

## SALAFI DA'WAH AMONG HIJRA CELEBRITIES

## DA'WAH SALAFI DI KALANGAN SELEBRITAS HIJRAH

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31330/penamas.v36i2.711>

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Received: August 29<sup>th</sup> 2023  
Revised: November 25<sup>th</sup> 2023  
Published: November 30<sup>th</sup> 2023

### **Abstract**

*Many Islamic movements have emerged with a different style from the mainstream. One of them is the Salafi movement. Although many parties reject Salafi preaching, not a few can also accept it, one of them is a group of artists who are growing their religious passion. They are known as hijra celebrities. This article discusses the process of acceptance of Salafi da'wah among hijra celebrities. This research is field research with a descriptive qualitative approach. The primary data of this study were obtained from in-depth interviews with preachers and celebrities who attended Salafi recitations. The research subjects were determined purposively after observing several Hijra artists. This research also utilizes various literature related to the Salafism theme and the phenomenon of Hijra celebrity. The results show that social media plays an important role in encouraging the development of the Hijra movement. Social media has connected Hijra celebrities with Salafi preachers. Some of the celebrities interviewed admitted that their interest in attending Salafi studies grew after listening to recitations through social media. Thus, Hijra celebrities are actively seeking and receiving Salafi preaching.*

**Keywords:** *Hijra celebrities; salafi movement; salafi preaching*

### **Abstrak**

Artikel ini membahas tentang proses penerimaan selebritas Hijra terhadap dakwah Salafi. Masalah ini dibahas karena akhir-akhir ini banyak muncul gerakan Islam dengan corak yang berbeda dari mainstream. Salah satunya adalah gerakan Salafi. Meski banyak pihak yang menolak dakwah Salafi, tak sedikit juga yang bisa menerimanya, salah satunya adalah sekelompok artis yang sedang tumbuh gairah beragama. Mereka dikenal sebagai selebritas/selebriti Hijra. Penelitian ini merupakan *field research* dengan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif. Data utama diperoleh melalui wawancara mendalam terhadap dai dan selebritas yang mengikuti pengajian Salafi. Subyek penelitian ditentukan secara purposif setelah dilakukan pengamatan terhadap beberapa artis Hijrah. Penelitian ini juga memanfaatkan berbagai kepustakaan yang terkait dengan tema Salafisme dan fenomena selebritas Hijrah. Hasil penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa media sosial memainkan peran penting dalam mendorong perkembangan gerakan Hijrah. Media sosial telah menghubungkan selebritas Hijrah dengan para dai Salafi. Beberapa selebritas Hijrah yang diwawancarai mengakui bahwa minat mereka untuk mengikuti kajian Salafi tumbuh setelah mendengarkan pengajian melalui media sosial. Dengan demikian, para selebritas Hijrah merupakan pihak yang aktif mencari dan menerima dakwah Salafi.

**Kata Kunci:** *selebritas hijrah; gerakan salafi, dakwah salafi*

## INTRODUCTION

The 1998 reformation opened up freedom of speech and association in Indonesia. The first decade after the reformation was characterized by the emergence of various movements with diverse orientations, including those with a religious character. In this era, many Islamic movements displayed a different Islamic orientation from the mainstream. They are commonly called as "new *santri*" (Fata & Ichwan, 2017; Machmudi, 2008). Most of them get their Islamic spirit and knowledge not from Islamic learning centers such as *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) and *madrassah* (Islamic school), but from books, mass media, or study groups, so Kuntowijoyo (2018) calls them "Muslims without mosques".

Among these emerging movements is the Salafi movement. This movement actually existed in Indonesia long before the 1998 reformation. Abd A'la (2008) noted the existence of a movement inspired by Saudi Arabia's Salafism (Wahhābiyah) in the early 19th century, where the Padri movement rejected the practice of local customs and opposed Dutch colonialism. In the post-independence era of Indonesia, the Salafism movement is suspected to have developed rapidly in Indonesia in the 1980s or even since the early 1970s through various campus da'wah institutions in several state universities such as ITB, IPB, UGM, UI, UNPAD or UNAIR (Bachtar,

2023; Fauzan, 2023; Qodir, 2008). In addition, the existence of the Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Islam dan Bahasa Arab (LIPIA or the Institute for the Study of Islam and Arabic Sciences) in Jakarta and the return of Middle Eastern alumni, especially Saudi Arabia, to the country also greatly contributed to the development of Salafism in Indonesia (Dewi & Fata, 2021; Zaenuri & Yusuf, 2019).

After the reformation, the Salafi movement has become more active in spreading its religious ideas, causing pros and cons and friction in the midst of society. The rejection of the establishment of Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal mosques in Bogor and Gresik by a group of people, as well as the dissolution/prohibition of many Salafi recitations in various regions, are examples of this controversy (Muliono, Suwarko, & Ismail, 2019). However, the wide openness and freedom in the reform era are not the determining factors for the rapid development of Salafi da'wah in the reform era. Hidayat (2012) noted other factors, such as the social networks built since the New Order era and their ability to frame their ideology well so the community can accept it as a determining factor in the expansion of Salafism in the reform era .

Among the groups of people who are receptive to Salafi proselytizing are celebrities who have a strong passion for religious teachings. They are commonly called hijra celebrities (Zahara, Wildan, &

Komariah, 2020). The question is why the Hijra celebrities accept the Salafi's da'wah? What is the process of their acceptance? What is the media that connects hijra celebrities to Salafi preaching? These questions are interesting to study further to reveal the factors and process of accepting Salafi da'wah among the middle class working in the entertainment sector. On this basis, this research discusses how hijra celebrities' acceptance process towards Salafi da'wah.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

There have been many studies on the Salafi movement and the phenomenon of artists who choose to migrate. Studies on the history of Salafi development in Indonesia have been conducted by many scholars, including Abd A'la (2008) and Zuly Qodir (2008).

A'la (2008) stated that radicalism in Indonesia is rooted in the Padri movement in Sumatra. Although they have some differences with the Wahhābi movement in Arabia, the two movements (Padri & Wahhābi) have in common their radical attitude in practicing what they believe to be pure Islam. Meanwhile, Qodir's study (2008) discussed the rise of new Islamic movements after the Reformation, especially the Tarbiyah Movement and Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI). In the article, Qodir mentioned that both movements have a political

mission to make Indonesia an Islamic state, even a caliphate state. Qodir also mentioned that Adian Husaini is an HTI activist, and Hidayatullah Magazine, even a POP porn magazine, is a media belonging to the Tarbiyah movement. Unfortunately, Qodir's "accusation" was not accompanied by clear evidence and references.

Adian Husaini is an Islamic activist who was active in the Pelajar Islam Indonesia (PII), Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam (HMI), Muhammadiyah, MUI, and Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia (DDII). There has never been a record of him being active in HTI (Admin, 2019; Fata, 2006; Firdaus, 2014; Suhadi, 2017). In comparison, Hidayatullah magazine is a mass media affiliated with the Hidayatullah organization from East Kalimantan (Kamil, 2018; Utami, 2020). Thus, Qodir's statement is a baseless accusation.

If Qodir said the Salafi movement had a hidden political agenda, Wahid (2011) saw the opposite. According to him, Salafi is a religious movement that is oriented towards puritanism and anti-politics, especially political parties. They only became involved in politics when they defended Muslims in the conflict in Maluku in the early 2000s.

Research that discusses Salafi da'wah in Indonesia was conducted by Chozin (2013). In his research, Chozin explained that the Salafi movement propagates its ideas in various ways. In addition to conventional

methods such as lectures, they also established educational institutions (schools, madrasas, pesantren), utilizing mass media (radio, TV, print media) and digital media. They get financial support to run all the programs from the Middle East. This finding is corroborated by Iqbal's research (Iqbal, 2019).

Other studies conducted by Hafid (2021) and Muliono, et al. (2019) are more focused on discussing the controversy of Salafi da'wah in the community associated with radicalism. They suggested that accusations of Salafis as radicals were a stigma deliberately created to produce a negative view of the movement. This stigma is raised by groups that are worried about the rapid development of Salafi da'wah in society.

Many scholars have also conducted studies that discuss Hijra celebrities. Zahara et al. (2020) stated that the Hijra phenomenon is part of the search for identity among young Muslims by utilizing digital media. The massive development of this phenomenon has created a new social group that is slang but still Islamic. The opposite perspective is demonstrated by Fitri and Jayanti (2020). In their study, the two researchers actually consider the phenomenon of Hijra celebs to display an exclusive style of religion. In contrast, Muna (2020) found that apart from expressing active piety, the phenomenon of Hijra among artists is

also a form of 'resistance' to demonstrate their presence while wearing a hijab.

Even though so many studies deal with Salafi da'wah in Indonesia and the phenomenon of the Hijra artists, no studies focus on Salafi da'wah among Hijra celebrities, especially those that discuss how they can accept Salafi da'wah. This absence disconnects the discussion about Salafi da'wah and Hijra celebrities, so the reasons and processes of the artists accepting the da'wah have not been revealed. Thus, this research becomes interesting.

## **METHOD**

This field research study seeks to reveal the phenomenon of Hijra celebrities joining the Salafi movement. "Celebrity" is "a famous person" ("Celebrity," 2023). Celebrities are famous people for being too close to the news or press. Professions that can be included in the celebrity group are singers, musicians, models, actors, athletes, presenters, film directors, and even politicians. Along with the development of new media, nowadays, the term "Selebgam" is also popular, namely people who become famous through social media (Badriyah, 2021). In this study, the term celebrity was limited to artists and musicians/singers who were growing their religious passion. These are known as "Hijra celebrities".

A descriptive qualitative method is used to uncover this research problem. Main data was obtained through in-depth interviews

with celebrities who follow Salafi recitation and preachers who become their mentors. The researchers determine the research subjects purposively after observation of several Hijra artists and Salafi preachers. Informants are selected based on their involvement in recitations held with mentors from among preachers who are widely known as Salafi figures. It was also based on their willingness to provide information for this research. The interview process itself was conducted around 2018-2019. The phenomenological approach is used so that researchers can reveal the facts as they are. To strengthen the discussion, this research also utilizes various available literature on Salafism and the phenomenon of Hijra celebrities. This literature review is carried out before, during, and after extracting field data and continues to be updated until this paper is written perfectly.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Salafi: Its Identity & Teachings

Salafis, a Muslim group in Indonesia, have experienced tremendous growth over the past few decades. Their development began in the decades of the 1970s and 1980s. At the time, there was a trend of more and more young people wearing beards (*liḥyah*) and robes (*jalābiyyah*), as well as turban (*'imāmah*), short pants, and black broadcloth. In addition, female worshippers have also

begun wearing face coverings (*niqāb*) (Hasan, 2006).

The tenets of Salafi teachings focus on their belief in pure faith. For them, the correct creed is one based on pure tawhid. Three main elements must be believed for someone to be considered to adhere to pure tawhid.

First, believing that only Allah has the power to create everything. This concept is called *tawḥīd rubūbiyah*, which recognizes that Allah is the only one with the power to create and govern the universe. There is no other entity that can create or govern other than Allah. People who believe that other things have the power to create health or safety, such as believing in the efficacy of amulets or *jampi-jampi*, have fallen into *shirk*, which is prohibited in religion (Al-Tamimi, 2014, p. 141).

Second, believing that only Allah has the right to be the sole object of worship. This concept is known as *tawḥīd ulūhiyah*, which refers to the divine nature that specifically refers to the essence that deserves worship. Someone who worships other than Allah has fallen into *shirk*. In this context, Salafis consider Muslims who practice *tawasul* - the mentioning of the name of the Prophet or saints (pious people) in praying to Allah - to be committing *shirk*. The same applies to those who seek blessings from the pious, ask for help from other than Allah, or perform grave pilgrimages. All such practices are considered doors to *shirk* (Al-



Tamimi, 2014, p. 199). Third, recognizing and attributing the names and attributes of Allah as they have been described in the Qur'an and Sunnah, without making any interpretation or meaning other than their literal meaning. Interpreting His name and attributes in any other way is considered a rejection of the teachings about Allah's names and attributes. This concept is known as *tawhīd al-asmā' wa al-sifāt* (Al-Tamimi, 2014, p. 266).

In the Salafi movement version, the trilogy of tawhid is augmented by the concept of *tawhīd hakimiyyah*. *Tawhīd hakimiyyah* refers to Allah's right to be the only legislator that must be followed. It means that only Allah Almighty has the right to establish laws and has absolute authority over applicable laws. If some individuals or institutions declare themselves as the party entitled to set the law and be followed, then the action is considered an act of *shirk*. This term has political overtones because it is often used to criticize rulers or governments that are considered not implementing the laws of Allah Almighty (D. Wahid, 2017, p. 399).

In the Jihadi Salafi view, this teaching is expanded with the concepts of *al-wala' wa al-bara'*, *takfīr*, and *jihād*. *Al-wala' wa al-bara'* describes the attitude of loyalty to the doctrine of monotheism and groups that support the doctrine of monotheism. Meanwhile, *takfīr* is the act of expelling

someone from the group if it is considered contrary to the *tawhīd hakimiyyah* doctrine. Usually, the *al-wala' wa al-bara'* concept is used to expel Muslim rulers and their supporters who are considered contrary to the doctrine of *tawhīd hakimiyyah* from the Islamic community. It is rarely used to expel non-Muslim groups because they are already considered enemies if they do not pay *jizyah*. Meanwhile, jihad is an effort to eliminate various forms of shirk and strengthen the teachings of monotheism through state institutions (Cook, 2017).

The Salafi group has its roots in a Saudi Arabian religious reform movement spearheaded by Muḥammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhāb (1703-1791 CE). At first, the movement was better known as Wahhābi. However, the term Salafi began to refer to the da'wah movement connected to Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's teachings, a new development. These changes confused scholars. Previously, the term Salafi was adopted in scholarly circles to refer to the reform movement that was initiated by Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afgāni (1838-1897 CE) and Muḥammad Abduh (1849-1905 CE). This movement played a significant role in various reform movements across the Islamic world. As a result, there is an overlap in the use of the term Salafi (Lauzi`ere, 2010; Pall, 2016; Weismann, 2017). Under the leadership of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, the movement for reform

divergence from the perspectives of Afgāni and 'Abduh. Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb was more oriented towards traditionalism with a desire to replicate the life of the era of the Prophet and companions, while Afgāni-'Abduh was more oriented towards modernism ("Salafi," 2018).

### **The Development of the Salafi Movement in Indonesia**

Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia (DDII or the Indonesian Da'wah Islamiyah Council) was one of the first institutions to establish cooperation with Rābiṭah al-'Ālam al-Islāmī (MWL) and the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY). In the 1980s, students who wanted to study in Saudi Arabia usually had to be DDII cadres or at least get a recommendation from this institution (Hidayat, 2012; Husin, 1999; D. Wahid, 2014). ICG notes that in 2004, DDII published a pamphlet stating that since 1967, they had sent 500 students abroad. These alumni later became an important element in the spread of Salafi Wahhabi da'wah in Indonesia. They established a number of institutions that developed Salafi da'wah. Apart from the institutions managed by the alumni, the Government of Saudi Arabia also established an educational institution in Indonesia, namely LIPIA, which is a branch of the University of Imām Muḥammad ibn Sa'ud in Riyāḍ (Jahroni, 2017).

However, not all Indonesian students

recommended by DDII and studying in Saudi Arabia became Wahhabis. Many of them continued to follow the movements from their origins before leaving for Saudi Arabia, such as DDII, Muhammadiyah, Persis, and even Nahdatul Ulama (NU), such as KH Mohammad Tidjani Djauhari, Caregiver of al-Amin Islamic Boarding School, Prenduan, Madura. Some chose to follow other international Islamic movements, such as al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn, Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr, or Jamā'ah Tablīg. Later on, DDII's right and privilege to provide study recommendations to Saudi Arabia was revoked. The students themselves handled the selection of students who wanted to continue their studies on Saudi campuses. This policy resulted from the conflict between the Saudi government and the Ikhwān in the 1990s. During the Gulf War, the United States pressured the Saudi Arabia to eliminate the Ikhwān's influence in the country because it was considered a distraction to American interests. Following the wishes of its coalition partners, Saudi undertook a de-Ikhwānization movement on its campuses (Bachtiar, 2018; Miranti, 2020).

Before the reformation era, Salafi developments in Indonesia had almost no direct connection with the political sphere. They could be categorized as "Silent Salafism (*Salafist-Quetist*)" that focused on education and da'wah. However, when

there were many conflicts in some areas, they began to get involved in political dynamics, such as Laskar Jihad led by Ja'far Umar Talib, who tried to defend Muslims who were victims in the inter-religious conflict in Ambon (Hasan, 2006). On the other hand, there is a small group of Salafis associated with global terrorism, such as Jamaah Islamiyyah (JI) (Alamsyah & Hadiz, 2017; Fata & Khamdan, 2021; Solahudin, 2011). Some other Salafi groups are involved in the struggle for sharia formalization in Indonesia, both nationally and regionally (Nashir, 2016). Although many Salafi groups in Indonesia have various orientations of their movements, most focus more on da'wah and educational activities (Kovacs, 2014).

Rābiṭah al-Ālam al-Islāmī and the International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO) are international institutions based in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, that are active in channeling social assistance to da'wah networks in Indonesia. Initially, the organization wanted to partner with DDII to deliver financial assistance, but the offer was politely declined. They approached Abu Bakar M. Altway, who had studied in Saudi Arabia and were enthusiastically welcomed. Together with Abdul Hakim Abdat and Abdul Qadir Jawwas, Altway established the al-Shofwah Foundation in Lenteng Agung, Jakarta, in 1992. The organization operates in three areas: da'wah,

education, and social assistance. Their first highly successful programme was to recruit 100 preachers to be distributed throughout Indonesia. The programme successfully recruited preachers, most of whom graduated from LIPIA and Middle Eastern universities. The education division in al-Shofwah created an innovative learning programme ahead of its time, using modern technology such as facsimile, telephone, email, and post to communicate with teaching staff remotely. By 2004, the program had graduated around 2,000 alumni and had established a diploma-level educational institution called Ma'had 'Ali that regularly held *dawrah* activities to educate preachers (Group, 2004).

In addition, IIRO collaborates with Wahdah Islamiyyah (WI), an organization founded in Makassar, South Sulawesi. WI was established in 2002 as a foundation by alumni from the Middle East and South Asia. This Salafis organization has successfully built networks in various regions, especially in the Sulawesi, East Kalimantan, and Yogyakarta regions. In addition to IIRO, WI also cooperates with al-Haramayn, a donor organization from Kuwait (Group, 2004). WI has branches scattered in various areas in Indonesia, where in each branch, there is a leader, one fluent Arabic instructor, and two *ustāḍ* with sufficiently deep religious knowledge as ḥalaqah (intensive study groups consisting of ten to fifteen people) supervisors. The



team is also complemented by at least one person with computer (IT) knowledge. Although not all branches meet these requirements, the recruitment and development of Salafi cadres within the WI is evidently based on a systematic approach. WI adopts the LIPIA education model, so most of its teachers are graduates from LIPIA. The curriculum comes from Ibn Sa'ud Islamic University in Riyadh and Madinah Islamic University. Preachers from WI actively give lectures and Friday sermons in 60 mosques throughout Makassar City and foster 150 *tarbiyah* (religious study groups) on various campuses in Makassar. In addition, WI also possesses a magazine, a radio station, and 130 preachers who operate beyond the Makassar region (Group, 2004).

Besides organizations, individuals also play a significant role in spreading Salafi da'wah in Indonesia. Born in 1954 in Gresik, East Java, Chamsaha Sofyan received primary education from NU educational institutions and secondary education from Muhammadiyah institutions. He later became better known as Abu Nida' and played a pioneering role in Salafi da'wah in Indonesia. In 1976, Abu Nida' began studying at the Karangasem Islamic Boarding School, Paciran, Lamongan, East Java, and attended a preacher training held by DDII in Bogor, West Java. He was then assigned to preach in

West Kalimantan among the Dayak people, who still strongly held local beliefs and faced Christian missionaries. Two years later, he was moved to DDII central office in Jakarta. Shortly after, he earned a scholarship to study at Imām Muḥammad ibn Sa'ud University in Riyāḍ, Saudi Arabia, while still working at the DDII office, which was then led by Abdul Wahid. Abdul Wahid was DDII's liaison with various donor agencies in the Middle East, including the Kuwait-based Jam'iyyah Ihya' al-Turāth al-Islāmī (Revival of Islamic Heritage Society). Abu Nida' was later appointed as the organization's official representative for Indonesia (Group, 2004).

After completing his studies at Muḥammad ibn Sa'ud University, in 1985, Abu Nida' went to the Pakistan-Afghanistan border for three months of jihad training under Jamil Ur Rahman. After returning to Indonesia, he joined the al-Mukmin Islamic Boarding School in Ngruki, Solo, as a teacher. In 1986, he married a student from Ngruki and relocated to Sleman, Yogyakarta. While living there, he worked as a teacher at the Ibn Qayyim Islamic Boarding School and gained fame as a Salafi preacher. In this city, he became acquainted with Saefullah Mahyudin, an administrator of DDII Yogyakarta who was also a lecturer at Gajah Mada University. Through Saefullah, Abu Nida' began to foster students in the campus mosque

environment and formed the Jamaah Salahudin. In 1988, Jamaah Salahudin established the al-Turots Foundation as a branch of Jam'iyyah Ihya' al-Turāth al-Islāmī in Indonesia and held various *dawrahs* involving a number of young people from Sumatra and Kalimantan at Ibnul Qayyim Islamic Boarding School (Group, 2004).

Abu Nida' also cooperates with al-Irsyad Islamic Boarding School in Tenganan, Salatiga, led by Yusuf Baisa. In addition to its contacts with the Salafi groups, Abu Nida' also established partnerships with Tarbiyah and Darul Islam groups. In the 1990s, the relationship between Jamaah Salahudin and Abu Nida' began to deteriorate as he believed they were closely associated with the activism of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Tarbiyah movement. According to Abu Nida', both groups had strayed from the fundamental principles of Islam, which is to purify the faith. The tension ultimately reached its apex when the two factions vied to control the mosque near the Faculty of Medicine at UGM. Eventually, the Tarbiyah activists assumed command of the mosque, causing Abu Nida's group to withdraw. Abu Nida' decided to join al-Irsyad Islamic Boarding School in Salatiga. However, divisions also occurred among Abu Nida's followers. Some people were dissatisfied with Abu Nida's decision to be influenced by IM-

style teachings (Group, 2004).

Ja'far Umar Talib, another notable Salafi figure, enrolled at LIPIA in 1983 and participated in the al-Irsyad student movement. He obtained a scholarship endorsed by DDII and pursued his studies at the Mawdudi Institute in Lahore, Pakistan 1986. A year later, he joined the resistance movement against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. Like Abu Nida, Talib attended military training at a camp led by Jamil Ur Rahman on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. After returning to Indonesia in 1990, Talib began teaching at al-Irsyad Islamic Boarding School, Salatiga. Then, in 1991, he went to Dammaz, Yemen, to engage in academic studies with the distinguished Salafi scholar Shaykh Muqbil ibn Hādī al-Wādī'ī. After completing his education in 1993, he returned to Degolan, Sleman, Yogyakarta, and established Ihya' al-Sunnah Islamic Boarding School. His work in the Islamic boarding school made him one of Indonesia's leading Salafi figures (Group, 2004).

In 2004 Abu Nida' and Ja'far Umar Talib, along with several other Salafi figures, established the Forum for the Communication of Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jamaah (FKASWJ) as a means of connecting and meeting preachers in the Salaf manhāj. At that time (2004), 55 *ustād* (individuals) and 28 institutions throughout Indonesia joined FKASWJ. However, not all institutions and individual

Salafi preachers joined the institution formed by Abu Nida and Ja'far Umar Talib. Many of them still stand alone or join other organizations outside FKASWJ.

In recent years, the Salafi community's da'wah has grown rapidly, especially with the widespread use of internet technology. Salafi preachers have wisely taken advantage of this situation, which other preaching groups are unaware of. They actively establish community radio, television channels and widely use social media. Among these, the utilization of social media has been the most phenomenal. Islamic video content, over the past few years, has been dominated by the Salafi version of Islamic material. Preachers such as Dr. Syafiq Reza Basalamah, Dr. Khalid Basalamah, Badrussalam, Lc., Dr. Firanda Andirja, Abduh Tuasikal, Lc., and Ammi Nur Baits, ST., BA. are some of the many Salafi preachers who play a role in spreading Islamic propagation on the internet. Generally, they also develop educational institutions or da'wah institutions that are professional enough to spread Salafi teachings in a more organized and structured manner.

### **Salafi Da'wah among Celebrities**

An interesting phenomenon of Salafi da'wah in Indonesia in recent years is their success in reaching celebrities. Salafis in Indonesia have used the internet and social media platforms to spread their

message. They are considered to be the pioneers of the Muslim community in Indonesia in using the internet for da'wah. For example, Khalid Basalamah first uploaded his video lectures on YouTube in 2012. At that time, no preachers in Indonesia posted da'wah videos on YouTube. Officially, Khalid Basalamah's da'wah video posted on Khalid Basalamah's official account is dated February 8, 2013 ("Khalid Basalamah Official," n.d.)). As of July 31, 2023, the channel has 2.61 million subscribers with 3.7 thousand videos. The average view is 50,000 to 200,000 times.

Using the YouTube platform is an important milestone in the changing pattern of Salafi preaching in Indonesia. Previously, preachers known as "*ustāḍ* celebs," similar to televangelists in the West, relied on television media to spread the teachings of Islam. However, a major shift occurred about a decade ago when the internet entered Indonesia and began to be used massively. Khalid Basalamah and Salafi communities, such as Radio Rodja, pioneered the developing of internet-based da'wah media. Compared to mainstream Muslim groups in Indonesia, Salafi communities were quicker in adopting this new technology to support their da'wah movement.

This virtual da'wah case is dilemmatic for Salafis. On the one hand, they ban images of living things, but on the other hand, they actually use YouTube and various social

media platforms to preach. They seem to see such potential for benefit in preaching virtually; therefore, they justify it (Andirja, 2017; Basalamah, 2017, 2020; Ibnu, 2023). Due to this case, we can see that although Salafis often refer to the text of Quran and hadith literally and strictly, in certain cases, they are "reconciled" with reality on the consideration of *al-maṣlahah*.

Soon after, urban communities familiar with the internet responded enthusiastically, including celebrities. According to Khalid (*interview*, 2018), the first celebrity figure interested in his da'wah model was Teuku Wisnu.<sup>1</sup> Initially, Wisnu followed Khalid Basalamah's online recitation before finally meeting him in person at a recitation at al-Azhar Mosque, Kebayoran, Jakarta. Previously, Wisnu had felt spiritually restless and tried to find religious references with various recitation communities he could access. However, he found the internet as a source and medium that provided the religious information he needed. At the same time, videos of Khalid Basalamah's

lectures were widely circulated on YouTube. The two of them met and became acquainted. Wisnu began holding a recitation (*ta'lim*) at his home with Khalid Basalamah as a mentor. Wisnu also invited other artists, such as Primus Yustisio.<sup>2</sup> Khalid's recitation attracted the attention of many artists who deeply desired to explore religion, as Wisnu had before. This recitation also attracted the participation of many other artists, so Teuku Wisnu's residence was no longer sufficient to accommodate the number of worshipers. Finally, the recitation was moved to Primus' residence and continues until now. The recitation community led by Wisnu also often invites other Salafi preachers, such as Badrus Salam from Rodja (Dewi & Fata, 2021).

About the beginning of his Hijra and interest in Khalid Basalamah's *ta'lim*, Primus said:

*"Imagine, I used to wake up at 3 AM to run in the morning, at 4 AM I heard the azan (call to prayer) but didn't go to the mosque. When I watch Ustaz Khalid's YouTube, he always says: 'Men must pray in congregation, there is no reason not to go to the mosque'. I was like a slap, for me, this was guidance*

<sup>1</sup> Teuku Wisnu is an actor, presenter, singer and model. In the movie "Cinta Fitri" his name became popular. Some of the awards he has won in entertainment include: MTV VJ Hunt 2006 finalist, Favorite Actor at Panasonic Award (2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014) SCTV Award (2007, 2008, and 2010). See

[https://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teuku\\_Wisnu#Video\\_musik](https://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teuku_Wisnu#Video_musik)

<sup>2</sup> Primus started his career in soap opera in

1993. But the soap opera that launched his name was "Cinta" with Desy Ratnasari. Some of the soap operas he has starred in include "Kehormatan", "Panji Manusia Millenium", "Papaku Keren-Keren", "Si Kembar", "Titipan Ilahi", and "Cinta Itu Tidak Buta". In 1999, he was awarded as the most favorite actor by Panasonic Award. Since 2009 he has been elected as a member of the House of Representatives through PAN. See

[https://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Primus\\_Yustisio](https://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Primus_Yustisio)

*(hidāyah). It took courage to start. I like Ustaz Khalid because he is firm, easy to contact and answer, and his references are clear. I think my character and Ustaz Khalid match. He is what he is. That is, he tells it like it is. Not saying 'according to me', but according to the Qur'an and the hadith. Clear, black-and-white."* (Primus Yustisio, interview, 2019).

Mediana Hutomo<sup>3</sup> is a celebrity who is also interested in Salafi da'wah, especially that of the Rodja. She states that her interest in Sunnah recitation, another name for Salafi da'wah, came after a dozen years of spiritual searching. In the early 2000s, she felt the need for self-improvement. Initially, Mediana attended a recitation organized by Din Syamsuddin, a leading figure of Muhammadiyah. However, she was dissatisfied with the thematic approach used in the recitation. She preferred a recitation that was based directly on references to Islamic texts. Around 2013, by chance, Mediana visited a friend's house. There, she found out that a recitation would be held by inviting a Salafi preacher named Abdullah Sya'roni. Mediana felt interested and began to attend the study regularly. After three months had passed, Mediana asked Abdullah Sya'roni to hold a recitation (*kajian/ta'lim*) at her house. The Salafi recitation at Mediana's house continued

and became a routine every Thursday. Abdullah Sya'roni is one of the Salafi preachers affiliated with Rodja (Mediana Hutomo, interview, 2018).

The process of celebrities' Hijra to Salafism occurs through various methods. Among the celebrities willing to be interviewed, they confess to initiating their Hijra process from a "crisis" within themselves, then progressing to a search for "something" to overcome that "crisis," ultimately leading to a "discovery." This "migration" process resembles what Lewis R. Rambo describes as the "religious conversion process": starting from a crisis, followed by a search, and concluding with an encounter (Rambo, 1999).

Mediana Hutomo admits to experiencing anxiety due to a fear of death. She feared that if she were to die without being obedient to Allah Almighty, it would be problematic. This fear and awareness of death eventually drove her to study religion and practice worship diligently. Mediana recounts,

*"At that time, my life was really bad. I prayed carelessly. I often neglected prayer. I didn't even cover my aurat. Let alone covering my aurat, I frequently neglected prayer. I rarely fasted, and the fasts I missed were never compensated (qodho'). I had been doing this since I was a child. Until, at one point, I became very afraid of death. I was afraid that I would die in a state of*

<sup>3</sup> Mediana Hutomo is a actress and presenter. One of the films hse played was "Saat Cinta Bertasbih". Her debut in entertainment began through the soap opera "Pondok Pak Djon" in

1993-1995. Famous soap operas starring Mediana include: "Cinta Fitri", "Tukang Bubur Naik Haji", and "Surga yang Tak Dirindukan, the Series" ("Mediana Hutomo," n.d.).



*disobedience to Allah. So, I migrated by covering my aurat in just a few days. I started earnestly studying religion. Redeeming it all. Improving worship"* (Mediana Hutomo, interview, 2018).

Egi John<sup>4</sup> had a similar experience. Following the tragedy of his sibling's death, he migrated and became active in Salafi. He says,

*"What made me change and delve into the true teachings of the Prophet was perhaps a reprimand from Allah. My family faced a tragedy. My sibling passed away. That's when I began to delve into the true religion according to the authentic teachings of the Prophet. When my sibling died, I was scared when I saw the corpse. At that time, I couldn't cry because I was shocked and still in disbelief. However, when they buried it, piled up the soil, I couldn't stop crying. The family invited me to go home, but I didn't want to".* (Egi John, interview, 2018)

On the other hand, Muhammad Hamzah (popularly known as Bjah)<sup>5</sup> migrated due to another "crisis." Years of failure in business and being frequently deceived by business partners made him realize and decide to repent. Bjah then began searching and delving into religious knowledge (Bjah, interview, 2018).

Celebrities who join Salafi recitations are movie or soap opera stars. It differs from

the celebrities who follow Jam'ah Tablig who are generally musicians and only a few movie actors. The growth of Salafi's preaching within these circles is closely linked with the investigative work done by individual celebrities. It is an interesting finding because studies on the spread of Salafi da'wah usually focus more on the active role of preachers or Salafi da'wah institutions. In such studies, individual Salafi worshipers tend to be seen as passive subjects, even considered "indoctrinated" without considering their ability to absorb the material taught.

But this perspective forgets to consider that they are human beings with freedom, choice, and the ability to filter information. Moreover, most of them are middle-class people with a fairly high level of education and the ability to access information widely. The influx of Salafi da'wah among celebrities shows a different phenomenon, where the truth-seeking artists become active subjects who consciously choose Salafi da'wah as a place to learn about Islam. Their decision is based on their voluntarism and awareness, indicating their freedom to make religious choices in

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<sup>4</sup> Egi John Foreisythe is known through the soap opera "Anak Cucu Adam" and "Kodrat". In addition, he is also known as a cover boy and model. Egi has been familiar with the screen since she was a toddler. By the time she was two years old, Egi had become the star of a baby food advertisement. He recorded more than 55 product advertisements.

When he was in grade 4 of SD Egi was offered to play in the soap opera "Hanya Satu Mutiara,"

then he played in the soap opera "Kau Bukan Milikku" starring Paramitha Rusady. Egi has played in at least 3 movies, 30 soap operas and 2 FTV (See "Egi John Foreisythe," n.d.).

<sup>5</sup> Bjah started his career since forming in the music group The Fly as a vocalist in 1992 until he left in 2005. Now he has hijra and has left the world of music activity ("Muhammad Hamzah (Penyanyi)," n.d.).

accordance with their beliefs.

At this point, it is important to note that online media is just one of the means that facilitates celebrities' encounters with Salafi preaching. After interviewing several hijra celebrities, we can deduce several factors that led them to be interested in Salafi da'wah:

Firstly, Salafi preachers always refer to the Qur'an and Sunnah. It makes celebrities confident in the practices and understanding taught by Salafi preachers. Secondly, Salafi preachers are easily accessible, and their religious content is widely disseminated on social media. Thirdly, Salafi preachers are firm and clear. Although some people may perceive Salafi preachers as rigid and literal, celebrities actually prefer such an approach because it provides certainty. Being firm here means that when there are questions, Salafi preachers answer based on what is in the Qur'an and hadith, without personal opinions/interpretations. Salafi preachers also rarely present differences of opinion on an issue. Even if they convey differences among scholars, they will explain which opinion is stronger according to the references to the Qur'an and hadith. It prevents the congregation from being confused when choosing an opinion.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Hijra movement is gaining popularity as many celebrities have publicly declared

that they have made hijra. Social media plays an important role in encouraging the rapid development of this movement. In addition to expanding their network of friends, social media also serves as a means to connect celebrities who have emigrated with Salafi preachers. In this study, some of the celebrities interviewed admitted that their interest in attending Salafi studies grew after listening to recitations through social media. It shows that the celebrities who emigrated are not only passive recipients of Salafi preaching but also actively and proactively engage in Salafi preaching.

Salafi groups utilize the development of information technology as one of their main strengths. They quickly adapt to technological advances. While many other Islamic groups are still debating the status and benefits of social media, Salafi groups have already utilized it to spread their da'wah. As a result, Salafis were the first to preach on the internet and succeeded in saturating Islamic discourse with content that was in line with their ideology. Salafi groups' social media accounts and websites also get a large number of viewers and subscribers. This fact also refutes the view that Salafis are anti-modern and want to return to medieval times.

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