underscores the ongoing vitality of this religious group's activities.

Theoretical Framework

Gafatar represents a recent religious movement with a messianic structure, employing a pledge of allegiance to initiate members. This new religious movement is a response to conventional religious norms in the modern era, serving as a form of protest (Anoshka 2021). Its existence introduces an alternative mode of religious expression and organization, encompassing spiritual and social dimensions. Consequently, new religious movements are often seen as deviations from established religious orthodoxies (Zeller 2021). This divergence frequently leads to tensions between new religious movement groups and adherents of mainstream religious beliefs around them. Hence, they must be careful when establishing connections with the wider community (Imran 2017). Their presence

can potentially incite social unrest among followers of religious orthodoxy, sparking more social conflicts (Ropi 2020).

New religious movements often take the form of messianic movements, characterized by the belief in the arrival of a leader who will usher in a better, more just, prosperous, and happier world order at the end of time (Ramadhan 2019). Messianic movements are driven by the aspiration to achieve perfection within a secular societal framework (De Boer 2023). Messianism is a social movement that typically carries utopian qualities (Sawczyński 2022). Despite its utopian nature, the vision of a new world order advocated by these movements motivates their members to engage in a religious and social movement (Xi 2023), striving to bring this vision to fruition. When functioning as new religious movements, messianic movements often align themselves with established religious movements and utilize religious texts, such as references to Imam Mahdi in Islam or the Messiah in Christianity and Judaism, to validate the authenticity of their beliefs (Sudirman, Gunawan, and Salenda 2019).

As a social movement, Messianism can serve as a motivating force leading to protest and social resistance. A perception of an unjust world order or dissatisfaction with prevailing social conditions often drives these actions (Marzal 2023).

Messianism envisions a future in which society can transcend various forms of suffering. The leader, seen as the embodiment of the Messiah (Imam Mahdi) (Pabbajah et al. 2019), is believed to guide followers into an era characterized by truth and prosperity, a concept known as millenarism. The relationship between leaders and members is typically cemented through a pledge taken by prospective members or followers, symbolizing their affiliation and loyalty—this pledge is known as allegiance (Yusoff and Ismail 2023). Bai'at represents a declaration of complete allegiance made by individuals who later become members of the religious group. The content of the Bai'at is directly linked to the core doctrines and beliefs of the religious group (Yusuf 2020).

RESEARCH METHODS

The research was conducted for seven days, from November 22-28, 2020, in Palopo City, South Sulawesi Province. The location is where the ex-Gafatar group's religious activities are suspected to have revived through allegiance activities in a video spread on the internet. The research is in the form of fact-finding, which aims to find the facts as they then lead to problem identification and problem-solving (Soekanto 1982, 2002). Fact-finding photograph to and explores facts related to religious information carried out by a group of people to three IAIN (State

Islamic Institute) Palopo students.

The data were collected using interviews, observations, and documentation. The informants consist of key informants directly involved in the *baiat* activity, Coordinating Board for the Supervision of Community Beliefs (Badan Koordinasi Pengawas Aliran Kepercayaan Masyarakat-Bakor Pakem, of Palopo City, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the District Attorney's Office, and The National Unity, Politics and Community Protection Agency. Interviews were also conducted with religious leaders in Palopo, especially the MUI and academics of IAIN Palopo. Documentation was conducted by reviewing various documents and related news, such as videos and photos during *baiat* activities and photo documentation of meeting activities conducted by Bakor Pakem. The written document is the minutes of the coordination meeting of the relevant ranks from the Palopo City Police Agency. The researchers obtained notes from the students participating in the group's religious study. To protect the confidentiality of individuals involved in the research, the researchers assigned pseudonyms throughout this research paper presentation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Chronology of Events in Baiat's Video

There are two other videos of the *baiat* event. In a one-minute 44-second video, a

man was preparing an electronic device that will later be used to display the *baiat* text through a slideshow connected to a cellphone. In the video, a man's voice is heard explaining about the *imam* or leader appointed by Allah and is connected to Ibrahim, whose descendants have gone global.

Another one-minute and 19-second video shows the preparation for the pledge of allegiance, in which the young woman in the black headscarf stands. However, due to a slight technical problem, this woman has not read the text of the *baiat*. In the video, a woman who is not wearing a hijab is also seen in a room that looks like the living room of a house. The viral video is 2 minutes and 19 seconds, containing a reading of the text of the black-veiled young woman. The woman was Ana, a student of the College in Palopo. The *baiat* was attended by two of Ana's friends from the same department, Ani and Ane. Ani is the one who secretly took the video. According to Ana and Ane, whom researchers had met, eight people were in the room: husband and wife Anto and Anti, who own the house. There was also another husband and wife and a young man who acted as moderator and operator, but the identities of the three people are not yet known. Another man at the event was Aco, who gave a religious presentation to the three female students before the event.

The incident began when several students conducted Field Practices (Pengenalalan Lapangan Persekolahan, hereafter PLP) in one of the state junior high schools in Palopo City. A tutor guided the students who conducted the PLP in their field study. Three female students, Ika, Ana, and Ani, were mentored by Anti as their supervisor teacher. By Anti, the three female students were invited to her house on the grounds of the Kapurung event (Palopo specialty made from sago). Unsuspectingly, the three female students and a friend on behalf of Ane fulfilled Anti's invitation. Ane was also a student of field research, but was not under Anti's supervision. She came to Anti's house for friendship with her three colleagues.

The incident occurred on Saturday, September 5, 2020, two days after they started PLP. The four students went to Anti's house in the Perumnas area of Palopo City. When they arrived at Anti's house, they were invited to enjoy "Kapurung" and given religious materials by Anti's husband on behalf of Anto. The term for giving material to religious studies is to provide a briefing of "revelation." At first, they were unsuspecting because the material presented referred to verses from the Qur'an, and Anti wore a daily veil.

At the second meeting on October 3, 2020, they were again invited under the excuse of "Kapurung." However, when they arrived

at Anti's house, Anto gave them religious presentations again. At that meeting, after the presentation, they were asked to say the first pledge, which included a commitment not to commit adultery and not to steal. The four of them verbally uttered the "first pledge" by Anti.

They were again invited to Anti's house at the third meeting on Friday, October 23, 2020. However, one of them, Ika, could not attend because she had to go home to take care of her sick mother in Soppeng Regency. The meeting had been scheduled several times but was delayed, waiting for Riska, who was still in the village treating her mother. Because Ika stayed longer in the village, the meeting was held without waiting for her arrival. Thus, the meeting was attended by only three people: Ana, Ani, and Ane.

At the meeting, the three got follow-up materials that had not been completed at the first meeting, such as the basics of belief based on verses in the Quran. At the meeting, they were asked, "Are you willing to walk on the bridge of *sirat al mustaqim*"? then the three of them fell silent and began to think, "What exactly is this, and why would such things be being discussed?". Anto told them, "If you have walked in the *sirat al-mustaqim*, then the risk is that no one will be happy. Many will hate if they stand there". The three became even more confused by the statement but

were reluctant to ask. Respecting Anto, the three of them still followed the material, even though they already felt something was wrong. The people noted that Anto and Anti did not pray, even at the October 23 meeting that coincided with that Friday. Anto did not go to Friday prayer. Ane had asked about it but was answered by Anto that the theme would be discussed in due course.

The next day, on November 4, 2020, they were called to get the material on nine scientific basics. However, due to time constraints, they only discussed about four themes. The presentation usually starts at 9 a.m. and continues until lunch, after which it resumes at two o'clock in the afternoon. They never see Anti and her family performing prayers. Because they had not finished some aspects, they planned to continue the discussion in the next meeting.

The next meeting was on Monday, November 9, 2020. Anto stated he was tired, staying up all night because of working in the *empang* (fishpond). Finally, the religious preaching was delivered by Anto's colleague. Anto knew Aco when he worked at a private Bank in Palopo, and previously, Anto had also worked at the bank. Because Aco is in Makassar, the material was delivered online using the Go to Meet application. The presentation of materials, as usual, lasted from 09.00 to

12.00, followed by the lunch break. The event restarted from 13.00 to around 17.00. They conducted *baiat* event for the three female students on that day. At first, they would read the *baiat* simultaneously. However, Ani, who had thought about recording the incident, asked for the reciting of the *baiat* (in their terms) to be done individually.

Ana was the first to be asked to stand up to read the *baiat* text, which was highlighted by a slide and displayed on the wall. It was because he realized there were irregularities and needed documentation as evidence. Ana read the text as seen in the video. Ane and Ani took turns reading the text with procedures and methods like Ana. The study and witness event were on the eve of the Maghrib, and the three returned to their homes.

Ana, the "main character" in the video, seemed to be in a state of psychological distress or shock when the video began to spread. It was due to various comments, especially on social media, which differed from reality. However, based on their confession, when the researchers interviewed Ana, her psychological condition had begun to improve. Ana recounted her experience after she went viral on social media, and now her feelings had calmed down somewhat. She admitted that after the incident, she immediately changed her number and closed her social

media accounts, including Facebook. At the beginning of the spread of the video, Ana found out that her friend Ani made it. She had previously agreed to make the video as documentation that could later be used as evidence so that it was not said to be far-fetched. According to Ana, after returning from Anto's house on November 9, Ani did not show the video. In the evening, they communicated again and wondered why the agreement was breached. Ana still did not know about the existence of the video. While facing the supervisor the next day, Ana learned that Ani only documented a video when she read the *baiat*.

Likewise, Ane admitted that she was still traumatized because she was considered the one who focused most on following the speech. According to Ane, when she read the text, her heart remained calm because she relied on Allah. After all, Ane was conscious. Her heart wondered about what she was reading. Ane regretted being too serious while Anti was not her supervisor, which traumatized her. Ane admitted that she was interested in the studies given because she had never taken religious studies seriously, let alone discussed verses of the Quran.

Ana emphasized that she and her friends seemed to have become members in some media reports. Meanwhile, she believed that they were just victims. One article stated that ten members would get one

motorcycle. They never made that statement, but they wondered why it was in the news that way. Because the news has become "wild," they feel it is in their interest to set the facts straight with the relevant parties.

Based on the chronology of events surrounding the *baiat* event in the video, this study finds the recruitment models of non-mainstream Islamic groups. The fundamental differences are in their methods and doctrines. The religious group suspected of being a metamorphosis of the Gafatar group offers a distinctive model of spirituality articulation. The rite of allegiance is intended to affirm one's commitment to the group after acknowledging its doctrines and teachings. The doctrines taught are explicitly shown in the allegiance text read by the three female students.

The video shows that the Gafatar group, which has been designated as a banned religious group, is still carrying out its activities, albeit clandestinely. The allegiance event shows that the Gafatar group still consistently spreads Messianism's teachings to the community. This teaching has sparked controversy in the wider community, especially among Muslims. Furthermore, the recruitment mode involves the power relationship between students and a mentor teacher. The power that the teacher or lecturer has

creates a condition that leads the student to be preached and blessed as a member (congregation). Religious groups with strong mission doctrine commonly use this mode and pattern to recruit new members. However, in a social context, these modes and patterns are very vulnerable to triggering psychological pressure for recruited members and can even be referred to as "mission victims." It is evidently what the three female students experienced. Psychological pressure was due to the difference in the teachings from what they used to know. The students were forced to declare their allegiance as members. This study views the three female students as "victims of the mission."

Key Figures and Religious Teachings

Anto and Anti

The husband-and-wife duo of Anto and Anti are the key figures behind the *baiat* video. Anto claimed to have been active in several Islamic religious groups, such as the Fathul Muin Foundation (now Wahdah Islamiyah), Ashabul Kahfi Youth (youth wing of the Salafi group), and Jamaah Tabligh. He confessed that he was among the first to bring Hizbut Tahrir in South Sulawesi in 1996. In 2006, Anto joined the Al-Qiyadah Al-Islamiyah group, a diversity group led by Ahmad Musaddeq. At that time, Anto was a figure who actively spread the understanding of Al-Qiyadah in the Palopo region and its surroundings. Anto

and his friends had caused an uproar in the Palopo community. As a result, Anto and several of his colleagues were reported on charges of blasphemy and had been languishing in detention for two weeks.

In 2008, Anto and seven Al-Qiyadah frontmen were "re-Islamized" at the Great Mosque of Palopo by the Chairman of MUI of Palopo City, Syarifuddin Daud. One of Anto's colleagues who became an Al-Qiyadah activist at the time was Amirullah, who served as the Chairman of HMI-MPO Badko Eastern Indonesia. Amirullah is currently the leader of the Hidayatullah Islamic Boarding School in Luwu. According to the information obtained by researchers, after being "reislamized," Anto was active again in congregational prayers in the mosque for about a year.

When Al-Qiyadah Al-Islamiyah transformed into Gafatar in 2012, Anto rejoined the group and became the Gafatar City Leadership Council Chairman of Palopo City. Gafatar was active in social activities, including on April 29, 2012. Gafatar, in collaboration with the Student Regiment of STAIN Palopo, carried out a clean-up action at the Datu Luwu Palace. At that time, Anto was the Chairman of the Gafatar Palopo district. At that time, the Gafatar secretariat was located on Jalan Tando, Pattene Village, Palopo City. Until 2016, under Anto's leadership, Gafatar Palopo City actively carried out social

activities. According to Zuhri Abunawas (Vice Chairman of the Palopo City MUI and Director of PPs IAIN Palopo), Gafatar, under the leadership of Anto, had carried out devotional work activities in his residential environment. At that time, Gafatar conducted social services, including free medical check-ups, because one of their members worked at Prodia Makassar.

In 2016, when the Gafatar group built a village in Mempawah Regency, West Kalimantan, ten people from Palopo migrated there. The ten people consisted of two families, five adults and five children, including Anto and his four children. Another family was Sahmuddin and his four family members. At that time, Anto did not have time to emigrate to Mempawah because he was taking care of his transfer as a civil servant teacher. Gafatar village was burned, and the Gafatar members were repatriated to their respective areas, including Anto and his children. The government banned Gafatar, and the MUI issued a fatwa in 2016, stipulating Gafatar as a heretic group. Previously, the MUI also issued a fatwa stipulating the heresy of Al-Qiyadah Al-Islamiyah group in 2007. Ahmad Musaddeq himself was later convicted and sentenced to five years for blasphemy. In 2007, Ahmad Musaddeq was sentenced to four years on the same charge (Ropi 2017).

Since then, the movements of Anto and other ex-Gafatar members have not been heard of until the videos of the three students went viral in the media. Anto and his family live in the Perumnas area of Palopo City and daily work managing ponds. Based on Anto's narrative, when the researchers met at his home on Thursday, November 26, 2020, although he was once the leader of Gafatar, according to him, it was a thing of the past. It was because he was a "traveler" teacher. He confessed that the schools and teachers he met influenced his religious understanding. According to Anto, what was conveyed to the student was his thoughts.

Anti and Anto were two key figures playing an important role in the allegiance event conducted by the ex-Gafatar group. Anto and Anti's previous involvement in the Gafatar group strengthened the allegation that the *Baiat* event was the resurgence of Gafatar.

Gafatar Identical Group

Gafatar is a new religious group that belongs to the messianic group. The vision of the world's end requires its members' commitment and loyalty to its leader, who is claimed to be the promised Messiah. As explained earlier, Anto and Anti, the key figures in this case, had a track record of affiliating with the Gafatar group. Even Anto was once the Chairman of Gafatar DPK Palopo. This fact has led to the

suspicion that the ex-Gafatar group is the religious group behind the *baiat* video.

Moreover, the pledge text recited by the students in the video and the religious teachings of the Gafatar group were similar. Khareul, an Official of the Supervisor of Community Beliefs Section of the Palopo City District Attorney's Office, said that Anto and his group behind the video were Gafatar's identical religious group. It is this keyword that researchers use to refer to Anto's group.

Before Gafatar, this group was called Al-Qiyadah Al-Islamiyah, which spread in Palopo in 2006. According to Amir Faqih, a lecturer at IAIN Palopo whom researchers interviewed on Friday, November 27, 2020, the entry of Al-Qiyadah in Luwu, especially Palopo City, cannot be separated from a key figure who is one of Ahmad Musaddeq's *thin-thank*. The teachings of Al-Qiyadah found their way to Palopo and served as one of the fundamental pillars of the group in South Sulawesi.

Al-Qiyadah transformed into Gafatar after being banned by a 2007 MUI fatwa. Ahmad Musaddeq, its leader, was sentenced to four years in prison. Before changing to Gafatar on September 12, 2009, Musaddeq's followers declared a new name for their community under Millah Abraham Community (Komar). Komar founded a wing organization called

Gerakan Fajar Nusantara (Gafatar) in Jakarta on August 14, 2011.

Since becoming Gafatar, the group has grown and recruited members through social activities. The number of Gafatar members in Palopo City reached tens of people who were active in social activities. By the end of 2015, two families from Palopo emigrated with thousands of other Gafatar members from all over Indonesia to the Mempawah area of West Kalimantan to form a village.

For almost five years since the repatriation of ex-Gafatar members in January 2016 and the suspension of Gafatar as a mass organization by the government and following a heretical fatwa by the Central MUI regarding this group, its movement was not heard. However, the members were suspected of moving "underground," as evidenced by the video involving three students. According to Amir Faqih, a former activist of the Makassar, the ex-Gafatar group will continue to move "underground" as long as there are no serious actions from the government and stakeholders.

The recruitment modus of these three students by Anto and Anti appears to be similar to the modus of Al-Qiyadah and Gafatar. The persuasive approach of preaching basic religious teaching began with "making a pledge" and ended with the *baiat*, which is similar to the method

practiced by Al-Qiyadah and Gafatar. To prove whether the Anto group is a continuation of Gafatar, the researchers explored the religious teachings conveyed by Anto to the three female students through the notes of one of the female students. She intensely participated and recorded the study material during four meetings.

Anto group's teaching material was also explored through interviews and discussions with Anto and Anti at their residence on Thursday, November 26, 2020. Researchers also obtained a recording file of Bakor Pakem's coordination meeting with Anto and Anti, in which Anto and Anti explained their teachings.

Although Anto denies that his teachings are a continuation of Gafatar or Al-Qiyadah, researchers observed that Anto's thoughts still indicate similarities or are identical to Gafatar's beliefs. Anto explained his teachings based on the Quranic verse on Millah Ibrahim, found in four verses: Sura An-Nisa: 125, Al-An'am: 161, Yunus: 38, and Al-Hajj: 78.

In a video sent by a female student to the researcher, there is a rumor that Anto's presentation of the leader connected to Prophet Ibrahim. Another similarity is the belief that the descendants of Ibrahim's third wife, Ketura, are the ancestors of the Nusantara nation, and it is through the

Nusantara nation that Ibrahim's descendants from his third wife will be fulfilled.

Al-Qiyadah and Gafatar groups named their teachings after the term Hanif Islam, which means straight Islam. It is what *sirath al mustaqim* (straight path) means in surah al Fatihah. That is why the emphasis on the meaning of *sirath al mustaqim* became so important and became an early part of the discussion of his teachings. This finding is similar to the narrative of three female students who participated in the Anto group study, which emphasized the importance of understanding and practicing "*sirath al mustaqim*" from the beginning.

Anto admitted that he interpreted the verses of the Qur'an with other verses or interpretations of the Quranic verses with other Quranic verses. According to him, the verses of the Quran explain each other. It is the method that Anto used to understand the interpretation of the Quran. The researchers found this model similar to the interpretation of Quranic verses used by both Al-Qiyadah and Gafatar. According to Zuhri Abu Nawas, the verses of the Qur'an used by Anto are verses that the Gafatar group also uses. The analysis of verses quoted by Anto reveals that the verses were often used in Gafatar teachings.

The researchers have questioned Anto about his views on the periodization of

Makkiyah (Mecca) and Madaniyah (Medina) in Islamic history and the periodization of the Quranic revelation. This question implies the Gafatar's belief that Muslims are still in the Mecca period, meaning that Sharia-based rituals, such as prayers and fasting, should not be practiced yet. Anto explained that the period of Mecca and Medina does not indicate a place but a time. The Mecca period focused on fostering and instilling the teachings of Tawhid (the oneness of God) and the time when *sharia* had not yet been revealed.

According to Anto, that period is repeated today because social conditions depict the state of the *Jahiliyyah* (age of ignorance) era in terms of social deterioration, as shown by moral decadence and the deviation from the true teachings of Islam. Anto expressed his views on this recurring Mecca period. However, the researchers matched the reports of the three female students and concluded that Anto and Anti's beliefs were similar to Al Qiyadah and Gafatar regarding the invalidation of *sharia* in the Mecca period.

Another keyword that Anto talked about is the concept of Messias, expressed explicitly in the text of *baiat* or act in the viral video. In this regard, Anto initially argued about his understanding that messiahs are witnesses of the divine teaching. The researchers allude to whether Anto

believed that the messiahs were personal figures who promised to be present in the last days to fulfill the teachings of Islam. Anto acknowledged that even though he did not explicitly mention the name of the Messiah in question,

The text mentioned in the video shows that the concept of a messiah believed by Anto and his group describes that the Anto group is a messianic religious group whose beliefs are centered on the messiah figure as the promised savior. Its religious and social movements describe the messianic movement, synonymous with Messianism Al-Qiyadah, Millah Abraham, and Gafatar. The word "tuan semesta alam" (master of universe) referred to in the *baiat* text is synonymous with the concept of the Unitary State of the Lord of the Universe, which is the mission of the Gafatar group. Thus, they carried out a communal hijra to Mempawah, West Kalimantan. This mission remains preserved, as the text mentions the need to sacrifice wealth and self for the mission.

Based on the above explanation, Anto's movement is a new form of the ex-Gafatar group, banned since 2016. Anto and his friends' movement implies that the ex-Gafatar group still exists even with underground movements. Anto and his wife's recruiting three female students indicated a fairly structured and systematic movement.

Gafatar can be considered a problematic sect based on the criteria compiled by the Research Team of the Research Center, Religious Services, and Training Agency of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. These criteria include sects or movements that are clearly against state law, commit treason to create conflict and establish a new state, and advocate hostility, terror, and crimes against humanity. The next criterion is a religious sect the court has determined to be problematic. Secretly or openly, they still do not change (Mufid et al. 2017). The ban on Gafatar in 2016 was based on the criteria that the movement is a treason movement.

The Gafatar-identical religious group led by Anto will likely be penalized by the second point of the criteria. Even with the banning of Gafatar, Anto and his friends have been still secretly part of the group. With the public's reaction to the viral video, there is a need for guidance and supervision from related parties, which, in this case, involves MUI, all religious leaders, the Police, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Coordinating Body for Monitoring Cults, and National Unity and Political Affairs Agency of Palopo City.

Controversy and reactions from the community, especially religious leaders, are common for religious groups considered to be deviants. It is what Anto and his group have experienced. The

conflicting teachings with the mainstream have certainly sparked controversy. This event has also triggered responses from the Indonesian Ulama Council or MUI, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and other Islamic religious leaders. The stakeholders' involvement becomes crucial to controlling society and avoiding conflicts. Furthermore, there have been efforts to invite Anto and his followers to return to mainstream beliefs.

The new religious movement is a response to dissatisfaction with the doctrines of the mainstream groups. However, for the mainstream group, the new religious movement is seen as a deviation and is considered a threat by society and the government. It is because new religious groups are considered to offer teachings that disrupt the established teachings of mainstream groups. Therefore, in the name of stability, the religious group will experience exclusion. It was the case for Anto and his group. Attempts to revive the Gafatar group's activities have faced most of the community's reaction. In this situation, the government tends to side with the aspirations of the majority group.

Anto and his ex-Gafatar group's attempt to revive their activities in Palopo exemplifies what is described above. The intervention of religious institutions and the government is more likely to respond to the aspirations of mainstream groups.

Therefore, new religious groups that are considered deviant groups, like Gafatar, will always be the "guilty" party. Even if dialogue and mediation approaches are conducted, they tend to be directed towards forcing the group to stop their activities.

CONCLUSION

The recent incident in Palopo City, where ex-Gafatar members pledged allegiance to three female students, highlights the continued activities of the Gafatar religious group despite its government prohibition. The viral video of this allegiance sparked controversy and resistance, particularly among the Muslim population in Palopo City. Local government authorities and religious leaders are encouraged to respond swiftly to prevent societal conflict escalations.

The resurgence of Gafatar's activities underscores the ineffectiveness of monitoring and regulatory measures

implemented following the group's ban by a Joint Decree of Three Ministers in 2016. Consequently, this research proposes concrete actions by security agencies, government bodies, and religious leaders to monitor and prevent Gafatar group activities, ensuring that an incident similar to the 2016 Mempawah case does not recur. A persuasive approach towards former Gafatar members is recommended, involving social, economic, and religious support to facilitate their reintegration into mainstream society.

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