



Radicalism among Children

By

Indah Gitaningrum

Intern at The Habibie Center

thc@habibiecenter.or.id

Introduction

During the holy month of Ramadan in 2017, in a small village in Yogyakarta Province, a group of primary school children chanted in unison 'Kafir' (infidel) to a Catholic staff member of a social organization who was carrying out field checks. When questioned why the children used the term 'Kafir', they answered that as far as they knew the former Governor of Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama – popularly known as 'Ahok' – was a blasphemer. Moreover, he was regularly referred to as a 'Kafir' and a Christian. As such, a new premise had appeared in their thinking: in their mind, a Christian was therefore a 'Kafir'. Not only that, recently there was a case involving a radical chant, which occurred at a primary school that was also in Yogyakarta. A hand-clapping chant that is usually taught from generation to generation was altered in a way that allegedly fostered radical and discriminatory thinking because at the end of the chant was the phrase, "Islam, Islam yes! Kafir, kafir no!"¹ The issue was seen to have damaged Yogyakarta's reputation which bears the title of the 'City of Tolerance.' Unfortunately, similar cases have not only occurred in Yogyakarta. Alarming cases of radicalism also took place in Bogor, such as the one involving Hatf Saiful Rasul, an 11-year old child who chose to join ISIS in Syria and ended up dying in the conflict zone.²

Who are the Children?

According to the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, a child is defined as someone under the age of 18 years, including those still in a mother's womb. Specifically, children are considered as those that are still undertaking formal education from primary school to senior high school. Even so, in terms of mental development, especially those at primary school and junior high school age, it can be

said that it is in the maturing period.³ It is at this period that the process of forming their mindset begins. This period is the first stage in developing critical thinking in dealing with various issues that surround them. Children will ask questions on many matters that they encounter around them to those that they frequently interact with such as parents, friends, and teachers. Meanwhile the knowledge that they obtain will often be unfiltered and later applied in their daily life in the form of words and behaviour.

In the case of intolerant expressions i.e. by using the term 'kafir', based on the children's own admission, their main source of information was from television broadcasts. However, whenever the children try to find additional information or to confirm what they had heard, the children often did not find any answers that could give further explanation. As a result, they believed that the information they heard was true and could be expressed in their daily socialization.

Roots of Radicalism

The emergence of the roots of radicalism in children cannot be separated from their actual condition. The position of a child in a social or individual system is still classified in the 'dependent' category. Dependence often causes limitations in getting knowledge and decision making, resulting in behaviour that reflects what they have been taught. Meanwhile, individuals who have a large role in a child's education (formal and non-formal) are their parents, the environment, and educational institutions where children spend most of their time. In Hatf's case, it was found that the radical ideas that grew within him was partly due to the education he received at a religious boarding school, as well as the support of his father who was also a suspect in the terrorist bomb attack in Pasar Tentena, Poso in May 2005.⁴ Hatf became one of 12 people from the Ibnu Mas'ud religious boarding school who left for Syria to join ISIS.⁵ The father, who heard from Hatf that several of his teachers and friends from the religious boarding school had left for Syria to fight with ISIS, permitted Hatf to follow in their footsteps.

The use of teaching and education to bring up children has a major impact on the formation of their mindset. The controversy of the hand-clapping chant in Gunungkidul, Yogyakarta Province shows the central role that teachers play in passing on knowledge to children. Yet the allegedly radical narrative of the hand-clapping chant has actually previously been taught by teachers in schools during scouting activities. Indeed, the issue is not limited to Yogyakarta, as the Mayor of Bandung Oded N. Danial also noted the phenomenon of children and radicalism in schools. He stated that there are 600 primary and junior high school students in Bandung that had been influenced by radical understanding.⁶

Analysis/The Verdict

The issue of radicalism that was suspected to have originated from intolerant attitudes in Indonesia has attracted wide attention recently. Seeing the various problems of the spread of radicalism among children such as the ones that took place in Yogyakarta, Bogor and Bandung, it is necessary for the government, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector to develop a strategy and better coordinate with each other to address the challenge of radicalism in children.

In responding to the issue of radicalism in children, there needs to be an effort from the government in the form of evaluating the education system, the quality of teachers, and the curriculum taught in schools, especially at the primary and junior high school level. One of the triggers for radical thinking, such as in the case of Hatf, comes from the education that is given to them when they are in religious boarding schools. The same is true with the hand-clapping chants in Yogyakarta that was taught during extracurricular scouting activities at the school. Education institutions have a significant contribution in the formation of mindset and behaviour of children. Those who teach religion without educating about the religious system will lead children into merely acknowledging the values of their own religion, without living by them. Meanwhile, all religions have one common value, namely peace. In addition to the system and curriculum, teaching staff also need to be equipped with more inclusive teaching materials and methods, so that change can start from where the source of knowledge for children comes from.

The rapid and massive flow of information exchange also makes it difficult to filter contents that provide radical education that can form radical mindsets among children. The government should involve the private sector, which in this case are corporations involved in the Information Technology sector, such as video platforms like Youtube as well as national television broadcasters. Many children nowadays use their gadgets such as handphones to access the internet or regularly watch television after learning, making them think that they can obtain answers to their questions in a visually attractive package. It is hoped that better supervision of social media and television program contents can be a way of filtering information for children. Aside from that, adding educational contents especially on the issues of peace and tolerance broadcasted on media platforms, should also be encouraged. In this way, children can have other sources of information on radicalism issues to refer to, in a format that is not boring and still attractive to watch.

Furthermore, the emergence of government and non-government organizations that focus their

activities on addressing the issue of radicalism to young people deserves an appreciation. In general, the efforts are carried out through training programs, youth camps, and even inter-religious gatherings and peace conferences that are routinely held in various cities. These activities are aimed at introducing our diversity as well as creating an inclusive religious climate. However, unfortunately most of these activities only target participants from high school to tertiary level. There are not many interfaith or cultural activities that focus on children, particularly of elementary and junior high school levels. Fun activities and 'learning by doing and playing' methods for children of such age levels would make it easier for introducing them to encountering diversity and knowing how to respond to the differences in their surroundings.

Meanwhile, the involvement of parents in children's education as well as in supervising the mass media content accessed by children is also needed to support the efforts of the government, private sector, and non-governmental organizations in preventing the development of radicalism in children. One step that could be undertaken is to foster inclusiveness at the smallest and closest level: the family. Parents should encourage their children to be more critical in their thinking, while always prioritizing tolerance over the diversity that they find. We need to remember that the wide array of sources of information that can be accessed and education patterns given to children can serve as a double-edged sword: on the one hand it can teach them to maintain diversity, however on the other hand it can sharpen those differences and create hate.

Endnotes

- 1 BBC. (16 Januari 2020). Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/indonesia-51108496>
- 2 Kompas. (16 Januari 2020). Retrieved from : <https://www.kompas.tv/index.php/article/13971/hatf-saiful-rasul-sekolah-di-pesantren-ibnu-mas-ud-bogor>
- 3 Gavrila (17 Januari 2020). Retrieved from : <https://sahabatkeluarga.kemdikbud.go.id/forum/showthread.php?tid=18089>
- 4 CNN Indonesia (17 Januari 2020). Retrieved from : <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasion-al/20170913093302-20-241368/mengenal-syaiful-brekele-anam-ayah-bocah-petarung-isis>
- 5 Reuters (20 Januari 2020). Retrieved from : <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-indonesia-militants-school-insight/indonesian-school-a-launchpad-for-child-fighters-in-syrias-islamic-state-idUSKCN1BI0A7>
- 6 CNN Indonesia (20 Januari 2020). Retrieved from : <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasion-al/20191029142528-20-443810/wali-kota-bandung-sebut-siswa-sd-turut-terpapar-radikalisme>



THC INSIGHTS

THC Insights are timely and policy-relevant analysis of current political, economic and socio-cultural issues affecting Indonesia and the region. The expert observations and recommendations are produced by researchers at The Habibie Center. Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of The Habibie Center.

The Habibie Center was founded by Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie and family in 1999 as an independent, non-government, non-profit organisation. The vision of The Habibie Center is to create a structurally democratic society founded on the morality and integrity of cultural and religious values. The mission of The Habibie Center are first, to establish a structurally and culturally democratic society that recognizes, respects, and promotes human rights by undertaking study and advocacy of issues related to democratization and human rights, and second, to increase the effectiveness of the management of human resources and the spread of technology.

Contact:

The Habibie Center

Jl. Kemang Selatan No. 98, Jakarta 12560

Tel: +62 21 781 7211 | Fax: +62 21 781 7212

Email: thc@habibiecenter.or.id

Website: www.habibiecenter.or.id