Research Article

The Influence of Wahhabi Teachings on Its Congregation in Indonesia: An Analysis of Religion as Social Action in Max Weber's Perspective

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Abstract

Wahhabi teachings originating from Saudi Arabia have grown rapidly in Indonesia and influenced the religious understanding and practices of its worshipers. This study analyses the phenomenon using Max Weber's theory of religion as social action. In Weber's perspective, religion not only functions as a belief system, but also influences the social action patterns of individuals and groups. This research uses a qualitative method with a literature study approach to explore how Wahhabi teachings shape the mindset and social behaviour of its followers. The results show that Wahhabi teachings tend to emphasise a more scripturalist and exclusive understanding of Islam, which has an impact on changes in social interaction in society. In addition, social actions carried out by Wahhabi worshipers are often based on absolute value orientation, as explained in Weber's theory. This study provides insight into the role of religion in shaping social dynamics, especially in the context of Islamic diversity in Indonesia.

Keywords: Wahhabi, Max Weber, Religion, Sociology

1. Introduction

Wahhabi teachings originating from Saudi Arabia have grown rapidly in various parts of the world, including Indonesia (Hafid, 2020). In recent decades, this phenomenon has attracted increasing attention, both in theological, social and political terms. Wahhabism is known as a puritanical movement in Islam that emphasises the strict application of Islamic teachings based on an understanding of the Qur'an and Hadith without any additions or innovations (Hasan, 2007). This movement, which began in the 18th century in Saudi Arabia, has had a significant impact on the development of religious views in various countries, including Indonesia. Therefore, it is important to analyse the influence of Wahhabi teachings on its worshipers in Indonesia, particularly in their social context and religious actions.

Indonesia, as a country with the majority largest Muslimin the world, has diversity in religious practice. Various sects and schools of thought flourish in the country, from Sunni, Shia, to various modernist and conservative sects (Masyath et al., 2024). One sect that has received considerable attention is Wahhabi. Wahhabiism is often associated with a rigid understanding of Islamic teachings, and is often regarded as an understanding that opposes traditional Islamic practices that have developed in Indonesia, such as *tahlilan*, *maulidan*, and pilgrimage to the tombs of the saints (Fahrizal et al., 2024). The influence of Wahhabi teachings on Indonesian society is not only limited to the realm of theology, but also penetrates into the social and cultural life of the community. Changes in the perspective on religion, which tend to be more exclusive and rigid, can affect social interactions between individuals and groups. This can lead to a shift in the way people understand and practice





religious life, which was previously more open to plurality, becoming more conservative and strict in the application of Islamic teachings.

From a sociological perspective, this phenomenon can be analysed through Max Weber's theory of religion as social action. Weber states that religion not only affects the belief structure of individuals, but also provides orientation to their social actions (Weber & Priyasudiarja, 2000). Action social, according to Weber, is an action performed by individuals that is adjusted to their understanding of social norms and religious values (Weber & Priyasudiarja, 2000). Therefore, Wahhabi teachings that prioritise textual understanding of and literal the Qur'an and Hadith, can be seen as a belief system that influences the social actions of its congregation. In terms of the sociology of religion, it is important to understand how Wahhabi teachings shape the mindset and social behaviour of its in the context of multicultural Indonesian society. As stated by Weber, religion is not only a personal belief, but also has a social dimension that can affect social dynamics at the community level.

In this context, the Weberian approach to religion as social action offers a useful analytical framework to understand how Wahhabi teachings influence the mindset and social behaviour of its worshipers. By viewing religion as a value system that directs social action, we can better understand how Wahhabi teachings shape social interaction and religious life in Indonesia. This research is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the influence of Wahhabi teachings on its worshipers in Indonesia, as well as its impact on the social dynamics of religion in this country. By adopting perspective Max Weber, it is expected to find new insights into how religion as social action plays a role in shaping Indonesia's pluralistic society and culture.

2. Methods

This research will explore the influence of Wahhabi dakwah in Indonesia on its congregation through the analysis of Max Weber's social action theory. This research uses a qualitative method through a library research approach. This research uses two data sources, namely primary and secondary sources. Primary data sources in the research were taken from Max Weber's book about his social theories, as well as various books and articles about Wahhabi teachings. While secondary sources of research are taken from literature or previous studies that are still relevant to this research. The data obtained from the news on social media will later be analysed and examined based on Max Weber's social theory of religion as a source of social action.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Max Weber's Biography

Max Weber was born on 21 April 1864 in Erfurt, Germany, into an influential upper middle class family. His father was a liberal politician and German government official who was known as a connoisseur of worldly affairs who adopted a bourgeois lifestyle (Arisandi et al., 2015). His mother, on the other hand, was a devout Protestant Christian who did not have much involvement with worldly affairs and thus had a strong influence on the spiritual and moral life of her family. Through the different characters of his parents, it eventually had a psychological influence on Weber's own personality (Weber, 1905), which later influenced his sociological views.

In 1869, Weber moved to Berlin. When he was 4 years old, he had meningitis. However, on the positive side, little Max Weber had begun to love books until he reached a fairly mature age. When he was 13 years old, he wrote several historical essays. By the age of 15, Weber was reading voraciously and was able to summarise what he read. Max Weber had great talent, but his teachers said that he lacked



study skills and morals. This was because Weber had been involved in delinquency and deviance, which in turn made a bad impression on his teachers. Like the European society at that time, Weber also drank a lot, but interestingly he still filled his time by reading books.

Weber began his education at the University of Heidelberg, where he studied law, economics, history, and philosophy. During this time, he was also involved in various academic and intellectual activities, and interacted with many of the leading thinkers of his day. After completing his education in Heidelberg, Weber continued his studies at the University of Berlin, where he deepened his knowledge in law and economics. In addition, he also wrote a dissertation on the history of trade in medieval Italy, which showed his interest in the relationship between economy and society (Bendix & Collins, 1998).

After completing his studies, Weber began teaching at various universities in Germany, including the University of Freiburg and the University of Heidelberg. During this period, Weber published a number of important works that formed the basis of modern sociology. One of his most famous early works was "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" (1905), in which he outlined how values Protestant, particularly Calvinism, played a role in the development of capitalism in the West. In this work, Weber argued that Calvinism's teachings on predestination and hard work as a form of worship to God created a high work ethic and encouraged the development of capitalism. Weber's thinking was heavily influenced by the intellectual and political environment in which he grew up. His father, a liberal politician, often held political discussions at home which gave Weber insight into the political and social dynamics of the time. In addition, his religious mother gave Weber a perspective on the importance of moral and spiritual values in human life (Weber, 1905).

Weber was also influenced by great thinkers of his time, such as Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche. Although Weber did not fully agree with their views, he took certain elements of their thinking and incorporated them into his own theories. From Marx, Weber adopted the concepts of economic and social analysis, while from Nietzsche, he took the concepts of individualism and the will to power. Weber was also active in social and political organisations, and often gave lectures and talks on issues of important his day. Weber's involvement in practical politics and public life demonstrated his commitment to the application of his sociological theories in understanding and addressing real social and political problems (Weber, 1954).

Weber died on 14 June 1920 at the age of 56, but his legacy in sociology and social science endures to this day. His works continue to be important reference materials for sociologists, economists and political scientists in understanding the relationship between religion, economy and society. Weber not only contributed profound theories, but also innovative research methods that continue to be used in contemporary social research. Weber's thoughts on the relationship between religion and economy, the concept of verstehen, as well as analyses of authority and bureaucracy, remain relevant and used in various contexts of sociological studies and policy analyses. As one of the founders of modern sociology, Weber has formed a foundation for the development of social science that continues to evolve and change over time (Weber, 1964).

3.2. Religion in Max Weber's View

Max Weber viewed religion as one of the major social forces that can shape individual behaviour and the structure of society as a whole. Weber did not see religion simply as a set of spiritual beliefs or rites, but as a factor that influences economic, political and social actions. One of Weber's most famous works in this area is "*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*" (1905). In this work, Weber outlines how Protestant values, particularly Calvinism, contributed to the development of capitalism in Western Europe. Weber argues that Calvinism's teachings on predestination and hard work as a form



of worship to God created a high work ethic and a strong sense of personal responsibility. The doctrine of predestination, which teaches that one's fate in the afterlife has been determined by God, encouraged Calvinists to look for signs of salvation in their earthly lives. One way they did so was through economic success, which was considered a sign of God's favour. This encouraged Calvinists to work hard, save, and reinvest their profits (Weber, 1905).

In addition, Weber also developed the concept of social action (*soziales handeln*), which includes how individuals understand and give meaning to their actions based on religious values. Weber states that in order to understand social action, sociologists must understand the subjective meanings that individuals give to their actions. In this case, religion provides a framework of meaning that shapes how individuals see the world and interact with others. Weber also emphasises the importance of charisma in religious leadership. Charismatic leaders, according to Weber, are individuals who are perceived to have exceptional qualities that are recognised by their followers. Charismatic leadership often emerges in the context of crisis and social change, where charismatic leaders offer a new vision capable of inspiring and mobilising their followers to effect social change (Weber, 2009).

3.3. Max Weber' Theory of Social Actions

Their meaningful social actions. So, what Weber meant, social action is the action of individuals who can influence others. Action and social action have different meanings, action includes all behaviour carried out by humans, while social action is an individual action directed at others and has meaning both for oneself and for others. If the action is not directed at others and has no meaning, it does not include social action but is only called an "action", so that social action will have an influence on others, because social action contains three concepts, namely action, purpose and understanding (Weber, 2009). Max Weber is a figure who put forward the theory of social action, Weber sees that social reality fundamentally consists of individuals.

One of Weber's greatest methodological contributions to sociology is the concept of "verstehen" which in German means "understanding", referring to the interpretive approach used to understand social action from the point of view of the individuals who perform it (Pals, 2014). Weber argued that in order to understand social action, sociologists must interpret the subjective meanings that individuals give to their actions. This approach differs from the more quantitative and objective positivistic approach. Weber developed the concept of verstehen as a reaction to the dominant positivistic methods of his day, which often ignored the subjective aspects of human action. According to Weber, social action cannot be fully understood through quantitative methods that only measure external phenomena. Instead, sociologists should try to understand the motives, goals, and meanings that individuals give to their actions.

Weber suggests five main characteristics that are the target of sociological research, namely: (1) Human action, which according to the actor contains subjective meaning. this includes various real actions. (2) Actions are real and fully internalised and subjective. (3) Actions that include the positive influence of a situation, deliberately repeated actions and actions in the form of tacit approval. (4) The action is directed to a person or to several individuals. (5) The action pays attention to the actions of others and is directed at others (Ritzer, 1985). From Weber's opinion, it can be concluded that the characteristics of social action are that it has subjective meaning, real actions that are internalised and subjective, actions have a positive effect, actions are directed at others and actions are a response to the actions of others.

Rational is the basic concept used by Weber in classifying types of social action. The meaning of rational itself is through logical and conscious thought and consideration. distinction The is between rational and non-rational actions. Rational action according to Weber relates to the conscious



consideration and choice that the action is expressed. Within the two main categories of rational and non-rational action, there are two parts to each other. Rational actions include acts of instrumental rationality and acts of value-orientated rationality, while non-rational actions are affective actions and traditional actions. Weber classifies four types of social action that affect the system and social structure of society, namely of types of social action

First, instrumental rationality (*zwerk* rational). This type of instrumental rational social action is an action that has the highest rationality, which includes a conscious choice (reasonable) related to the purpose of the action and the tools used to achieve it. Individuals are seen as having various goals that they might want, and on the basis of a criterion determine one choice among competing goals, then individuals assess the tools that might be used to achieve goals (Jochnson, 1994). In this action, humans carry out a social action after they have gone through careful consideration of the goals and means that will be taken to achieve these goals. This means that the actions or behaviours carried out are clearly to achieve certain goals. Social action has carefully considered the goals and means used to achieve certain goals (Ritzer & Goodman, 2001). Humans in carrying out actions or behaviour are aware of what they are doing and are aware of the purpose of their actions.

Second, value-oriented rationality (*werk* rational). Value-oriented rationality is a social action that is almost the same as instrumental rational action, namely actions that have been carried out through careful consideration and have clear goals, the difference lies in the values that are the basis for this action (Jochnson, 1994). This social action takes into account the benefits, while the goals to be achieved are not too considered, the criteria for good and right are according to the judgement of the community. For this social action, what is important is the suitability of the action with the basic values that apply in people's lives. These values can be cultural and religious values as well as other values that become beliefs in each individual community. Each individual or community group has a belief in different values so the actions taken by each individual according to this type of action have different meanings.

Third, affective/emotional action. This action is different from instrumental rational action and value-oriented rationality action, because affective action is not through conscious consideration, this action is created spontaneously due to the influence of one's emotions and feelings. This type of social action is dominated by feelings or emotions without intellectual reflection or conscious planning. A person who is experiencing overwhelming feelings such as love, anger, fear or joy, and spontaneously expresses these feelings without reflection, is showing affective action, this action is truly irrational due to the lack of logical considerations, ideology, or other rational criteria (Jochnson, 1994).

Fourth, action traditional. Action This socialis carried out by someone because it follows traditions or habits that have been taught for generations and have been standarised and cannot be changed. So, this action does not go through conscious planning in advance, both in terms of method and purpose. Because they repeat it from habits that have been done for generations. A person exhibits certain behaviours because of habits acquired from ancestors, without conscious reflection or emotion without intellectual reflection or conscious planning. Affective action is spontaneous, irrational and is an emotional reflection of the individual (Ritzer & Goodman, 1995: 102). If there is a community group dominated by this social action orientation, their habits and understanding will be supported by long-standing customs or traditions in the area as a frame of reference that is taken for granted without question (Jochnson, 1994).

3.4. The Influence of Wahhabi Teachings on its Jama'ah in Indonesia Based on Max Weber's Analysis in the Theory of Religion as Social Action

Wahhabiyah is also known as muwahhidin, which is a tawhid purification movement inviting Muslims to abandon practices that have the potential for shirk (Chasan, 2021). The Wahhabi version of the purification movement is very rigid and exclusive, unwilling to accept the truth from sources outside Islam including sources from local culture and wisdom (Hamdi, 2019). They only adhere to the text of the Islamic scriptures, namely the Koran and hadith. The holy book is as if it were made "God", it cannot be replaced by other sources even though it makes a positive contribution. These ideas are used as principles in Wahhabi da'wah that must be conveyed to Muslim communities. Wahhabi does not see local wisdom that develops in society, if it contradicts Islamic values, it must be fought, preached, and directed back to true Islam (Hamdi, 2015).

The Wahhabi cleric's approach tends to be harsh, rude, and insensitive to the feelings of the community, even ready for confrontation as long as it is considered not in accordance with Islam. This attitude often causes conflict and division in society (Abdullah, 2018; Hamdi et al., 2015; Hasan, 2013). Religious social conflict is a challenge serious faced by the congregation Wahhabi and local communities due to the massive imposition of purification ideas in every step of their da'wah, which often contrasts and contradicts the practices of traditions local religious. The majority of Wahhabi congregations in Indonesia believe that their mission is the mission of Islam and their interpretation is the most correct because all of that must be conveyed through da'wah continuous wherever and whenever congregations Wahhabi are without considering and seeing the social background of local communities. Here, the role of religion as a tool to strengthen brotherhood actually functions otherwise. Religion as a tool to divide the ummah (Khamid, 2016).

Researchers argue that the religious behaviour of Wahhabi figures is what has encouraged and created conflict and social division. Wahhabi congregation, when viewed from the orientation of its actions that refer to Weber's concept, can be categorised as an absolute value-oriented group. That is, social action is done to reflect and apply values that are considered absolute (Kinloch, 1981). In other words, social action is a form of awareness to apply values to achieve success or happiness in life (Ritzer, 1985). The actions taken by the Wahhabis are a reflection of Islamic values that are believed to bring happiness and success. These values are part of the values of life that must be carried out by Muslims.

Within the framework of the theory of religion as social action according to Weber, the behaviour of the Wahhabis can be understood as social action aimed at realising religious values that are considered absolute and sacred. Weber states that social action can be categorised into various types based on its orientation, namely goal orientation (*zweck* rational), value orientation (*wert* rational), affective orientation, and traditional orientation (Jochnson, 1994). In the Wahhabi context, this absolute value orientation is clearly seen in the way they interpret Islamic teachings and apply them in social life. They perform social actions not only to achieve worldly or material benefits, but more as a form of dedication and loyalty to religious values that are considered pure and should not be questioned.

According to Weber, religion can be considered a form of social action that has a major influence on social structures and relationships between individuals in society (Kahfi et al., 2022). In this case, Wahhabi groups practice their religious teachings in a highly structured and organised manner, leading to the formation of social communities based on very strict religious principles (Rahman, 2020; Mawardi & Agama, 2016). These groups build exclusive social networks, where any individual who wishes to join must submit to their precepts and norms, which emphasise the literal application of Islamic laws and the rejection of any religious innovations that do not conform to the sacred texts. This is very much in line with Weber's view that religion is a value system that directs the behaviour of



individuals in society, creating social action based not only on self-interest, but also on a belief in absolute truth.

Furthermore, within the framework of Weber's theory, the social action of Wahhabis can also be seen as a meaningful action in which they perform social actions with full awareness of the values they believe to be true. This action is not only orientated towards personal life or the achievement of worldly happiness alone, but also to obtain salvation in the hereafter. Weber argues that value-oriented social action reflects an individual or group's belief in a value that is considered the right and noble way of life (Ferrera, 2018). In this case, Wahhabi teachings about strict Islam become the main driver for their social action, where they consider that living according to these teachings is the only way to achieve true happiness.

However, this social action, despite its religious value and ideal according to the Wahhabi perspective, often clashes with other Muslim groups that have a more moderate or contextual interpretation of Islamic teachings. Based on Weber's theory, social actions carried out by Wahhabi groups can create tension or even conflict with groups that have different views, because they consider themselves as holders of absolute truth in religion. This conflict is a clear example of social division caused by differences in the understanding and application of religious values in everyday life. As theorised by Weber, these social actions are not only orientated towards personal goals, but also aim to form an ideal society according to their interpretation of religious teachings (Kurniawan et al., 2024).

In a broader dimension, Weber also identified that religion-based social action has a major impact on social structure and the relationship between individuals and society (Hasanah, 2024). In this case, absolute value-orientated Wahhabi groups view that the existing social structure should be based on pure Islamic laws, without any interference from other cultural values or ideologies that are considered a form of polytheism. Therefore, they may demand changes in the existing social, political and legal structures to create a society that is more in line with the teachings of the religion they believe in. social action Such can lead to significant social change, but is often accompanied by conflict and tension with social groups that maintain different views or values.

One of the main impacts of Wahhabi teachings is that congregation become easy to blame and idolise other groups that have different religious practices (Ayu, 2020). Their exclusive views cause many Islamic traditions that have developed over centuries to be considered deviations. This often leads to internal conflicts within Muslims, where groups that follow different understandings are labelled as perpetrators of heresy that must be fought. In addition to heresy, Wahhabi influence also leads to an attitude of easily misleading others (Siswanto, 2016). Those who do not follow religious teachings and practices that conform to Wahhabi standards are often considered to have deviated from true Islam (Hasan, 2013). This narrative has the potential to divide Muslims as it creates a strict boundary between "the right" and "the misguided", ultimately hindering efforts at dialogue and unity within Islamic diversity.

A much more serious attitude from the influence of Wahhabi teachings is that congregation tend to disbelieve others. They consider other Muslims as infidels if they do not conform to their understanding, becoming part of the mindset of some congregations of this Wahhabi teaching (Al-Hakim, 2021). This disbelief is not just a theological debate, but also legitimises discriminatory actions, even to the point of committing acts of violence against those who are considered different. Some terrorist groups in the Islamic world, especially those in Indonesia, are known to have links with Wahhabi ideology (Hannan, 2013), where their thinking encourages violence in the name of religion. A rigid understanding of religion that does not consider the socio-historical context makes some Wahhabi congregation easily influenced by the wrong jihad narrative (Thohari, 2021). One form of extremism is acts of terrorism committed by groups inspired by Wahhabi teachings (Lamanepa, 2022). Some



individuals or groups who adopt this ideology even go as far as committing suicide bombings, believing that they are fighting in the way of Allah (Detik.com, 2021). This attitude is very contrary to the teachings of Islam, which actually prioritises peace and compassion.

Thus, Weber's theory of religion as social action provides a deeper perspective in understanding the social dynamics presented by Wahhabi groups. Their actions are not just ordinary social actions, but rather a reflection of a deep commitment to religious values that they consider as absolute truth. This Wahhabi teaching has a significant influence on the emergence of intolerant attitudes and actions in Muslim society. This social action, although perceived as an attempt to improve the condition of Muslims by them through the purification of their monotheism, actually exacerbates divisions in the wider community, given the exclusive and absolute nature of the views they believe to be true.

4. Conclusion

This study analyses the influence of Wahhabi teachings on its worshipers in Indonesia through the perspective of Max Weber's theory of religion as social action. Based on the analysis, it was found that Wahhabi teachings tend to emphasise the purification of Islam through a textual and literal understanding of the Qur'an and Hadith. This has an impact on the mindset and social actions of the congregation, which are often exclusive and rigid in interacting with people who have different Islamic traditions so that those who are different from them are considered as enemies who must be eliminated because according to them, they are not in accordance with the Qur'an and Hadith. From Max Weber's perspective, the social action of the Wahhabi congregation can be categorised as a value-oriented action (wertrational), where they perform actions based on beliefs in teachings that are considered absolute. This orientation encourages the formation of a more homogeneous social community, but on the other hand it can also trigger tensions with other groups that have a more moderate understanding of Islam. This study shows that religion has a significant role in shaping the social actions of individuals and groups.

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