

THE CONVERSION OF NAHDLATUL ULAMA'S (NU) AFFILIATED PEOPLE TO MAJELISTAFSIR AL-QUR'AN (MTA): A CASE STUDY FROM TRADITIONAL TO PURITAN ISLAM

Achmad Maimun

Institut Agama Islam Negeri Salatiga, Indonesia

*e-mail: pakeakmal03@yahoo.co.id

Abstract

*Religion is a principle that has been taught since the early age. Therefore, religion is difficult to change and even contributes to form one's soul. However, it does not mean that one's religious understanding or religion cannot change. Religious change, which is often synonymous with religious conversion, can be considered as the transfer of *ma'ab* (schools) or religious beliefs, such as from Nahdlatul 'Ulama (NU) to Majelis Tafsir Al-Qur'an (MTA). To explain that phenomenon, this study is conducted based on three main issues: the process of conversion from NU to MTA, the basis of its rationality, and further implications. Those issues are examined using qualitative research method, applying phenomenological approach. The following results are the research's findings: changes on understanding from NU to MTA are often caused by one's psychological factors, while its complementer is caused by social factors. The process of the changes does not happen suddenly, but gradually with the basis of rationality. There are seven phases of the conversion from NU to MTA, namely curiosity and crisis, quest, encounter, interaction, commitment, consequences, and deployable agent. Meanwhile, its basis of rationality consists of clarity and certainty of the basis of Islam, obedience to Al-Qur'an and al-Hadi, and egalitarianism. The phenomenon of conversion may result in counterproductive effects, such as verbal violence towards the perpetrator and social exclusion. Thus, to avoid conflict, one of the important things to do is to give *tasamuh* education to the moslem community so that they are willing to accept differences wisely.*

Keywords: *Traditional Islam; Puritan; Conversion*

Abstrak

*Agama merupakan hal prinsip yang telah tertanam sejak usia dini. Karena itu agama sulit untuk berubah dan bahkan berkontribusi bagi pembentukan jiwa seseorang. Meskipun demikian tidak berarti paham keagamaan atau agama seseorang tidak dapat berubah. Perubahan agama yang sering disinonimkan dengan konversi agama, bisa bermakna perpindahan madzhab, aliran atau paham keagamaan semisal dari NU ke MTA. Untuk menjelaskan fenomena tersebut, kajian ini didasarkan pada tiga masalah pokok; bagaimana proses konversi dari NU ke MTA, rasionalitas yang mendasarinya dan implikasi yang ditimbulkan. Masalah tersebut dikaji menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif dengan pendekatan fenomenologi. Berikut ini beberapa temuan penelitian; perubahan pemahaman dari NU ke MTA terjadi lebih disebabkan oleh faktor psikologis seseorang, sedangkan komplementernya adalah faktor sosial. Proses perubahannya bukan tiba-tiba (suddenly) tapi berproses dan memiliki dasar rasionalitasnya. Ada tujuh tahap konversi dari NU ke MTA; curiosity dan krisis, quest, encounter, interaction, commitment, consequences, dan deployable agent. Sementara itu, basis rasionalitasnya terdiri dari kejelasan dan kepastian dari dasar Islam, taat kepada Al-Qur'an dan al-Hadi, dan egalitarianisme. Fenomena konversi dapat menimbulkan efek kontraproduktif, seperti kekerasan verbal terhadap pelaku dan pengucilan sosial. Oleh karena itu, untuk menghindari konflik, salah satu hal penting yang harus dilakukan adalah memberikan pendidikan *tasamuh* kepada masyarakat muslim agar mereka bersedia menerima perbedaan dengan bijak.*

* Corresponding author, email: pakeakmal03@yahoo.co.id

Citation: Maimun, Achmad. "The Conversion of Nahdlatul Ulama's (NU) Affiliated People to Majelistaafsir Al-Qur'an (MTA): A Case Study from Traditional to Puritan Islam." *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura* 21, no. 1 (2021): 101-116.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.22373/jiif.v0i0.5784>

©Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry. All rights reserved.

commitment, consquencies, deployable agent. Sedangkan dasar rasionalitasnya diantaranya; kejelasan dan kepastian dasar dalam berislam, ketertundukan pada al-Qur'an dan al-Hadis, dan egalitarianisme. Fenomena konversi ini membawa dampak yang kadangkala kontra produktif, misalnya terjadi kekerasan verbal pada pelakunya, pengucilan sosial (social exclusion). Karena itu untuk menghindari konflik, salah satu hal krusial yang penting untuk dilakukan adalah pendidikan tasamuh di masyarakat moslem agar bisa menerima perbedaan secara arif.

Kata kunci: *Islam Tradisional; Puritan; Konversi*

مستخلص

الدين هو من الأسس الرئيسية التي يغرسها الناس في نفوسهم منذ وقت مبكر. لذلك، من الصعوبات تغيير الدين في نفس شخص، بدلاً من ذلك، فهو يساهم في تكوين روحه. ومعنى هذا أن الفهم الديني في نفس شخص لا يثبت بل يمكن أن يتغير من مذهب إلى مذهب آخر، ومن مدرسة إلى مدرسة أخرى. ويمكن تفسير التغيير الديني الذي يترادف غالباً بالتحويل الديني على أنه تحويل مذهب إلى مذهب آخر، أو تحويل مدرسة إلى مدرسة أخرى على سبيل المثال من حركة NU إلى حركة MTA. ترجع هذه التغييرات إلى عوامل نفسية وحدها وعوامل اجتماعية كعوامل مكملة. وتحدث هذه التغييرات تدريجياً وتبني على الأسس العقلانية. هناك سبع مراحل في التغيير من NU إلى MTA، وهي روح المعرفة والأزمات والمهام والمواجهات والتفاعلات والالتزامات والطوارئ والوكلاء القابلين للنشر. أما الأسس العقلانية في هذا التغيير فهي الوضوح واليقين على الأساسيين الرئيسيين في الإسلام هما القرآن والحديث، والخضوع لهما، والمساواة. قد يؤدي هذا التغيير في المجتمع الواسع إلى آثار سلبية مثل الإساءات اللفظية والانعزال الاجتماعي. ومن أجل ذلك، من الأشياء المهمة في أوساط المجتمع الإسلامي تغريس التسامح وتقويته في نفوس المسلمين جميعهم حتى يقبل بعضهم بعضاً بدون النظر إلى مذهبهم ومدرستهم.

الكلمات الرئيسية: الإسلام التقليدية ؛ تنقيه ؛ تغيير الدين

A. INTRODUCTION

Human beings are dynamic that change from time to time. The changes of human beings could be influenced by various aspects of life including behavior, thought, belief and understanding. Further, this change of belief in religion is known as religious shift or it can be called conversion. There are two main factors that have influenced the conversion of religious belief and understanding from both internal and external factors.¹

Taking one of the examples of the belief's conversion in religious group, which is the movement of some people affiliated with the religious understanding of Nahdlatul Ulama' (NU) to be the member of Majelis Tafsir Al-Qur'an (MTA). Seeing this conversion from the dynamic of the human's characteristics could be a natural phenomenon. But it is different if it

¹ Achmad Maimun, "Konversi Agama ke Islam" (Yogyakarta, Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, 2019).

THE CONVERSION OF NAHDLATUL ULAMA'S (NU) AFFILIATED PEOPLE TO MAJELISTAFSIR AL-QUR'AN (MTA): A CASE STUDY FROM TRADITIONAL TO PURITAN ISLAM

is seen from the theological and sociological perspectives and many implications resulted. This phenomenon leads to many implications which are sometimes sociologically counter-productive. For instance, the estrangement of social relation, exclusion, friction, and division among Muslims has been affected. This means that social cohesiveness of the community has been disturbed by that phenomenon.

The most recent case is the conflict between the people affiliated with NU and the members of MTA in Bentangan Village, Dopleng Sub-district, Teras District, Boyolali Regency in Central Java Indonesia. The case happened at the end of July in 2016. MTA has developed their *da'wah* in several regions. As the result, many societies in Bentangan migrated from NU to MTA. During this process, the conflict of interest among these Islamic communities cannot be avoided until this finally can be solved properly.²

Social exclusion as the implication of joining MTA can be in the form of dismissing someone who decided to join MTA from the *imam* (leader) and preacher of the mosque and sometimes from the involvement of religious activities. In short, self-declaration as a member of MTA resulted which means they have been receiving such social exclusion afterwards. Further, this is followed by the domestic implications that happened. Another case is in Sruwen Sub-district, Tengaran District, Semarang Regency, Central Java Province. This happened in a family in which a husband becomes the member of MTA and it is based on the interview with local people.

Based on its diversity, people in Sruwen (also the focus on this research) can be categorized as Traditional Islam that they are affiliated with NU, they admit that they join NU based on their practice on praying (*amaliah*). In this case, one of the fundamental principles is *Ahlussunnah Waljama'ah* or often called *ASWAJA*.³ This *ASWAJA* means of the daily practice of the community which is closely related to the tradition of *tahlil*, recitation of *al-manaqib* and *al-barzanji*, *istighasah*, *ziarah kubur* (visitation of the cemetery) to the tombs of Walisongo, and so on.⁴

These understanding and practice of religion are accepted by muslim community in Sruwen. However, most of the people accept this tradition not through adequate learning, only

² "Pernyataan Pagar Nusa Terkait Konflik MTA Dengan Warga Di Teras, Boyolali - Muslimedia News - Media Islam|Voice of Muslim," accessed April 24, 2019, <http://www.muslimedianews.com/2016/07/pernyataan-pagar-nusa-terkait-konflik.html>.

³ Masyhudi Muchtar et al., *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah Ajaran Ahlussunnah wa al-Jama'ah yang Berlaku diLingkungan Nahdlatul Ulama* (Surabaya: Khalista, 2007), 5.

⁴ Wasisto Raharjo Jati, "Tradisi, Sunnah dan Bid'ah: Analisa Barzanji dalam Perspektif Cultural Studies," *EL-HARAKAH (TERAKREDITASI)* 14, no. 2 (June 26, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.18860/el.v14i2.2315>.

following the existing tradition, without in-depth study of what they have practiced. Such transmission of religious understanding definitely contributes to the social problem particularly when people meet different religious understanding and practice. Thus, the counter-productive thing in society cannot be ignored. This is important to take the understanding of the issue deeply and to deal with negative impacts and it is the background of why the researcher conducted the study.

To develop the discussion, this study has several research questions, they are: 1) what is the conversion's process of the religious understanding and practice of NU into MTA?, 2) what is the rationality of the shift from the religious understanding of NU to MTA? and 3) what are the sociological implications of the conversion from the religious understanding of NU to MTA?

B. DISCUSSION

1. Theoretical Framework

a. Traditional and Puritan Islam

Normatively Islam is one religion with the two main guidance books namely al-Qur'an and as-Sunnah (Hadits).⁵ Meanwhile, Islamic school of thought (Mazhab) can be varied particularly when comes to the interpretations that have been done by human's common sense and their practiced of their followers, this means Muslims. Islamic dialogue with the socio-cultural aspects of Muslims have resulted the various interpretations in this religion, for instance, between the traditional Islam and puritan Islam. Also, there are the differences among fundamentalist Islam, liberal Islam, and other Islamic affiliated groups. Such distinction is an effort to identify the understanding and practice of Islam by Muslims.

The traditional Islam, according to Azyumardi Azra, has been interpreted by Muslims who hold the tradition of the sacred Islam, either contained in al-Qur'an and al-Hadit or developed by scholars and Sufis throughout history. Then, the traditional Islam is to those who accept the al-Hadi not only as a source but also as a guidance and ethic inspiration without questioning whether it is authentic or not. In the context of Indonesian

⁵ Syaikh Muhammad Khudhari Bik, *Ushul al-Fiqh* (Mesir: al-Maktabah at-Tijjaariyah al-Kubra, 1969), 5-6.

THE CONVERSION OF NAHDLATUL ULAMA'S (NU) AFFILIATED PEOPLE TO MAJELISTAFSIR AL-QUR'AN (MTA): A CASE STUDY FROM TRADITIONAL TO PURITAN ISLAM

culture, Azra includes people who are affiliated, both emotionally and formally, with NU religious organization as traditional Islam.⁶

According to Azra, some prominent characteristics of traditional Islam are closely related to the *tarekat*, such as *wirid*, *zikr*, *tahlil*, and *talkin*. They also strongly believe in “sacred guardian” (*wali keramat*) that have obtained eternal wisdom. For this group of people, thoughts, daily practices, and worship practices received from their predecessors that should be maintained without ignoring new thoughts that come after that. The rules are often related to the understanding of *al-muh}a>fad}ah ‘ala> al-qadi>m as-s}a>lihwaal-akhz}u bi al-jadi>d al-as}la>h}*.

Meanwhile, puritan Islam or known as reformist Islam has the concept and understanding that is opposite to traditional Islam. They think that the concepts of traditional Islam become one of the causes of Islamic stagnation. To make Islam be victorious again, there is no other way except to avoid practices that have no basis of “pure” Islam.⁷ This Islamic model can be found in the thoughts of some figures such as Ibn Taymiyah, Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab and Jamaluddin al-Afghani.⁸

In this study, what is meant by NU and MTA people are they do not have to state officially that they become those members which marked by a Member Identity Card. It is due to the reality that not all members of NU and MTA have membership card and are registered as a member. NU and MTA people in this context are those who have an emotional relationship with NU or MTA as a belief of understandings and practices of Islam.

b. *Religious Conversion*

Conversion is derived from Latin language, *conversio* and *convertere* which mean returning to, becoming, and impacts of changes in terms of both material and spiritual aspects. In Jewish and Christian tradition, the term *naham* and *shub* are known referring to the same meaning of conversion which means returning to God and repenting.⁹ In the aspect of language, conversion means to repent, to change (religion), to turn around (opposite direction) toward the teachings of a religion or come into a religion. Conversion

⁶ Azyumardi Azra, “*Darul Arqam: Tradisionalisme vs Reformisme.*” www.hamline.edu, 1994, www.hamline.edu/apakabar/basisdata/1994/09/09/0006.html.

⁷ “Profil Sekilas – MTA Majelis Tafsir Al-Qur’an,” accessed April 24, 2020, <https://mta.or.id/profil-lawas/>.

⁸ A Rafiq Zainul Mun’im, “ISLAM PURITAN VS ISLAM MODERAT (Menapak Gagasan Khaled Abou el Fadl,” no. 2 (2018): 20.

⁹ Dong Young Kim, “*Rambo’s Interdisciplinary Approach To Religious Conversion: The Case of St. Augustine*” (Boston, Boston University, 2011), 32.

of religion is a change of religion of a person that changes his worldview and his position to the world.¹⁰

Thus, the conversion of religion is a term referring to a process of accepting a religious attitude, either gradually or accidentally. Religious conversion is an act in which a person or a group of people move to a belief system or attitude that is different or contrary to the previous beliefs.

Meanwhile, some people classify the conversion of religion into two kinds. An internal conversion has happened when someone moved from a certain school of thought (mazhab) and perspective to another school of thought (mazhab) and perspective in which this is still within the same religious environment. Meanwhile, an external conversion happens when someone moves from one religion to another religion. This external kind might happen in a particular circumstance.

Lewis R. Rambo explains that all changes in mindset, attitudes, and religious behavior are called religious conversion, yet only the type is kind of different. The types including: first, apostasy which is the conversion of a person from a religious to become atheist. Second, intensification, it is a revitalization of commitment to the faith that has been owned, for instance from Islam “KTP” (religion as an individual identity for administration purpose) to become a more religious Muslim who really obey the teachings of Islam. Third, affiliation that describes a person’s movement from never being involved in religious activities to being fully involved in a particular religious group. Fourth, institutional transition, this is a change from the mindset of certain religious group to the mindset of other religious group in one religion such as from Methodist to Orthodox. Fifth, tradition transition, it is the conversion from one religion to another religion.¹¹ Looking at those various types, the movement of some people with religious understanding of NU to MTA is included in the category of institutional transition.

c. Phases of Conversion and Rational Choice: Theoretical Framework

The theory of conversion phases helped the researcher in analyzing the conversion process experienced by NU people who move to MTA. Religious conversion, as a human psychological dynamics, does not just happen, but through a process. According to Lewis R. Rambo, there are seven steps generally done by the doers of conversion, they are

¹⁰ Bernard Spilka, Ralph W. Hood, and Richard L. Gorsuch, *Psychology of Religion An Empirical Approach* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1985), 199.

¹¹ Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 13-14.

THE CONVERSION OF NAHDLATUL ULAMA'S (NU) AFFILIATED PEOPLE TO MAJELISTAFSIR AL-QUR'AN (MTA): A CASE STUDY FROM TRADITIONAL TO PURITAN ISLAM

context, crisis, quest, encounter, interaction, commitment, and consequences.¹² These steps will be explained below.

First of all, it is context which covers a broad panorama of factors that are dialectic and contradictory from one to another and these facilitate the conversion process. The context can be macro and micro context. Macro context is a broad social context that includes political, economic and religious policies. Meanwhile, micro context includes family relationship, friendship, ethnicity, and so on.¹³

The next stage is crisis, which is the stage when a person feels differences or even conflict between ideal condition and reality. Crisis might happen in various forms such as in social, political and self-exploration process that makes a person in tension. Considering that case, Ali Kose cited from an opinion of Snow & Philips which differentiates the problems resulted from the tension namely: a) spiritual meaningless, b) interpersonal problems, c) character problems, d) material problems, and e) physical problems.¹⁴

The third stage is quest. Rambo defined it as the stage of building meaning and goals. This stage is passed by everyone who experiences conversion. In this stage, someone will get the meaning of life. It is in line with logotherapy theory that explains about desire to have meaningful life (the will to meaning) as this is the basic motivation in life. With that desire, humans can embrace the meaning of life which leads to a meaningful life.¹⁵

The next stage is an encounter in which after a person goes through the searching stage, they will go to the next stage of learning about religion. After he goes through the learning stage, he will go to the next stage, which is interaction stage. It is the interaction with the community whose religion is followed by them. After establishing an intense relationship with the adherents of the religion that he follows, then there will be a commitment formed within him, as the next stage. To enter this stage, the convert need some time that varies from one person to another. The last stage of the conversion process

¹² Rambo, 17.

¹³ Patrick D. Bowen, "Conversion to Islam in United State: A Case Study in Denver, Colorado," *Intermountain Journal of Religious Studies* I, no. Inaugural Issue (2009), <http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/imwjournal/vol1/iss1/4>.

¹⁴ Ali Kose, *Conversion to Islam: Study of Native British Converts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) 13-14.

¹⁵ H.D. Bastaman, *Logoterapi Psikologi Untuk Menemukan Makna Hidup Dan Meraih Hidup Bermakna* (Jakarta: Rajawali Press, 2007), 37.

is consequences. That is a stage where a convert will face various consequences, both from the family, friends, and institutions.

The second phase of the conversion is the rational choice which the theory focuses on actors whom they have goals and intention. The actions they undertake are directed to the ends and the final goals. In this theory, humans are seen as the actors who have choices or preferences where the actions are taken based on the level of preference.¹⁶

As an actor in carrying out his action, human uses consideration of optimizing profit in a situation in which there are many obstacles. As an actor, it is possible for human to take actions that may harm them to some extent. With such an assumption, this theory provides an explanation why an action is performed.¹⁷

2. Conversion from NU to MTA

a. Review of Geographical, Social and Religious Context

This study was conducted in 2013 in Sruwen Sub-district, Tengaran District, Semarang Regency. Sruwen is in the southern part of Semarang regency while the border of the northern part with Boyolali regency. Sruwen is on the edge of Solo-Semarang main road and until 2019, the geographical, social and religious Context in this study have not changed much.

Despite geographical status that Sruwen is a sub-district, the social aspect of this context can be categorized as advanced. This can be seen from the educational aspect that many of the residents have received higher education. Further, many people in Sruwen who have undertaken the undergraduate program (S-1) and also followed by quite many who have undertaken postgraduates (S-2 and S3) which means most the society are educated in higher education level.

However for the elderly people who still uphold the rituals and mystical beliefs, they still do it hereditary. Meanwhile, some rural areas still use the social system within the community or it is called *paguyuban* for the mechanical solidarity and some areas tend to *patembayan* with organic solidarity.

Seeing the aspect of the religious life of the society, the understanding and practice of their religion is closer to the understanding and practice of Nahdliyin/ Nahdlatul Ulama' (NU) with the principle of Aswaja. In terms of the practical and emotional aspect,

¹⁶ Michael I. Ogu, "Rational Choice Theory: Assumptions, Strengths, and Greatest Weaknesses in Application Outside the Western Milieu Context," *Nigerian Chapter of Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review* 1, no. 3 (February 2013): 90–99, <https://doi.org/10.12816/0003628>.

¹⁷ George Ritzer, *Sociological Theory* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 494.

THE CONVERSION OF NAHDLATUL ULAMA'S (NU) AFFILIATED PEOPLE TO MAJELISTAFSIR AL-QUR'AN (MTA): A CASE STUDY FROM TRADITIONAL TO PURITAN ISLAM

NU basically has existed in that sub-district for a long time, while in terms of formal-organizational perspective; the existence of NU just quite new. The establishment of NU branch of Sruwen just formally declared in 2016 followed by NU multipurpose building was inaugurated. Genealogically, the religious scholars of Sruwen are transmitted from Islamic development centers in East Java particularly for those who have graduated from Tremas Islamic Boarding School.

The religious practices (*amaliah*) of Sruwen people are the same as the those commonly done by nahdliyin followers, for example rituals of *tahlilan*, *barzanji*, *manaqib*, *fida'*, *nariyahan*, *yasinan*, and visiting the tomb of Wali. Such rituals for instance *tahlilan*, can be found at various events including in the meeting of the Neighborhood Association (RT), there is also a recitation of *tahlil* before the meeting begins.

On the other hand, the intense preaching conducted by MTA followers has been done intensely through radio broadcasting channels this time. This resulted some Sruwen's people have converted into MTA. People who converted from NU to MTA and became the correspondent in this study are 3 people in Gudang Sakti village. The first informant's initial is SHR, who is a retired of being a religion teacher and his age is about 75 years old. He became a religion teacher when there was an opportunity of Religion Teachers Examination (UGA) program in the 1960s. His religious subjects of education have been obtained through the traditional methods of reciting and studying since he was a child. He attended recitals and various religious activities in his village. The second is NA (49 years old) who is a child of SHR. His last education was high school and got married already. He has two children (boy and girl). His religious education can be said to be mediocre that has been obtained from studying to a religion teachers in the village and from formal schools. Another MTA follower is in Gudang Sekti village, his initial is TPK and he is still single. He received education from Diploma IV in fisheries and agriculture. Currently, he is a private company employee in the field of chicken farming in Tengaran Sub-district, Tengaran District. Further, he has previously worked as a private employee in Madiun, East Java. When he was in the East Java, he still often returned home every weekend. Based on the received information from SHR, TPK is actively following MTA study center in Solo.

One informant lives in Muteran Village and the other lives in Sruwen Village. These two are brothers and are alumni of the boarding school in Tremas. Another

informant is a person in Duren Sawit Village and the other are in Margosuko Village. Another MTA member lives in Krakal Mukti Village who works as self-employed and his economic life can be categorized as middle class, neither poor nor too rich. His religious knowledge has also been obtained through traditional methods.

b. Process and Conversion Stages from NU to MTA

This study analyzes and explains the process of converting NU people to MTA, both from the psychological and sociological aspects. The psychological aspect refers to a psychological dynamic experienced by someone who decided to follow an understanding and practice of Islam in MTA version. Meanwhile, the sociological process means the social dynamics traversed by the doers of conversion from NU to MTA that lead them to their interest and choice to MTA as their religious “understanding”.

According to Lewis R. Rambo’s theory and data obtained, the study formulated the conversion’s process from NU to MTA into the following stages. First, it is curiosity and crisis in which these two conditions are interconnected as the beginning stage. Curiosity can be defined as an urge and desire to know new things including understanding and practices of religious teachings. Meanwhile, crisis is a state of tension or instability of the soul caused by the gap between the expectation and reality. In this context, it is related to the practice of Islam. Curiosity owned by the doers of the conversion from NU to MTA resulted in a crisis. Crisis might be influenced by the references; the way they read from books and some references that have not been able to satisfy their curiosity and this affected personally they were still curious and considered to know further.

These two things become the basic reasons for the doers of conversion to carry out the quest (self-searching) as the second stage. The quest is kind of a tit for tat which is on one side of the doer of conversion that has resulted very powerful self-searching process. On the other hand, there are various “menus” of Islam “offered” to them. Menus here mean the various presented media such as television, radio, bulletins and invitations from friends. At this stage, the doers of conversion from NU to MTA entered the third stage, it is encounter. This means a dialogue of thought and understanding between himself and “menu vendors”, one of them means referring to MTA. The meeting of ideas and ideologies through various media encouraged a fourth stage, namely more intensive personal interaction with MTA followers. If that happens, it can be confirmed that someone will enter the next (fifth) stage, namely commitment to the “new” understanding and practices. At the commitment stage, a convert from NU to MTA is a “new” person who is different than before particularly in terms of understanding and practices of their

THE CONVERSION OF NAHDLATUL ULAMA'S (NU) AFFILIATED PEOPLE TO MAJELISTAFSIR AL-QUR'AN (MTA): A CASE STUDY FROM TRADITIONAL TO PURITAN ISLAM

religion. The previous Islamic understanding was deconstructed by a new understanding of Islam taught by MTA. Islamic understanding of MTA has become a part of them and becomes a benchmark for one's happiness.

The real form of the deconstruction of Islamic understanding can be seen in the reluctance to attend *tahlilan*, *barzanji*, *yasinan*, *shalawatan*, and *manaqiban* conducted by the majority of Muslim communities in Sruwen. These rituals are no longer the practices that will increase the reward (*pahala*) instead of this will bring sin to the doers due to it is considered a form of *bid'ah* that should be avoided.

As the intensive interaction of Islamic belief with MTA understanding and the followers increased, the rejection of such rituals is also getting stronger. For instance, someone who is invited to a "celebration" (*selamatan*) hosted by the neighbors which comprising rituals, the doer of conversion from NU to MTA might present but they will not follow the ritual. When the other people who attended that event, they recited *tahlil*, then the MTA's follower was just silent and looked down without joined the recitation. Then, when there was *al-Barzanji* where in this religious tradition, there was called *asyraqal* ritual, the MTS's follower just sit. In the next development, the rejection of such rituals can be seen through the absence of someone at an invitation to a social-religious event organized by the surrounding community. If so, then the conversion process done by someone will be easily seen and identified by the surrounding community.

Then, such process leads to a convert to the sixth stage, namely consequences. That is an implication that must be accepted by the convert. An ideological personal implication for instance, is one must teach the "new" understanding to the other people that closest to him. The problem is if the people closest to them resist, there will be more serious problems. The data findings have showed that there is a convert who has to divorce with his wife if she did not follow his new understanding. On the one hand, his wife still followed the plurality of the surrounding Muslim community while her husband wanted the opposite understanding. As the result, the divorce between husband and wife was a choice that was taken as a logical consequence that must be accepted as a follower of MTA. Further, the social consequence that must be accepted by the convert is how they should be positioned as an in group in the community. The terms used by local people to show that they are no longer in a group are called *Islame bedo* (their Islam is different), *ora kaya awake dewe* (no longer like us), *saiki wis bedo* (now they are different). These terms are often expressed by the community as the result of the converts, in this case,

from NU to MTA or sometimes to people who are different from the understanding and practice of Islam with the majority of Sruwen community.

Referring to the conversion stage offered by Lewis R. Rambo which reached the consequence stage, it seemed that there are still the next stages for the converts from NU to MTA. Other theories stated by Lofland & Rodney Stark explained that the emptiness of previous theories namely at the end of the journey of the conversion, they become the deployable agent in which the person who embraced the teachings of MTA then become the agent to spread the teachings they have received. In other words, they have to dedicate their time, energy, and thoughts, even material to spread MTA religious understanding as well as inviting others to be like themselves. Such agents will become the effective media for the transmission of Islamic understanding of MTA in the community.

Here is the chart to describe the conversion process:

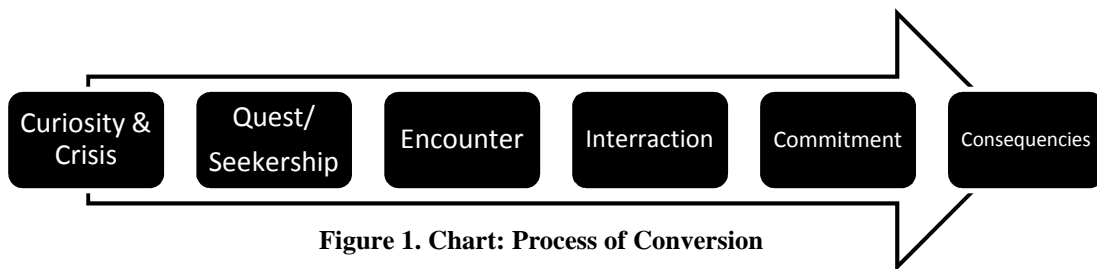


Figure 1. Chart: Process of Conversion

c. Rationality of Conversion from NU to MTA

The change in Islamic understanding from traditional to puritan Islam conducted by some NU people to MTA have their own rationality base including in relation to personal understanding. Here are some considerations of the convert for deciding to become MTA followers.

Clarity and Certainty on Religious Basis

The first underlying factors of the converts for deciding to follow the religious understanding of MTA are *clarity* and *certainty* of the basic of the religious practices. They feel different than before. Before conversion to MTA, they thought that the religious practices are only based on hereditary traditions without knowing the used basis. After following MTA, they feel a sense of stability in religion because they are given information about clear arguments that referred only to al-Qur'an and al-Hadit as justification of their position.

Obedience to Al-Qur'an and al-Hadis

THE CONVERSION OF NAHDLATUL ULAMA'S (NU) AFFILIATED PEOPLE TO MAJELISTAFSIR AL-QUR'AN (MTA): A CASE STUDY FROM TRADITIONAL TO PURITAN ISLAM

MTA study offered clear information and arguments of Al-Qur'an and Al-Hadiths through many photocopied writings. MTA followers feel their obedience to Al-Qur'an and al-Hadith through the preaching from Ustadz (preacher).

This has been different from the previous condition before their conversion. What they felt was obedience only to the words of Ustadz without knowing the *dalil* (basis) clearly. Furthermore, now they can say that it is not certain that what is said *ustadz* is true since they only follow without knowing the basis.

Egalitarianism

The view of equal treatment between old and new followers as well as between the *Usta*'s family and ordinary followers is another reason that makes the converts are interested in and the commitment to the teachings of MTA. The converts thought that MTA organization do not apply for certain privileges to followers or their family members. The simple thing is that there is no difference between the way to mention the sons or daughters of *usta* and those who are not; all are considered the same. At least that's what the correspondent said.

Those conditions have attracted the interests of the converts as an egalitarian attitude that should be shown by Muslims. Meanwhile, there is a gap that makes NU has been perceived as different in terms of attitudes, although this might result social stratification in NU community. For instance the terms among *santri*, there is a term of "*santri ndalem*", which refers to certain *santri* who are very close to *Kyai* (Islamic religious leader) and serve at *Kyai*'s house. There is a special designation for "*Gus*" for *Kyai*'s descendants, while for ordinary people's descendants they will not get such designation. Likewise there is a term of *ja ab* for the things that are not common for *Kyai*'s family, while for ordinary people who do uncommon things, they are not called *ja ab* but it is kind of disorder. Egalitarianism in MTA has become a reason for the converts to choose MTA as their Islamic *manhaj*.

d. Response and Implications of the Conversion

Every action that it is in opposition to the mainstream will definitely have the implication, in this case including the conversion from NU to MTA. Here are the implications that happen as the result of the conversion from NU to MTA in Sruwen.

Public Resistance

The phenomenon of conversion from NU to MTA that happened in Sruwen community have resulted various reactions from the Muslim majority particularly who are

affiliated with NU. One of them is resistance or public rejection. Although the resistance is not explicitly stated, it can be seen in people's daily lives such as in their daily conversation when they are talking about social and religious life. Meanwhile the rejection might happen in preaching when the preacher clearly mentions the rejection to the particular organization, in this case MTA as this seems not in line with ASWAJA.

Solidarity: Becoming Out of Group

The community sees that the members of MTA are no longer part of themselves or in terms of sociology, they are no longer a solidarity. People often express it with the term “*awake dewe*” (ourselves) to refer to people who are still in the same religious understanding (NU) while MTA followers are said as “*dudu wonge dewe*” (not our people), “*bedo karo awake dewe*” (different from ourselves), or “*Islame bedo*” (their Islam is different). Becoming MTA followers means being out of the group of the major community. People who still adhere to their traditions identify themselves as “*awake dewe*” (ourselves) and MTA followers are called “*wong liyo*” (others). Thus, there is a different sociological identification between NU as the major community and MTA followers. At the same time, this kind of identification with “*awake dewe*” and “*wong liyo*” is also applied to MTA community's circle.

Religious-Social Exclusion

This study identified that the religious conversion naturally leads to exclusion from religious social life (religious social excluding). Such isolation is a necessity that happens as a logical consequence of ideological commitment. Taking a real example that an MTA's congregation considers that the rituals of *manaqiban* that are practiced at the time of the *aqiqah* by the community as heretical, as the result they will not attend the event. They possibly avoid the practices that considered as heresy. That means staying away from religious social life in the community. So exclusion from religious social life for members of the MTA congregation in the midst of the NU community is a sure thing to happen everywhere.

Verbal Violence

Verbal violence happens caused by people who generally are not able to accustom to living in the differences. The differences in understanding and religious practice that have resulted in the polarization of Muslim solidarity whether within this group or out of this group often lead to the conflicts, consequently verbal violence arises and the minority group is affected by that verbal violence from the majority group.

THE CONVERSION OF NAHDLATUL ULAMA'S (NU) AFFILIATED PEOPLE TO MAJELISTAFSIR AL-QUR'AN (MTA): A CASE STUDY FROM TRADITIONAL TO PURITAN ISLAM

Taking examples of verbal violence in this context, when one family member of MTA follower passed away for instance, there will be a question and answer of the burial process that has a satirical tone. Following the tradition of Sruwen people before the procession of burial to the grave, it is usually started first with the prayer's calling. However, this is considered heresy by MTA circles, so there was a dialogue with a satirical tone as the following quote.

"Iki arep diad ani opo ora iki...? The informant says, "ora sah wae". Then another person says: "Iha wong ora arep shalat kok yo, yo ora sah dia ani yo". ("Do we need to recite adzan? The informant says: "No need to". Another person says: "We will not do salat, so we do not need to recite a an").¹⁸

These statements are such kind of attitude of resentment of the neighbors towards the correspondent (NA) who are no longer carry out the traditions of handling the corpse when it has been inserted into the tomb, not like what it has been previously done by the community.

C. CONCLUSION

First, the conversion of religious understanding from NU to MTA through several stages 1) the stage of curiosity and crisis. 2) the stage of quest (self-searching), 3) the stage of encounter, 4) the stage of interaction, 5) the stage of commitment, and 6) the stage of consequence. Some of the converts reached to the last (seventh) stage, as the agents for spreading the mission of their religious understanding and thought (deployable agent).

Second, the main factor that influenced the religious conversion from NU to MTA is the psychological factor, while the social factor is also influenced but it is as the supporting factor. The social factor will strengthen and increasing the way for the conversion process from NU to MTA.

Third, there are several implications of the conversion process from NU to MTA, both sociological and personal-psychological implications resulted. From the sociological implication, this can be identified clearly from the response of the correspondents. There are several public responses to this conversion. The first implication is the resistance which is cracking of solidarity and exclusion in religious social life. Another implication in this study also can be identified from the psychological aspect referring to the existence of verbal

¹⁸ Nur Ahyani, Alasan Ikut MTA, 2014.

violence. For instance, the result of the psychological burden from the conversion process has lead to the broken family such as divorce.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ahyani, Nur. Alasan Ikut MTA, 2014(interview).
- Azra, Azyumardi. "Darul Arqam: Tradisionalisme vs Reformisme." www.hamline.edu, 1994. www.hamline.edu/apakabar/basisdata/1994/09/09/0006.html.
- Bastaman, H.D.. *Logoterapi Psikologi Untuk Menemukan Makna Hidup Dan Meraih Hidup Bermakna*. Jakarta: Rajawali Press, 2007.
- Bernard Spilka, Ralph W. Hood, and Richard L. Gorsuch. *Psychology of Religion An Empirical Approach*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1985.
- Bik, Syaikh Muhammad Khudhari. *Ushul al-Fiqh*. Mesir: al-Maktabah at-Tijjaariyah al-Kubra, 1969.
- Bowen, Patrick D. "Conversion to Islam in United State: A Case Study in Denver, Colorado." *Intermountain Journal of Religious Studies* I, no. Inaugural Issue (2009). <http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/imwjournal/vol1/iss1/4>.
- Jati, Wasisto Raharjo. "Tradisi, Sunnah dan Bid'ah: Analisa Barzanji dalam Perspektif Cultural Studies." *El-HARAKAH (TERAKREDITASI)* 14, no. 2 (June 26, 2013). <https://doi.org/10.18860/el.v14i2.2315>.
- Kim, Dong Young. "Rambo's Interdisciplinary Approach To Religious Conversion: The Case of St. Augustine." Boston University, 2011
- Kose, Ali. *Conversion to Islam: Study of Native British Converts*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.
- Maimun, Achmad. "Konversi Agama ke Islam." Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, 2019.
- Muchtar, Masyhudi, . A. Rubaidi, A. Zaenal Hamdi, and Maftuhin. *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah Ajaran Ahlussunnah wa al-Jama'ah yang Berlaku diLingkungan Nahdlatul Ulama*. Surabaya: Khalista, 2007.
- Mun'im, A Rafiq Zainul. "ISLAM PURITAN VS ISLAM MODERAT (Menapak Gagasan Khaled Abou el Fadl," no. 2 (2018): 20.
- Ogu, Michael I. "Rational Choice Theory: Assumptions, Strengths, and Greatest Weaknesses in Application Outside the Western Milieu Context." *Nigerian Chapter of Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review* 1, no. 3 (February 2013): 90–99. <https://doi.org/10.12816/0003628>.
- "Pernyataan Pagar Nusa Terkait Konflik MTA Dengan Warga Di Teras, Boyolali - Muslimedia News - Media Islam | Voice of Muslim." Accessed April 24, 2020. <http://www.muslimedianews.com/2016/07/pernyataan-pagar-nusa-terkait-konflik.html>.
- "Profil Sekilas – MTA Majelis Tafsir Al-Qur'an." Accessed April 24, 2020. <https://mta.or.id/profil-lawas/>.
- Rambo, Lewis R. *Understanding Religious Conversion*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.
- Ritzer, George. *Sociological Theory*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998.