Sustaining Dakwah Movement: A Study Of Kammi Alumni Role in the Democratic Era of Indonesia

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Abstract

This paper examines an empirical evidence of a frame continuation performed by KAMMI alumni, a contemporary Indonesian Islamic social movement organization. The concept of frame continuation and value-based identity can be used as theoretical foundation to explore and explain the phenomena of dakwah movement performed by the alumni of KAMMI. Field research on KAMMI alumni role provides the primary empirical foundation for investigating frame continuation: sustainability of the dakwah movement beyond student movement organization. Discussion about KAMMI alumni’s role provides empirical evidence about how they have a strong commitment to either political or religious activities (or both) as their strategies to maintain and continue their previous identity as both political and religious activists. The main foundation for their activism is a value of dakwah (proselytizing), in which Islamic values are believed to be a suitable vehicle for constructing a sacred society in the democratic era of Indonesia. The KAMMI alumni believe their movement is a significant religious duty.

Keywords: Frame continuation, KAMMI alumni, dakwah movement, dakwah value, value-based identity.

Introduction

Involvement in student movements is generally viewed as relatively short-term, since members are only engaged in the movement during their university studies, ranging for from one to six years. Often the numbers and profile of activists change every year. Activism in student movements is often considered an integral part of youthful idealism that will not last
forever. As DeGroot argues (1998: 4), the student movement is mainly produced from youthful obsession caused by ‘youthful dynamism, naive utopianism, buoyant optimism, attraction to adventure, and surplus of spare time’. Therefore, student movement organizations usually have relatively short-term objectives compared to other movement organizations such as the women’s movement, the peace movement, or the environmental movement.

Most student movement organizations in Indonesia feature these characteristics, but KAMMI is unique because of its long-term movement agenda, expressed in its vision and mission. KAMMI’s vision is the establishment of the Islamic society in Indonesia and its mission is to work for the improvement of Indonesian society through the establishment of the concept of a rabbani (religious) madani, a fair and prosperous society under the spirit of amar ma’ruf nahi munkar. This vision and mission constitute social change agendas which are definitely not short-term projects. KAMMI goals, therefore, cannot simply be fulfilled by their current activists, but must include the commitment of the alumni as well.

The stories of the KAMMI alumni are the fascinating resource for understanding the impact of KAMMI long-term goals on the alumni’s lives and, therefore, whether KAMMI goals are sustainable beyond the university setting. The alumni exhibit various levels of commitment to KAMMI’s long-term agendas. Some still have a strong attachment to KAMMI goal and beliefs, which have significantly affected their choice of career and lifestyle.

This paper will present important empirical evidence of the fulfillment of KAMMI agendas beyond the KAMMI movement, describing the KAMMI’s alumni stories about the effect of KAMMI long-term objectives on their lives. The paper will show how KAMMI alumni journey after leaving KAMMI. This paper presents alumni stories about their self-adjustment as they entered their working environment, revealing how they define and recognize KAMMI long-term agendas in relation to their current roles in order to maintain the social change agenda. The alumni stories presented in this paper will be mostly confined to those who are successfully continuing the fulfilment of the KAMMI long-term agendas.

**Methodology**

For this purpose, from late 2007 to early 2009, I collected data on KAMMI alumni in Indonesia, mainly in two locations, Jakarta and Bandung (West Java Province). The primary method of data collection involved participatory observation, where I participated in various activities such as rallies, meetings, and daily activities. I was accepted in each as a person interested in KAMMI’s long-term goals and as a researcher gathering data about their
activities. Detailed field notes were taken and recorded during my participation in the organization. Life history interviews were conducted with 20 alumni from Bandung and Jakarta. Finally, several documents published in various newspapers and magazine were collected and analyzed.

Frame Continuation

Frame analysis theory was used as a template for interpreting the alumni’s stories, as they illustrated their strategies to promote KAMMI’s long-term agenda beyond KAMMI as movement institution. A unique phenomenon especially in relation to the continuation of movement commitment and identity across different movement organizations can be found in the case of the KAMMI alumni. In the KAMMI case study, activists leave the student movement organization and join other organizations or institutions, or perform other roles (e.g. political party, NGO, entrepreneur, etc.). Previous research concerning frame continuation was conducted by Mooney and Hunt (1996), who examined the U.S. agrarian mobilization between 1790 and 1990s, where they found a continuation of the implementation of movement values and commitment to maintain the existence of this movement. It is evident that they concentrated on only one particular movement. In the study about KAMMI alumni, there is considerable evidence of movement continuation, or at least of the continuation of a social identity across movement organizations or activities which have similar character and goals as KAMMI. Thus, this study provides additional insight into the concept of frame continuation.

The concept of frame continuation refers to the continuous application of values and practices (i.e. KAMMI character and commitment) of the student movement organization into the post-KAMMI practices and roles of its alumni. In the KAMMI alumni case, the concept of frame continuation applies to the alumni’s strong attachment to the KAMMI culture, which, even after they have graduated and left KAMMI, continues to provide them with the reasons to constantly refer to it as their ethical guide in the formulation of their goals and the choice of their current roles.

Discussion about alumni efforts to sustain their social change agendas offers other evidence about the existence of what Gecas (2000) identified as value-based identity. It refers to the self-definition constructed upon the ‘desirable personal quality and desirable social conditions’ through which certain characteristics can be maintained within a personality. The personal character emerges from certain values considered as a desirable model for conduct. The KAMMI alumni identity can be classified as having a ‘value-based identity’, since they
believe that KAMMI beliefs are suitable to be implemented as both personal identity and essential concepts for the construction of an appropriate social reality. Here, the concepts of dakwah have powerfully contributed to the alumni character, which goes on to sustain their commitment to establish social conditions based on this concept.

**Sustainability of the Value of Dakwah by KAMMI Alumni**

According to Federspiel (1995), the concept of dakwah is constituted of two elements: (1) the educational role of improving Islamic knowledge and practices; and (2) the role of certain Islamic groups to enhance Islamic practices in the community. These elements accord with Esposito’s arguments that dakwah currently tends to represent a rapidly growing and diversified socio-religious movement consisting of many organizations aimed not simply at non-Muslims but at calling upon Muslims themselves to return to Islam, to more fully and self-consciously reappropriate their Islamic identity and be more observant in the practice of their faith (1991, p. 216).

It is evident that dakwah is no longer simply defined as Muslims’ missionary efforts to spread Islam to non-believers, but is also known as the religious movement to improve Muslims’ piety and promote the establishment of the Islamic society. Thus, a dakwah movement targets both individuals and the community in order to achieve a social transformation through moral reformation by reinforcing Islamic values and practices. It is, therefore, not only about the propagation of faith but also encompasses various social institutions such as educational institutions, media, publishing, economic institutions (i.e. the Islamic banking system, insurance companies), and social services (i.e. hospitals, clinics, legal aid societies) (see Esposito 1991). All of these institutions are essential instruments to accelerate and achieve dakwah goals.

The research reveals that KAMMI’s long-term agenda to establish the Islamic society under the spirit of dakwah can be promoted by the alumni after leaving the university. The KAMMI alumni case study has offered some interesting features about how the alumni have retained a strong commitment to support and promote the movement goals after leaving the organization. The alumni’s strong commitment to KAMMI goals and beliefs has assisted them to link their previous values and commitment to their current roles. Their beliefs and commitment have provided significant guidance for identifying roles that will not contradict these beliefs and, most importantly, are suitable for them to continue their commitment to
these beliefs. As a result, KAMMI efforts to sustain its movement agendas have largely succeeded.

I found that KAMMI alumni tend to continue and maintain their previous activity as *dakwah* activists through various roles, such as lecturers, entrepreneurs, NGO activists, and politicians. Based on their various roles the alumni have real opportunities to interact with the public in order to extend their vision as *dakwah* activists. They feel that they can perform real actions to accomplish their political and religious movement agendas. The concept of frame continuation provides a significant foundation for understanding the phenomena of why certain former student activists tend to continue and maintain their previous engagement with a socio-political movement even after leaving their student organization.

**KAMMI Alumni Role as Islamic Politicians**

The role as Islamic politicians can be found in the cases of the alumni who join an Islamic political party which has similar characteristic to KAMMI. This becomes a continuation of their identity as religious and political activists. Joining the Islamic political party known as PKS (*Partai Keadilan Sejahtera*, Prosperous Justice Party) is recognized by the alumni as a suitable mechanism to achieve KAMMI’s long-term agendas:

Now, I am actively engaged in PKS and have become a member of the DPR (House of Representatives). My friends supported me to fulfil this job. Anyhow, we are fighting for something good, and we have to struggle wherever we are as *dakwah* activists. Especially, since both KAMMI and PKS can basically be classified as *dakwah* organizations that have similar goals. [Adam; Male; 35]

As a relatively young organization, established in 20 April 2002\(^1\), the PKS has been acknowledged by KAMMI alumni as a partai *dakwah* (*dakwah* party) and has attracted a number of KAMMI alumni to become members. Since the organization is similar to KAMMI, there were few difficulties in adjusting their intentions to their new environment.

**KAMMI Alumni Role as NGO Activists**

Some other alumni will consider NGOs as relatively important institutions for social change. The NGO is usually used by them to support their activities such as research projects that provide useful solutions to the recent socio-economic crisis. In this case, they actually combine their educational expertise and political awareness to identify significant national problems that could quickly become catastrophic.

\(^1\) See PKS website (http://pk-sejahtera.org/).
KAMMI alumni who have an engineering background tend to be concerned with the recent energy crisis. They try to develop proposals about alternative energy and communicate their findings to the government, the legislative, and the public, as expressed by this alumnus in his story:

I established an NGO called INDENI (Indonesia Energy Institute) that focuses on studying energy. The NGO is located in Jakarta and it consists of my friend whom I met in Japan while I was studying there, my academic colleagues, and also my ex-activist friends who have expertise in energy engineering. We launch the results of our study periodically. In one month we have two or three results of studies. So far we publish them in journals and on our website. We also send bundles of the studies to policy makers. We also release them to the mass media, in order to build opinions on energy, for example, our study on bio fuel. We often go and meet members of the House of Representatives, Local Governments, and other relevant political powers to give advice about energy matters. [Bima; Male; 31]

This alumnus’ current role implements his intention to provide real solutions for very important issues that may affect the sustainability of the community. He is advising the government by making recommendations based on his expertise in order to influence policy-making in relation to the recent crisis. Such alumni believe that a real contribution to the nation does not always come from a political angle but from their expertise as engineers.

KAMMI Alumni Role as Lecturers

The role as a lecturer is also seen as a suitable occupation for the alumni to fulfil their social change agenda in society, as Lily explained in her story:

I think it is special to be a lecturer, since I can pass on my knowledge to my students. Later on my students would do the same, they will pass on their knowledge to the next generation, and it happens like that, on and on. I think lecturers can direct their students to the right path. My purpose is to make my students become better persons, even much better that I am. [Lily; Female; 29]

As lecturers, the alumni have the opportunity as individuals to work directly for social change within their working environment. They can influence their students to use their knowledge and values to become useful persons who will bring benefits to their society. Lecturers have direct access to the future generations, whom they can construct into people with the intention and spirit to go on and solve Indonesian socio-political problems. It is considered an important role by both the activists and alumni.
KAMMI Alumni Role as Entrepreneurs

Some KAMMI alumni try to sustain their *dakwah* commitment by becoming entrepreneurs, as described by Wulan in her story:

I have been running a garment business since 2001. Now, I am a supplier for Muslim boutiques. I design Muslim dresses in my own factory. I design the dresses and cut the dress patterns, then send these to the tailors to be sewed and embroidered. These will later on be sent back to me for the finishing stage. I employ several tailors working within my surrounding area. The products are then sent to Borneo Island, especially to the city of Samarinda and Balikpapan. *Alhamdulillah* (Praise to God) it is a good business, and there are six boutiques that are being supplied by me. [Wulan; Female; 31]

When activists imagine the role of entrepreneur as suitable to continue their commitment in the religious or political arena, the alumni tend to have a rather different perspective. Initially, alumni tended to choose to become an entrepreneur because they have expertise related to certain businesses (e.g. garment production). Once the business was established they could use it to continue their commitment to bringing socio-political change to their surroundings.

KAMMI Alumni and Their Commitment as Dakwah Activists

KAMMI alumni also acknowledge that their previous attachment to *dakwah* can be maintained in their current environment, within their jobs and surroundings. *Dakwah* is important to keep alumni steadily aware about their personality and the necessity for performing good deeds within their day to day activities. Some alumni identify themselves as ‘agents of *dakwah*’, obviously stemming from their KAMMI past, as indicated in the next story:

As the alumnus of KAMMI I feel that *dakwah* is always there wherever I go. I feel I have become an agent of *dakwah*. Everywhere I go I have to play my part to tell people to do well. [Kartika; Female; 25]

Other alumni may recognize *dakwah* as the concept that can give them a ‘long-term vision’ in conducting their current activities. They also identify it as ethical guidance to continually be good to others:

*Dakwah* provides a long term vision of all activities we have. The basic concept of it is to tell people to do good deeds. It means that in all of our activities, both in academic and professional, it is the most wonderful to be beneficial for others. *Dakwah* is considered as an essential principle both in KAMMI movement and also in the professions. [Ali; Male; 28]
The alumni’s interpretation of the concept of dakwah shows the importance of the dakwah both in the KAMMI environment and in their current activities. The dakwah has actually supported their intention to maintain their previous identity, continuing to be thoughtful and generous because they have to become role models for others.

The alumni’s stories about continuing the movement journey provides insightful empirical evidence on how they try to find appropriate and desirable roles guided by their former character and commitment as KAMMI activists. The majority of alumni still express their intention to continue promoting KAMMI long-term goals by trying to find or establish suitable roles. This effort can be termed frame continuation, carried out by the alumni in their current working environment.

The strong attachment of the alumni to their previous movement culture not only influenced their early adjustment to their new roles but it also affected their views about the sustainability of the social change agenda within their roles. Their link to the KAMMI culture has produced a strong consciousness of the necessity for constantly working towards socio-political change for society through real actions. This consciousness has directly affected their roles, strategies, and commitment.

Conclusion

A short-phase movement does not necessarily have a short-term movement goal and, therefore, is not necessarily limited to the short-term commitment of its activists. The KAMMI movement, as a student movement organization, has long-term movement goals which are applicable to its alumni’s working environments as well. KAMMI’s long-term objectives provide the alumni with the motivation to continue their previous movement commitment within their current roles. KAMMI beliefs have contributed to the activists’ ambitions about their future roles and the alumni’s real experiences in finding appropriate roles for maintaining the social change agenda beyond the KAMMI environment. These beliefs have become an essential moral grounding for them, keeping them conscious at all times about the purpose and meaning of their existence within their community. The experiences of the KAMMI alumni provide fascinating evidence about how movement beliefs, previously functioning as a bonding mechanism within KAMMI, are transformed into personal identity in the alumni characters, through which the sustainability and fulfilment of KAMMI long-term goals can be achieved. These findings obviously show that KAMMI alumni are basically trying to continue their previous engagement as political activists in their current roles by maintaining their activity as dakwah activists. This represents the movement
continuation (framing continuation) across movement settings to maintain the achievement of
the movement goals.

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