

Researching Salafi Movement in Cirebon Brings Doctorate

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The emergence of Salafi foundation and boarding schools in Cirebon, West Java, that has traditional understanding and adheres to culturalist Islam as well as adopting tariqa has drawn some responses. On the one hand, this movement has drawn admiration due to its polite preaching, on the other hand, it has stirred anxiety, even conflict, among community.

“The claim that they are the most Islamic among Salafism adherents makes the people of Cirebon worried. The adherents tried to spread Salafism principles using movements that may trigger a conflict in the community,” said Muhammad Ali in his doctoral promotion on Monday (23/1) at UGM Graduate School.

In his dissertation entitled *Salafi Movement in Cirebon in the Reform Era: Teaching, Spreading and Challenges*, Ali explained Salafi movement represents itself as a sub-culture of Islam that renews itself in the modernisation process for the strengthening of morality based on Salafi ways, and doing purification of tawhid in response to practices of heresy, deification, and modernity challenges. This movement prioritises on the contestation of meanings as the holder of fatwa authorities that resourced to the Qur’an and Hadits as the best solution to resolve problems found among their masses.

“If there is any one member straying away from the Salafi ways, they will be warned by the group in order that they return to the right path of Salafism,” said Ali.

By representing the model of lifestyle affirmation and remains a religious personality, the Salafi group has impressed the people of Cirebon. However, the group is one that is not free from conflict, internally or externally. The internal conflict is caused by, among others, different outlooks of Salafi ways, incompatibilities between certain adherents, and contradictory preaching strategies. These problems also trigger a conflict with other groups in the community.

“They don’t hesitate to be on opposition with other mainstream Islamic groups and the surrounding community, so they are branded as terrorists, radicalists, fundamentalists, and so on and so forth,” he said.

Even so, Ali said, despite the conflicts that emerged in several areas, the incident did not turn into a bigger horizontal conflict. This is due to the rapid measures by the authorities in Cirebon and local government to respond to the conflicts, the ignorance among Salafi members, and the disinterest among the people of Cirebon who have grown weary with conflicts.

To prevent such conflicts from re-emerging, said Ali, three things need to be taken into account, which are: firm position of government, enhancement of tolerance behaviour and legal as well as political systems. Just restraining oneself from conflict, in his opinion, would not resolve the current problems.

“Mediation, negotiation, and arbitration are means to manage the conflict,” he added.

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