

Editorial

Besari, Humanity, and Tegalsarian Network: An Introductory Note

Dawam Multazamy Rohmatulloh^{1*}, Muhammad Muchlish Huda²

¹ Institut Agama Islam Sunan Giri (INSURI) Ponorogo, Indonesia

² Ikatan Sarjana Nahdlatul Ulama (ISNU) Ponorogo, Indonesia

* dawam_mr@insuriponorogo.ac.id

Abstract We are delighted to introduce and launch *Besari: Journal of Social and Cultural Studies* through this inaugural article. Here we briefly present the legacy left by Kiai Ageng Muhammad Besari of Pesantren Tegalsari in Ponorogo, Indonesia, and its significance and importance on current ideas and realities, especially about the development of Islam in Indonesia and Indonesian Islam. By perpetuating the name of the kiai as this journal name, we do not only expect to inherit the legacy, but also understand the value behind the name, Besari, which contains concepts of *ukhuwah basyariyah*, the brotherhood of humanity, Islam as a religion of salvation, and humanitarian Islam. Therefore, this inaugural article is aimed to those feeling invited to answer the call for humanity, call for *Besari*.

Keywords Besari; humanity; Tegalsarian; ukhuwah basyariyah.

Article history Submitted: n/a; revised: n/a; accepted: n/a.

Statement The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.



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1. INTRODUCTION

It was in Tegalsari, Ponorogo regency of East Java province, Indonesia, where Kiai Ageng Muhammad Besari (hereinafter referred to as KAMB) began his endeavour as a preacher of Islam. In the early years of the 18th century, the *kiai* taught Islamic teaching based on *turats* or *kitab kuning* (books on Islamic knowledge written by classical or medieval scholars) among the *santri* at a mosque in the *pesantren* Gebang Tinatar, Tegalsari, the eastern side of Keyang river, Ponorogo (Multazam, 2016). Two centuries later, the existences of 1) *kiai*, the leading authority of Islamic traditional knowledge, 2) teaching based on *turats* or classical Islamic learning books, 3) *santri*, the pupils who learn the teaching, 4) mosque as a gathering place for praying or studying, and 5) *pondok*, a boarding house or dormitory where *santri* might stay under

the kiai's supervision, were defined as the fundamental principal elements of pesantren (Dhofier, 1980). Considering those components, there is a belief that Pesantren Tegalsari is the first institutionalized pesantren in the history of Islam in Nusantara, particularly in Java island. Van Bruinessen (1994) is among the famous Indonesianist scholars supporting that belief.

As both KAMB and Pesantren Tegalsari have already acquired pivotal significance among societies, it is not for nothing that many recent events are eager to inherit the legacy by commemorating the kiai's name. For instance, the State Institute for Islamic Studies (IAIN) Ponorogo has proposed the name of Kiai Ageng Muhammad Besari (Amsari) as part of its upgrading toward the State Islamic University (UIN). Sharing similar reasoning, we at the Nahdlatul Ulama Scholars' Association (ISNU) branch in Ponorogo publish this journal, *Besari: Journal of Social and Cultural Studies*. In this inaugural article, we would like to introduce the journal, which aims to contribute to the academic discourse through meticulous analysis and thoughtful discourse, especially of works on social and cultural studies, fostering a greater understanding of the complex interplay between tradition, modernity, and interconnectedness.

Right in Besari's name, we believe, lays the concept of *ukhuwah basyariyah*, the brotherhood of humanity. A profound expression of interconnectedness among fellow humanity, as promoted by Kiai Haji Ahmad Shiddiq in 1989 (Azisi & Moefad, 2022), reflects the core values that bind individuals in a collective pursuit of shared well-being. Relevant to the *ukhuwah* concept is also the idea to understand *Islam* as a religion of salvation (Setyawan, 2020). By understanding both *ukhuwah basyariyah* and *Islam* as a religion of salvation, we come to the concept of humanitarian Islam.

All those are not merely jargon; they should be treated as social analysis. Humanitarian Islam (Abdelkader, 2018; Mohamed & Offeringer, 2015), a philosophy rooted in compassion, empathy, and social justice, finds resonance in the ethos of KAMB, the name of Besari, the brotherhood of humanity, and *Islam* as a religion of salvation. Therefore, this journal is eager to pave the ways toward that vision.

2. TEGALSARIAN: A NETWORK AND A RESEARCH SUBJECT

In 2015, when the lead author was conducting research on the dynamics of Tegalsari, especially by scrutinizing the roles of the disciples (santri) and the kiai's descendants, he thought about coining the term *Tegalsarian*, just like what some of us might have already been familiar on similar terms: Weberian, Kantian, or Gusdurian

to call those following on the ideas developed by the famous Weber, Kant, or Gus Dur. To the lead author, *Tegalsarian* is a network of those affiliated with Tegalsari, whether through bloodline or intellectual genealogy as the descendants or disciples of KAMB or simply by showing personal affection, affinity, and interest in recognizing the importance and significance of Tegalsari. The latter includes those researching KAMB or Tegalsari or anything related as a research subject.

Besides, the eponymous adjective (n.d.) of "Tegalsarian" not only captures the geographical roots of the network but also serves as a symbolic representation of the diverse threads interwoven within it. *Tegalsarian* implies a fusion of tradition and modernity, a synthesis of cultural identities brought together by the expansive reach of the network. This term becomes a lens through which we can examine the intersection of KAMB and Tegalsari's legacies and current ideas and realities.

Having genealogical traces upward to classical authorities of Java, both Sunan Ampel of the *Wali Sanga* as a religious authority and the king of Majapahit, Prabu Brawijaya V, as a political one, KAMB had also obtained Islamic knowledge from Kiai Donopuro, whose intellectual origin derived from Kiai Pandanaran or Sunan Bayat, Semarang. After building the pesantren as well as cultivating the religious community, as in Alatas's (2021) term, KAMB himself was able to inherit and legate his teachings through the presence of many descendants and disciples. Following the similar role of KAMB during his life, many also became community leaders, either in religious or administrative roles. Among them are the kiai of one of the largest *pesantren* in current Indonesia, Pondok Modern Gontor, one of the Indonesian respected founding fathers, Haji Omar Said Cokroaminoto, and so forth.

From research sides, the *Tegalsarian* network presents a rich collection of data and insights to be studied under various aspects or perspectives. Its influence on cultural practices, social interactions, and the dissemination of knowledge offers a fertile ground for exploration. There are a network of KAMB's significance and legacy (Djuhan, 2011; Guillot, 1985; Rohmatulloh, 2018), a network of *pesantren* developed by the descendants or disciples (Multazam, 2016), a network of anticolonial troops especially under Prince Diponegoro influence (Fuadi, 2018), a network of *turats* (Kusuma & Suryadi, 2019; Tim Peneliti Lektur Keagamaan, 2007), and so forth. Examining the manifold aspects of Tegalsarian networks allows us to learn more than a horizon.

We have learned that the central activity in pesantren, including in Tegalsari, is to study Islam, especially what were written on *turats*, classical Arabic books on many

matters including Tafsir, Fiqh, Hadith, Linguistics, Aqidah, Akhlaq, even Metaphysics, and so forth. Classical books of *turats* have always been the primary strength for pesantren traditions in Nusantara, and that strength is now the legacy of Tegalsari which has been studied by many interested scholars and is open to be accessed by the global audience. From Tegalsari alone, for example, there are no less than 107 files containing 16,018 TIFF images of 69 manuscripts already digitized in a project of The British Library's EAP (Endangered Archive Programme) funded by the Arcadia Foundation and carried out by Amiq Ahyad of MIPES Indonesia (British Library, 2007; Tim Peneliti Lektur Keagamaan, 2007).

The preserved manuscripts consist of various types of classical books such as *Tafsir Jalalayn*, *Al-Jawhar al-Thamīn Li Umm al-Barāhīn*, *Irshād al-Murīd Zammatuhā Ahl Al-Sunna Min Ghayr al-Mazīd*, *Hidāyah al-Sibyān*, *Al-Muharrar*, *Kāshif al-Ummah Fī Bayān Firaq Hādhihi al-Ummah*, *Fath al-Mu`īn*, *Bahjah al-`Ulūm Fī Bayān `Aqīdah al-`Usūl*, *Al-Ajrūmiyyah*, *Al-Sarf*, *al-Manthiq*, and so forth. Not only replicated versions of popular *turats* which commonly written in both Arabic language and letters, but in Tegalsari collection also found some manuscripts written in *pegon* (Javanese or Malay in language but modified Arabic in letters) such as *Ceritera Dusun Kradinan* (the History of Kradinan Hamlet), *Kitab Layang Ambiyō* (the History of the Prophets), *Mujarrobot* (the Amulets), and a history of Tegalsari's clerics titled *Sejarah Kyai Ageng Tegalsari*.

Pesantren in Nusantara has paid great attention to the network of *turats* and the transmission chain of knowledge tracing back to the Prophet which commonly called as *sanad* (pl: *isnad*). This can be found in various aspects such as the *sanad* of the *tarekat*, of *hadith*, and also of the books studied in pesantren. The chain or *sanad* could be a guarantor and proof of authenticity of Islamic teaching in pesantren (Baso, 2017). Manuscripts found at Tegalsari have shown a solid network and chain of knowledge transmission built by KAMB and other Tegalsari leaders as their essential contribution to the development of Islam in Indonesia.

Furthermore, the *Tegalsarian* network also possessed not only national but also global significance as they had networked with the Haramain ulama. The famous Haramain scholar originated from Nusantara, Syekh Nawawi al-Bantani and Kiai Abdul Mannan Dipomenggolo, the grandfather of Syekh Mahfudz At-Tarmasi, for example, were believed to have studied at Tegalsari before their departure to the Haramain, not to mention other influential clerics such as Kiai Abdul Mannan Muncar Banyuwangi, Kiai Abdurrosyad, the father of Kiai Munawwir Krapyak Yogyakarta, Kiai Mulabaruk Cirebon, Kiai Tolhah bin Thalabuddin Cirebon, and Kiai Modjo, the advisor of Prince Diponegoro (Bizawie, 2016). The abundance of importance and

significance of *Tegalsarian* network is then what has invited us to “stand on the shoulders of giants” (Chen, 2003), to perpetuate the name of KAMB by launching *Besari: Journal of Social and Cultural Studies*.

3. CONCLUSION

Finally, through this inaugural article, we are delighted to introduce *Besari: Journal of Social and Cultural Studies* as our efforts to connect the legacy of KAMB and Tegalsari to us *Tegalsarian* and those interested to researches on social and cultural studies, and those feeling invited to answer the call for humanity, call for *Besari*.

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